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EVERY
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GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^D}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

Week
Ending
April 14th,
1945.



The
FLATTERER
SHE
WOULD NOT
TRUST

The Boy Tennis Champion Was So Pleasant—And Yet Jean Was Forced To Doubt His Sincerity—By ANNE GILMORE.

THAT PUZZLING NEW MEMBER

WAITING quietly in the glade of Minster Wood, Jean Partridge pricked up her ears alertly as a soft footfall sounded among the bushes.

"Jim," she breathed. "Is that you, Jim?" Her breath was held as she waited for a reply. Her pretty face was anxious. Abruptly the footfalls ceased. A voice, hardly above a whisper, reached her.

"That you, Jean?"
"Jim, yes."
"Good!" The voice expressed relief. Then the bushes parted and a boy, slightly older than Jean, but so unmistakably like her that it was obvious at a glance they were brother and sister, advanced cautiously through the low hawthorns.

"Good old Jean!" he breathed as he came towards her. "I knew you wouldn't let me down. Brought the grubbins?"
"Yes, Jim. Here." She nodded towards the bulky parcel that lay at her feet. "You don't think I would have forgotten that! Oh, Jim, I'm so worried. Have—have you got the proofs yet?"

"No—" he answered slowly. "Not—not yet. But I'm still hopeful. I believe I know now where the stuff is to be found, and when I've found it—" His handsome face became fierce. "By gum, sis, I'll have no pity on that rotter, Alec Stevens."

"You mean—you've seen him again?"
"Yes. Down by the grotto. It's there he's hidden the stuff, I'm certain. I expect he's waiting till I'm expelled, and then he'll get leave and take it up to London or somewhere and dispose of it. Meet me again this afternoon, Jean—after your tennis try-out. If I haven't got the stuff then—well, there's something wrong with me."

Jean's eyes were shining then. She adored her brother Jim; would have done anything for him. And Jim, at the moment, was in trouble and needed her help.

It had all started three days ago. There was no denying that, at times, Jim was a bit reckless, and, like most of the other boys at Willowmere, did things in defiance of school rules.

Three nights ago Jim had broken bounds to meet an old Senior boy to whom he had once been fag, and who had been at home on a brief leave from the R.A.F. Returning to school, Jim had used the usual mode of entry into the school—through the Museum—and all, apparently, had been well.

Until next morning. Then, to the school's horror, it had been discovered that the Roman gold and silver coin collection from the Museum had been stolen in the night. And what had immediately pointed to Jim as the thief was the fact that his Fifth Form badge had been found on the site of the robbery, and one of the missing coins had been discovered in the pocket of his dressing-gown.

"But it was Stevens who fixed that," Jim said fiercely now. "I shared a study with him, as you know, and I know he'd always had his eye on those coins. He once said he could get pounds and pounds for them from someone he knew in London. He knew, of course, that I was breaking bounds that night, and so—"

"He stole the coins, got you blamed, and—"
"And got me sentenced to expulsion!" Jim said savagely. "But thank goodness I got away. And perhaps it was a bit of luck that I saw Alec Stevens and tracked him to this wood and the Grotto on the river. I'm pretty sure that's where he's hiding the stuff, and is only waiting for the hue-and-cry to die down before parting with it."

"But you, Jean—you've been a sport," he added. "A real brick in looking after me and bringing me food and so on. But you ought to go now. We daren't risk being seen. Be here about four this afternoon, will you?"

"And—and do you think you'll have the proofs then?" she breathed.

"I hope so. I'm going back to the grotto now, and I'm going to search every inch of the place. Bye-bye, sis!"

She left him then, rather worriedly, but a little more hopefully, wending her way through the wood towards the little town of Stackhill, where she lived—for Jean did not attend an expensive school as Jim did, who had won a scholarship to Willowmere.

Not that Jean minded. She had her own interests in the little town. Chief of those interests was the Stackhill Junior Tennis Club, in which she was looked upon as a coming star. And, apart from that, Stackhill, this season was going to compete in the County Junior Tennis Championships.

A glow came to her face as she thought of that. To be sure there was just one drawback—rather a curious coincidence, too, when she thought of her brother. That drawback was Ruth Stevens. Ruth, of course, was the sister of the boy her brother suspected, and in addition Ruth was her keenest tennis rival. Long before this trouble between her brother Jim and Alec Stevens, Ruth and Jean had been far from friendly.

"But the new boy—what's his name?"—Doyle Blackwell, will decide all that," she told herself comfortingly, and with unconscious eagerness hurried her steps.

For Doyle Blackwell, a new member to the club, whom Jean had not yet met, was already a junior champion.

Oh, if only there hadn't been all this trouble with Jim, she thought. How happily and with what enthusiasm she could have concentrated on the great events which were now approaching.

But here she was at the tennis club, with its neat wire netting fencing, its hard and its grass courts. And there on the main court a game was in progress with about fifty interested spectators standing around the sidelines, some of them shouting their heads off. A cry reached her ears as she broke into a run.

"Oh, marvellous, Doyle! What a shot!" "He—he's in action!" Jean thought with a thrill.

A few moments later she was among the watchers. Doyle Blackwell was playing with Ruth as his partner. Ruth Stevens was doing her best, but it was obvious to Jean that Ruth was having quite a job to keep up with his lightning moves, his disconcerting change of play, his flashing volleys. And suddenly a roar went up.

"Game to Blackwell and Ruth. Well played—both of you!"

There were excited cheers, a prolonged rattle of handclapping as Doyle Blackwell, with Ruth at his side, came off the court, to be immediately surrounded by a dozen of the club's enthusiastic members.

For a moment he stopped in the very leisurely pace at which he was walking as he saw Jean. He whispered something to Ruth at his side.

Ruth turned. For a moment her dark eyes flashed dislike as she looked at Jean, her lips disdainfully pouted. She made as if to tug her partner away.

But he, with a smile, serenely detached himself and came across. He halted.

"Aren't you Miss Partridge?" he asked.

"Yes—Jean Partridge. I—I'm glad you've joined our club," she found herself saying.

"And so am I—now I've seen you." He smiled lazily.

"They tell me you're pretty wizard with the old racket. And I'm trying out the talent in the club for my doubles partner, y'know. Ruth here is pretty good, and—"

Ruth, at his side, simpered again. But the look she threw towards Jean was the reverse of friendly.

"If you'd like to try the next set, Miss Partridge—"

"Please," Jean said quickly. "But call me Jean, will you?"

"With pleasure. And you'll call me Doyle, of course," he said pleasantly. "Meanwhile, just to celebrate this new friendship, what about taking a spot of something with me at your excellent canteen—"

"But look here, you said—" Ruth protested angrily.

"I said I'd talk to you—about that back-hand—yes," he smiled blandly. "But we didn't fix any time, my dear Ruth; that can come after my game with Jean. Jean, old partner, allow me—" And he gently took her elbow in his hand and led her away. "Now tell me all about yourself," he added good-humouredly.

Jean laughed. She hardly knew what to make of him. He was so different from the other boys she had met, and yet there was no denying he was nice.

He talked to her over coffee and biscuits in the canteen, watching her all the time with that amused smile in his eyes, and yet now and again frowning so gravely that she knew that more serious thoughts were passing through his mind. He startled her suddenly with a question.

"You've a brother, haven't you—at Willowmere School?"

She was immediately on the defensive.

"How do you know about him?"

"Oh," he shrugged, "I just heard about him. I gathered from Ruth that he's now in some sort of a jam. Have another coffee?"

But Jean shook her head. Her eyes clouded.

Doyle did not mention the subject again, and she was grateful. She was glad when, ten minutes later, they were called out to the court, and she was more than thrilled when, just before the game she found him murmuring:

"Now, Jean, do your very best. I rather want you for my partner, you know."

She laughed, her cheeks suddenly rosy. But nothing could have inspired her as that remark did. She wouldn't let him down, she promised herself. She had set her heart on representing Stackhill in the junior doubles, and from the first went into the game as though her very life depended upon it.

It was a great game. It exhilarated her and brought forth continual applause from the crowd.

As for Doyle—well, he was just wizard—a tennis wonder. He was here, there, everywhere, always doing the unexpected, always bewildering, baffling, and upsetting his opponent's calculations. And when, at last, their rivals had been hopelessly outclassed and beaten—

"Well?" she puffed when they were in the pavilion.

"You—you were splendid!" he breathed.

"I've got my partner, Jean!"

She smiled delightedly at the compliment.

"But," he added, "you'll still have to practise, y'know. Practise hard—with me. I've got a pretty cute idea, too," he added thoughtfully.

"Yes?"

"What about playing against a couple of real junior champs—Stebbings and Jones? I know 'em both, and they happen to be in Stackhill. Supposing, in my own inimitable way, I nailed 'em down to a game with us?"

Her eyes shone.

"Doyle, could you?"

"Nothing, easier," he assured her. "But—but it would have to be this afternoon. Stebbings and Jones are due off to the North of England to-morrow. What time shall we say—about four? That should just about suit them."

Four! Suddenly he saw the eager radiance die from her face, and the quick biting of her

lip. His grey eyes seemed to sharpen in expression.

For Jean was thinking in dismay of her promise to meet her brother at four o'clock. It was then she hoped to hear from him that at last he had found those proofs which would lift the shadow of disgrace that hung over him. She faltered.

"Couldn't—could you make it later? Five, say?"

He shook his head. It could be made neither later nor sooner, he said, for Stebbings and Jones had so many other engagements they just had to fulfil before going North.

"But," he added, and regarded her keenly, "don't look so worried about it. Or"—with a sudden shrewd look—"is there something else worrying you?"

"I—I happen to have another appointment, you see," she said.

"Oh!" He pulled a face. "I mustn't ask questions, I suppose?"

"I'd be grateful if you didn't," she replied.

"Your wish, fair one, is my law," he assured her gravely. "But don't forget—practise—practise, that's what counts. And when that championship comes along—whoops!"

"I will, Doyle, I'll practise as hard as I can," Jean assured him fervently.

It was a great honour to be chosen by tennis champion Doyle Blackwell to be his partner in the doubles, and, she vowed, she would not let him down. She would practise—practise as much as she possibly could—every spare minute she would spend perfecting her strokes until—

A crowd, among them Ruth Stevens, swarmed into the pavilion then.

Jean felt happier than she had for days. What with having Doyle select her as his partner, and the prospect of Jim at last finding the proofs which would establish his innocence, everything looked rosy indeed.

She went home and had lunch. At half-past three she set out with a hopeful, springy step, for Minster Wood, along the towpath by the river. She had nearly reached the wood when she saw, with a sudden leap of her heart, a boat approaching in which was seated a boy and a girl.

At once she recognised them. They were Doyle—and Ruth Stevens!

She paused, flustered, as suddenly she remembered that she had refused to explain to Doyle why she could not keep the appointment he had wished to make, as she remembered, too, that Ruth was the sister of her brother's enemy—that Ruth might be curious if she saw her at this spot. Instinctively she darted into the bushes as the boat approached, and, crouching there, waited until it should have passed from sight.

But the boat, approaching slowly, was hugging the shore.

Without any intention of listening, Jean heard what they were saying:

"I can only recommend my partner to the committee, of course," came Doyle's voice. "They'll do the actual selecting, but there shouldn't be much difficulty."

Jean tensed.

"And—and you'll recommend me?" Ruth asked eagerly.

He laughed.

"My dear Ruth, haven't I already told you that I think you're the only partner from my point of view?"

And at that Jean felt her heart contract—felt a sudden, trembling wave of anger shake her. She could have cried out when she heard Ruth's next words:

"But what about Jean?" she asked. "I thought—"

He laughed again.

"Don't you give that another thought. You stick to me, and I'll stick to you. You've no need to worry about Jean Partridge, Ruth, I've already made my choice!"

JUST PLAYING A GAME!



"OH, how could he! The hateful thing!" Jean choked, as her angry eyes followed the boat upstream.

Her cheeks burned with humiliation. Scorn leapt in to take the place of the liking she had felt for Doyle Blackwell. So that was his real nature, was it?

This was how he got on with people—by flattering one at the expense of the other.

He was just a flatterer, and she—fool that she was—had fallen for his flattery!

Her lips quivered a little. She had liked Doyle, had felt her every best effort coming out in playing at his side. And now he had callously discarded her; was in reality laughing at her behind her back. And to Ruth Stevens of all people!

She was still quivering with anger when she at last reached the spot by the old oak where she was to meet her brother. It was five minutes past four then, but, to add to her dismay, no Jim was to be seen. She waited a while—ten minutes—but still no Jim came. Then suddenly she remembered the arrangement they had made in the event of any of their appointments failing.

She looked round quickly and then stopped. Beneath one of the outgrowing roots of the ancient tree there was a small cavity, and, sure enough, in the cavity was a note. Swiftly she picked it up, smoothed it out, and read it.

"No luck yet, but still hunting. Can't keep appointment because two of the prefects are stoozing about in the wood. See you at six."

It was not signed, but she had no need for a signature. It was Jim's writing. That was enough.

"So that's that," she thought.

Her worry for Jim returned. Obviously he was no nearer to solving his mystery and was still in peril. She'd have to see him at six, of course. She would know no rest until she had heard the latest news from his own lips. Meanwhile—

"Meanwhile," she resolved, "I'll jolly well go and have it out with Doyle Blackwell."

With a firm, determined step she made her way back along the towpath to the club. Doyle had returned five minutes ago, she learned, with an excited and triumphant Ruth.

"Where is Doyle Blackwell?" she asked Dot Ellis shortly.

"In the captain's room, I believe. I say—"

Dot's eyes widened in astonishment as Jean, with a stormy step, strode off. She was going to waste no time. And, reaching the captain's room, she flung the door open, and saw with satisfaction that Doyle was in there—alone. Stepping in she closed the door.

