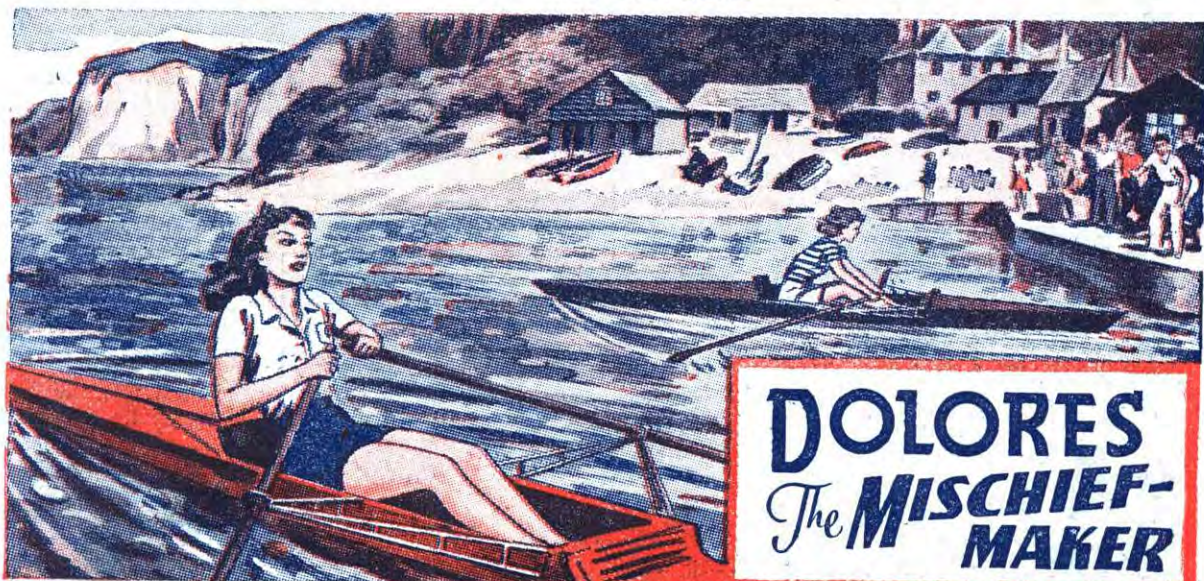


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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3D}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

Week
Ending
July 17th,
1948.



DOLORES The MISCHIEF- MAKER

The Race Between The Rival Mystery-Solvers—Written by HAZEL ARMITAGE

BRUCE'S WAY OUT

PAT ROCKWELL and her chum, Chris Caslon, who were staying at Westonsmouth 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.

A mystery surrounded the ketch, and the chums were out to solve it.

But Dolores Belgrave Bellamy, a beautiful, wealthy girl, staying at the camp, was also after the secret. She found a clue on the ketch which she carefully guarded from the chums.

But Pat and Chris managed to secure possession of it. It directed them to a cave on near-by Dartfleet Island, owned by Admiral Hardacre.

The island was out of bounds to the campers, but, knowing that Bruce Feltham, the camp's young sports master, meant to visit the admiral, the chums hurried along to see him.

To their dismay, however, Dolores was before them, and already had suggested to Bruce that she should accompany him to the island on the morrow.

Dolores looked surprised and a little distressed, but there was an angry gleam in her eyes which betrayed her real feelings.

"I'm—I'm awfully sorry if I've done something I shouldn't have done," she stammered, "but I was only trying to be helpful. I only thought—"

But Chris did not let her finish. "Never mind what you thought," she snapped, "it's not coming off, Bruce"—she whirled on the young sports master—"the regatta stunt was Pat's idea in the first place, so it's not right to leave her out now. I'm sure you didn't want to be unfair to her."

"Of course not," said Bruce hurriedly. "You are quite right, Chris. I can see now that Pat has first claim, but I'm afraid I've half-promised Dolores that she shall accompany me, and it wouldn't be wise to take two girls with me. Admiral Hardacre is such a difficult old chap." He rubbed his chin, plainly embarrassed by the situation, then suddenly his face cleared. "I think I see a way out," he declared. "Dolores, you are good at rowing, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Dolores hesitantly, "but—"

"And I know Pat is," went on Bruce, "so what about a little sporting contest? We shall be practising on the river this evening, so it would be easy to arrange a race between you two."

"And the winner to go with you to see Admiral Hardacre to-morrow?" asked Pat eagerly. Bruce nodded and Pat's eyes shone. "It's a wizard idea," she cried. "I'm game if Dolores is."

She turned to that girl, and Dolores bit her lip. It was obvious that she was not so keen, but she could hardly refuse, so reluctantly she nodded. Bruce gave a sigh of relief.

"Right! Then that's settled," he said. "The race will take place immediately after tea. Now we must get busy decorating the old ketch."

When you've had your lunch, will you join us, Pat? And you, too, Chris?"

The chums nodded and hurried off to the dining-hall to get their meal. As they ate, they eyed one another with satisfaction.

"This race is a grand idea," declared Chris with a chuckle. "You're not stuff with a oars, Pat, so you ought to beat that mischief-maker. In fact, you've got to beat her."

Pat nodded. She knew how important it was that she should get to Dartfleet Island before Dolores and locate the mysterious Captain Kirabee.

Lunch over, the chums strolled off towards the boathouse, intending to put in a good afternoon's work themselves. But as they emerged from the copse and came in sight of the river-mouth—

"Hold hard," Pat breathed. She stopped, swiftly pointing. A hundred yards away a little wooden jetty ran out into the water, and moored to that jetty were the two racing skiffs Bruce had mentioned. In one of them was Dolores, her golden head bent into the well of the boat, her slim fingers busy on some task they could not see. Chris drew a deep breath.

"Pat, she's tampering with that boat. Don't you see? She's doing something there because—"

"She means me to lose," Pat finished, grimly. "But quick, Chris—"

Just in time—or did Dolores, for a split-second, see them?—she dragged her chum back into the bushes. Dolores braced her elegant shoulders a little, looked round, and then, as though reassured, bent to her task again.

The two chums stood, grim and tense, no doubt now existing in their minds that Dolores was up to some new treacherous trick. But before they could decide upon what course to pursue there came a cheery hail from the trees behind them.

"Cheers, Pat, how're you doing?"

"WELL, of all the impudence!" cried Chris. "Come on, Pat, Dolores mustn't be allowed to get away with this!"

And pushing open the door, she led the way into the hut, where Dolores was still smiling bewitchingly at the young sports master.

Bruce and his beautiful companion swung round and stared in surprise as the flushed, angry Chris marched in, followed by Pat.

"What's the matter?" asked the sports master.

Chris pointed indignantly at Dolores.

"She is. It's not fair what she's asking you to do," she exclaimed. "If you're going to take anyone to Dartfleet Island to-morrow, Bruce, that somebody should be Pat."

cried Willis Green, as, swinging a hatchet, he came sauntering into view. "Just off to look for a few straight sticks to cut. Want 'em for making standards for the Roman shields, you know. And—whoops, there's Dolores," he added, as that girl, hearing the voice, now rose and came walking towards them. "Hallo, Dolores, we missed you off the ketch. Where've you been?"

"I?" Dolores laughed in that lilt-ing way of hers. "Didn't you see? Just taking a look at the skiffs," she said. "We're pretty interested in those skiffs at the moment, aren't we, Pat? Nice little boats. But why the chopper, Willis?"

Willis re-explained his mission. They all agreed at once to help him. There and then they made a tour of the cove, and in half an hour had collected several armfuls of stout ash branches. In high good humour they returned to the ketch. Willis and Dolores tripping ahead.

And then, significantly, Chris looked at her chum.

"Tricky, aren't we?" she sniffed. "And so charmingly innocent. All the same, steer clear of that skiff, Pat. Dolores wasn't playing around in it just for fun."

Pat smiled. "Don't worry," she said. "I've got my eyes open. And it won't be my fault," she added, "if Dolores doesn't paddle her own faked canoe when the race comes off."



NOT SMART ENOUGH

Arrived back on the ketch—now a swarming hive of enthusiastic industry—they found themselves immediately caught up.

Magnificently the old ketch was taking shape. A small army of willing carpenters were erecting a raised poop in the stern of the vessel, at spaced-out intervals the ash sticks, on which would rest the glistening Roman shields, were secured along the rails. Out on the slipway half a dozen boys and girls were busy painting Roman emblems on sails.

"Well, isn't it?" Bruce asked proudly. "I doubt if Steve Connelly would recognise his old ketch now. Wants a lot doing to it yet, though—and the biggest job will be to find a figurehead to fit it. Got any ideas about that, Pat?"

"At the moment—no," Pat confessed. "But it needn't give us a headache. Steve Connelly will help when we're ready. Or we may pick something up if we go along to the Westonsmouth Shipyard."

Bruce agreed. He seemed extremely pleased. A few minutes later came the signal that work for the afternoon was finished, and the whole party tramped back to the camp in high good humour.

By this time the news of the skiff contest had got around. The air was full of intrigued whispers. At tea it was common talk, and interest was growing apace. And when, shortly before the end of the meal, the loud speakers in the dining hall blared out the announcement officially excitement was rife.

"Gee, this is going to be good," Lucy Day chuckled. "Wouldn't miss it for the Oxford and Cambridge!"

"Who's umpiring?"

"Bruce," Dolores said.

"Goodie! What's the prize? Is there one?"

"Yes," Dolores dimpled at Pat. "Whoever wins goes with Bruce to see Admiral Hardacre on Dartfleet Island to-morrow morning."

That added to the zest, and when it became known that the visit to Admiral Hardacre was in connection with their own regatta, excitement was high.

Practically the whole camp tramped down to the jetty. Ahead of the crowd were Pat and Chris. Dolores, as they expected, dawdled along in the rear of the procession, talking to Bruce.

"O.K. We're first," Chris chuckled, as they reached the jetty where the two skiffs were tied up. "Quick, Pat, nip into the one on the left."

Pat needed no urging. To get hold of the untampered skiff had been her main idea. Smartly she clambered into it, and, lifting the sculls, fitted them into the rowlocks. A minute or two later the crowd arrived at the water's edge, good-humouredly determined to get all the fun they could out of the race. Then Dolores came along.

She paused as she saw the smiling Pat already seated in the skiff on the left.

"Oh," she said, as if nonplussed. "Anything wrong?" Pat asked sweetly.

"No—of course not. But—well, I'd rather fancied that skiff myself, Pat. If—"

"First come, first served," Chris declared briskly. "Anyway, it doesn't matter so much, does it? Let's get on with the race. All set, Bruce?"

All set Bruce was. Dolores hesitated just a second longer, and Pat, meeting the look she threw at her as she reluctantly stepped into the second skiff, grinned a little. Well, that was that, she thought. If Dolores had been playing any tricks in the other skiff she could now reap the benefit.

She chuckled inwardly. Then, braced for the fray, she dipped her sculls. Bruce took out his watch and handkerchief. On the crowd descended a sudden silence as he held the handkerchief up.

"The course is to the buoy out in the bay and back again," he said. "Ready? Right! When the hanky drops, off you go. One—two—three!"

The handkerchief fluttered to the ground, and there came a burst of cheering as the two rivals shot away, both pulling with a will.

For fifty yards they kept bow to bow, then, when the open sea was reached, Dolores began to forge ahead.

Pat smiled, in no way perturbed. She could see that Dolores was rowing all out; she could not possibly keep up that cracking pace. Sooner or later she would tire, and then would come Pat's chance. For the moment, however, Pat was content to keep her best efforts in reserve.

On and on they raced, the two light skiffs skimming through the mirror-like water. Dolores was still a length or two ahead, but already she was beginning to feel the strain. Her speed dropped, and Pat could see that she was almost exhausted.

"Now's the time for me to get cracking," Pat told herself, and began to row at a quicker rate.

