

GIRLS' CRYSTAL³

Week
Ending
Nov. 24th,
1945.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



RICK REFUSED HIS FRIENDSHIP

Ann Sutton And Rick Oakley, The Heroine And Hero Of That Popular Serial "Wild Boy Of The Woods," Are Featured In This Fine Complete Story—By HAZEL ARMITAGE

THE NEWCOMER TO THE STABLES

"ANN, please do your best. Do make Rick come to the party. You know it's no good my asking him. He'd just refuse." Vance Gower spoke anxiously, almost pleadingly, as he faced Ann Sutton in the Lodge of Sutton's Stables. And Ann, looking back at him, smiled.

"I'll do my best, Vance," she assured him. "Rick isn't really as surly as you think, you know. He's just a bit—well, reserved, because you haven't been here long, perhaps."

"The chap doesn't like me," Vance insisted. "And you know it, Ann, though you're sticking up for him. I wish he did," he added, with a little sigh, "because he can't possibly know how much I think of him. Do your best, Ann, won't you?"

Ann promised. She certainly would. She liked Vance Gower, always so courteous, so thoughtful, so generous. She echoed Vance's wish with all her heart. But she was so perplexed. Why was it that Rick Oakley, her young partner in the stables, treated Vance with such silent hostility?

It was odd, looked at from any point of view. For Rick had known and liked Vance's Uncle Stephen, who had sent Vance along to the stables. Rick's pet enthusiasm in the stables at the moment was Fancy Lad, the fine hunter which belonged to Stephen Gower, and which he was training for the Hertfield Handicap, which was to take place in a fortnight's time. Yet there was no doubt that Rick did not like Vance Gower, and, being Rick, had taken no trouble at all to conceal that dislike.

"I'm throwing the party because I want to get to know everybody," Vance went on. "You'll have most of your riding school clients

here this afternoon, won't you? Please invite them all. Tingley's, the caterers, are seeing to the food, you know, and they've promised me a good show. We'll use the big barn behind the stables, if you don't mind. But we've already discussed that, haven't we? Ann, what does Rick think of Fancy Lad's chances? He won't tell me a thing."

"Oh, Rick's as keen as mustard. He thinks the horse will win easily."

"It'll be a good thing for your stables, won't it?" Vance asked.

"I'll say." Ann dimpled enthusiastically. "It's the one big honour Sutton's haven't claimed yet—the training of a winner for the Hertfield Handicap. And it will win—if Rick says so," she added, with confidence.

He nodded and smiled. Then as the maid came along to tell him that Tingley's men had arrived, he hurried off to make the necessary arrangements for his party.

Ann watched him go. A nice boy, she thought. But why—oh, why, was Rick so antagonistic towards him? There was no reason that she could think of. As far as she knew Rick and Vance had never met until the latter's arrival at the stables the day before yesterday. Then he had strolled in saying that he had taken a room in the village, and would be keeping an eye on uncle's horse until the day of the race.

Rick had known Vance's uncle, however, when he had lived with his old father at Flatlands Farm, just the other side of Wildwood. And Rick had liked the uncle—and the uncle's father. Then why did he not like Vance?

Ann shook her head. She must certainly tackle Rick about it, she thought. She'd do so as soon as he arrived back from the market at Hertfield.

Meantime, preparations for Vance's party were going on apace in the big barn. In the early afternoon the riding school guests began to arrive, and one and all were delighted at being invited. Half an hour before the party was due to commence Rick Oakley himself came riding in.

"What goes on in the big barn, Miss Ann?" he asked, as he unharnessed his favourite horse, Black Ben.

Ann told him. His brows came together. "Master Vance is having a party," he said quietly. "Oh! You gave him permission, Miss Ann?"

"Rick, of course. He's invited you, too."

"At once Rick shook his head.

"I prefer not to go, Miss Ann. I have work to do."

"Well, haven't we all?" Ann looked at him. "Rick, supposing this had been my party—would you have had work to do then?"

He looked at her reproachfully.

"You know, Miss Ann, that neither work nor anything else could come before your wishes. But this—this is different."

"Because——" Ann looked at him. "Rick, admit the truth. It's different, because you don't like Vance Gower?"

Rick coloured a little. But his clear eyes, unflinching and steadfast, stared at her.

"I have no cause to like him, Miss Ann."

"Why?"

He shook his head.

"I have my reasons, but you would not understand, Miss Ann."

"But what on earth has he done to you?"

"Nothing."

"Rick! For the first time Ann found herself becoming impatient. This was so unlike Rick—usually so definite, so clear-headed in his way of thinking. "Rick, that's nonsense."

"It may be, Miss Ann." He shook his head. "You go to your party, Miss Ann. You enjoy yourself."

"Without you?"

"I am afraid so."

"Rick!" She fought back the little surge of crossness she felt growing. "Rick, please listen. I can't go to the party without you. You're my partner, don't forget. We've accepted Vance's uncle's order to train his horse, and we hope to win with it. Vance is here as his uncle's representative, and it would be positively rude to turn down his invitation. Don't you see that, Rick? You've got to come to the party—for the sake of the stables."

He stared at her, the colour mounting under his weather-tanned cheeks. She could see that it was on the tip of his tongue to argue. But she could also see that he realised she was in earnest.

"You mean, you ask me to go, Miss Ann?"

"Yes, Rick, I ask you to go!"

"In that case, I will come," he said, though he could not hide the flicker of distaste which crossed his features. "I will be ready as soon as I have stabled Black Ben," he added, and with that led the horse away.

He was as good as his word. Half an hour later when Ann, happy again and dressed in her nicest afternoon frock, came down from her room, she found him waiting in the sitting-room of the Lodge, carefully changed out of riding breeches into a blue, well-cut suit, which seemed to make him more towering and gigantic than ever.

Ann laughed at him as she saw the admiration in his own eyes.

"How do I look, Rick?" she asked.

"As always, Miss Ann—lovely. But this afternoon I think a little more lovely than usual."

She laughed again, embarrassed by the fulsome-ness of the compliment.

"I'm glad. It's a change to wear a dress, after breeches and shirts."

There was a cheer when they walked into the big barn together, where two dozen other guests had congregated, and where Vance

Gower's party was in full swing. Vance himself came eagerly towards them.

"Nice of you to come, Ann," he said enthusiastically. "And you, Rick. Come along to my table——"

Rick would have drawn back, but Ann urged him forward.

They arrived at Vance's table. Tea was poured, cakes handed to them. But Ann noticed that Rick drank nothing, and made no attempt to eat.

"Old man, you'll starve," Vance laughed. "You work hard, you know, so you ought to eat, which reminds me. Ann tells me you think Fancy Lad has a good chance——"

"I think he has the best chance," Rick said stiffly.

And he closed his lips as though that ended the conversation.

Vance flushed. Ann could see that he felt snubbed, and again she was nettled with Rick. She was glad when somebody suggested a dance. Tony Allen had brought his accordion and had begun to play, and Vance, at once rising, asked her if he might be honoured. The flash of disapproval she saw in Rick's face hastened her acceptance.

When the dance was finished Rick had gone.

There was another dance—another. Then the party wound up, with everybody linking hands and declaring, to the accompaniment of Tony's accordion, that Vance Gower was a jolly good fellow. And then, of course, Vance was bombarded with demands for a speech.

Vance made his speech—a pleasant, easy little speech which bubbled with good humour.

"You know why I'm here," Vance concluded—"just to keep an eye on Fancy Lad. Uncle's dead keen for him to win the handicap, and a fine judge of horseflesh says that he will win it. I've no need to tell you who that judge is," he smiled, and immediately went on to do so. "Rick Oakley!"

There was an enthusiastic cheer.

"And now just to round off, what about having a look at Fancy Lad?" Vance went on. "Supposing we have an impromptu race—with me riding Fancy Lad?"

"Good idea," Dick Lacey applauded at once. "O.K. with you, Ann?"

"Perfectly," Ann smiled.

"Then let's go."

Eager to see the fancied champion of the coming handicap in action, they all swarmed out into the stable-yard. And Vance, rushing to Fancy Lad's stable, pulled at the door.

Then he stopped.

"Ann, the door locked. Have you got the key?"

"Locked?" cried Ann.

She bit her lip. It was not the habit at Sutton's to lock stable doors during the daytime, but Fancy Lad's stall was certainly locked. And that meant, of course, that only Rick could have locked it.

"Rick must have done it for some reason," she said.

"But where's the key?" Vance questioned.

"Rick's got it."

"Then where's Rick?"

A little silence fell. Again Ann felt that sense of annoyance against Rick. Really, Rick had no right to play this trick without telling her. But loyalty to Rick was her first consideration, and she was desperately struggling to find an excuse in his favour when there came a sudden cry from Dick Lacey.

"There he is!"

There Rick was—a sturdy, rock-like figure mounted on Black Ben. He had changed, Ann noticed, again from his lounge suit into his riding clothes.

"Rick!" she called.

He heard, and slowly he came towards the group.

"Yes, Miss Ann?" he asked quietly.

"Rick, have you the key of Fancy Lad's stall? Master Vance wishes to take the horse

for a gallop. So will you unlock the door, please?"

She was amazed and humiliated when she saw Rick's reaction to that request. She saw the look he threw at Vance Gower. Then he braced himself.

"I am sorry, Miss Ann," he answered quietly, "but that I cannot do. Fancy Lad was entrusted to me for my care and for my training. No one except myself may gallop Fancy Lad."

"But, dash it all, man, I'm the owner's nephew!" Vance protested. "Look here, Rick—"

"My answer is still the same," Rick said steadily, gazing at him. "While that horse is in my hands, only I shall ride him. That is all," he added stiffly.

And while everyone gasped in surprise, and Ann stood rooted in sudden fury and shame, Rick turned Black Ben's head and went trotting towards the stable gates.

THE FEUD GROWS

"RICK!" Ann shouted angrily.

But Rick did not turn this time. Reaching the gate he trotted through, and then, urging Black Ben into a canter, quickly disappeared.

There was a murmur from the crowd—a murmur of surprise, of resentment. There

was a burning flush in the face of Vance Gower, and much sympathy in the looks the others threw at him.

"Ann, what on earth is the matter with the chap?" Vance asked.

"I—I'm terribly sorry," Ann stammered. "Oh, please don't be!" he said swiftly. "It's not your fault. But"—he laughed—"I don't know. This beats me. He seems to take himself much too seriously, if you ask me."

Ann did not answer. She had always thought she understood Rick as no one else did. But now he puzzled her. Annoyed her, too—and she did so hate to feel annoyed with Rick—the truest, and most loyal comrade she had ever known.

Why should he treat Vance Gower like this? Why lock up the horse that his uncle owned—even if the uncle had deputed Rick to train and manage the horse? It was all so absurd.

"He—he's a funny boy," she said now. "But I'm sure he's got some reason for it. Anyway," she said brightly, turning the conversation. "Don't let's be done out of our gallop. Supposing I lend you Firebrand, Vance?"

Vance accepted the loan. In the zest and enjoyment of the gallop which ensued, Rick's behaviour was forgotten. He was not in the stable when they returned, nor when the guests finally said good-bye and went home, Vance Gower among them.

Not until dusk did Rick come in, and then he set about his usual evening work. When it was finished, and the horses were watered, fed, and stabled for the night, Ann approached him.

"Rick, just what is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, Miss Ann."

"But—but why did you lock Fancy Lad's stable and refuse to hand over the key?"

"Because, as I said, Fancy Lad is my responsibility, Miss Ann. The owner has left him in my charge."

"But, Rick, you're not forgetting that Vance is the owner's nephew? And Mr. Gower hasn't said that Vance shouldn't ride him?"

"No," Rick admitted. "Mr. Gower has not even mentioned his nephew. And until he does, until Mr. Gower says that Vance may ride the horse, Fancy Lad is in my care only."

Ann saw, from the dogged line of his jaw, that it would be no good pursuing the argument. She wanted to pursue it, but she was

afraid now of her own feelings—afraid of that vexation she found rising, and which might well bring about a quarrel if she allowed it to get the upper hand. With difficulty she stifled her feelings.

But at supper, for the first time, there was restraint between them. And later, when Ann went to her own room, she was more worried than she cared to admit.

Oh, what was wrong with Rick Oakley? Why had he made such a dead set against such a pleasant and likeable fellow as Vance Gower?

In the morning just after breakfast she received a visit from Vance himself. He was looking very concerned.

"I had a word with uncle on the phone last night," he said. "I didn't mention, of course, that there'd been any upset at the stables, but I did ask him if he minded my riding Fancy Lad. And, of course, he said I could."

"Well, Vance, you know I don't object," Ann said at once.

"No, but Rick does." His brows corrugated. "It makes it dashed awkward, Ann. What a queer chap he is! Why does he dislike me so?"

"He hasn't said he dislikes you," Ann defended at once.

"No; but he's shown it pretty plainly. Do you think he's jealous, or anything?"

"What has he to be jealous of?"

