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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3!}

Week
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AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



The *CASE* of the ELUSIVE STOWAWAY

This Week's Exciting Detective Story Features Rosina's Most Audacious Coup—
Written by PETER LANGLEY

THE GIRL IN THE HOLD

"GOODBYE, America!" murmured June Gaynor.

She stood with her famous detective uncle by the rail of the great liner, while the myriad twinkling lights of New York faded slowly into the distance.

Noel Raymond smiled down at his attractive young partner.

"Glad to be going home, June?"
"Am I!" June's eyes shone. "It's been wonderful in America, but I'm longing to see England again. One thing—oh— She broke off, with a smile. "There's that awfully nice purser who promised to show me round the liner."

The good-looking ship's officer nodded to them with a friendly grin, as he escorted a distinguished-looking old lady to a cabin on the saloon deck. Returning, he was accosted by a bearded gentleman of foreign appearance who plied him with excited questions.

He was mopping his forehead when at last he joined the detective and his young partner.

"Sorry, Miss Gaynor, but I've not had a minute to spare!" he declared. "What with eccentric passengers who insist on keeping valuables in their cabins—and the usual last-minute rumours of stowaways—"

"Stowaways?" cut in Noel interestedly.

"Oh—we always get tales," laughed the purser. "We don't take much notice of 'em, apart from a routine check—yes, Willis, what is it?" he asked, as a steward approached.

"I found this on the companion-stairs, sir. Must have been dropped by one of the passengers."

He held out a dainty black kid glove.

"Another item for the lost-property office," remarked the purser. "You'd be amazed how careless some passengers are, Mr. Raymond—"

"Just a minute," put in Noel, his eyes narrowing suddenly as he caught sight of two initials on the glove—"R. F." "May I have a look at it, purser?"

In some surprise, the officer passed it to him. An incredulous expression crossed the young detective's face.

"June," he muttered, "I believe this glove belongs to someone we know!"

June bent forward, and a startled expression flashed into her eyes as she, too, saw those initials. She raised the glove to her nostrils, at once detecting a faint, elusive perfume.

"Nunky—you don't mean—it can't be Rosina—Rosina Fontaine!" she gasped. "Why we left her in Hollywood—"

"You know the owner of this glove?" inquired the surprised purser.

"Only too well, I'm afraid!" replied Noel. "Unless there is some strange coincidence, purser, Rosina Fontaine, the most dangerous and elusive girl crook who ever baffled the police, is on board this liner!"

The purser started.

"But, surely that is impossible, Mr. Raymond! The passenger lists are always carefully checked—"

"Rosina would hardly travel under her own name," replied the detective dryly. "She might even—"

"Nunky—she might even be a stow-away!" gasped June.

The officer whistled significantly.

"It's just possible," Noel agreed. "Rosina must have been pretty desperate, with the American police on her trail. What possibility is there of a stowaway remaining hidden on board, purser?"

"All depends on how smart she is, Mr. Raymond—and whether she can get food. Most of 'em are driven out by hunger, after a time."

Noel frowned thoughtfully. "I can't imagine Rosina putting up with any hardship while she can use her wits!" he said. "But I'll follow

up this clue. Meanwhile, would you allow my niece to go through the passenger list with you—just in case there is a suspicious entry?"

"Of course, Mr. Raymond," nodded the purser. "This way, Miss Gaynor." Noel watched them go, a thoughtful frown on his face, then turned to the steward. Together they made their way to the companion-stairs where the glove had been found.

"Are there any passenger berths on this deck?" asked Noel.

"No, sir," replied the steward. "Only the crew's quarters and the hatches leading to the holds."

Noel's eyes glinted as the man departed.

"It sounds as though June may have hit on the right idea—"

He broke off, turning sharply as a stealthy footstep sounded behind him. The young detective caught a momentary glimpse of a slim, girlish figure darting across the deck.

A faint waft of elusive perfume reached him.

"Rosina!" he exclaimed and started in pursuit.

He heard the girl's sharp intake of breath. She paused, turning instinctively. A cigarette glowed in the dusk as she raised a hand to screen her face. The next moment she darted behind one of the huge ventilators, and was lost to sight.

Noel sped after her. It would be an ironic twist of fate if Rosina, the beautiful and elusive crook whose luxurious tastes had driven her to crime, had come to be a hunted stowaway!

And while Rosina was at liberty and in hiding, she was a danger to the other passengers—especially those possessing anything of value!

As he reached the spot where the girl had vanished, he saw that one of the hatches leading to the ship's hold stood open. There was no one in sight on the deck.

Crossing quickly to the open hatchway, Noel cautiously descended the iron steps. The hold was dimly lit by a few isolated electric bulbs—sufficient to reveal the iron-plated floor and the baggage racks towering on either side.

A strange hiding-place for the glamorous Rosina—

"Stand just where you are, Mr. Raymond!" breathed a voice—and at the same moment the lights in the hold flickered out.

Instinctively Noel reached for his torch, but the soft, menacing voice stayed his hand.

"Please don't move, Mr. Raymond—for your own sake! I warn you, I'm desperate—and I can see you quite clearly against the hatchway. If you drive me to it, I shall shoot!"

Noel could just see the glow of her cigarette now, a few yards away from him—and more dimly he could discern the glint of the revolver in her steady hand.

"Rosina—don't be a fool!" said Noel quietly. "You must realise that you're cornered. You can't hope to remain in hiding during the voyage, and—"

"That's what you think, Mr. Raymond!" came the mocking retort. "'Rosina, the elusive, you once called me—and I promise you I shall live up to my name. They can have the liner searched from bow to stern—but they'll never catch me!'"

Noel's hands clenched as he watched the glowing cigarette.

"Don't be too sure, Rosina! Five days is a long time—without proper food, hunted in the dark, afraid to come out even for a breath of air—"

He was interrupted by a soft, amused laugh.

"What a terrifying picture you draw, Noel! But please don't break your heart about me. A little risk and discomfort is a small price to pay for what I'm after. You don't imagine that I'm returning to England empty-handed?"

Noel commenced to edge cautiously forward.

"So you're planning some mischief on board, as I suspected," he said grimly. "Don't flatter yourself, Rosina—you haven't a chance! I advise you to give yourself up. If you agree, I can promise you at least a comfortable voyage to England—"

"And—if I refuse?" murmured Rosina.

"You will take the consequences!" rejoined Noel sternly.

"Don't hurry me!" said Rosina, the cigarette shaking slightly in her fingers. "I've still got you covered, Mr. Raymond! I—I must think."

"You'd better think quickly," said Noel, "before I give the alarm. I shall count thirty, Rosina—and I'll take the risk of your aiming in the dark."

The cigarette glowed more steadily as the slender hand grasping the revolver was withdrawn into the shadows. Calmly the young detective counted.

"The time's up!" he said sharply. "Will you come with me?"

The girl did not deign to reply as her cigarette glowed in the dark.

"Very well," said Noel, "I'll call your bluff, Rosina—and you can blame yourself for what happens!"

He ducked swiftly and sprang forward, whipping out his torch.

As the brilliant beam cut the darkness, a stifled ejaculation was torn from his lips, and he was brought up sharply against a luggage rack.

Beyond the rack, a dim passage led to an adjacent hold, and secured by a pin to the luggage rack glowed a half-burnt cigarette!

Rosina, the resourceful, had escaped—with thirty seconds to spare.



A BAFFLING THEFT

Noel bit his lip in momentary chagrin. He switched on the lights and removed the glowing cigarette from the pin.

The astute trick was typical of

Rosina's audacity, and to attempt to overtake her in the dark labyrinths of the ship's hold would be an impossible task for one person. Yet surely even Rosina must realise that eventual capture was almost certain.

What worried Noel was his own conviction—strengthened by the girl's veiled hint—that she had designs on something of value on board.

It would be typical of Rosina to carry out a reckless coup, trusting to her luck and cunning to evade capture till they berthed at Southampton.

Noel stubbed out the glowing cigarette-end, slipping it into his wallet. If only he had some clue to the daring girl's immediate intentions—

His eyes narrowed suddenly as he caught sight of something lying on the iron-plated floor, near the luggage-rack, and he bent swiftly to recover it.

It was a thin ivory disc, resembling a key-disc, and it bore a printed number:

"34"

Noel whistled softly. Rosina seemed to have been strangely careless. Here was something he could work on, for a start!

A few minutes later he entered the purser's office. The purser and June were still studying the passenger list, with another of the ship's officers. They all turned as the young detective entered.

"Well, nunky?" asked June eagerly. "Rosina's on board, right enough," said Noel. "I discovered her in one of the holds—but she evaded me by a cunning trick. I suggest you have the liner searched without delay. The girl is armed—and desperate."

The agitated purser gave instructions to his junior, and the young officer departed.

"But what is her game, nunky?" asked June. "Is she just trying to escape?"

"To escape—yes," rejoined Noel. "But not empty-handed. I'm sure there is someone on board whom she plans to rob, hoping to lie low with her spoils till we reach England. Do you recognise this disc, purser?"

The purser started as Noel held it out.

"Of course! That belongs to one of the cabin keys. Number thirty-four—let me see—" He ran a finger down the list. "Great Scott—that's Mrs. Forrester's state-room!"

"Forrester?" inquired Noel, raising his eyebrows.

"The widow of a South African diamond magnate," replied the purser. "You possibly saw me ushering her to her cabin. She made arrangements to sail at the last minute, and insisted on keeping her jewellery in her own charge. According to a fellow-passenger—Monsieur Gustave, the expert on precious stones—she possesses some of the most priceless gems in existence."

Noel whistled, his eyes glinting.

"Rich prey for Rosina!" he murmured. "But how did she get hold of that key-disc?"

The purser snapped his fingers.

"Come to think of it, Mrs. Forrester reported the loss of her key—and it was found by a steward shortly afterwards, minus the disc."

"Then Rosina probably took a wax impression!" said Noel grimly. "With your permission I'll have a word with Mrs. Forrester, and persuade her to hand her jewellery into your care."

"I wish you luck," rejoined the purser. "She's the most stubborn old lady I've ever encountered."

While June departed with the purser, to organise the search for the elusive stowaway, Noel visited the old lady's state-room.

Mrs. Forrester—tall and white-haired—opened the door to him, sharply inquiring the reason for his visit. Noel produced his card, explaining his errand. Beyond the old lady, on the cabin table, he saw a flat leather jewel-case, with a brass padlock.

The other followed the direction of his glance, and her lips tightened.

"It is kind of you to have taken the trouble, Mr.—er—Raymond," she said coldly, "but my jewels are quite safe in my own keeping."

"No jewels are safe—with Rosina on board, madam," replied Noel.

"Who is Rosina?" inquired the old lady, frowning.

"An audacious and desperate girl crook who is at present on this liner," rejoined Noel. "It's possible that she has taken a wax impression of the key you mislaid. From that impression she is clever enough to file another key to fit the lock of your cabin and thus be able to enter at will."

The old lady stiffened, a momentary shadow of anxiety crossing her face.

"Why has the young scoundrel not been arrested?" she demanded angrily. "It shows inefficiency on the part of the ship's staff. I refuse to entrust my jewellery into their care. But I have heard of you, Mr. Raymond—" She hesitated, looking hard at the young detective. "Can I trust you to take charge of my jewel-case?"

"Certainly—if you wish," replied Noel. "What does it contain?"

