

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

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

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## THEIR SCHOOL ON CASTAWAY ISLE

Had Gerry Come To Rob Her Of Her Precious Book?—By RENEE FRAZER

### TANIA'S ACCUSATION:

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

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

She believed that Michi, her panther, could identify her secret enemy, but he disappeared. Later, there was a great commotion, and Tania learnt to her horror that Michi had been accused of attacking a seaman and the captain had ordered him to be killed.

### MICHI, her panther friend, in danger!

Her eyes blazing with anger, a dread fear at her heart, Tania sped across the beach in the direction of the distant outcry.

The jungle girl's simple mind could not grasp the exact nature of the peril that menaced her four-footed friend. It was incredible that Michi, unprovoked, would have attacked any of the wrecked ship's crew.

Yet what was the meaning of those ominous shouts—that startling, vicious crack? Tania had never heard of fire-arms; all she knew was that Michi's life was in danger and that she must save him.

Mr. Barnard raced after her, calling anxiously. Gerry and Dave were close at his heels, with several of the other boys.

"Tania—wait!" shouted the master. "Leave this to me—"

But Tania, deaf to his appeals, was heading for the big store-tent erected in the sheltered bay. A burly, red-faced figure came hurrying from the tent as she approached.

"Hi—you!" shouted Captain Rawlins. "Keep away from here—"

"What's the trouble, captain?" panted Mr. Barnard as he hurried up.

"Trouble enough!" growled the captain. "The animal broke into the store-tent and attacked Stanhope, the mate. His shouts brought the other men, and the brute escaped among the trees. It might have killed him—"

"It is not true!" exclaimed Tania, her eyes flashing stormily as she turned on the captain. "Michi is not fierce unless he is attacked. Nor would he harm a man—"

"Hey?" barked the captain, glaring at her. "What d'you mean? Are you telling me that dangerous animal belongs to you?"

"All right, captain," cut in Mr. Barnard, dropping a hand reassuringly on Tania's shoulder. "I can explain. The panther is Tania's pet. It accompanied her to school, and I gave her permission to shut it in an outhouse. Somehow it must have escaped—though I don't understand why it should have attacked the mate."

Captain Rawlins' rugged face was a picture of amazement.

"Well, Mr. Barnard," he exploded, "it's a queer kind of pet to have around the place. Luckily, Stanhope escaped with a scratch or two, though it might have mauled him. I told the men to take guns and search—"

At that instant there came a sudden, harsh shout beyond the trees.

"There it goes, men! Watch your chance—don't let the brute get away!"

Tania's heart jumped, and a startled gleam flashed into her eyes. She knew that voice! It was that sinister voice she had once heard in conversation with her unknown boy enemy.

And now—now it was threatening her pet!

Twisting from Mr. Barnard's de-

taining hand, she raced towards the trees.

"Michi!" she called. "Michi!" There came a sudden crashing in the undergrowth, and a sleek, black shape sprang from the bushes.

At the same instant there came a deafening report from among the trees, a faint puff of smoke, and the panther leaped into the air, to sprawl in a huddled, twitching heap on the sand.

With a choking cry, Tania sped towards her pet, dropping on her knees on the sand.

"Michi—Michi!" she sobbed.

The panther's glossy head was limp as she raised it, and a faint trickle of blood came from a wound behind the ear.

Mr. Barnard hurried up, followed by the captain. Gerry and Dave were close behind them, with the other boys. Their excited exclamation had given place to an uneasy silence, broken only by the jungle girl's sobs.

"I say, Mr. Barnard," said Gerry, his good-looking face twisted in concern. "is he badly hurt?"

"I know something about animals, sir," cut in Dave gruffly. "If Tania would let me examine him—"

Tania swung round on them, her eyes blazing through her tears.

"You boys shall not come near!" she exclaimed chokingly. "Have you not done harm enough? One of you, with treachery in his heart, let Michi escape—to be killed by the white man's thunder—"

"I say—" protested Gerry.

But Mr. Barnard shook his head warningly as his hand closed gently on the jungle girl's trembling arm.

"Tania's very upset, and I don't wonder," he said. "But she'll let me examine Michi—won't you, Tania? As I thought!" His face cleared. "It's only a superficial wound, though an ugly looking one. Michi is unconscious, Tania—asleep. He will be better soon."

His meaning sank into the jungle girl's mind.

"Asleep?" she breathed, and she pressed her ear close to her pet's side, listening to the beating of its heart. A little gulp of relief escaped her lips. "Yes, Michi sleeps—but he is hurt—and his hurt was caused by the white men. Tania will not forget! She will find the enemy who did this thing—and the treacherous one whose word he obeyed!"

Her voice shook with rising anger as she stared accusingly round the silent, uneasy group. Gerry met her stare with a rueful glance, and Dave looked pale and worried.

"Tania," cut in Mr. Barnard gently, "you've no enemy here! Your panther met with an accident—"

But even as he spoke he saw the jungle girl stiffen, rise slowly to her feet, her gaze fastened on the bushes. A tall figure stepped out from the undergrowth—a lean, dark-haired man, a smoking rifle in his hand. It was the mate, Stanhope.

His lips curled as he glanced at the motionless panther.

"I see one of us got the dangerous brute, cap'n!" he remarked in a deep voice. "A good thing, too—"

His words trailed away in a gasp as, like a wild thing unleashed, Tania sprang at him.

"You are my enemy!" she gasped, her eyes blazing, her fears forgotten in her anger. "I know your voice! It was you who plotted with the false white boy and sent the white man's thunder to kill Michi, that he might not smell out the treacherous one! But Tania will find the truth!"



### A FIND IN THE JUNGLE

An astounded clamor greeted the jungle girl's accusation.

It was Mr. Barnard who took charge in his usual masterful fashion. Firmly grasping Tania by the shoulder, he drew her away from the scowling mate.

"Tania, you don't know what you are saying," he remarked gravely. "Mr. Stanhope has no reason for wishing you any harm. He was simply obeying orders—and we can't even be certain that he fired the shot that hurt Michi—"

"Might have been any of the men," growled Captain Rawlins. "And Stanhope had as good a reason as any, seeing that the panther attacked him."

The mate nodded darkly. "Went for me without any reason," he declared, "while I was unpacking the stores. Pity we didn't finish him off—"

"Just a moment, Stanhope," put in Mr. Barnard quickly. "I've already explained to Captain Rawlins that the panther is Tania's pet. That being so, I think that no further attempt should be made to harm the animal!"

There was a mutter of agreement, for most of the crew were touched by the jungle girl's grief for her pet—if puzzled by the stormy accusation.

But the mate looked on sullenly, and Captain Rawlins' bluff features wore a slight frown.

"In that case, Mr. Barnard," he remarked gruffly, "it's only fair to ask this jungle girl to keep away from our quarters in future. We've enough trouble as it is, without having the crew upset by her accusations—to say nothing of her strange pets."

"Fair enough, captain!" agreed Mr. Barnard. "Tania, you understand?" he asked gently.

The jungle girl nodded. "Tania understands," she replied with a gulp. "But she will watch her enemies from afar—and some day they will fall into Tania's trap!"

Fiercely, scornfully she turned away and attempted to lift her injured pet.

Both Gerry and Dave started forward.

"Tania, let me help!" urged Gerry.

"You'll never manage on your own—"

"I'm more used to animals, Tania," put in Dave.

Coldly Tania ignored them—and it was Mr. Barnard who with an effort picked up Michi's limp body in his powerful arms.

"Where do you want me to take him, Tania?" he asked.

With a swift, grateful glance, the jungle girl led the way towards the stream where her canoe was moored. She refused Mr. Barnard's offer to have the panther treated for its wound at the island camp.

"Michi as been Tania's friend for many moons," she replied softly, a little catch in her voice, "and Tania will take care of him now. She is grateful to the white master for what he has done."

She stepped into the canoe, where Michi already lay.

"Tania will not be at school when the morning comes," she added. "She will not come back till Michi is better. She bids white master goodbye."

"Au revoir, Tania!" said Mr. Barnard, with a grave smile. "That means—not for long. We shall all be waiting for you."

The jungle girl shook her head.

"There is one who hopes that Tania will not return," she replied—"who hopes that Michi will not get better till the scent of the treacherous one is forgotten. But Tania will find him—one day!"

And plunging in her paddle, she set the light canoe gliding down the stream till it was lost to sight under the dark tunnel of overhanging trees.

FOR Tania, the days that followed were strangely lonely after the brief, happy time spent at the island school.

But her concern for her wounded pet would not permit her to leave him even for a few hours.

Michi lay on his bed of rushes, too ill to eat, occasionally rousing himself to lap from a bowl of clear spring water.

Tania treated his wound as her simple, jungle instinct prompted her. But she knew nothing of ointments and bandages—and its healing was slow.

Occasionally she made a brief excursion into the jungle for food, and on one such occasion she discovered a strange object lying in the undergrowth—a torn and crumpled net of tarred twine.

The jungle girl examined it with grave curiosity. She had never seen such a thing before. And then her heart missed a beat as she found a few tufts of silky black fur still clinging to the net.

Michi's fur!

Slowly but certainly her jungle wits pieced together this puzzle. She realized how Michi had been taken unawares by his enemy—caught in the treacherous net and dragged helplessly away from the shed outside the schoolhouse.

By his fierce struggles he had escaped and chased his attacker into the store-tent.

But how had the mate known where to find Michi? Who was the treacherous one who had told him—who had planned the whole cruel plot?

Gerry, of the laughing blue eyes? Or quiet, reserved Dave?

Tania returned slowly towards her jungle home. If only she could discover her enemy's purpose—why he should have done this thing. What had he to gain by harming Michi?

Michi was her friend and the guardian of her simple home. Tania's hands clenched as a new thought came to her.

Perhaps it was not only that her enemy feared Michi's keen scent; perhaps he had planned to kill or injure the panther so that there would be no one left to guard her home—and the one treasure that she possessed.

The book of pictures that had belonged to the white man who had

brought her to the island—the book that held the secret of her forgotten childhood!

Instinctively Tania quickened her steps at the uneasy thought, darting swiftly along the winding jungle path that led to the grotto. As silent as a shadow, she approached the ladder of twined lianas suspended from the platform of her little home.

She climbed nimbly, her hands grasping the platform of wattles as she drew herself up.

And then a broken cry escaped her lips, and her dark eyes blazed with angry accusation.

Kneeling on the platform, her precious book of pictures open in his hand, was—Gerry Royston!



### TWO VISITORS

Gerry turned quickly to confront her, the book grasped in his hand, his handsome face slightly flushed.

"Gerry! It is you! You are my enemy!"

Scorn and bitter reproach trembled in Tania's voice, but her heart felt suddenly numbed. It was Gerry who had first won her trust by his charming smile and easy ways—who had brought friendship into her lonely life. Now Gerry was here to rob her—or so it seemed.

Deliberately Tania steered her heart against his appealing glance.

"Can the white boy tell why he comes by stealth to Tania's home—when Michi is ill, and Tania is not there?"

"Of course I can!" said Gerry quickly. "I came to ask about your pet, Tania. Everyone at school has been inquiring about him—including Mr. Barnard. We hoped to have heard something from you before now."

Tania's heart beat more quickly; she longed to believe him, but she was no simpleton, and the boy's ready answer did not satisfy her.