He was reclining in one of the deep arm-chairs, a magazine in his hands, his neatly flannelled legs stretched luxuriously across the carpet. He rose as he saw her, a welcoming smile on his face.

"Well, it's Jean herself," he said genially. "Come in, sunshine!"

She stood still, eyeing him scornfully.

"Please," she said, "don't bother to be charming." She paused, then: "I hear you've changed your mind?"

He frowned.

"Often do," he said cheerfully. "Lots of people do at times. But what exactly have I changed my mind about now?"

"Your partner."

"Oh!" It amazed her that he could not show more embarrassment. "You mean—" he suggested gently.

"Doyle, don't pretend!" She faced him angrily, yet conscious that her defences were weakening under his grave scrutiny. "You told me this morning that I was going to be your partner in the tennis doubles—"

"Quite right!"

"And now—now Ruth Stevens is putting it about that you've selected her."

"Oh!" He grimaced. "So that's it, is it? H'm, awkward—dashed awkward. And you believe it?"

"Of course I believe it—"

He shook his head warningly.

"Gossip, y'know, my dear old Jean—bad stuff, very. I hardly thought you'd be the one to swallow it. I can't, of course, prevent Ruth, or anyone else, saying what they want to say—"

"But you told her to say it," she flared scornfully. "Oh, don't deny it. I didn't believe it because it was gossip. I believed it because I heard you say it yourself."

He started, glancing sharply at her.

"You did? Where? Jean, I protest—"

"Protest, fiddlesticks!" She was boiling with fury now, but still she could not altogether feel all the rage she would have liked to have felt. "You're—you're just a hypocrite, Doyle Blackwell. You're one of those fellows who tells every girl the same story—I know. And—well, you needn't try it with me any more. I'm finished!"

She turned, and would have stalked through the door, but he had stepped forward, had caught her hand, twirling her round to face him again. He shook his head reprovably.

"My dear old Jean, you're hurtful—but let me tell you something. If I'm the fellow who tells every girl the same thing, you're the girl who jumps at hot-headed conclusions. I've told you—and I mean it—that I want you for my partner—and I haven't changed my mind. Now what about a singles just to let the rest of your steam off?"

She faltered, suddenly wanting to believe him, but knowing that she was only fighting her own good sense.

"Then, if that's true, prove it!" she challenged. "Go out now and tell Ruth Stevens that she's made a mistake. Or tell her"—bitterly—"that you've been kidding her, as you kidded me. Go on!"

But he shook his head.

"No, Jean."

"Why not?"

"Because," he said, "I don't choose to. Now about this singles—"

"Bother you—and your singles!" she flared, and she wrenched herself away, shaken and afraid that he might see the hurt tears which she felt storming into her eyes. She hurled herself back through the door. As he would have followed her, she caught it and banged it back into his face.

"Oh, great pip," cried a voice. "Look at that! Jean's quarrelling with Doyle Blackwell."

It was Ruth Stevens' voice—Ruth, who, at the head of a dozen other boys and girls, was now approaching the captain's room. A horrid gasp went up.

"Jean!"

But Jean did not heed. She ran. She ran right out of the club, down the road, and then, composing herself, walked into the Butterfly Cafe, hoping to goodness no one would follow. Well, she had got that off her chest, she thought.

She ordered tea and toyed with it. She read the evening paper, determined now to kill the time here until her appointment with brother Jim was due. And shortly after half-past five she left the cafe; using a different approach now, she plunged into Minster Woods again.

But she had advanced no more than a hundred yards into the woods when catching her breath, she stopped. Surely that was someone behind her! Surely someone was following her!

She twisted round. And then she saw him. It was Doyle Blackwell—Doyle following her. He tried to step back as he found his eyes caught and held by hers, then he darted forward—

"Jean—"

For one split second she stood her ground. What was Doyle doing here? Why had he followed her? From where had he sprung? Had he trailed her from the cafe?

She did not know, but from that instant suspicion was linked to the other impression she had of him. Hastily she fancied she saw a reason now for his friendliness towards Ruth; and she remembered with sudden vividness that reference of his to her brother. As he came forward she turned and ran.

"Jean—" he called again.

He, too was running. Jean sprinted desperately, anxiety filling her to think that he was probably in the plot against her brother, feeling that he was tracking her in the hope of being led to him.

Well, this was where he had a shock coming to him, she thought grimly.

But, though she did her best, Doyle did better. Rapidly he began to overtake her.

He was within ten yards when the little plank bridge that spanned the Minster River came into view. Jean saw it, and knew immediately what she was going to do.

In three leaps she was across it; swivelled, and, in the same movement, stooped. Then, with a terrific effort, she jerked one end of the plank into the air as Doyle's first foot came upon it.

He saw her intention. He yelled.

"Jean, don't dare—"

But she did dare. With a heave, she thrust the loose end away from her. Then it fell, and as it fell Doyle went right into the stream. And at the same moment—

"Jean! Jean Partridge. You awful cat!"

And there, running out of the wood behind Doyle Blackwell, came half a dozen of the club's members, headed by Ruth Stevens!

ALL AGAINST JIM!



Jean did not wait. She fled, leaving Ruth and her friends to rescue their precious champion. But she did not go to meet Jim, either. With the woods apparently teeming with people who knew him, she felt that would be altogether unsafe.

So she went back home, buoyed by the hope that before the night was out she would see Jim. But she didn't, and her heart grew more and more despairing as the night wore on.

She was up early in the morning. She wondered: should she go and see Jim? She knew where he was hiding-out—in the old Home Guard post in the middle of the wood; but again she decided against it.

She felt afraid now, felt that the situation was too delicate to take risks, with so many people apparently hunting down her brother.

She ate her breakfast under her mother's watchful eye. Mrs. Partridge was silent and sad, for though she knew her son had run away from school, she did not know that he was hiding in the neighbourhood. Jean had thought it best to keep that knowledge to herself. She shook her head when Jean prepared to go out.

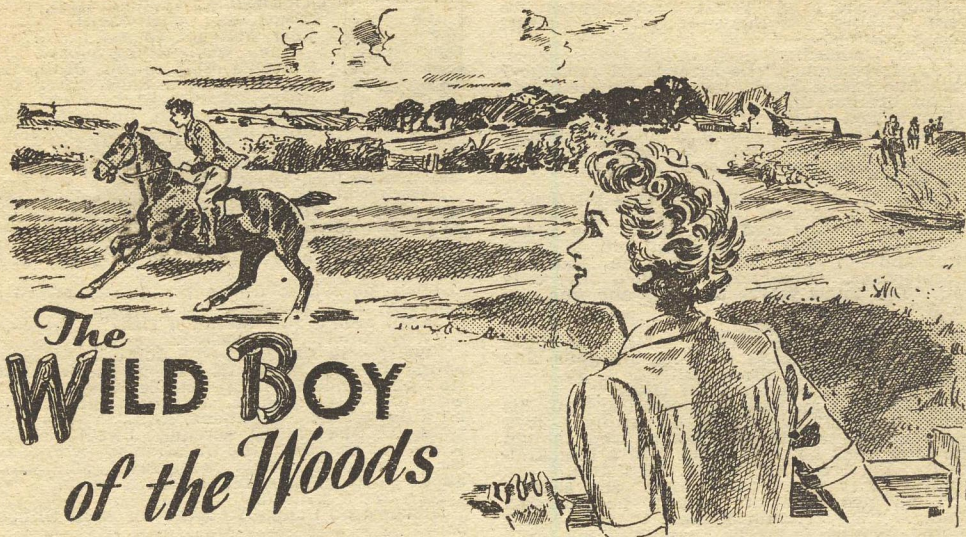
"No news of Jim yet," she sighed. "Oh, dear, I hope we hear soon."

"Don't worry about him, mother. Wherever he is he'll take care of himself," Jean said gently. "The next news we hear of Jim will be good news—you see."

Her mother dubiously echoed that wish, and off Jean went. Automatically her steps took her towards the club. She knew she would have to face a barrage of criticism and comment there, but Jean did not flinch.

But, prepared though she was, she hardly expected the barrage she did have to face when she reached the club.

(Please turn to page 17.)



The WILD BOY of the Woods

THE BROKEN GOLDEN GUINEA

ANN SUTTON had always believed her father to be a rich man, but when he died, and she went to live with her Uncle Ralph at the Sutton Riding Stables, she found he had left her almost penniless.

Determined to make a success of the stables, she decided to enter a magnificent but half-tamed horse named Firebrand for the important Hertford Steeplechase.

Whilst out riding on Firebrand she met Rick Oakley, whom the villagers called "the wild boy." Little was known about him, save that he lived in the woods, with only a herd of wild ponies as company. In addition to being a superb rider, he exercised a strange mastery over all horses, and Ann decided that she would ask him to train and ride Firebrand in the forthcoming big race.

She rode into the woods and saw him sitting by a camp-fire. She was about to speak to him when she noticed he was wearing something on a chain around his neck. It was half of a broken golden guinea. Ann stared at it in amazement, for she had the other half of the coin. It had been given her by her father, and she had always felt that there was some secret attached to it. But how had Rick come into possession of his half?

"RICK, where did you get this?"

For the moment Ann Sutton had forgotten her real reason for visiting Rick Oakley as she stared in wide-eyed amazement at the broken golden guinea which hung from the chain about the wild boy's neck. For she herself owned the other half of that coin!

And vividly again she was recalling her dead father; was hearing in memory those significant words of his when he had given her that memento just before he died.

"Keep this, girl," he had said. "Keep it until you find its second half; then all that may be a mystery to you will become clear."

And here was the second half—here, worn by Rick Oakley, the wild boy of the woods.

Ann approached a little closer in her eagerness and stared at it. Then she caught her breath as she saw, engraved upon it, a number

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

of those same mysterious signs as were engraved upon her own piece.

"Rick—" she said breathlessly.

He was staring at her, with sudden uneasy suspicion in his dark eyes again. Instinctively his hand went up to cover the coin, and he backed away. Ann looked at him.

"Rick, please show me. Where did you get it?"

But, with a sudden wrench, he snapped the fine gold chain from about his neck, grimly closed his hand over it, and thrust it into his pocket.

"Miss Ann, have you come here to pry into my secrets?" he asked.

"Goodness, no!" she laughed. "But I'm interested, Rick. You see, I have a broken coin like that. Rick, do let me see it!" she pleaded.

But more suspiciously he drew away.

"This is my secret possession!" he said surlily. "Never has that coin passed from my hands, and never shall it pass until—"

He checked himself, glowering as though he blamed her for having trapped him into an admission he had not intended to make.

"Miss Ann, if you still wish to be friends with Rick Oakley—though why a fine young lady like you should want the friendship of such as I, I do not know—let us not talk about it. See!" he added, and drew from the pocket of his trousers a thick hide purse, dropped the chain and coin into it, then closed it with a snap, the significance of which there was no mistaking. "It is forgotten," he said simply.

She looked at him, intrigued and curious, but warned by the dogged expression on his face that it would be wiser not to persist. And, suddenly remembering the urgency of the mission which had brought her here, she reluctantly made up her mind to fall in with his whim.

But, she determined, that was not going to be the last she would see of that coin. Their friendship was so very new at the moment. She must wait a little until he had implicit faith in her; she must first of all gain his

RICK KEEPS HIS WORD

complete confidence before she approached him about it again.

"Rick," she said, "you remember when we were talking yesterday—about Firebrand? You remember—"

His lips curled.

"Ay, I remember," he agreed. "I remember your fine friend on the bay who insulted me." Ann bit her lip.

She looked at the wild boy appealingly.

"But, Rick, Lyell Norton's not my friend—not my real friend. Not," she added daringly, but she meant it—"not such a friend as you are, Rick."

Again he stared at her, his eyes puzzled.

"And he's nothing to do with Firebrand. Firebrand is your own colt, Rick," she added desperately. "Rick, I do want you to train Firebrand—to ride him in the Hertfield Steeplechase. You know that he'll obey only you. You know you're the only one who can do it."

He drew a deep breath.

"And that—that means coming to your stables. That means meeting all your fine friends?" he asked distastfully.

"Rick, you're not afraid of them?"

"Afraid!" A momentary gleam leapt into his eyes. "Afraid!" he echoed scornfully. "Is a thoroughbred afraid of a mule, even though the mule may be decked out like a fine Arab steed? No, I am not afraid, Miss Ann."

"Then why won't you come?" she asked.

"I do not want to come!" he answered gruffly. "Why should I come to be laughed at and insulted? No, on that point my mind is made up!"

She paused, wondering what to say next. She remembered that yesterday she had challenged him. He had accepted that challenge and had ridden Firebrand in the finest test race of his life. She saw clearly now that the only way to fulfil her mission was to challenge him again. She took a step towards him.

"Rick," she said—"Rick, please listen! There's a stunt on to-morrow." The stunt had flashed into her mind at that very moment. "Rick, these fine folk you talk of are coming to the stables. They have horses. They're going to run a trial across the moor. Most of their horses are good—real thoroughbred hunters, the best in the county. I want Firebrand to run in that race, Rick. I want him to win. But—well, you know he can only do that if you ride him."

His dark eyes smouldered. But still he shook his head.

"No."

"All right!" She shrugged. "Have it your way. But you know Firebrand can beat all of them if you ride him. No one else can. They will only say he is wild and unmanageable—not to be trusted. Are you going to let things like that be said and thought about your own colt? You say a horse is a friend. Surely we have to do our best for our friends. Rick—"

"Stop!"

The word came out abruptly, harshly. Her heart jumped as she saw the expression upon his flushed face. Was it possible, she wondered, that her words had had the desired effect upon him?

"Rick, you mean—you'll come?"

"I'll come!" he said curtly.

"And—and you'll ride Firebrand?"

"I'll ride him," he said. "I'll ride him, and I'll show your fine folk they shan't laugh at him—or me! Ay, I'll ride him," he added, as if answering his own smouldering thoughts, "and I'll ride the rest of your grand friends out of the county! What time shall I be there?"

