

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3rd}

Week
Ending
May 22nd,
1948.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



The CLUE of the Mermaid Bracelet

In This Week's Fine Detective Story June Finds Herself Under Arrest—
Written by PETER LANGLEY

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

"NUNKY! Aren't you coming for a swim?"
Wearing a dainty wrap over her swim-suit, June Gaynor ran gaily down the terrace steps and caught at her uncle's arm.

Noel Raymond, the famous detective, shook his head with a wry smile. "Sorry, June—I wish I could! The swimming-pool looks enticing, but I've an appointment with the district attorney about the activities of the 'Frisco gang.'"

June pulled a face. She and her famous uncle were staying at a popular coastal resort not far from Hollywood, where Noel was engaged on a special assignment.

A gang of jewel thieves, led by an elusive crook known as 'Frisco Jim,' had been defying the Californian police for several months—and Noel had been asked to co-operate.

His young partner found herself left very much on her own—though there was plenty to amuse her in the gay resort, where the villas of film stars and millionaires overlooked the sparkling bay.

"Oh, well—I suppose you must go," sighed June, "but I do wish you'd let me help."

"I'm afraid this case isn't a job for a girl," put in Noel. "Frisco Jim is a tough character, and he's lying pretty low at the moment—" He paused, staring curiously at her wrist. "Is that a new bracelet you're wearing?"

June laughed as she held up her hand for his inspection.

"I wondered if you'd notice it! I found it on the beach. The bathing attendant said it wasn't worth a dime—but it matched my costume, so I kept it."

There was a curious expression in Noel's eyes as he drew his young partner on to the flower-bordered terrace of the swimming club. To June's surprise he took out a

magnifying-glass and scrutinised the bracelet more closely.

It was obviously a cheap trinket, of imitation pink coral with a fanciful clasp, and June could not understand her uncle's interest.

"Anything wrong with it, nunky?" she asked teasingly. "It's not some priceless treasure in disguise—"

Noel smiled, shaking his head. "It's the kind of thing you might pick up at any bazaar," he replied, "but the large clasp—shaped like a mermaid—is rather unusual. I came across a similar piece of cheap jewellery in a house recently burgled by the 'Frisco gang—but it's probably a coincidence!"

He glanced suddenly at his watch. "I'll have to be hurrying, June!" he declared. "My appointment's at three, and it's a long drive into town. Have a good time."

June waved as he entered his car and drove off. Then she crossed the sunlit grounds, to mingle with the merry crowd of bathers.

She suddenly missed her footing on the slippery tiles surrounding the pool, and would have fallen heavily if a powerful hand had not gripped her arm in time.

"Say—you're heading for trouble, young lady!" drawled a masterful voice. "Lucky for you I happened to be around."

June stared at her rescuer—a tall, athletic young man in an immaculate linen beach suit. A pair of keen grey eyes looked sardonically into hers.

He waved aside her breathless thanks.

"All right—don't attract attention!" he said curtly. "This is yours, I guess. I spotted it as it slipped from your wrist. You'd better take more care of it in future—or there'll be trouble!"

June flushed at his peremptory tone, as he snapped the coral bracelet more securely on her wrist.

"I don't understand—" she started.

"Surely it's clear enough," he interrupted quietly. "We can't afford to take risks! You should have contacted me as soon as you arrived."

Bewildered, June was about to make a retort, when she noticed the direction of the other's glance.

He was looking meaningfully at the mermaid clasp on her bracelet!

The girl detective caught in her breath sharply, her thoughts racing. She suddenly remembered Noel's interest in that unusual clasp. Was it possible that it had some connection with her uncle's dangerous quest—and that this young man had mistaken her for its former owner?

Daringly June decided to test her theory.

"Say—how did you recognise me?" she asked, with the faintest trace of an American accent.

"My dear girl—I didn't!" rejoined the other coolly. "This"—he touched the bracelet—"was quite sufficient to prove that Ted sent you as I ordered. But we've wasted enough time as it is! Feel fit for the job?"

"Fine!" gulped June. "Then we'll get to work!"

Her thoughts were in a whirl as he led her from the pool. By a strange trick of fate this purposeful young man believed her to be someone he was expecting. That someone must still be in the area somewhere, but June decided recklessly to keep up the bluff—in order to discover his game!

Disarmingly she looked up into her companion's face.

"I guess I'm sorry about this appointment," she said. "I didn't realise it was so urgent—"

"That's all right!" The other grinned. "I was a bit annoyed at first, but I can forgive a charming girl who's as clever at her work as you are. By the way"—he winked meaningfully—"what name are you using?"

The girl detective hesitated.

"Just call me June!" she said daringly.

"O.K.—June!" He nodded. "I'm

Jim to you—Jim Ferris. And now"—his tone became suddenly crisp—"how soon will you be ready?"

June made a quick decision. "As soon—as soon as I'm changed, I guess!"

"Say—that's talking! I'll meet you with the car in half an hour's time—and mind you're not late!"

In spite of his smile, there was an unmistakable command behind his tone and for an instant June's confidence faltered as she watched him stroll away.

She had let herself in for something now! If only Noel had been here—but it was no use worrying. The girl detective was on her mettle.

She changed into an attractive frock, completing her toilet in record time. Carrying a light coat, she made her way to the car park and looked round anxiously.

Supposing the young man grew suspicious and failed to keep his appointment—

But a smart grey coupé pulled up at the kerb and the debonair Jim Ferris threw open the door, beckoning with a smile.

"I guess you're punctual, June!" he murmured as she slipped into the seat beside him, her pulses racing. "And we've no time to lose!"

He steered the car deftly out of the crowded car park and drove off fast. For some time June said nothing, bracing herself for whatever was to come.

"Where are we going?" she asked suddenly.

The car pulled up outside a block of smart office buildings.

"Right here!" said the young man, "Feeling nervous?"

"Why should I be?" countered June breathlessly.

"I guess not—with your experience!"

He assisted her from the car and led the way to the block, unlocking a frosted-glass door.

"Here's the office—and the stuff in the top drawer. I guess you know what to do. Whatever happens, you've got to keep your nerve—savvy?"

"I guess so," said the girl detective, with a coolness she did not feel as she stared around her.

"Then I'll be right back!" declared the young man; and the door closed behind him. The key turned in the lock.

A momentary panic seized June when she found herself alone, but she mastered it quickly. It was too late now to draw back. And this was her chance to solve the intriguing mystery!

The office was smartly furnished, but gave the appearance of having been rarely used. It was extraordinarily neat and orderly—the only exception being a bunch of keys that hung from the top drawer of a desk.

June remembered what Jim Ferris had said. Her pulses racing, she crossed, unlocked the drawer and drew it open.

What would she find? And what was she supposed to do with whatever was in the drawer?

"Oh!" June couldn't prevent the gasp of utter amazement. Slowly, hesitatingly, she lifted from the open drawer a thick wad of five-dollar bills!

Dazed, June stared at the money. What was she supposed to do with it? Was it counterfeit—that she had to circulate?

She held a note up to the light and carefully examined it. Then her eyes widened, for it was genuine enough. What did this all mean?

And then a key grated in the lock of the door behind her. She whirled as the door was flung wide.

Jim Ferris stood there, his handsome face sternly accusing—and behind him loomed a burly police officer.

"That's the girl, officer!" rapped the young man. "She persuaded me to give her a lift—and stole my office keys. We've caught her red-handed, robbing my desk!"



JUNE—SUSPECTED CROOK

Horried, June recoiled as the policeman took a step towards her. Too late she realised that the engaging Jim Ferris had, for some extraordinary reason, enticed her into a cunning trap!

But even as she whirled on him, eyes blazing, her indignant outburst was frozen on her lips.

For, unmistakably, the young man had given her a warning wink behind the policeman's back!

An incredible suspicion dawned on June. He had told her to keep her nerve—whatever happened! Had this whole affair been staged as part of an amazing plot? It was obvious that Jim Ferris was expecting her to play up.

"Better come quietly!" snapped the police officer, his hand falling on her shoulder.

June hesitated, then all her detective instincts rose uppermost. There was one way to discover what was behind this amazing bluff—and she took it.

She gave a despairing shrug. "O.K., officer!" she said. "It looks like a fair cop. But I'd like a word with Mr. Ferris before we go."

"Make it snappy, then!" grunted the policeman, releasing her and blocking the doorway with his burly frame.

June crossed over to the young man.

"Say, Mr. Ferris—must you go through with this charge?" she asked pleadingly, as she drew him aside. Then, in a swift undertone, she added: "Am I playing my part correctly—doing what you want?"

The young man's eyes gleamed approvingly.

"You're doing fine—just as planned," he muttered. "Keep it up! Contact Mimi—and get the dope on the house with red shutters. Nuff said!"

June's heart missed a beat. She was getting warmer! There was some strange plot afoot, and she believed it was connected in some way with Noel's mission.

Her only hope of unravelling the mystery was to continue with her daring bluff—even though it meant arrest!

She turned to the stolid policeman. "I—I guess it's no use, officer. Let's go!"

A police car was waiting outside, and June was led into it beneath the curious stares of the passers-by.

Her thoughts were racing as she took out her notebook, swiftly jotting down the young man's last message.

Who was Mimi? Apparently a member of the gang! But where was the girl—and how could she contact her? And what of the house with red shutters?

The police car sped through the gay, thronged streets of the holiday resort—and June, catching a glimpse of the sparkling sea and the merry crowds, almost wondered if she were dreaming.

But she was brought sharply to earth as the car swung into the entrance of the police station.

Firmly grasping her arm, her burly escort led her into a white-walled office, with barred windows overlooking the sea.

"Caught her red-handed, chief!" announced the policeman, addressing the officer behind the desk.

The latter looked piercingly at the attractive young prisoner.

"Name?" he demanded.

"Sadie—to you, chief!" replied June coolly.

The other frowned. June bit her lip, feeling suddenly nervous under that steely glance; and just then an inner door opened, to admit a dark-haired girl carrying a tea-tray.

By her neat uniform she was obviously a prisoner, engaged on light duties. Her eyes were lowered, and she appeared to take no notice of June

as she brought the tray across to the desk.

But the girl detective's heart gave a sudden jump: for on the other girl's wrist was a coral bracelet, with a clasp identical to her own!

An excited gleam flashed into June's eyes, and her mind worked like lightning. Was this Mimi? Had the arrest been arranged solely so that she could get certain information from this girl?

With a seemingly clumsy movement she knocked against the tray, upsetting its contents over the floor.

"Say—I guess I'm sorry!" she apologised, bending hastily to assist the startled girl.

"Mimi?" she whispered. "The house with red shutters—"

The girl started violently, darting a swift glance at the bracelet on June's wrist.

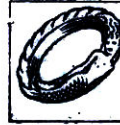
"O.K.," she breathed. "To-night, at six. Watch for the hamburger sandwich and coffee for supper!"

Blankly June stared at her, wondering if she had heard aright—but she had no time to ask questions. There was a knock at the door as a policeman announced a visitor.

"All right, Hennessey—show him in," jerked the officer. "And take that girl to the cells!"

Then June heard an incredulous ejaculation.

"June!" Standing in the doorway, his eyes narrowed in blank amazement, was—Noel Raymond himself!



THE HOUSE WITH RED SHUTTERS

Uncle Noel—here!

Her face pale, June encountered her uncle's incredulous stare. The dramatic encounter had taken her completely by surprise—and it was plain that Noel, here in connection with his latest case, was equally astounded.

"Say, Mr. Raymond," interjected the surprised police officer, "do you know this girl?"

