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EVERY
FRIDAY.

GIRLS' CRYSTAL ^{3^d}

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"

Week
Ending
April 20th,
1946.



The Room of Vanishing Clocks

Noel Raymond, The Popular Young Detective, Is Featured In This Intriguing Mystery Story—By PETER LANGLEY

THE INVISIBLE THIEF

"PITY June's engaged on another case. This is just the kind of romantic place which would appeal to her."

Bringing his car to a halt before the ivy-covered castle which nestled amongst the trees, Noel Raymond, the famous detective, smiled to himself.

June Gaynor, his young niece and partner, simply loved ancient castles, and Tor Castle was one of the best known in the country. Every summer thousands of holiday-makers visited it, to explore its beautiful grounds, to sample the thrills of its baffling maze, and to inspect the treasures displayed in its museum.

It was the strange disappearance of some of these treasures which had been responsible for Noel motoring post-haste from London.

Getting out of his car, he ran up the entrance steps. The great oaken door stood ajar, and from the other side came the purr of electricity. Pushing the door wide open, the detective saw that an elderly, shirt-sleeved attendant was busily engaged in running a vacuum-cleaner over the Persian carpet which covered the floor of the raftered baronial hall.

As Noel entered, the attendant looked up and shook his head apologetically.

"Sorry, sir, but you're too early to look round. The castle isn't open to visitors until ten."

"It's all right. I've come to see the curator. He's expecting me, I believe. My name's Raymond—Noel Raymond."

Instantly the attendant's whole manner changed. He switched off the vacuum-cleaner and reached hurriedly for his brass-buttoned uniformed coat.

"Mr. Raymond, the detective!" he exclaimed. "Then you'll have come about the clocks, sir."

Noel nodded.

"Yes; I understand one or two of them have been stolen," he said.

"That they have, sir—been spirited clean away. Uncanny it is, how they vanished. Clean through locked doors and bolted windows. If you ask me, I'd say it was a ghost who took 'em." The old man shook his head knowingly; then, realising that his visitor was waiting to see the curator, he gave an embarrassed cough. "Sorry, sir, I was forgetting. You wanted to see Mr. Percival, but I'm afraid he has gone down to the village. Perhaps you wouldn't mind waiting, or maybe you'd see Miss Stella Randolph."

"Miss Randolph?" Noel repeated inquiringly.

"The assistant curator, sir. A very nice young lady, sir, though very worried. These thefts have upset her terribly. You see—"

The voluble attendant broke off as footsteps pattered on the ancient staircase. Turning, Noel saw a dark-haired girl in a business-like white blouse and navy blue skirt, descending. Despite her severely cut clothes there was something very appealing and feminine about her, and in her dark eyes was a haunting look which instantly roused all Noel's sympathy.

At sight of him she gave a gasp and came to a sudden halt, catching at the banisters. Noel stepped forward.

"Sorry if I startled you," he said, with a smile. "You'll be Miss Randolph, I expect. I'm Noel Raymond. Mr. Percival telephoned me last night."

The colour rushed back to the girl's cheeks and she gazed down at him in relief.

"The detective!" she whispered. "Thank goodness you've come! We have been nearly worried off our heads. Those clocks disappearing like that—" Her voice trailed away and she clasped

her hands. "Oh, I do hope you can solve the mystery!" she added agitatedly. "You don't know what it means to me."

"I'll certainly do my best," Noel promised. "Now, if you'll just give me a few details—"

Eagerly the assistant curator did so.

"You say that only one clock was taken at a time?" he queried as she finished.

She nodded.

"Yes; and they have always been taken when the museum is locked up. There's been a theft each night and morning during the past few days. Four have been stolen so far. Oh, it's uncanny—inexplicable! You see—"

She broke off, and they all stiffened as through the silent castle came the strident ring of an electric bell.

"The alarm! The burglar-alarm!" It was the attendant who shouted out, and excitedly he pointed towards the corridor to the right of the staircase. "The invisible thief's at it again!" he gasped.

From the girl there came a horrified cry, and, thrusting a trembling hand into the pocket of her skirt, she produced a bunch of keys.

"Quickly—oh, quickly!" she urged. "This time he mustn't escape—mustn't!"

And, turning, she led the way down the corridor at a frantic run. Noel and the attendant followed hot on her heels, almost deafened by the bell which still awoke the echoes.

At the far end of the stone-flagged passage was a solitary door, with a single word painted on its panels: "MUSEUM." As she reached it Stella Randolph fitted one of the keys into the lock, and with desperate haste threw open the door.

Noel could not help wondering at her almost frantic distress. That she could be eager for the thief to be captured was understandable, but that fact alone could not explain her obvious agitation. Then he again broke off his thoughts as there came a startled, panic-stricken cry from the girl.

"It's empty! The museum's empty!" she exclaimed.

Noel, stepping into the long, oak-paneled apartment, saw that she was right. Whoever had been responsible for setting off the burglar-alarm had disappeared.

Yet how could the thief have escaped? The solitary door had been locked, while the windows were all barred.

Crossing over to them, the young detective tested the fastenings. All were in perfect order. Impossible for anyone to have got out through the windows. Turning, he saw the attendant standing in the doorway, shaking his head, a look of fear in his eyes.

"It's a ghost—that's what it is," the man muttered.

Noel ignored him and turned to the assistant curator. She had crossed to a great metal-topped table which stood in the centre of the museum, and she was gazing at it as if petrified.

On the table were arrayed a whole collection of ancient clocks. Each was a rare specimen, and they were of every conceivable shape and design. Only one thing had they in common—all were on the small side; none of them stood higher than fifteen inches.

Crossing to the stricken girl, Noel gave the table a quick calculating scrutiny. It was divided up into black and white squares, rather like a huge chessboard, and on most of the squares stood a clock. Swiftly he counted the vacant squares, then turned to Stella Randolph.

"Five!" he ejaculated. "But you said—"

Her lips quivering, she nodded.

"I know. Up till this morning only four clocks had gone, but now—"

—she clutched him by the arm—"now another of them has vanished!" she announced.

Incredulously Noel gazed around the museum. It seemed impossible that the thief

could have snatched up the clock and made his escape from the locked room in the few brief moments which had elapsed since the bell had first sounded its strident warning.

With the clamour of it still filling his ears, he turned to the attendant.

"Can you shut off that noise?" he asked.

"Certainly, sir. There's a switch in that cupboard over there. It's my job to turn it on every evening before Miss Randolph locks up."

Crossing to one of the walls, the man opened a panel, put in his hand, and there came a click as he pressed up a switch. Instantly the metallic clangour came to an end.

"That's better!" Noel gave a smile of relief. "Now perhaps one of you'll explain how it works."

"The table electrified." It was Stella Randolph who spoke. "And all the clocks have metal bases. As long as they're not moved everything's all right, but the moment any of them is lifted up—the circuit is broken and the alarm bell rings."

Noel nodded understandingly, and he frowned at the table.

"Very ingenious," he murmured. "That means, then, that the thief must have been in this room when we heard the bell."

"Unless it was a ghost, sir," earnestly the attendant regarded him. "There's mighty funny tales told about this castle, sir. I used to laugh at them, but now—"

But Noel only chuckled.

The old attendant eyed him grimly.

"Aye, you may laugh if you like, sir," he went on. "But if you knew the tales I've heard about this here castle, then you'd know that this thief is no human being. You'll see I'm right—you mark my words, sir!"

Shaking his head forebodingly, the garrulous old man left the room, and a moment later there came again the purr of his vacuum-cleaner.

Taking a leather-covered hammer from his pocket, Noel proceeded to tap the walls; then, rolling back the carpet, he examined the floor, looking for possible secret entrances to the room.

But though he searched high and low, he failed to find one. Frowning in bafflement, he rolled the carpet back in place; then gave a sudden gasp. Something lying under the table had attracted his attention. It was a small metal tube. Reaching across, he picked it up, to see that it was a tube of blue paint such as artists use.

"Hallo, that's a queer thing for the thief to drop!" he commented.

"But it wasn't dropped by the thief. I'm positive it wasn't!" came in an agitated cry. And, looking up, he saw the assistant curator gazing at him in urgent appeal.

"Oh, what makes you so certain?" he asked.

She coloured; then gave a nervous laugh.

"We had some of the girls from the local art school in here last week," she explained. "Several of them brought their paints with them, so it's obvious, isn't it, that one of them must have dropped that tube." At that moment voices could be heard out in the hall, and the girl darted to the doorway. "That'll be Mr. Percival and horrid Claude Wayson," she declared. "I must get on with my work."

And she hurried away, leaving Noel keenly examining the little metal tube. It was only half full and one or two drops of paint adhered to the label. He touched them with his finger. They were moist and tacky.

"So I was right!" he exclaimed. "This tube wasn't dropped a week ago. It's only been here an hour or two at the most—otherwise these drops of paint would be hard and firm."

But what could the phantom thief have been doing with a tube of paint? And why had Stella Randolph so desperately tried to put him off the scent? Was it possible that in some way she was connected with the mystery of the room of vanishing clocks?

A LIKELY SUSPECT



NOEL RAYMOND was still pondering on the problem when Mr. Percival entered the museum, accompanied by a young and rather over-dressed man who was presumably the Claude Wayson whom Stella Randolph had referred to in such unfriendly terms.

The curator was a portly, stern-faced man, and he greeted the detective with hands held high in horror.

"Another clock stolen!" he cried. "This is terrible! There must be some reasonable explanation. Thieves can't walk through locked doors!"

"They certainly can't," agreed Noel. "But they might be able to get in through a secret entrance, you know."

"Secret entrance?" It was Claude Wayson who spoke, and he regarded Noel with a derisive sneer. "That takes a bit of believing. More likely the thief had a key."

"But there are only two in existence," protested the curator. "I have one and Miss Randolph has the other."

"Exactly," was the young man's comment, and he grinned with malicious significance. "I can't help remembering that Miss Randolph used to be very thick with that rascal Gordon Benton."

"Gordon Benton?"

Inquiringly, Noel turned to the curator. Mr. Percival frowned, as if angered by the mention of the name.

"He was a young artist who used to work here—copying some of the masterpieces in the castle. I gave him permission to use the old tower in the grounds as a studio. In fact, it was to discuss renting the studio which brought Mr. Wayson along here this morning. He's also an artist, you know."

Noel made no comment, but looked at the curator's companion, deeper interest in his eyes. Was mere professional jealousy behind Claude Wayson's malicious insinuations, or had he some deeper reason for saying what he had?

"What became of Benton?" Noel asked.

The curator shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know—and I don't care. You see, one or two things disappeared from the castle—nothing very valuable, fortunately, and there was not sufficient evidence to accuse Benton. Nevertheless, I ordered him off the premises, and, thank goodness, he hasn't worried me since."

"But he's still in the district," put in Claude Wayson. "I ran into him the other night—in the woods just beyond the castle grounds."

The curator stared at him in horror.

"You don't think that he can be the thief?" he gasped.

It was the young artist's turn to shrug.

"Don't ask me, sir—ask Mr. Raymond; he's in charge of the case," he said, with a barely concealed sneer in the detective's direction.

Noel found himself disliking Wayson more and more, but he forced himself to hide his feelings. He turned again to the frowning Mr. Percival.

"I suppose the tower studio has been kept locked up since Benton left?" he said casually.

The curator nodded, while his companion sneered again as he blew a spiral of cigarette smoke from his lips.

"Yes—and the key can't be found. Apparently Miss Randolph has mislaid it. Well, if she can mislay one key she may have mislaid another."

And he laughed maliciously. Noel made no comment, although what he had just heard had set his mind working busily.

Though the mystery of the room of vanishing clocks was as baffling as ever, he had two suspects whom it might be worth making inquiries about. The first was the sneering artist who seemed so eager to see a rival blamed. The other was the other artist himself, whose sus-

picious behaviour some months ago had caused him to be ordered out of the castle.

Taking leave of the two men, Noel went outside. Very beautiful and peaceful the gardens looked in the morning sunlight, and away to the left, rising above the bushes, was an old tower with crumbling battlements.

"That must be the studio Benton used," Noel told himself.

At once he strode towards it, and, pausing at the heavy door, he grasped the rusty latch and pushed with all his strength. But the door refused to budge. Obviously it was securely locked. Stepping back a few yards, he surveyed the narrow window set in the stone wall about twenty feet from the ground, and as he did so his lips tightened. Here and there the ivy was torn.

"Someone's been climbing up there—and pretty recently at that," he murmured. "Well, it's an idea."

And, inserting a foot amongst the tangled tendrils, he grasped the ivy with both hands and began to battle his way upwards. It was a difficult and dangerous climb, but Noel hardly noticed, and in a few moments he was swinging himself on to the broad sill of the glassless window.

It lighted a small circular apartment containing a solitary chair and table, a pile of old canvases, and an artist's easel. This was evidently the studio which Gordon Benton had used, and, judging by the dust, it had not been occupied for months.

But wait a minute!

Dropping to the floor, Noel frowned as he saw the faint imprint of footsteps. They led to the pile of canvases. Curiously the young detective examined them. Most of them were obviously copies of the castle paintings, and one in particular held his attention. It was a glowing replica of the famous "Shepherdess" picture he had noticed in the museum. As he unrolled the unmounted painting he whistled his admiration.

