

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

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

Week  
Ending  
Dec. 22nd,  
1945.



## SECRET ALLY of the SCHOOLBOY MASQUERADER

Only Maisie Knew That The New Master Was Really A Schoolboy In Disguise—And She Meant To Keep His Secret—By HAZEL ARMITAGE

### THE CHANGE-OVER

"I WONDER who will be my first customer?" Maisie Lancing murmured excitedly.

She had just opened the shop—her aunt's shop. A costumier's shop it was, very pretty, neat and attractive, situated on the Dovestone Road, just a mile from the famous boys' school of Dovestone Clovey. The mahogany counter, behind which Maisie expectantly stood, was shining and bright. The figures, on which were draped colourful theatrical costumes, stood between her and the windows.

Hopefully Maisie gazed towards the door. For this was her first real experience of running the shop all on her own, though she had now and again assisted aunt on holidays and on odd week-ends.

She loved the work—especially when serving those boys from the near-by Dovestone Clovey School. Secretly she was hoping that her first customer would prove to be one of them now, especially as she knew they had a big costume dance taking place at the school in a few days' time.

But there was no aunt for her to-day. For Aunt Emily had been ill, and had gone off to the seaside to convalesce, leaving Maisie in complete charge.

And, if Maisie made a success of the job, aunt was going to take her into partnership.

"So I must show aunt how well I can manage," Maisie told herself. "I must—Golly!"

The shop bell jangled; the door came open, and there, to Maisie's delight, was—a customer! One of the Dovestone boys at that!

Maisie was instantly the brisk business girl. A nice boy, she thought—yes, decidedly, with his shock of black, curly hair, his frank, blue eyes

and his athletic frame. He was a boy to whom she took an immediate liking. He grinned, and then came towards the counter.

"I say—" he said, and then stood staring at her. "Gosh! You're awfully pretty!" he said frankly. "Are you in charge of this shop?"

"I am," Maisie said. "What can I do for you, sir?"

"Yes, but cut out all the sir—please! I'm Jack—Jack Hayward." He bent forward a little. "I don't expect—" he said, and then broke off nervously as he glanced around. "Have you—have you—"

"I suppose you come from the school?" she said, to help him out.

"Yes—yes, I come from the school all right. I want a costume for the dance. A—a—master's gown," he added in a rush.

"Certainly. We have a master's outfit in the wardrobe there. I believe one came from your school in the first place, so if you will step that way—" She indicated a door to her right. "I expect you're planning some fun for the dance?" she ventured conversationally.

"Fun?" He shrugged. "Perhaps you might call it fun," he said. "It depends on the part you're playing. Do I go in here?"

"That's right: choose which one you like," Maisie said, and watched him as he disappeared through the little door she had indicated.

She was wondering if she should follow, perhaps to help him in his choice and to show him the wigs and boxes of make-up also in the room, when there came another clang from the shop door bell.

Maisie turned and put on her most business-like manner. This time it was a girl who came in.

"I want a mask—a purple velvet one, if

possible—to match the harlequin outfit I bought yesterday," she announced. "Have you got one? I'm going to the Dovestone School dance," she added on a note of conscious pride. "Lucky you!" commented Maisie. She picked a purple mask from a drawer, offered it up for the girl's inspection, and then wrapped it up. "Five shillings, please!"

The girl paid. Mask in hand, she whisked out of the shop, shooting a last superior glance at Maisie, as though pitying her for not coming to the dance, too. Maisie turned her eyes again to the door through which Jack Hayward had vanished, and was beginning to step from behind the counter when the door opened.

"How'll I do?" asked an inquiring voice.

Maisie blinked. Now she saw a figure in a master's mortar-board and gown, a pair of thick tortoise-shell spectacles on its nose, and a little moustache decorating its upper lip. If it had not been for the voice she would have been completely deceived.

"Gosh, it—it's not you?" she asked wonderingly.

"It is—Jack Hayward!" he grinned. "Behold me now—Mr. Louis Treville, arts master from Vancouver. Pretty good, isn't it? Thanks to your jolly efficient gowns department. But, I say," he added anxiously.

"Yes?" She sensed a sudden note of urgency in his voice. "What's wrong?"

"Not much—yet." He smiled wryly. "You look a jolly decent sort, as well as being pretty," he said sincerely. "Would you be a pal?"

"Why, of course!" Involuntarily she found the words leaving her lips. She wondered even as she uttered them if she was doing the right thing, but, somehow, she decided to take the risk. "What's the idea?"

"I—well, I'm playing a joke—sort of—in connection with the dance. You won't let on, will you?"

"No," she answered.

"The other chaps—they're on their way," he went on awkwardly. "They don't know that I've come here. But they're expecting a new master at the school—an arts master, named Louis Treville, who comes from Canada. You get the idea? I'm playing the part—for the time being. Don't give me away, will you?"

"Of course not," she said again, and felt her sincerity firm as she met those frank blue eyes. "But— isn't it risky?" Then, as she heard footsteps approaching the shop, she impulsively raised a warning hand. "Look out—someone's coming," she whispered.

Instantly he stepped back into the make-up room, just as the bell jangled and the door swung open. Next moment half a dozen boys, all in Dovestone uniform, surged into the shop.

"Hail, smiling morn!" one of them cried. "I say, where's auntie?"

"If you mean my aunt, Miss Lancing, she's away," Maisie said. "I'm her niece, and I'm in charge. Anything I can do for you?"

"Rather," the boy grinned. "We want extra oddments to go with our costumes for the dance. I say, are you coming?"

"I haven't been invited," Maisie told him.

"Then what about accepting an invitation now—from me? Supposing—"

"Supposing nothing," another boy said, and eagerly pushed forward. "Don't make everything your show, Denny. Won't you come as my guest? You wouldn't want to be seen around with old Denny here."

"Nor with Bob," another voice cut in. "The ass can't dance, Miss Lancing. Now supposing you come as my guest? I can dance—"

"Yes, he won the clodhoppers' cup last term!" another boy snorted. "As graceful as a barrel on a pair of stilts. Now, I suggest, Miss Lancing—"

"Maisie Lancing." Maisie laughed. The boys were all crowding forward now, obviously forgetful of their original mission in their anxiety to claim her as a partner.

The door of the room containing the costumes flew open again. A voice sounded.

"Boys, boys, what is this? Is this a sample of Dovestone behaviour?"

There was a general gasp, an abrupt wheel towards the cause of the interruption. And Maisie herself gasped as she saw Jack Hayward, in his borrowed gown, now sweeping forward majestically, looking the master he was supposed to represent to the very life. "Really," he murmured reproachfully, "I—er—am surprised, boys!"

He spoke with an accent that made Maisie stare—an accent with a real Canadian twang. If she had not known this was Jack Hayward in disguise she would have been completely deceived.

"I—I'm sorry, sir," stammered the boy who had spoken first. "We—we didn't know you were here—"

"I guess not," the other said. "But you know now. And you know who I am?"

"Yes, sir. At least"—the boy shook his head—"we know we're expecting a new master from Canada—Mr. Louis Treville. But we didn't expect to find him here."

"I'll say you didn't," the disguised Jack answered good-humouredly. "I guess I didn't expect you to find me here myself. But I'm a stranger hereabouts, and I thought—well, I guess I thought I'd make sure I was on the right road—"

It might have had a double meaning, that explanation, Maisie thought, but it satisfied the boys. He went on:

"But I'm sure glad to have met with you boys. Take no notice of the tick-off; I guess that's how all we masters are expected to introduce ourselves. Now, if you'll do what you came to do, and then escort me back to school, I'll be real glad."

"Yes, sir. Of course, sir."

And so, in an atmosphere much more subdued, the purchases were made, Maisie handing them over the counter. Nobody but she saw the wink that came from the "new master," and nobody but she was aware of that grinning "thumbs up" gesture he made to her as, in the midst of the boys, he left the shop. But when he had gone Maisie stood staring thoughtfully at the door. She was wondering—wondering—

She liked Jack Hayward. But, all the same, she had a strange feeling that there was more behind this lark of his than appeared on the surface. Supposing—

Ciang! went the bell. Into the shop stormed the next customer. Another Dovestone boy.

This boy Maisie most definitely did not like. Few people did like Sidney Drayton, the prefect. He was always bad-tempered; always looking for trouble. Maisie knew him slightly. She had met him on a previous occasion in the shop when he had complained—wrongly—that she had given him short change. He had not troubled to apologise when he had been corrected of his error.

"Good-morning," Maisie said brightly. "And what sort of a costume would you like?"

He stared at her. From her his glance went suspiciously round the shop.

"I don't want a costume," he said surlily. "I'm looking for someone—a boy. A Dovestone boy. I've reason to believe he's been here."

"Quite probable," smiled Maisie. "Half a dozen of them have just gone out—"

"You mean that gang with the new master—?" Sidney Drayton frowned. "He wasn't with them. This boy came in earlier—must have. Chap with dark hair and blue eyes. Name of Jack Hayward. Have you seen him?"

Maisie looked at him quickly. She sensed trouble suddenly; sensed that the prefect had no good intentions towards Jack Hayward. Swiftly her mind flew back to Jack—that cautious way he had entered the shop, that suggestion of uneasiness in his attitude, the

surprising way he had transformed himself into the new master. She felt suddenly that she knew he had adopted that disguise to get away from this prefect.

And instantly Maisie was all on Jack's side. Instantly all her instincts were urging her to help him.

"I really couldn't say," she replied. "He may have been here, of course."

The prefect's eyes narrowed a little.

"That boy came in—but he never went out again," he said measuredly. "I know that for an absolute fact. Which means," he added, "that he must still be here."

"There is certainly no boy here," Maisie retorted. "You don't suggest I'm hiding him, or something?"

"It'll be pretty serious for you if you are," he said grimly. "It'll probably mean that this shop will be put out of bounds to the school. Helping any boy to break school rules is serious enough, but to give refuge to a boy who's just been expelled—"

He saw her eyes widen; saw the horror that flashed into them.

"Expelled?" she breathed.

"Expelled." The word was almost a snarl.

"Jack Hayward was kicked out of Dovestone Clovey this morning for theft. He never caught the train he was supposed to catch, and the last place he was known to visit was this shop. So now, if you do know anything, you'd better admit it."

#### MAISIE VISITS THE SCHOOL



THERE was more than a hint of threat in the words. There was a decided viciousness. Even in that shattering moment Maisie found herself wondering at the venom of the boy, found herself recoiling from him. But was it true what he had said?

Never for a single moment had she thought of such a dramatic explanation of Jack Hayward's behaviour. But in a second she was recovering herself. She knew at once that she did not believe this boy. Jack, whatever else he might be, was a thief. If he had really been expelled on that charge there was a horrible mistake somewhere.

But she had to be careful what she said.

She knew that Sidney Drayton had power. She knew that he spoke no more than the simple truth when he said that the shop would be put out of bounds if she was found helping a Dovestone Clovey delinquent. And that, certainly, would be serious, considering that her aunt depended so largely upon the school's custom.

"I'm sorry," she said coldly, "but I'm afraid I cannot help you."

"Did he come here?"

"How can I say? You don't expect me, surely, to ask the name of every customer?" Maisie demanded. "And just to assure yourself that no one is here now," she added, seeing the hostile doubt still in his eyes, "you can search the place."

"Thanks, I will," he said gruffly.

Maisie hadn't meant that offer to be accepted. Instantly she was alarmed as she saw his eyes turn towards the door behind which Jack Hayward had disguised himself. She remembered with a sudden terrified start that Jack might have left his cap, or coat, or scarf in the room. In a flash she was on the other side of the counter.

"Please, not there," she cried, as the prefect made a move towards it.

"Why not?"

"Be-cause that—that's a private room," she said, and she turned the key.

"I see. But supposing I insist?"

"Then you'll have to insist," she told him hotly. "You can search anywhere else. I

give you my word of honour there's no one in that room. If that doesn't satisfy you—"

"It doesn't," he said curtly. "All right, leave it," he added with a sudden gesture. "It'd only be a waste of time anyway. All the same, just remember this—if I do find you've been helping this boy—then you're in for it. Good-morning!"

He strode to the door. With immeasurable relief Maisie watched him go, her cheeks still hot. What a rude boy. She hoped she wouldn't see him again.

She jumped as the door came open again and he reappeared as though a sudden thought had struck him.

"What made the new master come in here?" he demanded.

She started at the question, but as quickly recovered herself.

"How do I know? Anyway, I didn't ask him."

He frowned at her again, grunted, and once more went out. Maisie fanned herself.

She waited a few moments in case he should come back again. He didn't. Then abruptly she made a dive for the door on her left, unlocked it again and hastily caught up the cap and the tell-tale overcoat which the careless Jack had left behind. Just in case of accident she stuffed them under the counter.

Ncw—now what was she to do?

She'd got to do something. Obviously Sidney Drayton wasn't satisfied. That last question of his seemed to suggest that his suspicious mind was coupling facts. Jack ought to be warned—must be warned.

How?

She knew, even as the question occurred to her. It was, fortunately, early closing day today, which meant that business finished at one o'clock. On what excuse, though, could she go to the school and see Jack—possibly still masquerading there now as the new arts master?