"Oh, I don't know! Perhaps because I come to the stables too often. Perhaps—I don't know—perhaps because the clients seem to like me. It's a pity," he added ruefully, "because I really would like to be pals with the chap. He could teach me such a lot about horses while I'm here. Ann, can't you try to persuade him? It would be so jolly if the three of us could hit it off together."

Ann thought for a moment, all her own feelings echoing the wish.

"Let's go across the yard and have a word with him," she suggested.

But Rick was not to be found. Dick Lacey and a few others had appeared for an early morning canter. But they all shook their heads when Ann asked if they had seen Rick.

"No," said Dick. "That's odd, isn't it? He's usually around about this time— He paused, not missing the shadow that crossed Ann's face. "Ann, there's nothing the matter with him, is there?"

"What should be the matter?" Ann questioned, with a sharpness she did not intend.

"Nothing. But—well, he's been a bit weird just lately. Look at yesterday afternoon, for instance. He was like a spectre of gloom at Vance's party. And—I say—" Dick whistled suddenly. "Has somebody taken Fancy Lad away? His stable door's open."

Both Ann and Vance whipped round together, and for a moment they stood staring in surprise at the door now creaking in the wind. Then, with a frown, Vance ran towards the stable. He peered in.

"It's right enough," he said. "Fancy Lad is out. Gosh, you don't think Rick—"

"No," Ann said at once. "It—it must be Jim, the groom. Rick would have mentioned that he was going to take out Fancy Lad if he intended to do so. Anyway, what about a canter across the common, people?"

They were all keen on the idea. Again Ann lent Firebrand to Vance, and, saddled up, they trotted out of the stables in a string. As they did so Vance pulled up with a start.

"Well, just look at that!" he suddenly cried. "Who said that Rick hadn't taken Fancy Lad out?"

Ann stared, her heart once again engulfed in dismay. For there was Rick, riding the magnificent chestnut hunter which was his present pride and joy. He was riding towards the other entrance to the stables—and, as usual, riding superbly. He saw them, half-raised his hand in salute, and then galloped on.



"I say, that's a bit thick," Vance said indignantly. "Here am I, having to borrow a mount when my own—or my uncle's—is being tried out by someone else! Come on, Ann, I'm going back into the stable to get it."

There was a pause. Ann sensed trouble. But Vance's argument, after all, was reasonable. It did seem absurd to deny him use of his uncle's horse, when he had not got a mount of his own. Biting her lip, she turned as Vance turned. With the rest of the cavalcade trotting in rear, they clopped back into the stables. Rick, in the act of locking Fancy Lad's stall, turned inquiringly as they came up.

"Look here——" Vance began.

But Ann, riding swiftly alongside, silenced him.

"Please let me do the talking, Vance!" she begged.

Vance shrugged. But he stood aside. Ann slipped from her saddle.

"Rick, you've just been out with Fancy Lad?"

"That's right, Miss Ann."

"Master Vance rather wanted to ride him," Ann said, and braced herself as she saw the stormclouds gather at once in her partner's face. "He's had his uncle's permission, Rick——"

"Oh! When?"

"Last night. I telephoned him," Vance said quickly. "Look here, old man——"

"You telephoned him?" Rick shook his head. "But he did not telephone the stables, did he? I obey only his direct instructions——none other."

There was a murmur. A little wave of resentment passed through the crowd. Really Rick was being too high-handed altogether.

"But, Rick, this is ridiculous!" Ann said hotly.

"You think so, Miss Ann?" He looked at her. "Then let us phone Mr. Gower ourselves——"

"That would be useless!" Vance put in angrily. "Uncle is away to-day——will be away for the next few days, as a matter of fact, so you couldn't get in touch with him. Anyway, what's the objection to my riding the horse? Do you think I'll lame him, or something?"

"No," Rick said simply.

"Then perhaps you think I'll steal him——my own uncle's horse!"

"I do not think that, either," Rick said. "In Firebrand you have the best horse in Sutton's Stables, so why bother about Fancy Lad?"

"Oh, come on, the fellow's batty!" Evan Trivett said disgustfully. "I've never heard such bosh! Why not admit the truth, Rick? You don't like Vance, so won't allow him to touch his uncle's horse."

For answer Rick picked up a bucket. Clearly demonstrating that the conversation was at an end, he walked away towards the pump.

But the scene left an unpleasant aftermath. Ann was really worried. There really did seem to be no possible reason for Rick's attitude towards Vance Gower, and Vance himself, as if to emphasise that point, was nicer than ever on that jaunt of theirs. It was he who suggested a gallop to the Dick Turpin Road-house—he who stood treat when they got there, and he who, seeing a dance advertised in the coffee-room, bought tickets there and then for all present.

Back at the stables there was no sign of Rick. He did not appear, in fact, until tea-time, and Ann guessed that he had spent the time in Witches Wood with his wild forest ponies, who he still treated with the greatest devotion.

It was a very silent Rick who had tea with Ann. It was a very unhappy Ann who shared the meal with Rick. He asked questions—trifling questions—which she answered, endeavouring to keep out the note of strain which she felt trembling in her voice. After tea they both listened to the radio, and then,

as it was growing dusk, Rick picked up his cap.

"I will see that all is right for the night," he said, and went out.

Ann nodded. Rick really could be so nice—always trying to save her work. She wondered what on earth she would do if ever she were without him? Immediately she knew the answer. She couldn't do without him.

Dusk deepened to near darkness. Ann rose and switched on the lights. And then all at once from the stable-yard outside there came a sudden clatter, the frightened whinny of a horse—a crash!

And then a cry—a cry of pain—in Vance Gower's voice!

In a flash Ann was on her feet, and darted outside. It was not yet quite dark, and the landing light was helped out by an early moon. She ran, and as she ran she heard Rick's voice—angry and threatening.

"You asked for it!"

Ann recoiled in horror as she came upon the scene. For there in front of her was Rick, his chest rising and falling, a stout stick in his hand. And there at his feet, a great weal across his cheek, was Vance Gower.

"Rick!" Ann shrieked.

Rick turned, but Ann did not give him a second look. She flew to Vance Gower's side.

"Vance, what's happened?"

"That—that rotter——" Vance got out painfully. "Oh—my—face——"

"Rick!" Ann flashed round. "Rick, how—how could you?" she quivered.

Rick stared.

"You—you think I did that, Miss Ann?"

"Of course!"

"I did not!" Rick said, and a sudden fire smouldered in his eyes—a fire of scorn as he looked at the figure at his feet. "He fell in the stable; hurting himself. But why should I explain, Miss Ann, since you seem so ready to believe ill of me? I thought that you would know better," he said bluntly. "I am not a bully."

He turned, swinging away. Ann stood still, shaken to her depths. Did she believe him? She knew in a flash that she did—that Rick, however much he disliked Vance Gower, would never descend to an act of treachery such as this scene suggested.

But Rick, obviously, was deeply hurt and offended by her lack of belief in him. She turned as Vance staggered to his feet, still holding his face.

"Vance, what happened?"

"I don't rightly know," he said slowly. "I only know I was determined to ride on Fancy Lad, and I was going into the stables when Rick came up behind me. Then——he shrugged—"I heard a whiz, got a whang in the face—and just went down for six. I suppose that chap lashed out at me with the stick——"

"But, Vance, he wouldn't!"

"Will you tell me who did, then?" he asked curtly. "Dash it, Ann——"

"But, Vance, I'm sure——"

"I think I ought to be the one to know," he said, rather tartly. "I don't want to hurt the stables, as you know, Ann, for your sake, but if this sort of thing is going to go on I'll have to think about writing to my uncle. We——" And then he stopped as Rick, swinging a lantern, came forward again.

He would have passed them both without a look as he headed for Fancy Lad's stall, but Ann called to him:

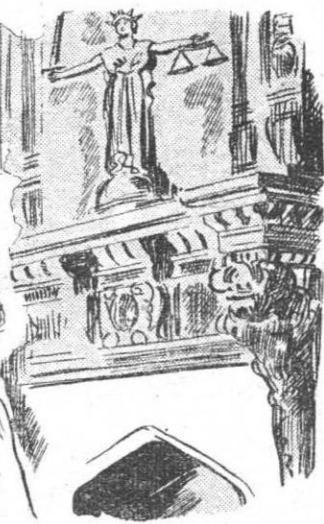
"Rick, what are you doing?"

He paused. With eyes that still smouldered he gazed at Vance.

"I'm going to sleep in Fancy Lad's stall," he said deliberately. "I'll have no interlopers meddling with horses which have been given to my charge. So please keep out, Master Vance."

(Please turn to page 137.)

Detective June's MOST THRILLING CASE



JUNE'S ASTOUNDING SUSPICION

By PETER LANGLEY

JUNE GAYNOR, niece of Noel Raymond, the famous young detective, went to Port Craig College disguised as a new girl, Dorothy Whitman. Her object was to help her uncle track down a mysterious master-crook known as the Grey Falcon.

As a result of the Grey Falcon's scheming Noel was accused of himself being the Grey Falcon, and of stealing jewels from the near-by Manor, tenanted by Howard Wyndham, chairman of the college governors.

Miss Tuft, the Upper Fourth Form mistress, was secretly in league with the Grey Falcon, and she suspected that one of her girls was really Noel Raymond's niece in disguise.

The Upper Fourth Formers were invited to a party at the Manor. All of them eagerly looked forward to it, especially June, for her uncle arranged to meet her there, disguised as a Scotland Yard inspector.

To June's dismay, when she arrived, there was no sign of Noel. And as the afternoon wore on she began to feel anxious.

And then, during tea, she received another shock. The voice of the portly butler seemed vaguely familiar to her! He wore a strip of tape across his finger, a strip of tape that might conceal a scar! Was this the Grey Falcon?

JUNE caught in her breath.

Was it possible that her startling suspicion was correct?

Even as she joined in the merry chatter of the tea-table, she managed to keep the grave-faced, stately figure of the butler under observation.

He seemed the perfect servant, and yet June could not forget that tape on his thumb. Such a tape might well hide the tell-tale scar which the Grey Falcon possessed. And then there was his voice. She was certain she had heard it before.

"If he's not the Grey Falcon, then he's one of the gang—I'm positive of that," June told herself.

How she wished that Uncle Noel were here! Together they would quickly discover the truth, she felt sure. But if what the butler had told her was true, there was little chance

of the supposed Inspector Brown visiting the Manor this afternoon.

What had caused the disguised detective to alter his plans? He had been so certain of being able to bring the case to a successful conclusion to-day. In his letter to June he had declared that he had solved the message in code which was the key to the whole mystery, and—

Again June caught in her breath. Suddenly she had remembered that Uncle Noel in his letter had declared that the vital secret was to be found in the library. Why then should she not look for it? If Uncle Noel had decided it was unwise to keep his appointment here this afternoon, then he might deem it too risky to venture into the Manor at any future date. Certainly June herself would not get another such opportunity as this.

Her pulses began to race at the prospect of adventure, and she bent over her ice-cream to hide the sparkle of excitement in her eyes.

"I'll take a look around the library and see what I can find," she resolved.

Her chance came immediately after tea. Mr. Wyndham and his older guests retired to the ball-room, where the Upper Fourth Formers were to enact the scenes from their play, while a servant led Julie & Co. to the apartment which they were to use as a dressing-room.

Excited, and a little nervous at the ordeal which loomed ahead, the girls went trooping across the hall, but June deliberately loitered. She watched her chums file into the dressing-room, then looked swiftly around.

On the opposite side of the hall was a mahogany door bearing the name "LIBRARY" on it. Instantly she darted across to it, and turned the handle. Pushing open the door, she peered anxiously into the room. To her relief it was empty, so entering, she softly closed the door behind her and looked speculatively around her.

The library was a large room with ancient panelled walls and an oak-raftered ceiling. Book-cases lined two of the walls, and smaller cases stood on either side of the ancient fireplace, in which two big logs crackled and flamed. There was a Persian carpet on the

floor; big, comfortable-looking armchairs were dotted about.

It was a pleasant, innocent-seeming apartment, and June frowned a little helplessly as she gazed around.

What secret could be hidden here? What could Uncle Noel have possibly meant when—

"Goodness!"

June gave a sudden gasp, for her gaze had been drawn, as if by a magnet, to the wall above the big, old-fashioned fireplace, and there, carved in the panelling, was something which set her heart thumping.

The figure of Justice, holding aloft the traditional scales.

Instantly her thoughts went to the similar carving she had discovered in the old Refectory back at the college.

That carving was actually responsible for operating a secret door. By placing three queer brass figures in the scales, the ancient mechanism was put into action.

Was it possible that this carving worked in the same way?

It was certainly a strange coincidence that the walls of both apartments should be ornamented in the same way, and June could not help remembering that the Manor and the Refectory dated from about the same time.

She gave a thrilled gasp.

"Golly, suppose they're both connected!" she ejaculated. "Suppose those secret passages under the Refectory run out to the Manor! Suppose—"

Breaking off, she crossed to the panelled wall, looking eagerly for the three weights which might operate the mechanism, but none were visible. Stretching up her hand, she tested the carved scales which the figure held. The delicately balanced bowls quivered beneath the weight of her fingers.