"If this is young Benton's work, he certainly can paint," he murmured. "This is a perfect copy, and—"

Breaking off, he examined the picture more closely, and as he did so an excited gleam crept into his grey eyes.

"Gosh, this is an important clue!" he ejaculated. "I don't know what it means as yet, but—"

He broke off, his gaze wandering to a square, paint-smearing box that stood on the table. Replacing the picture, he strode forward and picked up the box. On opening the lid he saw that it contained eighteen or nineteen small tubes of paint, arrayed in tiny racks. But one of the racks was empty. Swiftly he read the various names; then his eyes gleamed again.

It was the tube of ultramarine blue which was missing! He took the tube from the museum out of his pocket and slipped it into the empty place. It fitted perfectly.

"That proves it!" he muttered. "Gordon Benton—or someone else—has been using this studio in secret. And, whoever it was, somehow managed to enter the locked museum an hour or two ago."

Thanks to the clue of the tube of paint, he had already made a good start towards discovering the identity of the phantom thief.

At that moment he heard a stealthy creaking noise outside the studio. Someone besides himself was in the tower!

Going on tiptoe to the door, he jerked it swiftly open, but the dusty landing to which it gave access was empty.

Cautiously he looked around. The original stone stairs had long ago collapsed. They had been replaced by two rickety ladders, one leading up to the battlements, the other down to the main door on the ground floor.

Out here on the landing it was almost pitch dark, but as he peered over the frail railing he heard again that stealthy, creaking sound. Round he whirled.

THE IMPOSSIBLE THEFTS

But too late!

From above his head a black, shadowy figure launched itself. Leaping from the rickety ladder, it crashed down on his shoulders, causing him to slip and fall.

Next moment Noel was in the grip of a dim, almost invisible adversary. The phantom thief of the museum! And with ferocious strength the unknown was striving to force the young detective towards the edge of the landing. Frantically he strove to tear himself free, but that first thunderbolt attack had left him dazed.

With a supreme effort he managed to force himself to his feet, but as he swayed there he received a brutal push. Back against the ancient railing he thudded. There was a splintering, rending crack, and the railing collapsed, causing him to pitch headlong into space.

Down—down Noel hurtled. He flung out his hands. His fingers managed to close over the rungs of the ladder. There came an agonising jolt on his shoulder, and, unable to bear the pain, he released his grip, to crash downwards again.

There came a bone-jolting thud, then oblivion swept over him.

When he recovered consciousness he found himself lying on a pile of old sacks, and bending over him was a white-faced, girlish figure.

Stella Randolph!

As Noel blinked open his eyes and struggled up into a sitting position she regarded him in distress.

"Are you badly hurt?" she whispered.

He felt his head gingerly; then grinned.

"No bones broken, I imagine," he said. "Don't worry, Miss Randolph; I'll be as right as rain in a jiffy."

She gave a gasp of relief.

"Thank goodness! But—but what happened?"

Noel decided to be evasive.

"Oh, I fell, that's all!" he said. "But what are you doing here? And who opened the door?"

From her his gaze went to the oaken door, which now stood wide open, letting in the sunlight. She coloured and seemed to find it difficult to answer his question.

"Oh, I—I just happened to be passing by," she stammered, "and, seeing the door open, I looked inside! Then I—I saw you. But you could do with a drink," she added hurriedly. "I'll fetch you some water. I won't be a moment."

And, jumping to her feet, she hurried out of the tower. Frowningly Noel watched her go. He liked the girl—there was something about her which roused all his sympathy—but there was also something suspicious about her behaviour.

Scrambling up, Noel looked speculatively up the rickety ladder; then he shook his head.

"Whoever attacked me will have got away," he told himself. "But who could it have been? Gordon Benton, or—"

He broke off, his attention attracted by Stella Randolph's handbag, which in her haste she had left lying on the floor. Impulsively he picked it up and opened it. The first thing which met his eye was a torn sheet of cartridge paper on which, in a bold, masculine hand, had been written the following message:

"Expect me again to-night. Don't worry. No one will see me."

And lying underneath was a new tube of ultramarine blue paint and a big, rusty key! A feeling of dismay in his heart, Noel inserted the key in the lock of the open door. It fitted perfectly. Then Stella Randolph had lied to him. The door had not been open when she had come across him. She herself had unlocked it—with the key which she had pretended had been lost!



WHEN Stella Randolph returned with a glass of water her handbag was lying where she had left it, and Noel said nothing about his startling discovery. Instead, he smiled as he sipped at the water.

"Just before my accident I was looking at young Benton's paintings," he remarked. "Very fine work. I'm not an expert, but I should imagine he will make a name for himself one of these days."

The girl clasped her hands and her cheeks glowed.

"Oh, I'm certain he will!" she cried. "If only he can win the competition—"

"Competition?" cut in Noel interestedly.

"The one organised by the owner of the castle—for the best copy of any of the pictures here," explained Stella. "The prize is a contract to paint replicas of the whole collection. It will be a wonderful chance for Gordon if—"

She coloured in confusion as she realised how intently Noel was regarding her.

"You and young Benton were friends, weren't you?" he asked.

She nodded, and blushed again, clearly revealing how deep was her liking for the artist.

"And is Claude Wayson also entering for this competition?" was Noel's next question.

Once more she nodded, and a scornful look flashed in her dark eyes.

"Yes—but he doesn't stand a chance against Gordon!" she declared. "Mr. Wayson's only a conceited boaster. He's done nothing but make himself objectionable since all that wretched misunderstanding which led to Gordon being sent away from here."

"So Gordon hasn't been able to return and get on with his painting?" Noel asked quietly.

She nodded, then gave a gasp, startled by the sudden stern look which had come over the young detective's pleasant face.

"What—what is the matter?" she gulped, drawing back. "Why—why are you looking at me like that?"

"Because you're not telling me the truth," he declared. "One of the pictures I examined has been worked on within the last few hours. The paint is not even dry. And you didn't find the door open just now. You unlocked it yourself. Why? What brought you here?"

At his unexpected questions she recoiled as if struck, a fluttering hand flying to her throat. Noel's heart was full of pity. He hated hurting her like this, but he must put his suspicions to the test—must discover what connection this painting business had with the vanishing clocks.

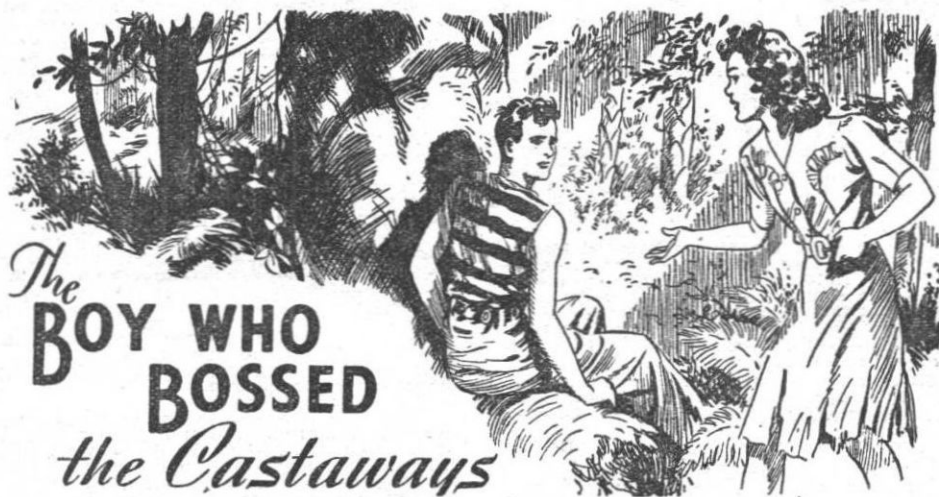
"Ever since Gordon Benton was forbidden to come here you have been helping him," he declared, as, silent and anguished, she stood there. "You've not only helped him secretly to use his old studio, but you have also helped to smuggle him into the museum each night—so that he could finish his entry for the competition. And why you came here just now was to replace that missing tube of blue paint. You were frightened that if I discovered it was missing I might become suspicious."

His swift, keen summing-up of the position brought a sob to her throat, and, dropping on to the solitary chair, she covered her face with her hands.

"What—what you say is true," she whispered between her tears. "But Gordon knows nothing about those clocks—oh, you must believe that! Although both of us may have done wrong, we're neither of us thieves!"

Noel found it difficult to doubt her sincerity, yet if what she had said was true, who could be the phantom thief? Involuntarily his mind went to the young artist's rival—to Claude Wayson. Could he be the culprit?

(Please turn to page 37.)



The
**BOY WHO
BOSSSED**
the Castaways

ACCUSED OF HELPING LARRY

By HAZEL ARMITAGE

JULIE WALLACE and her chums, Elsie and Roly Maynard and Dick Mardle, and a party of other passengers from the s.y. *Daffodil*, found themselves marooned on the island of the Golden Palm—upon which Julie's father had been castaway for two years.

On the island was a strange gold-coloured pillar in the form of a gigantic palm-tree. Upon it were hieroglyphics which resembled those on a locket which Julie's father had given her.

Also on the island was a lawless boy named Larry Woodstock, who seemed to have a strange interest in Julie's locket, and whom most of the castaways believed was responsible for their being marooned on the island.

Subsequently, at the instigation of Nell Gilson, who had assumed leadership of the castaways, Larry was made a prisoner and locked in a cave.

Julie, indignant at the harsh treatment Larry was receiving, secretly took him food from the castaways' store.

When she returned to the camp, she found Gilson & Co. gathered round the food dump, their faces grim.

"You've been raiding our store to feed Larry Woodstock!" accused Ada Henshaw.

JULIE didn't attempt to deny Ada's accusation.

She faced the group proudly.

"Why should I deny it?" she challenged.

She saw Gilson's frame stiffen, saw the frown that appeared on the professor's brows, the incredulity which dawned in the faces of Roly and Dick.

"You mean you've been feeding Larry Woodstock—with our rations?" Gilson demanded.

"Yes," Julie faced him straightly. "But the food I gave him was his own—he brought it to this island. Why should he starve while we feed—on his food?"

Gilson gave a cluck of impatience.

"Julie, we've been through that," he said. "We're not going through it again. I don't know what's come over you. You don't think we're keeping that young tiger under lock and key for the fun of it, do you?"

"I don't see why he should be kept under

lock and key at all," Julie boldly retorted.

"Egad!" the professor muttered, immeasurably shocked.

Gilson glared.

"You know as well as I do that he's working against us. You know as well as I do that he schemed to get us here—is scheming to keep us here—"

"I don't think I know all that," Julie said levelly. "You suggested that. Because he had a motor-boat and a radio transmitter it was assumed he was going to make a get-away. But now we've found the motor-boat—useless—has been useless ever since it reached the island. We've got the radio transmitter. That's also useless. It doesn't look as if he did plan to run out on us, after all. Mr. Gilson—"

"All right, have it your own way," Gilson said, although there was a rasp in his tones. "But look at the other facts. You can't deny that after we landed here he gave a false message to the *Daffodil*, sending her away from the island so that we should be left here marooned. You don't deny that he's after your locket—the locket which contains some sort of secret connected with the island. You don't—"

And then he stopped, staring at her. "Julie, where is that locket?" he finished in a suddenly, changed voice.

"Where—" Julie began, and instinctively her hand went to her throat, fumbled there, and then fumbled again, all the colour suddenly draining from her face and her heart beginning to flutter in panic.

The locket had gone!

Gone—yes. No longer was the thin gold chain about her neck. No longer did the locket lie against her chest. It had vanished.

For a moment she stared at Gilson, and at the others, their faces becoming rather grim as they saw what had happened. She stared in horror, not so much concerned at that moment with her loss of the locket as at the sudden memory which flashed across the screen of her mind.

For vividly she was recalling now the moment when, in freeing Larry, she had felt his hand

upon the nape of her neck. She had looked up in surprise, and he had apologised, saying that a muscle of his recently freed arm had jerked into an involuntary action. Was that when she had lost the locket?

She shrank from the thought. She didn't want to believe it. And yet—

"Where is it?" Gilson repeated.

"It—it's gone!" Julie found herself stuttering.

"Oh, Julie—you—you chump!" involuntarily burst from Dick.

"And who took it?" Gilson asked. "There's only one person interested in the locket. Only one who could have had any reason for taking it. And that's Woodstock—the boy you stick up for. But come on," he snapped, jumping into brisk action at once. "If Woodstock stole it, he's still got it."

Without more ado, they all moved forward, striking the trail that Julie's betraying feet had made in the still damp grass. Julie, her mind in a whirl, followed them, hardly aware, in the agitation of her mind, that she was moving at all. To think that Larry could have done this—Larry, whom she thought now had just a little friendship for her.

Stumbling and running by turns, she found herself at last in sight of Larry Woodstock's prison cave again. And then, with a gasp, she halted.

"Look!" Gilson cried hoarsely. "He—he's gone!"

And even as they all stopped, recognising the futility of running farther, they realised the truth. For the great gate which had kept Larry at bay while his legs and hands had been bound, had proved no obstacle to a Larry with his bonds removed. The gate was flung wide, and the cave was entirely uninhabited.

"After all our work to capture him!" flared Ada. "We— " And then, in fury, she flung round upon Julie. "And it's all your stupid fault!" she accused. "You let him out!"