"If Gerry came to ask about Michi," she said coldly, "why then did he search and find the book of pictures? Will pictures tell white boy if Michi is ill or well?"

Gerry grinned a trifle shamefacedly.

"I guess I haven't an excuse for that, Tania," he admitted, with disarming frankness. "It was just plain nosiness on my part. I came along hoping to find you at home; as you weren't here, I couldn't resist looking round your novel home—and I came on the book by accident."

But Tania, though her first suspicions were melted by the boy's frank tone, could not entirely believe him. She held out her hand.

"Give Tania the book," she ordered, a little catch in her voice. "When Michi is better, perhaps Tania will find the truth—and know who is her friend."

Gerry gave a twisted smile as he obediently handed her the book.

"Sorry about this, Tania," he said. "I don't blame you for being suspicious of everyone, but I swear I'm your friend. If you need my help—in any way whatever—just let me know!"

He held out his hand, but Tania ignored it, stooping to stroke Michi. She pretended not to notice the boy as he slowly descended the swaying ladder, with a final rueful glance over his shoulder.

But there was an aching lump in her throat and her eyes smarted with unshed tears.

Her simple, jungle-bred mind had never dreamt that the friendship for which she had longed might go hand-in-hand with treachery!

Yet one of her new boy friends was a traitor—working against her in secret. Could it be Gerry? Even now she shrank from the thought. But if not Gerry, then who—

Her heart gave a little jump as she

(Please turn to the back page.)

# The HOAXER OF Beverly Hills



NO JOKE, AFTER ALL

THE telephone shrilled in Noel Raymond's Hollywood flat. June Gaynor, his young niece, turned her gaze from the sunlit boulevard outside the window and crossed to the table, lifting the receiver.

"Hallo, hallo!" called a soft, agitated voice. "I guess I want to speak to Mr. Raymond, the English detective. It's urgent!"

The caller appeared to be a girl. "Noel Raymond's partner here!" said June crisply as she reached for a pencil. "Who is calling, please?"

Her cool, professional tone had its effect.

"I'm speaking from Floyd Carson's house in Beverly Hills," came the breathless reply. "There's a party here and one of the guests has been attacked and robbed—"

"One minute, please!" June scribbled quickly, a gleam of interest in her grey eyes. "Will you tell me exactly what happened?"

"Sure—I'm telling you! Mortimer Dane, the old violinist, was found bound and gagged in the minstrels' gallery, and his fiddle was stolen and broken to pieces. Will Mr. Raymond come at once, please? I guess we're all scared—"

The voice stopped abruptly and the line went dead.

June turned as the door opened to admit her uncle.

"Anything wrong, June?" demanded the famous detective.

Breathlessly his young partner explained.

Noel whistled softly.

"Floyd Carson's house, eh? He's one of the wealthiest men in California—and a well-known collector of antiques."

"But, nunky, what does the message mean? Why should anyone attack an old musician and break his violin?"

"That," cut in Noel tersely, "is what we're going to find out."

"We're going to Beverly Hills?" asked June eagerly.

"Of course!" Noel smiled as he pressed the bell. "We've nothing on our hands till our new film starts production."

A spruce pageboy answered the bell, and a few minutes later a powerful grey coupé, loaned to Noel by the film studio, drew up at the kerb outside.

June scrambled in at her uncle's side, and they drove swiftly away from Hollywood and its gay throngs into the sun-bathed country where the mansions of film stars and millionaires were scattered among hills.

They drew up outside a house of coral limestone, surrounded by smooth lawns and tropical palms, and were ushered by a young footman into a delightful loggia, with a tiled floor and a minstrels' gallery approached by a winding staircase.

The footman took Noel's card, and a moment later the owner of the house appeared, a puzzled smile on his shrewd, clean-shaven face.

"Mr. Raymond?" he inquired as he shook hands. "I'm sure glad to meet you! I'd heard that you were in Hollywood, but I guess I didn't expect the pleasure of a visit—"

"You didn't expect us?" interjected

Noel, encountering June's startled glance. "But we came in answer to the phone message about the mysterious attack on Mortimer Dane and the theft—"

"Just a minute!" cut in Mr. Carson, staring. "You've sure got me guessing, Mr. Raymond! There's been no one attacked here, and nothing stolen."

It was Noel's turn to stare. And June gasped:

"But—but the phone message—"

"It must have been a hoax!" said Noel quickly. "My niece and partner took the message, Mr. Carson. It was a girl's voice apparently—"

"A girl's voice?" interrupted the collector, his face clouding. "I reckon one of my daughter's young guests was responsible for this! Currie"—he beckoned the footman—"will you ask Mr. Mortimer Dane to step into my study for a minute? And tell Miss Elsie and her guests that I want a word with them all."

The footman departed, and Mr. Carson turned apologetically to Noel.

"I guess you know what young people are, Mr. Raymond, but one of them has sure gone too far this time! Mortimer Dane is an elderly musician whom I engaged to entertain my guests. He's quite a character in his way, and— But here he comes!" he added, lowering his voice.

Both Noel and June glanced with interest at the distinguished-looking old gentleman who came across the loggia towards them.

Tall and silver-haired, Mortimer Dane gave the impression of one who has seen better days. He bowed to June and Noel with an old-world courtesy, and turned questioningly to his host.

A startled expression crept into his mild blue eyes as Mr. Carson explained the reason for the detectives' unexpected visit.

"That is very strange!" declared the old musician, rubbing his slender hands nervously. "I trust my precious fiddle has not really been harmed—"

"My dear fellow," put in Mr. Carson, frowning. "I locked your violin in my safe—as you requested. No one but myself knows the combination. The story of the theft is as phoney as the amazing tale about your being attacked! But, to set your mind at rest, I suggest we take Mr. Raymond along to see the violin for himself!"

He led the way to his study, followed by Noel and June with the anxious musician.

Mr. Carson crossed to his safe and operated the intricate combination that opened the massive iron door.

"There you are!" he declared.

The old musician gave an audible sigh of relief as Noel took the violin from the safe, examining it.

It was not damaged in any way, and nothing had been disturbed in the safe, which contained a number of

By PETER LANGLEY

valuable curios. Noel turned his attention to the safe.

Just then there came a clamour of excited, youthful voices, and the study door opened to admit Mr. Carson's daughter and her young guests.

"Say, pop, what's the trouble?" demanded Elsie Carson gaily.

But her smile faded as Mr. Carson sternly explained, and the young people exchanged uneasy glances.

"Can any of you throw any light on this stupid and heartless trick?" demanded their host, frowning.

There was a self-conscious silence, broken by a lank, bespectacled youth with a mop of ginger hair.

"I guess I can, Mr. Carson! I saw one of the girls standing near the telephone this afternoon. She dodged off when she heard me coming, so I didn't see her face—but she was wearing a red dress, like Madge—"

There came a little gasp as he pointed, and all eyes were turned towards the dark-haired, vivacious girl standing near June. Her attractive face had turned crimson.

"I—I'd just been phoning my brother," she faltered, staring a trifle defiantly round the group.

There were significant whispers and nudges among the others. From those whispers June gathered that attractive Madge Rigby had a brother at college, reputed to be rather wild, and that Madge herself was said to take after him.

"I saw her looking at Mr. Dane's fiddle in the music-room this morning," added the bespectacled boy, whose name was Horace Sneed.

"Because I was interested in Mr. Dane's violin doesn't mean I'd play a hateful trick like that!" retorted Madge scornfully.

June looked shrewdly from one to the other; she could see that Noel was staring at them, too.

"Whoever played this trick," declared the detective sternly, "was someone staying in this house, someone who knew Mr. Dane's attachment to his violin. No harm has been done—yet—but I mean to discover the name of the hoaxer!"

With that he dismissed them, and watched Mr. Carson return the violin to the safe, locking it. A few moments later the relieved violinist departed to his own room.

"Say, Mr. Raymond," put in their host, "what did you mean when you said that no harm had been done—yet? Surely you don't imagine—"

Noel's eyes were grave as he turned from the safe.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that we haven't heard the last of this hoax! That phone message was no ordinary youthful prank. I'm convinced that it had a sinister purpose!"

"Nunky," gasped June, "why do you say that?"

"Because," said Noel, "whoever phoned that message made a previous attempt to break into this safe—and failed! There are deep scratches on the metal. It's plain that the hoaxer must have tried the safe, but was baffled by the combination."

"But why should the trickster phone for you?" demanded the bewildered Mr. Carson. "And why tell that extraordinary tale about an attack on Mortimer Dane? I guess it doesn't make sense!"

"That," rejoined Noel grimly, "is what worries me. I suggest you make certain that your safe is secure, Mr. Carson—and warn the young people to remain within call. There's a hoaxer in this house whose presence means danger!"

### THE HOAXER STRIKES



June stared at her uncle wonderingly; but it was not till after tea that she was able to speak to him on her own.

They were strolling on the terrace, in the soft twilight of the Californian evening, when she broached her exciting theory.

"Nunky, I believe I know the name of the hoaxer!" she whispered. "I believe it's Horace Sneed!"

"Horace?" Noel whistled softly. "What makes you pick on him?" "I've discovered that he's a mimic," declared June eagerly. "But that's not all. What made me suspicious was his using the word 'fiddle' instead of 'violin.' That's what the hoaxer called it on the phone!"

Noel's eyes gleamed admiringly. "That's pretty smart, June!" he declared. "And there's something in it, though I fancy we're up against a more desperate character than young Horace. Whatever happens, we must be on our guard—"

A sudden, distant commotion from the house brought him spinning round, in time to see a muffled figure leap from one of the downstairs windows, to vanish among the bushes. "June, find out what's happened!" rapped Noel as he raced in pursuit of the shadowy figure.

June darted into the house, to find an agitated group surrounding the door of Mr. Carson's study. As the girl detective pushed her way into the study Mr. Carson turned from the open safe.

"Miss Gaynor, your uncle was right!" he exclaimed huskily. "The hoaxer meant business. My safe's been opened—and the scoundrel's got away with a priceless collection of antique rings!"

June caught in her breath sharply. Just then there was a stir in the group as Noel thrust his way into the study. The young detective looked dishevelled and his eyes were stern as he took in the scene at a glance.

"I was afraid of this, Carson!" he remarked grimly. "The scoundrel escaped, though I tried to stop him. He was wearing some kind of hooded cloak. Exactly what has been stolen?"

Mr. Carson described the valuable trinkets, but June was looking for something else.

"Nunky, the old musician's violin has gone!" she gasped. "Just as the hoax message said—"

"Has anyone seen Mortimer Dane recently?" broke in Noel.

"He told me he was going up to his room to fetch a book—" began one of the boys.

Noel spun on his heel, his expression grim.

"Come on—quickly!" he jerked, and ran towards the stairs leading to the minstrels' gallery.

June and Mr. Carson were close on his heels as he reached the gallery, and a cry escaped the girl detective's lips.

Lying bound and gagged on the floor, behind one of the palms, was the old musician. And kneeling beside him, her face deathly pale, a

broken violin in her hand, was Madge Rigby.

The hoaxer's mystery message had come true!

"I DON'T know anything about it!" gasped Madge, her dark eyes tearful as they questioned her. "I was crossing the gallery when—I saw poor Mr. Dane lying on the floor, the violin beside him—"

She shuddered. There came a groan from the unconscious violinist, who had been carried to the couch in Mr. Carson's study.