"Among sundry stones of lesser value," explained the old lady, "it contains the priceless Star of Nyasa—an almost unique gem, discovered by my late husband. I was locking it away as you entered—ah!" She caught at his arm, a startled expression crossing her face. "Whose face was that at the porthole?"

"A face?" echoed Noel, turning.

"A girl's face," rejoined the old lady, "shadowed by a black scarf."

Noel stepped swiftly out on to the deck, but among the scattered passengers strolling in the dusk he could see no trace of the lurking girl. His eyes were troubled as he returned to the cabin.

"The sooner you hand your jewel-case into my care the better, Mrs. Forrester," he said. "Locks and bolts mean nothing to Rosina."

"For to-night, then," said the old lady, reluctantly parting with her treasured case. "In the morning I wish to show the star to M. Gustave, who informs me that he has an almost identical gem, though his is pure white and mine is tinged with pink which he declares may lessen its value—though I think otherwise! Perhaps you would bring it to his cabin at ten o'clock?"

Noel promised, and went in search of June.

A mist was creeping up over the sea, and the figures on deck looked like shadowy ghosts. Noel determined not to leave the case in his cabin. It was slim enough to fit into the inner pocket of his coat, and he carried it with him for the rest of the evening as, with his young partner, he assisted in the hunt for the daring stowaway.

But by midnight Rosina had not been found, and the search was called off till the next day.

Noel warned June to keep her own cabin door locked and bolted, and to call him if she heard the slightest suspicious sound. The young detective slept with the jewel-case under his pillow, having taken special precautions against anyone gaining entry from the deck.

In the morning the fog was even thicker, and the great liner was moving at "dead slow."

A new search had been organised for the stowaway, and June begged to be allowed to accompany the searchers—in case her feminine eye might spot something that the men overlooked.

At ten o'clock Noel made his way to Monsieur Gustave's cabin, carrying the precious jewel-case. The famous expert had been joined by Mrs. Forrester, and they were awaiting Noel impatiently.

The old lady gave a sigh of relief as Noel handed her the case.

"I might have known I could trust you, Mr. Raymond," she declared.

(Please turn to the back page.)



The COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

ON THE WAY TO THE RODEO

"WELL, here we are at Cactus City, Pommie. Now for the rodeo."

Merle Wason, standing in the yard outside the railroad depot, smiled across at her chestnut horse, although there was an anxious little frown between her eyes.

She and Pommie had spent all morning travelling from Happy Valley, where her uncle owned a small ranch, and now she was wondering how the railway journey had affected her big pet.

"You're not tired, are you, honey?" she asked.

Pommie tossed his head, swished the air with his silky tail and pawed at the sun-baked ground with an impatient hoof. It was his way of announcing that he not only felt fine but was eager to get moving.

Merle ran a fond hand over his gleaming coat, and regarded him with admiring eyes. He certainly looked a picture. There was not a finer horse in all Arizona, she told herself.

"If looks mean anything, the Bronze Rider is as good as ours," she declared, and her pulses leapt as she thought of the prize which would be awarded to the winner of this afternoon's steeplechase.

Although the bronze statuette was not worth a great deal in actual cash, it would be a great feather in her cap if she could win it, for it would prove that Pommie really was as good as she had always thought him to be. Besides, her success would please Uncle Stephen, and she was particularly anxious to please him at the moment, for things were not going too well at the ranch and he had had a worrying time of late.

"Though I can't imagine why he's so set his heart on my winning the Bronze Rider trophy," Merle murmured.

She frowned in puzzlement as she remembered how insistent her uncle had been that she should enter the steeplechase, as she recalled how intense his manner had been when he had urged her to do all she could to secure the bronze trophy.

"We'll do our best not to disappoint him, won't we, honey?" Merle whispered.

Pommie seemed to understand, for he tossed his handsome head up and down.

Merle gave him a hug, then leapt into the saddle and gathered up the reins.

"Off we go," she said.

Pommie trotted out of the yard and down the short, dusty street beyond, but at the end of it Merle reined in, looking doubtfully around her. This was her first visit to Cactus City and she did not know in which direction the rodeo stadium lay.

"Say, are you Merle Wason?" suddenly asked a curt voice.

Merle swung round in the saddle and stared in surprise at the young cowboy who came trotting up. Mounted on a magnificent black

horse, he wore woolly chaps, a chequered shirt and a battered Stetson hat tilted at what seemed like a defiant angle.

"Yes—that's my name," she said with a smile, "though I don't know how you knew. I'm a stranger in Cactus City, and I don't think we've met before."

He shook his head.

"Nope. We've never met—though we're goin' to see a lot of each other in future."

Merle's eyes opened wide.

"What ever makes you think that?"

He shrugged.

"Oh, just a hunch I've got. But never mind that. Let's get movin'."

"Moving! Where to?"

"Why, to the rodeo, of course. You've entered for the steeplechase, haven't you?"

Merle regarded the young cowboy in frank astonishment. How was it that he knew so much about herself and her plans? Despite his curt manner, she found him both intriguing and attractive.

"Are you offering to guide me to the stadium?" she asked.

"Sure! Guess that's the reason I came here."

"But why? Why should you go out of your way to help me?"

His steel-grey eyes flickered with sardonic amusement.

"Why not?" he countered. "Maybe I'm just one of those fellows who can't help playin' the Good Samaritan. But come on, or we'll be late for the steeplechase!"

"We!" Merle eyed him sharply. "Are you going to ride in the race, too?"

Again those grey eyes surveyed her with a glimmer of amusement.

"Maybe. But let's get movin'." This way.

And, apparently completely confident that she would follow, he turned his horse and went cantering off down the street to the right. For a moment Merle stayed where she was. His air of self-assurance, coupled with the bland way he had parried all her questions, made her feel exasperated. Yet it would be foolish to refuse his help. Besides, there was something almost compelling about his mysterious manner.

"O.K., Pommie, we'd better follow!" she said.

With an eager toss of his head, the chestnut took her level with the young cowboy. She covertly eyed him from under the brim of her hat.

"Aren't you going to introduce yourself?" she inquired.

He frowned, as if he found the question one which required careful consideration.

"Guess you can call me Larry," he said at last.

"Larry what?"

"Oh, just Larry!" Then, as if anxious to change the subject, he checked his horse and leaned across the saddle. "Suppose you've got your entry ticket?" he asked. "Of course, you realise no one can ride in the race without one?"

"Oh, yes—and don't worry! I've got it safely here." And Merle smilingly patted the leather purse attached to her belt.

"Good! That's O.K., then! Let's get crackin'!"

It was almost as if some great worry had been removed from his mind, and he urged his horse into a gallop. At speed he led the way past the wooden-framed buildings and up the steep, winding hill beyond.

Pommie, glad of the chance to stretch his legs, raced after him, and as Merle bent over her mount's velvety neck she stared curiously at the lithe figure just ahead.

Larry had obviously been reluctant to reveal his Christian name. Why? And why had he set his mind on escorting her to the rodeo?

Merle shook her head. It was all beyond her. Then, as Pommie swept her past the long line of trees, the mystery was blotted from her mind. For at last she could see the great stadium with its packed stands and with its flags and banners flapping in the breeze. She gave a surprised gasp as it came into view, for it did not lie immediately ahead, as she had expected; it lay away to the left, at the foot of the rocky hill up which they had just climbed.

Reining in, Merle gave a startled cry.

"You've come the wrong way! There's the stadium—down there!"

Larry checked his horse, then came cantering back to her, that queer look of sardonic amusement again in his eyes.

"If sure is," he agreed.

"But—but surely you must have known!" she cried. "Surely—!" She finished with a horrified gasp. "Why, I believe you deliberately led me astray!"

To her indignation and amazement, he made no attempt to deny the accusation. Calm and nonchalant as ever, he sat there in the saddle.

"I shouldn't be surprised if I did," he drawled.

"What! You admit it?" An angry rush of colour dyed her cheeks and helplessly she regarded him. "But why? Why did you set out to trick me like this?"

He shrugged.

"Guess it was the only way. I knew it would be useless to explain."

"Explain! What was there to explain?"

"More than you realise. There's a mighty good reason why you shouldn't ride in the steeplechase this afternoon."

"Not ride!" She stared at him incredulously. "You must be crazy! Of course I'm going to ride. If you think I'm going to be put off by any fantastic story you can tell me, you're mistaken."

He shrugged again.

"There, what did I tell you? I knew you wouldn't listen. That's why I decided on direct action."

"On direct action?" She exasperatedly gathered up the reins. "I don't know what you mean, but I've got something better to do than stay here arguing with you. I've got to get to the stadium."

And she made to ride on, but swiftly Larry's right arm lunged out, and a strong hand closed over Pommie's bride.

"Sorry," he said, "but it can't be done. I hate to disappoint you, but

I'm afraid I can't allow you to ride in the steeplechase."

"You not allow me! Why, of all the cheek! Who do you think—"

Merle's angry tirade came to an abrupt end, and in sudden consternation she surveyed the young cowboy, conscious of the change that had come over him. Now there was a grim, almost desperate air about him, and the hand that clutched Pommie's bridle had closed like a vice.

"Nope. It's not you who's goin' to win the Bronze Rider—it's me."

"Y-y-you?"

He nodded.

"Yes—me. I'm going to take your place in the race, so I guess I'll ask you to hand over your entry ticket."

And, leaping down to the ground, he coolly held out his free hand.



POMMIE TO THE RESCUE

Merle just sat there, for a moment too flabbergasted to speak. Another angry wave of colour swept up her cheeks and it was only

with an effort that she found her voice.

"You must be crazy!" she gasped. "How can you possibly take my place in the race?"

"Guess it'll be plumb easy, honey."

"Don't call me honey!"

"O.K.!" He smiled tantalizingly.

"But as I was sayin' before you interrupted me, it'll be plumb easy. Competitors for the steeplechase don't have to give in their names or enter any special horse. All they have to do is to buy an entry ticket the day before the race, so if you pass over yours I'll be all fixed up. You might as well, because you won't be needing it!"

The meaning behind his words dawned on her and her eyes filled with horror.

"You mean, you intend to try to prevent me racing—from getting to the stadium?"

Silently he nodded.

"You'll even use force if necessary?" she gasped incredulously.

Again he nodded.

"I'm afraid I'll have to—unless you're sensible. But I'm hopin' it won't be necessary. You see, honey—"

"Stop calling me honey!" Quivering with indignation, she faced him. "And there's no need to try to explain!" she stormed on. "I see it all now. You're nothing but a cowardly trickster—a miserable cheat!"

For the first time his nonchalance deserted him. He winced, and a tinge of red dyed his cheeks. Her eyes flashed with fierce satisfaction as she saw that her scornful words had stung him.

"Yes—a miserable cheat!" she repeated. "You know you won't stand a chance against Pommie—you know you can't win the steeplechase fairly—so you're adopting these underhand tactics. A fine fellow you are, to be afraid of a girl beating you—to try to cheat her out of her chance!"

He smiled twistedly.

"So that's what you think of me, is it?" he muttered. "Well, I suppose I ought to be used to hard names by now—". Abruptly that grim, determined expression returned. "Guess we've done enough talkin'," he said. "If you'll hand me that ticket—"

"Not likely! You're not going to cheat me out of the Bronze Rider. I promised uncle I'd win it, and win it I will. Get on, Pommie!"

As she cried out the angry words she flapped the reins—the signal for her horse to go into action. Instantly Pommie obeyed. He leapt into a flat-out gallop back down the hill.

But he went alone.