By the time the buoy was reached she had drawn level. Desperately Dolores strove to prevent Pat from getting ahead, but it was not to be. Round the buoy Pat's boat plunged, and next moment it shot into the lead. More frantically than ever Dolores rowed, but as the rivals raced back for the river mouth she fell farther and farther behind.

It was Pat who was smiling now, for she knew that, barring accidents, the race was as good as won. And then, as she pulled again on the long oars, it happened.

Crack!

There came a splintering sound from under the binding on the right-hand oar and it broke in half.

Taken completely by surprise, Pat fell backward and her hand involuntarily relaxed its grip on the top half of the broken oar. Away it floated, the current quickly carrying it out of reach. And as she sat there, helplessly clutching the other oar, Dolores came shooting alongside, a mocking gleam in her eyes.

"What a shame!" she cried. "Still, accidents will happen!"

And with a tantalising laugh she rowed on.

Desperately Pat struggled after her, using the sole remaining oar as a paddle. That mocking gleam and triumphant laugh had told her the truth. The breaking of the oar had been no accident; it had been deli-

berately contrived by the mischief-maker.

It was obvious now that Dolores had never meant to row in the left-hand skiff. She had doctored the oar before Pat and Chris had seen her by the skiffs, and, having heard them approach, she had jumped into the right-hand skiff and had pretended to tamper with that.

"She guessed I'd take good care not to pick that skiff," Pat told herself, "and, like a chump, I fell for her artful trap. I actually grabbed the very skiff where the tampered oar was!"

She gave a groan as she realised what this disaster meant. Now it would be Dolores, and not herself, who would go to Dartfleet Island to-morrow! Dolores would locate Captain Kirabee and follow up the intriguing clue.

For there could be no hope of Pat winning the race now. It was as much as she could do to make any headway at all. Already her unscrupulous rival was ten lengths in front, and as Pat paddled awkwardly on a burst of cheering announced that Dolores had reached the jetty.



PAT'S DECISION

Bruce and Willis Green rowed out to meet Pat, and, as they began to tow her on to the jetty the young sports master turned and regarded her sympathetically.

"Hard luck—losing an oar," he said. "What happened? You seemed to lose control after passing the buoy. I suppose you accidentally let go of the oar and it drifted away before you could salvage it?"

Pat nodded. She felt too fed up to speak, and she knew it was useless to accuse her rival of treachery. Without the evidence of the broken oar no one would ever believe that the glamorous Dolores had deliberately contrived the "accident."

As the two boats drew alongside the jetty the campers crowded sympathetically around, and amongst them Pat could see her chum's white face. Dolores was there, too—a mocking gleam in her eyes.

"What beastly luck losing your oar like that," the mischief-maker said. "Still, it was a fair race, wasn't it?"

Challengingly she regarded Pat, as if anxious to goad her into shouting out an angry accusation, but Pat resisted the temptation. Again she nodded and as quickly as she could she hurried away, Chris at her side. Once they were out of earshot Chris stopped and frowningly looked at her chum.

"Now come clean," she ordered. "Exactly what did happen?"

In a few words Pat told her, and Chris' eyes flashed angrily.

"The trickster!" she exclaimed. "The miserable mischief-maker! Oh, Pat, why didn't you tell Bruce? Why did you let her get away with her scheming?"

Pat shook her head sadly. "I had no proof," she said. "Without the evidence of the oar—"

Chris gave an excited gasp.

"Golly, suppose we could salvage it!" she cried. "It's bound to be washed up by the next tide, and if we could find it, then we'd be able to prove that it had been sawn through. Then Bruce would hold an inquiry—perhaps order a re-race!"

Pat's heart gave an excited leap. She saw that Chris was right, and straight away they decided to get up early in the morning and comb the beach for the broken oar.

With the first grey streaks of dawn Pat and Chris were up. Tramping down to the beach, they began searching the beach from end to end. The tide had thrown up plenty of flotsam, but, to their dismay, there was no sign of the missing oar.

"It must have floated right out to sea," said Chris mournfully. "That means—"

She paused, sniffing. "What's that—a fire?" she cried.

(Please turn to the back page.)

Peril Loomed Ahead, But Sally Was Too Happy To Think About It. At Last She
And Her Chums Were Re-united



The MERRYMAKERS —AFLOAT—

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

FORCED TO HIDE

"SALLY! Oh, Sally, it's really you! It's grand to see you again!" "And it's wonderful to see you three, too!"

On the dark deck of the ketch anchored off Palao Island, Sally Warner radiantly regarded her three chums, Don Weston, Fay Manners, and Johnny Briggs—the chums she had begun to believe she would not see again.

Her heart was almost bursting with joy and thankfulness as she stared at them, as if unable to believe that they were really here. She had forgotten for the moment that the four rascally owners of the ketch would be returning from the island soon. She had forgotten everything, but the glorious fact that she and her chums were reunited again; that, in order to rescue her, they had dived off the Ocean Star, the College Ship, on which they had all been travelling to Australia before the startling events had begun which had parted them. And, on the merest suspicion that she was there, they had swum back to the island to look for her.

Already they had talked themselves almost breathless explaining all that had happened since they had been parted. But there was still so much more to say. Fay and Sally, it seemed, would go on for ever, but Don, his face suddenly anxious, tensed.

"Listen!" he said. They listened, their faces growing suddenly alarmed as, from the direction of the tree-lined shore, there came the murmur of gruff voices.

"The rest of the news had better wait," said Johnny grimly. "Come on, everybody! We'll have to grab a boat—"

"But the oilskin bag those scoundrels stole!" cried Sally. "Johnny! Don! We can't go without that!"

"Gosh, no!" Don's face took on a truculent look. "Where is it, Sally, do you know?"

"I only know they took it downstairs somewhere," replied Sally quickly. "But come on! We'll find it!"

She led the way along the littered, untidy deck. With a quick glance towards the shore, she sped down the hatchway, her chums on her heels. The alley-way below was gloomy, only dimly lit by the meagre light of a swinging oil-lamp.

Quickly Don detached it from its hook, holding it aloft as he pressed forward. The first cabin they entered, obviously the men's quarters, littered and untidy as it was, contained no oilskin bag, though they wasted precious minutes looking for it—minutes during which each of them was listening tensely for the sound of movement overhead; minutes during which each of them, though outwardly cheerful, was

worrying frantically about the safety of the others.

For they knew that, even if they were successful in launching a boat from the ketch, it was going to be desperately hard to contact the Ocean Star again. It would be miles away from them now, and if the absence of Don, Fay, and Johnny was not discovered until morning—and there was no reason why it should be—their task would be almost impossible.

But not one of them voiced those dread thoughts as they set about their task. They had got to find that precious bag which had been stolen from the Ocean Star—that was all that mattered at the moment.

"Not here," said Don briefly. "Come on!"

The next cabin was smaller, even more untidy. But the rough desk, the tattered charts on the walls, told them it must be the captain's cabin. Another frantic search among all the litter, with time growing more precious.

"If it's not here, we'll have to look in the hold," said Johnny. "We—Gosh, don't do that, Sally!"

For Sally, forgetting the need for caution, had given a loud cry of excitement.

"I've got it! I've got it!" she cried, groping under the desk. "Don—quickly! Get it out! Oh, wonderful! We'll be off any minute now!"

Don needed no urging. With an overwhelming feeling of relief, he scrambled beneath the desk, tugged at the oilskin bag, whilst an impatient Johnny danced around, trying to help, while Sally and Fay stood by, their faces crimson with impatience and excitement.

"It's coming!" grunted Don. "Gosh, it's wedged in there tightly. Hold the lantern, Sally, I—"

And then his voice trailed away, while Sally, holding the lantern aloft, gave a violent jump, sending the shadows dancing eerily round the small cabin.

For suddenly from overhead had come the sudden clump of footsteps, the sound of gruff voices.

"Sally!" gasped Fay, her face turning white. "It's the men—they've come back! What shall we do?"

"Shush!" whispered Sally, her own face tense and drawn. "Maybe they've just brought some more stuff aboard."

But a minute later that hope was brutally shattered. For suddenly a queer throbbing shook the old ship from stem to stern. She heeled over suddenly, sending the chums staggering. And their faces grew even whiter as they realised the ketch was swinging out to sea, bearing them off, prisoners, to some unknown destination.

"Any good trying to rush the blighters?" asked Johnny grimly.

"No good at all," said Sally flatly and decidedly, her alarm at that characteristically rash idea of Johnny's sweeping away her other fears. "Those men are armed, and they're desperate." She drew her brows together in a frown, thought, frantically for a moment, then snapped her fingers. "You'll have to hide," she said suddenly, "all three of you."

"But what about you?" asked Don. "We're not leaving you in the lurch, Sally."

"No, we'll see it out together," agreed Fay, white-faced but firm.

"But you won't be leaving me in the lurch," said Sally. "Don't you see that our strength lies in the fact that these men don't know you're aboard? We may be able to think of some scheme later on for taking them by surprise and getting away—but for goodness' sake," she added frantically, "don't argue! Get away—quickly!"

"Okay," agreed Don. "But if they start anything—then I start something. Come on, shipmates, down in the hold."

"And take these with you," hissed Sally, grabbing a couple of rough towels and throwing them to Fay. "I'll try to bring you some dry clothes and some food later."

The three scuttled off, along the alleyway to the door which, as they had surmised, led to the hold. While Sally, her heart beginning to thump uncomfortably, once again ascended the hatchway.

As she reached the top she gave a cry of alarm as Seth, his face black with anger, grabbed her arm, pulled her on to the deck, then gave her a brutal push that sent her staggering.

"Snooping around again, eh?" he snarled.

Despite her apprehension, Sally eyed him calmly.

"I was looking for my cabin," she said coldly.

"Your cabin!" Seth gave a sneering laugh. "You're here to work, sister. You can go to your cabin when I say so, not before. Get below now, and get busy on some food. The men are hungry. And mind you go straight to the galley—no nosing around."

He watched her as she disappeared down the hatchway. But once out of his baleful glare Sally's face brightened a little.

If she had the handling of the food at least she could make sure that her hidden chums did not go hungry. Also, she could stay below without raising suspicions.

But Sally's spirits took another downward plunge when she looked at the small galley. There was plenty of food there, sacks of potatoes, flour and biscuits, tins of meat and fruit. But the oil-cooker was rusty, the pans blackened and burnt. Fastidious Sally gave a little grimace as she set to work, lavishly opening several tins of meat and vegetables to make a hash, placing them in a thick saucepan over the stove. She started on a pile of potatoes. Might as well do plenty, she thought. Her three chums would be feeling hungry by now.

The thought that her chums were near her brought a warm glow to Sally's heart, a smile to her lips. Whatever peril they were in, at least they were in it together. She was no longer alone, frightened, miserable, desperate.

Despite the tedium of her task, Sally, her cheeks bright, her eyes shining, began to hum the tune of a favourite waltz to which she and Don had danced many times aboard the Ocean Star. She sang the words softly at first, then, losing herself in the lilt of the music, more loudly, tapping her foot on the floor in time with the rhythm.

And then startlingly, frighteningly, a rough hand seized her shoulder, swung her round so that the knife flew from her grasp. Seth, his black brows drawn together in a ferocious scowl, glared into her face.

"Kinda chirpy, aren't you?" he snarled, shaking Sally roughly. "What's made you so happy all at once?" He glared again, suspicion glimmering in his small, deep-set eyes. "A little while ago you were too darned miserable to move. Now you're dancing and singing. What's the meaning of it? Answer me!"



SETH'S SUSPICIONS GROW

Sally's first feeling was one of icy terror. Had Seth discovered anything? Oh, what a fool she'd been!

She should have concealed more carefully, should have concealed her new-found happiness from these rascally men.

With a terrific effort she steeled herself to return Seth's suspicious glare with a look of disarming innocence, even while she hoped fervently that he had no other ground for suspicion.

"Well, why not?" she asked, with a careless little shrug. "If I've got to go with you I might as well make the best of it. Being miserable won't help."