LARRY'S DENIAL



JULIE denied that. But there was no doubt she was to blame. It was through her, and her alone, that Larry Woodstock had been able to make his escape—this time, taking her precious locket with him. She felt almost sick with humiliation.

"Well, I hope this will be a

lesson to you, Julie," Gilson said bitterly. "You were an idiot to trust him," Dick said bluntly.

"You ought to have known he'd play some rotten trick," Roly protested.

They were almost bitter in their disappointment—in their anger. All the worst thoughts they had ever had of Larry Woodstock were multiplied in that moment. Their annoyance with Julie was unmistakable.

"I—I deserved it, I suppose," Julie shook her head. Suddenly she threw off the shackles of stupor that held her. "Yes, I was an idiot," she said clearly. "I thought there was some good in him. I felt that I could trust him. But not now—"

"Och lass, there's no need to take on so," the professor said gruffly. "We all make mistakes. Just mind that you don't make this one again. But perhaps," he added, blinking unhelpfully at the ground, "he dropped the locket. Let's look round."

They looked—in the cave; around the cave. But they all knew what the result of the search would be before they even embarked upon it. No locket was to be found.

"All the same, he's not getting away with it," Gilson vowed angrily. "He can't be far away, anyway. He must be on the island somewhere. As he's got the locket, and as that locket is connected with the Golden Palm—"

"We go to the Golden Palm," Dick said. "Gilson, yes, that's the move. I bet he's rushed off there. What's more likely, knowing that Julie would soon find out that he's pinched the locket? Come on," he said grimly.

He turned at once, the others following. Julie hesitated, but she did not accompany them. She felt somehow that she couldn't—that she did not want to meet Larry again—now or ever—that she would prefer to hear of his recapture without being on the spot to witness it. A strange mood! She wondered why her first shock of anger at his treachery was not still gripping her.

The others seemed not to notice her absence. Eager to catch the outlaw, they did not even turn to see if she were following. In a few minutes they had vanished into the trees.

Julie turned aimlessly. With no purpose in her mind, she found her feet carrying her through the liana-strewn undergrowth. How long she had been strolling, or how far she had strolled, she did not know, until, with a start, she pulled up. What was that?

She had heard something—something from the little dip in the ground in front of her. And as she straightened and stiffened she heard the sound once more.

"Larry!" she cried.

Larry—yes, it was Larry's head she could see. Without thinking, she found herself hurrying to the spot. Forgetting her desire never to set eyes on this boy again, she found her anger kindled afresh as her memories of his treachery flooded back into her mind. And then, reaching the crest of the dip, she stopped.

"You!" she quivered.

He was sitting there—in the hollow—just sitting, as though nothing had happened. He looked up as he heard her voice, and the half-glad smile that lit his face filled her again with an inward fury.

"Aye, it's me, all right," he said. "It's nice to see—"

"You—you dare have the cheek to talk to me," she quivered.

He frowned a little.

"I thought you'd be angry. I ought to have warned you that I should try to escape. You didn't get blamed for it, did you? Gosh, don't look so cross about it," he protested.

"You know perfectly well I'm not cross about your escape," she protested. "I—I think I might have been glad of that if it hadn't been for the other thing you did. I trusted you, Larry Woodstock. I didn't think even you would descend to such a mean trick as you played. And you ought"—her voice choked—"you ought to be ashamed of yourself—"

His eyes flickered a little. There was a look of blank misunderstanding in his face.

"Julie, what is this? I don't get you."

"No," she retorted scornfully, "but you've got my locket."

"Your what?"

"My locket!" she flung at him. "The locket you stole from me in the cave."

The amazement on his face was so genuine that for the first time Julie felt a faltering doubt in her mind. The next moment his lips had shut. That old dogged expression had returned. His lips twisted a little.

"O.K.," he said. "So you've lost your locket—"

He seemed to ponder on that. "And I, of course, am the thief. As usual—"

"Larry, you don't deny—"

"You must believe what you like," he said curtly.

"But— " She found herself unsettled, bewildered, all at once. There was a doubt in her heart which irritated her, yet which filled her with a strange sort of joy at the same time. "Larry, did you—did you steal my locket? I want a direct answer."

"If you like to think— " he began.

"Larry, did you?" In an unconscious demand she stamped her foot on the ground.

"No," he said.

"Larry—"

"I did not steal your locket," he repeated distinctly. "As it happens, though, I did notice you weren't wearing it, and I meant to ask you if you'd given it to Gilson or someone to keep it for you. If you've lost it, you must have lost it before you came to the cave. That's all I can say about it."

She paused. Was that the truth? But she knew it was—knew that she believed him.

She saw suddenly a new expression on his face—a quick, agonised jerk of muscles that told of physical pain. She looked at him.

"Larry—Larry, you're not hurt—" she cried.

He made an effort to control himself. But there was a gasp in his voice when he spoke.

"No—at least, not much. My foot—it'll be all right when I've rested it. I came a cropper in this lina that trails under the grass. I was chasing a young hog, you see. I—"

Again he broke off, biting back a gasp of pain. Immediately, her heart fluttering with a new anxiety, forgetful altogether of her previous doubts, Julie was at his side. She caught at his foot and was looking with dismay at the puffy swelling just above the ankle.

"Oh, Larry," she breathed. "And—and I was angry with you—"

"It's nothing," he said, and made an effort to rise, but she pushed him back.

"It's a dislocation—a bad one," she told him. "Now, keep quiet, young man. And hold tight," she added, as she gripped the injured foot, "because I'm going to hurt you. I had an ankle like this myself once. Someone put it right for me. So I'll try to do the same for you. Lean back on your two hands and grit your teeth."

"Sure! Go ahead," he said cheerfully.

She caught the foot, pressing the toes down from the joint, at the same time questing with her thumb to discover just where the dislocation had taken place. She found it. Without warning, her hand closed over the ankle. She gave a sudden, swift, fierce little pull. A gasp came from Larry, and she saw his eyes shut.

"Gosh!" he said. "Something happened then—I felt it. And—gee; I believe you've done it, Julie. It—it feels better already. You ought to have a medal for your first aid. But—"

He stared at her. "Julie, what about that locket? You're sure it's gone?"

"Do you think I'd have gone for you like that if it hadn't?" she asked him. "Yes, it's gone, right enough. I—I suppose the chain must have snapped somewhere."

He was silent for a moment. The announcement seemed to cause him as much consternation as it caused her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'll keep my eyes open for it. Thanks a lot for what you've done, Julie—and thanks most of all for believing I didn't pinch that locket. But"—he looked round himself—"hadn't you better be going now? The others will be looking for you."

"Let them!" Julie said defiantly. "But, Larry, tell me, what are you going to do—now?"

He grinned. "Lie low," he said. "If I can only dodge them for the rest of the day I can get back to my own hide-out again by to-night. Once I've got there again—well, I promise I stay put. Don't you worry about me, Julie. Just you push off," he added urgently. "I'll get in touch with you—somehow—as soon as I've fixed myself up. And—good luck with the locket," he added as she rose.

She left him then—felt because she wanted to, but because she felt that his words were true—that very shortly Gilson & Co. would be looking for her, and she did not want them to find her in Larry's company.

Her thoughts were of Larry and the locket as she went back to the camp. Then suddenly a thought struck her. Vividly in her mind's eye was the dark tunnel leading out of Larry's cave into the underground lake.

Suddenly she was remembering that moment of consternation in the tunnel when she had been jostled between Ada and Gilson.

And suddenly a burning conviction flashed upon her.

"That's when I lost the locket," she told herself. "That's when it must have slipped off. It's in the tunnel. I'm sure of it. I must go there—on my own."

JULIE'S SEARCH



BEFORE she had reached the camp Julie had mentally made her plans. First, she must get hold of the lamp they had brought back from Larry's cave. Second, while revisiting the cave on her own behalf, she would take with her articles of food and comfort which would be serviceable to Larry when he reinstalled himself in his old home.

When she arrived in the camp it was to find everybody there again, Gilson and Dick and the rest, looking very disgruntled and angry. Obviously they had found no trace of Larry.

They more or less ignored Julie, but that didn't worry her now. Already her eyes were upon the stores they had brought back with them from Larry's hide-out that morning—stores now placed in full view of the camp, just beneath the trees—and on top of them the lamp which was absolutely necessary to the search she had promised herself. But how could she slip back to the cave without the others knowing?

It was Dick who provided her with an unexpected outlet when he asked:

"I suppose you didn't find your locket, Julie? Larry pinched it, all right."

"Did he?" Julie shook her head. "I've been thinking. I'm not so sure. I can't see, anyhow, how he could have done, because I've got a feeling that I wasn't wearing it then—"

"But that's nonsense," Gilson said. "Of course you were."

"Did you notice it?" Julie challenged him. Gilson paused at that. Julie wondered at his hesitation. But again it was Dick who chimed in.

"You mean to say, Julie, you might have lost it somewhere else?"

"I'm pretty sure I did," Julie answered him. "After all, it was only on a thin chain and it might have broken anywhere. It might, in fact, be anywhere around on the beach between here and the caves. I've looked everywhere, of course—but well, if we could all look—" She smiled at Gilson. "Perhaps when you've had a rest, Mr Gilson, you'd organise a search—"

Her suggestion of his power to organise made Gilson swell at once.

"It's an idea," he said. "My own opinion is that Woodstock has got it. Still, just to leave no stone unturned, we will search the beach. And we'll do it now," he added.

"Yes, rather," Roly said at once.

"Right-ho! Then let's get busy," Gilson, man of action, was on his feet again. "Come on, everybody!"

"Oh, Mr. Gilson, how kind you are," Julie sighed.

Gilson was already organising his search party, was already lining them up. With a twinkle of mischief in her eyes, Julie watched as, at Gilson's pompous word of command, they began to move off, their backs towards her, eyes fixed searchingly on the ground.

"And now's my chance," she told herself.

She threw a glance at Aunt Martha and Mrs. Fry, the latter busily polishing some small shells which she was threading into a necklace. Aunt Martha walking across to the woodpile to find faggots to keep the fire going.

It was, Julie felt, her golden moment, and, taking advantage of it, she slipped across to

the dump of stores, caught up the lamp, a small steef frying-pan, and a tin of biscuits. Then she dashed off.

Half an hour later—a little less perhaps—she found herself outside Larry's cave, hot and panting, with the sun beating mercilessly down from above.

"And now to look for my locket," she breathed gleefully.

She went into the cave. There, near the bed, she hid the things she had brought with her. Then she tidied up, taking a lonely sort of pleasure in the task. Then she lit the lamp, using some matches she and Elsie shared, clamped down the glass, and, swinging it at her side, stepped into the cave.

She approached the tunnel cautiously, remembering the treacherousness of its slope. Cautiously she made her way down, glad of the light, and stopping now and again to listen to the lap-lapping sound that came from below. It was gratefully cool in the darkness.

Step by step she felt her way, the light throwing flickering shadows on the coral and limestone walls.

Here and there, on the slippery floor, she saw footprints—traces left by the feet of her own party which had trodden this tunnel two days ago. And then suddenly she paused. Some inner instinct told her that she had arrived at the spot she had in mind.

"Now," she breathed, standing still. The confused blur of prints convinced her that it was here where she, Ada, and Gilson had stumbled against each other—that here, if anywhere, was her lost locket to be found.

Slowly she swung round, allowing the lantern beam to cover every inch of the floor. But no gleaming locket and chain met her gaze.

But wait. What was that? Suddenly a little gleaming twinkle caught her attention—so small, so tiny, that for a moment she wondered if her fancy was playing her tricks. Then, stooping lower, she saw with a little catch of the breath that it was no fancy—but that it was the gleam of gold that had momentarily attracted her. It was, in fact, the small gold swivel of her locket.

She picked it up. Yes; no doubt about it. She felt a sense of disappointment stealing over her, and yet she had the feeling that, after all, the locket itself must be somewhere around.

She set herself to search with a sort of feverish excitement spurring her. Every inch of the ground she covered. But there was nothing else. Just that swivel. That was all. "But—but it's ridiculous!" she found herself arguing. "When I lost the swivel, the necklace itself must have fallen. I suppose no one else picked it up!"

But she knew at once that was unlikely. Everybody in the camp was aware that she had lost the locket. Weren't they all searching for it, perhaps, at this very moment? Nobody was holding it back, surely—

Unless—
She shrank from the thought. Had Ada or Gilson got it—having robbed her during the little scuffle. Or—she recoiled from this and burned with annoyance to find herself thinking it—had Larry, after all, lied to her?

But no—no, she would not believe that. She had made too many mistakes already about Larry Woodstock.

Intensively she continued her search, gradually wending her way down the tunnel. Still no sight of the locket rewarded her gaze, and she was almost startled when at last she found herself in the circular cave in which the waters of the lake gurgled and lapped.

She had given up hope of finding the locket now. Almost automatically she looked around and felt no disappointment when she found nothing. But there was something different about the cave. Something, for a moment, she could not account for, until she saw that the lake seemed to have shrunk. The water

which had poured down the dark, mysterious tunnel which she believed led to the sea, had become a mere trickle, that the wreck of Larry's motor-boat was now high and dry, revealing the heavy damage to its keel.

Abruptly she realised that the tide was out. That the underground cave was now negotiable—on foot.