For even as he tore his bridle free from that clutching hand the young cowboy acted.

With lightning speed he grasped Merle around the waist and whipped her clean out of the saddle.

"How dare you! Let me go!" she panted, struggling furiously in his arms.

But he seemed oblivious of her kicking heels, of her whirling arms. Clutching her firmly, he carried her across the road, to disappear amongst the trees just as Pommie, having realised that his beloved mistress had in some inexplicable way vanished from his back, pulled up.

Hidden amongst the trees was an old wood-cutter's hut, and, realising Larry's intentions, Merle struggled more desperately than ever.

"Let me down! Let me down!" she ordered, then gave an even more furious shout as she felt his fingers at the purse on her belt. "My ticket! Don't you dare—"

But he had already snatched it, and before she could recover from the first shock he had dumped her down on a truss of hay inside the hut.

"Sorry to leave you like this, but I guess it's got to be done," he said. "So-long!"

The door closed behind him. Leaping up, Merle hurled herself across the hut. One hand grabbed the wooden latch. She pulled, but the door refused to budge. Tears welled in her eyes as she realised that he had bolted it behind him.

"Oh, the trickster—the cheat!" she gulped.

Darting to the window, she pushed her red, angry face to the rusty old bar that divided it. She was just in time to see Larry mount his black horse and go riding away.

She stared after him, her fury mingled with bewilderment.

Why was Larry so desperately anxious to win the steeplechase? It wasn't as if the Bronze Rider trophy was valuable; it wasn't as if the race was particularly important. Then why should he have adopted this method of ridding himself of an unwanted rival?

She shook her head in bafflement. Everything about Larry was strange and mysterious.

Then she remembered her uncle—remembered how curiously eager he had been that she should bring the bronze trophy home with her. Could there be any connection between that and Larry's extraordinary behaviour?

A plaintive whinny from outside cut into her thoughts. She saw that Pommie had returned and was now trotting to and fro.

"Pommie! Pommie darling!"

At the sound of her voice he turned his head, and cantered over as he saw her face pressed against the window. He thrust his nose between the bar and nuzzled her.

Fondly she patted him.

"I wish I could join you, Pommie," she said. "But that cowboy's prevented—". She broke off as suddenly she remembered the coil of rope hanging from the pintle of Pommie's saddle. "But he shan't cheat me!" she exclaimed. "Between us, honey, we'll beat him yet. Turn round, there's a dear."

Though at a loss to account for the sudden excitement in her voice, the chestnut swung round, and eagerly Merle reached out through the window. Grasping the coiled rope, she swiftly tied one end to the pintle, or strong spike that rose from the front of the saddle. Then she made the other end fast to the rusty iron bar.

"Run, Pommie!" she ordered. "Run off as fast as you can!"

At first the horse did not obey. He stood regarding her uncertainly. But as she gave him a slap and repeated her order, he whinnied and went galloping away.

Merle held her breath.

Would her ruse succeed?

There came a sudden splintering noise as the rope snapped taut, followed by a gasp of delight from Merle. For the old window frame had broken under the strain and both it and the bar went clattering to the ground.

Eagerly she clambered through the opening and, untying the rope, went running to her pet, re-coiling the rope as she went.

"Oh, you darling! Thanks to you I'm free!" she panted. "Now to surprise that cowboy, Larry! I'll teach him to try to cheat me!"

Swinging into the saddle, she sent

Pommie trotting back to the road. There she paused, looking speculatively down the steep face of the hill. A track led down to the bottom. It looked treacherous and dangerous, but she had implicit faith in Pommie.

"You can manage it, honey," she told him, and guided him to the edge of the precipitous path. "And it'll save lots of time."

For a moment the chestnut shied away, then, reassured by her confident voice, he took the plunge, slithering and sliding down the steep slope.

Safely he gained the bottom, and there before them loomed the stadium. Thanks to this short cut they had saved many precious minutes.

"We'll just about do it!" whooped Merle, and, her eyes agleam with fierce satisfaction at the thought that, after all, she would outwit the cowboy who had tricked her out of her entry ticket, she went galloping for the competitors' entrance.

But when she reached it she received an unpleasant shock.

The narrow door was closed and bolted.

Frantically she hammered on it with a clenched fist, but an interminable time seemed to pass before at last the upper half of it swung open and the head and shoulders of a uniformed attendant appeared to view.

"Yep? What is it?" he demanded.

"I want to come in. I want to compete in the steeplechase!" panted Merle.

"Got your entry ticket?"

"No. You see—"

But he did not wait for her to explain.

"Sorry; you can't compete without a ticket."

"But—"

"Sorry," he said again, and the door was closed in her face.



LARRY SPRINGS ANOTHER SURPRISE

For a moment Merle stood there in utter consternation, then, turning her horse, she went galloping back down the road.

She refused to admit defeat. No matter what happened, Larry should not cheat her out of the trophy her uncle wanted.

Reaching the public entrance, she tossed a dollar bill to the attendant there and rode in through the wide gateway. The crowd was so thick that at first she could see nothing of the arena, or of the stakes and hurdles that mapped out the course of the steeplechase. Frantically she strove to guide Pommie through the packed spectators, heading for the competitors' enclosure.

At last she was able to glimpse the great oval grass arena. Involuntarily her gaze went across to the starting-post, and then her heart sank.

For lined up there were eight or nine riders!

"Oh gee, the race'll soon be starting!" she panted. "Quickly, Pommie! We've got to stop Larry racing. We've got to get back—"

And then her voice trailed away, as for the first time she caught sight of Larry.

He had just come up to the starting-post.

Even from that distance Merle saw the confident set of his head, and she gave an angry gasp.

"How dare he! How dare he take my place and cheat me out of my chance of winning the Bronze Rider!"

She knew, without being boastful even to herself, that she would have won that trophy. The horses entered for the race were all fine animals, but Pommie was a champion, and had in a recent test made championship time. This would have been easy.

"But he won't get away with it," she vowed.

Shaking the reins, she began to edge Pommie through the crowd. There was not a moment to lose now. The starter was already climbing up on to his platform.

(Please turn to page 155.)



Their School ON CASTAWAY ISLE

By RENEE FRAZER

HER ESCAPE FROM THE CAMP

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

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

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

Mr. Barnard, in charge of the island school, had taken charge of Tania's book, and determined to retrieve it. Tania stole back to the camp. Before she could reach the schoolhouse where Mr. Barnard kept the book, however, she was seen, and, in turning to flee, tripped and fell.

ALMOST too terrified to move, Tania crouched in the shadow of the tent as she heard the excited voices of the castaways and the sound of their footsteps racing across the camp clearing.

"You say you saw someone here, Captain Rawlins?" demanded Mr. Barnard, as he called a halt.

"Positive!" came the captain's gruff reply.

"It couldn't have been Tania, I suppose, sir?" ventured Tim Burchell doubtfully.

"Tania?" echoed Mr. Barnard sternly. "She would not dare to show her face here after what has happened. Possibly it was a wild animal

"If that's the case, Mr. Barnard, you leave it to me." At once the captain assumed authority. "You young people stand back, and I'll have a look behind the tents."

In hiding, Tania heard his heavy footsteps cautiously approaching.

Desperately, inch by inch, she edged herself through the long grass that grew between the tents, using all her jungle skill to avoid making a sound.

And just then the flap of one of the tents parted, and a tall figure stepped from the shadows.

A scream was stifled on the jungle girl's lips as a hand was clapped over her mouth, and she was pulled quickly into the opening of the tent. Terrified, she looked up—into Gerry Royston's cool, masterful blue eyes.

"Quiet!" breathed Gerry, with a cautioning gesture. "All right, Tania. I won't give you away. I am still your friend. You can trust me."

Her mind awhirl, Tania could only kneel obediently in the shelter of the tent, while Gerry stepped out to encounter Captain Rawlins.

"Hallo, cap'n!" he remarked cheerfully. "Looking for someone?"

Tania was unable to distinguish the captain's reply. A great relief had swept over her.

Gerry—Gerry was still her friend!

He had said so himself. And he was going to help her.

Just then his footsteps returned, and he stood in the opening of the tent, a smile on his handsome face.

"I've sent 'em on a wild-goose chase!" he said softly. "I've told Cap'n Rawlins that I'd seen an animal of some kind making for the beach, and they've gone to look for it."

He dropped to his knees beside her. "I believe you were scared when you saw me, Tania!" he reproached her.

"I thought"—the jungle girl's lips trembled—"I thought you were angry with me like the others," she whispered unsteadily.

Gerry shook his head, his blue eyes wary.

"Not angry, Tania. I knew you were innocent, though everyone else believed you were guilty. I tried to convince Mr. Barnard, but he wouldn't listen. Nor would the others. You see, Dave had practically accused you of causing his accident

Tania's dark eyes were wide with distress. Even now it cut her to the heart to think of Dave's apparent disloyalty.

"He—he was ill; he did not understand what he was saying," she faltered. "Poor Dave! Was his hurt very bad?"

Gerry's good-looking face hardened. "You needn't waste your sympathy on him, Tania," he rejoined impatiently. "The rotter got off more lightly than he deserved. It's only a superficial wound, and he seems practically himself to-day, though Mr. Barnard won't allow him to be questioned."

"I am glad he is better," declared Tania simply. In her forgiving heart there was no bitterness against the boy whom she believed had wronged her. "Perhaps"—her face cleared—"perhaps, when he is better, he will tell them all that happened, and they will know I am not to blame?"

"If I know Dave, he'll stick to his story," Gerry retorted. "But don't let's talk about him, Tania. I'm more anxious about you. What on earth are you doing here?" As Tania hesitated, he added quickly: "You know you can trust me."

Meeting his blue eyes, the jungle girl's last doubts were swept aside. Impulsively she blurted out the reason for her visit—her anxiety for the precious book which held some secret connected with her.

Gerry whistled softly. His cunning mind was working swiftly, though Tania only saw the look of sympathy on his face.

"I don't blame you, Tania," he said. "After all, the book is your property, and Mr. Barnard has no right to retain it. But I will help you to get it."

Tania stared at him incredulously. Gerry was smiling, a daredevil gleam in his eyes.

"Yes, I mean it, Tania. But it's too dangerous to talk here; the others may be back again in a few minutes.

Come with me, and I'll explain my plan."

He stepped cautiously out of the tent, beckoning her when he saw that the coast was clear. Her heart beating with excitement and gratitude, Tania followed him. Gerry led the way to a quiet, sunlit glade and motioned her to a seat on a fallen tree-trunk.

"Listen to me, Tania—and listen carefully," he breathed. "I'm going to help you to get back your book, but we'll have to wait till this evening. Mr. Barnard has arranged to check over the ship's papers with Captain Rawlins after supper. The papers are locked in the safe with your book, and he's almost certain to leave the key in the safe while he's talking to the captain in his tent. Do you understand?"

Tania nodded, her dark eyes fixed eagerly on his face.

"Tania understands," she whispered.

"Good! Well, this is how we'll work it. Come back to the camp at dusk and watch for my signal. I'll distract the attention of the others while you slip into the schoolhouse. Grab the book from the safe, and leave by the window that opens on to the jungle. That's very important. I'll only be able to distract the others for a few minutes, and one of them might spot you if you left by the door. Is that clear?"

Once again the jungle girl nodded. "Then you can leave the rest to me, Tania," declared Gerry. "I promise you that you won't be caught. And to-morrow—he smiled at her strangely—"to-morrow we'll arrange a meeting—just the two of us—anywhere you like to suggest. I'll help you to discover the meaning of those pictures in the book, with the help of the map I'm minding for you. And perhaps—perhaps, Tania, we'll be able to clear up the mystery surrounding you."