For a moment longer Seth held her in that cruel grip, his eyes boring into hers. Then he thrust her roughly aside.

"Pretty slick with the answers, aren't you?" he sneered. "Seems to me you changed your views mighty suddenly. Well, watch your step, sister. If there's any monkey business round here you'll pay for it!"

He took a suspicious look round the galley, nodded, and marched off.

Sally shivered as he disappeared. Golly, she would have to be more careful! Seth wasn't the type to have his suspicions easily lulled. He would watch her, she knew, as a cat watches a mouse. One false step and he would be on her like a ton of bricks—not only herself, but the chums as well.

"From now on, my girl," she told herself severely, "you'll behave as if you haven't a friend in the world. Remember that."

She put the potatoes on the stove to cook and crept cautiously out of the galley. Her own cabin was a minute room next to the galley. There were only two rough blankets on the bunk. She took one of them and crept along the alleyway.

Hardly daring to breathe, she approached Seth's cabin, peered in. It was empty. Like a flash she darted inside, whipped one of the blankets from his bunk, snatched a heavy jersey and a pair of dungarees. Her chums, soaked to the skin, must be shivering with cold now, she thought with a pang. She could only hope Seth wouldn't miss these things.

Stealthily she edged along the alleyway, only stopping to snatch two more jerseys and some more dungarees from the men's cabin. Then she flew along to the hold and hurried the things inside.

"Fay, you come with me," she hissed. "I'll stow you away in my cabin. Quickly! I'll bring you some food in a minute, shipmates."

Together she and Fay darted back. Unceremoniously Sally bundled her

chum into the tiny cabin, then hurried back into the galley. Not a moment too soon, for with a clatter Frank, another of the men, pounded down the hatchway.

"Dish up in ten minutes," he said briefly. Then added in surprise: "Say, you cooking for a regiment or something? But I guess we can eat it—we're all pretty hungry."

Sally waited until he had disappeared again, then hastily dish up the food and took a generous share of it to the hold.

She didn't wait for Don and Johnny's thanks—their shining eyes were sufficient to show how they appreciated the meal. By the time she had given Fay hers, and set aside a portion for herself, the quantity had diminished considerably. Sally eyed it with some misgiving as a loud shout sounded along the alleyway.

"Coming!" she called, and, loading the things on to a large tin tray, hurried into the main saloon where all but the man on duty on the bridge sat waiting.

They eyed the tray expectantly as she came in. Then Seth's mouth fell open in astonishment as he eyed the two small basins.

"Say, where's the rest of it?" he demanded angrily. "Bring it all on, sister. We don't want you flapping in and out while we're eating."

"That's all of it," replied Sally apprehensively, backing towards the door. "But I've had mine—you needn't save me any."

"Save you any?" Seth's voice rose to a screech. "Say, are you hollow or something? You've eaten a good half of what you cooked."

"Can I help it if the sea air gives me an appetite?" asked Sally in pretended resentment, wishing she really felt as unconcerned as she tried to sound. "You brought me on this trip. The least you can do is to let me have enough to eat."

Seth's big hands clenched. "You're up to something," he gritted, "and I warn you to be careful. You haven't eaten all that missing grub—you've thrown it overboard or something out of spite."

"That isn't true," cried Sally. "No?" The man gave an ugly laugh. "It'd better not be. But just remember that in future you eat after us, not before. If we're good enough to leave you anything you can have it, otherwise you go without. Get that? Now get us some biscuits and cheese to finish up with."

Sally hurried away, glad to escape. And once again she chided herself for her carelessness. These men, particularly Seth, were ready to pounce on anything she did. She had got to be more careful in dealing with them. But her last shock was nothing to the one that awaited her when she returned. Joe was missing, but Seth was standing by the table, glaring at Frank.

"A blanket's missing from my cabin," he rapped. "And my thick jersey and my dungarees. Someone must have swiped them."

Only with difficulty did Sally stop herself from dropping the plate of biscuits, but inwardly she gave a groan. Who would have thought that Seth would have discovered the missing things already? Quickly she dumped the biscuits on the table and turned to leave. But at that moment Joe, his face red with mystification and anger, re-entered the saloon.

"Say, what's going on here?" he demanded. "Two of my sweaters and a couple of pairs of dungarees have disappeared!"

Frank gasped in surprise, but Seth's face grew blacker than ever. "Don't hurry away," he barked at Sally. "Maybe you can help us."

"I—I don't know what you mean," blurted Sally, a feeling of cold fear creeping over her.

"Come off it!" snapped Seth. "Those things haven't disappeared without someone taking them—the same someone who got rid of our supper. This is another one of your tricks." His glare seemed to bore right into Sally, making her shiver.

"Well, where are our things? Come on, tell us!"

"I haven't got them," cried Sally desperately. "Really I haven't—"

"Sure you haven't!" Seth gave a brutal laugh. "But you've put them somewhere. Maybe in your cabin, eh? I think I'll take a look."

"No—oh, no!" Sally, white-faced, terror-stricken, darted to the door, desperately trying to think of some way to stop these men going to where Fay was hidden. She gave a quick, astonished glance along the alleyway, then suddenly her heart jumped. Her cabin door had opened just a crack. It was her only chance. "You're making a mistake," she cried loudly. "You won't find anything in my cabin even if you do search it. You probably left the things on the island."

She dared not risk another look up the alleyway, but she hoped fervently that Fay had understood her warning. Next moment she went reeling into the corridor as Seth pushed her aside, then went striding along the alleyway, accompanied by Joe and Frank. She followed them, like one in a nightmare, catching her breath as the three men entered the cabin.

There came no outcry, so she told herself that Fay must have hidden herself. Stepping forward, she entered the cabin. Seth & Co. were glaring around.

"If I can't find my blanket I'll have yours," Seth said viciously. "You can go without one."

He snatched at it as he spoke, pulling it from the bunk. And as he did so he gave a shout of startled amazement, while a cry of despair came from Sally.

For there, crouched in a small heap on the bunk, was Fay. She had been hidden under the blanket, but now she was revealed to full view.



SALLY'S DESPERATE RUSE

As Sally saw the furious look on Seth's face, she ran forward and flung a protecting arm around Fay's shoulders, then defiantly she faced the dumbfounded trio.

"Blow me down!" gasped Joe. "A stowaway!"

"Stowaway nothing!" Seth's tone was quietly menacing. There was something about it that made Sally and Fay shiver, cling closer together. "She's from the Ocean Star—one of this girl's buddies. She was with those two boys this morning."

He frowned thoughtfully as he spoke, and a stab of fresh fear went through Sally. Surely he wouldn't suspect that Don and Johnny were aboard, too!

Next moment Sally's worst fears were confirmed.

"Two boys and a girl," he continued musingly, running a hand raspingly over his bristly chin. "Three jerseys and three pairs of dungarees missing!"

"Boss, you don't mean there's any more aboard?" bellowed Frank angrily.

"What else?" snapped Seth. "Use your brain, man. Those two interfering cubs who were nosing about the island this morning—they're the ones I'm thinking of. They're the type who never know when they're licked." He gave a short, hideously menacing laugh. "They'll be licked all right if I find them aboard my ship!"

"Maybe you think you've been smart," he added turning round on the white-faced Sally, "but I'm telling you this. If I find those two boys here, if I find you've been hiding them, then I warn you that both they and you two girls will be dumped on the first desert island I come across. And that's no empty threat."

"Why wait for an island?" rapped Joe, his own temper at boiling point.

"Never mind the back-chat! Come along to the hold with me!" snapped

(Please turn to the back page.)



THEIR SCHOOL ON Castaway Isle

By RENEE FRAZER

GERRY LULLS TANIA'S SUSPICIONS

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 met Gerry at the rapids, bringing with her her precious book. While they were examining a sketch of a waterfall that appeared in it, Tania suddenly had a premonition of danger. Gerry pooch-pooched the idea, however, and asked her if she knew where the waterfall was situated.

"TANIA—you do trust me, don't you?" asked Gerry. "You know that I'm trying to solve this mystery—for your sake?"

The jungle girl stared at him, her lips trembling. A sixth sense, an instinct born of her wild life in the forest—warned her of danger. But it was a danger she did not understand.

In Gerry's handsome face she read only friendship—an anxiety to make amends for his momentary flash of anger.

She nodded, smiling unsteadily. "Tania knows that Gerry is her friend," she said. "But for a moment she was afraid, for something seemed to tell her that an enemy was near."

The boy laughed easily, covering his momentary confusion.

"That was your fancy, Tania," he declared. "You were feeling strung-up after your encounter with that rotter, Dave, and this exciting discovery, on top of it, started you imagining things. We're quite alone, Tania, and you're safe with me."

He stole a swift, wary glance towards the bushes where his confederate had been lurking a moment before, but Stanhope, the mate, appeared to have taken the hint, and was lying low till he was required.

With a sigh of relief Gerry reached for the pictured diary, his eagerness hidden beneath a light, friendly manner as he tapped the open page.

"Just think, Tania!" he murmured persuasively. "If only you could recognise this picture, it might help to solve the mystery of your life on the island—how you came here—everything about you."

The jungle girl glanced at him quickly, her dark eyes questioning.

"Is that why Gerry wishes to know about picture?"

"Partly," replied Gerry easily. "That and other reasons." His eyes narrowed slightly. "Ever heard of treasure-trove, Tania?"

Tania stared wonderingly.

"It—it is something to eat?"

Gerry laughed.

"More than that—a lot more. It

means gold—jewels—something which, in the white man's country where you came from originally, will buy anything you wish. What do you want most in the world, Tania?" he asked cunningly.

The jungle girl reflected. What did she want most of all?

Her eyes shone mistily.

"Tania wishes to be friends again with Mr. Barnard—with Pat, Tim, and the other boys and girls," she breathed. "She wishes one day to sail with them in great ship, to Tania's country across the sea—to go to their school—to learn to be even as they

Only one name she did not mention, for her heart ached when she thought of Dave—the boy whom she believed to be her enemy.

A faint sneer crossed Gerry's handsome face. But it had gone in a flash as he encountered her trusting glance. "Well, all that will be yours, Tania," he declared lightly. "And a whole lot more when we've found your treasure. Marvelous clothes, Tania—jewellery—everything a girl can want. If you'll let me help you."

"What does Gerry want me to do?"

A triumphant gleam flashed into the boy's eyes, for he knew by her tone that her doubts were banished.

"Just tell me what that picture reminds you of," he said, "and leave the rest to me."

Tania looked gravely at the faded picture drawn by the hand of the bearded seaman who had cared for her many moons ago.

A picture of a waterfall foaming over a cliff between two great pinnacles of rock.

"Tania knows it well," she declared, "for there is Tania's new home."

"What!" exclaimed Gerry, staring at her in excitement. "Your new home, Tania? Where is it?"

"Long way from here," replied the jungle girl, pointing. "In secret valley among hills. Only Tania knows how to find it."

Gerry laughed softly, triumphantly. "And you'll take me there, Tania—right away?" he demanded eagerly. "We've no time to lose."

For a second Tania hesitated, with a return of her uneasiness, as she heard a rustling in the bushes. Gerry heard it, too, and looked round sharply.

From the undergrowth sprang a lithe, black shape, eyes glowing in the sunlight as it bounded across the clearing.

"Michi!" cried Tania, her face lighting with pleasure at the sight of her pet.

Gerry bit his lip in annoyance, mingled with a shade of uneasiness. He had reckoned without Michi. He knew that Michi did not trust him; and it was going to be awkward if the animal suspected the presence of Stanhope the mate, whose cruelty it had caused to remember.

But his narrowed eyes revealed nothing of his thoughts as Tania bent to embrace her pet.

"Michi is the faithful one!" she declared, smiling up at the boy. "When

Tania does not go home, Michi comes to fetch her."

"Quite a good watch-dog," remarked Gerry, smiling thinly as Michi crouched protectively beside his young mistress. "Well, you'd better send him away now, Tania, as we're starting on that little quest of ours."