She told him—ten o'clock. He nodded, and then, in that strange, curt way of his, he nodded an abrupt dismissal of her, and, turning sharply, walked off round the corner of the cliff.



"GOODNESS," thought Ann, with breathless excitement, "I've jolly well got to get busy!"

She was riding back to Sutton's Stables on Jean, the amiable stable hack, after her interview with Rick—Rick, who puzzled her so, but who had filled her with the wildest hope

she had ever known. She was excitedly planning to-morrow's great event, turning over all the possibilities in her mind.

Arriving at the stables, she turned Jean into the paddock and hurried off into the Lodge to see her uncle, who had just finished breakfast. He stared in amazement at her when she told him the result of her interview with Rick.

Then he whistled—but no means enthusiastically, Ann thought.

"Ann, aren't you taking a risk?"

"Why, uncle?" she asked.

"Well"—he shrugged—"I don't know. But young Oakley hates us all—we know that. He's never mixed with people before—not even with the village people. It might turn out to be a dangerous experiment, Ann."

"Well," she smiled serenely, "we'll risk it. We've got to. Now, the question is—who shall we invite to the trials to-morrow? And what about putting up some sort of a prize?"

Her uncle winced.

"There's no money to spare for such things, Ann."

"Just a minute, uncle. I've got an idea. Also," she added, with a chuckle, "I've still got five pounds in the bank. What about buying a bowl or something with that?"

"Ann, no! I couldn't let you—"

"Yes, uncle," she broke in determinedly, "I'm going to do it. I can get a decent-looking second-hand trophy from Haymarks' in the town, and it'll add a lot to the event. Why, just think of the publicity when it gets round that the Sutton Stables have organised a competition on its own account! What shall we call the bowl?"

"The Ann Sutton Challenge Bowl," her uncle said promptly. "But, frankly, Ann—"

But Uncle Ralph's frankness was blithely ignored by his niece. She was determined now. Her hunter trial was going to be a success, she resolved.

After a hasty breakfast, she rode into the town, visiting bank and Jeweller's in turn, and triumphantly arrived back at the stable with the silver-plated bowl in her possession. And there she found the squire's son, Lyell Norton.

Lyell, in fact, was often around the stables these days. Ann liked him in a vague way, but there were times when she thought Lyell behaved rather as though the stables belonged to him. He greeted her with a grin.

"What-ho, Ann! What's this your uncle's been telling me about a cup competition?" She explained eagerly. At first he frowned, then his face lit up.

"Gosh, it's a great idea! But—you really mean to say you're getting that freak in the woods to ride Firebrand?"

"Rick's not a freak!" Ann retorted indignantly. "He's—!" She caught herself up. "Anyway, just wait and see him ride. But, Lyell, give me a hand in this, will you? Tell them about the bowl—and mention there'll be refreshment," she added, with a laugh.

"You mean—you're really serious about inviting Rick Oakley?"

"I've already invited him," she replied. "What's more, he's coming. And—!" Struck by a sudden memory, she stared at him.

"Lyell," she said gravely.

"I'm listening."

"Lyell, when he comes—please, no larking!" she warned. "You know he's sensitive. Make him feel at home, please, just to oblige me."

"To oblige you," he said, with a theatrically gallant bow, "is my life's ambition, Ann."

"Then you promise not to be horrid to him?"

"On my heart!" he said solemnly.

Ann felt relieved. She was satisfied. She phoned up a few people she thought would be interested. And they were interested, especially when they heard that there was a prize. Lyell, for his part, also did his share, and during the afternoon Ann joyfully announced to her uncle that, including Firebrand, they would have twenty hunters in the trial.

During that afternoon, assisted by Mary Dawlish, the one and only "domestic" left to the Lodge, she made cakes, tarts, and biscuits. When night fell she was tired out. But she was happy, visualising with a thrill the great experiment of the morrow.

Would it, after all, be the success she hoped? Might it not be the turning-point in the fortunes of Sutton's Stables? That, she felt, depended entirely upon rugged, rock-like Rick Oakley.

She went to bed thinking of Rick. Tomorrow, when Rick came, she would do her best to break down this strange hatred of his for "gentlefolk," she resolved. She would get him so interested in the stables that he would finally be persuaded to train Firebrand with a view to riding him in the Hertfield Steeplechase.

She was up early the following morning. Over breakfast she talked of the trial; with her uncle planned out the course. And at ten o'clock Lyell Norton, looking splendid in a new riding outfit, and mounted upon a sleek three-year-old, arrived with half a dozen other competitors.

"My new nag, Streamline," he said airily, "son of a national champion. I think I'm going to show you something to-day, Ann. Streamline has a habit of making other horses look as if they have wooden legs when it comes to racing. Where's the wild man?" he added, looking around.

"Lyell, please!" Immediately she was up in arms. "You're not to talk like that. You know what you promised."

"Oh, yes! Sorry!" He pulled a face. "Pardon!" he grinned. "I just made an inquiry because I noticed you hadn't got a cage prepared for him!"

There were chuckles from the crowd around him—a crowd now rapidly swelling as other competitors came trotting through the gates.

"Sorry again, Ann!" he apologised, as he saw her face flame. "But there's no harm in having a joke in the cave-man's absence. I'll be as good as gold when he's actually on the scene. You don't think he'll bring his club with him, do you?"

"But what exactly is the idea of inviting that rough boy along, Ann?" asked Pamela Price. "He's hardly the sort of company we're used to, is he? I mean to say—"

"Wait till you see him ride!" Ann said. "You'll forget everything else then. Oh, goodness, here he is!" she added breathlessly.

And there Rick was—at the gate, mounted on his great, shaggy black horse. His stolid face was grim as he regarded the smartly dressed crowd of boys and girls surrounding Ann. His eyes were uneasy, yet betraying in their depths a flicker of scorn. They all turned to stare at him, then gaped in astonishment.

For Rick, in his rough wool jersey and a pair of breeches which had seen their best days years ago, looked rather like an ill-dressed stable-lad.

"And the nag! Get an eyeful of it!" Lyell Norton breathed.

For the black, beside the sleek, well-cropped mounts of his companions, looked ragged and unkempt.

Ann could see at once that the horse had been groomed, but it was doubtful if his coat had ever seen a pair of clippers. A great, bushy tail hung well below his hocks, and the lock on his forehead flopped down almost to

his muzzle. But he looked alert, healthy, with a breadth of shoulder, and a depth of chest that might have put him in championship class if he had been properly clipped.

Horse and rider, like a man and animal carved from stone, stood statuesque, the horse looking almost as uneasy and doubtful as its master. But Ann smiled welcomingly.

"Rick!" she cried, and ran forward to meet him. Rick, seeing her, immediately looked relieved, and slipped down from the saddle as she arrived at the gate.

"I have come, Miss Ann," he said. "But I have come, only because I made a promise to you. If you would now like me to go back—"

"No, no!" she cried. "Oh, Rick, thank you for coming! It's splendid of you! Now come along and be introduced—"

He stood still.

"To those young gentlefolk? No, Miss Ann, spare me that."

"But, Rick—"

"I came only to ride Firebrand," he reminded her quietly.

He caught the rope that served as a head harness to his own mount. With another glance at the group in the yard he led the horse forward, deliberately averting his head as he passed them. Ann, with a glance of apology towards her guests, hurried after them.

"Well, of all the rudeness!" Pam Price breathed.

A little murmur broke out. Stolidly Rick ignored it. Reaching the hitching-post, he tied up the shaggy black horse, gave it a pat on the flank and a murmured word, and then turned to Ann again.

"Now show me Firebrand," he commanded.

She showed him Firebrand, thrilled to see the immediate and happy response of the horse as soon as the wild boy entered the box. Rick patted him—spoke to him in soft, crooning undertones which puzzled Ann, but which the horse seemed delightedly to understand. Then he nodded again.

"You'll be wanting to talk to your friends," he said quietly. "Leave me. I'll harness up."

She nodded. Anxiously she rejoined the group. They were all looking a little indignant as she reached them.

"Look here, Ann, if you expect us to ride with him—"

"If he thinks he can ignore us—"

"If that freak—"

"Oh, please!" Ann anxiously begged. "Please! Don't—don't take any notice, at least—not yet. Remember, he's strange. He doesn't often mix with people, and—and it's been a terrible job getting him to come at all. But—but I thought you might like the idea," she added desperately. "It will be rather a novelty riding with him, won't it?"

"I'll say!" Lyell Norton chuckled. "You mean it'll be a novelty starting out with him. But don't worry, I'll pick him up for you on my way back, Ann."

Rick heard their laugh, and for a moment glanced suspiciously towards them, and then went on strapping up the saddle girths beneath Firebrand. At that moment Uncle Ralph came out.

"Nearly time to start," he said. "You all know the course, I hope—"

He explained the route for the benefit of those who did not know. The horses were then lined up, Lyell Norton riding in a jaunty manner towards the meadow which was to see the start.

"Rick, are you ready?" Ann called.

He stood there, his face dark with suspicion, and looking decidedly regretful now. She ran towards him.

"Rick, what's the matter? We're ready."

"Ay, Miss Ann, I see that," he said. "But they—they make fun of me."

He looked at her as though half-accusing her of sharing in the fun.

"Rick, please!" she begged. "They—they are only having a joke. They mean no harm—"

really. Rick, never mind them. I asked you here. I want you to race. And—remember what you said—

A little flame seemed to light in his eyes.

"Ay, I'll remember," he vowed.

With that he took an upward leap; in one movement was in the saddle. Another, and he had ridden forward, taking his place at the end of the line.

Then came Uncle Ralph's "Ready?" With Ann holding one end of the rope which marked the starting line, and Jim, the groom, the other, they tensed.

"One, two, three—off!"

The handkerchief Ralph Sutton held, dropped. There came a sudden shower of dust, a vibrating of the earth as twenty eager animals flung forward in a crowd. And Ann, exchanging a look with her uncle, who was now taking his glasses from his pocket, thrilled.

"The Trial at last was on—and Rick, the wild boy, was in it. Would he fulfil all those hopes which she had of him and Firebrand? Would he in this test prove that he and Firebrand were good enough to win the Hertfield Steeplechase?"

AFTER THE RACE



ANN hadn't to wait long for the answer to that question.

The Sutton Stables stood on the crest of a hill commanding an ideal view of the low-lying country around. Away went the horses as excitedly as if they were racing a classic, and for the first few minutes there was

nothing to see save a jumble of flying bodies. There came the gate.

It was the usual five-barred gate, but two of the horses, pulled too early, went down before it. Firebrand took it side by side with Streamline, both horses sailing over it as though it was the merest straw in their path. Those two were leading when the hedge at the end of the meadow was reached, and again they went over side by side.

"Lyell's making it a race between himself and the wild boy," Uncle Ralph muttered. "He rides well."

"But Rick rides better," Ann said jubilantly. That was evident, even her uncle could not deny it. Rick was leading when he and Lyell reached the brook over which Firebrand flew without a pause, while Streamline landed splashingly about a foot from the farther bank.

And after that—
After that the race was Rick's. With the others straggling well behind him, with Lyell losing distance with every stride, Rick suddenly decided to put on speed.

It was just as though Firebrand had been cantering until that moment. Suddenly, at a rate which made even her uncle gasp, he shot forward. Streamline thundered after him—but Streamline might have been a dog chasing a hare for all the headway he could make.

Like a bullet Firebrand flew, his white-fringed heels flinging derision to the rest of the field. He had rounded the hayrick, which was the turning point of the trial, was on his way back when Streamline reached the hayrick on the other side.

"Oh, golly, look! Just look at him!" thrilled Ann. "Uncle, there's nothing—nothing to touch him!"

"No! Not with that lad up," her uncle agreed. "But with anyone else—Ginger, just look!" he shouted.

Ann wanted to dance. For here was Firebrand coming back, passing those other amazed and discomfited competitors still on the outgoing trail—Firebrand travelling like the wind across the fields.

And suddenly Ann saw Rick wave his hand

wildly in the air as though, he, too, was filled with the triumph of his accomplishment.

Stream, hedge, gate—Firebrand took them as easily as on the outward route, and eagerly and exultantly was coming up the hill, while the nearest of his opponents was still a good half-mile away.

"Rick, you've won!" Ann cried. "Rick—"
He reined in. Firebrand, his flanks quivering, tossed up a proud head. He, too, was filled with an excitement which matched that of his rider, and which now shone in the wild boy's ruddy face, for a moment giving it a striking handsomeness which had escaped Ann before.

"I've won—ay!" he said. He chuckled. "Did I not say that I would show them? But it was child's play, Miss Ann. Firebrand can go faster, and travel farther if he is but trained. There is no race he cannot win if he is looked after."

"I guess that's about right," Ralph Sutton said.

Rick stared at him and shut his lips. Quietly he slipped from the saddle.

"Give me cloths, Miss Ann, and I will rub him down," he said. "Then bring the bandages so that I may strap up his legs."

Without another glance at Uncle Ralph, he trotted Firebrand to the hitching-post. There he tied the horse up beside his own shaggy black, who whinnied an eager welcome as he watched his master approach.

Ann, her heart filled with joy, got the cloths and the bandages in double-quick time.

"Rick, would you like the groom to help you?" she asked, as she gave them to him.

"I want no help," he answered. "The horse has served me, now it is my turn to serve him. Here come your fine friends," he added, as there was a clamour at the gate. "See to them, Miss Ann; they must be feeling sore that Rick, the wild boy, has shown them what real riding is."

Certainly Ann's "fine friends" were feeling anything but cordial when she joined them. One or two of them had taken defeat lightly, and had no complaints to make. But there were others who felt humiliated at the knowledge that they had been beaten by the wild boy; others, now that the race was over, who thought it was an affront to have included such an uncouth competitor.