Noel's lips moved—but frantically June interrupted, before he could speak. She knew that the girl crook, Mimi, was watching—listening. The whole success of her daring masquerade was at stake.

"I guess there's some mistake," she drawled, meeting Noel's stare unwinkingly. "I've never seen this guy in my life before!"

In the pause that followed her denial, the famous detective seemed to make an effort to pull himself together.

His keen blue eyes looked into hers, and June tried desperately to flash him a signal.

Abruptly, he turned to the officer. "What is this girl charged with?" he demanded, a trifle huskily. "I—I thought I recognised her—but perhaps I'm mistaken."

The officer read the charge from his book, and Noel started.

"Look here," he protested, "are you sure you're not making a blunder—"

"I guess not!" cut in the other, with a slight frown. "We don't make mistakes like that out here, Mr. Raymond! Besides, the girl admitted the theft when she was confronted with the evidence. She's a tricky customer—and the sooner she's locked away, the better!"

Noel looked swiftly across at June, but she smiled back at him with composure. She was toying with a pencil, doodling on a scrap of paper.

"It was a fair cop, Mr. Raymond!" she drawled. "You needn't lose any sleep about me. I guess your name seems familiar."

"Really?" inquired Noel, speaking with an effort.

"Sure—I remember now! You're the famous English 'tec, aren't you?" June held out her hand with a disarming smile. "I'm sure glad to have met you, buddy!"

For a moment her hand touched Noel's and he felt the scrap of paper that was pressed into his palm.

(Please turn to the back page.)



Their School ON CASTAWAY ISLE

By RENEE FRAZER

SEEN FROM THE TREE TOP

TANIA, a jungle girl who had lived alone on Castaway Isle for many years, was thrilled when Mr. Barnard, in charge of a party of ship-wrecked 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. Events made her begin to doubt Gerry.

It seemed that her enemy was interested in an old book she possessed, and one day in school an intriguing map of the island was found concealed in the book.

"A MAP! I say, what fun!"
"A map of Castaway Isle! Do let me see, Tania!"
The jungle girl stared in bewilderment as they all crowded round her, eager for a glimpse of the thrilling new discovery.

Even Mr. Barnard's keen eyes held a glint of unusual excitement. He spread out the yellowed chart which had fallen from Tania's treasured book.

"Map?" repeated Tania, staring in some puzzlement at the wriggly lines and queer marks on the curious picture. "But that—that is not my island. Tania sees no trees or rivers, nor her animal friends who walk in the jungle."

A ripple of laughter in the little school was quickly checked by Mr. Barnard, though there was a twinkle in his eyes.

"You don't understand, Tania," he explained. "This isn't an actual picture. These lines show the shape of your island as you would see it if you were a bird. These green marks show the trees; the brown ones the hills. This"—his pencil hovered and touched the paper—"this is the beach where we landed, and here is the stream that runs near the camp."

Tania's eyes lit up as, with quick understanding, she grasped the idea. "Please!" she breathed, holding out her hand for the pencil. "Tania show you!"

For a moment she stared at the map, her forehead puckered with concentration. Then, confidently, she commenced to add a few lines of her own.

"Tania's home!" she announced, making a tiny drawing close to the stream.

Gerry bent forward curiously to look at the map, but Dave edged quickly between him and the desk. There was a momentary scuffle and exchange of hostile looks, quickly checked as Mr. Barnard stared sharply towards them.

Engrossed in her task, Tania noticed nothing amiss.

"I say, what are you drawing now?" chuckled Pat Saunders, as the jungle girl made an upright stroke, with a whirl at the top and a black dot in the centre.

"That is Tania's special tree, where she pick fruit for Mr. Sam to cook," explained the jungle girl gravely.

"And—the dot?" inquired Mr. Barnard, his lips twitching.

"That"—a roguish gleam crept into Tania's eyes—"that is Tania, keeping watch on her friends."

A burst of laughter greeted this, and Gerry whistled in mock dismay.

"I say, Tania, we'll have to mind our p's and q's!" he teased.

The jungle girl looked steadily into his handsome, smiling face.

"Tania not understand p's and q's," she replied simply. "For many moons Tania watch from her tree, lonely for friends. Then, one day, great ship come with many friends, and Tania's heart is glad."

"That's a nice way of putting it, Tania!" said Mr. Barnard, smiling.

"But—you're not lonely now?"

A slight shadow crossed the jungle girl's face.

"Tania not lonely, but sometimes she is sad. Sometimes she looks for friends, and thinks she sees an enemy—"

Her eyes flickered doubtfully towards Gerry.

"Come, come!" exclaimed Mr. Barnard, while there came a warm murmur of protest from the others. "You mustn't get ideas like that into your head, Tania. The trouble is you've lived far too long on your own, but we're going to alter all that."

"Hear, hear!" came an eager chorus.

"Why don't you come and live with us at the camp, Tania?" asked Pat eagerly. "We'd love to have you—you know that!"

"A good idea!" declared Gerry, grinning. "No enemies here, Tania. We'll help you move your home, lock, stock, and barrel. And then you can keep an eye on all of us, including Dave and me—"

"Thanks!" cut in Dave, flushing. "You might let Tania speak for herself."

But the jungle girl shook her head, her eyes rather wistful.

"Maybe—one day," she replied, meeting Pat's friendly smile. "But Tania has animal friends who would miss her. Not only Michi and Bimbo, but many others."

"Well, well!" put in Mr. Barnard cheerfully. "You know best, Tania. Meanwhile, we're going to do our best to solve the mystery surrounding you. You must have relatives living somewhere—possibly in England. As soon as we get the radio working on the ship, and can report what has happened, we'll pass on the news of your being here. Till then we'll have to content ourselves by exploring the island—"

His words were drowned by an excited chorus.

"Exploring! I say, sir," cut in Gerry, "that's a wheeze! When do we start?"

"Perhaps as soon as I've studied this map," declared Mr. Barnard, smiling, as he raised a hand to quell the eager clamour. "That is, if Tania will let me take charge of it?"

Tania nodded, realising the importance of this strange piece of paper.

"It will be safe with Mr. Barnard—like Tania's book," she replied simply. "But there are many paths in the jungle that Tania alone knows, and she will show them to her white friends—when they wish."

"Good for you, Tania!" exclaimed Tim Burchell, thumping her on the back. "You're a little sport!"

"Oh!" gasped the jungle girl, recovering her breath, a glimmer of laughter showing in her eyes as she rubbed her back. "To be a 'little sport' is not so good—for Tania."

There was a roar of laughter at Tim's expense, and the stout boy crimsoned, stammering his apologies.

It was useless after that to attempt to continue the lesson. Everyone wanted to talk about the map and the intriguing mystery surrounding the jungle girl.

Good-naturedly, Mr. Barnard gave in and, wiping the history questions off the blackboard, he gave a little talk on map-reading until the clang of the dinner-bell rang out.

Laughing and joking, they trooped out of the schoolhouse, Tania lingering for a moment to watch Mr. Barnard lock her precious book in the ship's safe and slip the map into his pocket.

"I'll study it this evening, Tania," he promised, "and maybe to-morrow we'll discuss an exploring trip across the island—with you as our guide."

Her mind filled with pleasurable, unaccustomed excitement, Tania joined the others in the camp clearing. There Sam Perkins had laid a sailcloth on the long trestle-table and rows of tin plates for the midday meal.

An appetising odour came from the cookhouse, where the handyman sailor was busily stirring the contents of a stewpot.

"Happy, Tania?" asked a voice beside her.

Tania looked up quickly, meeting Dave's grave smile. She nodded.

"Tania happy—because everyone so kind," she said. "Now she does not think of her enemy."

Dave eyed her strangely, but the question hovering on his lips was interrupted by the jungle girl's excited gasp. She was pointing.

"Mr. Sam has lost his eye!" she exclaimed.

"What?" demanded Dave, startled, as several of the others crowded round.

Then a broad grin crossed the boy's face, for Tania was pointing at the old brass telescope that Sam had left on a bench.

"I say, haven't you seen one of those before?" asked Dave. "I'll show you."

He picked up the telescope, adjusting the lenses, and showed Tania how to put it to her eye. At first she could see nothing except a blur as Dave focused it on the cookhouse; then a startled cry escaped her lips as a big red face seemed to fill the lens, and she saw Sam Perkins peering into the stewpot.

"Oh!" gasped Tania, dropping the telescope as though it had been red-hot, and glancing nervously towards the cookhouse.

But now Sam had receded miraculously into the distance, stewart and all. Tania gulped, meeting Dave's broad grin and hearing the chuckles of the others.

Timidly she picked up the telescope and ventured to look up at a tall tree. The result amazed and delighted her.

"Tania pick fruit without climbing now!" she declared. "Fruit come near to Tania by magic eye!"

Dave smilingly endeavoured to explain the principle of a telescope, and, though Tania was still puzzled, her ready wits grasped the general idea.

She was loath to part with the fascinating "eye" when the time came for her to leave, and Dave, amused by her interest, suggested that she asked Sam Perkins to let her borrow it for an hour or two.

To Tania's delight, the grizzled sailor raised no objections, and triumphantly she carried off the gleaming telescope—to spend an exciting afternoon in her jungle home, examining everything within sight through this new and exciting toy.

But, as the novelty wore off, more serious thoughts crept into her mind. The discovery of the map—the talk about her island—had come as a revelation to her. Till now she had accepted the island as her natural home, not able to imagine any other. But Mr. Barnard's suggestion that she might have come from some far-off land awakened new and exciting reflections.

Perhaps—perhaps this magical eye might help her to see that distant country!

Thrilled by the thought, Tania set off with the telescope and climbed her favourite tree. From its lofty branches she could see the beach, the lagoon, and the distant reef with the wrecked ship, still grounded, a faint wisp of smoke rising lazily from its galley.

Her heart beating quickly, Tania trained the telescope out to sea, hardly knowing what kind of land she expected to discover. What she actually saw was the distant reef, now seeming almost within a stone's-throw.

Accidentally she moved the telescope—and the wrecked steamer came clearly, sharply into focus.

Tania stiffened, clutching the telescope, mingled dismay and anger suddenly showing in her eyes.

For there were two figures on the deck of the ship, and one she recognised in a flash. It was Stanhope, the lanky mate—the man she had cause to hate and fear. He was standing near an awning, and his companion—a boyish figure wearing a khaki shirt—was partly hidden from Tania's view.

But what riveted the jungle girl's horrified gaze was the sheet of paper they held between them. Even at that distance, the powerful telescope revealed the yellow, crinkled sheet unmistakably.

It was the precious map—the map of her island! And the boyish figure whose back was towards her was either Gerry—or Dave!

CAUGHT BY HER ENEMIES



In her anger and dismay, Tania quite forgot the distance between herself and the ship.

"Give me the map!" cried the jungle girl angrily. "You are a thief—a thief!"

She snatched the telescope from her eye.

And then a little sob escaped her lips as the ship and reef swept into the distance, and the two figures on board became like two dark specks.

The telescope slipped from her fingers, crashing through the branches into the tangled undergrowth below.

The sun was sinking below the far horizon, and the brief, tropical twilight was creeping over the jungle. Soon—very soon—it would be dark.

But still Tania crouched there, her hands tightly clenched, her dark eyes smarting with angry tears.

Dave—or Gerry! One of those boys had stolen her precious map and taken it out to the ship to show to her enemy, the mate! But surely not Dave? Yet could it be handsome, smiling Gerry?

Gradually, into Tania's numbed mind crept the thought of action. Her first idea was to run to the camp—to tell Mr. Barnard. But suppose he was not there?

