

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ³

Week
Ending
Jan. 12th,
1946.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



Instead Of Visiting Her Aunt In A London Suburb, Hazel Nixon Found Herself Flying Across Europe, On Her Way To A Strange, Unknown Country—By NANCY WALDOCK

A STRANGE REQUEST

HAZEL NIXON had a queer, uneasy feeling that she was being watched. She had had that feeling during most of her long train journey from Pendlebury to London.

She was sure there had been someone lurking in the corridor spying on her. But each time she turned her head in that direction there was no one to be seen. Yet still that strange feeling persisted, although, as far as Hazel knew, there was no earthly reason why anyone should be spying on her.

Then, in the excitement of reaching Paddington and mingling with the crowd on the station, she had momentarily forgotten her suspicion.

For this, Hazel's first visit to London, was the result of a glorious invitation from Aunt Margaret. Hazel pushed her way through the barrier, gave up her ticket, and then stood still, momentarily undecided what to do. She had come by an earlier train than expected, so, consequently, Aunt Margaret was not here to meet her.

"Well," she decided, "I'm not going to sit around here for hours. I'll"—her eyes sparkled—"I'll have a look round London."

And eagerly she moved towards the main entrance. It was then that the strange feeling of being followed returned to her.

Who was this person who, for some unknown reason, had been secretly watching her? She determined to find out.

By the main entrance she halted suddenly and swung round. The ruse worked. Her eyes met those of a girl twenty yards away. The girl was staring at her intently. For an instant Hazel had a vision of her before she turned

swiftly and was lost in the crowd. She was a pretty, foreign-looking girl, with dark, intent eyes set in an oval face.

Hazel was puzzled. Why on earth had this girl, an utter stranger, been spying on her? She shrugged her shoulders. There was no answer to that question, but—

"Taxi, miss?" A voice spoke at her elbow. Hazel started, then nodded. Much as she would have liked to confront that girl who was spying on her, it was little use searching for her in the crowd. And this was a holiday that called for a taxi-ride. The driver put her case inside, and she got in, telling him the address.

He was just moving off when the far-side door opened and someone almost fell into the taxi beside her.

Hazel gave a gasp of amazement and indignation. It was the dark-eyed foreign girl who had been following her.

"What do you mean by jumping into my taxi?" Hazel demanded hotly, and leaned forward to tell the driver to stop. But the stranger laid a hand restrainingly on her arm.

"Don't be alarmed," she said in a soft, smooth voice.

"You needn't think I'm alarmed!" Hazel retorted. "But I'm not used to being watched and spied on, and then have a stranger calmly jump into my taxi. Driver, pull up!" she called through the glass panel in front.

"Alexis, do not stop! Drive to the appointed place!" The young stranger calmly countered Hazel's order.

"Very good, Miss Tanya," the taximan said over his shoulder.

Hazel stared in astonishment from one to the other, and a cold feeling of apprehension came over her.

"What is this?" she demanded fiercely. "Are you trying to kidnap me? Because, if so, you're—"

"Please, your Highness, I beg you to be calm!" said Tanya in a respectful but purposeful voice.

"Your Highness?" Hazel echoed, and dazedly she shook her head. This was getting more and more mysterious. "What do you mean—'your Highness'?"

"It is of no use pretending," Tanya said. "For months you have evaded us, but now we have found you. Really, your Highness, it was very wrong of you to disappear like that!"

"So that's it!" Hazel gasped in enlightenment. "I say, I'm afraid you've made a mistake. I'm awfully sorry, but I'm no 'Highness.' My name's Hazel Nixon, and I come from Pendlebury—in London on a visit."

Tanya smiled patiently. "It is no good, your Highness—we are not deceived. Do you think I, your maid-in-waiting, would not know you?"

"But it's the truth!" Hazel exclaimed. "I'm not a princess—I'm Hazel Nixon. My father has a tobacconist's shop in Pendlebury, and my aunt is Mrs. Margaret Wilcox, of—"

Tanya interrupted her. "Please, your Highness, save your protests until you see my uncle, the Regent. And please remember that Alexis, the driver, is one of our people, and it is not befitting your dignity to demean yourself with this pretence."

Hazel stared at her, bewildered. So this was why she had been followed. How could she convince this girl she was mistaken?

She looked desperately out of the window. Where were they taking her?

The taxi had turned down a broad avenue lined with big buildings, and now it swung through an archway into a stone courtyard with doors on every side.

Liveried servants appeared at the biggest door. One opened the taxi door, another took Hazel's case. Tanya steered her finally out of the taxi.

"The princess is feeling a little faint after a long journey," Tanya said smoothly. "Assist her to her quarters."

"You must be mad!" Hazel exclaimed in alarm. "I am not going inside that house!"

Tanya said nothing, but made a sign to the servants, and Hazel felt respectful hands laid on her arms, and she was gently but forcefully being led into a wide, carpeted corridor and into a lift. Two floors up, she was led out and taken into a lavish suite of apartments.

Tanya closed the door, and she and Hazel were alone again for the moment. Hazel turned angrily on her.

"You can't keep me here! I'm not the princess, I tell you! You've made a mistake—a big mistake! Isn't there someone here who really knows the princess? Anybody who does will surely know that I am not she!"

"In the morning there is to be a big reception for you"—Tanya calmly ignored Hazel's protestations—"and you will meet the Regent, your Uncle Fernando."

"In the morning! Look here, you don't expect me to stay all night?" Hazel cried, aghast. "My aunt will wonder where on earth I've got to!"

Tanya shrugged. "I am grieved your Highness keeps up this pretence. Your bed-room lies beyond, and you will find clothes there befitting your rank." I will send maids to assist you if you wish."

"I don't wish!" Hazel exclaimed. "I want to leave here at once!"

Without a word, Tanya opened the door and went out. Hazel dashed to the door and grasped the handle. Furiously she tugged, but in vain. She was locked in—a prisoner!

She must escape somehow. She thought of her aunt—of the panic she would get in when her niece failed to arrive.

There was no way out through the door. The windows were too high from the ground

to attempt escape that way. She would try the bed-room. She crossed to the bed-room door and gazed around the room. In it was a four-poster, tapestried bed, with a monogrammed coverlet. And laid on the bed were lovely frocks and underclothes; an emerald green frock with billowing flounces; a day frock, and an ermine coat.

And then her attention was attracted by a soft, urgent tap-tapping in the other room.

Curiously she went back to investigate. The sound seemed to be coming from the window, and quickly she ran across and threw it up.

Next moment a lithe figure drew itself on to the sill from the drainpipe and jumped lightly into the room. It was a good-looking, fair-haired boy with, Hazel noticed, frank blue eyes.

"What—" she began, then stopped as he raised a warning finger to his lips.

"Are you alone?" he asked in a low, husky voice.

"Yes, but—"

"Good. I've got to talk fast," he said. "It's as much as my life is worth to be caught in here. I've come to help you get out of this mess—and to ask you a very great favour."

He smiled suddenly, his blue eyes twinkling. "I'm sorry. I'd better introduce myself. My name is Rod—Rod Norris. I know who you are, and I know you've been mistaken for Princess Terena of Betharania. You've innocently become mixed up in a wicked plot—I can't pretend it's not dangerous for you. If you ask me to, I'll get you out of here immediately. But I'm going to ask you to stay—to pretend you're the real princess until I come back. I can't begin to tell you now how much depends on it. But I can't ask you to carry on with this thing without warning you beforehand—there is danger! Are you prepared to trust me, Hazel Nixon? It's a case of 'Yes' or 'No' now. I'll be no more help to you or anyone if I'm found in these apartments."

His urgent blue eyes were on hers. She drew in a deep breath.

"All right," she said. "The answer is 'Yes.' I'll trust you."

He gripped her arm, his frank face serious. "I had a feeling you would be willing to take the risk," he said. "And I give you my word of honour I won't let you down."

"But, Rod, my aunt—she's expecting me," Hazel told him.

"Write her a note quickly. Say you've been delayed and you'll explain later." Rod drew a pencil and paper from his pocket. "I'll see the note gets to her."

Quickly she did as he bade her, folded it, and handed it to him. And even as she did so there came the sound of approaching footsteps in the corridor.

"Quickly!" she whispered tensely. "You must go! They're coming here!"

He was astride the sill and lowering himself to the drainpipe as the key turned in the lock.

With thumping heart, Hazel swiftly pulled the tapestry curtains, and stood with her back to them as Tanya came into the room.

The other girl halted suspiciously, gazing at the swaying curtains.

"What is it you try to do, your Highness?" she demanded.

"If you are going to keep me here I want something to eat," Hazel said boldly. At all costs she must keep Tanya from the window.

"You will dine in your room alone to-night, your Highness," the other girl said, still staring fixedly at the closed curtains. "And I hope that by morning you will have recovered from the strange idea that you are not the princess. What are you trying to hide from me?"

Hazel shrugged her shoulders. In another moment Rod would have reached the ground. She must bluff for a few moments more.

"You lock me in here and accuse me of hiding something!" she said angrily. "Tell the

kitchen staff that the princess is ready for dinner!"

Tanya's eyes narrowed at this sudden change of attitude in Hazel.

"What is behind that curtain?" she demanded.

"A very dull view of my prison yard," Hazel retorted.

Rod would have reached the ground by now. Tanya moved forward and jerked back the curtain, to reveal the open window. She did not even bother to look outside.

"Your Highness will not escape that way," she said, believing she had guessed Hazel's thoughts. "If I thought you would even attempt it I would put a guard beneath your window."

She turned and moved to the door. Hazel held her breath.

"I will send a maid with your dinner, your Highness," Tanya said smoothly, and, to Hazel's relief, left the room.

Ten minutes later a maid brought soup, chicken, and ice cream on a tray. It was fun, after all, being a princess, Hazel decided.

And as she ate the delicious meal she puzzled over the mystery that surrounded her; but she was still no nearer to solving it. Yet, she decided, she would go through with this masquerade. Rod Norris had asked her to, and she trusted him. Yes, she would be Princess Terena till Rod released her from her promise.

Next morning Tanya came for her, and together they went down in the lift. A little procession of uniformed attendants joined them in the corridor, bowing in silence as Hazel appeared. Then she was getting into a shining black limousine, and, accompanied by Tanya, was starting for her unknown destination.

For some three-quarters of an hour they purred through the suburbs, till the chauffeur turned off a by-pass road into what appeared to be a huge park.

Hazel looked out of the window, then choked back a gasp. This was an airport; there were two gleaming planes taking off, and, shining in the sunlight only a few yards from them, was a smaller, silvery plane.

Then her heart gave a lurch as the car pulled up by the side of the small plane. A question suddenly flashed across her mind, and she knew a vague feeling of fear.

"What did all this mean? Why had she been brought here?"

Oh, if only all this had never happened! If only she could wake up and find it was all a dream!

A little quiver of horror ran through her. Surely—surely they did not intend to fly somewhere? Surely—

There was no time to ponder over such questions, for the car door had been opened and she was stepping out into the centre of a little group of officials.

"We are delighted to welcome your Highness, and wish you godspeed!" said the spokesman.

So they were going to fly somewhere! But she couldn't, she told herself desperately. She would have to tell them the truth—make them understand that she was not the princess.

She realised that someone had stepped forward, was taking her hand, and raising it respectfully to his lips. With an effort she brought her attention back as the pilot spoke.

"I am honoured, your Highness," he said, "to be chosen as your pilot! In five hours my princess will be back in her country of Betharania!"

"Betharania!" Hazel cried, aghast. "I—can't go there!"

With a movement of her hand, Tanya signalled to the attendants in the background. They came swiftly forward, and Hazel, her mind in a whirl of conflicting emotions was escorted firmly to the plane.

MEETING AT THE CARNIVAL



"LONG live the Princess Terena!" came in a roar from the crowd.

Hazel was in a daze as she drove with Tanya through the cobbled streets of Bethacrest. It was five hours since she had found herself in the aeroplane flying across Europe to Betharania. There was no drawing back now. She was too deeply entangled in the web of mystery to get out now.

An open carriage had awaited her and Tanya at the airport just outside Bethacrest, the small capital. And, amid the cheers of the crowd, they made their way through the little mediaeval town.

On either side the streets were thronged with people. Bunting hung across the road; flags and banners flapped in the afternoon breeze.

Feeling an utter fraud, Hazel mechanically waved and smiled to the crowds. Rose petals showered down on her, and the red-jacketed coachman almost had to force a way through the pressing multitude.

They passed through the town and out into the country till they reached a brown gabled lodge nestling on the green hillside.

"Your hunting lodge," Tanya told her.

Hazel gave a cry of delight, then broke off. Her hunting lodge! No, that it could never be—could never belong to an impostor. And she forced back the momentary twinge of envy she felt for the real Princess Terena as they flashed past the beautiful house and bowled on up the hill to the castle at the top. They clattered over the drawbridge and came to a halt at the foot of broad stone steps, upon which had been laid a red carpet, leading into a huge hall.