At last she was forced to admit that the locket was gone. It certainly was not here. Somebody else had got it.

Who?
She felt afraid to answer that question—even to herself.

But now, standing again on that underground shore, suddenly an adventurous idea came to her.

"Why not explore the tunnel while the tide is out? See where it leads to?" she asked herself.

The idea filled her with a sense of excitement. Why not, indeed?

She hesitated only a moment; then, picking up her lantern, she advanced to explore.

The tunnel, after all, was not very frightening—probably because she had caught it at its best advantage when the tide was at its lowest ebb. It was rocky and narrow in places; here and there so low that she had to duck, but all along it the dry beach to one side was maintained.

And presently, ahead, she saw light, heard the murmur of the sea. Pressing on, presently she arrived in a tiny cove, where she stood blinking in the bright light and breathing heavily in the sudden heat of the brassily revealed sun. She wandered on to the broad beach and looked around her.

"Now, where am I?" she murmured.

A glance along the cliff line told her. To her left the rocks rose steeply. To her right they dropped until the shore-line merged with the sea. Gazing to the left was that point where she and the other castaways had lit their ill-fated beacon the other night. And in that direction, stepping over upjutting crags of coral, she wandered.

Her thoughts were still all of her locket—that locket so precious to her now, which contained her father's undiscovered secret. Who had taken it? Who had got it—now? If only she could answer that question!

It was answered more suddenly, more shockingly, than she expected.

For, about to climb over a barrier of rock that jutted out from the face of the cliff, she suddenly heard voices. Instinctively she stopped, realising that she must be somewhere near the camp, that search parties might be on the look-out for her. And as she paused she recognised Gilson's voice.

"Yes, I'll take care of it," he said. "This is going to be useful, Ada—very useful indeed. Thanks for your help. But you'd better let me have it now—"

Julie went tense. That was Gilson and Ada Henshaw, of course. She hardly realised what she was doing as cautiously she raised herself and peered over the rugged cliff. But what she saw made her whole body stiffen; with difficulty she forced back the cry that rose to her lips.

For there, in front of her, were Ada Henshaw and Neil Gilson, and Gilson, a satisfied smile on his face, was in the act of receiving an object from his secretary. And that object was—

Julie's eyes widened incredulously. It was her own locket and chain! Then—then Ada was the thief—and she and Gilson had obviously planned that mix-up in the cave yesterday in order to rob Julie of her treasured possession!

But what can Gilson know of the secret of Julie's locket? And why does he want it? There are further exciting chapters of this serial in next week's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**. Don't miss your copy.

The River Revellers



FALSE FRIEND OF THE *River Revellers*

CAUGHT OUT OF BOUNDS

By RENE FRAZER

RITA CHALMERS and her chums of Riverside School invited the boys of the nearby Grey Towers to enter a joint team, to be known as the River Revellers, in the forthcoming local regatta.

Barry Howard, a close friend of Rita's, was very enthusiastic, and Mr. Nevison, the popular young sports master, also seemed to support the idea, but some of the boys were doubtful about the wisdom of the two schools joining forces. Before a final decision was taken, it was decided that the girls should display their rivercraft by engaging in a canoe run on a difficult course set by the boys.

Before the test could take place, Rita was disturbed by the appearance of two threatening messages, warning the girls to give up their plans to form the River Revellers. Rita believed them to be the work of a secret enemy.

Believing that the unknown trickster meant harm to a canoe lent them by the boys, Rita hid it, and kept guard over the boathouse one night.

There she encountered a mysterious figure, and, in escaping from him, desperately rang a ship's bell hanging above the door. The figure disappeared as Cherry Oakwood, her chum, who had followed her, arrived on the scene.

While searching for the intruder, Cherry was caught by Miss Ridley, the Form-mistress, who had been aroused by the bell.

RITA had never been in a worse predicament in her life. She stood wretchedly behind the bushes, only a few paces from her chum and the irate Form-mistress, wondering how best she could help.

"Answer me, Cherry Oakwood!" repeated Miss Ridley sternly. "What are you doing out of school at this hour of night? Did you ring that bell?"

"Me?" came Cherry shocked tones. "Oh, Miss Ridley—of course not! I—I just felt like a stroll, 'cause the dormitory was so stuffy, and—"

"That will do!" exclaimed the mistress, in obvious displeasure. "You are being ridiculous

and flippant. Return to the school at once. I shall have more to say about this in the morning!"

Rita took an impulsive step forward, and the faint rustle she made attracted Miss Ridley's attention.

"Cherry—did anyone accompany you on this foolish escapade?" she demanded.

"Oh, no, Miss Ridley!" exclaimed Cherry.

Rita halted, biting her lip. What her chum had said was the truth, of course, for she had set out alone, after Rita. Her impulse was to step forward, to stand by Cherry. But that would only mean that two of them would be punished, instead of one—and it might even lead to the cancellation of to-morrow's vital test!

Rita clenched her hands, waiting in wretched uncertainty as the footsteps receded.

Then she returned to the boathouse, carefully locking the door, after a quick glance round to make certain there had been no damage.

Thank goodness she and Cherry had moved the new canoe in time; there was no telling what might have happened!

She hurried back to school, climbing cautiously into the dormitory, via the roof of an adjacent shed.

A cautioning "Hst!" greeted her as she slid through the window. Cherry had returned, and was sitting on the edge of her bed in the moonlight. With a comically dramatic expression she jumped up to greet her chum.

"Rita—thank goodness she didn't catch you! I let the old sour-puss think I was out for a lark on my own. She's no idea who rang the bell—and she mustn't find out!"

"But, Cherry," breathed Rita, "I can't let you be punished on your own—"

"Why not?" countered Cherry. "Let's be sensible, old dear. You're captain of the regatta team—and the River Revellers depend on you! Do we want the scheme to be a success—or don't we?"

"Yes, but—" protested Rita.
"No 'buts'!" breathed Cherry. "I'm in for it, anyway—and if you butt in it'll cause the merry dickens of a row. So—mum's the word!"

Rita squeezed her chum's hand.
"You're a sport, Cherry!" she breathed. "I shan't forget it."

Rita awoke to a morning of brilliant sunshine, and a tense feeling that something important was to happen. Then she remembered. It was the morning of the big test!

Thrilled, she sat up in bed—even as the recollection of the previous night's happenings crowded on her, momentarily shadowing her excitement.

Her suspicions of a secret enemy had become a dramatic certainty. But, thanks to her precautions—and Cherry's loyal assistance—his latest plot had been foiled.

The new canoe was safe—and at eleven o'clock they were to meet the boys!

Rita sprang out of bed to rally her little team. Some of the girls had been disturbed by the bell ringing on the previous night, and there was much excited speculation as to the reason.

But Rita was worried on her chum's account. Miss Ridley was bound to take notice of last night's escapade—but in what manner would her displeasure be visited on Cherry?

They were left in suspense for the first lesson, which was taken by a junior mistress. The period was occupied mainly in excited whisperings and glances at the reluctant clock.

But at ten o'clock precisely Miss Ridley entered to take over the class. She held a list in her hand, and rapped sharply on the desk for silence.

The girls waited in tense expectancy. Rita held her breath as she stole a glance at Cherry.

"In accordance with a request made by Mr. Nevison, of the boys' college," began the Form-mistress tartly, "the following girls will be excused the remainder of morning classes to take part in a boating exercise." She sniffed her disapproval and rustled the list.

"Rita Chalmers!"
"Here, Miss Ridley." Rita was on her feet, tense and eager.

"You will be responsible for the good behaviour of your team, Rita. The girls I name will accompany you in an orderly manner when the bell rings for break."

Quickly and disapprovingly she rattled off the list—with one significant exception.

Rita was on her feet again, her heart thumping.

"You—you haven't mentioned Cherry Oakwood, Miss Ridley."

"I am aware of that," rejoined the mistress tartly. "Cherry will not accompany you. Owing to her recent behaviour, she will forfeit that privilege—and will also be gated for this afternoon's half-holiday."

Rita's heart sank, and she heard her chum's faint gasp of dismay.

"But—but, Miss Ridley," she protested, "Cherry is an important member of the team, and—"

"I am not interested in the team," snapped Miss Ridley, her eyes glinting. "School discipline comes first. If you persist in questioning my orders, Rita, I shall cancel permission for this—this absurd contest!"

Rita sat down, pale and rebellious, as Cherry kicked her warningly under the desk. There was a murmuring among the girls, silenced by the rap of Miss Ridley's pointer.

When the bell rang for break, an anxious little group of girls gathered round Rita in the changing-room.

"What a blow!" exclaimed Joyce Hargreave, the good-natured deputy captain. "Cherry's one of the best in the team. Why should Miss Ridley pounce on her like that?"

"Rita ought to know!" sneered a voice from the doorway as Della, Hopkins, carrying her

cocoa and bun, strolled in to gloat over their discomfiture. "It's something to do with one of her wild ideas. They were both out of the dormitory when that bell rang last night!"

Rita started, her hands clenched, as she found herself assailed by a battery of curious and reproachful questions.

But she was saved from answering by a sudden crash, as Della's cup and saucer went flying.

"Sorry, Della!" panted Cherry, who had burst into the room in her usual harum-scarum way. "You shouldn't block up doorways, you know."

"You—you little cat!" gasped Della furiously. "Look at my frock—"

"I'm looking at it," said Cherry cheerfully. "Looks awful, I admit. Perhaps it'll remind you that Rita had nothing to do with my being gated—so eat your bun and keep quiet!"

Della's discomfiture relieved the tension, and Rita, with a grateful glance at her chum, called the meeting to order.

"We've got to select a substitute for Cherry—and there's no time to lose," she urged. "We've promised the boys we'll meet them at eleven!"

But it was not an easy matter to find anyone to take Cherry's place at a minute's notice. Precious time was wasted in argument among the team—but in the end, a junior named Linda Garton was selected by a majority vote.

Linda was willing and enthusiastic, but she came nowhere near Cherry's form.

The inevitable delay in securing Miss Ridley's permission for Linda to absent herself from lessons brought the girls to the boathouse a quarter of an hour late for their appointment.

The boys, including members of the sports committee, were waiting with ill-concealed impatience. Barry hurried forward, an anxious expression on his face.

"I say, Rita—what happened?" he asked, glancing at his watch.

"Fine way to show your enthusiasm—I don't think!" cut in Basil Hopkins, Della's brother, with a sneer.

"All right, Basil—enough of that!" snapped Barry, noticing Rita's distress. "Mr. Nevison isn't here yet. If you'll unlock the boathouse, Rita, we'll get the canoe out for you," he added, with a reassuring smile.

Rita bit her lip. Her intention had been to get to the boathouse early with Cherry, to remove the canoe from its hiding-place before the boys arrived. Now she was forced to explain.

"I'm sorry, Barry, it isn't in the boathouse," she replied awkwardly. "I thought it would be safer elsewhere. We put it in Farmer Crofter's barn."

A bewildered gasp arose from the girls and boys alike, and the latter were obviously annoyed.

"Well—of all the cracked ideas!" exclaimed Dan Kester, Barry's chum.

Barry frowned a little, his grey eyes puzzled. "I suppose you did it for the best, Rita," he said, a trifle reproachfully. "But this means more delay. Come on, chaps—let's fetch it out!"

Rita, her cheeks flushed, led the way to the barn. Even Barry and her own team obviously thought she was crazy—and they would only laugh at her if she tried to explain.

She unlatched the door of the barn and Barry threw it open. The others crowded in behind them.

"Where—where's the canoe?" demanded Dan Kester, looking round.

Rita's heart missed a beat as she stared in cold dismay at a heap of farming implements and other lumber that had been piled on top of the sacking beneath which she and Cherry had hidden the boys' canoe!

And just then there came a yelp from Basil Hopkins.

"Look at that, fellows!" he piped. "There's a place to put our canoe. I bet the fatheaded girls have ruined it for us before they even start!"

And he pointed to the polished keel of the canoe protruding from beneath the lumber.

THEIR BIG TEST



AN angry gasp went up from the boys, and even Barry looked annoyed.

"I say, Rita—what's the idea of this?" he asked.

Rita's eyes were smarting, and there was a lump in her throat. Only too clearly she could see what had happened. A farm-

hand must have dumped those things there in the half-light of the early morning.

Or—was it so accidental? Rita's hands clenched, her thoughts racing. The heavy farm tools seemed to have been dropped in haste, as though someone had been surprised at the task.

She met Barry's reproachful glance, her heart thumping.

"Barry—those things weren't there when we left the canoe," she declared unsteadily. "Someone may have tried to damage it—on purpose!"

There came an incredulous laugh from one or two of the boys.

"Who on earth would want to damage our canoe?" demanded Dan Kester, in his blunt way.

Rita clenched her hands, her eyes flashing. "The enemy who's trying to spoil our regatta!" she replied breathlessly. "The same person who tampered with the paddles and nearly wrecked our canoe—"

She was interrupted by several mocking shouts, led by Basil Hopkins.

"That was your fatheaded blundering, and so's this—"

A shadow crossed the doorway. "I say—what's going on here?" inquired a cheery voice.

Barry's face cleared and the commotion died down suddenly as a tall, athletic figure strode into the barn.

