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EVERY
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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^d}

Week
Ending
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1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



THE MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

This Week's Thrilling Sally & Co. Story Features Their Adventures When Afloat
In The Pacific—Written by DAPHNE GRAYSON

ONLY THE SUN TO GUIDE THEM

RISE and shine! Jump to it!" Johnny Briggs' cheerful voice rang out lustily.

Sleepily Sally Warner blinked open her blue eyes, then in one quick movement sat upright, staring somewhat bemusedly around her.

"Here you are, Sally," said Don Weston with a smile. "Have a cup of tea to bring you down to earth. It will, too," he added with a chuckle. "Johnny made it—and the only good thing I can say about it is that it's hot."

Sally took the proffered cup, gratefully drank down the scalding, if rather queer-tasting contents, then dimpled at the two boys.

"Nectar," she laughed. "Come on, Fay, you don't know what you're missing."

She shook her fair-haired chum gently. With a violent start Fay Manners sat up.

"Whoa! Take it easy," called Johnny. "You're rocking the boat!" "The boat?" Fay's voice was puzzled. Then, as she looked around, she gave a little chuckle. "Goodness, I'd forgotten where I was."

"Speeding along in the middle of the Pacific," Sally reminded her gaily, "in the motor-boat we snaffled from Seth & Co. last night. Wonder what they're feeling like this morning," she added with a grin, "after losing their prisoners, their boat and their precious oilskin bag?"

She glanced across at the small locker as she spoke, in which the bag lay concealed—that valuable mystery bag which had been stolen from the Ocean Star, the college ship in which she and her chums had been sailing to Australia, and the saving of which had led them all through so many adventures.

"Pretty sick," replied Johnny. "But who cares? We're all right. Nice little boat. Plenty of food and water,

a good compass and enough petrol to get us to Borlona Island."

"And at this rate it shouldn't take us long to get there," put in Don brightly, as he sent the little craft speeding over the water. "On my reckoning we'll be there almost as soon as the Ocean Star, which means —"

"That we'll be picked up," finished Sally eagerly. "Oh, Don, how wonderful to see all our friends again. Golly, I'm so thrilled!"

She looked around as she spoke, at the smooth sea; at the pearly morning sky. The sun had not yet risen, and the fresh morning breeze whipped Sally's dark curls around her bright cheeks, making her blue eyes dance with excitement and anticipation.

"We'll make them throw a party for us," said Fay enthusiastically.

"With lots of grub," said Johnny eagerly.

"Goodness, talking of grub," put in Sally, throwing aside her blanket and scrambling to her feet, "it's about time we thought about brekker. Let's see what we've got."

She raked around, found the frying-pan and placed it on the little oil-stove. It was no easy task cooking food as the little boat bounced over the water, but with Fay's help it was soon ready, and they all agreed that the hard ship's biscuits, the bacon and fried potatoes and the coffee was the best meal they had ever tasted.

"Now, Don," said Sally briskly, "you and Johnny can lie down and get some sleep. Fay and I can take over for a while."

Gratefully Don relinquished his place at the wheel, and he and Johnny settled down under the blankets.

"Don't forget to keep your eye on the compass," was Don's last sleepy warning as his eyes closed.

"O.K., skipper!" promised Sally cheerfully.

She smiled across at Fay who, eager-eyed, was staring ahead. And Sally's own eyes were no less eager. What a thrill, she thought, if only they could sight the Ocean Star before it reached the island, while the boys were still asleep. And that was not an impossible task, surely, seeing that they had been travelling all through the night.

Keeping a firm hold on the wheel, she took a glance at the compass. Everything was all right. Sally's lips curved in a smile of pure delight. She was enjoying this. The knowledge that they would almost certainly get into contact with the Ocean Star before long turned the trip into a pleasure cruise.

With startling suddenness a golden shaft gleamed across the sea, topping each little wave with blinding radiance. Sally put a hand to the back of her neck.

"It's going to be a scorcher," she called across to Fay. "Better rake around, old thing, and find some sort of headgear. The back of my neck is getting burnt already. I—"

And then quite suddenly Sally stopped, her eyes widening incredulously as she looked at the compass.

"Sally, what is it?" asked Fay, alarmed at her chum's sudden change of expression. "Is anything wrong?"

She slipped from her seat and hurried to Sally's side.

"Fay, look!" With a trembling finger Sally pointed at the compass, then turned and gestured towards the sun. "Don't you see, the sun has risen behind us. But according to the compass we're steering south-east. We're travelling in almost the opposite direction to what we should do."

For a moment Fay was silent, staring down at the compass. Then her face paled a little.

"You mean, Sally, that all this time we've been travelling the wrong way? That we're not going in the direction of the island at all?"

"I mean just that!" Sally's voice was grimly worried. "This compass is out of gear. Instead of getting nearer to the island we're getting farther away from it. And goodness knows how many miles off course we are."

She switched off the engine as she spoke, bringing the little craft to a standstill. And as if the sudden cessation of noise disturbed them, Don and Johnny almost immediately sat up and demanded to know what was the matter.

It took Sally only a few seconds to explain. Don gave a whistle of dismay.

"Great snakes, that's a snorter," he said.

Sally heard the underlying apprehension in his tone, saw the look of fear dawning in Fay's eyes. Suddenly, what had seemed just a grand spree a few minutes before, was now turning into an uncomfortably perilous situation. The calm sea with its gold-tipped waves was now a shuddersome expanse of loneliness, a mute threat to all their high hopes of a short while before.

She looked round, then suddenly her face brightened.

"What chumps we are," she cried. "The sun told us where we were wrong, and now it can jolly well put us right. We'll steer by it."

"Why, of course," said Johnny, as if that simple solution had been in his mind all the time. "Swing her round, Don. And step on it a bit. We've got a lot of time to make up."

Don nodded and swung the boat round, heading south-east. Fay and Johnny, their momentary scare forgotten, were laughing and joking now, as they made old biscuit-bags into queer-looking sunhats. All that day they sailed on, steering by the sun. With the coming of night, they rigged up a sea anchor, and, with the boat almost stationary, they settled down to sleep. But they were up with the sun, to switch on the motor and eagerly continue their journey.

Fay and Johnny were in the best of spirits as, breakfast over, they sat in the bows, but Don who was steering, looked unusually worried. Sally could not understand it. Thanks to the sun, they were steering a correct course, and though they were eight or ten hours behind schedule, still that did not greatly matter, for the Ocean Star would spend some time at the island.

As the second day wore on Don's quietness and worried frown puzzled Sally more and more and at last she could bear it no longer. Crossing to where he sat, she regarded him anxiously.

"Don, what is it?" she asked quietly. "No, don't bother to pretend you're not worried, because I jolly well know you are. Come on, out with it."

For a moment Don hesitated, then he shrugged.

"I suppose you'll have to know sooner or later, Sallykins," he said with a heavy sigh. "We've come miles out of our course, and that means we've used up a lot more petrol than we should have done."

Sally looked at him in horror. "You mean you think we're going to run out of petrol before we get to the island?" she asked incredulously. But before Don could answer that question there came a splutter from the engine, a few queer, coughing noises. And then silence as the boat came to a standstill.

"Not a drop," replied Don heavily. "Not another teaspoonful."

"And there're no filling stations in the middle of the Pacific," put in Johnny, with a dismal attempt at lightheartedness.

There came a muffled little cry from Fay and she sank nervously on to the wooden scat, looking at the chums with a pathetic helplessness that wrung their hearts.

"But we've got to do something," said Sally desperately. "We can't just stay here. There's——" She stopped short. No need to alarm Fay further, but with a horrible jolt she thought of the food and water. That had seemed plentiful a little while ago, when everything had been going smoothly; now it seemed pitifully inadequate when they might be stranded like this for days. She resolutely pushed away the sudden terrible thought that they might never be picked up. That was a thought she mustn't entertain even for a moment.

Somehow or other they'd got to get out of this—there must be a way!

It was Johnny who had the brain-wave.

"A sail!" he suddenly cried jubilantly. "We'll fix up a sail. There's a bit of a breeze, and it's in the right direction. Come on, Don, get cracking."

In one of the lockers they found a ragged piece of canvas—just sufficient to make a small sail. They rigged it up, using oars as a mast, and as the breeze filled out the canvas the boat began to forge forward again.

"It may take a bit longer this way," said Johnny airily, "but we'll get there just the same, don't worry."

"Sure, just a matter of a few extra hours," agreed Don cheerfully.

Sally smiled, but she wasn't taken in by the boys' optimism. Their position now, though not hopeless, was extremely perilous. If only, she thought with a wild longing, they could sight the Ocean Star. Just for a moment she allowed her thoughts to dwell on that wonderful prospect, then she gave an impatient shrug. That sort of wishful thinking didn't help in the least. Far better to busy herself with some task to take her mind off their present plight.

She turned to Fay, wincing a little at sight of that girl's wan, scared face, her heart twisting with pity at the bright, pitiful smile that Fay forced to her white lips.

"Come on, old thing," she said gently, "let's make some coffee and a bite to eat. It'll cheer us up a bit."

Fay nodded eagerly, glad of something to do. And presently she and Sally made their way over to the boys, gingerly balancing tin mugs full of hot coffee.

"Sorry we can't serve it iced," said Sally with a smile. "And it's no good setting it aside to cool because it would only get hotter. Golly, I feel like taking a plunge over the side. This heat's terrific."

She glanced up at the brassy-looking sky, from which the glittering sun shone down with furnace-like heat. She saw the queer haze on the water far out on the horizon, felt a faint stab of apprehension as she noticed how, in the distance, enormous black clouds, tinged with fiery red and deep purple, seemed to be boiling up in an ominous heap.

Don, following her gaze, bit his lip. "Doesn't look too good," he said in a low voice, with a wary glance towards Fay. "Storm clouds if I'm not mistaken. But don't say anything to Fay. It may pass us by."

"Gosh, I hope so," said Johnny fervently. "We've got just about all the trouble we can comfortably handle right now."

But as, anxious-eyed, they watched those storm clouds gather and multiply, they knew their hopes were in vain. For the storm was coming towards them, and coming fast. Already the waves were beginning to swell angrily. A chill wind swept upon them, sending their boat skimming across the sea. Next moment the sky seemed to be rent by a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a deafening crash of thunder.

With a little scream Fay swung round, her eyes wide with fear, clutching frantically at Sally as the little boat heeled over then slowly righted itself.

Then came the rain—tearing, torrential rain, that beat through their clothes, leaving them battered, gasping for breath. And all the time the wind increased, shrieking across the sea with gale-like fury, whipping up the waves to terrifying heights.

Those were nightmare moments to the chums. Every second they expected the boat to capsize. How it stayed afloat in those mountainous seas was a never-ending wonder to Sally. One moment they were up, up on the crest of a viciously foaming wave—the next they were flung viciously down into an oily trough of water, with great seas towering above them, setting the boat awash from end to end.

The boys worked heroically to keep the boat afloat, while the girls, grabbing up empty tins, baled out the water that came splashing in.

The storm raged all that night and all the following morning. It was a nightmare experience and Sally & Co. were exhausted long before it was over.

How they survived those mountainous seas they never knew. But gradually the storm died down, leaving them limp and utterly exhausted—almost exhausted to realise that they were still afloat.

Painfully Sally, who had flung herself with Fay into the bottom of the boat in those last terrible minutes, raised herself and looked. She shuddered at the sight of the sullen, sunless sky, at the battered boat awash with salt water, at the still angrily swelling sea.