"It is the same," she whispered. "I'm certain—"

And then she dropped her hand to her side, as if suddenly the carving had grown red-hot, and in alarm and dismay she swung round, for from the far side of the room had come a tell-tale click as the door had opened.

Standing there, a startled scowl on his face, was the butler, and as she swung round he came striding forward.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, and it was impossible to mistake the menacing note in his voice.

With an effort June forced herself to meet his hostile glare with an innocent smile.

"Oh, I'm just looking around," she said lightly. "I love old libraries. And that carving attracted my attention. Rather quaint, isn't it?"

His frown faded, but that suspicious glint in his eyes remained.

"Quite interesting, miss," he said, "but you have no right in here. I must ask you to leave."

"No right?" June raised her eyebrows in surprise. "But Mr. Wyndham said that we could go where we liked," she protested. "Anyway, is there any special reason why I shouldn't look in here?"

The butler's frown returned. He seemed to find her innocent-sounding question a little embarrassing.

"No, miss. Of course not, miss," he said hurriedly. "But the master has some very valuable books in his collection, and he does not care for visitors to come here. And might I remind you, miss, that the guests are waiting to see your play. You will no doubt wish to change. If you will be so good as to follow me, I will direct you to the dressing-room."

As he spoke he held open the door and stood aside. There was nothing for it but for June to leave, but as she made to pass through the doorway she paused, looking pointedly at the man's hand on the door-handle.

"Oh, I say, what have you done to your thumb?" she asked.

Hurriedly he let his hand drop to his side. "I had the misfortune to cut it, miss," he said stiffly. "This way, please!"

June's brows were puckered thoughtfully as she followed the man across the hall. She was positive now that the carved figure of Justice did hold the secret of the library, and she was equally certain that the butler was a crook.

But was he the Grey Falcon?

That cut thumb was certainly suspicious, and yet June had her doubts. Despite his indefinable air of menace, the butler seemed too crude and clumsy to be the clever master-crook. After all, his injury might only be a coincidence. Any of Mr. Howard's guests might have a similar cut; an old scar on the thumb would be difficult for any chance observer to spot.

"I've got to find out definitely," June told herself, as she reached the dressing-room, and the butler opened the door for her. "I know the Grey Falcon is living in the Manor, and I can't leave until I've discovered his identity. Somehow—"

She broke off and smiled apologetically as she entered the room, to find that Julie and all the rest were nearly ready.

"Sorry to be late," she said, "but I shan't be a tick."

"Well, mind you're not," urged Julie. "The curtain's due to go up in five minutes." "And it'll look bad if we make a late start," pointed out Lady Sue.

"Rather!" agreed Celia Treves.

"We've simply got to impress Mr. Wyndham," pointed out Mary Twigg. "Unless we do we've got no chance of putting on the play on Foundation Day. Unless we can persuade him to allow Miss Stanton to lift the ban on the Refectory, we'll just have to call it off."

There came an agitated chorus from all around, and June nodded understandingly. She could sympathise with her fellow Fourth Formers, and knew how extremely important it was that their performance this afternoon should be a success.

"Don't worry, girls," she said, "I won't keep you waiting."

But as she changed at top speed, her thoughts were not on the play, but on the identity of the Grey Falcon. By hook or by crook she was determined to solve that puzzle before the day was over, and as she groped in her attache-case for her make-up box she gave a sudden chuckle.

Lying beside it was a small, black-bound book. It looked to be an ordinary autograph book, but each of its pages had been specially prepared with a solution of Noel Raymond's invention, and more than once it had enabled June to secure a vital finger-print without her quarry having any suspicion as to what was afoot.

"That book'll help me," she murmured, and excitedly she stuffed it into the pocket of her billowing satin gown.

AN ASTOUNDING DISCOVERY



A FEW minutes later there came a knock at the door. It was one of the servants, come to conduct the schoolgirl players to the door which gave access to the stage that had been fitted up at one end of the large ball-room.

When her chums had arranged themselves for the first scene, Julie looked around a little anxiously, then gave a nod to the footman who was in charge of the curtains.

"Right! Let's start," she said.

The velvet curtains slid aside, and there came an involuntary outburst of clapping from Mr. Wyndham and his guests. The Upper Fourth Formers, attired in their picturesque costumes of long ago, certainly made a striking picture.

The performance started rather haltingly. Some of the girls were nervous, while June found it difficult to put on one side her detective worries. Gradually, however, the caste gained confidence, and June, clever little actress that she was, soon threw herself heart and soul into her part.

From where she stood in the wings, script in hand, Julie nodded approvingly.

"You're doing fine," she whispered. "Keep it up!"

When the first scene came to an end there was a thunder of applause. It was obvious that the schoolgirl players had made a hit, and when the performance was finally over the chairman of the college governors himself called for three cheers, then, leaving his seat, stepped up on to the stage, to beam around at the flushed, happy Upper Fourth Formers.

"Splendid, girls—simply splendid!" he cried. "I congratulate you all on a really sterling performance. We have all enjoyed it immensely. I can see your play is going to be the star feature of the Foundation Day programme."

The look of obvious admiration which accompanied his remarks made the girls flush with delight, but Lady Sue gave Julie a nudge.

"Now's your chance," she whispered.

A little anxiously Julie regarded the beaming Howard Wyndham.

"We're glad you're pleased, Mr. Wyndham," she said, "but we may not be able to put the play on on Foundation Day. You see, there's only one possible place to present it."

He frowned.

"You mean the old Refectory?" he said.

Julie nodded, and appealingly she surveyed him.

"Won't you ask Miss Stanton to lift the ban—please?" she begged.

The chairman of the governors pursed his lips.

"I'd like to help you, my dear, you know that," he said, "but I can't forget the threats made by that rascal, the Grey Falcon. While he remains at large I do not feel justified in letting you use the Refectory. But cheer up, my dear!" Abruptly his face broke into another reassuring smile. "Long before Foundation Day that scoundrel will have been laid by the heels."

"You really think so, sir?" asked Julie anxiously.

"Positive, my dear." Genially Mr. Wyndham patted her on the shoulder. "Now don't you worry. I'll see you put on your play somehow. Keep on rehearsing, and leave things to me. Now what about a little refreshment?" he asked.

He turned to signal the waiting servants, and June seized her opportunity to pull her autograph book out of her pocket.

"Please will you put your name on it?" she asked. "I'd like to get as many signatures as I can—just as a memento of this lovely party. We have thoroughly enjoyed ourselves, haven't we, girls?"

She regarded the others, and there came an enthusiastic chorus of assent. Mr. Wyndham, by his generosity and kindness had won all their hearts. He beamed at them, and good-naturedly took the book from June.

"Certainly, my dear—it's an honour," he said, and scrawled his signature across one of the blank pages.

While her chums sipped iced lemonade and nibbled at the delicious cakes the servants handed round, June went from guest to guest with her book. Although some of them seemed slightly surprised at being asked for their autographs, none of them refused, and when June rejoined the other girls her eyes were agleam with satisfaction.

In every case she had handed the book in such a way that the recipient had had to grasp it with the left hand, and, although no fingerprints were visible to the naked eye, actually each signed page bore a set. All June had to do when she returned to school was to dust

the specially prepared pages with a certain grey powder, and all the finger-prints would spring into life.

"I'll soon discover whether any one of them is the Grey Falcon," she told herself. "If none of their thumb-prints has a scar across it, then I'll know that either the butler or one of the other servants is the leader of the gang."

She felt proud of the way she had carried out her simple but artful scheme. Only one fact marred her happiness—that was the absence of Noel Raymond.

"What can have made him miss keeping the appointment he made with me?" she asked herself again, then cheered up at the thought that possibly when she reached the college she might find a letter of explanation awaiting her.

But in this she was disappointed. No note had come from her uncle.

"Still, never mind," she murmured. "Perhaps he's posted it. I'll have to wait patiently until Monday. Meanwhile—"

She surveyed her autograph book with a thrilled smile, and locking herself in her study, she set to work. Page after page she dusted with the grey powder. Adhering to the invisible but slightly sticky film that covered the paper, the powder clearly revealed the fingerprints the unsuspecting guests had left behind. But none of them bore a tell-tale scar, and June was beginning to think that, after all, the butler must be the Grey Falcon when—

Abruptly her heart gave a wild leap.

For as she dusted yet another page she saw a broad, ugly mark running across one of the prints. There could be no mistaking it. This was the print of the Grey Falcon!

Then the butler was only an ordinary member of the gang. The master-crook must be one of the guests. But which one?

June's heart began to beat suffocatingly with excitement. At long last she was going to discover the real identity of the villainous Grey Falcon.

Whom would the owner of that incriminating finger-print prove to be?

Hardly daring to breathe, she peered at the signature above that tell-tale thumb-print, and then she gasped.

"It—it can't be!" she whispered. "I must be dreaming."

And in startled amazement she gazed again at the signature, hardly able to believe the evidence of her own eyes. For of all the people who lived in the Manor, the owner of this particular signature was the very last person she had ever suspected.

"Gosh, but this is astounding!" she breathed. "Uncle Noel will get the shock of his life when he learns what I've discovered. But no one will ever believe me unless I get additional proof. Now how—"

Breaking off, she pursed her lips thoughtfully. Into her mind's eye came the memory of that striking carving on the wall of the library at the Manor, and she remembered her conviction that the library was connected with the college Refectory by means of one of the underground passages.

Why should she not put her theory to the test? The thought set her heart leaping. After all, it would be quite easy to steal out of school after lights out and explore that labyrinth of secret tunnels. And by doing so she would be killing two birds with one stone.

"I'll be able to find out definitely whether the library is connected," she told herself, "and if it is—then I can crawl around the Manor and prove conclusively whether or not the Grey Falcon is the person I think he is."

At that moment the college bell clanged out. It was time for bed. That sudden summons decided her. Locking away the vital autograph book, she rose to her feet.

"I'll do it," she whispered. "Uncle Noel would call it reckless, but I can't help it. I simply must get at the truth—simply must prove this amazing suspicion!"

THE TRAIL OF DANGER



"ANYONE awake?"

Standing in slippers feet in the doorway of her cubicle, her hooded macintosh over her dressing-gown, June peered anxiously through the darkness.

From the other cubicles came only faint snores. She lingered a few moments, then, satisfied, hurried along the landing to the window at the far end. Noiselessly she opened it, then clambering over the sill, went hurrying down the fire-escape.

But suddenly she paused. What was that? A faint crunching sound! Someone was walking along the gravel path below.

Fearful of being seen, June crouched down on the iron steps of the fire-escape. Dimly she saw a slender figure loom into view and her eyes opened wide with surprise.

"Why, it looks like Miss Tuft!" she told herself.

But where could the rascally Form-mistress be going at this time of night?

For a moment June was tempted to follow her, but resolutely she resisted the impulse. She must carry out the definite mission she had set herself, and as soon as Miss Tuft had disappeared she went hurrying on.

The night was pitch dark, but June knew every inch of the way to the old Refectory. Letting herself in by means of the duplicate keys she had had made, she opened the secret door, then, heart pounding, she descended the crumbling stairs which gave access to the tunnels.

At the foot of the steps she paused, shining her torch to and fro. There was the entrance to the passage she had explored on that never-to-be-forgotten day when she had been captured by the Grey Falcon. A little to the right loomed another dark entrance.

"That's the one for me to try now," she murmured, and eagerly set off down it.

Unlike the other tunnel, which was hewn out of the solid rock, this one had walls built of massive blocks of stone. Curious carvings adorned the stonework, and here and there shields and crests, their colours faded and tarnished, had been painted on the sides of the passage.

Involuntarily June found herself wondering what strange secret lay hidden here underground. According to the old book she had taken from the college library, it concerned Sir Roger de Coreville, the medieval knight whose ghostly figure was supposed to still haunt the Refectory. And according to what she had overheard the Grey Falcon tell his gang, the secret, whatever it might be, would make the crooks rich for life.

"Perhaps, if I'm lucky, I'll discover what it is," June whispered, and her pulses raced.

This promised to be the most thrilling night of her life. So many exciting possibilities loomed ahead that she felt impatient to investigate them all, but she resisted the temptation to turn aside from her main task. Sir Roger's secret must wait. Her first job must be to discover whether this tunnel really did connect with the Manor.

As she tip-toed on, the bright beam of her torch revealed two narrow openings ahead, one on the right, one on the left, but they seemed to give access to only secondary passages, and so she decided to explore them later on.

Breathlessly she made her way on up the main tunnel, and then, as she rounded a bend, she came to a sudden halt. Ahead the passage ended abruptly. Dimly she discovered four stone steps leading up to what appeared to be a door, although it had no handle.

She let her torchlight rove to and fro, and suddenly an excited cry left her lips.

"A lever!" she exclaimed, and with shining eyes surveyed the rusty iron bar which protruded from one wall. "I'll bet that opens the

door. And I'll bet, too, that it gives access to the library."