There was a lump of gratitude in the jungle girl's throat as she met his eager glance.

"It shall be as Gerry says," she said. "Tania will get back her book with Gerry's help, and to-morrow, early, when the sun touches the treetops, she will meet him in canoe where the water from the hills tumbles into the valley—"

"You mean the rapids?" asked Gerry. "I caught a glimpse of them yesterday. All right, Tania. Till this evening, then—and don't forget my instructions."

Almost happily, Tania left him, her former despair replaced by eager excitement as she hurried away through the trees. Gerry was going to help her! Gerry, her friend!

Gerry watched her till she was out of sight, then turned with a start as a hand fell on his shoulder.

"Stanhope, what do you want?" he demanded.

Stanhope, the ship's mate, stood there, scowling.

"What's your game, Gerry Royston?" he countered. "You must be crazy to have anything to do with that jungle girl. I thought we'd seen the last of her."

"You can think again!" rejoined Gerry smoothly. "She's going to be

very useful, Stanhope. She's anxious to get back her precious diary—and, what's more, I'm going to help her!"

The other stared at him in blank dismay.

"You must be crazy!" he gasped. "We want that book ourselves, and we've got to act quickly. When young Dave's well enough to talk he'll blurt out what he knows, and he may persuade Barnard that Tania's innocent—"

"Let him!" rejoined Gerry, with a cool smile. "No one will believe him, Stanhope—not after this evening, for when Tania comes back for her book I'm going to kill two birds with one stone."

He whispered something in the mate's ear, and an unpleasant grin crossed the latter's face. Still chuckling, they both disappeared among the trees.



TANIA BLAMED

Twilight had fallen over the forest, and Tania, perched high in a tall tree, waited anxiously for Gerry's signal.

She could see the leaping flames of the camp-fire reflecting on the laughing faces of the young castaways as they ate their supper.

The jungle girl's lips trembled. In spite of her taut excitement—her reckless determination to carry out Gerry's plan—the sight of that happy party brought a stab to her heart.

Not so long ago she had been one of them, welcome to come and go as she pleased. But now she was an outcast. Now—

And then she stiffened as she caught sight of Gerry's tall, handsome figure as he strolled across to the group.

Tania saw him beckon to them laughingly, and though she could not hear his words, it was plain that he was trying to persuade them to follow him on some pretext—to leave the way clear for her!

One by one they left the camp-fire, forming an excited group round the boy. He was pointing towards the trees, and in a moment they were running in the direction he indicated.

Gerry lingered for a moment, and Tania saw him raise his hand; saw the sudden gleam of a torch flashing towards the tree in which she crouched.

Gerry's signal!

Tania slid from her lofty perch, springing nimbly to the ground. Her pulses raced with mingled excitement and anxiety as she crept through the bushes towards the clearing.

It was deserted now, though a light glowed behind the canvas of two of the tents. One would be Mr. Barnard's tent, where he and Captain Rawlins were busily studying the papers; the other, perhaps, was Dave's, for the injured boy had not been among the group around the fire.

Cautiously she crept out into the firelit clearing, moving like a shadow towards the schoolhouse.

The door stood open—as Gerry had promised!

In a moment Tania had reached it and slipped inside.

An oil-lamp, its wick turned low, threw a faint, almost eerie gleam of yellow light on the rows of desks, books, and the big iron safe standing in the corner.

Tania darted towards the safe. The keys were in the lock, as Gerry had expected, and Tania had often seen Mr. Barnard use them.

A swift, desperate turn, and the safe door swung open.

There, lying by itself on a tray, was her precious book!

Tania snatched it up, holding it tightly, her heart thudding.

Then she stiffened as to her ears drifted the sound of distant voices. The castaways were coming back!

In sudden terror, she stared around. The window! She must escape!

She darted across the room. The small window above the rostrum was wide open, and she could see the trees silhouetted against the sky outside.

Gerry must have opened it for her!

Panting, Tania sprang towards the window—when something caught her foot, and she was almost thrown headlong. She heard a faint twanging sound and a muffled crash, but she dared not look round.

For now she could hear the shouts and laughter of the castaways as they trooped across the clearing.

With an agile spring, she gained the window, still clutching her precious book. Between her and the safety of the jungle was only a narrow strip of open ground; but, even as she sped recklessly across it, there came a loud, excited yell:

"Look! Look over there!"

"There's someone making for the jungle!"

"It's Tania!" cried Moyra Curtis shrilly. "She's been up to some mischief, I'll be bound!"

"After her, chaps!" yelled Tim Burchell.

"Tania! Come back!" thundered Mr. Barnard's stern voice, as he came running from his tent.

But Tania, panic-stricken, was running like a hare, and in a moment had disappeared into the jungle. Mr. Barnard, realising they could never overtake her, called the jungle girl's pursuers back. And then a new voice broke into the confusion.

"What—what's going on here?" it asked shakily and rather puzzled.

They all turned, and an expression of swift anxiety crossed Mr. Barnard's face.

"Dave!" he exclaimed. "You shouldn't have left your tent!"

Dave Cardew, his rugged face pale and drawn, his head still bandaged, stood in the glow of the firelight, looking round with a puzzled smile.

"It's all right, sir. I'm feeling much better," he declared, as they clustered round him. "Just a bit thick-headed." He grinned boyishly. "What's all the row about?"

Eagerly Moyra stepped forward to tell him.

"Goodness, Dave! Haven't you heard about Tania? Mr. Barnard banished her from the camp, and now she's had the cheek to come back for some reason—probably out of spite—"

A startled expression crossed Dave's face.

"Just a minute!" he exclaimed huskily. "I don't understand. Tania—banished. Why—"

A clamour of voices started to reply, but Mr. Barnard checked them. Quietly, reluctantly, he explained to Dave the reason for his action, and the boy's face turned deathly pale.

"But—but it can't be true, sir!" he protested, looking towards Gerry, who met his glance with an unwinking stare. "I—I don't remember exactly what happened." He raised a hand unsteadily to his bandaged head. "It was all so sudden. I'd been imprisoned in that cave by Tania. Then I saw the stone move. I—I thought Tania had come to release me. I stepped out, and someone attacked me. But I can't believe that Tania—"

"Tania was the only one who knew where you were," pointed out Mr. Barnard. "I must admit that she did not seem the sort of girl to act as she did. Still, I was mistaken; we all were. I'm sorry, Dave, but I'm afraid it's true—"

He was interrupted by a startled shout from one of the boys.

"Look! Mr. Barnard—the schoolhouse!"

Everyone whirled, and a horrified cry went up. For smoke was belching from the open door of the schoolhouse, and they could see the red glow of flames beyond.

Above the cries of dismay came Moyra's shrill, accusing voice:

"Someone's set fire to the schoolhouse—and Tania was there a few minutes ago!"



THE MEETING AT THE RAPIDS

Mr. Barnard rapped out orders. The boys raced for the canvas buckets lined up outside the tents, and Gerry snatched up an extinguisher that had been brought from the ship.

In a few minutes they were attacking the flames that curled from the doorway, licking the bamboo walls.

Fortunately, the fire had not had time to get a grip on the main structure; most of the flames came from a cupboard containing books and stationery, near which the oil-lamp had been left burning.

Gerry was the first to burst through the clouds of smoke that poured from the open door. A handkerchief over his face, he groped his way through the blinding smoke, feeling over the floor.

His fingers closed on a length of fine wire stretched from the window to the base of the overturned lamp. With a swift tug, he removed the incriminating trip-wire—the wire against which Tania had unknowingly stumbled.

Thrusting the incriminating evidence into his pocket, Gerry returned to meet Mr. Barnard and the other boys.

"It must have been an accident, sir," he declared. "I can hardly believe that Tania would purposely have done a thing like this—out of revenge—"

There came a gasp from the group standing outside.

"That's it!" declared Moyra. "It was revenge—revenge for being banished from the school! Even Dave must see what kind of a girl Tania is now!"

Dave, pale and silent, stood beside Mr. Barnard, looking hard at Gerry. And that boy returned the other's gaze with a cool, unflinching stare, a gleam of satisfaction in his blue eyes.

His plot had succeeded even better than he had hoped. Even Dave must have his doubts about Tania now. The jungle girl would have no one to turn to except Gerry Royston.

UNAWARE of the cunning scheme of which she was the innocent dupe, Tania returned to her new home, carrying her precious book.

Her gratitude to Gerry knew no bounds.

That night she slept with the book under her pillow of dried grass, dreaming of the secrets to be learned when Gerry had helped her to decipher those quaint, faint pictures.

The next morning she was astir as the sun rose. Soon she set out to keep her appointment with Gerry, carrying the book in a woven satchel slung across her shoulder.

Picking her way sure-footedly over the stepping stones that crossed the rapids, she climbed into her canoe and set out on the risky, yet thrilling journey to the rendezvous.

Her touch on the paddle was strong and deft. She sent the light craft skimming over the turbulent water, in and out of the jagged rocks.

At length a bend in the rapids brought her in sight of a glistening pool, into which the waters poured with a noise like thunder.

Through the fine spray she caught a glimpse of a boat—one of the ship's boats—a figure seated motionless at the oars.

"Gerry!" called Tania, urging her canoe through a barrier of rushes. "Gerry, I come with the book—"

Then her voice trailed away in a startled gasp as the boy leaned from his boat, grasping the prow of her canoe.

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

She shrank back with a cry, her hands clenched, staring into Dave Cardew's stern, penetrating eyes.

Dave has come instead of Gerry. What does this mean? See next Friday's instalment.



DOLORES

The Mischief-Maker

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

A SHOCK FOR THE CAMPERS

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

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

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

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

The chums, believing Dolores had hidden the notebook containing the message in an ornamental black box, awaited their opportunity, then went along to Dolores' chalet to search for it.

While they were searching they heard Dolores' voice outside, and, to their horror, saw her approaching with a crowd of campers.

"CHRIS, we've got to hide!" Pat gasped. "If we're caught in here we'll find it difficult to explain. Come on—into the wardrobe!"

Still clutching the black box, she darted across the chalet. Eagerly her chum followed. They jerked open the door of the wardrobe and quickly clambered amongst Dolores' clothes.

Hardly had they concealed themselves than footsteps sounded on the veranda.

"Hope to goodness," came Dolores' laughing voice, "that nobody's paid me a visit while I've been away. I'm rather anxious about that black box, you know."

The two chums held their breath as the door opened and Dolores, Bruce Feltham and a group of young holiday-makers entered the chalet.

"Gee, you've certainly made yourself comfy here!" exclaimed the young sports master, looking admiringly around.

"And why not?" asked Dolores with a smile, then she pointed to the expensive box of crystallized fruits on the table. "Anyone care for a snack? Please help yourselves."

As the campers eagerly availed themselves of the invitation, Dolores stared across the chalet, a queer look in her eyes.

"Now where did I put that ignition key?" she murmured. "Oh, I remember—in the pocket of the blazer I wore yesterday. That will be in the wardrobe. Like to see my wardrobe, folks?"

Pat and Chris froze with horror and frantically they tried to screen themselves with the hanging frocks. The door was jerked open and Dolores' slim arm was thrust into the wardrobe.