"Golly," she said wearily, stretching her cramped limbs, "I feel as if I've been kicked by a dozen horses all at once. And what sights we must all look. But at least," she added, with a determined effort at cheerfulness, "we've won through."

"Yes, we're all here and we're still afloat," gulped Fay. "Things could be worse."

"Could they?" asked Johnny tonelessly.

"Johnny, what do you mean?" Sally's voice was sharp with sudden swift anxiety as she looked at the two boys. "Don, what is it? Tell me."

Don cast a look of pity at the two girls.

"I'd much rather not," he said hopelessly, "but if you insist——" He shrugged. "We've been blown off our course—goodness knows in which direction we're heading now. There's no sun now to guide us. We've no petrol, no compass. And—take a look over there."

As if he found it impossible to put into words, he nodded towards the locker in the stern of the boat. And, glancing in that direction, Sally suddenly stood transfixed with consternation. For the door of the locker had been wrenched open by the wind. The cooking stove and most of the pots and pans had been swept overboard. And with them practically all the food, and all but one jar of water. Only the oilskin bag remained intact, securely lashed to the locker.

Despite her iron self-control Sally could not repress the cry of anguish which came to her lips as she turned back to meet her chums' hopeless eyes.



THE STORM

In utter horror the four chums stared at each other, at their suddenly useless craft which was rocking gently to and fro to the swell of the waves.

"Isn't there any spare petrol?" asked Sally, determinedly fighting down the wave of panic that swept over her

HAVE YOU A SECRET HOARD?

No, not treasure, but something just as important to us to-day. I'm sure many of you have scraps of paper lying around that are no longer of any use.

SAVE EVERY PIECE FOR SALVAGE!

(Please turn to the back page.)



IN NEPTUNE'S NEST

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

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

Scratched on the ketch was a message which directed the chums to find a Captain Kirabee in Neptune's Nest on Dartfleet Island, which was out of bounds to the campers.

Dolores Beigrave Bellamy, a beautiful, wealthy girl staying at the camp, was also after the secret. She persuaded Bruce Feltham, the camp's sports master, to allow her to accompany him when he went to see Admiral Hardacre, the irascible owner of the island.

Pat, determined to reach Neptune's Nest first, decided to swim across to Dartfleet Island.

IN amazement Chris watched her chum donning her swim-suit. Pat's daring decision to swim across to Dartfleet Island momentarily robbed her of her breath; then she gave an excited whoop.

"If you're going to swim, then I'm coming with you!" she declared.

Pat frowned.

"No, Chris; it's too risky," she said. "You're not used to swimming so far, so I'd prefer to go on my own."

"Rats!" Chris shook her head. "I'm not going to be left behind!"

And swiftly she unbuttoned her blouse. Realising that further protest was useless, Pat waited until her chum had changed, then together they stole out of the chalet.

The grounds of the holiday camp, gay with rose-beds and flowering bushes, were deserted. The second breakfast-bell had rung, and everyone had flocked to the dining-hall.

"O.K. The coast's clear," whispered Pat, and led the way down to the sandy beach beyond the river-mouth.

Out in the bay Dartfleet Island loomed, its forbidding cliffs gleaming in the early sun. As they paused at the water's edge, Pat and Chris stared wonderingly, the same questions buzzing in each of their heads.

Who was the mysterious Captain Kirabee the clue they had found had urged them to seek? What would they learn from him? And what would they find in the cave that bore the romantic name of Neptune's Nest?

"Come on! Let's go!" urged Pat, and, wading deep into the water, began to swim.

Next moment Chris was forging along at her side. The sea was as smooth as a millpond, and so they made good progress, and, as they drew near the rocky island, they caught a glimpse of the small, crescent-shaped beach which was the only landing-place. The whole length of it was guarded by massive, spiked iron rail-

ings, in the centre of which was a padlocked gate. And behind the barrier, cut in the face of the cliff itself, was a narrow, winding flight of steps.

"The place looks like a fort," commented Pat.

Chris nodded, but did not speak. She needed all her breath for swimming. Already she was finding it hard going, and she was almost exhausted by the time the island was reached. As they waded through the shallows she turned to her chum.

"What do we do now?" she panted.

Pat chuckled.

"Climb over the fence, of course," she said. "But be careful how you go."

As they reached the railings they paused, looking anxiously about; but, to their relief, there was no sign of life, and the only sound was the cawing of rooks in the trees at the top of the high cliff.

Pat caught at the railings and began hoisting herself up. More nervously, Chris followed her example. Together they reached the top; for a second they gingerly balanced themselves, then climbed over the iron spikes and began the descent. Safely they dropped down on to the beach.

"So far, so good," said Pat. "Now to find Neptune's Nest. According to my maps, it should be along on the right here somewhere. Keep well into the cliff, Chris."

She led the way. Crouching almost double, they crept along the base of the limestone mass. Twenty—thirty yards they went, and then, rounding a shoulder of rock, Pat suddenly paused. Before them gaped a narrow gully that led back into the cliff itself. Pat thrilled as she looked in.

"Neptune's Nest it is!" she breathed.

She plunged through the entrance, to find herself immediately in a big, circular cave. But what a cave! Blinking in entranced astonishment, the two girls halted.

"Gee, it's like a sort of sea museum!" Chris breathed.

It was an apt description. Very much like the interior of a museum was the cave. It was full of seafaring relics—an ancient wheel, a huge, old-fashioned, brass-bound chest, the effigy of a mermaid, giant clam shells and crabs, fantastically carved corals, stuffed swordfish, and goodness knows what else.

But the most startling exhibit of all was a small, but beautiful, fragile crystal statue of a squatting Buddha, placed near an oak ship's figurehead, which depicted a striking bearded

face.

"Must be the admiral's treasure-house," Pat observed. "Whizzo, though, what a collection! And where," she added, gazing around in some bewilderment, "do we start looking?"

Chris, baffled herself, shook her head. Her eyes were on the figurehead. Strong and compelling was the wooden face which stared out at them. The carved eyes seemed to possess some magnetic quality.

DOLORES

The Mischief-Maker

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

"Pretty wizard bit of carving!" she said. "Gee, Pat, what a figurehead it would make for our Roman galley! I—"

And then she peered more closely. "Hallo! It's got something carved on it!" she cried.

That was true, as Pat now saw. Under the fine head was carved a curling scroll. On that scroll was some sort of lettering. More closely they approached the figurehead, and suddenly the letters seemed to resolve themselves from the mass of twirls and loops which surrounded them. They spelt only two words, but, reading those words, both girls gave a simultaneous choking gasp. For those words were:

"Captain Kirabee!" Chris breathed. "Captain Kirabee!" Then

"This is Captain Kirabee!" Pat excitedly cried. "Chris, don't you see? That message didn't refer to a living man—it referred to this figurehead! 'Go to Dartfleet Island. Find Captain Kirabee in Neptune's Nest,'" she quoted. "Here is Captain Kirabee, Chris. And here," she added, trying to keep a tremor of excitement out of her voice, "the secret lies!"

Chris nodded. Most vividly she understood that. Her eyes were almost on fire as she stared at the carving, devouring it inch by inch, as though, by the very intensity of her gaze, she would force the secret to reveal itself. And then suddenly she clutched Pat's arm.

"Pat, look!" she cried in a strangled voice. "What's that?"

Her finger trembled a little as she pointed. And then Pat jumped again. For a foot beneath the scroll was a plain square set in a mass of tangled fishes and seaweed—a square in each corner of which was drilled a neat hole, plainly proclaiming that at some time or another a metal plate had been fixed there. And in the middle of that square, scratched into the woodwork in a manner irresistibly reminiscent of the message scribbled on the ketch floor, were two initials.

"C. C.," Chris muttered. "Now, who—"

And then her eyes seemed to bulge. For a moment she stood stock-still. "It must be!" she gasped.

"Pat, those are uncle's initials! Then—then it's possible that it was Uncle Charles who scribbled that message on the floor of the ketch. And that means—Great Scott, it means the secret concerns uncle!"

THE CHUMS IN HIDING

For a moment Pat just stood and stared. Was it possible that her chum was right?

"I'm certain I am!" Chris breathed.

"I know it! I feel it somehow. Pat, it was my Uncle Charles who wrote that message. This figurehead was the Captain Kirabee to which he referred. This concerns me, Pat—"

"Oh, gosh!" Pat said. She was fascinated by the idea; excited by the possibility that the mystery they were trying to solve might be of great importance to Chris herself. "But—but if that's so, what's Dolores got to



do with it?" she asked. "Why is Dolores after it? How could she have known there was a secret? And—"

Then swiftly everything else was blotted from her mind, for outside there came the crunch of a footstep, followed by a man's deep, growling, rather irritable voice.

"Ay, Malcolm. I'm sure I heard something down here. Drat my buttons, man, I'm not deaf, am I? Shiver 'em, whoever they are! But, by hooker, I'll make 'em sorry if I find 'em! Let's look in Neptune's Nest."

"The—the admiral!" gasped Pat. "We must hide, Chris."

Pat, swiftly looking round, spotted the big, old chest. Instantly she darted forward and lifted the lid. She gave a gasp of relief as she saw that the chest was empty.

"Quick—in here!" she whispered. "We mustn't be seen."

Chris nodded. She also realised that to be caught at this moment would not only ruin their own quest, but would almost certainly spell failure for Bruce Feltham when he visited the island later. The crusty old admiral wouldn't be likely to give permission for his island to be used for the holiday camp's regatta if he caught two of the holiday-makers trespassing on the island.

Hurriedly the chums clambered into the large chest, and, as Pat lowered the lid, Admiral Hardacre's voice sounded again. This time, apparently, from the cave-mouth.

"H'm! Nothing in here. Shiver me, where can they be? Some dratted boy or gal playing tricks, most like. Why can't the pesky young lubbers respect a man's privacy? See anything unusual, Malcolm?"

"No, sir," answered a voice.

"Then look round, man!"

Pat's heart thudded as the footsteps advanced into the cave. At her side Chris shifted a little, and warningly Pat dug her elbow into her chum's back. Nearer, nearer came the steps. Oh, gee, they were heading straight for the chest! Both girls held their breath as the admiral accidentally kicked against its side. For a moment they gave themselves up for lost. Then the admiral grunted again.

"Dash 'em, whoever they are! Where's my matches—and my pipe?" he added querulously. "Oh, here they are! Take another walk along the beach, Malcolm. I'll squat here till you come back."

There was a creak as he dropped on to the lid of the chest. A scrape as his match flared, then the crunch of footsteps as the unseen Malcolm departed.

"Oh, crumbs!" Chris breathed. "Hope he doesn't stop long! I'm melting!"

Pat, squashed in beside her chum, fervently echoed the wish. It was stuffy in the chest. Hot, too. She felt little pins-and-needles beginning to prick at her face.

But the admiral above her showed no disposition to move. Presently Malcolm came back.

"Must have got away, sir. No sign of them—none whatever. Er—it wouldn't be visitors from the holiday camp you are expecting, would it?"

"Man, talk sense!" the admiral testily growled. "Why should they come spying around when I've agreed they could call on me? Nay, nay, it's not them; though, like as not, it is some young lubber, from the camp. By the way, who's this sports master fellow who's coming to see me?"

"A fellow named Feltham, sir. And a girl named Dolores Bellamy. I've never seen either of them before."

The admiral grunted. He mumbled on. Chris, half-suffocated, shifted restlessly. Pat began to experience all the sensations of a hot steam bath, and was sure that in a moment she would be gasping loudly for breath. They could endure this not much longer. Another five minutes—

Then, to both girls' vast relief, there came a clang from the bell at the iron gate along the beach, accompanied by a loud hail.