Tania looked surprised. "But Michi come with us!" she declared. "He is Gerry's friend, too, because he knows that Gerry is good to Tania."

The boy's face clouded. "All right," he said impatiently. "But let's hurry or Dave may get on our track."

He thrust the map into his pocket, but Tania insisted on carrying her precious book as she led the way across the sunlit glade, Michi padding silently, watchfully, at their heels.

THE TRUTH AT LAST



"How much farther, Tania?" asked Gerry at length.

The jungle had given place to an area of moss-grown crags and tumbling streams, where the winding path grew steeper with every yard they travelled.

For a while Gerry had set out to show how charming he could be when he wished—to banish any lingering doubt that Tania might possess.

But after a time he lapsed into silence, becoming intent on his own thoughts, while Tania, her uneasiness forgotten, hurried on ahead, eager to show Gerry the novel, secret place she had chosen for her new home.

"It is just here!" she called, halting at a bend in the path and pointing, a roguish laughter in her eyes.

Gerry hurried up, panting a little from the climb—to stare in amazement at the great sheet of sparkling water that poured over the cliff's edge, falling into the gully below with a sound like muffled thunder, and sending up a fine rainbow spray into the sunlight.

A soft whistle escaped his lips as he recognised the original of the picture in Tania's diary.

"But where's your home, Tania?"

"It is here—even as Tania say," replied the jungle girl, leading the way along a narrow path that skirted the edge of the cliff, and turning to beckon laughingly. "Gerry, come!"

For a moment the boy hesitated, for Tania was pointing at the curtain of foaming water. Then, meeting the laughing challenge in her eyes, and seeing that Michi was trustfully following at his young mistress' heels, Gerry hurried to overtake her.

He saw now that a narrow ledge ran behind the falls—into a dim, natural grotto, screened by the curtain of water.

In a moment he had joined Tania in her strange retreat, and was gazing round him, his eyes narrowed excitedly.

"Gosh, this must be the place!" he exclaimed, his voice sounding hollow and muffled above the rush of the falls. "How far does it go, Tania?"

"Tania not know. She come here once or twice only, and when her old home is hit by great storm, she remembers the grotto of falling water."

"It's the identical spot right enough," declared Gerry, eagerly pulling out the map and tracing the route with a pencil. "The fellow who drew this map—probably that same bearded sailor who brought you to the island—must have stumbled on this place accidentally. He may have imagined that there were natives on the island, and I've an idea he was anxious to hide something pretty important."

He looked at the jungle girl as though anxious to see the effect of his words. Her lips parted, her dark eyes filled with eager curiosity, she stared from the map into his handsome face.

"We're hot on your secret, Tania," said Gerry. "If only you could remember what this old sailor chap told you! He must have said something at the time when he gave you the book of pictures. Try to remember—try!"

The jungle girl shook her head, half puzzled, half alarmed by the boy's agitated manner.

Why was Gerry so strange this morning? Was it the greenish light that crept through the curtain of falling water that gave his face that tense, frightening look? Was it the echoes of the cave that made his voice so harsh?

"Tania cannot remember. It was so many moons ago. Gerry, you are not angry with Tania?"

"Of course not!" With an effort the boy recovered his composure, forcing a smile. "I'm just disappointed for your sake. If you can't remember, we'll just have to depend on the map. These dotted lines that lead from the waterfall must mean something. Keep your eyes open, Tania. If you spot anything unusual—that reminds you of something you've seen or heard before—tell me at once. You and I are going to search the grotto."

He took out a powerful torch, flashing it into the shadows, illuminating the strangely shaped stalactites that hung from the vaulted roof.

Gerry's footsteps gave back hollow echoes as they pressed deeper into the cave. Tania's bare feet and Michi's velvet paws making barely a sound.

Water dripped incessantly from the roof, and in places the walls were covered with moss and lichen where a glimmer of daylight crept through some deep crevice in the rock.

Gerry's excitement increased. He strode ahead, leaving Tania to follow as best she could. The jungle girl lingered where a tiny patch of sunlight revealed the unusual limestone formations.

Some were like glistening trees, with spreading branches; others like giant mushrooms, gourds, and crouching animals.

And all at once she found herself staring at the likeness of a huge, grotesque bird, seemingly perched on a ledge above her, approached by a few rough-hewn steps.

Her heart leapt, for she had seen that strange bird before—or something like it!

With a trembling hand she felt for her satchel, taking out her book of pictures. There, almost on the last page, barely glanced at by Gerry in his haste, was a picture of that same queer formation, drawn by the old sailor's skillful hand!

"Gerry!" she called, and the echoes repeated her trembling, excited voice. "Gerry, come quickly! Tania has seen something!"

"Hullo! What's that, Tania?"

She could see his torch flashing on the walls as he hurried to rejoin her. But at the same instant there came a low, ominous growl from Michi.

The panther was staring into the shadows, and Tania's blood ran cold as she thought she could see a tall figure lurking behind a stalagmite pillar.

"Hullo, Tania! What have you discovered?"

Tania shook her head, pointing a trembling finger.

"Gerry, there is someone watching us!" she gasped. "Michi has seen him."

"Rot!" snapped Gerry impatiently. "No one could find us here—"

He flashed his torch. A stifled ejaculation was torn from his lips and Tania gave a piercing scream.

Lounging against the opposite wall, a sardonic smile on his lips, a revolver in his hand pointing towards the panther, was Stanhope, the ship's mate!

"Stanhope!" snarled Gerry, his handsome face white with anger. "I thought I gave you orders—"

He broke off, remembering too late. Tania was staring at him, and the mate gave an unpleasant laugh.

"Sure, Master Gerry," he sneered. "You ordered me to follow at a distance—in case the girl gave you any trouble. I was to settle her like I settled young Dave—doing all your dirty work while you waded in and bagged the treasure. But it's not good enough, see! You promised me half shares, and I'm here to make sure I get it!"

And he grinned menacingly as he encountered Tania's horrified stare.



MICHI PLAYS A PART

"Gerry!" A pitiful cry escaped the jungle girl's lips. She shrank from the grinning mate, to stare appealingly into the white, scowling face of the boy she had trusted.

"Gerry, what words are these? Tell me it is not true!" she begged.

With an effort the boy forced an unsteady laugh, but guilt was written plainly on his handsome features.

"Don't listen to him, Tania!" he said harshly. "He's joking—"

"Joking, eh, Master Gerry?" sneered the mate. "The joke will be on you—if you try to double-cross me. The girl's brought us to the right place. What are we waiting for?"

"You—you fool!" burst out Gerry savagely, throwing all pretence aside. "She still holds the secret, and you've ruined everything by butting in. Tania"—he spun round on her, catching her by the wrist, his blue eyes cold and ruthless—"don't take any notice of Stanhope. You're taking your orders from me!"

Petrified, she stared at him—seeing him without his smiling mask, his handsome face pale with fury.

Instinctively she caught at the snarling Michi—partly for self-protection, partly because she feared that gleaming weapon in the mate's hand might harm her pet.

Her heart felt numbed by the shock of her discovery.

Gerry, the boy she believed to be her friend, was the enemy who had been plotting against her from the first—Gerry, and not Dave! It was all so clear now!

With a sharp stab of remorse, she realised—too late—that Dave had been her friend; Dave, who had tried to warn her, who had pleaded with her so earnestly, Dave, whom she had sent away—

A choking sob escaped her lips. "Listen to me, Tania!" Gerry rapped. "You and I understand each other. You're too sensible a girl to ask for trouble, by being stubborn. Remember our little bargain? I agreed to help you get back your diary—and you promised, in your turn, to help me to discover its secret. I kept my part of the bargain, Tania—and now you're going to keep yours!"

White-faced, Tania stared at him—seeking vainly for some relenting in his cold blue eyes.

The boy misread her silence, putting it down to fear. Swiftly, cunningly, he pressed his advantage.

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WASTE PAPER IS VALUABLE

Not a scrap should be destroyed, for it can all be re-pulped and used again. Old cardboard is also urgently needed, so save all you can.

.....

"I promise you, Tania, you won't lose by keeping to your bargain," he murmured, with a warning glance at the impatient mate. "You want to find your treasure, as much as we do—and Dave and the others would have robbed you of it if they'd got the chance."

"Tania not believe that!" gasped the jungle girl, finding her voice. "If she had not listened to Gerry's false words, Dave, Mr. Barnard, Tim, all of them, would be her friends. Perhaps even now—a glimmer of hope shone in her eyes—perhaps Dave will bring them to search for her—"

Gerry laughed.

"Don't you believe it, Tania! They've forgotten you. They're too busy preparing to leave the island. Captain Rawlins expects to get his ship afloat by to-morrow. Isn't that right, Stanhope?"

"Sure, Master Gerry!" rejoined the mate, with a knowing wink. "They may be off by to-morrow's tide."

"You hear that, Tania?" insisted Gerry. "They don't care about you. If you're foolish, the mate and I will have to tie you up somewhere and leave you on the island—when we set sail to-morrow with the others!"

"Aye," agreed Stanhope with a grim smile. "And who would set you free then? Not any of your jungle animals. You'd just have to stop there."

"Gerry would not do that," Tania said desperately.

"Why not?" Gerry shrugged, and then smiled. "After all, what have we to lose? But, Tania—"

Tania, however, had turned. For one moment she took a desperate step towards the mouth of the cave, only to pull up as Stanhope barred the way.

"You can't get away," said the mate. He raised the revolver he carried. "And if you try it might be too bad for that panther of yours. I don't think you'd like that to happen."

An icy hand seemed to clutch at Tania's heart.

"But if you agree to help us," went on Gerry quickly, "I'll see that everything is fine for you. You'll have your part of the treasure, and I'll persuade Captain Rawlins to take you on the ship as a passenger, whether Mr. Barnard likes it or not. Be sensible, Tania, and tell me what you discovered just now."

For a moment the old, persuasive smile showed in his eyes, and his voice became softly coaxing.

But now Tania shrank from him in scorn and anger, seeing him for what he was—this handsome boy who had tricked and deceived her from the first, turning her against her true friends. She knew he lied now.

But blinded by his eagerness and conceit, Gerry imagined that she was weakening. He winked triumphantly at the mate, who stepped forward.

There came a savage snarl from Michi, and the panther tore itself from Tania's grasp and leaped with bared fangs at its hated enemy.

The mate fired wildly, the shot hitting the wall and awakening the echoes with the deafening explosion.

A bundle of snarling fury, Michi landed on the mate's shoulders, but the latter's stout reefer jacket saved him from more than a few deep scratches as he struck savagely at the panther's face with the butt of his revolver.

Michi rolled to the ground, clawing the torn jacket, and the white-faced scoundrel took refuge behind a pillar, dropping his weapon in his panic.

Gerry started forward to scoop it up; but Michi turned on the boy, with teeth bared and eyes blazing.

And at that moment Tania saw a glimmer of daylight behind the grotesque limestone figure on the ledge—a narrow crevice in the rock.

It was a frail chance, but her only one, for Gerry barred her way to the entrance of the grotto.

"Michi—quick!" she cried desperately. "Follow me!"

The adventure behind the waterfall becomes even more exciting in next week's instalment. Don't miss it.



The Cow-Boy Who Mystified Merle

By GAIL WESTERN

A DARING RESCUE

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

Merle believed that the Bronze Rider contained a secret vital to the future of Happy Valley Ranch. She was cheated out of the trophy, however, by a young cowboy named Larry.

Merle's uncle met with an accident, and had to be taken to hospital. Returning home in a buggy cart after visiting him, Merle discovered that the main road had been blocked by Larry, and he calmly insisted that she should drive on along the dangerous Outlaw's Trail.

After furiously accusing him of robbing her of the secret hidden in the Bronze Rider, she angrily drove the buggy on down the side trail.

But suddenly her horse took fright, and raced blindly down a slope, to where yawned a terrifying precipice.

