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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

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DOLORES The MISCHIEF- MAKER

Life In A Holiday Camp Is Featured In This Grand Serial—By HAZEL ARMITAGE

PAT'S SNAPSHOT RUSE

PAT ROCKWELL and her chum, Chris Casion, who were staying at Westonmouth Holiday Camp, were helping to organise a regatta. Pat's idea was to turn an old ketch into a Roman galley.

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

Dolores Belgrave Bellamy, a beautiful, wealthy girl who was also staying at the camp, seemed strangely interested in the ketch.

She copied a mysterious message which had been scratched on the floor of the ketch into a note-book, then scrubbed out the original message to prevent the chums from seeing it.

Dolores hid the note-book on the ketch, and one morning while the holiday-makers, dressed up in their regatta costumes, were holding a rehearsal, Pat saw her take it from under the binnacle cover.

PAT'S first inclination was to confront Dolores and call the rest of the holiday-makers on to the scene, but she resisted the temptation.

There were no witnesses of Dolores' action except herself and so it would be unwise to accuse her of hiding the note-book. From past experience Pat knew how clever the mischief-maker was at wriggling out of awkward situations.

As Pat stood there, deciding what to do, Dolores stuffed the incriminating note-book into the Roman empress costume she wore, then from the robe she plucked the jewelled girdle which was part of her costume.

Pat smiled grimly. She guessed what purpose that girdle was serving. Undoubtedly Dolores had pretended she had forgotten it so as to secure an excuse for returning to the ketch.

As the mischief-maker turned, Pat bobbed out of sight. Her mind was made up now.

"I'll carry on as if I didn't suspect a thing," she murmured. "But I've got to get hold of that costume before Dolores can remove the note-book."

She waited until the other girl had left the ketch, then she also clambered down and rejoined the rest of the young holiday-makers on the nearby beach. Bruce was just completing the arrangements for the group and he smiled as Pat came strolling up, camera in hand.

"You're in this, Pat," he declared. "I'll do the photographing."

Pat handed over the camera and the sports master took several snaps, then, as the group broke up Pat managed to draw Chris to one side and tell her what she had seen. At once Chris looked excited.

"And she's got the note-book on her now?" she asked.

Pat nodded. "And that means we've got to watch and see that she doesn't smuggle it away to some new hiding-place," she said.

Chris required no urging on that score, and when the girls went back aboard the ketch to change she and Pat kept a watchful eye on Dolores. Surrounded as she was by a crowd of girls, the mischief-maker had no opportunity to remove the note-book, and when they went on deck, carrying their regatta costumes, the chums were certain that the note-book was still in the empress robe.

By now the boys had taken off their helmets and breast-plates and packed them away in one of the hampers, together with their swords.

Bruce nodded to the girls. "Pack your costumes away in the other hamper, please, girls," he said with a smile. "And quick's the word. It's nearly lunch-time."

To the chums' surprise Dolores did not seem in any way perturbed at following the other girls' example, but when the hampers had been fastened down she looked across at the sports master.

"Where are they going to be stored until we want them for the next rehearsal?" she asked.

"In the camp," he said. "I'll get a couple of porters to come and collect them."

"Oh, there's no need to do that," said Dolores quickly. "We can carry them back ourselves. Come on, Lucy, you and I will carry this one."

Pat and Chris were instantly on the alert, for they saw through Dolores' apparently innocent suggestion. She, of course, would make some excuse to get rid of Lucy Day for a while and, left alone with the hamper, she would soon recover possession of the note-book. Swiftly Pat's mind worked to combat that idea.

"Just a minute," she cried. "I've still got a couple of exposures left on that film. Let's use them up before we go, then I can get the spool developed as soon as we get back to the camp. What about a picture in the stern?—where we're going to put up the royal dais. Bruce, you be in this one, please. We haven't included you, so far."

Bruce nodded, everybody good-humouredly agreed, and a move was made for the stern, Dolores unsuspectingly following the others. When their backs were turned Pat turned quickly to Chris.

"Switch over the hamper labels," she whispered.

Chris chuckled and nodded. She not only saw her chum's idea, but acted on it. While Pat followed the rest of the campers, Chris worked swiftly on the two labels that were fastened to the hampers. The one containing the empress costume had a figure "1" printed on it, while the other hamper was numbered "2." By the time Pat had arranged her group the exchange was complete.

"Smile, please," Pat urged. "Chris"—as her chum appeared in sight—"tag on at the end there. Ready? Keep still. Good—got it! Thanks a lot, everybody."

She wound the film while the group broke up again. Then she nodded at the hamper.

"Did you say you're taking one of these along, Dolores?" she asked. "Righto, Chris and I will take the other one. Any preference, Dolores?"

"Yes!" Dolores said quickly, indicating the Number One label. "We'll take that."

Pat chuckled. If Dolores only knew! She winked at Chris as they swung the hamper between them, and off the campers went, Dolores and Lucy among them. Chatting and laughing, the chums allowed the others to get a little ahead. Then, as they reached one of the many coves that dotted the hillside, Pat stopped and dropped her end of the hamper.

Bruce, at the rear of the procession, turned.

"What's the matter, Pat? Let me give you a hand," he said.

"No, it's nothing—thank you," Pat laughed. "It's only my sandal—we can manage."

Bruce nodded and hurried after the others. No sooner was he out of sight than Pat, with a swift nod at Chris, lifted the hamper and marched it into a clump of undergrowth near by. And there, screened on all sides, Pat swiftly unfastened the lid.

"Corks, if only Dolores knew how we'd fooled her!" she chuckled. "And whoopee, here's the costume

There, indeed, was the empress robe, carefully laid on top of the others. Pat lifted it up, and Chris ran her fingers down it.

"This feels like it!" she cried excitedly, and pushing her hand into an inside pocket, she withdrew the all-important note-book.



THE MYSTERY MESSAGE

Pat, flinging the costume over her arm, took the note-book as Chris handed it to her. With her pulses leaping she examined the

page of spidery writing which Dolores had faithfully copied from the floor of the ketch.

It was difficult to make it out at first. Goodness knows what position the writer had been in when he had scratched this message in the varnish of the floor. It was jerky, and looked as if it had been done under great duress. Pat held it away from her. Slightly she slanted the page. And then, instantly, the message came clear.

"Go to Dartfleet Island," it said. "Find Captain Kirabee in Neptune's Nest—"

That was all. It seemed that the writer had meant to add more but had found the effort impossible. Slowly she read it out to Chris.

For an instant the two girls stood, staring at each other.

"Captain Kirabee!" Chris repeated. "Never heard of him. But—gee, Pat, fancy the clue leading to Dartfleet Island! What on earth is Neptune's Nest?"

Pat did not reply for a moment. She felt a little startled by the extraordinary link with their own activities this message made. Odd that the clue should refer to Dartfleet Island, which was the place which they had earmarked for their regatta stunt. Odd that they should have discovered that the old ketch which was to be used in the regatta had originally been the property of Chris' uncle Charles.

But she knew Neptune's Nest, for she had made a study of the maps and guides of the district. The Nest was the name of a small cave on the island, one that was reputed to have been used in bygone days by smugglers.

She explained that to Chris, but she, like Chris, shook her head over Captain Kirabee.

"We can easily find out who he is by going to the island," she said, then frowned down at the open note-book. "So this is what Dolores is interested

in, is it? This is the message she copied. And now—"

"Now," Chris said grimly. "We've got to look out," Pat decided. "Yes, we've got to get a pretty rapid move on. As soon as Dolores finds out that we've read this message, she'll also be on the jump—to get to Dartfleet Island and see this Captain Kirabee before us. We've got to beat her at that game, Chris. We've got to get to Dartfleet Island as soon as we can—yes, today," she cried with sudden fervour. "Once Dolores gets to know—but shush!" she added swiftly.

Instinctively she thrust the note-book into her pocket as she heard a sound on the other side of the bushes. Quickly she turned. And then she stiffened as the bushes parted and there, her eyes rapidly taking in the open hamper and the empress' costume on Pat's arm, stood Dolores!

For a moment Pat saw a spasm of fury cross her beautiful features.

"Tricky game you're playing, isn't it?" Dolores said. "Pat Rockwell, that's my hamper."

"Is it?" Pat looked mockingly astonished. "Well, fancy that now! I thought it belonged to the holiday camp."

"You know what I mean," Dolores' eyes glittered. "That was the hamper Lucy and I should have taken back to the camp. Instead—she choked a little—somebody altered the labels—"

Pat and Chris looked utterly surprised.

"How awfully cute of them," Pat grinned. "They must have been taking a leaf out of your book, Dolores. Still," she added cheerfully, "there's no harm done, is there? Here's the hamper—all safe and sound! We've finished with it. And now you're welcome to it."

Dolores glared, and Chris and Pat chuckled, knowing the inner fury that was consuming her. She stared accusingly at the costume still draped on Pat's arm.

"And why," she asked, "have you taken that out?"

"This? Oh, the costume!" Pat laughed disarmingly. "It's lovely, isn't it? We wanted to have a really close look at it, you know, seeing that we hadn't an opportunity before—"

"You thought you'd find something in it!" Dolores accused.

"Such as?" Pat asked in astonished innocence. "Oh, Dolores, you don't think there are moths in it, do you?"

"Don't fool!" the incensed Dolores shrieked. "You were after that note-book!"

"Note-book?" Pat looked puzzled. "We don't understand, Dolores. You don't mean, surely, the note-book you said didn't exist? How could we possibly be after a note-book that nobody's ever seen or heard of?"

Dolores breathed hard, her cheeks scarlet with anger. Then, suddenly, she shrugged.

"O.K.," she snapped, "you win. I'm sorry Pat, I underestimated you. But don't worry; I shan't do it next time. And don't think"—she broke off abruptly, as if fearful lest she was saying too much. "All right! Let it go at that. Good-bye."

"But—hey!" Chris called, as she walked away. "What about this hamper? I thought you said it was yours?"

"I don't want it—you can keep it!" Dolores snapped, and disappeared from view, leaving the two chums chuckling.

"Poor old Dolores!" Chris gurgled. "It must be awful for Smartie to be outsmarted. This is one up for us, Pat. But what's the next move now?"

Pat thought a moment.

"First," she said, "get this hamper back. Second, nip off to Dartfleet Island—"

"But what about lunch?" "Blow lunch! We'll make up for that afterwards." Pat was suddenly intensely serious. "Dolores knows now that we know as much as she does. So what's her next move? To visit the island, of course! And

we've got to get just that jump ahead of her. Chris. We've got to get to Dartfleet Island now—and interview this Captain Kirabee."

Chris nodded enthusiastically. She was a girl who preferred deeds to words. They repacked the hamper, clamped down the lid and fixed it in position. Then, swinging it between them, they carried it back to the camp and deposited it in the stores but just as the lunch bell went.

"Come on, scoot!" Pat said. "Get back to the beach and grab a boat!"

Chris chuckled. Everything she felt was fitting in ideally—for now, with lunch as the chief attraction, there would be no curiosity as to their movements. Back they walked to the beach. There they helped themselves to one of the camp's row-boats. But just as they were about to clamber into it—

"Whoa! Wait a minute!" called a voice. "Where are you two taking that boat?"

They paused. Old Bert, the boatman in charge of the Westonmouth Holiday Camp's foreshore, was striding towards them, puffing the inevitable pipe which seemed to be a permanent feature of his face. They grinned.