Rita's heart missed a beat as she encountered Mr. Nevison's quizzical glance. Keen and immaculate as usual, the young sports master stared round at the group.

"What's the trouble, Barry?" he asked.

Barry explained, obviously glad to shift the responsibility on to broader shoulders. Rita expected the sports master to be annoyed—angry, even—but his dark eyes held a smile of understanding.

"Rita did her best," he said briskly, "and you boys have no right to scoff at her! I'm certain that her fears are quite unfounded, but that's not the point. As far as I can see, no real harm's been done—so get cracking, you lads, and shift this lumber!"

Rita stared at him in swift gratitude, reproaching herself for ever having doubted him. He smiled at her reassuringly as he assisted Barry to lift a heavy ploughshare.

Luckily a pile of boxes had taken most of the weight, or the canoe would have been crushed. As it was, the gunwale was badly scratched and the glossy varnish chipped in several places.

The boys looked glum, and one or two of them commenced to mutter—but a glance from Mr. Nevison silenced them effectively.

"I want you to supervise this test, Barry," he said, "to make sure the girls get a fair chance—and to banish Rita's doubts!" His eyes twinkled as he glanced at her. "Give the canoe a thorough overhaul, and examine the paddles. I suggest they take the same route

as they covered yesterday—and you will time them at the starting point."

"Thanks, sir!" said Barry, obviously pleased. "I wish my watch was as good as yours—"

Just then Rita gave a little gasp of dismay, as she glanced instinctively at the young sports master's handsome gold wrist-watch on its broad leather strap.

"Oh, Mr. Nevison—your watch!" she exclaimed. "It's broken!"

A look of momentary vexation crossed the young sports master's handsome face as he looked down. The glass on the watch was badly cracked.

Then he jerked back his hand with a quick laugh.

"Must have caught it on the plough-share," he said lightly. "Never mind—I'll get a new glass fitted. The important thing at the moment, young lady, is to get started on your test. Barry will see that you're safely launched—and I'll keep an eye on you from along the tow-path. Off you go, now—and the very best of luck, girls!"

With a cheery smile, he mounted his bicycle and departed.

"There's a chap for you, Rita!" said Barry. And Rita nodded, warmly agreeing, her former antagonism completely thrust from her mind. The young sports master had shown himself a real friend!

There followed an exciting and busy five minutes as the canoe was run to the shipway and launched. Barry examined it carefully, and announced that apart from the few scratches no damage had been done.

The boys cheered up at that, and their attitude to the girls became more friendly. Dan Kester and several other members of the sports committee set off on their bikes for the finishing point—the Grey Towers boathouse, on the far side of the island.

Rita gathered her little team and gave them a few last-minute instructions.

Her heart was beating quickly, her eyes shining with suppressed excitement.

So much depended on the result of this test! If they succeeded in satisfying the boys' committee, the launching of her cherished project would be almost an accomplished fact. The River Revellers would come to stay!

"Take it easy, Rita," Barry said as he gripped her hand. "You'll make it with flying colours—so long as you keep your nerve! Are you all set?"

Rita nodded, her pulses racing, as she glanced at her little crew—waiting in tense eagerness, their paddles poised.

"All ready, Barry!" she breathed.

"Right!" Barry stepped back, his hand raised a fluttering handkerchief. "Steady, then. Go!"

He dropped the handkerchief. Four paddles flashed in unison as Rita nodded. The canoe shot away from the bank, skimming the surface with a flying start.

"Steady, girls," called Rita breathlessly. "Take your timing from me—and whatever happens, don't get flurried. We'll be judged on form, as well as speed—and Mr. Nevison will be watching."

The girls nodded obediently, as youthful backs were bent and slim arms swung in unison with their leader's stroke.

Rita smiled as the banks skimmed past them, the splashing paddles beautifully timed, the water gurgling pleasantly past the bows.

They were nearing the bend now, and would soon be in sight of their goal—the Grey Towers boathouse.

From the direction of the tow-path came the tinkle of Mr. Nevison's bicycle-bell, though the bushes momentarily hid the young sports master from view. A number of girls and boys who lined the banks cheered loudly as the canoe approached.

"Faster, girls!" breathed Rita, increasing the timing of her stroke. "Keep an eye on the

bend—and don't panic if the current drags a bit. Once we get into the straight, we'll make up for it."

With breathless speed they shot towards the bend.

Rita was looking out for the overhanging bough she had noticed on the previous day, determined to keep well clear of the bank at that point.

But, to her puzzlement, she could see no sign of it. And even as she stared, her heart contracted, a cold chill running down her spine. It might have been imagination—or a trick of the slanting sunlight—but she fancied she saw a muffled figure crouching in the shadow of the bushes.

A figure that reminded her of her encounter of the previous night!

Rita bit her lip, her heart pounding, as she bent over her paddle. But not once did her stroke falter—and her little team had no suspicion of her fears.

She was not going to be scared by the trickster! Everything depended on the result of this test—and they were so near, now, to their goal.

And just then a dull splash reached her ears, and Rita caught in her breath sharply, her eyes widening in horror.

This time she could not ignore what she had seen—a dark, sluggish object, half-submerged, that swung out on the current directly in the path of their canoe!

Rita's nerve did not desert her; with a plucky effort she shook off a momentary sense of panic.

"Girls—look out!" she breathed tensely. "There's a floating bough ahead! Sharp to the left, and we'll just miss it—"

But she had reckoned without the newcomer to the team. Linda, catching sight of the floating object so near to them, gave a scared cry and paddled wildly, forgetful of instructions.

Desperately Rita tried to avert the inevitable disaster—but in spite of her efforts the canoe swung broadside in the current—and the next moment the drifting bough struck them amidships with a hideous, rending shock.

A STAGGERING SHOCK



FOR an instant, Rita thought the canoe would capsize, flinging them all into the river.

With swift presence of mind she grabbed at a branch of the floating bough, helping to steady the frail craft.

"All right, girls?" she gasped. "Anyone hurt?"

"No bones broken," came Joyce Hargreave's unsteady reply. "Phew—it was a narrow shave! That bough seemed to come from nowhere—"

Instinctively Rita glanced towards the bank—but the sinister figure had vanished. Could it have been her fancy? Was the drifting bough simply another grim coincidence?

But in her heart she knew that it was no coincidence—no mere unlucky chance. The mystery enemy had hit at them again!

An excited crowd had gathered on the bank, and Rita could see the young sports master dismounting from his bicycle. He raised a megaphone to his lips.

"What's happened, girls? Want any help?" Rita drew a quick breath, glancing at her chums.

"Let's go through with it, girls!" she whispered. "We're so near—don't let's give in!"

She received immediate unanimous support—even from Linda, who had recovered herself and was looking rather shame-faced.

Cupping her hands to her mouth, Rita shouted back:

"Don't worry—we're going on!"

There came a cheer from the boys on the bank as Rita waved her paddle.

"Put your backs into it!" she whispered to her little team. "We've lost minutes—but there's still a chance!"

They needed no urging. Like an arrow from a bow the canoe shot away from the entangling branches, heading for the distant boat-house.

But now Rita became aware of another alarming fact. The canoe was letting water!

At first it was a mere trickle, that might have been caused by the splashing paddles—but gradually it widened into a pool at their feet, rising slowly but with frightening certainty.

One by one the girls became aware of the unpleasant fact, though no word was spoken; and instinctively they increased their efforts, each realising that it was now a grim race against time!

Rita's face was white as she strained every nerve and muscle to quicken the pace. She blamed herself for her decision to go on, instead of taking advantage of the sports master's offer of help.

The safety of her chums was at stake! Mingled with the splash of the paddles was the ominous gurgling of the rising water—and with each minute the pace grew slower, as the canoe wallowed more deeply in the river.

Another fifty yards to go! Would they be able to make it?

Rita's heart was thumping madly, and the perspiration was pouring from her face as she called to her chums for a last desperate effort. "Stick it!" she urged. "Not much farther to go now!"

Gallantly the other three paddlers responded, forcing themselves to ignore the water which now flooded over their shoes.

On plunged their craft towards dry land and safety.

A shout rose from the onlookers as the canoe, the water halfway to its gunwales, lurched into the bank.

Anxious hands helped them ashore as, with a dull gurgle, one end of the canoe sank—while the boys dragged on the mooring-line.

"Thank goodness you're safe, Rita!" gasped Barry's voice unsteadily. "In another minute —" He broke off, glancing at the canoe as the boys hauled it ashore. "What's the timing, Dan?"

"Six minutes—thirty-five seconds," said Dan gruffly. "And they've wrecked our canoe!"

There came the tinkle of a bicycle-bell as the young sports master rode up quickly to join the group. Mr. Nevison's handsome face looked pale and concerned as he sprang from the saddle.

"How did it happen?" he demanded tersely, with a quick glance at the canoe.

A dozen voices answered him. "There was a drifting branch, sir—and the girls bashed into it!"

"They panicked, sir—it was as clear as daylight!"

"I vote we wash out the test!" Rita felt her last hopes fading as Barry intervened.

"I say—that's not fair, chaps! The girls may have blundered—but they made a plucky effort. And six minutes is pretty good going. I say we ought to take a vote on it!"

He glanced appealingly at Mr. Nevison; the young sports master nodded gravely.

"That's fair enough, Barry. The committee's here—let them judge the case on its merits, for and against."

Rita held her breath, her feelings alternating between hope and despair as the boys forming the committee gathered on the bank in a serious conclave, the young sports master acting as chairman.

Finally Mr. Nevison called for a vote.

(Please turn to the back page.)



THE BUMPTIOUS NEW BOY

By DAPHNE GRAYSON

"JOLLY good story of yours, Don!" Sally Warner said, with a smile. "I bags we print this in the first number!" "Have a look at this cover drawing of Johnny's!" Don Weston said eagerly from the other side of the cluttered table. "And do we all agree on the title?"

"The 'Merry-makers' Magazine"—rather!" came an enthusiastic chorus from the editorial committee.

It was a busy and eventful scene in the Merry-makers' clubhouse, for Sally & Co. were preparing the first magazine ever to be produced in Roxburgh Co-ed College.

Drawings and manuscripts flooded the table. Two rather rickety typewriters rattled with triumph. A triumph it was indeed for J House over their rivals of K. Sally had been first to form the Merry-makers' Club for J House—and now the club was to launch its own college magazine under the expressed approval of the dean!

"Don't be afraid to criticise—we only want really good stuff!" Johnny Briggs said earnestly across the crowded room.

Don glanced regretfully at the clock.

"Guess I'd better cut off now and meet the new chap who's coming to-day," he said. "They're generally so shy, these new chaps—"

"Don't go yet, Don—there's tons of time," put in Sally, echoed quickly by all. "There's such a load of work to do here, if we're going to get this number off to the printer's by Friday!"

"O.K." And Don bent busily over his manuscripts again.

A breeze sent them scattering to the floor as the door crashed open.

"Any of you guys know where Mr. Grittal is?" asked a bumptious voice.

Everyone gasped, and Sally got up from the table, gazing at a strange youth with horn-rimmed spectacles, a turned-up nose, and a smug, podgy face.

"Are you the new 'boy'?" she inquired.

He nodded. "Bagshaw's my name—Horace Bagshaw," he announced, in a tone which implied that he was proud to be Horace Bagshaw. He goggled inquisitively round the busy room. "What are you all doing?"

Don breathed hard as he rescued his scattered papers, but he answered the new boy politely:

"This is the Merry-makers' Club, and we're getting out the first number of our new mag."

"A new mag., eh? I've run dozens of 'em!" And Horace coolly picked up one of the manuscripts and held it close to his large spectacles. "Frightful bilge, this!" he said. "Who wrote it?"

It was Don's editorial chat, and he had written it with the careful co-operation of the whole committee. They all glared at Horace now with looks that would have perished anyone else.

"Say, are you trying to teach us our job?" gasped Johnny.

"Look, Horace," Sally said gently, "let's take you along to—"

But Horace wasn't listening. He had picked up one of Johnny's poems, and he was reading the first two lines aloud in pained horror:

"Whenever you are in the blues and feel your spirits flag

We want to make you merry with the 'Merry-makers' Mag.'"

"You're not going to print bosh like that?" he yelled, agast. "It gives me the blues reading it!"

"Who told you to read it?" quivered Johnny, while Mick Rogers wrenched the script furiously away from him.

"It needs brains to run a mag.," said Horace, quizzing at everything on the table, even the letter in Sally's typewriter. "I know! I've done it! They got me to edit all the mags. at my last school, and I used to write every word in 'em. I could lick any of this stuff easily!"

"Could you?" murmured Sally.

"Yes, of course!"

"Then lick these envelopes!" And Sally pushed the letters across to him.

Most new boys would have piped down then, but not Horace Bagshaw. He ignored Sally and planted himself in the chair she had vacated.

"I can see this mag. of yours being a perfect flop the way you're going on—" he began.

"Would you mind getting out of that chair?" put in Don very quietly.

"But I'm quite willing to run it for you," proceeded Horace, leaning back and putting

his feet on the table. "I shall want full control, and I shall make a clean sweep of all this tripe, straight into the waste-paper basket. What I shall demand—"

"Get out of that chair!" hissed Don, and with one heave yanked Horace out of it.