Convinced that she was about to confirm one of her suspicions, she darted forward, but as she made to grasp the ancient lever her foot brushed against something on the floor. Bending, she turned her torch downwards, and then another gasp escaped her, for it looked like a wig and a false beard which lay there.

She picked them up, and then, as she examined them in the torchlight, the blood began to drain from her face.

For very familiar was that black beard and black wig. They were exactly similar to those worn by Noel Raymond when he had posed as Inspector Brown.

"But what are they doing here?" she breathed, an uneasy feeling of premonition seizing her, causing an icy shiver to run down her spine. "Surely—"

Breaking off, she directed the torch down on the stone-flagged floor again. In the dust was the mark of footprints. Several different sets there seemed to be. Some of them were trodden over, and her anxious fears began to deepen.

"It looks as if there's been a struggle," she told herself. "Perhaps this wig and false beard were torn off when—oh!" She finished with a cry of sheer horror, for suddenly the roving beam had alighted on something which gleamed and glittered. "A cuff-link!" she gasped.

Picking it up, she examined it, and her face went whiter than ever, for that premonition had not been false. The cuff-link bore Noel Raymond's monogram. Then that wig and beard must also belong to him. Uncle Noel, disguised as the Scotland Yard man, had been the victim of the struggle indicated by the tell-tale marks on the dusty floor.

But what had brought him here? And what had become of him?

As she stood there, petrified with horror, June remembered the queer glint in the butler's eyes when, that afternoon, he had told her that his master had not expected Inspector Brown to visit the Manor. At the time June had not been entirely satisfied, now she was certain the man had lied.

"Uncle did mean to keep his appointment with me," she told herself in a whisper. "He did come to the Manor, but before he could get in touch with me he was attacked. Oh, but where is he now? Did he manage to escape, or—"

She glanced around fearfully, as if half-expecting to find the young detective's bound and gagged body lying amongst the sombre shadows.

And all at once she realised how reckless she had been to venture out of school like this. The Grey Falcon and his gang were utterly ruthless. If they should find her here—

She bit her lip, and half-turned. Caution urged that she should beat a quick retreat.

But, no, she couldn't do that. She couldn't possibly return to college until she had discovered the truth about Uncle Noel. No matter what the risk, she must face it now she had gone so far. For his sake, if for no other reason, she must press on with her vital investigations.

So, screwing up her courage, she put the beard and wig into an envelope she took from her pocket, then grasped the iron bar and recklessly pulled it. Instantly there came a muffled whirring noise, and the oak panel at the top of the stairs slid aside, revealing a pair of black, drawn curtains, through which stole a glimmer of light.

Switching off her torch, she crept up the steps, and, her heart in her mouth, peeped through the curtains.

And what she saw sent her heart leaping to her throat, while a startled gasp rose to her lips.

Next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL will contain another thrilling instalment of this great detective story.

The SKATING GIRL'S MYSTERY MASCOT



By MARIE MATHESON

THE REDSKIN PORTRAIT

SHEILA 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 in an old shack which the Bluebirds were using as their clubhouse.

Red Eagle, a young Redskin, told Sheila to guard the necklet closely, and also offered to help her improve her skating.

Sheila and the rest of the Bluebirds were invited to a week-end party at Larry Green's home.

While idly looking at the fine paintings on the ball-room wall, Sheila halted, staring in amazement at the portrait of a handsome Redskin.

Mr. Green, noticing her curious gaze, came up.

"That fellow up there and his tribe were traitors and deceivers," he told her, "right down to the last of the line—a young scoundrel known as Red Eagle."

SHEILA gave a little gasp as she looked up at Larry's father.

"Yes," he said again. "They were scoundrels all, and I believe at one time they had associations with Chinook Lodge."

Sheila gave another gasp.

Here was another new twist to the mystery surrounding her friend. Was it for this reason he had taken an interest in her?

"You know it's rather strange, my dear, that this portrait was actually painted by a relative of yours?" Mr. Green went on.

"Of mine?" gasped Sheila, surprised.

"Yes, it was painted by your grand-uncle, Rupert Mayne, first owner of Chinook Lodge," declared Larry's father. "He had a great gift,

but it was only a hobby. Your father is an artist, too, isn't he?"

Sheila nodded.

"Yes, he painted as a hobby till his illness, then he could not continue business as an architect and had to come west," she confided. "But this is a wonderful painting. I wonder if daddy knows about it?"

"Probably, I should say," went on Mr. Green. "I'm thinking of selling this picture, by the way, as I've had a good offer for it. But we'll see—we'll see. Now, run along and enjoy yourself. I'm sure there are plenty of partners waiting for you."

He wandered off, after giving her a paternal pat on the shoulder.

Sheila turned her head to see Tubby Laing making for her. But when he asked her to dance, she shook her head.

"Sorry, Tubby, not this one, but I'll keep one for you later," she promised. "I'm feeling a bit tired and want to rest."

"I'll sit it out with you, Sheila," he suggested. "I don't mind, you know."

"Oh, I couldn't let you do that," said Sheila. "Look, there's Mabel Rowan waiting for a partner. There are far more girls than boys. Be a sport, Tubby, and take her on."

"Right-ho!" grinned Tubby, and strolled off. Sheila sighed in relief, for Mr. Green's disclosures had excited and intrigued her. She wanted an opportunity to examine this portrait of Red Eagle's ancestor more closely.

Quietly she took her place in front of it, and gazed up at it. Suddenly a little gasp came from her lips. Hanging round the neck of the dead Redskin chief was a necklet bearing a totem exactly like hers, or so it appeared from the distance.

This new fact made her feel certain that the portrait had something to do with the mystery surrounding Red Eagle.

Sheila looked round. It was impossible to take a closer view of the totem while the ball was going on. She would need a chair to stand on.

"If only I could see Red Eagle now and tell him," she murmured to herself. "I'm sure he could help me—would explain things."

But Red Eagle was probably far away. She did not know where he was, or how to get in touch with him. Then she stiffened, for just a little distance away Corinne Lefevre was watching her, with a curious expression on her face. For a moment it seemed as if Corinne was going to step forward and say something, but she changed her mind and turned away.

leaving the ball-room. Just then the music came to an end and Larry came out of the throng.

"Come on, Sheila. The 'Quebec Quadrilles' is the next dance. Let's have it together if you aren't booked already," he said.

Sheila laughed. "I'd love to," she agreed. "I like the quadrilles."

In the enjoyment of the dance Sheila temporarily forgot the things that troubled her mind. It was so gay in the Green's ball-room with the decorations, and everyone in costume, dancing under shaded lights.

"What do you think of the show?" asked Larry. "It—it's really a try-out for our ballet, you know."

"I think it's wonderful," Sheila cried. "Oh, Larry, I do hope we make a success of it. It'll mean a lot to me, you know. I do so want to make a hit when Lee Farrell comes."

"You carry on practising your skating and you'll make a hit all right," said Larry. "You've got something that even Corinne doesn't have, you know—grace, as well as style."

She patted his arm gratefully. Larry was a real chum and so trustworthy. She wished she were able to tell him everything and get him to understand, but she had her vow to keep to Red Eagle.

The costume ball went on till well after one o'clock in the morning, and at the conclusion everyone was tired but radiantly happy.

It had been the star night of their stay at the Greens' the Bluebirds were all agreed. Their ballet costumes had been tried out, and they would feel more satisfied and natural in them at the next dress rehearsal.

When Sheila entered her bed-room she found it warm and stuffy, so she opened the window. As she did so, she gave a little gasp of surprise.

A little distance from the house a light was winking from the edge of a bunch of trees. At first Sheila thought it might be someone searching for something, or just the spluttering gleam of a small camp-fire. But in a moment she realised it was definitely someone signalling in Morse code.

The secret signaller could only be signalling to someone in the Greens' mansion. But to whom?

"It might be Red Eagle, trying to get a message to me," she thought excitedly, and darted to fetch a piece of paper and a pencil.

Returning to the window, she peered outside again. Her heart leaped in dismay. The winking light had disappeared. She waited, then gave a start as she saw a light flashing from a balcony of a wing of the house beside her.

Sheila instantly recognised the room. It was Corinne Lefevre's, and the discovery took her breath away. Sheila did not understand Morse code, but she started jotting down the dots and dashes on the paper.

She had written down quite a lot when the person signalling from behind an open shutter of Corinne's room turned a trifle sideways, so that she lost the last bit of the signal.

Her message finished, the signaller closed the shutter of her window, and excitedly Sheila sat down on her bed. The signaller must have been Corinne, but with whom had she been exchanging signals?

"Perhaps it was Karl Olsen," Sheila murmured. "Anyway, first thing in the morning I'll look for a book on Morse code in the library. Then I'll be able to translate Corinne's message."

Getting into bed, she soon fell asleep, for it was late and she had had an exhausting and exciting evening.

The Bluebirds had arranged to be up early and have a game of basket-ball in the long games-room at the back of the house.

Sheila, however, managed to excuse herself from joining in the play. This was her chance, early in the morning, to go to the library and decode the message she had jotted down.

It did not take her long to discover an encyclopedia and turn it up. Patiently she started to translate the message. As her own name appeared and other words followed, she worked faster, her eyes bright with excitement.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "That last bit. I missed it. But this makes things certain now." The words she had transcribed were as follows:

"VITAL SHEILA DOESN'T LEARN SECRET OF PICTURE, YOU MUST DO . . ."
"Do!" exclaimed Sheila. "Do what? Oh, if I'd only got the last part of that message!"

CORINNE'S SPITEFUL BEHAVIOUR



SHEILA sat puzzling over the incomplete message. Here at last was definite proof that Corinne was not only her enemy, but was definitely bound up in the mystery of the totem mascot.

It also meant that Sheila's suspicion had been correct and that the portrait of Red Eagle's ancestor was also connected with it.

"Corinne is trying to stop me finding out something that may be helpful to both Red Eagle and myself," thought Sheila excitedly. "That could have been Karl Olsen she was signalling to. Well, I'm jolly well going to beat them."

She raced off to dress for breakfast. Sheila deliberately wore her normal house frock, and when she sat down all the rest of the Bluebirds noticed it at once, for they were dressed in outdoor winter sports attire.

"What's wrong, Sheila? We're going on a ski-ing trip over the West Ridge," said Larry in surprise. "Aren't you coming? We've got some jolly good runs round here, you know. It'll be good fun. We're taking lunch with us."

Sheila shook her head. She had definitely decided that the most important thing she had to do now was to have a quiet and secret examination of the portrait which seemed to have such an interest for Corinne.

"No, Larry. I'd rather you excused me," she apologised. "I'm a bit tired after last night, and I want to write home and rest a bit."

"Oh, that's too bad! We'll miss you," said Larry. "But you certainly must look after yourself. We know you've a lot to do back home at Chinook, and we don't want to make this week-end too much of a strain."

He looked round at the others and smiled, taking a bundle of cards from his pocket.

"I've another surprise for you," he said, addressing all the Bluebirds. "This evening we're going to have a try-out of our torchlight parade to advertise the ice-ballet, and finish up with a masked ball on the lake. I'm giving you each an invitation card to send to anyone around here, or in Juniper, who might like to come. I'll see that they are delivered in time by one of the servants."

The Bluebirds all cheered, signifying that this was a bright idea. Larry, as their host and president, was certainly doing all he could to further the interests of the club, and at the same time give the members a rattling good time.

"You won't miss that, Sheila, anyhow," laughed Larry.

"No, of course not," Sheila agreed. "I'd really like to go with you this morning, but I think it's best to stay in to-day. But I'm all for the torchlight and the ball. That'll be really swell."

Corinne Lefevre leaned across the table, a slight sneer on her lips.

"I think Sheila's just kidding us," she suggested maliciously. "I believe she's dropping out of the ski-ing party on purpose. She prefers her mystery partner's company to ours, that's what it is."

Larry turned on her at once.
"That's a mean thing to suggest, Corinne," he declared. "Sheila never backs out of anything without good reason."

Corinne tossed her head.
"Agreed," she sneered. "But I happen to know there's a disreputable Redskin fellow camping quite close to here, at the foot of Mohawk Wood. In all probability he's Sheila's secret pal."

Sheila's face flamed.
"How dare you suggest I am going to see anyone!" she exclaimed. "I'm staying right here. I don't intend to leave the house. As for this Red Indian, I didn't even know one was camping out near here."

Corinne smiled maliciously.
"But your secret partner—this chap who is helping you with your skating—is a Redskin, isn't he?" she persisted.

Larry and the others were looking most uncomfortable and regarding Sheila curiously. With a throb of indignation Sheila realised that Corinne was definitely out to try to cause trouble between her and the rest of the Bluebirds.

"Oh, cut it, Corinne!" said Larry uncomfortably. "It's no business of ours who Sheila's coach is."

Corinne shrugged her shoulders.
"Perhaps not," she admitted, "but you must admit it's queer that Sheila is so secretive about him. If she's not ashamed of him, why doesn't she tell us who he is?"

Sheila went redder than ever.
"Because I don't choose—that's why," she said curtly.