His velvet jacket was torn and he appeared to be suffering from severe shock.

Noel busied himself with his first-aid kit, finally rising to his feet. He glanced around at the silent guests present.

"Have you checked up on everyone, Mr. Carson?" he inquired.

Mr. Carson nodded agitatedly. "Yes; they were practically all in the house at the time, and most of them can vouch for one another. But we've no proof of Miss Rigby's movements." He looked rather sternly at that white-faced girl. "You will oblige me by going to your room, Miss Rigby, and staying there till I have had a search made for the missing gems! And you other young people will remain within call."

Madge left the room, her face pale and defiant, and the others followed silently. Noel closed and locked the door after them, then turned.

"There will be no need for a search, Mr. Carson!" he said quietly. "I would have set your mind at rest before, but I wished to keep the affair a secret—in case the trickster was among the crowd. When that scoundrel broke away from me, in the grounds, this was dropped in the struggle!"

And from under his coat he drew a flat leather case. Mr. Carson's face lit up with incredulous relief as Noel opened the case—to reveal the stolen curios, glittering intact on their velvet bed.

"My dear Raymond, I don't know how to thank you—"

"Don't worry," put in Noel, with a dry smile. "I would have been better pleased if I had caught the hoaxer. Unfortunately he—or she—is still among us, and we can't afford to relax our precautions. There has been one attack—and there may be another!"

June started as her uncle crossed to the window and drew the heavy curtains, motioning his host to switch on the softly shaded light.

"Nunky, what is the hoaxer's plot?" she asked, glancing at the unconscious musician. "If he just wanted to steal those rings, why did he attack poor Mr. Dane and smash his violin?"

"When I can answer that," replied Noel grimly, "I'll have solved the mystery behind the hoax message!"

He turned at Mr. Carson, who was about to lock the precious rings away in the safe.

"Just a minute!" said Noel. "You've forgotten—somehow the hoaxer discovered that combination! With your permission, I'll alter it while we're undisturbed. June, will you keep watch by the door?"

Crossing to the safe, Noel deftly manipulated the dial.

It was at that moment that the telephone in the loggia rang shrilly.

Noel was busy with the safe, and Mr. Carson was watching him. June stepped quietly out into the loggia and picked up the receiver.

"Hallo!" called a distant, husky voice. "Is that Mr. Carson's house? This is the hoaxer speaking!"

June started. "The hoaxer!" she gasped, her eyes flashing angrily. "Who are you and where are you?"

There came a mocking laugh over the wire as Noel and Mr. Carson hurried to join June.

"I guess that would be telling, Miss Gaynor!" said the caller. "I'm phoning to warn you and your meddling uncle of my plans. I shall

come for those rings again in half an hour's time!"

Once again came the mocking laugh and a distant sound like splashing water. Even as Noel grabbed the receiver the phone was silent.

Breathlessly June described the strange message, and Noel's eyes glinted.

"That sound of splashing water gives me an idea, Carson! There are some falls near your home, I believe?"

"Sure! The Beverly Park Falls—about ten minutes from here."

"With any luck, we'll catch the hoaxer this time!"

A few minutes later, with June seated beside him, Noel was driving fast through the twilight towards the well-known pleasure park and its picturesque waterfalls.

As they swung through the gates of the park June pointed out a call-box partly hidden by the bushes surrounding the falls.

Noel pulled up, springing out of the car with his young partner at his heels. The park was deserted at this hour and they could hear no sound except the rush of the falling water.

There was no one in the kiosk, but June gave a stifled cry, her face very white as she pointed.

"Nunky, look!" she gasped. "Over there! It—it's Madge!"

With a stifled ejaculation, Noel sprang towards the shrubbery, dropping to his knee beside a figure lying pale and motionless among the bushes.

"It's Madge Rigby right enough," he said, "and—she's fainted."



### THE THIRD MESSAGE

Madge Rigby recovered as they drove her swiftly back to the house. Unsteadily she tried to explain her presence in the park.

Worried by the accusation against her brother, she had kept watch in the grounds, disobeying Mr. Carson's orders.

She had followed a mysterious figure, losing sight of him near the falls, only to be attacked suddenly while making her way to the kiosk with the intention of phoning the house.

Her story carried conviction to June's ears, but Noel remained thoughtful and quiet.

As they drove up to the house they were greeted by Mr. Carson.

"Well?" he demanded as he peered into the car. An angry frown crossed his face. "Miss Rigby! So you were the hoaxer, after all!"

June indignantly denied it, repeating the girl's story; but Mr. Carson frowned sceptically as the girl detective accompanied Madge to her room.

"I don't know what you think, Raymond," he remarked grimly, "but it's my own opinion that Madge Rigby was persuaded by her ne'er-do-well brother, who's in hiding somewhere outside the house, to assist him in a daring theft. Luckily you recovered the rings from the young scoundrel, and the second boastful warning was frustrated by our prompt precautions!"

"You're certain the gems are safe?" asked Noel.

"Positive! No one has been near the house since you left, and I've personally kept watch in my study. Poor old Dane is still suffering from shock. Currie and one of the other servants carried him to his room and are taking it in turns to sit with him in case he recovers and can give any information."

Noel nodded approvingly. "The hoaxer appears to have been beaten this time," he admitted, "but, if you don't mind, I should like to have another look at those rings."

Mr. Carson led the way to the safe, operating the intricate combination. As the door swung open he pointed to the leather case.

"Just as we left it!" he declared. "Even if the thief had got in—which

(Please turn to the back page.)



# HER HOLIDAY WITH LING MIN YO

By DORIS BROOKES

## A TEST FOR HER DISGUISE

WHEN Maureen Carstairs went to Puchow, in China, to stay at the home of her friend, Ling Min Yo, she took with her part of a jade tablet her father had given her. A mystery surrounded it, and it was stolen by a secret organisation known as the Scarlet Dragon.

Wong, a young boatman whom the Lings believed was chief of the river pirates, proved himself Maureen's friend by regaining it. He also obtained the second half of the tablet. The Scarlet Dragon hit back, however, by kidnapping Ling Min Yo and cunningly blaming Maureen for her disappearance.

In order to find Ling Min Yo, Maureen disguised herself and went to the house of Ku Yi Tso, who was really the rascally leader of the Scarlet Dragon organisation. There she was mistaken for a servant girl, and ordered to serve tea to Ku Yi Tso, who was entertaining Mr. Ling.

MAUREEN knew she would have to obey Ku Yi Tso's command, fraught with danger for herself though the situation was.

She was here disguised as a serving maid and deliberately to ignore an order from the autocratic Ku Yi Tso himself would be to arouse his wrath and suspicions. It would jeopardise all her chances of getting possession of the key to the tower in which Min Yo was a prisoner.

"Hurry, girl!" rapped Ku. "Wouldst keep your master and his honourable guest waiting? Hurry!"

Maureen took a grip on herself and hurried into the courtyard. The two men had now seated themselves at a low table on which was a red lacquer tray with tea and dainty rice cakes. It had been put there by a serving maid who—unfortunately for Maureen—had then scuttled off at the approach of Ku and Min Yo's father.

Keeping her face averted as much as possible, Maureen picked up the heavy silver teapot. She had remembered to move with the shuffling gait of a Chinese household helper. But in her agitation she had forgotten to bow when entering the presence of the august master of the House of Ku.

He frowned angrily. "And does a serving girl not show proper respect these days?" he demanded.

Maureen flushed beneath her make-up. She realised her omission and sought to rectify it. Hastily she bowed, the teapot still in her hand—and in doing so spilled some of the hot liquid.

"Clumsy girl, what is the matter with you?" Ku exclaimed.

His gaze was fixed coldly on her. If he saw through her disguise—

"Speak, girl! Have you no tongue?" Maureen's heart thudded with alarm. Her disguise might stand the test, but her voice certainly

would not. She understood Chinese far better than she spoke it.

But his words gave her an idea, and desperately she seized on it. She pointed to her throat, at the same time shaking her head.

"So—a serving maid who has no voice!" Ku said disdainfully. "You are new in this household, that I have not seen you before?"

Maureen nodded. "Take more care, girl, or you will not stay long."

Trying to steady her hand, Maureen began pouring out the tea. "A thousand apologies," Ku said, turning to Ling Cho Yen. "My trusted friend, I am indeed terribly distressed to learn of Min Yo's disappearance. If there is anything I can do—"

"That is why I have come to you," Ling replied, in a distraught voice. "To ask you to use all your power and influence to find my beloved daughter."

"Of course, old and worthy friend," Ku assured him. "I will give orders at once. Everything will be done. A price shall be put on the heads of those who have committed this wicked crime. You say it has been done by Wong and the English girl? I warned you that it was unwise to have a foreign girl staying as guest in the House of Ling."

"And now I suffer for my foolishness," Min Yo's father said brokenly. "The House of Ling welcomed her gladly, to be repaid with deceit and treachery!"

Maureen almost spilled the tea again, such seething indignation burned through her. For Ling Cho Yen, haggard with grief over the disappearance of his daughter, she felt only sympathy, in spite of his harsh judgment of her. But Ku Yi Tso—

An urge came to Maureen to cry out that Min Yo was here in the grounds of this very house—a prisoner of the man who professed to be Mr. Ling's trusted friend. She wanted to expose him for the treacherous enemy he was.

The urge was almost irresistible; but somehow Maureen fought it back, knowing that she would not be believed, that such a move would be fatal.

She went on pouring out the tea. Ku spoke again.

"And you say that Wong and the foreign girl have come to this province? They must be caught. Was I not robbed myself by this scoundrel Wong? Such things happen in Puchow, but not in this province where I am all-powerful. They shall be captured, my friend, and your daughter found if she is anywhere in Kanloo."

The tea was poured out now, and the two men were sipping it.

"You will be staying, old friend?" added Ku. "I will give orders to prepare for your reception."

But Ling shook his head. With many apologies he said that, honoured as he would be to stay in

the House of Ku, it was his wish to return to Puchow at once, to learn if there was any more news of Min Yo.

Ku did not press him to stay. Ku, Maureen realised, would not want Mr. Ling to remain for fear his treachery was discovered.

Again she tensed for action. The men were rising from the table. Ling Cho Yen was preparing to go, and that would be her chance—

"Summon Chang!" curtly ordered Ku, looking across at Maureen. "At least my worthy friend shall depart with all the ceremony of an illustrious guest."

Maureen gulped and again her heart fluttered in panic. Chang, she guessed, must be the high steward of the House of Ku. And he was the last person she wanted to see, because he would at once realise that she was not a member of the household.

Then she nearly laughed aloud in her excitement. No need at all for panic, for there was no need to obey Ku's order! This was her opportunity to get away and find the key.

With a low bow she turned and scuttled off, ostensibly to look for Chang. But a swift glance over her shoulder showed her that the two men had now passed out of sight, and immediately she broke into a run, making for the vase-shaped gateway which led into the inner courtyards.

She reached it, peered cautiously round the porcelain screen, with its sprawling dragon in red tiles. And then a thrill ran through her as she saw the dove-cot Wong had told her of.

Elaborately ornamental it was, with many entrance holes and alighting platforms on which cooed and stalked the doves.

Her heart quickening with excitement, Maureen crossed over to it. The birds cooed louder and fluttered around as she stretched up a hand and groped inside one of the apertures.

