

By the author of the NANCY DREW BOOKS

A THREE-CORNERED MYSTERY



THE DANA GIRLS MYSTERY STORIES
By CAROLYN KEENE

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The DANA GIRLS Mystery Stories

**A
THREE-CORNERED
MYSTERY**

**By
CAROLYN KEENE**

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“Look! The wire has been cut,” Jean exclaimed

CHAPTER I

THE FUGITIVE SALESMAN

“Louise, that car is from Oak Falls!”

“How can you tell, Jean?”

“Look at the license plate. The number is in the same series as the license numbers of the cars back home.”

Louise and Jean Dana, two pretty sophomores from the Starhurst School for Girls, gazed curiously at the big touring car as it came to a halt in front of the little restaurant in the mountains. The girls, clad in trim riding habits, stood beside their saddle-horses, which were enjoying a drink from the spring beside the trail.

“It seems odd to see an Oak Falls car way up here,” said Jean musingly.

“Tourists, very probably. Perhaps we know them.”

The girls watched as the door of the car swung open and two men clambered out. One was bluff, red-faced and middle-aged; the other was young and alert.

“Taylor Lott!” exclaimed Louise, recognizing the middle-aged man at once.

“And Fred Callahan, his clerk! Now what in the world are they doing so far away from Oak Falls? They can’t be buying real estate in the mountains.”

The girls hastily tied their horses to the nearest tree and hurried toward the tea room, still wondering about the presence of the men.

Mr. Lott, hands clasped behind his back, was gazing up at the steep mountain slopes, while his clerk, young Callahan, raised the hood of the car and inspected the engine. Taylor Lott was the leading real estate agent of Oak Falls, a highly-respected citizen and a personal friend of Captain Edwin Dana, uncle and guardian of the girls.

As the sisters approached, Mr. Lott glanced at them casually and then resumed his appreciative inspection of the mountain. He had not recognized the Danas.

““A Lot From Lott!”” murmured Jean, quoting the real-estate slogan which was inevitably associated with the Oak Falls realtor’s name.

Mr. Lott started. He had overheard.

“Bless my soul!” he gasped. “Are you familiar with that sign even up here?” He snatched off his hat, bowing. “I always thought that slogan was pretty well known, but I had no idea——”

Then he blinked as he recognized the girls.

“Why—why, you’re Ned Dana’s nieces!” Mr. Lott exclaimed. “I didn’t recognize you. So far away from home—and in those clothes——”

He apparently felt he had not said the right thing, for he became quite flustered.

“Charming! Charming get-up! Horseback riding, eh? And how are you both? You go to school somewhere, don’t you? Yes, I’ve heard Ned Dana mention it. Starbeam or Woodhurst or some such place——”

“Starhurst, Mr. Lott,” replied Louise demurely. “It’s nice to meet someone from Oak Falls again. We’ll be going home in a few days, though, because the Spring vacation isn’t far away.”

“Splendid! Splendid!” Mr. Lott turned to his clerk. “Fred, take your head out of that engine and come over here. You know these young ladies, don’t you? Ned Dana’s nieces, from Oak Falls.”

“Indeed I do,” returned Fred Callahan, smiling pleasantly and walking over. “It’s an unexpected pleasure to meet them in such an out-of-the-way place as this.”

“And quite as unexpected to see you and Mr. Lott here,” Jean said. “Surely you’re not planning a new townsite here?”

“Oh, no. Not at all. Different business entirely,” said Taylor Lott. “I was just thinking that this little restaurant could be developed into something worth-while if a smart man took hold of it. A few mountain cabins, a small hotel, a good advertising campaign——”

His eyes grew dreamy as he imagined a picturesque settlement that should attract tourists from far and wide. Already he had in mind the place where he would erect an enormous sign bearing the great legend, ‘A Lot From Lott.’ Then he spoke again. “No, we’re not up here on real estate business. We’re trying to run down a crook!”

“A crook!” exclaimed the girls in unison.

“Yes, indeed,” snapped Taylor Lott warmly. “A double-dyed scoundrel. A robber. A man whom I trusted. If ever I lay my hands on that fellow,” he declared, his voice trembling with wrath, “I—I’ll have him thrown into a penitentiary. It isn’t the money. It’s the principle of the thing. To think that I trusted that villain, and then he turns around and bites the hand that fed him—er—I mean—he turns around and robs the hand that paid him fifty dollars a week.”

“He means Ed Carrillo,” remarked Callahan, interpreting this tirade.

“Mr. Carrillo!” exclaimed Jean. “He is one of your salesmen, isn’t he?”

“He *was* one of my salesmen,” amended Mr. Lott. “But he cleared out, ran away, and took with him all the rent money

he could lay his hands on. That's the sort of salesman Ed Carrillo was. Haven't seen him in these parts, have you?"

"I remember the man," Louise said, "but we haven't seen him. What makes you think he is in this part of the country?"

"We traced him," remarked Callahan. "We lost the trail about five miles from here. I think we'd better be getting back to the main highway, Mr. Lott. The engine is all right again. It was knocking a bit but I located the trouble."

"Just a minute. I'll ask the restaurant people if Carrillo passed this way."

Taylor Lott hurried into the eating-place, but returned a moment later with the news that no one of Carrillo's description had stopped there that morning.

"Just as I thought," he fumed. "Well, we can have something to eat anyway and then we'll go on."

The four went into the tea room. Taylor Lott and Fred Callahan ordered sandwiches and ate them hastily, eager to get back on the trail of the absconding Carrillo. The Dana girls promised that if by any chance they should hear anything of the salesman they would let Mr. Lott know at once. A few minutes later the two Oak Falls men departed and their big car went roaring down the mountain road.

Jean and Louise ate leisurely.

"I wonder if any of the other girls will ride this way," Jean said.

They had gone out that afternoon with a party of students from Starhurst, but had become separated from the others while in the mountains.

Suddenly the door was flung open and two girls rushed into the restaurant. Jean and Louise eyed them without enthusiasm. The newcomers were Lettie Briggs and Ina Mason, two Starhurst pupils who were not at all popular at the school. Lettie Briggs, rude and snobbish, was the only daughter of an enormously wealthy oil magnate; yet all her unlimited pocket-money had not served to purchase the popularity which she thought should be hers. Ina Mason, meek and toadying, was her shadow.

“Oh, girls!” cried Lettie, with ill-concealed malice in her voice. “Where did you leave your horses?”

“At the spring,” said Louise.

“Well, they’re not there now. You’d better get busy and find them for they’ve run away. We saw them heading up the trail a few minutes ago.”

With exclamations of dismay the Dana girls leaped to their feet and fled from the tea room. The horses belonged to Starhurst School and their loss would be a serious matter.

“I was *sure* I tied that strap tightly!” declared Jean as they ran toward the spring.

“Perhaps it’s just one of Lettie’s practical jokes.”

But the horses were not at the spring. The girls looked at each other blankly.

“We must find them,” Louise said. “We don’t dare go back to Starhurst without them.”

They began a hasty search through the nearby bush but their mounts were nowhere to be found.

“Somehow,” Jean said, “I can’t see how they could have slipped the tie-straps. It seems impossible that both could have escaped at the same time.”

“I know what has happened. Lettie Briggs untied the straps.”

“It’s like a trick she would play.”

“One of the horses might have escaped by accident, but not both. And when Lettie Briggs is mixed up in it, I suspect trouble.”

“In that case,” returned Jean, “we won’t give her the satisfaction of knowing we’re upset about it. As a matter of fact, I think the horses will return. They can’t be far away and they’re well trained.”

“We’ll go back to the restaurant. If Lettie and Ina think we’re going to search all over the mountain-side they’re mistaken.”

The girls retraced their steps down the mountain trail. When they reached the spring Jean examined the damp earth in the vicinity of the pool.

“Footprints!” she exclaimed in a tone of satisfaction. “And they’re not ours. Lettie Briggs is the only girl in this place with a foot that size. Lettie has been here and the horses are gone.”

“Cause and effect.”

“Let’s go back to the restaurant. I think the horses will not stray very far.”

The Dana girls stepped out onto the road. At that moment a coupé swept around the bend, sped past them and drew to a grinding stop in front of the tea room. As it flashed by, Louise grasped her sister’s arm.

“Now it’s my turn to talk about license numbers!” she exclaimed. “There’s another Oak Falls plate.”

“Who can this be? Someone else on the trail of Ed Carrillo?”

As the girls walked quickly toward the restaurant, a man leaped out of the roadster and headed for the eating-place. He was a dark, swarthy fellow of about thirty-five, thick-set and well-dressed. There was something familiar about his appearance. Then, as he paused to open the door, the Dana girls had a glimpse of his face.

Simultaneously, as they recognized him, the girls gasped with amazement. The man was none other than Ed Carrillo, the fugitive salesman once employed by Taylor Lott of Oak Falls!

“Carrillo!” whispered Jean excitedly.

The man vanished into the restaurant.

“I should recognize him anywhere,” Louise said.

“If Mr. Lott had only stayed a few minutes longer.”

“What can we do?”

“Do?” replied Jean with spirit. “We’ll go inside and talk to him. After all, he doesn’t know that we’ve already talked with Mr. Lott.”

They hesitated a moment.

“We’ll have to be careful,” Louise advised. “We can’t walk up to him and accuse him of stealing Mr. Lott’s money. It would frighten him and he’d drive away. Then we’d be no farther ahead.”

“Perhaps we can find out where he is going, and get in touch with Mr. Lott.”

At that moment the door of the restaurant was flung open again. Mr. Carrillo stood for a few seconds at the top of the steps, opening a packet of cigarettes he had just purchased. His eyes rested on the two girls, a light of recognition leaped into them, and then an expression of fear flashed across his face.

Louise retained her presence of mind. It would not do to frighten the quarry away at this stage.

“Well, if this isn’t a surprise!” she exclaimed. “Why, it’s Mr. Carrillo from Oak Falls!”

The man’s face cleared. He managed to force a smile. He removed his hat quickly.

“The Dana girls!” he said, coming down the steps and extending his hand. “Fancy meeting you here.”

“Fancy meeting *you* here, Mr. Carrillo,” Jean replied demurely.

CHAPTER II

TROUBLE

“I was just passing through,” said the salesman hurriedly. “I’m out on a sales trip.”

“You’re a long way from home, aren’t you, Mr. Carrillo?” remarked Louise innocently. “We don’t often see anyone from Oak Falls in this part of the country.”

Carrillo evidently concluded that he had nothing to fear from this accidental meeting. How could these schoolgirls know that he was a fugitive?

“As a matter of fact,” he confided, “I have lost my way. I went into this place to inquire about the road to Cranbury but they couldn’t tell me.”

“Cranbury!” said Jean, trying to conceal her exultation. So that was Carrillo’s destination! “Let me see—it’s about ten miles from here but the main road is closed a little farther on. You’ll have to make a detour.”

“At the next village,” added Louise. “You can’t miss it.”

“There’s a big road sign right at the village. You can’t miss it,” Jean assured him. “But how are all our friends in Oak Falls, Mr. Carrillo? Did you just drive from there today?”

“Yes—yes,” said Carrillo, glancing nervously at his watch. “Just drove over today. Going back tomorrow. I saw your aunt the other morning. She looks very well. But I’m sorry—I’m really in a hurry——”

“You’ll be staying with friends at Cranbury, I suppose,” Louise remarked. “I’m positive there is no hotel in the town.”

“No hotel?” demanded Carrillo. “But I was sure there was. The Liberty Hotel!”

“How foolish of me,” said Louise. “Of course. The Liberty Hotel. I’d forgotten. Well, it’s too bad you have to rush away.”

“Business,” said Carrillo. “I’m late as it is.”

“Please remember us to any of our friends in Oak Falls. You’ll be going back tomorrow, you said?”

“Yes—staying at Cranbury tonight, going back to Oak Falls tomorrow. It’s been nice to have seen you. Thanks for the information about the detour.”

Without losing any more time, Mr. Carrillo got back into his coupé and drove off, evidently glad to get away.

“And thanks for *your* information about the Liberty Hotel, Mr. Carrillo,” murmured Jean as the car disappeared down the road. “What a stroke of luck, Louise—meeting him here! He hadn’t the faintest idea that we knew he was running away.”

“We’ll have to get word to Mr. Lott at once,” returned Louise practically.

“But how can we? We don’t know where he is now.”

“All we can do is call up his house at Oak Falls and leave word. He will either reach home tonight or telephone there, and the message will get to him somehow.”

The girls hurried into the tea room.

“Have you a telephone in this building?” asked Louise of the proprietor.

“Yes,” the man answered, “but it is out of order at the moment.”

“Oh, dear,” sighed Jean, “that *is* unfortunate.”

“The company was to send some one at once to fix it, but so far no one has arrived.”

Louise looked out of the attractive window down the long road. Suddenly she caught a glimpse of a truck speeding toward the restaurant.

“Here they come now to repair the line,” she exclaimed excitedly.

“What good luck,” murmured Jean. “I hope it takes only a few minutes. Then we can get Mr. Lott’s home on the wire.”

The service men soon unpacked kits of tools and set to work. Jean strained her ears to catch the conversation between the experts.

“Just a worn screw,” explained a tall worker, bending low over the box of wires. “Fix it in a jiffy.”

The Danas were elated at this report, and in less than ten minutes they were told the service had been resumed.

“Now, if only we can make connections with Oak Falls, it will be fine,” exulted Louise.

Eagerly they waited.

Louise and Jean Dana were orphans who lived with their Aunt Harriet and her brother, Captain Edwin Dana, a sea captain. Louise, seventeen, was a dark, pretty, rather serious girl. Jean, a year younger, was blonde, gay and flippant. They were students at Starhurst, situated some distance from Oak Falls, on the outskirts of the town of Penfield.

Louise and Jean shared a gift possessed by few girls. It was a talent for deduction and for solving mysteries. They had a keen zest for adventure and their ability as amateur detectives had led them into several complicated affairs in which they had had their full share of thrills and excitement. They were

constantly on the lookout for new mysteries, and their interest in the affair of the fugitive salesman, therefore, was only natural.

In a few moments the telephone connection was made. Louise left a message with Mrs. Lott to the effect that Carrillo would be staying at the Liberty Hotel in Cranbury that night.

“Thank you so much,” said the woman, gratefully. “My husband has been deeply upset by the man’s disappearance. I’m sure he’ll take advantage of the information.”

Louise and Jean were conscious that Lettie and Ina, grinning smugly, were watching them covertly from a nearby table but they gave no sign that they were annoyed over the incident of the missing horses. They left the restaurant. Just as they had predicted, the animals had returned to the spring and were patiently awaiting them.

“I’m glad we didn’t make a fuss about it,” declared Jean in relief. “It would have given that pair too much satisfaction.”

They mounted and rode down past the restaurant just as Lettie and Ina emerged, giggling.

“Bye, Lettie. Bye, Ina,” chirped Jean. “The horses didn’t run away after all.”

The two schemers were crestfallen. Their annoyance at the failure of their “joke” was obvious.

“See you at Starhurst,” cried Louise, as the horses trotted off down the road. The sisters laughed as they recalled the blank expressions of their schoolmates.

“We’ll have to hurry,” said Jean. “We have to fix up our costumes for the farewell party tonight.”

“I haven’t forgotten.” Louise glanced at her wrist watch. “It’s getting late, too.”

They were not far away from Penfield, however, and in less than half an hour they were back at the school, the horses had been turned over to the stable boy, and Louise and Jean were hastening to their study. On the desk lay a letter.

“From Aunt Harriet!” exclaimed Jean, snatching it up and glancing at the handwriting. “How odd of her to write when she knows we’ll be home in a day or so.”

“Perhaps it’s important.”

Jean tore open the envelope and the girls read the letter together. After Aunt Harriet’s invariable opening paragraph in which she hoped they were well and assured them that she was the same, they came upon this information:

“I am sure you will remember my old school chum, Mrs. Elizabeth Flower. Since her husband’s death she has been living out at Rocky Corner. Well, she is now staying with me. Poor Elizabeth has had a dreadful misfortune. She has been fairly wealthy, for you may remember that her husband left a good estate, but now a great part of it has been lost. Elizabeth sold the Flower estate, in which most of her

money was tied up, and the proceeds of the sale would have been enough to have kept her in comfort for the rest of her life. However, the payments on the estate were made to the office of Mr. Lott, the realtor in Oak Falls, and while we all know that Mr. Lott is as honest as the day is long, it appears that the same can't be said of his agent, Ed Carrillo."

"Carrillo again!" gasped Louise.

"Carrillo," went on Aunt Harriet's letter, "has disappeared and taken with him the money already paid over for the estate, as well as a lot of the rent money that should have been paid to Mrs. Flower's account. Of course she isn't exactly penniless, but the loss of the money has been a severe blow. I don't suppose there is any hope that Carrillo will be caught but Mr. Lott is doing his best to find the rascal and make him return the money—if it isn't all spent already."

There was more to the letter but this was the chief item of news. The girls were deeply interested.

"Isn't it lucky that we saw Carrillo when we did!" exclaimed Jean. "Oh, I do hope he is brought back. I'm glad we sent that message on to Mr. Lott. Perhaps Mrs. Flower may get her money back after all."

"Perhaps we won't have any costumes ready for the party if we don't get busy," said Louise, as she looked into the clothes closet for the outfits the girls had planned to wear that evening.

For the next half hour they were busy sewing and making over two costumes that had been used the previous Hallowe'en. Then they became aware of a familiar high-pitched voice out in the hall. It was that of their arch-enemy, Lettie Briggs.

“—and they actually sneaked away from the restaurant without paying for what they had eaten!” Lettie was saying.

“Not Jean and Louise?” demanded another voice, which the girls recognized as that of Evelyn Starr.

“Of course. I suppose you think they'd be above playing a trick like that.”

“I certainly do think so,” retorted Evelyn loyally. “Jean and Louise wouldn't cheat anyone out of a cent.”

“Well, if you don't call it cheating to walk out of a tea room without paying, I don't know what you would call it.”

“Goodness!” exclaimed Louise, horrified. “Jean, *did* you pay the restaurant-keeper?”

“No. I thought you took care of the bill.”

“And now Lettie and Ina are telling it all over the school. Oh, I wouldn't have had this happen for anything.”

A moment later there were sounds of confusion in the hall. Then a voice, calling:

“Dana girls!”

Louise flung open the door. Lettie, Ina, Evelyn Starr and a group of other girls were gathered in the corridor. Doris Harland came hurrying toward the sisters' study.

“Did you call us, Doris?”

The newcomer looked uncomfortable. She was a good friend of the Dana girls and did not relish the assignment Mrs. Crandall, the headmistress, had just given her.

“You’re wanted in the office,” she said. “It must be some dreadful mistake.”

CHAPTER III

AT SPRING CORNER

Jean and Louise looked at each other in amazement.

“There’s a man down there—he tells Mrs. Crandall you went away from his restaurant without paying your bill,” continued Doris Harland.

“I told you so!” snapped Lettie Briggs triumphantly.

It was an embarrassing moment for the Danas.

Lettie Briggs was gleeful.

“At least *I* always pay *my* bills,” she remarked, as Jean and Louise hurried down to the office.

“And so do the Dana girls,” snapped Evelyn Starr. “You know perfectly well it must have been an accident.”

“Accident-done-on-purpose, trying to save a few nickels,” sniffed Lettie.

Downstairs the sisters faced the angry restaurant proprietor and Mrs. Crandall. The headmistress was stern.

“Girls,” she said, “this man tells me you were in his tea room this afternoon and left without paying your bill.”

“We’re sorry,” said Louise, opening her purse. “It wasn’t intentional. I thought my sister had paid and she thought I had. How much was our bill?”

“Sixty cents,” replied the restaurant man, somewhat mollified.

Louise handed over the money.

“We’re sorry you had to come all the way to Starhurst,” apologized Jean. “But really, we didn’t realize we had walked out without paying.”

Now that he had his money, the man was in a better mood and backed out, apologizing in his turn for having made a fuss about it. Mrs. Crandall, convinced that it had been nothing more than an oversight on their part, said no more about it. The Dana girls hastened back upstairs and resumed work on their costumes.

The party that evening was a big success. Every girl likes to “dress up,” and the queer makeshift costumes that made their appearance in the staid halls of Starhurst provoked peals of laughter. Professor and Mrs. Crandall put in an appearance toward the end of the evening and took part in the fun.

A persistent ringing of the telephone called the headmistress to her office, and a moment later she returned to the party to say that the Dana girls were wanted. It was a long distance call.

“Who can it be?” asked Louise, as they hurried to the telephone.

“Perhaps some accident has happened at home.”

Louise picked up the receiver.

“Miss Dana?” said an agitated voice. “I received your message. Taylor Lott speaking. Lott, from Oak Falls.”

“Who is it?” whispered Jean, trying to get her ear close to the receiver.

“Mr. Lott,” replied Louise hastily.

“My wife told me you had seen Carrillo. I tell you, I was mighty excited when I got that message, for I’d been hunting for him all day and couldn’t find hide nor hair of the fellow.”

“He told us he was going to Cranbury and that he would be staying at the Liberty Hotel.”

“I know. I know. That’s the message my wife gave me. And I didn’t lose any time getting over to Cranbury.”

“Did you find him?”

“I was too late,” confessed Taylor Lott sadly. “The bird had flown. He had been at the hotel but changed his mind about staying overnight and checked out. They couldn’t tell me where he has gone.”

Louise was disappointed.

“Isn’t that too bad?” she exclaimed. “We were sure you would be able to find him if you got our message in time.”

“I’m much obliged to you just the same,” said Taylor Lott. “If you happen to catch sight of him again or hear anything about him I hope you’ll let me know.”

The disappointed realtor rang off and Louise told Jean what had happened.

“Carrillo was lucky,” said Jean. “Perhaps he suspected that we might hear that he was running away.”

“That’s what happened, probably. Knowing he had told us he would be staying overnight at Cranbury he decided to move on. Well, we did the best we could.”

At luncheon next day there was a sensation at Starhurst when it was learned that a woman newspaper reporter was visiting the school. Mrs. Crandall was showing her through the building. The reporter, a bright, attractive girl in her early twenties, was Miss Edith Darrow, who was said to be connected with a paper in Penfield.

“She came to see me,” said Lettie Briggs with an air of importance. “Miss Darrow is a cousin of mine.”

“It’s strange she hasn’t called on you before this,” remarked Evelyn Starr.

“We really didn’t discover that we were cousins until yesterday,” said Lettie. “Somehow, the paper learned

that I am to spend my holidays in New York at the home of Count Salame, and Miss Darrow asked if I would grant her an interview.”

One of the girls snickered. Lettie had been making mysterious references for several days to the visit to the Count’s home but no one had believed the story.

“My, but we’re grand!” mused Doris Harland. “Interviews and the nobility. Is he a real Count?”

“Or a no-account?” put in Ann Freeman.

“If you would care to see the invitation,” replied Lettie acidly, “I’ll be glad to prove that I’m telling the truth.”

She produced an impressive sheet of note-paper, headed with an embossed crest. The girls regarded it with respect. Signed by Count Salame, it extended an invitation to Lettie to spend her vacation at his New York residence.

“And so,” observed Lettie, relishing her triumph, “since girls from Starhurst aren’t invited to visit the nobility every day of the week, Miss Darrow has asked for an interview.”

Shortly after luncheon, when Miss Darrow and Mrs. Crandall had returned from their tour, the triumphant Lettie was duly summoned to the office. Her pleasure, however, was short-lived. The “interview” lasted only a few minutes, and then Miss Darrow came down the hall toward a group of girls that included Louise and Jean.

“I’ve been told that you have two very interesting girl detectives in the school,” said Miss Darrow pleasantly, “and I’ve been hoping to meet them.”

“You mean the Dana girls, of course,” Evelyn Starr suggested. “Well, here they are, in person. You ought to write a story about them for your paper.”

“A story about us!” gasped Louise, greatly embarrassed. “Oh, Miss Darrow, please don’t do anything of the kind.”

“Why not?” asked the reporter. “It isn’t often one hears of a girl detective. But are you really detectives, or is it just a sort of game?”

“We aren’t, really,” said Jean. “It’s just that we’ve been lucky _____”

“Lucky, fiddlesticks!” exclaimed Evelyn. “They’ve been clever enough to solve three mysteries since school started, Miss Darrow, and if they won’t tell you about themselves, I’ll tell you.”

She proceeded to give the reporter some of the details of the affair of the study lamp, the case that had first brought to light the detective abilities of the Dana girls. From there she went on to tell about the strange case of the missing English teacher, when the Danas had succeeded in reuniting an estranged family at Lone Tree Cottage. Miss Darrow was deeply interested, and when Evelyn told the story of Josie, the waif whom the Dana girls had befriended in the shadow

of the tower and who eventually became a great radio star, the reporter rapidly began to take notes.

“I should love to hear more about your adventures,” she said to the girls. “Unfortunately I’m rather pressed for time. I wonder if you could come and spend the week-end with me. I live at Spring Corner with my mother.”

“We’d be glad to,” agreed Louise, after a glance at her sister. “That is, if Mrs. Crandall doesn’t object.”

“I’ll speak to Mrs. Crandall. Come out after school. Spring Corner isn’t very far away from here and anyone in the village can direct you to the Darrow Farm. I do hope you’ll be able to visit me.”

Miss Darrow went back to the office and returned in a few moments with the information that the headmistress had no objection. The girls were a little annoyed, however, when they learned that Lettie Briggs had also been included in the invitation. They had scant desire for her company over the week-end.

“If I had known that,” remarked Jean, when the reporter had departed, “I’d have made some excuse to stay away.”

“Perhaps it won’t be so bad,” said Louise resignedly.