Tanya cut short the deputation of welcome which awaited them by saying briefly:

"The princess is tired. She will see her uncle, the Regent, and then rest."

Hazel's heart sank. Her uncle! Surely he—if anyone—would know his own niece—would know that she was not the princess?

Her pulse was racing as she and Tanya were shown into a high-ceilinged state-room, where, advancing to meet her, she saw a tall, bearded, dark-eyed man.

This, thought Hazel, was the Regent. She steeled herself.

"Welcome, my child!" he said. "Your Uncle Fernando is happy to see you again after—"

He stopped abruptly, staring intently at her; then his face flushed angrily.

"What is the meaning of this?" he cried harshly. "You are not the princess!"

Hazel stood silent, thinking only of her promise to Rod Norris, the boy she had liked so much.

"But—she is the princess, your Grace!" Tanya cried. "Your agents—they all said that she was. She kept on telling me she wasn't the princess, but I took no notice—"

Fernando held up his hand.

"She is not the princess!" he repeated coldly. "Are all my agents fools and half-wits? The real princess must be here to-day!"

"It's impossible. If this isn't the princess, then we've lost her!" Tanya cried.

"I did my best to make you understand. I couldn't have done more," Hazel whispered.

"But—but if you want me to, I could go on being the princess for the time being. I would be glad to help—"

It was out now—the only way she could go on helping Rod, if these people would let her.

The Regent's dark eyes bored into her.

"It is possible. They are very alike—might be twins, in fact—no one but myself could tell the difference—"

He broke off and paced up and down, frowning, his hands behind his back. Hazel watched him breathlessly, expectantly. At last he stopped in front of her.

"My child, you are involved in something

graver than you realise," he said. "You have come here as a princess—for the time being you shall remain as princess. But I must warn you of the grave consequences if you forget for a single moment the part you will have to play in this castle—in this country. If your masquerade is discovered now you will answer to me and to the whole country!"

"I—I understand" Hazel whispered, inwardly exultant. All unwittingly they were giving her the chance to go on helping Rod Norris.

"You needn't have any fears," she told them. Fernando appeared satisfied. He nodded, then became suddenly grim.

"Just one warning!" he said. "We have a youthful outlaw in this country known as the Shadow. In his impudence and daring he has even been known to break into this castle. Beware of him! But Tanya will be your constant companion. Go now and prepare for the carnival. The people wish to see you this evening in their midst. To-day is a fiesta of games and dancing."

He dismissed the two girls and returned to his desk.

Tanya accompanied Hazel to her rooms, and told her that she must now dress for the carnival. A hairdresser was sent for, who set her hair after the fashion of the country, completing his work with a tiara, whose diamonds shone in the shape of a star amid Hazel's brown curls.

Despite herself, Hazel felt herself thrilling at the prospect of the colourful and exciting carnival. And in the evening, when a carriage took them down the winding road past the hunting lodge, where they stopped for a moment while a silver key was presented to her, her eyes were sparkling joyously, her worries were momentarily forgotten.

Dusk had fallen as they drove into the gay, decorated streets of the town. The blue, starlit sky was tinged red with the dancing reflections of a hundred bonfires. A sound of singing, merry and carefree, drew gradually nearer, till out of a side turning came a weird procession of boys and girls dressed as animals.

The carriage came to a halt before them.

"You have to accept their gifts—it's a custom," Tanya whispered.

The strangely dressed crowd was round the carriage, cheering and laughing.

A boy stepped forward, dressed as a cat. He thrust a paper bag of sugared almonds into Hazel's hands.

"Please accept these, your Highness, from Lucky Cat," he said.

One by one they piled their gifts in the carriage, and Hazel found herself laughing with them and enjoying herself immensely.

"Mountain Monkey has nothing," said another boy. "He says come to the dance."

"Yes, come to the dance!" the cry was taken up all round.

Fireworks blazed, coloured lights across the sky, and in an impulsive moment Hazel's mind was made up. Why shouldn't she join the happy crowd as a fellow-reveller for a while? She slipped out of the carriage.

With an exclamation Tanya shot out a hand to stop her, but too late. Hazel was being swept away towards the market square, where a band was playing gay dance tunes.

At sight of Hazel the band struck up the Royal Waltz, and a ring of dancing young people was formed round her.

Then suddenly there came a shout.

"Look everyone! Up on the balcony! It's the Shadow!"

A great burst of cheering went up.

"Welcome! Welcome to the Shadow—friend of the people!"

Hazel stared up at the balcony, and saw the slim, boyish figure, waving gaily down at the crowd, seemingly oblivious of the danger to which he was exposing himself. Hazel smiled, admiring that reckless figure; then

her gaze sharpened, she found herself watching him tensely.

He was clad in riding breeches, open-necked shirt, and a mask covered the upper half of his face. Yet somehow he seemed familiar to Hazel.

And then he vaulted over the balcony, dropping lightly to the square beneath.

The crowd drew back, forming a lane for him as he walked towards her. And Hazel, staring at him, felt her heart thump. She knew who the Shadow was—knew who this reckless young outlaw was! Rod Norris!

She stared at him, dazed. A sudden silence had fallen, and it was as if only the two of them were in that market-place, and the multitude of people were just an audience, remote and far away.

He bowed over her hand, and so that all could hear him, he said:

"The Shadow craves the honour of a dance with his young princess."

With an effort, Hazel composed herself and spoke calmly:

"The princess will be pleased to dance with the Shadow."

But her mind was in a whirl. What was he doing here in Betharania? How had he come here? The questions pounded through her brain as he led her gently but masterfully into a waltz.

"You know who I am?" he asked softly.

"Yes," she whispered. "I know who you are."

"I want to thank you for being such a sport," he said. "And I want to ask you to go on being the princess for the time being."

"As long as you want me to," she whispered. "But—I don't understand. How is it—"

"Soon I'll be able to explain everything." His voice held a note of urgency. Other couples were joining them in the waltz, and he had to lower his voice till she could hardly hear his quick words. "There's no one else but you who can carry out this dangerous mission. The real princess is not here. It is not time, and she must not fall into the Prince Regent's hands."

"I'll go on with it," Hazel said. "But Fernando has found me out."

"Yes, I knew he would do that, but I also knew he would have to let you go on being the princess, Hazel."

"And you?" she whispered, as he whirled her round. "Isn't it dangerous for you here?"

He smiled.

"The people are my friends—they will warn me if Fernando's police appear."

Even as he murmured the words a cry went up:

"The police, Shadow! Go quickly! The Regent's men are here!"

In the far corner of the square appeared horsemen in the blue uniform of the state police. As of one accord the crowd closed round Hazel and Rod like an enveloping wave. And the wave pushed them to safety in the shadows of an alley.

Hazel felt Rod's hand close on hers, and they were running along the dark alley away from the square.

They came to the broad road—deserted now—where Hazel's carriage stood.

"In you get!" Rod cried. "Torrio"—he turned to the coachman—"drive to the castle. I will accompany the princess until we reach the woods. And not a word to anyone, Torrio, that you have seen me to-night."

The old coachman nodded unquestioningly, and Rod climbed into the carriage beside Hazel. In a moment they were bowling down the road.

"Torrio is one of my friends. Trust him completely," Rod whispered. "We have shaken off any pursuit now."

But he was wrong. Hardly had they reached

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The CASE OF THE FRIGHTENED GIRL

THE MYSTERIOUS PACKAGE

By PETER LANGLEY

JUNE GAYNOR, niece and partner of Noel Raymond, the famous young detective, went to the Lake District to investigate the mystery of a spectral Green Rajah, who was supposed to haunt Temple Isle. She was specially intrigued because a person calling himself the Green Rajah had made a vain attempt to steal a large package which had been entrusted her by a frightened girl and her uncle, Roger Standish.

Also staying at Glen Hall was Jack Linton, a boy who seemed anxious that she should not carry on her investigations.

To June's amazement, Roger Standish arrived at Glen Hall, and declared that he had never seen June before. June, realising that the man who had accompanied the frightened girl had been an impostor, suggested that the mysterious package should be opened. So June went with them to the library and fitted the key in the secret cupboard in which she had placed the package.

JUNE'S heart was thumping as she opened the door of the secret cupboard and lifted out the heavy package.

All along she had been convinced that its mysterious contents were the key to the baffling case on which she was engaged. And now, at long last, those contents were to be revealed.

She carried the package across to a nearby table and, setting it down, looked eagerly across at Mr. Henley and Mr. Standish.

"May I open it?" she asked.

Mr. Henley smiled.

"Of course, my dear. You are the detective in charge of the case, so it's your privilege."

"But do buck up!" urged his daughter, Mildred. "I'm simply dying to know what it is."

Expectantly she watched as June produced a pair of nail scissors from her pocket and proceeded to cut the sealed cords. Mr. Standish and Mildred's father also crowded round as June pulled down the stiff brown paper, revealing a cardboard box. They were just as excited as the girls.

What did that box contain? Something of tremendous value—that was obvious, otherwise the Green Rajah would not have tried so desperately hard to steal it.

"Well, we'll soon know now," June murmured. "And when we have discovered it we—"

She broke off as she lifted the lid from the box, and incredulously she stared.

Exactly what she had expected the box to contain she hardly knew, but certainly not what now met her startled gaze.

"A b-b-brick!" she exclaimed dazedly.

"Wh-aa-t?"

There came an incredulous gasp from the two men, then a hysterical giggle from Mildred as June lifted out an oblong block of baked clay.

A common brick—and underneath it was another, and yet another! One by one the schoolgirl detective lifted them out of the box and deposited them down on the table. Then hopefully she peered into the box, but it contained nothing else—nothing but those half dozen bricks.

Helplessly they all regarded them. For a few moments no one spoke. Disappointment and bewilderment held them rigid, then from Mr. Standish came an explosive roar.

"We're too late! That scoundrel, the Green Rajah, has beaten us after all! He's stolen the real contents of the box and substituted those bricks!"

From Mr. Henley came a grim nod.

"It certainly looks like it," he agreed.

But June shook her head.

"Impossible," she said. "Since the Green Rajah's last attempt to steal this package, it's been safely locked up in this cupboard. He couldn't possibly have got at it. No one has. Because I took the precaution of arranging almost invisible threads of cotton across the door. It couldn't possibly be opened without breaking those threads, but they weren't even disturbed."

Mr. Standish looked unimpressed. He gave another irate snort.

"Are you suggesting that Colonel Raikes sent all the way to India for half a dozen ordinary, everyday bricks?" he demanded. "Are these"—derisively he indicated the pile on the table—"what he asked Henley to guard so carefully? It's absurd. That package obviously contained something of great value, and as it isn't in the box now, there can be only one explanation—it's been stolen."

Slowly Mr. Henley nodded. "It certainly looks like it," he agreed again. June made no comment. There was a baffled look on her face. Plausible though Mr. Standish's theory was, she was certain it was not correct. Despite the evidence, she was convinced that the secret cupboard had not been forced open.

Incredible though it seemed, she was positive that the contents of the box had not been changed since it had come into her possession. What, then, could be the explanation? Why should anyone bother to send a box of bricks halfway across the world?

Picking up one of them, June peered at it through a pocket magnifying glass, but there was nothing distinctive about it. It seemed what it looked—just a valueless oblong of baked clay.

She took up another of the bricks and was examining that when there came a sudden startled exclamation from Mr. Standish. Looking up, she saw that he was glaring across at Mr. Henley, a gleam in his eyes.

"I believe I know who the Green Rajah is!" he cried. "I believe I know the identity of that impudent scoundrel who impersonated me and who's now playing ghost!"

Mr. Henley and his daughter regarded him in amazed excitement, while June nearly dropped the brick she was clutching, so unexpected was this sudden outburst.

A grim smile of satisfaction on his lips, Roger Standish nodded slowly.

"Yes—it all fits in," he declared. "And it proves what I always thought. I knew that young jackanapes, Ronald Baring, was a real wrong 'un, and what's happened here confirms it up to the hilt."

"Ronald Baring—who is he?" asked June.

"A young fellow Colonel Raikes tried to help," was the reply. "He brought him here—treated him like a son. He had some idea of making him his confidential secretary when he was older. When I heard about it I warned the colonel he was making a big mistake, and it wasn't long before my warning was proved to be right—although even I didn't realise the full extent of that young scoundrel's cunning and audacity."

As Mr. Standish gave another angry snort, June regarded him eagerly. She had a feeling that the key to the whole mystery might be found in this episode from the past. Eagerly she took a notebook and pencil from her handbag.

"Please tell us all you know about this Ronald Baring," she urged. "It may be awfully important."

Willingly enough, Mr. Standish did so. It was a simple, though tragic, story. It seemed that Ronald Baring had disgracefully rewarded all Colonel Raikes' kindness. On several occasions he had been suspected of stealing the colonel's curios, and at last had been caught red-handed, having to flee in order to escape arrest.

"And not content with robbing Raikes when the poor chap was alive, he's even stooped to robbing him now that he's dead!" Mr. Standish declared, his ruddy face dark with anger. "Of course, being in Raikes' confidence, he'd know all about the package which was coming from India. So he just bided his time."