An idea came to her. One or two of the other boys had left parts of costumes for alteration. What was more natural than that she should deliver them?

And at the same time she would take back to Jack his cap and coat.

"The very notion," Maisie told herself.

After lunch, with four or five parcels in the carrier on the handle-bars of her cycle, she set off, humming softly to herself, to the ancient school of Dovestone Clovey.

Maisie had never visited Dovestone Clovey before. She was impressed as she approached it, and, finally dismounting at the great wrought-iron gates, was confronted by the middle-aged gatekeeper who came out of his lodge near by. He smiled when he learned who she was and what was her business.

"Yes, miss, I expect they're keeping you pretty busy with the dance," he commented. "You say you want to see Mr. Treville, the new master?"

"Please. Where do I find him?" Maisie asked quickly.

"Nice fellow," the old gatekeeper mused. "Bit young perhaps—but he seems to get on all right with the boys—and that's what matters, isn't it? Go into the West Wing there. You'll find the masters' quarters past the Prefects' room in the rear of the building. Mr. Treville's name will be on his door. You can leave your bike here, miss."

Maisie thanked him. Parcels in arm, she went forward. She reached the door of the West Wing. Feeling almost timid, she entered the wide, vaulted hall which stretched beyond it, and, observing the masters' quarters notice, went down the corridor indicated. Her heart was beating fast now. She must demand an explanation from Jack, she was thinking, when a door to her side abruptly opened and a voice spoke.

"Wait a minute, young lady."

Maisie spun round. Then her heart sank. For confronting her, his eyes gleaming, and a

look of suspicion on his face, was Sidney Drayton.

"I—I'm in a hurry," she said.  
"Maybe. But you're on school property," he reminded her. "As a prefect, I want to know where are you going, and what have you got there?"

"Only—only some costumes that needed altering," she said. "I'm delivering them."

"Bit unusual, isn't it? I thought the boys generally called?"

"Perhaps they did, to save my aunt," Maisie retorted. "But I'm in charge of the shop now, and as it's early closing day, I thought I might as well do the job myself. You see—"

"I do. You're in a hurry—yet you've got time to deliver these costumes!" Faintly derisive, a grin crossed his lips. "Still—bring those parcels inside," he added.

She drew back, aghast. Convulsively, she hugged the one parcel that mattered—the parcel which contained Jack's cap and coat—to her side.

"At once!" Drayton snapped.  
She hesitated, but she saw that there was nothing for it but to hope to be able to bluff him.

"Do as I say!"  
She shrugged and followed as he led the way into the room behind him. She put down the parcels—all except the one which belonged to Jack, and which she still clutched beneath her arm. He glanced at the labels.

"And that one?" he asked, indicating the parcel she still held. "Who's that for?"

"It's for—for another customer."

"Indeed?" His eyes glimmered. "Anyway, I'll still have a look at it."

"You won't!" she straightly told him.  
"You dare defy me? Remember, I'm a prefect here."

"And remember," she flashed back, "I'm a free citizen in a free country. My private business is nothing to do with you, Mr. Drayton. This is my parcel—"

"The fact that you've brought it into this school gives me the right to examine it," Drayton rasped. "I've a reason for wanting to see that parcel, Miss Lancing—a reason which affects the school. Now hand it over!"

"I won't—"  
She backed desperately towards the door. But he, his eyes growing small and menacing, was cutting off her retreat. Just one glare he gave, then he sprang. She cried out as he grasped the parcel, flinching in horror as she heard the paper tear. She was remembering the tell-tale label on the coat, the name stitched into the cap.

"Don't! You mustn't!" she cried, frantically pulling at his arm.

His answer was to wrench the parcel out of her hands. And then—

"Say, what's going on here?" a voice asked.

The door had come open. A figure stood there—a figure in gown and mortar-board.

"Jack!" Maisie almost breathed the name aloud. But the disguised Jack Hayward did not even look at her.

He was gazing sternly at the flabbergasted Drayton. And the disconcerted prefect was mumbling incoherently.

"You can hand this young lady her parcel, Drayton," the supposed master said quietly. "And after tea you can come and see me. You need a lesson in manners, prefect that you are. You heard what I said, man? Give the young lady her parcel—at once—"

"But—but I only wanted—"

"At once." Jack said with a snap, and Maisie thrilled at the masterly way he was carrying off his part. "Drayton, you may be a prefect, but that doesn't allow you to be rude to a guest in the school—especially when the guest is a lady. Thank you," he added, as the prefect, a look of fury on his face, handed the parcel over. "Now apologise!"

"Eh?"

"And don't gape, man. Apologise. Tell this young lady you're sorry for having behaved like a low-down cad—"

"Really, sir—"  
"Really!" Jack said, a glint in his eyes. "Either that, Drayton, or I send you to the headmaster. We might see a change in the list of school prefects if I did, eh? Now will you apologise?"

Drayton, under that threat, turned red. He choked. But he did apologise, although the glare in his eyes should have withered Maisie. The disguised master nodded.

"That'll do, I guess. But next time you say you're sorry, try to look less scratchy. I guess you'd better come along with me, miss, if you want any help. These your other parcels?"

He picked them up and bundled them under his arm. With another glance at the completely deflated prefect, he nodded Maisie to precede him, and went out of the room, closing the door behind him. As he closed it he gave Maisie a wink which nearly convulsed her.

They passed along the corridor, across a stone-flagged landing, and into another corridor marked "Masters Only." There Jack opened a door, and waved her into the room.

"My study," he said. "Enter, Maisie."

She went in—without a scared glance round in case someone had heard that friendly use of her name. He gestured her to a chair.

"I think you'll find that comfy," he grinned.

"Gosh, I'm glad to see you. I've been dying to talk to you ever since this morning. How'm I doing?"

"Fine," Maisie breathed. "But—but, Jack, you're not going to keep this up?"

"Why not?"

"Supposing you're found out?"

"Supposing?" He shrugged. "What can they do? I'm expelled, anyway—you'll have heard that by now. This is my one chance."

"Of what?"

"Of proving that they're all wrong and I'm right. But sit down," he repeated, as she remained standing. "And in the first place, thanks—thanks a million for being such a sport. These are my things I left behind, I suppose?"

He picked up the parcel, giving her a grateful glance as he unwrapped it and saw its contents.

"I—I just had to see you," Maisie explained.

"I was hoping you—you'd—"

"You hoped I'd explain?" He eyed her gently. "There's no reason why I shouldn't. I think I'd like to tell you. You know I'm expelled. You know it was for—theft—"

She winced.

"Drayton told me."

"He would!" A bitter smile crossed his lips. "I did not commit the thefts. Things went missing—stolen over a long period—and—well, a few days ago some of the missing things were found—in my locker—"

"But how—"

"I don't know. The discovery came as big a surprise to me as to anyone. Of course, I couldn't explain, so I was hooped out. But I did get a clue. I felt sure that if I only had a few more days at school, I could bowl out the real thief."

"Yes?" Maisie leaned forward excitedly.

"Then, the night before I was expelled, I had a stroke of luck. I happened to be alone in the Head's study—waiting for him—when Mr. Louis Treville rang up—"

"And you answered the phone?"

"Sure!" He grinned. "The line was bad, and he took me for the Head. He rang to say that he wouldn't be arriving this morning, as arranged, but would come at the week-end. And so—"

"And so you got your idea?" Her eyes sparkled. "But—but how did you know what Mr. Treville looked like?"

(Please turn to page 217.)

Featuring **June Gaynor** And **Noel Raymond**

# The CASE of the FRIGHTENED GIRL



## JUNE'S FIRST CLIENT

**JUNE GAYNOR** saw the newly engraved plate the moment she stepped out of the lift.

There it was, on the door of the London flat which served Noel Raymond both as home and professional headquarters:

**"RAYMOND & GAYNOR,  
Private Investigators."**

That notice set the seal on all June's hopes; dispelled all her doubts. Although the arrangements necessary to embark her upon the career she had chosen had been made weeks ago, she had never quite got over the first thrilling shock.

To be junior partner in the firm which her detective uncle had made so famous!

It had seemed too good to be true. June had not been able to get over the feeling that she was living in some wonderful dream. Every morning she half-expected to wake up and find all her hopes shattered.

But now—  
Conscious of a sudden swelling in her heart, breathlessly she surveyed that shining plate, and in a quivering voice read the lettering on it.

"Raymond and Gaynor" she whispered. "Oh, doesn't it sound lovely? Of course, actually I'll only be Uncle Noel's assistant—the word partner is far too grand—but it was sweet of him to have my name put on the plate. At last I really am a detective!"

And, tossing up her handbag, she caught it, then did a pirouette up and down the landing—until she heard a chuckle coming from the lift. Turning, she saw the liftman grinning at her, and, realising that her behaviour was not quite that of a professional detective, she blushed a rosy red. Then, striving to assume a dignity she did not feel, she stepped sedately across to the flat door and felt in her handbag.

She felt another thrill of pride as she took out the gleaming key which Uncle Noel had presented to her only yesterday. Possession of that key made her feel more important than ever, and her eyes sparkled as she fitted it into the lock and opened the door.

Parker, Noel Raymond's trusted manservant, was in the hall. He greeted her with a solemn bow.

"Good-morning, miss," he said. "You will find your private office all ready for you. I trust everything will be to your liking."

And with a respectful hand he indicated a door on the left—a door which had June's name painted on it, and above the name the word: "PRIVATE." Again June's heart swelled with pride, and then as she saw the friendly twinkle in Parker's eyes, she forgot her new-found dignity, and, rushing forward, gave him an impulsive hug.

"Oh, Parker, isn't it simply wizard?" she gasped. "I hardly know whether I'm standing on my head or my heels. I've always wanted to be a professional detective, and, although I've often helped uncle in the past—well, this is the real thing, isn't it?" Anxiously she regarded him. "I'm so scared of letting nunky down," she whispered. "He's been so awfully sweet. Parker"—her voice quivered—"do you really think I can make a success of this new job?"

The manservant smiled, and he put a reassuring, fatherly hand on her shoulder.

"Of course you can, miss," he declared. "The master and I have always been agreed that you were born to be a 'tec. Now don't you worry, miss. You'll be a credit to the old firm. That reminds me, miss." He lowered his voice and again indicated the closed door. "Your first clients are waiting to consult you."

"Con-consult me?" June gave a startled gasp, and she felt her heart beginning to pound. It was a devastating shock to know that her ability was to be put to the test so quickly. "Are you—are you sure they don't want to consult uncle?" she stammered.

A flicker of a smile crossed Parker's gaunt face.

"Well, they did inquire for the master first," he admitted. "But he's been called away."

"C-called away?" echoed June, another tremor of uneasiness seizing her as she realised that she would have to conduct the interview all on her own, without any possi-

bility of securing Noel Raymond's expert advice.

"Yes, miss." The manservant nodded. "He received a telegram yesterday afternoon and left for the North by the night train. He stated that he would be writing to you, miss, and that meanwhile you were to take full charge. Now don't you start upsetting yourself, miss," he added, giving June's shoulder another reassuring pat. "The master has complete confidence in you—and so have I, miss, if I may say so."

"Thank you, Parker." June flashed him a grateful smile. His encouraging manner made the ordeal before her seem less frightening. She patted her hair, adjusted her handbag, then took a deep breath. "O.K.! I'll go and see what they want."

And, looking superbly sure of herself, but actually quaking at the knees, she crossed to the door and opened it. As she stepped into the office she saw two people seated in front of the new, shiny desk which had been provided for her exclusive use.

One was a girl of about her own age—a dark-haired girl, with a pretty, but white face, and with eyes in which seemed to be lurking a haunting fear. On her knees rested a large brown-paper package, and she was clutching at this as if she feared someone might attempt to snatch it from her.

The girl's companion was a middle-aged man—small-built and lean of figure, with black hair and moustache, and wearing tinted, horn-rimmed spectacles. As June entered the room he jumped to his feet.

"Good-morning!" he said crisply. "Are you Mr. Raymond's partner?"

June nodded, and looked inquiringly from the man to the girl.

"Did you wish to consult me?" she asked.

It was the man's turn to nod.

"Yes—at least my niece does. She wishes you to take charge of that package."

He indicated the brown-paper parcel which reposed on the girl's knee, and curiously June regarded it, wondering what it contained.

"It will be only for a day or two," the man went on. "Just until we can make other arrangements for its safe custody." He smiled genially. "A very simple commission, eh? And needless to say, we shall be prepared to pay you liberally for undertaking it. Well, what do you say? Will you oblige us in this matter?"

"Oh, please say you will!" For the first time the girl spoke, and as she raised her eyes to regard June appealingly, June again sensed the haunting fear which lurked in their depths.

She felt an irresistible urge to do all she could to help this strangely frightened girl, yet she smothered the temptation to nod immediate assent.

"May I ask what the package contains?" she asked.

Instantly the girl's grip on it tightened, and agitatedly she shook her head.

"No—no one must know!" she burst out.

"But, surely, if I am to take charge of it, we ought to open it—so as to check its contents," suggested June.

There came another wild shake of the head.