Lettie, on her side, was overheard making a muttered remark about “upstarts who crashed in where they weren’t wanted.” She was evidently angry that her invitation to Darrow Farm had to be shared with the Dana girls.

In French class that afternoon Lettie was particularly unfortunate. She was not a good student and her lessons were seldom prepared. On this occasion the teacher was exasperated by Lettie's dullness.

"I am going to report you to Mrs. Crandall," she said angrily. "I intend to recommend that you be forced to spend the whole week-end on your French."

"But—but I have an invitation to spend the week-end——"

"Your invitation will have to wait."

And, greatly to Lettie's wrath and discomfiture, word came down from Mrs. Crandall a little later to the effect that Miss Briggs was not to leave the school.

Jean and Louise were in high spirits when they set out on their hike to Spring Corner that afternoon. The pleasure of their week-end, they knew, would not have been enhanced by the presence of Lettie Briggs, and they were more than relieved that they would not have to endure her company.

They located the Darrow place without difficulty. It was now a farm in name only, for it was evident that the land had not been worked that season and they saw no livestock. The buildings, however, were comfortable and well-built. Mrs. Darrow, Edith's mother, greeted the girls and made them welcome. She was a kindly, middle-aged woman.

"My daughter has been delayed," she explained to the girls, "but she asked me to entertain you until she comes out from Penfield."

Mrs. Darrow showed them around the farm.

“We have no men working for us now,” she explained, “and of course the job is too big for two women to handle. Since Edith has been employed by the newspaper we’ve had to let the land lie idle. I’ve thought of taking boarders. As a matter of fact, we did have a boarder—a Mr. Carrillo——”

“Carrillo!” exclaimed Louise in astonishment.

“Yes. Do you know him?”

“We once knew a man of that name,” Louise admitted. “But perhaps he wasn’t the same person.”

“This man came from the West originally,” went on Mrs. Darrow. “He spent some of his time in the barn napping. He said he loved the sweet hay odor. It made him think of his boyhood days.”

The girls did not make any further inquiries about Carrillo, and Mrs. Darrow passed on to other subjects. But Louise’s mind was working rapidly. A little later, when their hostess went into the house to look at some biscuits in the oven, she turned to Jean.

“So Mr. Carrillo once boarded at Darrow Farm!”

“It must have been the same man.”

“I have a hunch. I wonder if he was really asleep all the time in the barn.”

“What do you mean?” asked Jean.

“Let’s go and have a look at the place.”

It was, as Louise said, nothing more than a “hunch.” But more than once Louise intuitively had guessed her way to the very heart of a problem. If Carrillo had spent a noticeable amount of time in the Darrow barn, then the barn would bear investigation.

They prowled about the huge, roomy building, which was almost empty. There was very little hay in the mows. After ten minutes search Jean suddenly gave a cry of excitement.

“Louise! Look! I’ve found something.”

Her sister hurried across the haymow. Jean was crouching beside a narrow opening between two boards.

“There’s something here!” she exclaimed. “I do believe it’s a hiding place.”

CHAPTER IV

THE MIDNIGHT WATCH

Hastily the girls inspected their find. Louise thrust her arm into the narrow opening and drew out a bundle of papers, which they sorted out into several piles.

Some of the papers were receipts. A few bulky documents proved to be deeds for land. One flimsy slip was a sweepstakes ticket, numbered 8231.

“And this,” said Jean, unfolding a blueprint, “looks very much like a plan.”

“It’s a drawing of a piece of machinery,” Louise remarked. “An invention of some kind.” Her quick eye had caught the words “Patent Applied For” at the bottom of the sheet.

Jean ransacked the cache further. She found a few more receipts and an antique knife. But that was all.

“I wonder if Carrillo hid these things here?” she exclaimed.

“And if he did, I wonder if they belonged to him.”

“It’s a strange hiding place for a man’s own possessions.”

“If Carrillo has been here recently,” said Louise, “I shouldn’t be surprised if these are some of the papers he took from Taylor Lott’s office.”

Before the girls could do any more inspecting, they were interrupted. Someone entered the barn. As they looked down out of the haymow, they saw Edith Darrow.

“So this is where you are!” called out the reporter. “Mother said she thought she saw you going into the barn. I just came out from town a few minutes ago.”

“We’ve made a discovery,” said Jean quickly. “Come and see.”

Miss Darrow clambered up into the haymow.

“Well, what in the world——!”

“It’s a cache. Someone evidently hid these papers here.”

The girls did not voice their suspicions of Mr. Carrillo. And it did not, evidently, cross Edith Darrow’s mind to connect Carrillo with this strange discovery. She went over the various papers and documents, deeply puzzled.

“Some hiker may have spent the night here and hidden them,” she suggested.

“We’re rather interested,” Louise said. “It has all the earmarks of a mystery, and we adore mysteries.”

“The papers must have been left here very recently,” observed Jean. “They’re not a bit damp or mouldy. Perhaps the person who hid them may come back.”

“And if he does,” decided Louise, “we’ll be waiting for him.”

Edith Darrow’s eyes sparkled with excitement.

“You mean that you’ll stay here and keep a lookout for him?”

“Why not? We’ll put a bundle of fake papers into the hole, in case we’re not quick enough to catch him.”

“It would be a good story for my paper,” Miss Darrow said. “Let’s go and tell Mother.”

When Mrs. Darrow heard of the discovery she was quite upset. The Dana girls were surprised that neither Edith nor her mother seemed to connect the discovery of the cache with their recent boarder, Mr. Carrillo. In fact, Mrs. Darrow eagerly accepted the theory that a wandering tramp had been responsible for leaving the papers in the barn.

“It’s too bad Mr. Carrillo isn’t here now,” she said. “He could have helped us. He visited us just last night.”

Jean and Louise looked innocent, trying to conceal their excitement at this piece of news. More and more they were

convinced that Carrillo had visited the barn to hide the papers in the course of his flight from Taylor Lott.

“I’m sure I don’t like the idea of your staying in the barn all night,” said Mrs. Darrow uneasily. “It won’t be very comfortable. And perhaps the man won’t come back after all.”

“We’ll make ourselves comfortable,” Louise assured her. “We’re used to camping.”

“After all, I don’t suppose the papers are very important.”

“They may be,” said Jean. “Why were they hidden in such a peculiar spot? Perhaps they were stolen.”

At length Mrs. Darrow gave her consent, although it was plain that she regarded it as a hare-brained scheme. Edith Darrow, too, seemed puzzled that the girls should take such an interest in the cache.

The sisters enjoyed an excellent dinner, and afterward were pressed by Edith to give some of the details of their previous experiences in solving mysteries. During the evening they heard a rumble of thunder and then a soft patter of rain on the roof.

“It’s going to be a wet night,” said Mrs. Darrow. “Girls, I do wish you would give up this plan. Stay in the house where it’s dry and warm.”

Neither Jean nor Louise was as enthusiastic about the prospect of a night in the barn as she had been, but each was

unwilling to admit it.

“No, we’ll go through with it,” declared Louise. “We may have some blankets, I suppose, and a flashlight?”

“Certainly. And you’d better take along a lunch. I’ll go with you for a while,” said Edith. “I won’t say I’ll spend the whole night out there, though. I’m not so keen about a mystery that I’m willing to lose a night’s sleep.”

By the time the girls were ready to set out for the barn the storm had reached formidable proportions. There was a torrential downpour of rain, thunder rolled constantly, and flashes of lightning illuminated the countryside.

“If you should become frightened,” said Mrs. Darrow, “you must come into the house at once. I shan’t lock the door.”

They assured her that they would seek the shelter of the house if they should tire of their vigil, and then ran across the streaming barnyard through the downpour.

“What a night!” gasped Edith, laughing, when the three were under cover once more and listening to the steady drumming of the rain upon the barn roof. “If the person who hid those papers here comes back for them tonight, he must consider them very valuable.”

The girls made themselves as comfortable as possible in a corner of the haymow, after having duly put a bundle of worthless papers into the cache.

“We forgot the lunch!” exclaimed Louise suddenly.

“Oh, bother!” said Jean. “I’ll go back for it. We’ll arouse Mrs. Darrow if we wait.”

She slipped down out of the haymow and ran across to the house. In a few minutes Louise and Edith heard her coming across the barnyard again. Suddenly there was a startled cry and a splash.

“Something has happened to Jean!” exclaimed Louise.

She jumped up and made her way to the side of the haymow. In an instant she lost her footing as the floor seemed to disappear. She felt herself falling and uttered a shriek as she plunged down a chute that led into an empty cattle stable below.

Although she landed unhurt in a manger that was piled high with hay, there were a few moments of great excitement. Edith, running to her rescue, caught her dress on a nail in the barn wall. Finally she switched on the flashlight and discovered the whereabouts of Louise, who by this time was laughing.

“Not hurt a bit!” she said, as she clambered out. “More frightened than injured. But where is Jean?”

“Here I am,” said a mournful voice, and in the gleam of the flashlight a bedraggled object entered the barn. Jean had slipped in the treacherous mud and fallen into a deep puddle with the lunch-basket. The other girls burst into peals of laughter at her disconsolate appearance.

“It may be comedy to some folks but it’s tragedy to me,” said Jean ruefully, as she climbed up into the mow. “My dress is ruined and I’m sure the lunch is soaked. What was all the excitement about before I came in?”

“Louise thought you were hurt and rushed to the rescue but she fell down the hay chute,” explained Edith Darrow. “And I tore my dress when I ran to help *her*.”

“I’m beginning to wish we had stayed in the house,” said Jean ruefully, as she tried to wipe off some of the mud with loose hay.

In a little while, when they had wrapped themselves up in their blankets and assured themselves that the lunch was not badly damaged after all, the girls felt a little more comfortable. Time passed slowly. The atmosphere of the old barn was eerie. The storm raged with unremitting violence as the rain drummed on the roof and splashed in the gutters. Then, in the distance, they heard the sound of a car.

“It seems to be coming down the lane,” Louise remarked, glancing at her wrist-watch. “Now who could be coming here at this hour of the night? It’s nearly eleven o’clock.”

“I can’t imagine,” said Edith Darrow, “unless it’s a friend of mine. Perhaps he planned to call on me tonight and was delayed.”

They listened. The auto came along slowly, passed through the barnyard and drove up to the house. Edith scrambled down out of the haymow.

“I’d better go and see who it is.”

She hurried out. There was a small window at one side of the mow and Louise and Jean peered through it. Dimly they could see the reporter making her way across the yard. In front of the house they discerned the shadow of a car but in the darkness and rain they could make out little else.

After that nothing happened. Edith did not come back. The rain continued. Half-past eleven. Twelve o’clock.

“Perhaps Edith decided to spend the rest of the night in the house,” whispered Jean.

Louise looked out of the window again.

“It’s so dark that I can scarcely see,” she said, “but I think the car is not there any more.”

Half-past twelve, and they were deeply concerned, wondering if they should go back to the house. They hesitated doing this, however, not wishing to arouse the Darrows unnecessarily.

“Perhaps we may as well try to get some sleep,” decided Jean, and curled up in the blankets.

Louise followed her sister’s example but in a little while sat up with a start.

“What was that?” she whispered.

Jean raised herself. They heard a faint creak, then another—the creak of rusty hinges. Gazing down out of the haymow they saw a faint patch of light.

“Someone is opening the barn door!” gasped Jean.

Then they heard a voice; a man’s voice. He mumbled to himself as he staggered across the threshold.

Tensely the girls watched the shadowy figure.

CHAPTER V

THE EMPTY HOUSE

The Dana girls were braver than the average, yet there was something about the sinister appearance of this man stumbling across the threshold of the barn and then slumping to the floor; something about the whole atmosphere of the place with its darkness and gloom and strange noises, that filled them with apprehension.

“Perhaps it’s Carrillo!” whispered Jean.

“What shall we do?”

“Wait.”

A moment later the man struggled to his feet. He was groaning as if in pain and they wondered if he had hurt himself when he fell. He lurched on across the floor of the barn.

“We’ll follow him!” Louise decided.

Noiselessly she crossed the mow and slipped down over the side. Jean was close behind. They heard a sinister rustle and a

patter of feet. They almost screamed as a rat sped across their path less than a yard away.

Suddenly there was a gust of wind and the door slammed shut with a violent crash. The place was in utter darkness now. Jean grasped her sister's arm. A little distance ahead they could hear the faltering footsteps of the man. He was groaning horribly as if in agony. Then he stumbled and fell heavily again. This time he did not get up.

“He must be hurt!” exclaimed Louise.

She whipped out the flashlight and moved cautiously forward. The brilliant beam revealed a huddled figure lying inert. As she beheld the man's face, she gasped. One glimpse was enough. The stranger was not Carrillo.

However, this unconscious person, who was young and good looking, was evidently in bad shape. There was a cut across his forehead and his clothes were torn.

“We'll have to get help,” said Louise quickly. “He seems to be badly injured.”

“Looks to me as if he might have been struck by a car. I'll run to the house.”

Hastily she went to the door, flung it open, and rushed out into the pouring rain. Splashing across the yard, she hurried up the drive toward the darkened homestead, her clothes drenched by the time she reached the shelter of the porch. Frantically Jean pounded on the door.

Long minutes passed. There was no response from within the house. Again and again the girl hammered on the panel with her fist.

Finally Jean ran around to the back door, but with no better success. Then she renewed her assault on the front entrance.

“I’ve raised enough racket to awaken even a deaf person!” she said to herself finally. “It’s strange that they won’t answer.”

The car they had seen in front of the house earlier that night was no longer there, she noticed.

In the distance she heard the barn window being opened. Through the roar of wind and rain Louise called out:

“Jean! Can’t you awaken them?”

“I’ve tried and tried, but there’s no answer.”

“We must do something. This man is suffering. We must get help.”

“The door is locked.”

“Climb in a window.”

Jean left the porch and tried the windows on the ground floor of the house. But they were all securely fastened. She was so drenched with rain by now that it did not seem to matter any more. At length she spied a lattice-work arbour that led to an

upper porch. Although the harbour was wet and slippery, the girl slowly clambered up. Half a dozen times she nearly lost her footing but somehow achieved the precarious climb in safety, at the cost of torn stockings and bruised hands.

Once on the upper porch she was confronted by a door that led into one of the second-floor rooms. This she tried, but it was locked, so she hammered at it.

“Mrs. Darrow! Edith!”

There was no response.

Jean hesitated no longer. She took off her slipper and promptly smashed the glass in the top part of the door. It made a fearful clatter as it fell.

“If anything will awaken them,” she said to herself, “that racket should do it.”

But no one came. Jean reached in through the shattered glass and found the key in the lock of the door. A moment later she had let herself in.

There was something uncanny about the atmosphere of the place. *Jean felt instinctively that there was no one in the house!*

She called out, but heard no sound other than the constant, monotonous drumming of the rain on the roof. As she advanced into one of the bedrooms, she saw from the faint light from the window that the bed was empty but that it had

been occupied. The next room was likewise unoccupied, and the bed was neatly made.

It occurred to her that perhaps Mrs. Darrow and her daughter had gone downstairs, so she descended into the lower part of the house. But it was deserted.

A chill of fear took possession of her. What had happened? It was strange that Edith had not returned to the barn after the car drove up to the farmhouse. And where was Edith's mother?

There was a heavy thudding at the front door!

Jean blundered through the dark house into the hall. She could see a shadowy figure outlined against the glass of the door.

"Who are you?" she called.

"Let me in!" called Louise. "What's the matter?"

Jean unlocked the door and Louise rushed across the threshold in a flurry of rain. The two girls faced each other in the gloom.

"Louise! There is no one in the house!"

"No one here!" cried the older Dana incredulously. "But where could they have gone?"

"There's something very mysterious about this. I can't understand it."

“Let’s turn on the lights. Perhaps something has happened to Edith and her mother.”

Louise located an electric light button near the door. But when she pressed it, there was no answering gleam.

“Perhaps the power is off.”

“I remember seeing a lamp in the kitchen this evening. Let’s get it,” suggested Jean.

They made their way out to the back part of the house and Louise found the lamp. After considerable groping in cupboards they located some matches.

In the yellow light they gazed upon a scene of disorder. Drawers of the kitchen cabinet had been pulled out and the contents disturbed. When they went in the living room a similar scene greeted their eyes. A chair had been upset, and a table drawer had been pulled out and flung on the floor.

“Something terrible has happened!” Louise exclaimed. “I’m going to telephone to the police.”

She located the instrument in the hall, but after several attempts found that she was unable to get a connection.

“Look! The wire has been cut,” Jean pointed out.

It was true. The wire leading from the telephone had been severed.

The girls stared at each other blankly. Mystery was being piled upon mystery. There seemed to be no reasonable explanation of the strange events of that sinister night.

Then, outside the house, they heard the roar of a car. Through the window they saw the glare of headlights in the barnyard.

“Perhaps they have come back!” gasped Jean.

The girls ran to the door and peered through the glass. A car was drawing up in front of the house. As it came to a stop two men stepped out and hurried up the path toward the place. Jean’s teeth were chattering with excitement. “Who can they be?”

Heavy footsteps thudded on the porch. Then someone pounded on the door. The girls were silent.

“Come on, open up there!” called a gruff voice.

Louise’s face was pale.

“I don’t care who they are,” she said, “I’m not afraid.”

“Who are you?” demanded Louise.

“State police,” announced one of the newcomers. “Sorry to disturb you but we had a call to investigate an automobile accident near here and we’ve come to see about it.”

The girls breathed deep sighs of relief, and unlocked and flung open the door. The lamp-light revealed two tall, burly men in dripping oilskins. There was nothing sinister in their

appearance, however. They were bluff, red-faced individuals, and the girls caught the glint of the light on metal badges.

“Oh, I’m so glad you’ve come!” said Jean. “We’ve been terrified. We were waiting in the barn—and a man came—and he was hurt—and I ran to the house—and there wasn’t anybody here——”

“Hold on! Hold on a minute,” grinned the second trooper. “Not all at once. Let’s get this straight. You say that a man came here. Well, we got a report that somebody was hurt in a car accident near this house and we came out to get the details. We couldn’t find the victim, and we’ve been chasing around these country roads for hours. Then we saw a light in this place and came in to make inquiries.”

“The man is in the barn!” exclaimed Louise. “We were trying to get help. I think he’s badly hurt.”

“In the barn, eh? Then we’ll go and have a look at him. After that we’ll hear the rest of your story.”

The Dana girls led the two State troopers out toward the barn. They felt relieved now that the police were on the scene. One of the men had a powerful electric lantern to light the way.

“You say this man stumbled into the barn and that he seemed badly hurt. I guess that’s our accident victim, all right. I’d just like to catch the motorist who ran him down.”

The trooper opened the door. The brilliant beam of the lantern lit up the interior of the gloomy building.

“Now, then, where is he?”

“Right over there—*why, he’s gone!*” cried Louise.

CHAPTER VI

THE STRANGER AGAIN

“Gone!” shouted the other officer. Then he looked at the girls skeptically. “But I thought you said he was badly hurt.”

“He was. I didn’t think he could move. He was unconscious when I left him to go after my sister. I was worried because Jean hadn’t come back from the house.”

“Well, this is a queer business,” growled one of the men. He advanced into the barn, swinging the lantern to cover every inch of the interior. “How long is it since you left here?”

“Not more than ten minutes.”

The troopers made a thorough search but the mysterious stranger who had crawled into the place for shelter was nowhere to be found. Both the officers were puzzled. They went outside and searched the yard.

“Are you sure you didn’t dream all this?” demanded one of the men when they came back.

“We both saw him,” answered Jean. “He was groaning and could scarcely walk.”

“How did you come to be in the barn? Seems a strange place to spend the night.”

The Danas looked at each other. Should they tell these men the truth? They decided it was best, and nodded.

“Have you ever heard of an Ed Carrillo?” asked Jean.

The troopers looked at each other significantly.

“Ed Carrillo, eh? Now just how does *he* come into this picture? We’ve been on the lookout for that fellow, as it happens.”

The girls scarcely knew where to begin. But they told of meeting Taylor Lott and of learning about Carrillo’s disappearance, then of encountering the missing salesman only to lose the trail again. They explained also about finding the cache in the Darrow barn.

“We thought Carrillo would come back for it,” explained Louise. “It’s a long story, but you see we figured that Ed Carrillo was the man who had hidden the papers in the barn _____”

“We knew that Carrillo had been in here, so we thought he might have been the person who had hidden the papers and would be back for them,” added Jean.

“Good reasoning, too,” said one of the troopers approvingly.

“We decided to spend the night in the barn. Miss Darrow was with us but she went to the house when a car drove up.”

“A car drove up?” One of the men made rapid notes.

“No chance of finding any marks now, with this downpour. How long did it stay?”

“We don’t know. We didn’t hear it drive away. About one o’clock this man came into the barn. When we saw he was hurt, Jean went to the house for help, but found that no one was there.”

“This beats the Dutch! Why didn’t you telephone to us?”

“The telephone wire had been cut. What’s more, the lights were out and everything in the house seemed upset.”

“And the Darrows and the strange man and the car have all disappeared! What do you make of it, Jim?”

“It’s all a big riddle to me,” answered the trooper addressed as Jim. “I guess we had better go back to the house and have a look around.”

The rain had ceased by now. As the troopers returned to the farmhouse with Jean and Louise they asked more questions about Carrillo, and when they learned that the girls came from Oak Falls one of the men said:

“A distant relative of mine is living in that town now. Her name is Mrs. Flower.”

“Mrs. Flower!” exclaimed Louise in surprise. “Why, she is staying with our aunt. She lost a lot of money when Carrillo disappeared.”

“Is that so? Well, if you see her you can tell her that Jim Barclay is working on the case. So the poor old lady lost her money, eh? It’s been years since I’ve seen Mrs. Flower.”

They found the house damp and chilly.

“I’m going to start a fire in the stove and make some hot coffee,” said Jean practically.

“Good idea!” declared Jim Barclay. “How about it, Ned?”

The two troopers began to explore the farmhouse. Jean found some kindling in the woodbox and busied herself making a fire while Louise explored the cupboard in search of coffee-pot and coffee. In a few minutes there was a crackling blaze in the stove and a pleasant warmth began to pervade the kitchen.

“What could have happened to that man?” wondered Louise. “He seemed so badly hurt that I didn’t think he could get out of the barn.”

“Perhaps he was just pretending. He may have heard us when he came into the barn.”

“That cut on his forehead was real enough.” Louise stirred up the fire and looked into the woodbox. It was empty. “I’ll have to get some more wood.”

“There’s a shed leading off the kitchen,” Jean remarked, indicating a nearby door. “That’s probably where you’ll find the wood-pile.”

Louise opened the door and went into the dark shed. She groped about, reaching for the wood-pile. Suddenly she uttered a sharp cry of alarm. Her outstretched fingers had come in contact with a warm object on the floor.

“What is it?” demanded Jean, running across the kitchen.

“There’s someone—lying on the floor of the shed!” Louise gasped, momentarily frightened. “Quick! Get the lamp!”

Jean ran back for the lamp. A moment later its light revealed a huddled body lying beside the wood-pile. It was the form of a man, unconscious and bleeding, sprawled on the floor of the shed.

“It’s the same young man who was in the barn!” Louise cried.

They summoned the two troopers, who hurried out into the shed to investigate. After a hasty examination they saw that the stranger was indeed badly hurt.

“We’ll have to get him to a hospital right away,” declared Jim Barclay. “I can’t imagine how he managed to get from the barn to the woodshed alone.”

“We’ll carry him out to the car,” decided the other trooper. “I guess we can’t wait for that hot coffee.”

Together the State troopers lifted the inert body. The injured man stirred slightly and opened his eyes. He muttered something in a thick voice.

“What is he saying?” asked Louise.

The stranger was hardly conscious. Jean managed to catch a confused mumble of words:

“—six—seven—six—eight—” she heard, and then the voice trailed off indistinguishably.

“We’ll hear his story when he comes around,” said Jim Barclay, as they carried the man out through the kitchen. “What he needs right now is a doctor.”

The troopers went out, Louise going ahead with the flashlight. Carefully they put the injured man into the car.

“We’ll come back as soon as we drive this man to the hospital,” promised Barclay. “You won’t want to stay here all night.”

“I should say not,” Louise declared.

“We’ll see that you get back to Starhurst all right. Sorry we can’t take you with us now but this fellow must have a lot of room and we’re going to have a fast ride.”

The car turned around, then sped down the drive and across the barnyard, and went roaring out to the main road. Jean and Louise went back into the house. They piled more wood on the fire and locked the doors. While they were waiting for the coffee Jean said:

“Do you remember the license number of Ed Carrillo’s car?”

“I can’t say that I do. I noticed the Oak Falls license plate when he drove up to the restaurant but I didn’t make a note of the number. It was stupid of me, too. I should have written it down.”

“I did,” said Jean quietly. “And here’s a strange thing. The number was 6768.”

“Well?”

“That’s the number the injured man was mumbling when the troopers carried him out of the woodshed!”

Louise stared.

“Perhaps Ed Carrillo was the man who ran him down!”

“That’s what I’ve been thinking. He may have had presence of mind enough to remember the license number as the car drove away.”

“Jean—do you think it possible that Ed Carrillo might have been the man who drove up here at eleven o’clock?”

“It could have been. But I’d like to know what happened to Mrs. Darrow and Edith.”

“Maybe we let them walk into a trap. Perhaps Carrillo wasn’t a special friend of theirs after all.”

The girls were worried. The mystery seemed more impenetrable than ever. They discussed every angle of it while they drank some of the coffee. Then they went on a

further search of the house, which had been thoroughly ransacked both upstairs and down.

“Somebody was looking for something,” decided Louise.