Nothing more was said until after breakfast, then, as the others went to prepare for the ski-ing expedition, Larry Green crossed to where Sheila still sat.

"I say, Sheila," he said, "don't let what Corinne said upset you. She's only jealous, you know. Still"—he regarded her uneasily—"I do hope you are doing the right thing about this mystery fellow. However, it's really none of my business. Cheerio. Hope your rest does you good."

When the ski-ing party had departed Sheila went to the ball-room, only to find her immediate plans frustrated. The servants were busy cleaning up after the ball. If she intruded, her appearance there would attract attention.

It might be much easier after lunch, she decided. The servants would be finished by then. So she went upstairs and changed, took down her skates to the small lake near the house, and practised figures all morning.

After lunch, which she had alone, as Larry's parents had gone out, she went to the ball-room again. It was clean and empty. The whole house was quiet, and the servants' quarters were at the other end.

Now was her opportunity.
Standing on a chair and using a hand torch and a magnifying glass, Sheila started to examine the picture thoroughly. Some of the signs on the painted totem looked very familiar, and when she compared them with those on her own mascot she knew that they were identical, although there were many additional signs on the necklace in the picture.

Pocketing her torch and magnifying glass, Sheila stepped down from the chair.

Could the signs on the painted necklace be some kind of clue to the picture's real secret?

"Oh, if Red Eagle were here," she murmured. "I am sure those signs have something to do with what Red Eagle is after. If I could only find him or get word to him!"

Then she gave a start.

What if Corinne had told the truth and there really was a Red Indian camping by Mohawk Wood? It might actually be Red Eagle come to help in any emergency, and also out to keep an eye on Corinne, whom he had named as an enemy.

"I've a good mind to ski over and see," Sheila told herself. "I've plenty of time to do that before the Bluebirds all come back. It's worth risking, anyhow."

She hurriedly dressed for ski-ing, and set off. One of the servants had told her how to get to Mohawk Wood, and she found it without any difficulty.

"Ah! There it is," exclaimed Sheila, as she went ski-ing down a long, snowy slope. "Corinne was not fibbing after all. There's a wigwam down there by the wood!"

As she neared the wigwam she saw that the door of caribou hide had been fastened tight.

"Is anyone at home?" called Sheila, tapping on the wigwam.

There was no answer. The wigwam appeared to be empty.

Timorously Sheila looked round. There was no one in sight. If she could get inside she would soon know if this camp belonged to her Redskin friend.

Fumbling with her gauntlets she found it almost impossible to undo the ties. So she took off one glove and tried with her bare fingers. She had to hurry lest anyone came, and the wigwam actually did not belong to Red Eagle.

At last she had the door flap open and stepped inside.

The interior was very bare, except for its couch of spruce boughs, covered with a number of deer skins. But there were some Redskin garments in one corner, and on lifting them Sheila discovered a small tin box.

It was filled with a variety of contents, a carefully broken-up pile of tinder and dried fir cones, some candles, and a box of grease, and also something wrapped up in what appeared to be a piece of newspaper.

Sheila felt guilty, but her curiosity was too much for her. She had to find out if this was Red Eagle's wigwam.

She unrolled the paper, which was partly torn and destroyed by damp, and a roll of dried gut such as is used for bowstrings fell out.

But it was the paper that intrigued Sheila. She started to straighten it out, then her eyes were held fascinated by one large printed word: "WANTED."

Underneath followed a description of a person that was almost identical with Red Eagle. Trembling, Sheila realised that she held in her hands a fragment of a large police notice, though the portion intimating the crime was missing.

"Oh!" she gasped in dismay and horror. The camp must be Red Eagle's after all. But this notice could mean only one thing. The friend she trusted was an outlaw—a person wanted by the police!

Sheila sat down on the rough couch and stared at it, fascinated and dismayed.

Could it be really true?

Was Red Eagle, after all, someone who could not be trusted, a branded outlaw?

HER LOYALTY WAS UNSHAKEN



SITTING there, Sheila tried to remember all she knew about Red Eagle, and what Larry and others had said about him. But the more she thought about it, the more her faith returned.

Red Eagle was not a villain. She simply could not believe that one who had been so gallant and helpful, who had shown such sympathy and feeling, could be a wrongdoer.

Red Eagle had always been mysterious, but in his dealings with her he had been always honest and sincere.

As she sat there, gazing at the torn

"Wanted" notice, the flap of the door was raised and someone stepped into the tent.

"Sheila!" exclaimed a voice. "How did my paleface friend find I was here?"

Sheila jumped up, her cheeks flushing. It was Red Eagle who stood in the doorway, carrying his bow and with the carcass of a young deer over his shoulders, which he instantly dropped before stepping over and grasping her hand.

"Oh, Red Eagle, you startled me!" Sheila gasped. "I—I heard there was someone camping here, and I thought it might be you. So—I opened the wigwam and looked inside, and—"

"And found this!" he finished for her, taking the wanted notice from her grasp. "Red Eagle is so sorry!"

His face was grave and troubled, and there was a look of sadness in his eyes as he looked down at her.

"You read this?" he asked.

Sheila nodded. She did not know what to say, for she saw the great hurt in his face.

"Then you will no longer want to trust me," Red Eagle declared. "This is what I would have concealed from you till my quest was over, till Red Eagle could speak freely and tell all."

He made a sign, begging her to sit down on the rough couch. Then he stood before her, grave but still tall and handsome, with a proud expression on his face.

"Red Eagle," said Sheila impulsively, "I can't believe it. It's not true. I do trust you. That's why I came here. I know you have some great burden to bear. I want to help you, as you have helped me."

He looked down at her, his lips twitching, strangely affected. Sheila had raised her hand impulsively and clutched his deerskin jerkin.

"You still believe in me?" whispered Red Eagle huskily. "That is good news! And I vow to you that I am innocent of the crime that was written on the other half of that notice. I cannot explain. I can only say that part of my mission is to clear myself. Some day I shall be able to prove that I am no outlaw."

Sheila looked at him and found it impossible to doubt his sincerity.

"I believe you, Red Eagle," she whispered. "I don't care what anyone says—I will continue to trust you. But can't you tell me anything about the mystery?"

The Red Indian youth shook his head.

"Not yet," he said. "Red Eagle has good reason to keep silent. But his quest and your future, Sheila, are connected. It was not by chance that Red Eagle came to Chinook. His mission and the mystery of your totem necklace are linked. Be very patient, Sheila. Before many more moons have come and gone the truth will be revealed." He regarded her earnestly, then smiled. "But how goes it with you?" he asked. "Has anything happened of late?"

Excitedly Sheila nodded.

"I'll say it has!" she cried, and quickly told him about Corinne's signal message and about the portrait of the Redskin chief. His eyes gleamed with interest and approval.

"You have done well!" he exclaimed. "For long have I sought that portrait. Somehow, I must obtain a look at the ancient totem painted on it. It will help me, help you, too. But how is it to be done? That is the question. You have an enemy in the house and others are outside. We must foil them!"

Sheila drew a deep breath. Suddenly an idea had come to her. Putting her hand in her pocket, she produced a square of white cardboard. It was the invitation ticket Larry had given her for the torchlight parade and party that evening.

"Listen, Red Eagle," she said. "I know Corinne's up to some mischief. You have got to see that portrait and try to solve the secret before she does—and this ticket will help you to do it."

She told him about the dance, explaining that they would all wear masked costumes for the torchlight procession.

"Don't you see, Red Eagle," she continued excitedly. "With this card you'll be admitted to the party, and as you will be masked no one will recognise you. And it should be easy for me to smuggle you into the house so that you can examine the picture for yourself."

Red Eagle's eyes shone brightly.

"Sheila is clever. That would indeed make things easy. But I do not wish to get my paleface friend into any trouble. That would not be fair."

"Oh, there's no danger of that," declared Sheila.

Red Eagle frowned.

"But what of paleface boy Green's parents? And the servants? If they were to see me would they not become suspicious?"

Sheila shook her head.

"They will not become suspicious because they will not see you, Red Eagle. The servants will be down at the lakeside, attending to the guests. Larry's mother and father will have to be there as well. So the house will be empty."

Red Eagle still looked doubtful.

"It's your only chance, Red Eagle—your only chance to take a look at that portrait," Sheila urged, plucking impulsively at his sleeve. The Redskin boy nodded thoughtfully.

"You are right, paleface Sheila. I must see the totem painted on it—I must!"

Sheila rose.

"Then you will take the ticket? You will come to the party?"

With a smile, Red Eagle took the ticket she handed out to him.

"Yes, Red Eagle shall be there," he promised. "What happens to-night may mean very much to Red Eagle, and also to you. Perhaps—"

He broke off and they both started. They had been so immersed in their conversation that they had not until now heard the sound of approaching voices.

"No one must discover us together," declared Red Eagle, and, tiptoeing to the doorway, opened the flap a little and peered out.

Sheila, peering over his shoulder, gave a gasp, for walking towards the log bridge that spanned the near-by ravine were Larry Green, Corinne Lefevre, and the rest of the Bluebirds ski-ing party.

Corinne was pointing to the ski-tracks left by Sheila in gaining the wigwam.

"There!" she shouted. "I knew Sheila Mayne was only making excuses this morning. I'll bet she just wanted a chance to sneak off and meet that rascally friend of hers. Come on, everyone, let's investigate. I shouldn't be surprised if we don't catch her redhanded with that Redskin friend of hers!"

And eagerly she led the way forward.

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

THE BOY HER PET MISTRUSTED

By HEATHER GRANGER

This enthralling long complete story, featuring a young kennel-maid and her clever Alsatian dog, will appear in next Friday's

GIRLS' CRYSTAL

The Merry-makers at College



BOUNDS-BREAKERS

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

LOOK! Wasn't it worth breaking bounds—to try out a champion swimmer like Bunty?" Sally Warner said in triumphant delight.

"Just look at her—gosh, what speed!" exclaimed Don Weston.

"Bunty Shane's our winner for the Gala!" whooped Fay Manners.

Sally raced along the edge of the swimming-pool, stopwatch in hand. She had been wonder-struck by the speed of the new girl, Bunty Shane, the moment she saw her swimming in the smaller pool of Roxburgh Co-ed College. She had caused quite a sensation in J House by suggesting that Bunty, the newcomer, should enter the house team in the big District Swimming Gala, which was open to all the local clubs.

But Sally's hunch had been unshakable, and to-day she had gone to the length of smuggling Bunty out to the magnificent Laguna Swimming Pool. It was out of bounds by order of the dean of the college. Unfortunately, owing to a rag in which Sally & Co. had taken no part. But it was the pool in which the Gala was to be held on Saturday, and it was the only pool large enough to try out the new girl's speed under all-out racing conditions. The results now had more than repaid Sally's successfully contrived breach of bounds.

She rushed to the steps with the rest of the chums to help the new girl out.

"Bunty, you're the hope of J House," she said excitedly. "D'you know you've put up a faster time than the deadliest of our local rivals—Mattie Johnson!"

"Who's Mattie Johnson?" asked Bunty, dripping wet, and hardly out of breath after her superb performance.

Sally indicated the various team photos on the wall of the pool, all bearing the fastest times of their members.

"Mattie's a member of Roxburgh City Club—and she seems to be the favourite with everyone for the gala. As for the coll.," she went on breathlessly, "K House have two entrants who're faster than anyone in our team, but they've got no one as fast as Mattie. If only you can beat her, Bunty, you'll win the race for J House!"

"And are you going to let me try?" Bunty asked eagerly.

"Let you!" cried Sally, fairly hugging her. "You bet we are, Bunty. You're the shining star of the J team!"

"You just are the team!" added Don.

"Gosh, if I could do a crawl like yours—"

"We never shall—no hope!" laughed Sally, and placed her stopwatch down on a bench.

"But that's all the more reason for training while we can. In we go! Race you to the chute, Don!"

She took a header into the pool, Don and the others diving in after her. Half a length they covered, and Sally was struggling mightily for the lead when—

Ping! Something whizzed into the water, grazing Sally's chin with a stinging flick.

"Hey!" she gasped, thrown off her stroke, and made a grab for the thing that had struck her. It was a small coil of paper tightly bound with an elastic band! Blinking the water out of her eyes, she wrathfully unrolled it.

A feather dropped into her hand—a small green feather that had been wrapped in the paper. Then, curiously, she was reading a scrawled message:

"BE WARNED! DON'T LET BUNTY SHANE RACE IN THE GALA, OR I WILL STRIKE!—THE SIGN OF THE FEATHER."

Sally laughed as she tossed the paper to her chums.

"I suppose some K House genius thought of that," she said. "I can forgive 'em being afraid of a licking from Bunty, but—what a masterpiece!"

Don & Co. read the effusion, then gazed round the pool in search of some other bounds-breakers from K House—but there was none to be seen.

"Looks to me like Piggot's work," remarked Johnny. "The Sign of the Feather—yes, that's feeble enough even for Nat Piggot!"

"Maybe you're right, Johnny. Some of them must have followed us here and are spying now!" Sally said. "Do your stuff again, Bunty—show them what real swimming is!"