His bumptiousness was unshaken. He perched himself on the corner of the table, straightened his spectacles, and reached for another manuscript to criticize. It was maddening for Sally and her chums, who were all trying to restrain their feelings out of courtesy for a newcomer.

"Our Social Corner, by Sally Warner," he read out in jeering tones. "That's no good. People don't want social tosh—they want sensation. You've got to take a crack at somebody—take up a scandal about 'em, and—"

"You keep your ideas till you know the coll. better, new boy!" cut in Sally.

But Horace snatched up two more manuscripts.

"Tennis Notes, by Rene Chalmers! 'Swimming Strokes, by Bunty Shane.' His voice rang with scorn. "Girls can't write this! What do they know about swimming and tennis? Only a chap—"

But that was the last straw. The idea of J House's crack tennis player and the coll's swimming champion to be scoffed at by this blown-up newcomer was too much!

"Put those down!" howled Johnny, pushing him off the table.

"Who do you think you are?" raged Don.

"A bumptious upstart, that's what he is!" "He wants the corners knocked off him, this new guy!" roared Mick Rogers, and grabbed up a baseball bat.

Sally intervened, but Horace faced the infuriated co-eds with an arrogant sneer.

"You needn't think you can shut me up!" he said. "I'll say what I like about your rotten mag. You'll see!"

"Open that door, Sally," exploded Don, leading a rush for Horace. "Grab him, chaps! Bounce him out!"

A pompous step sounded outside, and with a lightning warning from Sally the boys released Horace.

In stepped Mr. Grittall. "Ah, here you are, Horace!" he said, beaming, and he held out his hand to the new boy. "So you are making yourself useful already, eh—helping the club with their magazine?"

"That's what I was trying to do," answered Horace, in accents suddenly meek, "but they don't seem to want my help, Uncle Hector!"

Uncle! Sally wondered if she had heard aright. She blinked at Don and the others, and their dazed faces showed that they, too, had heard the new boy address Mr. Grittall as uncle!

"Don't want your help, Horace?" Mr. Grittall echoed him, bridling, and he turned warmly to the speechless committee. "Evidently you are deceived by the modesty of my nephew. He has great literary gifts, and is studying for the higher branches of journalism. His help will be invaluable to you in producing your magazine."

"I couldn't think of it now, uncle," bleated Horace, screwing his podgy face into an expression of injured innocence. "All they do is to pooh-pooh my ideas and hurl insults at me—just because I'm your nephew, I suppose!"

"It's the first we've heard about that!" burst in Sally.

"It doesn't give you the right to barge in here and try to boss the show!" cried Johnny.

"Really, Briggs!" And Mr. Grittall drew himself up. "This is a monstrous injustice to my nephew. I see it all now. You are jealous of him." Mr. Grittall gazed coldly at Sally. "I believe this magazine was your idea, Miss Warner? The dean spoke to me about it, and we approved the idea provided it was conducted in a serious and responsible manner. Who have you chosen as editor?"

"We're working as a team, sir—an editorial committee of six," answered Sally.

"I see!" Mr. Grittall said, and frowned slightly as he turned to Horace. "Do you think you could do your most brilliant work, Horace, with so many others working around you?"

"Well, I'm used to taking full charge, uncle," began Horace meekly, "but, of course, I could give the committee my advice—"

There was an explosive buzz in the room, and Sally stood up.

"The committee doesn't need any extra advice!"

"Indeed, Miss Warner," snapped Mr. Grittall, "my nephew has joined you now, and he, of course, will be one of the committee!"

"B-but he hasn't been elected, sir—" began a furious clamour.

"Then you will elect him here and now, on my orders!" barked Mr. Grittall, while Horace smirked behind his back. "I know my nephew's ability, even if he is too retiring to push himself in face of this jealousy I perceive amongst you all. I insist that he be given a prominent place on the editorial committee!"

HORACE TAKES COMMAND



NEVER had Mr. Grittall roused such a storm of feeling—never had a new boy brought such rapid unpopularity upon himself as Horace Bagshaw. He stood meek and smug while the uproar went on. His uncle had the last word—and his uncle's word was law.

The lecture bell rang, and in indignation Sally & Co. went along to language class.

"We'll thrash this out this evening!" decided Sally.

"We won't have him on the committee!" fumed Bunty Shane.

"I don't see why not," murmured Elsie Pym, who was a born toady. "He'll have a lot of influence, and if we keep on the right side of him—"

"That bumptious bounder—that one-man band!" raged Johnny. "He's not going to run our magazine just because he's Grittall's nephew. If we can't get him pushed into K House—"

"Hey, you guys!" interrupted a grinning voice.

Nat Piggot, the notorious japer of K House, came, hurrying to meet them outside the lecture hall.

"This new chap of yours," he said eagerly; "is that right he's Grittall's nephew?"

"Yes!" hissed Johnny.

"Oh, boy!" And Piggot's face became ecstatic. "As you know, we always like to welcome a newcomer, even an ordinary J boob, but when it's Grittall's nephew—"

He paused. At all other times, J House loyally defended their new members from any jape by the rivals of K. But now he saw a look of deep satisfaction, not to say gratitude, light every countenance.

"Do your best, Piggy!" Sally said kindly, and patted his arm. "The name is Bagshaw, Horace Bagshaw. Chalet Number 5, Cubicle 4. Let's know if we can help."

"Thanks a lot!" Piggot said with emotion, and went gleefully away to inform his cronies.

Some healthy ragging would do Horace good, thought Sally, but how was he to be removed from the editorial committee—how was he to be induced to step down? She did some hard thinking during lecture, and it came to her that they had seen only the worst side of Horace, and now they must appeal to his better side. He was new to Roxburgh, after all, and he had yet to learn that a new boy—whichever he was—had to carve his own position.

"I vote we have a straight, friendly chat with him," she said to the others over tea in the cafeteria. "I'm sure he'll see reason."

"It's better than squabbling and bringing Uncle Grittall into it," agreed Don.

"Then we'll invite him to the committee meeting this evening," Johnny said hopefully.

Sally rehearsed what she would say to Horace, while Johnny collected the tea money and paid Mrs. Barwell. Then, in a much more agreeable state of mind, they all went along to the clubhouse to resume work on the magazine.

"Hallo!" Sally stared as she opened the door. "Where's my table gone?"

"And my chair!" exclaimed Fay. Everyone gaped, for the room looked oddly bleak, with the best table and chair missing, and the best rug also.

Suspecting a jape, Sally ran out into the passage. Then with a gasp she pulled up outside the writing-room. The door was locked, but a large notice was pinned to it, bearing the inscription:

HORACE BAGSHAW, EDITOR.
Private. Keep Out!

Sally read the notice dazedly. The cheek of it took her breath away till the committee suddenly hurled themselves at the door.

"Bagshaw! Open this door, Bagshaw!" "Can't see you now!" came Horace's cool voice from within. "Go away, I'm busy!" "We'll give you busy!" cried Don, and at a gallop he led the way outside to the writing-room window.

It was a maddening sight that met their gaze. Horace was sitting smugly in Fay's chair, his arms resting on Sally's table, his feet sprawled out on the missing rug, and he was scribbling away on a sheet of paper headed: "Editor's Chat, by Horace Bagshaw."

"Sorry if we're disturbing you, Horace," murmured Sally, throwing open the window, "but how long have you been editor?"

"And who made you editor?" Johnny asked, as he climbed in, tiger-like, through the window.

"I did!" said Horace complacently. "I'm sure my uncle would approve."

Sally could not hold back the storm then. Don and Johnny bounced him out of the chair. Andy Ruggles clicked the door open. Up went Horace, and in a flying column they rushed him out of the clubhouse, Horace flapping arms and legs as they bore him across the campus, and they didn't see Mr. Grittal approaching from the opposite direction on his way to Horace's chalet.

"Ah, I was just coming to see you, Horace" they heard him say, then his voice choked off in horror. "Bless my soul! What are you doing to my nephew?"

"They're bullying me unmercifully, uncle!" wailed Horace, dropping pathetically to his feet. "It's all because they don't want me on the magazine!"

"My poor boy—this is a scandalous outrage!" cried Mr. Grittal. "It is sheer spiteful jealousy. There is not one of you who has the literary talent of my nephew. Where are those magazines you edited at your last school, Horace?"

"They're in my chalet, uncle!" said Horace, with cunning eagerness.

"Come with me, everybody—you shall see them!" rasped Mr. Grittal, leading the way indignantly up the steps of Chalet Number 5. "You shall see to your shame what my nephew can do!" And he thrust open the door of Cubicle 4. "It will teach you to respect—"

Plop! A large paper bag descended with a soft thud, knocking Mr. Grittal's mortarboard off and smothering his head and face with flour mixed with treacle.

"Oh, now what have they done, uncle? They meant that for me!" wailed Horace, who knew as well as Sally & Co. did that it was Nat Piggot's work, for Elsie Pymm had warned him.

"It is m-monstrous! D-dastardly!" choked Mr. Grittal, lurching furiously about the room with his eyes blazing through the flour. "How many times have I said that I will not tolerate this ragging? Give me a towel, Horace!"

Mr. Grittal's temper was at its last ebb as he wiped his face and tried to recover his dignity.

"Those magazines of yours, Horace," he said through clenched teeth. "Where are they?"

"In this case, uncle," Horace said, and slyly he handed Mr. Grittal the attack-case to open.

"Let this work be a model for your own magazine, Miss Warner!" rasped Mr. Grittal! "Let it be an example to you all, and an end to this tomfoolery of yours!" And he flicked open the clasp.

Whrrrrpp! A pair of striped pyjamas whirled up out of the case, a spring inside them, and curled their arms round Mr. Grittal's neck. The legs clung coyly round his knees.

"What the—" Mr. Grittal flung the garment to the floor and thumped his foot on it. "This," he thundered, "this is the last straw! You are nothing but a pack of hooligans! You have no brains of your own and no respect for my nephew's! Forace," he cried, "I will not have you browbeaten in this scandalous way! This settles it! You will take full control of the magazine, and from now on you will be editor!"

He went stamping out of the room with Horace following smugly on his heels—and the only one who had voice to speak was Elsie Pymm.

"I'm glad you're going to be editor, Horace," she said eagerly, and kept close beside him. "May I be your sub-editor?"

In a kind of daze Sally led the stunned committee out of the chalet. Horace Bagshaw had beaten them! He was officially editor of their own magazine! The full shock only fell upon them when Elsie Pymm presently came running back from the enemy camp, and delivered a bulky envelope into Sally's hands.

Out of that envelope Sally drew her own manuscripts, Don's story, Johnny's drawings and poems, and the whole of their carefully written contributions for the first number. With them was a slip of paper in Horace Bagshaw's bumptious writing:

"The Editor regrets that he must return the enclosed efforts, as they do not come up to the high standard required for his magazine."

THE RIVAL MAGAZINES



"WE'RE not letting Bagshaw get away with this, Sally!"

"What's to be done?"

The editorial committee, backed by the whole of J House, were assembled in community-room behind locked doors. Sally's eyes held a resolute glitter, but she was strangely calm.

"I don't care whether it hails, rains, or snows," she announced in measured tones, "it's our magazine and we're getting it off to the printer's on Friday! All that matters now is the jolly old editorial slogan—The Paper Must Come Out!"

All that week, Sally and the editorial committee worked harder than ever in the locked secrecy of community-room. Horace Bagshaw had no suspicion of it. He was too busy creating his own journalistic masterpiece. But he found time to chortle loudly over the displaced Sally & Co., and they had reason to suspect that Elsie Pymm was helping him produce skits and caricatures of them all.

Early on Friday morning Johnny went out to a public telephone booth, and he rang up Horace Bagshaw. His voice was disguised to a deep and businesslike bass:

"Hallo! Is that the editor of the 'Merry-makers' Mag'?"

"Speaking!" answered Horace smugly. "This is Fox & Webb, the printers. Can we have your magazine copy by midday, sir?"

"Sure, it's all ready now!" came eagerly from Horace.

"O.K., sir!" And Johnny's deep voice seemed to compliment him on his promptness. "Then

"I'll send the boy for it at one o'clock sharp!"

This gave Sally comfortable time for her own little disguise after morning lecture. She changed in the boathouse, and Johnny lent her a boy's ginger wig and the few other trifles necessary.

Wearing an inky suit of overalls, and a cap pulled down over her eyes, she looked a typical printer's imp as she rode up, on a borrowed bike, to the writing-room which Horace Bagshaw had purloined as his editorial sanctum.

"Ah, here you are, boy!" said Horace importantly, and he handed her a bulging envelope from his desk. "Tell your boss that the whole of the copy is there, and I shall want the proofs by Wednesday."

"Okey-dokey!" said Sally, in a cheeky boy's voice. "Sure you haven't forgot anything?"

"I'm not in the habit of forgetting— Oh, I see what you mean!" And with a frown Horace put his hand in his pocket and drew out his smallest coin. "Here's a dime for you, off you go!"

Off Sally went—pedalling out through the college gates and then down to the boathouse, to change.

Don & Co. met her as she returned to the community-room, with Horace Bagshaw's entire week's manuscripts and sketches hidden under her blazer. But there was apprehension in their glee.

Johnny hurriedly locked the door, while the committee got together their own manuscripts for immediate dispatch to the printer's.

"Gee, there are going to be fireworks when the proofs come back!" breathed Don, amidst uneasy grins.