“And probably couldn’t find it. There isn’t a room in the house that hasn’t been searched.”

“Where did Mrs. Darrow put the papers we found in the cache?” demanded Louise suddenly.

“I don’t know. She said she would put them in a place where they would be safe and that we could have them in the morning.”

“That’s why the house was searched.”

The girls hunted high and low for the bundle of documents but they were not able to find them. Bitterly they regretted that they had not asked Mrs. Darrow where she intended to hide the papers.

“And we didn’t even examine them closely,” declared Jean.

“I thought we should have plenty of time later on.”

On the floor beneath the living room table she suddenly spied a scrap of paper, which she picked up and examined.

“I believe I’ve found something valuable,” she cried. “This looks strangely familiar to me,” Jean said.

“What in the world is it?” asked Louise.

CHAPTER VII

A MYSTERY

“The lottery ticket!”

Jean’s find was, indeed, the sweepstakes ticket that had been among the papers in the cache.

“And the rest of the clues are gone!” Louise declared ruefully.

There seemed little doubt now that the papers which had been transferred from the barn had been the object of a search which had thrown into disorder the Darrow farmhouse. What was worse, it was probably true that the deeds had been found.

“That lottery ticket was dropped on the floor by accident,” Jean reasoned as she put the pasteboard bit into her purse.

Louise was searching through a carelessly piled heap of old newspapers, magazines and booklets on the table, in the vain hope that the other documents from the cache might have been overlooked. She did not find them, but her attention was attracted by a familiar steamship folder issued by the line by which her Uncle Ned was employed.

He was captain of the *Balaska*, one of the great Atlantic liners. On the folder was listed a schedule of the vessel's sailings for the season.

"I see by this that Uncle Ned's ship is due to dock at New York tomorrow," Louise said.

"Oh, good!" cried Jean. "That means we'll probably see him when we go back to Oak Falls."

Outside they heard the sound of a car coming toward the house. A moment later a horn honked sharply.

"The State troopers! They've come to take us back to Starhurst."

"And I, for one, am not sorry to leave this house," Jean said. "I never put in such a wild night in my life."

Jim Barclay rapped at the door a few seconds later.

"All set, girls? We took that fellow to the hospital and now we'll drive you back to school."

"Did you learn his name?" Louise inquired eagerly.

The trooper shook his head.

"Couldn't get a word out of him. He was unconscious again when we put him into the car and he was still in a coma when we got him to the hospital in Penfield. The interne said he thought the man would live, though, so I daresay we'll hear all about the accident when he revives."

Before the girls left the house, Louise insisted upon getting blankets for them to put around themselves.

“No use getting chilled again,” she said.

The men extinguished the lamps and put out the fire. They locked the front door and helped the girls into the rear seat of the troopers’ automobile.

“Half-past three!” said Barclay, glancing at his watch with a grin. “A fine time for schoolgirls to be out!”

“It’s a good thing we had leave,” laughed Louise, “or we’d have plenty of explanations to make to Mrs. Crandall.”

“If you have any trouble, just refer her to us,” remarked the other trooper as the car pulled away.

The drive back to Starhurst did not take long. When the girls’ eyes became accustomed to the gloom of the car Louise noticed a white object on the seat beside her. Curious, she picked it up. It was merely a torn scrap of paper, but in the dim light she saw that there was writing on it, and that it looked like the fragment of a letter.

Louise recalled that the injured man had been lying on the rear seat of the car when the officers were driving him to the hospital. It occurred to her that this scrap of paper might have fallen from the victim’s pocket, so she quickly slipped it into her own, deciding that at an opportune moment she would return it.

Ten minutes later the Danas arrived at Starhurst, to be admitted by a sleepy maid who was too dumbfounded at the sight of the two bedraggled girls to make any comment. In a few moments Jean and Louise were again in their cozy study. They were so tired that they tumbled directly into bed, too exhausted even to discuss the stirring events of the night.

In the morning, at the breakfast table, Lettie Briggs eyed them maliciously.

“I thought you two were going to spend the night at Darrow Farm,” she remarked.

“That’s where we were,” replied Jean promptly.

Lettie’s lip curled.

“I might believe it if I hadn’t looked out of the window and seen you coming home,” she said.

“You must have been up late,” Louise retorted.

“A quarter to four is a fine hour to be returning from a visit to the Darrows, I must say. Who were the two men who brought you home in the car?”

“Maybe you’d like to meet them,” suggested Jean.

“I’m sure I wouldn’t. I don’t care to meet the sort of men with whom you’d go car riding half the night.”

An angry retort was on Jean’s lips when suddenly there was a severe voice at her back.

“What’s this? Car riding at a quarter to four? Lettie, what do you mean?”

Lettie flushed. She had not seen Mrs. Crandall approaching.

“I only know what I saw,” she replied. “The Danas drove up to the school entrance with two men at a quarter to four, after telling everybody here that they were going to spend the night at Miss Darrow’s place.”

Mrs. Crandall frowned. The other girls at the table were wide-eyed with excitement.

“Jean and Louise,” said Mrs. Crandall, “I’ll have to ask you to come to the office with me and explain this.”

Coolly the Dana girls left the table and followed the headmistress to the office. There was an instant buzz of high pitched conversation when they left the dining hall. Lettie was the centre of attention. She was enjoying her triumph, highly satisfied in the thought that she had made serious trouble for the Danas.

“Now, girls,” said Mrs. Crandall, closing the office door, “I do not doubt you have an explanation for this extraordinary conduct. One of the maids told me you came back here at an early hour this morning. I was on my way to ask you about it when I overheard Lettie’s remark.”

“We were brought back to Starhurst through the kindness of two State troopers,” Louise explained calmly. “We’ll be glad to tell you everything, Mrs. Crandall.”

They related to the headmistress the whole story of their visit to the Darrow farm.

“But what happened to Mrs. Darrow and her daughter?” demanded Mrs. Crandall in amazement when they had finished.

“We don’t know. They simply disappeared, leaving the house locked,” said Jean.

“It’s an extraordinary affair,” mused the headmistress. “I wouldn’t have let you accept Miss Darrow’s invitation if I hadn’t thought she was thoroughly reliable. It seems odd that they went away without letting you know. Of course, under the circumstances, I can see that you couldn’t have acted otherwise than you did, although I think it was rather foolish of you to undertake to spend the night in the barn. Still, if you hadn’t, the poor man who was knocked down by the automobile might never have been discovered but might have died. There’s that much to be thankful for. Did you learn his name?”

“He was unconscious when he was taken to the hospital,” Jean replied.

“A strange business. You girls seem to have a positive talent for getting mixed up in mysteries. But I can’t understand why the Darrows acted as they did. I do hope no harm has come to them.”

Louise had an idea.

“I understand Miss Darrow was employed by the Penfield newspaper. If she is back at work this morning she ought to be able to throw some light on the affair.”

“That’s true,” agreed Mrs. Crandall. She reached for the telephone and put through a call to the newspaper office. When the connection was made she said, “I should like to speak to Miss Edith Darrow. I believe she is one of the reporters on your staff.”

Then, as she listened, her eyes grew wide with astonishment.

“What’s that? You say she has never been employed in your office? . . . I see. . . . Yes. . . . Very well. . . . Thank you very much.”

Mrs. Crandall replaced the receiver and looked at the girls thoughtfully.

“There is something very strange about this,” she said. “Miss Darrow was not a reporter for the Penfield paper.”

CHAPTER VIII

LETTIE'S HOAX

Presently Mrs. Crandall dismissed Jean and Louise, assuring them that their explanation of the events of the previous night had been entirely satisfactory.

To the Danas, however, the mystery had assumed a more perplexing turn than ever.

“I’m beginning to think that the Darrows know a great deal more about this affair than we have ever imagined,” said Louise. “Now, why did Edith Darrow say she was writing for the Penfield newspaper?”

“I can’t recollect whether she actually made that claim or not. It seems to me that it was Lettie who said so, when she was bragging that the reporter was a cousin of hers.”

“We’ll go and see Lettie. Perhaps we can get the truth from her.”

The girls went up to the floor on which Lettie Briggs shared a study with Ina Mason, and walked quietly down the corridor. Lettie’s door was open.

The school snob was deeply engrossed at her desk, and did not look up, so it was evident that she had not heard the Dana girls approaching her study. Jean was just about to speak when Louise quickly grasped her sister's arm, cautioning silence.

They watched Lettie. In front of her the girl had a cigar band, a long envelope, and a pot of paste. She picked up the cigar band and trimmed it carefully with a pair of scissors. Then she stuck the crest of it on the back of the envelope flap. Then Lettie held it up and regarded her handiwork with pride.

The Danas tiptoed quietly away.

“Now what was she doing?” asked Louise, still unable to explain the reason for this mystifying procedure.

“Don't you see?” laughed Jean. “Remember how she has been boasting about her invitation to visit her precious Count Salame in New York? Remember the crested envelopes she has been showing us?”

“Cigar bands!” gasped Louise.

“And nothing more. This is rich! Wait a minute. I've just recalled something that ought to make Lettie look foolish.”

They hurried back to their study and Jean rummaged in her trunk. Among the odd hobbies of the Dana girls in times past had been that of saving cigar bands. To tell the truth, their collection was somewhat limited and they had long since abandoned the pastime, but it had been originated

on a rainy day when they had discovered a quantity of cigar bands on their Uncle Ned's desk. When he learned of the new hobby of his nieces he had made it his business to pick up odd bands at the various ports he visited.

"I'm sure that old book of ours is somewhere in my trunk," said Jean.

In a few minutes she found it, with the gaily-colored strips neatly arranged between slits in the pages.

"I think I recognized the one Lettie was using. It is a fairly common brand. Here it is." Jean extracted the crest from the page. "Now let her try to pretend that she has been corresponding with the nobility."

They went downstairs, where they found Lettie Briggs surrounded by a group of girls to whom she was showing the formidably crested envelope.

"It's from Count Salame, of course," she said.

"What a pretty crest!" exclaimed Jean. "May I look at it?"

"If you wish," replied Lettie loftily.

Jean took the envelope and examined it.

"Count Salame is in the cigar business, isn't he?" she inquired innocently.

Lettie was furious.

“What an idea!” she exclaimed. “Of course he isn’t in the cigar business. I’ll have you understand that Count Salame does not work. He doesn’t have to. He is a member of the nobility.”

“But his crest is the same as this one,” said Jean, producing the cigar band she had taken from the collection. “Look, girls, it’s exactly the same.”

There was a moment of silence as the students compared the two crests, which were identical in pattern. Then, as they realized Lettie’s trick, they burst into shrieks of laughter. The Briggs girl, humiliated beyond measure, snatched the envelope from Jean’s hand and fled.

The Danas returned to their study, still laughing over their success in exposing Lettie’s pretentious trick. Then they began packing their trunks for vacation, as they were to leave for their home in Oak Falls the following afternoon.

Directly after luncheon the next day Evelyn Starr tapped at their door.

“Come in,” said Jean.

“You’re wanted downstairs, girls,” she cried. “What have you done now? It’s a policeman.”

“A policeman!” exclaimed Louise.

“A State trooper.”

“Perhaps it’s Mr. Barclay,” said Jean. “They may have discovered something about the man who was hurt last night.”

They hurried downstairs. Jim Barclay was waiting for them in the lower hall. He looked a bit sheepish in this environment, uncomfortably aware of the curious glances directed at him by the many girls who were passing and repassing in the hall.

“I thought maybe you might know something about that fellow we took to the hospital last night,” he said to the Dana girls, “or the Darrows.”

“Nothing, except that Miss Darrow wasn’t working for the Penfield paper after all.”

Barclay frowned.

“That’s queer. Well, if you get in touch with her or her mother, I wish you’d let me know. It’s a strange business all around.”

“Do you know the man’s name yet?” inquired Jean eagerly.

The trooper shook his head.

“As a matter of fact,” he told them, “the man is still unconscious and we have been unable to learn his name or anything about him.”

“Will he live?” Louise asked.

“The doctor says he has a good chance of pulling through, although of course it’s a bad sign that he hasn’t come around to his senses as yet.”

“Yes, it is,” agreed Louise. “I wish we could find out who he is so that his relatives could be notified of his predicament.”

“Have you searched the territory?” asked Jean.

“We went back to the spot where the fellow probably dragged himself off the road and onto the path to the barn early this morning, and we found this,” explained the officer, “but that is all.”

The trooper brought forth a badly smashed wrist watch. The Danas peered at the broken timepiece. Jean turned it over hopefully.

“No initial,” she murmured sadly as she gazed at the smooth case.

“Not a bit of a clue in this,” exclaimed Louise. “It could have belonged to anyone. It is of a common make.”

The girls were disappointed, but after the trooper left Jean said suddenly to her sister:

“Louise, what happened to that scrap of paper you found in the car last night?”

“I forgot all about it,” Louise confessed. “I put it into my pocket. It was too dark to read it at the time.”

“Where is it now?”

“It’s still in my pocket. And I packed that dress right in the bottom of my trunk.”

“Too late to get it. We have a hundred and one things to do before train time.”

This was true enough. The next hour was a flurry of excitement as the girls prepared for their homeward journey. Farewells were exchanged, and at last they were on their way to Penfield station, accompanied by half a dozen school chums whose homes were in the neighborhood of Oak Falls.

The journey was without incident. It was dark when they reached their destination. Under the station lights Jean and Louise could see Uncle Ned and Aunt Harriet awaiting them.

“My, isn’t it good to get home again, even though we’ve had such an exciting time at school?” declared Jean enthusiastically.

“Yes, and don’t Uncle Ned and Aunt Harriet look nice and kind, waiting to greet us. They have been so good to us, I want to do something really fine some day to show how much I appreciate their care,” replied Louise.

Then they bade good-bye to the girls who had accompanied them and rushed from the train. Jean flung herself upon Uncle Ned. Louise embraced her aunt.

“Avast, there!” boomed Captain Dana as Jean hugged him. “It looks as if you’re glad to see your old uncle after all.”

“Glad! Why it’s heavenly to see you again.” Jean kissed her aunt. “Hello, Aunt Harriet. It was good of you to come down to meet us.”

“We brought the car,” said Uncle Ned, as he led the way to the automobile at the side of the platform. “I’m not much of a hand at the wheel of one of these contraptions. Can’t remember which is the starboard and which is the larboard beam, somehow. But get in and we’ll soon be back home again.”

Both girls had been struck by the fact that their Aunt Harriet looked haggard and ill. She was usually the picture of health but there was no doubt now that a great change had come over her. They did not mention the matter, however, at the moment. Not until they were driving to the big rambling house on the outskirts of Oak Falls, did Jean say to her uncle, sitting beside her in the front seat:

“What’s the matter with Auntie?”

“So you’ve noticed it too?” asked Captain Dana grimly.

“No one could help but notice it. She looks dreadfully worn and ill.”

“First thing I said to her when I came back from my voyage. I just got in from New York yesterday.”

“Has she been ill? Why didn’t she write and let us know?”

“Ill, nothing!” said Uncle Ned. “It’s just this Flower woman that’s the cause of all the trouble.”

CHAPTER IX

MRS. FLOWER'S MISFORTUNE

The Dana girls were to learn that there was a very real reason for Aunt Harriet's haggard appearance. Out of the goodness of her heart she had invited Elizabeth Flower to stay with her, only to find that her old friend was a great problem. The girls had their first acquaintance with the woman next morning, when they heard a querulous voice issuing from the guest room down the hall.

"Harriet, surely you know by now that my oatmeal must be hot. Quite hot! I simply can't abide cold oatmeal. It turns my stomach. I loathe it."

"I'm sorry, Elizabeth," said their Aunt Harriet. "Probably it got cool while you were eating your grapefruit."

"If I were you I would speak to the grocer about that grapefruit, now that you remind me of it," whined Mrs. Flower. "It wasn't a bit juicy and there were too many seeds in it. Will you take the oatmeal back and heat it? And tell that girl that I don't want burnt bacon again this morning."

When the girls were dressed they presented themselves at the doorway of the guest room. They saw a fat,

flabby old woman in a pink bed-jacket with an enormous frilled nightcap on her head, propped up by pillows in the bed. Her expression was peevish and discontented.

“Oh, you must be the Dana girls,” she said. “Come in,” Mrs. Flower sighed. “It’s mighty good of you to bother to stop to say good-morning to a poor old woman. But never mind. I’ll soon be out of the way and a care to no one. I’m not long for this world.”

“You don’t look very ill, Mrs. Flower,” said Jean.

“That’s all you know about it,” snapped the woman. “When you’re young and healthy it’s hard to sympathize with the troubles of older people.” Mrs. Flower began to sniffle. “I’ve had a hard time in this life and now I’m penniless and friendless.”

“Not friendless, surely,” remarked Louise.

“Practically,” moaned Mrs. Flower. “Sick and poor and practically friendless. I’m sure it will be just as well for everybody when I’m dead and gone.”

Aunt Harriet came back a few minutes later with the oatmeal and the rest of the breakfast. The Dana girls went downstairs.

“If Aunt Harriet has had to put up with *that* for the past month it’s no wonder she’s not looking well,” said Jean to Uncle Ned.

“I don’t believe there’s a thing wrong with Mrs. Flower,” put in Louise. “She’s just a spoiled old woman

and now that she's lost her property she thinks someone ought to take care of her."

"She's a trial. I can sympathize with Aunt Harriet," Jean remarked. "What's to prevent Mrs. Flower from going back home to Rocky Corner?"

"Nothing, so far as I can see," laughed Uncle Ned, who left the room to answer the telephone.

"If we can get her out of the house, it will be all the better for everyone concerned."

That morning she visited Mrs. Flower in the guest room and found the old woman sitting up beside the window. Louise was sympathetic and diplomatic; so much so, in fact, that she finally got Mrs. Flower to agree with her suggestion that perhaps she would be happier in her own home. The old lady thought it was her own idea, and once convinced of it was all for action. She called for Aunt Harriet, told her she had decided to return to Rocky Corner at once, and was making preparations for her departure.

"But I can't go alone," she said to the Dana girls. "My servants won't be back for two days. Someone will have to come and look after me."

"We'll come, with pleasure," declared Louise, not adding that the pleasure would lie in the knowledge that Aunt Harriet would have some peace in her own household.

That afternoon the Dana girls drove Mrs. Flower over to Rocky Corner in the car, leaving Aunt Harriet vastly relieved

and Uncle Ned vastly puzzled as to how they had managed it.

“They must have hypnotized her,” he chuckled. “I thought she was all set to stay here until her dying day.”

“Elizabeth was always a good friend of mine when we were younger,” observed Aunt Harriet, “but I must say she’s a little trying.”

“Trying!” snorted Uncle Ned. “She’d have had you in the hospital in another month.”

Mrs. Flower had a big house in the village of Rocky Corner not far from Oak Falls, which had been closed up for some time. The Dana girls got busy making the place comfortable, while Mrs. Flower took to her bed with a bottle of smelling salts and a novel, occasionally shouting instructions downstairs. Other than that, she gave no assistance whatever. The journey from Oak Falls, she said, had been very hard on her.

During the afternoon there was a ring at the door-bell. As Louise went into the hall, Mrs. Flower called downstairs:

“That’s Taylor Lott. I saw him coming up the steps. I don’t want to see him. What does he mean, coming to bother me about business at a time like this? Tell him I’m ill. Tell him I can’t come downstairs.”

Louise was embarrassed, for Mrs. Flower shouted these instructions in a tone that was certainly audible to the man on the veranda. However, she opened the door to admit Taylor Lott, who was surprised to see her.

“Why, you’re Miss Dana, aren’t you?” the real estate man exclaimed. “One of the girls I met near Penfield. I didn’t expect to find you here.”

“Mrs. Flower has been staying with Aunt Harriet at Oak Falls,” explained Louise. “When she decided to come back to her own house we came to stay with her until she got settled.”

“Yes, I was told that Mrs. Flower had returned. I have a few little business matters to discuss with her, if I may.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Lott, but Mrs. Flower isn’t feeling very well. She said she wouldn’t be able to come downstairs.”

Mr. Lott looked disappointed.

“That’s too bad. I made the journey especially to see her.”

“Won’t you come in, Mr. Lott? It’s too bad you’ve had your trip for nothing.”

“I’ll come in, gladly,” replied the real estate man, stepping quickly into the hall. “I haven’t really had a chance to thank you for your help in that Carrillo affair, even if I didn’t succeed in catching the rascal. He slipped right through my fingers.”

“We have more to tell you about him,” Jean said, coming in from the living room.

“You haven’t bad news of the fellow?” asked Lott quickly.

He accepted the offer of a chair, as the Danas began to tell of Carrillo's visits to the Darrow homestead, of the hidden papers, and of the accident victim.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the realtor, amazed.

"We think perhaps it was Carrillo who ran down that poor chap," said Jean. "Maybe it was he who drove back to the farmhouse. If we could only locate the Darrow family, we're sure they could tell us where he is."

"And they couldn't identify the accident victim?" asked Mr. Lott.

"Not up to the time we left Penfield."

"I must look into this. I'll ask the police to help me find Mrs. Darrow and her daughter. You had no chance to look through those documents in the cache?" he added.

"We gave them to Mrs. Darrow for safekeeping, hoping we'd have a chance to read them in the morning," Louise confessed.

"Very likely they were some of the deeds he stole from your office," suggested Louise.

"It's unfortunate," groaned Lott. "Most unfortunate. But you did the best you could. I'm going to get in touch with the police at Penfield right away."

Out he bustled, thanking the girls profusely for the information they had given him. As soon as Taylor Lott had

departed they heard Mrs. Flower calling peevishly to them from upstairs.

“He stayed a long time,” she complained. “I’m glad I didn’t have to see him. He should have been more considerate—calling here when he knows I’m so dreadfully ill.”

“We told him you couldn’t see him,” Louise said. “He didn’t seem to mind.”

“It’s a great worry, having all these business details to attend to when I’m sick,” moaned the invalid. “I can’t depend on anyone. Not even my nephew. I wrote to him and he promised faithfully he would come and help me in my trouble, but even he has forgotten. Nobody cares for me. I thought I could depend on my nephew at least. But I’ll teach him,” she muttered vindictively. “I’ll teach him a lesson he won’t forget in a hurry. I’m going to cut him out of my will.”

Mrs. Flower considered this revenge with a great deal of satisfaction.

“That’s what I’ll do. I had planned to leave my money to him—what little is left after that rascal Carrillo got through robbing me—but now he won’t get a penny of it. I’ll leave it to the Old Ladies’ Home in Oak Falls, so I will.”

Once the idea possessed her, she was impatient to execute it.

“Go to the telephone,” she directed, “and call up Josiah Jarvis, the lawyer. Tell him to bring out a new will form. I’ll make a new will right away.” Mrs. Flower pressed her hand

over her heart and sighed prodigiously. “I don’t think I’m long for this world.”

“Perhaps your nephew will come after all,” Jean suggested. “Maybe you ought to wait a little while.”

“I know my own business,” snapped Mrs. Flower curtly. “I have decided to change my will and that’s all there is to it. Call up Mr. Jarvis at once.”

The girls went downstairs and Louise put through a call for the lawyer, an individual they had often seen on the streets of Oak Falls and for whom they had scant liking. When Mr. Jarvis presented himself at the door an hour later, they decided that they liked him less than ever.

He was a tall, thin, gaunt man clad in sombre black. Mr. Jarvis had a syrupy, insinuating manner and spoke in a hushed and reverent voice. He was a man of about fifty, quite bald, and his expression was shrewd and sly.

“My dear young ladies,” he said softly as he slithered quietly into the hall, “you have no idea how pained I am to learn that dear Mrs. Flower is so ill. She has suffered much. Ah, yes,” and he wagged his head sadly as he looked reflectively at the crown of his hat, “she has suffered a great deal indeed. And now—I understand—she wishes to make an alteration in her will.”

“That’s what she said,” replied Louise briskly. “You’re to go upstairs.”

“Very good. Very good,” breathed Josiah Jarvis. “An unpleasant duty, this business of making a will or changing it. But wise. Very wise. We are here today and gone tomorrow,” he said with the air of one who has made an original statement.

With that he glided up to the sitting room where Mrs. Flower was vindictively waiting to cut off her nephew without a penny and bestow her money upon the Old Ladies’ Home.

“I don’t like that man,” said Louise. “He is altogether too polite.”

“I don’t trust him, either.”

Louise thrust her hand absently into her pocket. Suddenly her expression changed. She withdrew her hand and stared at a scrap of paper she had encountered in the pocket.

“Oh! I had forgotten all about it!” she exclaimed.

“About what?”

“This is the dress I was wearing the night we were at the Darrow place. I unpacked it this morning.” Louise held up the scrap of paper. “And this is the fragment of the letter we found in the police car.”

CHAPTER X

A VALUABLE CLUE

Louise put the piece of paper on the table and the Danas scrutinized it closely. In faded ink they could discern only a few words.

“ . . . llo to justice. I do hope you will be able to come soon and help me in my great trouble.

Yours sincerely,

Aunt Bett . . . ”

A corner of the fragment was torn just at the signature.

“There could be only one letter missing,” Jean said.

“Wouldn’t the complete signature be ‘Aunt Betty’?”

“Most likely,” agreed Louise, examining the paper thoughtfully. “But there’s something familiar about the first part of it. Those letters ‘—llo.’ Couldn’t they be part of the name ‘Carrillo’?”

Jean was excited.

“I do believe you’ve hit upon the answer!” she cried.
“Perhaps this letter has something to do with the Carrillo case after all.”

Louise studied it a moment longer. Then, without a word, she fled into Mrs. Flower’s sacred “front room,” otherwise known as the parlor, a place obviously seldom opened from one end of the year to the other. They had been permitted a peep into this sanctum when they had arrived at the house, and Louise had noticed a family album prominently displayed on a center table.