Mr. Henley, his usually genial features grave and shocked, nodded slowly.

"Yes—there doesn't seem to be any doubt about it, Standish," he agreed. "It must be

Ronald Baring who's impersonating the Green Rajah. Well, he's got to be caught and exposed. June"—earnestly he regarded the schoolgirl detective—"you must leave no stone unturned to track down the young scoundrel. The Green Rajah has not only to be caught, but the contents of that package have got to be regained."

June nodded. "I will do my best," she said, then turned to Mr. Standish. "I suppose you have never seen Ronald Baring since he fled?" she said.

He shook his head. "No. If I had, I'd have handed him over to the police. That old charge is still hanging over his head, you know."

"Do you think you'd recognise him if you did see him?" was June's next question.

Roger Standish pursed his lips, and anxiously June awaited his answer, for there was a nagging fear at her heart.

When she had learnt about Ronald Baring, involuntarily her thoughts had gone to Jack Linton, the likeable yet mysterious boy whose acquaintance she had made while staying at Glen Hall.

Was it possible that Jack Linton and Ronald Baring were one and the same person?

The possibility distressed June. Despite everything, she had taken a liking to Jack. The thought that he might be a thief—a worthless scoundrel—was almost unbearable.

Then, angrily, she took a grip on her emotions. A detective could not afford to be sentimental; could not even let friendship interfere with her activities. Likeable or not, if Jack Linton was indeed the villain, then he must be exposed.

"I might recognise him," Mr. Standish said at last, "though the rascal would certainly be disguised if he were ever in this neighbourhood. But of one thing you can be certain. From now on I shall keep my eyes open, and if I do catch sight of him I shall hand him over to the police."

Mr. Henley nodded approval. "The young scoundrel certainly deserves no mercy," he agreed.

Her lips set, a determined gleam in her blue eyes, June faced the two men.

"You need not worry," she said. "I shan't rest until I have solved this mystery."

Her quiet air of confidence impressed both Mr. Henley and his guest. The solicitor patted her encouragingly on the shoulder, while Mr. Standish smiled approvingly.

"And if you succeed in getting on the track of this Ronald Baring, I'll double your fee," he declared.

"If you want any help," put in Mildred, her eyes shining, "then call on me and my friends. We'd love to help you."

"I won't forget," June promised, then replaced the bricks in the box. "If you don't mind, I'll take these up to my room," she said. "I'd like to give them a thorough examination."

Mr. Henley nodded, and laden down with the package, June retired. Once in the privacy of her room, through her magnifying glass, she peered first at the sealed string, then at the paper, then at the box itself. But she could not find the slightest trace of the package having been tampered with.

"Yet it must have been—unless it really was bricks which were sent from India," she murmured.

She lifted the heavy box right out of its paper wrapping, and as she did so she gave an excited gasp, for, unexpectedly, a white, oblong square was revealed lying underneath the box.

"A letter!" June exclaimed. "Golly, fancy none of us guessing that a letter might be enclosed with the box!"

With fingers that quivered she snatched it up and took out the sheet of yellow paper which was tucked inside.

HER SEARCH IN THE TEMPLE



"THIS must have been written by the sender of the package," June told herself excitedly. "And it's quite likely it'll say what was in the box! Oh, what luck!"

Eyes sparkling, heart thumping, she smoothed out the sheet of paper. From it came a curious Oriental perfume—like the scent of spice—and it was covered with a spidery writing which the schoolgirl detective found difficult to decipher.

Bit by bit, however, she managed to read it, and her excitement grew as she pored over it.

"Honoured Sir.—At last your obedient servant, Lal Singh, has succeeded in carrying out your instructions, and with this letter he sends you that for which you have long sought. May it help you to discover the lost secret of the Purple Mountains.

"With the aid of the contents of this package, you should easily be able to read the signs engraved on the Crystal Goblet. You were wise to safeguard the Goblet, for it is certainly the key to the whole secret.

"Awaiting your further instructions, I sign myself your faithful and trusted follower,—
LAL SINGH."

June's first reaction was one of disappointment. Her hope that the letter would identify the contents of the package had not been borne out. She still could not decide whether the box had originally contained bricks, or, as Mr. Standish had so vehemently asserted, the real contents had been stolen by the Green Rajah.

Nevertheless, although the letter had not fulfilled all her hopes, yet it had been responsible for a further simplification of the mystery.

"It's clear now what the Green Rajah's after," June told herself. "The lost secret of the Purple Mountains! How intriguing that sounds! What can it be?"

For a moment she let her imagination run riot. Then resolutely she smothered her romantic visions. Her task was to track down the Green Rajah, not to speculate about the Purple Mountains.

The first thing she had to decide was: Had the Green Rajah really stolen the contents of the package? Impossible to answer that question yet, though she had her doubts. But one thing was certain.

"Even if he did manage to spirit away whatever was originally in this box, it won't be of any use to him until he's got the Crystal Goblet," she murmured. "That was obviously one of Colonel Raikes' treasured curios, and it—"

She broke off, and her pulses leapt as, involuntarily her gaze went to the open window. Out there in the distance, encircled by the moonlit waters of the lake, was Temple Isle, and clearly she could see the strange, Eastern-style tower of the actual temple silhouetted against the silvery sky.

That wooden building of Indian design had been used by the erstwhile tenant of Glen Hall as a museum. His curios still lay exhibited there, and amongst them might be the vital Crystal Goblet!

June's eyes gleamed. Why not go across to the island and look for it? It was late—by now most of the occupants of the house would be seeking their beds—but that did not deter her.

Impulsively June pocketed Lal Singh's letter and snatched up her hat and coat.

"I'll do it," she decided. "The sooner that Crystal Goblet's located, the better. We can't risk—"

And then she broke off, catching in her breath.

For on the still waters of the lake she had suddenly glimpsed a row-boat, a shadowy figure at the oars.

The oarsman was too far off to identify, but there seemed something very boyish and familiar about his figure.

June frowned.

"It's Jack Linton—I'm sure it is! And he's making for Temple Isle! But what can he want there at this time of night?"

That was a question she found herself strangely unwilling to answer, yet she forced herself to face its implications. Suppose her earlier suspicions were right! Suppose Jack Linton was really Ronald Baring! If so—

Her cheeks paled and her heart gave a dismayed leap.

"Then that would settle it," she told herself. "It would mean that Jack is also the Green Rajah!"

Angry with herself for feeling so concerned about a boy whom she had only met recently, and whom she knew little about, she donned her coat and hat determinedly. But before she left her room she carefully hid the box of bricks under her bed. Absurd though it seemed, she was still unconvinced that the contents of that box had been exchanged during the time it had been in her possession. Anyway, she meant to take no risks.

The box hidden, she grabbed the bag containing her detective outfit and left the room. The whole house seemed to be in darkness, and the front door was bolted. It was evident that the rest of the household had retired for the night.

Silently drawing back the well-oiled bolts, June let herself out, then went hurrying through the grounds. When she came in sight of the landing-stage, she looked across at the island, but there was now no sign of the boat, nor of its mysterious occupant.

"Perhaps he's already started looking for the Crystal Goblet!" she told herself in apprehension.

The thought spurred her on. Clambering into one of the boats tethered to the landing-stage, she unslipped the painter and got out the oars. Another moment and she was rowing strongly through the smooth, silent water.

When she reached Temple Isle, she beached the boat, then looked keenly about her, but there was nothing to be seen of another boat, nor of its occupant. She listened, but there was not a sound.

"Perhaps Jack—if it was Jack—wasn't making for the island, after all," she murmured. "He may have just been rowing across the lake to the village."

Nevertheless, it was cautiously that she approached the strangely designed wooden building which had given the island its name. The great brass-studded door was closed. Stealthily she pressed down the latch. Slowly the door swung open, to disclose a black vault from which arose the odour of Oriental wood, the perfume of scented, silken garments.

The darkness pleased her. It showed at least that the unknown rower was not here. She could carry out her mission without the risk of being disturbed.

Switching on her powerful torch, she entered the temple. The bright rays fell on grotesquely grinning idols; on a bewildering variety of strangely assorted relics from the East.

Despite herself, June shivered. There was something very eerie about this vast, gloomy building. It was as if she had been magically transported to far-off India. The cheery atmosphere of Glen Hall seemed very remote.

Right ahead was a life-size wooden figure, with a snarling mouth and beady eyes which seemed to mock her. And once she thought the figure moved. She knew it was ridiculous—it could only be a trick of the shadows—yet vaguely she felt uneasy. There was something about this lonely temple which disturbed her.

and she shivered again as she remembered the ghastly legend which surrounded it.

With an effort she forced herself forward.

Resolutely she crossed to the first shelf of curios, and by the light of her torch eagerly examined the array of relics displayed there, but she failed to see anything even remotely resembling a crystal goblet.

Disappointed, she turned her attention to the next shelf, then to a third, but though she hunted high and low, she failed to discover the vital goblet.

A gasp of dismay rose to her lips.

Had the Green Rajah already discovered and stolen it?

Hoping against hope that Lal Singh's letter might contain some clue which she had overlooked, she took the yellow sheet of paper from her pocket.

As she did so there came a faint but unmistakable sound. The pitter-patter of sandalled feet!

In alarm she swung round, but except for where her torch made a pool of light, all was inky blackness. Agitatedly she raised the torch; let its stabbing beam rove to and fro. But only the grinning idols confronted her. She listened, but now nothing could be heard.

"I must have imagined it," she told herself. "There's no one—"

And then, abruptly, her voice trailed away, for from the darkness had come a soft, blood-chilling laugh.

Alarmed, she turned her torch in its direction. The light fell on the life-sized wooden figure which had scared her earlier on. Involuntarily she recoiled, then that ghastly laugh rang out again—and this time it came from behind her.

Round she whirled, to give a startled cry, for standing between her and the door was an eerily glowing figure.

The figure of the Green Rajah!

A DIFFERENT PERIL



TWICE before the schoolgirl detective had encountered the Green Rajah face to face. On neither of those occasions had she been really scared. Startled—yes. But not frightened. Indeed, it had been the Green Rajah himself who, judging by subsequent events, had been

the more alarmed of the two.

But this time was different.

It may have been the eerie atmosphere of the temple, or her own taut-up nerves, but the fact remained that June was gravely disturbed. There was something vaguely menacing, vaguely sinister about that silent figure which stood there, a gleam of mockery in his dark eyes.

That queer sense of premonition which always warned June when danger impended was throbbing wildly in her brain.

She sensed that on this occasion at least the Green Rajah had no intention of turning tail.

Licking lips which had suddenly become dry, June stood there, as if hypnotised, unable to move.

The spectral figure's bearded lips curled into a sardonic smile.

"So the English girl still refuses to ignore the warning of the Green Rajah, does she?" he murmured, and indescribably ghostly his husky voice sounded, as it went echoing around the dark temple. "Well, she will regret it. None shall rob the Green Rajah of the lost secret of the Purple Mountains."

June gave an excited start. Here was confirmation of her theory. With an effort she smothered her sense of fear and forced herself to look that mocking figure full in the face.

"So you're after the Crystal Goblet, too, are you?" she said.

He nodded and glared.

"Yes—and none shall rob me of it!"

June could not repress a smile of satisfaction. Her seemingly artless question had established definitely that the Green Rajah had not yet succeeded in stealing the all-important goblet. The fact gave her a new feeling of confidence. Scornfully she regarded him.

"It's no good trying to scare me, because I know who you are!" she cried, hoping to trick him into a guilty admission. "You are Jack Linton dressed up!" she asserted.

But that eerily glowing figure ignored the accusation. Instead, his glowering gaze went to the sheet of yellow paper she still clutched in one hand.

"What is that?" he demanded. "It looks like a letter from that obstinate fool, Lal Singh. Give it to me."

But swiftly June thrust it back into her pocket.

"Give it to me, I say," growled the Green Rajah.

"I won't!"

"Then I will take it. English girl has to learn the folly of defying the Green Rajah."

As he hissed out the words, the beturbaned figure dropped one hand to the jewelled hilt of the dagger he wore in his sash.

"I shall not warn you again," he hissed, and slowly, silently, yet with inexorable purpose, he began to glide forward over the dusty flagstones.

Whether this really was Jack Linton dressed up or not, June knew he meant her harm. Impossible to ignore the menace in those dark eyes, in that lithe, tigerish figure.

Impulsively June turned and took to her heels. Blindly she went plunging across the dark temple.

Crash!

Blundering into one of the carved idols, she brought it tumbling down. Then on she plunged again. Behind her, there came the pitter-patter of sandalled feet, then another soft, mocking laugh echoed around the eerie temple.

"English girl cannot escape! This time—"

But June heard no more. She had suddenly found her way barred again, and this time she realised that it was no idol, but the wooden wall. She was trapped!

Softly, unhurriedly those sandalled feet drew nearer. The Green Rajah seemed to realise that he had her at his mercy.