Sally had opened Horace's envelope and was gazing at his own efforts with curious interest.

"Yes, very likely!" she murmured mysteriously. "H'm! We shall see!"

HORACE was watching eagerly through his editorial window on Wednesday afternoon when he saw the printer's boy come cycling through the gates.

"Here they are! Here's the proofs, Elsie—I recognise the boy!" he cried.

Then he saw the ginger-haired lad dismount and gaze dawningly about him—and in his impatience Horace ran out to meet him.

"I'm waiting for those proofs, my lad!" he said. "You know my office—you should bring them straight to me!" And he made a grab for the envelope in the cyclist's hand.

But the lad promptly backed away. "Not so fast!" he said cheekily. "Tisn't for you! The boss said I was to give it to Miss Sally Warner!"

"What?" blared Horace. "What's Sally Warner got to do with it?"

He saw the word "Proofs" stamped across the envelope, and with a grab he snatched it from the disguised Sally's hand. He slit open the flap. Then his eyes popped in his head as he drew out the proof magazine.

It wasn't his magazine at all—not one word of it! It was filled with that rubbishy tripe written by Sally Warner & Co.!

"What's the matter, Horace?" inquired Elsie Pymm, running to join him.

"Matter?" roared Horace. "Those bounders have cheated me! They've got their own rubbish printed instead of mine! Look at it! Look! Not a line of my work! Every page written by Sally Warner and her crowd! I'm going straight to my uncle with it, and I pity them when—"

But the printer's lad snatched the proof from him before he could go storming away.

"You can't have that!" he said, placing it firmly in the bulging pocket of his overalls. "My orders was to give it to—"

"Never mind about Sally Warner!" burst in Horace. "You'll take your orders from me now, and you'll bring that proof straight to Mr. Grittall! Follow me, my lad! This way!"

Mr. Grittall was sitting at his study desk,

when there was a tap at the door and Horace and Elsie entered excitedly, followed by the printer's messenger.

"Ah, have you brought me the proofs of the magazine, Horace?" Mr. Grittall asked, looking up with expectant pride.

"That's right, uncle—I want you to see them before I say anything!" breathed Horace, and he gave the printer's boy a sharp nudge.

The boy fumbled in his overalls pocket for an envelope, which he now handed to Mr. Grittall.

"You're going to be surprised, uncle—" Horace began, then broke off dumbfounded.

It was one of his own compositions which Mr. Grittall had drawn out of that envelope! It represented a crude caricature of Sally and her chums falling a cropper, with some lines of doggerel that Mr. Grittall was dazedly reading:

"Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall,

So did Sally Warner and all—

They started a mag,

Such a poor little rag,

But—"

"Horace!" spluttered Mr. Grittall. "You don't mean to tell me you wrote this—this insulting twaddle?"

"Yes, uncle," gasped Horace, "b-but—"

"Then I thought you had more sense!" cried Mr. Grittall. "It would disgrace a boy of ten! What do you think the dean would say to such stuff in a college magazine?"

Horace blinked speechlessly through his specs, for he had been very proud of his efforts. What he couldn't understand was this boy's mistake in producing the wrong envelope. He made frantic signs to him, and the boy produced a second envelope and handed it to Mr. Grittall.

"I hope this will be more worthy of you, Horace," Mr. Grittall said severely—and then he jumped with rage as he drew out a caricature of Don Weston, even cruder than the first, with a line or two of rhyme beginning:

"We all know a fathead named Weston,
Whose face is a subject to jest on—"

"Do you stand there and admit to this drivel, Horace?" exploded Mr. Grittall, while Elsie edged uneasily towards the door. "If your own brain is so addled, even Miss Pymm could have told you that the dean would never permit such childish, offensive trash in the magazine! What else have you?"

The printer's lad swiftly popped another effusion into his outstretched hand.

"Talking of pigs, let me tell you of
Briggs—"

But that was as far as Mr. Grittall read. He tore the sheet in half and threw the pieces in Horace's face. Then with a groan he clapped his hands to his head.

"I am beginning to think I have blundered in making you editor, Horace!" he said hollowly. "Where is the rest? Where is the finished proof? I must know the worst!"

The printer's boy pushed another envelope before him, and with quaking hands Mr. Grittall drew out the proof magazine.

Horace's mouth opened and closed dumbly. He wanted to tell his uncle that this was not his magazine, but the spurious work of Sally Warner & Co. But the words wouldn't come.

For Mr. Grittall's horrified face had suddenly brightened! He was turning over the pages in eager relief, admiring the drawings, nodding with approval over the well-written features by Sally and Don, Johnny and Fay and the others, and rejoicing to see that there wasn't an offensive word in it about anybody. He was positively beaming by the time he came to the end.

(Please turn to the back page.)



The Room of Vanishing Clocks

(Continued
from
page 24.)

For a few moments Noel was silent. "When Benton came to this tower to paint or to put away his things—how did he get in?" he asked then.

She stared at him in surprise. "Why, through the door. How else could he get in?" she said. "I had the key, and I always let him in."

Instantly Noel's thoughts turned to the broken ivy on the outside wall. If Benton had not climbed up to the window, who had? And why? As he ruminated on all that the girl had told him, a startling suspicion occurred to him. Then he frowned, for there seemed to be one insurmountable law in the new theory his mind had evolved.

"Miss Randolph, I want you to lend me your key to the museum," was the unexpected request he made after a short silence.

She surveyed him in amazement. "But what do you want it for?" she gasped. He grinned boyishly.

"To lay a trap for the phantom thief. But now we must be going. I've got some inquiries to make."

When the ancient oak door had been locked behind them, he took from her not only the key to the museum, but also the key to the tower. Then, telling her not to worry, he left her.

It was not until late afternoon that he returned to the castle. As he entered he heard the purr of electricity again. Kerr, the attendant, was busy vacuuming the museum. Standing in the doorway, Noel watched him for a few moments; then his gaze went across to the table of clocks. But now a dust-sheet enveloped it, hiding the clocks from view. Other dust-sheets covered the rest of the exhibits.

"Ah, there you are, Raymond! Have you any news for me?" asked a gruff voice; and, turning, the young detective saw Mr. Percival, the curator, surveying him anxiously.

"It's a little early to make a report yet," was Noel's reply, "but I hope to have some news for you to-morrow."

"And I sincerely hope it will be good news," declared the curator. "I am worried for fear there shall be another theft this evening. However, I mean to take every precaution to prevent it. Have you switched on the current that operates the alarm, Kerr?" he asked, looking across at the attendant.

"Yes, sir. Everything's been attended to as usual. And I've just finished the vacuuming."

Disconnecting his machine, Kerr trundled it out into the hall, and, leaving the curator to lock the door, Noel excused himself on the plea that he wanted to see Miss Randolph.

He went along the corridor which led to her office, but once out of sight, he halted and stepped into an alcove. There he waited until both the curator and Kerr, the attendant, had departed; then he tiptoed back into the hall again. Taking from his pocket the key Stella had lent him, he quietly inserted it into the lock, turned it, and pushed open the door.

Entering the museum, he closed the door again, relocked it, then looked around. The long apartment was, already dark, for it was

nearly sunset, and the narrow windows let in very little light.

Ghostly and eerie the draped showcases looked in the gloom, but Noel had no eyes for them. For a few minutes he was busy on some secret task; then he groped his way to the nearest showcase and crouched down behind it.

If the phantom thief did show up again, he was booked for an unpleasant surprise!

In the dark, silent museum time seemed to stand still, and Noel was beginning to think that his vigil had been in vain, when he heard a slight squeaking noise.

Instantly he stiffened, one hand sliding to the revolver in his pocket as he tiptoed from behind the case, peering in the direction of the sound. And then—

Trrrr-ii-ng!
Like a thunderclap the silence was shattered, and in his ears clamoured the strident ringing of the alarm bell.

The phantom thief had struck again! Frantically Noel darted for the electric-light switch, but in the darkness he collided with a chair and fell headlong. Gasping, he picked himself up and groped his way to the switch.

"Stay where you are!" he rapped. "I've caught you this time!"

And as he pressed down the switch, flooding the long room with dazzling light, he whipped round, revolver in hand. Then he gasped, staring incredulously, for except for himself the museum was empty. The table of clocks was still covered by its dust-sheet, and, except for the still clattering alarm bell, there was nothing to suggest that there had been an intruder in the room.

Noel looked down at the floor, then pocketed his gun.

"The alarm bell must have gone off accidentally," he told himself. "Perhaps the connection is faulty."

Nevertheless, crossing to the table, he pulled off the dust-sheet, then he gasped again, hardly able to believe his own eyes. For now there were six vacant places on the table.

Impossible though it seemed, yet another of the valuable clocks had vanished!

THE FALSE ALARM



WITH the alarm bell still echoing in his ears, Noel Raymond stood there as if petrified.

This was the most amazing theft in all his experience. How on earth had it been contrived? He peered at the table, then, reaching forward, he picked a tiny piece of fluff from one of the vacant spaces. As he examined it thoughtfully, a sudden gleam in his eyes, he heard startled voices and the sound of hurrying feet. The alarm had brought the curator racing down from his private apartment.

Crossing to the cupboard in the wall where the alarm-bell switch was, Noel pressed it up. To his surprise, nothing happened. The bell continued to ring. He was juggling with the switch when the door burst open and the curator and Kerr, the attendant, came rushing into the room. At sight of the young detective they pulled up, staring in astonishment.

"Raymond!" gasped the curator. "What are you doing here? And what's been happening?"

"I've been keeping watch," was the grim reply, "but I'm afraid the phantom thief was too clever for me." Then he turned to the attendant. "How do you switch off this bell?" he asked.

"Allow me, sir. The switch is a bit faulty." Stepping past him, Kerr inserted a hand in the dark cupboard, and almost instantly the bell ceased its deafening clamour. But almost instantly the silence was shattered by a horrified cry from Mr. Percival. In amazed shock the curator was regarding the table of clocks.

"Another's been stolen!" he thundered. "But this is outrageous! Mr. Raymond, if you were keeping watch, surely—"

His voice trailed away, for from the castle grounds came an agitated voice, shouting for help. Mr. Percival gave a groan of despair.

"Great Scott, what's happening now?" he demanded. "That sounds like Claude Wayson!"

Agitatedly he led the way out of the museum, across the great baronial hall, and out through the front doorway. Noel and the attendant raced after him down the steps, and as they gained the grounds they heard an urgent shout coming from the direction of the tower, and standing amongst the trees they saw Gordon Benton's rival.

"Quick—before he gets away!" Wayson yelled. "I saw him snooping amongst the trees, but the moment he spotted me he made a dash for it. It's Benton!"

"Benton!" The curator gave a horrified cry. "Then—then he must be the thief!" he gasped. "Wayson must have seen him just as the scoundrel was escaping from the museum."

"From the museum?" Claude Wayson stared in apparent surprise. "Don't say there's been another robbery!" he gasped. "Now I come to think of it, the blighter was hugging something to his chest. And he was running in the direction of the tower!" he added breathlessly.

The curator shook his head. "He can't be hoping to hide there. There's only one key, and Miss Randolph's lost that." Claude Wayson grinned disagreeably.

"You mean she says she's lost it." Noel frowned. Seldom had he come across anyone he disliked more than this sneering young man.

"As a matter of fact," the young detective said quietly, "the missing key has been found, and it happens to be in my possession. That suggests that your insinuation is untrue, Wayson. However, to satisfy you, we will investigate."

While the others stared in surprise, Noel led the way forward to the tower, unlocked the door, and went in, the others following. One by one they ascended the rickety ladder. As they entered the studio on the second floor, Noel produced a torch from his pocket and switched it on; then he turned to Wayson.

"Perhaps you would like to do the searching?" he suggested. "As you—"

He was interrupted by a cry of anger from the curator.

"Wayson was right! Look—there it is! There's what the scoundrel stole not ten minutes ago!"

And with a quivering hand he pointed to the table. Standing on Gordon Benton's box of paints was a richly enamelled object. The missing clock!

There came a laugh of triumph from Claude Wayson; a horrified gasp from Kerr, the attendant. Noel said nothing, but his face was pale as he stepped forward and bent over the clock. Then his eyes gleamed as they saw several tiny, almost invisible pieces of fluff adhering to the gold scroll which decorated the face.

His thoughts were cut into by Claude Wayson.

"Now it's clear what Gordon Benton was doing in the grounds to-night!" the artist exclaimed. "He came to steal!"

It seemed so obvious that no one spoke, until Noel turned to the door.

"Leave this to me," he said briskly. "If you'll return to the castle, I'll follow in a few minutes with the clock."

When they had gone, Noel picked up the clock and examined those curious pieces of fluff through a magnifying-glass. As he did so, the gleam in his eyes deepened.

"I thought as much," he muttered. "This proves my theory. Now, if only I can find the last missing link—"

Breaking off, he went out on to the landing, shining his torch on the ladder which led upwards to the battlements.

On ascending, he found his way suddenly barred by a wooden trapdoor. He pushed against it, and after a few efforts he was able to fling it back and climb through.

He found it gave access to the flat, circular roof, protected by the high, crumbling battlements. At one end was built a low lean-to, which seemed to be filled with old sacks. Crossing over to it, he pulled aside the sacks, and as he did so an excited gasp escaped his lips, for underneath lay hidden a large, square wooden box. Pulling up the lid, he shone his torch into the box, and then a cry of satisfaction left his lips.