The album was the object of her search now. Jean was puzzled when her sister picked it up and began to turn the pages.

“What *are* you looking for?”

“I have a hunch.”

Louise turned over page after page and at length she paused.

“There,” she said triumphantly, thrusting the album over to Jean and pointing at a photograph of a young man. “Have you ever seen him before?”

Jean stared at the picture in downright astonishment.

“Why—why it’s the man who was hurt in the automobile accident!” she declared. “The man in Penfield Hospital.”

The photograph was signed. Jean read the signature and gasped. The mystery was striking close to home indeed.

“We’d better tell Mrs. Flower!”

“I should say so.”

They scampered upstairs, and found the door of the sitting room closed, but in the excitement of the news they had to convey the Dana girls thought little of this. Louise flung open the door and the girls rushed into the room, only to find that they had intruded upon an unexpectedly romantic scene.

Mrs. Flower was sitting in an easy chair by the window. Kneeling at her feet was Josiah Jarvis, the lawyer.

“My dear Mrs. Flower,” he was saying, “it is little enough I have to offer you, but such as it is I lay it before you. If you would do me the great honor of becoming my wife——”

Mrs. Flower, bridling and coy, blushed with confusion when she saw the girls.

“What do you mean?” she demanded angrily of them. “Don’t you know enough to knock? I declare, I think it’s very bad manners——”

The Dana girls scarcely knew what to say. As for Josiah Jarvis, he was the picture of misery. He scrambled hastily to his feet, smirking and smiling, overwhelmed with embarrassment.

“Really!” he exclaimed. “Really—this is most—my dear Mrs. Flower, if you are quite satisfied that the document is in

order—ahem—I have considerable business to attend to in town—yes—perhaps I had better be going.”

“Please don’t go on our account,” said Jean apologetically. “We have some very important news for Mrs. Flower. We didn’t realize we were intruding.”

“Not at all,” stammered Mr. Jarvis. “Not intruding at all. Mrs. Flower and I were just discussing a matter of—ahem—of business. But it can wait. I’ll be back again, Mrs. Flower.”

Still stammering, he backed out of the room and hastily made his way downstairs. The front door slammed with a resounding crash. Mr. Josiah Jarvis was evidently peeved that his proposal to Mrs. Flower had been interrupted so unceremoniously.

“Well, what is it?” demanded Mrs. Flower in a sharp voice.

“It’s about your nephew,” said Louise, meekly. “I think we’ve found some trace of him.” She handed over the torn fragment of the letter. “Is that in your handwriting, Mrs. Flower?”

The widow put on her spectacles and examined the paper.

“Why, that’s part of a letter I wrote to James!” she said. “Where did you get it?”

“It means that your nephew is now in Penfield Hospital, recovering from injuries sustained in an automobile accident,” explained Louise quietly.

“James? In an automobile accident?” cried the widow, astounded. “But what do you mean? How did you learn this?”

“It’s a long story, Mrs. Flower, but it’s concerned with that man Carrillo, who robbed you. We’ve been trying to trace him, you see.”

Together the girls told Mrs. Flower some of their adventures following their meeting with Taylor Lott near Penfield, ending with the discovery of the fragment of the letter that had fallen from the injured man’s pocket in the police automobile.

“It was James. It must have been James!” said Mrs. Flower in great distress. “That’s certainly part of my last letter to him.”

“We found his photograph in the family album and it’s the picture of the man who was hurt in the accident. We recognized it at once,” Jean declared.

The widow seemed to forget that she was supposed to be an invalid. Full of concern for her nephew, she got out of her chair immediately and hurried downstairs.

“I’m going to telephone to the Penfield Hospital right away. Just to think that he’s been lying there all this time and I didn’t know it!”

Mrs. Flower lost no time in getting the institution on the long distance telephone and making inquiries about the accident victim. She was relieved to learn that although

the injured man had not emerged from his coma, it was conceded by the doctors that he had a good chance to recover.

“But his name?” insisted the widow. “Has he been identified yet?”

There was a brief pause. Then the hospital superintendent said:

“No, he has not been identified. Nothing on him—no papers—to indicate who he is.”

“Oh, dear,” said Mrs. Flower. “Well, I think he is my nephew. What shall I do? Can you tell me more about him?”

“Has your relative any sort of a birthmark?”

“I don’t know.”

“You had better come here, then,” was the crisp reply, and the connection was cut off.

The victim’s aunt wrung her hands. “What shall I do? What shall I do?” she wailed. Then, turning to the Danas, she said, “You’ll have to drive me to the hospital at once!”

Jean and Louise assented, after telephoning to Aunt Harriet of their plans. As they drove along, the widow talked of nothing but her nephew.

“I can’t understand how James came to be near Penfield!” she exclaimed. “Perhaps he was on his way to visit me. It’s

possible that I have been unjust to the boy.”

Louise and Jean thought of Mrs. Flower’s expressed intention of cutting her nephew out of her will. The widow made no reference to the matter, however.

“There’s the institution ahead of us,” announced Jean after they had driven for a long time. One minute Mrs. Flower would ask for speed, the next she would complain of bumps and demand a slow pace. The girls forgave her, however, realizing that she was anxious and nervous.

As soon as the car stopped in front of the hospital, the widow was out and bustling into the building. In a few moments she had been directed to the men’s ward, and was urging the girls to follow her. On a bed lay the young man the Danas had first seen in the barn.

“It is my James!” exclaimed Mrs. Flower, bending over her relative with such force that a nurse had to pull her away. “Oh, how dreadful! How terrible!”

Then she called for the superintendent. “See that this dear young man has the best of care. Remove him to a private room. I’ll be responsible for the bill.”

After the change had been made, and the widow had left at least a hundred orders, she and the Danas drove back to Rocky Corner.

That night, after the girls had gone to bed and the house was silent, they heard a stirring in Mrs. Flower’s room. After a while the door of the widow’s room creaked.

Jean, overcome with curiosity, peeked out into the shadowy hall. Mrs. Flower was walking quietly to the head of the stairs. In one hand she held two long envelopes. The old lady made her way downstairs.

Jean aroused Louise and the two girls followed. With bated breaths they crouched on the steps. Through the staircase they saw the widow move toward a small safe in the corner of the living room. She crouched before it, worked the combination, and swung open the door.

In the light of a small desk lamp she looked at the two envelopes. One of them was clean and fresh. The Dana girls were convinced that it contained the new will that had been drawn up that day. With a sudden gesture Mrs. Flower tore the envelope across and dropped it into a waste-basket. The other one she put carefully inside the safe and then locked the door.

She did not see the girls as she turned and walked into the front room. She came back in a few minutes, carefully carrying the heavy family album. After placing it on the table, she began to turn the pages. Presently, with a heavy sigh, she closed the book and took it into the other room.

Softly Jean and Louise stole up the stairs. In a few minutes they heard the click as the living room light was switched off. Then Mrs. Flower came back upstairs, went to her own room, and quietly closed the door.

“I’m sure she tore up the new will,” Jean whispered, as the girls snuggled down beneath the covers again.

“Perhaps it’s just as well. But if she marries Josiah Jarvis he’ll get her money.”

“No doubt that’s what he’s after. He looks like a schemer to me,” Jean said.

“Didn’t he look silly when we walked in this afternoon and interrupted his proposal?” laughed Louise.

Next morning Mrs. Flower was all agog with plans for having her nephew transferred from Penfield Hospital to her home. As soon as her housekeeper should return, she would attend to the matter.

“He’ll recover much quicker if he is among friends instead of at an institution. I must call up and see how he is this morning.”

Immediately after breakfast a small coupé drove up to the door and a neatly-dressed, good-looking young man strode briskly up the walk. Mrs. Flower frowned as she looked through the window.

“It’s Dr. Bell. He’s the new doctor. Just came to Rocky Corner a few months ago. And I’ll bet he’s come about the rent,” added the widow grimly.

Dr. Bell had, indeed, come about his rent.

“Mrs. Flower,” he said, when the widow admitted him, “I understand that Taylor Lott’s clerk, Carrillo, has disappeared.”

“That’s true,” admitted Mrs. Flower. “And if I ever lay my hands on him I’ll fix him.”

“As you know, my office is in one of your buildings and the business is handled by Mr. Lott.”

“True enough.”

“Now, I paid my rent to Carrillo. Six months in advance. But I didn’t get a receipt. He said he would make out a receipt and mail it to me but I didn’t receive it.”

“Yes?” said Mrs. Flower non-committally.

“Did he turn the rent money over to you?”

“He did not.”

Dr. Bell looked anxious.

“I hope it doesn’t mean that I have to pay it over again.”

“I have only your word for it that the money was paid, Dr. Bell. I haven’t had my money. You have no receipt to show that you paid it.”

“That’s so. Of course, I realize you have a perfect legal right to collect again, but I hope it won’t come to that. After all, I can’t afford to lose all that money and I *did* pay the rent.”

Mrs. Flower was not very gracious about it.

“You are occupying the office, Dr. Bell, and I haven’t received the rent money. It was careless of you to let Carrillo go without giving you a receipt.”

“It *was* careless, I’ll admit. But it never occurred to me that he might be a crook. I do wish you would consider this carefully, Mrs. Flower. I’m just getting started in practice here and this will be a bad blow to me.”

Louise intervened.

“I think Carrillo will be caught before long, Mrs. Flower,” she said. “Why not let the matter go for a few days until we see what happens?”

Dr. Bell flashed her a grateful glance.

“I suppose it won’t do any harm to wait a little while,” admitted the widow grudgingly. “Although I think Carrillo has disappeared for good!”

CHAPTER XI

THE DETECTIVE

Mrs. Flower took advantage of Dr. Bell's visit to request a favor of him. She asked him to see to it that her nephew was removed from Penfield Hospital and brought to her home. Dr. Bell, after hearing some of the circumstances of the case, agreed to do what he could and drove away.

Louise and Jean had not expected to stay more than a night with the widow but an unexpected development prolonged their stay. A telephone call from Mrs. Flower's housekeeper that morning notified the widow that her servant would be unable to return at once. A relative had been taken seriously ill and the housekeeper sent word that she would be unavoidably delayed.

"That's the way it goes," complained Mrs. Flower. "Once a person gets old and loses her money no one has any further consideration for her."

"We'll stay with you until she arrives," Louise promised.

This relieved Mrs. Flower a great deal as she had been dreading the possibility that she might be obliged to look after the house by herself. She soon forgot her

disappointment over the non-arrival of the housekeeper and busied herself putting the best guest room in order for the reception of her nephew.

“I do hope he is well enough to come,” she said. “He’ll be much more comfortable here with me to talk to him.”

Privately the girls were of the opinion that if James Flower had to lie helplessly in bed and listen to a dreary recital of his aunt’s physical ailments and financial troubles for any length of time, he would prefer the hospital.

Just after lunch Dr. Bell drove up to the house with the patient in his car. James Flower looked white and ill. His head was heavily bandaged and one arm was encased in a sling. He managed to smile faintly at his aunt when she rushed down the steps to greet him. Mrs. Flower embraced him solicitously.

“My poor James!” she cried. “It was not until yesterday that I learned you were in the hospital.”

“It was not until last evening that I knew it myself,” said her nephew. “They say I was unconscious for a long time.”

“The hospital authorities didn’t want to let him go,” Dr. Bell explained as they helped the injured man into the house. “They said it would be dangerous in his present condition and it wasn’t until I promised to take all responsibility that they agreed to release him at all. But he must be kept quiet and put right to bed.”

Under Dr. Bell's direction, and with Mrs. Flower fluttering around and offering a great deal of advice while the Dana girls did most of the work, Mr. Flower was finally assisted upstairs. The doctor put him to bed. The strain of the journey had evidently told on the patient, for he fell asleep at once.

"It's evident that he had a narrow escape from being killed," said the doctor. "Unless complications develop he ought to be on his feet again in a few days. He was suffering from exhaustion and exposure as well as from his injuries when they brought him to the hospital."

"The poor lad!" breathed Mrs. Flower.

James Flower was indeed the stranger who had stumbled into the Darrow barn. The Dana girls recognized him at once. He was a young man of about twenty-five, fair-haired and good-looking. Louise and Jean were deeply curious to learn how the accident had happened, but were forced to bide their time until the patient should be in a condition to talk.

It was not until after supper that evening that James Flower was able to give any coherent account of the affair. He did not recognize the girls, although he admitted having a dim recollection of being in the farmhouse. When Mrs. Flower explained that it had been through the Dana girls that he had been traced to the hospital he was exceedingly interested.

"It was all on account of that fellow Carrillo," he said weakly.

“Carrillo!” exclaimed Mrs. Flower. “I wrote to you about him. He is the man who stole my money.”

Her nephew nodded.

“I was coming to help you. As a matter of fact, I was on my way here when a friend told me of meeting Carrillo on the road to Cranbury.”

“That’s where he said he was going to spend the night. Mr. Lott went after him but missed him,” said Jean eagerly.

“That’s true. He was at the Liberty Hotel,” said James Flower. “I found him there.”

He closed his eyes and lay back on the pillow, exhausted by the effort of talking.

“You found him?” said Louise. “But he had checked out when Mr. Lott reached the place.”

“He checked out all right. But I checked out with him. I was going to bring him back to Oak Falls. I caught up with him at the Liberty Hotel, met him face to face, and accused him of absconding with the money from Taylor Lott’s office. At first he blustered and denied it, but when I threatened to call the police he broke down and admitted everything. He said he wouldn’t make any trouble and that he would come back to Oak Falls with me.”

“Then how did he get away from you?” demanded Mrs. Flower.

“I’m coming to that. I left my auto at Cranbury and decided to go back to Oak Falls in his car. He seemed meek enough, and I was a fool to think that he had given up any hope of escaping. And it was near Spring Corner that he got away.”

“Spring Corner!” exclaimed Louise. “Why, that’s where the Darrow homestead is.”

The young man nodded.

“The car stopped. Carrillo said it was stalled and that he couldn’t start the motor. I thought he was bluffing, so I stepped out and went around to look at the engine. I had just raised the hood when he threw the car into gear and drove it ahead.”

“The brute!” cried Mrs. Flower warmly. “He might have killed you.”

“He nearly did. As a matter of fact, I was knocked down and dragged several feet. I became unconscious. When I regained my senses, it was raining. That was probably what revived me. Carrillo was gone and so was the car. I managed to get to my feet and stumbled down the road but my head was cut and I was dizzy. I didn’t know where I was.

“At last I came to a lane and followed it, hoping to come to a farmhouse. Then, when I saw a barn I was so weak that I could scarcely go any farther so I got the door open and stumbled inside. Then I passed out again.”

“That was when we found you,” Louise said. “We went to the house for help but there was no one at home. And when we went back to look for you we couldn’t find you.”

“I don’t remember leaving the barn at all. I must have recovered and then have seen the light in the farmhouse. So that’s how I landed in Penfield Hospital and it’s all on account of that villain Carrillo.”

“I never heard the like in all my born days!” declared Mrs. Flower. “Why, the man is no better than a murderer. I’m going to see that he pays for this. I’m going to set a detective on his trail. And I’ll offer a reward, too. I’ll offer a reward of five hundred dollars and pay every penny of it cheerfully if he is caught.”

Mrs. Flower was as good as her word. Next morning she had a long telephone conversation with Josiah Jarvis, instructing him to post a reward offer for information that would lead to Carrillo’s arrest, and also to engage an experienced detective to handle the case.

“Josiah knows a detective,” she announced when she came away from the telephone. “He is going to send a telegram right away and have the man come out from the city this afternoon.”

Mr. Jarvis, having been stirred to activity by Mrs. Flower’s instructions, appeared at the house that afternoon accompanied by a keen-faced man of about forty-five years, whom he introduced as Lemuel Lowney. Mr. Lowney had very sharp eyes and a bored manner.

“We’ve been very fortunate,” announced Jarvis proudly. “Mr. Lowney happened to be at liberty at the moment and consented to take the case. Very fortunate. Mr. Lowney has an excellent reputation. One of the very best detectives in the State——”

“That’ll do, Jarvis. That’ll do,” interrupted the detective drily. “I’ll let my work speak for itself. Let’s get the details of this affair so I can go to work.”

The Dana girls were prepared to like Mr. Lowney, for he appeared to be a man who knew what he was about, and there was no doubt of his intelligence. Quickly he extracted from Mrs. Flower all the details of her business dealings with Carrillo. Then he interviewed James Flower. When he came downstairs again he said to Louise:

“It seems that you two girls have been pretty active in this affair, according to Mr. Flower. What’s your part in it?”

The Dana girls told their story. They were modest enough about it, but realized that their information would be valuable to the detective, particularly as it concerned the Darrow Farm. There was little doubt in their minds now but that it had been Carrillo who had called at the Darrow homestead on the night of the accident to James Flower, and they were convinced that it was a valuable clue.

However, to their undisguised annoyance, Lemuel Lowney did not take their information very seriously.

“Probably just called there to ask his way,” he remarked, yawning. “I can’t see that your story has much bearing on the case at all.”

“How about the cache in the barn?” asked Jean, nettled.

“No proof that Carrillo left it there. It doesn’t mean anything. I’m afraid you haven’t helped me very much.”

Lemuel Lowney put his notebook into his pocket.

“I appreciate the time you have given me,” said the detective. “Small details are important many times in solving great mysteries,” he continued seriously, “but those minute clues which I demand must be authentic.”

“But we thought—” began Jean hopefully, when she was interrupted by Mr. Lowney.

“Now, Miss Dana,” sighed the detective, “do not concern yourself further with this case. Your school work, I’m sure, needs all your attention. Good day.”

The detective sauntered away for a conference with Josiah Jarvis.

“Louise, I never expected anything like this,” said Jean, as she watched the fleeting figure of the exasperating man.

CHAPTER XII

HOUSEKEEPER WANTED

The girls were momentarily stunned.

“Haven’t helped him very much!” Louise exclaimed. “We’ve given him more information than anyone else. And if he doesn’t make use of it I shan’t think much of him as a detective. He doesn’t want to give anyone credit, that’s the trouble.”

Mrs. Flower did not share the girls’ dislike of the man.

“That’s a person who knows his business,” she said. “He’s sharp. He’s shrewd. If he doesn’t have Carrillo locked up before many days are over, I miss my guess.”

Jarvis was also confident that Lemuel Lowney would soon meet with success in his efforts to locate the missing salesman. For that matter, the detective made no secret of the fact that he thought so too. The Dana girls were irritated by the sleuth’s manner and his lofty attitude toward them, yet they were fair enough to admit that Lowney was obviously a shrewd and intelligent man.

After Josiah Jarvis and the detective had gone away they received a telephone call from Uncle Ned, who wanted to know when they planned to return home.

“Here you come back for the vacation and we’ve scarcely had a glimpse of the two of you,” he complained.

“We’ll be home just as soon as Mrs. Flower’s housekeeper comes back,” Louise assured him.

“I hope she doesn’t take too long about it, then,” grumbled Uncle Ned. “How’s the old lady?”

“She seems a great deal better.”

“Nothing wrong with her, anyway,” said Captain Dana. “She just wanted to be babied while she was staying here. Oh, by the way, I had a letter from a very dear friend of yours this morning.”

“Evelyn Starr?” asked Louise. “Josie?”

Uncle Ned chuckled.

“Lettie Briggs.”

“No friend of mine,” sniffed Louise. “But why did she write to you? What did she want?”

Uncle Ned had met Lettie Briggs on the occasion of a visit to Starhurst School, and had scant regard for the heiress.

“Oh, she just wanted a little favor. Nothing to speak of. Just because she goes to the same school as my nieces she thinks I ought to be able to fix it with the company to give special rates and privileges on the *Balaska* to a friend of hers. That was all.”

“What impudence! Who was the friend?”

“Some foreign fellow. A count.”

“Count Salame?”

“That’s the name. Do you know anything about him?”

“We’ve heard Lettie mention him but we didn’t really believe he existed. We thought she merely invented him to make the other girls jealous.”

“However, count or no count, I told her I didn’t have authority to grant any favors such as that. She called me up on the telephone a little while ago and wanted to know if I had received her letter. So I told her the count would have to pay full fare, just like anyone else, when he traveled on my boat.”

Louise and Jean giggled.

“She didn’t seem any too well pleased,” chuckled Uncle Ned. “Said she would tell her father about it, so I told her she could write to Congress if she wished, but that the count would still have to pay full fare. Then she remarked that her friend came from one of the oldest families in Europe and I said that even if he were able to trace his

ancestry clear back to the Stone Age, he would still have to pay full fare on my boat. So then Miss Briggs informed me that the count wouldn't travel on the *Balaska* if we paid him. She rang off before I could thank her for telling me."

Louise laughed. "You've made an enemy for life."

"I guess I'll get along all right," replied Uncle Ned. "Well, come home as soon as you can. Your aunt and I are getting lonesome."

When the mail arrived that morning, however, it appeared that the Dana girls would be obliged to prolong their visit. Much to Mrs. Flower's wrath and disappointment she received a letter from her erstwhile housekeeper, indicating that the woman had decided not to return. She had been offered the opportunity of traveling to California with the sick relative and had decided to avail herself of the chance.

"What an inconsiderate woman!" declared Mrs. Flower. "Giving up a perfectly good position with me—just for the sake of going to California. I never heard the like. And now I must find another housekeeper. It will probably take several days. What am I going to do? I simply can't look after this big house myself, sick and all as I am."

She looked so upset and helpless that the Dana girls quickly assured her that they would stay until a new housekeeper should arrive. Mrs. Flower instantly became a great deal more cheerful and went to the telephone to summon Dr. Bell.

“Perhaps he knows of someone.”

The physician came in during the morning and listened patiently to the widow’s troubles. Gravely he promised to do what he could toward finding a housekeeper.

“She mustn’t be too young,” stipulated Mrs. Flower. “Young girls are so giddy and shiftless. And she mustn’t be too old, either. Old women are too slow and they’re apt to be hard to get along with. And she must be neat. And tidy. And economical. I had a housekeeper once who wasted so much butter that I had to give her notice. And her references must be of the best. And I don’t want to pay too much money. She’ll have a good home and plenty of good clothes—I always give my old dresses to my housekeeper if they’ll fit her—and what more can a servant ask?”

Dr. Bell seemed to be of the opinion that it would not be an easy matter to find a paragon who could come up to all these specifications. He told the Dana girls, when Mrs. Flower stepped out of the room for a moment, that he knew of no one, but did not like to tell this to the widow.

“She has a bad temper when she’s crossed,” said Dr. Bell ruefully.

“Perhaps we can do something,” Jean said. “We’ll go out and ask Mr. Jarvis to help.”

“I may be able to find someone in Penfield,” remarked the doctor. “This afternoon I have to drive over there on business. If you like you might come with me.”

“That will be dandy,” cried Louise.

The girls called at the office of Josiah Jarvis in Rocky Corner that morning and put the problem before him. The lawyer was as meek and syrupy and polite as ever.

“Hm! A housekeeper, eh?” he murmured, as he tapped his desk thoughtfully with his lanky fingers. “Now, it happens—it just so happens—that a widow woman was in here last week and she was inquiring if I knew where she could find a place. Let me see. She left her address.”

He rummaged in a desk drawer for a moment and produced a slip of paper.

“She lives on the road to Penfield,” said Mr. Jarvis. “About five miles out of town. The name is Reynolds.” He described the location of the woman’s home more fully and the girls said they would call on the woman that very afternoon.

“Always glad to be of assistance to dear Mrs. Flower,” the lawyer assured them, rubbing his hands together.

“A brave, courageous woman, Mrs. Flower. She has had many troubles. What with one thing and another—financial worries—illness—yes, she has had many troubles and borne them bravely. I admire her greatly.”

Louise thought of the ridiculous picture of Mr. Jarvis on his knees proposing to the widow, and almost laughed aloud. However, the girls contrived to look properly impressed and thanked the lawyer for his help. They were just about to

leave the office when Lemuel Lowney, the detective, walked in.

“Good morning, Mr. Lowney,” they said.

“Hello,” he answered a trifle dourly.

“Anything new on the Carrillo case?” Jean inquired.

Lowney shook his head.

“Haven’t really got started yet. I’ve been checking up on the fellow’s record in Oak Falls. He shouldn’t be hard to find. I’ll tap him on the shoulder before long.”

After lunch Dr. Bell called at the Flower place in his car for the girls. They had already told the woman that they had the address of a housekeeper whom they would interview, and the widow seemed greatly relieved that there might be an early solution of her domestic difficulties.

“If she seems reliable and neat and honest you can tell her to come and see me,” she told them graciously. “I’ll discuss the matter of wages with her when she calls.”

They found the home of Mrs. Reynolds without difficulty. It was on the Penfield road, a ramshackle frame building with a sad-looking goat grazing in the front yard and a hen-house at the rear. Mrs. Reynolds was a fat, untidy, red-faced woman in her forties. She came to the door, wiping her hands on her apron.

“Yes,” she admitted, “I asked Mr. Jarvis if he knew where I could find a steady job. Housekeeping, eh? Well, that would suit me fine if the wages are right. Where is it?”

When they mentioned the name of Mrs. Flower, however, the woman pursed her lips scornfully.

“So ho! Mrs. Flower, eh? No thank you. I’d like a job, all right, but not with that lady. I wouldn’t last two hours in that house. Not me. I’m too independent. She’s too hard to please. A friend of mine worked there once and told me all about it.”

Mrs. Reynolds was quite firm in her refusal to consider the position and the interview ended then and there. The Dana girls went back to the car, disappointed.