In despair, June's hands wildly pressed against the wall, and then, suddenly, without the slightest warning, she felt a section of it give beneath her weight. There was a small door here, and as unexpectedly it swung open, June went reeling headlong out into the open air.

Now it was as black outside as it was inside, for a great cloud had swallowed up the moon. But June welcomed the darkness. Sobbing her relief, she broke into a run, went scrambling through the trees, over springy turf.

Where she was heading she did not know.

Still conscious of that eerily glowing figure behind, she sped madly on, her heart thumping in her throat, and then without warning she came to the edge of the cliff.

Ahead and below she caught a glimpse of rock-infested water, and frantically she strove to check her furious run.

But too late!

Over she went—over the tall cliffs which guarded the far end of the island. One moment she was racing over grassy chalk; the next and she was plunging headlong through space—down towards the jagged rocks below.

Look out for further thrilling chapters in this exciting tale of mystery and detection in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

The Merry-makers at College



By DAPHNE GRAYSON

AN UNPOPULAR CHOICE

"YOU'RE just off form to-day, Rene, otherwise you'd have beaten me hollow!" Sally Warner said as she led the new girl off the tennis court. "You'll be okay for Saturday when we play Granville!"

"But, Sally"—and Rene Chalmers went as white as her tennis frock—"you're not putting me in the team—against Granville? I mean," she said confusedly, "a new girl like me—"

"It's ridiculous! Of course you can't put her in the team, Sally Warner!" burst out Elsie Pymm, who had been jealously and scornfully watching the practice.

It was an important practice to-day on the hard courts of Roxburgh Co-ed College, for J House were picking a girls' team of six to play against Granville Co-ed on Saturday, and the choosing of the team fell upon Sally, as tennis captain. Although usually all the girls respected Sally's judgment, many of them looked surprised and dismayed on hearing Sally's decision.

"I won't have it!" stormed Elsie Pymm. "I won't be passed over for a new girl—a duffer who obviously doesn't know the first thing about tennis!"

But Sally ignored the outburst. Despite the poor showing Rene had made, Sally knew that Rene was naturally by far the best player in the college.

Perhaps, she thought, shyness had put the new girl off her game just now. Certainly she was modest. For Rene could have worn, had she wished, the coveted championship crown on her plain white frock! Sally happened to know that she had won it last year as junior tennis champion of Texas State!

"Never mind the back-chat, Rene!" she murmured as she led the way into the pavilion. "What was wrong this morning, dear? Touch of tennis elbow?"

"I'm right off my game, Sally," Rene said, and her eyes were strangely troubled and didn't meet Sally's. "I get like that. Can't play a stroke!"

But Sally only smiled. "You've played quite a lot of tennis before you came to us, Rene—" And Sally paused, eyeing her with a twinkle, for Rene had never breathed a word about her brilliant past, and Sally had only spotted her champion's badge by accident while she was unpacking.

"Oh, a little," was all Rene said, hastily. "And I know I could never hope to beat you, except by a fluke," went on Sally. "Was it nerves this morning, Rene? Did Elsie Pymm put you off?"

"Oh—er—oh, yes, and the newness and all that," answered Rene, and seemed to clutch eagerly at that excuse. "It'll take me a week or two to get into form, Sally. When I've got used to the courts—used to the coll, I mean—and got to know people, and made some friends in—"

"Rene!" And Sally took her by the arm, smiling into her face. "Do you count me as a friend?"

"You, Sally? Rather!" And Rene's eyes lit up with real fondness. "You've been so sweet, I'd do just anything for you!"

"I'll keep you to that!" laughed Sally. "Yes? Anything you say!" sparkled Rene.

"Then I want you on top of your form for Saturday!" Sally said. "I want you to play in the team against Granville, and beat 'em for us! Promise?"

To her utter surprise the cloud rushed back into Rene's eyes.

"I daren't promise—I know I'll never be fit for Saturday, and—and it isn't fair to the rest of the team," she said in a nervous flurry. "Sally, I—I should just hate myself if I let you down—"

"But you've got three days—you'll be back in shape by then, Rene!"

"Not for team play! Sally, please," she caught her arm pleadingly, "you won't put my name down yet?"

"All right—not yet," and Sally yielded in puzzled amusement—"not till you've had another day's practice, Rene—okay!"

Extraordinary how Rene had gone off her game this morning, mused Sally in wonder, as she strolled back to her chalet. It had given the other girls a totally wrong impression of her.

"Hallo, Sally, what have you been up to?" Don Weston greeted her with a chuckle. He was waiting for her on the chalet terrace with Fay Manners and Johnny Briggs.

"So you girls are squabbling already over your tennis match?" grinned Johnny. "I hear Elsie Pymm's going to call a committee meeting against you, Sally, if you put that new girl in the team!"

"I hope she will!" Sally said brightly. "Then I'll show them what Rene can really do!"

"I've seen Rene beat Sally, and if she can do that, she can beat any girl in J House!" said Fay. "And any girl in Granville!"

The college courts weren't free for practice next afternoon. K House were using them. But Sally was delighted to see Rene Chalmers slip quietly out with her racket under her arm, evidently to get some private practice at a local friend's. Sally only wished she could have joined her, but she had all the refreshments to get in for Saturday's match—also a dozen match balls.

There was a sports shop near the local tennis club ground which sold regulation balls, and Sally left this call till last, after she'd cycled round to the various caterers.

A number of errand boys were standing on their employers' bikes, craning their chins over the club fence.

"What's on?" Sally asked them.
"Charity game, in aid o' the Orphanage," the butcher's boy told her breathlessly. "All star players, and—wham!—can they play!"

Sally propped her bike beside his and jumped on to the saddle. She gazed precariously over the fence, then almost lost her balance in a sudden thrill of excitement.

Rene Chalmers was one of the players! She was playing in a mixed foursome, and playing with a speed that made Sally dizzy to watch. Talk about back in form! Rene was faultless! She was playing as only a champion could play, putting up a show that had never been equalled by anyone in the college team.

"Coo, look at that!" breathed the butcher's boy as Rene put over a superb smash. "I'll say she's a licker, that girl!"

"I'll say she is!" exclaimed Sally.
Spellbound she watched, unseeing, while Rene's brilliant play scored point after point for a crashing victory. Then she slid down from her perch and cycled joyfully back to coll.

The uncompleted team-list lay in Sally's drawer in the Merry-makers' Club. She whisked it out. Five names it held so far:

"Sally Warner and Fay Manners—Pat Waters and Sophie, Wendon—Bunty Shane and—." There was a blank where Elsie Pymm had considered her own name should go.

Sally seized her pen, and with an eager flourish she added the sixth name: Rene Chalmers. Then she ran along to J House Community Room and posted the list up on the notice-board.

She was in her chalet about two hours later, typing a letter to Granville Co-ed announcing the names of her chosen team, when the door opened and Rene Chalmers hurried in.

"Sally, I—I see you've put my name down for the team," she said in a nervous fuster. "I can't play. Really. I'll be hopeless. I'm so terribly off form—"

"Off form?" smiled Sally, and noticed that Rene had changed now out of her tennis whites.

"Do be a darling and scratch my name out, Sally!" Rene hurried on, her face flushed and quite desperately pleading. "I'll never pick up by Saturday. It isn't fair to the other girls. There's Elsie Pymm, for instance—"

"Has Elsie been getting at you?" Sally put in swiftly.

"N-no— Yes! Yes—not to my face, but I know what she's saying, and everybody else is angry as well," Rene said in pink confusion. "It's an important match, and they saw what a dud show I made yesterday—"

"But not to-day!" Sally murmured.

"To-day?" And Rene seemed to start.

"I saw you playing in the charity match this afternoon!" Sally told her softly.
Rene's face changed colour. It was as if she'd made a guilty slip, for she looked more troubled now than ever.

"You were simply great, Rene! Off form?" And with a teasing laugh Sally jumped up and shook her. "Then all I can say is you've made a marvellous come-back. There's not a girl in Roxburgh to touch you—nor in Granville either, if I know anything! I'm banking on you for Saturday!"

Why didn't Rene speak? There was a look of mute distress in her face, almost of fear! Sally saw it and was suddenly startled. Had Elsie Pymm been saying something to her? Threatening her?

"I'm banking on you, Rene," she repeated quickly, "and you wouldn't let me down, would you? No matter what anyone else says!"

"Oh, Sally! It's only because I want to play my very best—for you—" Rene began tremblingly.

"And you will! You'll play the same wizard game on Saturday that I saw you play to-day—won't you, Rene?" Sally urged her in fond earnestness. "For my sake! To prove to them all I was right!"

Rene gazed back at her with warm eyes that were troubled still, but filled now with some deep resolve.

"Yes, I'll do my best, Sally—I promise," she said, and rather shakily she hurried out.

Something was wrong! Something was worrying Rene about Saturday's tennis match. Sally watched her pensively from the window, and noticed that she hurried straight across to the gates, avoiding the other girls grouped about the campus.

Had some of them been spiteful to her? Had Elsie Pymm been badgering her, threatening to turn the whole house against her if she played in the team?

Impulsively Sally left her typing and strolled to the gates after her. She would take Rene under her wing. Tell her not to worry about the battle royal that was coming with Elsie Pymm over the tennis selections. It wasn't Rene's battle. It was Sally's—and she was looking forward to it.

Funny, no sign of Rene in the road. She must have gone into the woods. Sally climbed over the little stile in understanding sympathy. It proved that poor Rene was certainly down in the dumps. Her shoemarks in the damp leaves showed that she'd taken the loneliest path.

Sally followed the path almost as far as the river—then suddenly she stopped, rigid.

"You had my answer before, Rene Chalmers—I'm not going back on it!" she heard a boy's voice say sharply.

Sally stared, discomfited, through the trees, an unwilling eavesdropper. She could see a rather conceited-looking youth in sports flannels talking to Rene, but he wasn't a Roxburgh boy; he was no one she knew.

"Listen, Alec—please—" Rene began in a suffocated little voice. But he didn't listen. He pushed her hand away as she tried to clutch at his arm.

"If you want me to give you that letter," he said, "I've told you what you're to do. Or rather—and this time Sally couldn't mistake the threat in his voice—"I've told you what you're not to do! It's the last chance you'll get, Rene!"

SALLY FACES THE TENNIS COMMITTEE



SALLY'S heart quickened with compassion, yet embarrassment. She could hear Rene crying. She felt a fierce urge to comfort her, to go and defend her against that boy who was upsetting her—but she couldn't interfere or be caught eavesdropping in their private conversation. She turned and hurried back agitatedly the way she had come.

Was this what had been troubling Rene?

That there was some private quarrel between her and the boy was certain.

Sally felt the more concerned, because there was nothing she could do. It was evidently not Elsie Pymm or the other girls who had caused Rene's distress. It was that stranger she had called Alec. That was why she hadn't confided in her.

Anyhow, mused Sally more hopefully, Saturday's match would probably take Rene's mind off her trouble, whatever it was. She had promised to play, and—

"Sally Warner!" the curt voice of Elsie Pymm greeted Sally as she was making for her chalet. "You're wanted in the club-house. The tennis committee want you!"

"Sure!" And Sally's eyes glinted with relish. The battle was beginning! She was just in the mood for it.

But it wasn't only Elsie Pymm and her cronies who confronted Sally in the club-house. All the girls of J House were mustered there, with Elsie Pymm heading the committee, and all looked equally serious.

"To come straight to the point, Sally Warner," Elsie led off, "I say that you only put the new girl's name down in the team list to slight me. And I demand—and the whole committee backs me—that you scratch her name out at once!"

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" Sally said clearly.

"You will!" cried Elsie, growing hot with anger. "You know she can't play. You know perfectly well I should be in the team. You're passing me over out of sheer personal spite, and making a mock of the thing by—"

"My personal feelings for you don't matter a hoot, Elsie, and you know it!" Sally put in. "I'm skipper. My job is to choose the six best players in the house. That's why I've chosen Rene Chalmers, who's far and away the best of the lot!"

"Oh, just listen to her—" raged Elsie, but now the rest of the committee, all loyal friends of Sally's, intervened warmly.

"You know that's rot, Sally!"

"It's insulting the rest of us to say it," protested Buntzy Shane, who was herself in the team. "We saw the kind of tennis Rene played in the test yesterday morning, and if the rest of us were no better, or even worse, we wouldn't stand a hope against Granville."

"Hear, hear!" shrilled Lena Tooting and other of Elsie Pymm's cronies.

It was time, thought Sally, to tell them the truth. She looked calmly round at all the heated faces.

"Throw the match away?" she said. "Rene Chalmers? Now let me tell you that Rene was a first-class tennis star before she came here, and that she's junior champion of Texas State!"

There was a gasp, then a burst of explosive laughter.

"A State champion? Rene Chalmers?"

"Who's been telling you that, Sally?"

"D'you know any more funny stories?"

Sally was laughing with more enjoyment than any of them. She knew what an eye-opener was in store for Elsie Pymm. Then, as she happened to glance out of the window, she gave a start, then in sudden alarm rushed out of the club-house.