"Just off for a little trip to the island, Bert. O.K., isn't it?" Pat asked.

"O.K. the trip—yes!" Bert wagged his pipe. "But you ain't going to land on the island, like be?"

"Well"—Pat paused—"we thought about it. No objection, is there?"

Bert shook his head. "There's every objection in the world, Miss Rockwell," he told her. "If that's what you're going to do—I'm sorry—but I've got to stop it. Because, you see, Dartfleet Island is out of bounds."



WHAT THE CHUMS OVERHEARD

Completely taken aback, Pat and Chris eyed each other. The possibility that Dartfleet Island might be forbidden to the

campers had never occurred to them.

"But—but—" Pat stuttered. "Oh, corks, why is it out of bounds?"

"The owner's orders," Bert answered briefly. "Admiral Hardacre. A hard nut, too, if you ask me. Doesn't like strangers—which is the reason," he added, contemplating the island along the stem of his pipe, "he's shut himself up there like a hermit. And even if you wanted to land on the island unbeknowns to him, you couldn't."

"Why?" asked Pat.

"Cos there's only one way of getting on to it—through the iron gate of the admiral's put there. The rest of it is cliff which nobody can climb. Queer old stuff, the admiral. A queer collection of things he's got on the island, too, so I've heard. But you certainly can't land there. The admiral would raise Cain if he thought you intended to try."

Pat gulped. She tried hard to hide her disappointment. Then she had another hope.

"But—but he's away at the moment, isn't he?"

"He was—until last night! But he came back this morning." Bert informed them. "He's at home now—as you'll see by the Blue Peter he always flies on the foreshore there. Like he he's on the look out for trespassers, too, with his shotgun under his arm. No. Sorry, Miss Pat, but there it is. Best give up the idea until you get official permission."

Pat bit her lip. It was obvious that their project was off. Bert, for one, would keep a very watchful eye on them indeed if they rowed off now, and they dared not risk offending Admiral Hardacre, if they still had to persuade him to allow the campers to use his island for their regatta stunt.

"Well!" Pat tried to smile. "Seems we're up a gum tree, eh? Righto,

(Please turn to the back page.)



By PETER LANGLEY

BRUNO'S AMAZING BEHAVIOUR

"WHAT a storm!" exclaimed June Gaynor. "Lucky we've got our macs, nunky, but hadn't we better shelter, all the same?"

A vivid flash of lightning, followed by a violent clap of thunder, punctuated her words.

Black clouds scudded across the sky, and a gusty wind moaned in the pine-trees. Noel Raymond, the famous young detective, took the arm of his youthful partner and pointed through a gap in the foliage. "There's an old house not far from the road, my dear," he said. "We'll find shelter of some kind there, I expect. Let's run for it!"

They turned in at an open gateway and raced up a rain-soaked drive. Another flash of lightning showed them an old Tudor house with gabled roof and diamond-paned windows, and the name "Wildwood Hall," carved over the porch.

In a few seconds they were safe inside the porch.

"Nobody will grudge us a spot of shelter, I hope!" Noel smiled.

He and his niece, after completing a case on the South Coast, were spending a day or two hiking in the New Forest, but it certainly seemed as if the storm had washed out their plans for the afternoon.

"Wonder who lives here, nunky?" June murmured. "Maybe it's empty, though I thought I saw curtains at some of the windows. But it seems so silent—so lonely! And it looked rather eerie in the lightning, with all those dark trees around it!"

"And here," Noel added with a smile, "is something rather strange, too."

He pointed to an ancient, weather-stained tablet at one side of the porch, and wonderingly June read the words carved on it:

"WHEN THE INVISIBLE MINSTREL SHALL PLAY THE GOLDEN HARP, THE O'KEEFES WILL LOSE THAT WHICH THEY LOVE BEST IN THE WORLD."

"I say, what does it mean?" June exclaimed. "Such an odd—"

She broke off, as a sound made them both swing round. A big blue car was squelching up the drive. It came to a halt in front of the house, and the driver threw a quick glance at the two strangers in the porch before opening the rear door of the car.

"Golly! What a marvellous dog!" June breathed.

A magnificent black-and-tan collie had sprung out, and grasping his lead came an attractive, auburn-haired girl, who bent to pat the dog's sleek head.

"We're home, Bruno dear!" she breathed. "Our new home, old fellow."

The big dog gazed up at her and wagged his tail, seeming to have no eyes for anyone but the slim, blue-eyed girl at his side.

Behind them followed a tall, hand-

some man with greying hair, and the little party hurried across to the porch, leaving the driver to collect the baggage.

Noel stepped forward with a smile to explain their presence.

"But of course you're welcome to shelter!" the girl smiled. "I'm Elaine O'Keefe—the last of the O'Keefes, you know! And this is the house my Uncle David left me in his will. And this," she added, indicating the tall gentleman, "is Mr. Davenant, the solicitor who is arranging it all for me."

A sudden gust of wind sent the rain lashing into the porch.

"Come right in, both of you!" Elaine cried. "And shelter till the storm's over."

She opened the door with a latch key, smilingly ushering them into the hall.

"And I must introduce Bruno," the girl continued. "He's my best pal—the one I love best in all the world. He saved my life once. I'll never, never find another chum like Bruno!"

Her lips trembling a little, she sank on one knee beside the collie, her arm round his neck.

"I do hope you're going to like it at Wildwood Hall, Bruno boy!" she whispered. "Not that it matters where we are really, so long as we're together—you and I!"

A little silence followed her tender words. It was broken by a strange sound—a sound that floated down the broad staircase into the spacious hall.

The rippling notes of a harp playing a haunting little tune again and again!

Noel was standing near the foot of the stairs. He had already noted on the landing at the top a half-open door, marked "Music Room," and it was from this that the notes of the harp floated out.

Before the young detective could make a move, however, there came a startling interruption.

The driver had just entered the hall with a suitcase in each hand. He dropped them with a crash, his face pale, his eyes wide.

"The harp!" he burst out. "It's being played! There's no one in that music-room, Miss Elaine! My wife's the only other person in the house and she never goes in there—she's in the kitchen quarters. It's the O'Keefe legend coming true! It's the invisible minstrel—"

"Rubbish, Griggs!" snapped Mr. Davenant. "For goodness' sake, don't scare Miss Elaine on her first day here with your old wives' tales. Someone is up there playing the harp—they must be!"

A cry from Elaine interrupted him. Her face had paled. But it was not the eerie music of the harp that had wrung that cry from her.

It was the strange behaviour of her pet, Bruno.

So far the collie had never left his young mistress' side. But now he seemed to have forgotten Elaine. She was still holding his lead, but he was struggling wildly to break free, straining towards the stairs, as if that eerie, rippling music was calling him away from her.

"Bruno!" she cried, and there was sudden fear in her voice. "What is it, boy? Bruno, please! Oh—"

For the big dog had broken free and had leapt like an arrow for the stairs. Noel acted swiftly. He jumped and grabbed Bruno's lead.

"June—Mr. Davenant—hold him!" he panted. "And, with your permission, Miss O'Keefe, I'll see what's happening upstairs."

The collie was still straining at the lead, still uttering eager little whimpers as he struggled to escape. But the two girls and Mr. Davenant were able to control him now, and Noel sprinted lightly up the stairs.

The young detective had a feeling that something very strange was occurring in this lonely house amid the pinewoods.

The rippling notes of the harp still floated through the half-open door of the music-room. Griggs, the caretaker and driver, had said that his wife was the only other person in the house, and that she never went in there. Then who was playing?

And why had the dog, Bruno, seemed so strangely attracted by the music?

Noel's pulses quickened as he gained the landing.

He was only a few feet from the door when suddenly the music died away. A second later he had sprung across the threshold, and then stopped short in utter surprise.

The room was empty, except for the musical instruments it contained.

In the centre was a large harp with a beautifully gilded frame, fixed to a stand of polished wood, and its strings were still quivering as if they had been plucked by invisible fingers!



A MIDNIGHT ALARM

Noel's keen eyes glanced swiftly around.

There was a piano, an old-time spinet, and other musical instruments beside the

harp. The floor was of polished wood and showed no trace of footprints. The windows were all locked on the inside.

"There's no hiding-place," Noel mused. "This is amazing!"

Already footsteps were echoing on the stairs as the others raced up to join him, but before they entered the

room he had noticed one curious little fact.

One of the window curtains was swaying slightly, as if it had been stirred by a breeze, although there was not the slightest draught in the room. Noel stepped across to examine it, and on the window-sill close by he noted a tiny trace of gold-coloured powder.

Before he could look at it more closely, however, quick footsteps made him turn.

"Mr. Raymond!" It was Elaine who burst in first, still grasping the collie's lead, her face pale and strained. "Miss Gaynor says you are a detective, so maybe you can help me. What does it mean? Why should Bruno have struggled to get away from me when he heard that harp? Who played the harp?"

Her sensitive lips trembling, she glanced down at the collie, who now stood calmly by her side.

"There's an old legend, Mr. Raymond!" she whispered. "It says that if the invisible minstrel should play this harp the O'Keefes will lose what they love best in the world. I'm the last of the O'Keefes—the only one left—and Bruno is what I love best. Perhaps I'm superstitious, but I'm afraid, Mr. Raymond—desperately afraid—for Bruno!"

A low rumble of thunder followed her words, as June and Mr. Davenant came into the room.

"Nunky! Did you find anyone here?" June burst out, throwing a glance of sympathy at the pale-faced Elaine.

Noel shook his head. "For the moment I'm afraid I'm baffled," he replied quietly. "There was no one in the room, and there doesn't seem to be any possible hiding-place."

"But suppose the harp should sound again!" Elaine cried. "Suppose it should lure Bruno away! Oh, I—I almost wish I'd never come here!"

She whirled round on Noel and June.

"Mr. Raymond! Miss Gaynor!" she panted out. "You're held up by the storm. Couldn't you stay the night here? I'm sure Mrs. Griggs could fix you up with spare rooms, and I'd—I'd be so glad to have you. Just in case the harp sounds again, and some terrible danger threatens Bruno!"

Mr. Davenant, glancing at his watch, stepped forward.

"An excellent idea," he agreed. "I would have stayed with you myself, Miss Elaine, but I have an important business engagement. After what has occurred, I should certainly feel easier in my mind if you had someone to spend the night here, apart from Griggs and his wife."

June heaved a sigh of relief as Noel smilingly agreed. She was longing to help this slim girl with the auburn hair, whose homecoming had been so frightening and mysterious.

A few minutes later Noel was once more alone in the music-room.

Taking out a powerful magnifying-glass, he carefully examined that gold-coloured powder on the window-sill. Then he moved across to the harp, examining every inch of its frame with the beautiful gilded scrollwork.

"It's as I thought," he murmured. He tried to move the harp, but it was firmly attached to its heavy wooden stand, and while he was still gazing at it a stealthy sound just beyond the door made him swing round.

In a moment Noel had glided to the door and flung it open, coming face to face with Griggs, who was hovering out there.

"I wonder you've the pluck to stay in there alone, sir, after what happened!" the caretaker muttered, flinging Noel a curious glance. "My blood fairly froze when I heard the harp. But I came to tell you, sir, that supper will be ready in the dining-room in half an hour."

Noel nodded, eyeing the man keenly.

"That harp, I suppose, is an heir-

loom of the O'Keefe family," he said. "Can you tell me when it was last moved?"