A jubilant cry rose to her lips. First time lucky! She had found it—here was the key, dangling from a hook inside the dove-cot. Then, even as she unfastened it, drew it out, her feeling of elation changed to consternation.

Suddenly she had heard the soft pad of footsteps; her eyes widened in horror as she saw the figure of a Chinese passing on the other side of the ornamental wall. From the mode of his dress she guessed at once that he must be Chang, the high steward of the household.

If he saw her—saw her with the key—

Hastily she lowered her arm, concealing the key in her hand. No chance to hide; nowhere to hide.

But Chang passed on without glancing in her direction!

Maureen drew a gasping breath of relief. She had not been seen. And now to get away with the key; to return to Wong, who had said he would wait for her by the outer wall.

But even as she reached the gateway she had to stop again, concealing herself behind the screen.

The steward had halted in the courtyard beyond and was talking to someone.

"Hold yourself in readiness," Chang was saying. "I have had news that there is danger abroad. I go to tell our illustrious master now, and I have no doubt that he will give instructions to proceed to the tower with all possible haste."

Maureen gave a start. Was he referring to the tower in which Min Yo was a prisoner? Was it suspected that an attempt was going to be made to release her?

Wong must be told of this. No time must be lost in rescuing Min Yo.

She crouched there, awaiting her opportunity to escape. The two figures walked away and Maureen made a dash for the outer wall.

She plunged through the gateway—and then pulled up in startled dismay.

Wong was no longer there.



### WHERE IS WONG?

Desperately, wildly, Maureen stared around her. Had Wong concealed himself, fearing discovery if he remained by the gate-

way too long?

No movement, however, disturbed the bushes which would have offered a hiding-place. And the only sound, coming from the other side of the house, was the purr of a motor-car. Clearly it sounded in the still evening air, then grew fainter and was lost in the distance.

That would be Ling Cho Yen driving away from the House of Ku, never suspecting the treachery of the man he believed to be his friend; never suspecting that the daughter he sought was a prisoner of the man to whom he had come seeking help.

Still no sign of Wong.

"Oh, goodness, what am I to do?" Maureen asked herself, frantic with worry. "Now that Ku suspects Wong is in the neighbourhood looking for Yo-Yo, he may move her somewhere else. That was what Chang meant!"

What could she do? Had Wong returned to the creek, where the junk had been moored among the willows? She might be able to find her way back there, but that was going to take time. And there was no time to be lost.

Maureen's fingers tightened on the key in her hand. Suddenly she knew that there was only one thing to be done. A reckless gleam shone in her blue eyes.

She must rescue Min Yo herself!

Her mind made up to such a perilous venture, Maureen plunged among the shrubs and trees, following the outer wall for a short distance and then striking away across the extensive grounds.

She had noticed a tower on her way here with Wong. It was the only one she had seen, so she surmised it must be there that her Chinese friend was imprisoned.

It loomed up now through the trees, still some distance away, beyond the gardens and standing on the fringe of the rice-fields which stretched for miles around.

In days bygone, when rival warlords had fought each other for power and plunder, it had been a watch-tower. Strong and battle-scarred, it stood on a rising knoll of ground, the setting sun glinting on its thick, ancient walls, solid save for a few slit-like apertures.

Maureen drew nearer, and then abruptly came to a halt, uttering a gasp of anxiety.

In front of the tower was a burly Chinese, pacing up and down and guarding the big door. An open stretch of grassland surrounded the tower. To reach the door she would have to leave the concealment of the trees—and as soon as she did that she would be spotted.

Maureen bit her lip, dismayed, and knowing that every passing second was precious. If only she could distract the man's attention, get him away from the door—

"Got it! It's worth trying, anyway!" she breathed, and stopped.

A moment later she straightened

up again, a largish-sized stone in her hand. She drew back her arm and then threw the stone with all her strength, heaving it among the trees on the other side of the tower. A second stone quickly followed it.

They clattered down through the branches and foliage. Maureen heard them clearly. So did the guard.

At once he swung round, peering about him suspiciously. Tensely Maureen waited. Surely he'd go and investigate—

Her heart leapt. He was going round the side of the tower and making for the trees.

Before he was out of sight Maureen was skimming towards the big door. She reached it; a moment later was thrusting the key into the lock. It turned, and then she was inside the tower.

A feeling of triumph surged through her. Now to find Min Yo! In the few seconds before re-closing the door she took in the interior of the stone-floored tower, saw the flight of steps curving upwards. No sign of her friend down here.

Then blackness hemmed her in as she re-locked the door. She groped her way across to the stairs and became aware of a flickering yellow glow from above.

Was it coming from where Min Yo was being kept a prisoner? Was Min Yo guarded—or alone?

She went up the stairs cautiously, the yellow glow lighting the way. She reached a bare stone landing, and then—

"Yo-Yo!" she exclaimed.

There was Min Yo, lying on a straw mattress, her hands bound behind her back, a gag over her mouth. A smoking tallow lamp stood on the floor with a platter containing the remnants of a meal near by.

The Chinese girl, at the sound of that cry, struggled to her feet, for they had not been bound. Her eyes widened in amazement. She knew that voice—but not at first did she recognise that figure rushing towards her.

"Oh, Yo-Yo!" gulped Maureen. "Thank goodness I've found you. Poor Yo-Yo!"

"Maureen!" panted Min Yo incredulously. "Maureen, is it really you? You look so Chinese—"

"Now you know what a spot of disguise does to me. Let me get these cords off your hands. Soon have you free, Yo-Yo. Soon have you away from this horrible place!"

"Oh, Maureen, this is so wonderful!" Min Yo's hands were free now, and she hugged her friend, trembling with the surge of her emotions.

"We've got to hurry!" Maureen said urgently. "I'm taking you back to Wong's junk—"

She felt a shudder run through Min Yo.

"Wong! But, Maureen, I do not understand. It was Wong who kidnapped me!"

The words came as a shock to Maureen. Min Yo still believed Wong was her enemy. But didn't she realise—

"It wasn't Wong, Yo-Yo! Don't you know where you are?"

"I was blindfolded when I was brought here. I have not been able to see out, for the slits in the walls are boarded up. Maureen, where am I?"

"You're in the watch-tower in the

## DON'T THROW AWAY YOUR BUS TICKET

Like every other form of paper and cardboard it is valuable. For just as paper was a vital munition of war, so it is now an important factor in the export drive.

Help to hasten our return to prosperity by saving all the waste paper and cardboard you can, and ask all your friends to do the same.

grounds of the House of Ku! And it was Ku who had you kidnapped. But come on—"

"No, no! I cannot believe it!" Min Yo cried.

Maureen, however, had taken her friend's arm and was leading her towards the stone staircase. There was no time now to try to convince Min Yo. In a few moments she would see for herself that it was true.

Other and more impelling worries occupied Maureen's mind.

She had tricked the sentry outside to get into the tower. Could she trick him again to get out and escape?



### A BREAK FROM THE TOWER

With Min Yo standing beside her, Maureen stooped and peered through the large keyhole of the tower door.

Through it she saw a narrow expanse of green and the red glow of the setting sun. Then that limited vision was blotted out momentarily as a dark form passed it.

The sentry had returned and was pacing up and down outside.

Maureen's brain worked with desperate swiftness. At any moment now others might be coming. Somehow they must get away before that, or they would be trapped in the tower—and then there would be two prisoners!

"Yo-Yo, get ready to scream when I give the signal," Maureen whispered. "We've got to take a chance. And be ready to make a dash for it!"

Min Yo nodded. She asked no questions, putting her trust in her friend.

Maureen produced the key again, but it noiselessly in the lock. "Now!" she breathed.

Min Yo screamed. At the same moment Maureen turned the key in the lock, slowly opening the door.

Outside the tramp of feet stopped. There came a muttered ejaculation in Chinese. Then followed the sound of rushing footsteps as the sentry, alarmed by this unexpected emergency, agitatedly hurried forward.

He charged through the doorway, concealed behind which were Maureen and Min Yo. And as he rushed through Maureen quickly thrust out one foot.

Over it stumbled the sentry, and went crashing to the stone floor with a startled cry.

"Run!" gasped Maureen. Min Yo darted out. Maureen followed in a flash, just as the man, half-dazed, scrambled to his feet. He lurched forward—but too late.

Maureen slammed the door, inserted the key and turned it.

"Make for the trees!" she panted. But even as they raced across the open stretch of grassland, shouts sounded from the direction of a path leading through the wood.

Maureen groaned in despair; that moment of triumph was short-lived. Chang and another man had appeared, had seen them.

"Keep going, Yo-Yo!" Maureen gasped. "We'll do it yet! If we can find somewhere to hide until darkness—"

Darkness was closing down over the countryside. Another twenty minutes and it would be night. If only they could dodge their pursuers until then—

Breathlessly the two girls raced on through the trees. Behind her Maureen heard the thud of footsteps and the swish of branches and undergrowth as Chang and his companion followed relentlessly.

Then she gave a sudden gasp of dismay.

Min Yo was lagging. Her strength had been sapped by the ordeal of her imprisonment.

"Give me your hand!" Maureen cried. "Try to keep going just for a few more minutes!"

"I—I try, Maureen! But—but that is Chang who pursues us—the

(Please turn to page 59.)



# ASSISTANT to the SECRET AGENT

By DOROTHY PAGE

## MR. X HER ONLY HOPE

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

Gaye and Peter tracked a consignment of toy soldiers, which Peter believed was the key to the Count's activities, to a toy shop owned by Simon Brown.

Gaye, disguised, took the place of a new girl assistant, in order to search for the toy soldiers. But her imposture was discovered by the Count, and she was locked in a secret room, in which there was a fire-bomb.

**I**N five minutes at most the fire-bomb was due to explode!

As Gaye realised her position, she dragged frenziedly at her bonds, but her captors had tied them securely. Her efforts to get free were unavailing and at last, exhausted, panting, she relaxed.

The bang of a door sent a sudden throb of hope through her tensed frame. It was the back door of the shop.

Had one of the Count's men returned, or—was it Peter?

With agonised intentness she strained her ears, staring wide-eyed at the door of the secret room.

The moments ticked by. She could hear nothing.

The suspense was unbearable. And then—

What was that? On the staircase leading up to the living quarters she could just hear a patter of feet. Someone was stealthily going upstairs.

There was a sudden, sharp popping noise in the secret room.

Gaye's heart seemed to lurch. From behind the packing-case a vivid sheet of flame had leapt up, almost blinding her.

The fire-bomb had exploded! Gaye felt the searing heat from where she lay. In fascinated dread she watched the tongues of flame spreading. Already they were licking greedily at the packing-case of wooden soldiers.

"Gaye—Gaye, are you here?" Peter's voice!

It came from above, faintly, desperately anxious. So it was Peter who had entered! Daringly he had eluded the Count's men. He was here in the shop, searching, wondering what had happened.

But Gaye was gagged. She could not shout.

The flames crept across the floor. Smoke made Gaye's eyes burn. Her brain began to swim.

A clattering of footsteps on the stairs. Peter, caution gone now, was hurrying down, calling still: "Gaye—Gaye!"

But he did not turn into the passage. No sign of fire had as yet escaped from the secret room. Half-fainting, Gaye heard the shop door

bell clang. Was Peter leaving; did he think everyone had gone?

"Oh, no—no! Peter—"  
"With her last strength, almost blinded by the flames, Gaye swung her bound legs round, catching against the hurricane-lamp, hurtling it against the secret door, where the glass smashed, scattering out burning oil to add to the flames.