Rene Chalmers was limping across the campus with Don's arm held around her, supporting her! Don was even whiter in the face than Rene was. Johnny was following anxiously, leading his bike and Don's.

"Rene! Don!" Sally rushed to them. "What's the matter?"

"Only a—sprained ankle!" Rene said shakily.

"My fault—my bike hit her as she was getting over the stile," gasped Don. "Didn't see her in time!"

"It wasn't Don's fault—his bike didn't touch me, Sally," Rene said in trembling distress. "I fell!"

"Never mind, dear—take it gently!" whispered Sally. "We'll get you up to the san!"

With the boys' help she carried her up the stairs into the college sanatorium, where, fortunately, a nurse was on duty, though only a young probationer. She took charge of Rene and seemed to be able to get on better by herself.

"Nurse will give you a compress and make you comfy, Rene," Sally said soothingly in her ear. "I'll come up and see you later!"

Outside Don was waiting, dreadfully worried and concerned.

"I just don't know how it happened, Sally," he said. "I didn't see Rene till I was right up by the stile. Tried to pull up. Next thing I knew she was lying on the ground."

"It seemed to me," muttered Johnny, "that she was sort of absent-minded, as if she stepped into the road without thinking."

Sally nodded, but she didn't tell them what she could very well guess now. Rene had been upset. She had come straight from her quarrel with that fellow Alec, and she hadn't seen the bike in time, her mind had been on her troubles.

It was cruel bad luck. It was also a crushing blow to Sally, if it meant that Rene would be unfit to play on Saturday.

She went to see her in the evening, and the first thing Rene said to her, and kept repeating in anxious distress, was:

"You mustn't blame Don, Sally. It was my fault—all my fault."

"No one's to blame, dear—accidents just happen," Sally said, trying to smile and trying desperately to be hopeful. "Is the pain easier now? Old ankle feeling more comfy?"

"It doesn't pain me a bit while I'm lying here, Sally," Rene assured her.

"What does nurse say? Will it soon be right again, Rene?" And with a deep breath Sally asked wistfully: "Any hope for Saturday?"

"I'm afraid not!" Rene looked at her so sadly, then looked away again and added shakily: "Not by Saturday, Sally!"

Sally stifled a sigh, and brightly she turned the talk to other things. She sat for two whole hours with Rene, cheering her up, and liking her more and more. But her hope was gone. Rene wouldn't be playing in the match on Saturday.

Elsie Pymm accosted her as she was going back to her chalet.

"And how's the champion?" she asked with a thin smile.

Sally didn't answer.

"I see you haven't altered the list yet!" Elsie said steadily.

"Plenty of time before Saturday!" replied Sally, and walked away without another word.

A parcel came for Sally next morning. A box of gorgeous California peaches from her uncle in Hollywood. It was waiting for her on the breakfast table when she went into the cafeteria with Don & Co.

Sally handed the box all round the table, then she made her way across to the sanatorium, meaning to give the rest of the peaches to Rene. But when she came within sight of the sanatorium she received a shock. A girl was climbing through one of the first-floor windows—a girl with a bandaged ankle!

"Why, it's—it's Rene!" Sally gasped.

Bewildered and amazed, she watched the supposed invalid clamber down the drain-pipe, then go racing across to the college gates.

RIVALS FOR THE PLANTATION

This grand story of a girl's strange adventure in Jamaica will appear complete in next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.

SALLY LEARNS THE TRUTH



"WELL—!"

It took Sally a full moment to grasp what she had seen—a still longer moment to grasp that Rene had deceived her and had nothing wrong with her ankle.

Then, dropping the peaches, she was chasing dizzily after her. Rene not only had a good start

of her. Rene's speed was as champion as her tennis.

Sally had lost her by the time she reached the gates. But a little way down the road was the stile. And it was a safe guess that Rene had gone that way again as she had done yesterday.

In a jiffy Sally was over the stile, pursuing the same path as before. She was almost at the end of the woods, within sight of the river, when she spotted Rene.

Rene was hurrying down the bank to meet a boy waiting in a punt—the same conceited-looking boy whom she had met yesterday.

"I couldn't get here before, Alec—it's been awful carrying out this hateful deceit," Sally heard her say breathlessly. "Have you kept your promise? Have you brought me that letter?"

"Oh, yes!" he answered with a drawl. "I've brought it!"

"But where is it, Alec?"

"Where?" Sally saw his hand go rather mockingly to his jacket, and he drew out a letter from the inside pocket, holding it at a distance from Rene's outstretched hand. "There it is! You can see it for yourself, Rene, so you can't say I didn't bring it!"

"But give it to me!" Rene's voice was urgent, and she was grasping feverishly for the letter. "Alec, give it to me!"

"Oh, no!" And he gave a cool laugh as he held the letter out of her reach. "It's been so useful to me this time, Rene, that it might be useful again. So I'm going to keep it!"

"Alec!" Sally heard a wild cry from Rene. "Oh, you wouldn't be such a cad—you wouldn't go back on your promise?"

"Praps another time I'll let you have it," he said mockingly. "We may be able to strike an even better bargain—eh, Rene?"

"Bargain!" Rene panted. "You promised to give me that letter if I did what you told me. I did it, though I hated myself for it. You made me lie to the tennis captain, the nicest girl I've met in Roxburgh. You made me cheat her, made me pretend I'd sprained my ankle, so that I couldn't help her out in the match against Granville, and now—"

But Sally didn't wait to hear the rest. She burst out through the trees and made a rush down the river bank.

"What's all this, Rene?" she cried. "Do you mean you were forced by this fellow not to play against Granville?"

"Oh!" With a strangled little gasp Rene fell back at sight of her. "Sally!"

The boy in the punt gazed back coolly and insolently at Sally, and for the first time she saw that it was the Granville badge he wore in his buttonhole.

"Force isn't a nice word, and it doesn't happen to be one of my methods," he drawled at her. "My advice to you is to mind your own business!"

Then with a goading smile at Rene, he very deliberately put the letter back in his pocket, and pushed off in the punt.

"Sally!" Rene covered her eyes with her hands. "I just can't face you!" she said in a choked voice. "You know now, I'm a cheat. There was nothing wrong with my ankle."

Sally drew her hands gently away.

"Tell me all about it," she urged. Rene couldn't speak at first—then her story came in a torrent, as if she found it a relief to confide in Sally's sympathetic ear.

"You wouldn't know, Sally. But in Texas, where I come from, everyone knows there was a

great scandal about my father, after he died. He was always too easygoing over money. And—after he died—his money affairs weren't in order. People said that he'd been dishonest. But it wasn't true, Sally. It wasn't!"

Sally put a sympathetic arm round her. "Mother's always hoped and prayed that something would turn up to clear dad's name," Rene went on brokenly. "And something has turned up. A letter. That was the letter which Alec Horshaw promised he'd give me!"

"Alec Horshaw, you call him?" Sally burst in. "He's a Granville boy, isn't he?"

"Yes, but his people have a business in Texas. They knew my father," Rene rushed on, "and that's how Alec came to get hold of that letter. It proves that my father did nothing dishonest. It absolutely clears him. But it's for my mother's sake that I wanted it so much, because I know how she's fretted and grieved, Sally, and it would make her happier than anything else on earth. Perhaps you wouldn't understand—"

"I do, Rene! I know how much your mother's happiness means to you!" Sally whispered.

"I mean"—and a painful flush came over Rene's white face—"you wouldn't understand the—promise I made Alec. He said he would give me the letter, Sally, if I didn't play against Granville—didn't help you to win against them. And I promised. I even cheated you—"

"For your mother's sake! That justified anything you did, Rene, bless your heart," Sally put in warmly. "But tell me the rest. You kept your promise. And Alec didn't keep his?"

"No!" Rene said with a choke. "I did everything he told me. I made the other girls think I was a duffer at tennis. I deliberately played badly so that they wouldn't want me in the team. I deliberately frightened poor Don and made him think I was hurt when I wasn't. I let you down after I'd promised I'd play, and—"

Why did Alec Horshaw get you to do all this, Rene?" Sally broke in urgently. "Why was he so anxious that you shouldn't play against Granville?"

"Because he's got a bet on Granville winning!" Rene said with a shudder. "A big bet!"

"Money! I guessed it was something like that!"

"And now that he's got me out, he's cheated me," Rene gulped. "He won't give me the letter!"

Sally's gaze flashed to the river, her face alight with resolution. She could see Alec Horshaw's punt, just a tiny speck now on its way to Granville.

"He hasn't cheated you, Rene! Not yet! Oh, no!" And Sally's gaze leapt now to the road, which was a much quicker way to Granville College than by river. "I'll get you that letter somehow. No wasting time about it, either! And when I've got it, you're going to snap your fingers at Alec Horshaw! You're going to play for us to-morrow against Granville!"

"Sally!" Rene gasped.

But Sally was already sprinting through the short path to the road. There was a thin belt of trees which screened the road from the river. Alec didn't see her. Nor did she see Alec again. But she passed and overtook him. She reached the river bank behind Granville College long before he appeared.

She was snugly hidden behind one of the college boathouses, waiting, when at last Alec hove in sight round the bend. Sally stole one furtive glance at him, and her eyes glistened. He had taken off his jacket. It was lying in the bottom of the punt. And that letter was in the pocket!

"Horshaw!" Someone was calling to Alec just as he steered his punt in to the bank. "I've got that information from the girls, Horshaw, that you were asking for!"

Sally couldn't have hoped for such luck! Alec jumped out of the punt, leaving his coat

there, and ran eagerly up the bank to join his friend who was calling him.

Out darted Sally from her hiding-place. She swooped down to the punt, and without a glance behind her, she seized Alec's coat and whisked the letter out of the inside pocket.

"Hey!" There was a yell, and she turned to see Alec Horshaw rushing furiously down the bank. "Wh-what are you doing here?" he panted. "Wh-what have you taken out of my pocket?"

It had been easier than Sally had dared imagine. She laughed now as she faced him scornfully.

"I've taken that letter you promised to give Rene!" she told him. "I'm going to give it to her myself, Alec Horshaw! What's more, she'll be playing in the tennis match to-morrow against your girls!"

Alec gritted his teeth in an angry grin. He was chagrined, but not beaten.

"Oh, no, she won't!" he mocked her. "You can have the letter. But Rene won't be playing in the team to-morrow. Your committee's over-ruled you and put Elsie Pymm's name in as sixth! I've just seen the list, and it's final!"

Sally's heart dropped. She turned mutely away and walked back to Roxburgh. She met Rene on the way, and it was sweet to see the gratitude in Rene's eyes as she gave her that all-important letter. So much more important than everything else, of course.

But if only the committee had listened to her, they could have played Rene in the team to-morrow. They had decided otherwise. And they had lost their best chance!

IT was Saturday, and in an atmosphere keyed up with unusual tension, shared by visitors and home team alike, the Roxburgh-Granville tennis match had begun.

Sally sat with Don & Co. on the steps of the pavilion, her eyes strained on the game. Rene sat nearby in a deck-chair, a pretended convalescent, not even noticed by the rest of her tensely-absorbed housemates.

The first of the three games had been played, and had been won by Roxburgh after a narrow, desperate fight.

The second game had begun now, and the Roxburgh players were Bunty Shane—and Elsie Pymm.

"Well, Elsie's only got to win this game, Sally, and Roxburgh wins the match," Johnny said in a tone that lacked all conviction. "Best out of three, eh?"

Sally didn't speak. Her nerves jangled with dismay as she watched Elsie Pymm losing point after point. A slapdash player! Peeved after every defeat—poaching from her partner and losing points for her as well. The Granville couple could see Elsie's ill-tempered floundering, and were hammering the ball to her to their own crushing advantage. Sally had known this would happen if Elsie Pymm played. And to think that Rene might have played instead!

"Set and game to Granville!" trumpeted the umpire at last through his megaphone. "Granville equal now. Score—one game all, one more to play!"

A roar of applause burst from the Granville spectators, and Sally saw Alec Horshaw smiling in gloating excitement. He was counting his bet won already!

Sally got up from her seat. She could see the next Granville couple walking on to the court. Their strongest couple, saved for the deciding set. Both were higher classed in tennis either than Sally or Fay.

"Jolly good luck, Sally! breathed Don.

"Go in and help her win, Fay!" urged Johnny.

It was at that moment that the disaster happened. Just a deck chair left carelessly sprawling—but Sally's foot caught it, and with a crash she fell, her ankle doubled up beneath her!

The boys rushed to her in alarm. Elsie Pymm and the others rushed to her in frantic dismay. "Are you all right, Sally? Are you all right?" Elsie was panting.

No one noticed that Rene Chalmers joined in the rush. No one remembered Rene's supposed injury, nor did they care. One wan smile from Sally was enough for them, as she lay unmoving on the ground. Sally was crooked! The match depended on her now—and she was crooked!