“Mrs. Flower wouldn’t be very pleased if she knew about that,” laughed Louise.

“We’ll have to go farther afield,” said Dr. Bell when they told him of the woman’s refusal. “Mrs. Flower’s fame has evidently spread.”

They drove on toward Penfield, the doctor remarking that he would make inquiries in the town in an effort to locate a servant.

“I think my sister and I will not go all the way in to Penfield,” said Louise suddenly. “You may let us off at Spring Corner.”

“That’s near the place where James Flower was hurt, isn’t it?” said Dr. Bell.

Louise nodded.

“I think we’ll pay another visit to the Darrow homestead,” she said mysteriously.

CHAPTER XIII

A WORRIED TRAVELER

The Dana girls got out of the car at Spring Corner. Dr. Bell drove on toward Penfield, after promising to return and pick them up in a short time.

“Do you think that the Darrows are back?” asked Jean as they walked down the road toward the farmhouse.

“If they are, we want to talk to them. I’d like to know why they left the house so suddenly the night we visited them.”

“Somehow,” remarked Jean, “I think we’ll not find them at home.”

There was no sign of life about the homestead when the girls walked down the lane and went into the barnyard. The house seemed deserted. The place appeared to be exactly as they had last seen it. The windows were shut, the doors closed.

Louise went up onto the veranda and knocked at the door. The sound echoed and re-echoed through the silent house. There was no response.

“They’re still away,” remarked Jean.

Louise knocked again, but with no success. She tried to open the door. It was locked. They went around to the rear of the house, and tried the back door. It would not open.

“Nobody home,” she said, disappointed.

“Let’s go over to the barn,” Jean suggested. “Perhaps Carrillo has been back. He may have made a new cache.”

They left the house and explored the barn. There was no indication, however, that anyone had been in the building since the night the Darrows had disappeared.

“No use,” remarked Louise. “We may as well go up and sit on the porch until Dr. Bell comes along.”

While they were waiting on the porch of the deserted farmhouse, wondering if Dr. Bell would be successful in locating a housekeeper in Penfield, Jean spied a woman walking quickly down the lane toward the homestead.

“Perhaps this is Mrs. Darrow!” she exclaimed in excitement.

“Or Edith.”

As the woman drew closer, however, they saw that she was a stranger. She was about sixty years of age, a motherly, white-haired lady who came hurrying across the barnyard when she saw the girls.

“How do you do?” she said breathlessly, as she came up to them. “I’m so glad I’ve found you at home.

Which one of you is Miss Darrow?"

"Neither," returned Louise promptly. "We called on the Darrows ourselves but they aren't at home."

The elderly woman was disappointed.

"Dear me," she said. "That's too bad. I came here a few hours ago but no one answered my knock. I do hope they aren't away for the day."

"They have been away for several days," Jean told her. "We don't know where they've gone."

The stranger seemed greatly upset by this news.

"But what shall I do?" she exclaimed. "I've come a long distance. From away out West. You see, my son has been living here. It's very strange. In his last letter he didn't say anything about moving. Of course, he may be at work now."

"What is your son's name?" asked Louise.

"Edward Carrillo," she answered. "I am Mrs. Carrillo."

Both Jean and Louise were momentarily stunned by this unexpected development but tried to conceal their feelings.

"I should have written to him," went on the woman.

"It's my own fault. But I did want to surprise Edward.

He tells me he has done so well since he has been working for the Darrows. I haven't seen him for several years."

It was obvious by this time that Carrillo had grossly deceived his unsuspecting mother. Bit by bit the Dana girls heard details of the woman's story. Carrillo had evidently said nothing of his employment in Mr. Lott's office, but had led his mother to believe that he was working on the Darrow farm and making plenty of money.

"So, you see," she confided, "when Mr. Brown died——"

"Who is Mr. Brown?" asked Louise.

"I was his housekeeper. He was an elderly man, and not in very good health. He died last month, and although he had always promised that I would be paid for my services out of his insurance money he didn't leave a will—at least none was found after his death—and his relatives claim all his estate. So I didn't get my money after all. There was nothing else for me to do but come to Edward. I knew he would look after his old mother. And now I don't know what I am going to do."

The girls were sorry for the woman because she was so confused and distressed.

"The Darrows have evidently been away for several days," Louise said. "If we could only locate them they might be able to give you some information about your son."

The girls were careful to say nothing about their own knowledge of Carrillo. It was quite evident that his mother was an honest and hard-working woman, very proud of her boy and with no suspicion of his real character.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do,” said the woman, fumbling at the catch of her purse. “I—I haven’t very much money, and I have no friends in this part of the country. If I can’t find Edward I’ll be in a dreadful fix. What could have possessed him to go away from here without letting me know?”

Her purse suddenly fell open and a few cards and letters tumbled out onto the porch. Jean hastened to pick them up. As she handed them back to the woman she noticed that one of the envelopes was addressed to “Mrs. Mary Carrillo” and that one of the cards was similarly engraved. She was convinced, then, of the truth of the stranger’s story.

“I’ll have to find work, somehow,” said the woman in a worried voice, “but I imagine it will be difficult, for I never bothered to get references from Mr. Brown while I was at his home.”

Louise had an idea. She beckoned to Jean and the two girls, excusing themselves for a moment, went around to the side of the old farmhouse to converse.

“The poor woman is in trouble,” said Louise. “She’ll have to get work, that’s certain.”

“But how can we help her?”

“Haven’t we been trying to find a housekeeper for Mrs. Flower?”

Jean gasped.

“Louise! We couldn’t offer her that position.”

“Why not? She seems honest and reliable, even if her son is a rascal.”

“But Mrs. Flower wouldn’t employ her. The mother of Ed Carrillo! Why, she’d fly into a rage at the very idea.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” admitted Louise, who realized now that Mrs. Flower could not be expected to feel friendly toward any relative of the man who had swindled her.

Just then they saw Dr. Bell’s car approaching. As it turned into the lane Jean said:

“Let’s go and meet him. We can tell him the whole story. Perhaps he will be able to suggest something.”

“Maybe he found a housekeeper himself.”

They ran across the barnyard and met the physician at the entrance to the lane. Quickly the girls asked the man what he had done, and when told he had accomplished nothing, they related to him their encounter with Mrs. Carrillo and of the dilemma in which the woman had found herself.

“I thought she might be able to fill the position at Mrs. Flower’s house,” Louise said. “But of course it’s impossible. She wouldn’t engage Ed Carrillo’s mother, I’m afraid.”

“It’s hardly likely,” agreed Dr. Bell with a smile. “However, I’ll go up and have a talk with her.”

At that moment the girls saw another car speeding down the lane.

“Who can it be?” cried Jean.

“Perhaps the Darrows are coming back.”

The car held only one occupant, however. It did not stop or slow up, but rattled swiftly past and swerved into the barnyard. The Dana girls recognized the man at the wheel.

“Lemuel Lowney!” exclaimed Louise.

“The detective?” asked Dr. Bell in surprise. “What can he be doing here?”

They watched, bewildered and puzzled, as Lowney brought his car to a stop. Then he leaped out and walked swiftly toward the farmhouse.

“Perhaps he is looking for the Darrows, too,” Jean guessed.

They watched the tall figure of the detective as he strode up to the house. Then he spoke to Mrs. Carrillo, who was sitting on the porch. The Dana girls were mystified. It almost seemed as if Lemuel Lowney had come to the homestead for the express purpose of interviewing Mrs. Carrillo. But how had the detective learned of the woman’s presence?

“Let’s go up,” suggested Dr. Bell.

Louise wanted to be cautious.

“I think we had better wait a while. I think Mr. Lowney did not recognize us when he drove past.”

CHAPTER XIV

AN ASSUMED NAME

The detective did not remain long in conversation with Mrs. Carrillo. After a few moments the girls saw him turn away with an impatient gesture. Then he strode back toward his car.

“He seems angry about something,” Louise commented.

Lemuel Lowney got into his auto, swung it around and drove back through the barnyard. As he approached Dr. Bell’s car he suddenly recognized the doctor and the girls. He flushed, scowled, then waved his hand as he drove past. The physician laughed.

“Not very friendly, is he?”

“I should say not,” returned Jean. “But I wonder what he said to Mrs. Carrillo.”

They went back up to the farmhouse and there the girls introduced Dr. Bell. He was favorably impressed by the woman. After he had asked her a few questions he said:

“We know of someone who is eager to engage a housekeeper.”

Mrs. Carrillo’s face lighted up.

“Do you?” she exclaimed. “Oh, please tell me about it. I must find work of some kind.”

“I’m quite sure you would be satisfactory to this lady,” the doctor said, “but for one thing.”

“And what is that?” asked Mrs. Carrillo. “Not my age, surely. I’m sixty, but I’m as strong and active as many a woman not half my years. And I can cook and sew——”

“It isn’t that,” observed Dr. Bell. “It’s your name. Are you foreign-born?”

“Indeed not,” said the woman. “I’m as American as you are. Perhaps more so. I was born in North Dakota, and Whitehall was my name before I was married. My husband was American born too, although his father was Italian.”

“It’s the name, you see. It has a foreign sound. And this lady happens to have a prejudice against foreign people.”

“I have an idea,” exclaimed Jean. “Why not use your maiden name? After all, it won’t be deceitful, because it’s *your* name.”

“If Mrs. Carrillo can’t get a job because her name has a foreign sound to it,” declared the woman energetically, “then

perhaps Mary Whitehall will have better luck. Mary Whitehall it is, then.”

“You’re quite agreeable?” asked Dr. Bell.

“Why shouldn’t I be?” she laughed. “It’s my own name. If it makes that much difference to this lady, I won’t object. Does she live far away?”

“At Rocky Corner,” Louise explained. “We can drive you there if you wish.”

“That will be very kind of you,” replied Mrs. Carrillo. “I stopped at a house in the village and left my valise there. It’s all the baggage I brought with me.”

“We’ll call for it at once,” Dr. Bell assured her. “Then we’ll drive you to Rocky Corner and you’ll meet Mrs. Flower.”

“I do hope she gives me the position. I must have work of some kind while I’m waiting for word of my son.”

“By the way,” remarked Louise with apparent carelessness, “what did the tall man want?”

“The man who drove up in the car?” asked Mrs. Carrillo, referring to Lemuel Lowney. “Oh, he thought I was Mrs. Darrow. When I told him I wasn’t, and that the Darrows had gone away, he didn’t seem at all pleased. He said he had expected them to be here and was disgusted because he had come a long way on a wild goose chase just on account of a couple of schoolgirls. He seemed real mad about it and then

he went back to his car and drove away. I wonder what he meant?”

It was all quite unintelligible to Mrs. Carrillo but it was clear to the Dana girls, who realized that they would stand even lower in Lemuel Lowney’s opinion now. However, Dr. Bell seemed greatly amused by the fact that the shrewd detective had failed to learn that he was talking to the mother of the man he was seeking.

Mrs. Carrillo was not enlightened as to the reason for the detective’s visit to the Darrow property. She was so delighted at the prospect of getting employment that she quickly dismissed the incident from her mind. In a short time her baggage had been retrieved from the village home where she had left it, and the car was speeding back toward Rocky Corner.

“If I were you, Mrs. Carrillo,” suggested Dr. Bell, “I shouldn’t say anything about your son to Mrs. Flower if she engages you. She is rather eccentric in some of her ways and she has had a great deal of trouble lately.”

“I wouldn’t force my troubles on anyone,” replied Mrs. Carrillo with dignity. “My own affairs I’ll keep to myself.”

Dr. Bell said quietly to Louise, who was sitting with him in the front seat:

“It may work out all right. But I’m afraid Mrs. Flower may accidentally make some reference to Carrillo in this woman’s hearing. We’ll have to circumvent that if possible.”

“Perhaps her nephew could help us,” Louise suggested. “Why not tell him the whole story? He seems a sensible sort of man.”

“It would be a good idea,” agreed the doctor. “If he understands the situation he can do a great deal toward seeing that no trouble arises.”

When they returned to Mrs. Flower’s home they presented Mrs. Carrillo to the widow, introducing her as Mrs. Whitehall. After a short interview the latter expressed herself as being completely satisfied. The woman was engaged and entered upon her housekeeping duties then and there.

“You’ll have no further need of us now, Mrs. Flower,” said Louise, greatly relieved that the situation had been filled at last.

“I’m sure I don’t know how to thank you for your help, girls,” replied Aunt Harriet’s friend gratefully. “You have been very kind and I shan’t forget it.”

“We’ll go upstairs and talk to your nephew for a little while before we go,” said Jean.

James Flower was feeling much better, although he was unable to get up. When the girls called on him he was quick to express his thanks for their clever work in identifying him. He was a pleasant young man with a winning smile.

“You can do something for us if you wish,” Louise told him.

“Name it,” said James promptly, “and I shall do it.”

They explained how they had encountered Mrs. Carrillo and how she was now employed in the Flower household.

“But surely Aunt Betty wouldn’t engage Ed Carrillo’s mother as housekeeper here!” exclaimed the young man in amazement.

“She doesn’t know. And we want you to help keep her from learning the truth.”

“How can I do that?”

“Mrs. Flower is apt to drop some chance remark or tell her troubles to the housekeeper. That would give the whole situation away. Of course, poor Mrs. Carrillo doesn’t realize that her son is a rascal. She will be broken-hearted if she ever learns the truth.”

James Flower nodded.

“I see the point. After all, Mrs. Carrillo is not to blame for her son’s misdeeds. I’ll have a little talk with my aunt and caution her against discussing her losses and troubles before the new housekeeper. If I put it strongly enough, I imagine she won’t mention Carrillo’s name in the house.”

The Dana girls were glad they had secured his cooperation. James Flower seemed amused at the circumstances. He chuckled.

“My aunt would be very angry if she knew she had hired Ed Carrillo’s mother as housekeeper,” he said.

“It’s really quite funny when you come to think of it.”

“It won’t be funny if she finds out,” Jean assured him.

The girls went to their room to pack. This did not take long, as they had merely brought a few necessities with them. When they went downstairs, ready to take their leave, they found Mrs. Carrillo already at work, attired in a neat apron, and dusting the living room.

“Do you think you are going to like the place?” asked Louise.

“Like it! I love it!” declared the woman emphatically. “As for her—,” and she gestured toward the kitchen where Mrs. Flower was at the moment engaged in an argument with the grocery boy, “I think we’ll get along fine. I know how to handle invalids, whether they’re really sick or only think they are. You’ve got to humor ’em.”

The door-bell rang. When Jean answered it she confronted Lemuel Lowney, the detective.

“Mrs. Betty Flower at home?” he inquired gruffly.

Jean was in a momentary panic. At all costs, she thought, the detective must not meet the new housekeeper. He might recognize her as the woman he had seen at the Darrow farm that day and awkward questions might be asked.

“Why—yes—she’s rather busy just now—” faltered Jean, as she tried to block the entrance to the widow’s old-fashioned home.

“That’s all right,” returned Lowney, without casting the girl a second glance. He stalked into the house unhesitatingly, made his way to the living room and sat down in an easy chair, as though he were accustomed to doing so often.

CHAPTER XV

THE SWEEPSTAKES WINNER

The detective cast no more than a casual glance at Mrs. Carrillo, who was dusting the mantel-piece. Then he took a newspaper from his pocket and began to read.

Jean and Louise had been breathless. Now they sighed with relief. Lemuel Lowney had not recognized the housekeeper at all.

Mrs. Flower bustled into the room a few moments later and Mrs. Carrillo retired to the kitchen. Jean and Louise said good-bye to the widow, who was profuse in her expressions of gratitude.

“I don’t know what I’d have done without you,” she declared. “You’ll come and see me again, won’t you? And give my love to your Aunt Harriet.”

While they were speeding back toward Oak Falls in the car, Louise said:

“It’s all getting so complicated. Now I don’t know that I should care to see Carrillo caught, for his mother’s sake. It will break her heart.”

“That’s the way I feel about it too,” Jean admitted.

“I’d like to locate him but I shouldn’t like to see him arrested.”

“If he could only find some way of making restitution, then his mother wouldn’t feel so bad when she learns of what he has done.”

“Maybe he won’t want to make restitution,” objected Jean.

“I only wish we could locate him and talk to him. At any rate, I think we have an equal chance with Lemuel Lowney. He may be a very clever detective but he didn’t recognize Mrs. Carrillo as the woman he saw at the Darrow farm!”

The Dana girls received a warm welcome when they returned home.

“It seems we haven’t seen you at all,” Uncle Ned declared.

“No more going away now. I have only a few days leave and I want my nieces with me. Sit down and tell us all about the latest mystery and how it’s going.”

“We’ve made a lot of progress,” Louise replied, “but the mystery seems to become deeper.”

“What sort of progress is that?” grinned Uncle Ned. “You must be going backward.”

The girls told how they had discovered that the man in Penfield Hospital was actually Mrs. Flower’s nephew.

“When we went to Rocky Corner,” explained Jean, “we found a picture in an album at Mrs. Flower’s house and we knew it was the man we had seen in the barn at Spring Corner. So that’s how we discovered James Flower. And then, when we left Rocky Corner and went out to Spring Corner——”

“Ship ahoy!” roared Uncle Ned. “Don’t talk so fast. This is a corner on mysteries, I guess. Spring Corner. Rocky Corner. Puss-in-the-Corner. I’m getting all mixed up.”

“Well, Spring Corner is where the Darrows live and Rocky Corner is where Mrs. Flower lives. James Flower was at Spring Corner—that’s when we found him in the barn—but now he’s at Rocky Corner at his aunt’s home,” Jean said.

Uncle Ned shook his head whimsically and winked at Aunt Harriet.

“My head is spinning again,” he declared. “Maybe you’d better not explain it too much. It just confuses me.”

However, the girls finally got through their story, and both Uncle Ned and Aunt Harriet were deeply interested.

“I’m afraid there will be trouble over Mrs. Carrillo, just the same,” said Aunt Harriet, shaking her head. “I hardly think Dr. Bell should have persuaded her to call herself Mrs. Whitehall.”

“But Whitehall is her maiden name,” Jean explained.

“And we knew she wouldn’t have been given the position if Mrs. Flower had learned her real name,” added Louise.

Aunt Harriet was not convinced.

“Mrs. Flower is bound to learn the truth sooner or later. Mark my words, it will slip but somehow. And then there will be trouble.”

“We did what we thought was best.”

“I suppose it was the only thing under the circumstances,” Aunt Harriet agreed. “It isn’t exactly a deception. Mrs. Flower needed a housekeeper and Mrs. Carrillo needed work. I’m afraid it will be very unpleasant for Mrs. Carrillo, though, if Mrs. Flower learns who she really is.”

“Maybe she won’t find out,” said Uncle Ned. “No use worrying about it. I think the girls have done splendidly.”

“Except that we can’t find any trace of Carrillo,” remarked Jean ruefully.

“A bad penny always turns up,” Uncle Ned observed. “Maybe the detective will find him for you.”

That evening Jean wrote a letter. She was mysterious about it.

“I have an idea,” she told Louise. “Maybe it doesn’t amount to anything so I’m not going to tell you what it is just now. I’m sending away for a copy of a newspaper.”

“What newspaper?”

“Never mind. If it has the information I want, I’ll tell you. If not, then there’s been no harm done.”

Louise was mystified. However, she did not question her sister further, and Jean busied herself at the writing desk. When the envelope was sealed and addressed she slipped it into her pocket and then invited Louise to drive in to Oak Falls with her while she mailed it.

The mystery was thrust into the background within the next few days as the Danas began to enjoy their vacation. They were invited to several parties in Oak Falls, one of them being an outing on the river, which they enjoyed immensely. Both girls were very popular among the young people, and found no lack of amusements. Uncle Ned, too, entertained them royally and even hinted at taking them to New York with him when he returned to the city for his next voyage.

One morning a bulky bundle of newspapers arrived in the mail, addressed to Jean. She promptly took them to her room, where she spent the next hour. Louise was curious as she listened to the constant rustling of the pages. She had an idea that the papers had some connection with her sister’s mysterious letter. After a while Jean called to her.

“I hope you didn’t think I was keeping a secret from you,” she laughed, holding up one of the newspapers. “I was afraid that perhaps nothing would come of my idea and I didn’t want you to think I was foolish.”

“What *have* you been doing? I’ve been eaten up with curiosity.”

“I wrote away for copies of all the country newspapers around here for which Edith Darrow might be a reporter,” explained Jean. “It was never definitely settled about her journalistic work and I had a hunch. Here’s the result.”

“Go on.”

“If Miss Darrow had gone away intentionally, I was sure there would be some sort of explanation in at least one of the newspapers. Here it is.”

Jean indicated a small item on one of the pages. She read aloud:

“Readers of *The Herald* will regret to learn that Miss Edith Darrow, a faithful correspondent of this paper for some time, has severed her connection with this organization. She is now in New York City, accompanied by her mother, engaged in some special work before sailing abroad.”

Louise gasped.

“What do you think of that?” asked Jean triumphantly.

“I should say it’s a real piece of detective work!” declared Louise. “This is a dandy clue. So the Darrows are in New York.”

“And perhaps Carrillo is with them.”

“Maybe. At any rate, it’s possible that the Darrows know where he is.”

The girls were more than ever convinced that Carrillo had been responsible for the sudden disappearance and flight of the reporter and her mother, and they felt that if the two could be located, it would not be difficult to get from them some clue as to the fugitive salesman’s whereabouts. It was something, at any rate, to know that the Darrows were in New York.

“Let’s write to the editor of the paper,” suggested Louise. “Perhaps he will know Miss Darrow’s address in the city.”

Louise was whole-hearted in her praise of Jean’s initiative in sending for the copies of the newspapers, but now it was Jean’s turn to congratulate her sister upon her idea for following up their clue. A note was written and despatched at once.

Next day Louise had a chance to prove her alertness and match her sister’s ability. Uncle Ned had just returned with the morning mail and settled himself in an easy chair with his letters. Louise and Jean divided the daily paper between them—the latter to read an installment of a serial story she had been following, the former to skip through the news items.

Suddenly Louise gave a smothered exclamation, tossed the paper to the floor, and ran out of the room and upstairs. Uncle Ned looked up, peering over his spectacles.

“Now what?” he grunted.

A moment later his niece came scurrying back with a slip of paper in her hand.

“Eighty-two, thirty-one,” she was saying to herself as she snatched up the newspaper again. “Eighty-two, thirty-one.”

Uncle Ned scratched the back of his head in wonderment. Jean was puzzled.

Louise hastily turned the pages of the newspaper, found the item she sought, glanced at the bit of paper, and then uttered a cry of triumph.

“I thought so!” she exclaimed. “Eighty-two, thirty-one. The very same.”

“What *are* you raving about?” demanded Jean curiously.

“Come and see.”

Jean looked over her sister’s shoulder, and saw that the newspaper item consisted of a list of sweepstakes winners. Down toward the bottom of the list was an explanatory note:

“A number of prizes have not yet been claimed and the identity of the ticket holders has not at this writing been ascertained. If they will communicate with the committee in charge and produce their ticket stubs, the prize money will be duly paid over. The numbers are as follows: —” and then came a long list of numerals.

Among them was the number 8231. Jean suddenly realized the reason for her sister's excitement, for in her hand Louise held the stub of the sweepstakes ticket they had discovered in the cache in the Darrow barn.

It was number 8231.

“Don't you see!” exclaimed Louise. “If this belongs to Carrillo he won't want to pass up the chance of claiming the prize money. We have the ticket stub. We'll use it as a trap.”

“But how?”

“It pays to advertise,” declared Louise solemnly.

Jean was still unable to understand how their possession of the suddenly valuable ticket stub would constitute a trap for the elusive Carrillo, but Louise got pencil and paper and quickly began to write.

“If the Darrows are in New York,” she reasoned, “it's probable that Carrillo is there too. We'll advertise in one of the New York papers and try to tempt him to claim his ticket.”

Her advertisement read as follows:

“If the person who lost the stub of sweepstakes ticket number 8231 will write to Box—, in care of this newspaper, he will learn of something to his advantage.”

“He won't know who inserted the advertisement and he will certainly want to claim his ticket,” Louise said eagerly. “This

ought to bring him out of hiding.”

Uncle Ned came over, wondering at his nieces’ unwonted excitement. When the girls showed him the ticket and the list in the newspaper, he rubbed his chin.

“Maybe that will fetch him,” agreed the sea captain. “But at the same time he may be too frightened to claim it. It’s worth trying, though.”

CHAPTER XVI

A VISIT TO ROCKY CORNER

“Will you ask the newspaper to send the reply to you at Oak Falls?” said Uncle Ned. “That is, if there should be a reply?”

“Of course. What else can we do?”

“You might call for it in person,” Uncle Ned suggested blandly.

“Call for it!” exclaimed Jean. “But the newspaper is published in New York.”

“I know it.”

A slow smile spread across Captain Dana’s bluff, good-humored face. Then suddenly the girls understood.

“Uncle Ned!” cried Louise, hugging her uncle affectionately. “You’ll take us to New York with you!”

“You old dear!” And Jean flung herself upon him and embraced him.

“Wait a minute. Wait a minute. Avast, there,” pleaded Uncle Ned as they danced around him in delight. “It’s not all settled yet, but I’ve been talking it over with your aunt and I think a trip to the city would do both you and her good. It’ll give her a chance to do some shopping, and I daresay the two of you will want to pick up a few spring dresses and knick-knacks when you’re in the big town.”

“We never dared hope you would take us with you,” said Jean, her eyes sparkling at the prospect of a trip to New York. “Oh, it will be wonderful.”

“Talk to your aunt about it,” advised Uncle Ned. “She wasn’t quite sure she wanted to go, but maybe you can help her make up her mind.”