Her next daring thought was to make her way out to the ship. In her home-made canoe she had never ventured farther than the inland streams and lakes. One big wave would be sufficient to swamp the fragile craft; and, though Tania could swim like a fish, she knew that there were sharks in the lagoon!

She stared out to sea. The lagoon was calm this evening, though the great waves of the ocean rolled beyond the distant reef.

With reckless decision, Tania swung herself from the branches and raced to fetch her canoe.

Paddling swiftly, she brought it out into the narrow estuary where the stream poured its waters into the lagoon. Twilight had settled over the island, and the tiny canoe with its single occupant would scarcely be visible from the shore.

Tania swung her paddle fast and rhythmically, her fears forgotten in her anger.

Once her heart leapt as she saw a dark fin cut the surface of the lagoon, but the frantic splashing of her paddle sent the deadly shark veering on another course.

The canoe was within hailing distance of the reef now, and the great ship loomed above her, a few lights twinkling behind the portholes.

Tania heard distant, gruff voices and the clatter of crockery. The captain and the crew were at their evening meal.

For a moment the jungle girl's heart misgave her as the canoe grounded softly against the iron side of the ship. But the thought of her precious map, a determination to discover the identity of her treacherous enemy, brought back her courage.

Agile as a monkey, she scaled the ladder at the side of the ship and swung herself on to the deck. Except for a solitary lantern, the deck was in darkness.

But just then she heard heavy footsteps mounting the companion ladder.

Panic-stricken, Tania made a dive for the first available hiding-place—which happened to be the open door of the wireless cabin.

Not till she was inside did she realise that new terrors awaited her. A low humming came to her ears, and strange eyes glowed in the dark. Tania, who had never heard of a wireless valve, recoiled with a stifled cry, tripping over a chair and pitching to the floor of the cabin.

There came an ejaculation from the deck, and a figure loomed in the doorway.

"Who's there?" It was the voice of her enemy—Stanhope, the mate!

Too terrified to move, the jungle girl crouched in a corner as another figure appeared—a more slender figure. They spoke in undertones, obviously not wishing to be heard by the men below.

"You fool!" breathed the newcomer. "Why didn't you lock the door after you? If the captain finds out that—"

A boy's voice! Yet so husky and cautious that Tania could not recognise it.

The mate grunted impatiently. "Don't worry. He'll never guess. The men are all below. If anything's got into the cabin, it must be a stray gull or— Wait a minute!"

The dazzling glare of a torch shone into Tania's frightened eyes. There came a startled, incredulous gasp from the mate's companion as he grabbed the torch and clicked it off.

"It's that jungle girl!" snarled the mate. "Grab her!"

Footsteps crossed the cabin, but Tania was on her feet in a flash, and she fought like a young panther as a hand was clapped over her mouth.

A powerful arm lifted her from the ground, kicking and struggling. She felt something cold and hard pressing against her neck.

It was Dave's present to her—the nail-scissors that she had worn proudly on a cord ever since that day.

Hardly pausing to think, she snatched at them, using them as a weapon against her ruthless captor.

There was a sharp sound of tearing material, a stifled ejaculation, and the grip relaxed. With a desperate wriggle, Tania freed herself, diving past the mate and out on to the deck.

And now there came startled shouts from below, footsteps pounding up the companion-way.

Tania looked round frantically, not knowing who was her friend—who her enemy.

"Hey! What's going on here?" bellowed Captain Rawlins' deep voice.

"A stowaway, cap'n!" retorted the mate's voice harshly. "Caught her in the wireless cabin, up to some monkey tricks. Look, there she goes!"

Tania felt suddenly frightened—frightened of all these people who were racing in pursuit.

Her one thought now was to get back to her canoe. Desperately she rushed forward, only to pull up with a jerk and swerve as two burly seamen seemed to rise up out of the darkness before her.

With a little cry she evaded their outstretched arms and pounded on along the wooden deck.

Behind her Stanhope's harsh voice urged the seamen on, as he himself attempted to cut off her escape.

"Quickly, you fools, she's making for the rails. Bring lanterns, she mustn't get away!"

Lanterns swung in the darkness as a rush was made across the deck.

A slight, dusky figure was picked out for an instant in the glow of the lanterns—a figure balanced precariously on the ship's rail.

"After her!" bellowed the mate. "Don't let her escape!"

"Hold her, someone!" shouted Captain Rawlins, his face paling. "The lagoon's infested with sharks— Ah!"

He broke off with a horrified gasp as the desperate young figure leaped from the rail into the dark waters of the lagoon.



A SURPRISE FOR THE CASTAWAYS

"I say, Mr. Barnard, did you hear those shouts?" panted Tim Burchell, as he hurried up to the group surrounding the blazing

fire in the camp clearing. "I guess something's happening out there on the ship! I saw lights on the deck and a boat pulling out—"

Mr. Barnard started to his feet, dropping Tania's diary, which he had been studying by the cheerful glow of the fire.

"Eh—what's that, Burchell?" demanded the schoolmaster, reaching for his binoculars. "Shouts, you say, and a boat putting out at this time of the evening?"

He climbed a hillock, training his glasses on the distant reef.

There was a puzzled frown on his face when he returned.

"Everything seems quiet enough now, Burchell, but it's too dark to see clearly. Possibly it was a false alarm. Captain Rawlins would send word if anything was amiss. Which reminds me—I asked Dave to tell the captain about our plan to explore the island. Has anyone seen Dave recently?"

"Not for some time," replied Moyra Curtis, looking up from the novel she was reading. "He and Gerry went

(Please turn to the back page.)



Her Holiday WITH LING MIN YO

By DORIS BROOKES

THE OMINOUS POSTER

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

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

Min Yo was kidnapped by Ku Yi Tso, but Wong and Maureen were blamed for her disappearance. Disguised as a Chinese maid, Maureen managed, however, to rescue her Chinese friend and take her to Wong's junk.

Wong had then to go off on a mission connected with a strange jade tablet. Before he could return, Maureen and Min Yo were horrified to see Wong's junk captured by members of the Scarlet Dragon.

"WHAT are we going to do?"

Maureen echoed Min Yo's words as she lay there in the hollow, hoping desperately they would not be seen by their enemies. And truly it was a situation that daunted even her stout heart.

Wong's junk had been captured by the Scarlet Dragon organisation. And now a trap was being set—to capture them and Wong. They knew about it. But Wong—

Maureen caught in her breath. "Yo-Yo, we've got to warn Wong," she whispered.

"But we do not know where he is," Min Yo said worriedly.

"Then we've got to find him!" Suddenly Maureen saw what they must do. "We know he's gone to Luchin to see some learned old Chinese named Li San. Then that's where we must go, too. There is only the one road to Luchin, Yo-Yo?"

Min Yo nodded. Such a journey would be fraught with peril, but she realised Maureen was right. Wong must be found and warned.

"Crawl towards those rocks over there," Maureen hissed. "And whatever we do we mustn't be seen."

With fast-beating hearts, the two girls wriggled out of the hollow, taking advantage of every bit of cover, fearing that at any moment they would be spotted by the men hiding on the junk and in the rocks around the cavern.

But the luck was with them, and Maureen heaved a sigh of relief when at last they reached their objective. Now they would be safe from observation and, with a nod to her Chinese friend, Maureen led the way towards that narrow, winding road which would take them to Luchin.

"Is my disguise all right, Yo-Yo?" she asked, thankful that she was still dressed as a Chinese girl.

"Maureen make very sweet Chinese maid," Min Yo assured her. "But your handbag—that is very English."

Maureen gave a start, realising the truth of Min Yo's words.

"Goodness, you're right, Yo-Yo. But I must hang on to it."

It contained all the possessions left to her—she, who had arrived in China with half a dozen loaded suitcases. But everything else, of course, had been left at the House of Ling. And in the handbag, too, was the precious jade tablet.

Hastily she tucked the bag out of sight under her Chinese blouse, and even as she did so a party of coolies appeared along the road, making their way to the rice fields.

"Do not stare at them, Maureen," hissed Min Yo. "Remember you are Chinese girl."

Maureen was only too glad to avert her face as the coolies passed. The search for them would be going on all over the province of Kanloo, and here the Scarlet Dragon organisation was powerful.

The coolies passed on, chanting a native folk song. Maureen and Min Yo continued on their way to Luchin—a nerve-racking journey they would never forget.

Coupled with the fear of discovery and capture was the anxiety of wondering what had happened to Wong. All the time their gaze was fixed on the winding road ahead, hoping to see him suddenly appear.

But he never came. He had said he would return by dawn—and now it was midday. Never before had Maureen known him to fail to keep his word, and the realisation deepened her anxiety. Had danger befallen Wong?

At last the high wall surrounding Luchin came in sight, and the two girls made their way along the dusty road towards the gateway. They looked at each other, and though neither spoke each knew what the other was thinking.

Great as had been their danger so far, that danger would become intensified once they passed into the crowded streets of Luchin. But their steps did not falter.

They reached the gateway. And then, just as they were about to pass through it, Min Yo suddenly stopped, her startled gaze fixed on a poster which had been pasted on the wall.

"What's the matter, Yo-Yo? What is it?"

Maureen, aware of her friend's agitation, stared at the poster. Bit it was printed in Chinese and though she spoke and understood the language, she could not read or write it.

"It is a police notice offering a large reward for the capture, or information, leading to the capture, of Wong!" Min Yo whispered. "And—and it also gives your description, Maureen, calling you his English girl accomplice!"

Maureen's heart gave a violent lurch, and in her consternation she forgot the handbag which she had been holding concealed under her blouse.

A moment later, as she moved her hands, the handbag slipped down and fell to the ground.

With a horrified gasp Maureen

swooped down to pick it up. If anyone saw that very English-looking handbag—

Sudden panic gripped her then as she realised that it had been seen. From less than a dozen yards away a pair of slit-like eyes stared at the handbag, and then at Maureen!



NEWS OF WONG

The owner of that pair of eyes was an elderly Chinese who was baking small cakes on a portable oven set on a table just in

front of him.

Swiftly Maureen grabbed up the bag, but she knew that she was too late. The damage had been done. That man had seen it—as he must have seen that poster announcing that the police were searching for an English girl who was wanted as the accomplice of the notorious river pirate, Wong!

He would connect one with the other—and then the hue and cry was going to start.

Min Yo, alarmed by this unexpected catastrophe, turned as if expecting Maureen to make a bolt for it.

Maureen was on the point of doing so, but something made her stop.

The roadside cake vendor had quickly picked up a portion of cake mixture and begun shaping it in his hands. Then, still looking at Maureen, he placed it on the grille over the glowing charcoal.

Maureen's blue eyes widened in amazement.

That cake had been kneaded into the shape of a crescent moon!

"Wait, Yo-Yo!" she hissed in sudden excitement. "Look! That's the sign of Wong!"

Was it Wong himself who sat there, in another of his disguises? She shuffled forward, the handbag again concealed within the folds of her blouse.

"Your cakes look very tempting, O venerable one," she murmured in Chinese.

"Which one do you like, O stranger to Luchin?" replied the man.

Maureen knew now that he wasn't Wong. But surely he must know of Wong, for his action in shaping that particular cake had been deliberate.

"It is this one that I like, O maker of cakes," she said, pointing to the crescent-shaped one.

"You seek a friend?" asked the man, his face still expressionless.

"We seek a friend," Maureen replied. "Have you news of him?"

They spoke in undertones, so that even Min Yo, standing close beside Maureen, could hardly hear what was being said. People were jostling by, and the need for caution could not be exaggerated when a chance word, overheard, might betray everything.

"Stranger must try humble cakes before making purchase," the man said aloud, then added sibilantly: "Our friend arrive too late to meet Li San, and he go in search of him."