"No—no one must know what's in it! No one but I must open it!" With a visible effort the girl battled with her emotion, and with pleading eyes she regarded the puzzled June. "I'm—I'm sorry," she said, in a whisper. "I know it must seem very queer to you, but—there are reasons why I can't tell you. Please—please don't press me."

June's sense of wonder increased. What could the package contain, she asked herself? Certainly not jewellery. It was far too big a parcel for that. Covertly she measured it with her eye. It was about a foot by four inches, and stood nearly two feet high.

Conscious that the unknown girl's dark

eyes were still fixed pleadingly on her, she smiled.

"I won't ask you to reveal your secret if you don't want me to," she said reassuringly. "After all, its contents don't really concern me—as long as the package doesn't contain a time-bomb."

"A time-bomb, eh?" The girl's companion laughed. Ha, that's good! But you need have no worries on that score, my dear young lady. I give you my solemn word that the contents are perfectly harmless, and I hope you will agree to take charge of them. I can assure you that by doing so you will be doing my niece a very great service. You see—he leaned forward confidentially—"she has reason to believe an attempt may be made to steal that package."

"But why not deposit it with your bank?" asked June. "Surely it would be safer there?"

The man shook his head. "My niece has no bank, and I am only in this country for a short while. No, I am perfectly satisfied. It will be safe locked up here, young lady."

June regarded him. For all his genial manner, there was something about him which struck her as odd. What exactly it was she could not determine, but deep down in her she felt that he was not all that he appeared to be. Feeling vaguely uneasy, she turned her attention to the girl.

"And what have you to say?" she asked.

"Would you like me to take charge of it?"

The girl hesitated. She looked down at the package, then across at the door, then at her uncle. Finally, she gave a nervous little nod.

"Yes, please," she whispered, and, lifting up the package, she put it down on the desk, her frightened eyes full of appeal.

"Will you?" she breathed.

Impulsively June nodded. She liked this frightened, intriguing girl; felt an irresistible desire to help her.

A soft sigh of relief escaped the girl's lips, while the man at her side beamed and felt inside his well-fitting coat.

"Splendid!" he exclaimed. "Splendid! Now if you will tell me how much your fee is—"

Taking out his wallet, he opened it, but June shook her head.

"Mr. Raymond will fix the fee later on," she said. "Now if you will give me your name, I'll—"

She turned expectantly to the girl, then paused as she gave a startled gasp.

"You—you want my name?" she gulped.

"But, of course, don't be silly, Mildred." Her uncle gave her a surprised look of reproof.

"Naturally, Miss Gaylor wishes to know the identity of her client." He turned to the wondering June. "Henley is the name," he declared. "Mildred Henley."

The girl gave a nervous nod.

"Yes, yes—that's it. Mildred Henley," she repeated, in a whisper.

"And the address, please?"

"Glen Hall, Tarnbridge, Cumberland."

Again it was the man who gave the information.

June nodded and took a card from her desk.

"Will you write your name and address down here," she said, "just in case I forget it?"

The girl obeyed a little reluctantly, writing in a bold, striking hand. As she finished her uncle beamed across at June.

"Well, if there's nothing else, we will bid you a very good day," he said; and, grasping his bowler hat, he crossed to the door. But there he paused, looking back. "By the way, I suppose you will lock the package in the safe?" he said.

June shook her head.

"I am afraid I can't—until Mr. Raymond returns. You see, he is the only one to know

the combination. But you need have no fear. In the library is a strong, burglar-proof cupboard. It will be perfectly safe there."

"I'm sure of it." He nodded, apparently completely satisfied. "Well, good-day, Miss Gaynor, and thank you for your invaluable help!"

He flashed June a beaming smile, then turned to open the door. His niece, her dark eyes still fixed on the intriguing-looking package, caught impulsively at June's sleeve.

"Keep it until I send for it," she whispered. "Remember, no one is to have it but me—no one."

"I won't forget," June promised. "Good-bye—and don't worry. If you want any further help, just come to me. I'll be only too glad to assist you."

Mildred Henley nodded, smiled, and, with a last longing look at the package, followed her uncle through the door, leaving June prey to a mixture of emotions, the dominating one of which was a sense of vague uneasiness.

### THE MIDNIGHT INTRUDER

STANDING in the doorway of her office, June frowned thoughtfully as she watched the soft-footed Parker usher out her visitors.

The frightened girl was intriguing enough, but it was her companion which held June's attention. Was he

frank, genial person he pretended to be, or—

June's frown deepened as suddenly she realised that, although he had been very ready to reveal his niece's identity, he had not given his own name. Was that because he didn't think it necessary, as it was his niece's package that June was to guard, or was there another explanation for his reserve?

"He seemed nice enough," June told herself, "but I've got a queer feeling that he's not all he seems. I'm certain it was he who suggested coming here, and he seemed almost pleased that Uncle Noel was away. Yet if that package is as valuable as it seems to be, you'd think he'd be nervous of letting his niece hand it over to a girl like me."

She bit her lip, gripped by that sense of premonition which always came to her when danger impended. Re-entering her office, she wonderingly regarded the brown-paper package. How she wished she could open it! Almost overpowering was her curiosity, and she could not resist the temptation of running her fingers over it. Straight and unyielding were the sides. It seemed as if the package contained a box. But what was in the box?

Experimentally, June lifted it up, then she gasped and nearly dropped it, for the weight of the package took her by surprise.

"Why, it's as heavy as lead!" she exclaimed. "What can be in it?"

She examined the brown paper eagerly, but there was not a mark on it—no name; nothing. The strong cord around it, however, was sealed with green wax, and June caught in her breath as she examined the green blobs.

The package had evidently been sealed with a signet ring, and on each blob of wax was imprinted the portrait of a man—a bearded man wearing a turban.

"He—he looks like an Indian rajah!" June breathed. "But what a funny seal to use! And what a grim look he has! I wouldn't like to get into his bad books!"

With an involuntary shiver, she carried the parcel out of the office and into the adjoining library. Here, at the side of the fireplace, was a deep, strong, mahogany cupboard. June placed her burden in it, then closed the double doors, carefully dropping into place the rather intricate fastenings. Actually, those fastenings were connected with electric burglar alarms placed in her office and in her bed-room

on the next floor up. Should any intruder attempt to open the cupboard, an instant alarm would be sounded.

During the rest of the day June's thoughts often went to the mystery package in the cupboard, and before she went to bed she looked into the cupboard to make certain that it was still undisturbed.

Once between the sheets, it was not long before she dozed off. How long she slept she did not know, but suddenly she found herself wide awake.

What was that trident ringing sound in her ears?

Blinking into the darkness, she sat up, then she gave a startled gasp.

"The alarm bell!" she exclaimed. "Oh, golly, someone's after the package!"

Throwing aside the bedclothes, she dragged on a dressing-gown, thrust her feet into slippers, and simply tore out of the room. Her wisest course would have been to have aroused Parker, whose bed-room was on the lower floor next to the kitchen, but she was too agitated to think of that. Down the stairs she rushed, to race across the hall and to push open the library door. And then, on the threshold, she pulled up as if petrified, staring with dilated, amazed eyes.

The cupboard by the fireplace had been forced open, and crouching there, in the very act of pulling out Mildred Henley's mystery package, was an eerie, awe-inspiring figure.

The figure was that of a small, lean man, dressed in barbaric clothes whose silken sheen seemed to hold a ghostly gleam—a black-bearded man with a green turban would around his head.

It was as if the original of the portrait on those wax seals had come to life!

For a moment surprise held June speechless, and then she took a firm grip on herself.

"What do you think you are doing?" she demanded.

As she rapped out the words she stepped right into the room and snapped on the electric light.

The man in the green turban let the mystery package thud to the floor, and, straightening up, he regarded June in alarm.

"The Green Rajah has only come for what is his!" he muttered.

Indignantly June regarded him.

"Yours!" she exclaimed. "That package doesn't belong to you, and you're not going to have it!"

As she spoke she pressed the bell-push near the door. Instantly there came a ringing as the bell in Parker's bed-room shrilled out its warning.

The Green Rajah gave an agitated gasp. For one moment he looked longingly across at the package; then, as Parker's startled voice could be heard out in the corridor, he turned and, with amazing agility, leapt over the sill of the open window.

"Quick! Help!" shouted June, and running forward, was just in time to see the green-clad figure disappearing down the fire-escape.

"What's the matter, Miss June?" came from the doorway; and, swinging round, June saw Parker standing there, a policeman's truncheon clutched in one hand.

June pointed across to the open cupboard. "He nearly got away with it—the package, I mean!" she gasped. "I caught him at the cupboard."

"He, miss? Who exactly do you mean—a common burglar?"

June shook her head.

"No, he certainly wasn't that. He called himself the Green Rajah."

"The Green Rajah, miss?"

Eyes wide with surprise, Parker regarded her, and swiftly she related all that had happened. When she had finished he frowned worriedly.

"I don't like it, miss," he declared. "There's something very uncanny about the whole



business. Now, if only we knew what was in this." Picking up the package, he regarded it through narrowed eyes. "In the circumstances, miss, don't you think we had better open it?" he suggested.

June found the temptation very strong, for the contents of that queerly heavy package might be the key to the whole mystery, but manfully she smothered her curiosity.

"No. I practically promised I wouldn't," she said. "No, we must wait in patience until Mildred Henley gets in touch with us. Then I'll ask her to explain. After all that's happened, she can hardly refuse to do so. Meanwhile"—breaking off, she crossed to the table and put her arms about the brown-paper parcel—"this must be guarded day and night," she declared.

Parker watched her uneasily. "Where are you going to put it, miss?" he asked.

"In my bed-room. It'll be safe enough there."

"But suppose this—this Green Rajah has another try?" Obviously concerned, Noel Raymond's trusted manservant surveyed her appealingly. "Let me take charge of it," he urged.

But June shook her head. "No. It was put in my charge, and I'm going to look after it. Thanks all the same, Parker, and—don't worry!" She laughed as she saw the almost comical look of dismay on his face. "My room's on the fourth floor, you know, and it hasn't any convenient fire-escape outside, so it'll be safe enough. Anyhow, to make doubly sure, I'll lock my door."

And, picking up the package, she left the room with it, leaving the manservant shaking his head and uneasily looking across at the smashed doors of the cupboard.

#### A LETTER FROM NOEL



THERE were no more alarms during the night, and next morning June was too busy attending to Noel Raymond's correspondence to speculate much on the strange happenings of the previous day.

The mystery package standing on the corner of her desk, she worked hard until lunch-time; then she went out on a shopping expedition—but not until she had entrusted Parker with the package and given him strict instructions not to let it out of his sight for a single moment while she was out.

The delight of buying the few articles of clothes she had in mind wiped the mystery completely from June's mind, and it was smiling and laden down with parcels that she returned to the flat after an early tea. Parker met her in the hall, and inquiringly she looked across at him.

"Any callers while I've been playing truant?" she asked.

He shook his head, and she gave a mischievous chuckle.

"What! Not even our friend the Green Rajah?"

"Thank goodness—no, miss! That rascal has made no further attempt to break in, and you need not worry about the—er—package, miss. I have locked it in the pantry. But there's a letter for you—from the master." "From Uncle Noel? Oh, goody!"

Dumping her parcels down on the hall table, June took the envelope from him and ran into her office, making herself comfortable in her new swivel chair. She was eager to learn the details of the case which had taken Noel Raymond so unexpectedly away from home.

Her chair tilted back, her feet resting on one of the open drawers of her desk, she ripped open the letter and took out the embossed

piece of notepaper it contained. She did not even glance at the address, but excitedly scanned the famous detective's firm, rather boyish handwriting:

"Dear June.—Arrived safely and having a grand time. This is a lovely spot, but I won't attempt to describe it, for you will shortly be seeing it for yourself. Urgent business means that I have to leave for Ireland on Saturday. Besides, this case is just up your street. I know I can safely leave it in your capable hands—"

June broke off and gave a whoop. "Good old nunky!" she exclaimed. "He's got work for me to do already. But what is this case, I wonder?"

She turned her attention to the letter again and read on:

"This house is situated on the edge of the lake, and attached to the property is a small island which is reputed to be haunted. The ghost has been seen several times lately, and my host is worried, for he has a party of young people staying with him. I think, personally, that the whole business may be a hoax; but, anyway, it will be your job to run this spectral Green Rajah to earth—"

June stopped, and her feet fell with a clatter to the ground, while her heart gave a startled leap.

"The Green Rajah!" she exclaimed. "Why, what an amazing coincidence! Surely there can't be any connection between this spooky business, uncle wants me to investigate and the queer fellow who broke in here last night?"

Her pulses tingling, a strange feeling of excitement coursing through her veins, she read on. The next paragraph simply asked her to catch the Friday morning train North, then appeared three sentences which set her heart pounding again:

"You will like all the young folks here and should have a good time. Mr. Henley—who, incidentally, is a solicitor who has his offices in our block of flats—has a daughter named Mildred. She is at present staying in London, but she's expected back any day, and—"

But that was as far as June got. The closely written handwriting seemed to swim and dance before her astonished eyes.

"Mildred Henley!" she gasped. "But surely she—"

She glanced at the address embossed at the top of the notepaper, then gave another gasp. For the address was the same as that which the owner of the mystery package had given!