"Sorry," she was saying faintly. "Sorry, everybody! It's my ankle! It's sprained! Guess I'm out of the game!"

The girls stood stunned. Polite but ready sympathy came from the Granville captain, who asked if Sally had a reserve she could put in.

Sally gazed up weakly at Rene. "Will you play, Rene? Will you take my place with Fay?" she said.

Elsie Pymm gave a cry. "Don't be silly, Sally Warner! How can she play when she's also got a twisted ankle? And anyway, she can't—"

"Oh, yes, she can!" Sally broke in, and turned to Rene. "You will, dear, won't you?"

"No, she won't!" Elsie cried. "There are heaps better substitutes than her. If she plays we're bound to lose."

Rene looked embarrassedly from one girl to the other.

Sally smiled mysteriously. "You'll see," she said softly. "Now, Rene, would you take my place, please?"

Words couldn't describe the faces of Elsie Pymm and her cronies, as the new girl darted into the pavilion and rapidly changed. Rene Chalmers to play after all! They groaned with anguish.

"It's ghastly luck," wailed Johnny, as he helped Sally gently into a chair. "The second accident of the same kind! Two sprained ankles! There's a blight on this match, Sally!"

All J House thought the same—particularly when they saw Rene Chalmers walk on to the court with Fay. The new girl, the duffer, the humorously-called "champion," to take Sally's place in the match against the crack Granville couple.

It was the Granville captain who served the first ball. A smashing service.

Elsie Pymm shuddered. She saw Rene Chalmers swing her racket. The rest was too quick for Elsie to see. Too quick for the Granville skipper too. But with a magnificent forehand drive Rene sent the ball crashing back like a cannon shot. A smashing winner!

It must have been a fluke. Elsie blinked her eyes and watched again. The same fluke happened every time Rene took the ball. And slowly and dizzily it began to dawn on Elsie Pymm, and every one else, that the new girl could play. Not only play, but she was unbeatable! All Fay had to do was to give her a free hand. With superb calm Rene did the rest—and Granville just didn't have a look in.

Every game was a love game—for Roxburgh. "Six love!" the umpire was trumpeting all of a sudden. "Six love, game and finish! Roxburgh wins, two games to one!"

Sally bounded out of her chair, and to the stupefied amazement of all, she went rushing across the court to Rene, taking the net at a jump!

"Sally! Your—your ankle?" dithered Rene. "Same as yours, Rene! A fake!" whooped Sally, hugging her rapturously. "Wasn't it worth it? Look at Alec!"

With drooping shoulders Alec Horshaw was slinking out through the gate. He had lost his bet. But he didn't look more limp than Elsie Pymm. She knew now that Sally's tennis champion was a champion after all!

(End of This Week's Story.)

Sally & Co. will be featured in another entertaining story in next Friday's GIRLS' CRYSTAL.



The SKATING GIRL'S Mystery Mascot

By MARIE MATHESON

THE CLUB'S DECISION

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, a film producer, who would be present.

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

Sheila discovered a ring in her Christmas pudding during the Bluebirds' Christmas celebration, but Corinne refused to believe her, declaring that it had been stolen from her home by Red Eagle. She demanded that Sheila should be expelled from the club. Larry Green, as president, decided to put it to vote the following evening.

On her way to the clubhouse to attend the meeting Sheila met Red Eagle, and, in escaping from two mounted policemen, who had come to arrest him, the young Redskin fell and injured his ankle. With Sheila's help he found refuge in a shed at the back of the clubhouse, and, leaving him, Sheila went in to watch the fatal vote being taken.

THERE was an anxious hush in the Bluebirds' club-room as Larry Green emptied the ballot-box on to a table and counted the votes. Her heart in her mouth, Sheila waited. What would the verdict be?

At last Larry turned and faced them all. "The vote is fifteen for the expulsion of Sheila Mayne," he said, without a vestige of emotion on his face. "And seventeen that she remains in the Bluebirds. I am glad there was no draw, and that I am not called upon to employ my casting vote as president."

For a moment the gathering sat staring, then Corinne Lefevre jumped to her feet.

Her face was red with anger and mortification. It was easy to see she had been counting on Sheila being expelled.

"The vote is a disgrace to the club," she cried. "Well, if so many of you are eager to associate with Sheila, I certainly am not. I'm resigning, here and now!"

A gasp came from Sheila, who had been so wild with joy at the announcement of the vote that she could scarcely breathe from relief.

Corinne had produced her Bluebirds' membership card and badge. Now, while Larry protested, she tossed them on to the table in front of him.

"But, Corinne, you're crazy," protested Larry, while the others stared in dismay. "What about the ice ballet, and the other things we've planned for Carnival Week when Lee Farrell comes from Hollywood?"

Corinne tossed her head.

"You should have thought of that when you voted," she retorted. "Nothing will persuade me to stay if Sheila Mayne does. And there are others of the same opinion. You can leave it to us to take care of our own interests when the ice carnival comes."

She waved a hand, and her cronies rose behind her, and marched up to the table, throwing down badges and cards. Altogether there were a dozen who followed her example. Realising what this mass resignation meant to the club, Sheila got to her feet. She could not bear the thought of seeing all the Bluebirds' carnival hopes shattered like this.

"Larry, what's one person against all these?" she gasped. "I'll resign myself. That'll put things right."

"Resign then," said Corinne. "That's what we've wanted you to do all along. Then we'll stay with the rest."

It was Larry who intervened. His face was white, but his eyes were bright with contempt. "Sheila will not resign," he declared. "But as regards you and your friends, Corinne Lefevre, your resignations are accepted. You have no further rights in here, or in the transactions of the club. I can see now how much of this trouble has been caused."

The retort was so unexpected that Corinne stood gaping. She had never dreamed that the Bluebirds could afford to do without her and her followers. Corinne had felt her sensational bluff was sure to succeed, and that, with Sheila gone, she would be able to dominate the scene.

With an effort she recovered her voice. "You wait and see what happens to your miserable Bluebirds!" she shouted, glaring

across at Larry. "You won't have a look-in at the ice carnival. Good-bye!"

She stormed out through the door, followed by her companions.

"Larry, we'll scarcely be a club at all," pleaded Mavis Poynter. "Isn't there any way to patch things up?"

"I'm afraid not," said Larry grimly. "Corinne was ready to sacrifice the club—all of us, all we've done, anything—to satisfy her own vanity, or work her spite on Sheila there. I'm not saying that Sheila hasn't been at fault, but—"

He paused as there came a knock at the door. Next moment two uniformed men entered. They were Mounties, and Sheila's face paled at sight of them, for she could guess what had brought them here.

Undoubtedly they must be the men who had chased herself and Red Eagle, who was now lying hidden in the lean-to at the back of the clubhouse with an injured ankle.

"Seen a couple of Indians snooping past here?" asked the first man gruffly. "Some sleighs and sulkies left here a minute or so ago, but we didn't get a chance to quiz them."

"Redskins?" queried Larry, involuntarily giving a look at Sheila. "No, we haven't seen any. You say there were two of them?"

"Yeah!" drawled the other man. "We've orders to tally up on all Red Indians in the area. But I guess they wouldn't come here. Most likely taken to the woods. But if you see two suspicious-looking characters let us know."

Larry nodded, and the two men stepped outside. When they had departed the Bluebirds' thoughts again turned to their own plight.

"Larry, what are we going to do?" asked Sheila.

"Get cracking, of course," said Larry. "We've got the best of the crowd, and most of the ballet stars. We'll need to gain new members, as many as we can, for the chorus. We've got to fight Corinne. She has money behind her, and she'll be in opposition, with Karl Olsen to help her train her crowd."

He looked round and then smiled encouragingly.

"Don't worry, we'll win through somehow," he declared. "We'll meet again to-morrow night. Then we'll get down to brass tacks. Meanwhile, each of you think hard of what's the best way to keep going," he suggested.

They all agreed, and then made preparations for departure.

"I'll look up," said Sheila. "See you to-morrow!"

No sooner was the last one of them away than she ran back inside, stoked up the fire, and put a big pot of water on it to boil. Then she went outside and had a prowling round, before going to where Red Eagle was hidden.

"They've all gone," she whispered, reaching him. "Now let me help you inside, and I'll bandage that ankle. The Mounties have been looking for you, but they don't suspect you are here."

"This is bad medicine," said Red Eagle. "When Red Eagle should be free to do things he must lie up because of this ankle. Sheila is kind to look after him."

She helped him into the clubhouse. There she removed his deerskin boots and looked at the ankle. It was badly swollen. There was no telling if a bone had been broken or not.

She bathed it in hot water, then from the club's Red Cross kit she found the necessities for a soothing dressing and a tight bandage.

"You cannot go back to where I found you now, Red Eagle," she said with concern. "You must rest that ankle for a while before you can go about again. Tell you what, there's a loft up above. You can hide there. No one ever goes up there."

He started to protest, but she fetched a ladder and propped it against the wall. Then, ascending it, she opened the small trap-door in the roof and helped him up. When she had made him comfortable in the loft she told him all that had happened. Red Eagle frowned

"Corinne is as crafty as a fox," he declared. "But perhaps it is a pity she has gone. I wanted you to keep an eye on her, for I think it is either through her, or Karl Olsen, that we will find the third totem—the Wolf—last clue to the secret of Chinook."

Sheila drew a deep breath. She knew what he was thinking, that somehow Corinne was related to Joubert, the French-Canadian he suspected had secretly killed his ancestor and Larry Green's grandfather, in order that he alone should keep the secret of the gold they had found together.

"Don't worry, Red Eagle," said Sheila comfortingly. "If, as you say, the secret has anything to do with Chinook, Corinne will have to show her hand again, and next time we'll be ready for her. It's something we have to fight for together now. Good-night. I'll come back again to-morrow."

She descended the ladder, closed the trap-door, and then set off for home.

JERRY AGREES TO HELP



SHEILA was up early next day, and her first thought was of her secret patient. It was quite evident that she would not be able to sneak down again until the children had left, and she had seen to her early household duties.

As she prepared breakfast and wondered what she could do, Jerry started demonstrating with a new bow he had made. That gave her an idea, and she smiled across at her young brother.

"Jerry," she said. "Could you keep a secret?"

"What about?" he demanded. "How would you like to be taught to use a bow and arrow and lots of other things by a real young Redskin chief?" she asked.

Jerry's eyes popped.

"Who's kiddin'?" he demanded. Sheila put on a grave face. She knew how Jerry loved mystery and adventure. He was always reading adventure books in his spare time.

"Jerry, you won't let me down, tell anyone, not even dad, will you? That friend of mine whom you knew as Little Raccoon is in danger. Enemies are after him, and he is lying wounded in the loft of the clubhouse. I can't go down to him with food and a message, but you could do it for me. Then, later, Little Raccoon would be grateful and make you his friend."

"Gee," gasped Jerry, "has he got his tomahawk and things with him?"

The boy's eyes were simply glistening with excitement as Sheila told him what he had to do. He promised faithfully to keep her secret, and, with a bundle of food and a bottle of milk tucked inside his schoolbag, he whizzed off downtrail on skis before the others were seated for breakfast.

Sheila had given him the key, and told him to leave it in the door, so that she could get it when she went down later.

Sheila, that immediate burden off her mind, went on with her varied tasks, giving her father breakfast in bed, packing Gracie off to school, and then phoning the nursing home about Toddles.

The news was good. Toddles would soon be home, it seemed.

Karl Olsen did not come down till half-past nine. He was suave and polite, as usual, but underneath all this Sheila saw that he was worried. Had Corinne already told him of her resignation and of the break-up of the club into two parties? she wondered.

When she had done her housework and prepared the dinner, Sheila packed some food for Red Eagle in a rucksack and set off for the clubhouse. As she came in sight of it she saw

a number of sleighs and sulkies drawn up in front of it.

There was the sound of laughter and the voices of a number of boys.

"Come on, Horace. Come on, Ted and the rest of you. We'll soon remove our stuff. Some sap left the key in the door last night, so we don't need to ask permission. In any case, at least half the furnishings are ours."

Sheila stared in consternation, for it was Corinne's voice she had heard. The leader of the rebel Bluebirds had arrived with her cronies to take away their belongings.

"She certainly hasn't lost any time," Sheila murmured, and then her face paled as she thought of the hidden Red Eagle. "Suppose they were to discover him?" she gasped.

Agitatedly she ski-ed forward, to arrive at the clubhouse just as the first articles of furniture were being carried outside.

"How dare you?" she cried. "You had no right to enter till you obtained permission."

Corinne, appearing in the doorway, sniffed.

"Oh, it's you, Sheila Mayne, is it?" she sneered. "Well, you mind your own business. No one can keep us from taking away our own things."

Sheila stepped up towards her. "I'll take care that's all the harm you do, Corinne," she declared. "Carry on, the rest of you. I'll keep a tally of what you take."

Corinne tossed her head. "We'll only use these things in the spare rooms at the new clubhouse we're taking over. I've rented that lovely little chalet half a mile down the lake from here, paying three times the rent of this place. It's already furnished, with a modern oil stove, and every comfort. All my friends are crazy about it."