"THIS is all Larry's fault!"

There was burning anger in Merle's heart as she sat on the driving-seat of the lurching buggy.

But for the young cowboy she would now be driving peacefully along the main road.

Why had he forced her to take to Outlaw's Trail?

Surely he could not have wanted some such disaster as this to overtake her!

But there was no time to think about Larry's extraordinary behaviour. The high-wheeled buggy was plunging madly down the grassy slope.

Desperately she dragged on the reins—in vain. The runaway horse had the bit between his teeth. It seemed that nothing could check him.

The precipice ahead yawned nearer. Merle's cheeks went white as she glimpsed the awful drop.

Frantically she looked over the side. Dare she risk jumping out? It seemed madness, with the buggy tearing along at this break-neck speed, and yet—

"It's my only hope," she gulped. Screwing up her courage, she got to her feet, but as she braced herself for the terrifying leap there came a sudden shout:

"Hang on!"

Merle turned her head, and then she gasped.

Racing in desperate pursuit of the runaway buggy was a magnificent black horse, a lithe boyish figure bent low along its back.

"Larry!" exclaimed Merle in amazement.

The young cowboy whom she had blamed for the disaster was now galloping headlong to her rescue!

Even in that moment of peril she knew wonderment. She just couldn't understand Larry.

With a thunder of hoofs, he was alongside. She caught a blurred glimpse of his recklessly smiling face, and then he had kicked his feet out

of the stirrups and had gathered himself for a leap.

Through the air he came hurtling—landing right on top of the runaway horse. Swiftly his long legs scissored the heaving flanks; his hands snatched at the bridle.

The horse gave a startled squeal, reared, then blindly plunged on again. Merle gave a horrified cry.

The edge of the drop was a bare twenty feet ahead. It seemed that Larry must be whirled to destruction with herself.

There came a lurch as one wheel struck a loose rock and Merle went toppling headlong into the back of the buggy. As she lay there, dazed and breathless another high-pitched squeal sounded and amazingly the buggy swerved.

Larry had succeeded in forcing round the horse's head. For a few anxious moments the buggy skidded on, now parallel with the edge of the precipice, then it clattered to a halt and Larry looked round.

"Not hurt are you?" he asked, as, still astride the runaway horse, he sent the buggy bumping back up the grassy slope, his own mount trotting behind.

Merle was still too overcome to speak. Silently she shook her head.

"Okay, then we'll get back on to the trail. Maybe you'll now realise that this horse is too high-spirited for a girl to handle. You shouldn't have gone off like that, you know. You should have waited for me to take charge."

Larry shook his head disapprovingly.

Merle gasped. He was actually suggesting that she was to blame! The cool impudence of it considering that but for him she would never have dreamed of leaving the main road!

Hot, angry words rose to her lips, but she checked them, for mingled with her indignation was a feeling of gratitude. No matter how strange and exasperating Larry was, she could not forget that she owed her life to him.

Her eyes grew soft and her lips quivered as she thought of the daring risk he had taken. But for his recklessness and courage she, the buggy, and the money she had got from the bank, would now be lying at the bottom of the precipice.

In that moment she forgot all her suspicions about him, remembered only that irresistible feeling of liking which had gripped her ever since they had first met.

Scrambling up, she stumbled across to the driving-seat, and climbing over its high back, dropped back into her original place.

By now the pebbly trail had been reached, and safely the buggy went clattering down it. Not until the dangerous hillside had been left behind and they were once more bowling along a level road did Larry speak. Then, bringing the horse to a standstill, he clambered back into the buggy and handed the reins to Merle.

"Guess it's safe for you to take over now," he declared. "I must be on my way."

As he spoke, he jumped to the ground, but, reaching down, she clutched at his arm.

"But I haven't thanked you yet," she murmured. "Oh, it was wonderful how you saved me, Larry. I shall never forget—"

He cut her short, a rather bitter look in his steel-grey eyes, as he gathered up the reins of his own horse.

"Guess I don't want any thanks," he said gruffly. "A guy like me's better without 'em. You see—"

He stopped, as if frightened of saying too much, and leapt nimbly into the saddle. Wonderingly Merle surveyed him. What a strange boy he was!

"Wait!" she urged. "There're things between us that simply must be straightened out."

That old sardonic gleam in his eyes, he sat there in the saddle, facing her. "Such as?" he asked.

"Why you stopped me from driving along the main road for one thing," Merle replied. "Larry, why did you force me to take Outlaw's Trail?"

He shrugged.

"Guess you'll find out soon enough."

"But Larry—" In exasperation Merle broke off, then she tried again.

"Well, what about the Bronze Rider?" she asked. "If you didn't want it, why did you prevent me from winning that trophy? And why hand it me afterwards?"

He shrugged again.

"I thought you'd already made up your mind about that. Accordin' to you, I only gave you the trophy after I'd stolen old Crogan's secret out of it."

"Yes—but you hinted that uncle might have made a mistake; suggested that perhaps the statuette didn't contain any secret. Is that really true, Larry?"

Eagerly, earnestly she surveyed him. His lips twisted a little bitterly.

"Would you believe me if I answered?" he asked.

"Of—of course."

"Okay, then there wasn't any secret hidden there."

"Then why did you scheme to stop me winning the trophy?"

"Well, I suspected you might run into danger if you entered for that race, so I decided it would be best to win the trophy myself."

"But—" began Merle.

"No time to explain further, honey. For the moment, just try an' grasp the idea that I'm your friend. So-long. We'll be meetin' again before long."

"But Larry—"

He did not stop to listen, however. With one tanned hand raised in salute, he rode off, leaving Merle sitting there more mystified than ever.

How was it that Larry knew anything about old Crogan's secret? And why was her uncle so desperately anxious to find it?

"I can't imagine what the secret can consist of," she told herself. "But somehow I've got to find it."

And her mind still filled with Larry's strange behaviour, she flicked the reins and went driving on.



THE SILVER RIDER

When Merle returned to Happy Valley Ranch with the money she had drawn from the bank she found Slim Harris, the foreman, and several of the cowboys in the yard, busy branding a bunch of young steers.

As the buggy drew up and Merle lifted the bag of money from under the seat, the foreman hurried forward.

"Gee, then the money's safe after all!" he gasped.

Merle regarded him in surprise. "Safe!" she repeated. "Why shouldn't it be safe?"

The foreman looked a little sheepish.

"I was scared you might have been held up, Miss Merle—"

"Held up?"

"Yep—we heard a rumour that an outlaw's been operatin' on the main road—"

"A no-good cowboy by the name of Denvers," put in Jake Binns, the bandy-legged horse-breaker. "According to Slim, he's a feller who had to clear out o' Snake Canyon because o' his rustlin' tricks."

Merle's eyes opened wide, and her heart gave an excited leap as she remembered what Larry had said. He had hinted that this afternoon, at all events, Outlaw's Trail was less dangerous than the main road.

Had he suspected that an attempt might be made to hold her up and rob her of the money needed for the ranch wages? Could that be the reason for his high-handed action in preventing her from going along the main road?

"Perhaps I've misjudged him," she told herself.

The possibility made her eyes glow, then she frowned. If her theory was right, why hadn't Larry told her of the danger? Why had he gone about saving her in such a mysterious and exasperating manner?

She could not answer that. But it was grand to know that Larry really had tried to help her; to know that, despite his extraordinary behaviour, he really might be her friend.

It was happily that Merle went indoors, there to count out the money and put it into the wage packets, all ready for distribution after dinner. Then she went into the kitchen, to help Mammie the cheerful negro housekeeper, to prepare the cowboys' food.

Busy as she was with her duties, Merle had little time to speculate about the mystery of old Crogan's secret, nor about Larry's behaviour. Other problems filled her mind, for quickly she began to realise that running a ranch was not a light-hearted, simple business.

Slim, though a competent foreman, had not much initiative and he had been used to bringing all his problems to Stephen Wason. As the rancher was not there, he retained them to Merle. She did her best to solve them, but wistfully she thought of her uncle. Oh, if only he were here to advise her, she thought.

And then next morning, as she was preparing to ride into town to visit the hospital, Jake rode up with the mail. Amongst it was a letter from Nathaniel Garsten, the wealthy rancher who held a mortgage on the Happy Valley Ranch. It curtly reminded her that the interest was due in ten days' time.

A little glumly Merle read the letter. How was she to raise the money? she wondered. There was hardly anything left in Uncle Stephen's bank account and the manager had refused to make her a loan.

"I suppose I'll have to go over and see Mr. Garsten—ask him to wait for his interest," she murmured.

But she did not look forward to the interview, for Nathaniel Garsten was a hard, overbearing man and the Wasons had never got on very well with him.

As Merle pocketed the letter and

with a sigh proceeded to saddle up her horse, Pommie, Mammie came out of the house and one look at her coal-black face told the girl boss that something else was wrong.

"What's the matter?" she asked anxiously.

"It am the hospital, missy," was the reply. "They've just ring up to ask you not to go and see your uncle today."

The colour faded from Merle's cheeks.

"He's—he's not worse, is he?" she whispered.

The plump housekeeper shook her head.

"No, no, missy, it ain't nuthin' to worry about. They're anxious to get his temperature down, and reckon it better if he not have visitors to-day. But don't you fret, Missy Merle." She laid a hand on Merle's shoulder and smiled comfortingly. "Your uncle sure am as strong as a hoss. He'll soon get better."

Merle nodded. She knew it was silly to worry. Her uncle was not seriously ill. And, in one way, the fact that she would be unable to see him that day was a relief for it meant she would have time to decide what would be the best way of breaking to him the disappointing news about the Bronze Rider trophy.

Her uncle had been so certain that old Crogan's secret had been hidden in the trophy, and he was bound to be upset when he learnt that this was not so.

What form could the secret take, and why was Uncle Stephen so desperately anxious to find it? And, if the secret had not been hidden in the Bronze Rider, then where was it to be found?

Merle was still puzzling over those questions as she rode along to the V-Bar-V ranch where Nathaniel Garsten lived with his daughter, Celia.

A maid ushered Merle into a small study, then went in search of her employer. To while away the time Merle picked up a newspaper that lay on the desk, and then, as she glanced at it she gave a sudden start, for someone had marked one news item with a blue pencil. The headline seemed to leap out and hit her:

SAMUEL CROGAN'S RACING TROPHIES.

With a strange feeling of excitement gripping her, she began to read the report. It contained news that set her pulses throbbing.

"There is likely to be keen competition for the three racing trophies that were once the prized property of Samuel Crogan, the eccentric old pioneer who died some years ago. They all consist of statuettes cast in the form of a riding cowboy. One is made of bronze, one of silver and one of gold."

"The Bronze Rider has already been won and the silver one will be competed for at Lone Pine Rodeo on Wednesday week. Together with a purse of two hundred dollars, it will be the prize in the two-mile hurdle race."

Merle was too excited to read any more. Her heart was thumping for a simple explanation of her failure to find Crogan's secret had occurred to her.

Suppose Larry had been right! Suppose her uncle had been mistaken in thinking that it had been hidden in the Bronze Rider! Suppose, actually, it had been concealed in one of the other two trophies!

"Gee, that must be it!" Merle told herself. "And that means that I've got to try to win both of them, but why—"

She broke off, frowning wonderingly down at the folded newspaper. The reference to the Lone Pine Rodeo, where the Silver Rider was to form one of the prizes, had been heavily underlined in blue pencil, as if that race was of particular importance.

Presumably Nathaniel Garsten had marked it, but why should the

wealthy rancher be so interested in the old pioneer's racing trophies?

She caught in her breath with a startled gasp.

Was it possible that he also, suspected that one of the statuettes held a secret? Was he himself out to secure it?

Merle was still speculating on the sensational possibility when she heard the door open. Hurriedly she laid aside the newspaper and turned to see a tall, gaunt figure in black clothes, and with the ends of his trousers tucked into riding-boots, standing in the doorway, his bushy eyebrows narrowed in an unfriendly manner.