And Lyell Norton, for all his gay confidence before the race, was looking almost savage.

"Tricky blighter!" he said, smolderingly eyeing Rick's industrious figure. "Pretending to go all out from the start, and then, just when he ought to have started lagging, finding a new speed. Still—"

"Still, he beat you, Lyell," laughed Ann. Lyell shrugged.

"I suppose you might call it a beating. Though, of course"—with a scowl—"I wasn't going to race Streamline all out for the pleasure of giving that outsider something to beat. But wait till next time," he threatened darkly.

Ann laughed again. Her own idea was that the next time—if ever there were a next time—would turn out exactly the same. But she was too overjoyed to heed Lyell's grumbings then. The main thing was that Rick had won—had proved himself superior; that Rick, without doubt, was the only possible rider for Firebrand in the great Steeplechase.

But still the biggest, the most delicate task lay ahead. She had got to try to make Rick promise to take Firebrand in hand, to ride him in that famous event.

The others now had taken their horses into the paddock, where they could receive the attention of the groom and Ralph Sutton. Ann, with a laugh, rejoined Rick; without a word picked up one of the bandages and began to bind beneath Firebrand's hock. For a moment Rick stared at her, watching her critically. Then he nodded.

(Please turn to the back page.)



The Warning OF THE Phantom Watcher

GERALD'S ULTIMATUM

ON her first term at White Bay School, Beryl Anthony encountered a Secret Society belonging to the neighbouring boys' school, whose leader was known as the Phantom Watcher. He warned Beryl that Gerald Maitree, the captain of the boys' school, was plotting against her and against the film that the Fourth Formers of both schools were making.

Beryl believed the Phantom Watcher, though she could not tell her girl chums about Gerald, for all adored him.

Just before some of the filming Beryl received a message, telling her that Gerald meant to get hold of the ring her father had left to her. This ring had engraved on it a curious crest, which seemed in some way to be connected with Highwayman Sal, whose part Beryl was playing in the film.

Later that evening Beryl received a message telling her to go at once to the ruined crypt, and, thinking it was from the Phantom Watcher, she hurried along, only stopping to don the hooded robe the Phantom Watcher had given her. But when she entered the inner room she realised that she had been tricked, for facing her was Gerald Maitree. He threatened that if she did not hand over her ring, he would expose her and she would be expelled!

"HAND over that ring, or you'll be expelled!" Gerald Maitree's ultimatum made Beryl boil with anger. If only Connie and the other Fourth Formers could see their idol now, she thought. If they were here to listen to his outrageous demand, then they would quickly realise what a two-faced hypocrite the college captain was.

"Well, which is it to be?" he demanded roughly. "Hurry up and choose. Are you going to give me the ring?"

What was she to do? She couldn't accede to his rascally demands, and yet if she didn't he—

The blood drained from her face and her lips quivered as she thought of the alternative. The end of all her film hopes and the end of her career at White Bay School.

By GAIL WESTERN

Somehow she must play for time, she told herself desperately.

"I—I haven't got the ring with me," she blurted out.

"Then where is it?"

"Back at school. After what happened yesterday in Dragon's Cave, I hid it. So I couldn't give you the ring even if I wanted to. You're only wasting your time by keeping me here."

To her surprise he nodded.

"Looks as if you're right," he agreed, and, rising to his feet he took the key of the door from his pocket.

Beryl's heart gave a wild leap.

"We'll have to postpone our little talk until to-morrow," he went on. "Let's see, you girls are coming over to East Point to do some filming after lessons, aren't you?" She nodded. "Good, then you can bring the ring over with you."

"You mean that—that you won't say anything about my being a friend of the Phantom Watcher until then?" Beryl gulped.

"Exactly," he said, and Beryl stared dazedly. It seemed incredible to her that he did not intend to denounce her now.

"All right," she said, and frantically strove to conceal her real thoughts. "I'll see you to-morrow at the college."

As she spoke, she moved across to the door, but to her dismay he made no attempt to open it. Instead, he remained by the table, tossing the key up and down and smiling sardonically.

"Just a minute," he said. "Before you go there is one little formality to go through."

"F-formality?" she stammered.

"Yes—a document for you to sign. You see, I guessed you might not bring the ring with you, so I came prepared." Still smiling, he put a hand into his pocket and produced a folded sheet of paper. "When you've signed that, you can go," he declared.

Realising by his mocking manner that all her hopes had been foolish, she took the paper and smoothed it out. Then, as she read what was typed there, she gave a horrified gasp.

"I confess that I am the girl who all along has been helping the Phantom Watcher, and admit that I am just as much to blame for all that has happened as he is."

With an effort she found her voice.

"You—you must be crazy if you think I'm going to sign this?" she gasped.

"I am afraid you have no choice," he shrugged. "If you don't—well, then I shall signal my two friends, and you will be marched back to White Bay wearing that rather melodramatic costume—"

"But
"You little fool"—once more his voice became harsh—"do you think I trust you any more than you do me? That document is my only protection. If you try to trick me, then I shall send it to your headmistress. On the other hand, if you hand over the ring to-morrow, then I'll give you the paper in exchange. Surely that's fair enough?"

Helplessly Beryl stood there. What should she do? What could she do but sign? Confidently the debonair Sixth Former took a fountain-pen from his coat pocket and pressed it into her trembling fingers.

"Sign," he ordered.

Despairingly Beryl stared at the document. To append her name to it was to seal her fate. Oh, if only the Phantom Watcher were here, she thought, if only he knew of her terrible predicament, he might be able to suggest some way of outwitting this smiling, ruthless youth.

She gave a sudden start. If she signed she would at least gain a respite of twenty-four hours—and a lot could happen in that time. She could get in touch with her secret ally; together they might be able to think up a plan.

But could she trust the college captain to keep his side of the bargain? Slowly she nodded. He was desperately keen to secure her father's ring. For his own sake he would keep the document to himself until to-morrow evening. Beryl's fingers tightened on the pen, and, coming to an abrupt decision, she scrawled her name at the foot of the paper.

"Good girl! I knew you would be sensible!" Once more his usual smiling, pleasant self, Gerald Maintree took the document and the pen from her and put them back in his pocket. "Okay, then I won't detain you."

Nonchalantly he crossed to the door, inserted the key in the lock and turned it. As the door swung open, Beryl stumbled out, and, without so much as a backward glance at the exultant Sixth Former, she ran across the stone-flagged floor of the crypt and up the winding stairs.

Nor did she stop running until she had reached her own school grounds. Then, as the sports pavilion loomed before her, she paused.

At all costs she must try to get in touch with the Phantom Watcher. Only he could help her. But dare she risk leaving a message for him under the veranda? Maintree knew of the existence of their secret "post office" now.

"It's my only hope—I'll have to chance the note being stolen," she told herself, and, crouching beside the pavilion, she ripped a couple of pages out of her notebook.

Quickly she wrote all that had happened, then placed the message under the flat stone beneath the veranda. As she straightened up, the school clock chimed out six o'clock.

"Oh, golly, the film show!" she gasped.

"And I promised I wouldn't be late."

Frantically she tore off her hooded costume, bundled it up, then looked around wonderingly. Now that Gerald Maintree knew about the pavilion, it wouldn't be safe to leave the incriminating robe there.

"I'll have to take it into school and hide it!" she ejaculated, and with the costume tucked under her arm, she went racing across the quadrangle. It took hardly a bare minute to stow the bundle in her locker in the cloak-room, and, turning the key, she went hurrying on down the corridor.

The sound of applause came from the Common Room as she opened the door, and she realised with dismay that the show was over. The lights had been switched on and Sadie Peters, standing beside the school projector, was re-reeling the spool of film.

The Fourth Formers stared at Beryl in disapproval, while Connie regarded her in surprise.

"You've missed the film," she said. "Where on earth have you been, Beryl?"

Before Beryl could reply Iris Bell cut in with a sneering laugh.

"Why bother to ask her? She won't tell the truth," she declared. "She's always slipping off somewhere—and I bet I know why. She goes to meet that precious chum of hers—goes to meet the Phantom Watcher!"

AN APPOINTMENT WITH GERALD



BERYL ignored her spiteful rival.

Instead, she turned to Connie.

"I'm awfully sorry, Connie," she apologised. "I wouldn't have missed the film for worlds, but I was delayed. What was it like?"

Before the Form captain could reply Iris chipped in again impetuously.

"A lot you care!" she snapped. "If you were interested you would have turned up to see it. You mark my words," she added, swinging round on the rest of the form, "you'll be sorry you ever picked Beryl Anthony for the star part. She'll let you down—just as she's let you down this evening."

"Hear, hear," put in her crony, Wendy Farrow. "I vote we throw her out before it's too late. If she couldn't be bothered to see the film, she can't really have any interest in it."

Beryl flushed.

"That's not fair," she protested. "I didn't mean to be late."

"Then where have you been?" flashed Iris.

Beryl bit her lip, and the other girl laughed.

"Scared to answer, eh?" she jeered.

"It's just that I don't intend to tell you!" burst out Beryl, and, turning, she rushed out of the room, her nerves at breaking-point.

She spent the rest of the evening in the school library, alone with her worried thoughts, going over and over in her mind that interview with Gerald, wondering what the morrow would bring forth.

Suppose the Phantom Watcher was unable to achieve some miraculous last-minute turning of the tables—what should she do?

For a long time that night she lay awake, conscious of a certain coolness in the Form's attitude towards her—a coolness which was still there the following morning.

Glumly Beryl made her way downstairs and, slipping out through the side door, went racing across to the sports pavilion. Had the Phantom Watcher found her note? She pushed her hand under the veranda and levered aside the flat stone, then her heart leapt. The cavity was empty.

"He's got it!" she exclaimed, then she frowned.

But could she be certain? It might have been Gerald Maintree who had found and destroyed her message. She stood there a moment worriedly, and it was with a heavy sigh that she returned to the school. There was no means of discovering whether or not her note had fallen into the right hands. She would just have to hope for the best.

"Hallo, what are you looking so fed-up about?" asked Iris Bell as Beryl seated herself at the breakfast table. "Didn't you meet your boy friend in fancy dress this morning?"

Beryl flushed but said nothing. Silently she got on with her breakfast, but never had she felt less like food, and as soon as she could she pushed back her chair and slipped away

Up and down the quadrangle she paced, that one question hammering in her brain.

What should she do this evening—hand Gerald Maintree the precious ring, or defy him? "I—I suppose I'll have to give him the ring," she told herself in a whisper. "It will mean expulsion otherwise, and I daren't—"

She broke off as she felt fingers close on her shoulder, and, looking up, she saw Connie Bailey regarding her in concern.

"What's the matter?" Connie asked.

"Gloomily she shook her head.

"N-nothing," she replied.

"But there is—I know there is. Can't you tell me? You know I'd love to help if I can."

"I know. You're a perfect dear." Beryl's voice was unsteady and it was through misty eyes that she regarded the other girl. "And I'm acting like a perfect beast. Instead of repaying your kindness, I'm spoiling the film!"

"Silly! The film's going to be a tremendous success. Those first shots are certainly wizard. But"—the excitement faded from Connie's voice and her fingers tightened on Beryl's shoulder—"can't you confide in me?" she asked.

Beryl bit her lip.

"I—I'm sorry," she gulped, "but I can't. Perhaps soon all this mystery will be cleared up. Perhaps by this evening—"

Her voice broke as she thought of what might happen before the day was out. Fortunately at that moment the bell clanged out. It was time for lessons, and so Connie could not question her further. Together they made their way to the class-room, but never had Beryl felt less like work than now, for still she found herself unable to come to a final decision. Miss Rakes, never the best tempered of mistresses, completely lost patience with her.

"Take two hundred lines, Beryl," she snapped eventually. "And if I find you day-dreaming again I'll gate you. And the same applies to you all," she added, glaring around the class-room.

The Fourth Formers hurriedly concentrated on their work, but several of them darted indignant looks at Beryl. Plainly they blamed her for Miss Rakes' bad temper.

Afternoon lessons were little better, and everyone breathed a heartfelt sigh of relief when at last the bell went and the Form-mistress gathered up her books and departed.

"Phew! Talk about living on the edge of a volcano!" gasped Naida Sterling, puffing out her plump cheeks. "I've never known old Raiky to be so cross. Lucky we aren't all gated—although most of us have a terrible lot of lines to do," she added wryly.

"Oh, well, don't forget we've been invited out to tea," Connie cried. "And don't forget we're going filming over at East Point. Come on, forget your troubles and get cracking. It's going to be grand fun. The Trial scene we're going to shoot is one of the big moments in the film."

"I'll say it is," whooped Sadie Peters. "Let's get a move on!"

Instantly the Form's mood changed, and they made a rush for the cloak-room to wash and tidy up. Beryl, however, slipped upstairs to the dormitory. In her bedside locker she had locked her father's ring, and she sighed as she put it in the pocket of her blazer.

"Beryl! Beryl! Come on, we're ready and waiting!"

The shout came from the quadrangle, and realising that Iris Bell would be sure to make the most of her non-appearance, Beryl rushed downstairs, to be greeted with disapproving sniffs from some of the girls. But most of them were too keyed up with expectancy to bother about Beryl.

As they trooped across the grounds and along the woodland path which connected the two schools, they excitedly discussed the forthcoming filming.

The Trial scene was to depict Highwayman Sal facing her accusers in the magistrate's

court. Then, just as she was about to be committed for trial at the assizes, there was to be a dramatic interruption. Her devil-may-care father was to rush into the court, hold up the startled spectators at the pistol point, whisk his daughter out of the dock, and escape with her on horseback.

"East Point's Assembly Hall will make a fine court," declared Connie, as she led the way up the carriage drive. "Benny and his chums have painted some realistic scenery, so—"

She broke off as there came a chorus of welcoming shouts from the steps leading up to the main entrance. Gathered there were not only a crowd of Fourth Formers, but also Gerald Maintree himself.