The chums held their breath. Would they escape discovery? It seemed so, for, having extracted the ignition key from her blazer pocket, Dolores turned away. But that queer

gleam still showed in her violet eyes and abruptly she swung round again, snatching at the hanging dresses, pushing them aside. Then she gave a startled gasp.

"Why, someone's hiding in here!" she exclaimed. "Well, if it isn't Pat and Chris!"

But as she surveyed the dismayed chums there was no astonishment on her face, only a smile of mockery.

"Pat and Chris!" exclaimed Bruce, while Lucy Day and all the others stared incredulously.

Red-faced and humiliated, the chums stepped out of the wardrobe and Dolores gave another gasp, as she saw what Pat was clutching.

"Why, that's my black box!" she exclaimed. "But whatever were you doing with that? And why were you hiding in the wardrobe? Is this a joke?"

Most of the campers were looking suspicious and indignant, and the chums flushed hotly as they realised what they must be thinking. Bruce Feltham regarded them sternly.

"Why did you take Dolores' box?" he asked.

Chris drew in her breath sharply. "Because we wanted to look inside," she replied. "You see, we believe that it contains Dolores' notebook—the book whose existence she has denied; the book in which she copied that message that was scratched on the floor of the ketch!"

There came a startled gasp from all around and all eyes went to Dolores. She did not turn a hair. Calmly she stood there, a tantalising, almost mocking smile curving her lips.

"But that is absurd—really it is, Pat," she said. "That box only contains a little secret of mine."

Pat gave a derisive snort. "Then open it and let's see for ourselves," she said.

"Yes—I dare you to open it," put in Chris.

Challengingly they faced the mischief-maker, but to their surprise she calmly nodded.

"Very well—if you insist—although it will spoil the surprise I was preparing," she said, and, taking a key from her pocket, she fitted it into the lock of the box and turned it.

Wonderingly Pat and Chris eyed each other. Was it possible that they had made a mistake? That mocking gleam in Dolores' eyes made them feel suddenly uneasy.

While everyone crowded round Dolores lifted the lid and revealed its contents. Another gasp went up, for the box contained, not a notebook, but a model of a silver sailing ship, with a silver plate attached to its base, all ready for an inscription. And across the model lay a slip of paper on which was written:

"To PAT ROCKWELL—in memory of the Westonmouth Regatta, 1948, with grateful thanks from all her friends at the holiday camp."

Dolores shook her head regretfully as she lifted up the miniature Roman galley and displayed it.

"You see—this was the surprise I

was planning," she said. "I was waiting until I went into town to have the words engraved on it, and I meant to present it to Pat on regatta day."

Pat's head was in a whirl. As for Chris, she stood as if petrified. This discovery had taken them completely by surprise, but as they saw that tantalising gleam in Dolores' eyes they had the feeling that once again they had been cleverly tricked.

From the other holiday-makers came an indignant murmur.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied now," said Lucy Day.

"Reckon you ought to apologise to Dolores," put in one of the boys.

They all looked pointedly across at the chums, but they remained silent. Dolores was openly grinning at them now, and their last doubts vanished.

They had been tricked. Dolores, knowing that they were still after the notebook, had deliberately planned for them to overhear her conversation with Lucy—knowing that as a result they would search her chalet. She had planted the model in the black box—lured them into an artful trap!

"Well, what about it?" demanded Lucy. "Aren't you going to do as Derek says?"

"Yes—aren't you going to apologise?" asked that boy again.

Pat's lips drew tight. Her chum remained silent also. It was Dolores who ended the embarrassing scene.

"Goodness, I don't want an apology," she cried. "Come on, let's forget all about it—let's go for that cruise."

Her light-hearted words lessened the tension and an eager move was made for the door. Slowly Pat and Chris followed and smilingly Dolores beckoned to them.

"You coming cruising with us?" she asked.

Pat shook her head. "No thanks," she replied. "We've—we've arranged to go for a walk."

She knew that her refusal had created a bad impression, but she could not help it. She was seething at Dolores' trickery and she could not bring herself to go aboard the mischief-maker's cabin-cruiser.

When the rest of the holiday-makers had gone streaming down to the beach and Bruce had gone about his camp duties, Chris turned to her chum.

"Was there ever such a girl!" she gasped. "She seems to think of everything!" Then she frowned. "But where can she have hidden that notebook?" she asked.

Pat's brows puckered thoughtfully. "I've a feeling it must be still on the ketch," she said. "Anyway, let's forget it for now. Let's enjoy ourselves. We mustn't let that mischief-maker spoil our holiday."

The chums thoroughly enjoyed their stroll along the cliff-top, but during the next few days they continued to keep a close watch on Dolores. She however made no suspicious move, and Pat's conviction that she must have hidden the all-important notebook somewhere on the ketch deepened.

And then, one afternoon after lunch, Bruce made an announcement.

"The ketch has been cleaned and is all ready for us to start painting

and decorating it," he said, "so what about us all getting busy this afternoon?"

There came an enthusiastic roar of agreement, but Pat was watching Dolores and suddenly she saw an excited gleam come into that girl's eyes. Pat gave Chris a nudge.

"She's excited because she thinks now's her chance to get back that notebook," she whispered. "But she's going to be unlucky. We'll watch her like a hawk and the moment she acts we'll pounce!"



THE ARRIVAL OF THE COSTUMES

The whole camp went in a body to the boathouse, and when they were on board the young sports master surveyed them

smilingly.

"I suggest we split into two parties," he said. "One to undertake the carpentry—the other to do the painting. Now who shall be in charge of the painters?"

"Dolores!" came the quick shout and Dolores smiled, obviously pleased by this evidence of her popularity.

Bruce nodded, then looked around. "Now for the carpenters. Who shall be their leader?"

Instantly before anyone else could speak, Dolores answered.

"Why, Pat, of course," she said. "This regatta stunt was her idea, so it's only right she should be one of the leaders."

There came a murmur of approval, for the scene in Dolores' chalet had by now been forgotten by most of the holiday-makers. But to everyone's surprise Pat shook her head.

"Thanks—but I'd rather not," she said.

"But—" began Dolores. Smilingly Pat interrupted her. "It's nice of you to nominate me," she said, "but I'd rather work in your squad, Dolores."

"Rather! Me, too!" chipped in Chris, quickly realising the reason for her chum's unexpected action.

Pat did not intend to let Dolores out of her sight!

The mischief-maker frowned and for a moment a furious glare filled her beautiful eyes. It was as if she also understood Pat's motives.

"But—" she began again, only once more to be interrupted.

"I suggest Willis takes charge," Pat said sweetly. "He's a dab hand at carpentry."

"Right-ho, Willis it is," agreed Bruce and to Dolores' secret fury the matter was at an end.

Pat and Chris exchanged covert smiles as they followed the mischief-maker across the deck, to where pots of paint and brushes stood ready. For once they had got the better of her. Curtly Dolores indicated two of the paint-pots.

"Pat and Chris—you'd better start on the starboard rail," she snapped. "I'll get to work on the other side."

"Oh, then we'll come with you," said Pat, calmly picking up a paint-pot and following the other girl. "We'd like to watch to see how it's done."

And to Dolores' increasing anger they insisted on working close beside her all afternoon. Several times she made excuses and tried to slip off, but always it was to find one or the other of the chums close at her heels. The result was that she abandoned any scheme she had had to recover the notebook and Chris frowned rather disappointedly as work for the day finished, they all filed off the ketch, leaving Bruce to lock up behind them.

"I'm afraid we overdid it a bit, Pat," she whispered. "We scared her off from looking for the notebook."

Pat nodded. "I know—but I couldn't resist the opportunity of tantalising her," she said with a chuckle. "Anyway, there'll be plenty of time to-morrow."

In the morning work on the ketch was resumed. More cautiously this time Pat and Chris kept watch on Dolores, and at last, when she thought

they were busy painting, the mischief-maker began tiptoeing away.

The chums' hearts leapt. Was she at long last to lead them to the notebook?

Stealthily they began to follow. Dolores was making for the stern, but before she could achieve her secret purpose there came a sudden shout from the boathouse door.

"Stop work, everybody!" And there was Bruce, accompanied by two of the camp porters, carrying two huge wickerwork hampers.

Dolores swung round and she glared as she saw that once again Pat and Chris were on her trail, but before she could say anything Bruce spoke again.

"The regatta costumes have arrived," he announced, nodding towards the hampers. "So what about trying them on?"

There was instantly an excited clamour. A rush forward was made and the porters were hardly given a chance to drag the hampers aboard. With a whoop the campers overwhelmed them, captured the hampers and enthusiastically carried them on to the ketch's deck.

Feverish fingers unfastened the lids, and on to the deck tumbled a mass of white, crimson and green garments, and a glittering array of brass breast-plates and helmets, swords, spears, shields and daggers.

"I bags this wizard red costume!" whooped Lucy Day.

"And me for this lovely green one!" cried a girl named Daphne French.

Excitedly the girls helped themselves while the boys eagerly examined the brass helmets and swords.

Even Pat and Chris forgot their quest for the hidden notebook. As thrilled as any, they gathered around. And then an admiring gasp went up as Lucy held up an exquisitely fashioned purple garment.

"This must be the Roman empress' costume!" she exclaimed. "Golly, isn't it simply grand? Here, Dolores, let's see how you look in it."

Dolores took the costume and held it against her, smiling charmingly, and another gasp of admiration went up.

"My, but it suits you to a 'T'!" exclaimed Daphne.

"Rather!" agreed Lucy. "Dolores is just the girl to take the role of empress!"

There came a murmur of agreement from several of the others, but Chris, who had been watching with increasing indignation Dolores prouetting up and down, basking in Lucy and Co.'s admiration, stepped angrily forward.

"Not so fast!" she cried. "You seem to forget that this regatta stunt was Pat's idea. It's she who should be empress, not a newcomer like Dolores!"

And challengingly she looked around.



THE NOTEBOOK AT LAST

For a moment there was silence, then Lucy gave an irate sniff.

"Rats! Dolores would make a much better empress," she declared.

"Go on, Dolores, try it on," "No—it's Pat who should wear it," affirmed Chris, determined that her chum should not be robbed of the proud position which she felt rightly belonged to her.

Instantly an argument broke out. Some supported Pat; others Dolores. It was Bruce who brought it to an end. As sports master, he was anxious that there should be no friction in the camp.

"Steady on!" he cried, looking round at the flushed faces with a soothing smile. "It's far too early to decide who shall be empress. This is only an informal try-on, so it doesn't really matter who wears the costume this afternoon."

"Then I will try it on, if I may," said Dolores quickly.

"Oh, no, you won't," cried Chris, determined that the mischief-maker should not score over her chum.

Bruce frowned. He sensed the tension in the air. Then he smiled.

"I suggest that the best way to settle the matter is to toss for it," he said. "Heads, Dolores; tails, Pat. Everyone agreed?"

There came a murmur of approval and, taking a penny from his pocket, the young sports master threw it into the air. Everyone craned forward as it clattered down to the deck.

"Heads!" whooped Lucy. "Then the honour falls to me," said Dolores, and she grinned triumphantly across at Chris and Pat.

Carrying the coveted costume, she went below to change. The rest of the girls eagerly followed with their costumes, leaving the boys up on deck, excitedly to strap on the breast-plates, don their helmets and engage in mock duels with the swords.

Pat, selecting a pale yellow costume, was close at Dolores' heels. Not even now was she going to let the mischief-maker out of her sight.

Amid excited chatter the girls donned their costumes, and when they were ready, laughingly lined up for an inspection by the empress—at Dolores' instruction.