With a gay laugh Bunty went off, while Sally & Co. made an enthusiastic but vain effort to keep pace with the new girl's easy, tireless stroke.

"What did I say, Merrymakers?" panted Sally as she climbed out of the pool. "Wasn't it worth missing lunch and climbing over the summer-house roof? Oh, Bunty, you'll simply walk away with the gala cup for J House!"

"Well, I think I'm jolly lucky to have been given the chance, being a new girl," Bunty said shyly and gratefully.

"Lucky?" laughed Sally, echoed fervently by her chums. "No, we're the lucky ones—to have had a swimmer like you put into J House. And to think you might have been dumped into K House!"

As Don said, as they hurried back across country to the coll., their victory over the rival K House was now a foregone conclusion. It was a certainty that Bunty was going to beat all-comers in the gala.

"Which is going to mean some stiff training, and we've only got till Saturday!" breathed Sally.

"Pity the Laguna's out of bounds. The college pool's too small and crowded!" groaned Johnny, and added quickly. "Cave! Someone's coming!"

They all draw back cautiously, hearing a step as they were approaching the college wall. But it was only Wilkins, the pageboy.

"Thought I'd better warn you, Miss Sally," he said in a low voice. "The dean's on the warpath. He's got an idea that some of J House have broken bounds to-day!"

"What?" gasped Sally, while the others gaped in dismay. "You're not trying to pull our legs, Wilkins?"

But Wilkins was a knowing youth with a strong appetite for the dramatic, and they could see by his puckered face now that he was giving no empty warning.

"The dean asked me," he said meaningly, "if I'd seen any of J House climb out over the summer-house roof. Taking swimming suits with them!"

Sally & Co. gazed at each other in dismay.

"Then"—Don could hardly credit such a breach of the Roxburgh code—"then someone must have g-given us away!"

"K House!" Fay said with a gasp. "Did you—did you see anyone talking to the dean, Wilkins?" spluttered Johnny. "Did you see Piggot?"

Wilkins blinked and looked hastily away. "I'm not saying a word," he muttered.

"But if you can slip in past the dean, there's no harm done, eh?" And he winked conspiratorially. "I'm going in by the wicket gate, and I'll leave it off the latch—get me?"

"Thanks, Wilkins!" breathed Sally.

They watched Wilkins' small figure, in his spruce red jacket and glittering buttons, go through the wicket gate. They waited a moment, then softly Sally stole forward, leading the others in after her through the unlatched wicket.

"Miss Warner—Weston—Briggs!" Sternly the voice of the dean broke upon them, and with a jerk they halted. "So you are the offenders! You have gone deliberately against my orders, broken bounds, and been to the town swimming pool!"

With their telltale costumes and towels under their arms, Sally & Co. could only stand speechless, as the dean came sweeping down upon them, his furious gaze upon Bunty Shane, in their midst.

"The new girl!" he cried. "Is this the fine example you set her? Taking her on this escapade with you—teaching her to flout my orders?"

"I'm to blame, sir"—Sally took a desperate step forward—"it was entirely my fault!" she told him. "Bunty's our best swimmer in the

gala team—and—well, she simply must have some real practice!"

"That's no excuse! You knew the Laguna pool was out of bounds, and so did she?" And the dean swung sharply upon Bunty. "Is that so, Miss Shane?"

"Yes, sir!" confessed Bunty in a whisper. "We were going to ask you, sir—" began Sally imploringly, but the dean cut in before she could finish:

"You didn't ask me! You broke bounds—and I was informed that certain members of J House had done so!" He paused. "As a punishment you are all strictly confined to the college, and not one of you is permitted out of the gates until the day of the gala! You understand?"

And with a grim glance at Bunty, he swept away.

REPRISALS



SALLY & Co. hardly knew how they stifled their feelings.

"Sorry, Miss Sally, but I did my best," muttered young Wilkins, as he hurried out to latch up the wicket.

"Did you actually see Piggot, telling the dean about us, Wilkins?" she asked.

"I'm not giving any names," said Wilkins, tightlipped. "But it's not my fault if you guess, is it?"

"Good enough!" And Sally hustled her chums away. "We'll have something to say to Piggot!"

"Better wait till after lecture," advised Don, glancing at his watch. "Not much time now, you know."

Sally nodded, and the chums made their way into the lecture hall. Then suddenly, from Johnny, came a cry.

"Hey, look!"

"What?"

The seats were still deserted, but a taunting message was crawled across the blackboard, and below it a crude sketch of a feather:

"DROP BUNTY SHANE OUT OF THE TEAM, OR WORSE DISASTERS WILL BE-FALL YOU.—THE SIGN OF THE FEATHER."

Sally choked for words. "So that p-paper he shot at me in the pool, and getting us all gated—"

"Is all one miserable little plot against Bunty," finished Don. "Trying to frighten Bunty out of the race, with Piggot using a trick that's got whiskers on it, and calling himself—'The Sign of the Feather'! Huh!"

The rest of J House came trooping in now, eager to know how Bunty had shaped in the try-out. Their storm of wrath, when they heard what had happened, was cut short by the sudden entry of the dean for lecture.

The first thing he saw was the threatening scribble on the blackboard, and Sally & Co. gathered around it.

"Miss Warner," he said sternly, "you will remove that nonsense from the board. And you will give your attention now to the lecture, and not to swimming!"

Somehow Sally & Co. bottled their feelings till lecture ended. Then grimly they marched cut across the campus in search of Nat Piggot.

They met him coming up the path from the college pool—his expression disarmingly guiltless.

"Just a minute, Piggot!" And Johnny and Don planted themselves on either side of him. "We want you!"

"It's a little matter about a feather!" Sally said, facing him.

"This a joke?" asked Piggot with a most convincing lack of comprehension. "What's funny about feathers?"

"We don't think it a bit funny!" retorted Sally. "You're sore because Bunty Shane's been put in our House, and you know you've got no one to stand a chance against her in the gala. But you're not going to spoil her chances and ours, Nat Piggot, and you're not going to get away with any more tricks, by sending stupid messages with feathers!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Piggot frowned. "Messages? Feathers? Say, has someone been pulling your leg?" And he began to laugh.

"You call it leg-pulling, do you?" Don said quietly. "You sneaked on us to the dean, and got us gated, and Bunty, too! If there's any more of that kind of leg-pulling, Piggot, there's going to be trouble!"

"Are you accusing me of sneaking?" cried Piggot, his ears going red.

"We know jolly well you did!" blazed Johnny.

"I've never sneaked on anyone yet," denied Piggot furiously. "We don't do that kind of thing in K House. You're just trying to cook up trouble because you know jolly well we'll lick you silly in the gala!"

"Oh, will you?" fired Sally. "Yes, we will! We'll give you feathers—you birds'll need 'em now you're caged!" And Piggot gave a goading laugh. "Go and look at the pool—that'll please you!"

He pushed on his way, while the chums set off tightlipped to the pool to find out the meaning of that last taunt.

Fay was looking vaguely perplexed.

"I say," she murmured, "you don't think we've made a mistake in picking on Piggot do—"

"Of course not!" scorned Johnny. "He's the biggest spoofer in the coll!"

"It was the way he looked when Sally tackled him about the feathers," Fay went on. "Made me wonder whether he was spoofing, after all—"

Then her voice froze away, and all four chums were glowering speechless at a notice pasted on the closed door of the pool:

"BY SPECIAL PERMISSION.

"This Pool is Reserved this evening
EXCLUSIVELY for Members of
K HOUSE."

The notice was written in the unmistakable hand of Nat Piggot—but at the foot of it had been carefully pinned—a mocking green feather!

"The founder—he's tricked us again!" cried Don furiously.

"Barred us using our own pool this evening!" wailed Fay.

"He's stopped us from practising at the Laguna—and now——" Johnny turned on Fay. "Now are you satisfied it's Piggot, Fay? Look at that feather! Gosh, just let me get my hands on him——"

"Come on, let's catch him," cried Don, and led the rest out on to the path. But of Piggot there was no sign, and after vainly scouring the campus, the four chums made their way to Sally's chalet.

"He's lying low—but it's our turn now!" Sally said quietly. "We know where Piggot's going to be this evening, and we've to prepare some well-thought-out reprisals!"

They sat around the table and were soon engrossed in devising a plan of action. Certain materials would be needed, and Don and Johnny undertook to find an old football bladder, if the girls could provide a flock of feathers out of an old cushion, and a tin of treacle. Fay was taking careful note of these items, when suddenly——

"Ping!—and something whizzed over her shoulder and caught Johnny a stinging smack on the ear.

"Ow!" Johnny sat up with a yell as the missile burst open on the table.

It was a paper pellet. Don picked it up, smoothed it out, flung a green feather on to the table, then read the scrawled message:

"BLOW AFTER BLOW, AND ANOTHER ONE READY! DROP BUNTY SHANE BEFORE WORSE HAPPENS.—THE SIGN OF THE FEATHER."

Sally took one glance, and made a dive for the open window.

"This is where it came from—he must be here somewhere!" she cried. "After him!"

She was over the sill in a flash, the others following, but their quarry had already escaped unseen through the trees.

"He can't have got far! Let's fan out!" breathed Sally, and dashed into the copse.

Then her eyes gleamed as she saw Wilkins, the page, sweeping away the leaves at the edge of the path.

"Which way did Piggot go, Wilkins?" she burst out.

"Mr. Piggot?" Wilkins blinked curiously. "Funny you should ask that, Miss Sally!" he whispered. "Look!"

And he pointed over the hedge on the other side of the path.

There, on the green, stood Piggot, talking to the dean as though butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir!" they heard him saying. "I thought I'd ask you, sir, as I consider K House has a very good chance in the gala!"

The chums watched grimly, then softly they all stole away.

"I'll get you those feathers and the treacle, boys," volunteered Sally softly.

"Right!" Don nodded. "Johnny and I'll see about the football bladder."

The college pool was still closed, half an hour later, when Sally & Co. climbed stealthily over the wall and concealed themselves in the pump-room, from which the water supply was operated.

Don and Johnny busied themselves screwing the powerful hose to the pipe, while Sally and Fay kept eager vigil at the grating in the door, Bunty Shane sharing the spyhole with them.

Nat Piggot walked unsuspectingly into the pool, deposited a beautifully folded towel and costume on the ledge, and then went out again!

"He's just asking for it!" grinned Sally.

Quickly she ran from the pump-room, and with a borrowed paint brush was very busy for a few minutes. Then she folded the towel as carefully as before and placed it back on the ledge where Piggot had left it.

The chums were still stationed in their hiding-place, peeping through the grating, when K House came clattering into the pool for their exclusive practice—led by Nat Piggot.

"Get changed as quickly as you can, everybody!" he ordered them. "Then we'll have time for a few lengths before the big moment!"

The big moment! Sally & Co. grinned at each other in silent anticipation, and Don reached for a bulging but somewhat tattered-looking football bladder. Doors banged as K House popped into the dressing-boxes. Two minutes passed. Then doors banged again as they came out, clad in their swim-suits.

Piggot looked unusually smug in elegant cream top and blue trunks, with a magnificent K embroidered startlingly across the chest. He came marching straight towards Sally & Co.'s hiding-place. He took up his diving position only three yards away from them, his back turned to them.

"Now listen, everybody!" he sang out. "The most important thing in a swimming race is getting off to a good start. If you've seen how J House do it—Weston and Sally Warner and

all that crowd—you've seen the wrong way. I'm going to show you the right way!"

Sally crouched behind the pump-room door, ready to whisk it open.

"There isn't much time—you know there's big things happening this evening," went on Piggot, "but I want you to watch me! This is the way—and the only correct way!—to enter the water— Oouch!"

A door burst open behind Piggot and something hit him with a squelch on top of the head.

Piggot didn't enter the water. Instead, his feet went up and he landed heavily on the side of the pool, with golden treacle cascading down his face and his head crowned with an incredible mop of sticky, straggly feathers.

"Wh-wh-what's this?" he yelped, swallowing golden treacle.

"The sign of the feather, and plenty of 'em!" sang out Don.

A cry went up from K House, and furiously they came charging at the pump-room.

"Look! Sally Warner and her crowd!"

"Let 'em have it!"

But Sally & Co. were ready for all odds. Johnny grabbed the hose. Don directed the nozzle. Bunty and Fay turned the water on full circle.

Whooooooh! A streaming avalanche met the oncoming K House. They fell back, skidding and tumbling in all directions. Then with gasps of fury they came on again. Don swung the nozzle round to meet them.

The noise was bedlam, but suddenly a stern voice rang out and a tall, dark figure burst in through the entrance, right into that foaming jet of water.

It was the dean.

"Wh-what on earth—" The dean fell back, staggering, drenched. "Have you all gone mad, Piggot? Is this why you asked me here to—to coach you this evening?"

"N-no, sir! It's n-nothing to do with us, sir!" panted Piggot, and pointed inarticulately to the pump-room, where Sally & Co. were desperately switching off the water—too late.

