

GIRLS' CRYSTAL^{3D}

Week
Ending
Dec. 29th,
1945.

AND "THE SCHOOLGIRL"



Delightedly Mary Ainslie Accepted The Unexpected Christmas Invitation—Little Realising The Strange Reception Which Awaited Her At The Manor—By ANNE GILMORE

THE MYSTERY INVITATION

"CHRISTMAS!" sighed Mary Ainslie wistfully. "What fun all those people are going to have!"

She stood at the window of the solitary room she rented in Bayswater, London. The window overlooked one of the busy shopping quarters—particularly busy on this pre-Christmas Saturday noonday. A smoky mist, against which the shop windows glowed warmly, enveloped the thoroughfare, and in and out of the shops tramped smiling people, armed with bags, baskets, and parcels. Somewhere a radio was broadcasting "Good King Wenceslas," and across the road at the bus stop, an anxious mother was trying agitatedly to prevent her small boy from bouncing a brightly coloured rubber ball into the gutter.

Christmas! How all these people were looking forward to it! If only she could, too, thought Mary.

Here she was, in this one room of the dull boarding-house. Here, without a friend of her own age, with nobody who cared a thing in the world for her.

Mary sighed. She had no parents like those other girls and boys. No one would invite her to a party; no one with whom she could even talk. Half the guests at the boarding-house had already gone away for the holiday; the others, like herself, were left to their own devices. Mary stirred restlessly. If only someone would invite her somewhere! But that just wouldn't happen, she told herself.

"Oh, well," Mary sighed, and her deep blue eyes clouded with sadness, "I—I'll have to make the best of it, I suppose!"

She turned away, biting her lip. If only she

had parents—some relative! But she had none—no one at all to whom she could turn, except the kindly but old Mrs. Marryat. It was Mrs. Marryat who kept the boarding-house, who had looked after her, and found her a job at the box-making factory near by, ever since her mother and father had been killed in the raids of 1940.

There was a knock on the door. Glad of any diversion, Mary called "Come in!" But the momentary hope in her eyes died when she saw the kindly, buxom form of Mrs. Marryat.

"The postman's just come, and he's left this for you, Mary," she said. "Looks as if somebody's sent you a Christmas card."

She held an envelope in her hand, and Mary, thinking of the girls with whom she worked in the factory, took it. Mrs. Marryat smiled at her, and withdrew as Mary pulled the flap of the envelope open. And then she stared.

For it was not a Christmas card the envelope contained.

She stared at it more closely, bewilderedly.

"Mr. James Upton, of Upton Tor Manor, Rivershill, Devonshire, requests the pleasure of the company of Miss Mary Ainslie at his Christmas celebration party, December 23rd-29th inclusive."

"An—an invitation!" Mary stuttered. "To—to me!"

An invitation—yes, neatly printed in red, except for her own name, which was written in ink in a bold, characterful hand. But—

Who was Mr. Upton? Mary had never heard of him in her life. Where was Upton Tor Manor? It sounded a grand and imposing place—the home, obviously, of a rich man. Oh, this couldn't be for her. And yet—there was her

name. Here on the envelope, in the same handwriting, was her address. The invitation was a complete mystery.

But it was a mystery which immediately set her eyes dancing. There could be no mistake that the invitation had been meant for her—but who was the mysterious host?

"Well, why not go and find out?" Mary demanded of herself.

She knew at once that that was her firm intention. Without realising it, she found herself feverishly fumbling in her handbag.

"Four pounds," she said, and blessed the factory which had given its employees a double week's salary as a Christmas season gift. "Mary, you're going away for Christmas after all!"

She was all excitement now. Gone was the forlorn, heavy-hearted girl who, two minutes before, had been staring out of the window in the mist-filled Bayswater street. Now Mary became a bundle of excited activity, hardly giving herself time to think.

In ten minutes she had packed the belongings she felt necessary for such a stay; in a quarter of an hour she was kissing a hurried and breathless good-bye to an astounded but pleased Mrs. Marryat. An hour later she was sitting in a crowded train, thirty shillings only of her treasured four pounds left, now that she had bought her return ticket, and, still feeling herself the centre of a delightful dream, was speeding through a whitened countryside on her way to—Devonshire.

It was five o'clock when she alighted at Rivershill Station, to find then that Upton Tor Manor was four miles away. A taximan told her he would take her there for six shillings, and Mary, recklessly festive now, hired the cab at once. Bowling out of the town, she spotted a florist's shop, its windows gay and bright with chrysanthemums.

The thought came to her: "There must be a hostess at such a party. And I'm going without a present, so—what about some flowers?"