"Then my Mildred and the one uncle mentions are the same!" June ejaculated. "And the ghost and the Green Rajah must be the same, too! Well, of all the surprises!"

Her head spinning, she sat back, dazed by the unexpected turn the mystery of the sealed package had taken. Her fascinated gaze went across to it. What could it contain?

"I must find out," she told herself. "In view of nunky's letter, that is absolutely essential, for its contents are the key to the whole mystery. I'm certain of it, and when I see Mildred—"

She broke off, for the phone had begun to ring. Reaching across, she pulled it nearer and lifted the receiver.

"Hallo! June Gaynor speaking," she said. "Oh, thank goodness!"

As she recognised the agitated, breathless voice which came along the wire June nearly dropped the receiver.

"Mildred!" she gasped. "Yes, it's me—but I can't stop more than a

(Please turn to page 212.)





## The SKATING GIRL'S Mystery Mascot

By MARIE MATHESON

### THE BEAR TOTEM NECKLET

**S**HEILA MAYNE lived with her family at the little Canadian town of Juniper Bend.

The "Bluebirds," the skating club to which Sheila belonged, were anxious to do well in the forthcoming ice carnival and impress Lee Farrell, the film producer, who would be present.

Sheila's rival, Corinne Lefevre, was being tutored by Karl Olsen, who boarded with the Maynes. He and Corinne seemed curiously interested in an owl totem necklet which Sheila had found, and which Red Eagle, a young Redskin, told her to guard closely. He also offered to help her improve her skating.

After receiving a phone message from M. Cuvier, an antique dealer, telling her that a totem necklet like her own had come into his possession, Sheila went to his shop.

There the dealer offered her the necklet for twenty dollars. At that moment Corinne entered the shop, and, seeing the necklet, immediately offered to give the dealer a larger sum for it. Sheila waited for the dealer's answer. Would he accept her rival's offer?

**S**HEILA looked indignantly across at her skating rival.

"Just a moment, Corinne," she said. "Monsieur Cuvier and I were discussing this Indian charm before you came in. I have the prior claim, I think. Is that not so, monsieur?"

Monsieur Cuvier blinked behind his spectacles. He had been a bit taken aback by Corinne's appearance and thrusting methods.

"That is true, mademoiselle," he admitted. "Perhaps Mees Lefevre would be interested in something else."

"No," said Corinne abruptly. "This is what I want. I've got the money. I'm sure she hasn't. And thirty dollars is a good price."

"I haven't the money with me," admitted Sheila, "but I can leave five dollars by way of deposit, and I can pay the balance within twenty-four hours. Will you accept that, Monsieur Cuvier?"

The old French-Canadian nodded. "Yes, I'm quite willing," he admitted. "I will give you until to-morrow at this time."

Corinne could scarcely conceal her chagrin. She darted a malevolent glance at Sheila.

"You're always getting in my way somehow, Sheila Mayne," she said. "But you're going to be sorry some day. I'll call in to-morrow, Monsieur Cuvier, and if the totem has not been claimed I'll buy it. Is that agreed?"

Cuvier nodded, whereupon Corinne stamped out of the shop.

"Why should your friend be so persistent?" the antique dealer asked, as he wrote out a receipt for Sheila. "The trinket is not worth more than twenty dollars."

Sheila shrugged her shoulders. "Maybe these signs mean something she would like to know, Monsieur Cuvier, that's all. And I know only one person who can translate them. It is for him I wanted to buy it."

His eyes twinkled. "Well, I shall keep it for you," he smiled. "If you bring the rest of the money it shall be yours."

Sheila thanked him and left in triumph. The bear mascot and the other one she possessed were undoubtedly two of the three totems which had been painted on the missing portrait of Red Eagle's ancestor. It would be a strain on the family finances to ask her father for an advance of fifteen dollars, but then it would be the first time she had asked anything for herself, and she had already done so much to aid them.

She was hurrying along the street when a low whistle attracted her. A shadowy figure stood in the entrance to a large warehouse.

"Red Eagle!" she cried. Red Eagle beckoned to her quickly. "Come here, I have only a moment," he called. "Hurry, for I must get out of town."

It was on the tip of her tongue to blurt out all that had happened at Monsieur Cuvier's, but it was Red Eagle himself who cut short her words.

"I have good news, Sheila," he whispered. "I have tracked down this 'Mr. Leopold' to whom I am sure Olsen sent the stolen picture. I will soon have it in my hands again."

Sheila cried out in delight, but before she could speak Red Eagle gave a gasp of dismay.

"Look!" he whispered. "Your friends—and I think they have seen us. That is bad medicine. I must go."

He hurried away, and Sheila whirled. Staring at her were Jack Nelson, the two girls she had met with him, and also Corinne.



"Oh, hallo!" said Sheila, as the Bluebirds approached.

"Hallo!" responded Jack, and paused. "Sheila, I thought you said you weren't going to meet that Redskin rascal?"

Sheila flushed. "I didn't intend to. I—I just ran into him accidentally."

Corinne laughed derisively. "Always got some excuse ready, haven't you?" she sneered, then nodded to the two other girls. "Come on, don't let's argue with her," she urged, "she isn't worth it."

The girls walked on, leaving Jack Nelson, looking red and embarrassed, to follow.

Sheila gave a heavy sigh. Once again Corinne had succeeded in putting her in a false position. Oh, if only she could tell the Bluebirds the whole story—could expose Corinne in her real colours! Then, as she remembered what Red Eagle had told her, Sheila cheered up. If her Red Indian friend succeeded in recovering the stolen portrait he might be able to solve the mystery, especially as by this time to-morrow she would have in her possession two of the three vital mascots.

The thought cheered her up, and it was happily that she returned home. But as she neared Chinook Lodge she received a shock. The doctor's sleigh stood outside her house.

What did this mean? Was somebody ill at the lodge? Could an accident have happened in her absence?

Racing forward, she kicked off her skis and rushed into the house. Her father and the doctor met her in the hall.

"What's wrong?" cried Sheila in alarm, as she saw the anxiety on her father's face.

"It's Toddles, dear," he told her huskily. "He took suddenly ill, and I phoned for the doctor. He has to go at once to Dr. Luke's nursing home, as there's no room in the hospital."

Toddles, the baby of the family. Sheila's heart contracted sharply. She could scarcely believe it. But upstairs a nurse and the Indian woman who helped to do the chores were already preparing the child for his departure.

"Toddles, darling," gasped Sheila, bending down and putting her arm round the bundle of blankets. "What ever is the matter with you?"

"It looks suspiciously like a mastoid," the nurse told her. "It's a simple operation, so there is no need to worry unduly, Miss Mayne. But the sooner we get him to the nursing-home the better."

When Toddles had been taken away Sheila put her arm around her father, who looked worried and miserable.

"Cheer up, daddy," she urged. "Toddles'll soon get better. He's always been so strong and sturdy."

John Mayne smiled wistfully. "I hope you're right, Sheila," he said. "It's silly of me to be so upset, I suppose. But it's not only of poor little Toddles I'm thinking about—this business is going to make things very difficult for us. As you know, we were hard up enough before, but now, with doctor's fees and the cost of a nursing-home, it's going to be a job to manage. If it weren't for what Olsen brings in, I don't know what we would do."

Sheila caught her breath. Everything seemed to come at once. She had come home to borrow the money to make sure of securing the bear totem, only to be met with this.

Of course, Toddles came first, and now she could not possibly ask her father for fifteen dollars. She would have to let the totem go, and with it might eventually go all she had dreamed of, the solving of the mystery, the achieving of her ambition, and security for all those she loved so much.

Oh, if she only had Red Eagle to talk to and guide her.

But that was impossible. She had to face things out alone.

THE next morning Sheila phoned the nursing-home, to learn that Toddles had been operated on successfully and that he was as well as could be expected.

Her anxiety was relieved a little, though not altogether. But she felt happier going about her household duties.

Then, suddenly, as she remembered her appointment with M. Cuvier, she stopped work and frowned worriedly. In a short while Corinne Lefevre would be calling to see if the totem discovered by M. Cuvier was still for sale.

"I've got to outwit her somehow," Sheila told herself. "I can't stop her from buying the totem, but—"

She broke off as an idea occurred to her, and, going to the telephone, she dialled the antique dealer's number.

It seemed ages before she heard the connection go through and she heard his voice. Earnestly she spoke to him.

"Can you do it?" she asked at length. "Oh, it means so much to me, M'sieur!"

Back came an answer that made her smile. Sheila put down the phone and started doing a little ballet dance all on her own, so that when her father appeared out of the studio, he stared in astonishment.

"Sheila, what's the matter with you?" he said almost reprovingly. "Dancing like that when we're all so worried about Toddles. I don't understand it."

Sheila flushed. "I'm sorry, daddy. I—I was only practising. And I'm happy because I'm sure Toddles is going to be all right now."

John Mayne frowned. "You were telephoning the nursing home again?" he asked eagerly.

"No, I was just phoning a little order, that's all," she admitted quite truthfully. "Now I'll have to away and prepare dinner."

He accepted the explanation and retired into his studio, where he was already putting the finishing touches to the back-cloth he had promised to make for one of the ballet scenes.

But, alone again, Sheila smiled mysteriously to herself. Corinne Lefevre might crow at getting hold of the totem, perhaps, but her triumph might prove a small one in the end.

Next day, Sheila and her father both went down to see Toddles. He looked pale, but he recognised them, and his temperature chart showed a fall. Doctor and nurse were both satisfied.

"I'll be able to come in and see him every day, now," said Sheila on the way home by sleigh. "Our first dress rehearsal on the ice rink is to-night, and I can look in before it, and the same to-morrow."

She touched her father's arm. "I'll be so busy with the ballet, with performances on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day itself, daddy. Would it be best for us to have our own little celebration when Toddles gets back, just as a welcome home party? Christmas would be so empty without him."

Her father nodded. "That's an idea," he admitted. "You'll be spending most of your time with the Bluebirds, I suppose?"

"Yes," admitted Sheila. "There's a party after the second show on Christmas Day. I'll have tickets for you, Jerry and Gracie given me, as we're allowed so many free."

Sheila was just a trifle nervous when she appeared for the first rehearsal on the ice rink. The scenery had been almost all fitted up, and the backcloth her father had painted was ready for the waltz scene.

But it was not thought of her performance that made Sheila nervous. It was how Corinne and the others who were now hostile towards her might behave.

When she did put in an appearance Jack

Nelson and one or two of the other boys acted awkwardly, without being actually rude. Some of Corinne's coterie ignored her absolutely, but Corinne herself, while disdainful, could not conceal her triumph.

Taking a necklet out from her dress, she held the bear totem tantalisingly in front of Sheila.

"Tried to bluff me, didn't you?" she sneered. "I knew you couldn't raise the dollars, not when you have to take in a boarder to keep things going at Chinook. You had a nerve, Sheila Mayne."

Sheila made no reply, but turned away. At that moment Larry Green appeared, and before the rehearsal began he asked them to gather round.

"Don't forget, the Christmas performances are only a try out," he said. "The real test will come when we put the ballet on at the Ice Carnival later on. That's when Lee Farrell will be here to watch us. Nevertheless, this Christmas show has got to be a success—so, no quarrelling! I want you all to forget your little squabbles, and to work as a united team. Okay?"

He looked around, and there came a chorus of assent.

The rehearsal was a big success, and when it was over Sheila went along to the nursing home. To her delight Toddles had made further progress, so she went home happily.

But the following evening when Sheila went to the ice rink for the next rehearsal she received a shock, for the moment Corinne Lefevre entered she knew that something serious had happened. Angrily Corinne glared around.

"Our house was burgled when we were out this afternoon," she declared fiercely. "Several valuable things were stolen, including a special ring of my own. We've told the police, of course, and I'm certain the same person was responsible, as the one who burgled the Greens' portrait."

"What's that?" exclaimed Larry Green. "You've proof?"

"Not exact proof," snapped Corinne. "But enough to make me suspicious. I mean that fine friend of Sheila Mayne's—Red Eagle, of course. Well, if he's caught, it'll mean a long spell in prison for him."

Sheila flushed angrily. She was certain that there was nothing to convict her Indian friend of the burglary. Red Eagle was no thief. She had implicit faith in him.

"How dare you say such a thing, Corinne Lefevre," she cried. "I don't believe for a moment that Red Eagle stole the portrait, and I'm just as certain he didn't break into your house."

Corinne gave a shrill laugh. "Trust you to stick up for him!" she exclaimed. "You're as bad as he is, and I shouldn't be surprised if—"

"That's enough, Corinne!" It was Larry who interrupted. "You leave Sheila alone. Anyway, we're here to get on with the show, not to discuss burglaries. Let the police take care of that."

Corinne scowled, but she said nothing more, and the rehearsal began. Sheila, however, found it hard to concentrate on her skating. She was thinking of what Red Eagle had told her.

He had said he had tracked down "Mr. Leopold," the mystery person who had collected the parcel containing the totem portrait. Suppose that the vital painting had been taken to Corinne's house, and suppose that Red Eagle had managed to get it back! That would account for Corinne's anger, and all her talk about valuables having been stolen might just be a spiteful attempt to further blacken Red Eagle's name.