The girls fled to the kitchen, where Aunt Harriet was helping Cora Appel, the ruddy-cheeked servant, with the baking. Their excitement at the prospect of a visit to the metropolis was enough to decide matters for their relative. The ordeal of taking care of Mrs. Flower during the past few weeks had taken its toll of Aunt Harriet’s strength, and she admitted that she felt the need of a vacation.

“Don’t worry about the house,” she was advised by “Applecore,” which was the girls’ nickname for Cora. “It won’t fall down while you’re away, and I’m sure I’ll find it a lot easier cookin’ for one than for five. You go on and take that trip and you’ll feel the better for it.”

The next day the Dana girls decided to drive over to Rocky Corner to call on Mrs. Flower, in the hope that

Lemuel Lowney might have found some trace of Carrillo. They were also eager to learn how Mrs. Carrillo was progressing in her new situation as Mrs. Whitehall.

Mrs. Flower greeted them warmly. She was sitting in the living room talking to her nephew, and appeared to have forgotten that she was supposed to be an invalid. The presence of James Flower seemed to have given her a new interest in life, and had helped her relegate her financial worries to the background for the time being.

“Mr. Lowney said he might drop in for a few minutes this afternoon,” stated the widow. “He hasn’t had much success so far, I know.”

“He may be a smart detective,” observed James, who had now recovered sufficiently to be able to walk around. “But I can’t see wherein he has distinguished himself in this particular case. Carrillo must have covered up his tracks pretty thoroughly.”

“How is the new housekeeper?” asked Louise.

“Priceless!” declared Mrs. Flower enthusiastically. “She is neat and clean, minds her own business, is a good cook, and keeps the house looking like a new pin. The best housekeeper I ever had, bar none.”

James Flower winked slyly at the girls.

“Yes,” he said, “Mrs. Whitehall has turned out to be a treasure, a paragon among housekeepers.”

The girls were delighted that Mrs. Flower was pleased. They were telling her about their prospective trip to New York when the door-bell rang.

“I’ll go,” said James, rising from his chair. He limped out into the hall and returned in a few moments accompanied by Lemuel Lowney. The detective glanced at the Dana girls and scowled. Dourly he sat down. It was evident that the Carrillo case was not progressing as he had wished.

“Any word, Mr. Lowney?” inquired the widow.

The detective shook his head.

“I’ve been following up some clues but they don’t seem to lead anywhere,” he admitted. “I’m beginning to think that this fellow Carrillo is a little smarter than I thought.”

“He’s clever, all right,” said James. “I think he is not in this part of the country any more.”

“*We* think he’s in New York,” spoke up Jean.

Lemuel Lowney looked at her with a sardonic smile.

“You think so?” he said acidly. “And what is the basis for that opinion?”

Jean flushed.

“We believe he went with the Darrows. And the Darrows are in New York.”

Mr. Lowney seemed surprised, but not caring to show it, he pursed his lips.

“I can’t follow that line of reasoning,” he said. “The Darrows are in New York. Therefore, Ed Carrillo is in New York. Why?”

“I’m sure he called at the farmhouse the night that family disappeared,” declared Louise.

“Can you prove it? Did you see him?”

“No, but——”

“Then you’re simply guessing,” snapped Lowney. “In detective work you can’t guess. You have to *know*. I should look fine going to New York in search of Carrillo just because I guessed that he might be there. You’re all wrong, young ladies, all wrong.” He rose heavily from his chair. “I’ll drop in tomorrow, Mrs. Flower. Perhaps I’ll have something to report then.”

Jean and Louise looked ruefully at James Flower after the detective went away.

“He doesn’t seem to think much of our theories,” said the latter. “Just the same, I still believe Carrillo is in New York.”

“And so do I,” laughed the young man. “Come, let’s go into the garden. I haven’t been outside today.”

He walked with a pronounced limp and his head was still bandaged, but he had made good progress toward

recovery and assured the girls that he would be in first-class condition within a few days. The three left the house and sauntered down the garden path, where they found Mrs. Carrillo preparing a bed for planting seeds.

“So you are a gardener too, Mrs. Whitehall?” asked the young man.

“I have always loved flowers,” the woman answered. “I’m glad there’s a good big garden here. I’m going to enjoy looking after it.”

“That’s more than the last housekeeper did, from what I have heard,” he told her.

“Are you happy in your new position?” asked Jean.

Mrs. Carrillo smiled.

“I can’t tell you how grateful I am to you girls,” she said with emotion. “It’s been a godsend to me, this place.”

“We’re glad,” said Jean. “And I know Mrs. Flower is pleased with you, too.”

“I can guarantee that,” put in James.

“I do the best I can,” returned the woman simply. “A housekeeper who could get along with old Mr. Brown—he’s the man I worked for before I came here, you know—could get along anywhere and with anyone.”

“Have you done anything about collecting your back wages from Mr. Brown’s estate?” Louise inquired.

“I wrote to his lawyer and gave him my address, in case anything should turn up,” she replied. “But I haven’t received any answer to my letter. I don’t suppose I’ll ever hear any more about it.”

Mr. Flower and the Dana girls sauntered on through the garden, and from there went out to the hills at the rear of the Flower place. Jean and Louise were a little worried lest the exertion should be too much for the young man, but he laughed and said he felt as well as he ever had in his life.

“Ready for mountain climbing, if necessary,” he declared.

“You must remember that you’ve not been out of the hospital long. You should be careful,” advised Louise.

“When I’m tired I’ll turn back,” he promised.

They were making their way along a rocky ledge in the sunlight, with Jean in the lead. James Flower followed her, and Louise brought up the rear. Jean, whistling gaily, came around a heavy boulder that protruded over the ledge. Suddenly she screamed in terror.

At the same moment there was a harsh, ominous rattle almost directly at her feet.

“What’s the matter?” cried James, coming forward as quickly as he could.

There, in the sunlight among the rocks lay half a dozen hideous, sprawling reptiles. Even as Jean screamed and sprang, one of them swiftly drew itself into a coil.

Rattlers!

The dry whirr of the blood-chilling sounds was unmistakable. Jean stood rigid, her muscles taut.

James Flower turned pale. Almost at his feet one of the snakes was winding up its evil body.

Louise, alarmed by Jean's cry, came running along the ledge. Then she too shrieked in terror. They had evidently blundered into a veritable nest of rattlers. One of the reptiles came slithering silently from among the rocks and lay across the ledge, cutting off her escape.

“Stand still!” warned James Flower in a low voice. “Don't move!”

Half a dozen snakes were now whirring angrily. They had been aroused as they lay basking on the rocks in the heat of the spring sun.

James took in the situation swiftly. Jean was in the gravest danger. The rattler nearest her was drawn up in a heap, head swaying, its cold eyes fixed on her, its forked tongue darting with menace. It was preparing to strike.

The other reptiles, still sluggish, were relaxed but watchful. The snake that had been close to James's feet had suddenly uncoiled itself and glided away between the rocks.

“There’s a ledge at your back, Jean,” said the young man quietly. “I’ll try to attract the rattler’s attention. The moment he takes his eyes off you, try to pull yourself up that ledge. He’ll probably strike, but you should be out of reach by that time.”

“I—I can’t,” gasped Jean. “My foot is caught between the rocks. I can’t move.”

CHAPTER XVII

LOWNEY'S BIG CASE

Jean's plight was desperate, but she was facing it bravely. Her ankle was securely caught and she was powerless to escape. The others were unable to help her.

"Can't we do anything?" cried Louise, unmindful of her own danger from the rattler lying across the ledge behind her.

James Flower knew that any movement would only precipitate the snake's swift, vicious attack. He was unarmed. There was not even a stick within reach.

The rattler's ugly head swayed. Its cold, glittering eyes were fixed on the helpless girl.

Then the silence was abruptly shattered. A shot rang out!

At the same instant the reptile tumbled into a squirming, thrashing heap. The other snakes, alarmed, went gliding swiftly out of sight into their hiding places among the rocks.

From behind a clump of bushes only a few yards away a man emerged. He was carrying a smoking pistol in his hand.

It was Lemuel Lowney! The detective's face was grim. Jean uttered a cry of relief and almost collapsed against the ledge.

"That was close enough," remarked the man coolly, as he looked around to see if any rattlers remained. "Another second, and it would have struck." He walked over to where the reptile now lay in a lifeless heap. "Big fellow, too," he said unemotionally.

"You certainly showed up in the nick of time!" exclaimed James Flower, his voice still trembling. "There was nothing we could do to help Jean."

"Maybe it'll teach you to stay away from the sunny side of the rocks in the springtime," observed Lowney sourly. "This place is alive with snakes. Lucky I had my gun with me."

He put the pistol back into his pocket and then knelt down and untied the lace of Jean's oxford.

"Do you think you can get your foot out now?" he asked.

Jean's shoe was jammed tightly in a crevice between two rocks, but in a moment she was able to extricate her foot. Then the detective worked the oxford free.

"We're ever so grateful to you, Mr. Lowney!" said Louise, whose opinion of the detective had altered considerably in the past few moments. Jean, whose gratitude was too deep for words, because she realized the deadly peril from which Lowney's timely shot had rescued her, merely extended her hand. The detective took it, shrugged, and said:

“Let’s get out of here.”

“That was a marvelous shot,” James Flower declared, as they made their way back toward the garden. “You must have an eye like a hawk.”

“I’ve had a good bit of practice with a gun,” muttered the man.

“Do you always carry a pistol?” Louise asked.

“Most of the time,” Lowney admitted. “In my job a man makes enemies. I carry a gun in case I might happen to run up against some tough customers. I’ve never had to shoot yet. Just the sight of a weapon is usually enough to make ’em wilt. That is,” he added drily, “if you’re quick enough to get the drop on them.”

The Dana girls felt it was very fortunate that Lemuel Lowney had been so near at hand. They did not suspect that the detective had been following them deliberately, trying to overhear their conversation in the hope that they might let drop some information that would be of value to him.

Lowney had not done very well on the Carrillo case, which had looked simple to him when he undertook the assignment. He was coming grudgingly to the realization that the Dana girls had made greater progress in the affair than had he himself. While he pretended to dismiss their theories relating to the disappearance, he had actually given them a great deal of earnest thought. It was on the suspicion

that perhaps the girls knew even more than they had told him that he had shadowed them across the rocks that day.

How, for instance, had they arrived at their conclusion that Carrillo was in New York? He wondered about that; also, how had they learned that the Darrows were in the city? Perhaps, he had reasoned, they might confide in James Flower.

He managed to hold the girls in conversation after James went into the house. Lowney felt that Jean and Louise might yet give him some clue of importance. As for the girls, they were more disposed to be friendly to the detective now than at any time since they had first met him.

“This Carrillo business,” said Lowney, “isn’t the sort of case I usually handle. There’s nothing to it. Just a small affair.”

“Do you think you will find him eventually?” asked Jean.

“No doubt of it,” returned the detective airily. “I’ll land him. I’m taking my time about it, though. This isn’t the only case I’m working on right now. I have another—a really big affair.”

Lemuel Lowney was actually a good detective. This he knew, and he did not lack a good opinion of himself.

“Of what sort is it?” inquired Louise eagerly.

“Spy case! I’m on the trail of an international spy,” returned Lowney with an impressive air. “Half the detectives in the country are on the lookout for the fellow. The Secret Service

has agents working on the case. But I'm willing to bet dollars to doughnuts that when he is finally rounded up it will be Lemuel Lowney who claps the bracelets on him."

"A spy!" exclaimed Jean, greatly thrilled.

"Somehow or other this fellow has learned certain secrets of the Army and has been selling them in Europe. Agents across the Atlantic tipped off the Secret Service and they have a full description of the man and his picture. But he knows we're looking for him and he's lying low. Kurt Hassell is his name. At least, it *was* his name. I don't know what he calls himself now, for he has been using half a dozen or more aliases."

Lowney reached into his pocket and extracted a notebook from which he removed a small photograph. The girls studied it with interest. It was a picture of a dark, handsome man in uniform. Despite his good looks, there was more than a suggestion of cruelty about his mouth.

"He's as handsome as a movie hero," said Louise. "But he looks treacherous."

"And he is," Lowney assured her, putting the picture back in his notebook. "I won't take any chances with *that* lad, I tell you, if I catch up with him."

"If there are so many detectives after him I imagine he won't be able to keep his freedom very long," said Jean.

"He's smart. Don't think he goes around looking just as he does in that picture. Not Kurt Hassell. He used to be an actor

and is mighty good at disguising himself. That's why he manages to dodge us."

The detective now brought the conversation around to the Carrillo case again; but greatly to his disappointment, Jean and Louise did not have any information for him. After a while he looked at his watch, excused himself, and went away.

The Danas went into the house, where they found Mrs. Flower in a state of great agitation and concern over Jean's narrow escape from being bitten by the rattlesnake. More than ever was she convinced that Lemuel Lowney was a man of unusual ability and cleverness.

"Imagine!" she exclaimed. "And he killed the reptile with one shot. Think of it! Why, it's a mercy you weren't bitten, my dear."

"It was very fortunate for me that Mr. Lowney appeared when he did," Jean said.

"And fortunate that he knew how to shoot straight," added James Flower.

The widow invited the girls to stay to tea, and immediately afterward they announced that they must leave for Oak Falls at once, because Uncle Ned and Aunt Harriet worried when they had the car out after dark. It was twilight by the time they had said good-bye to their hostess and her nephew, and backed the car out of the garage.

“Just a minute, Jean,” whispered Louise, grasping her sister’s arm. “Do you see someone there in the shadows?”

Her sister peered into the gloom. She thought she could discern a dark figure lurking near the entrance of the garage.

“We’ll soon find out,” she said.

Swiftly she backed the car into the driveway. She had not yet turned on the lights, but as she swung the car around suddenly, she snapped on the switch. The brilliant beam of the headlights fell full on a dark figure standing a few yards off the driveway.

“Who is it?” gasped Louise.

Silently a man advanced toward them.

CHAPTER XVIII

A FAMILIAR FACE

For a moment the girls were inclined to be on their guard, but as the man came nearer they recognized him as Lemuel Lowney. The detective wore a long coat which reached almost to his heels. A broad-brimmed hat was pulled down over his eyes.

“What is it?” asked Louise.

The man came up to the side of the car in a mysterious manner.

“By the way,” he said, “I suppose you girls can be trusted to keep a secret?”

“Of course.”

“I was thinking,” went on the detective awkwardly, “that I spoke a little too freely this afternoon about Kurt Hassell, the spy. I hope you didn’t mention our talk to anyone else, for it was in absolute confidence. Perhaps I shouldn’t have said anything about the case to you,” he finished.

“You need not worry about us, Mr. Lowney,” Jean assured him. “We won’t give away your secret.”

“Can I depend upon that?” he demanded.

“We won’t breathe a word of it.”

“That’s fine, then,” remarked the man, stepping back.

“I shouldn’t want the story to get around.”

Without another word he glided silently away and vanished in the shadows. The girls looked at each other; then they laughed.

“Spooky, isn’t he?” said Jean.

“Just like a detective in a play. He was worrying because he thought he had told us too much. As if we’d go around telling his old secrets.”

The girls dismissed Lemuel Lowney and his portentous spy mystery from their minds, and drove back to Oak Falls. The journey to New York was scheduled for the next day, because Uncle Ned had to sail on the *Balaska* at the end of the week.

The following morning the house was in a flurry of excitement as preparations for the trip got under way. Uncle Ned was pattering around the garage and tinkering with the car. He knew little or nothing about automobiles, yet he seemed to feel that as man of the house it was his duty to look after this part of the proceedings.

Applecore, the hired girl, was trying to do a dozen things at once, getting hopelessly tangled up as she assisted Aunt Harriet with her packing. As for Jean and Louise, they were soon ready, for they decided not to take many of their belongings with them.

“There really would be no sense in burdening ourselves with a lot of luggage,” remarked Jean, as she snapped shut the catch of her club bag. “There, I’m ready.”

“I’m ready, too. Let’s go down and steer Uncle Ned away from the car. He’s certain to have it in such a shape that it won’t go a mile!”

They were on their way downstairs when they saw a man coming up the front steps. It was Taylor Lott, the real estate man. He looked worried and harassed, and perceptibly older than when the girls had last seen him.

“I heard you were going to New York,” said the realtor, “so I thought I would run over to see you before you left. Have you heard anything more about Carrillo?”

“Mrs. Flower has hired a detective,” said Louise, “but he hasn’t had any luck thus far. We haven’t made a great deal of progress, either.”

Taylor Lott sighed.

“This affair will very likely put me out of business,” he said heavily. “I have been hoping Carrillo would turn up so that I might get back some of that money, but it begins to look as if I’ll have to pocket my loss, which I can’t

afford to do. Business is bad enough as it is. Ever since Carrillo disappeared, people have been afraid to trust me.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” said Jean.

“Of course not. But the public doesn’t reason that way. I’ve been hard hit by this affair, I can tell you.”

Louise and Jean felt sorry for Mr. Lott. They tried to encourage him by saying that they had picked up a few clues as to Carrillo’s whereabouts, and were in hopes of locating the fugitive before very long.

“We’re on his trail,” Louise said. “Of course, we may not be lucky enough to locate him but we’re going to do our best.”

Mr. Lott brightened.

“Do you really think you know where the fellow is now?”

“In New York,” Jean replied promptly.

“New York is a big city,” answered Mr. Lott doubtfully.

“We have a little plan,” Louise told him. “Perhaps it will work.”

“I hope so. It will take a big worry off my mind if you can land that rascal in jail where he belongs.”

He trudged away, and the girls hurried out to the garage where they found Uncle Ned, his face very grimy, tinkering with the motor of the car. The engine did not

need attention, for it had been running smoothly the previous evening. Fortunately, however, Captain Dana had done no damage to it, so the girls hustled him into the house to make himself ready for the coming trip.

In due time, Uncle Ned had his face scrubbed and shining, while Aunt Harriet had numerous suitcases and hat-boxes packed. She gave “Applecore” a dozen last-minute instructions which apparently were not understood, and then settled herself in the car with the air of one who has done her best but fears the worst.

“I’m sure that girl will have the house in terrible disorder before we get back,” she declared, “but I’m determined to enjoy myself on this trip.”

“Forget her,” advised Uncle Ned, chuckling. “You can’t take the house with you. All right, Louise. Step on the gas! New York or bust!”

The car slid away, with “Applecore” shouting farewells and finally bursting into tears and covering her face with her apron, as if they were leaving on a journey around the world.

Out on the broad highway leading from Oak Falls the car sped swiftly along in the spring sunlight. Aunt Harriet sat back and relaxed, forgetting her numerous worries about the household and Cora Appel’s doubtful ability to look after the place in her absence.

The journey was without incident. They had lunch in a cozy tea room on the way, and made such good time

during the afternoon that they reached a city about a hundred miles from New York that evening. The place boasted a handsome modern hotel, where they decided to spend the night.

“I think I’ll go right to bed,” said Aunt Harriet, after they had been assigned to rooms and had had dinner. “I’m tired, and not used to these all-day trips.”

Louise and Jean were too excited to go to bed at that early hour so they asked permission to take a walk.

“Stay on the main streets and don’t be out late,” said Uncle Ned. “I think I’ll buy myself a good cigar and some newspapers and read a while.”

The girls strolled along the brightly-lighted sidewalks for half an hour, looked into shop windows, and finally came back to the hotel.

“I suppose we may as well go to bed,” said Louise. “We’ll have to make an early start in the morning.”

They stepped into one of the elevators.

“Fifth floor,” Jean said.

At the fourth floor the elevator stopped to admit a passenger, and it was while the door was open that the girls heard a violent uproar coming from one of the rooms just across the corridor.

“What do you mean?” cried a shrill voice. “I’ll have you reported to the management! The very idea—coming into my room like this!”

“Lady!” boomed a familiar voice. “Let me explain. It was this way——”

“I don’t want any of your explanations. There is no excuse for this. I’m a respectable woman, I’ll have you know.”

“Lady, I’m sorry, but I got off at the wrong floor.”

The elevator boy was grinning with amusement. The door across the corridor was partly open and the voices could be heard clearly.

Jean and Louise stared at each other.

“Uncle Ned!” they gasped simultaneously.

They fled from the elevator and rushed into the room where they found their uncle, very red in the face, engaged in a spirited argument with a thin, elderly maiden lady who was giving him a thorough tongue-lashing.

“And now what?” she demanded, when the girls entered. “As if it isn’t enough that one stranger should walk into my room without so much as by your leave or knocking at the door! Now these two girls march in! Who are you?” she snapped at the sisters. “And what do you want?”

“Whew!” said Uncle Ned, mopping his brow with a huge handkerchief. “I’m glad you two showed up. I’m

in trouble. I thought our rooms were on the fourth floor just across from the elevators and I stepped in here without thinking.”

Jean and Louise tried to pacify the irate lady.

“Please forgive us,” said Louise. “Don’t you see it was just an innocent mistake?”

“Oh, I suppose it was a mistake all right,” answered the woman, somewhat mollified. “But it would give anyone a start to see a perfectly strange man walk into one’s room.”

After a while the girls managed to persuade her that the affair was merely a harmless error that might happen to anyone. When Uncle Ned was finally able to tell who he was, and the woman learned that he was captain of the famous *Balaska*, her mood changed completely, and his profuse apologies were accepted in the best spirit.

The girls were about to leave when Jean suddenly noticed a framed photograph on the dresser. It was that of a sleek, dark, handsome man. Somehow, the face seemed familiar. Then she recognized it.

“Kurt Hassell!” she said to herself in excitement.

CHAPTER XIX

THE THIRD CORNER

“Please don’t think I’m inquisitive,” Jean said to the woman, “but I’m very interested in that picture on your dresser. It resembles one I saw yesterday. Do you mind telling me the man’s name?”

The woman looked at her in astonishment.

“It’s none of my business, of course,” Jean said apologetically.

“His name is Raymond Del Mort,” answered the woman. “He is a friend of mine in New York.”

“I’m sure—yes, there’s no doubt of it—he is the same man,” declared Louise, looking at the photograph closely. “A friend of ours was showing us his picture just yesterday. He was trying to get in touch with Mr. Del Mort.”

“Really?” answered the woman, a trifle more graciously. “I’m glad to do anything for any friend of Raymond. A charming man,” she added, gazing proudly at the picture. “I met him in a business way but he has since become a very dear friend.”

“Do you think you could let us have his address? Our friend has been very eager to locate him.”

“Not at all. I’ll write it down for you. And when you see Raymond you just tell him that Miss Laverne sent you.”

Miss Laverne sat down at the writing table and hastily scribbled a New York address on a card and gave it to the girls. Uncle Ned looked on, considerably mystified.

“It is an odd coincidence, isn’t it?” said Miss Laverne. “Perhaps it’s fortunate that your uncle made his mistake after all.”

“Indeed it is,” said Louise. “I’m sure our friend will be very glad to learn Mr. Del Mort’s address.”

They then took their departure, leaving Miss Laverne in better humor than when they had entered. Uncle Ned was still upset by his experience.

“Anyone could make a mistake like that,” he grumbled, as they went up to the next floor. “She wouldn’t let me explain. I thought she was going to scratch out my eyes. It’s a lucky thing you came along when you did.”

“Lucky in more ways than one,” declared Jean, referring to their good fortune in obtaining the address of Raymond Del Mort—otherwise known as Kurt Hassell.

Both girls were convinced that Miss Laverne’s friend was none other than the missing spy, the subject of the picture Lemuel Lowney had shown them the previous day.

“If we can’t find Carrillo, at least we’ll find Kurt Hassell!” declared Jean excitedly, when they were in their own room. “Whether he calls himself Del Mort or not, I’m positive Miss Laverne’s friend is Hassell.”

“Wouldn’t it be a jolt to Lemuel Lowney’s pride if we actually found the spy!” Louise exclaimed.

“We won’t count our chickens before they are hatched.”

“You mean we won’t count our crooks before they are caught.”

They were up early next morning and resumed their journey to New York without seeing Miss Laverne again. The girls were impatient to reach the city. In the first place, they hoped that by this time some reply might have been received to their advertisement about the sweepstakes ticket. Then, they were eager to investigate the address given them by Miss Laverne in the hope that it might lead them directly to the hiding place of Kurt Hassell, the international spy.

They were swept up in the stream of New Jersey traffic, crossed the Hudson River, and finally found themselves in the roar and bustle of Manhattan. It was mid-morning by the time they reached the hotel Uncle Ned had chosen for their visit. After they had been shown to comfortable rooms, the girls changed into fresh dresses, losing no time in starting out for the newspaper office where they expected to find a reply to their advertisement.

“Don’t be gone long,” Uncle Ned warned them. “I’m figuring on going to a matinee.”

“We’ll be back for lunch in good time,” they promised.

They strolled through the busy streets, enjoying the rush and turmoil of New York, which was in such pronounced contrast to the leisurely life of Oak Falls. Finally they located the huge newspaper building. A polite clerk in the classified advertising department waited on them as they explained their errand.

“I’ll see if any replies have come to that box number,” he said, and went away. In a few minutes he returned with a letter.

“Just one answer,” he said, tossing the missive across the counter.

The girls went over to a desk near the window. What would the letter contain? Would it be from some stranger claiming the ticket, or would it be from Ed Carrillo himself? In the back of their minds had been the thought that the ticket might not have belonged to Carrillo at all, but probably was part of the loot he had stolen.

Louise opened the letter. She glanced quickly at the single page of note-paper, then uttered a cry of delight.

“It’s from Carrillo!”

Jean danced with excitement.

“Oh, good! Read it!”