"Aho, there! Anyone at home?"

"Bruce," thought Pat, "and Dolores!"

And, though it had been far from her mind to be on the island when Bruce and Dolores arrived, she was immeasurably thankful now for their interruption.

She could have cried out in her relief as the admiral, with a grunt, hoisted himself and ambled to the cave-mouth, followed by his companion.

"For pity's sake, Pat, let's have air!" gasped Chris. "I'm half-boiled!"

Pat very willingly heaved up the lid. With a gasp, the two girls sat up, gulping gratefully as the soft air filled their lungs again. Outside came a buzz of voices, and a musical laugh from Dolores as she and Bruce introduced themselves.

Then Chris looked at her chum.

"They're here," she said significantly. "Pat, what now?"

"Lie low," Pat advised. "Can't do anything else," she added ruefully. "As soon as they go, off we scoot. But—oh, snakes! Get another lungful of air and bob down!" she added feverishly. "They're coming this way!"

One hastily snatched breath, then swiftly they subsided again. Pat lowered the lid. But just as it was closing a slim figure appeared in the entrance to the cave. Dolores!

The chums both lay, tense and tingling. Had Dolores seen? they wondered. Had she, just for an instant, spotted the movement of the lid of the chest?

They both waited in an agony of suspense and expectation. What would Dolores do?

THE BRASS PLATE



But Dolores, to Pat's vast relief, appeared not to have noticed anything. Into the cave she tripped, a trilling laugh on her lips.

"Oh, gracious, what a ducky hide-out!" she exclaimed. "Admiral, is this your museum?" she asked, as the owner of the island appeared on the scene, followed by Bruce.

"My what? Museum? No," the admiral said. "It's just the place where I store the big things. My real collection is in the house on the cliff-top; but be careful with that crystal Buddha, young woman! It's only made of thin glass, though it does look solid. That was a present from an Indian rajah."

"It's lovely!" Dolores declared rapturously. "Everything is lovely! Oh, admiral, what a marvellous collection you have got! Don't mind if I look around, do you?"

"Mind nothing," the admiral grunted. "But don't touch. I get jumpy when boys and girls are around." He turned to Bruce. "I'm dashed, young fellow, if I know what to make of this proposition of yours! Had an idea, when I was told you were a sports master, that you'd be—I don't know—much older. What exactly is it that you want me to do?"

Pat and Chris, sweltering in the chest, heard Bruce explain their regatta idea, adding that all the proceeds were to be given to a sailors' charity in which he had apparently discovered the admiral was interested. The old salt grunted.

"The charity—hum, that ought to be supported!" he said. "But, as for the stunt—well, I'll think about it. Depends on how you behave. I don't trust youngsters, that's flat, and I'm not too keen on the idea of handing over my island—even for a day—"

"But we'll take good care of it, sir," Bruce anxiously said. "We'll treat it as if it were our own."

Pat, in the chest, was perspiring. Chris was just as suffocatingly hot. But suddenly they forgot their discomfort as they heard Dolores speak.

"Well, well! So this figurehead is called Captain Kirabee!" Dolores exclaimed. "What a lovely name! And

what a marvellous figurehead! Oh, admiral, please do tell me something about this! Where did Captain Kirabee come from?"

"Off a sailing-boat," the admiral said. "It was given to me by a friend who's dead and gone now, bless his memory!"

"But the carving—it's so exquisite!" Dolores exclaimed. "And—oh, look! There's a space here where a plate must have been. Admiral, have you got the plate?"

Pat tensed. She felt Chris grow tense and rigid beside her. Both of them felt a conviction that the missing plate was of great significance, and breathlessly they both waited for Admiral Hardacre's reply.

"Ay, I've got the plate—up at the house," he growled. "Fool thing it is, too, with all kinds of idiotic figures on the back of it. Can't make head nor tail of 'em. A brass plate it is."

"Pat!" breathed Chris. "Shush!" Pat returned.

But her heart was racing now. In those words she detected a clue. Not for nothing, she decided, had Charles Caslon inscribed his initials under the plate—not for nothing had that unfinished message been scratched on the floor of Uncle Charles' ketch. Suddenly, vividly, almost like a lightning flash, it came to both girls that the secret was in the plate itself.

Was that also the thought in Dolores' mind? It seemed like it when they heard her reply.

"Intriguing," she said. "And you say you've still got the plate, admiral? I'd just love to see it!"

With sudden resolve Pat raised her hand and cautiously opened the lid of the trunk a few inches, just enough to allow herself and her chum to see what was happening.

She bit her lip as she saw Dolores standing before the figurehead, an intent expression on her lovely face.

Then again she resumed her remarks.

"May I see the plate, admiral?" she pleaded. "These old sea things intrigue me so much."

She beamed at the admiral, and half turned as she spoke. Hastily Pat dropped the lid of the trunk, but her heart was racing. Would Dolores get her wish?

Then she gulped. "Well, why shouldn't you?" the admiral growled. "I suppose you'll come along to the house after your inspection? You can see it then."

Pat tingled. From Chris came a low, deep gasp. Tensed and perspiring, they crouched while Bruce & Co. completed their inspection of the cave. Then there came the crunch of footsteps as the admiral led the way out on to the beach. The chums waited half a minute or so, then, when they felt the coast to be clear, they raised the lid and filled their lungs with clean, fresh air.

"Pat, that plate! The secret's there!" Chris gasped. "Pat, Dolores has cottoned on to it. Dolores knows. We've got to see that plate before she does—"

"Hist!" Pat said suddenly.

For outside she had heard the approach of footsteps. Somebody was coming back. Frantically Pat let down the lid. With a groan, she and Chris bunched together again. With hearts palpitating, they listened as the footsteps came into the cave, and they both stiffened as they heard them making a direct track for the chest.

Oh, gosh, what did this mean? Pat asked herself.

Next moment she knew, for the newcomer gave the side of the chest a contemptuous kick. It was followed by the cool, mocking voice of Dolores herself:

"You can come out of there, Pat and Chris! Did you really think that you had fooled me?"

The lid was jerked up, and they found themselves staring up into the sneering face of their rival!

What will Dolores do? And what secret does the brass plate contain? There are more surprises in next Friday's enthralling instalment.

THEIR SCHOOL ON CASTAWAY ISLE

By RENEE FRAZER



THANKS TO DAVE

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

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

Not realising Gerry's treachery, Tania, accompanied by her panther, Michi, took Gerry to a cave hidden behind a waterfall, where treasure was hidden.

There, joined by his confederate, Stanhope the mate, Gerry revealed himself in his true colours.

Desperately, Tania sought some means of escape.

"**TANIA**—come back!" shouted Gerry, his handsome face white with baffled rage.

He attempted to follow her, but Michi, the panther, barred his way, snarling ominously, part of the mate's torn jacket gripped in his jaws. Its scoundrelly owner was cowering against the wall of the cave, fearful of making a move.

Her heart pounding, the jungle girl scrambled up the slippery steps leading to the narrow gap in the cave.

"Michi—to me!" she called breathlessly.

Slowly, with obvious reluctance, the panther backed away from his two enemies, still growling deep in his throat.

"Tania, don't be a fool!" cried Gerry, his tone more coaxing. "You misunderstood me just now. I want to help you—if you'll only be sensible. You'll never find your treasure on your own—"

The jungle girl flashed him a scornful glance.

"Tania has listened to Gerry for the last time!" she called back. "She sees him now for what he is—a treacherous as a snake—with a heart as false as his words. Come, Michi!"

The panther leaped for the steps, and the mate made a hurried dive to retrieve his fallen revolver.

Tania wriggled desperately through the narrow gap, as the mate fired, the bullet chipping the rock close behind Michi.

"Michi—quickly!" she gasped. With a swift bound, the panther followed his young mistress through the gap—and Gerry's threatening shouts came muffled and hollow to the jungle girl's ears.

For the moment, at any rate, she was safe! Neither Gerry nor the mate could hope to squeeze through that narrow opening without breaking down part of the wall of the cave.

Passing down the sloping ground, she paused to stare round her. She found herself in a low-roofed tunnel, faintly lit by crevices admitting the sunlight.

An underground stream ran swift

and dark at her feet, the sound of its gurgling magnified by the echoes.

Half-scared of her strange surroundings, the jungle girl made her way sure-footed along a narrow ledge, Michi padding silently at her heels.

After a while there came a fork in the tunnel, where the waters of the stream divided. Tania halted, uncertain which way to go; she felt half dazed by grief and anger—anger against the boy who had deceived her.

So much had happened in the last few hours that her mind seemed numbed. When she had set out that morning with her precious book she had been almost happy—believing that at last she was on the point of clearing up the mystery and dreadful misunderstanding that had separated her from the youthful castaways.

But now, with the discovery of Gerry's treachery, all her hopes had been swept away. It was he—Gerry—with his handsome, smiling face and plausible speech, who had tricked her from the first!

It was Gerry who had plotted with the scoundrelly mate to rob her of her secret; Gerry, who had turned the castaways against her—and, with suave, cunning words, had poisoned her mind against her most loyal friend—Dave Cardew.

The jungle girl hit back a sob as she thought of Dave.

Dave had stood by her all along—facing her unjust suspicion and scornful words—trying to help her, in spite of herself. Even this morning, though weak from his injury, he had made a last attempt to save her—and she had tricked him, sent him away! Tania's lips trembled. Her one wish now was to find Dave—to tell him that she was sorry—to beg his forgiveness, and help.

But how could she find him? Gerry had said that the great ship would be sailing away very soon—and Dave would go with the other castaways, believing that she was false and ungrateful—leaving her alone on the deserted island.

"No!" whispered Tania. "I must find him, Michi—I must!"

Michi growled as though in sympathy, dropping the mate's torn jacket at her feet, and looking up at her with big, amber eyes in the uncertain light.

Tania bent impulsively to stroke him, taking comfort from his presence. And it was then that she noticed some crumpled, yellowed papers protruding from the ragged jacket of the coat.

Wonderingly, the jungle girl extracted them and, after a moment's hesitation, slipped them into the woven satchel beside her precious book. Though she could not read them herself, she determined to show them to Dave—if and when she found him!

But which way should she go? The dim light that filtered into the tunnel was barely sufficient to guide

her, but the air seemed fresher in the branch that led to the right.

Calling to Michi, Tania set out on her strange, rather frightening journey—not daring to turn back for fear of meeting Gerry or the mate. But the subterranean stream wound interminably, and the light grew even more faint as she pressed deeper into the tunnel.

And suddenly, with a stab of dismay, she noticed that the water seemed to be rising—lapping over the slippery edge on which she walked.

Anxiously she turned to call to her pet—and her heart jumped. For Michi was nowhere in sight! The restless panther must have explored some dark crevice on his own.

"Michi!" called Tania.

But only the mocking echoes of her own voice came back to her.

Alone and terrified, the jungle girl halted, gazing round her in despair. She could not go on—and to go back would surely take her into the hands of Gerry and Stanhope the mate.



MICHI GUIDES THE WAY

Meanwhile, in the castaways' camp, there was unusual bustle and excitement.

Mr. Barnard, accompanied by Captain Rawlins, was directing the removal of a number of cases and bales from the store-tents, into the ship's boats that were drawn up on the beach.

Tim Burchell and most of the other boys had rolled up their sleeves, and were assisting cheerfully with the work; while the girls, headed by Pat Saunders, were busily packing up their personal treasures, clothes and school books—helping to dismantle the camp that had been their novel home for so many thrilling weeks.

"Phew!" exclaimed Tim, mopping his perspiring face and grinning across at Mr. Barnard. "I can hardly believe we're really going, sir. It isn't a false alarm?"