"Oh, I hope Red Eagle has got the portrait," Sheila murmured. "If so, then it won't be long before we discover the truth about everything."

The prospect thrilled her, and it was more happily that she proceeded with the rehearsal.

She was still thinking of the stolen portrait when she got home. There were two letters awaiting her.

One was from Monsieur Cuvier, telling her that he had done as she wished. The second was a good-luck card wishing her a Happy Christmas, and success in the ballet, and it was signed with the initials R. E.

Sheila's eyes sparkled.

"Perhaps Red Eagle will come to the first performance," she murmured. "Then I'll learn the truth about this burglary. Anyway, it's up to me to do my best in the ballet. It's just got to be a success."

## THE ICE BALLET



THANKS to the fancy dress parade the Bluebirds had organised, everyone in Juniper Bend was eagerly looking forward to the Ice Ballet, and by Christmas Eve all the seats for the first performance were sold.

This fact made the Bluebirds feel confident and it was excitedly that they gathered in the wings on the opening night, listening to the orchestra playing the rousing overture.

At last the fateful moment arrived. The curtains swished aside, revealing Jack Nelson, dressed as Santa Claus, seated on a sulky, drawn by a tiny white pony. As the sulky slid forward over the ice, the Bluebirds broke into a tuneful chorus, and Sheila, representing the Spirit of Christmas, skated out on to the rink.

Loud applause greeted the first item, and as scene followed scene, the enthusiasm of the crowd grew greater and greater. At last the moment came for Sheila to give her solo display. She felt nervous, but the encouraging applause of the crowd quickly put her at ease, and she skated as if inspired. It was to tumultuous cheers that she finished, and as the curtains swished down on the final scene the Bluebirds regarded each other happily.

"We've made a hit!" declared Larry. "Rather," grinned Jack Nelson. "Oh, boy, but roll on the Ice Carnival! I reckon our ballet will be the star item on the programme. When Lee Farrell sees it he's bound to be impressed."

As the applause continued to ring out, the curtains rose again, and many of the audience surged forward, carrying bouquets of flowers. Among them Sheila caught sight of little M. Cuvier. She made to greet him, and take the flowers he held out for her.

"Merveilleuse!" he panted. "Wonderful, my dear. And you so remind me of my little one—the little girl who was so like you—especially like you in that frock. Congratulations! It was a magnificent performance!"

"It's so kind of you to say that," said Sheila. "I'm so glad for the Bluebirds' sake that everyone's so pleased. I didn't know you were to be here, M. Cuvier."

"I shall be here, and to-morrow night too, mademoiselle," said the little man. "And what is more, I have with me what you asked me to give you."

He winked at her slyly, and Sheila blushed. "Wait," she insisted. "Don't give me anything here. Come round to my dressing-room. It's No. 4. That will be best. There are too many people here."

Corinne was getting her plaudits, too, as one by one the artistes took their final bow. But every now and then she had glanced jealously in Sheila's direction.

At last Sheila was able to retire and gain her dressing-room. There she removed her ballet costume, and dressed in her ordinary clothes. After a few minutes there came a tap on the door.

It was M. Cuvier, the antique dealer, who entered, and from his pocket he took a small packet. Opening it, he displayed the contents. They were two small tin objects, identical with the bear totem Sheila had not been able to keep Corinne Lefevre from purchasing.

"I took your advice my dear," said M. Cuvier. "I made moulds of the totem, and you can see from the results that the impressions were good. Now you can continue whatever researches you and your friend may desire. It was only a little favour I did you, and I wish no thanks, or payment. To-night, you were so like my little Celeste. And your gown, too. I still have the one Celeste wore at home. I treasure it, because she is gone from me."

There were tears in the old man's eyes, and Sheila gave his hand a squeeze.

"You have done me a great favour, Monsieur Cuvier. How ever can I reward you?"

He smiled at her.  
"Just be to-morrow night, as you were this night, and you will delight the heart of an old man with memories of the past," he said gently.

He made a courtly bow, then prepared to leave. As he did so, the door of one of the other dressing-rooms opened a trifle and a head peeped out, then disappeared.

Neither Sheila nor M. Cuvier noticed it, but as Corinne Lefevre disappeared inside her own room, she knitted her brows angrily.

"What's that old fogey doing visiting her?" she muttered angrily. "There's something fishy about it. But if that little upstart thinks she and Red Eagle can beat me now she's mistaken. I've a nice Christmas surprise in store for her. And I'll find out what all this means as well."

Sheila, little suspecting what Corinne was planning, went happily off with Mavis Poynter, for she had arranged to spend the night with that girl.

Sheila received a warm welcome from Mavis' mother and father.

Mavis, her arm linked in Sheila's, led her upstairs to the little guest-room.

"You know, Sheila," she chuckled, "Mum's firmly convinced that you'll be a great skating star some day. You won't let her down, will you?"

Sheila laughed.

"I certainly won't if I can help it."

Mavis squeezed her arm.

"That's the ticket!"

As Sheila fell asleep that night she smiled wistfully. Mavis was such a dear, such a loyal chum. If only she could tell her the truth about herself and Red Eagle! But—no, that was not possible yet.

Next morning, the papers were full of pictures and a lengthy account of the Ice Ballet. Sheila obtained one or two to take and show to Toddes.

It was afternoon before she went to the nursing home. When she arrived there, it was to find her father there before her. He greeted her joyously and hugged her close.

"Sheila, I'm proud of you," said John Mayne. "I could never have believed you were so good. I do believe you'll be a great skating star, after all. We all wanted to go round and see you after the show, but thought it best to leave it till to-night, when there may not be such a crowd. Happy Christmas, darling."

"Gosh, it is Christmas," gasped Sheila. "D'you know, we've been so excited, Mavis and I, that we forgot. But I'm keeping my presents and things for our own celebration when Toddes comes home. Isn't he looking so much better!"

Toddes was. He smiled at the pictures, and already had Christmas gifts from the nurses piled on the foot of his bed.

On the way back, Sheila decided to go down to the ice rink. Like all the artistes in the ballet she had a key to the special rooms set apart for them. Her skates might require re-sharpening, and she wanted to know that

everything was ready for the show at seven-thirty.

One or two of the rinkmen were about, preparing the rink for the next session, but she found none of the Bluebirds.

Hurriedly she made for No. 4 dressing-room and entered it.

Examining her skates, she ran the sharpener over them till she was satisfied, then piece by piece went over her various costumes. Finally she made for the wardrobe where her dress for the final scene was hanging.

Opening the door, Sheila gasped in surprise.

The wardrobe was empty.

There was no sign of her dress, in which she had placed the copies of the all-important totem M. Cuvier had obtained for her. Sheila, stiff with surprise, looked round in dismay. Then she went all over the room, searched in the cupboards and in the trunk her costumes had been brought in.

But she found nothing.

"Oh!" she cried. "What will I do now?"

Her costume had been stolen, and without it she could not take part in the final scene. In addition, the replicas of the bear totem had also gone. Who could have taken them? And what was she to do now?

Next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will contain another dramatic instalment of this grand serial.

## THE CASE OF THE FRIGHTENED GIRL

(Continued from page 208.)

moment. Please listen carefully, June. I must have that package back—at once."

"Of course," said June soothingly. "I've got it on the desk here in front of me. If you like to call—"

But that agitated voice broke in, shriller and more breathless than ever.

"No, no! I cannot come to the flat. You must bring it to me, please. Bring it to Hyde Park this evening."

"To—Hyde Park?" stuttered June in astonishment.

"Yes—to the rose garden. I will wait for you in the shelter. Can you be there in three hours' time—let's say, seven o'clock? It's terribly urgent."

"Of course," agreed June. "But just a moment. There's something—"

"No, I can't stop. No one must know I have phoned. And remember what I said yesterday. If anyone calls about that package—anyone—don't listen to what they say. Above all, don't hand it over—only to me!"

In throbbing appeal, Mildred uttered that last word; then there came a click, and June knew that her caller had hung up. June did the same; then, as if frozen, she sat there, her whirling mind striving to grapple with the strange mystery which had begun her career as Noel Raymond's partner.

Had Mildred's unexpected decision to remove the package anything to do with the attempted burglary? Had she somehow learnt of the visit of the Green Rajah? And in what way was the ghost of Glen Hall connected with the mystery?

Helplessly June shook her head.

"It's all beyond me," she murmured. "I can't make head or tail of it; but one thing's certain. That poor girl's scared stiff. She needs help, and, Green Rajah or no Green Rajah, I'm going to give it!"

As she spoke she gazed again at that innocent-looking brown-paper package on the desk—the package which she felt an almost irresistible temptation to tear open.

June's first case as her uncle's partner has certainly started off with some dramatic surprises. Be sure you don't miss the thrilling chapters of this serial in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

# The MERRYMAKERS at College



By DAPHNE GRAYSON

## THE MISSING PAINTING

"IT'S going to be a wonderful Christmas!" Sally Warner breathed exultantly. "It was awfully good of your uncle to invite us all home to your place, Linda, and now this latest piece of luck—" She turned an excited face to pretty Linda Carson, a girl who had only recently been transferred to Sally's chalet, and with whom the chums had struck up a firm friendship.

"J. House being given the honour of choosing a Santa Claus for Breaking-up Day!" Linda Carson burst in excitedly.

"After K House being so sure they'd get the honour—" And Johnny Briggs broke off with sudden alertness. "Listen! I think I can hear them!"

Sally darted to the door of the Merry-makers clubhouse, where her other two chums—Don Weston and Fay Manners—were already on watch. Anything could be expected to happen this evening in Roxburgh Co-ed College!

There was an expectant tenseness in the atmosphere. It needed only two days to breaking-up for the Christmas vacation. The presentation of gifts and diplomas, by a Santa Claus appointed by the dean, was a tradition of the college. The honour had fallen to J House—to Don Weston. Sally & Co. were well aware now that their rivals of K House were plotting some mysterious jape by way of revenge, under their ringleader Nat Piggot.

The chums stood listening breathlessly now, their eyes peering through the night to the snow-covered college campus.

"Can't hear anyone!" whispered Don at last.

"False alarm!" breathed Sally.

"I'm not so sure!" muttered Johnny. "I'll swear I heard someone on the prow!"

They moved back into the clubhouse. But all were still on the qui vive—suspense hung in the air. They weren't going to be caught napping by Nat Piggot. Sally had one ear on the door as she resumed her talk with Linda Carson.

"It's going to be wizard, Linda spending Christmas with you in your uncle's mountain chalet. Isn't he the uncle who sent you here to coll.—the one who's so interested in art?" Fay questioned.

"Yes. He paid my fees for this first term." Linda nodded, shining-eyed. "He put me in the art section and he promised I should stay

here for a two years' course if I made a good job of that painting he gave me to do."

"And you've finished it now, Linda. Do show us it!" Sally said eagerly.

Shyly Linda drew out of her club locker a charming painting of a girl at the spinning-wheel.

Sally & Co. gazed admiringly at it. "Oh, Linda, it's really beautiful!" Fay said with sincere appreciation, echoed wholeheartedly by the rest.

"I copied it, you know, from an Old Master," explained Linda, flushing with pleasure. "Uncle lent me the original to copy from. It's one of the most treasured in his collection. A genuine Debroy!"

"Well, I don't know much about art," said Johnny, modest for once, "but I like this copy of yours better than any Old Master, Linda. Colours are fresher. Lines clearer. But if I was painting a spinning-wheel I'd—Hey!" He broke off with a glance at the door. "I can hear someone! After him!"

In a flash he was bolting for the door, Sally and the chums on his heels. All of them had heard that stealthy footstep. They reached the veranda just in time to see a spectacular figure streaking away in the snowy darkness.

"Look!" cried Sally breathlessly, pointing a quivering finger at a figure in a red-hooded robe and flowing white beard.

"Hey! That's my Santa costume!" cried Don indignantly.

"It's Piggot!" added Johnny. "He's making for K House!"

Another moment and the chums had bounded down the terrace steps and were ploughing their way as fast as was possible through the thick snow. Faintly, ahead of them, they could glimpse their quarry, the sack over his shoulder, as he headed for the row of K House chalets. And then he was lost to sight in the enveloping darkness.

"He's gone into K! I'll get him—Ow!" And the impetuous Johnny, making a desperate spurt forward, finished with a graceful somersault in the snow.

"That's the first booby trap!" remarked Don through his laughter as he helped Johnny from the buried washing-basket which had trapped him. "There's bound to be some more, knowing Piggot!" He paused, then frowned. "How did that bouncer get hold of my costume?" he gasped. "I locked it up in my chalet!"

"Are you sure?" Sally spoke quickly. "What

else did he get away with? What was in that sack?"

As fast as they could they hurried back through the snow to their own quarters. A jape was one thing. Unlocking someone else's property was quite another. They burst into Don's chalet. The closed cupboard looked exactly as he had left it; the door still locked.

Grimly Don whisked out his key and unlocked it. Then blank surprise and relief came over his face.

Safe in the cupboard hung his Santa Claus costume and beard.