For in the box were five strangely designed old clocks. The remainder of the valuable exhibits which had vanished from the museum!

But, exciting though this discovery was, it was not the stolen clocks which held Noel's attention, but the box itself. Stencilled on the lid was the name and address of the firm which had made it, and as he surveyed that painted lettering his eyes shone with delight.

At last he had discovered the missing link—the last piece in the puzzle!

Carefully rehid the box and its contents, he descended to the ground, and, after locking up the tower, set off for the hotel where he had booked a room for the night.

Next morning, after an early breakfast, he returned to the castle. The usual electric purring greeted him, and as he stepped into the baronial hall he saw Kerr, in his shirt-sleeves, busily engaged in vacuuming the museum carpet. The attendant greeted him anxiously.

"Any news, sir?" he asked. "About that fellow Gordon Benton, I mean. We had to tell Miss Randolph, and I'm afraid she's taken things badly, and if her young man's been arrested—"

Noel shook his head. "No, he's not under lock and key—not yet," he declared. "That's what's brought me round here so early. I've an idea he's hiding not far away."

The attendant gazed at him with startled eyes.

"You mean somewhere in the castle grounds, sir?" he gasped.

Noel nodded.

"Yes—and I've got an idea he will try to make one last coup. So I propose we keep watch out in the grounds, then if he has a secret way of getting in and out of the museum we'll trap him. I've already phoned Mr. Wayson. Now I'll go and tell Mr. Percival and Miss Randolph. When you've finished your vacuuming we'll get busy."

"Very good, sir."

Leaving the attendant running the cleaner over the carpet, Noel sought out the curator and his assistant. Mr. Percival showed himself anxious to help the young detective carry out his plan, but Stella Randolph, seated miserably in her small private office, regarded Noel with tear-brimmed eyes, saying nothing.

Leaving them, he returned to the hall, to find Kerr about to wheel his machine out of the museum. Noel, however, stopped him.

"Leave that where it is," he said. "The phantom thief isn't likely to touch it. I want to lock up and get started on my plan."

"Very good, sir."

Leaving the vacuum-cleaner standing near the still draped table of clocks, the attendant

stepped out of the room. Noel closed and locked the door, then looked at his watch.

"Wayson should be here any minute now," he said. "Will you go and tell Mr. Percival and Miss Randolph I'm ready?"

Obediently the attendant departed, and no sooner was he out of sight than Noel carried a chair across to the locked door and, stepping on to it, put a hand into the small, dark niche in which was the alarm bell.

By the time Kerr returned with Mr. Percival and Stella, however, he was down again and the chair had been restored to its original position. As the two men and the girl entered, Claude Wayson appeared behind them. He grinned at Noel, then looked in surprise across at Stella.

"Hallo, is she going to take part in the ambush?" he asked. "I should have thought she was the last one to help to catch the phantom thief."

Stella went white, then red. Noel frowned across at the young artist.

"That's enough of that, Wayson," he said sharply. Then he turned to the others: "This way, please."

He led the way outside, and then, one by one, he posted them. Kerr he ordered to take up his position behind the bushes at the north end of the museum. Wayson and Mr. Percival were instructed to watch the south wall, and Noel and Stella stationed themselves amongst the trees to the West.

As he stood there, watching and waiting, Noel could feel the girl at his side trembling. "Steady," he whispered.

Tremulously she regarded him. "But—but suppose we trap G-Gordon?" she gulped.

"You believe in his innocence, don't you?" "Of course!"

"Then you have no need to fear. Just sit back and relax, then—"

Abruptly Noel stopped, and they both stiffened. From inside the castle had come a strident ringing noise. The alarm bell! Apparently the audacious phantom thief had accepted Noel Raymond's challenge!

Instantly Noel leapt from concealment, beckoning urgently. "Come on—back indoors! Follow me!" he cried.

The other watchers stared at him in surprise.

"But what about the ambush?" demanded Mr. Percival. "Surely it would be best to remain here, then we'll catch him when he tries to escape."

But Noel was already racing for the castle steps, Stella Randolph's agitated figure at his side.

Reluctantly the three men emerged from their hidingplaces and followed the detective into the hall. There was a look of horrified expectancy on the curator's features. Kerr looked excited and a little baffled, while Claude Wayson wore his usual sneer.

Silently Noel unlocked the museum door, and led the way into the room. There came a chorus of startled gasps, for once again it was empty.

"If you ask me," said the artist, "it's a false alarm."

"Exactly!" said Noel.

Stella Randolph turned wondering eyes on him, but before she could speak there came a strangled roar from Mr. Percival, who, rushing past the others, had ripped off the dust-sheet and was now staring with popping eyes at the table of clocks.

"Another's gone! Another clock's been stolen!" he roared. "Is there no end to this villainy? Is there—?" Breaking off, he swung round on the gaping attendant. "For goodness sake, turn off that alarm bell!" he bellowed. "The din is driving me crazy!"

"Certainly, sir."

Kerr made for the cupboard by the wall, but before he could reach it, Noel stepped forward.

"The alarm bell isn't ringing," he announced calmly.

"What?" They all surveyed him blankly. "Have you gone mad, sir?" spluttered Mr. Percival. "The infernal bell's nearly deafening me!"

A flicker of a smile curled Noel's lips. "Some bell certainly is," he admitted, "but it's not the alarm bell outside. You see, I took the precaution of stuffing some cotton wadding between it and the clapper. As a result, it couldn't ring even if it wanted to."

"But—but—"

Helplessly the curator stared at him, while the others seemed too dazed to move.

Enjoying their bafflement, Noel crossed to the wall, ran his fingers over the panelling, and suddenly a second panel, above the switch cupboard, swung open, revealing a big brass bell, with its metal clapper still whirring, and underneath was a curious kind of clock.

Even as they all gaped at it the ringing ceased, and with a smile Noel indicated the clock.

"You see, it's that clock which causes the bell to ring—not the removal of one of the exhibits from the table," he said. "The whole thing's an ingenious trick to enable the thief to create an alibi for himself."

"An—alibi?" whispered Stella, her eyes round with wonder.

Noel nodded.

"Yes—the clocks were stolen not when the bell rang but half an hour before. After helping himself, the thief set this mechanism so that the hidden bell would ring later. Naturally, when you heard the ringing you thought it was the real bell sounding the alarm and that the thief was still in the museum. You never suspected that actually he had already come and gone. I had my suspicion of the truth last night, for when I kept watch I covered the carpet with a special footprint powder. But when I switched on the lights I was surprised to find there was no footprints on the powder, thus proving that no one but myself had been in the room since it had been locked up. Then, during the night, I let myself into the castle and had a good look around, finally discovering this ingenious little apparatus."

And calmly Noel waved his hand towards the clock-operated bell in the wall.

With an effort Mr. Percival found his voice.

"You say the thefts were actually carried out before the bell rang?" he gasped. "But that's impossible. No one could walk out with a clock without being detected."

"Oh, yes, they could," declared Noel. "You see— Hey, stop him!" he cried, for suddenly one of the staring group had made dash for the door.

Instantly the detective leapt forward to grapple with the fleeing figure. There was a swift, breathless struggle, then there came the click of handcuffs, and a furiously glaring man sank to the floor.

Claude Wayson gave an amazed gasp, while Stella stared in horror.

"Kerr—the attendant!" she whispered.

Noel nodded.

"Yes, he's the phantom thief. In fact, if you just think about it, he was the only one who could have rigged up that hidden bell."

GET YOUR COPY EARLY NEXT WEEK

Owing to the Easter Holidays, the next issue of the **GIRLS' CRYSTAL** will be on sale on Wednesday, instead of Friday. Included in its contents will be an enthralling long complete mystery story entitled: **"HER QUEST IN THE HOUSE OF SURPRISES."**

"But—but how did he smuggle the clocks out of here?" demanded the curator.

"Simple," said Noel, with a grin; and crossing over to the big vacuum cleaner, he undid the dust-bag and held it out.

From all around came more gasps, for embedded amongst the dust was the clock which had been stolen that morning.

"It was the bits of fluff which stuck to the clock we found in the tower last night which put me on the right track," Noel explained. "Then, later, I found the other clocks packed away in a box which bore the name of a well-known firm of electric-clock manufacturers. That provided me with the last clue I needed."

THE case of the vanishing clocks had a pleasant sequel some weeks later, when Noel Raymond received a glowing letter of thanks from Stella Randolph, for in it the girl curator announced her engagement to Gordon Benton, the young artist whose copy of "The Shepherdess" had already won him the enthusiastic praise of all the art critics.

Noel was pleased, but what pleased him more was that it had been Stella's sweetheart who had won the competition and not Claude Wayson, his unpleasant rival.

THE END.

THE MERRYMAKERS AT COLLEGE

(Continued from page 36.)

"This is a happy surprise to me, Horace—it will meet entirely with the dean's approval, and therefore with mine!" he said. "You have not contributed any features yourself, after all, I see—and that is just as well, in view of those shocking specimens you showed me. They showed none of that literary talent you are supposed to possess. They are beneath contempt. But I am glad you have had the wisdom to leave the writing to others, who have done it better!"

"The fact is, uncle," Horace, mumbled incoherently, "certain changes—"

"I will have no changes whatever, Horace—the magazine is excellent as it stands!" put in Mr. Grittal sharply, and he handed the proof back to the printer's boy. "Take this, my boy, and tell your manager with my compliments to carry on with the printing of the copies!"

"Okey-dokey, sir!" said the cheeky voice. And as the printer's boy moved to the door he looked back at Horace and mockingly raised his cap, at the same time winking one eye.

Horace gave a violent jump. There was something about that wink—something about that boy that reminded him of— It couldn't—couldn't have been Sally Warner, could it?

Then he noticed Elsie's gaze fixed agonisedly on the window—and he was just in time to see the grinning faces of Johnny and Don bob down under the sill.

When Horace next spotted them they were far away across the campus, and running with them was the printer's boy, Sally's head showing gaily above the overalls while she waved the ginger wig in her hand.

The first number of the "Merrymakers' Mag." was a brilliant success, but the only one in the coll. who didn't buy a copy was Horace Bagshaw. Sally & Co. are looking forward to receiving his resignation as editor when the time comes for getting out the second number.

(End of this week's story.)

More fun and excitement with the Merrymakers at college in next week's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**. Be sure not to miss it.

FALSE FRIEND OF THE RIVER REVELLERS

(Continued from page 32.)

"The question before the committee," he said pleasantly, "is whether we permit the girls of River House School to join up with us as a regatta team, to be called, I believe, 'The River Revellers.' A show of hands will decide. For?"

Up went Barry's hand. Dan Kester's hand followed, more slowly, as he eyed the damaged canoe. Four other hands went up at intervals.

"Against?" demanded Mr. Nevison. Basil Hopkins' hand shot up—and five others.

"A draw!" shouted someone. "That means the test is washed out!"

Rita's heart sank into her shoes. She met Barry's gaze, a choking lump in her throat.

"Just a minute!" said Barry quickly. He turned to Mr. Nevison. "In case of a draw, sir, you have a casting vote!"

Rita caught in her breath sharply as she met the young sports master's quizzical glance. He pursed his lips thoughtfully, glancing from the damaged canoe to the tense little group of girls. He seemed to be weighing some problem as everyone waited in suspense.

"I think," he said quietly, "that my vote goes to the girls. Rita—you win!"

A broken cheer of relief went up from the girls, and Barry grabbed Rita's hand, shaking it warmly.

She flashed him a smiling glance, though her eyes were smarting. Then gratefully she turned to the young sports master.

"Mr. Nevison," she breathed, "I—I don't know how to thank you—"

"Don't thank me," rejoined the young sports master with a smile. "Your team did splendidly—in spite of the unfortunate accident. We'll say no more about that—or the previous mishaps. I suggest we all forget them and celebrate this auspicious occasion. Supposing we all adjourn there now—to talk things over?"

A laughing cheer greeted his announcement, as the whole crowd trooped after him to the school tuckshop.

"Isn't he a wizard master!" exclaimed Barry enthusiastically, as he escorted Rita into the pleasant café adjoining the shop. "I told you he'd back us up—though you didn't believe me, at first."

"I do, now, Barry!" breathed Rita, her eyes shining. "I think he's a real sport!"

Just then Mr. Nevison came towards them, carrying a tray of glasses foaming with ginger-pop and lemonade.

"Here you are!" he said, his dark eyes gleaming quizzically. "Let's quench our thirsts in a toast—to the inauguration of the River Revellers!"

Laughing, he held out a glass—and Rita, meeting his challenging glance, clinked her own glass against it.

Then her eager smile was frozen on her lips—and the blood drained from her face. Her eyes wide with horror, she was staring at the young sports master's wrist.

Under his sleeve where his wrist-watch had been, was now just the faint mark of the strap—and a white zigzag scar!

With an effort, Rita bit back a cry. It was the same curious, distinctive mark she had seen on the wrist of the sinister figure in the boathouse last night!

It seems impossible that the popular sports-master could be the secret enemy! And yet—what about that scar? Don't miss the further chapters of this splendid serial in next week's **GIRLS' CRYSTAL**.