"We're jolly glad to see you all," he declared. "Benny and his henchmen have worked like trojans," he added, flashing the Fourth Form boys an admiring look. "When you see it, I'm sure you'll agree they've made a fine job of converting the Assembly Hall. But I expect you can all do with your tea. This way. It's all ready and waiting."

He led the way up the broad steps into the college, and then stood aside to let the girls and boys enter the dining hall.

Laughing and chattering, they surged into the long oak-panelled apartment, but as Beryl made to follow, she found her arm roughly gripped. Swinging round, she saw the college captain gazing at her, a threatening twist to his lips.

"Where's the ring?" he demanded. "Hand it over."

She tugged at her arm.

"Let me go," she ordered. "You're not going to have it until I've got the paper I signed. I wouldn't trust you an inch."

He scowled, but his fingers released their grip.

"Okay, I'll see you later," he growled. "But, remember, if I don't get that ring, you'll be for it. I'm not standing any more of your—"

He broke off, and like magic that pleasant, attractive smile returned to his face, as he realised that he and Beryl were under observation. "All right, folks, we're just coming," he called out. "I was just telling Beryl she must sit in the place of honour, alongside me. We must pay tribute to our brilliant young film star, you know."

And with engaging friendliness he placed his hand on her shoulder. Involuntarily Beryl drew away, horrified at his two-faced hypocrisy. "Thanks—but I'd prefer to sit here," she muttered, and hurriedly dropped into a vacant chair as far from the top of the table as possible.

Then she flushed as she saw Connie's distressed eyes on her; flushed even deeper as she realised what a bad impression her apparently ungracious behaviour had caused. And, as if deliberately anxious to add to her embarrassment, Gerald Maintree shook his head sadly and uttered a wistful sigh.

"I don't know what I've done," he observed, "but I seem to be in Beryl's black books. I'm afraid she hasn't forgiven me, after all."

Iris Bell gave a shrill laugh.

"Well, I shouldn't let that worry you," she said.

Fortunately at that moment two maids entered with the tea, and the incident was soon forgotten. Happily the tea-party proceeded. Only Beryl had no appetite for it. She was only conscious of the ring in her pocket—the ring she must shortly hand over to the two-faced college captain.

Oh, was there no way out of her dilemma? No way of outwitting him even at this late hour? It didn't seem so, and when tea was over it was on leaden feet that Beryl followed the others along to the Assembly Hall. Cries of admiration arose as the girls saw how skilfully Benny & Co. had worked. The ancient hall, with its raftered roof and stone walls, had been transformed into a grim-looking, impressive magistrate's court.

Along one end had been fixed a high canopied platform for the magistrate; in front of it was a seat for the bewigged clerk; and in front again an iron-spiked dock.

Many of the boys had already changed. Some came trooping in as yokels and fishermen. Others were arrayed as soldiers, and Will Turner, who was to play the magistrate, was an awe-inspiring figure in his long wig and ermine-edged robe.

The girls went off to get into their film clothes. Beryl with them, but for once her heart was not in her role. It was white-faced and dispiritedly that eventually she allowed herself to be escorted into the dock by two scarlet-clad troopers. The spectators, thinking her downcast manner was acting, commented appreciatively, and then, as Connie stepped forward, script in one hand, megaphone in the other, an expectant silence fell.

It took the Fourth Form captain some time to group everyone to her satisfaction, but at last she gave the waiting Sadie the signal.

"Okay—shoot," she ordered.

First Sadie took shots of the excitedly talking spectators in the well of the court, then her camera swung round to photograph the stern-looking magistrate, the confidently smiling prosecuting counsel, and, finally, that was disappearing figure in the dock.

Benny Kirk, dressed as a young Inland Revenue officer, stepped into the witness-box and the trial began. One of the dramatic high spots was the production of an incriminating letter supposed to have been written by Highwayman Sal himself. Snatching it from the witness, the prosecuting counsel thrust the rolled-up parchment in Beryl's face.

"Do ye dare deny that this is written in your handwriting?" he thundered.

Her mind still on the terrible dilemma which would shortly face her, Beryl mechanically shook her head. The lawyer glared at her.

"How can ye answer without looking at it!" he roared. "Take it! Read it! Then deny it if ye can!"

He thrust the parchment into Beryl's nerveless fingers, and Sadie tiptoed forward in order to get a close-up. Still hardly conscious of her surroundings, still dully thinking of her impending interview with Gerald Maitree, Beryl unrolled the yellow parchment, and then she gasped.

For it was no spidery handwriting that met her amazed gaze, but a message in modern typewritten characters.

A message from the Phantom Watcher!

NEW HOPE FOR BERYL



DAZEDLY Beryl blinked at the parchment, and her pulses began to race as she read the few curt sentences typed there.

"Do not hand over the ring. Demand that your enemy tells you where your confessor is hidden. Then await my signal."

The blood rushed back to Beryl's face, a wave of new hope coursed through her.

But who was the mystery leader of the Secret Society? She looked across at the uniformed figure in the witness-box. This unexpected message had come from his pocket. Could it be, then, that all along she had suspected the wrong person? Was Benny Kirk, and not Clive Hawkins, her secret ally? Or had the Phantom Watcher somehow managed to substitute the film note for one typed by himself?

"Well, what do ye say now?"

It was the voice of the prosecuting counsel that aroused her, and with an effort Beryl forced herself to forget her own private worries. Crumpling up the parchment, she thrust it into her pocket and defiantly gazed over the iron spikes of the dock.

"I have never seen this letter before," she cried. "It is a forgery!"

With new vigour her voice rang, and with all her old skill she acted the rest of the scene.

For the first time that afternoon she began to enjoy herself, and she was as thrilled as any when dramatically the double door burst open and a masked, menacing figure burst into the court-room, a pistol in either hand. It was Highwayman Sal's supposed father, and a storm of applause arose as, cowering the petrified soldiers, officials and spectators with a flourish of his muzzle-loaders, he plucked his daughter out of the dock and rushed with her back out of the room.

The next scene in the film depicted a thrilling chase across the moors, but that was to be shot later. Connie & Co. meant to spend the rest of the afternoon filming the excitement in court following Highwayman Sal's sensational rescue. Beryl, of course, did not figure in these scenes, so as soon as she could, she slipped away to the study that had been converted into a dressing-room, and changed into her school clothes. As she emerged from the room she heard herself hailed by a Third Former.

"I say, Maitree's looking for you," he announced.

Despite herself Beryl felt herself going pale. The moment she had been dreading had arrived.

"Wh-where is he?" she stammered.

The Third Former pointed towards the front door.

"Outside—on the steps," he said.

Her heart thumping, Beryl passed through the hall. She stepped through the doorway. Instantly Gerald Maitree saw her. He stopped and glared impatiently up at her.

"Well, have you brought it?" he demanded.

Reluctantly Beryl nodded.

"Then hand it over—I haven't any more time to waste on you."

But, remembering the Phantom Watcher's message, Beryl shook her head. Somehow she must find out where Gerald Maitree had hidden that confession.

"Not so fast," she said. "I want my confession in exchange. Where is it? Have you brought it with you?"

He scowled.

"No—I haven't. It's hidden away in my study."

"Where?"

"What does that matter? I tell you, I'll take you to it as soon as you've kept your part of the bargain."

"That's not good enough. I want to know exactly where you've hidden that paper."

"But—oh, well, if you must know, it's in the book-case, tucked away behind an atlas. I suppose I'd better take you along there. I can see you won't be satisfied until you've actually seen it. Come on!"

But Beryl did not stir. She was gazing over the boy's shoulder—across at the near-by bushes. A strangely robed figure had suddenly appeared to view there.

The Phantom Watcher, and frantically he was signalling to her.

Beryl drew in an excited breath. She realised now his daring plan. Having overheard where the vital confession was hidden, he intended to confiscate it, but in order to carry out his scheme successfully he must be given a few minutes start. It was essential that by some means Beryl should detain the treacherous college captain.

As the Sixth Former turned, he plucked at her sleeve.

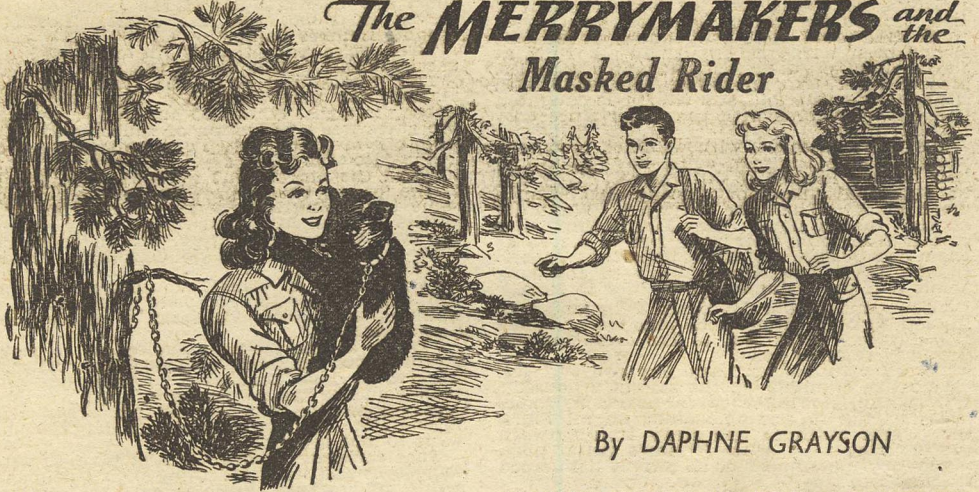
"Are you coming with me, or aren't you?" he demanded impatiently. "I haven't got—"

And then he stopped, a gleam of suspicion creeping into his eyes as he saw her strained, anxious look. "Hallo, what are you gaping at?" he growled, and to Beryl's consternation made to swing round.

Will Gerald Maitree see the Phantom Watcher? Be sure not to miss next Friday's exciting chapters of this grand serial in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

It Was An Exciting Mission Which Brought Sally & Co. To The Lumber Camp—
But What A Staggering Surprise Awaited Them There!

The MERRYMAKERS and the Masked Rider



By DAPHNE GRAYSON

AT THE LUMBER CAMP

SALLY WARNER and her chums, and Jill Patterson set off on a trip to Exhibition City in New Mexico. There they were to meet "the man in the blue cloak," a friend of Jill's Uncle Clem, who would have something vitally important to give Jill.

But the mystery man known as the Masked Rider, and his daughter, were also on the same quest—and would stop at nothing to beat the chums to it.

Sally & Co. arrived in Exhibition City, and after many thrilling adventures managed to outwit the Masked Rider. While making a last desperate attempt to get the document from Jill, the Masked Rider met with an accident, breaking his leg. But not before he had succeeded in partly burning the precious paper. Fortunately there was still enough of the message left to enable the chums to learn that Jill, as long as she could stake her claim before a certain date, was the owner of a rich gold-mine, the details of which she would find hidden in Bear Cave.

Believing they had nothing more to fear from the Masked Rider, the Merrymakers and Jill set out happily for Redwood Heights Lumber Camp, in the Canadian Rockies, where the Bear Cave was situated.

"WONDERFUL!" smiled Sally Warner, looking appreciatively around. "It's as pretty as a picture."

"Guess that goes for you, too, Sally," said Don Weston admiringly.

And it did, for Sally in her gaily checked flannel shirt, her grey slacks, and the wide-brimmed Stetson hat on her dark curls, looked radiant with excitement and happiness.

So, too, did Fay Manners and Jill Patterson, as they stood on the veranda of the picturesque log-built Redwood Heights Hotel in the Canadian Rockies, gazing out over the winding river below as it threaded its way through the rugged pine-studded country, with the towering snow-capped peaks, and forbidding rocks rising on either side of it.

"It—it almost takes my breath away," said Jill. "I guess I could just stand here all day and look at it, but—"

"But we've got something far more im-

portant to do, eh?" asked Sally. And this time there was no disguising the excitement that had her in its grip. "Well, let's get going. We know the way to the lumber camp—we know we've got to find Bear Cave. And after that—"

"After that we'll have the clue to where the mine is located," said Fay in a thrilled voice. "After all we've been through it doesn't seem possible that it's going to be as simple as that. How does it feel to be the owner of one of the richest mines ever discovered, Jill?"

"Gee, I don't know. I—I feel kinda bewildered," Jill stammered. "Guess I shall go on feeling that way until I've actually registered the claim and know that no one else can touch it."

"Now, Jill," said Don chidingly, "don't start that again. You know the Masked Rider's out of commission. Gosh, we saw the last of him days ago, so forget him. All got your food packages?" he added briskly. "Good! Then—say, where's Johnny?"

"Coming!" roared Johnny Briggs' well-known voice, and out of the doorway charged that boy, an enormous Stetson upon his head, a bulging knapsack dangling on one side, his precious guitar on the other. "Well, ready?" he asked with a beam. "Don't want to waste time, you know."

"Waste time!" echoed Sally indignantly. "When we've all been waiting for you. And what on earth have you got in that knapsack—and why the guitar?"

"Knapsack?" asked Johnny puzzledly. "Why, food, of course. You don't expect a healthy bloke like me to exist on a silly little packet of food like you're taking with you, do you? As for the guitar," he added with dignity, "a little good music is always welcome at any time."

"We'll let that pass," said Sally hastily, catching the mischievous glint in Fay's eyes. "Come on."

She ran down the hotel steps to the sandy open space round which were clustered the few shops which comprised the little township of Redwood Heights. Few people were about, for it was still very early. Those who were, gave the Merrymakers a friendly, if curious glance, for the chums had only arrived at the hotel late last night on their long journey from New Mexico and as yet had not become acquainted with any but the hotel staff.

But even with that limited acquaintance they had learned all they wanted to know at the moment—the exact location of the Redwood Heights Lumber Camp. About the Bear Cave, and the secret it contained, they had said nothing.