The master smiled gravely, as the others clustered round.

"Captain Rawlins thinks there's a good chance of refloating the ship on to-night's high tide," he explained. "The repairs are practically finished."

The cheers that greeted his statement were mingled with a few sighs of regret, as the youthful castaways scanned the dismantled tents, the cook-house and the log-built school-room against the background of waving palms.

"In a way I'll be sorry to go!" breathed Pat, expressing their secret thoughts. "It's been a wonderful holiday while it lasted—"

"Well, I shan't be sorry, for one!" drawled Moyra Curtis, as she joined the group. "Roughing it isn't my idea of a good time. And there've been too many upsets—what with Dave's accident, and Tania's treachery. That jungle girl deliberately upset things for everyone. It's obvious she wanted to get rid of us!"

An uneasy silence greeted her words, for all mention of Tania had

been carefully avoided since the malicious firing of the school-house.

"Has anyone seen Dave?" demanded Mr. Barnard, breaking the silence and looking quickly round the group.

There was a general shaking of heads.

"He borrowed one of the ship's boats, and went out before breakfast," said Tim. "He mentioned something about contacting Gerry, sir."

Mr. Barnard bit his lip. "Gerry told Captain Rawlins that he was going on a short exploring trip—but Dave's not really fit enough to take risks—"

"Here he comes now, sir!" exclaimed one of the boys.

An expression of relief crossed Mr. Barnard's face as Dave's familiar, broad-shouldered figure appeared from the bushes. The boy looked tired and rather dejected as he approached them, and his clothes were torn from his fruitless search in the jungle.

"Has Gerry come back yet, sir?" were his first words, addressed to Mr. Barnard.

"Not yet," replied the master in kindly tones, mistaking the reason for his anxiety. "He said he might not be back till dusk, so there's no need to worry. You look tired out, Dave—"

"Don't worry about me, sir—I'm all right," Dave said quickly. "May I have a word with you—privately?"

"Why, of course, Dave!" replied Mr. Barnard in some surprise, leading the way to his tent. He motioned the boy to a deck-chair and lit his pipe while waiting for Dave to speak. "Well—what's on your mind?" Dave hesitated, and then blurted out:

"It—it's Tania, sir." The master's face clouded. "What about Tania, Dave? Surely that girl has done enough mischief—"

"That's just it, sir," said Dave, "she hasn't! We've all misjudged Tania from the first. She needs our friendship and help to protect her from"—he hesitated, his hands clenched—"from the most cunning and cruel fellow I've ever met!"

Mr. Barnard stared at him in amazement and some concern.

"Dave, my boy, you're not feeling well," he said. "You've been over-doing it. I suggest you go to your tent and rest, while we're making preparations for setting sail to-night—"

"To-night?" echoed Dave, starting up. "But we can't sail to-night, sir—not before I've found Tania!"

"Dave, what nonsense is this!" exclaimed the master. "It has been amply proved that Tania has acted against us—doesn't want us on the island. I shall naturally report her presence here when we reach the mainland, but after what she's done—"

"Sir, she's done nothing wrong!" burst out Dave. "It was all part of a plot against her!"

The master's expression became a trifle forbidding.

"Dave, are you suggesting that someone on this island—some member of our party—was responsible for the recent outrageous happenings?"

"I am, sir!" said Dave, meeting the other's gaze squarely. "And when I have sufficient proof I'll give you his name. Meanwhile I'm certain that we should find Tania. I have a feeling she may be in danger."

The master hesitated, staring at the boy keenly. Obviously he was moved by Dave's earnest tone, though unable to credit his amazing story.

But his momentary indecision was settled by Captain Rawlins' booming voice, calling him from the beach. The urgent work of the moment was being neglected.

"I'm sorry, my boy," he said with gruff kindness, his hand resting on Dave's shoulder. "I know you mean well—but I'm afraid you've allowed your naturally kind heart to mislead you. Tania deserves no sympathy.

We welcomed her into our camp—treated her as one of us—and she betrayed our trust. I am convinced she is now deliberately keeping out of our way and will be pleased to see us go—"

"But, sir—"
Mr. Barnard did not heed, but hurried from the tent to join the captain on the beach.

Dave clenched his hands, his face very pale.

"I'm not giving in!" he muttered. "I'm certain Gerry's tricked Tania into danger of some kind. He's out to rob her. I'll go back! I'll search again—on the other side of the rapids this time!"

With sudden decision, he strode to his own tent. There he selected a stout stick, a torch, and a coil of rope for possible climbing.

It was a simple matter to leave the camp without being observed, for everyone was busily engaged in the exciting preparations for the departure. On the way out he filled a flask from the tea-urn in the cook-house, and stuffed a few sandwiches into his haversack.

The ship's boat was still moored where Dave had left it, and a few minutes later he was rowing inland.

He rowed with scarcely a pause, though his injured head was throbbing badly under the effort.

At last he heard the roar of the rapids, and this time veered to the left bank. There he moored the boat and rested for a light snack. But he gave himself no more than a few minutes before starting a careful search along the bank.

His dogged perseverance was rewarded. On a stretch of sandy ground he found two definite sets of footprints—Tania's and Gerry's! "So I was right!" he breathed.

Despite his tiredness he pressed on harder. Soon he lost the prints on rocky ground, but the two had obviously been making up-river. On and on, until he heard the muffled thunder of a giant waterfall.

He came in sight of it, a great curtain of foaming water, sparkling in the early evening sunlight.

Anxious and perplexed, Dave stared round him. In this wild, desolate spot there was no sign of human life. Had he come the right way? Even as he hesitated, uncertain whether to retrace his steps, he saw something slinking among the rocks.

"Michi!" he cried. The panther crouched, stiffening, as though recognising the boy's voice. Then, with a low, excited growl, he bounded towards him.

For a moment Dave imagined that the animal intended to attack him—for it sprang at him, teeth closing on his sleeve.

"Michi—steady—you know me!" exclaimed Dave, grasping the panther's fur, his grey eyes unflinching. "Where is Tania?"

Still growling, Michi tugged at his sleeve, and swift enlightenment flashed into Dave's eyes. The panther was anxious for him to follow!

"Great guns—he's going towards the falls!" muttered Dave, his face paling as the animal bounded away towards the tumbling, seething torrent.

A sudden fear clutched at his heart, but, to his amazement, Michi vanished beyond the streaming curtain of water. Dave followed—to find himself in the gloomy, fantastic grotto that Tania had chosen for her secret home.

He strode on and saw signs of a recent struggle. There was part of a torn coat on the floor, and a broken bead necklace—Tania's!

Dave snatched it up, knowing a deep anxiety.

But Michi had turned to the wall. There a flight of slippery steps led to a gaping cavity in the wall—a cavity that had obviously been enlarged recently by human hands, for a mass of fallen stones and rubble lay at the foot of the steps, and an iron crowbar lay beside the opening.

Dave mounted the slippery steps. Michi at his heels. But even as he reached the cavity a figure loomed

suddenly in the opening, a lantern in his hand, his clothes dusty and dishevelled.

"Gerry!" exclaimed Dave huskily.



TANIA'S DISCOVERY

Gerry was as taken aback as Dave himself. His handsome face was pale, and there was a furtive look in his blue eyes.

"Dave! What—what on earth are you doing here?" he jerked, barring the other boy's way.

Dave took a step forward. "I might ask the same thing," he snapped, his grey eyes accusing. "Where is Tania?"

Gerry gave an unsteady laugh. "You're crazy!" he retorted coolly. "I haven't seen Tania. I was just doing a bit of exploring—"

"You're lying!" rapped Dave, his hands clenched. "Tania's been here—I've found her necklace. And Michi's here, too. Let me pass!"

A dangerous expression crept into Gerry's blue eyes. His hand closed furtively on the crowbar. But Dave saw his movement and sprang at him, his fist landing on the other boy's jaw.

With a savage ejaculation, Gerry grappled with him—and, locked in a desperate struggle, the two boys swayed through the opening, fighting for mastery.

TANIA groped her way through the darkness of the subterranean tunnel. After turning back from the rising stream, she had turned off into another narrow tunnel, which got darker and darker.

Fear of pursuit drove her on. For a long time she had heard distant hammering sounds, as her enemies sought to break a way through the secret entrance.

The thought of meeting Gerry or the mate in that dark tunnel brought new terror to her heart. Especially as Michi now seemed to have vanished without trace.

Where could her pet be? Had he met with any danger? Surely he had not been hurt by Stanhope or Gerry? The idea chilled her.

With a plucky effort she mastered her fears as she struggled on, feeling her way.

But the air was certainly fresher than before, and the ground seemed to slope upwards, and—

Was that a faint glow of light ahead?

Then suddenly her bare feet struck against something hard, and she was flung to her hands and knees, bruising herself.

Half-sobbing, the jungle girl struggled up, her hands groping to find the object over which she had stumbled.

In the dim light she could scarcely see it—but it felt like an oblong box of wood, bound with metal. Her sensitive fingers were able to trace deep carvings in the lid—letters forming a name that she could not read.

How had the strange box come here? What did those letters mean?

For an instant her fears were banished by a mounting curiosity.

She remembered Gerry speaking of a treasure—something hidden many moons ago by the bearded sailor who had been her guardian. A treasure—so Gerry had said—that, in the far-off country of the white folk, would give her everything her heart desired!

Her hands trembling, Tania tried to raise the massive lid. At that moment she heard a shuffling sound in the tunnel behind her.

Her heart chilling, she turned—and a scream of terror broke from her lips.

Crouched in the tunnel, only a few yards away, the yellow glare of a lantern revealing his grinning, triumphant face, was Stanhope, the ship's mate!

The excitement mounts in next Friday's chapters. Look out for surprises.



The COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

By GAIL WESTERN

MERLE SPEAKS HER MIND

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

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

She encountered a strange young cowboy named Larry, who, despite his mysterious behaviour, declared he was her friend.

Merle was warned about a cattle rustler named Denvers, and, to her dismay, she discovered that Larry was the supposed outlaw, and that he was employed by her enemy, Nathaniel Garsten.

IT was a devastating discovery that Merle had made.

Not only was Larry Denvers employed by the rancher who was scheming to secure possession of her home, but it looked as if he was the no-good cowboy from Snake Canyon!

As she stood there beside Pommie, her horse, wrestling with her dismay and surprise, Larry saw her, and came striding across the yard.

"Merle!" he exclaimed. "Well, this is a surprise. I didn't expect to see you over here."

"And I didn't expect to see you here, either," said Merle, a tinge of bitterness in her voice. "So you work for Celia's father, do you?"

He glanced towards the rancher's daughter, who still stood by the stable door, glowering haughtily across at Merle, then nodded.

"Sure I do," he agreed calmly. "And you like it here?" Merle asked.

"You bet. Mr. Garsten is a real dandy employer; couldn't have a better. Guess he and me get on fine."

For a moment Merle stared incredulously. Nathaniel Garsten was both a bully and a rascal—surely Larry could not be serious? Yet there could be no mistaking his enthusiasm. "Perhaps it's a case of birds of a feather," she suggested, unable to conceal her angry surprise.

He regarded her with that sardonic gleam in his eyes she was beginning to know so well.

"Hey, honey, what's upsettin' you?" he asked.

"With flushed cheeks, she faced him. "You are!" she snapped.

"Me? But what have I done?"

"It's not so much what you've done as what you've led me to believe. Suggesting that I could trust you—that you were my friend. Friend! And yet you coolly admit you're as thick as thieves with the man who'd be pleased to ruin uncle. And that's not all, Larry Denvers—"

"Larry Denvers!" For once he looked really perturbed. "So you've discovered my full name, have you?" She gave a grim nod.