Griggs started. "Moved, sir? It hasn't been moved for years," he exclaimed. "Mr. David would never have it touched because of the legend. He always said 't'would come true one day—and it has! Miss Elaine will lose that dog of hers, sir, you mark my words!"

Muttering to himself, the caretaker turned away.

Before going into the dining-room Noel opened the small detective kit he always carried and took out a bottle containing a greyish substance, which he slipped in his pocket.

He heard June's cheerful voice as he opened the door. His youthful partner was doing her very best to keep Elaine's spirits up, and Noel also chatted gaily during the meal.

But their attempts were not very successful. Elaine was still tense, pale, her nerves on edge.

Again and again her glance went to the big collie who sat by her side, gazing trustfully at her.

And when the meal was over she sprang agitatedly to her feet. "It's no use pretending I'm not scared, Mr. Raymond, because I am!" she burst out. "Before I came down here someone made an offer to buy this house, but I turned it down because it was so small. But I wish I'd accepted it—for Bruno's sake. He'll sleep in my room to-night, as he always does, but suppose the harp should sound again—"

Noel, too, had risen to his feet. He bent over Bruno for a moment or two, apparently adjusting the dog's collar.

"I'd like you to keep Bruno's collar on to-night, Miss O'Keefe," he said. "And don't touch it, please. Keep it just as it is."

Both girls stared at him in surprise.

"Then you think something may happen to-night?" Elaine whispered.

The young detective nodded gravely as he lit a cigarette.

"I think it may," he replied. "For that reason I intend to keep watch in the music-room all through the night. Perhaps between us," he added with a strange smile, "we may trap the invisible minstrel!"

IT was midnight.

The wind still moaned in the pine trees around Wildwood Hall as Noel kept his lonely vigil in the music-room. He hadn't switched on the light, and it was pitch dark.

Not a sound came from the old house. Noel felt strangely tense as he waited in the darkness.

Would Elaine's fears come true? Would she be in danger of losing the dog who meant so much to her? Before going to bed that night she'd declared she could never stay another day at Wildwood Hall, if she lost Bruno.

Suddenly Noel sprang to his feet, every nerve on the alert.

A faint draught of air had fanned his face in that pitch-dark room, and at the same moment something else happened.

The rippling notes of the harp echoed eerily through the darkness!

Swiftly Noel sprang for the electric light switch. But while his fingers were still a few inches from it, a powerful pair of arms were thrown round him, and a gruff laugh echoed in his ears as he was dragged across the room.

Noel was young and strong, but his unseen assailant was more powerful still. There came the sound of an opening window, and Noel was pressed back against the sill.

Desperately he struggled, but inch by inch he was forced back, till at last he fell headlong, the eerie notes of the harp still sounding in his ears as he struck the earth below and lay half-dazed.

June, meanwhile, had woken with a start.

She was in a room opposite Elaine's.

some way from the music-room. But faintly in her ears sounded the throbbing music of the harp, and with quickening pulses she sprang out of bed, slipped on a wrap, and darted into the corridor.

At the same moment Elaine's door opened, but it was not the Irish girl who came out. It was Bruno!

The big collie had been taught the trick of opening doors, and he came bounding out, whirling round towards the music-room—as if those haunting notes were calling him.

"Bruno!" June cried. "Bruno—stop—"

But the collie raced past her before she could check him. A moment later Elaine hurried into the corridor, wild-eyed, pale-faced.

"It's the harp again!" she panted. "And Bruno's gone!"

June pointed up the corridor. "He went towards the music-room, Elaine. But nunky's in there. He'll protect him."

Breathlessly the two girls raced along the corridor, and on the landing at the end they found the shadowy figure of Griggs, the caretaker.

With a trembling finger he pointed towards the music-room.

"The dog went through there!" he cried. "But I daren't follow—not with that phantom music playing. The dog's gone, Miss Elaine—the legend has come true! Don't venture in, young ladies—don't—"

But June was already darting through the doorway, with Elaine at her heels, and even as they crossed the threshold the throbbing music died away.

Her heart pounding, June snapped on the light.

Both girls stared in blank amazement. The long room was empty, though the strings of the harp were still quivering.

"Bruno!" The heartbroken cry broke from Elaine. "You can't be far away, boy! Bruno! Come back! Come back!"

Only the moaning of the wind in the pine trees answered her.

June, meanwhile, had rushed to the open window, the breeze ruffling her brown hair as she bent over the sill. A cry of relief broke from her as she recognised the dim figure just picking himself up from the ground.

"Nunky!" she called. "Are you hurt? Bruno's gone—he's vanished!"

She heard the young detective's rueful voice in response.

"He certainly didn't jump out of the window, or I'd have seen him. The plotter was too quick for me, June—and too strong. If one of you will let me in I'll join you indoors."

"I'll let him in, miss!" Griggs had at last ventured a little way into the room. "But it won't be any good. No detective could find that dog now. He's been spirited away! It's the O'Keefe legend come true!"

June never forgot those heartbreaking minutes that followed. That desperate, vain search for Elaine's dog chum.

She had hoped against hope that Noel would have some dramatic explanation to offer; some theory that would reunite Elaine with her pet.

But Noel was strangely silent as he entered the house, joining in their search with set lips and thoughtfully furrowed brow.

And at last Elaine, with a sob in her voice, threw up her hands hopelessly.

"It's no good!" she whispered. "Bruno's gone, and something tells me I'll never see him again!"

Wildly she turned to Noel.

"I vowed I'd never stay here without Bruno, and I won't!" she cried. "Mr. Raymond! You'll help me! Please go to Mr. Davenant first thing in the morning and tell him I've decided to sell Wildwood Hall—tell him to bring the papers here and I'll sign them—"

Bravely she fought to keep back her tears, while June threw an arm round her shoulders to comfort her.

(Please turn to the back page.)



THEIR SCHOOL ON CASTAWAY ISLE

By RENEE FRAZER

TOO QUICK FOR DAVE

TANIA, a jungle girl who had lived alone on Castaway Isle for many years, possessed an old book containing a map of the island.

She suspected that Dave Cardew, a member of a party of castaways, was interested in the map and thought him to be her enemy, but actually it was Gerry Royston, the boy she trusted, who was plotting against her.

Not realising Gerry's treachery, Tania allowed him to take charge of the map. Later, as a result of his scheming, she was banished from the camp.

Tania arranged to meet Gerry at the rapids, bringing with her her precious book. But when she arrived, she found not Gerry awaiting her, but Dave!

"I've been waiting for you, Tania!" said Dave quietly.

The jungle girl shrank back, her heart pounding, as she stared into the eyes of the boy she believed to be her enemy.

Why was Dave here—Dave, with his pale, stern face and bandaged head? Where was Gerry?

The boy seemed to guess her thoughts, and his lips twitched in a grim smile as he kept a firm hold on the prow of her canoe.

"You're surprised to see me, Tania? You'd arranged to meet Gerry—I thought as much!" He noticed her involuntary start, the quick, frightened way in which she clutched at her woven satchel, from which protruded a corner of the tattered diary. "I heard Gerry ask Captain Rawlins for a loan of one of the ship's boats, pretending he wanted to explore the rapids before breakfast—but I managed to beat him to it!"

"What—what does Dave want with Tania?" she cried defiantly.

Dave leaned forward, his grey eyes determined.

"I want to stop you from making a fool of yourself, Tania!" he said. "While I've been ill things have been happening that have got to be cleared up. Your falling out with Mr. Barnard and the others—and that fire in the schoolhouse last night—"

"Tania not understand!" She stared at him sharply, incomprehendingly, knowing nothing of any fire—suspecting a trick.

"I suppose you wouldn't," said Dave grimly. "It happened after you left the camp—and the others all thought you were to blame. Especially when Mr. Barnard found the safe open—and your book missing"

Tania's eyes flashed and her fingers tightened protectively on her treasure.

"The book is Tania's!" she exclaimed. "She took only what was her own—"

"I know that!" cut in Dave. "But Gerry put you up to it—laid all the plans. He arranged for you to get the book, and to meet him with it this morning. Am I right?"

His grey eyes demanded an answer. "Gerry is Tania's friend!" said the jungle girl loyally. "He alone stood by Tania when the others turned away from her—because of the false words of Dave, her enemy—"

A flush crossed the boy's face.

"Look here, Tania—is that what Gerry told you? What I may have said while I was unconscious, goodness only knows—but I swear I've never tried to turn the others against you. You've got to believe me! I tried to talk them round last night, but they wouldn't listen. That trickster, Gerry, had his plans laid too well—"

"You shall not speak ill of Gerry—Tania's friend!" exclaimed the jungle girl fiercely. "It is Dave who comes to rob Tania of her book, even as he stole her map—"

"You're crazy, Tania!" exclaimed Dave. "Can't you see—don't you understand—that Gerry's after that book of yours for some crooked reason of his own? Tania, let me take charge of it—protect it for you!"

But the jungle girl shrank from him, her eyes hostile.

"No!" she cried. "Once Tania trusted Dave—and he stole her map. She will not trust him again!"

And fiercely she drove her paddle into the water. Her action took Dave by surprise. Away shot the canoe towards the rapids before he could make another grab at the prow of the frail craft.

"Tania—come back!" he shouted hoarsely, fumbling with the heavy oars of the ship's boat.

He commenced to row desperately in pursuit—but the heavy boat, built for use on the sea, was hopelessly outdistanced from the start.

Tania ceased paddling and glanced back over her shoulder. Her dark eyes shone recklessly—yet, in spite of her determination to escape, she felt a sudden feminine anxiety for Dave's safety.

Dave was not well—and that boat of his might come to grief in the rapids.

Skilfully bringing her canoe close to the bank, she secured it to an overhanging branch and scrambled on to a rock. From her vantage-point she could see Dave struggling manfully to manœuvre his boat among the rocks, though he could not see her.

"Dave!" she called, and her voice came faint and distant to him above the noise of the rushing water. "Dave—it is no use! Where Tania goes, none can follow—for the secret paths of the jungle are known to her alone."

"Where are you?" shouted Dave, staring towards the bank.

The jungle girl's voice came even more faintly.

"Tania goes by foot—and Dave will follow at his peril. Go back, while there is time—"

Dave's lips tightened stubbornly as he rowed to the bank, mooring the boat and climbing out among the bushes.

"Where are you?" he shouted. But this time there was no reply.

Tania held her breath, listening to the boy's footsteps as he crashed his way among the tangled undergrowth. Then silently she slipped back into her canoe and sent it skimming among the rocks to the opposite bank.

Swinging herself on to the lower branch of a tree, she waited till the boy's footsteps had died away. Her little trick had outwitted him for the time being. Sooner or later he would tire of the fruitless search and return unwillingly to the camp.

But meanwhile she must find Gerry—who would be heading this way to keep his appointment.

Slipping from the branches, she ran swiftly along a narrow path that brought her close to the arranged meeting-place. As Dave had taken the ship's boat, Gerry had probably been forced to set out on foot.

And the next moment she caught sight of Gerry, his handsome face flushed and angry, as he pushed a way among the undergrowth.

Tania dared not call out to him, for fear that Dave might hear her. Breathlessly she darted among the bushes, appearing suddenly in front of him—her dark eyes shining with eager welcome.

"Gerry!" she breathed. "I am here!"