Sally's heart sang with joy as she thought of how near to the end of their long quest they were. She could smile now, though at the time it had been terrifying enough in all truth, at the thought of their last encounter with the Masked Rider, that mysterious being who, with his equally mysterious and villainous daughter, had crossed swords with them ever since they had left Dixon.

Just for a moment, with wrinkled brow, she wondered who the man could have been, and how he had learned of Jill's secret. Why was he always disguised, or wearing that strange green mask? Then she shrugged. What did all that matter now? They had nothing now to fear from him; they were free to search at their own leisure for those important papers, though to be sure they mustn't be too long about it if the claim was to be filed in time.

"Come out of your daydream, Sally, and take the left fork up through the pine trees," called Don's voice. "We'll get to the camp quicker that way than by road."

"Quicker the better," said Fay gaily. "Gee, this is like climbing up the side of a house."

Laughing, glowing with the exertion, sometimes having to scramble along on all fours, the chums ascended the steep trail between the towering trees, with Johnny's guitar playing an accompaniment of its own as it bumped from side to side.

"Phew!" cried Sally, when eventually they reached a piece of level ground. "What a climb! I'm just melting. But what a view." And admirably she gazed around, then downwards at the now doll-like town below. "It's —" And there she stopped short, staring wide-eyed, with that odd, queer feeling gripping at her heart.

"It's what?" asked Don idly, staring quizzically at her from under his wide-brimmed hat. "Say, you seen a ghost or something?" he asked, as he noticed her startled expression.

Sally gave a shaky laugh. "I—I believe I have," she answered. "Down there—see, that black horse tied to the hitching rail in front of the general store? I saw a girl get off it. It—it looked like Jennifer!"

"The Masked Rider's daughter!" Johnny gave a hoot of laughter. "Gee, Sally, you're nuts," he grinned. "How could it be her?"

"And how could you possibly recognise her from this distance?" asked Don with a smile. "You're imagining things, old girl."

"It—it is like her father's horse," put in Jill tentatively.

"There's hundreds of horses around like his," replied Johnny scornfully, "so stop worrying about it and come on."

With a reassuring smile at Jill, Sally did as she was bid, but though she wouldn't admit it, that incident had shaken her confidence quite a bit. Of course, Don and Johnny were right. She was letting her imagination run away with her. But just the same, the girl had looked like Jennifer. And the black horse with the white blaze on its forehead was very similar to that owned by the Masked Rider—similar enough to bring back all those half-forgotten fears, to make her realise that there was still much to be done before they could relax completely.

Somehow that thought made Sally push on more urgently until Johnny, puffing and panting in the rear, cried out protestingly at the pace she was setting.

"Hey, take it easy!" he called. "I shall be having a heart attack or something. Besides, I'm getting hungry."

"Well, you stay hungry," replied Fay, with a smile. "It's not an hour since you had breakfast, and you ate enough for ten people. I say, look!" she added with a squeal of excitement, and forgetting Johnny and his troubles,

pointed ahead down the steep slope before them.

The chums followed her pointing finger, then they, too, felt a thrill go through them. For straight ahead, at the foot of a steep incline, was a pair of enormous wooden gates, flung wide, and over the top of the gates, cleverly carved in wood, was the name, "Redwood Heights Lumber Camp."

"Gee, we're really there!" Jill murmured, her cheeks ablaze. "The end of the journey."

They almost ran down the slope. As they reached the gates they saw that there was nobody in sight. Some two hundred yards from the gates was a collection of timber buildings, from one of which a wisp of blue smoke curled lazily into the blue sky. All around them towered the magnificent redwood trees, giants of the forest. From somewhere in the distance came the piping hoot of an engine, the faint shouts of men. And still farther away, dwarfing even the towering trees, was an enormous snow-capped peak glinting dazzlingly in the morning sun.

"Gee, what a place!" murmured Johnny admiringly. "Be fun to spend a holiday here, wouldn't it? Guess I'd make a pretty good lumberjack."

"Guess at the moment you've got to make a pretty good explorer," chuckled Don. "There's work to be done, remember. I think our best plan would be just to wander on until we come across someone, then we can ask about this Bear Cave. Say we've heard of it, and just want to look around."

That certainly seemed the best plan, so with eager eyes and hearts thrilling with a delicious sense of excited anticipation the chums plunged into the trees, climbing up the slope towards the shouting voices.

They could hear them more plainly now; could hear the clanging of the axes, the crisp whirring of the cross-saws. Here and there they could see a white stump, chips of wood and a pile of small branches where a giant redwood had been felled. They could see also where it had been dragged through the forest towards the river where it would start on its journey to the mill.

"Getting near someone now," puffed Fay. "Hope we'll be able to make ourselves heard above all this noise. We— Oh!"

A roar like that of an angry lion suddenly interrupted her. They swung round startledly, instinctively drawing a little closer together as a giant of a man strode towards them. A man with an enormous, reddish-brown face covered with red bristles, and an untidy thatch of hair even redder than Jill's. He clenched two huge hands like hams as he stopped in front of the chums, glaring down at them.

"And what," he asked thickly, "d'ye think ye're doing here?"

Sally smiled ingratiatingly. "As a matter of fact," she said sweetly, "we—well, we're sort of exploring. You see, we wanted to know—"

She stopped in alarm as she saw the man's face turn from red to purple, saw a vein swell in his forehead. His mouth opened.

"Then be off wid ye!" he roared. "Nobody's allowed in this camp but the people who work here. And no argument," he bellowed, as Johnny tried to speak. "You do as I say—go on, beat it! And don't ever let me catch you around here again or there'll be trouble!"

A SHOCK FOR THE MERRYMAKERS



USELESS even to attempt to argue with the man. That would only serve to infuriate him even more. At a little motion of the head from Sally the chums wandered down the slope again, a little stunned by that bellowing voice, more than a little stunned by this unforeseen setback to their plans.

"Phew!" said Sally, as they drew to a halt at

last out of sight of those glaring eyes. "He—he's like a charge of dynamite. Made things a bit difficult for us, too."

"A masterpiece of understatement," replied Don dryly. "He has, old Sallykins, gummed up the works completely. If we're forbidden access to the lumber camp, how are we going to locate the cave which is situated in said lumber camp?"

"You—you don't suppose we could ignore what he said?" suggested Jill, her face anxious. "Sort of dodge him?"

"We're more likely to dodge into him," replied Johnny. "Believe me, he'll be keeping his eyes skinned for us from now on. Nope, that won't do! But, gee, we've got to think of something!"

"We have," agreed Sally, "and fast." She wrinkled her brow in fierce thought. "Wouldn't be safe to explain to him what we were after, even if he gave us the chance," she murmured. "Only thing seems to be to find someone with more authority than he has—the manager or something."

"That's the stuff, Sally!" enthused Johnny.

A little cheered by what they hoped would be a solution to their problem, the chums hurried on, taking a different track this time, one which would lead them straight down to the cluster of wooden buildings, where they guessed the manager might live.

It was as they were nearing the clearing that Don suddenly stopped and looked around puzzledly.

"Say, what's that noise?" he asked.

They all heard it then, a queer, choked, whimpering noise, a scuffling, scratching sound, then the whimpering again.

"Come from that direction," said Sally, pointing to her left. "We—oh, look! The poor little darling!"

She rushed forward as she spoke. And the others, following, saw the cause of the disturbance. A tiny brown bear-cub, around whose neck was a collar. And attached to the collar was a thin chain, the end of which had caught in one of the lower branches of a tree. The cub, in imminent danger of choking, was making frantic efforts with his small paws to scabble a foothold on the tree trunk.

"Mind he doesn't bite, Sally," shouted Fay.

But Sally wasn't bothering about that. Her tender heart was touched at the cub's plight. Quickly she ran to him, lifted him in her arms, and with one jerk pulled the end of the chain from the tree. Then she laughed delightedly as, with a little squeal, the cub put its tiny forefeet around her neck, nuzzling his fluffy head against her face.

"Cute little fellow," said Johnny admiringly. "He's saying thank you."

"Obviously somebody's pet, aren't you, old chappie?" asked Don, ruffling the soft fur. "Good thing we came this way and spotted him. He'd have choked in another few moments."

"Choked!" echoed a gruff, horrified voice, and on to the scene strode a small, grey-haired man, his wrinkled face filled with alarm as he lifted the little bear from Sally's arms. "Gee, strangers, I guess you hadn't oughta be around here, but I sure am glad you were. Thanks a lot for saving the little fella," he added huskily, and then with a ferocity that deceived no one: "Ko-ko, you rascal, I oughta larrup the hide off'n you for breaking away like that."

The cub rolled its eyes, patting the man's face. The chums laughed.

"You're not scaring him a bit," chuckled Sally.

The man grinned.

"Guess not. Him and me's buddies—have been ever since I found him wandering round on his own. But, say," he added anxiously, "I hate to tell you after what you done, but if Red Rube catches you—"

"If that's the red-headed giant, then you're too late. He's already caught us," replied Don.

"And told us to clear out," put in Jill.

"That's him," said the little man with a nod. "He's the foreman—sure is throwing his weight about lately, though I guess it's not altogether his fault. He's a pretty good guy most of the time. Was you wanting something special here?" he asked politely.

The chums exchanged glances. But there was something about the little man that seemed to invite their confidence.

"Well, yes," replied Sally slowly. "We were looking for Bear Cave. We want to explore it. I—I suppose you don't know where it is?"

Her heart gave a jump of excitement as the little man nodded.

"Why, sure," he said in a matter-of-fact voice. "See that mountain——" He pointed to the snow-capped peak. "See that sort of hole in the side?" The chums nodded eagerly. "Well, that's Bear Cave. Injuns say it's haunted."

"And—how do you get to it?" asked Jill eagerly.

"Guess you don't, missie, not yet awhile. Pretty icy up there still, but I reckon it'll thaw out in mebbe six—eight weeks' time."

"Six or eight weeks!" Sally's voice was full of dismay. In six or eight weeks their time limit for registering that mine would be well broken. "We must——" She stopped. "Do you think we could get permission from the manager to—explore the camp?" she asked quickly.

"Manager ain't here," replied the man, taking the short black pipe from his mouth and thoughtfully rubbing his chin with it. "And the under-manager——" He paused.

"Well, what about him?" asked Don.

"Seems he's a mighty sick man—been that ways for some weeks now. Won't let nobody near his cabin. 'Twas him sent out the order that no strangers were to be allowed in the camp. Funny," he added slowly, "we ain't seen hide nor hair of him since he was took bad. I well mind when that was, too," he added ruminatingly. "'Twas the night we heard old Jed—crazy old prospector guy—had upped and died." He didn't notice the start Jill gave, and the way the chums looked at each other, but continued: "Jed's boy told us. Said the old boy had given him some money and told him to take a message to someone in New Mexico——"

"N-New Mexico," echoed Fay dazedly.

"That's it, missie. Guess we didn't pay much attention, but when Dolland, the under-manager, heard about it—gee, he went kinda haywire. Wanted to know why we didn't stop the boy. 'Twas that night he was took sick—we ain't seen him since. 'Cept the other evening," he murmured. "I figured I caught a glimpse of him hopping around with one of the guys—but mebbe I was mistaken."

The chums stared at each other as the old man stopped speaking. There was something strange here. Why had the under-manager been so angry about the boy going to New Mexico on his old master's orders? Queer! But if he had been ill for so long it seemed as if the chums' hope of gaining permission from him to explore the camp was foredoomed to failure.

"You—you think it would be impossible for us to see him?" asked Sally anxiously.

"Certain sure," replied the old man. "But, say," he added, "if you're so doggone anxious to stay here, why don't you ask for a job apiece? We get plenty of youngsters down here to help on their vacation, and I know there's extra hands wanted."

"Wonderful!" Sally's face glowed. "Gee, what chumps we were not to think of that before! Where do we go?" she asked quickly.

"Why, over there," said the old man, pointing with his pipe to one of the smaller huts. "You'll see the under-manager's daughter in there. Say old Pete sent you—and good luck," he added, as the chums scurried off.

"Thanks, Pete," called back Don. "Guess we're going to need it, too," he added a little apprehensively.

"Yes," agreed Sally. "Our job is to convince

her that what we don't know about lumber-jacking isn't worth knowing. Heads up, everybody!"

A little nervously the chums waited tensely as Sally tapped at the door, grimacing as a tart voice snapped:

"Come in!"

They went in, and saw the back of a down-bent head behind a filing cabinet.

"Well?" rapped the voice, without bothering to look around.

"Ahem!" said Sally. "We—that is—well, we want a job here. We're all strong and willing and we'd work hard. We—we—"

Her voice died away in a choked gurgle as the figure suddenly jerked upright, and with one bound hurtled from behind the filing-cabinet, to stand surveying the stupefied chums with a glare of bitter vindictiveness.

"You!" she choked. "You! So you finally found your way here, eh? And you have the nerve, the audacity to ask for a job? Well, the answer's no—never! And if you dare to show your faces around here again I—I'll put the sheriff on you! Now get out—get out!"

And as her voice rose to a scream she pointed a quivering finger towards the door. But in that moment the chums were incapable of movement. Rooted to the spot with horror, they just stared at the furious girl. Then Sally's lips moved.

"Jennifer!" she murmured. "Jennifer Nolan!"

Her brain whirled. Then suddenly she remembered what old Pete had told them, and in a blaze of white light everything became clear to her.

This girl was the under-manager's daughter. Then her name was not Nolan, but Dolland. And that—that meant that the under-manager was their old enemy himself, the Masked Rider!

SALLY'S BRIGHT IDEA



HOW Sally got out of the room she never knew. She felt completely dazed as she halted outside to face her chums, as white-faced and staggered as she was herself.