Maureen and Min Yo were nibbling at the tasty rice cakes which the vendor had proffered them.

Now the reason for Wong's non-

appearance became explained. Li San was the learned Chinese whom Wong had said would be able to translate the copy of the message he had taken from the jade tablet.

"Wong return to Luchin when mission accomplished," went on the roadside vendor. "You are to wait here until he comes. Is that not why you are here? Did you not receive the message?"

Maureen looked startled. "We have received no message. We came because Wong's junk was captured by the Scarlet Dragon. We had to flee."

The vendor's eyes flickered. "Messenger, too, must have been captured," he said. "But he is to be trusted and will not speak. Go you to the House of Soo, in the Street of Washing, where you will find lodgings and be safe until Wong returns. Everything is to your satisfaction, O maids who have honoured humble self with your custom?" he added, rising and handing a bag of cakes to Maureen with a sweeping bow.

"Everything is to our satisfaction, O maker of delicious cakes," Maureen solemnly replied, also bowing.

Min Yo bowed, too, handing him some money. All three bowed yet again, and then the two girls made their way through the jostling crowds, moving in the direction of the Street of Washing, which the roadside pastrycook had indicated.

"News at last, Yo-Yo!" Maureen breathed. "It was a lucky break we decided to come here. Goodness, I nearly spoil everything when I dropped that handbag. Mustn't blunder like that again. We're right in the lion's den here, and we've got to be on our toes all the time. You're not afraid?"

"Yo-Yo not afraid when she is with Maureen," the Chinese girl replied bravely. "But walk behind me—that is the custom!"

Maureen nodded, dropping behind Min Yo and imitating that girl's queer shuffling gait. The slightest slip might betray them. Would her disguise continue to stand the test? Could she pass muster as a Chinese girl?

She saw another of those posters, offering a reward for her and Wong's capture. The Chinese authorities, as well as the Scarlet Dragon organisation, would be on the look-out for her, and it was fortunate that the description given on the posters was that of her as an English girl.

Min Yo was thinking rather similar thoughts as she bobbed along through the bustling, chattering crowds, looking for the Street of Washing.

She was as much a hunted girl as Maureen. The temptation came to her to go to the authorities and reveal who she was—for surely they must know that she had been kidnapped from Puchow?

But then Min Yo shook her head, knowing she dared not take the risk. Only too well she was aware of the power of Ku Yi Tso, the secret leader of the Scarlet Dragon. He would be informed if she did go to the authorities—and that would be disastrous for both her and Maureen.

"Are we nearly there yet?" came Maureen's whispering voice. "You have some queer names in your country, Yo-Yo. What is this Street of Washing—"

"It will be where the laundries in Luchin are situated," Min Yo replied. "The laundries! Goodness, I didn't think of that. So we're going to lodge in a laundry—"

She broke off, bumping into Min Yo in front of her. Looking round, she had not noticed that her friend had come to a sudden halt.

"Kotow!" hissed Min Yo, her voice suddenly hoarse with alarm.

"Eh? What's that—"

"Do as I do! Do as everybody is doing. Look who comes!"

Everybody was prostrating themselves to the ground. For coming along the dusty, cobble street was a magnificent palanquin borne by eight bearers, four in front and four at the rear. It was preceded by guards with

staves and whips, hustling back the crowd.

"Make way! Make way! Pay homage to your exalted governor!"

Maureen flopped down on her hands and knees, tucking her face out of sight.

Approaching was Ku Yi Tso himself, the Great One of the Scarlet Dragon. Ku was in Luchin! Did it mean that he suspected Min Yo was here?

In an agony of suspense Maureen crouched there. She heard the tramp of feet, the faint creak of the carrier poles of the palanquin.

And then it had gone past, and tremblingly, cautiously, Maureen looked up.

"Come on, Yo-Yo!" she hissed. "The sooner we find the House of Soo in the Street of Washing the better! And once we get inside it we'd better stay there. The whole place will be buzzing with Scarlet Dragon men now that Ku has come here!"



HER DISGUISE IN DANGER

Min Yo nodded gravely, realising the truth of Maureen's remark. The unexpected arrival of Ku Yi Tso in Luchin brought home to them to the full the extent of their danger.

They must find refuge—and stay hidden until Wong returned.

"This way," Min Yo whispered. "We are nearly there."

Maureen herself realised that a few moments later. There could be no mistaking the Street of Washing.

Alongside a branch stream from the river was a wide open space with low buildings on three sides of it. A forest of bamboo poles rose from the ground, with line upon line of washing flapping in the breeze from a network of wires and ropes.

Everywhere there was washing. It hung from the lines and was spread out on the grass. And then there were piles more waiting to be dried, and yet more piles being trundled out in baskets from the buildings which clustered around that open space.

"Certainly is 'washing day'!" Maureen murmured, with a fleeting smile. "But let's find the House of Soo."

Min Yo was already looking round for the sign which would indicate the laundry they sought. She found it and led the way down a narrow avenue between two lines of washing, Maureen trailing behind her.

They came to a low, rambling wooden building, with upturned eaves in the style of China. Seated at the doorway was a plump Chinese with a shiny face. His chair was turned at an angle, so that he could see the workers inside the building and at the same time keep a watchful eye on those who were hanging up the clothes outside.

Min Yo bowed. Maureen faithfully copied her.

"Greetings, O Soo. We seek lodgings and have been told to come to your honourable abode," Min Yo said.

Soo beamed, heaved himself out of the wicker chair, into which he just fitted, and led the two girls to the house at the side of the laundry.

He showed them a room—small, barely furnished, but very clean. Maureen gave Min Yo a nudge, nodding.

Min Yo murmured that they would be delighted to occupy lodgings with such a marvellous view. Maureen smiled faintly, eyeing the vista of fluttering washing outside. But it hid the house from the road—and that was what they wanted.

Then came the matter of payment. Both girls had money with them—ample for a few days' stay here until Wong returned. But Soo waved his flabby hands.

"Miserable Soo honoured. No payment. Two maids stay—and work in humble laundry!" And he beamed benevolently, but his eyes blinked craftily. "No work in laundry, then no lodge in house."

The two girls looked startled, taken

aback by Soo's unexpected bargaining. But they knew they would have to accept. It was vital that they should find refuge.

Again Maureen nodded, and Min Yo bowed, accepting Soo's offer. Soo shook hands with himself, indicating his satisfaction, and told them that they would start work the following morning.

And so the two girls found a new hiding-place. But they knew they must not relax; must always be on the alert. Outside in the busy streets of Luchin the hunt for them would be going on relentlessly.

That was brought home to them the following morning, after they had started work in the laundry. Filing in with the rest of the employees—mostly girls, with one or two men overseers—they were shown to a couple of wash-tubs.

First the tubs had to be filled with hot water, carried in heavy buckets. Then Maureen was given the job of scrubbing, while Min Yo had to do the rinsing.

It was hard work, for Soo was a hard taskmaster. That bland expression of his, as he watched from the doorway in his usual chair in its usual position, was deceptive. And he kept an especial eye on Maureen and Min Yo, for though he was not taking money from them he meant to get all the work out of them he could during their stay.

Steam filled the place, and the heat became stifling. But Maureen went on scrubbing, and Min Yo went on rinsing. A low murmur of voices came from the girls working around them.

Suddenly Maureen started as she heard the name of Wong mentioned. One of the girls was saying that she wished she could capture the river pirate so that she could earn the reward and not have to work in the laundry any more.

At once there was a chattering murmur of agreement. Another voice proclaimed its owner's intention of looking for the English girl.

"I hear she is wearing the clothes of a Chinese," the voice added, "and she is believed to have come to Luchin!"

"That is so," said another. "But is it not also true that an English girl will not be able to imitate our ways? Surely one will soon see her? I, too, keep close watch."

With a gulp, Maureen looked up and met her eyes. In that moment she had a panicky feeling that the girl was going to penetrate her disguise.

But, after a searching look at the stranger, she turned away; it had been a narrow squeak.

If the girl had but one tiny cause to suspect—

Maureen, already hot from the steamy atmosphere, felt herself grow hotter. Soo was listening. He didn't mind the girls talking—as long as they didn't talk about him or let it interfere with their work.

He peered at Maureen. In her agitation she had stopped scrubbing. So now she was suspected of being in Luchin—and in disguise!

She became aware of Soo's beady glance upon her and began scrubbing again. Min Yo came across to take more clothes for rinsing. But suddenly the Chinese girl stopped, a look of horror dawning in her face.

"Your hands, Maureen!" she said in an agonised whisper.

Maureen stared down at her hands—and then she herself received a shock. The stain which she had put on to give them a yellowish tinge, to make them look Chinese, had been washed off in the soapy water. Now they were white, while the upper part of her arms were still yellow.

If anyone saw those white hands she would immediately be betrayed as an English girl.

Panic possessed her. Terrified, she looked around—to see Soo coming towards her.

Will Maureen be able to bluff through? Very tense moments await you in next Friday's instalment.



NEWS OF PETER

GAYE LEAMAN was helping Peter Kirby, a young secret agent known as Mr. X, to outwit an elusive personality called the Count, and his beautiful niece, Roma Vadell. After many thrilling adventures Gaye was captured and held as a hostage on a lonely island, from where the Count intended to flood Britain with forged bank notes and clothing coupons. In the room where she was a prisoner Gaye had to listen to the Count telling her that nothing could stop his plans now, especially as it seemed that Peter had perished in a storm. At that moment there came the sound of whistling outside the house, a whistling that suggested that Peter was still alive—and on the Count's heavily guarded island.

GAYE leant against the wall, so rigid, so tensed in her intent listening that it was almost painful. There—it came again! A gay little tune, drifting in through the small window, just audible above the boom of heavy waves smashing on the rocks. A tune from the night—a tune she recognised. "The tune Peter often whistled," she whispered shakely. "Can—can it be—"

The effect on the Count and Roma was remarkable. Roma's crimson lips had fallen apart; a strange grey pallor had crept into the Count's cheeks.

In the doorway stood Carl Mennin, huge in a belted raincoat. Slowly the Count turned his head. He stared at the tie still dangling from Mennin's podgy fingers as if to reassure himself. "It can't be!" The words hissed from his lips. "X has died—he perished in the storm—"

With a strangely radiant glow on her face, Gaye moved from the wall. The whistling had stopped now, only the roar of the waves, the thrum of wild wind could be heard. But somehow she felt hope, glorious hope. "I—I believe it is Mr. X!" she cried challengingly. "He's alive! He whistled to tell me he's here—to reassure me! It's Peter—"

"Silence!" The Count whirled on her, his long hands quivering in rage. "You young fool! It can't be! X is dead!"

His icy reserve was gone, and with it Gaye lost some of her fear of him. With blazing eyes she faced him. "You're afraid!" she cried. "You're afraid that he's alive—"

For a second she thought the Count would strike her. But with a great effort he regained control of himself. His pale-skinned features hardened and set.

"This is absurd," he said coldly.

"Fuss about nothing. That could not have been X whistling. It was one of my men. X has drowned—we have proof of it. Had he not drowned he could not possibly have passed among my men undetected!"

His normal, metallic tone, his curt, confident words, seemed to dash the hope and excitement in Gaye's heart. It was true. How could Peter have survived the perils besetting him? Impossible indeed, it seemed; and yet—

The Count crossed to the window. He bent his silver head out into the night blackness and called sharply: "Below there! Who was whistling? The nearest man answer!"

A pause. Then back on the wind came a distant shout. "Hulme, I think, Count. From Post No. 10. He's always humming and whistling—"

"Check, then!" commanded the Count. "I will take reports from the control-room."