Though inwardly seething at the way Dolores seemed to have taken charge of everything, Pat could not help but admit that she looked lovely in that costume.

Had she not known Dolores for what she was, she reflected, she would indeed have handed over the rôle to her, but now—

"She's certainly marvellous," Chris said. "Oh, what a pity she's so two-faced. She might be one of the nicest girls one could meet—"

But she wasn't, Pat thought grimly: She was their enemy, and they had to bowl her out.

With this thought in mind Pat followed the others out of the saloon.

And what a blaze of colour the deck of the old ketch became when the girls, dressed in their romantic costumes, rejoined the boys!

"I say, we must have a picture of this!" cried Pat, when the impromptu rehearsal neared its end. "Luckily I brought my camera with me."

"That's a wizard idea," declared Willis Green, and there came an eager murmur from all around.

"But you'd better adjourn to the beach," Pat suggested. "The light's stronger there. Bruce, will you form them into a group? I'll slip below and get the camera."

Enthusiastically the holiday-makers clambered off the ketch and hurried out of the boathouse to the adjoining beach, while Pat ran down the companionway. She found her camera, snapped it open, then put in a new spool of film. It took her a few moments to get it fixed, then, camera in hand, she mounted the steps.

But suddenly she paused, a startled gleam flashing into her eyes.

"Hallo, what does this mean?" she murmured, and hurriedly ducked out of sight.

For the deck was not deserted as she had expected. One of the holiday-makers had returned to the ketch. It was Dolores, and there was something furtive about her manner.

Instantly Pat thought of the hidden notebook and cautiously she watched. Had the mischief-maker made some excuse to return in order to retrieve that book?

Dolores had now reached the steering-wheel. There she paused, to look apprehensively around. Seeing no one, she chuckled and swiftly lifted the hood of the binnacle that stood in front of the wheel. Next moment she had whipped something out from under the hood, and it was only with difficulty that Pat suppressed the cry that rose to her lips.

For it was a green-backed book that Dolores clutched—the notebook in which she had copied the mystery message! At last Pat had caught her red-handed!

What will Pat do? And what does the mystery message say? See next Friday's enthralling instalment.



The MERRYMAKERS AFLOAT

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

THE DESERT ISLE

PHEW! That was something like a high dive!"

Sally Warner grinned ruefully as she recovered from the first stunning shock of falling overboard from the Ocean Star, the college ship in which she had been travelling to Australia.

Clinging to her lifebelt raft, she peered through the thick mist, expecting every moment to hear herself hailed, to see a rescuing boat come to her rescue.

But all was silent, save for the murmur of the waves, and there was no sign of a ship's boat. No sign either of the Ocean Star.

"Oh, golly, they haven't realised that I'm missing yet," she ejaculated. "And the ship's gone steaming on."

Something like panic seized her as she realised her awful plight, then she comforted herself with the knowledge that sooner or later her absence aboard must be discovered, then the Ocean Star was bound to return in search for her.

After an effort she managed to clamber on to the lifebelt raft and, thrusting her arm through a knotted rope, she stretched herself out.

And there she lay, while the strong current swept her relentlessly on—farther and farther from the Ocean Star. Exhausted by her nightmare experience, she felt her eyes closing and at last she fell into a coma.

When she awoke it was to find that the mist had gone and that the early-morning sun was streaming down on her. More surprising, she was no longer bobbing up and down on the raft. She sat up in bewilderment, then gave an amazed gasp, for under her was warm, dry sand.

Sally gave a whoop of joy, then she laughed as she realised that the tide had washed her up on to the shore of an island. She was saved! It was a wonderful thought, and for a moment she could only revel in her miraculous escape.

Then, scrambling to her feet, she looked down at the lifebelt raft which lay half-buried in the soft sand. Attached to it was that mysterious waterproof bag which Jack Morris, the rascally passenger who had been responsible for her falling overboard, had tied there.

Sign of that bag made her recall the notes Morris had made about the incoming tide to Paloa Island.

"This must be it," she told herself. "This must be Paloa Island. Now, if only I could sight the Ocean Star—"

Eagerly she peered out to sea, but to her dismay there was not a ship in sight. Her smile faded, and again panic seized her. Suppose the Ocean Star didn't come back to search for her! Suppose she was marooned on a desert isle!

Desperately she told herself that it was foolish to worry, that a thorough search was bound to be made for her. Then her thoughts turned to her chums—to Don Weston, Fay Manners, and Johnny Briggs. What were they doing now? What were they thinking?

Her eyes grew misty and a sob escaped her at the awful thought that she might never see them again. Fiercely she battled with her emotion.

"None of that, Sally Warner," she said briskly. "You'd better find something to occupy your mind for a while."

Her gaze again went to the waterproof bag. What was in it? Why had Morris risked so much to throw it overboard from the Ocean Star?

She dragged the raft up the sand into the shelter of the tall, luxuriant ferns that grew at the edge of the beach and freed the oilskin bag from the lifebelts. The top of it was fastened by a zipper, and after some difficulty she managed to open it. Inside the bag was a box, and inside the box a rather heavy object in another waterproof bag.

As she was about to open that bag Sally suddenly jerked up, a look of incredulity in her eyes. For from some distance away a gruff voice suddenly roared out:

"Ahoy, there!"

Sally's first thrillingly joyful thought was that a search party from the Ocean Star was approaching the island. With a choking cry of relief she scrambled to her feet and started forward. And then she stopped, staring.

For that shout had not come from the sea. It had come from a tall, uncouth-looking man clad in a dirty white suit, who was standing on high ground two hundred yards or so from Sally.

He was staring out to sea, waving towards a rowing-boat which was approaching the island.

"Any luck?" he roared. "Did you pick up the stuff?"

"No," came a gruff, angry shout from the boat. "We searched around in that darned fog, but we couldn't find a thing. We'll take another look soon."

Sally stood rooted, some queer feeling of foreboding telling her that there was something wrong here. Even so, her relief at seeing other human beings, however unprepossessing, was so enormous that she was prepared to ignore that warning inner voice.

She watched, however, as the boat grated on the beach, as three men jumped out.

"Not a thing," one of them declared savagely. "Not even a sign of the lifebelts."

Sally stiffened. Lifebelts! That word had a familiar ring. Very cautiously she crept a little closer, her heart beginning to thump with fear and excitement.

"Yep, it was his bright idea to steal the stuff and throw it overboard lashed to the lifebelts," said the first man. "Smart idea, too. But if that chap who calls himself Morris has let us down, let him look out for himself, that's all!"

"Here, go easy, Seth," murmured one of the others. "Don't condemn

the man yet. We may find it when we take another look. Anyway, Morris may have hit some snag. Maybe he couldn't work the plan the way he wanted."

"There's no such word as couldn't in this job," snarled Seth. "That stuff's worth a small fortune to us, and you know it."

Hardly daring to breathe, Sally stood motionless, hidden by the tall grass and ferns. With a shock the truth had hit her. These men were confederates of the rascally Jack Morris. Somehow he had managed to steal something of great value which was being carried aboard the Ocean Star, and he had intended to float it on the lifebelt raft to the rest of the gang, who clearly had their headquarters on this island. Had she not tumbled to his game no one would have known what had happened to the package. Certainly not the slightest suspicion would have attached itself to Jack Morris. But for Sally the whole affair would have remained wrapt in mystery.

For a moment longer she stood, listening to the men grumbling among themselves. Then a resolute look came to her face.

She had foiled Jack Morris, and she would foil these men. They shouldn't get away with this robbery. But what could she do? She must reveal herself to them, for on a small island like this it would only be a matter of time before they discovered her.

With a sudden gleam in her eyes she stealthily backed away until once again she reached the spot where she had left the raft. Feverishly she again undid the waterproof bag, extracted the box and pulled out the small waterproof bag.

With a quick look round she spied a large rock, and dug into the soft sand near it with her hands. Then carefully she placed the object in the hole, and smoothed the sand over again.

It was the work of a moment to fill the box with pebbles to make up the weight of the object she had removed. Quickly she thrust it back into the waterproof bag and closed the zipper.

Panting a little with exertion and elation, she rose to her feet, and with some apprehension started forward. Then she gave a violent start as a gruff voice, filled with astonishment, sounded behind her:

"Well, if it isn't a girl! Here, where on earth did you spring from?"



SALLY'S SMOKE SIGNALS

With a stifled gasp of alarm Sally swung round, staring into the wondering face of the man she had first seen on the island.

"Great snakes, you've got the raft—and the bag!" he shouted. "So Morris didn't let us down, after all."

His shouts brought the other men to the scene. Their astonishment equalled his own when they saw Sally, though on the scowling face of the man they called Seth was a look of deep distrust and suspicion.

"Sure I've got it," Sally said in a nonchalant voice. "It was a bit trickier than we thought, though. As a matter of fact, I had to come over with it, otherwise we'd never have got it away from the ship."

The first man whistled in astonishment.

"You came over with it!" he repeated in awed admiration. "Gee, you're a plucky 'un. But who—"

"Why, I get it," broke in the youngest of the men. "You're Jack Morris' niece, Janet. He said he might be bringing you along. Put it there, sister. I'm Joe. These are Al, Frank, and Seth."

Sally acknowledged the introduction with a nod and a smile, inwardly thanking the unknown Janet Morris for coming to her rescue like this. If she could lull the men's suspicions about herself, then there would be a better chance of bluffing them about the contents of the oilskin bag; a better chance of signalling to the Ocean Star when it came in search of her again, which surely, surely it must do!

"You'd better come along to the camp for some coffee and a bite to eat," Al's voice broke in on her thoughts. "Bring the bag, Frank. Guess everything's okay inside it, eh?" he asked eagerly.

"You bet," said Sally confidently. "Just leave that to nunky. Lead me to that coffee, brother. I certainly am thirsty."

With a swaggering step she followed Joe and Al, with Seth beside her and Frank bringing up the rear with the oilskin bag. She must, she thought with a grimace, look as ruffled as the men themselves. The hot sun, thank goodness, had dried her slacks and blouse, but they were dreadfully creased and stained with sea water.

Conscious of the dour Seth's lowering glance still fixed on her, she walked on. At last Joe and Al drew to a halt.

"Here we are—home, sweet home," said Joe mockingly.

Keenly Sally looked round at the tent, at the cooking utensils under a sheet of tarpaulin, and at a small wooden hut standing alone, its door secured by a padlock. And Sally's heart gave a tremendous leap as she saw the radio aerial above its roof.

"Cute dump," she said coolly, hoping desperately that no one would notice the excitement in her voice. "And who lives in the bungalow?"

She nodded towards the little hut. Joe gave a chuckle.

"That's strictly private," he said, with a wink. "Radio transmitter and so on. But you wouldn't understand about that."

"I guess not," yawned Sally. "Right now I'm more interested in the coffee. You boys sit down while I get it. By the look of this kitchen you're in need of a cook around here."

Even the surly Seth was prepared to agree with that. Placing the precious bag in one of the huts, they sat down on the ground to wait for the coffee. But while Sally heated the water over the fire in a battered old kettle, now and again exchanging a smile and a jest with the men, her brain was on fire with joy and excitement.

A radio transmitter! Oh, wonderful thought! If only she could get to it, get rid of the men for a while. She could contact the Ocean Star, let them know where she was!

"Coffee coming up," she said at last. "Say, you'd better take it over there in the shade of the trees. I'll bring you a bite to eat in a few minutes, when I've taken an inventory of the larder."