"I—I can't believe it," she muttered at length. "It doesn't seem possible. And yet—and yet it all fits in."

"Fits in?" echoed Jill hollowly. "You mean—"

"I mean what Pete told us about the under-manager going haywire when he found Jed's boy had gone off. He must have had some inkling of the old man's find, have wanted to get it for himself—"

"But his illness," put in Johnny. "What about that?"

"Pretext," replied Sally, her voice growing more firm. "It's as plain as daylight. He just pretended to be ill so that he could go off after the boy. His chase led him all the way to Dixon, and then to New Mexico and back again."

"And that was why he always wore a mask or disguise," put in Don quickly. "Of course! He just didn't dare risk anyone recognising him when he was supposed to be ill back here. After all, there's always lumber-men travelling around everywhere. Even Mr. Carson might have recognised him. He's been here."

"Exactly!" said Sally. "So at last we've found out who the Masked Rider is. But where does it get us?"

"Just nowhere," said Fay bitterly. "With Jennifer in charge here we've as much chance of getting to that cave, even if we could find a way of scaling the mountain, as we have of flying."

Jill shrugged hopelessly. "Licked!" she said listlessly. "And we were so confident—" She gave a short, bitter laugh. "Well, we certainly counted our chickens before they were hatched. Guess it's good-bye, mine, for little Jill."

"Jill, don't say that. We—we'll think of something."

But Sally's tone lacked conviction. The odds

seemed to be stacked too heavily against them, and despairingly the Merry-makers wandered past the huts, making for the gates.

"Wonder if Jennifer and her father know about Bear Cave?" asked Fay in a flat voice. "We never did know whether he was able to read what was on the paper he took from Pasquali before he threw it away."

"You can guess he's got a pretty good notion what we're looking for," replied Don bitterly. "And with us out of the way he'll have a clear field for exploring."

"On top of which he won't be tied down for time like us," said Johnny moodily. "Once Jill's time limit has expired the mine will become anyone's property."

They turned round by the next hut, and approached the large shack from which the blue smoke was still lazily rising—and there saw something which at any other time would have brought shouts of laughter from them.

For seated on the wooden step of the hut was Pete, now clad in a dirty white apron, a grubby white hat perched comically on his grey head. His face, already lined, seemed to have become even more so during the last few minutes as with head in hands, his elbows on his knees, he stared lugubriously before him.

Beside him sat Ko-ko, in exactly the same attitude, heaving the same deep sighs as his master.

Pete looked up as the chums approached.

"No luck?"

"No luck," replied Sally, with a heavy sigh. Pete sighed even more deeply.

"Seems everybody's got troubles today," he murmured heavily. "I'm mighty sorry you been disappointed, strangers, but I'm mortal feared about what's happened to me."

"And what," asked Fay in her gentle way, "has happened to you?"

"It's the cook," replied Pete. "Just upped and left. And me with my party to-day—first party I've ever had. Was going to be swell, too," he added wistfully. "All the boys was kinda excited—said they wouldn't come in to midday meal to-day 'cos of having such a swell feed to-night. I got chickens, sweet-corn—was going to have flapjacks, too. Saved all my money for it. And now there's no one to cook it. And what the boys'll say after a hard day in the forest and no hot food to-night—" He gave a little shiver.

"Oh, Pete, that's too bad," murmured Jill, finding, even in her own unhappiness, a wave of sympathy for the worried old man. "If only we could help. Sally—"

But Sally, her eyes suddenly ablaze, gave a little cry.

"Pete," she cried, "do you mean the cook won't come back—that you'll be without one, that there'll be no one to cook the men's food?"

"I mean just that," replied the old man. "And where we're gonna get another cook I just don't know. But what I do know is that the boys won't work without a good hot meal. Like as not they'll all quit."

"Then—then if someone cooked a good hot meal, if somebody got your party ready, you think they might stand the chance of getting the job as cook?" asked Sally, her voice trembling a little.

"Lady, I reckon anyone who could cook is as good as engaged right here and now," replied the old man forcefully. "Food is Red Rube's number one priority. He'll not let anything or anybody interfere with his meals, I reckon."

For a moment Sally stood still, her cheeks glowing. Then with a snap of her fingers she turned on her wondering chums.

"Then, shipmates," she said vibrantly, "into the kitchen we go. We'll turn out a meal this evening that'll make those boys think they've never eaten before. We'll give Red Rube such a feed that whatever Jennifer has to say about it he'll be begging us to stay. Come on!"

And into the kitchen she charged, her chums on her heels.

Another instalment of this exciting serial will appear in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** so be sure you don't miss your copy.



The FLATTERER

She Would Not Trust

(Continued
from
page 4.)

Ruth had apparently been stirring up feeling, and Ruth was at the head of a dozen Stackhill girls when Jean walked through the gates. Immediately she found herself surrounded by a hostile crowd.

"Well, I must say you've got a cheek!" Ruth said. "Fancy just strolling into the club as though nothing had happened."

"What has?" Jean asked deliberately.

"What has?" It was Pearl Taylor who took up the argument. "Who made Doyle Blackwell fall into the stream yesterday? We saw it, Jean Partridge."

"Well, am I denying it?" Jean asked.

"But why did you do it?"

"Because he was following me."

"And why should you be afraid of his following you?" sneered Ruth. "What were you going to do that was so secret?"

"That concerns me," Jean said decisively.

"Yeah!" Ruth sneered. "I'm pretty certain it was just rotten bad temper on your part because he's picked me to be his partner and not you!"

Jean regarded her with scorn.

"You're sure you are his partner?"

"Absolutely," Ruth returned with relish. "He actually confirmed it after your treatment of him. He came home with me, you see, to get his things dry. Hallo, here he comes," she added. "Now look out for trouble, Jean Partridge."

Jean braced herself as she flung round, ready at once for battle. Doyle Blackwell, that same lazy smile on his face, was strolling through the gates. He nodded pleasantly to the group; to Jean's astonishment the nod also included her. An uncertain little silence fell.

"Ah, Jean," he beamed, "the very girl I wanted to see." He looked quizzically around. "What's-happening? Trouble?"

"We were just telling Jean Partridge what we think of her for pitching you into the stream," Ruth said indignantly.

"What——" he frowned. "Oh, that!" And, to Jean's astonishment, he went off into a burst of laughter.

"But——aren't you going to tick her off?" Ruth raged.

"No. Why should I? As a rule, gentlemen don't tick ladies off." It was Ruth's turn to flush. "A ducking doesn't hurt a chap. Matter of fact," he added, "it did me good—yes, a lot of good! Gave me a wonderful appetite for supper, y'know! But, apart from that, Jean, may I have a word with you? Alone?"

Jean eyed him, baffled, and wondering.

"Ray, can I borrow your office?" Doyle went on, addressing the club secretary.

Ray said he could. Doyle nodded pleasantly again. Watched by the puzzled group, he led the way into the secretary's office, and there held out a chair. But Jean did not sit down. She felt more ready for battle standing up.

"What do you want?" she asked bluntly.

"Just a talk—if you will talk," he said pleasantly. "Sorry you were having such a

rough time out there—but don't let that worry you. They don't understand, of course."

"And neither do I," Jean reminded him straightly.

"No?" he smiled. "You—er—don't look on me as a friend?"

"Not exactly."

"Pity."

Regretfully he shook his head. "Because I am, y'know—your best friend, next to your brother—or does one put a brother on the friendship list?" He saw her stiffen, her eyes gleaming. "You see, your brother also happens to be a friend of mine."

She didn't believe that. Jim had never even mentioned Doyle. She was on her guard; the suspicion that he was in the plot against Jim was growing on her, warning her.

"Then if that's so," she smiled, "I congratulate you on having one of the best friends a fellow could have."

"So?" His eyes shone. "Now there's a sister for you," he added. "But, tell me, where were you going in such a hurry yesterday evening?"

"You tell me first why you followed me," she countered.

"Follow?" He shrugged. "Is that what you think? I didn't! We were in the woods, and I happened to see you——" he broke off. "But you don't believe me. You don't believe that, any more than you believe I've selected you as my partner in the tennis doubles?"

"I don't," she told him frankly, but was again aware that she was beginning to feel uncertain.

"Never mind. You'll see," he said blithely. "To-night I give in my nomination to the committee, and—well, perhaps you'd like to see it?" He plunged a hand into the inside pocket of his coat and withdrew a handful of folded papers.

And, as he did so, a slip smaller than the others fell to the ground. Mechanically Jean noticed it; impulsively almost stooped. But she didn't. Quite suddenly she stepped forward, putting her foot over it. Doyle, she felt sure, had not seen it fall.

And suddenly her heart was racing. For on that document she had just gained a flashing glimpse of a pencilled name—Jim Partridge.

"There," Doyle said, and he smoothed out a sheet of paper and handed it to her. "Now will you believe?"

She took the paper and looked at it. Sure enough, there was his recommendation—his own name, with hers as his partner. Her heart lifted a little. She wanted to believe it now—wanted to, except that she still could not understand why he had told Ruth that she would be his partner.

And also she wanted to read that note which now rested under her foot. But—but how could she do that?

Swiftly she had an idea. It was not an idea of which she was proud, but if Doyle was deceiving her, wasn't she entitled to deceive him?

"How do I know that's the document you'll really give to the committee?" she asked slowly. "Supposing you change your mind again?"

He looked hurt.

"Isn't there any way I can prove it to you?" he asked quietly.

It was the very answer she had hoped for. "Yes," she said, and glanced through the window. "There's Ray. Put it in an envelope, and go and give it to him."

"You'll come with me?"

"N-no." She faltered a little. "I'll wait. I

can watch easily enough from here. I—I don't want to start any more fuss."

He smiled then, with a shrug, produced an envelope, wrote upon it boldly—"The Committee"—and sealed it. He smiled again as he went out of the room, leaving her just a little ashamed, a little bewildered, and more than a little shaken.

But she did not watch his progress towards the secretary. She wasn't really interested, for she knew that, even if he handed over that document now, he could withdraw it later. But swiftly she stooped, swiftly snatched up the folded message beneath her feet.

And then her eyes gleamed. She felt a prickle of anger sweep through her as she read:

"We know exactly where to lay our hands on James Partridge in Minster Woods. Meet us at the Barn at the time arranged and we'll go and fetch him.—WHEELER & BROWN."

Wheeler & Brown! She knew their names—the names of two prefects at Willowmere! Those, evidently, were the fellows who were searching for Jim.

Contempt once more rose within her—contempt mingled with a bitter disappointment, for she had longed in her heart to prove that Doyle Blackwell was not a traitor. She knew that in spite of everything she still liked him.

But this proved the hypocrite he was. Resolutely she stifled any other feeling than one of contempt.

She was warned now. He was out to betray Jim.

She heard his step outside. Hurriedly she fought down her emotions. Calmly she thrust the letter into her pocket. By an effort faced him as he came in.

"Well?" he smiled gently. "I handed it to the secretary. Are you satisfied now?"

"I'm satisfied," she answered with apparent humility.

"Well, thank goodness for that." He laughed lightly, almost happily. "That makes us friends again, doesn't it? And—oh, boy, how I'm looking forward to that match with you as my partner, Jean. But—" He looked at the clock. Suddenly he paused. "You—you don't mind if I leave you now? I—I've a rather important appointment—in—in the town."

She was alert immediately. Thinking of the letter in her pocket, she thought she could guess what that appointment was. He was off to meet Wheeler and Brown—meet them so that they could go and track down her unsuspecting brother.

"Is—is it urgent?" she asked.

"I'm afraid so—very."

She sighed. But her brain was working quickly. Her own duty was plain. She had got to prevent Doyle meeting those prefects—had got to put him completely off the trail until she herself had seen Jim and had warned him of his peril. As he had said he was going into the town—well, she'd hold him to that.

"Then would you mind if I came with you?" she asked disarmingly. She noticed with inward grimness the sudden dismay in his face and knew she was on the right lines.

"Yes, of course, you can come with me," he faltered. "But you won't mind if I bolt as soon as we get to the town?"

"Not a bit," she said, knowing that he meant he'd have to bolt back to the Barn—his real destination—to keep his appointment there.

So they went out together.

There was a lonely stretch of road running through a thickly wooded copse which lay between the club and the town. About a mile along lay the old watch-tower—a strong, formidable landmark, which formed one of the outposts of Willowmere School itself. Its oak door, fastened now only by a strong hasp and staple from outside, and its two tiny barred windows, had given Jean her idea.

Her heart began to thump more rapidly as they came within sight of the tower. She was no longer listening to Doyle's chatter. But suddenly she stopped.

"What's that?"

"What?" He glanced at her. "I didn't hear anything—"

"I—I thought—" she breathed. "Doyle, yes! I'm sure. There's something—some animal trapped in the watch-tower! Listen!"

They listened, but there was no sound. He smiled with easy reassurance.

"Imagination, Jean! Now, as I was saying—"

"Doyle, please. Don't—don't go on without looking I'm almost sure."

Good-naturedly he went to the door. He lifted the iron peg that was threaded into the staple, and pulled the door open. Then he looked into the dark, circular interior which confronted him.

"Not even a mouse, Jean. Not even—I say!"

The last word was jerked out by him in a surprised yelp. For Jean, behind him, had suddenly pushed with all her strength. And as, with a gasp, he went floundering down the little step that gave access into the interior, she had caught the door, slammed it to, and with feverish fingers jammed back the peg.

"Jean!" he cried from inside. "Jean, you can't do this—"

But Jean had. She was racing along the road now as fast as her feet could take her.

SURPRISES IN MINSTER WOOD



JEAN was sorry for playing that trick; but she was also glad.

She was sorry because it was against her nature to be so tricky. But it served him right, she told herself. It was the only way in which she could save her brother. Now—now to get the prefects off the scene!

She had heard of Wheeler and Brown from Jim—not very popular fellows, she gathered. She had never met them, however, and they did not know her—which was going to help her now.