The boy started violently, and an expression of swift relief crossed his face.

"Tania—thank goodness!" he exclaimed. "I was afraid I'd be too late. But the book"—he stared at her sharply, anxiously—"you've brought it, as you promised? Is the book safe, Tania?"

His fingers closed almost furiously on her arm as his blue eyes searched her face.



GERRY MAKES A SLIP

Tania was a little startled by the boy's manner, so unlike his usual, easy charm. But she told herself that Gerry was anxious

on her behalf—worried about that book that meant so much to her.

"Tania—why don't you answer?" he demanded. "Did Dave—"

The jungle girl shook her head quickly.

"Dave try to get book from Tania," she declared, "but Tania's canoe is too quick for him. The book is safe, Gerry—I have brought it to you, even as you ask!"

Gerry gave a quick sigh of relief as she opened her satchel, revealing the precious diary. An avaricious gleam crept into his blue eyes, but he concealed his eagerness with his old, disarming smile.

"Good for you, Tania!" he declared admiringly. "I might have guessed you wouldn't let that fellow get the better of you. But I'll admit I was anxious when I discovered that he'd stolen a march on me—anxious for your safety, of course. I suppose"—he regarded her narrowly—"I suppose he told his usual pack of lies to explain why he was there?"

The jungle girl's face clouded.

"Dave say many things that Tania does not understand, for she was too angry to listen. He speak of a fire at the school—"

A wary expression crossed the boy's handsome face.

"Oh—that," he said. "It was an accident. Someone overturned the lamp, and Dave tried to throw the blame on you. They're more angry with you than ever, Tania—that's why you and I have got to stand together."

His voice shook slightly with suppressed eagerness as he nodded towards her satchel.

"There's no time to lose, Tania! If Dave stirs up trouble they may start another search for you—and take your book away as a punishment. The sooner we get busy on discovering its secret, the better. It's a good thing that you let me take care of your map. With that and the book we ought to find out something—between us!"

Tania's heart was beating quickly, her own excitement fired by Gerry's eagerness. But even stronger than her anxiety to solve the intriguing mystery was her gratitude to this boy whom she believed to be her loyal friend.

"Gerry—Gerry has done so much for Tania," she said. "Is there nothing she can do to show her thanks—"

Gerry made a smiling, half-impudent gesture.

"I don't want any thanks," he declared. "I'm just anxious to clear up the mystery surrounding you, Tania—for your sake! Let's find a quiet spot where we won't be disturbed and we'll get to work on that book—"

But Tania shook her head, a determined sparkle in her dark eyes. "The book—it can wait for a little while! Gerry come out early to help Tania—before he has breakfast, yes? Let Gerry rest—while Tania makes him a jungle meal such as he has never tasted before. Thus will Tania try to show her thanks!"

Appealingly, her eyes shining, she looked up at him in a way that might have touched a heart of stone. But Gerry bit his lip in annoyance, glancing at the satchel.

"But look here, Tania—I'm not hungry. The book is far more important. If we're caught before I can get at—I mean," he corrected himself hastily, "before we can discover the secret—"

"We will not be found!" declared Tania, catching impulsively at his hand. "Come with Tania, and she will show you. It is only a little way from here."

Concealing his impatience with an effort, Gerry followed her as she led the way to a secluded glade on the bank of the rushing stream—a tiny clearing hemmed in by luxuriant tropical trees laden with fruit.

"Tania make breakfast for Gerry!" declared the jungle girl. "Better than breakfast he would have at the camp."

The boy shrugged, forcing a tolerant smile. He dared not appear too anxious for fear of arousing her suspicions—but he was secretly fuming at the delay.

"Hurry up, then!" he remarked lightly. "And I'll be looking at the book while I'm waiting."

Trustingly Tania handed him the tattered volume from her satchel.

Gerry almost snatched at it, becoming absorbed in the pictured pages of the diary—completely ignoring Tania's presence as he compared the pictures with certain marks on the map that he took from his pocket.

Tania felt a little hurt at his abruptness—but she believed that he was anxious only for her sake. With a quick smile she darted away and collected an armful of fruit and nuts, then set to work to prepare the meal.

First she ground nuts between two flat stones, mixing them with luscious berries. Over them she poured a sweet, honey-like syrup obtained from a species of sugar-cane.

Other ingredients went to make the dish—culled from her knowledge of jungle plants. The final result looked like a delicious trifle piled up in a hollow gourd.

Smiling, she carried it across to

Gerry—kneeling beside him and holding the gourd out for his inspection.

"Gerry—look—your breakfast!" she exclaimed, eager to meet with his approval.

"Eh?" demanded Gerry, treating her offering to a cursory glance. "Put it down somewhere, Tania—and look at this! I believe I've got on to something, here—"

"But, Gerry—look what I have made for you!" begged Tania. "If Gerry will only taste—"

"In a minute," snapped the boy, with an impatient gesture. "I've no time to worry about your fiddling dishes just now. Come here, and see what you make of this."

He caught at her arm, upsetting the gourd with most of its delicious contents, some of which spilled on the pages of the diary.

"Confound it!" shouted Gerry, his handsome face darkening with sudden anger. "Look what you've done. If you've ruined that page with your messy concoction, I'll—"

He turned, his eyes blazing—to meet the jungle girl's tearful, incredulous stare.

"Gerry!" she whispered, shrinking from him. "Gerry—what do you mean? Why do you speak to Tania like that?"



THE MYSTERIOUS WATERFALL

For one dreadful moment it seemed to Tania that she was looking at a different boy—a stranger. A frightening stranger,

totally unlike handsome, smiling Gerry—her friend.

And the boy was quick to read the momentary fear in her eyes.

His expression changed. "I say, Tania—forgive me!" he cried. "I didn't mean that. I was so wrapped up in my discovery that I didn't realise what I was saying—what I was doing. And now I've upset your delicious breakfast—"

He picked up the gourd, quickly sampling its contents. An admiring smile crossed his face—a smile he knew so well how to assume.

"Tania—you're a little wizard!" he declared. "And I'm an ungrateful wretch. I've never tasted anything so delicious in my life. Please say that you'll forgive me, Tania—please!"

The jungle girl's lips trembled as she stared at him. She had been bitterly hurt—and shocked to think that Gerry could speak to her in such a way. But his remorseful tone and appealing smile were hard to resist.

"Gerry spoke angrily to Tania," she whispered. "His eyes were cold and cruel, even as the eyes of the hawk when his prey escapes him."

Gerry bit his lip, forcing a quick smile.

"You imagined that part, Tania!" he declared banteringly. "I just felt annoyed because I was afraid the diary had been spoilt—and you know how much it means to you. On my honour, that was all. I'm only thinking of your happiness. Let's see if the book has been damaged."

He picked it up, dabbing the page carefully with his handkerchief so as

A WORD FROM YOUR EDITOR

I am still getting a large number of letters from readers, telling me that from now on they are going to collect all the waste paper they can. This is grand news, and I am sure all you other girls will rally round when you realise how urgently old paper—and cardboard—is needed. Not a scrap should be thrown away. All of it can be put to good use.

Best wishes,
The Editor

not to smear the quaint, faded pictures. He gave a sigh of relief.

"Not much harm done," he declared. "This is really what interested me. These drawings are actual sketches of objects on the island—and they true up with certain numbers on your map. Do you see what I mean?"

He turned the pages, while Tania bent over his shoulder, forgetting her recent hurt in her curiosity.

"For instance," said Gerry, "here, on page one, is the reef on which our ship was wrecked—and it is numbered 'One' on the map. The clump of palm-trees drawn on page two is also marked 'Two' on the chart."

Tania nodded eagerly. The boy's suppressed excitement awakened her own.

"Now—here's the point!" said Gerry. "There seems to be a couple of pages missing. There's a break in the numbers, you see—and page fifteen is followed by page eighteen. On the map there's a number in a circle—number seventeen—specially marked in red ink. Which suggests that the missing page was important!"

Tania stared at him. "Gerry means—"

"I mean—the missing page may contain your secret, Tania!" declared the boy. "If only we could find—Great Scott!"

Tania was startled by his ejaculation as he held up the book. His eyes glittered.

"What—what has Gerry found?" Gerry chuckled.

"Why—don't you see, Tania? There isn't a page missing! There are two pages stuck together—and the fruit-juice has loosened them! Carefully, now—for Tania had reached out eagerly to examine the strange discovery—"let me handle this."

Cautiously he parted the two pages, and an excited whistle escaped his lips.

"A double-page sketch!" he declared. "A waterfall! What do you make of that, Tania? Ever seen anything like that on this island?"

Just then there came a faint rustle among the bushes, unnoticed by Tania, who was staring at the pictured waterfall, a strange, excited expression in her dark eyes.

But Gerry heard the sound, and he turned quickly—as the bushes parted to reveal the tall, sinister figure of Stanhope, the ship's mate!

The boy raised a warning finger to his lips, and with an understanding wink the mate backed away.

Tania looked up. A twig had cracked under the intruder's stealthy foot.

"Gerry—there is someone here!" she said. "We are not alone—"

"Nonsense!" said Gerry hastily. "Possibly some prowling animal. Don't start getting nerves, Tania— he smiled at her banteringly—"just when we're on the point of discovering your secret! Have you ever seen that waterfall before?"

His blue eyes held hers with an eager, compelling glance. But Tania did not instantly reply.

Her jungle-trained wits told her that something was wrong. What had caused that twig to snap?

"Gerry, wait," she said as he made to speak again. "Perhaps it is Dave there, after my map—"

"Of course it isn't. Look!" Urgently Gerry caught her arm. "Look at this book. Tania, please, do you recognise this place?"

Tania, eyes wide, stared at the book. Eagerly Gerry gazed at her.

"Tania—I believe you recognise it!" he declared. "Why don't you answer me? You trust me, Tania—don't you?"

Her lips trembled as she stared at him, fighting against that premonition that warned her of danger.

"Tania—answer me!" breathed Gerry.

Does Tania recognise the picture? Will she give vital information to her false friend? You will see in next week's fine chapters.



The COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

By GAIL WESTERN

NEWS ABOUT THE TROPHY

MERLE WASON arrived in Cactus City with her horse, Pommie, to take part in the rodeo. Her Uncle Stephen had set his heart on her winning the Bronze Rider Trophy in the steeplechase.

On the way to the course she met Larry, a mysterious young cowboy, who told her he would escort her to the rodeo stadium. But instead he made her prisoner in a lonely shack, and, taking her entry ticket for the race, declared his intention of riding in her place.

With Pommie's help Merle managed to escape, but she arrived at the course too late to take part in the race, which was won by Larry.

Angry and indignant, Merle sought him out, and to her surprise, he calmly offered her the Bronze Rider.

AMAZEMENT in her eyes, Merle looked from the bronze trophy the young cowboy had thrust into her hands to Larry himself.

"You really mean me to have it?" she gasped.

Calmly he nodded.

"Sure."

"But—but why?" Merle was baffled. "If you didn't really want the Bronze Rider, why did you take my entry ticket—win the race?" she demanded.

He shrugged, the flicker of a smile on his sun-tanned face.

"Maybe it's because I like you—want to make you happy," he said, and turned to where his magnificent black horse stood.

Dazedly Merle stood there, the statuette clutched in her hands. She still felt indignant at the way she had been cheated out of her chance to ride in the steeplechase, yet she found her anger fade as she thought of Larry's unexpected act of generosity.