He turned and stared at Gaye with his ice-blue eyes. "You hear? That was one of my men! Your hopes are groundless and you shall come with me to hear it proved!"

He signalled to Mennin and Roma. They seized Gaye by the arms and hustled her towards the door, the Count preceding them.

Gaye did not resist. The quivering joy and hope that had suddenly flooded her whole being was slowly dredging away. Her heart sank. Clearer thought showed her that it was surely just a coincidence that Peter's tune had been whistled.

Very pale, she was marched along a stone corridor, Roma clutching her arm with unnecessary force. The Count opened a metal door.

The room beyond was small, with one window. From the ceiling blazed a powerful electric light. Beneath it was a desk, on top of which rested what seemed to be a telephone exchange with a microphone and loudspeaker attachment.

Seated before it was the bearded, bird-like Simon Brown. Tersely the Count ordered him from the room.

He locked the door behind him and pocketed the key.

"You may release Miss Leaman now," he said coldly. He crossed to the instrument on the table, picked up the microphone, pushed down one of a row of switches, and spoke: "Control calling the cave. Report."

A voice answered briskly from the loudspeaker: "Cave answering. All in order here. Loading ahead of time. We shall be ready before dawn."

The Count turned to Gaye. "You heard that answer, Miss Leaman? Immediately the storm has abated my fleet of boats will leave with forgeries to flood Britain! And now—"

He smiled with unspeakable

ASSISTANT TO THE SECRET AGENT

By DOROTHY PAGE

malignancy. his icy calm fully regained. "Now we shall make sure of the whistler, eh, Miss Leaman? It is unfortunate that your foolish hopes must be crushed!"

He abruptly threw down every one of the switches. "Control here," he said into the microphone. "All posts report on man who was whistling three minutes ago. Report as I order. No. 1?"

Clearly through the loudspeaker came the answer: "Did not hear whistle, Count. All well here. No alarms."

"Off to you, No. 1. No. 2?"

"Nothing to report. Did not hear whistle."

So it went on down to No. 7. Post No. 7 answered: "All well here, Count. Whistling came from Hulme at Post No. 10."

A tiny groan left Gaye. "Report, Post No. 8—"

"Whistling from Hulme at No. 10." The Count was smiling thinly. Post No. 9 answered the same. The whistling was certainly from Hulme at No. 10.

"Control calling Post No. 10. Hulme, you will explain to me why you were whistling when my orders for all posts is silence!"

There was no reply from Post No. 10.

"Post No. 10, answer!" commanded the Count again. "Was it you who whistled?"

The answer came, but not in words—just a soft little chuckle.

The Count stiffened. His hand clenched in anger on the microphone. "Hulme," he rasped, "are you mad? Answer me! Did you whistle?"

Gaye was rigid. That chuckle! Surely—oh, was it—was it—

Very faintly, very clearly, a voice came from the loudspeaker: "Yes, my dear Count, I whistled—and friend Hulme is unconscious! Did you really think I was dead—your old friend Mr. X?"

THE HUNT FOR MR. X



"Peter!"

The single word burst from Gaye's lips in a breathless cry of sheer wonder and glorious relief. Her eyes glowed like stars. It was Peter—he was alive! She wanted to laugh and sob at the same moment.

And he had heard her cry, for over the loudspeaker: "Gaye! You're there, old thing! You heard my whistle? Make you feel better?"

Miraculously his tone was gay and whimsical as of old. "Oh, Peter!" choked Gaye. "Oh, Peter!"

"I'm coming for you, Gaye. Hear that, Count?" Clear came the vibrant challenge. "I'm coming for Gaye!"

The loudspeaker abruptly went quiet and the Count moved.

His knuckles were blue-white where they gripped the microphone. With one fierce gesture he flicked up Post

No. 10 switch and then smashed down all the others.

"Count, calling all posts!" he rasped. "X is alive—at Post No. 10! Converge on No. 10! Shoot at sight—shoot to kill. No mercy! Get X!"

The venom in his cold-blooded command was chilling.

"You hear that, Miss Leaman?" The Count whirled. "No mercy for X now. The fool! He can't escape! He surprised that blunderer Hulme, but there are thirty men of mine out there in the night—all armed! Thirty against one. He has no chance!"

Gaye stared back, breathing fast. Peter—one against thirty. No chance—no warning—

A surge of wonderful courage sent her suddenly leaping forward. She was past Mennin and Roma before they could move; snatched at the control set before the Count had a suspicion of her intention.

The switch of Post No. 10 went down under her plunging finger.

"Peter—look out!" she cried. "Everyone's ordered to attack Post 10. They're armed. Look out—oh!"

She reeled back under a lightning sweep of the Count's arm.

"Roma—Mennin, is this how you watch her? Bind her—quickly. I will take no more chances."

In a moment Mennin was holding her helpless.

In cold silence the Count watched while Roma bound her legs—then her arms. Breathless, Gaye at last lay still on the floor, trying to meet the Count's bleak gaze without tremor or fear.

"For that act, Miss Leaman," he said calmly, "you will have the pleasure of lying there, waiting—until the report comes through, as come it will—that Mr. X has been finally exterminated."

HOURS had dragged slowly by.

It was very quiet in the control-room of the Count's headquarters. The wind, sighing in through the half-open window, stirred the dark red curtains. The boom of heavy seas came in on the wind. But the fierceness was dying out of the storm as the night passed.

The glaring white light shone down on stillness.

The Count sat at his desk, waiting, staring without expression at the loudspeaker—calm, deadly.

Mennin had gone, ordered to join the hunt.

Roma Vadell was leaning back in a chair, smoking cigarette after cigarette, occasionally glancing with narrowed green eyes towards one corner of the room, where Gaye, bound, helpless, lay back against the wall. She waited, too, listening, a terrible anxiety almost crushing her.

Five minutes after her daring attempt to warn Peter, a burst of shots had sounded somewhere on the night-bound island. A report had come through from one of the Posts.

A man had been injured—but not Peter. When the attack had centred on Post 10, the man Hulme had been found unconscious, and the daring young secret agent had vanished.

One man had fired at a fleeting shadow—and it had turned out to be one of the gang!

Immediately the Count, cold as ice then, had given fresh orders.

"This hide-and-seek and shooting in the dark will cease. X moves like a cat at night. If you play his game you will be attacking one another. And so—every man will lie low, and only shoot at anything that moves. Thus we must get him! If he does not move—he cannot act, and at dawn he will be revealed!"

Since that order—nothing!

Time dragged on. The Count never moved. Cigarette ash littered the floor about Roma's chair. Gaye grew stiff and cramped.

Then with a suddenness that brought her heart to her mouth, two clear pistol shots rang out, high above the abating wind.

Roma sat up quickly. Gaye's eyes flashed to the Count. He had raised

the microphone, was looking at the loudspeaker, waiting.

A light flickered rapidly above Post No. 8 switch. The Count's long forefinger clicked down the switch. Instantly the loudspeaker brought in the voice of Simon Brown, hoarse and wildly excited:

"Count, we've got him! He tried to creep up on the Post. I got him twice. We've brought him in. He hasn't long, I think. He's trying to say something. What shall we do?"

Gaye fell limply back against the wall, shutting her eyes, trying to shut out those horrifying words. As in a dream she heard the Count click down all the switches, heard his voice going out: "All Posts—Control calling. All clear. X is finished! I'm coming out—"

And then, very faintly, bringing the tears stinging to her eyes, she heard over the loudspeaker Peter trying to call, weak but undaunted to the last: "Gaye—old thing—sorry—I failed—sorry—"

His voice trailed, and was cut out as the Count flung up the switches.

Gaye dropped her head and sobbed. Subconsciously she was aware that the Count had risen and crossed to the door; was aware, too, of the click of high heels as Roma, breathing rather agitatedly, followed.

The door slammed, and the key turned in the lock.

Footsteps hurried away. They sounded on the staircase, going down. And Gaye lay against the wall, numb. The minutes passed.

Peter—shot down! Peter, who had dared so much—for her. Never again to see him; that whimsical smile; never again to hear his laughing voice, the gay little whistle.

Strangely, it seemed to Gaye, that the whistle echoed softly in her ears now in imagination. She bit her lip to fight back the flow of tears. In that poignant moment her own position was forgotten.

Merry little tune. Peter's tune—Slowly, wonderingly, she lifted her head. Surely—she could actually hear that whistling? Surely it wasn't imagination? But it must be—must be! And yet—

A rustle at the window brought her head jerking round. The curtains were flapping with the wind. They parted abruptly. She nearly screamed.

And then a soft call! A sturdy figure appeared on the sill like a ghost from the night, ivy leaves drifting from his broad shoulders—a figure with unforgettable, rugged features who was—

Peter Kirby.



TRAPPED

Peter Kirby—clothes drenched, torn and muddled; hair unruly, face grimed—but a Peter, as he poised for a second on the sill and saw Gaye, whose grey eyes were still indomitable, lips curved in a tiny reckless smile.

In a flash he dropped to the floor.

"Gaye—old thing—"

"Peter! I—I—thought you were—"

She choked bewilderedly, then had to pause and stare at him again.

"But, Peter, I—I heard that man, Brown; I heard your voice saying—"

saying—

He smiled, half regretfully, half whimsically, as he knelt and swiftly began unbinding her wrists.

"Did it bluff you, too, Gaye? That wasn't Brown speaking. It was I! I was getting rather desperate. Time was passing; I had to get to you before dawn—yet to move meant trouble—"

He paused, watching her with deep concern.

"Gaye, you're all right? I've been worried stiff—"

"Oh, gosh, Peter, I'm feeling better—now you're here. When I thought—"

She gulped, then rushed on: "But tell me, Peter; I still don't understand."

He had freed one wrist now.

"While I'm freeing you I'll talk," he said quietly. "We've a few

minutes at least. You see, I was lying doggo near Post 10, which was unoccupied. I had to do two things—get the Count away from here—and make the gang relax so that I could move. So I fired off two shots from friend Hulme's gun, and then—as you know, I've encountered Simon Brown before. His voice isn't difficult to imitate—"

Gaye understood and gasped.

"So it was you who reported—"

"That I'd been shot—yes! Then I moved farther away from the microphone in the Post and spoke in my own voice. Sorry if that last bit upset you, Gaye," he added, "but I had to make the bluff a good one—to get the Count out, and so give me the chance to sneak up here."

He drew her other arm free, and steadily watched her as he reached for the ropes round her ankles.

"Gaye—no good pretending we're not in a tough spot—we are! We've no boat. And we've got to get out of here. That door's locked, obviously. But there's a chance we may be able to climb down the ivy before the alarm is raised. What happens afterwards—well, you'll have to trust in Uncle Peter. What about it? How's the nerve?"

"Anything you say, Peter," Gaye answered simply. "I'm not so scared now—honestly!"

"That's the spirit, Gaye!" His voice was light. "Why, Gaye, we'll beat 'em all yet, you and I—"

"Will you, Mr. X? I think not!"

The quiet, metallic voice broke into his words.

Gaye went rigid. Her gaze lifted. Over Peter's bent back she could see the door. Without a sound it had opened—and framed in the doorway, coat hanging cloak-like from his shoulder, one hand holding the key; the other his black ebony cane, was the tall still figure of the Count!

"At last, Mr. X! At last I have you!"

Peter slowly rose and turned.

"Well, well," he said gently, "my old friend, the Count! What a surprise! I confess I hadn't expected you quite so soon. Surely you haven't been as far as Post 10 and back?"