She carried the mugs of coffee on a biscuit-tin lid into the shade of the trees behind one of the tents, her eyes gleaming as she saw the men lazily throw themselves down.

Heart racing, she hurried back and picked up another mug of coffee. Was the hut locked? She must find out. Cautiously she approached the door, tried it. Then her heart sank. For the padlock

was secure. Only the key would open it.

It was a bitter blow for Sally. A choking lump came to her throat, a shattering yearning for the company of her chums. Fleeting she wondered whether all her efforts to save the mystery waterproof bag had been worth while. Then, at the thought of the unpleasant Morris, and his equally unpleasant associates here, her shoulders squared. Of course it was worth while!

"You should be ashamed of yourself, Sally Warner," she told herself mentally, "getting downhearted at the first setback. You'll just have to find out where the key's kept—"

She jumped violently, spilling the coffee as a rough hand caught her shoulder, jerking her round.

"Snooping, eh?" came an angry voice, and there was Seth standing there. "Just what I thought," he added.

For a moment Sally's heart seemed to stop beating.

Oh, why hadn't she remembered that Seth was suspicious? If she gave him cause to investigate further, he might look inside the bag and find the mysterious contents had been removed.

Seth's narrowed, glittering eyes glared at Sally. In quick aversion she took a step back, then managed a light, exasperated laugh.

"If you aren't the most suspicious man I ever met," she said, in assumed indignation. "Doesn't the poor chap working the radio need any coffee?"

"There isn't any chap working the radio," rapped Seth. "Al attends to that when it's necessary, and, what's more, he keeps the key. So don't let me catch you around here again. You look after your cooking."

"Oh, don't keep on for goodness' sake!" snapped Sally, and, shaking off Seth's clutching hand, she marched off.

But at least she had learnt something, she thought, as she set about the job of getting a meal. Al had the key of the radio shed. Though what good that was she couldn't think at the moment. Rather despondently she built up the fire, pausing every now and then to gaze out through the trees at the clear blue sea.

Somewhere out there was the Ocean Star—all her chums. Surely they hadn't given her up! They must come back—they must! So fervent was that thought that when Sally saw a grey shape on the water she thought for a moment it must be imagination. Then a wild cry came to her lips—a cry which she stifled with difficulty.

It wasn't imagination. It was the Ocean Star—it was—it was! A quick look round told her that the four men were out of sight, busy with various tasks about the camp. Desperately she racked her brains. What could she do to let the Ocean Star know she was here? How could she signal?

Ah! An old sack lying on the ground caught Sally's eyes. Recklessly she poured the remains of the coffee on it, soaking it thoroughly. Then, face scarlet with mingled elation and fear, she brought it down over the thin column of smoke rising from the camp-fire, sending up

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WANTED

100,000 Tons Of Waste Paper

It sounds an awful lot, but it can soon be collected if everyone rallies round. And not only should every scrap of old paper be saved, but cardboard as well.

It can all be repulped and turned into a 101 useful articles that are urgently needed.

.....

puffs of smoke in an Indian signal. High above the trees rose the smoke puffs. One—two—

Would they see them? Would they recognise them for signals, guess who was signalling? Oh, let Don and the others be looking this way! They would guess what it meant!

In her desperation Sally quite forgot the four men. Up and down went the sack over the flames. Then a wild shriek came from her lips as she suddenly went spinning backwards.

Tripping, she fell heavily to the ground, and as she crouched there, her blue eyes wide with fear, she saw that she was ringed in by Seth & Co. All four were glaring, and it was obvious from their expressions that they had understood the significance of those smoke signals.



FORCED TO CONFESS

There was no bluffing her way out of this, thought Sally in sudden panic. And, as if reading her thoughts, Seth nodded in savage triumph.

"Didn't I tell you she was phoney?" he demanded, as his three cronies threw off their coats and worked frantically to damp down the fire.

"You fools believed all she said—took her word for everything. Wouldn't listen when I tried to warn you just now. And now we find her signalling to that darned ship. Trying to bring a search-party here to get us. Why, she's no more Jack Morris' niece than I am!"

"What's the game?" demanded one of the others menacingly.

More frightened than she had ever been before, but determined to do anything rather than show it, Sally scrambled to her feet. Frantically she racked her brains, but before she could speak Seth gave a sudden savage exclamation.

"Never mind that now," he rapped. "We can deal with her later. She had that bag—she said the stuff was all right. How do we know it is?"

"We don't," gritted Al, "but we'll soon find out!"

With a threatening look at Sally he charged into the tent where they had concealed the bag. A moment later he came out with it in his hand and dumped it on the ground.

"Everything had better be all right," said Frank menacingly, dropping to his knees and wrestling with the stiff fastener.

Sally stood motionless, her eyes wide in her white face.

Desperately she looked out to sea, a sob rising in her throat as she saw the Ocean Star gradually disappearing. She realised that her frantic signal had not been seen by the anxious watchers on board. Her chance of rescue was gone, and now—

She looked down, trembling, as Frank ripped open the oilskin bag and pulled out the box.

Sally's breath came faster; she looked huntedly round. But there was no escape, no hope—

Suddenly she drew in her breath, her hands clenching convulsively. And at the same moment there came a hoarse cry from Frank:

"Look! We've been fooled!"

He held out the box in shaking hands, revealing the collection of sand and pebbles with which Sally had filled it.

"You did this!" he cried accusingly. "This is your work!"

Sally made no attempt to deny it, but her silence seemed further to infuriate the men.

"What have you done with it?" roared Joe. "Out with it—where's it hidden?"

He gripped Sally's arm fiercely. For a moment Sally stared at him defiantly. Then, as if admitting herself beaten, she gave a little sob.

"I did hide it!" she blurted out. "I tried to stop you getting it. Oh, if only I hadn't interfered last night I—I wouldn't have fallen overboard."

I tried to stop Morris from throwing the raft over and I—I fell over myself—

"Cut out the sob stuff," said Al unsympathetically. "You take us to where that stuff's hidden—you can howl your eyes out after that for all we care."

Sally made a valiant attempt to pull herself together, staggered back and collapsed weakly to the ground.

"I can't take you," she said faintly. "I—I feel so ill. But I can tell you where it's hidden. You'll be able to find it without any difficulty."

While the men listened she told in minute detail where she had hidden the precious bag.

"You'd better be telling the truth," said Seth menacingly, "otherwise, it'll be the worse for you when we get back."

"I've told you the truth," said Sally weakly. "I know when I'm lied." "You'll find it just where I said."

As if at the end of her tether, she leaned back against a tree, closing her eyes. With a last menacing glare at her the four men rushed off.

Still leaning wearily back, Sally watched them go. But the blue eyes between the half-closed lids were remarkably alert; her expression was amazingly tense for a girl as exhausted as she appeared to be.

And as the crashing footsteps died away, Sally sprang to her feet. She ran silently forward, listening intently to make sure that none of the men had come back to keep guard over her.

But there was not a sound. As she had hoped, their desire to get the mysterious but valuable object had made them oblivious to everything else for the moment.

Frantically she rushed back. She reached the pile of coats the men left behind in their hurry. With trembling hands she turned them over. Then an exclamation left her lips.

"Ah! This is the one!"

Shaking now, she held up the coat. With a fervent hope in her heart she felt in each pocket. For one shattering moment she thought her carefully-thought-out plan was going to crash about her ears. Then a cry of triumph came to her lips.

"Got it!" she cried jubilantly, almost sobbing in her joy. "It must be the key—it must!"

Quiveringly she dashed across to the radio nut and tried the key in the padlock. To her delight, it fitted. She turned it and the padlock clicked open. Flinging it aside, she swung open the door and entered the hut.

Thank goodness, she thought fervently. Don and Johnny had always been interested in all branches of radio. Thank goodness she had watched them at work.

But did she know enough to send out a message? Would she be able to work this transmitter? Would the men return before she managed to get her message through?

That last question Sally didn't dare ponder on. She had got to get the message through—she had got to—everything depended on it!

With terrific will power, she forced

herself to be calm, seated herself before the radio and began with trembling hands to tap out her message.

"Calling Ocean Star . . . Calling Ocean Star! Paloa Island calling . . . Paloa Island calling . . ."

She stopped, drew out the switch, and listened. Then her heart dropped with a sickening lurch. Not a sound in reply.

Feverishly she tapped out the message again—and again! Oh, answer, she thought fervently as she drew out the switch once more. Please answer! Those men will be back soon—it will be too late then! You must—must answer!

And then, as if her thoughts rather than the radio, had transmitted themselves over the ocean, there came a faint answering signal on the radio. A great engulfing wave of joy swept over Sally—a joy almost too great to be borne.

The Ocean Star was answering—they were receiving her message.

So her final gamble had come off. She had given in to the men, had told them where the precious object was hidden.

But it would be no use to them—no use at all! For before they could leave the island the Ocean Star would be here, and the men would be captured!

In what had seemed her moment of greatest disaster, Sally had achieved her greatest triumph.

(End of this week's story.)

Next Friday's grand story will relate what happens when Don & Co. set out in response to Sally's radio S.O.S. Look out for thrills and surprises.

THE COWBOY WHO MYSTIFIED MERLE

(Continued from page 148.)

A crowd of people barred her way, and for a moment she could not move. Again she glanced towards the course. All the horses were quiet now. In a few more moments—

"Pommie, quickly!" she breathed, as the crowd before her gave way. Her chestnut broke into a gallop as he saw an open path before him. Eagerly Merle rode towards the competitors' enclosure, but suddenly her eyes filled with despair.

Above the murmur of the crowd had come the clamour of a bell. Next moment the line of riders at the far end of the course had gone bounding forward.

She was too late. The steeplechase had begun!

Reining in, tears of vexation in her eyes, Merle stared in dismay. Again she recalled Uncle Stephen's agitated words to her before she had left home. Confidently she had reassured him; lightheartedly she had promised to win for him the Bronze Rider trophy.

But that was impossible now. She had been cheated of her chance by the young cowboy.

There came a roar from the watching crowd as the leading riders took the first hurdle, and suddenly Merle's cheeks again became red with anger.

For there was Larry, astride his magnificent black horse. Cleverly he had slipped between two rivals, had taken the first fence in fine style, and had raced into the lead, a lead he swiftly increased.

There was no doubt about it, he was a grand horseman. And his mount was grand, too.

"But not as good as Pommie," Merle told herself fiercely. "You could have beaten him, honey, if you'd been allowed to—beaten them all!"

It was doubly infuriating to be convinced that, but for trickery, her lovely chestnut would have been galloping to victory at this very moment.

But it was not Pommie the excited crowd were cheering. It was the horse who had taken his place.

"Well done, No. 11!"

"Keep goin', buddy!"

"Guess there's no beatin' No. 11!"

As Merle heard the shouts she almost choked with anger. It was the number of her entry that was on everyone's lips. The number that by rights should have flapped from Pommie's saddle!

Feeling she could not bear to look any longer, she turned away. The minutes slipped by, and then another resounding cheer forced her head round. Through angry tears she blinked at the track—just in time to see a lithe figure in a chequered shirt go cantering triumphantly across to the judges' box.

It was Larry. He had won and was now going to collect his prize. Merle saw the bronze statuette—the trophy which her uncle wanted—handed to the young cowboy.

"Oh, the cheat!" she gulped. "I—I hate him! But he shan't get away with it! I'll tackle him—force him to own up!"