What an amazing person he was! Despite his curt manner and extraordinary behaviour, there was something very attractive and intriguing about him.

Looking up, she saw that he had mounted his horse and was glancing down at her, that sardonic gleam of amusement again in his eyes.

"Well, I guess I must be goin'," he drawled. "But don't worry, honey—we'll be meetin' again before long. Cheerio! Hope your uncle likes the trophy!"

And he sent his horse trotting forward.

"But Larry—" began Merle, feeling it was essential that she should know the truth about him and his strange action.

But the young cowboy only raised his hand in salute and went riding on through the doorway of the hut. Still spellbound, Merle listened to the hoofbeats receding in the distance, then she was forced to forget Larry as there came a plaintive whinney and Pommie, her own horse, looked in through the doorway.

She smiled.

"Anxious to get home, eh?" she said. "Well, I'm just coming. But, Pommie, what an amazing boy!"

She shook her head, then laughed excitedly as she stowed the trophy away in the saddle-bag.

"Won't uncle be thrilled!" she exclaimed. "For some reason he was crazy on me winning the Bronze Rider, and he will be ever so bucked when I give it to him. It will be a real tonic."

She gave a rather wistful sigh. Uncle Stephen could do with all the tonics going, for of late things had not been going too well at Happy Valley Ranch.

Swinging easily into the saddle, she rode out of the rodeo stadium, through the town, and on to the railroad depot, arriving there just in time to catch the afternoon train back to Happy Valley.

During the journey her mind constantly went to Larry, but all thought of the mysterious young cowboy was wiped from her mind when her destination was reached, for when she led Pommie out of the station she was surprised to see a slim-built, youngish cowboy waiting by the entrance, standing beside a big, piebald horse. It was Slim Harris, the ranch foreman.

"Why, Slim!" she exclaimed. "What—? And then she stopped as she saw how worried was his weather-beaten face. "There's—there's nothing wrong, is there?"

The foreman fidgeted with his broad-brimmed hat, and then slowly nodded.

"It's not—it's not uncle, is it?" she whispered.

To her consternation, Slim gave another reluctant nod.

"Fraid it is, Miss Merle. He met with an accident soon after you left this mornin'—was thrown from his hoss while ridin' the range. That's why I came into town. I thought you'd be wantin' to visit him."

"Visit him!" Merle gazed at him in horrified apprehension. "You mean—he's in hospital?"

"Yes, Miss Merle. We took him in straight away. You see, he fell awkward—broke his leg. But you mustn't worry too much. It was a clean break, and—"

But Merle was not listening. Already she was in the saddle and, only stopping to throw the foreman a word of thanks for his thoughtfulness, she sent Pommie galloping out of the station yard.

Her face was white and fearful as she rode through the tiny town. Uncle Stephen had given her a home ever since her parents had died, and though at times he was rather unreasonably stern and short-tempered, she loved him.

The strange events of the afternoon wiped from her mind, she made haste to the hospital. The motherly matron who received her did her best to allay her fears.

"Mr. Wason is in no danger," she said soothingly. "The shock has brought on a touch of fever, but once his temperature has gone down he

will be quite comfortable. Of course, it will take a few weeks for his leg to knit—"

Merle caught in her breath as she realised what this accident might mean to the ranch she loved. Things were difficult enough already, but how were they possibly to carry on without Uncle Stephen's guiding hand? Of course, Slim Harris was a competent foreman, but—

With an effort Merle smothered her fears and turned eagerly to the matron.

"Can I see him, please?"

"Just for a minute, but you mustn't stay. Until we've got his temperature down it would be unwise for him to receive visitors. This way, my dear."

She led the way along the corridor and opened a white door at the far end. In the doorway of the private ward Merle paused, catching in her breath as she saw the bed by the window. Very still her uncle lay, his gaunt cheeks bright with fever, his bedclothes humped up around the wickerwork cage that protected his broken leg. But his eyes were open, and he gave a husky cry of welcome as he saw her standing there.

"Merle!" he muttered, and weakly his hand reached out towards her. "The trophy—the Bronze Rider—did you win it?"

Soothingly Merle nodded as she bent over him and kissed his fevered brow.

"Yes—I won it," she said, for this was no time to explain what had really happened.

His hot, moist fingers closed convulsively over her own, and a great sigh of relief escaped him.

"Thank goodness!" he muttered. "You don't know what that trophy means to us, honey. Unless you'd won it, we might have had to sell up the ranch, but now—"

His voice trailed away, and his eyes closed, as if the effort had exhausted him.

Wonderingly Merle gazed down at him.

What could his cryptic words mean? How could the bronze trophy be of such tremendous importance?

Here was another mystery—one every bit as strange as Larry's extraordinary behaviour.

Her uncle was speaking again, but so faintly that she had to stoop low so as to catch his fevered words:

"The ranch, honey. It's in a bad way, but you'll have to do the best you can—keep things going until I'm strong enough to come home."

She smoothed his hot brow.

"Don't worry, uncle," she whispered. "Between us, Slim and I will see to things. You just hurry up and get better."

But he did not seem to have heard. His fevered mind had returned to the trophy.

"Take care of it, honey!" he muttered. "It contains a big secret—Crogan's secret!"

"Crogan's secret?"

Merle opened her eyes wide. The only Crogan she had ever heard of was old Samuel Crogan, one of the early pioneers who had died when she was a child. After a life of wandering, he had settled down in Happy Valley, and the last years of his life had been centred on horse

racing. But what secret could that eccentric old man have left? And how could it possibly affect the destiny of Happy Valley Ranch?

"Yes—Crozan's secret," came in a delicious murmur from the bed. "It's in the Bronze Rider—screw off the head—you'll find it hidden there! You'll find—"

Uncle Stephen's voice died away, his eyes closed, and he lay still. Fearfully Merle looked across at the matron, but she shook her head and smiled.

"It's all right, my dear. He's fallen asleep—the best thing that could happen. Now I'm afraid you must go, but don't worry. We will look after him."

Merle nodded and reluctantly allowed herself to be led away. It was a little dazedly that she left the hospital and made her way round to the hitching-rack where she had left Pommie, for she was still thinking of what her uncle had told her.

"Thank goodness Larry gave me the trophy!" she exclaimed.

Involuntarily her heart warmed towards the mysterious young cowboy. Despite his strange behaviour, he had at least handed her the trophy which, by all accounts, was of such vital importance.

But what secret could be hidden in it?

Almost quivering with impatience, she unstrapped the saddlebag and took out the finely cast statuette. It represented a galloping cowboy, and, remembering what Uncle Stephen had said, she tried first to unscREW the horse's head and then the cowboy's.

The first refused to budge, but the latter moved under the twisting fingers, and her heart leapt as the bronze head swung round and round. At last it came clean away, and she caught in her breath as she saw that the bronze casting was hollow.

"Now for the secret!" Excitedly she thrust in her fingers. Then she turned the statuette upside down and shook it. But nothing fell out. She peered into the hollow body, and then abruptly the thrilled look of expectancy died from her eyes.

For the trophy was empty!

WAS LARRY TO BLAME?

"Empty! Oh goodness! What does it mean?" What does it mean? In disappointment and consternation Merle stared at the



Bronze Rider.

Was it possible that her uncle's words had only been the empty fancies of a disordered brain? Had he only imagined that the trophy contained some stupendous secret?

"Slowly Merle shook her head. "No—it wasn't just delirium," she told herself. "He was crazy keen on me winning the Bronze Rider this morning. He was really certain it did contain a secret. But there's nothing here now. If there was anything hidden in the trophy, then it's been stolen."

But who could possibly have removed the secret? Until a few hours ago the Bronze Rider had been locked up in a safe in the rodeo committee's office. It had lain there for months, so—"

She caught in her breath as she realised that one person—and one person alone—could have taken whatever had been in the trophy.

"Larry!" she exclaimed. For a moment she shrank from the startling thought that rushed across her mind. Despite the young cowboy's curt, hostile attitude, she hated to believe him a thief. Yet what other explanation could there be?

"He gave me back the trophy because he'd no further use for it," she murmured. "Because he had already robbed it of its secret! That was what he was after all along. He prevented me from competing so as to make sure of winning the Bronze

Rider himself, and when he had rifled it—"

Stormy patches of colour swept across her cheeks. She almost choked as she remembered how nonchalantly Larry had handed her the trophy; remembered his sardonic grin as he had passed it over.

"Oh, the cheat! The hateful trickster!" she gasped.

Her blood boiling, she stood there, angrier than she had ever been before in her life. Her first impulse was to rush off to the sheriff's office; to pour out the whole story and demand the young cowboy's arrest.

But how could she? She had no proof that anything had been secreted in the trophy, that Larry had stolen it. And she couldn't even tackle him herself. She didn't know where he lived—didn't even know his full name.

Hot, stinging tears rose to her eyes as she realised her helplessness, and miserably she regarded her horse.

"Oh, Pommie, what will uncle say when he learns what's happened?" she gulped. "How ever will I be able to break the news to him?"

Pommie did not understand what she was saying, but he sensed her distress and thrust out his velvety nose as if to comfort her.

Merle patted him, and with a sigh swung up into the saddle. She must get back to the ranch. Slim and the other hands would be impatiently waiting to hear the latest news about the injured rancher. Besides, there was business to attend to. From now on she would have to take charge.

In her anxiety to get back home, she left the main road and took the short cut through the hills. Outlaw's Trail, as she expected, was difficult and dangerous, but thanks to Pommie's sure-footedness she got through safely and at last she saw on either side her uncle's cattle grazing on the open range; saw right ahead the white-painted homestead, with purple wistaria curling over the veranda rail.

Slim Harris; Mammie, the buxom negro housekeeper; Jake Binns, the bandy-legged horse-breaker—all the staff were gathered at the gate to greet her.

They listened sympathetically to what she had to tell them, then the foreman twiddled with his dusty stetson and tried to speak reassuringly.

"Guess things might have been a lot worse, Miss Merle," he said gruffly. "A broken leg's a nasty thing, but your uncle's hale and hearty, and it'll mend right enough. Meanwhile we'll carry on. You needn't worry about the ranch, we'll see to things—won't we, boys?"

He looked around and there came a murmur of agreement from the cowboys. Nevertheless, some of them wore uneasy frowns, and Merle herself was frowning as she followed Mammie into the house. She guessed they were not too happy about the future.

There was a big mortgage on the ranch; all kinds of other debts. It would not be easy to keep things going while Uncle Stephen was away in hospital.

"But we'll do it somehow," Merle told herself. "We've got to. It would break my heart if Happy Valley was sold up."

She sighed wistfully as she recalled what her uncle had said. If only she had found the secret hidden in the Bronze Rider! If only it had not been stolen! The angry colour rushed back to her cheeks as she remembered who had been responsible for her loss.

But next morning all thought of Larry was wiped from her mind. There was too much to do—Mammie to help with the cowboys' breakfast; the chickens to be fed; the young calves in the corral to be attended to. Then there was Mammie to be consulted about the week's groceries that were to be brought from town. She had just finished compiling the list when heavy feet clattered along

the veranda and Slim Harris appeared in the doorway.

"I've harnessed up the buggy," he announced. "Knowin' you don't like Pommie between the shafts, I've put in Starlight. He's a bit irisky, but I reckon you'll be able to handle him as long as you stick to the main road."