Sheila gave a start. So competition was going to start in earnest. She might have expected that Corinne would not stay far away from Chinook.

Corinne was still extolling the new club when a yell from inside the shack made them both turn. Sheila was just in time to see a ladder crashing down on the floor, after being hit by an end of a sideboard the others were shifting.

"Hallo, that's the ladder to the loft," said Corinne, with sudden interest. "I remember now, we stored some rugs of mine up there. Put up the ladder, Ted, and I'll look for them."

The boy Corinne had spoken of lifted the ladder and propped it up against the wall. Corinne stepped towards it, but Sheila reached it first. At all costs she must stop her from entering the loft.

"Just a minute, Corinne," she said abruptly. "You've no right to go about here as you like. I'm in charge, as you're all non-members."

She was trembling with excitement, and her face was flushed as she spoke, and Corinne instantly became suspicious.

"What's up there that I can't see?" she asked.

"Perhaps my friend, Red Eagle," mocked Sheila. "Or perhaps the ghost of his ancestor, who was killed by a scoundrel named Joubert."

There was a giggle from the watching band at Red Eagle's name, and Sheila's pretence that he might be up there. But at the name "Joubert" Corinne went pale.

"What do you know about Joubert?" she demanded. "I—I—never heard the name before."

Corinne was lying. Sheila saw that. The unexpected blow had struck home deep. No one—not even Corinne—made an attempt to prevent Sheila mounting the ladder, opening the trap-door, and crawling up inside.

"Now keep still, all of you, and I'll drop down the rugs," ordered Sheila from inside the loft. "Here you are—one—two—three!"

Sheila was picking the rugs off the bed she had made for Red Eagle, who, she now saw, had dragged himself off into a dark corner.

She gave him an Indian sign which he had taught her, which warned him that all was

well, but he must keep still. At last all Corinne's property had been dropped down below.

"That's the lot, so now you can get out," said Sheila, closing the trap-door, and descending. "I hope you're satisfied!"

Corinne was not, but she pretended to be so, tossed her head, and ordered her followers outside. Not till they had all disappeared round the bend in the lakeside road did Sheila enter, close and lock the door, then again climb up to Red Eagle's hiding-place.

"What is it, Sheila?" he asked. "I was afraid—not for myself, but for you."

She explained to him, and he smiled and nodded. His leg was much better, and he fully agreed that it had been wise to send Jerry. He and the boy were now fast friends.

"He said he could help Red Eagle better if we were blood-brothers," laughed the young Redskin. "So we became blood-brothers with the aid of my hunting-knife. Two scratches, and our blood mingled, and we swore the oath. He will do anything you ask to help us now."

Sheila opened the rucksack she had brought with her and passed him the contents. Red Eagle thanked her, then bade her not to wait any longer, lest she should be missed.

"Another day, and I shall be fully healed," he promised her. "And while I lie here my brain will think—think of ways to outwit those who would rob us. But always be careful how you come. If in doubt, send Little Thrush, your brother with the freckles on his face."

"I'll tell him you called him that," she promised, then took her leave, happy and contented.

But when she reached home and started to rush inside for the kitchen, her father's voice called her.

"Sheila, where ever have you been?" he demanded. "I've looked for you all over the place. I've had bad news—a telephone call from Karl Olsen."

"From Mr. Olsen?" she repeated. "Yes," said John Mayne, with a worried look. "He's sending a week's board money in lieu of notice. He's leaving, and will have his luggage collected to-morrow. What are we going to do without that board money? It just enabled us to keep going. But now, faced with the bills for Toddles' illness, I'm dead up against it. I'll have to sell something in order to get some ready money. I counted on Olsen's board to meet some long-due bills, for which I have been summoned."

He sighed and frowningly regarded Sheila. "I'm afraid," he said, "our affairs are getting into a pretty hopeless mess."

MORE BAD NEWS FOR SHEILA



SHEILA looked at her parent. He was upset and very worried. Probably he had been keeping most of his financial worries from her during the stress of preparation for the ice ballet, and Toddles' illness.

"Oh, daddy," she cried anxiously. "You mustn't let that worry you. Already people are in town, to await the ice carnival. It should be quite easy to get a new boarder. Perhaps more than one. And at the carnival I may be able to win some money prizes."

"I suppose I worry too much," said John Mayne with another sigh. "But I wouldn't waste time, Sheila. Phone an advert, down to the paper at once, also to the boarding-house agency."

Sheila was swift to obey. She knew only too well what the loss of Olsen's board money would mean to the household exchequer, but she had not dreamed that things were quite so bad. They had managed so well for some time.

(Please turn to the back page.)



PRINCESS for a WEEK-END

(Continued
from
page 264.)

the crest of the first hill than the sound of horses' hoofs rapidly gaining upon them sounded through the night air.

Hazel's face paled. What were they to do? There must be some way of saving Rod from capture. Her feverish gaze alighted on the hunting lodge, the gates of which were but a little way ahead. What better place to hide Rod? After all, it was her lodge.

"Let us down, Torrio, and then drive on!" she cried. "Quick, Rod!" she whispered.

"Not you—you must stay in the carriage!" The boy outlaw jumped out as the carriage slowed down, but Hazel was beside him in a second.

"Come with me!" she breathed, and led the way up the winding path to the lodge, fumbling for the silver key which she had hung round her neck by the blue ribbon attached to it.

She threw open the door, and beckoned Rod in.

Then—even as she stepped over the threshold—the lights were switched on. Rod had no chance, either to fight or escape. Before he could move half a dozen blue uniformed agents of the Prince Regent were upon him, pinioning his arms to his sides.

Hazel's heart seemed to freeze. Rod was a prisoner! And it was she who had brought him here! Her pleading eyes sought his as his captors led him out.

For an instant he halted as he was about to pass her. His blue eyes mocked her, and she bit her lip at his words.

"Congratulations, your Highness!" he said. "These men couldn't have trapped me—it took a girl—it took you to do that!"

He turned abruptly away between his guards. Hazel stared dumbly after him, her hands clenched, his words echoing in her ears.

Rod Norris believed that she had deliberately trapped him!

THE END OF HER MASQUERADE



HAZEL was escorted back to the Regent's home, feeling sick at heart.

She was too dazed to care what happened to her now.

All she could think of was that Rod was in deadly danger. He was in the hands of his enemies—in danger, and some-

how she must find a way of rescuing him. Whatever happened to her, Rod must escape! Fernando was waiting for her in the big lounge that formed part of his quarters.

He greeted her with a triumphant smile when, white-faced, she was shown in.

"Well done, my dear!" he exclaimed exultantly. "For months I have tried to trap the Shadow, and within twenty-four hours of getting here, you do it for me!"

His gloating words seemed to come to her out of a dream, and as he took her cold hands in his, she shuddered.

"I reward those who do me such a fine ser-

vice as this," he said. "To-morrow I shall give you Roland—the finest black horse in Betharania. Roland shall be yours—it is my gift to you for giving me the Shadow."

"I don't want any gift!" Hazel cried. "I don't want anything at all from you!"

She snatched her hands away. Innocent as she was, every word the Regent uttered made her feel the traitor that Rod believed her to be.

Fernando looked concerned. "You are tired, my dear. You must go to bed."

He pulled the big bell rope, and a servant came and conducted Hazel to her room. For long hours she lay, staring into the darkness, thinking of Rod, the boy outlaw—thinking of some way to rescue him.

Next morning Tanya insisted that Hazel should accompany her to the stables, where Hazel found Roland—the fine black horse which the Regent had promised her, already saddled. Beside him, impatiently pawing the ground, was a glossy brown mare, evidently Tanya's.

Tanya was sulky and petulant, and Hazel realised that she had not forgiven her for giving her the slip the previous evening.

"We will ride this morning—if you can," Tanya said curtly.

Hazel's eyes gleamed. There was a challenge in the other girl's voice, and she would accept that challenge. Not for herself—but for Rod's sake.

"Oh, yes, I can ride!" she said.

The other girl led the way through the big park-like grounds to the gates. Then Hazel urged her horse to a trot, then a gallop.

Tanya's mount was no match for Roland, either in speed or sure-footedness, and the light of excitement returned to Hazel's eyes as she found herself rapidly outdistancing the enraged Tanya.

On she galloped till Tanya was at last out of sight.

Below Hazel lay Bethacrest, the white roofs gleaming in the valley.

Down there in the grey battlemented prison Rod was held captive. Hazel urged Roland on faster and faster till, within twenty minutes, they were thudding up the main street, while passers-by turned to stare wonderingly at the unescorted princess.

Hazel made straight for the bleak prison which had been pointed out to her yesterday. It lay on the far side of the market-square where she and Rod had danced the evening before.

The sentry at the gate saluted, and she rode through into the prison square, where a flustered-looking official came hurrying up to her.

"What is your Highness doing here?" he asked, in amazement. "This is no place—I want to see the prison governor!" Hazel commanded imperiously.

"The prison governor, your Highness? Why—why, certainly!"

She dismounted, and tethered Roland to the old-fashioned hitching-post in the square. Then she was being led through a cold, dark corridor to the prison governor's office.

A thin, elderly man with silver epaulettes on his blue uniform sprang up as she entered, and came forward.

"Your Highness honours me!" He bowed over her hand. "What is the reason for this."

visit? What service does your Highness require of me?"

Not for one moment did Hazel betray her inward tenseness.

"I wish you to free the Shadow!" she said boldly.

"Free the Shadow!" The police chief stepped back, aghast. "But—but your Highness can't understand what she asks! He is the boy outlaw who for six months—"

"I understand all about that," Hazel said coldly. "I want him released—immediately, and brought to me in the courtyard!"

For a long moment the police chief stared at her, completely flabbergasted. But she was the princess, and this was a direct order.

"Very well, your Highness," he said huskily, and went to the door to call a warder.

Hazel returned to the sunshine of the courtyard. So far her plan had worked. All that remained now was to get Rod out of here.

As she stood by Roland she saw him appear, a guard on each side of him, in the big, main doorway of the prison. He came down the steps alone and walked towards her.

"I've brought Roland for you, Rod," she said. "He's a present from the Regent."

Rod looked at her, his eyes gleaming with amusement. Then he bowed.

"I'm sorry I had to make out that it was you who had trapped me last night," he told her. "But it was necessary to make the Regent think you were on his side. Now you have undone it all by openly setting me free!"

"Go quickly, Rod! Any moment something may happen, and you'll be caught again!" Her voice was tense with anxiety.

He smiled at her.

"I accept my freedom, your Highness," he said. "Good-bye for the present!"

He swung himself lightly into Roland's saddle, and, with a light-hearted wave of his hand to the sentries at the gate, he galloped through.

Hazel drew in a long breath of sheer relief and thankfulness.

"IT'S clear to me that you no longer wish to be the princess!"

The Regent's voice was harsh with anger as Hazel confronted him in the state-room of the castle on her return.

"Why you have done this thing, I don't know!" he exclaimed. "But it is sufficient that you have done it!"

He paced up and down, and Hazel watched him, her heart sinking, in spite of her resolve that nothing mattered now Rod was free.

"I am generous to those who render me services," the Regent said, his dark eyes cold. "But my enemies know how hard I can be. Remember that, girl. Now, go!"

Without a word Hazel left him. What he meant to do now she had no idea, but she was filled with a great foreboding.

Outside the study, Tanya was waiting for her.

"You will prepare yourself now for the ceremony of the diadem," she said, and Hazel caught a queer gleam in the other girl's eyes, and suddenly she felt more uneasy.

"What is the ceremony of the diadem?" she asked.

"In the Lakeside Palace outside the town there are the three crowns of the state—the one with the jewelled cross is the princess' diadem—you have to go up the steps of the palace, and put on the diadem before you drive through the town for the banquet. It would be unwise to choose the wrong diadem."

As the carriages were lined up in the courtyard, Hazel was thoughtful. She sensed trickery, but could do nothing about it. She had promised Rod to go on pretending she was the princess, and so she would until he released her from that promise.

The carriages drew out of the courtyard with Hazel sitting alone in the first one,

dressed in the white and gold national costume.

At the foot of the hill an old woman pressed her way through the cheering crowd, and threw a posy of flowers into Hazel's lap. And then as the carriage passed on the old woman did a strange thing. She raised her hand in a gesture of warning.

Hazel started, then as the carriage swept on, she stared down at the posy. It was just a bunch of field flowers. But was it? Suddenly, with a start of surprise, she realised that a note was tied in the string that bound the posy.

She pulled the note free and opened it. Then a glad cry, hastily suppressed, rose to her lips. A note from the Shadow:

"Beware of treachery—two of the diadems are called, 'The Crown of Ill-Omen,' and 'The Diadem of Disaster.' The princess' diadem is the centre one of the three.—THE SHADOW."

Hazel's heart swelled in gratitude towards the boy outlaw. He had foreseen that the Regent and Tanya might attempt to ruin her in the eyes of the people, and had warned her in time.