But the glass had shattered with a loud report—and surely burning oil would creep under the secret door into the passage, smoke as well.

Half choked, Gaye slumped back, cringing as far as she could from the flames. Breathing was difficult. Hope faded, and with it her senses.

Then a mighty crash! Gaye did not know it, but it was the hall-stand covering the secret door that had been overturned by desperate strength. The secret door abruptly smashed open, bringing a gust of air that fanned the flames to a roaring furnace.

And through them burst the figure of Peter.

With a hoarse cry he had seen her. He wrenched off his jacket, draped it about her, while darting tongues of fire licked at his shirt.

As in a dream, Gaye felt strong arms seize her, and then everything was blackness.

**A** VOICE talking quietly; the touch of cool water on her forehead; then a liquid in her mouth that tasted fiery but which cleared her head.

Gaye sighed and blinked open her eyes.

The first thing she saw was a shaded light. Next she realised she was lying on a soft couch. Thirdly—as memory flooded back—came the wonderful relief of knowing she was safe.

"Gaye, you're better—"

A face moved quickly into her vision. It was Peter's. He held a glass in one hand.

"Peter!" she breathed. "Oh, Peter, it's you! You—you got me out—"

The worry in his clear grey eyes faded a little.

"Thank goodness," he murmured. "I couldn't see any signs of burns on you, but I was scared stiff that the smoke—the shock—"

"I'm fine," broke in Gaye, smiling a little shakily. "But you—oh!" She gave a tiny exclamation of concern.

"Peter, your hands—your face! You were burnt saving me!"

"Almost fiercely he made a gesture. "That's nothing, Gaye! Never mind me. It's you—are you sure you're O.K.?"

She nodded.

"Perfectly sure," she declared, and swung herself upright on the couch. Then she looked around curiously.

"But where are we?"

"We're in the Marlowes' house. Remember—the house where I brought the real Jess Hamilton while you impersonated her? When I got you out

of the shop I warned the first person I saw about the fire and then, rather than face awkward questions, drove straight here with you. Mrs. Marlowe helped me to look after you."

Gaye nodded eagerly.

"Later, when you're fit and have had a rest," he went on, "you must tell me all that happened."

"Peter, I'm fit now," she insisted, and breathlessly related the events of the night. Intently and silently he listened. "And now, Peter," she finished, "I want to hear what happened to you. The Count's men were nunting you—"

"Steady, old thing! Haven't you had enough for to-night?" The old whimsical smile lurked on his lips. "What a show you put up! But even so—he grimaced slightly—"I'm afraid the Count wins—we shall never learn the secret of the wooden soldiers now. He made sure of that with the fire!"

Gaye's face fell, but only for a moment. Then she leapt to her feet.

"Peter! We haven't lost—yet!" And feverishly she began to fumble at the bottom buckle of her loose leather coat. "I'd almost forgotten, Peter. In the secret room I managed to knock down one of the soldiers from the case. It fell into my coat, and here—and here—"

The coat came open. Her trembling hand flashed up and, eyes shining in glorious triumph, she held before Peter's dumbfounded gaze, a gaudily painted wooden toy soldier!

"Peter," she cried, "we've a chance of discovering the secret even now—a chance of beating the Count!"

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## A STARTLING DISCOVERY



"Gaye! You're a wonder! Quick—under the light with it—"

Peter, with an excitement foreign to him, sprang to her side and seized the toy. Together they stared at it under the electric light.

"Peter—look! The head seems loose—perhaps it unscrews!"

"By Jiminy, you're right!"

On tiptoe, Gaye craned over his arm, watching as his fingers moved deftly. With a squeak of wood on wood, the head came away, revealing that the body of the toy was hollow.

Gaye held her breath.

"There's something inside! It—it's the secret—"

Peter tilted the soldier; shook it. On to his broad palm fell a wad of crisp rolled paper, held together by an elastic band. He snapped the band—and the staggering truth faced them at long last.

"P-pound notes!" stuttered Gaye.

"And clothing coupons, by all that's wonderful!" Peter held them up, grey eyes alight. "Pound notes! Pages of clothing coupons—"

"Peter, I—I don't understand!" gasped Gaye dazedly.

"Nor I, unless—"

The secret agent broke off, as the door opened and a sturdy man in

tweeds stepped in. Peter's lips curled under a smile.

"Gaye, this is Mr. Marlowe," he said. "Jerry, meet Gaye."

"So this is Gaye!" exclaimed the newcomer, studying her with an interest and admiration that brought a quick flush to her cheeks. "By thunder, young lady, that's a wonderful disguise. You look the image of Jess Hamilton!"

He paused, turning to face Peter with a slight frown.

"Incidentally, I'm a little concerned about the real Jess. I don't trust her. She's sly. I'll be glad when we can get rid of her—"

"And that'll be soon, Jerry," broke in Peter, almost impatiently. "But forget her—and look at these! Look at them! They were in the wooden soldier. Jerry, you're an expert. Tell me—are these genuine?"

Gaye gave a tiny start. "Forgeries! Was that what Peter suspected?"

With a soft whistle, Marlowe drew out a small magnifying-glass. Under the light he peered keenly through it at the wad of paper.

"X, the notes at least are genuine," he said suddenly. "Sure of it—" He stopped, a gleam of indecision and amazement in his eyes. "Or if they're not genuine," he added slowly, "they're the most brilliant forgeries I've ever seen in my life—"

"Can you make certain?" broke in Peter tensely. "You see what this may mean—the hugeness of it?"

Jerry Marlowe gave him a quick glance and sucked in his breath.

"Great guns—yes! X, give me a few minutes. Upstairs I've got a strong microscope and the necessary acids to make the test—"

He raced from the room and Gaye, staring at Peter, saw that he was in the grip of a great agitation.

"Peter," she asked, "you—do you think they're really forgeries?" He nodded and she frowned. "But, Peter, surely a few fake pound notes and clothing coupons are not worth the Count's while."

"A few!" He laughed softly. "Gaye, I don't think you quite understand. The notes and coupons in the soldiers were only a few samples for testing out the scheme. Somewhere the Count must be making these forgeries—by the thousand! Can you imagine the fortune he'll make, not only in pound notes, but on the black market with coupons, when he gets his real scheme working?"

Gaye gasped. The hugeness of it began to dawn upon her.

"This, Gaye—this is the Count's great scheme!" Peter declared. "A scheme for colossal wealth and power, no matter what happens to the country—"

He was still discussing his theory when the door crashed open. Jerry Marlowe, very pale, grim-faced, stood there, a wad of paper in his hands. Peter started up, Gaye beside him.

"Jerry—"

He nodded, breathing hard. "Forgeries, X! I won't guarantee the coupons, but the notes—brilliant enough to deceive all but one in a thousand—are definitely forgeries!"

Gaye stared breathlessly at their set faces.

"Thanks to Gaye," jerked Peter, "we know the plot. But, by Jiminy, how can we scotch it—how—how? Unless we can discover where he's making the stuff, smash him before he can swamp England with it—"

"And there's a chance, X!" broke in Jerry Marlowe sharply. "Look, there was a coded message in the bundle of notes. This toy soldier was obviously intended for one of the Count's special agents. It appears to order this agent to return to headquarters—"

Peter jumped to his side and took the message.

"Jerry, I think you're right!" he exclaimed. "If we can get this decoded it may give us the Count's headquarters. Quickly—contact X4. Tell him I'm coming over straight away. He's the man to decode this!"

"Right, X. Anything else?"

"Yes—" Peter's rugged features

hardened. "This, Jerry, may be the show-down, the big battle with the Count! Contact every man we've got. Tell them to stand by for crash action. If that coded message tells us what we want to know, we're going flat out to smash the Count before he can swamp the country!"

Silently Jerry Marlowe nodded and sped from the room.

"And what about me, Peter?" Gaye asked half timidly.

"You, old thing?" His eyes crinkled at the corners. "Bed for you—now!"

"But—in the morning?"

He saw her wistful look; perhaps he guessed what was passing through her mind.

"I'm sorry, Gaye." His voice was very gentle. "To-morrow morning I'm sending you home to your aunt in the country. You've been very wonderful, young lady," he added, "but the game is drawing to a climax, a climax that is going, frankly, to be dangerous. And after what happened to-night, you must take no more chances."

Gaye's lips trembled a little, and his hand met hers in a warm clasp.

"Bless you for all you've done to help, Gaye," he said. "Knowing you—working with you—has been great fun."

She smiled rather shakily at him. Neither of them saw the figure that had been crouching outside the window—the figure which now slipped away silently into the night, a cunning gleam in its eyes.



### THE COUNT'S PLAN

The boom of breakers came up through the night to the lighted window of a certain lonely house on the South Coast.

A tall, pale-faced figure, draped in a black overcoat, whirled impatiently from a scrutiny of the night.

"It's time Simon Brown and the others arrived!" he declared.

The beautiful, perfectly dressed girl, seated in a deep armchair, paused in the act of lighting one of her interminable cigarettes.

"Perhaps they caught X—and are bringing him with the girl."

The Count's expression suddenly contorted in fury.

"That girl! She nearly ruined all our plans, Roma! But—"

He paused. A telephone had purred softly from the desk. The Count crossed, laid down his ebony cane and lifted the handset.

As he listened, not a muscle of his pale skin moved, but there was something in the rigidity of his pose that brought Roma to her feet.

"Count, what is it?"

He spoke five words into the mouthpiece: "I shall call you back!" and then abruptly clamped the handset back into place.

"Bad news?" asked Roma quickly.

"The worst! X rescued the girl!"

A hiss of amazed fury slipped through Roma's crimson lips.

"For some reason," continued the Count harshly, "Brown did not get the girl away before the fire. X rescued her—and with her, one of the soldiers—the one meant for Flaskett, which contained a coded message naming our headquarters!"

"They got that one?" Roma's husky voice was agitated. "Count—you're sure? Who was it who phoned?"

"Carl Mennin. The real Jess Hamilton had been held by some of X's people. To-night she escaped after hearing X talking. She contacted Mennin, hoping by her information to get back into my favour and receive a monetary reward. You realise what this means, Roma?"

"Yes. If they decode that message correctly—discover our headquarters at—"

She paused, faltering. The Count abruptly rose.

"Exactly, Roma! And we cannot move our headquarters. The plant is there. All our perfect plans for the

vast distribution of the forgeries are centred on that one spot. We cannot leave it until the scheme is fully operating—"

"But if X discovers it before then?"

The Count paused, his silver head slightly bowed in thought.

"Roma," he said slowly, "Mennin reported one other thing, a little thing which now becomes vastly important. It will enable me to act, set into motion a plan that must checkmate Mr. X—smash all his plans into smithereens!"

And for once he smiled a smile of cold, deadly malignancy.

"DEAR old, dreamy Little Brightlywell! In a way it's fun to be back, and it'll be lovely to see aunt again, and yet—"

It was the following day, and Gaye gave a big sigh as she stood outside the little, red brick station, hearing the train that had brought her puff away along the single track.

Three hours ago she had said good-bye to Peter, and now she was almost home.

Gaye sighed again, gazing around at the peaceful countryside. It seemed almost impossible to believe that only yesterday she had been a captive of the Count.

And now—all her exciting adventures with Peter were at an end.