Merle nodded and, stuffing the shopping list into her pocket, she strode across to the waiting buggy and climbed up into the high driving-seat.

As the foreman had said, Starlight was in one of his most difficult moods, but fortunately the main road was smooth and level and Merle managed to prevent him from getting out of hand.

On reaching the town, she did her shopping, then called at the bank, for there was money to draw for the men's wages, also for the interest due to Nathaniel Garston, the wealthy owner of the big ranch adjoining Happy Valley, who held a mortgage on Uncle Stephen's land.

It was then that Merle began to realise what a difficult task she had taken on. There was barely enough money in her uncle's account to pay the wages, and the manager refused her timid request for a loan.

"Sorry, Miss Merle, but it can't be done," he said. "Still, don't worry. Rancher Garston's well off. He won't mind waiting for his money."

"Maybe he won't," murmured Merle, although not too certainly, for she knew what a hard man her neighbour was.

Pushing the bag containing the wages under the driving seat, she clambered up after it and gathered up the reins.

"Gee up!" she ordered. Starlight tossed his head, tried to rear, then shot off through the town as if possessed. It took all Merle's time to get him under control, but at last he sulkily consented to settle down to a jog-trot.

The cross-roads were reached and Merle was just about to swing the horse round to the right when, with a gasp, she realised that the main road to the ranch was blocked.

Piled high between the jagged boulders on either side of it were prickly branches that made an impassable barrier.

Hurriedly reining in the restive Starlight, Merle leapt to the ground in angry astonishment.

"Well, of all the fool tricks!" she gasped. "Who can have blocked the way? Who can be responsible—"

"Guess it was me," cut in a calm, boyish voice.

Merle swung round, then she almost collapsed. For from out of the trees that edged the dangerous short-cut through the hills had cantered a lithe figure on a magnificent black horse.

Merle could hardly believe her own eyes.

"Larry!" she exclaimed.

And the mystery cowboy it was who sat there in the saddle, regarding her with that sardonic glint of amusement in his eyes.



DANGER ON OUTLAW'S TRAIL

Merle was so startled that for a second or two she could not speak.

She had believed Larry to be miles away; despite what he had said when they had first met, she had never expected to set eyes on him again.

"Larry!" she cried again; then, as her gaze went once more to the piled-up branches, she made a bewildered gesture. "Was it really you who blocked up the road?"

"Fraid it was," he admitted.

"But why?"

He shrugged. "Oh, I guess I had my reasons. Maybe it was to stop you takin' the wrong trail."

(Please turn to page 167.)



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

THE S O S MESSAGE

"AHOY, there!" The cheery shout rang along the promenade deck of the Ocean Star, otherwise known as the Floating College, en route for Australia. "Lovely ices, fresh and creamy. Come along, young fellow, see what you can do with that."

"Thanks a lot, Mr. Meldron, but I'd rather not," said Don Weston, and he did not even glance at the luscious confection which the friendly passenger had placed down on the small table beside him.

"Oh, come now! Fay, you won't let me down?"

Fair-haired Fay Manners looked up into the genial, tanned face bending over her, saw the look of concern behind the twinkle in the kindly brown eyes, and looked away again hastily.

"Th-thank you, but I couldn't," she whispered.

"Well, well! Two of you on a diet. But at least I've got one pal who won't let me down. Johnny, what about it?"

Johnny Briggs, hunched up in his chair, chin sunk in his palms, shook his head.

"Sorry, sir! I guess it would just about choke me," he said in a muffled voice.

A silence followed that remark, during which the other passengers around exchanged looks of concern with the good-hearted Mr. Meldron, then looked pityingly at the down-bent heads of the three chums. Mr. Meldron sighed.

"Sure wish there was something I could do to make you feel better," he said worriedly. "You just sit and stare out to sea. You've got to snap out of it, you know. Brace up—"

"How can we brace up when—when Sally—" Don's voice broke as he thought about their chum, Sally Warner, who had disappeared overboard the previous night. With a terrific effort he recovered control of himself. "It's the uncertainty that's driving me crazy," he added. "Not knowing what's happened to her, not knowing whether she's alive or—dead."

"That's the worst part of it," put in Fay in a hollow voice. "If only we knew—" She stopped suddenly, flinching as she saw the pitying glances which passed between the other passengers. "I know what you're thinking," she whispered, "but it isn't true! Sally's safe—she is! I feel it—"

"Of course she is," said Johnny staunchly, but with an undercurrent of dread in his tone. "Nothing could happen to Sally—it couldn't!" But somehow his voice lacked conviction. Mr. Meldron shook his head.

"I wish with all my heart that I

could believe that," he said, with deep sincerity. "But—" He sighed and shook his head again.

With a queer little muffled sound Don suddenly sank back into his chair and buried his face in his hands. This was like some horrible nightmare. To think that it was his wonderful girl chum whom they were discussing like this! Only last night she had been with them, sparkling, laughing, intent on finding out what connection there was between Jack Morris, one of the passengers, and the mysterious disappearance of a number of lifebelts.

She had followed the man up to the boat-deck, had grappled with him in the fog when she had seen him about to throw overboard the lifebelts to which was attached an oilskin bag containing valuable radio equipment. But in the struggle she had lost her balance. She had called for Don even as she had fallen. He could still hear her cry ringing in his ears—he felt he would hear it for evermore.

But though the Ocean Star had halted, though they had searched and searched, no trace of Sally could they find. Sally was lost!

Fiercely Don pushed back the black cloud of despair that threatened to engulf him. He wouldn't admit that anything could have taken Sally from him.

He started up suddenly as the clanging of bells sounded through the ship, looked quickly at Johnny and Fay as the ship slowly but surely changed course.

"Gosh! What is it?" asked Johnny hoarsely. "We're going back—"

"Perhaps they've seen something," said Fay tremblingly, her hands clenching the rail so tightly that the knuckles showed white.

Don's heart gave a violent lurch, then began to thud sickeningly.

"There's something behind this," he said tensely. "They'd given up the search— Hey, Sparks!" he called. "What's going on?"

The junior wireless officer hurried over.

"Don't know," he replied. "Had a mystery radio SOS from Paloa Island—that place we passed last night. It's queer, though, if the island is supposed to be uninhabited."

"Did—did they say who it was who radioed?" asked Fay eagerly.

"Nope! Transmitter went dead. But we've got to go back—can't ignore an SOS."

But the chums weren't listening to Sparks. With sudden, wild, unbelieving hope they were staring at each other.

"Sally!" breathed Don. "It must be Sally." She got washed to the island—

"Hey, take it easy!" commanded Sparks. "I wish I could believe that,

but where could she get a transmitter from?" He looked at the shining-eyed trio, then frowned. "Don't hope too much," he advised.

But the chums were full of hope. What a radio transmitter could be doing on a supposedly uninhabited island they did not know. But last night Sally had disappeared. This morning a mysterious SOS had come from an island near the spot where she had gone overboard. That, surely, wasn't just mere coincidence.

In suffocating excitement they glued themselves to the rail, staring out over the sparkling sea until their eyes ached. Until finally a blurred smudge came into view.

"Paloa Island!" shouted Don, as the Ocean Star drew in nearer and stopped. "Quick! They're lowering a boat."

With Fay and Johnny at his heels, he rushed to the boat deck, reaching it just as the men were taking their places. He pleaded so eloquently that finally the officer in charge gave way.

"Very well, come along," he said resignedly. "But please don't take it for granted that your missing friend's connected with this. You've been through enough, you don't want any more shocks."

"The only shock we're going to get is a pleasant one," said Johnny confidently. "Off we go!"

Swiftly, expertly the boat was lowered, and soon it was skimming over the waves towards the small island. Crouched tensely in the boat, Don, Johnny, and Fay stared ahead, a prey to alternate wild, suffocating hope and the blackest of despair.

Would they find Sally on the island? If so, was she all right? Or had the mysterious message stopped abruptly because she had been hurt? Those questions raced through their heads as quickly as the boat raced over the water. And all the time their eyes were searching for a glimpse of a girlish figure. They failed to see one, but through the trees they saw a hut and a radio aerial fixed above it. Then, as the boat grated on the silvery sand and the sailors and the three chums tumbled ashore, there were the sounds of hoarse voices, and from among the trees that fringed the shore hurried four grimy-looking figures, their hands upraised in welcome.

"Howdy!" said the foremost, baring his teeth in a grin. "Mighty nice to see someone. Sure began to think we were here for life."

In a fever of anxiety Don stared at them, vaguely disliking the shifty air about them, but too consumed with a feverish desire to know of Sally's whereabouts to bother about the men.

"You sent us a message?" said the Ocean Star officer. "What's the trouble?"

"We ran out of oil," said the man laconically. "Our old motor-ketch is moored on the other side of the island. Must have some oil to get her going—"

Don could wait no longer. Finally he burst out:

"But where's Sally? She is here, isn't she? She must be—how else could you have known to radio the Ocean Star? Is she hurt—"

"Tell us where she is," begged Fay, her voice quivering. "Oh, quickly—"

The man stepped back a pace. Once again he and his friends exchanged that queer, furtive look. Then with an air of bewilderment he shook his head.

"Sally?" he asked puzzledly. "Say, what are you talking about?"

"Perhaps you don't know her name," said Fay, with a little sob. "But she must be here. She fell overboard last night. Please—"

She stopped, her blue eyes stricken, her face white as paper as the man slowly shook his head. Hardly realising, she gripped the arms of Don and Johnny for support as they, with faces as white as her own, listened incredulously to what the man was saying.

"Sorry I can't help you, miss. We didn't radio any particular ship—it was just luck that yours happened to be in the vicinity. As for a girl"—he gave a short laugh—"guess you're the first one we've seen for quite a time. It's a certainty there's not one on this island. Sorry!"



SALLY'S SHOE

The man's statement was a shattering blow to Don & Co. They did not know that the leader of the ruffianly looking quartette was lying—that, actually, it had been Sally herself who had sent off that radio S.O.S., and that she had been surprised and overpowered before she could finish transmitting her message.

For a moment or two the three chums stood there, too stricken to speak. Yet, even in his despair, Don found himself looking with distrust at the faces of the men before him, found himself disliking their shifty looks. Their words of sympathy didn't seem to ring true; they jarred him, filled him with bitterness.

He ignored the officer's suggestion that he, Fay, and Johnny should return to the Ocean Star in the boat which was about to leave to fetch the oil-drums, still feeling perversely that he must himself search the island, must make sure that Sally hadn't landed here unknown to these men.

"I'll look around a bit until the boat gets back," he said gruffly. "Coming, Fay—Johnny?"

Before they could answer, however, the first man stepped forward, barring their way.

"Look," he said in an ingratiating tone—"it seems to me you've had a pretty big let-down not finding your friend here. That's tough. But why make it tougher for yourselves by hanging around? We'd have known for sure if anyone had landed here. Isn't that so, fellers?"

"Sure!" answered the other three promptly—a shade too promptly for Don's liking. These men, he felt, were trying to conceal something, some shady activity, perhaps. Well, what they were up to was no concern of his, but just the same he was not going to let it interfere with his plan to search the island. Indeed, it only made him all the more determined.

"Thanks," he said curtly, "but I'll take a look round just the same."

For a moment an ugly light shone in the leader's eyes. Then he shrugged.

"O.K. Suit yourself," he said nonchalantly.

But as the chums set off one of the men followed slowly behind, keeping a wary eye on the three downcast figures.