“In answer to your advertisement concerning sweepstakes ticket No. 8231, which I hope is now in your hands, may I say that I am the original purchaser. Unfortunately I lost the ticket a short time ago while in the vicinity of the town of Oak Falls and the village of Spring Corner, near Penfield.

“As you may know, this ticket was one of the winners in the sweepstakes and I am entitled to a prize of \$3000 when I present it. I will be glad to pay a reward of \$100 for its return. By way of identification I might say that my ticket had a small cross-mark in ink on the reverse side. If your advertisement means that you have found the ticket I should appreciate its return. My address is No. 57, Three Corners Apartments, No. 793 West ———th St., New York City.

Yours very truly,

EDWARD CARRILLO.””

It was a big moment for the Dana girls. For the first time since they had taken part in solving the mystery they felt that they were really on the verge of its solution. They had succeeded in locating their quarry at last.

“There is something familiar about that address,” said Louise, frowning. “I think I’ve come across it before, but where, I can’t say.”

“The Three Corners Apartments! This affair is full of corners. Spring Corner, Rocky Corner, and now Three Corners.”

“The third corner of the mystery,” mused Louise.

Then, as she studied the address again, she had an inspiration and searched quickly through her pocketbook.

“It *can't* be the same,” she murmured. “And yet——”

From her purse she extracted the card on which Miss Laverne had scribbled the address of her friend, Raymond Del Mort.

It read:

“Mr. Raymond Del Mort,
Apartment No. 57,
No. 793, West ——th St.,
New York City.”

The name, as well as the street and apartment numbers, were identical with the address claimed by Ed Carrillo.

This was indeed an amazing and unexpected turn of events. The girls were perplexed. That there might be some connection between Carrillo and the spy, Kurt Hassell, had never occurred to them for a moment. Yet, before them, was the evidence which seemed to prove that such was the case.

“Carrillo can’t be Raymond Del Mort,” argued Jean. “We know him, and we have seen Del Mort’s picture. They must be two different people living in the same apartment.”

“It’s a wonderful streak of luck for us if they are,” said Louise breathlessly. She looked at the letter again and noticed that Carrillo had scribbled a telephone number at the bottom of the page. “What shall we do? Call at the apartment, or telephone?”

“We’ll telephone first, but we haven’t time just now. Uncle Ned and Aunt Harriet will be waiting for us.”

They left the newspaper building and hurried back toward their hotel. On Forty-second Street they encountered a familiar figure, sauntering along with her nose in the air and an expression of scornful disdain on her face. Not expecting to meet anyone they knew in the crowds of New York, the girls cried out impulsively:

“Lettie!”

Lettie Briggs blinked as she recognized her schoolmates, but her manner expressed no surprise. She considered it vulgar to display emotion or excitement.

“How nice!” she drawled. “Fancy running into you like this. I didn’t know you planned to spend the vacation in New York.”

“We didn’t,” said Jean, “but we were lucky enough to have Uncle Ned treat us to a trip. We just arrived this morning.”

“Oh, I’ve been here for the past three days,” Lettie answered. “I have been having a gay time with my friend, Count Salame. You may have heard me speak of him.”

“Yes, I think I recall the name,” said Louise, remembering how Lettie had bored everyone at Starhurst by her claims of friendship with a member of European nobility. “I believe you wrote to our uncle about him.”

Lettie flushed as she recalled the failure of her attempt to induce Captain Dana to grant Count Salame special rates on the *Balaska*.

“I think it was very rude of your uncle to answer me as he did,” she snapped. “Surely he must realize that Count Salame is accustomed to receive special privileges when he travels abroad.”

“I hope the count isn’t angry with Uncle Ned,” said Jean meekly.

“Angry!” sniffed Lettie. “He wouldn’t demean himself to let a slight incident like that annoy him.”

“That’s fine,” replied Louise. “I’m sure we should be dreadfully worried if we thought Uncle Ned had annoyed Count—Count Salami!”

“The name is Salame!” snapped Lettie. She looked at her wrist watch. “But you must excuse me. I have a luncheon engagement with him. It’s been nice to have seen you.”

“Don’t mention it,” murmured Jean, as Miss Briggs went on her way, assuming the air of one who is far more accustomed to limousines than to the pavement.

“Hurry!” said Louise to her sister. “We have plenty to do.”

CHAPTER XX

IN DISGUISE

The Dana girls had matters of greater importance on their minds than the displeasure of Lettie Briggs and her friend, Count Salame, but they were not destined to follow up the clue of the Three Corners Apartments that same day.

They took luncheon at the hotel with Uncle Ned and Aunt Harriet and afterward attended the theatre. This was followed by a visit to several shops. They had dinner at a well-known restaurant, after which Captain Dana produced tickets to a musical comedy hit which had taken the city by storm.

They did not return to the hotel until after midnight. So tired were the girls after the excitement and novelty of the afternoon and evening that they tumbled into bed without even discussing their plans for the following day. Uncle Ned was to sail the next afternoon, but it was arranged that Aunt Harriet and the girls should spend the remainder of the week in New York.

Their time was fully occupied in the morning as well. When Uncle Ned left them to go to the offices of the shipping company, Aunt Harriet insisted that her nieces

accompany her on a tour of the shops. It was not until after luncheon that the girls had a moment to themselves.

“We had better telephone Carrillo right away,” said Louise, when they managed to escape to their room. She took the letter from her handbag and looked up the telephone number Carrillo had given in his message.

Louise picked up the phone and gave the operator the number. In a few moments a woman’s voice said, “Hello.”

“Must be some mistake,” whispered Louise to her sister. Aloud she said, “Is this Mr. Carrillo’s apartment?”

“I can take a message for Mr. Carrillo,” replied the woman. “He is not here just this moment.”

“He answered an advertisement about a sweepstakes ticket.”

“Oh, yes!” There was a note of eagerness in the woman’s voice. “Do tell me—has it been found?”

“Yes, the ticket has been found. From Mr. Carrillo’s description I have no doubt but that he is the rightful owner.”

“Yes, he owned the ticket. I’m so glad it has been recovered. And just in time, too. We are all leaving here late this afternoon. Will it be possible for you to call before we go? I know Mr. Carrillo will want to give you a reward for finding it.”

“Will two o’clock be all right?”

“Mr. Carrillo will be here then. Yes, two o’clock. Thank you very much.”

There was a distant click. Louise replaced the receiver and gazed fixedly at the telephone.

“Will wonders never cease?” she exclaimed.

“Why?” asked Jean, puzzled.

“I think I know that voice. Unless I’m greatly mistaken I have just been talking to Edith Darrow.”

“No!” gasped Jean.

“Yes! Edith Darrow herself. And she is leaving there this afternoon.”

“Perhaps she and Carrillo are married!” ventured Jean.

“Stranger things have happened. And I wonder if by any chance they are going abroad. Do you recall seeing a folder with a list of steamship sailings in the Darrow house the night we were there? I noticed the name of the *Balaska* was one of them. Perhaps they’re sailing on Uncle Ned’s boat!”

“Kurt Hassell, Ed Carrillo and Edith Darrow—all at the same New York address!” Jean exclaimed. “What a scoop!”

“I’m glad I telephoned. She didn’t even ask my name. I know what we should do now. We’ll call at the apartment and deliver the ticket all right—but *we’re going in disguise.*”

Jean did not know how this could be managed, but Louise quickly outlined her scheme. She suggested they alter their appearance by wearing very long dresses, and also spectacles.

“They don’t know we’re anywhere near New York and naturally will be off their guard. We can size up the situation better in disguise than by going as we are. If Carrillo were to recognize us he would leave at once and we should never see him again. We’ll have to be very careful.”

The girls were thrilled with the knowledge that the mystery was apparently so near a triumphant conclusion; yet at the same time they realized the necessity of great caution lest they lose all their hard-earned advantage at the last moment. Louise’s suggestion that they keep their identity hidden when they called at the apartment appealed strongly to Jean.

Glancing at her watch, she exclaimed, “It’s after one o’clock now and we promised to be there at two. We’d better hurry.”

They left the hotel at once, and in a department store just across the street purchased two cheap dresses, which were extra long and undeniably dowdy. In the same shop they bought two pair of cheap spectacles and then returned to their room at the hotel.

The gowns and eyeglasses wrought a remarkable transformation. The girls changed into low-heeled shoes, while Jean hit upon the idea of reversing their hats. When they looked at themselves in the mirror they burst into laughter.

“I’m a fright!” exclaimed Louise.

In the two serious, bespectacled, dowdily-dressed girls no one would have recognized the ordinarily gay, pretty, smartly-attired Dana sisters.

“Do you think they’ll know us?” asked Jean.

“Never in this world. Let’s go. Have you the sweepstakes ticket?”

“It’s right here in my purse.”

They went downstairs and stepped into a taxi at the front entrance of the hotel. Louise gave the driver the address of the Three Corners Apartments.

It proved to be a handsome, ten-story building in the Sixties. They paid the driver and then walked in bravely. Their hearts were pounding. Soon they would be face to face with Carrillo!

They stepped into the elevator and went up to the fifth floor.

“Are you afraid?” asked Louise, as they walked down the softly-carpeted corridor.

“No. Why should I be? Are you?”

“Not afraid—but I’m excited.”

They found Apartment No. 57 without difficulty. Louise was about to ring the bell when the door

suddenly swung open.

Ed Carrillo stepped out into the hall.

Jean smothered a gasp. In the doorway stood Mrs. Darrow.

“Perhaps you had better wait, Edward,” the woman was saying. “She said she would be here at two o’clock.”

“I’m in a hurry,” Carrillo answered. “I have a hundred things to do before we leave.” Then, seeing the two girls, he stepped aside and removed his hat. “Oh—how lucky! Did you come about the sweepstakes ticket?”

“Yes,” answered Louise. “We brought it with us.”

“Won’t you come in, please?” invited Mrs. Darrow. “Didn’t I tell you, Edward? I knew they would be here.”

The man changed his mind about going and followed the girls into the apartment. It was very large, beautifully decorated, and sumptuously furnished.

“Please sit down,” invited Mrs. Darrow, as she ushered them into the living room. “We have all been excited to learn that Mr. Carrillo’s ticket has been recovered. He knew it had won a prize, but of course he couldn’t claim the money.”

“I had given up all hope of seeing the ticket again,” said Carrillo. “Not everyone would have been honest enough to advertise for the loser. By the way, where did you find it?”

Before the girls could answer, a door opened and Edith Darrow entered the room. Jean and Louise, meekly seated side by side on a divan, wondered if the reporter's sharp eyes would penetrate their disguise.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DARROWS' STORY

It was a moment of great suspense for the Danas as Edith Darrow's eyes rested upon them. But her glance was casual.

"How do you do?" she said politely, and sat down in a chair by the window.

The girls were relieved. Their disguises had passed inspection; the young woman had not recognized them.

Louise opened her purse and produced the ticket.

"We're vewy glad we found the owner," she said with a lisp.

"I am, too," replied Carrillo, highly delighted, as he took the ticket and looked at the number to assure himself that it was really the prize-winner. "How fortunate that it turned up when it did. We're starting on a trip this afternoon, so I'll just have time to collect the money that's coming to me."

"And remember, Edward," reminded Mrs. Darrow, "that you promised a reward for its recovery."

“I’m not forgetting that,” he answered. “I’ll write a check immediately. To whom shall I make it out?”

“Agnes Johnson,” replied Louise, giving the first name that entered her head.

“Very well, Miss Johnson. It’s certainly worth a hundred dollars to have that ticket returned.” Carrillo took a check-book from his pocket and went over to a nearby writing-desk where he wrote out the sum of one hundred dollars, drawn on a Western bank.

“I have no account in New York,” he said, giving Louise the slip of paper, “but you’ll have no trouble cashing this.”

Louise greatly doubted this statement. Even had there been an Agnes Johnson it was entirely probable, she thought, that Carrillo’s account in the Western bank was nonexistent or else devoid of funds. However, she merely thanked him and put the check in her purse. Carrillo excused himself, went to the telephone, and called a number.

“Hello, Mr. Dale! This is Carrillo speaking. You’ll remember I was talking to you about that sweepstakes ticket. Number 8231. Well, I’ve recovered it. . . . That’s fine. . . . I can have the money now. . . . Good! I’ll be down to see you right away.”

Carrillo was in high spirits. He snatched up his hat.

“I’ll have to rush.” he said. “See you later, Edith. Good-bye, Mrs. Darrow. And thank you,” he said hastily to the girls as he headed for the door.

They were relieved that in his excitement he had completely forgotten to ask any further questions as to where they had picked up the precious ticket. However, Mrs. Darrow had not forgotten. She was curious about the affair. When the door had slammed behind Carrillo, she said:

“I can’t get over Edward’s good fortune in having the ticket returned to him. Where did you find it?”

“In your barn,” replied Louise calmly.

Edith Darrow started forward. Mrs. Darrow’s eyes widened with astonishment.

“In my barn!” she exclaimed. “But—but I haven’t even told you my name yet!”

“And we haven’t told you ours,” Louise answered.

She removed the spectacles and tossed her hat onto the divan. Jean did likewise.

Edith Darrow sprang to her feet.

“The Dana girls!” she cried.

Mrs. Darrow was almost speechless with amazement.

“But I don’t understand!” she exclaimed. “Is it—is it a joke of some kind?”

Jean shook her head.

“No. Mrs. Darrow, it isn’t a joke. It’s a very serious matter. We had to come here in disguise because we didn’t want Mr. Carrillo to recognize us.”

“You have met him before, then? But what is behind it all? Where did you find the ticket? How did you know we were here? And what happened to you that night you were at our farm?”

Edith Darrow came forward, her face pale.

“Yes,” she said tensely. “Why were you afraid Edward would recognize you?”

“Because we have been trailing him. He is wanted by the police,” said Louise flatly. “Didn’t you know that?”

Mrs. Darrow screamed.

“Wanted! By the police!”

Edith’s face was white.

“I don’t believe it!” she declared.

The Dana girls were convinced by now that neither Edith nor her mother had any idea as to Carrillo’s true character or of his misdeeds in Oak Falls.

“I’m sorry,” said Louise, “but it happens to be true.”

“It’s false!” insisted Edith wildly. “It can’t be true. Why, Edward and I—we—we are to be married.”

“Then perhaps it is just as well that you learn the truth about him,” Jean told her.

“Why are the police looking for him?” asked Mrs. Darrow. Her voice shook with emotion.

“Theft. While working for Mr. Lott at Oak Falls he collected rent money which he kept for himself. When he left he took some papers belonging to Mr. Lott. There’s a reward of five hundred dollars offered for his capture. One of the clients whom he defrauded has hired a detective to look for him. He would have been found sooner or later,” said Louise.

At first the Darrows could not believe what they heard. It was plain they had been duped by the plausible salesman. But as the Dana girls told their story and piled proof upon proof to substantiate it, the mother and daughter were finally convinced, much against their will, that the man in whom they had placed such implicit faith was indeed a rascal.

Edith was weeping with humiliation; Mrs. Darrow was white-lipped and stern.

“He boarded at our place, as you know,” the latter told the girls. “I didn’t realize for a long time that he was making love to Edith. We knew he had a job in Oak Falls, and after he left the farm he would come over from time to time. The night you were at our place he drove up and asked us to go to New York with him at once. He wanted to marry Edith and promised us a trip abroad if we would accompany him. We were somewhat curious because he urged an immediate decision, but he said he had a wonderful position awaiting

him and that he had to be in New York right away. So finally we agreed to go with him.”

“We—we sent him out to the barn,” sobbed Edith, “to tell you we were going away.”

“He didn’t give us the message,” said Jean. “We didn’t see him at all. We waited for more than two hours. Then, when we came back to the house and found you weren’t there we didn’t know what had happened.”

“Edward told us he went out to the barn and found you both very frightened and eager to go back to Starhurst. He said he drove you to the school at once.”

“That wasn’t true,” said Louise.

She went on to tell about James Flower, of the finding of the sweepstakes ticket, and the subsequent search for Carrillo. By the time the story was concluded there was no doubt left in the minds of either Edith or her mother as to the real character of Carrillo. Their castle of dreams had toppled into ruins.

Mother and daughter were weeping in each other’s arms. The Dana girls felt very sorry, for it was plain that they had been victims of Carrillo instead of accomplices in his shady dealings. The only consolation was that the exposure had come in time to save Edith from marrying a criminal.

“Is he coming back here?” asked Jean.

“Y-yes!” sobbed Edith, drying her eyes. “He was to call for us to take us to the boat. We were to sail on the *Balaska* this afternoon.”

“Oh!” cried Jean. “You guessed right, Louise!”

“You two must not be here when Mr. Carrillo returns,” declared Louise.

She went to the telephone, looked up in the directory the number of the hotel at which the Danas were staying, and put through a call to Aunt Harriet’s room.

“Aunt Harriet,” she said, when she heard the familiar voice on the wire, “we are sending two friends of ours over to the hotel—Mrs. Darrow and her daughter. Will you entertain them for a while?”

“What in the world are you up to now?” exclaimed Aunt Harriet. “Where are you? Who are these people? What does it all mean?”

“We’ll tell you all about it when we come back,” Louise assured her. “You’ll do this for us, won’t you, Aunt Harriet?”

“Why, of course. But it’s all so mysterious and unusual.”

“It *has* been mysterious and unusual,” said Louise, and rang off.

Then she called the apartment office downstairs and asked for a taxi.

“Your luggage is all packed, I suppose,” Jean said to Miss Darrow.

Edith nodded, her eyes tear-stained as she thought of the glamorous European trip that was now merely an illusion.

Arrangements were very hastily completed. Mrs. Darrow and Edith were soon in a taxi with their bags. But before they left the apartment Edith wrote a note to Carrillo at the dictation of the Dana girls. It read:

“Will meet you on the dock at sailing time.”

Edith would have written more, including a fiery denunciation of her erstwhile sweetheart, but the Danas insisted that this would be very unwise. They had plans of their own.

“Aren’t you coming with us?” asked Mrs. Darrow, as she got into the taxi.

“Not right away. We’ll be over later.” They gave her the number of Aunt Harriet’s room. As the taxi pulled away from the curb Louise turned to her sister and said:

“We’ll go back up to the apartment. I want to find out where Kurt Hassell fits into this affair.”

CHAPTER XXII

A SPY

When the Dana girls returned to the apartment building they stopped at the telephone switchboard.

“Is Mr. Raymond Del Mort staying here?” Jean asked the operator.

The girl shook her head.

“He gets his mail here but doesn’t live in the house. He visits Number 57 often. That’s where he calls for his letters.”

The Dana girls stepped into the elevator and gave the floor number.

“On my way there now,” grinned the boy, indicating a bulky package of envelopes and papers under his arm. The afternoon mail had just arrived.

The door of the car slammed shut and the elevator shot swiftly to the fifth floor.

“If you are going back to 57, you may as well take these letters in with you,” said the boy, handing over some mail to

Louise. Then he stepped out of the cage and walked down the corridor, whistling, pausing every once in a while to deposit pieces of mail at various room doors.

The Dana girls made their way back to the Darrow apartment. Jean had taken the precaution to snap back the catch of the safety lock before they left, so they were now able to gain entrance without difficulty.

Inside the doorway Louise paused.

“There must be some business connection between Carrillo and Del Mort. Otherwise, why should they both use the Darrow apartment as headquarters?”

“We’ll have a hard time explaining our presence here if Carrillo returns.”

Louise made a circuit of the rooms. She opened drawers and cupboards in the hope that she might find something that would give a clue to the apparent alliance between Carrillo and Del Mort—otherwise known as Kurt Hassell. But the Darrows had packed all their belongings and had left nothing of consequence.

Jean inspected the letters that had arrived in the afternoon mail. There were four of them. All were addressed to Raymond Del Mort.

One heavy, creamy envelope, addressed in a feminine handwriting, had the street and number of the writer in the upper left-hand corner. Jean read it in surprise.

“This is from Miss Laverne!” she exclaimed.

The envelope bore the postmark of the city where they had encountered the woman who had given them Del Mort’s address.

Another letter, the address typewritten, bore a Washington postmark; one had a foreign postage stamp, and had been mailed from a European city; the fourth one was postmarked West Point.

“I’d give anything to know what those letters contain,” declared Louise.

“Lowney said Kurt Hassell is an international spy. We’re pretty sure he and Del Mort are one and the same. Washington—West Point—a foreign postmark—I shouldn’t be surprised if these letters contain valuable information for him.”

“We can’t open them. That’s against the law, you know.”

“We can turn them over to the police.”

At that moment the girls heard the distant clash of the elevator door; then footsteps coming down the corridor. The sounds came nearer, and stopped outside the apartment. A key rattled in the lock.

“Quick!” whispered Louise.

There was a curtained alcove in the front room. The girls rushed toward it. They had scarcely hidden themselves,

before the door opened and someone stepped into the foyer.

A man came into the sitting room. Beneath the curtain the girls could see a pair of expensive, well-polished shoes. Louise parted the curtains a little and peered out.

The intruder was tall and dark, with a handsome face stamped with a sinister imprint of cruelty. He appeared restless and worried. He frowned, went into one of the other rooms of the apartment, then returned.

Louise clutched Jean's arm excitedly.

The man was Kurt Hassell. She recognized him at once from the photograph Lemuel Lowney had shown them. The portrait in Miss Laverne's room, which was the same as the one the detective had, proved Kurt Hassell and Raymond Del Mort to be one and the same.

Hassell went over to the writing desk and picked up the note Edith Darrow had written. There was a muttered imprecation as he read it. He wheeled away from the desk and snatched up the telephone.

"Hello!" he snapped, in a voice that bore more than a flavor of foreign accent. "This is Del Mort speaking. Has the mail not arrived yet?"

A moment's silence. Then Hassell continued:

"It has been sent up, you say? Letters for me. But they are not here. . . . No, I have looked. . . . Very well, I shall ask the boy."

Kurt Hassell put down the telephone.

“Strange!” he muttered. “Very strange! And why didn’t those women wait? Something queer about this.”

He went out into the foyer and opened the door. A moment later the girls heard the sound of the elevator buzzer, then the hum of the ascending cage. When it reached the floor they heard Hassell saying sharply to the boy:

“Where is my mail? The switchboard girl tells me it came up a few minutes ago.”

“Yes, sir. I gave it to two girls who were going into the apartment.”

“What’s that? Two girls?”

“Yes, sir.”

Hassell strode back, muttering to himself. Jean and Louise were trembling, for they realized that they would be in a very unpleasant predicament if they were found.

They breathed a little easier, however, when Hassell walked directly through the sitting room and out into the rooms at the rear.

“Now is our chance!” whispered Jean.

Instantly they stole out from behind the curtains and fled toward the door. Hassell was nowhere in sight. They made

their escape unnoticed. Louise had hidden the letters inside her dress.

“We had better go down the stairs. That elevator boy may make trouble if he sees us,” she said.

They hurried along the corridor, but before they could pass the elevator the door slid open and a man stepped out.

It was Carrillo!

Carrillo confronted them in the corridor. Escape was cut off. To make the situation worse, the elevator boy, seeing them, blurted out loudly:

“Mr. Del Mort was asking for his mail. I gave it to those girls a little while ago when they said they were going to the apartment.”

Carrillo frowned.

“You’re the girls who brought me the sweepstakes ticket, aren’t you?”

The buzzer sounded, fortunately summoning away the operator. Louise thought swiftly, hoping to divert Carrillo away from the subject of the letters.

“Mr. Carrillo,” she said, “we’ve been thinking it over and we believe we had better not accept your reward for returning the sweepstakes ticket. After all, it was your property.”

“Nonsense! Nonsense!” he exclaimed. “You deserve every cent of the reward and I’m only too glad to pay it. The ticket brought me a great deal more than the hundred dollars I gave you.”

“Just the same, I think we’ll feel better about it if you will take your check back,” replied Louise, producing the slip of paper from her purse and handing it to him.

“Well, if you feel that way about it, of course I’ll have to take it,” Carrillo answered, as he accepted the folded slip of paper.

The elevator door slid open again and a woman stepped out into the corridor. The Dana girls almost called her name aloud.

It was Miss Laverne!

Although they recognized her immediately, it was evident that the newcomer did not know them, disguised as they were.

“How do you do, Mr. Carrillo!” she said. “Is Mr. Del Mort at home?”

“I believe so, Miss Laverne,” he replied, raising his hat. “Won’t you step inside?” Then he bowed politely to the girls. “You won’t reconsider your decision about accepting the reward?”

“No, thank you.”

Carrillo considered the matter ended, for he turned away and opened the door of the apartment, stepping aside to allow Miss Laverne to enter. When the door had closed behind them Jean leaned against the wall with a deep sigh.

“We got out of that fix nicely!” she said.

“I’d like to know what they’re talking about in there,” Louise observed thoughtfully, looking at the closed door. “It might be valuable evidence.”

“We had better get out of here while we can, and notify the authorities,” advised Jean. “We mustn’t take a chance of letting those men get away.”

Louise had noticed that the door of the adjacent apartment was open. She looked inside and saw that the place was empty and unfurnished. Moreover, she found that one of the windows opened upon an air-shaft.

“That air-shaft must go past the Darrow apartment, too,” she reasoned. “Jean, let’s stay in here. Perhaps we can hear what those men are saying.”

Jean looked dubious, but she was not one to avoid risks where a mystery was concerned. She nodded assent and the girls quickly slipped into the empty apartment and closed the door behind them.

Just as Louise had hoped, the Darrow rooms also opened on the air-shaft. Moreover, the windows had not been closed. Across the intervening space the girls could plainly hear the voice of Miss Laverne.

“You know very well that the money is due me, Mr. Del Mort,” she was saying angrily. “You didn’t send it as you promised, and now I understand you are going away.”