"And that's not all I've discovered.

I've found out where you came from. From Snake Canyon, wasn't it?"

He gave another violent start, and it was as if icy fingers had clutched at her heart. So it was true. He was the suspect cattle rustler Slim Harris, her foreman, had spoken about!

No wonder he had found work on the V-Bar-V, she told herself bitterly. If Nathaniel Garsten was the rascal she believed him to be, then it was not surprising that he had found a job for a suspected outlaw.

Before either of them could speak again there came an impatient cry from the stable doorway.

"Larry, don't waste time on that girl. I want you to come for a gallop."

The young cowboy glanced round at the rancher's sulky daughter and smiled.

"Sure thing. I'll be delighted," he said cheerily; then laid a hand on Merle's arm. "Guess we'll have to postpone our discussion. Can't keep Celia waitin', you know."

Angrily Merle wrenched free her arm.

"Don't worry; I've no intention of detaining you."

"But, honey, I'd like a little chat—"

"Well, I wouldn't!"

And, swinging into the saddle, she gathered up the reins and sent Pommie galloping for the yard gateway.

"Oh, what a fool I've been!" she choked. And, despite herself, stinging tears rose to her eyes.

It was not the fact that Larry was the suspected cattle rustler who had had to flee from Snake Canyon—though that was bad enough—which upset her so much. It was the fact that he seemed to delight at being at Celia's beck and call; seemed so pleased at being employed by Nathaniel Garsten.

Merle's sense of bitterness grew as she remembered her recent interview with the bullying rancher. She forgot that only yesterday Larry had saved her life; forgot the likeable, if mystifying, ways she had found so irresistible. All she could think about was the ugly fact that he appeared to be in league with Celia's father.

And that fact now gave an explanation for Larry's strange interest in the three trophies which had once belonged to old Crogan.

Merle believed that, hidden in one of those trophies, was the secret her uncle was so desperately anxious to find. Her discovery in the ranch-house just now had suggested that Nathaniel Garsten might also be interested in that secret, so—

Merle gave a start as she recalled that Larry had prevented her from winning one of those trophies. True he had afterwards given the prize to her, but might that not only have been because he had already discovered that nothing was hidden in it?

A gasp escaped her as her suspicions raced on. Suppose Larry had cheated her out of that trophy at his employer's orders! Suppose he and the wealthy rancher were plotting

together to prevent her from finding the secret!

She flinched from the thought, for now that the first angry shock was fading she could not entirely smother that old liking she had had for the cowboy.

"Well, whatever the truth, I'm going to discover that secret for uncle," she told herself determinedly. "And the first step towards doing it is to try to win the Silver Rider trophy."

Abruptly she jerked on the reins and swung round her horse.

"We won't go straight home, Pommie," she said. "We'll ride into Happy Valley and enter for the hurdle race at Lone Pine Rodeo."

Her heart was pounding excitedly as she galloped into the little township nestling at the foot of the wooded hills.

If she succeeded in winning the race, then her quest might be over, for the secret might be hidden in the Silver Rider trophy. But that was not all. By winning the race she would earn, in addition, the sum of two hundred dollars.

Two hundred dollars! Her eyes gleamed at the prospect. She would be able to pay Nathaniel Garsten the money her uncle owed him. No longer would she have to worry about his threat to seize Happy Valley Ranch.

Outside the sheriff's office was a board on which was pinned a notice giving full details about the forthcoming rodeo at the neighbouring town. Pinned there also was a slip of paper on which intending competitors were invited to enter their names.

Several people had already entered for the two-mile hurdle race, but neither Celia Garsten nor Larry's names were included in the list. Merle put down her name, then happily took the homeward trail.

Slim Harris, the Happy Valley foreman, frowned in dismay on learning the result of her interview with the neighbouring rancher, but he cheered up when she told him about her hopes for the hurdle race.

"Guess Pommie's a mighty fine hoss," he declared. "There's not likely to be any jumpers at Lone Pine to beat him."

"I'll say there won't," laughed Merle, and she gave the chestnut a fond hug.

During the rest of the day she had no time to think about the race or of old Crogan's secret. Her ranch duties kept her fully occupied. There were the chickens and calves to feed; Mammie, the negro housekeeper, to consult about next day's meals; and a long ride with Slim in order to inspect the boundary fences. Running a ranch, Merle was discovering, was no light job for a girl.

And then next morning there came good news—a phone call from the hospital, announcing that her uncle was much better and could be visited.

Straight away Merle saddled up her horse and rode into town. Before visiting the hospital she had some shopping to do, but as she cantered down the dusty main street, carrying a bunch of flowers she had collected for her uncle, she saw something that made her rein in sharply.

Standing outside the sheriff's office was a slim figure in a checkered shirt and woolly chaps.

"Larry!" ejaculated Merle, and she frowned.

The young cowboy had a pencil in his hand and he was gazing at the list of entries for the Lone Pine races.

Did he intend to enter for the two-mile race? Merle wondered. And then she gasped as she realised that Larry was not writing in a name—he was striking out one that already appeared in the list.

Her own name!



LARRY'S KIND ACT

"Well, of all the cheek!"

Quivering with indignation, Merle leapt out of the saddle, so hurriedly that a bunch of flowers fell to the ground.

"How dare you!" she cried. "How dare you cross out my name!"

Slowly he turned, and, to her exasperation, there was no sign of alarm on his sun-tanned face, no trace of guilt. It was quite coolly that he met her stormy, flashing eyes.

"Feelin' mad, eh?" he drawled. "Well, I suppose I can't blame you. In the circumstances my action must look a bit peculiar. It's a pity you decided to ride into town to-day. I was hopin' you'd know nothin' about my decision until I had a chance to write to you."

"Your decision!" she gasped. Incredulously she glared at him. "Are you trying to tell me that you—you!—have decided that I shan't enter for the hurdle race?"

"Fraid so. It's tough luck, I know, but it's the only wise thing to do. Believe me, honey, in scratchin' out your name I was only lookin' after your interests."

"My interests!" There was blazing scorn in her voice and her blood boiled as all her old suspicions came flooding back. "You mean the interests of the man you admire so much! Nathaniel Garsten—he's the rascal who put you up to this! Do you dare deny that you are in league with him?"

That sardonic gleam again in his steel-grey eyes, he met her challenging gaze.

"Would you believe me if I did deny it?" he asked.

Stormily she shook her head.

"No, I wouldn't. You made it crystal clear yesterday that you and Garsten are as thick as thieves, and I know that you are both interested in old Crogan's secret. You think that it might be hidden in the Silver Rider trophy that's to be awarded to the winner of the hurdle race, don't you?"

He shrugged.

"Guess it might be."

"And that's why you don't want me to enter," she flashed. "You're scared I shall win and find that secret. Well, it isn't coming off!"

He shrugged again, and a rather bitter smile flickered across his lips.

"If that's how you feel about it, then I suppose it's no good arguin'," he said. "But I must tell you, honey, that you're runnin' into danger."

She caught in her breath.

"Is that a threat?" she demanded.

"Nope—just a warnin'. And I mean it."

For a moment the earnest note in his voice made her pause, then angrily she whipped a pencil from the pocket of her shirt.

"You're just trying to frighten me," she declared. "This is another trick, and I'm not going to be taken in by it."

She darted towards the list pinned to the noticeboard, but in her angry haste she stepped on to her dropped flowers. She gave a gasp of dismay as she saw that they were crushed and ruined.

"Meant 'em for your uncle, eh?" said Larry, an unusual note of sympathy in his voice.

She nodded, reluctantly laid the bruised flowers aside, then turned back to the board. Vigorously she re-wrote her name under the one that

had been scratched out, and with fierce satisfaction she surveyed it.

"There, that'll show you that I'm not to be put off," she asserted. "And don't you dare scratch it out again. I mean to write to the secretary over at Lone Pine—tell him that I've entered—so it's no good you trying any more of your tricks."

He shook his head.

"You'll regret it, honey," he said again. "I'm warnin' you. If you don't take my advice—"

"Your advice!" she echoed scornfully as she strode back to Pommie and swung into the saddle. "Thanks, but when I need the advice of a cattle rustler I'll ask for it."

Red, angry colour rose to his cheeks, but he made no comment and stood there silently as she rode off.

During the next half-hour she was busy shopping, but never was Larry out of her thoughts, and the memory of his high-handed action still made her feel fiercely indignant. Yet mingled with it was a tinge of uneasiness.

What had his cryptic hint of possible danger meant? she wondered.

A worried frown remained between her eyes as she rode to the hospital. There was so much at stake—not only the statuette of the Silver Rider, but the whole future of Happy Valley Ranch. Only if she won the hurdle race would she be able to pay Celia's father the money that was owed him. But if anything happened to stop her from winning—

She caught in her breath.

Then the employer Larry professed to admire would keep his threat—he would foreclose on the mortgage he held and Merle and her uncle would lose the home they loved so much.

"But Pommie can't lose!" she told herself fiercely, arriving at the hospital and dismounting. "And now, Merle, you mustn't let uncle see you're worried!"

She was guided through the hospital by a nurse who at last swung open a white-painted door and ushered her into a small private ward.

"Uncle!" she cried in delight, for there was Uncle Stephen sitting up in bed, happily munching grapes, only the wicker-work cage that enclosed his broken leg betraying the fact that he was an invalid.

"Merle, my dear!"

He greeted her warmly, and, overjoyed at seeing him looking so well, she hugged him; then, in surprise, she glanced down at the huge bunch of black grapes that reposed in the basket on his lap.

"Grapes—real hot-house ones, too, by the look of them!" she exclaimed.

"Who's the extravagant person who sent them?"

He shook his head.

"Don't know, my dear. Although they were intended for me, actually they were addressed to you."

"To me?"

"Yes; from a friend of yours. Forget his name, but you'll find it on the card that's lying about somewhere."

Merle looked around; then, seeing a white card on the floor, she stooped and picked it up. On it was her own name and underneath had been scribbled a hurried message:

"Know how disappointed you must have been about the flowers, so thought you might like to give these to your uncle instead—even though they do come from someone who had to leave Snake Canyon rather hurriedly!"

And below was scrawled a single name.

"Larry!" ejaculated Merle. And, in astonishment, she stared.



HER HORSES DRIVEN AWAY

This expensive present had come from the cowboy she had convinced herself was her enemy!

In bewilderment she read that brief message again. How typical of Larry's sardonic humour that he should slyly remind her that

she had accused him of being a cattle rustler! And yet—how thoughtful, how wonderfully generous it had been of him to send the grapes. Surely such a boy could not be a rascally schemer?

For a moment she wondered if she had not misjudged him. High-handed and mystifying though his latest action had been, was it possible that in some strange way he had been trying to help her?

Suppose he really did think that she was in danger. Suppose he had learnt that his employer intended to plot against her and that his cryptic warning had been genuine!

Slowly Merle shook her head. "That can't be true," she told herself. "If Larry was on the level, if he suspected that Garsten was a rascally schemer, he would never stay at the V-Bar-V, let alone praise him. Oh, I give it up—"

She broke off and coloured uncomfortably as she saw that her uncle was regarding her anxiously.

"Anything the matter, my dear?" Quickly Merle screwed up the card and pocketed it.

"No, no—of course not," she cried. "It's only that I've got some rather disappointing news for you."

Instantly his face clouded over, and he caught at her hand.

"You mean about old Crogan's secret?" he asked. "You didn't manage to find it?"