"I did not go to Post 10, Mr. X," the Count purred—"because outside the house I met Simon Brown. I spoke to him—and things became clear—doubly clear when I looked up and saw the curtains in this room were now apart!"

Peter's eyebrows rose.

"I see! Rather bad luck for me, eh, Count?"

"Very bad, Mr. X! Your luck has held well, but now—"

"Abruptly his control broke.

"But now you are finished!" he ground out. He turned his head and called harshly: "All right—come on up, all of you!"

The house seemed to shake under the sudden pounding of many feet on the stairs—and in that second Peter acted.

He shot across the room. The Count heard, swivelled—but too late to dodge Peter's sweeping arm. It smashed across his shoulders and sent him staggering headfirst into the room.

The key dropped to the floor.

Peter scooped it up, jammed it in the lock and slammed the metal door, just as a rush of heavy footsteps sounded deafeningly in the passage.

"Finished, Count!" cried Peter. "I think not—"

He made to turn the key in the lock—to keep out the rush of men.

Gaye suddenly screamed.

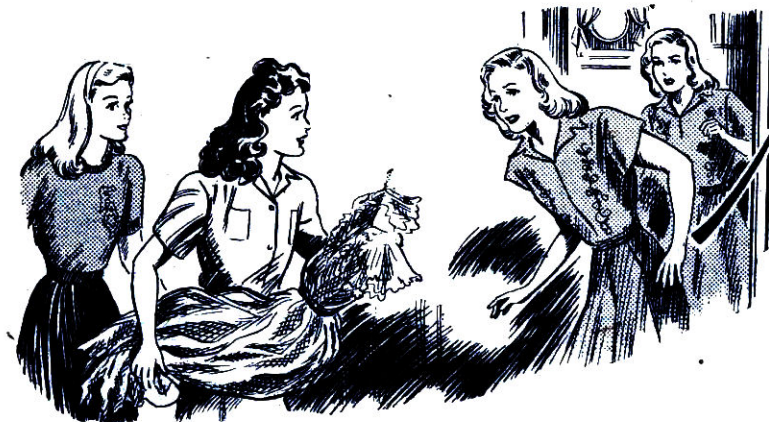
The Count had staggered up. He twisted the handle of his ebony cane—and two feet of glittering steel came free.

A sword-stick!

"Peter—look out!"

The Count sprang forward, and Gaye's heart seemed to stop as she saw the flashing blade driving straight for Peter's unprotected back.

You will find next Friday's grand instalment more thrilling than ever.



The Merry-makers Afloat

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

THE TORN DANCE FROCK

"GOLLY! My hair—my skirt!" And Sally Warner, strolling around the deck of the Ocean Star with her three chums, laughingly made frantic clutches at both. "Goodness, this must be what is called half a gale!"

"Feels more like one and a half!" said fair-haired Fay Manners, firmly anchoring her wildly waving hair with a length of ribbon.

"Pooh! What a fuss to make about a little bit of a breeze!" said Johnny Briggs loftily, thrusting his hands into his pockets and drawing a deep breath. "Blow!" he added. "My scarf—grab it, somebody!"

"It's blowed," grinned Don Weston. "Right into the sea! Never mind, old chap, it'll make quite a nice dress for a mermaid!"

"Talking of dresses, what's this?" asked Sally, stooping to pick up a filmy white object which presumably had been thrown carelessly over a deck-chair, and had now blown off and was whipped around the rail. "It's a bit grubby and torn, I'm afraid!"

She held it up, and Fay gave an exclamation of dismay.

"Oh, goodness, it's Valerie's frock for the fancy dress dance to-morrow night! She must have put it on the chair and forgotten it!"

"Oho!" said Don. "More trouble when Sybil hears of this!"

Rather apprehensively the chums looked at one another, then at the dress. Valerie Brett's forgetfulness again, thought Sally worriedly, certainly looked like causing more bother with her twin sister Sybil. And so much seemed to be going wrong between them lately.

Valerie and Sybil were, like Sally & Co., students aboard the College Ship, and until a short while ago they had been devoted to each other, with the quieter, gentler Sybil smiling indulgently at her harum-scarum sister's scrapes. And Valerie, in her tomboyish way, protecting Sybil, fighting her battles for her.

But one thing they had in common—their brilliant dancing. And that, strangely enough, had seemed to start the rift between them. For since they had entered their names for the ballroom dancing competition which was to take place at the masked fancy dress ball to-morrow night, everything seemed to have gone wrong.

Such little things at first—Valerie having to do extra studying when Sybil wanted to practise, or skipping the studying so as not to disappoint her sister and making trouble for both of them in consequence.

At first they had laughed things off, but it had got past that stage now. Real quarrels had developed—quarrels that were increasingly difficult to make up.

"Well, I suppose we'd better take it back," sighed Sally. "We'll try

to see Val alone. You coming, Don?" "No fear!" said Don hastily. "Johnny and I will just stooge around a bit until you and Fay come back!"

Sally smiled, though she wasn't feeling too happy as she and Fay made their way downstairs. She wished desperately that somehow she could patch up the quarrel between the Brett twins. They were both so nice, and their fondness for each other was the nicest thing about them.

Sally sighed as, with a look at Fay, she raised her hand to knock on the door of Cabin No. 14. Then her hand dropped again as from inside the cabin came the sound of raised voices.

"But, Sybil, I tell you I've done the essay—really, I have!"

"Then where is it?" Sybil's usually gentle voice sounded cross. "The professor spoke to me about it a few moments ago. I told him you were in the cabin doing it. And then—she choked a little—and then he pointed out that you were in the café. He—he must have thought I was fibbing just to cover you!"

"Well, he'll jolly well find out differently!" came Valerie's defiant retort, but with an undercurrent of unhappiness in it that caught at Sally's heart. "I left the essay on Phineas' desk. I did it especially quickly just to please you. You might show a bit of gratitude!"

"That's nice," said Sybil stiffly. "Just the same, I'll ask Phineas what he's done with it."

"Quick!" hissed Sally to Fay. "Scram!"

She was too late. Before they could move the door swung open. Sybil, her mouth drooping, her blue eyes looking suspiciously moist, stood there.

"Hallo!" she began, forcing a smile. "Were you coming—"

And then she stopped, her eyes fixed on the dance frock on Sally's arm.

Sally smiled disarmingly. "Just coming to return Val's frock," she said brightly. "She left it on a deck-chair—"

She tried to conceal the grubby, torn hem of the frock as she spoke, but with a smothered cry Sybil took the dress and held it up.

"Valerie's frock!" she said bitterly. "Of course it isn't Valerie's—it's mine! She promised to fetch it from the ship's cleaners for me."

"Oh, shucks!" Valerie's dismayed face suddenly peered over her shoulder. "I did collect it, Sybil. I left it in the lounge when Joan Hilton asked me to go along to the café for an ice. But I knew it would be quite all right—I wouldn't have left it otherwise."

"Left it in the lounge!" Sybil's tone was scathing. "Sally found it on a chair on deck, and it looks as though it's been used as a deck swab.

Oh, Val, how could you? You—you're spoiling our dancing practice, and now you've spoilt my frock!"

Her voice broke. Her face crumpled suddenly in a way that touched Sally's heart. She went quickly forward and put an arm round Sybil's shoulders.

"Never mind, old thing," she said gently. "Maybe somebody else moved it or—or something," she added, rather lamely. "Anyway, hand it over. Fay and I will get it right for you."

"Thanks, Sally," said Sybil, in a low voice. "That's sweet of you! But—but I'm getting so fed-up. You know how much I want to win the dancing competition—for Valerie's sake as much as my own. And—and she just doesn't bother about practising or—or anything!"

As if afraid to say any more, she suddenly fled down the corridor, leaving a flushed and very unhappy-looking Valerie behind.

"Gosh, I would go and put my foot in it again!" she groaned ruefully, looking penitently at the dance frock. "But, Sally, I did leave it in the lounge—truly, I did. And I did that wretched essay in double quick time just to please Sybil!"

She ran a distracted hand through her wavy hair.

"It seems the more I try to please Sybil the more I upset her!" she said, with such a comical look of dismay that Sally had to smile. "And I do want us to win the competition. I know Sybil's set her heart on it—and you know I'd do anything for her. Except when she gets in a rotten temper with me for no reason at all!" she added defiantly.

Sally gave a little sigh. Certainly things did not seem to be improving between the two sisters. And at the same time she was puzzled.

Valerie was quite definite that she had left the dance frock in the lounge. True, she was a scatterbrain and had a dreadful memory, but surely even she couldn't forget a thing like that?

Just the same, it was unthinkable that anyone else could have moved it and left it on deck to be blown around. It just didn't make sense. Sally dismissed her puzzling thoughts with a quick shrug and smiled at Valerie.

"We'll make the frock as good as new again, and mind you don't cause any more upsets. After all, you two can win this competition hands down—you're easily the best dancers on board!"

"There's Joan Hilton," said Valerie doubtfully.

"She hasn't got such a good partner as you," put in Fay. "No, it's a certainty, Val—though, of course, you must practise. When is your next practice, by the way?" she added.

Valerie looked at her watch, then gave an agitated exclamation.

"In ten minutes! And whatever happens, I mustn't miss that. I—Goodness, what's the deputation for?" she added in rather an alarmed voice.

Sally, following her gaze, felt a

swift stab of apprehension. For coming along the corridor was Sybil, her face strangely flushed. On one side of her was Edgar T. Phineas, the head prefect of the College Ship, his hands, as usual, full of forms. And on her other side Professor Willard, the headmaster.

"Valerie, about that essay I instructed you to write?" began the professor.

Valerie gave a beam of relief. "Oh, yes, professor," she replied. "I told Sybil I left it on Phineas' desk, and—"

Her voice trailed away as, looking at Phineas, she saw him shaking his head slowly, as if more in sorrow than in anger.

"But—but I did!" she blurted.

Professor Willard's lips tightened. "Had the essay been left on Phineas' desk it would be there now," he said grimly. "You know my rule, Valerie!"

"Schedule nine, section four," put in Phineas. "All work to be done in the specified time."

"Exactly!" snapped Professor Willard. "You will sit down and do that essay immediately, Valerie!"

Sybil gave a cry of dismay, while Valerie looked desperately from her to the headmaster.

"But, professor—" she began.

"Oh, please—" put in Sally.

"Silence! I said at once! And with that the headmaster stalked off, while Sybil, white-faced now, just stood and stared.

"So you've done it again!" she said at length in a bitter voice. "You've let me down again, Valerie! Thanks to you, we can't practise! Well, I hope you're happy!"

And with a smothered sob she darted off.

SALLY THE PEACE-MAKER



"It's not fair! It's just not fair!" Valerie's tone was indignant. "I did do the essay, and I did put it in Phineas' study. At

least, Sybil might have believed me. You believe me, don't you, Sally?" she asked a little chokily.

"Yes, of course I do," said Sally reassuringly. "Yet it's jolly queer where that essay can have gone to! Phineas searched his study thoroughly!"

That was true. Phineas was nothing if not thorough, and at Sally's request he had looked all over his cabin, but there was not a sign of Valerie's essay.

Sally shook her head in bewilderment, then put her arm in Valerie's.

"Look here," she said, "I know it's tough, and I'm jolly sorry, Val, but you'll just have to get on with that essay or bring down another packet of trouble on your head. Why don't you press on with it now, and I'll go along to see Sybil? She's probably cooled down by now and is feeling as upset as you are. Shall I try to fix up another practice for later on?"

After a moment's hesitation Valerie nodded. Never downcast for long, she visibly brightened.

"That'll be fine," she said enthusiastically. "Thanks, Sally!"