“Perfectly true, dear lady,” answered Hassell smoothly. “But I do not go until tomorrow.”

“I heard you were leaving today.”

“A mistake. Tomorrow. And now, if you will do me the honor of having supper with me this evening, I shall be glad to adjust that little financial matter and pay you the money that is rightfully yours.”

“Why can’t I have it now?”

“My check-book, it is not here. I shall have to return to my office. And in the meantime I have matters of great importance to discuss with Mr. Carrillo.”

“Very well, then,” replied Miss Laverne. “If you will call for me at my hotel, I’ll go out to supper with you. I’m glad you aren’t sailing until tomorrow.”

“And so am I,” said Hassell in honeyed tones. “Especially when it means that I am to enjoy more of your charming company, Miss Laverne.”

His voice faded away. Apparently he was showing the mollified spinster to the door. A few moments later the girls heard his voice again. This time, however, it was harsh and contemptuous.

“The fool! She will have a good long wait before I call for her. By that time I’ll be safely away from here, eh Edward?”

“You certainly do know how to talk them out of their money!” said Carrillo admiringly. “I wish I had your gift.”

“Flattery, that is the recipe. This Laverne woman came up here to make trouble. She was very angry. And suspicious. I invite her to have supper with me. It is so long since a man has invited her out to supper that she is immediately grateful. Now she has forgotten all about her precious money.”

“Look here,” said Carrillo, “I wonder what possessed Edith and her mother to leave here so early. Did you see that note?”

“Doubtless they had several matters to attend to,” replied Hassell casually. “It is perhaps just as well. Now we have the apartment to ourselves and we can go over these papers.”

“I had trouble enough getting my hands on them. I had to pretend I was taken suddenly sick while I was talking to the old boy in his office. He ran out to get me a glass of water. The moment he stepped from the room I opened the desk drawer, grabbed the papers, substituted a fake bundle for them, and was looking as innocent as a lamb by the time he came back.”

“You have done well,” said Hassell.

Just then, to the horror of the girls, they heard footsteps and voices outside the door of the apartment in which they were hiding.

CHAPTER XXIII

EVIDENCE

The door swung open suddenly. Two workmen in overalls, carrying paint pots and a ladder, stepped inside.

Louise was resourceful. As if continuing a previous conversation, she gazed about the room and said:

“I don’t care for the wallpaper. I wonder if they would redecorate the apartment if we were to lease it.”

“This is too large for us. I think we ought to look at a smaller place,” said Jean quickly.

The workmen stared at them.

“Excuse me,” said one of the men. “I didn’t know there was anyone here. We want to leave these paint pots and the ladder.”

Louise nodded, as if the matter were of no consequence whatever, and sauntered out into the kitchenette.

“I think they’re asking too much rent for it, anyway,” she said to Jean. “We can find cheaper places than this, I’m

sure.”

“It’s very bright and airy, of course.”

The workmen, satisfied that the girls were merely prospective tenants looking at the apartment, put down their things and then went out again.

“I’m getting nervous,” said Jean, when the men had gone. “Let’s leave, Louise. We’ll be caught if we stay much longer. And then all our plans may be changed.”

“In a minute.” Louise fled back to the air-shaft. She was eager to hear more of the conversation between Carrillo and Kurt Hassell.

“But I don’t want to be a traitor to my country!” Carrillo was saying in an agitated voice. “I got those papers for you but I thought you merely wanted to read them. I planned to go back and slip them into the old man’s desk before he misses them.”

“The papers remain in my hands,” snapped Kurt Hassell. “You are receiving a salary from me. I am not paying money for nothing.”

“But I can’t do this!” Carrillo declared. “Why, it means that you are—a spy!”

Hassell laughed coldly.

“Didn’t you guess it! Are you so thick-headed that you didn’t realize why I wanted those plans? I am a secret agent for my

government. What of it? What are you going to do about it? Do you want to notify the police? You don't dare. You know very well I can expose you and have you sent to the penitentiary if I please."

"You wouldn't do that!" exclaimed Carrillo hoarsely.

"I can and I will, unless you do as I say. You stole those papers. You have been paid for your work, and well paid."

"But—but I didn't realize I was selling my country's secrets _____"

"You realize it now, and the best thing you can do is hold your tongue. You wouldn't want the Darrows to learn the truth, would you?"

"No," replied Carrillo slowly in a wretched voice. "I wouldn't want them to know."

"Nor your mother!"

"No! Above all, my mother must never know," said Carrillo desperately.

"Then do as you are told and don't be so chicken-hearted."

Without realizing it, the girls had drawn closer to the window, for at times the voices of the two men were scarcely audible. They heard Carrillo say:

"That reminds me. I must send a telegram to my mother in the West and let her know that I'm—I'm going on a trip."

They heard the rattle of the telephone receiver, after which Carrillo gave a number. A moment later he stated his name and address and said, "Take a message, please."

The tall form of Kurt Hassell suddenly appeared in the window across the air-shaft. The girls shrank back quickly.

"Do you think he saw us?" whispered Jean.

"I don't know. I'm afraid so. But it may not occur to him that we were listening."

The girls waited.

"If he suspects something he will probably mention it to Carrillo," said Louise.

They could hear the latter dictating his message over the telephone. But they did not notice Kurt Hassell's voice. After a while they breathed easier.

"We had better get out of here at once," Jean insisted. "After all, we have enough evidence on them now."

"We'll go to the police and tell them what we know."

The girls stole over to the entrance and listened. Not a sound came from the corridor beyond. Quietly Louise opened the door and peered out.

"No one in sight," she whispered.

The Danas advanced quietly into the hall. Because of the danger of trouble with the elevator boy over the matter of the missing mail they knew they would have to descend by way of the stairs. To reach them, however, it was necessary to pass the door of the Darrow apartment.

They were just congratulating themselves on making their escape so easily, when, without warning, the apartment door was flung open and Kurt Hassell strode out into the corridor.

He confronted them menacingly.

“So!” he said. “I was right. You were spying on us from across the air-shaft.”

His face was white with anger. He called to Carrillo:

“Edward! Come here!”

The other man hurried out. He stared at the girls in astonishment. They had removed their spectacles while in the vacant apartment and Carrillo now had no difficulty in recognizing them.

“Why—why these are the two girls I saw near Penfield,” he stammered. “They’re from Oak Falls. And they brought me that sweepstakes ticket.”

“They were spying on us!” snapped Hassell. “I saw them at the window across the air-shaft. I came to the door here and waited. When they tried to steal past I stepped out. They know too much. I think we had better look into this matter.”

He stepped forward and grasped Louise roughly by the shoulder.

“You will come into the apartment!” he said in a harsh voice. “We want to talk to you.”

“I should say we do,” growled Carrillo. “If these girls get out of here we’re ruined.”

“They won’t get out,” Hassell assured him.

He thrust Louise toward the doorway. Jean dodged aside and ran down the corridor, hoping to escape by the stairway, but Carrillo was after her at a bound, grabbed her, and dragged her back toward the apartment.

At that moment the elevator door slid open. The boy looked out.

“Not a word!” muttered Carrillo to Jean. “Not a word, or it will be the worse for you.”

The boy stared. Then he shouted:

“Why, those are the girls! Did you get your mail from them, Mr. Del Mort?”

“What’s this?” snapped Hassell. “My mail?”

“I forgot to tell you,” said Carrillo. “The boy told me he handed your letters to two girls who were going into the apartment.”

“Not only spies, but thieves as well, eh?” snarled Hassell.

“We’ll see about this.”

“Say, I’m going to get a cop, Mr. Del Mort,” announced the elevator boy. “They’re nothing but a pair of sneak thieves. I’ll bet they’ve been in half the apartments on this floor. I’m glad you caught them.”

“Where did you hide those letters?” demanded Hassell.

The Dana girls maintained a stubborn silence.

“I’ll go down and call the cop on the corner,” the elevator operator insisted. “He’ll run them in quick.”

Jean and Louise said nothing, realizing that silence was their best policy. They hoped the boy would carry out his threat to call in the police. They had nothing to fear and knew that if they had a chance to place their evidence before the authorities it would not be long before Hassell and Carrillo would be locked up.

But this hope was doomed. Hassell turned on the boy.

“You’ll do nothing of the sort!” he snapped. “We’ll attend to this matter ourselves.”

CHAPTER XXIV

PRISONERS

It did not suit Hassell and Carrillo to have the police concerned with their affairs just now. Any official investigation would only lead to trouble for themselves, and they knew it.

“Look here, boy,” said Hassell, pressing a dollar bill into the lad’s hand, “just keep quiet about this and forget what you saw. I’ll make these girls hand over my mail. You run along back to your work and let me handle this.”

The lad did not understand. The dollar bill, however, was a powerful inducement to obey Hassell’s request.

“Just as you say, Mr. Del Mort,” he answered dubiously. “But all the same, I think you had better let me call a cop.”

“Perhaps we’ll ask you to do that later on. Just now I want to find out why these girls are so interested in my mail.”

The boy went back to work. Hassell and Carrillo thrust the Dana girls into the apartment and slammed the door.

“Now then,” said Hassell, his voice full of menace, “we’ll just ask a few questions. You say you know these girls, Carrillo?”

“Yes. They come from Oak Falls,” cried the agitated salesman. “They probably know all about me. I met them just when I was making my——”

“Hush!” said Hassell. “It means that they aren’t here by accident.” He turned fiercely on Louise and Jean. “What’s the meaning of it?” he demanded. “What brought you here? What do you want?”

“And why are you in disguise?” shouted Carrillo. “You were wearing glasses when you brought me the sweepstakes ticket.”

“And above all, why were you listening to what we said from across the air-shaft?” asked Hassell. “And what did you do with my letters?”

Neither girl answered. They had inwardly resolved on a policy of complete silence.

“Stubborn, eh?” snapped Hassell. “Answer my questions!”

The girls looked at him defiantly. Still they said nothing.

“Answer me!” cried Hassell angrily. “Where are those letters?”

“Look here,” Carrillo said to him nervously, “if they won’t talk there’s no use wasting time on them. We planned to

leave here at a certain time and we better do it.”

“They’ll talk,” gritted the other. He strode over to a clothes-closet and flung open the door. “Maybe they’ll think it over when they’ve been in there a while.”

The girls struggled, but were no match for the pair of determined rascals. They were thrust into the closet. Then the door slammed shut, and they were left in pitch darkness. The lock snapped.

“Maybe you’ll be ready to tell me what you did with those letters,” Hassell called through the closed door. “I warn you, we’re leaving this city in an hour or so and you’ll either suffocate or starve to death before anyone thinks of looking here for you. Talk it over.”

Suddenly they heard Carrillo saying:

“The letters! Man, you didn’t search them! Probably they have the letters with them now.”

“You’re right!” declared Hassell, advancing toward the door. “I didn’t think of that.”

They heard him fumbling with the key. Jean ran her hands swiftly along the inner surface of the door. Her groping fingers encountered a bolt, which she shot across just as Hassell turned the key and tried to pull open the door.

There was an angry exclamation.

“The fools have locked themselves in! They must have those letters after all.” Hassell pounded frantically at the door. “Open up! Open up, I tell you.”

The girls almost wished that Lemuel Lowney would appear on the scene to help them out of this queer fix. They had valuable letters in their possession, but they were obliged to make themselves prisoners if they were to retain them.

Hassell was pounding furiously at the door, enraged that he had been outwitted. Suddenly Louise had an idea.

“We’re not worrying about being locked in here!” she cried. “The police may be on their way up now, for all you know. And when we give them our evidence it will be a good many years before either of you will be taking a trip.”

There was a shocked, stunned silence.

“We must get out of here,” urged Carrillo. “Come on! Did you hear what she said? The police!”

“Did you say the police are on their way up?” demanded Hassell.

“If you don’t believe us,” invited Jean, “just wait around for a while and you’ll see for yourselves.”

There was a muttered imprecation from the international spy.

“Get our baggage ready, Ed!” he snapped. “I’m certainly not going to land myself in the penitentiary just through a couple

of schoolgirls.”

The Danas, delighted at the success of the ruse, could hear the two crooks rushing about the apartment, opening and shutting suitcases, and making preparations for escape.

“I think that was just a bluff about the police,” panted Hassell, “but we can’t afford to take any chances. If the officers don’t come, we’ll be far away before these girls are found. And if they do come——”

“If they do, we don’t want to be here!” said Carrillo, who was obviously panic-stricken.

A few moments later they hurried out of the apartment, and the door slammed behind them. Jean shot back the bolt. But Hassell had not turned the key in the lock; they were still imprisoned in the dark closet.

With victory in their grasp it had apparently been snatched from them. If they could not escape in time the two crooks would soon be out on the ocean. Jean and Louise pounded at the door. Then they screamed, hoping to bring someone to the scene by their uproar.

Although they called out until they were hoarse, and battered at the door until their knuckles were bruised, evidently no one heard them. They sank back against the wall, exhausted.

After a while Jean looked at the luminous dial of her wrist-watch. The tiny hands shone in the darkness.

“Half-past three!” she exclaimed hopelessly.

“And the *Balaska* sails at four. Those men will get away.” Louise almost wept with chagrin as she thought of the narrow margin by which Hassell and Carrillo had made their escape. “To think that we worked so hard and found them both, and cleared up the whole mystery, only to have them get away in the long run.”

“The boat hasn’t sailed yet!” declared Jean, as she began pounding at the door again.

“One thing that worries me,” said Louise, “is that those men may change their plans and not go on the steamer at all.”

“We must take that chance. They did not once mention a boat, and I doubt if they think we know where they are going.”

Once more she shouted loudly for help. This time her cries were noticed. In the outer room they could hear a door slam, then quick footsteps. A bewildered voice cried:

“Hey! What’s going on here?”

“We’re locked in!” cried Louise. “Open the door and let us out.”

A moment’s silence. Then:

“By gosh, you’re the two girls who stole Mr. Del Mort’s mail. He locked you up while he went to get the police, eh?”

It was the elevator boy.

“Let us out!” cried Jean desperately. “Del Mort is a crook. He put us in here so he could get away.”

The boy laughed scornfully.

“Oh, yeah? Tell that story to the cops when they come up. They’ll let you out soon enough.”

“You *must* believe us,” appealed Louise. “It means so much to us to get out right now.”

“Yes,” drawled the boy, “just how much? I say, gals, just *how much?*” he reiterated with emphasis.

The implication was not lost on the girls. Louise remembered she had her purse safe with her in the closet.

“How would a flat five dollar bill agree with you?” asked the impudent lad. “Just slip it under the sill.”

“I guess we had better comply,” whispered Jean. “We *must* get out.”

“All right,” answered Louise, fumbling in the dark for the money. “Here it is,” she said aloud.

The greenback was hastily pushed through the slit. The boy grabbed it. Soon they heard him turning the key in the lock. The girls thrust the door open and rushed out of the closet.

“Free!” cried Jean.

Then, to their consternation the elevator starter suddenly dashed for the door of the apartment. He was out in the corridor before they could stop him, and had locked the door.

“Try and get out of there!” the boy shouted triumphantly. “I’ll have a cop up here inside of two minutes.”

Again they were prisoners.

Jean was not daunted. She ran toward the telephone, snatched up the directory, and hastily thumbed through the pages until she found the number of the shipping company that owned the *Balaska*.

A moment later she was saying:

“May I speak to Captain Dana?”

A crisp voice answered:

“I’m sorry. Captain Dana is on the *Balaska* now. He is due to sail at four o’clock.”

“This is his niece speaking. Please—please ask him to hold the ship for ten minutes. It’s extremely important.”

“Really, miss, I’m afraid it can’t be done.”

“You *must* do it. Please give him my message. Tell him—tell him it’s about Carrillo.”

“Carrillo?”

“Yes. Ed Carrillo. The boat mustn’t sail until we get there.”

There were dubious mutterings at the other end of the wire, but Jean felt that her message would be delivered and that Uncle Ned would realize that the request would not have been made without good reason. She replaced the receiver and swung around to see Louise struggling to open a window.

“There’s only one way out,” Louise panted. “We’ll have to go down the fire escape.”

Five stories below lay the courtyard. The fire escape looked very frail. But Louise did not hesitate. She clambered quickly over the sill. Jean followed.

Gingerly, carefully, they began their descent down the steel steps.

“If we can only get to the pier in time!” breathed Jean.

The fire escape creaked and rattled. They reached the landing at the fourth floor, then the third. They could see an alley leading from a courtyard out to the street. At the end of the alley stood a taxicab.

Past the second floor, then down to the first floor landing. A moment later and they were in the courtyard and racing along the alley. They emerged into the street. The taxi-driver, drowsing at the wheel, looked up and saw them.

At the same instant they heard a shout:

“There they are! Help! Police! Don’t let them get away!”

CHAPTER XXV

CORNERED

The taxi-driver swung open the door. The girls caught a glimpse of the elevator boy standing on the steps of the apartment building with the superintendent. Either the taxi-driver failed to hear the lad's urgent shouts or else he did not connect them with the two girls, for he paid no attention. The Danas scrambled into the cab. Louise hurriedly gasped the name of the dock and said:

“Drive like mad! The boat is leaving in a few minutes.”

“Okay, Miss!” said the driver, and the car shot away from the curb.

Jean looked out of the window and saw the elevator boy and the superintendent running down the steps, waving their arms and shouting. By this time, however, the rising roar of the motor drowned their voices and in another moment the taxi swerved swiftly around the corner.

“Hurry!” urged Louise.

“I'll do the best I can, without gettin' pinched for it,” promised the man.

A traffic light held them up at the next corner, and the girls were in an agony of impatience. Luck was with them for the remainder of the journey, however. They suffered no further delays, but the trip seemed an endless one as the cab rocketed on its way to the river. At length the docks came in sight. They heard the hoarse blast of a steamer whistle.

Jean looked at her watch again.

“Nine minutes past four!”

The taxi ground to a stop in sight of the gangplank of the *Balaska*. Passengers were crowded along the rail, late-comers were hurrying up to the decks, and people were milling about the pier as they called farewells to friends and relatives on the boat. Louise flung a bill to the driver as she leaped out of the cab.

The girls thrust their way through the crowd toward a big policeman who was standing beside the gangplank. Suddenly they were rudely jostled and a tall, angular girl thrust them aside, waving an immense bouquet of flowers.

“Count Salame! Oh, Count Salame!” she cried shrilly.

“Wait!”

The girl was Lettie Briggs, coming to bid her count *bon voyage*. She was ploughing remorselessly toward a tall, dark man who was just about to go up to the ship. He turned, and the Dana girls saw his face.

It was Kurt Hassell, alias Raymond Del Mort, alias Count Salame. This, then, was the member of European nobility of whom the deluded Lettie had boasted so much at Starhurst.

Neither she nor Hassell noticed the Dana girls as they made their way toward the gangplank. They could see Captain Dana on the bridge, looking at his watch.

“Please—don’t let the boat sail—tell Captain Dana that Carrillo is on board,” gasped Louise, when she reached the policeman’s side. “And that man talking to the girl with the flowers—he’s a spy—arrest him——”

Incoherently the Dana girls poured out their story. The officer scratched his head in bewilderment, scarcely able to understand the reason for their excitement. Just then two burly men in plainclothes came up.

“What’s it all about, Miss?” asked one of them brusquely. He flipped back his coat lapel and revealed a detective’s badge. “Did you say something about a spy?”

“Kurt Hassell! He is wanted by the police.”

“Hassell!” snapped the detective. “I should say he *is* wanted. What do you know about him?” he asked.

“He plans to sail on this boat. There he is, standing near the gangplank talking to that girl with the bouquet.”

“That isn’t Hassell. He is on the passenger list as Count Salame.”

“He is a crook, and we can prove it,” declared Jean.

In a few words they told their story. The detectives, convinced, edged over toward Hassell and suddenly confronted him. The international spy turned pale when accosted by the detectives. Then he wheeled and tried to escape in the crowd. But the men were too quick for him. The offender was hastily seized, a pair of handcuffs was flashed, and in a moment he was manacled.

There was great confusion as a large crowd gathered. Lettie Briggs, crimson with humiliation, tried to sneak away. She flung aside the bouquet, almost directly into Jean’s arms, and fled.

“Look! There’s Carrillo!” cried Louise.

To one of the detectives she pointed out Hassell’s accomplice, peering over the ship’s rail. The plainclothesman rushed up the gangplank. He returned in a few minutes, thrusting his struggling prisoner ahead of him.

“This is an outrage!” Hassell was blustering. “I shall report this to our ambassador!”

“Tell it to the Judge, Kurt,” growled the other detective. “We’ve been trying to pick you up for a long time.”

Then Uncle Ned came down to the wharf, and the girls explained what had happened. He beamed with pride.

“Good work!” he declared. “I received your message but I couldn’t hold the boat much longer. You got here

just in the nick of time.”

At that moment a tall individual pushed his way through the excited crowd.

“Captain! Captain!” he was clamoring. “I want the ship searched. I have a warrant here for a man named Carrillo. He is sailing on your boat this afternoon.”

The newcomer was Lemuel Lowney. His jaw dropped and his eyes bulged when he saw the Dana girls.

“Carrillo isn’t sailing on this boat,” grinned Captain Dana. “You’re just a little bit late, my friend.”

He indicated the two prisoners. Lowney uttered a baffled yelp.

“Why—why, that other fellow is Kurt Hassell, the spy!” he shouted.

“Are you telling us?” growled one of the detectives. “If it hadn’t been for these two girls, both of these men would have slipped through our fingers.”

Lemuel Lowney’s face was a study in consternation.

“The Dana girls!” he stammered. “You don’t mean to tell me _____”

“The credit is theirs,” replied the detective. He turned to the policeman. “Call the wagon, Mike. Come on, you,” he snapped at Hassell. “We’re going for a little ride

down to Headquarters, Mr. Salame—Del Mort—Hassell. You'll have to postpone that European trip for a few years, I'm thinking."

"Well, I'll be hanged!" grumbled the discomfited Lowney. "Beaten by a couple of schoolgirls! I'll never live this down."

Lowney's work had been done for him. The Three-Cornered Mystery had been solved at last.

When the Dana girls returned to Oak Falls with Aunt Harriet and the Darrows two days later, they were able to tell Mrs. Flower and Taylor Lott the story of their exciting adventures while on the trail of the crooks. They dreaded the duty of informing Mrs. Carrillo of the arrest of her son, but it was not as unpleasant as they had anticipated.

"I realize that you are trying to spare my feelings," said the widow, "but I have known for some time that Edward was wild and untrustworthy. He had to leave town when we lived out West because of a scrape he got into. He is an adopted son, but I have always tried to do my duty by him."

"He was decent enough to turn over his share of the sweepstakes money," put in Taylor Lott, who had appeared at the gathering in the Dana home. "That, with money he had taken from me repays all he stole and none of my clients will lose anything after all. Of course, it was the wisest thing for him to do, for his sentence will probably be lighter now that he has made restitution."

“I’m thankful for that, at any rate,” said Mrs. Carrillo. “I wouldn’t be able to sleep nights if I knew innocent people were suffering because of his misdeeds.”

Mrs. Darrow and Edith had recovered from the shock of the realization that the plausible real estate salesman had been an unscrupulous crook. They were inclined to look on the bright side of the affair now, thankful that Edith had not been inveigled into marriage with a man who would have ruined her life.

“Back to the homestead for us!” said Edith with a wry smile. “Of course, it’s a dreadful disappointment. And we *had* been counting on that trip abroad. Home town reporting will be good enough for me from now on, though.”

Kurt Hassell, on the strength of clinching evidence contained in the letters which the Dana girls had turned over to the authorities, had been quickly convicted and sentenced to a long term in a military prison, to be followed by deportation.

“He won’t swindle anyone else for a long time,” said Louise with satisfaction. “Miss Laverne called on us at the hotel before we left New York and told us that she had recovered the money she had given him to invest for her.”

“It seems that almost everyone has something to be happy about except me,” complained Mrs. Flower. “I have recovered my money, and I’m only too glad to pay you girls the five hundred dollar reward I promised if Carrillo was arrested, but now I’m going to lose the best housekeeper I ever had.”

The girls looked inquiringly at Mrs. Carrillo. The widow smiled.

“I’m sorry to leave Mrs. Flower,” she explained, “but yesterday I received a letter from my lawyer in the West, who tells me that Mr. Brown’s will has been found. He left me his house and twenty thousand dollars, which is enough to keep me in comfort for the rest of my life.”

All were prompt with their congratulations upon Mrs. Carrillo’s good fortune. Then James Flower, with a sly wink at the Dana girls, said to his aunt:

“Perhaps if you marry again——”

“Marry!” snapped Mrs. Flower. “And whom would I be marrying?”

“It strikes me that Mr. Jarvis has been around the house a good bit of late.”

“Jarvis!” she said, and her tone spoke volumes. It was quite evident that Josiah Jarvis had not the slightest chance of marrying either Mrs. Flower or her money.

“And how about Lemuel Lowney?” inquired Aunt Harriet. “Has he gone back to the city?”

James Flower laughed.

“Mr. Lowney didn’t seem to be in a very good mood when I met him at Kurt Hassell’s court hearing. I think he had considered the five hundred dollar reward as good as in his

pocket. He said that the detective business was on the down grade when two schoolgirls could get ahead of a man who had devoted a lifetime to the work!"

Of course he did not mean this, but later events, when the sisters were to uncover "The Secret at the Hermitage," would prove his words to be more wise than he had thought.

"Poor Lowney," said Louise.

"Poor Lettie Briggs," observed Jean.

"We'll find out what she thinks of the whole affair when we go back to Starhurst tomorrow," her sister remarked.



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CAROLYN KEENE**

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[The end of *A Three-Cornered Mystery* by Carolyn Keane]