It was Nathaniel Garsten, and as Merle remembered her mission she forgot all about the mystery of the three racing trophies.

Apprehensively she noticed the man's hostile manner.

What would be his response to her appeal?



LARRY'S OTHER NAME

"Waal, what's the reason for this unexpected honour? We don't often get a neighbourly call from Happy Valley. Don't say

you've brought me my money, ahead of time for once!"

There was a sneer in Rancher Garsten's voice.

Merle found herself flushing. How she hated to have to ask favours of this man. She had never liked him, or his haughty daughter. But for her sick uncle's sake it was essential that she should be pleasant to him, so she forced an apologetic smile to her lips.

"No, I am afraid I haven't brought the money," she said, "but it's about that I've come. As you know, uncle's met with an accident and is in hospital—"

But he did not let her finish.

"I'm not interested in that. All I want is the interest on the mortgage."

With difficulty Merle controlled her feelings.

"I quite understand that, Mr. Garsten," she said, "but I was hoping you wouldn't mind waiting an extra few weeks."

He shook his head.

"Not a day—not an hour! Unless I get the money when it's due I'll foreclose. I am a business man and I insist on our contract being honoured to the letter."

Merle gave a heavy sigh and reached for her Stetson. She knew Nathaniel Garsten too well to attempt to argue.

"Very well. In that case, there's no point in my remaining here," she said, and made for the door. But as she opened it he stretched out a long arm.

"Wait," he ordered. "Mebbe we could do a deal."

"A deal?"

A little uneasily Merle regarded his tall, gaunt figure.

"Yep. That tin-pot outfit of yours isn't worth much, and now that your uncle's crocked up it's likely to be worth even less in the future. But I've taken a likin' to it and I guess I'd like to add it to my own ranch. Tell you what. I'll give you a thousand dollars for it."

Merle gasped. Happy Valley was worth at least ten times that amount.

"The ranch is not for sale," she said stiffly.

He shrugged as if unconcerned.

"Okay. Have it your own way. I don't mind waiting ten days. It'll fall into my hands then, for I guess you won't be able to raise the two hundred dollars you owe on the mortgage."

"Don't be too sure." Angered by his contemptuous, confident manner, Merle faced him with flushed cheeks. "I'll find some way of paying you."

He laughed.

"Such as?"

Merle remembering the news item she had just read, saw a sudden ray of hope.

"Such as winning the hurdle race

(Please turn to page 170.)

MYSTERY AT THE ZOO

By PETER LANGLEY

THE GIRL WITHOUT A MEMORY

"MR. RAYMOND! Can you help me? I'm in terrible trouble, and I just don't know what to do or where to turn!"

The words broke from a slim, fair-haired girl who had just stepped into Noel Raymond's office. Her blue eyes gazed in desperate appeal at the famous detective and his girl partner and niece, June Gaynor. She swayed slightly on her feet, as if on the point of falling.

Noel and June both sprang forward. June reached the girl first and gently helped her to a chair.

"But you're hurt!" June cried, her grey eyes alight with sympathy as she noted the slight bruise on the girl's forehead, partly concealed by the blue head-scarf she wore with her light swagger coat.

"It's nothing!" the newcomer whispered. "I'm not really hurt, but—"

She broke off, once again gazing wildly around, her lips trembling.

"Perhaps, to begin with, you would tell us your name," Noel suggested quietly.

To his surprise she shook her head.

"I can't!" she burst out. "Because I don't know it. Unless it's—this!"

She pointed to her head-scarf, on which was embroidered in several places the name "Daphne."

"That must surely be my Christian name," she went on, her voice trembling. "Unless it is someone else's scarf. But I don't know what my surname is, where I come from, who I am! I just don't know a single thing about myself except that I've been wandering the streets since eleven o'clock this morning."

A hint of tears showed in her wide blue eyes.

"I take it that you have lost your memory," Noel said gently. "But calm yourself, Miss Daphne. We will help you if we can."

She flashed him a grateful glance. "Thank you. I feel—I feel steadier now," she replied, "and I'll tell you what there is to tell. It's not much, but it's bewildering, frightening!"

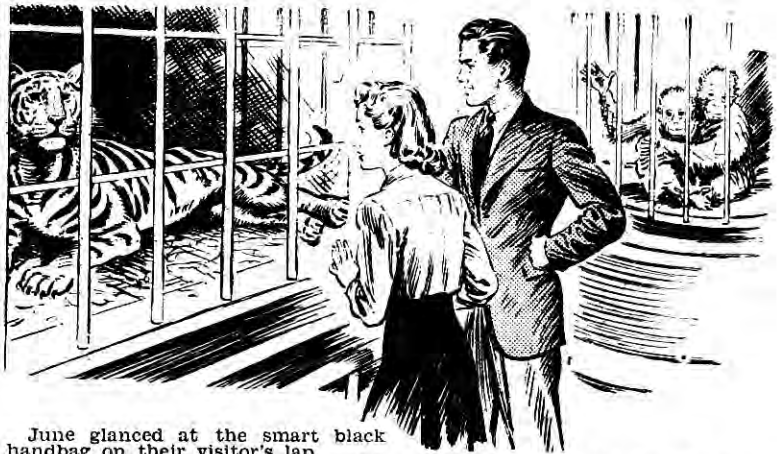
She glanced from Noel to June, still with that look of desperate appeal.

"At eleven o'clock this morning I came to myself in a deserted street near Greenways Park," she went on. "I was lying against the wall—whether I had fallen, or been knocked down by a passing car, I don't know. And my mind was a perfect blank. I couldn't remember a single thing about myself or anything else!"

"You were quite sure of the time?" Noel inquired.

She nodded quickly.

"Perfectly sure," she answered. "Because as I got up and staggered away, I heard a church clock striking the hour. And from a radio shop round the corner Roger Abbott was announcing the Eleven O'Clock Follies on the wireless. And since then I've been roaming the streets in a kind of nightmare!"



June glanced at the smart black handbag on their visitor's lap.

"I was wondering," she said gently, "if the handbag wouldn't help. Wasn't there something in the bag that would help to establish your identity?"

To their surprise, Daphne sprang to her feet, her face paler than ever.

"That's just it!" she cried. "There's a clue in the handbag—a strange and terrifying clue. And it was that which made me determine to ask your help when I saw your name-plate on the door."

She snapped open the bag with fingers that trembled again.

"In this bag," she uttered, "I found a powder compact, a pencil, a handkerchief—and this!"

She took out a scrap of paper and laid it on Noel's desk.

In amazement Noel and June read the words scribbled on the paper:

"Tempest—full moon—midnight—third shadow from north end. Hardcastle Private Zoo and Menagerie. Beware Jack Dunne and Elvira Ferris. Both are dangerous and may be watching."

There was a brief silence.

"Mr. Raymond—Miss Gaynor—help me!" Daphne burst out. "It seems there's something hidden in that private zoo which concerns me. If it was found it might prove who I am and bring back my memory. Yet it speaks of danger, of mysterious enemies who are lurking there. I dare not venture there myself, but I'm begging you to go for me—to solve the mystery that may tell me who I am and what it all means!"

She looked so forlorn—so desperate—that June heaved a sigh of relief when Noel nodded.

"I certainly think we can try to help," the famous detective said. "The message mentions the full moon, and it so happens that there's a full moon to-night—which may be a lucky coincidence!"

He reached for a railway timetable and flipped its pages.

"The nearest station to Hardcastle Zoo is Medford Cross," he told them. "There's a train leaving Waterloo in exactly half an hour."

"And perhaps," June added, with a glance of sympathy at their visitor, "Daphne would like to stay quietly here while we—"

With uplifted hand the fair-haired girl interrupted her.

"Oh, no—please!" she begged. "I'm frankly too scared to enter the zoo where those mysterious enemies may be waiting for me. But surely I could stop somewhere close at hand—in Medford Cross, perhaps? Then if you have any news for me, I'd be able to hear it at once."

And so, half an hour later, all three were in a train speeding south-westwards.

With every mile they covered, Daphne seemed to grow more tense and troubled.

Unable to sit still she wandered out into the corridor, leaving her handbag on the seat and gazing out at the passing countryside with wide, worried eyes.

Warm-hearted June could imagine the kind of thoughts that were passing through the girl's mind.

"Nunky, I'm terribly sorry for her!" she murmured impulsively. "How terrible not to be able to remember even her own surname, or anything that happened before eleven o'clock this morning! I do hope we can help her!"

She glanced at Noel, who had been turning the pages of a magazine he had bought at the station.

Rather to her surprise, she saw it was a copy of the "Radio Times." And as Noel looked up she recognised that quizzical gleam in his eyes.

"You've thought of something, nunky!" she challenged him. "You're beginning to see a way through the mystery!"

The famous detective smiled faintly as he tapped the copy of the radio paper on his knee.

"Hardly that, my dear," he replied. "All the same, I've a feeling that the key to the riddle may be here—in the radio programmes!"



NOEL IS TRICKED

The hoarse roar of a lion, followed by the shrill chattering of monkeys, echoed through the heat of the late afternoon, as

Noel and June strolled into the beautiful wooded grounds where was situated the private zoo owned by David Hardcastle, who lived in the big house just visible between the trees.

On certain days of the week the grounds were open to the public, though there were few visitors to-day.

Noel had booked rooms at a country inn not far from the zoo, and they had left Daphne there, pacing anxiously up and down, feverishly awaiting any news they might bring her.

"We must help her, nunky!" said June, remembering the girl's tense, strained face. "But that message on the paper is so baffling. How can there be a tempest if the full moon is shining? And what is the third shadow from the north end? And how can—"

She broke off suddenly, clutching Noel's arm.

Amidst a dense clump of bushes they were passing she'd caught a glimpse of a pale-faced girl in a dark cloak gazing out with intent eyes.

Only for a brief second did June glimpse the watching girl. Before Noel could turn she had vanished.

"But there was someone in there!" June declared. "A girl in a dark

cloak staring out at us. And then—she disappeared!"

Noel nodded approvingly. "Your eyes are sharp, my dear," he said. "It's quite possible that was Elvira Ferris the girl mentioned in the message. The girl against whom Daphne was warned. But I don't think we shall gain anything by trying to trace her in that maze of bushes."

Thoughtfully Noel lit a cigarette as they moved on.

Was that girl in the dark cloak still watching? The thought sent an odd little shiver down June's spine as they strolled towards the animal cages, many of which were in the open air.

They saw bears, monkeys, parrots, eagles. And then—

"Gosh! What a beauty!" June exclaimed.

She almost forgot—the baffling problem that had brought them to the zoo, as she stared at the magnificent Bengal tiger in a cage apart from the others. The huge, striped beast lay with its head on its paws, its eyes closed sleepily.

Noel's mind, however, was still on that puzzling message in Daphne's handbag.

"Tempest—full moon," he murmured aloud.

Then he stopped short, staring intently at the tiger.

The huge beast had opened its eyes, its yellow, unwinking gaze fixed on the famous detective.

"Tempest!" Noel repeated, more loudly.

A growl rumbled in the tiger's throat, its ears twitched forward.

"Nunky! It seems to recognise the word!" June exclaimed.

"And for a very good reason, I fancy," Noel replied keenly. "I believe Tempest must be the tiger's name, June—and if that is so, then we've found the spot to which the clue refers!"

"I'm sure you're right, nunky!" June cried. "The word in the clue doesn't mean a storm, it means this tiger! Tempest! Tempest—"

She was interrupted by sudden, quick footsteps.

They swung round to see a uniformed keeper striding towards them. He seemed little more than a boy, his face dark and rather sullen-looking, his eyes fixed on them angrily.

"I'd like to know," he burst out, "how you discovered that tiger's name? There's nothing to indicate it on the cage. It was Elvira who named him. Always he'd respond when she spoke that name, but—"

He checked himself, as if feeling he had said too much.