Last night, with the help of Jerry Marlowe's attractive young wife, she had removed all traces of her disguise; her hair flowed once more in rippling auburn waves to her shoulders.

Then early this morning had come that last good-bye to Peter; the rush to Kennchester station with Mrs. Marlowe.

Now—here she was at Little Brightlywell once more.

Picking up her suitcase, she set out for her aunt's old-world cottage.

"Wonder—what Peter's doing now?" she pondered as she walked along. "Did he decode the message? Will it lead him to the Count's headquarters?"

She sighed wistfully again, and, pushing open the wicket gate of her aunt's house, walked up the garden path. Lifting the old-fashioned latch, she stepped into the low-ceilinged passage. From the parlour to her right came the sound of movement.

"Aunt polishing her beloved brasses, I bet," she smiled, and softly entered the parlour. Her aunt's favourite armchair had its back towards her; she could just see the movement of a well-remembered shawl. "Guess who!" she called lightly.

"Miss Gaye Leaman, I believe the name is!" came a soft, husky answer.

Before her staring eyes a figure rose slowly from the armchair, shawl slipping from the shoulders of an exquisitely tailored suit—and Gaye was looking into the green eyes of Roma Vadell!

The Count's niece—here! She couldn't speak; she couldn't move.

Roma laughed, her crimson mouth twisting cynically.

"Yes—I! Like the touch of the scarf? To one so fond of disguise," she mocked, "it must have appealed! But won't you say good-day to your other visitor?"

Her slim, bright-tipped fingers swept out, indicating behind the door the tall, silent figure of—the Count!

Gaye recoiled in horror. Oh, what did it mean? How had they traced her here? And what of her aunt?

"What—what do you want?" she whispered.

The Count's answer came, cold and chilling.

"We want—you, Miss Leaman! You will be my trump card. You will be the means of crushing Mr. X—and ensuring that my master coup goes through without a hitch!"

What exactly is the Count's villainous scheme? See next Friday's exciting instalment.





# The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

## CARMENITA'S ACCUSATION

"TOPICAL news, but with a different angle—that's what we must aim for if we're going to win this competition," said Sally Warner thoughtfully.

"What do you mean—if?" asked Johnny Briggs. "It's in the bag—"

"You'll be head-first in the sea if you're not careful," warned fair-haired Fay Manners. "What are you doing, Johnny?"

"That's his idea of photographing news from a different angle," grinned Don Weston. "So different that the audience will have to stand on their heads to make out what it is when it's shown on the screen."

Johnny did not join in the Merry-makers' laughter. Scarlet-faced with exertion, he was hanging almost upside-down over the rail on D deck, supported only by his legs, both hands being engaged in manipulating the cine-camera which was focused at an oblique angle on C deck below.

For Johnny was determined that he and his chums should win this competition which had been organised by Joseph Laidlow, the big film magnate, who was travelling on the College Ship, Ocean Star. The three best news-reels would be shown that evening in the ship's cinema, and the one the audience judged the best would earn for its creators a prize of ten pounds.

There were only half a dozen or so cine-cameras on the ship, nevertheless, competition was very keen, the chums' most formidable opponents being Carmenita Pascall the fiery Mexican girl, and her friends.

"Done it!" shouted Johnny triumphantly. "Whoops!"

He gave a cry of alarm as he lost his balance, but his chums grabbed him and hauled him to the deck, not noticing how his shout had startled a man on the deck below, who looked up just in time to see one wildly thrashing arm, still clinging to the cine-camera, disappearing from view.

"Now if I'd only been holding the camera instead of you, Johnny," said Sally reprovingly, though her blue eyes twinkled, "we needn't have bothered to save you. What a scoop we'd have had—you falling from one deck to the other. Absolutely exclusive. As it is—"

"As it is, the whole thing's a flop," declared Don. "The chump knocked the shutter open in his struggles which means he's messed-up the film."

Johnny's face fell, though he cheered up again as Sally quickly changed the film, pushing the spool one into her pocket.

"Now we'll start again," she said cheerfully.

"Why bother?" drawled a languid voice. It was Carmenita, accompanied by her crony, Alec Burt, who was carrying the Mexican girl's very expensive cine-camera. "You don't

stand a chance against me. I have a first-class camera, not a cheap toy."

Sally flushed.

"That remains to be seen, Carmenita," she said. "It's not only the camera—"

"But the brains behind it," finished Don.

Carmenita's black eyes flashed.

"You dare to suggest that I, Carmenita, am less clever than you?" she began stormily. "For that impertinence I shall now make it my business to win whatever happens, so—"

"That's right, Carmenita," put in Alec Burt, "tell them where they get off—"

"I'll jolly well show you where you get off if you don't pipe down, Burt," snorted Johnny.

"Johnny—shush!" Sally tugged warningly at Johnny's arm as Professor Willard, accompanied by Edgar T. Phineas, the head prefect, approached.

The headmaster of the College Ship said nothing, but Sally sensed his disapproval, and with a jerk of her head to her chums motioned them away before Carmenita could continue the argument.

Luck seemed to favour the chums after their unpleasant scene with Carmenita. After a little cajoling they were allowed a few brief shots of Lester Maxton, the famous American comedian, rehearsing his new act. They also managed to photograph the scene when the tiniest passenger aboard, having eluded his nurse, somehow found his way to the bridge, there to be discovered by the amazed captain.

"That's one reel," said Sally with satisfaction an hour or so later. "We'll take about three, then choose the best. I'll just dump this in my cabin."

She placed it on the dressing-table, then excitedly rushed out again, almost colliding with Carmenita as she ascended the companion-way.

But Sally was in no mood to cross swords again with the "Wildcat." With a brief "Sorry!" she hurried on, rejoining her chums.

Their second attempt seemed even more successful, and the chums were smiling with satisfaction as they placed the second roll of film beside the first and went down to lunch.

Carmenita, too, seemed to have had a successful morning, and the other competitors seemed no less cheerful.

"It's going to be a close thing," said Sally, as they wandered back to her cabin after lunch. "We'll really have to be on our toes this afternoon—try to get something even more—"

Her voice trailed away as she stared towards the dressing-table. Then she darted into the cabin and started to search frantically around the floor.

"The films," she said bewilderedly. "I put them here. Have any of you moved them?"

Even as Don, Johnny, and Fay shook their heads in concern and

mystification, there came a shriek of rage from along the corridor, a torrent of angry words in shrill Mexican. And next moment Carmenita charged out of her cabin. She gave another shrill scream as she saw the chums, and dashed toward them.

"My films!" she hissed. "I leave them in my cabin—they are gone! Gone! You say I will not win. Is this, then, one of your tricks?"

"Here, take it easy, Carmenita!" urged Don. "You might like to know that our films have gone, too."

"Yes, perhaps you can tell us something about them?" put in Johnny. "You said you'd make it your business to win, whatever happened."

"How dare you suggest such a thing!" Carmenita shrieked. "Oh, you are the cunning ones! You take my films, then pretend that yours, too, have vanished. It is too much!"

"It certainly is!" snapped Sally. "The same remark could apply to you, Carmenita. But it seems fairly obvious that your films have disappeared. You must believe that ours, too—"

"I say, so have mine!" said the plaintive voice of Tubby Winwood.

"That goes for me, too," put in Linda Powell, the American girl. "There's some funny business going on around here, I guess—"

"Then ask them who are responsible!" shrieked Carmenita, flinging out a wildly accusing finger at Sally & Co. "Sally Warner was down here before lunch. I saw her—"

"Then you must have been down here yourself!" flashed Fay.

By now a milling crowd of students had gathered in the corridor attracted by Carmenita's shrieks of rage and Johnny's shouted replies. A positive babel arose.

"Please—" Sally began entreatingly.

And then stopped as another figure strode on to the scene. It was Professor Willard, his face cold with anger.

"Silence! Silence at once!" he snapped. "This noise is disgraceful!"

"But my films!" wailed Carmenita.

"And ours—" snapped Johnny.

"Silence, I said!" rapped the headmaster. He frowned from Sally & Co. to Carmenita and back again.

"Once before I have seen you quarrelling over this competition. Now you are doing it again. If you cannot enter for this competition without quarrelling, then you will not enter at all!" He paused, waiting for his words to sink in. "Remember, this is your last chance!"

And, with a curt nod, he walked on.

## JOHNNY'S FORGOTTEN FILM



"I can't understand it," Sally slumped moodily in a chair in the club-room and glanced at her chums. "Somebody's taking

these films—but who?"

"And why?" asked Fay puzzledly. "It doesn't make sense. Couldn't have anything to do with the thefts we've been hearing about, could it?" she asked doubtfully. "There was another on C Deck this morning."

"Of course not," replied Johnny. "What on earth use is a used film?" That was what the chums had been trying to puzzle out for some time, ever since they had left the noisy gathering outside their cabin after Professor Willard's warning. For Carmentita, with the fixed conviction that the chums were responsible for the disappearance of her films, was not in a mood for talking things out quietly. The only thing to do was to keep out of her way until she had simmered down a little.

"We've got just one more roll of film," Don said now. "Shall we use it up?"

"Yes, of course," replied Sally vigorously. "Whoever has taken our films, we're not going to play into his hands by tamely giving up. Bigger and better news is the watchword, shipmates."

"That's the stuff!" approved Johnny. "I say," he added, his eyes gleaming excitedly, "wouldn't it be a snip if we could get a shot of the mysterious thief at work?"

"It would be a miracle!" laughed Fay. "You're too ambitious, Johnny. But what about trying for some news on C Deck, Sally?"

"O.K.," agreed Sally; and, grabbing up the camera, she made her way to the companion-way leading to C Deck, followed by her chums.

But half-way down the stairs she paused to give a groan of dismay. For there, at the bottom, was Carmentita, still looking furiously angry. "We'd better retreat," said Don, as the Mexican girl, spotting them, opened her mouth to start the hot argument all over again.

But Sally, who had glanced along the deck, suddenly stiffened. Then, with one bound, she had leapt down the stairs: was at Carmentita's side.

"Carmentita, listen!" she said urgently. "Please listen just this once!" There was something so compelling in her tone that for perhaps the first time in her life Carmentita did as she was asked. "Look—along the deck!"

With a quivering finger, Sally pointed, and at what she saw the "Wildcat's" eyes narrowed.

For at the rail stood one of the men passengers from C Deck, and in his hands he held several rolls of films.

"So!" said Carmentita hissingly. "Maybe he enter for the competition, yes? Maybe he want to win, and so he take all our films. Why else should he have so many? Come!"

"Carmentita—no! Wait!" Sally's cry was frantic. True, the man's possession of all those films was highly suspicious, but he should be given a chance to explain.

That, however, was not Carmentita's way. Several rolls of film were missing, and this man had several rolls of film in his possession. The whole thing seemed very clear to Carmentita, and, wildcat that she was, she hurtled along the deck, the chums behind her, and pounced upon the man by the rail.

He let out a wild yell, jerked up his hands, and lost his hold upon the films. There was a cry of dismay from Sally as she saw them fall into the sea. But the accident seemed to rouse Carmentita to even greater heights of fury.

With a shriek of rage, she grabbed the man's arm, while Sally & Co., fearful of what she would do, grabbed his other arm. The din was at its height when on to the scene walked Professor Willard.

"What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

"Sally & Co. let go of the man as if he had become red-hot. Not so Carmentita. Still shaking the unfortunate man, she panted out the story of the missing films in a shrill, furious voice.