"So it was his own get-up he was wearing!" he grinned, slightly appeased. "Somehow I didn't think even Piggot would snoop in here and—"

"Oh, yes, he did—he's been here all right!" burst in Johnny. "Look at these shelves! He's taken a whole lot of my things. There's half your things gone, too, Don! The bouncer!" he raged. "He's raided us while we were at the clubhouse."

"So that's what he was up to!" gasped Don. "That's what he had in that sack!" guessed Sally, and dashed to the door. "Fay—Linda! Better see what he's taken of ours!"

Their own chalet showed evidence of the raid as soon as they burst inside. Sally and Fay darted into their cubicle while Linda ran to hers. They weren't a bit surprised to find that a whole host of their own belongings were also missing.

"What an idiot Piggot is!" Fay said in exasperation.

"We're the idiots, to give him the chance!" Sally said, with a wry grin.

"Yes, but he's only taken a lot of rubbish. What does he want them for?"

"To swop it over with the gifts on Presentation Day, I should imagine," Sally said with a shrewd guess. "He wants to make Don look a laughing-stock when he opens his sack to give out the presents, and finds it full of old shoes and slippers and Johnny's stuffed owl and—Hullo, what's the matter, Linda?"

She broke off, startled, as Linda came rushing, pale-faced, into the cubicle.

"Sally, he's taken my uncle's painting—that valuable Debroy that was lent me to copy!" she burst out.

"What?" Sally cried. "Oh, Linda, no, surely he wouldn't take it! He must know how valuable it is!"

"If anything happened to it my uncle would never forgive me!" Linda said in agitation.

Fay's face was grim as she laid a gentle hand on Linda's arm.

"Don't you worry, Linda. We'll get it back all right!"

Sally nodded, seeing the worried look in Linda's eyes.

"We certainly will, Linda. Come on, let's find the boys and then we'll go straight to Nat Piggot and make him hand it back."

Linda gave them a grateful smile and followed them down the steps of the chalet to where Don and Johnny stood waiting. Both boys saw at a glance that something was wrong. They took a very different view of the so-called jape when they heard of Linda's loss and sympathised with her over the serious consequences to her if the picture should be harmed.

"That ass Piggot couldn't have known its value, of course, but we'll see he doesn't give you another scare like this, Linda!" vowed Don, leading the way vigorously to Nat Piggot's chalet.

The outer door was locked, and it was a few minutes before, in answer to their banging, it opened a few inches, and Piggot, looking very mysterious, gazed out at them.

"Look here, Piggot, we know all about your little joke, and it's gone too far!" Sally told him warmly. "We want that picture you took from Linda's room!"

"You don't mean," whispered Piggot in an awed voice, "that something has vanished from J House?"

"You know what we mean, Nat Piggot!" Don retorted, then went on more quietly. "Look here, we don't mind a joke, but when it comes to marching off with a valuable oil painting—well, that's going too far. That painting belongs to Linda's uncle and it would ruin her Christmas, and ours, too, if anything happened to it."

"Extraordinary!" frowned Piggot. "I know things do get spirited away at Christmas. Ghosts and peculiar things like that, you know. But—"

"Stop fooling, Piggot, and hand that picture over!" cut in Don. "We heard you prowling round J House to-night. We saw you scooting away in that Father Christmas outfit."

"Saw what?" And Piggot's brows lifted in mocking amazement. "Surely not? Didn't you know that Father Christmas doesn't come till Christmas Eve—"

"We all saw you, Nat Piggot, and you can stop making a joke of it!" burst in Linda fiercely. "It's no joke to me. I want my picture back! Maybe you're unaware of the fact that that picture is extremely valuable and belongs to my uncle. If he doesn't get it back, then—then my whole career at this college is—finished!" she ended brokenly.

"But I haven't got it!" Piggot told her.

"You have!" blazed Linda.

"I haven't—that's the whole joke!" he grinned. "I've got plenty of surprises for you J House idiots—but I haven't got that picture."

Sally's eye swept to the window. There through the half-drawn curtains, she distinctly saw a bulky object lying in the corner of Piggot's cubicle. It was a bulging sack!

"There it is!" she cried.

Don & Co. darted to her side, and instantly the door was banged and there came the click of the key. Piggot had locked himself in again.

With a cry, the chums turned once more to the door, pounding, and calling for Piggot to come out and give them the picture.

There was a quick step behind them and a shocked voice burst upon their ears. It was the dean!

"Really!" he cried. "Is this the spirit you show at Christmas?"

Sally & Co. whirled round guiltily. The dean looked from one to the other and couldn't mistake their very real anger.

"We were—we were only trying to get something, sir—" Don began in confusion.

"I don't want to hear anything about the dispute—I am only ashamed to find such unfriendly House rivalry, such animosity, at a season of goodwill such as this," the dean said. "Go back to your own House, all of you. You simply can't agree, even at Christmas-time, so you will keep away from your K House neighbours and I forbid you to come to their quarters any more!"

## ELUSIVE SANTA CLAUS



THERE was nothing for it but to obey the dean's stern order, and disconsolately the four chums and Linda turned away and went trudging off through the snow, unconsciously making their way to the art room.

"I—I've got to return the painting to uncle before we break up; he's coming to the presentation!" Linda said, frantically. "I daren't face him without it."

Another art student, Rex Walpole, was working alone at his easel in the art room. Though he belonged to Piggot's house—K House—he came hurrying over in quick concern at sight of Linda's evident distress.

"What's wrong?" he asked in sympathy.

"It's your prize japer—Piggot," Sally explained. "He's walked off with that Debroy painting belonging to Linda's uncle. But we're going to get it back for her—oh, yes, we are!"

"Oh, Linda, I'm awfully sorry! Can I help in

any way to get it back? I mean to say, it's not a question of House loyalty!" he hurried on, seeing the surprise on the chums' faces. "Linda's a colleague of mine in the art section. I know the value of that Debroy painting and Piggot shouldn't have taken it. So if you can think up some scheme I'll help."

The chums thought hard. Then, from Don, came a triumphant cry.

"I've got it!" he said excitedly. "It'll mean waiting till to-morrow night—and we'll need your help, Walpole. We'll pretend we're going to make a raid. And you're supposed to have overheard it, and, naturally, you'll let Piggot know."

"Yes," breathed Walpole. "Leave it till about eight to-morrow night, then whisper to Piggot that you've heard we're planning a raid on his chalet." Don instructed him in quick, low tones. "What's the first thing he'll do? He'll take the sack away to hide it somewhere else! We'll be in ambush, watching for him. We won't need to break orders and go into K House! We'll wait till Piggot's got away with the sack, as he thinks—then we'll pounce out and grab it, on neutral ground!"

"Jolly good idea!" beamed Sally, while Linda's anxious face cleared at last.

"About eight o'clock," Walpole said softly, and nodded in friendly conspiracy. "Right-ho! I'll fix it!"

A little before eight next evening, in the snowy dark, Sally & Co. took up their ambush with Linda. They were not intruding on K House ground. They were crouching behind some bushes just a yard or two short of the boundary line. But their position commanded a clear view of Nat Piggot's chalet.

"He'll have heard the false news by now from Walpole," whispered Don.

"Any minute now he'll walk out of his chalet with that sack!" thrilled Sally.

Then, with frightening suddenness, a figure loomed up before them in the snow—the dean!

"Come out from behind those bushes! I know you are there!" he cried in a stern, angry voice.

Sally & Co. came hesitantly forward. "We were w-waiting for Piggot, sir. We——" Linda tried to explain.

"I know—I can see with my own eyes that you are designing further trouble against K House! Against my orders!" thundered the dean. "You are the same culprits that I warned last night. It is flagrant defiance on the part of you all. You, at least, should have better sense, Miss Carson!"

"B-but, sir——" stammered Linda.

"Your uncle only sent you to the college on a term's trial—and he is coming here to the presentation to-morrow night!" the dean reminded her ominously. "Do you think he would allow you to stay here if I gave him an unfavourable report of you?"

Linda's voice caught in her throat and she shook her head dumbly.

"I think not!" said the dean. "You are endangering your whole future at college by allowing yourself to be led into this petty House squabbling by Miss Warner and her friends. I will say nothing to your uncle this time, Miss Carson, but let there be no more of it! Please take that as a warning! Now, you will all return to your own House."

Bleakly they made their way back to J House. It was a serious cloud now which overhung their Christmas. Their only hope was that Piggot would give up his ill-natured joke and resign the painting to Linda in the morning.

That hope died next day as the hours went by.

Piggot was keeping out of their way. Every effort Sally & Co. made to corner him, he carefully dodged, a smirk of secret triumph on his face.

There was no work being done in the college. Even the art room was locked up and barred to everyone because it had been chosen for the scene of to-night's presentation and had been

hung with Christmas decorations for the purpose.

By the time evening came, and the visitors began to arrive, Sally & Co. were at their wits' end.

Don had gone to his chalet to change into his Santa Claus robes. Sally & Co., lingering for a few minutes until he had time to get ready, set off half-heartedly, with Linda, to join him.

"There he is," Linda said listlessly, pointing in the darkness to a red-hooded figure. "Up there by the art room!"

Sally stared. Yes, there was someone in Father Christmas robes, wearing a long white beard, furively peering into the window of the art room. Then rapidly he pushed the window up and hoisted himself up on the sill, then vanished inside.

A cry burst from Sally.

"That's not Don!"

With a rush she led the way to Don's chalet and tore open the door, to find Don just in the act of hooking his beard over his ears.

"Quick, Don! We've got Piggot! He's playing Santa again!" she told him breathlessly.

"What? Where?" cried Don, and dashed out after the others' already retreating figures, running back to the art room. There was no need to bother about the locked door. The lighted window was still open where the bogus Santa Claus had climbed in. Sally leapt on to the sill and fairly dived inside, the chums after her.

"O-oh!"

There was a frightened gasp. A bearded figure went scurrying in panic to the door, a square object clutched under his arm. Linda's picture!

Next second there was a snick, and the room was instantly plunged into darkness.

"Make for the door—he can't get out!" directed Sally, making a blind rush in that direction. Johnny, Don, Linda, and Fay came thumping after her, crashing into chairs, colliding with each other. Noisily but skilfully their invisible quarry dodged them. In the dark Johnny grabbed something—someone's hair.

"I've got him!" he yelled.

"Let go, you ass! Ouch! It's me you've got hold of!" Don groaned.

Their quarry had taken advantage of the incident and was at the other end of the room before the chums could recover their wits.

"Quick—quick! Grab him!" cried Sally, darting forward, only to trip over a fallen chair.

Too late! They heard a hurried, fumbling movement at the far end of the room. Then a shadowy figure leapt for the window and the pseudo Santa was gone!

At the same instant the key clicked in the door. It was thrust open, to admit the dean. Furiously he reached for the light switch. The lights blazed on, and he was gazing at Sally & Co. and Linda. They stood breathlessly amidst the fallen chairs and scattered decorations, and in the centre of the debris, as if to provoke the dean's ire by deliberate mockery, stood Don in the red robe and whiskers of a benevolent Santa Claus.

"So it's you again—after all my warnings!" the dean cried as he strode angrily into the room. "You, Weston, you were supposed to help me! You call this keeping up the Christmas spirit! As for you, Miss Warner——" And then his angry eyes came to rest on Linda.

"Miss Carson, your uncle will talk to you—after I have had a word with him!" he thundered. "He is here now—all the visitors are here!"

Linda gave a choked gasp. Sally, following the direction of Linda's unhappy eyes, started. Already, the visitors were coming towards the art room, led by a triumphantly smirking Nat Piggot.

"You will all straighten this room instantly," the dean said quietly. "You, Weston, you will give up that costume to someone else. You will give it to someone in K House—someone more worthy of playing the part of Santa Claus!"

## CHRISTMAS PRESENTATIONS



DON'S hand went slowly to his beard. This was the final defeat for J House.

Sally's eyes blazed round the room, taking in the havoc caused by the bogus Santa, who had made off with Linda's picture. Her keen glance alighted on a bulging and familiar-looking sack lying on the platform. And in that moment inspiration flashed upon her.

"I suppose, sir, you wouldn't recommend Nat Piggot as Santa Claus?" she ventured.

The dean frowned.

"Certainly!" he retorted. "I will nominate Piggot as Santa Claus!"

He didn't see the gleam in Sally's eyes as he swung round upon Don.

"You will hand that costume, Weston, and the beard, to Piggot, who will take your place as Santa Claus."

"M-me, sir?" stammered Piggot. And to the chums' amazement he looked oddly uneasy all at once.

"Yes. Make haste and change, Piggot!" hustled the dean. "The visitors are taking their seats now!"

Half-heartedly Nat took the robe Don handed him and put it on, gazing, a pathetic look on his face, round the room. Sally, meeting Linda's puzzled eyes, grinned.

"Er—are you looking for your sack, Santa Claus?" she asked. "Because it's on the platform."

An almost agonised expression clouded Nat's face.

Linda's anxious face was turned towards the door as the visitors came merrily streaming in. She smiled wanly as her uncle entered, giving her a fond wave.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, I think we are all here," said the dean, taking his place on the platform. "This is the occasion when I can sit back and listen to someone else doing the talking." He paused as a laugh went up. Then: "I call upon—Santa Claus!"