As Larry, still holding aloft the Bronze Rider in one sun-tanned hand, disappeared into the tunnel under the grandstands she sent Pommie galloping on along the path.

A uniformed attendant stood on guard at the entrance to the competitors' enclosure. He tried to bar the way, but, too angry to bother about rodeo regulations, Merle brushed by and went racing on.

Behind the grandstands, competitors for the other events were busy giving their horses a last check over.

Eagerly Merle looked around, seeking Larry. But, to her dismay, there was no sign of him. She looked in the stables, but they were empty. The minutes passed and still she had not found him. She was beginning to despair when, between some trees, she noticed an isolated wooden hut.

Not very hopefully she cantered across to it, and, sliding down from the saddle, pushed open the door. Then she gave a triumphant gasp.

For there was the young cowboy. He was giving his horse a drink of water, and as he heard the door creak open he swung round. Though he must have been surprised to see her taut, indignant figure standing there, there was no trace of it on his face.

"Hallo! So you managed to escape," was his greeting. "Good!"

"G-g-good!" spluttered the surprised Merle.

Calmly he nodded as he put aside

the empty bucket and gave his horse a pat.

"Sure! It's a long ride up that hill and I'm in a hurry. I don't want to seem ingallant, honey, but you've saved me a heap of trouble, getting free like that."

Merle was rendered speechless. The impudence of the boy, talking like that. Not a word of remorse; not a sign of regret. Instead, only a glimmer of sardonic amusement in his steel-grey eyes.

"Did you get here in time to see the race?" he inquired. "Pretty easy, though I say it myself. Pity you couldn't have taken part in it—you'd have enjoyed it."

Merle's cheeks went scarlet, and at last her indignation found relief in a stormy cry:

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" Steadily he regarded her, then shook his head.

"Can't say I am. Sorry to have to borrow your ticket, of course, but I had no option. You see—"

"I see that you are a miserable cheat!" she cut in furiously. "But don't think you're going to get away with it. By rights that trophy belongs to me. I promised uncle I'd take it home, and I will—despite your trickery."

"The trophy." He looked across at the statuette of the Bronze Rider, then that sardonic look of amusement flickered again in his eyes. "Is this what you're making all the fuss about?" he asked, picking it up.

"Of course it is! You have no right to it. It belongs to me," she cried.

"O.K.! Then take it, honey," he drawled.

Merle gaped, hardly able to believe her own ears.

"You m-mean—"

Calmly he nodded.

"Sure! Take it—only too glad to make you happy."

And he thrust it into her hands. Dazedly Merle's fingers closed around the statuette. Helplessly she looked at it. If Larry hadn't wanted the trophy, why had he robbed her of her ticket? Why had he gone to such desperate lengths to take her place in the steeplechase?

That was a grand first instalment, wasn't it? And what an intriguing situation now exists. Be sure not to miss next Friday's chapters.

THE CASE OF THE ELUSIVE STOWAWAY

(Continued from page 140.)

"This Rosina person is not so clever as they all imagine. Now, Monsieur Gustave, we will see whose jewel is the more perfect—your white star or my pink one."

"I shall be delighted to give my opinion, madame," declared M. Gustave, as he unlocked a portable steel safe and withdrew a flashing, many-pointed gem that brought an admiring whistle to Noel's lips.

"That must be worth thousands, Monsieur Gustave!"

"It is almost priceless," declared the expert gravely. "If Mrs. Forrester's is a finer stone, as she declares—"

"But it is!" announced the old lady. "As you will see for yourself—"

Triumphantly she unlocked her case, opening it on the table. Then a horrified cry escaped her lips, and Noel sprang forward incredulously.

For the jewel-case was empty—empty except for its layer of cotton-wool and a few worthless pebbles!

Lying on the pebbles was a scrap of paper that held a short message:

"You slept too soundly, Mr. Raymond! Many thanks!"

"ROSINA."



PASSENGER OVERBOARD

"But, nunky, how could Rosina have stolen it?" gasped June, as Noel encountered his young partner on the deck,

after leaving the tearful old lady and the indignant expert. "And where—where is she hiding?"

Noel's eyes were stern as he took her arm.

"I've only one theory to account for it, June," he said slowly. "A fantastic, incredible theory—but I'll have to find more proof. You say you discovered something during your search of the hold?"

June nodded excitedly.

"The men found some provisions left by the stowaway—sandwiches and biscuits, with a glass of water. But I told them not to touch them till you'd seen them for yourself, nunky. There's something wrong!"

Together they went down to the hold, and June led the way along a dim passage, halting near an up-turned packing-case.

On the box stood a ship's tumbler, half filled with water, together with an open packet of sandwiches and another of biscuits.

"These sandwiches have come from the buffet, nunky," explained June. "I recognised them, because I bought a packet myself soon after we came on board yesterday. They're salmon sandwiches—and the buffet hadn't got any this morning. That means Rosina obtained them somehow last night."

"Well?" inquired Noel.

"Well, nunky," said June, "Rosina must be living on air—because only two of those sandwiches are missing from the packet—and those two I found tucked away behind a case in the corner. And the packet of biscuits hasn't been touched!"

Noel's eyes gleamed admiringly.

"Rosina apparently has no need to eat or drink," he said. "She hasn't touched this food and drink, which means—that she can't be a stowaway! The whole thing was a cunning trick to divert our attention. But she's not yet obtained the priceless thing she was after."

June stared.

"But—but she's stolen Mrs. Forrester's valuable star!"

"If my theory's correct, she's after something far more precious," said

Noel gravely, "and we'll have to act quickly to stop her game. This afternoon there's a concert on board, and most of the passengers will be there. I want you, June, to keep watch on M'sieur Gustave, the jewel expert—the dark gentleman with a beard. Don't let him out of your sight if you can help it. If you notice anything suspicious, however amazing it seems, give the alarm at once."

"M'sieur Gustave?" repeated June. "But, nunky, you don't think he's Rosina's accomplice?"

"On the contrary," replied Noel. "I'm convinced that he's Rosina's next victim! And somehow I've got to find the evidence before she can get away with her amazing plot."

That afternoon, as the great liner crept through the fog, M. Gustave escorted Mrs. Forrester to the ship's concert, and June unobtrusively took her seat behind them.

Noel himself did not waste a minute. First he dispatched an urgent radio message in code to the police in New York. Then borrowing a set of duplicate keys from the purser, he paid a visit to M. Gustave's cabin and to Mrs. Forrester's.

It was possible that the elusive Rosina might have left some clue to her activities. There was a satisfied gleam in Noel's eyes when he left the cabin, carrying with him a book dealing with precious stones, and a small phial that appeared to have contained some coloured liquid.

He paid a visit to the ship's laboratory and returned to the wireless-room, where a message was awaiting him from New York.

The young detective exclaimed in triumph as he decoded it. Rosina's audacious plot was now crystal clear. But unless he acted quickly, he might still be too late to thwart it!

Even as he hurried on deck he heard a loud commotion. The concert was over, and anxious groups of passengers were surrounding M. Gustave, who was talking and gesticulating to the white-faced purser.

"My pocket has been picked!" he exclaimed in broken accents. "My precious star has been stolen during the concert! I carried it in my wallet, as I feared to leave it in my cabin after what happened to Mrs. Forrester's jewels. I have only just missed it—"

Noel, pushing his way through the crush, caught sight of June, her face very pale.

"Nunky, I didn't let M'sieur Gustave out of my sight for a minute!" she gasped. "If Rosina was in the concert-room, I didn't see her—"

She was interrupted by a startling outcry from the boat-deck. A member of the crew came running up to the purser.

"Passenger overboard, sir!" he gasped. "It looked like a girl. I saw her run across the deck in the fog and climb on to the rail. When I reached the spot she had gone—but I found this caught on the rail."

He held out a torn, black silk scarf. June's face paled as a waft of elusive perfume reached her.

"Nunky," she whispered unsteadily, "do you think that Rosina—"

Noel's eyes narrowed as he took the scarf, while a horrified murmur arose from the assembled passengers.

Already the engine-room bell was clanging, as an urgent signal was flashed from the bridge. A rush was made for the boat-deck, Noel and the purser in the lead—but the thick fog prevented anything from being seen.

"She may have arranged for a launch to pick her up," said the purser gruffly. "Though in the fog it would be a risky business—"

"The reckless creature!" exclaimed Mrs. Forrester, who had joined the group. "Though she has got away with my precious star, I trust no harm comes to her—Oh!" she broke off with a little cry.

"M'sieur Gustave—look! There by your feet!"

Noel bent swiftly, snatching up something that had rolled into the scuppers—something that flashed and sparkled with a pinkish hue.

"It—it is the star!" gasped M. Gustave. "Almost identical with mine—except for the pinkish hue."

"The Star of Nyasa—my husband's last gift to me!" exclaimed Mrs. Forrester; her voice almost choked with relief. "The girl must have dropped it when she escaped."

She held out a trembling hand for the gem. Then a startled gasp escaped her lips as Noel's hand closed on her wrist.

"Not so fast, Mrs. Forrester!" said the young detective sternly. "I have just had a radio message from New York, informing me that the widow of Jabez Forrester, the diamond magnate, is at present in a nursing home in America, and nothing is known of a supposed pink-hued diamond called the Star of Nyasa!"

"How—how dare you!" exclaimed Mrs. Forrester, attempting to free herself. "You must be mad, Mr. Raymond! What does this mean?"

"It means," said Noel grimly, "that Rosina did not go overboard. A clever pretence, but you lose—Rosina!"

As he spoke, he snatched off the old lady's white wig, revealing a sleek head of dark hair. A sharp, reckless laugh escaped the girl's lips as defiantly she wiped at the cunning lines that disguised her lovely face.

"So what, Mr. Raymond?" drawled Rosina. "You have caught me—but with what am I charged? With stealing the Star of Nyasa—a jewel which you state does not exist, and which in any case is my own property?"

"The Star of Nyasa exists only in your fertile imagination, Rosina!" declared Noel. "M'sieur Gustave, the gem in your hand is your own diamond! Examine it closely, and you'll see that it has been cunningly stained with a special quick-acting dye, a specimen of which I found in Rosina's cabin, together with the book in which she found the formula."

"Her story about the precious gem was a clever trick to win your interest—and confidence. Once she had stolen your diamond, her own jewel would be surprisingly recovered—thus ensuring that she could get it ashore in England without risk or question."

"But—but the stowaway—" protested the amazed purser.

"Did it not exist?" replied Noel grimly. "It was a ruse on Rosina's part to divert suspicion—when she discovered that I'd got wind of her presence on board."

"But you made two slips, Rosina," he added, glancing at the defiant girl crook. "The supposed 'theft' of the Star of Nyasa was just too clever; the only person who could have had access to the jewel-case was Mrs. Forrester—yourself! Because I was conscious of that, I searched your cabin, and sent a radiogram to the authorities in New York."

"And the other slip, Mr. Raymond?" inquired Rosina, with an insolent smile.

"You forgot, Rosina, that even stowaways must eat and drink—and not just pretend to!" replied Noel dryly. "My young partner saw through the bluff."

Rosina inclined her head mockingly to June.

"I shall remember that, Miss Gaynor—next time!" she said.

"If there is a next time, Rosina," said Noel.

"There will be," murmured the girl crook, as the purser took her arm to lead her away. "This is not good-bye, Noel—it's merely au revoir!"

(End of this week's story.)

THE LEGEND OF THE GOLDEN HARP is the title of next Friday's Noel and June story.