"Leave go of this gentleman at once," ordered the headmaster, "and be silent! I cannot think what to say," he added, turning to the half-dazed passenger.

"Phew! I—I guess it's all right!" panted the man. "Can't blame these

youngsters too much. Tough luck losing their films. But I feel kinda peeved that they picked on me, seeing that I've had some of mine taken, too."

"You—you mean you're entering for the competition, too?" asked Fay.

"Sure! I was just sorting out the last of my new films." The man smiled ruefully. "But I guess they've all gone now," he added, glancing over the side.

"Oh, golly!" Johnny's face was a study of consternation as he gazed from the man to the impetuous Carmentita. "We—"

"Silence!" snapped Professor Willard. "I saw the whole disgraceful incident. I warned you all what would happen if I found you quarrelling over this competition again, but I never dreamed you would dare to attack an innocent passenger—No!" he rapped, as Sally made to speak. "I do not want to listen to excuses! You are all barred from the competition! Furthermore, you will hand over to me the films already in your cameras!"

There was no use arguing. In silence they took the films from their cameras and handed them over. Then, at the headmaster's stern command, they hurried off. Sally and her chums made for a deserted part of the deck, and there Sally regarded the other three grimly.

"I don't believe that passenger was as innocent as he sounded," she declared.

"Why, what do you mean?" chorused her chums.

"That—that tale of his about new films wasn't true. They were developed films. I could see that as they fell. Besides, they didn't even fall accidentally. He deliberately threw them when Carmentita grabbed him."

"Then you think they were the missing films?" Fay asked breathlessly.

"I'm pretty sure of it," replied Sally. "But why did he want them? Not so that he could win the competition himself—that's too silly. No, he was looking for something, and, judging by the expression on his face, he hadn't found it."

The chums looked puzzledly at one another, then Don said doubtfully:

"Could somebody have taken a shot of something he didn't want made public—something, perhaps, that made him look rather ridiculous?"

Sally jerked up suddenly, her blue eyes excited.

"Don," she said softly, "I do believe you've got it! Something he didn't want made public. But, whatever it was, he hasn't found it—I'm sure of that. And yet he had all Carmentita's films and all of ours."

"And Linda's and Tubby's," added Fay. "There isn't anyone else."

They looked blankly at one another, then suddenly Sally snapped her fingers.

"You're wrong!" she said triumphantly. "There is one you've forgotten—the first one that Johnny took."

"But—but it's spoiled," said Fay bewilderedly.

"The man isn't to know that," replied Sally. "And, anyway, I don't suppose the whole of it's spoiled. But don't let's sit here chuntering about it; let's get along to the dark-room and develop it. Then, maybe, we'll get a clue to this mystery."

Thrilling with excitement, they hurried along to the dark-room. Carefully Sally took the film from her pocket and watched, with bated breath, as Don set to work on it. Would this film, she wondered, solve the mystery? And, if so, would Professor Willard relent and allow them all to enter the competition again?

Breathlessly, she watched as the film began to take shape, her excitement mounting.

And then, without warning, the door suddenly swung wide. It had been deliberately pushed open by an unseen hand. The chums cried out in dismay as a vivid shaft of sunlight entered the dark-room. Sally rushed

to the door, but she was too late to see the furtive figure outside. It had quickly made its escape. As Sally turned back there came a despairing cry from Don.

"It's no good, Sally! The film's utterly ruined!"



### SALLY'S AUDACIOUS RUSE

"Good news, shipmates!" Sally's voice was unusually loud and cheerful as, after dinner, she hailed her three chums, who were

seated on C Deck. "You mean the film is all right, after all?" cried Don delightedly.

"Everything's O.K.," replied Sally. "It's being shown this evening. First, the big film. Then a short interval, followed by our news reel, and the second feature."

"Wonderful!" cried Fay. "To think that it shouldn't have been ruined, after all!"

"It's wonderful all right!" echoed Sally. "And there's going to be some pretty big surprises, too, I imagine, when that film is shown. But come on, shipmates! Let's go and get ready. The show starts in half an hour."

And, with a quick look round, she led the way back to B Deck.

THERE was a hush in the cinema as the big film gradually drew to a happy close. But, though the stars were two of Sally's favourites, she could not concentrate on the screen. She twisted and turned restlessly on her seat, attempting to make out the identity of the shadowy shapes around her, peering alertly towards each exit.

At last the words "The End" flashed on to the screen, and, as the lights blazed up, she jumped up out of her seat and gazed anxiously around. And then her mouth tightened.

"There he goes!" she whispered. "I thought he'd try something. Quickly—after him!"

Don, Johnny, and Fay needed no urging. With wildly beating hearts, but trying to appear as inconspicuous as possible, they edged out of their seats, then fairly flew up the gangway and through the exit.

"This way!" urged Don, darting through a door marked "Private. No entrance."

A short flight of stairs confronted them, and at the top a door marked "Projection Room"—a door, Sally noticed with sudden agitation, that had just closed in a suspiciously stealthy manner.

"The projectionist must have gone out for the interval," she said agitatedly. "Hurry, Don!"

But Don was already hurrying. Two at a time, he took the stairs, burst open the door, and bounded into the room, Sally, Johnny, and Fay at his heels.

There was a startled cry from inside the room, a muffled exclamation as the figure that bent over the table on which the projector stood started up and swung round with a suddenly livid face.

It was the man whose films had gone overboard who stood there, and, at sight of the chums, he gave an angry snarl.

"So it's you interfering pups again, is it?" he snarled. "Get out of here, do you hear? Get out!"

"So you were right, Sally!" Don cried admiringly. "It is that fellow from C Deck! And you're the rotter who pinched our films and got us all chucked out of the competition!" he added, glaring at the man.

"And I'll chuck you out of here if you don't get out!" bellowed the man, forgetting caution in his agitation. "Beat it!"

He made a wild lunge forward, but Don neatly side-stepped, at the same time putting out his foot and bringing the man heavily to the ground.

"We're not leaving you to spoil our last film!" put in Johnny. "It's being

shown in a few minutes, then we'll know for sure what your little game is!"

"Though we've got a pretty shrewd idea already," put in Sally.

At that moment the door swung open, and in the doorway appeared the angry figures of the projectionist and Professor Willard.

"What are you all doing in here?" demanded the cinema operator. "Can't you read? This room's strictly private."

"Exactly," agreed Sally. "But this—er—gentleman didn't seem to realise that. He came in here with the object of interfering with the films that are to be shown this evening."

"Yes, we caught him red-handed," declared Don.

The projectionist and the headmaster stared in surprised bewilderment at the passenger as he scrambled to his feet.

"Is this true, Mr. Thomson?" demanded the cinema operator.

Thomson's eyes glittered. He had recovered from the first shock, and now there was a cunning look on his face.

"I came up here because I suspected that these youngsters were deliberately planning to defy their headmaster," he asserted.

Sally & Co. gasped. "Why, you tricky rotter—" began Johnny; but Professor Willard held up a stern hand.

"Silence! Do not interrupt!" he ordered, and looked curiously across at the passenger from C Deck. "What exactly do you mean, sir?" he asked. Thomson shook his head sadly.

"I mean that these boys and girls planned to defy your ban. They smuggled one of their films up here and intended it to be shown," despite your orders to the contrary," said Professor Willard's face flushed angrily.

"Is this true?" he asked the Merry-makers.

"Well—" began Sally. "Do not attempt to beat about the bush! Did you, or did you not, bring one of your films up here?"

"Y-yes," admitted Sally; "but if you will let me explain—"

But quickly Thomson cut in. "I know I did wrong to burst in here," he said, "but I acted for the best. You see, this film shows you in a pretty bad light, professor. These youngsters deliberately made it so as to get their own back."

"That's not true!" burst out Sally. "I'll say it isn't!" chorused her chums. "If only you'll let us explain we'll—"

But Professor Willard, having heard them admit that they had flouted his orders by smuggling a film into the projection-room, was in no mood to listen to explanations.

"Nothing you can say can excuse your disgraceful conduct!" he declared.

"But—"

"Silence!" He turned to Thomson. "I am very much obliged to you for your intervention, sir."

"Oh, that's all right! Glad to have been of help. Should have hated to see you made the laughing-stock of the whole ship. Guess I'd better take the film and destroy it."

And, a gleam of triumph in his eyes, he moved across to the pile of film on the table beside the projector, but instantly Sally rushed forward.

"No, you don't!" she gasped. "Collar him, boys!"

Forward plunged Don and Johnny, and there came a scandalised shout from Professor Willard as the two boys seized the passenger from C Deck.

"How dare you!" the headmaster gasped. "Release him at once!"

But Sally gesticulated urgently. "No, hang on to him!" she counter-ordered. "Our film is already in the projector. If only we can show it to—"

"Don't you dare!" cried the outraged projectionist; and he also darted forward, but Fay, desperate, clutched at his arm and held him back.

Professor Willard stared in horrified anger at the confused scene, but before he could intervene Sally had switched on the projector.

"Look!" she cried, as a powerful beam of light shone through the aperture in the wall in front of the projector. "Now we'll see who's telling the truth!" Triumphant she turned to the still struggling Thomson. "Well, what have you got to say now?" she demanded. "Hadn't you better own up?"

Thomson, his face white and scared now, struggled frantically, but Don and Johnny held him back.

"Switch off that film!" he gasped. "Don't show it!"

"Then confess!" ordered Sally. "Confess, or everyone in the cinema shall see the film!"

For a moment the man glared, then abruptly his defiance seemed to crumble, and he gave a sullen nod.

"Guess you've got me cornered!" he muttered.

The projectionist and the headmaster gazed at him in amazement.

"You mean, what you told me wasn't the truth?" gasped Professor Willard.

"Of course it wasn't!" chipped in Sally. "Thomson is the rascal who's been responsible for all the thefts lately!"

"What!" came in a gasp from the Head.

"Yes, but, unluckily for him, Johnny accidentally took a shot of him coming out of another pas-

senger's cabin," went on Sally calmly. "The rascal knew that if that shot was shown his guilt would be proved, but, unfortunately, he didn't know which film the incriminating shot was on, so he stole all the films entered for the competition—all but the one Johnny took, and that's the one in the projector at this moment." As she spoke, she switched off the projector and turned to the now helplessly glaring Thomson. "That's why you came up here, wasn't it?" she said. "You heard us talking, and, terrified lest the film should be shown, you meant to destroy it."

Sullenly the man nodded.

"Guess there's no point in denying it now!" he muttered.

"You mean, you admit you are the thief?" gasped the still dazed Professor Willard.

Thomson gave another sullen nod.

"Yep, it's useless to try to wriggle out of it!" he muttered. "Guess that film's gilt-edged evidence."

Sally laughed. "But it isn't," she said calmly. "What!"

There came an amazed gasp, and Sally chuckled.

"When you opened the dark-room door, you really did spoil Johnny's film," she told the startled Thomson.

"That's why we fixed up that little conversation on C Deck. We deliberately sat near you. You see, we wanted you to overhear. It was a little trick to lure you up here. This film, actually, has nothing photographed on it."

And, with another chuckle, Sally slipped the reel out of the projector and held it cut. For a moment Thomson glared at it dazedly; then, as he realised how he had been fooled into confessing, he gave a furious shout.