"You—you don't really think it's any good, Don, do you?" asked Fay chokily. "Oh, why were we so sure? Why— Don!" she added, with a shriek that made the boys jump. "Look!"

As her outflung finger pointed downwards, Johnny leapt forward

and snatched up the object which was half buried in the sand. His face was aflame as he held it up—a girl's shoe water-marked and bedraggled-looking, but thrillingly and unmistakably Sally's.

Accusingly he swung round upon the man behind them and waved it almost truculently in his face.

"What about this, eh?" he asked angrily. "Sally's shoe! How did that come to be here if she—if she—"

His voice trailed away as he saw the man very slowly, pityingly shaking his head.

"Too bad, son," he said heavily. "I hate to say it, but that shoe was washed up with the tide this morning. Guess you know what that means."

For a moment the three chums stood staring at him, sick with the horror of what he was trying to convey to them. Then Fay collapsed against Johnny with a choking sob.

"I—I can't bear it," she cried.

"Sally—oh, Sally!"

"We'd better take her back," said Johnny thickly. "Come on, Don."

Don, his face grey, shook his head.

"You take her back, Johnny," he said. "I must go on searching, in case—in case—"

He didn't finish, but Johnny nodded. Don, he knew, would not give up hope until all hope was past. If Sally's shoe had been washed up, why not other things belonging to her? Perhaps even Sally herself, unconscious, in need of help.

That was what Don himself was thinking. With alternate dread and hope, he pressed forward, making a complete circle round the little island. He found nothing. Numb with despair, he was about to return to the boat when another idea suddenly struck him.

Supposing the shoe hadn't been washed up on its own? Supposing Sally had landed on the island and the shoe had fallen from her foot when she had dragged herself further inland?

Once again hope flamed up in Don. To the alarm of the man who still followed him, he suddenly started forward at a run, through the bushes and the trees, until finally he came to the clearing where the men had their camp. Then he stopped, staring round.

It was strange, but he had the queerest feeling suddenly. A feeling that he was not alone here.

Keenly, excitedly he looked around. The place was deserted. He could hear his follower crashing about in the bushes some distance away. Suddenly his heart began to beat suffocatingly. For standing some distance away was a small wooden shed, heavily padlocked on the outside.

Like a flash he darted towards it, pulled at the door. It didn't budge an inch. The window— Too far from the ground for him to see through. If only he had something to stand on! Even as that thought entered his head the man who had followed him darted across the clearing, grabbed his arm and roughly spun him round.

"Hey, what's the idea?" he shouted. "Snooping around our camp—"

"Why, have you got something to hide?" shot back Don.

The man gave a violent start, clenched his hands. Then, mastering his anger with a terrific effort, gave a laugh.

"Sure we haven't," he said lightly. "It's just that we've got our transmitter in there. Don't want anyone tampering with it."

"If it broke down last night in the middle of a message it can't be much good," said Don calmly. "Maybe I could fix it for you."

The man swallowed convulsively. But before he could answer a sudden hail rang through the trees. The relief on his face was unmistakable.

"Your boat," he said to Don. "You'd better run for it."

For a moment Don hesitated. Then he turned and reluctantly made his way back to the boat. But his mind was full of that locked shed.

There was more in it than a radio transmitter, he was sure. Even so, sure! It was foolish of him to imagine for one moment that the locked shed had anything to do with Sally? No, that was absurd! What possible reason would the man have for concealing her? They, shifty-looking as they were, would never be so cruel as to keep her away from her friends!

He was being idiotic, and yet— Why couldn't he banish that feeling he had that somehow the small island held the clue to Sally's whereabouts?

He would, he decided, mention it to the officer in charge of the boat. But Don had no chance to do that. The officer, all impatience, was waiting for him when he ran up. Without waiting for Don to speak, he almost lifted him into the boat, barked out an order, and in a matter of seconds they were speeding back towards the Ocean Star.

"Wait!" cried Don. "Please—we must go back—"

The officer gave a short laugh.

"Not a hope," he replied. "We've lost enough time on this journey. That's the last we'll see of that island."

Don fell back, a look of frustration on his face, a feeling of despair in his heart. Agonisedly he gazed back towards the island. From their present position he could see right into the clearing, could see the locked hut. And as he stared he suddenly started violently, and with trembling hands lifted his binoculars to his eyes.

"Don, what's the matter?" asked Fay.

Don did not reply. He was staring through the fading sunlight across at the hut. Something had appeared at the window. It looked like a girl's hand and it seemed to be waving a scarf, but almost instantly it disappeared, and though Don looked and looked it did not reappear.

He reported his discovery to the officer, but, as he had feared, he, though sympathetic, was sceptical.

"There's nothing there," he declared when he had looked through the binoculars. "Guess you must have imagined it."

But Don was certain he had really seen someone waving at the window, and grimly he leaned across to where Fay and Johnny were sitting.

"We've got to report this to the captain," he declared. "I'm certain Sally's alive and on that island. At all costs we've got to go back and investigate."



THE CHUMS' DARING DECISION

The moment they reached the Ocean Star they went in search of the captain, only to learn that he was too busy to see them. Just as preparations were begun to get under way again, however, they managed to corner the first officer. He shook his head, however, when they poured out their story.

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid there's not a chance of investigating your story," he said. "The captain would never agree to hold the ship up further without some concrete evidence, and that's just what you haven't got, you know. There are no grounds for thinking your missing chum is on the island. Those men said they hadn't seen her. Whatever reason would they have for lying?"

"I don't know," said Don desperately, "but I feel they were."

"Look, old chap," said the first officer, "I'm sorry—more darned sorry than I can say about this business. But there's nothing I can do. I know it's tough, but I really think you're so worried and upset that you're letting your imagination run away with you. Now I must fly."

And with a sympathetic smile he darted off, leaving Don white and rigid, still staring out towards the island which was still visible in the gathering dusk.

"It's no good, Don!" With a look of agony in her blue eyes Fay buried her face in her hands. "I can't even cry. It all hurts too much even for tears. Oh, Sally! Sally!"

"Why did we leave the island without tearing that hut apart?" groaned Johnny, his usually merry, tanned face grey and drawn. "We're beaten—"

"We're not beaten!" Don's voice came like a whiplash through the gathering gloom. "I'm going back to that island. I'll pull that hut apart with my bare hands if necessary, but if Sally's there I'll find her."

"But how, Don—how?" asked Fay, staring haggard-eyed at her grim-faced chum.

"I'm going to swim for it," gritted Don. "I don't care what happens to me afterwards, but I'm going to get to that island. I know Sally's there."

"Swim!" Johnny and Fay said the word together. They looked from the Ocean Star to the island. A distance of nearly a mile. Then they looked at each other and nodded.

"I'm with you, Don," said Johnny, just as the muffled rumble of engines announced that the liner had resumed its voyage.

"So am I," said Fay staunchly. "Fay—no! Not you! You stay here—"

Fay did not reply. She watched as Don kicked off his shoes, watched as, with a careful look from right to left, he climbed to the rail, then dived neatly and expertly into the sea below.

She watched as, with hardly a splash, Johnny followed. Then, as they turned to wave to the watching figure on deck, there was another splash beside them.

"I don't like being deserted by my friends," said Fay calmly, as she bobbed up beside the two astonished boys. "Forward, troops!"

And in the waning light the three chums struck out for Paloa Island while the Ocean Star steamed off in the opposite direction.

THE COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

(Continued from page 164.)

"The—the wrong trail?" Blankly she regarded him. "But the main road is the right trail! It's Outlaw's Trail that's the dangerous one."

He shook his head.

"Not to-day it isn't. You take my advice and take the short cut. You'll find it a much shorter and safer way home."

She glared, too angry to wonder why he should make such a strange suggestion.

"I won't do anything of the kind! It's absurd to say that Outlaw's Trail is the safer way. Why, with a mettlesome horse like Starlight—"

He cut in with a nod, his steel-grey eyes fixed on the restive horse between the shafts of the buggy.

"Yep—it was kind of foolish to come out drivin' with him," he said. "Guess that's no horse for a girl. Still, don't worry, Merle."

"Don't call me Merle!"

"Okay, honey. Just as you say. But you needn't worry. I can handle Starlight, so if you'll jump aboard we'll get crackin'!"

She could hardly believe her own ears.

"You can handle Starlight!" she echoed, her cheeks getting redder and redder. "Are you suggesting that you should drive me back to the ranch?"

He nodded, as if surprised by her display of indignation.

"Of course. It needs a man to take a spirited horse down Outlaw's Trail."

"I'm not going down Outlaw's Trail!" she cried. "I'm going along the main road. So drag those branches away at once!"

But he did not move. That sar-

BACK on the island Sally sat slumped on the floor, so utterly dejected, so heartbroken that she felt numb, bereft of all feeling.

She thought dully of her elation not long before, of that wonderful moment when she had heard Don's voice outside the hut. How madly she had struggled with the bonds that tied her hands and feet; how desperately she had chewed at the gag in her mouth. Frenziedly she had concentrated all her thoughts on him, willing him to break open the hut, to come in and rescue her.

For one wonderful moment she thought he would succeed. Then had come that crushing, sickening moment when the hail had come from the waiting boat, when she lay almost weeping with despair, listening to the sound of Don's retreating footsteps.

For a few terrible seconds she had given up struggling, had sat in utter listlessness, every ounce of fight gone from her. Then, suddenly, her old spirit had returned. She wouldn't give up the fight yet—not until every last spark of hope had gone. There might still be time! That thought had added frenzy to her struggles. Wildly she had twisted her hands this way and that, until one hand had suddenly slipped from its bonds.

Without waiting to untie her feet, she had pulled herself up on to the bench, which ran round the hut, and tearing the scarf from her neck had waved it frantically.

But her captors had entered the hut, dragged her away from the window and had retied her hands.

Now, as she lay there on the floor, helpless and despairing, the door opened again and the man she knew as Seth entered. He grinned down at her.

"The Ocean Star has just started to sail away," he announced, "and I guess that's what we'll be doing soon. Now we've got that oilskin bag Jack Morris sent us, there's no point in stopping here, and I guess you'll be coming with us."

As he spoke he leaned down and

donic glint of amusement still in his eyes, he shook his head again.

"Nothin' doin', honey," he said.

"Then I'll shift them myself. And don't call me honey."

As she spoke, Merle strode furiously towards the piled-up branches. The young cowboy watched her with a grin.

"Guess I'd leave them alone if I were you. Those branches are mighty prickly, and there's cactus stuffed amongst them. Without gloves, I reckon, you'd tear your hands to pieces."

Merle had just realised that much herself, and as she stood there, glowering helplessly at the formidable barrier, he took a step forward.

"Now be sensible and do as I say," he urged. "Outlaw's Trail's much the better way this afternoon. If only you'll trust me—"

"Trust you!" It was as if his softly-drawn words had set light to a bomb inside her. "You must be crazy if you think I'd trust a cheat and a thief like you!"

"Thief!"

He winced as he echoed the word and a dull flush coloured his face.

"Yes—thief!" she repeated. "Oh, you were very clever, pretending to do the big thing by handing me the trophy you won. But I've seen through your fraud. You gave it me because you've already stolen the secret that was inside it!"

His grey eyes narrowed.

"So you think that Crogan's secret was hidden in the Bronze Rider?"