"And I," said Fay, with a smile, "will sit here and watch you do your essay, so you'll have a witness this time. I can mend this tear in Sybil's frock at the same time!"

Sally laughed, and with a gay wave quitted the cabin. But she wasn't laughing as she closed the door. There was an unusually thoughtful frown on her face. For Sally was very puzzled. Valerie was so very definite about having left the dance frock in the lounge; she was equally definite about having left her essay in Phineas' cabin. True, she was happy-go-lucky, forgetful, but never before had she been so forgetful as this. Never until—Sally's eyes narrowed.

"We always seem to get back to this dancing competition," she murmured to herself, as she made her way on deck. "When that idea

started, then the trouble between Sybil and Valerie started. I wonder if—"

But Sally's wondering ceased abruptly as, glancing along the deck, she saw Sybil leaning moodily over the rail. Beside her stood Joan Hilton, a friendly arm about her shoulders.

"Cheer up, Sybil!" she was saying soothingly as Sally approached. "I know it's miserable for you. But, at least, you have got a partner, even if only an unreliable one like Valerie. I haven't one at all. I wonder—"

She stopped suddenly with a little start as she caught sight of Sally, then gave a smile.

"I'm just trying to give Sybil a little comfort," she said lightly. "I suppose you've been doing the same for Valerie. I do wish they'd be friends again!"

"So do I," said Sally. "Look, Sybil, old thing," she added, "if you really believe that Valerie fibbed about your frock and about her essay, then you've every right to feel mad with her. But do you still believe it?"

She looked earnestly into Sybil's unhappy face; saw her half unwillingly shake her head.

"I can't believe it, Sally! I don't want to believe it! And yet—Oh, goodness, what's the good of talking? It's not only the dress and the essay. In half a dozen other ways she's let me down—"

"And she feels that you've let her down by not believing what she said," put in Sally swiftly. "But look here, Sybil, can't you forget all that? Give Val another chance—fix up another practice for this evening. She won't let you down—I know she won't!"

It was almost impossible to resist Sally when she really wanted anything. Added to that, Sybil was dreadfully unhappy about all these quarrels with her twin; would do almost anything to get back to their old happy relationship. So she nodded, though just a little dubiously.

"All right, Sally," she said slowly. "If you're so sure, I tell you what," she added, with quickening interest, "we'll try to get the rehearsal-room for eight o'clock this evening. Val will have to book it from Phineas straight away. I'm just going to the hairdresser's, so I can't do it myself.

"Anyway," she added, with the glimmer of a smile, "it will be a sort of test for her. And she'd better not make a mess of it!"

Her voice hardened slightly as she said that. But Sally was feeling too radiant to bother.

"You're a brick, Sybil!" she said jubilantly. "I know Valerie will be thrilled. And she won't make a mess of booking the room, I promise you. I'll stand outside Phineas' door while she does it. I'll go and tell her now. Cheerio!"

And feeling a lot happier now, she made her way back to Valerie's cabin, elated at the success of her mission.

She hoped desperately that the rehearsal-room would be available at eight o'clock. Being possessed of a radiogram, it was much in demand, and all applications for it had to be made to Phineas, and the appropriate form filled in. But it was very early yet, and if Valerie went straight away it should be all right.

A rather flushed and weary Valerie had just finished her essay when Sally re-entered the cabin.

Fay was still there, mending the tear in Sybil's frock.

Both girls looked up eagerly into Sally's smiling face.

"How—how did you get on?" asked Valerie falteringly.

Sally told her the news, and Valerie gave a whoop of joy.

"Oh, smashing!" she cried boisterously. "Good old Sybil! And dear old Sally! I'll go along to Phineas right now. Oh, bother!" she added, in dismay. "What about the essay? I should take it to Professor Willard. Now things are getting complicated again—I'm sure to come unstuck somewhere!"

"No you won't!" laughed Fay. "I'll take the essay along, and I'll make sure I put it right into the professor's hands. See you later!"

Almost her old light-hearted self again, Valerie danced along the corridor to Phineas' cabin. She knocked. There was no reply.

"Oh, Sally," she said ruefully, "he's out! Now what?"

"Go in," replied Sally, "get one of the forms, and fill it in, then leave it right on top of his blotting-pad. He'll see it when he comes in. Better look in his rehearsal-room file, though," she added, "to make sure it's not booked for eight o'clock. I'll wait outside to warn off anybody who trundles along, in case they put you off your stroke!"

"Nothing could do that now," smiled Valerie, as she entered the prefect's amazingly neat cabin, closing the door behind her.

About five minutes later she emerged again, smiling happily.

"Done it," she said jubilantly. "Now I can enjoy myself with a clear conscience until eight o'clock!"

"Good!" approved Sally. "Don, Johnny, and Fay are waiting in the café. We'll join them for ices, then what about some table tennis?"

Enjoying herself so much with the chums, Valerie might have overlooked the time. But Sally was on the alert.

"Come along, Valerie," she said, a little before eight. "I'll come with you to get your dancing shoes—I'm taking no chances!" she added, with a laugh.

Which was a good thing, because at the top of the stairs they met a rather uncertain-looking Sybil.

"Everything's all right," said Sally, in reply to her questioning look. "Val booked the room."

"Yes, you go ahead," called Valerie. "I'll be right along."

Sybil nodded happily and walked off.

A few minutes later Sally and Valerie followed. But as they neared the rehearsal-room the sound of loud voices came to their ears.

In sudden apprehension they stared at each other, then instinctively broke into a run, only to come to a sudden halt. For coming towards them was Sybil, her face ashen white, her mouth trembling, her eyes shining with unshed tears.

Almost contemptuously she looked at Valerie and Sally, yet with an unhappiness that caught at Sally's heart.

"Sybil," she cried, "what is it? What's happened?"

But Sybil did not look at Sally as she answered; she looked at her sister.

"You ask me that!" she said bitterly. "You told me you'd booked the room!"

"Yes, you go ahead," called Valerie. "I believed you," went on Sybil, in the same bitter voice, "but I found Carmenita using the room. She told me she'd booked it an hour after you were supposed to have done so. Wait!" she added sharply, as Sally started to speak. "Naturally, believing you, I asked her to go. She refused. We had a row, and Professor Willard and Phineas come on the scene!"

"And he told you that Valerie had left the form on his desk?" asked Sally eagerly.

"He told me he hadn't had any form from Valerie," said Sybil sharply. "Nothing at all. Carmenita was the only one who'd booked the room."

There was a stupefied silence for a moment. Then Sally shook her head.

"Sybil, it isn't true!" she protested. "I know Valerie booked—I was outside the room all the time!"

"And I know I got into a row from Professor Willard!" cried Sybil, almost hysterically. "I know you're always defending Valerie—that you're as bad as she is. And I know something else," she added, her voice suddenly breaking—"that this is the end! I refuse to dance with Valerie now, whatever happens!"

And, bursting into tears, she ran off.



WHEN THE DANGERS, UNMASKED

"So here it is!" There was a queer note in Sally's voice as she murmured those words to herself.

She was in the head prefect's study. Valerie, as unhappy as Sybil, had gone off to her cabin, refusing to be comforted or to listen to advice. If Sybil thought so badly of her as to want to call the dance off, then that was all right with her, Valerie had said defiantly.

But it was far from all right with Sally.

That was why she had crept unseen into Phineas' study.

For one awful moment she had wondered whether Valerie really had been up to some queer game all the time—really had tried to antagonise her sister. Now she had proof to the contrary. For before her lay Phineas' blotting-pad, and just visible on the pad to her keenly searching eyes was a faint indentation—just enough to convince Sally that Valerie really had sat at Phineas' desk, had filled in a form for the rehearsal-room, and now and again had pressed sufficiently hard on the paper for the impression to come through on the blotting-paper.

"But who could have taken the form she filled in?" murmured Sally, as she left the cabin and walked down the corridor. "And why?"

Her thoughts were interrupted as Fay, her eyes gleaming strangely, darted up and caught her arm.

"I've been looking everywhere for you, Sally!" she said excitedly. "They've just put up the entrants for the competition to-morrow, and just look at this!"

As she spoke, she pointed to the notice-board on the corridor wall. Sally looked across at it, then gave a startled exclamation.

"So that's it!" she cried. "That's been it the whole time! Why didn't I guess?"

For on the list of entrants pinned to the notice-board the name Sybil Brett was coupled with that of Joan Hilton.

But Sally did not join in the excited speculation the announcement aroused. Indeed, unusually quiet, she wandered off to her cabin quite early that night, had a little chat with Fay, then went off to sleep.

And the following morning the names of Sally Warner and Valerie Brett were coupled together on the list of dancing partners.

That caused another sensation. But Sally seemed not to notice. With Fay she just quietly carried on with the repairs to Sybil's frock—repairs that seemed to Sybil to be taking an unconscionable time.

But to all her agitated queries Sally smilingly replied: "Ready soon!" And not all Sally's urgings could budge her from that.

But it was not until after dinner that night, when excitement among the students was reaching fever-pitch, that she called out to the now frantically worried Sybil:

"I've just got to clean off the grubby marks. Won't be five minutes!"

Which was an under estimate. Because it was ten minutes to eight when a stewardess bustled into Sybil's cabin and deposited a dance frock on her bed, with the words:

"Miss Sally says will you please hurry up. The competition is at eight o'clock. And good luck, miss," she added kindly.

"But this isn't—" began Sybil frantically.

The stewardess, however, had gone. And after a moment's hesitation Sybil donned the dress, carefully adjusted her mask, and hurried off to the ballroom.

The band was already playing the competition waltz. As she darted in through the doorway, she was seized by a masked, impatient figure. Next moment they were on the floor, dancing to the lifting melody.

Sybil gave a little sigh. It was wonderful to be dancing, and Joan certainly was good. As good as Valerie. She felt, indeed, as though there were dancing with her sister. But Val, of course, was dancing with Sally.

A pang of regret went through her. How she wished now that she hadn't been so hasty in condemning Valerie. She should have been more patient—more understanding. And, above all, she should have known that Valerie would never lie. If only she hadn't flared up as she had, Val and she would be dancing together now—might have the honour of winning the competition together. What an idiot she had been!

While the same unhappy thoughts were going through Valerie's mind. It was all her fault. She was an empty-headed scatter-brain, and she didn't deserve a decent sister like Sybil. She would never forgive herself if, through her thoughtlessness, Sybil lost the chance of winning the competition. If only she was dancing with Sybil! Not that Sally wasn't good, of course. She was—amazingly so. It was almost like dancing with Sybil herself.

Sally, as if knowing the thoughts in the heads of the twins, smiled beneath her mask as she skillfully piloted her partner around the ballroom.

She was a good dancer, and she was doing her very best. But she knew that she was not up to the twins' standard.

Her eyes shone as she glanced round at the other couples on the floor.

They were all good dancers, but she knew the twins were better—and if her plan worked—

Anxiously she started then as politely the master of ceremonies began to request couples to drop out, leaving the best on the floor.

One by one the crowd of gay costumed figures began to thin, many disappointed, others laughing sportingly as they took up positions to watch the cleverer dancers.

Soon there were only eight masked couples on the floor. Then seven. Shrewdly the master of ceremonies crossed to another pair.

At last, only four couples remained, among them Sally and Sybil and their respective partners.

Keenly they were watched, but it was obvious to Sally the contest was nearly over now, obvious, too, who were to be the winners.

So it was no surprise to her when the band suddenly stopped—when the master of ceremonies stepped forward and genially held up a hand.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced to the tensely listening crowd, "my colleagues and I have unanimously decided on the winners of this competition. An outstanding pair—a pair who deserve the congratulations of us all. Columbine and Flower Girl, will you step forward, please."