She shook her head. "No, I didn't find it," she admitted.

"There was no secret—nothing—hidden in the Bronze Rider. But don't worry, dear." Seating herself on the edge of the bed, she smiled confidently down at him. "I mean to get hold of the secret before I'm very much older. Old Crogan left three trophies, you know, not one."

"Three!" he exclaimed in surprise. She nodded and explained what she had discovered.

"So I expect this secret of his is hidden in one of the other two," she declared. "In fact, I've a pretty shrewd idea it may be in the Silver Rider. Anyway, I'm going all out to win it next week, and if I draw a blank again, then I'll have a shot at the Gold Rider."

The worried look faded a little from his face.

"Good girl," he murmured. "I know I can rely on you."

"Of course you can," she said, and, bending, dropped a fond kiss on his brow. "But, nunky, what is this secret you're so anxious to find?"

"I don't know, my dear—"

"Don't know!"

Incredulously Merle gasped out the words. He shook his head.

"No; the piece of paper I found didn't say. It was tucked inside an old book that used to belong to Sam Crogan. Years ago he and I used to be friends, you know. All that was written on it were a few disjointed phrases. 'Look in the Rider. There you'll find my secret,' it said, and then there was something about the secret being vital to the future of Happy Valley Ranch."

Stephen Wason's eyes gleamed with excitement.

"That's why I was so desperately anxious for you to win the Bronze Rider, my dear."

Merle nodded, but she made no comment, for her brain was in a whirl. As a result of what her uncle had said she was more intrigued than ever. What could this strange secret be? And how could it affect the destiny of Happy Valley Ranch?

She did not know, but of one thing she was more resolved than ever. Nothing now should stop her from winning the two-mile hurdle race.

Accordingly, during the next few days, she spent every moment she could in the saddle, training both Pommie and herself for the all-important contest.

Slim, Jake Binns, and the rest of the cowboys erected hurdles out in the home range, and hour after hour she set Pommie jumping them. As a result of her training the chestnut

(Continued on page 191.)



The CLUES THAT NOEL FAKED

By PETER LANGLEY

NOEL IS BAFFLED

"THIS is the house, June!" declared Noel Raymond, bringing his car to a halt on the sweeping grave drive. "The new premises of the Melton City Motor Company. We're here to protect Michael Fenshaw, their crack racing-driver, who's leaving for France to-morrow for an important race."

June Gaynor's grey eyes lit with excited curiosity as she stepped out on to the drive, still wet from the recent rain. The big country mansion, with its picturesque grounds, had only recently been taken over as business premises—and Noel and his young partner had, motored down from London at the urgent request of the manager.

"Why should they think that Michael Fenshaw is in danger, nunky?" asked June, following her uncle on to the terrace.

The famous detective shrugged. "I gathered from Mr. Clayton's message that Fenshaw has had one or two narrow escapes recently while practising. We're here simply as a precaution—Ah, this must be Mr. Clayton!"

He paused as a spruce, grey-haired man hurried from the office to greet them. The manager, who was followed by a messenger-boy, seemed distinctly agitated.

"Mr. Raymond—it was good of you to come," he said unsteadily. "But I'm afraid you're too late—"

"Too late?" "Fenshaw's met with an accident!" declared the manager. "I've only just received the message. Apparently he slipped down some steps on his way to the test track—and was discovered by Elsie Warren, his assistant—"

"We'll come with you, right away!" said Noel. "Is he badly hurt?"

"Miss Warren's message wasn't clear," replied the manager, as they hurried after the boy along a winding path that led through the shrubbery. "She's been acting as Fenshaw's mechanic, in place of a young fellow who was sacked for dishonesty—"

Just then they came in sight of a flight of rustic wooden steps—and June caught in her breath sharply.

Lying huddled and motionless on the stone path at the foot of the steps was Michael Fenshaw, the famous racing-driver. Kneeling beside him, her face pale as death, was a dark-haired, attractive girl, wearing overalls.

Noel descended the steps in a couple of bounds, dropping to his knee beside the unconscious driver. His practised eye took a swift note of the man's injuries.

"Well?" asked the manager huskily. "Is he—"

"He's been stunned by the fall," said Noel tersely, "and his ankle has been badly sprained. It's a case for the hospital, I'm afraid, Clayton—"

"Great Scott," burst out the manager. "That means he won't be

able to drive to-morrow!" He whirled on the girl. "Miss Warren, how did it happen?"

"I—I don't know, Mr. Clayton," she faltered. "I was taking a short cut from the garage to our canteen, when I heard a crashing noise—and found Mr. Fenshaw lying here—"

"He must have missed his footing on the steps, nunky," put in June. "They'd be slippery after all this rain—"

Noel rose to his feet, a stern glint in his eyes.

"I'm afraid this is no accident, June," he declared. "Look here, Clayton—at this step!" He pointed to one of the steps about half-way up the flight—a step that was tilting at a dangerous angle. "This has been sawn partly through—and it gave way under the weight of Fenshaw's tread!"

"Raymond, what are you suggesting?" gasped the manager, while Elsie Warren's attractive face turned as white as a sheet.

"I'm suggesting," said Noel grimly, "that this was a deliberate trap! Possibly a block of wood was inserted to support the step—till Fenshaw was actually approaching, then it was quickly removed. The scoundrel responsible can't have gone far—"

He glanced keenly at the tearful girl.

"Did you see anyone as you came from the garage, Miss Warren?"

"N-no," she whispered. "There was no one—no one here except poor Mr. Fenshaw. I called for help, and young Billy came running from the canteen. Then I waited here till you came."

The manager clenched his hands. "This—is a dreadful affair, Mr. Raymond!" he declared. "If you are right, we must call in the police. There's a constable on duty outside Billy—he turned to the awed young messenger—"

"run to the house and tell two of the men to bring a stretcher for poor Fenshaw. Miss Warren—he regarded the girl sternly—"you will wait here with Mr. Raymond till I return!"

He hurried away, followed by the young messenger. Noel glanced at the white-faced, tearful girl.

"See what you can do for Fenshaw, June," he said, handing her his pocket first-aid kit. "I'm going to scout round for clues!"

He hurried up the steps, and commenced to explore the flower-beds and shrubbery that bordered the path. In a few moments he discovered a stout piece of wood that had probably supported the fatal step. It appeared to have been disordered when its purpose had been served—but Noel's expression was baffled as he stared round him.

For, in spite of the wet ground, he could find no trace of the attacker's footprints—no other clue of any kind.

Only on the gravel path leading from the garage were the clear im-

prints of Elsie Warren's high-heeled shoes.

Just then he heard a mutter of excited voices, and he returned down the steps—to find that the manager had returned, accompanied by a burly police constable and two of the employees with a stretcher.

While they saw to the unfortunate driver, the constable turned to Noel, saluting respectfully as he recognised the famous detective.

"A bad business, Mr. Raymond," he remarked. "Lucky you were on the spot. I take it, sir, that you've found some clue to the scoundrel responsible?"

There was a rueful expression in Noel's eyes as he met June's anxious glance.

"I'm afraid I haven't, constable," he admitted. "Though the ground is soft, there are no footprints—no clues whatever to point to the trickster. Yet it is obviously foul play!"

"I agree, sir!" said the constable grimly, examining the broken step. "And from what you say, it's pretty clear that only one person could have been responsible—the person whom we know was here, about the time. Miss Warren!"

Elsie Warren gave a broken cry and June started forward protestingly.

"But you can't arrest Miss Warren, constable!" she gasped. "There is no proof—"

"I know my business, miss," interrupted the policeman. "Miss Warren had the opportunity—and the motive. The manager tells me she was engaged to Dick Rogers, the mechanic who was sacked. It's clearly a case of revenge on the firm—"

"No, that's not true!" cried the girl. "I swear I know nothing about it! Miss Gaynor—Mr. Raymond, you must believe me!"

"I do!" exclaimed June warmly. "That's all very well, Miss Gaynor," put in the constable, "but by Mr. Raymond's own showing Miss Warren is the only person who could have been around at the time—"

"I didn't say that, constable," put in Noel with a troubled frown. "The lack of any footprints or other clues may point to the trickster's cunning"

"Nunky!" exclaimed June, pointing in sudden excitement. "Is that a handkerchief, caught in that bush—"

They all turned, and an incredulous ejaculation escaped Noel's lips. Fluttering among the bushes at the top of the steps was a man's white handkerchief—a surprising clue that he could have sworn had not been there a few minutes ago!

He raced up the steps, followed by the constable and June, the others a little behind.

"Your young partner's got sharp eyes, Mr. Raymond," remarked the policeman. "This puts a different complexion on the matter, and—Hullo!" he exclaimed, his eyes bulging

in excitement as he pointed to the flower-bed. "I reckon there's something else you overlooked!"

Showing clearly on the mould and the wet grass beyond were the deep impressions of a man's heavy shoes!

June stared from the footprints to her uncle, her thoughts racing. She knew that Noel's keen eyes could never have overlooked that unmistakable trail—let alone the fluttering handkerchief. That meant that the surprising clues must have been left there within the last few minutes! But—by whom? And why had no attempt been made to conceal them?



TOO MANY CLUES

"Well, sir," remarked the constable, regarding Noel a trifle scornfully. "What d'you make of that? If I'd seen those foot-

prints in the first place I'd never have accused Miss Warren—but I took your word for it that there weren't any clues. It's plain from this trail that a man was responsible—a big chap who was lying in wait for Mr. Fenshaw!"

There was a strange expression in Noel's eyes after carefully examining the footprints.

"This certainly appears to let out Miss Warren!" he declared quietly—and there came a quick sigh of relief from the girl as June squeezed her arm delightedly. "But there's something rather curious about these clues," he added.

"Curious?" The constable peered at them. "What do you mean, sir? They're as plain as a pikestaff!"

"A little too clear for my liking," said Noel.

"Clues are clues, Mr. Raymond," rejoined the constable. "You can't get away from 'em. The chap, whoever he was, was wearing heavy shoes—and he went that way!" he added, pointing triumphantly.

Noel accompanied the now determined officer, while the two girls brought up the rear with the worried manager.

For several minutes they followed the trail in silence. Then Noel gave a soft whistle as he bent to pick up a half-burnt cigarette—still warm to the touch. A moment later there came an excited shout from the policeman as he pounced on a man's heavy walking-stick lying among the long grass.

"We're getting warmer, sir!" he declared. "I bet this is what the job was done with. The chap hid among the bushes and pushed that block of wood from under the step."

Noel examined the stick, and a grim smile curved his lips.

"The trickster seems to have been amazingly careless," he remarked. "He leaves his handkerchief where it is bound to be seen; he lights a cigarette and drops it on the grass after taking a few puffs; he even throws aside this supposedly incriminating weapon."

The constable frowned. "I don't see what you're driving at, sir. The chap was in a hurry to get away."

"And he almost seems to have been anxious for us to follow him!" replied Noel dryly. "So far, only one thing is missing—"

"What's that, nunky?" asked June.

"The saw!" replied Noel. "That step was cut through with a fine hack-saw. If we could trace it, it might provide a valuable clue to its user—"

The manager whistled. "That's an idea, Mr. Raymond! I'll check up with the workshops to see if a saw has been borrowed by anyone. Meanwhile I'll have to make a report to the directors. Fenshaw's accident will be a serious blow to the firm. We haven't a good enough reserve driver for the race."

And he hurried away agitatedly, while the others followed the clearly marked trail.

"We're hot on his tracks, sir!" declared the constable with satisfac-

tion. "We ought to overtake him any minute now—"

He broke off, his mouth dropping open as he stared at the muddy path they were following. For the trail of footprints had vanished!