He sat down, beaming, and with hesitant steps Nat Piggot climbed up on the platform. Frantically he gazed all round him and under the table, as if he couldn't see the great bulging sack that stood on the floor almost at his side.

"Come, Santa Claus." And the dean smiled towards the sack. "Isn't that what you are looking for?"

"O-oh—er—oh, y-yessir!" gasped Piggot. If the sack had been red-hot he could not have reached more cautiously towards it. His hand groped tremblingly inside, and he drew out a long white scroll tied with a blue ribbon.

"Miss S-Sally Warner, J House," he announced in a hollow voice.

"A college diploma for Miss Warner!" elaborated the dean. "Then call her up and present it to her in the proper way!"

But Sally was already on her way up to the platform. Piggot tried to hand her the scroll hastily and get rid of her, but, with a sweet smile, she stopped him.

"I thought, sir," she said to the dean, "that Santa Claus read the diploma aloud to us before he presented it."

"Certainly he must! That is the traditional custom!" declared the dean, signalling hurriedly to Piggot.

The scroll quivered in Piggot's hand. It might have been a live snake he was holding, so frantically did he shrink from untying it.

"Open it, Piggot—we're waiting!" urged the dean impatiently.

"Y-yes, sir!" And, with a jerk, he pulled at the ribbon.

Whizzzzzzz!

Something leapt out of the scroll like a Jack-in-the-box. The audience jumped in their seats. A coiled spring whirred up into Piggot's face and curled itself in his whiskers.

The shock that went through the spectators

was followed by a burst of laughter. The dean blinked and picked up the scroll which had shot from Piggot's hand. It was no college diploma, but a blank sheet of wrapping paper.

"Some mistake, sir, evidently!" murmured Sally.

The dean turned a shrewd gaze on Piggot before he replied.

"H'm! Yes! Evidently!" he said quietly. Sally resumed her seat, while the dean, an enigmatical smile upon his face, addressed the audience. "I am afraid, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "that our Santa Claus was put to a slight embarrassment, but I am sure he will take it in the Christmas spirit as it has afforded the rest of us great amusement. I will now ask him to proceed with the next presentation."

The chums watched Piggot, a sickly look on his face, groping agonisedly in the sack. Linda's uncle was shaking with laughter. That, thought Sally with relief, was a good omen.

"B-Briggs!" stuttered Piggot, drawing a large parcel out of the sack and reading the inscription on it in a stifled voice. "Briggs, from his many admirers!"

Johnny went hurrying up on to the platform. But Piggot clung desperately to the parcel.

"Well, Santa Claus, why don't you present it?" prompted the dean, watching him narrowly.

"I—I'm not so sure about it, sir," faltered Piggot. "It l-looks like something phoney again!"

"Phoney?"

"Well, I m-mean, Briggs hasn't got any admirers!" gasped Piggot.

"Oh, I say, Piggot!" protested Johnny, and appealed to the dean. "If Santa Claus thinks it's phoney, sir, don't you think he ought to open it himself?"

"Certainly!" agreed the dean. "Will you kindly oblige, Santa Claus?"

Piggot opened his mouth to speak, then shut it again. The look he darted at Johnny should have withered that boy.

"Go on!" Johnny smilingly urged him.

Piggot looked from him to the dean. There was no escape. Holding the parcel as far away from himself as possible, he pulled the slip-knot and undid the wrapping.

Whoooooff!

A muffled explosion and a great cloud of soot burst up into Piggot's face, transforming his snowy white beard and brows into smoky blackness.

The audience was now thoroughly enjoying the proceedings, especially Linda's uncle.

"Remarkable!" pronounced the dean, leaning back in his chair and surveying Piggot with absorbed interest. "It is uncanny how Santa Claus suspected something of this kind. I certainly did not tamper with the gifts myself. We may be equally certain that Don Weston of J House did not, since he was chosen in the first place to distribute them. Therefore it must have been the work of an unknown person. We will call him X. Kindly proceed Santa Claus, with the next presentation."

Johnny bowed politely to Piggot and stepped down from the platform, leaving him to shake the soot out of his beard. He kept his distance from the sack as he gingerly reached in, brought out the next object, and eyed it fearfully.

"A bouquet for someone, I think," observed the dean with pleasant interest, seemingly oblivious of the fact that the "bouquet" was plainly a whitewashed cabbage.

"Who is to be the lucky recipient, Santa Claus?"

"It's f-for—" Piggot's voice seemed to get lost in his whiskers as he carefully avoided touching the gilt card that dangled from it.

"F-for you, sir!" he gasped.

"Ah, indeed!" the dean beamed, but didn't move. "I don't recognise the blossoms. What are they, Santa Claus? Place them to your nose, Santa Claus, and see if you can identify them."

(Please turn to the back page.)





# SECRET ALLY of the SCHOOLBOY MASQUERADER

(Continued  
from  
page 204.)

"Oh, that was easy. As it happened, his papers were on the Head's desk. Among them was his photograph," he said. "And—well, that's all."

"Do you think you'll be able to find the real thief?"

"Give me a couple of days," he said confidently. "I believe I'm on the trail. But meantime—if you don't mind—say nothing—"

"As if I would!" she protested.  
"No, I don't believe you would." He stood up, and she felt absurdly pleased at the compliment. "You've been grand, Maisie. Would you do one more thing for me?"

"Of course."  
"Would you send off a telegram for me when you reach the town?"

She agreed willingly. The telegram, he explained, was to his mother, who, knowing of his expulsion, would have been expecting him home. He took a piece of paper, a pen, and hastily scribbled:

"Don't worry. Still here. Writing at weekend.—JACK."

"There, if you wouldn't mind copying that on to a telegraph form," he said, as he handed the paper to her.

She took it, stowing it away in her pocket. She was happy now, for she believed Jack implicitly.

Whatever she could do to help him she would, she told him, and he, accepting that promise with gratitude, saw her to the hall and watched her as she made off towards the gates.

But she didn't get far. For suddenly there was a whoop. Half a dozen boys were bearing down on her.

"Here's Maisie! I say, Maisie—"

"I say, what about a snack at the tuckshop?"

"But—but—I'm in a hurry!" Maisie gasped. The boys, however, would take no objections. They were in a boisterous mood. Before she realised what was happening, she found herself being whirled into the little shop near by. Somebody ordered tea and cakes. In a chattering group they surrounded her.

"Now, don't forget, Maisie, you're going to come with me to the dance!"

"No, she's not. She's coming with me!"

"You are coming, aren't you, Maisie?" asked the first boy a little apprehensively.  
"I'd love to! And thanks!" Maisie answered breathlessly. "But don't you think it would be best if I just arrived, and we decided on a programme then?"

She broke off as somebody switched on the radio, and the strains of a dance number floated on the air. The next second she gasped as a boyish pair of arms whirled her into a quick-step.

"What about a rehearsal, Maisie? I claim this one—"

Maisie, to her breathless bewilderment, found herself being whirled round and round on the small tuckshop floor, while the others stood, clapping and cheering. Her partner was

certainly never destined to be a dancer, but what he lacked in art he made up for in enthusiasm and energy.

Maisie was too breathless to protest. And she didn't notice, in the mad swing and swirl, that Jack Hayward's note had slipped from her pocket.

"What the dickens is this?" suddenly blared a bad-tempered voice. "Take fifty lines, all of you, for turning this tuckshop into a bedlam."

Instant angry dismay fell upon the gay assembly, as they turned to face the ill-natured prefect who had just stormed in.

It was Sidney Drayton. He glared at them all, and then finally his eyes rested upon Maisie.

"You here?" he snarled, and then swiftly stepped forward. Eyes wide with horror, Maisie saw that he swooped upon Jack Hayward's note. That—she felt like fainting—he was reading it!

For a moment she almost rushed forward to snatch it from him. But in a flash wiser counsels prevailed. To claim that note would prove, unquestioningly, her connection with Jack Hayward; would undoubtedly make things more difficult for him.

"Who dropped this?" the prefect demanded.

Nobody spoke.  
"Who dropped it?"

"Never seen it before," one of the boys spoke up. "What is it, anyway?"

"It's a telegram—or a note intended to be telegraphed." The prefect's face was harsh and sharp. "It's written by Jack Hayward—in Hayward's own handwriting, to his mother. And that means he's asked one of you to send it for him. It also means that Jack Hayward is still in the school! One of you is helping him—an expelled boy! Now which?"

There was a startled silence. Uneasy glances flashed from one to another. The prefect's eyes were darting from face to face. Finally a flicker of understanding leapt into them. Suddenly Maisie found his glance upon her pale face.

"Perhaps," he said softly, "it's not one of you boys, after all. Perhaps it's someone else. Maisie Lancing, perhaps you can tell us how this note came to be on this floor?"

## THE INTRUDER IN THE SHOP



FOR a moment Maisie felt her limbs go rigid with sheer panic. Then she braced herself.

"Don't be ridiculous," she said defiantly. "What should I know about it?"

"That's what I'm asking you," Drayton drawled.

"I refuse to answer your impertinent questions," Maisie retorted. "I'm going!"

And, amid a little murmur of applause, she walked head high, to the door. But every nerve in her body was quivering when she found herself on the road again. Suddenly she was afraid—afraid first for Jack; secondly on account of the mischief Drayton might try to do to her, and, through her, to her aunt's business. What a hateful boy he was!

"Anyway, finding that note doesn't tell him where Jack is," Maisie thought. "But I hope—oh, I do hope—Jack succeeds in proving his innocence pretty soon."

She wished she could do more to help. In her mind she went over again the wording and

address on the note Jack had given her, and on reaching the town she went to the post office and sent off the telegram. Then she returned to the shop.

There was a great deal to do—costumes to be put away, bills to be made out, books to be checked. It was evening before these tasks were complete. She had supper and then went to bed.

She was awakened next morning by the shrilling of the telephone bell. A carefully disguised voice, which she recognised at once, came over the wire.

"Is that you, Maisie? You can guess who this is!"

"Jack!" she breathed.  
"That's me. But keep it under your hat. Maisie, I'm in a bit of a jam—nothing serious, but I need a hand. I can't explain now, but could you meet me?"

"Of course. Where, and when?"  
"In half an hour. Come to the school, and I'll see you at the gatekeeper's lodge."

"I'll be there," Maisie promised, and abandoning from that moment all thought of opening the shop, hastily washed and dressed and set out.

Her mind was racing as she hurried on. What had happened? For what reason could Jack require her so urgently? But it didn't matter, she told herself. She would soon know. She had promised to help him—and help him she would.

But when finally she reached the porter's lodge Jack was not there.

She waited—without worrying at first, but as the minutes ticked on and on, with increasing consternation. Then the gatekeeper appeared from the school.

"Mr. Treville?" he said, when he had questioned her as to her business. "Are you sure you haven't made a mistake, miss? Mr. Treville is taking Middle School Assembly at nine. But wait a minute—"

He strode into his lodge and picked up the house phone. He spoke for a few minutes, then put it down.

"Mr. Treville will be here in a minute, but he can't stay long," he said. "Maybe you'd better talk to him in the lodge here, miss. I'm going across to Upper House now."

Maisie thanked him, vaguely puzzled now, and entered the lodge. Two minutes later Jack, still in the disguise he had adopted, hurriedly came in.

"Maisie!" he cried. "What brings you here?"

"You," she said.

"Me?"  
"You phoned me, didn't you?"  
"I didn't." He stared. "I've phoned nobody." And then, as bewilderedly she explained, his face took on a worried look.

"Gosh," he breathed. "I wonder!"

"What do you wonder, Jack?"

"I wonder if it was Drayton who rang you? Though why, I can't imagine!"

Maisie started.

"To get me away from the shop for some reason," she said slowly. "I'd better—"

There was no time to say more, for the assembly bell was already beginning to chime and Jack had to race back to the school building.

"I'll tackle the blighter about it when I see him," he assured her, as with a wave he made his way up the drive. "Don't worry, Maisie!"

But Maisie couldn't help but worry as she hurried homewards. Then, reaching the shop at last, that worry became real fear.

For the door, which she had left locked, was slightly ajar. Pushing it open, she entered, her heart beating fast.

She looked round. In the first glance nothing seemed different. Then she heard a sound from her right, and, swinging round, saw that the door of the small changing-room was slightly open.

She strode to the door; flung it open.

"You!" she exclaimed.

Sidney Drayton was standing there. The curtain that screened the row of suits and dresses was swept aside. For a moment his eyes flickered as he met her gaze, but otherwise he seemed in no wise disturbed. He even grinned.

"Good-morning."  
"What are you doing in my shop?" Maisie demanded sharply. "I suppose you know I could call the police?"

"I shouldn't if I were you, Maisie Lancing!" he said with a leer of triumph. "You see, it happens that I've made some discoveries."

"What sort of discoveries? And why should they interest me?" Maisie snapped.

"Well—" He lounged against the rack of costumes. "This morning, for instance, I had a good look in Mr. Treville's study. And what do you think I found there? I found Jack Hayward's cap and coat!"

"Indeed!" Maisie said scornfully. "I dare say Mr. Treville will be able to account for their presence there quite easily. But what is this to do with me, may I ask?"