"M-Miss Warner and those others. They're J House—they have no business here this evening," the dean stuttered, rubbing the water from his eyes. "Great Scott, Piggot, what have you got on your head? F-feathers? Well, don't stand there so idiotically—hand me my towel! I'm drenched!"

"Yessir!" said Piggot—and, to Sally's horror, he handed the dean the carefully folded towel from the ledge.

The chums watched him unfold it, then give a start.

"NOW YOU'VE BEEN WARNED—BY J!" stared at him in glaring red letters painted right across the towel.

"I—I'm frightfully sorry, sir! I thought it was P-Piggot's towel!" Sally gasped—and that was as far as she was allowed to go.

The dean glared at her.

"First," he said, his voice seething with anger, "you will get brooms and swabs, when K House have finished here, and you will clear this mess up—every scrap of it. Secondly, if there is any more of this house rivalry—any more of it whatever, mark you!—I shall blame J House for it, and I shall forbid J House to enter the swimming gala!"

THE CHUMS LAY A TRAP



INDIGNATION ran riot in J House when they heard of the dean's ultimatum.

"That means that Piggot's got away with it!" they blazed.

"It means that we get the blame if there's any more trouble!" fumed Sally.

"Just got to swallow it, and forget about Piggot and his feathers!" summed up Don. "He was trying to get Bunty out of

the gala. And now all that matters is the gala!"

Keeping a wide berth of K House, they waited till the pool was clear, then made their way to the staff quarters in quest of mops and swabs.

Young Wilkins was in charge of these articles, and sympathetically he ushered the chums along to his cupboard in the scullery.

"I call it a shame, Miss Sally, and I reckon it's old Piggot who ought to do the mopping up, 'not you!' he said daskly. "There's the swabs—behind the brooms!"

Sally rummaged deep in the cupboard, and chose the articles required. Then off she went with Don & Co. and Bunty to clear up the disorder in the pool.

It was a long and laborious job. K House had left a lot more mess for them, and Piggot or someone had kicked the football bladder all round the matting, to extend the trail of treacle.

Sally was on her knees, cleaning up the mess, when—

Ping! and a hard pellet whizzed past her, burying itself in the stickiness and spattering her with treacle.

"Sally! Is that another of them?" cried Don.

Sally was grimly unwinding a paper coil, bound with elastic and containing the usual green feather.

"THE LAST WARNING!" she read. "BUNTY QUILTS—ELSE YOU ALL QUIT—THE SIGN OF THE FEATHER."

Don's hands clenched.

"I didn't think even Piggot would goad us again!" he said between his teeth.

"But you can't do anything, or you'll get the whole house barred from the gala!" Bunty said in distress. "It's all through me—I've brought you nothing but bad luck. Look here, I'll drop out of the team!"

"You won't!" cried the chums in one breathless voice.

"You're our only hope, Bunty, and you're the very reason why we're not going to be badgered out of the gala!" Sally said, and paused.

She was toying curiously with the green feather, eyeing it with far more interest than she had given to the message accompanying it.

"What's more," she added in a queer tone, "I've got an idea we can stop this little game, Bunty, if you're willing to take a chance. It may sound crackers, but listen!"

By the time Sally had outlined her idea, Don and Johnny were convinced she was crackers.

Next morning Bunty's risky task was carefully carried out, Sally & Co. keeping cave for her, while Nat Piggot was unsuspectingly oiling his bike in the cycle shed.

Sally then stole round to the kitchens and took Wilkins, the pageboy, into her confidence.

"Wilkins, you helped us before, and I'm going to let you into a secret," she told him softly. "We're carrying out our revenge against K House, and Bunty Shane's fixing it now! But just in case Piggot or any of them get wind of it, I want you to help us!"

Wilkins nodded eagerly.

"I certainly will, Miss Sally."

"You know what'll happen to us if they tell the dean," Sally said softly, "and they can't get to the dean, Wilkins, if you have orders that he won't see anybody!"

"I get you, Miss Sally!" said Wilkins, with a grin. "I'll keep 'em out as long as you like. The dean won't see anybody—that's what I'll tell them."

"Thanks a lot, Wilkins." Sally beamed at him then slipped away to rejoin Don & Co.,

(Please turn to the back page.)



RICK REFUSED HIS FRIENDSHIP



(Continued from page 124.)

And doggedly, sturdily, he swung on his way.

RICK DISOBEYS



NOT since the turbulent days of her earliest acquaintanceship with Rick Oakley had Ann Sutton felt so worried, so restlessly uneasy.

She spent a sleepless night while Rick performed his self-imposed vigil in the stables. She was upset, knowing that

there was a definite rift in her friendship with Rick. Oh, why was he behaving so ridiculously?

She realised with dread that she'd have to have it out with Rick. She would point out—quietly but firmly—the harm he was doing and plead with him to abandon this absurd attitude towards Vance Gower. The fate of the stables depended upon it. Already she felt the feud between Rick and Vance was upsetting those other happy clients of hers.

She got up in the morning, full of determination to clear the air. But it was not Rick she first met when she stepped outside. It was Vance Gower himself—Vance, a piece of plaster on one cheek and a decidedly annoyed flush on his face.

"Hallo, Vance—" she began, at once scenting trouble.

"Good-morning!" he said, and there was a new note of coldness in his voice. Then, as if unable to contain himself any longer, he burst out: "Ann, this idiotic nonsense has got to stop—"

"Stop?" Ann faltered.

"About not being allowed to ride Fancy Lad." His eyes glimmered. "I don't think I've mentioned it before, Ann, but if anything happens so that my uncle can't ride the hunter in the handicap I'm doing it for him. And how am I to ride the horse if that ridiculous partner of yours won't even let me take him out for a practice gallop?" he demanded.

"B-but can't you?" Ann breathed.

"No!" fumed Vance. "I've just been along to Fancy Lad's stall and found it all locked up again. When I tried to unlock it Rick came and threatened to attack me."

Ann eyed him.

"Vance, you're sure?"

"Should I say it if I wasn't? Ann, really, it's too much. It's just—well, senseless. Even if the chap doesn't like me, that's no reason why he should bar me riding a horse which is practically mine. If I told my uncle about this he'd have Fancy Lad taken out of these stables before you could say knife."

Ann's heart beat a little faster.

"Vance, you—you wouldn't do that?"

"I don't know." He shrugged. "I like you, Ann. If it hadn't been for you I'd have had the horse removed before. But I'm bothered if I'm going on being treated like this. There's a limit to everything, and either I do ride that horse or—well, I write to my uncle."

Ann was dismayed, yet she could not help but be sympathetic. She could understand

exactly how Vance felt, and she found it impossible to blame him for his attitude.

But she saw what would be the consequences of such an action on Vance's part. If he did persuade his uncle to remove Fancy Lad, bang went the stable's hopes of being credited with a winner in the Hertford Handicap, and down would go its prestige. Inevitably the story would get around, and inevitably it would have a damaging effect. Yes, decidedly, she must speak to Rick. She must assert herself. She hated the prospect, but it had to be faced.

"Come with me. We'll find Rick," she said. "They found Rick—just coming out of Firebrand's stall, a newly filled bag of oats in his hands. He looked up quietly when Ann, rather briskly, called his name."

But his eyes flew at once to Vance Gower, and a gleam of hostility showed in them.

"Rick, what ever's been happening? Master Vance tells me you will not unlock Fancy Lad's stable."

"That's so, Miss Ann," Rick said mildly. "Not while Master Vance is around."

Ann found her heart racing. But she knew it had to come to the show-down now. Hateful as the task was, she stuck to her resolve.

"You forget, Rick, that Master Vance is a client—"

"Master Vance is no client. His uncle is," Rick returned sturdily.

"He's here in his uncle's place. He's been authorised by his uncle to ride the horse—"

"But his uncle hasn't informed me," Rick replied steadily.

"But don't you see, silly, that he wouldn't have thought that necessary?" Ann protested. "Rick, please be sensible and unlock those stables at once."

The old dogged expression came into Rick's face.

"I'm sorry, Miss Ann—"

"Then give me the keys."

Rick stood still.

"Rick, you heard."

"Yes, Miss Ann, I heard."

"Then hand over the keys."

Rick drew a deep breath. His face was wooden now.

"Is that an order, Miss Ann?"

"It is."

She paused, feeling that if this argument went on she would scream. But she had no doubt now that she had won it. Rick would never disobey a direct order. Then, to her shocked humiliation, Rick deliberately thrust his hands into his pockets.

There was an expression of pain on his face when he spoke—an expression which suggested that the words he uttered hurt him, and that he would far rather have left them unspoken.

"For once, Miss Ann, I must refuse to obey your order!" And with that he turned on his heel and vanished into the stable.

Ann stood still, feeling stunned and shamed. A blow in the face would have been preferable to that humiliating refusal, she felt.

But Vance, his face flaming with anger, took a step forward.

"Oakley, you cad—"

"Yes?" Rick swung round. The expression on his face was almost savagely grim. "Yes?" he asked, obviously hoping that Vance would attack. "If you have anything to say, Master Vance—"

Vance breathed heavily. "If it wasn't for the presence of Miss Ann—"

"Miss Ann need not be present," said Rick stolidly. "There are plenty of places where"—he looked down at his huge fists—"where we can talk, Master Vance. I leave you to make up your mind!" he added curtly, and turned his back.

"Ann," Vance muttered—"Ann I—I'm sorry. The fellow's just an oaf—a pig. But you're trembling. You're upset. Let me see you back to the house."

Ann nodded. She hardly cared in that moment what happened. More hurt and more ashamed than she had ever been in her life, she stumbled alongside Vance, who put a kind, assisting hand upon her arm.

What had happened? What did this attitude of Rick's portend? She felt too numb to think.

But before entering the garden of the lodge she looked round, and she winced as she saw Rick, his coat on, the bag of oats on his shoulder, walking off deliberately towards the gate which led to the moors. Without being conscious of any desire to supply the answer, she wondered where Rick was taking those oats.

"He's going," Vance muttered. "Now, where, I wonder?"

"Oh, Vance, need you worry?" Ann asked wearily.

He shook his head, but he frowned. In the lodge he poured Ann out a cup of coffee she had left over for breakfast, and had one himself. Outside there was a clatter and a chatter of cheery voices as the usual morning clients arrived.

"The gang's here," Vance said. "And, as usual, I haven't got a horse. But, Ann, seriously, what are you going to do about Rick?"

"I don't know," Ann confessed. "But you're not letting him get away with it?" Vance challenged. "Ann, I want that horse to ride. Look here, Ann, supposing I break down the door—"

Ann shot him a startled look. "What? No," she cried, "you mustn't do that. Uncle Ralph would be annoyed. You can't get a new door so easily, you know. At the same time, yes"—a little flash of defiance came into her face—"you're entitled to the horse, and you shall have him. Wait a minute. I may find a spare key in Rick's quarters."

She rose and hurried away. Upset though she was, her determination was still strong. It had come to a deadlock between her and Rick, but she was still mistress of the stables, and her word should be final. Searching Rick's single room, it was not long before she found a bunch of keys, and these she took outside.

"Come on. Let's see if one of these will fit," she said.

They went off again, to join Dick Lacey and half a dozen others who had gathered. They all wanted to know where Rick was, and a little uneasy silence fell when Vance told them about the whole thing.

"Gosh, the fellow must be potty!" Evan Trevitt said. "Looks to me as if Ann would be better off without him."

Ann heard that, and flushed as the fourth key she tried clicked in the stable lock. Vance gave a whoop of glee.

"Now," he said—"now we'll show the conceited pup whether I shall ride Fancy Lad or not! Trot him out, Ann."

Ann went into the stable gloom, pushing her way alongside the big chestnut hunter so as to untie the head-ropes which was fastened to

the hay-loft above the trough. Without hesitation, she backed the horse out, and a little cry of triumph went up from the others. But it was a cry that was silenced at once when Vance Gower gave a sudden exclamation.

"Ann!" he cried.

"Well?" Ann asked. "That—that—" Vance choked. "Look at his feet!" he cried. "Where are Fancy Lad's white coronets? This is a horse like Fancy Lad—but it's not him—"

"What!" Ann cried, and her jaw dropped as, looking at the horse closely, she saw that Vance spoke the truth. "Then—then—Rick—"

"Rick," Vance said, between his teeth, "has cheated us in the end! He's put another horse in Fancy Lad's place, Ann."

IN WITCH'S WOOD



IT was true. Examining the horse more closely, Ann saw now that it was Red Rufus, one of Rick's semi-wild moorland pets. She thought she understood now why Rick had departed with that bag of oats on his shoulder. He was off to Fancy Lad's hideout—wherever that might be—to give the horse his morning feed.

Vance was furious. He even went so far as to suggest that Rick had secretly sold the prospective champion, and had substituted this horse in its place. It was a theory received doubtfully by most of the riders, but with no belief at all by Ann. Puzzling as Rick's attitude had been, she knew he would never descend to so unscrupulous a trick.

She hardly knew what to do then. She only knew, in fact, that she wanted to get rid of the whole crowd—Vance Gower in particular.