"Why, you—you—" he began, and made to hurl himself on Sally, but Don and Johnny quickly seized him again and held him back.

"No, you don't!" panted Johnny triumphantly. "We've got you this time, and I bet," he added with a grin. "You won't want to see anything like a cine-camera for a long time."

NEEDLESS to say, Professor Willard not only apologised to the chums for doing them an injustice, but also warmly congratulated them as well.

Owing to what had happened, Mr. Laidlow, the film magnate, decided to hold a new competition; and when eventually the amateur news reels were shown in the ship's cinema Sally & Co.'s was voted the winner.

(End of this week's story.)

More fun and thrills with Sally & Co. in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

## HER HOLIDAY WITH LING MIN YO

(Continued from page 54.)

steward of the House of Ku. And, as you said, these are the grounds of the House of Ku."

"Don't waste your breath talking! Just run!"

Maureen caught her friend's hand, to help her along as much as she could. Bravely Min Yo responded.

On through the trees. Then abruptly they ended. Maureen stared in horror at a vista of open rice-fields before her. Nowhere there to hide.

As she stood in despair a figure suddenly loomed up in front of her—and her blue eyes widened incredulously, joyously.

It was Wong!  
No longer was he disguised as a musician in that gorgeous red satin costume, but wore the drab clothes of a coolie from the fields.

"Courage!" he said quickly. "Come with me!"

He picked up the exhausted Min Yo in his strong arms. Then he led

the way along the rough path that bordered the wood hereabouts. Footsteps still crashed through the trees, but in the gathering darkness Chang and his companion had, for a few minutes at least, lost sight of their quarry.

Twisting, turning, Wong raced along the path, Maureen trotting behind, handicapped by her Chinese shoes.

"Wong, where are we going?" she panted. "I—I can't keep this up."

"Have courage, Maureen, it is not far," returned Wong.

Maureen gasped, and suddenly she stumbled, sprawling on the ground. As she did so from behind she heard the renewed sounds of shouting.

Trembling, she rose to her knees. Wong paused.

"No, go on!" she gasped. "I'm all right. I'll follow."

She was more shaken than she dared show, but she staggered to her feet and stumbled after Wong and Min Yo.

At last the sound of voices died. Then suddenly Wong stopped.

"Quickly! Hide in this!" he instructed.

Maureen stared in amazement. He was pointing to a heavy, clumsy-looking wheelbarrow, loaded with hay. Fixed to the front of it were two poles, between which was stretched a strip of canvas. A wheelbarrow fixed with a primitive way to assist progress!

With a thrust of his foot, Wong kicked out some of the hay, then laid Min Yo in the barrow. Maureen suddenly smiled excitedly as she saw his idea. A moment later she was clambering into the barrow beside her friend.

Wong scooped up the hay, spreading it over them, completely concealing them. He grabbed up the handles of the barrow, started trundling it along the path. The breeze billowed out the sail. But he had gone only a few yards when a figure loomed out of the trees, barring his way.

"Halt!"  
It was the voice of Chang, the steward of the House of Ku. Eyes glistened with suspicion, he barred the way.

Can Wong bluff through to safety with the two girls? Continue this exciting moment in next Friday's chapters.

## THEIR SCHOOL ON CASTAWAY ISLE

(Continued from page 50.)

felt the wattle platform tremble slightly. Someone was climbing the rope-ladder!

Had Gerry come back? Tensely she waited, one hand grasping her precious book.

The ladder creaked and swayed, and a head and shoulders appeared above the platform.

Tania drew back—a startled, wary look flashing into her eyes.

"You!" she whispered. Dave Carlew climbed on to the platform, his rugged face a trifle grim, his keen grey eyes looking round searchingly.

"Sorry to butt in like this, Tania," he said bluntly. "I was coming to inquire about Michi—but I noticed Gerry Royston had beaten me to it." His tone was a trifle bitter, and his eyes smouldered suspiciously. "What did Gerry want?" he demanded.

Tania stiffened. Dave's curt, masterful tone aroused her spirit.

After all, how did she know that she could trust this boy? He seemed strangely interested in Gerry's movements, and she saw his grey eyes narrow as he glanced at the book in her hand.

"What is that, Tania?" he asked quickly. Tania put the book behind her back.

"Two boys came to Tania's home," she said coldly. "Both come with smooth words to ask about Michi—but with their eyes they seek Tania's book of pictures. Tania is not a child that she is deceived by smiling words."

Dave's face clouded. "So—that's it!" he remarked cryptically. "Well, we'll talk about that in a minute. As a matter of fact, I really came to examine your pet. How is Michi?"

"Michi is sleeping," replied Tania, "and white boy must not disturb him. Dave will please go—now!"

And she pointed to the ladder. But instead of obeying, Dave crossed to the injured panther and knelt down. A sharp ejaculation escaped his lips.

"You will not touch Michi!" ex-

claimed Tania, her eyes flashing. "White boy—go!"

Dave took no notice. From a satchel slung across his shoulder he drew large rolls of bandages, a pair of scissors, and a tin of ointment.

Tania, who had never seen such things before, started forward in quick alarm, throwing her arms protectively round her pet.

"What are you going to do?" she gasped. "Go away!"

"Tania, don't be a little fool!" jerked Dave. "I can see that you've tended Michi as well as you could—but that's a rifle-shot wound, and it's festering. Unless you allow me to treat it properly, Michi may never get better."

Just then a low rumble of pain came from Michi's throat, as the wounded panther stirred. Tania's heart contracted. From the gleaming scissors and bandages, her gaze turned to the boy's determined face. Dared she trust him—this boy who might be her secret enemy? Would he keep his promise to make Michi well?

Will Tania decide to trust Dave—and if so, is it a wise decision? You will enjoy next Friday's fine instalment.

## THE HOAXER OF BEVERLY HILLS

(Continued from page 52.)

was impossible—the new combination would have baffled him!"

With a thoughtful frown, Noel carried the case to the table, opening it under the light of the lamp. Then he caught in his breath sharply, and a strangled ejaculation escaped Mr. Carson's lips.

The case was empty except for its bed of velvet. Once again the hoaxer had carried out his threat!

"THIS settles it!" stormed Mr. Carson. "I shall phone the police at once and have Madge Rigby questioned."

He strode out into the loggia and across to the telephone even as June reappeared. But with his fingers on the hand-set, he paused, staring at the message pad.

"Raymond, look at this!" Noel stepped to his side, June behind him. It was June who read the amazing message aloud:

"I am returning the stolen curios at nine o'clock promptly.—Yours sincerely,

"THE HOAXER."

"Say, is this another trick?" spluttered Mr. Carson.

"Possibly," said Noel grimly as he studied the message. "On the other hand, the fellow may have repented. This certainly lets out Madge Rigby."

"But, nunky, what does it all mean?" gasped June, her mind in a whirl. "First the hoaxer warned us of his intentions, then he carried out his threat. And now—now he's going to return what he has stolen!"

"It all sounds phoney to me!" grunted Mr. Carson. "What d'you suggest, Raymond?"

"I think I've got a clue," said Noel. "This time the hoaxer won't escape! I suggest you assemble your house party in the loggia at nine o'clock—but don't give them any warning. Have refreshments served and make it appear like an informal supper. I shall keep watch in the grounds—in case the fellow turns up."

The arrangements were quickly made, and just before nine o'clock the entire house party assembled in the loggia, where an appetising cold supper awaited them.

Horace Sneed was present, as smug as ever. Madge Rigby was there, looking very pale, with June beside her, Currie, the footman, served iced

drinks and coffee, and the gaiety of most of the youthful guests was unclouded by any thought of impending drama.

June's heart beat more quickly as the fateful hour approached, and she saw Mr. Carson glancing uneasily at the clock.

The musical chimes for which June had been waiting sounded above the merry chatter, followed by the deep, booming notes of the hour.

On the ninth stroke there came a sudden interruption—a loud knocking on the outer door!

June started to her feet. Mr. Carson himself crossed to the door, throwing it open.

A gasp of bewilderment arose from the youthful guests and the footman dropped his tray with a clatter.

Into the loggia walked the bowed, white-haired figure of the old violinist, his face still swathed in bandages, the broken fiddle under his arm.

"Mortimer Dane!" shouted the amazed Mr. Carson. "You—you are the hoaxer!"

The other inclined his head. "I am the hoaxer—and the thief!" he replied unsteadily. "Though Mortimer Dane is not my real name. I am a broken-down actor who was paid to play this part. The cunning plan was the invention of a certain scoundrel who is present here tonight!"

"What!" gasped the bewildered collector, while June and the rest listened breathlessly.

"It was simple, really," said the visitor. "The hoax message to Mr. Raymond—the opening of the safe in my presence—remember? Thanks to the hoax message, I was able to note the combination, and later to steal the rings! My confederate bound and gagged me, breaking the violin as a blind, and escaped with the jewels."

"Unfortunately they were recovered. But we were not beaten. Feigning unconsciousness, I was able to watch Mr. Raymond alter the combination. Then my confederate phoned. Remember the hoaxer's second message? I was left alone with the safe for a few minutes—enough for my purpose!"

"You—you scoundrel!" exclaimed Mr. Carson. "Why did you send that third message—offering to return the stolen rings?"

The visitor's manner changed imperceptibly as he stepped forward.

"Because," he said quickly, "I was determined to expose the trickster who led me into this. And now I will do so—"

A startled cry arose as the lights suddenly went out, plunging the

party into darkness. There came the sound of a scuffle, and just as abruptly the electric lights were clicked on again, revealing an amazing scene.

Slumped, white-faced, against the door, handcuffs on his wrists, was Currie, the footman! Beside him, one hand on the light switch, the other firmly grasping the footman's arm—was the old musician!

"I was waiting for you to make a break for it, Currie!" rapped a cool, familiar voice.

"Nunky!" shouted June, her eyes sparkling.

The old musician removed his white wig and bandages—revealing the face of Noel Raymond!

"Raymond! What does this mean?" gasped Mr. Carson.

"It means," said Noel grimly, "that Currie the footman was the brains behind this clever hoax. If you search him I'm sure you'll find the rings in his pockets. He meant to make his escape after the party."

"The old actor, whom I've locked in the room upstairs, was plainly the only person who could have discovered that combination. He broke down when I challenged him with the truth—but he refused to disclose the name of his accomplice. So I played this trick to make the scoundrel give himself away by making a bolt for it—as he tried to!"

"And to think that I suspected Horace!" exclaimed June, with a rueful smile, as she left the happy and relieved Madge to join her uncle. "I slipped badly there—"

"But you didn't," replied Noel, his eyes twinkling. "It was your theory that gave me my first clue! You see, the supposed Mortimer Dane also referred to his violin as a 'fiddle'—though it was only afterwards I remembered and put two and two together. That's why the 'hoaxer's' third message came from me!"

"I believe I see it now!" smiled June. "When you left that message, you banked on Mr. Carson assembling all the guests on the loggia."

"That's right," Noel agreed. "I didn't want Currie to suspect, and at the same time I wanted him there, too—so I got him to serve supper."

"He certainly didn't expect to be bowled out then," breathed June. "Oh, nunky, I'm so glad it wasn't Madge."

"So am I," smiled Noel, "but somehow I think this has cured her of playing hoaxes."

(End of This Week's Story.)

THE RIDDLE OF THE SEVEN SISTERS is the title of next Friday's story of Noel and June in America.