"You know it was!" she accused. "Uncle knew it, too."

"But your uncle may have been mistaken," he suggested.

"He wasn't. Don't try and bluff. You can't fool me any more. I know you for what you are now—a cheat and a trickster—and I never want to see you again!"

lifted Sally up. Slings her across his shoulder, he sturd across to where, in a small, rocky bay, a motor-ketch lay moored at the water's edge.

Sally's heart was thumping madly as she was carried aboard. This was the end, she thought.

Dumping her down on the deck, Seth pulled off her gag and undid her bonds.

"Guess you can't run away, so there's no harm in leaving you on your own," he guffawed. "But it won't be for long. As soon as we've finished clearing up, my pals and me'll be joining you."

He strode back up the beach, and after a few moments Sally rose to her feet and stared miserably out to sea.

There was no sign of the Ocean Star; it had disappeared over the horizon.

And for the first time a sob came from Sally's lips. Her heart felt full to bursting point. She couldn't bear it—she couldn't! With another sob she bent her head down on her arms. Then her heart gave a startled leap. She straightened up and stared incredulously over the rail. For from the distance had come a husky voice:

"Sally! Sally!" it called. "Is that you? Are you all right?"

And as Sally stared and stared again, three heads bobbed into view—heads that she recognised as they drew nearer.

Don, Johnny, and Fay!

Sally gazed at them in dazed wonder. Then another sob came to her lips.

"It's you!" she cried almost incoherently. "Don! Johnny! Fay! Oh, this is too wonderful! You've found me—I'm not alone after all! Oh, you're the most perfect friends a girl ever had."

And, as they swam to the ketch, she leaned over and helped her exhausted chums aboard.

(End of this week's story.)

Sally & Co. are re-united. But how will they be able to escape and rejoin the Ocean Star? See next Friday's thrilling story.

Tears of anger almost blinded her. She strode back to the buggy and clambered up to the driving-seat.

"Wait a minute!" Larry cried. But as he strode forward she flapped the reins.

Forward leapt the mettlesome horse, and down the winding, pebbly side trail the buggy went clattering and lurching. Merle gripped the reins tightly, but she was too furiously angry to realise that they were proceeding at a dangerous pace.

What could be the reason for Larry's latest high-handed action? She was asking herself. Why had he been so insistent that she should drive along Outlaw's Trail?

"It beats me," she murmured. "But it was for no good reason. He's up to some tricky game—"

And then her voice trailed away, for suddenly Starlight had slipped on a loose stone. The horse gave a startled squeal, regained his balance with an effort, squealed again, then swung wildly round.

Desperately Merle dragged on the reins. Desperately she shouted. What she had feared had come to pass.

The highly-strung Starlight had the bit between his teeth. He was now galloping along out of control—off the narrow trail and across the grassy slope to the right.

"And it's all thanks to Larry!" she gulped. "But for him—"

Breaking off, she shouted to the horse again; once more tugged on the reins.

But all in vain!

On plunged Starlight. On lurched and rattled the high-wheeled buggy. Racing blindly down the slope—careering for where the grassy ground came to an abrupt end; to where, a hundred yards farther on, there yawned a terrifying precipice!

Dangerous moments—and indirectly due to the strange Larry. Don't miss next Friday's instalment.

DOLORES THE MISCHIEF-MAKER

(Continued from page 158.)

Bert, we'll get the official permission first—and thanks for putting us wise. See you later."

She nodded brightly to Chris who, stifling down her own disappointment, nodded back. Then they went hurrying back up the hill towards the camp.

"Anyway," Pat said comfortingly, "what applies to us also applies to Dolores. If we can't go without special permission, neither can she. And there's just one way to get permission," she added thoughtfully.

"And that?" Chris asked.

"Through Bruce. Bruce has already been in touch with the old admiral—that's how he knew he'd been away. Bruce, of course, will have to have an

interview with him if we're to borrow the island for the regatta. Yes, that's it!" she said eagerly. "Let's tackle Bruce."

Buoyed by new hope they entered the camp, making the young sports master's hut their first objective. Eagerly they reached it, and then outside the doorway they paused. For inside the hut they saw a slim, beautiful figure—Dolores. And they heard Dolores saying:

"Oh, it's lovely, Bruce, to find everything going so swimmingly. And, of course I'll help—just as much as I can. The regatta ought to be a stunning success. And—and you really think you'll be able to persuade Admiral Hardacre to loan us the island?"

"Hallo," breathed Pat, and looked significantly at Chris. Then came Bruce's reply:

"I'm hoping so, of course, but I

gather it's not going to be too easy. They say he's a touchy old chap. Anyway, I've been on the phone to him, and he seemed quite amiable. So much so that I've fixed up to go over to Dartfleet Island to-morrow morning and see him—"

"Gee," Pat breathed, and beside her, Chris drew a deep breath, and then they both stiffened rigidly as Dolores' reply came.

"Good work!" she said enthusiastically. "Oh, jolly good work, Bruce! And here's an idea," she added swiftly. "What about the two of us going over to see the admiral? My cabin cruiser is at your disposal, as you know, and I'm sure that two of us could impress him better than one. Oh, do let me go with you, Bruce!"

What will Bruce's answer be and what will Pat and Chris do? Look out for more surprises in next Friday's enthralling instalment.

THE LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN HARP

(Continued from page 160.)



THE HARP AGAIN

Next morning the storm had passed. The sun shone on the tangled gardens of Wildwood Hall.

There had been little sleep for Noel that night. He had been up since before dawn making certain investigations.

As Elaine had implored him, he had called on Mr. Davenant, asking him to bring the papers for her, to sign. The young detective had also paid a visit to the near-by town and purchased certain articles in a large brown-paper parcel he was carrying.

As he made his way up the shrubby path towards the old Tudor house he met June, looking troubled and anxious.

"Nunky! I'm so glad you're back!" she exclaimed. "I'm worried about Elaine. It seems so dreadful—she should have to give up the house she's inherited—and still more dreadful that she's lost poor Bruno. It's all so weird, so mystifying—"

She stopped as she recognised that quizzical smile on Noel's face.

"You've discovered something, nunky!" she challenged him. "You've found—Bruno!"

Noel tapped the parcel he was carrying.

"I'm hoping the contents of this will help me to trace him!"

June's grey eyes widened.

"But, nunky, I'm just baffled!" she confessed. "Who was the invisible minstrel? Who played the harp?"

"Nobody played it, June!" Noel smiled. "I'm pretty sure that instrument in the music-room isn't the original heirloom of the O'Keefe family. I found some gilded wood on the window-sill, but I couldn't find a single spot on the gilded frame of the harp where it had been scratched. So I feel sure the original harp was moved away, and was knocked against the window-sill as it was shifted, and a trick harp put in its place, which probably plays by some mechanical means."

Smilingly he patted June's shoulder.

"Go and cheer Elaine up, my dear," he said. "And if anyone wants to know where I am, say I have to make an important phone call!"

Leaving June more mystified than ever, the young detective strode away.

An hour later a little scene was taking place in the library of Wildwood Hall.

Elaine was preparing to sign the papers the solicitor had brought. Mr. Davenant had asked June and Griggs, the caretaker, to be present as witnesses. Of Noel there was no sign.

Once those papers were signed the old Tudor house would no longer belong to Elaine, but it was not this thought that troubled her now.

Her thoughts were still with the magnificent collicle who had disappeared so mysteriously.

"I just couldn't live here, Mr. Davenant!" she exclaimed. "Everything would remind me of Bruno, and of that dreadful legend. I should be thinking of him all the time!"

The solicitor shook his head regretfully.

"I'm deeply sorry, Miss Elaine," he replied. "But if you insist on signing—"

He shrugged his shoulders, while Elaine picked up the pen.

And then, without warning, a startling thing happened.

Before Elaine could put pen to paper a loud, deep barking re-echoed through the house!

A startled cry came from Griggs. And Elaine, her blue eyes shining, sprang to her feet.

"That's Bruno's bark!" she cried. "I'd know it anywhere! It's Bruno! He's come back! He's here!"

She raced out into the hall with June at her heels.

Still that joyous barking echoed and re-echoed through Wildwood Hall.

"But where is it coming from?" panted June. "It seems to be coming from several directions at once—from all over the house!"

"No, it's from the kitchen, I think!" Elaine gasped. "Maybe Bruno is scratching at the kitchen door, trying to get in!"

Excitedly the two girls rushed for the kitchen quarters.

"Bruno! Bruno!" Elaine called.

But there was no sign of the big collie in the kitchen.

"It's uncanny!" June exclaimed. "You can still hear him barking, Elaine. It seems to come from everywhere at once. You try the garden, and I'll search upstairs."

Elaine nodded eagerly.

June raced back into the hall and up the stairs. Then, amid those echoing barks, she heard another sound—and it brought a choking cry from her.

It was the sound of the harp!

But not playing a haunting little tune this time. The notes were jangled and discordant, as if a number of strings were being struck at the same time again and again.

June raced for the music-room. Throwing open the door, she stopped short with a gasp of amazement and dismay.

Noel was lying on the floor, struggling with a man whose face June couldn't see, for his back was turned to her. Noel's opponent had one hand pressed over the young detective's mouth, but Noel had managed to signal for help by striking the strings of the harp with his foot.

And then June's quick eyes noticed something else.

A revolver was lying on the floor. It had been drawn by Noel's opponent, but the detective had struck it from his hand.

In a twinkling June had grasped it, and was covering the man.

And when he sullenly rose to his feet, helpless under the threat of the gun, June choked back a cry of astonishment.

For she was confronting the furious, flushed face of Mr. Davenant, the solicitor!

"Just in time, my dear!" Noel said breathlessly, taking the gun from her and still keeping Davenant covered. "It was a plot to scare Elaine into selling her house at a ridiculously low figure, and Davenant and his wife were both concerned in it. And I think you'll find Bruno through there!"

There was an opening in the paneled wall near the window, leading to a hidden room below, and here Bruno was found, still sleeping off the effects of the drug the Davenants had given him, to keep him quiet.

Noel had covered the dog's collar with a special marking powder which stained the hands of anyone touching it, and he had noted that tell-tale stain on Davenant's hands when he visited him that morning.

The trick harp was operated by a concealed switch, which caused tiny levers to rise from the gilded frame and pluck the strings; but it wasn't this that had lured Bruno away from his young mistress.

In the secret room they discovered a silver whistle of a special type sometimes used for training dogs. It emitted a note of such high pitch that only the sensitive ears of a dog could detect the sound. A previous owner of Bruno had trained him to respond to such a whistle—a fact which the Davenants had used in their plot to make the legend of the harp come true!

"But, nunky, we heard Bruno barking!" exclaimed June. "And all the time he was lying half-drugged in the secret room."

Noel chuckled.

"It was just a gramophone record, my dear," he replied. "There's a music shop in town specialising in animal records, and I fixed amplifiers to make the sound come from various parts. When he heard it, I felt sure Davenant would rush to wherever Bruno had been hidden to find out if the dog had escaped, and I kept watch and surprised him opening the secret panel."

There was no question now of Elaine selling Wildwood Hall.

And Noel and June will never forget the look of gratitude in her eyes as she hugged Bruno, and whispered her thanks to the two visitors who had sheltered from the storm under her porch.

(End of this week's story.)

There is a big thrill in next Friday's story of Noel and June. It is entitled: **MYSTERY AT THE ZOO.**