"Just this," Drayton smiled unpleasantly. "I had a good look at the so-called Mr. Treville's gown also. And I happened to recognise it. It's the one old Spinks left at this shop. I knew it was in this room a few days ago, and so—well, I just came to make sure—"

"And so," Maisie said cuttingly, "you sent that faked phone call—so that you could search here in my absence?"

"Exactly!" He nodded. "Rather gave yourself away on the phone, didn't you?" he grinned. "Well, I'm satisfied now. The gown isn't here because Jack Hayward, disguised as Mr. Treville, is wearing it!"

"How absurd!" Maisie's voice was icy, though a feverish fire was coursing in her veins.

"You'll see if it's absurd. I'm now going to show Jack Hayward up. At twelve o'clock Mr. Treville, as he calls himself, will be taking Middle School dismiss in the hall—and then—then things will happen. It'll be just too bad for him—and for you, too. Good-morning!"

He hunched his coat more firmly about his shoulders. He gave her a grin. Then, leaving her standing there in numbed dismay, he walked to the door, strode into the street and slammed the door behind him. Maisie's brain was reeling; she stared dizzily round the room he had vacated. What should she do? Oh, what should she do?

Feverishly she thought out some plan of action. She must warn Jack. She must get word to him—before twelve o'clock; before it was too late. She glanced at the clock. It was past eleven already.

Out of the shop Maisie ran. It was a quarter to twelve when she reached the school, but in answer to her question the gatekeeper shook his head.

"Mr. Treville is busy now, miss. He won't be free until five to twelve, when he takes Dismiss in Big Hall. I'm afraid you'll have to wait till then. Why not go to the tuckshop and wait?"

"Thank you. I will wait," Maisie said.

But she had no intention of going to the tuckshop. She hurried through the deserted grounds towards the school, hoping that by some means she would be able to get in touch with Jack, to give him warning of the peril that threatened him. Reaching Big Hall, with its maze of corridors leading off this way and that, she halted in bewilderment.

Even as she stood there a door at the far side of the hall came open.

Instantly Maisie darted behind a near-by screen. From that hide-out she peered across the hall, and her heart leapt.

"Jack!" she found herself calling.

For Jack Hayward, in his master's gown and

mortar-board, it was. For a moment he paused, for a moment stared straight at her. Then abruptly he had turned on his heel and hurried back down the corridor.

### DRAYTON'S BIG MOMENT



"JACK!" she cried again, in bewildered dismay.

But there was no reply. What was wrong? He had seen her she was sure.

"Jack, Jack, I've got to tell you— Her panted words trailed off as she entered the corridor. For Jack had disappeared. Then she gave a gasp and pulled up as she found herself confronting two figures coming towards her. One was Sidney Drayton, a look of gloating satisfaction on his face. The other, Doctor Brakethorn, the headmaster himself.

The doctor, unlike his prefect, was not looking pleased. He was, in fact, frowning heavily. He halted as he saw Maisie, and she, wondering if she should hurl herself past him, knew that Sidney Drayton had already prepared the headmaster for his surprise. Abruptly Maisie wheeled.

"No, you don't!" Drayton said softly, and caught her by the shoulder.

"This is the girl, sir," he said smoothly. "This girl?" The headmaster frowned. "What do you know about this—this conspiracy—this—this imposture? The allegation is that you have assisted one of my boys—an expelled boy—to impersonate a master here."

Maisie stared at him, her brain racing like a machine now. The game was up, she saw, but even at this last minute she would not let Jack down—would not abandon hope that in the next few seconds she might find some way of warning him—of saving him! She must play for time.

"This boy broke into my shop this morning!" she said angrily. "I should not dream of taking his word for anything. He—"

"What?" "She's trying to side-track you, sir," Drayton said furiously. "I tell you, she's been helping Jack Hayward to impersonate a master." He paused, as there came a tramp of feet from another corridor, as boys could be heard filing into the hall.

Then Maisie jumped as she heard Jack's voice:

"Halt, boys! Face to your front!" Jack was there, all unsuspecting of Sidney Drayton's trap. She did not hesitate. Like a top she spun round, racing back along the corridor.

"Hey!" shouted Drayton.

"Giri!" the headmaster cried. But Maisie was desperately running on, Drayton thundering in pursuit. She burst into the hall, to find thirty pairs of surprised boys' eyes upon her—in time to see the gowned form of Jack mounting the rostrum.

"Jack, Jack!" she shouted quickly. "Get away!"

The master frowned down at her. She felt frantic as she saw the surprised, unrecognising look in his eyes. Oh, great goodness, what part was Jack playing now?

Then Drayton was upon her. With a snarl he had whirled her aside and was running up the platform steps. His voice was shrill with triumph.

"One moment, Mr. Treville—"

"Jack!" Maisie gasped faintly. But there was nothing she could do now. She felt like fainting as Drayton's hand shot out and fastened firmly over the master's moustache.

And Drayton tugged. Hard! The school stood, open-mouthed, electrified. Doctor Brakethorn did not move. Then, from the master, went up a yell of pain. His head

jerked forward as Drayton pulled again. But the moustache remained firm.

"It—it's real," Drayton stuttered. "It can't be!"

The master's hand came round. There was a cheer as the prefect staggered back under the blow which smote him across the face. The next moment the hall was in an uproar. And Maisie, wondering if she were dreaming, was staring, wide-eyed, at the master: from him to the astounded, flabbergasted Drayton.

Then a new interruption occurred.

"Hallo, everyone!" Maisie jumped. Then, again, she almost fell down, for there, racing across the hall, was a second Mr. Treville. But this time she knew it was Jack—Jack carrying a bag under his arm.

"Hold that fellow Drayton!" he cried. "Hold him! I've found what I was after—in his study. He's the thief. He's the rotter who would have had me expelled for what he did. And no wonder he wanted me expelled," he added, as he shot up the steps.

He opened the bag. He shot the contents on to the floor. And Drayton staggered back, his face chalky white with guilt and terror as a mass of articles rolled across the platform.

"WELL, sir, that's the story," Jack Hayward said quietly. "I came back to the school in this disguise because I had a hunch I'd find the stolen things in Drayton's study, if only I could get the chance to search. He put the blame on me because he knew I suspected him from the start. But it was jolly hard to prove anything against a prefect."

"And you—the headmaster turned to Maisie—"you helped this boy?"

"Yes, sir," she said quietly.

"Come to that, I guess I did, too," the real Mr. Treville said with a smile. "I turned up unexpectedly this morning and found this boy in my study. But when he told me the story—well, I fell for it. I decided to help him by letting him run around while I took the class as usual. A bit against the rules, I'm afraid, sir," he added to the bewildered headmaster, "but as things have turned out—"

"As things have turned out—a worthy decision," Dr. Brakethorn said cordially. "You took a risk, Mr. Treville, but I'm glad you did. Hayward, you will, of course, be reinstated immediately. I will see that a full apology is made to you at the next assembly. And as for you, Miss Lancing—"

He smiled. "On behalf of the school, I—I thank you," he added. "I congratulate Hayward in having made such a staunch and loyal friend."

Maisie smiled happily, for she knew that she also had made a friend no less staunch and loyal in Jack. Her happiness was complete when, a week later, her aunt made her a partner in her costumer's shop, on the very day that she was to go to the Dovestone Clove ball, with Jack Hayward as her proud escort.

THE END.

## THE UNWANTED GUEST AT THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

Don't miss this grand complete story in next Friday's Christmas number of the

### GIRLS' CRYSTAL

# THE MERRYMAKERS AT COLLEGE

(Continued from page 216.)

Helplessly Nat Piggot placed the bouquet to his nose, and shook his head.

"Yet they remind me, vaguely, of a bloom I knew in my student days," the dean went on interestedly. "Take off the card, will you, Santa Claus?"

"It's tied on, sir!" said Piggot weakly. "Never mind, just give it a pull," smiled the dean. "A sharp pull!"

Piggot shuddered. He gave a hopeless, sharp pull at the dangling card on its string.

Bang! And the cabbage burst open, shooting clouds of flour into Piggot's already sooty face.

The audience, Sally & Co., Linda's uncle, and even the dean rocked with mirth at the extraordinary figure on the platform.

"I knew that trick in my younger days—and you knew it, too, eh, Santa Claus?" bantered the dean, watching Piggot with penetrating eyes. "I wonder how you knew? Did our mysterious X tell you what to expect?"

Piggot mumbled incoherently, but he knew he was bowled out.

"In fact," smiled the dean, "you yourself are Mr. X, and it was you who substituted this remarkable sack for the real sack of gifts, believing that your rival in J House was going to distribute them? Well, well, don't be discomfited, Piggot. You have embarrassed no one but yourself. You have given us all a hearty laugh and we were very glad to enjoy it—at your expense. Thank you, Santa Claus. Now I suggest—"

"Y-yes, sir?" faltered Piggot. "That you hand your costume back to J House, to the Santa Claus I first chose," said the dean. "The rest of us will retire for five minutes while Weston is changing."

Piggot threw off his whiskers and costume and fled.

While Don changed, Sally and the rest rummaged feverishly through the fake parcels.

There seemed to be no sign of the missing picture in the sack of fake parcels and Sally abandoned her chums to search around the art room.

Oh, where had Piggot hidden the picture? Didn't he realise how valuable it was—how much it meant to poor Linda?

She looked across at her chum and saw the worried, anxious look on her face. They simply must find that picture before Linda met her uncle, she decided. If they had to tell him that it had been lost, as the result of a stupid practical joke, Mr. Carson would never forgive her, and Linda's career at Roxburgh would be at an end.

Sally shook her head. No, that mustn't happen, she told herself determinedly. Linda was getting along too well at her art course to have to give it up now. Besides, she was such a good sport, such a loyal chum. That picture must be found!

She noticed that Rex Walpole had come in and joined the search. He was peering into dark corners and recesses of the hall, but to no avail.

Where could it be? Sally flitted about the room, looking behind the bookcases which lined the room, but no—

"Then a beaten cry came from Linda. 'It's not here! Uncle's picture isn't here!'"

Rex Walpole, showing the same anxious concern for her loss as before, jumped up on to the platform with her.

"But it must be here! We knew Piggot took it!" he insisted agitatedly. "You dash after him; I'll search here!"

Sally was gazing about her in fuming helplessness. There was no time to waste now, the

chums realised. In another three minutes the visitors would be flocking back for the presentation. Piggot would have to be tackled later about the picture. He had probably taken it with him, anyhow, when he escaped through the window during the chase. Where was the other sack, the real gift sack which Don would now need?

Then her gaze lit upon a plaster model covered by a canvas sheet which stood at the back of the platform. Swiftly she drew the canvas aside. Yes, there was the other sack hidden beneath it, leaning against the model.

She made a grab at it; then: "It's here! Linda's picture! It's here!" she cried joyfully.

Her hand flashed into the sack and drew out the missing Debroy painting. It was right at the very top, as if it had been thrust there in hectic haste.

Linda was almost weeping with relief as Sally thrust it into her eager hands.

"So this is where Piggot hid it!" she panted. "In the genuine Santa Claus sack!"

Sally looked puzzled. "B-but it couldn't have been Piggot—" she began.

How could Piggot have hidden the picture here? she was asking herself dizzily. He didn't know where the sack was! He obviously hadn't known, otherwise he could have saved himself that humiliating ordeal with the spoof sack! Anyway, of what concern was it now? Linda had got her picture back! That was all that mattered. Sally forgot her puzzlement and threw herself heart and soul into the fun of the real Santa Claus presentation.

It was a huge success, with loads of gifts and a college diploma each for Sally and her chums and a college honour for Linda Carson.

Linda's uncle was more than pleased with the delightful copy she had painted of his prized Debroy. He compared the two together. Linda's copy and his own original, and he pronounced himself quite satisfied. Two more years at Roxburgh, he said, and Linda was going to be a great artist.

"But we'll talk more about that when I see you and these friends of yours over the Christmas holidays—eh, Linda?" he finished up, his jovial smile embracing Sally & Co. "You break up to-morrow, so you'll go straight along to the chalet. You'll find it all ready for you, and the servants there by now. I shall join you a few days later—about Christmas Eve, I expect!"

"We've been looking forward to this, Mr. Carson, more than any of us can tell you!" Sally said radiantly, speaking for all.

"Then I'll tell you now, Sally, that my mountain chalet hasn't been opened since last Christmas, and I'm opening it specially for you young people this Christmas," he said. "There'll just be yourselves and the servants there till I come—and here is the key!"

With a thrill of excitement, Linda took the key he handed her, then rushed off with Sally and the others to pack for their Christmas holiday in her uncle's mountain chalet. But in Sally's eyes that look of puzzlement lingered. She was thinking again of the painting which had so unexpectedly turned up in the second sack. More than ever she was certain that Nat Piggot had not put it there. Then who had?

If Piggot had not been that furtive figure they had seen in the Santa Claus garments, who had been the real thief? Sally did not know, but she felt vaguely uneasy, for she could not rid herself of the suspicion that they were to encounter that elusive mystery person again; could not smother the feeling that at the mountain chalet there awaited them not only Christmas fun, but mystery and adventure.

End of this week's story.

Next Friday's Merry-makers story will be full of Christmas fun and adventure. So don't miss your copy of the GIRLS' CRYSTAL.