"And you, I suppose," Noel remarked coolly, "are Jack Dunne."

It was a shot in the dark, but it struck home!

The young keeper started violently.

"How did you know?" he cried hoarsely. "Who are you—?"

He checked himself, as a clear-cut voice came to their ears.

"Dunne! I'd like a word with you at once, please!"

A tall, well-dressed man, with greying hair, had stepped out from between the trees. Both Noel and June recognised him at once as David Hardcastle, owner of the zoo; his picture frequently appeared in the papers.

For one moment Jack Dunne glowered at Noel and June. Then he turned to meet his employer.

Mr. Hardcastle's words came plainly to their ears.

"I'm sure that young thief, Elvira Ferris, is lurking about, Dunne!" he exclaimed. "I warned you what would happen if she was found in the grounds again. We must make a search for her at once. Come!"

They turned and hurried away, Noel and June watching them disappear.

"We have certainly learnt something," Noel commented quietly. "It seems that Elvira Ferris committed a theft of some kind, and was dismissed. And it looks as if the young keeper was a friend or helper of hers,

judging by the tone in which Mr. Hardcastle spoke to him just now."

June drew a deep breath.

"But, nunky, how does Daphne come into all this?" she asked. "And the tiger's cage?"

"That remains to be seen, my dear," replied the detective. "At midnight to-night!"

They turned and gazed once more at the tiger. The cage had bars all along the front, and was divided into two by a wooden partition with a sliding door which was now closed.

"Nunky! You can't mean you're going to venture in there!"

Noel laughed lightly.

"Don't worry!" He smiled. "The empty compartment is at the north end of the cage, and it is there that I hope to find the secret. I shan't get any closer to Tempest than I can help, I assure you."

He took June's arm and drew her away, while Tempest lifted his mighty head and gave a savage roar that echoed menacingly between the trees.

IT was twenty minutes to midnight. The full moon had swung over the wooded grounds of Hardcastle Hall. Now and again came a muffled roar or screech from some wakeful animal or bird.

A dark figure had opened a shutter of the keepers' lodge, and crept inside. It was Noel.

While June returned to the inn to keep Daphne company, the young detective had concealed himself in the grounds at closing-time. Now he was in the keepers' little office, shining his torch on the keys that hung there.

He quickly found the right one—the key that would open Tempest's cage.

"No time to waste," he murmured, slipping it into his pocket. "I'd better—"

There was a sharp click, and Noel swung round as a blaze of light dazzled his eyes.

Someone had silently entered the room behind him and switched on the light. Noel's muscles tensed as he recognised the dark face of Jack Dunne, the young keeper.

"So it's you!" The words broke in an angry cry from Dunne. "I knew you were a spy!"

His fury overcame him, and he flung himself at Noel like a bullet from a gun. It was a short, sharp struggle; but, tough though he was, the keeper found his match in Noel.

Helpless in the detective's scientific judo grip, he found himself bound, gagged, and bundled into a corner.

Panting for breath, his collar torn, Noel scrambled out by the way he had come.

A distant church clock was striking midnight as he once again faced the cage in which lay Tempest, the tiger. The communicating gap in the wooden partition was still closed. The huge beast lay asleep in the southern half, his head on his paws.

It was to the empty compartment that Noel's eyes turned keenly.

"Third shadow from north end," he murmured.

His pulses quickened as he saw that, in the strong moonlight, each bar of the cage threw a distinct black shadow on the straw-covered floor. Surely under the third shadow he would find what he was seeking!

The huge tiger stirred in its sleep as Noel unlocked the door of the empty compartment and stepped softly inside. It was the work of an instant to clear away the straw from the third shadow.

On his knees, Noel examined every inch of the woodwork under that long bar of shadow.

An exclamation broke from him as he noted a loose knot in the stout wood, and, producing a small tool-kit from his pocket, he quickly prised it up. And then—

"At last," he breathed, "I've found it!"

In loosening the knot he must have touched a secret spring, for a wooden

flap opened suddenly, disclosing a cavity in which lay a small, paper-covered package.

"The secret that Daphne was so keen for us to find!" the detective murmured.

He turned close to the bars, so that he could examine it in the full glow of moonlight.

The next events happened with startling suddenness.

A figure sprang from the gloom. A slim hand reached between the bars and snatched the package from Noel's grasp. He just had a glimpse of a pale, girlish face, a dark, swirling cloak.

Almost in the same instant the unknown intruder did something else.

She turned the key in the lock, where Noel had left it, making him a prisoner, and with the same movement she pulled out the key and flung it away; then vanished into the darkness.

Noel leapt forward too late.

"Outwitted!" he muttered. "Why wasn't I more careful? Why didn't I consider the possibility of—"

His thoughts were interrupted in a terrifying way.

Tempest, the Bengal tiger, had been roused from sleep by these unusual noises. An angry roar escaped from between bared fangs.

The great beast scented that a stranger—a human intruder—was in the other half of the cage. The thought seemed to madden it. It began to throw its huge body again and again at the partition which was all that separated it from the young detective.

The woodwork creaked and groaned under those mighty blows.

And Noel, his throat dry, knew that he was in deadly peril.

RED FOR DANGER

"Mr. Raymond's not back yet!" The anxious words broke from Daphne as she paced their little sitting-room in the inn.

"What is keeping him? What can have happened to him?"

It was twenty minutes past midnight.

June had persuaded Daphne to lie down in her room for awhile, but, unable to rest, the fair-haired girl was now back in the sitting-room.

"Please don't worry!" Again June tried to cheer her up. "You don't know nunky as well as I do. He won't fail!"

"Oh, if only I could believe that!" Daphne whispered. "If only I could be sure Mr. Raymond would bring back something that would help me remember!"

The minutes passed. Although she hid her anxiety from Daphne, June was feeling worried, too, and she moved to the window, looking towards the nearby grounds of the private zoo.

And suddenly June saw something that brought a little cry from her lips.

A red glow rose up beyond the zoo wall, flickering luridly in the moonlight. As she gazed at that crimson gleam, June's instinct seemed to tell her that something was wrong.

She whirled round.

"I've got a feeling nunky may be in difficulties," she exclaimed. "And I'm going across to the zoo to see if I can help. Try not to worry while I'm gone—everything's going to come right!"

The zoo gates were closed for the night, of course, but agile June quickly found a spot where she could scale the wall. A few moments later she was racing through the grounds, guided by that flickering glow.

As she ran, she heard dull thuds and the sound of splintering wood. A hoarse, angry snarling reached her ears, and a terrifying scene met her eyes as she burst out into the open space in front of the cage.

A pile of straw was still burning on the ground. It was Noel's signal for help! He had thrown out the straw



from the cage and set light to it, in the desperate hope that the red glow would be seen.

Already one plank of the partition was down, though the gap wasn't wide enough to allow Tempest to pass through. But surely it would only be a matter of seconds before the shuddering woodwork gave way altogether as the great beast crashed against it.

"June! The key!" Noel's voice was hoarse. "It's lying somewhere near those silver birches. Hurry, my dear!"

No need to tell June to hurry! Never had she known such nerve-racking moments as when she desperately searched for that key, with those frightening thuds and snarls echoing in her ears.

At last she saw the gleam of moonlight on the metal key. She snatched it up and flew to the cage, her fingers trembling so much that she could hardly insert it in the lock.

Click!

The key was turned, the door flung open. Noel threw himself out at the very instant the partition gave way altogether and the great beast sprang through.

But by that time the door was closed behind Noel, and safely locked. The grim peril was over!

"Oh, nunky! Thank goodness I was in time!" June whispered, clinging to him, trembling from head to foot with the strain of it.

"My dear! You saved my life," Noel replied gently. "I hardly dared to hope anyone would see the glow of the burning straw—"

Before Noel could say more, there was a rush of footsteps as two newcomers arrived on the scene.

One was David Hardcastle himself. The other was the young keeper, Jack Dunne.

"What on earth is going on here?" Mr. Hardcastle was puzzled and angry. "I was roused by noises in the grounds, and found Dunne bound and gagged in the keepers' lodge!"

"And there's the snooper that bound me, sir!" Jack Dunne burst out, pointing at Noel.

None of them, except the famous detective, had noted a dim figure lurking in the shadows near by. Noel sprang sideways, grasping that figure and bringing into the moonlight a pale-faced girl in a dark cloak.

"Elvira Ferris!" Mr. Hardcastle exclaimed. "The girl who was forbidden ever to enter these grounds again! But who are you?" he demanded, rounding on Noel.

The young detective produced his card.

"Following up a certain clue that came into my possession, Mr. Hardcastle," he said, "I found a paper-covered package hidden in Tempest's cage. It was snatched from me before I could examine it by a girl in a cloak."

"Then that explains everything!"

Mr. Hardcastle burst out. "Elvira Ferris was my secretary, Mr. Raymond. She was dismissed because she was suspected of stealing the famous Hardcastle rubies, though there was no real proof. I've no doubt that package contained the rubies. The wretched girl snatched them from you—"

"I didn't! It's false!"

The cry came from Elvira.

"I'm not a thief, Mr. Hardcastle! I never touched the rubies, or the package!"

"She's right, sir!" Jack Dunne put in. "Elvira's the best friend I ever had, and she's innocent—"

Noel held up his hand.

"I'd like you all to come to the inn where Miss Caynor and I have engaged rooms," he said quietly. "In a very short while, I fancy, the whole mystery will be cleared up—and the rubies recovered!"

"MR. RAYMOND! Thank goodness you're back! Have you found anything? Have you solved the clue?"

The eager question broke from fair-haired Daphne as, some minutes later, Noel entered the sitting-room at the inn.

The young detective's gaze was curiously stern as he glanced round the room, noting Daphne's black handbag lying on the table.

For a moment he was silent. Then: "The solution, I fancy, is in your handbag, Miss Daphne Clarke," he replied coldly. "The paper-covered package containing the Hardcastle rubies, which your uncle stole from Mr. Hardcastle, throwing the blame on Elvira Ferris, his young secretary!"

The change that came over the fair-haired girl was startling.

Fury gleamed in her wide, blue eyes. Her pretty face was twisted with spite and malice as she jumped to the table, opened her handbag, and drew out a small revolver, pointing it at Noel.

"You're smart, Mr. Raymond!" she sneered. "But not smart enough. Maybe I ought to have made my getaway as soon as I snatched the rubies, but it would have seemed suspicious if I'd disappeared—and I wanted all the suspicion to fall on Elvira. But I'm going now. If you try to stop me you'll get a bullet."

Noel smiled coolly.

"I took the precaution of unloading your gun when I found it in the secret pocket of your handbag in the train," he replied. "And I found, too, a letter from your uncle which partly exposed the whole plot."

Daphne's bravado began to fade as she realised that Noel spoke the truth. She shrank back against the wall, her cheeks paling.

And then, at Noel's signal, the door opened—and in walked David Hardcastle, June, Elvira, and Jack Dunne.

Noel pointed to the cowering Daphne.

"There is the culprit, Mr. Hardcastle. Her uncle stole the rubies, hiding them in Tempest's cage. Later he was taken ill, and he sent his niece a puzzling message, telling her where he had hidden the jewels. But she didn't go to the zoo herself, for she guessed that Jack Dunne and Elvira would be on the watch."

"And so we were, Mr. Raymond!" the young keeper put in eagerly. "We believed the stolen rubies were hidden somewhere near Tempest's cage, and we thought the thief might come for them!"

Noel nodded.

"Daphne hit on the clever idea of pretending she had lost her memory," he went on. "In that way she hoped to enlist the sympathy of June and myself, and get us to solve the mystery clue and find the package for her. She didn't want me to see the rubies, however, which was why she snatched them away as soon as I'd found them."

"But, nunky, Daphne was with me in the inn," June put in puzzledly. "At least, she was lying down in her room part of the time."

"You thought she was lying down!" Noel smiled. "Actually she had slipped away to the zoo. And she took Elvira's cloak from the keepers' lodge to disguise herself."