The Barn was one of those pre-war roadside cafes which had degenerated now into little more than a wayside shack, and was a good mile, if not more, from the watch-tower—on the road that led to Minster Wood.

She was breathless with running when she got there.

They were waiting outside the cafe as she approached. Though she did not know the boys by name, they both wore Willowmere uniforms and were obviously seniors.

"Are you—are you waiting for Doyle Blackwell?" she asked, approaching them.

They regarded her sharply.

"Why?"

"Are you Wheeler and Brown?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, I've just come from Doyle," she said. "I've a message for you. He says—go back to the watch-tower. You'll find him there."

The two looked at each other, puzzled.

"But what does he mean by that? We had an appointment with him here."

"I know," she said darily. "But Doyle is at the watch-tower. I've just left him there, and he needs you—most urgently. Please go," she added.

"You're sure this is on the level?" the taller of the two asked, with a belligerent stare at Jean.

"You'll find out when you get to the tower," Jean replied.

"Come on, better get cracking," the other muttered. "What about you?"

"I'm going to have a coffee," Jean answered coldly.

She breathed freely as they turned, then, as

if carrying out her declared intention, she turned towards the café, but no sooner had the two boys vanished than she was dashing back towards the road again.

Now to warn Jim! Now to get him away from the Home Guard post before these fellows should find him.

She felt the morning had been a triumph so far. But the lightness died abruptly from her heart when she stepped into the road again. For there, hurrying towards her, an expression of surprise on her face, was Ruth.

Ruth! What was she doing here?

But Jean knew even as the question flashed into her mind. Ruth also was probably out to help catch him, and had come to meet Wheeler and Brown—and Doyle.

Ruth had paused, just a little disconcerted at sight of Jean.

"You—what are you doing here?" she blurted.

"What are you?" Jean returned.

"I have an appointment," Ruth answered.

"Perhaps I have, too," Jean smiled. "Going to wait long?"

Ruth threw her a glance of dislike. But it was a baffled, puzzled look. Very determinedly she took up her place on the pavement, her attitude suggesting that she was going to remain there till something happened.

But Jean's heart was racing now. Her brain was alert. She hadn't expected Ruth, and in a quarter of an hour those prefects would be back, and so would Doyle! She shrugged.

"Perhaps I won't wait, after all," she said.

"See you later, Ruth!"

Casually she commenced to stroll away. But, to Jean's alarm, Ruth fell into step beside her.

"Perhaps I won't wait, either," she said. "I'll come along with you—"

"But I don't want you to come with me," Jean protested.

"I'll come just the same," Ruth sneered. "The road's free to all. In a hurry, all of a sudden, aren't you?"

Jean shrugged. But her heart was racing now. How could she get rid of Ruth?

And then behind her she heard the bus. She threw a quick glance back. Suddenly her eyes were glimmering. She thrust a hand into her pocket and gripped the copper coin she felt there. The bus was very near now. All at once she flung the coin behind her.

With a clatter it fell on the pavement. Ruth, as Jean hoped and expected, turned to peer. In a moment Jean was running. By the time Ruth had picked up the coin she was breathlessly boarding the still moving bus. Ruth gave a shout.

"You—you tricky thing—"

But Jean laughed then. She stood on the footboard just until the bus had turned the corner two hundred yards down the road, and then, rapidly thrusting her fare into the conductor's hand, jumped off and fled.

Five minutes later she was plunging into Minster Wood.

But when she reached the abandoned Home Guard post in the wood Jim was not there!

Frantically Jean hunted around. It was ten minutes before she found him—suddenly popping up from a clump of bushes near the river. He looked utterly amazed at seeing her.

"Gosh, Jean, what's up?" he asked. "I've just been having a bathe—"

"Jim—!" She looked round frantically as she uttered the word. "Have—have you found anything yet?"

A rueful smile twisted his lips.

"Nothing—yet," he said. "I was wrong about the grotto. If Alec Stevens hid the stuff there in the first place, he must have removed it later. It's been pretty tough since yesterday with Wheeler and Brown wandering about in the wood; I've had to be pretty careful, you know—"

"Jim, you've got to clear out of this—now," she said quickly. "Wheeler and Brown, and another fellow are already on your track."

His face was blank.

"Oh, heck! But where can I go?"

"Come with me," she said. "You can hide out in the old ruins until to-night. Then—then—if nothing has happened, you'd better come home, and let's all discuss things. But the woods aren't safe now, Jim. You've just got to get away—"

In her agitation she was already tugging him. Jim, looking a little dazed, followed her.

But hardly had they emerged into the path, than—

"There he is. There's the rotter!" came a voice. "Partridge—"

With a gasp of dismay, Jean turned. With a jump, Jim faced round, suddenly clenching his fists. But it was too late then. For there, rushing towards them, were Wheeler and Brown, and behind them the scurrying, excitedly triumphant figure of Ruth!

"Jim—!" Jean gasped. "Leave him alone!" she cried next moment, as Wheeler jumped at him. "He's innocent—innocent, I tell you—"

"He's not; he's the thief! Hold him!" Ruth shrieked. "Take him back to school to be expelled! And she—she's in it, too," she flamed, wheeling viciously upon Jean. "She's been helping him. I expect she sold the coins he pinched—"

"Why, you—you—!" Jean choked

She saw the prefects' suspicious eyes upon her.

Wheeler, still struggling with Jim, set his lips.

"We'll go into that later," he promised grimly. "Anyway, you're coming with us, young Partridge—"

"Is he?" asked a sudden, surprising voice.

Jean wheeled. Then she fell back. For strolling along the path from the very bushes where she had met Jim was—

Doyle Blackwell!

Doyle—yes. Still looking as cool as ever, still with that maddeningly calm smile on his face.

"Doyle—!" Jean breathed. But it was Jim who received the biggest shock. There was an absolute whoop of joy in his voice as he goggled at the newcomer.

"Doyle—you! You old bouncer! Doyle, what on earth—"

"Jim, do—do you know him?" Jean stammered.

"Know him? Does a chap know his best pal?" Jim cried. "Doyle—why didn't I think of asking you to help me out of this mess—"

"There was no need to ask, old lad," Doyle Blackwell returned. He grinned at the stupefied Jean; then he looked at the prefects.

"I should let him go if I were you, old tops," he said, "because you've got hold of the wrong onion. If you want the real guilty laddie, go and collar Alec Stevens back at the school. And if you want his confederate, you'd better take this young lady back with you," he added. "Because—!" he shook his head regretfully at Ruth—"she's the one who hid the stolen property for him."

"What?" Ruth cried, but her face was suddenly as white as chalk. "Doyle Blackwell, how dare you—"

"Your brother, Alec, gave it to you," Doyle said. "First he hid it in the grotto here, but when he found Jim was searching around in the wood he handed it to you for safer keeping—"

"You dare! Prove it!" cried Ruth.

"Certainly." And, to her amazement, he produced a small handbag—a girl's handbag—from his pocket. "I think," he said easily, "there will be no difficulty in identifying this handbag as yours, Miss Stevens. Wheeler, old man, I'd better give it to you, because it contains the Roman coin collection from the school and also a couple of notes which Alec

wrote to his sister— I say, old thing, bear up," he added.

For Ruth, deadly white, was swaying on her feet.

"Where—where did you get that?" she cried.

"Where you hid it, old thing—in the cupboard in your own front room." He frowned. "I hate to confess I abused your hospitality that night you so kindly took me home after my ducking in the river. But—it was in a worthy cause, you know," he murmured reproachfully.

IT was all like a dream to Jean—these sudden, shattering revelations. But she felt she understood when, later, between her jubilant brother and the still grave-faced Doyle, she walked back to the club.

For it was then that Jim and Doyle between them told her the whole story.

Doyle and Jim were pals—great pals. But not school pals. They had appeared, been chums in the same Scouts' troop, where Doyle had gained himself a reputation for tracking—and for tennis.

Tennis, in fact, had taken him up and down the country. As a champion, he had been greatly in demand. Then, finally, he had come back to Stackhill, and, calling on Jim at school, had learned of the dreadful thing that had happened to him.

"Knowing Jim as I did, I knew he'd run away for some good reason," Doyle said. "But I didn't know he was in the neighbourhood. Why didn't you tell me, Jean?"

She flushed.

"I never even guessed you knew Jim!"

"True, O Queen," he answered gravely. "But to proceed. Inquiring, I saw Alec Stevens with his sister. I put two and two together, and decided that if I wanted to get at the truth about Jim, then the sister was the girl to help me. And so—"

"And so," Jean guessed, "you made up to her and promised that she should be your partner—after promising me?"

Reproachfully he shook his head.

"Not so, Jean—not so. If Ruth had—er—that unfortunate impression, could I be blamed? Think hard. Think well. Recollect, if you can, my exact words. I chose them carefully.

"I told Ruth I could only recommend my partner to the committee—but I didn't tell her who the partner was to be. Was it my fault if she jumped to conclusions? I admit I said she was the only partner from my point of view—but I didn't say at tennis. She was the only partner to help me find Jim! Any need for me to go on?"

Jimmy grinned. Jean flushed. But at last she understood, and grateful affection filled her. How glad she was now to find that she had misjudged Doyle. How splendid to think that he was really hers and Jim's friend—and such a clever friend. She looked at him.

"What happens now?" she asked.

"Now," he said briskly, "we're off to the committee meeting, and I'm handing in that recommendation. Because, Jean, you are going to be my partner, you know—and could a fellow ask a better?"

"Rather not," Jim said glowingly.

And that tribute was certainly justified when Stackhill put its junior champions on the courts in the championship match.

The smashing defeat than Jean and Doyle inflicted upon their opponents is still a byword in the club to this day!

THE END.

"THE UNWANTED BIRTHDAY GUEST"—By Elise Probyn. Look out for this grand double-length complete story in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

THE WILD BOY OF THE WOODS

(Continued from page 8)

"That is the way, Miss Ann. I see you understand something about horses."

"Thank you," Ann said demurely.

He wanted to go as soon as he had finished. He did not want the cup he had won, he told her—she could keep that. But as he would have moved off, she caught his sleeve.

"Rick, don't go yet. Let me show you the other horses—please. And—and, Rick, I've made a cake specially for you. Don't say you're going to run away and leave it."

"But your friends—"

"Oh, they're in the paddock! In any case, you aren't afraid of them, are you?"

The challenge brought him proudly to himself. His lips smiled scorn, though for a minute his eyes turned suspiciously towards the paddock. For the next half an hour he allowed himself to be led from stall to stall, often making some helpful comment.

It was more difficult when the inspection was finished to coax him back to the kitchen, but he was obviously relieved when he found no one there. And while he ate the cake, Ann broached the subject that was nearest her heart.

"Rick!" She looked at him pleadingly. "Rick, you'll not let Firebrand get out of training again now, will you? Rick, you remember what I talked to you about yesterday—training him for the Steeplechase? I'm still asking you to do that, Rick."

"I know," he said.

"And, Rick, you—you'll agree, won't you?" He paused.

"I do not know," he said reluctantly. "I like the horse. You I like, also. But these other people"—he frowned—"it is a matter I would rather think over, Miss Ann—"

"But my friends won't hurt you, Rick."

"They cannot do that," he retorted grimly. "Yet they despise me. They could make it difficult. Perhaps if they do not make fun of me, and leave me alone—"

"Rick, they will. I'll promise you they will," she cried eagerly. "Rick, please—oh, please, say you'll train Firebrand for me!"

He hesitated again, but she could tell by the look in his eyes that the promise was coming—that he was at last going to give in.

And then all at once there came a shout from the stableyard, a sudden burst of laughter, the squeal of a horse.

"What—" Rick cried, swinging round.

"Rick, wait!" Ann gasped, sudden dread in her heart. "Rick, finish that cake. I'll be back in a minute."

She knew that something had happened. She flew outside. And then she gasped at what she saw.

A crowd of laughing boys and girls, some mounted, some on foot, stood in front of Rick's shaggy, black horse. And on the horse's back, strapped to the saddle, was the stuffed scarecrow from the neighbouring field, a battered top hat on its head.

The horse itself was rearing and plunging in its mad endeavours to get rid of a cardboard notice which hung around its neck.

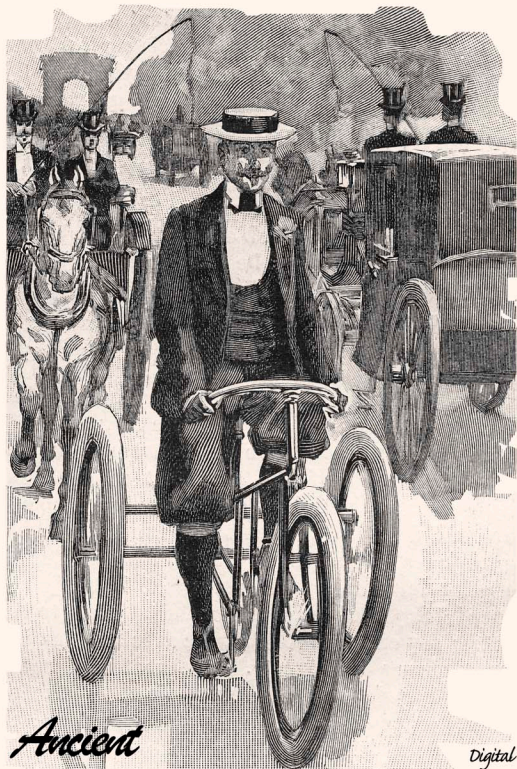
And the notice said:

"Rick Oakley—the Donkey on Horseback!" Ann's eyes flashed. If Rick should see that! Just when she had got him to the point of promising to join the stables! Her heart in her mouth, she plunged forward.

"You—you hateful things!" she panted. "Who did this?"

Whatever you do, don't miss next Friday's enthralling chapters of this grand serial in the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

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