"I was expecting something like this," Noel said coolly. "It's an old trick, constable. We were intended to follow the trail so far—and no farther."

"But what's happened to the chap, sir?" demanded the policeman.

"He simply walked straight on," said Noel, "but without his shoes! If you look closely you'll see the faint marks of his stocking feet—leading to the gap in that hedge."

The constable whistled, and June's eyes shone admiringly.

"Pshaw—that's cute, Mr. Raymond!" remarked the constable. "Come on, then! Through the hedge! Well soon have him!"

There came a quickly stifled cry from Elsie Warren as they reached the gap. She was staring in obvious dismay at a picturesque, ramshackle cottage standing in a small garden that bordered the estate.

"Hallo," exclaimed the constable, "so you recognise the house, too, miss? I guess we're on the right track, Mr. Raymond! That cottage belongs to young Rogers, the fellow who was sacked for dishonesty. It's clearly a case of revenge—"

"No!" cried Elsie brokenly. "Dick wouldn't—couldn't have done such a thing—"

"The trail speaks for itself!" interrupted the constable. "Dick Rogers is the culprit—and you can't get away from it!"

He drew his truncheon, stepping through the gap in the hedge and approaching the cottage. With a little sob Elsie started after him.

"Nunky," breathed June, "I almost wish we'd never followed this trail!"

Noel's hand tightened reassuringly on her arm.

"I'm glad we followed it, June," he said quietly, "for it convinces me of one thing: Dick Rogers is innocent!"

"Innocent?" gasped June, staring.

"But the clues—"

"Were deliberately faked!" declared Noel. "No guilty man would have been so crazy as to leave incriminating evidence scattered about in that way. The trail was purposely laid, by young Rogers himself! He realised how black things were for his fiancée, so acted to divert suspicion from her!"

Amazed enlightenment dawned in June's eyes.

"But, nunky, if Elsie and Dick are both innocent—who is the culprit?"

"That," rejoined Noel grimly, "is what we've got to discover, my dear—and quickly—"

He paused as the constable returned, followed by the tearful girl.

"Young Rogers isn't at home, sir," he announced, "but he can't be far off. I'm going to search the grounds—"

"You're not going to arrest Dick!" exclaimed the girl, a defiant gleam in her eyes.

Noel looked at her keenly. "If your fiancé is innocent, Miss Warren, I can assure you he won't be arrested!" he promised. "But I'm anxious to have a word with him myself."

They set out to search the overgrown garden, Noel accompanying the policeman, while June kept close to Elsie.

After a while the girl detective missed her companion, and looked round anxiously. She believed that Elsie had deliberately given her the slip—and neither Noel nor the constable were in sight.

Uneasily she hurried down a winding path, coming suddenly on a rustic summerhouse. To her sharp ears came the sound of a stealthy movement inside.

"Miss Warren!" she called, pushing open the door.

Then her heart leapt. In the shadows she saw a tall, dim figure grasping something in his hand. The faint light glimmered on the blade of—a hack-saw!

The man whirled on her, dropping the saw as he clapped a hand over her mouth.

Pluckily she struggled with him, only to be flung aside. She heard the crash of a breaking window as her attacker escaped. The next moment Noel burst into the summerhouse, followed by the constable.

"June—what happened?" panted the young detective.

Unsteadily June explained—and the constable pounced triumphantly on the hack-saw.

"Here's the proof, Mr. Raymond!" he exclaimed, pointing to the blade. "This saw's been used recently—to tamper with that step. Miss Gaynor caught the trickster, red-handed, in the act of hiding it. The scoundrel is young Rogers without a doubt!"

Noel bit his lip, encountering June's glance of dismay.

"I still can't believe it, constable—"

He broke off. From outside there had come the muffled purr of a starting car.

"This way!" he shouted, and racing from the summerhouse he sprinted towards the small garage adjoining the cottage, with June and the policeman at his heels.

As they approached it, a two-seater car swung out of the garage. Elsie Warren at the wheel, a desperate gleam in her eyes. Huddled on the seat beside her was a fair-haired young man, his face looking pale and dazed.

Noel sprang on to the running-board, leant over and switched off the ignition, bringing the car to a stop.

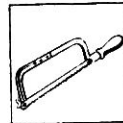
"Miss Warren," he said sternly, "what does this mean?"

"But the constable pushed forward."

"Dick Rogers," he exclaimed officiously. "I arrest you for the deliberate attempt to injure Michael Fenshaw—and I charge Elsie Warren with being your accomplice!"

Before Noel could intervene he snapped a pair of handcuffs on the young man's wrists.

FATEFUL FINGERPRINTS



"Nunky—I'm certain that Dick Rogers is innocent!" declared June. "And I can't blame Miss Warren for trying to get him

away."

The famous detective glanced at his youthful partner as they made their way back to the big house.

"Nor I, June," he said. "But the constable was quite within his rights in arresting them, on the face of the evidence. Young Rogers' story about being attacked by an unknown assailant who left him lying in the garage sounded pretty thin. And he was too loyal to admit that he faked that incriminating trail to protect Miss Warren. If only we had a single clue to the real scoundrel—"

"But I have, nunky!" said June unexpectedly.

Noel looked at her in swift surprise as she felt in her pocket, holding out a small object in the palm of her hand.

A button from the sleeve of a man's coat.

The young detective whistled softly as he examined it.

"Where did you find this, June?"

"It was lying on the floor of the summerhouse, nunky. I didn't have a chance to tell you about it at the time—and I knew that the constable wouldn't be impressed. But there was no button missing from Dick Rogers' jacket!"

Noel's eyes gleamed admiringly.

"Good for you, June! This proves my theory that the scoundrel was attempting to plant the hack-saw to incriminate Rogers—when you surprised him. The trouble is that one button is very much like another, and we'll need more proof to bowl out the trickster—"

He broke off, his eyes narrowing suddenly as he whipped out his magni-

lying glass and examined the button more closely.

"Green paint! Just a trace of it. Now, where have I seen— June, I believe I've got it!" he exclaimed. "It seems incredible, but there's one way to make certain. Come with me!"

June followed him to the rustic steps where the unfortunate driver had fallen.

"Look round, June," said Noel tersely. "I'm certain that the trickster was keeping watch, at a distance, when Fenshaw approached the steps. And he must have brushed, accidentally, against some green paint."

"Over there, nunky!" exclaimed June excitedly. "Those railings by the lily pond are painted green—and the paint looks fresh!"

"Exactly," said Noel. "And it's there, with any luck, we'll find the proof I'm after!"

Together they raced along the gravel path that led to the palings surrounding an ornamental pond.

"Don't touch the railings, June," said Noel warningly. "Now, there's something I'm anxious to find."

He commenced to search among the shrubbery, and a satisfied gleam flashed into his eyes as he brought to light a tangled skein of green garden twine.

"This is how he worked the trap, June!" he declared. "This twine was fastened to the block of wood supporting the step. He waited here till he saw Fenshaw descending the steps—then he pulled the block away. That's why there were no footprints—except the fake ones made by Rogers."

"What a hateful trick, nunky!" exclaimed June. "But who was the trickster—and how can we bowl him out?"

Noel smiled grimly. "I think I'll take a leaf out of Rogers' book, June. As the scoundrel left no clues, I'll have to fake a few!"

"Nunky! You're—you're joking!"

"I've never been more serious in my life! Keep watch for me."

Her mind in a whirl, June kept watch at the end of the path, while Noel busied himself at his surprising task.

She saw him deliberately making finger-prints on the painted rails; then, fetching a spade from a nearby shed, he loosened the crazy-paving that bordered the ornamental pond.

Barely had he completed his task when June gave a warning signal—and the next moment Noel had joined her in the shrubbery.

Approaching from the direction of the house came the constable, accompanied by Mr. Clayton, who was carrying a brief case.

The constable grinned rather patronisingly as he caught sight of the detective and his young partner.

"We all make mistakes sometimes, Mr. Raymond," he said, "and it looks as though you were wrong about young Rogers. He refuses to say anything in his own defence, though he swears Miss Warren is innocent. It's pretty clear that they were in the job together!"

"It's a bad business," declared the manager unsteadily. "And a serious matter for us. We'll have to cancel the entry of our car in the big race."

"But I'm not convinced of their guilt yet!" interrupted Noel, and he took out the green twine, explaining how the trap had been worked.

The constable gasped. "There's something in that, Mr. Raymond!" he declared. "But, we've no proof as to who used it—"

"Only the finger-prints!" said Noel, with a warning glance at June.

"Finger-prints?" echoed the constable.

"On the railing by the lily pond—where I found this twine," said Noel grimly. "I was just going to fetch my magnifying-glass from the car, to examine them more closely. I've an idea they'll give us the final proof! Are you coming with us, Mr. Clayton?"

"I'm afraid I've an urgent appointment," replied the manager, glancing at his watch. "But please report to my office at once if you find any clues. No one will be more delighted than myself if you can clear that unfortunate young couple."

He hurried away, and June stared at her uncle in growing amazement as he led the way solemnly towards his car. Suddenly he halted, clapping a hand to his pocket.

"My mistake, constable!" he remarked, with a grin. "I had my magnifying-glass with me all the time. We'll examine those finger-prints right away!"

They returned by a devious route that led out close to the pond. Then June gave a cry—and a startled ejaculation escaped the constable's lips. For a tall figure was kneeling by the railings, his back towards them, frantically scraping at the paintwork with a knife.

He started up at the sound of their footsteps, and made as though to dive for the bushes. But the paving-stones Noel had tampered with gave way under his feet, and with a stifled yell he pitched into the shallow, muddy water of the ornamental pool.

As Noel sprinted up, followed by the constable, an amazed shout escaped the latter's lips.

"Mr. Clayton!"

The manager, his clothes dripping with water, his face convulsed with fury, tried to scramble out of the pond and boat. Noel's hand closed like a vice on his shoulder.

"Sorry you missed your train, Mr. Clayton," he said grimly. "You needn't have bothered about those

finger-prints, you didn't leave them—I left them there myself! Constable, will you take charge of your prisoner while I examine the contents of his case?"

While the white-faced manager struggled and protested, Noel opened the dripping brief case and pulled out a bundle of papers.

"As I suspected!" he declared.

"Here's a letter from a rival firm—offering Clayton a thousand pounds to prevent the Melton City car from being entered in the big race. By injuring Fenshaw, and throwing the blame on Miss Warren and Rogers, he hoped to achieve his rascally purpose. And I don't doubt that later we shall discover that the previous charge of dishonesty against Rogers was trumped up because he became suspicious of Clayton!"

The constable whistled a trifle ruefully, and his confident manner had undergone a change when he joined them later in the office.

"So you were right after all, Mr. Raymond! Dick Rogers and the girl were innocent—and each trying to defend the other. But how did you tumble to Clayton's game?"

"My young partner's sharp eyes gave me the necessary clue," said Noel, smiling, "and turned my suspicions in the right direction. And I faked the evidence to trick Clayton into giving himself away. It's been a case of false clues from the start, constable—and it's only thanks to my niece that we've caught the real crook and cleared two innocent young people."

"But, nunky," June said, with a sudden frown, "what about the race? Clayton said how important it was for the firm—and he was right. Even though we've bowled him out there's no one to drive the car in the race."

"You're wrong, June," said Noel, and grinned boyishly. "The Melton City Company have a good driver now. I've been in touch with the directors and they've agreed to reinstate young Rogers. That means he'll drive their car in the race to-morrow—with Miss Warren as the mechanic."