Elvira's eyes were shining.

"Mr. Raymond! How can I thank you!" she whispered. "Jack and I will be grateful to you—always!"

"And so shall I," David Hardcastle put in. "For, apart from recovering my jewels, you've prevented me from doing a grave injustice. Elvira shall have her job back to-morrow!"

It wasn't till later, when they were alone together, that June had a chance to ask Noel a question that was puzzling her.

"Nunky! What made you suspect Daphne in the first place?" she asked. "You said it was something to do with the radio programme!"

Noel chuckled.

"And so it was," he replied. "Daphne said she heard Roger Abbott announcing the Eleven O'Clock Follies when she came to herself. Roger Abbott's voice is very well known, but, though he announces that programme, his name is never actually mentioned in it. If Daphne had really lost her memory so completely, how did she recognise his voice and remember his name?"

There was a twinkle in the detective's eyes.

"Which only goes to show," he finished up, "that even clever crooks like Daphne Clarke can sometimes make mistakes!"

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday's Noel and June story contains some very unusual happenings. Look out for THE CLUES THAT NOEL FAKED.

THE COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

(Continued from page 176.)

at Lone Pine Rodeo," she snapped. "In addition to the Silver Rider, there's a two hundred dollar prize for the winner."

"The hurdle race!" He started. "Are you entering for that?"

"I certainly am," declared Merle and, turning, she strode from the room.

Her heart was thumping excitedly as she emerged from the ranch-house. If only Pommie could win the forthcoming race, what a difference that would make to things at Happy Valley!

"The prize money would enable me to settle up with the Garstens," she told herself, as she made her way across to the hitch-rail where she had tethered her horse. "And it's possible that the trophy may contain the secret uncle's so keen to find—"

She paused, suddenly remembering

the marked newspaper on Nathaniel Garsten's desk, remembering his agitation when he had learnt her intention of competing for the Silver Rider.

"It almost looks as if for some reason he's scared of me winning it," she told herself. "As if he's interested in that secret himself."

Reaching the hitch-rail, she gave Pommie a fond pat, then untied his reins, but as she was about to mount she paused, her attention attracted by the sound of nearby voices.

Looking round she saw a girlish figure, clad in expensive riding clothes and with a mass of blonde hair, standing in the doorway of a stable across the yard.

It was Celia Garsten and she was talking to someone inside the stable. "I tell you, Denvers, it will be easy," she was saying.

Merle gave a start. Denvers! That was the name of the suspect cattle-rustler from Snake Canyon—the no-good cowboy Jake Binns had mentioned. Was it possible that the sup-

posed outlaw had found a job at the V-Bar-V?

Merle's lips curled scornfully. "I shouldn't be surprised," she told herself. "Garsten's no good himself, so it's quite likely that—"

And then she broke off, for the man Celia Garsten had addressed as Denvers had emerged from the stable. He was a young cowboy in woolly chaps and a bright, chequered shirt.

"Larry!" Merle gasped.

For the supposed outlaw was the boy she had come to think might be her friend!

So his name was Denvers! And he was an employee of the unscrupulous man whom Merle had every reason to mistrust!

It was a staggering discovery, and there was something like horror in Merle's heart as she saw him standing there, laughing and joking with the rancher's supercilious daughter.

Will Larry Denvers see Merle—speak to her? What will Merle do after this shock? Don't miss next Friday's instalment.

THE MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

(Continued from page 172.)

Seth. "That's the only hiding-place I can think of. And you two stay here—don't move," he added as he followed his two companions.

His warning was unnecessary. In that awful moment Sally and Fay were incapable of movement. Their minds were in a turmoil of agony. If the boys were discovered, then indeed everything would be lost. Seth, they knew, would be as good as his word. And every minute now they were sailing farther and farther away from the Ocean Star's course. There would be no hope of that ship picking them up.

"Sally!" Fay gave a frightened little sob. "What are we going to do?"

Sally, listening apprehensively to the men's hoarse, angry voices, did not answer. She heard the door of the hold crash open, then came a bellow from Seth:

"Anybody there? If so, come out—and quickly!"

There was no sound. Don and Johnny; Sally realised, were lying low. But how long could they keep it up? Next moment she drew in her breath with a hiss of fear as she heard Frank's startled voice:

"Great guns, Seth, you were right! There is someone else here—look down below. See that dish—those spoons? By jimbo, so that's where our grub went. Come out, you cubs! Let me get my hands on you!"

"Sally!" Fay gave a convulsive start, her face almost grey with fear. "Sally, they'll find them."

"They certainly will—and in just a few minutes," muttered Sally.

Suddenly she felt icily cold as she often did in face of great danger. She thought frantically, and then suddenly her blue eyes snapped. "Fay," she hissed, "I've got it! Go along to Seth's cabin. Get that waterproof bag—and wait there until I call you. Understand?"

Fay, puzzled though she was, knew better than to argue with Sally in this mood. With a little nod she darted along the corridor, while Sally, her eyes ablaze now, darted into the gallery.

In a matter of seconds she was out again, and behind her, from the direction of the galley, billowed an acrid cloud of black and yellow smoke. It drifted along the corridor, up the hatchway. Sally let out a wild scream.

"Fire!" she screamed at the top of her voice. "Fire! Help—all of you! The ship's on fire!"

There was the sound of loud exclamations from the direction of the hold, the thud of rushing feet. In a matter of seconds the three men, their faces white and alarmed, rushed back along the alleyway, knocking Sally aside in their haste to get to the galley.

They didn't see the two boyish figures emerge from the hold behind them, didn't see Sally's frantic beckon.

"Quick!" she gasped wildly. "Hurry—hurry! Fay—come on! They're going to find out the trick in a moment. I just rammed a lot of oily rags in a tin and set fire to them."

But the chums needed no urging. Quickly Don and Johnny grabbed the oilskin bag and followed Sally and Fay up the companionway. In a frenzy of fear and excitement Sally waited for them, almost hauling them bodily on to the deck. Not a moment too soon. For from below came a furious bellow of rage, the thud of rushing feet.

Grim-faced, breathing hard, Don and Johnny laid down the bag, swung over the hatch-cover and batten it down. And while the men below beat a fierce and deafening tattoo on it, shouting hair-raising

threats, the chums darted across to the boats.

It took some agonisingly anxious minutes to launch a motor-operated boat with the old-fashioned hand-winding gear, while below the thundering grew louder, accompanied by the ominous splintering of wood.

More agonising moments while Don and Johnny hurried stealthily to the bridge, dealt speedily with the bewildered fourth man who was on duty, grabbed chart and compass, and hurried back to the boat. Sally and Fay, meanwhile, had hurriedly collected some of the special rations of food and water which were kept in the small cabin on deck.

There came a loud splintering sound; an ominous thud.

"Hurry! Hurry!" gasped Sally.

"Coming!" panted Don. "We've got everything now, I think. Lower the stuff into the boat. Don't forget the oilskin bag, Johnny. We're guarding that with our lives from now on."

In frantic haste they lowered the things into the bobbing boat, expecting at any moment that Seth & Co. would come crashing after them.

"We'll never pick up the Ocean Star now," gasped Johnny, as the precious bag landed with a thud into the boat. "What'll we do, Don?"

"Make for Borlona Island," said Don tensely. "The Ocean Star's calling there. With any luck we'll pick it up—My gosh!"

A tearing, splintering sound from behind them sent a wild stab of fear through them all. Another minute and Seth & Co., livid with rage, would be free. Sally bit her lip to keep back the wild shout that rose in her throat. Fay, almost limp with terror and suspense, was grabbed by Don and Johnny and lowered gently by rope into the boat below. Sally followed, waiting in an agony of apprehension for the two boys.

The boat shuddered as Johnny almost fell in. Then Sally, despite her iron self-control, felt a cry escape from her lips as a last tearing, splintering sound came from above, followed by a loud thump and a sudden roar of upraised voices.

Seth & Co. were free. "Don!" she gasped. "Don—quickly!"

Don didn't wait for the rope. He took one flying leap from the deck, landing in a huddled heap on the floor of the little boat. At the same time Johnny pulled at the engine starter. There was a splutter—then silence.

"I can't bear it!" muttered Sally. "I can't bear it!"

Another splutter interrupted her words, followed by a loud whirr. And next moment the little craft shot forward.

From overhead there sounded a sharp crack and a streak of flame whistled over their heads.

"Duck!" shouted Don. "They're shooting at us!"

Another crack—and another. Tensely the chums crouched in the bottom of the boat as it shot forward, blessing the darkness, the creeping mist which was blotting them from view.

Then suddenly they straightened up and, almost fainting with relief, gazed around them.

They were alone upon the wide expanse of rolling sea. By a miracle, it seemed, they had escaped—and brought with them the precious oilskin bag which had been stolen from the Ocean Star.

Sally gave a big sigh.

"Gosh, we've done it!" she cried. "Thanks to you boys—"

"Thanks to us, my foot!" snorted Johnny, grinning. "Where would we have been but for your fire stunt, Sally? That was wizard!"

"Hear, hear!" echoed Fay and Don. Sally laughed.

"O.K., Merry-makers, then we'll share the honours. But I say," she added excitedly, "what about this oilskin bag? Why exactly has it caused all this excitement?"

Don smiled.

"Well, we can tell you about that, Sally," he said. "This package contains some jolly valuable radio invention. It was to be landed on Borlona Island—just the place we're heading for!"

They looked at each other in vast satisfaction.

"Well, we're the winners this time!" said Sally. "And now for Borlona Island and the dear old Ocean Star!"

And, shining-eyed, she beamed at her smiling chums.

(End of this week's story.)

Sally and Co. have escaped, but their adventures are far from over, as you will discover when you read next Friday's thrilling story.

DOLORES THE MISCHIEF-MAKER

(Continued from page 170.)

Pat turned. They were near the boathouse now. Behind it they saw a thin spiral of smoke, caught the sudden flicker of flames. But who could have lit a fire at this time of the morning?

"Come on. Let's see who's there," Chris said.

They made their way in the direction of the fire. In a few minutes they had reached it. It was burning brightly, proclaiming that it had not been long in existence.

Quite a bit of the wreckage from the shore was blazing away in its heart, and obviously its maker had been beachcombing long before Pat and Chris. And then, staring, Pat saw something that sent a sudden quiver through her frame.

"Chris!" she cried in a strangled whisper. "Look—the oar!"

She pointed. Chris stood rigid. Yes; there, without a doubt, was the missing oar—or what was left of it. It lay in the very centre of the fire, consumed now except for the edge of its blade.

Pat drew in an angry breath. It was plain what had happened.

"Dolores!" Pat cried. "She had the same idea. She meant to take no chances, Chris. She came here before us, found the oar, and lit this fire so as to destroy the evidence. Which means—"

"Which means," said Chris furiously, "that now there's no hope of stopping her from going to Dartleek Island. She will be able to follow up that clue before us—find Captain Kirabee! Gee, but that girl must have some really desperate reason for wanting to find that secret!"

Pat nodded, and it was silently that they both walked back to their chalet.

What secret was it that Captain Kirabee had to tell?

Pat did not know, but now more than ever she was determined that Dolores should not cheat them out of it, and as the camp bell clanged out its first breakfast warning bell she came to a sudden decision.

"There's only one thing to do," she declared. "That's for us to go to the island first."

"But we can't," objected Chris. "It's out of bounds and, anyway, all the boats are locked up. We'd never get one until after breakfast, and then it'll be too late, for Bruce and Dolores are going to visit Admiral Hardacre immediately after brekker."

Pat's face was grim.

"We don't need a boat," she said. "We'll swim across."

"Swim?"

"Yes—at least, I will. I'm a pretty good swimmer and I can manage the distance easily."

As she spoke, Pat unbuttoned her frock and reached for her swim-suit.

Will Pat be able to carry out her daring resolve? And if she succeeds in reaching the island, what will she discover there? See next Friday's exciting instalment.