She tucked the note away in her robes, feeling relieved.

Now, white and beautiful beside the waters of the lake, the palace rose before her. A great crowd was assembled on the marble terrace, and the pavement which stretched to the shore of the lake.

The carriages halted, and Hazel was escorted by a uniformed retinue to the wide steps, where Tanya joined her.

She curtsied respectfully, but the smile on her lips was not reflected in her eyes.

"The diadem awaits your Highness at the top of the steps," she said. "Choose the wrong one," she added, in a low undertone, "and just you see what the crowd will do about it."

Hazel did not answer her, but turned, and calmly mounted the gleaming, white steps, while a great cheer went up from the crowd. At the top of the steps she could see a ceremonial dais, and three diadems in a row.

"Long live the Princess Terena!" cried the crowd.

She was almost at the top now. In another moment she would make her choice. Rod had said the centre one. Tanya had said take the one with the jewelled cross.

She stood in front of them, her heart hammering as she saw the diamonds gleaming in the sunshine. Not one of them had a jewelled cross! Rod had not warned her for nothing. Resolutely she picked up the centre one of the three and set it on her head.

Then she turned and faced the crowd.

The echoing shouts suddenly faded. A deep, startled silence suddenly fell upon the crowd as she descended the steps to the carriage. Cold fingers clutched at Hazel's heart, and she felt a tremor of fear as she gazed upon those staring, wide-eyed people before her.

Then the silence was broken. First one voice, then another, until the whole crowd were shouting:

"It's the Diadem of Disaster!"

At last Hazel knew. Fernando and Tanya had triumphed. They had changed the diadems at the last moment!

"Impostor!" came a new cry. "She's an impostor—the real princess would have known her own diadem!"

Tears stung Hazel's eyes. Her masquerade was over! She wanted to tell them she hadn't wished to deceive them, but she couldn't—there was nothing she could say.

"Impostor—impostor!" the crowd shouted angrily.

A dozen blue-uniformed guards came forward as Hazel reached the bottom of the steps, and formed up on either side of her.

Curtly their young captain spoke:

"Take off the diadem! You are under arrest!"

They took the diamond collar from her throat, and the blue sash of honour from her shoulder, and the guard closed round her.

ROD TO THE RESCUE



TANYA walked beside her—a Tanya with no curtsies now—but triumphant. With the stiff marching guards on either side of them they went back to the carriages. To Hazel it seemed like some horrible nightmare from which she would never wake.

All the way the crowd shrank from them, forming a wide lane, as though Hazel's very presence was contaminating.

Their utter contempt for her stung her. With her hands clenched at her sides she walked through them, her head high. They must not be allowed to guess the misery in her heart.

"Get into the carriage!" the captain ordered, and this time no eager hands held the door open for her.

She sat back on the cushions, her heart thudding. She wasn't afraid—she hadn't had time to be afraid. All she could think was that this had been a dreadful thing to happen. She had let Rod down—yet it had not been her fault.

Slowly the procession wound its way back through the town. But it was a different journey this time. Not a sound came from the crowds that lined the roads.

Ahead came the sound of horses' hoofs, and Hazel saw another cortege approaching along the road from the castle. An excited murmur ran through the multitude of people. It swelled into a roar as the other procession came nearer.

Hazel saw a girl in riding kit rein in her horse. She was accompanied by green-uniformed attendants, whose horses breathed heavily as though they had come a long way and ridden hard.

But these Hazel scarcely noticed. Her eyes were fixed upon the girl. The carriages had had to stop, for the other cortege was completely blocking the road.

And Hazel stared at the girl in utter amazement. It was as though she were staring at her own reflection.

The crowd was hoarse with excitement. "It's the princess—the real princess!" they cried.

"Princess Terena has returned at last!" Hazel knew then that she was face to face with the girl whose place she had taken. For an instant they stared at each other in silence. Terena's face was cold and distant, and Hazel's heart sank.

Terena made a sign to her attendants, and pointed at Hazel with her riding-crop.

"Take her away!" she said. "And the Regent and his followers—they are all crooks! My father's councillors will look after Betharania now."

It had happened! Hazel knew a sick despair. She was going to be a prisoner. And in this strange country she would be completely helpless and lost. No one even knew she was here! The soldiers took charge of the Regent, Tanya, and their followers, while the royal party swept on.

Hazel was taken to the City Hall, where she was locked in a room with a barred window, and only a wooden bench to sit on.

Shakily, she tried to tell herself that everything would be all right, that somehow she would get out of this dreadful situation.

She sat disconsolately on the bench for some time, when suddenly there came the click of the key in the lock, and an old woman entered.

"You will take off the princess's clothes, and wear these instead, girl without shame!" she cried, in a loud voice.

Hazel looked at her with misery in her eyes. What did she care what clothes she wore? Then she realised with a start that this old woman of the dark eyes was the same who had given her the bunch of flowers and the note from Rod on the way to the Lakeside Palace that afternoon.

"Come on, I've no time to waste!" the old woman shouted, as she closed the door. Then, abruptly, her manner changed. She raised a finger to her lips. "Take good heart, missy," she whispered. "The Shadow never forgets his friends—and he's not far away at this moment."

Hazel stared in amazement. "Who—who are you?" she stammered.

"My name is Mazina. The Shadow has helped me and many others in this country, and I, Mazina, am able to help him sometimes. But you'll have to take off the princess's clothes, my dear, and put these on."

She held out the bundle. Hazel took it and changed into the rags it contained.

Mazina pressed her hand. "Courage, dearie!" she whispered. She gave Hazel a wooden bowl and a mug. "You're to come with me. I've persuaded them to give you something to eat."

Hazel followed old Mazina to a big kitchen. A surly cook poured some thin soup into the wooden bowl Hazel held out, dropped a slice of bread into it, and filled her mug with coffee.

Then, as soon as the cook had gone into the scullery, Mazina gripped her arm.

"Now is your chance!" she whispered. "Through that door, and run as fast as you can to where the woods begin. Give me that soup!" She snatched the bowl and mug from Hazel's hands, and spilt the stuff on the floor. "I'm going to pretend I struggled with you to stop you getting away," she added. "Now, go quickly!"

Next moment Hazel was through the kitchen door and dashing down the empty road, old Mazina's voice in her ears.

"She's gone—she's gone! She threw the soup over me!"

The cook had evidently returned, and the old woman had been forced to raise the alarm.

Hazel's hands clenched, and she ran as hard as she could. But the alarm had been given just a little too soon. Already she was panting, as from the City Hall came the sound of the alarm bell, followed a few minutes later by pounding hoofs, only a few hundred yards behind her.

And then in front she heard more hoofs. Round the bend swept a bay horse, a slim, masked figure bent low over its neck.

It was Rod!
He drew rein beside her in a cloud of dust. With a sobbing cry she felt a strong arm encircle her waist, and she was swung into the saddle behind him.

"Hang on for your life, Hazel!" he cried. At a breathless speed the bay cleared the ditch that bordered the road and fairly flew across the heath. All the time Rod murmured to him—words of encouragement that the horse seemed to understand.

Hazel shut her eyes and clung to Rod. It was a long time before she could bring herself to look round.

When she did she breathed a sigh of thankfulness. The pursuing horsemen were a good quarter of a mile away, and steadily losing ground.

Dusk was gathering as they skirted the woods. Darkness fell, a black darkness, with no moon. And then, faintly etched against the skyline, she saw a towering building.

In startled amazement, she realised that Rod was reining in at a postern of the castle. Before she could speak he had jumped down from the bay and had lifted her down.

THE SKATING GIRL'S MYSTERY MASCOT

(Continued from page 276.)

Taking Hazel's hand, Rod led her through the postern and across a courtyard into a long corridor of the castle. Moving cautiously in the gloom, they reached a door under which showed a light.

"But—but why here, Rod?" Hazel whispered wonderingly.

"You'll see in a minute," he breathed. As he spoke he opened the door and drew Hazel into the room.

Blinking in the sudden light, Hazel saw the Princess Terena rise, smiling, from a chair.

"So you've brought her back, Rod!" she cried joyfully. "Now I am happy. I've been so worried about her since this afternoon."

Hazel stood inside the door, nonplussed. She couldn't reconcile this smiling, happy girl with the haughty princess she had first met this afternoon.

"Please don't look at me like that, Hazel!" Terena smiled. "Yes, I know your name—Rod has told me all about you and all the dangers you braved to help me—and I want you to know how grateful I am. The town councillors Rod has been working for told me I'd got to denounce you; it was the only way of getting rid of the Regent as well."

"And he is as bad a man as you could find anywhere," Rod put in.

"I—well, I don't know what to say," Hazel stammered. "But I'm not wearing very nice clothes to meet a princess."

"We'll soon alter that," Terena told her gaily. She pointed to a door in the far wall. "Go into my bed-room, Hazel, and choose any frock in my wardrobe you like—I know they'll fit all right." She laughed merrily. "And then we'll have the most scrumptious supper this old castle can give us."

By the time Hazel reappeared a table for three, shining with silver and cut glass, had been laid.

"Come and sit between us, Hazel!" Rod called out cheerily.

So she sat between Rod and Terena. And while she ate Terena and Rod chatted gaily. Bit by bit Hazel learned the whole secret. Terena had never wanted to be a princess. She had lived with her aunt in England and gone to school there.

To save Betharania from the Regent, who was determined to be at the head of affairs himself, she had consented to appear at the right time—at the moment when he could be proved a fraud to all the people.

"He nearly upset the plan by kidnapping the princess and using her popularity for his own ends," Rod said. "But, of course, he kidnapped you by mistake, Hazel."

"I'm jolly glad he did now!" Hazel said. "Anyway, we've done our job, and all three of us can go back to England," Terena said happily. "Betharania has wise councillors at last and doesn't need a princess."

Terena rose and crossed the room to a big, window-fronted cabinet.

"There's one more thing I want to do," she said, and as she spoke she drew a beautiful, jewelled pendant from the cabinet. It sparkled in her hand as she brought it over to Hazel. "To-morrow morning," she said, "we three will be in an aeroplane going back to England. Will you accept this little gift from me, Hazel? I'd like you to have it for being so wonderful."

She leaned forward and clipped the pendant round Hazel's neck. And Rod, no longer an outlaw, looked on and grinned his approval.

Hazel, her eyes shining and her cheeks flushed with happiness, looked from one to the other. After everything that had happened, and the thought of them all going home together to-morrow, this was the most wonderful evening of her life.

THE END.

"Only a week or two till the carnival," she breathed. "I must make good then. I've got to be among the ones Lee Farrell picks for his film. Then I'll get a contract and money in advance, and everything will be O.K."

She left home early for the clubhouse that evening, hoping to be able to get a word with Red Eagle.

But Larry—a worried, but determined Larry had gained the clubhouse before her.

"I see Corinne and her gang have taken all their things," he said. "The old club doesn't seem the same, but we'll soon brighten it up again. First of all, however, we've got to concentrate on the ice show. The programme's being fixed in a day or two. The open competition and figure skating are open to individuals, but the ballet is a club show."

Sheila nodded. "You mean you want to improve it still further?" she asked.

"Exactly," he said. "And I've got an idea. What about a special hockey scene? We could work in some thrilling ice hockey stunts. Tell you what, we'll see what we can do when the others arrive."

Sheila's eyes sparkled as he elaborated his idea.

"It all sounds perfectly wizard," she declared, and when the rest of the Bluebirds heard about it they thought just the same.

Donning their skates, they turned on the radiogram, then went out on to the ice, and, under Larry's instructions began to put the suggestion into operation. The more they skated the more enthusiastic they became, and slowly, but surely, they began to create a skating ballet scene which contained the very spirit of an exciting ice hockey match.

"That'll do for to-night," said Larry at last. "You're coming on well. A bit more practice and you'll be O.K."

"I'll say we will," agreed Jack Nelson. "If you ask me, this idea's a real winner."

There came a chorus of agreement from all around, and happily the Bluebirds went in to supper. They were just finishing off their doughnuts and coffee when the door was thrust open and two rough-looking men entered the clubhouse.

"Hallo, what do you want?" asked Sheila in surprise.

The burlier of the two men grinned and silently handed her a sheaf of papers he took from his pocket. As she scanned through them, Sheila's face paled.

The men were bailiffs, and those papers consisted of a bill due from Sheila's father and a judgment that entitled the creditors to take all legal means to obtain payment.

"We've come to take possession of the clubhouse," declared the burlier man. "And here we stop until you pay up. What's more, you'll be responsible for feeding us."

Sheila gazed at the papers again. "Two hundred and fifty dollars!" she gasped. "No wonder dad was so upset."

She passed the documents over to Larry, and as the rest of the wondering Bluebirds crowded around, involuntarily her gaze went to the trap-door in the ceiling.

She was faced with a new and startling situation. For how was she to look after the injured Red Eagle now? And how was she to prevent the broker's men from discovering her outlaw friend?

Next Friday's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will contain another dramatic instalment of this grand serial. Don't miss it.