Sally's partner, who had been waiting in eager expectancy, gave a furious exclamation.

"Columbine!" she exclaimed. "But that's Sally Warner!"

"You're wrong, Joan Hilton," said a cool voice beside her.

BOXES—WALLPAPER—TEA TRAYS—WASH BOWLS—GAMES AND TOYS

All these and a hundred and one other articles can be made from waste paper, so save every scrap you can. By doing so, you will not only be aiding the Export Drive but will also be helping to bring back prosperity.

And Joan, swinging round, stared in amazement as her partner lifted her mask, revealing the pretty features of Sally herself. It had been Sally she had been dancing with, not Sybil, as she had thought.

"But—but your frock!" gasped Joan, still unable to take it in. "That's Sybil's!"

"Just a little—er—error, shall we say?" murmured Sally.

"An error! You did it on purpose, Sally Warner!" hissed Joan, her face white with fury. "I'll protest! I'll demand that the competition takes place again!"

"You," said Sally, catching the furious girl's wrist, "will do nothing of the sort! You see, Joan, there's a little matter here that needs explaining first!"

She held up a crumpled collection of papers, and beneath her mask Joan's face went white.

"Yes, Valerie's missing essay—and the form she filled in for the rehearsal-room. You thought they were still tucked safely in your bag, didn't you?" Sally added, nodding towards the little brocade bag on Joan's arm. "You haven't had a chance of disposing of them yet, because your cabin-mate's in bed with a cold and you could hardly light a bonfire on deck without causing comment. And you are the one who's been causing all the trouble between the twins! You just make one move," she added contemptuously, "and I'll tell everybody what you are!"

But Joan was incapable of making a move. Sickly white, she stared from Sally to the incriminating papers. But Sally was not looking at Joan now. She was looking towards the other two figures now before the platform. She saw the M.C. tell them to unmask—saw them stare unbelievably at each other—while a red flush rose into their cheeks.

Like a shot from a gun Sally ran forward, and with a quick apology to the startled M.C., she seized the arms of Sybil and Valerie.

"Look here," she said, in a low voice, "before you two call for swords and pistols, listen to me! I worked the whole thing. I switched dresses so that Valerie would think she was dancing with me, and Joan would think she was dancing with Sybil! And to prove I did the right thing in making you two dance together, just look at these papers! I found them in Joan's handbag!"

In amazement, the two girls looked at the papers, then at each other, while expressions of dismay, contrition, and a mounting happiness chased each other across their faces.

Then, as Sally stepped aside, they smiled mistily, clasped hands, and stepped forward to receive the handsome cheque which was their prize, while the excited students roared their approval.

But it was Sally who was the centre of attention some minutes later, as for the dozenth time she explained:

"I tumbled to Joan's little game after the names went up on the notice-board, so I thought I'd dish her by switching dresses. As everyone was to be masked, I knew Sybil and Joan wouldn't guess who their partners really were!"

"But why did Joan do it?" asked Don.

Sally shrugged. "You know Joan. She always wants the limelight, and the one thing she really shines at is dancing. She knew the only way to win this competition was to split Sybil and Valerie, and that's what she set to work to do!"

"And she would have done but for you," Sybil declared warmly. "Oh, Sally, we can't thank you enough!"

"You've already done that," smiled Sally, "by being friends again. Just keep it up and I'll be happy!"

And with a happy laugh she glided on to the dance floor in Don's arms.

(End of this week's story.)

Sally & Co. will be featured in another entertaining story in next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL.

THE CLUE OF THE MERMAID BRACELET

(Continued from page 74.)

"Enough of that!" cut in the police officer sharply. "Take her away, Hennessey!"

Her head in the air, June was marched towards the cells.

Noel made a hasty excuse to curtail his visit. Not until he was outside the police station did he cautiously smooth out the scrap of paper in his hand.

"Please don't interfere till six o'clock—I'm after a vital clue! Believe it's connected with your quest.—June."

Noel whistled softly, an admiring gleam flashing into his eyes. The whole daring plan was typical of his young partner, but he was still baffled.

Casually he turned the paper over—and started.

On the back were the cryptic words that June had jotted down in the car:

"Mimi—the House with Red Shutters."

"The House with Red Shutters!" muttered Noel. "That's the seaside villa of Clive Bentley, the millionaire! June's on to something big here! I wonder—"

Springing into his car, he drove swiftly to the millionaire's secluded villa, surrounded by its extensive grounds. The shutters were up at the windows, and it was clear that the family were away.

Thoughtfully he made his way round to the rear of the house, determined to test his suspicions. His eyes narrowed as he saw that the french windows on the ground floor stood ajar.

Cautiously Noel stepped into the room, his fingers closing on the revolver in his pocket. Too late he noticed a bulge in the heavy curtains. Even as he whirled, he felt a crashing blow that nearly stunned him, and dazedly he turned to grapple with a powerful assailant.

Locked together, they crashed out on the terrace, struggling for possession of the revolver.

"SIX o'clock!" breathed June, looking up anxiously from the hard chair in her cell. "It's time I had Mimi's message—"

A bolt grated, and the cell door opened to admit a burly policeman, carrying a tray.

"Supper, kid!" he remarked. "Hamburger and coffee."

June nodded, and did not move until he had left, bolting the door behind him. Then swiftly she investigated the contents of her tray. A large cup of coffee and a fat hamburger sandwich.

Her fingers trembling, she opened the sandwich—and a little cry of delight escaped her lips as she removed a tightly screwed piece of paper. Eagerly unrolling it, she held it to the light. Her eyes widened blankly. There was nothing there except a row of figures!

But mastering her disappointment, June slipped the paper into her purse. It was a clue—a cryptic clue—but none the less vital! She could depend on Noel's keen brain to solve the puzzle when she showed it to him.

At any minute now she expected her uncle to return.

Her eyes lit up as she heard the bolt withdrawn. The burly policeman looked in, a broad smile on his face.

"Say, kid, you're in luck!" he declared. "I guess the charge against you has been withdrawn. You're free! Your friend's waiting for you in his car, outside."

Her eyes shining, June followed her escort out of the police station into the soft evening dusk. Of course, she had Noel to thank for this. He must have used his influence with the authorities—and in the nick of time!

Eagerly she ran down to the car, throwing open the door.

"I've got it," she gasped. "I've got the clue—"

Her voice died away as a hand caught her wrist, jerking her into the car—and she found herself staring at Jim Ferris!

"Nice work!" he said softly. "Everything went as planned, eh? A neat little ruse—getting you arrested. It was the only way to contact Mimi and get the information from her."

The shock to June was tremendous—she fought to control herself, terribly conscious that Jim Ferris was staring at her in a strangely intense way.

"I had some trouble withdrawing the charge," he continued. "But it worked all right. In fact, everything's worked all right, even though you're not the girl who should have done the job—Miss June Gaynor!"

A scream was stifled on June's lips as she saw the revolver he abruptly raised.

"Yes, I know you now!" he snapped. "You were pretty smart, but I tumbled to the game after your arrest—when I searched the pockets of the coat you left in my car. An old envelope addressed to you told me the truth, Miss June Gaynor."

A mocking gleam entered his eyes.

"And perhaps I ought to be fair and give you my real name, too! Miss Gaynor, meet—'Frisco Jim!'"

June gasped and paled. As he spoke, he had started the car. One hand on the wheel, the other holding the revolver, he drove away.

Quickly they sped away from the bright lights of the gay resort, into the shadowy countryside.

"Where are we going?" cried June. "You'll see!" came the grim response.

The car swung into a dark drive, pulling up outside a house. June gasped as the brilliant headlights revealed the shutters.

The House with Red Shutters! Her companion gripped her arm, leading her round to the back of the house and through the open french windows.

"I guess one of my men opened up the place for me," he said. "Our little job, Miss Gaynor—is the strong-room! Where's the combination you got from Mimi? Make it snappy!"

White to the lips, June realised the dreadful truth. She had played into the hands of a ruthless gangster—assisted him in his nefarious plot! "I won't let you—" she began desperately.

Cruelly the other twisted her wrist, forcing her to release the purse grasped in her hand. With a murmur of satisfaction he took from it the vital scrap of paper.

The brilliant gleam from his torch revealed the door of the strong-room. "Get busy!" he ordered. "You'll operate the dials while I read out the figures. I'm not trusting you out of my sight. No tricks! Remember this gun of mine!"

June was forced across to the strong-room door. She was being compelled to take part in the daring theft!

With trembling fingers she turned the dial, conscious of the muzzle of the revolver against her side. At last came a faint, ominous click—and a satisfied grunt escaped her companion's lips.

"Open it!" he ordered.

Stifling a sob, June turned the brass handle, and the massive door of the strong-room swung open.

"Stand where you are, 'Frisco Jim!" rapped a voice from the vault.

June gasped and the crook recoiled, as a tall figure loomed in the opening.

"Uncle Noel!"

The next moment 'Frisco Jim was on his back, and the young detective snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

"Thanks to you, June, I've got the most dangerous scoundrel in the States!" he declared, as she clung to him, smiling with joyful relief. "I followed up the clue you gave me—but was attacked by Jim's accomplice. Luckily I managed to overpower him, and contacted the owner of the house and the police—only to discover that you'd been released."

"Guessing the scoundrel's plot, I decided to await your arrival. The police are rounding up the rest of the gang. There's a fortune in diamonds in that strong-room, June—and 'Frisco Jim was after it! His cunning plot would have succeeded if it hadn't been for you—"

"For the coral bracelet, you mean, nunky!"

"That was a lucky break," agreed Noel, smiling, "but only a very shrewd and plucky girl detective dared to follow it up!"

"Say!" protested June, squeezing his arm. "I guess you're flattering me—buddy!"

(End of this week's story.)

Next week Noel and June take part in a film. Look out for PERIL ON THE FILM COACH.

THEIR SCHOOL ON CASTAWAY ISLE

(Continued from page 76.)

out to find a likely place for a picnic—"

"You know, you promised we could have one, Mr. Barnard!" laughed Pat Saunders.

The master nodded, his eyes twinkling.

"And I see you haven't forgotten. As a matter of fact, I thought it would be a good idea to combine a picnic with a preliminary exploration of the island, I'm going to ask Tania to show—"

He broke off, starting to his feet as a rather dishevelled figure strode into the clearing.

"Dave!" exclaimed Mr. Barnard. "Is anything wrong? Where is Gerry?"

Dave shrugged.

"Hasn't he come back, sir? We lost touch with each other in the jungle, and I took the wrong path. I was hurrying back to tell you that a boat has just come in from the reef. I caught sight of Captain Rawlins—look as though there's been some trouble."

Voices sounded on the path leading from the beach, and Captain Rawlins' burly figure appeared suddenly in the faint circle.

He was mopping his face with a handkerchief, and his usually bluff manner was conspicuously absent.

"Mr. Barnard, I'd like a word with you!" he said gruffly.

"Anything wrong, captain?" inquired Mr. Barnard.

The captain nodded, his expression grim.

"There's been some trouble, sir—pretty serious! It's that jungle girl, Tania—"

"Tania!" exclaimed the master, and surprised, anxious murmurs arose from the others.

"She—she's not been hurt?" gasped Pat.

"Hurt!" snorted the captain, glaring. "I ask you! Look!"

He pointed, and they all turned. An amazed gasp went up at the incredible scene that met their eyes.

"Tania!" exclaimed Mr. Barnard. "What—what has happened?"

You will discover the answer to that in next Friday's exciting instalment.