Somehow she managed to send them away, and then her mind started working again. She knew Rick's simple ways, and it did not take her long to arrive at the conclusion that, wherever Rufus had come from, there Fancy Lad probably was. And, as it happened, Ann was a particular friend of Red Rufus'.

She went to the horse, saddled him, and turned his head towards the gate. Then, stroking his glossy mane, she said:

"Rufus, I want you to take me to Rick—Rick, your master!"

She knew, by the eager way Rufus' ears pricked forward, that he understood.

With no further thought, she sprang into the saddle, jerked the reins, and, allowing Rufus to have his head, jogged off across the moors towards Witches Wood.

Presently they had arrived at the outskirts of the wood, and here just for a moment Rufus paused, his great head up as he questingly sniffed the air this way and that. Then, abruptly, he turned to the right.

Ann knew that she was on the track now. She guessed, even before Rufus stopped, exactly where the horse was making for—the old shepherd's shelter, on the very fringe of the woods overlooking the moors. They made no sound in the soft, mossy grass as they approached the old place, but suddenly Ann reined in sharply as, nearing it, she heard voices.

And one voice was Rick's. "You do as you like, but you don't get any information out of me, Master Vance! What I've done with Fancy Lad is my business!"

"You—you cheeky upstart!" came the voice of Vance Gower.

"Your words do not worry me," came Rick's calm voice. "I repeat, you shall not know where Fancy Lad is, follow me as you will!"

Ann moved forward a few silent paces. She felt alarmed—disturbed suddenly. She felt also that she did not like that snarl in Vance Gower's voice—so different in tone from the

one she knew. Then again she listened as the voices broke out afresh.

"You know what you're doing," Vance Gower said thickly. "I could put the police on you for this, Rick Oakley!"

"I doubt if you would do that," came Rick's composed voice. "You see, Master Vance, I know your game. You may have deceived Miss Ann easily with your genteel ways, but you do not deceive me. Miss Ann trusts you. She doesn't know you for the scoundrel you are, but I do. I say again—you're not having Fancy Lad to help you in your schemes!"

There was a pause. Ann sat electrified as the next words—Vance's words—came:

"Rick, old chap, supposing I make it worth your while?" The words were eager—almost whining. "Supposing we go shares—half for you and half for me? What then?"

"My answer is just the same, Master Vance," came Rick's sturdy voice. "I do not play games like that. I do not steal, nor do I intend to help you to steal."

"It means a lot, Rick. You could do with a bit of money, couldn't you?"

"No. Money means nothing to me," came Rick's emotionless reply. "My honour does."

Ann drew a deep breath. What was this she was hearing? Vance, not troubling to deny Rick's accusation that he was out to steal; in fact, trying to bargain with Rick to help him!

She sat there, bewildered. But before she could make a move there came suddenly a shrill cry from the moorland behind her:

"Ann! Ann!"

Abruptly she turned. Out on the moors, two or three hundred yards distant, was a lone horseman whom she recognised at once as Dick Lacey. He was galloping urgently towards her. Ann thought swiftly. It would never do, she realised, to allow Dick to find Rick and Vance in this ugly scene—not on top of what he had already seen. So she turned swiftly and galloped to meet him.

"Dick, what's happened?" she cried. "Thank goodness I've found you!" Dick reined in, puffing a little. "Ann, you'll have to go back to the stables—at once! Mr. Gower has arrived—"

"Mr. Gower?" Ann stared, not understanding for the moment. Then, with a jump of panic, the name clicked into its proper place in her mind. "You mean, the owner of Fancy Lad—Vance's uncle?"

"That's him," Dick said grimly. "And, my, isn't he in a wax! Better buck up, Ann."

Ann nodded. There was a wild panic in her heart now. Oh, goodness! Could anything have been more disastrous than this?

Shrinking from the ordeal she knew she would now have to face, at Dick's side she made her way back to Sutton's Stables. Together she and Dick clattered into the stable-yard, where a tall, stern-looking figure stood outside Fancy Lad's stable, amid a rather worried-looking crowd of her clients and pupils. Ann braced herself as he came towards her.

"I am extremely annoyed, Miss Sutton!" he began. "What is this I hear about my horse Fancy Lad being stolen, and this—this animal"—he pointed angrily towards the stall—"being put in its place?"

Ann gulped.

"Your horse is not stolen," she replied.

"Then where is it?"

"Rick Oakley has it. Pick is—is looking after it for you. But—Ann, hardly realising what she was saying, knowing only a desperate need to clear Rick, and no longer trusting Vance Gower completely, decided to try to justify Rick's action. "Rick had a silly idea that your nephew has some scheme connected with Fancy Lad."

He looked at her sharply.

"My nephew?"

"Yes, Vance Gower. You sent him here to keep an eye on the horse."

He pursed his lips for a moment.

"I see." He spoke the words slowly, but Ann saw, with mild amazement, that the anger had died from his eyes. "And so what's happened?" he added.

"Well, as Rick had no instructions from you, and as he wouldn't have Vance interfering until you said so, he hid Fancy Lad and put this horse in its stable," Ann faltered.

The faces around her looked a little strained. It looked as if Ann were actually still trying to defend Rick to Vance's own uncle.

"And where is Rick now?" Stephen Gower asked.

Ann's brain was working swiftly. Why not take Stephen Gower to the shack in the woods? Why not let the explanation she did not understand come from those two themselves?

"I've just left Rick with your nephew. If you like, I'll take you there," she said.

"Thank you."

Some minutes later, mounted on the bay hunter he had brought with him, he and Ann were heading back across the moors. They came within sight of the shack at last, and both dismounted. But no sound came from the hut.

"Well"—Stephen Gower's face was a trifle hard—"I thought you said we'd find them here, Miss Sutton?"

"They—they were here." Ann gazed around. Her eyes fell on a telltale sign in the grass—a thin line of oats which looked as though they might have escaped from a hole in a faulty sack. And she knew then—knew with a flash of definite understanding—that it was Rick who had left that trail. "I think I can find Rick," she said. "This is the trail."

"But why should he have left a trail?" Stephen Gower questioned.

Ann shook her head. She didn't know, she said; but when she suggested following it up, Stephen Gower readily agreed. And so they followed it. It led them eventually to the river, and from there wound along the river bank.

And then, ahead of them, they heard a sudden shout, and then a scuffle. Accompanying it came a shrill, terrified whine.

"That's Rick," Ann cried, "and—and Fancy Lad!"

She broke into a run, Stephen Gower at her heels. There came another crash, a grunt, a sudden shriek, and a gasp. Then the sound of terrified hoofs pawing frantically at the ground and a long-drawn-out neigh of shrill distress.

With a rush Ann came on the scene—the old, roofless cottage which had been a derelict of the woods for years. The door was wide open, affording a complete view of the only room the cottage comprised. At the far end, tethered to a ring in a great timber support, was the magnificent chestnut hunter, and perilously near his flying hoofs in a half-crouching position, and with a look of agony on his face, was Rick.

And Rick, in spite of the fact that he was almost spent, was clinging frantically to the cords of a stout canvas nosebag, while Vance Gower was savagely trying to wrench it away from him. He was in the very act of striking the wild boy's bruised knuckles with a short, thick stick.

"No!" Ann cried shrilly. "Stop that!"

She was in the cottage in a flash. Vance wheeled round, a look of hate on his face. For a moment it seemed as if he would have slashed at Ann with the stick. But in a twinkling Rick had thrust out a foot; at the same moment had jerked the bag towards him.

Vance twisted again on the defenceless Rick. But at that moment Stephen Gower appeared. In two strides he had stepped forward, had caught the furious young villain by the scruff of the neck, and brought him

to his senses with a ringing slap across the face.

"Now!" he said harshly. Rick got to his feet, still gripping the bag. Then he murmured soothingly to the agitated Fancy Lad.

"Quiet, boy," he said. "It's all over now. Thank you, Miss Ann, for coming in time." "But, Rick, what happened? Why?"—and Ann looked at the defeated, whimpering Vance—"why didn't you tell me about—about him in the first place?"

"Because, Miss Ann, I knew I could not convince you. I knew you and those others liked him. But now—well, here is the story," he added.

He told it in his own direct, unemotional style. It began with the arrival of Fancy Lad at Sutton's Stables. The same day Rick had met his old gipsy friend, Mother Malone, who lived in the woods. She had warned him about Vance Gower, saying that he planned to find and steal his grandfather's savings, which he had hidden in the woods during the war. But even Mother Malone did not know where these savings were—only Fancy Lad knew the hiding-place now that old man Gower was dead.

"I only had Mother Malone's word for this," resumed Rick. "But I believed her, for I knew her to be a friend of old Mr. Gower. So I resolved Vance should have nothing to do with Fancy Lad. But to-day he followed me when I was carrying the oats to Fancy Lad, and I led him to the shack, Miss Ann. There I pretended I would accept half of Farmer Gower's savings, and in return lend Fancy Lad to him. Fancy Lad led us here. We found the savings—and the rest you can guess."

"Yes. He attacked you—from behind, too, I imagine," Ann said at once, throwing Vance a look of withering contempt.

"You young villain!" his uncle grated, and glared at his nephew. Then he turned to Rick. "You were right about him all along. He got to know about my father's savings from a letter the old man left. I was abroad, you know, when he died. Rick, how can I thank you?"

"I require no thanks," said Rick quietly.

"**RICK**, can you forgive me for having doubted you, even for a moment?" Ann asked softly. "Rick, I'm so sorry!"

"There is no need for my forgiveness, Miss Ann, nor for your sorrow," Rick replied simply. "To me you can do no wrong—ever. 'Tis I who ask for forgiveness for not obeying when you gave me an order."

"Rick!" Ann laughed happily, and took his arm. "Now all you've got to do is to win that handicap with Fancy Lad."

"That I will do!" Rick replied. And again Rick Oakley kept his word.

THE END.

THE MERRYMAKERS AT COLLEGE

(Continued from page 136.)

who were hiding, curiously enough, behind the hedge of the dean's quarters. They grinned a little anxiously at her as she joined them.

"You wait! I'm sure I'm right!" Sally said. It was a long and tedious wait. Then suddenly they all stiffened. Footsteps sounded, coming stealthily towards the dean's house. A boy's footsteps. Sally gazed with bated breath through the hedge, recognising the glittering buttons and red tunic of Wilkins, the page.

He had left the path now and was creeping silently along the grass verge—towards the open window of the dean's study. He peeped furtively in as if to make sure that the dean was not in the study now. Then his hand went swiftly to his pocket.

"Just a moment, Wilkins!" Sally flashed out from behind the hedge. "What have you got there?"

Wilkins jumped back, startled.

"Oh! Oh, n-nothing, miss!"

Sally made a grab at his hand, and from it she took a familiar-looking coil of paper and unfolded it before the wondering eyes of her chums.

"YOUR ORDERS HAVE BEEN DEFIED!" it read. "J HOUSE IS TAKING REVENGE ON K, AND RINGLEADER IS NEW GIRL NAMED BUNTY SHANE."

"Where did this come from, Wilkins?" asked Sally.

"Piggot gave it to me—asked me to deliver it to the dean. He said—'Hey!'"

He broke off with a startled cry, for Don and Johnny had seized his arms and began marching him with rapid strides towards the cycle shed.

"Are you sure it was Piggot who gave you that note, Wilkins?" persisted Sally. "How long ago? Where was he?"

"He c-came along to my scullery," stammered Wilkins. "It wasn't five minutes ago, and, if he denies it, I'll—" Then his voice froze away, for another voice burst upon his ears.

It came from inside the cycle shed, where Bunty Shane was hovering outside the locked door, and it was the voice of Nat Piggot.

"Let me out, will you?" he was storming, his words echoed by violent kicks and thumps at the door. "You won't get away with this, Bunty Shane! I know it's you—I can see you through the chink! Sally Warner and her crowd put you up to this! You wait! Twenty minutes by my watch I've been locked in here, and when I get out—"

Sally darted to the lock and snapped it open.

"Sorry, Piggot, but it was the only way to clear you of unjust suspicion!" she said with frank apology. "We've got the real culprit here—The Sign of the Feather! It's young Wilkins!" And firmly she pushed forward the quaking pageboy.

WILKINS soon broke down and confessed. It was a stupid betting craze that had been his downfall.

He had betted ten dollars on the local girl, Mattie Johnson, to win the gala swimming race. His bet had seemed a certainty—until he had seen the new girl, Bunty Shane, practising for the J House team. Then, scared of losing, he had conceived the idea of issuing mysterious threats.

"You might have got away with it a bit longer, Wilkins," Sally told him dryly, "but I happened to notice a clue in your broom cupboard. It set me thinking. It was a feather duster which looked as if it had been well plucked—and all the feathers were green!"

The chums' own pleading saved Wilkins from Nat Piggot's vengeance and certain dismissal.

But Wilkins lost his bet. It was Bunty Shane who beat all-comers in the gala, and won the race for J House—thanks to Sally.

(End of this week's story.)

Look out for another entertaining complete story featuring the popular Merry-makers in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.