"Thank goodness!" June gave a little sigh of relief. "If Clayton hadn't given himself away the company would have lost thousands of pounds. I think it's lucky Dick Rogers isn't still under arrest, don't you, constable?"

The abashed policeman met June's smiling glance, flushed a little, and tugged rather nervously at his moustache for a moment.

"I guess I owe you an apology, miss," he said handsomely.

"Don't mention it, constable," replied June, her eyes twinkling. "We all make mistakes sometimes!"

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday's Noel and June story is entitled: **THE AMAZING WAX DUMMY.**

THE COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

(Continued from page 188.)

was in wonderful form and her confidence grew.

"I'm sure we're going to win, honey," she told him as she groomed and fed him on the eve of the race. "We've just got to."

Merle went to bed early. She was soon asleep, but she was not fated to slumber for long. A medley of noises awoke her, and, confused and startled, she sat up.

What was happening outside? From the distance came the crack of a revolver, wild shouts, and the thud and squeals of galloping horses.

Suddenly her mind flew to Larry's grim warning.

"Surely—" she began. Then, breaking off her agitated thoughts, she threw back the bed-clothes, quickly dressed, and hurried downstairs.

Unlocking the back door, she darted out into the moonlit yard, just as a tall figure came running towards

the house. It was Slim Harris, the foreman, and anxiously she hailed him.

"Slim, what's the matter?"

He made a grim gesture towards the stables and the wire fence enclosure at their rear.

"The horses—someone's let 'em out!" he panted.

"Let them out?" She stared at him in horror. "Not—not Pommie, too?"

He gave another grim nod. "Yep—Pommie and all the rest of 'em. Every hoss we've got has been stampeded. I saw them being driven towards Forbidden Pass."

Merle felt the blood draining from her cheeks. Forbidden Pass was a jagged break in the hills a mile to the north of Happy Valley. It had got its grim name because of the dangerous quagmires that lurked there. But why should anyone want to drive them towards Forbidden Pass?

This wasn't just an ordinary case of horse-stealing. There must be more in this outrage than that. Then her heart froze as she thought of

"Oh, I'll never forgive myself if anything happens to him!" she gasped. "And the race is to-morrow—" Agitatedly she turned back to the foreman. "But how did they get out?"

"A gap cut in the wire fence. Come along and I'll show you."

Merle followed him across the yard and along to the fence. The bright moonlight revealed that many of the strands had been cut, and as Merle stared at them she remembered Larry's warning. Was this what he had tried to warn her about? Was this—

She broke off, seeing something glinting on the ground. It was a pair of wire-clippers, and beside them lay a cowboy's glove. She picked it up; then she seemed to freeze with horror, for burnt inside the glove was a monogram.

"L. D.," she whispered. "Larry Denvers!"

Is Larry responsible for this cruel blow against Merle? Read how she fights back in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL.**

THE MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

(Continued from page 182.)



ADrift IN THE PACIFIC

"Caught anything, Johnny?" asked Sally brightly.

"Only a cold, so far," replied Johnny, giving a tremendous sneeze. He was impatient. Rome

"But don't wasn't built in a day."

"And you won't catch a fish if you dangle that bent pin for a year," said Don, with an attempt at light-heartedness which deceived no one. "Chuck it, Johnny, and do a bit of baling. We've still got about three inches of salt water in the boat."

It was some hours later—hours during which the boat had drifted on aimlessly, with the chums too dazed to bother much where they were going.

A quick inventory had told Sally the grim story—that all the food that remained was a packet of ship's biscuits, that the jar was only half-full of water. That was why Johnny was fishing, with the aid of a bent pin and a line made from the unravelled sleeve of one of the jerseys they had brought from the ketch.

But though he had sat dangling the pin, baited with a piece of biscuit, patiently for ages now, he hadn't got a bite.

"The fish around here are a darned sight too choosy," he said at last. "We can eat ship's biscuits, but not they."

"That'll remind you in future to bring along your tastiest bait when you're shipwrecked," chaffed Don. "Whoa, easy with the water. I don't want to bathe in it!"

Sally, pouring out a pitifully small amount of water, smiled rather tremulously. She was not a bit deceived by the boys' chaffing remarks. They were, she knew, half-frantic with worry—as frantic as she was herself. She shivered as she looked at the jar of water, wondering how long it would have to last. But somehow she forced herself to smile as she turned to Fay—a white-faced Fay, almost at the end of her tether, but nevertheless bravely forcing a smile to her dry lips.

"Here you are, old thing," she said gently. "Sorry it's such a little drop, but—"

"I understand, Sally," Fay whispered. "Well, here's luck!"

Sally turned her head away quickly to hide the tears that rushed to her eyes as Fay, with a pathetically jaunty little smile, raised the mug to her lips. And as she turned she gave a sharp little cry.

"Don! Johnny! What are you doing?"

Don and Johnny, bending over the water-jar, straightened up, blushing uncomfortably.

"Well—er—" began Don.

"You see—" blurted Johnny.

"I did see—fortunately," returned Sally severely. "You were pouring your water back because you're frightened of it running out. You're a couple of adorable chumps, but we're not standing for that, are we, Fay?"

"We are not," agreed Fay staunchly. "Fair shares for all—and when it's gone—well, we all go without."

"But I'm not thirsty," objected Don. "Rubbish!" replied Sally firmly. "Here, take this."

She handed the mugs of water back to the boys, waited while they drained them, then firmly stoppered the bottle again, placing it in the locker. That water, she knew, was the most precious thing they possessed now. It was something she would have to guard with her life—for it meant life to herself and her chums. They might be adrift for days without sighting land or a ship—days in the

burning sun, unable to quench their thirst.

Hurriedly Sally thrust the grim thought from her, determinedly telling herself that all was not lost yet, that somehow or other they would win through.

She drew out the hard, unappetising-looking ship's biscuits and smiled at her chums.

"What do you fancy for tea?" she asked brightly. "Hard tack—or hard tack?"

"I'll settle for hard tack," said Johnny agreeably. "Good for the teeth, I believe, if they don't snap off in the biting."

"Coming over," called Sally. "Here—"

She paused, her arm in mid-air, mouth agape, eyes wide and staring. She blinked, stared again. Then a strangled cry burst from her. She gesticulated frantically, hardly able to speak.

"Look—look!" she gasped. "Oh, golly, look!"

Half-laughing, half-crying, she tremblingly pointed over the water. The haze which had followed the rain had raggedly parted, like a torn curtain. And there on the horizon, faint but unmistakable, was the shape of a ship.

"It—it's a mirage," stammered Johnny.

"It isn't! It isn't!" cried Fay hysterically. "It's the Ocean Star! Oh, what can we do? How can we make them see us?"

Frantically the chums grabbed anything that came to hand, waving frantically, shouting themselves hoarse even though they knew their shouts could not be heard.

Then, even as their hopes began to rise dizzily, the mist closed in again. And straining their ears, they heard the melancholy bellow of the Ocean Star's fog signal retreating farther and farther from them.

To the chums it was like the end of all hope. The blow was intolerably bitter. Better not to have seen the ship at all, than to see it and watch it steam away oblivious of their proximity.

With tears streaming unashamedly down her face Fay, wan, pathetic, sank hopelessly down in the bottom of the boat, burying her face in her hands. Desperately Sally swallowed down the lump in her throat—a lump that threatened to choke her, glancing towards the boys who, fists clenched, were fighting hard for self-control.

"At least we know it's around," she said lamely, in an attempt to comfort Fay. "We know we're somewhere in the region of the island."

But Fay could not be comforted. Try as she might, she could not stifle the sobs that broke from her lips. And she was still sobbing when, utterly exhausted, she fell asleep.

"You try to get some sleep, too, Sally," said Don gently. "Here, the blankets are dry now. Tuck them around you, Johnny and I will keep watch. Maybe things will look brighter in the morning."

Sally smiled at him gratefully, too full of emotion for words. But though she lay quietly, sleep would not come. She saw that with the coming of night the sky had cleared. Now the stars were shining brightly. The moon rose, turning the water to silver. Everything seemed so pleasant and peaceful, but—a shudder shook Sally—to-morrow would mean fresh perils, with the burning sun, the lack of water. What, oh what was going to happen to them?

Even as she asked herself that question, she heard Don and Johnny begin whispering together, heard the hopelessness in their tones. And, with her heart giving a great pang of fear, she cautiously straightened up without disturbing Fay and crawled over to them.

"Don," she whispered, "what are you saying? I heard you talking—"

"Oh, gosh!" said Don with a groan.

"I thought you were asleep. It was nothing, Sally."

"Tell me!" insisted Sally. Don, his face grey in the moonlight, shrugged helplessly.

"It's no good, Sally," he said. "You might as well know—but don't tell Fay. She's scared enough already, poor kid. Johnny and I have been discussing things. It's hopeless," he added, with another shrug. "Utterly hopeless. What chance have we got?"

"Not a dog's chance," said Johnny in a strangely crushed voice. "We might as well give up hoping!"

Even though those words only confirmed her own unspoken fears, Sally nevertheless swayed under the shock of them.

She felt Don's arm go round her shoulders; heard his muttered words of comfort. But she couldn't take in what he was saying. There was a strange roaring sound in her ears. She supposed she was going to faint, determinedly fought against it.

Still the roaring continued. Then Johnny's voice, full of alarm:

"Jumping catfish, what is it? We're near a whirlpool or something! Hang on, everybody! Keep hold of Sally, Don, I'll grab Fay."

Even as he spoke he lunged across to the rudely awakened Fay and gripped her tightly. The roaring grew louder, louder.

What new danger was this? What deadly menace now confronted them? As Sally dazedly, almost uncaringly now, pondered that question, the roar seemed to sweep over her. The boat whirled suddenly like a corkscrew. She felt Don's arm clasp her in a vice-like grip as their craft was lifted bodily out of the water, whirled dizzily round.

Almost unconscious now, she waited for the inevitable end—waited and waited.

"It was Don's joyous shout that brought her back to her senses."

"Sally! Sally! Wake up! We're saved. Oh, gosh," he added frantically, "don't faint on me now, Sally, we're at an island. Look!"

"Slowly, dazedly Sally opened her eyes, to stare unbelievably before her. Then a wave of joy that was almost unbearable in its intensity swept over her. The boat was floating gently in the placid waters of a lagoon. Before them, shining in the soft light of the moon, stretched a sandy beach, with palm trees casting dark, exciting shadows across it.

She looked behind saw that the roaring was caused by the water cascading over a coral reef, saw that by some miracle their boat had been lifted up and tossed over the reef.

She heard Fay, half-sobbing, half-laughing with relief. And with tears in her own eyes she turned to Don and clasped his hand.

"We're safe," she said, with a sob in her voice. "Don, Johnny, Fay! After all we've been through we're safe! Oh, it's too good to be true! I still can't believe it."

"It's true enough," said Johnny, his voice hoarse with emotion. "And by jiminy," he added in a whoop, "we're not alone here. Look, everyone—beyond the headland, a ship! Sally, is it the Ocean Star?"

In quivering excitement Sally jumped to her feet and stared. Then her eyes glistened and her heart gave a wild leap of delight as she recognised the white shape of the steamer moored off the other side of the island.

"It is the Ocean Star!" she gasped. "Then this must be Borlona Island, and that means—"

"That—that we're safe," gulped Fay.

Don nodded, his face one huge grin. "You bet—our adventures are over," he said with a chuckle. "Soon we'll be safely back aboard."

(End of this week's story.)
Though Sally & Co. have safely emerged from their perilous trip, there are unexpected adventures awaiting them on Borlona Island—as you will see when you read next Friday's grand story.