She bought the flowers—fifteen shillings' worth of them. More eager and excited than she had ever been in her life, she sat impatiently in the cab as it bowled on through the snowbound countryside. It was growing dark now, and the snow had stopped falling, but the softly covered hills and valleys to right and left, and the dark green little woods that grew out of them, seemed to Mary like some enchanted fairyland. It was all too good to be true! Mary felt like some character in a fairy-tale now as she compared her lot with the Cinderella of the morning who had so envied those Bayswater shoppers.

"Oh, I do hope there's no mistake!" she breathed.

And then ahead she saw Upton Tor Manor, and her eyes sparkled. It was long, low, and rambling, covered with a dark, bushy creeper, etched here and there with white, with warm, honey-coloured lights pouring from the quaint, old-fashioned, diamond-paned windows. She loved it on sight.

"Thank you!" she said breathlessly to the taxi-driver, when at last he had halted at the door. "Here is your fare—and two shillings to wish you a happy Christmas. Er—do you know Mr. Upton?" she inquired, as, with a smile, he pocketed the money.

"I do, miss—and I tell you're real lucky to be one of his guests," the driver said. "Mr. Upton likes young people, and he's got a house full of 'em this Christmas. Though I do hear," he added cautiously, "that he won't be able to join his party till Christmas Day."

"Oh?" Mary said questioningly.

"He's in London on business," the taximan said. "But that won't make no difference, miss. Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins—their's his butler and housekeeper—are past masters at entertaining, and they're in charge while the master's away. I wish I were you!" he added, as he slipped in the clutch. "Good-night,

miss, and—I'm sure you'll have it—a right merry Christmas!"

She laughed as she watched him depart, reassured and heartened by his words. Then, delightedly, she went towards the house, flowers and case in hand, and strode up to the door.

The sound of voices came to her ears—laughing voices, boys' and girls' voices, which showed that the party was already in full swing. Through the near-by window she caught sight of a huge Christmas-tree, all gleaming with coloured lights, and burdened with parcels and with presents. Oh, this was going to be lovely!

She rang the bell and waited, tingling at the thought of the gaiety to come, of the friends she was going to make.

Then—footsteps, voices behind the door. The door opened.

A rush of warm, welcoming air poured out to meet her. With a sudden reminder that she was ravenously hungry, she sniffed the fragrant scent of cooking meat. She glimpsed for a moment a great hall, gaily decorated. Then she found people confronting her.

One, a woman of middle age, hair primly pushed back. The other a man in black with white shirt and cuffs. She saw the woman peering at her.

"Yes?" she asked, her voice holding a question. "This is Upton Tor Manor."

"I know," Mary responded joyfully. "Are you Mrs. Hawkins?"

"That's right. This is my husband, Mr. Hawkins, who's looking after the Manor till Mr. Upton comes back. But who might you be, miss?"

Mary knew the first stab of real alarm when she saw blank unresponsiveness on their faces as she gave her name. The two looked at each other and shook their heads.

"I'm sorry, miss," the woman said. "But no one of that name is expected here. There's no Mary Ainslie on my list."

"But—" And Mary's heart was suddenly frantic. "But I am invited, you know. I am. Look"—and frantically searching in her bag, she pulled out the invitation card—"there's my invitation."

The two examined it. Then the woman regarded Mary strangely.

"There's still a mistake," she said firmly. "Nobody of your name is expected. I don't know how you got that card, but all I can tell you is that you've no right to it. And so"—she caught the door—"good-night, miss!"

And while Mary, feeling the whole world crashing about her ears, stood there in utter dismay, the great door firmly closed. There was a thud as it fell into place and as the key turned in the lock on the other side.

Mary remained numb, frozen, every emotion seeming suddenly dead within her. So this—this was the end of her dream. This, the climax to the joyous adventure, so full of promise. She had travelled two hundred miles, and spent all but seven shillings of her money without even being allowed to step inside Upton Tor Manor.

And this was—Christmas!

THE BOY WHO INTERVENED



THERE was a sob in her throat as she turned towards the gates. There was ice in her heart where a minute before had glowed the promise of Christmas excitement.

Now what was she to do—she with only a return ticket to London, seven shillings in her purse, and a dreary four-mile plod through deep snow in darkness before she could reach Rivershill Station?

There was only one possible answer to that

question. Go back—go back to the Bayswater boarding-house to spend Christmas alone.

"Well," she thought, "I suppose I asked for it. Anyway, I wish I hadn't spent all my money. I could at least have gone to a show, perhaps to a restaurant for a meal or two—perhaps a dance. Now—"

She looked at the bunch of chrysanthemums in her hands. Fifteen shillings—fifteen shillings' worth of disappointment. In the sudden disappointment she could have thrown them away, but something stopped her. She didn't want those now—but Mrs. Marryat would be glad of them.

She reached the Manor gates. With vague hope that she might find herself on a bus route she was pulling them open, when there was a soft step in the snow behind her.

"Just a minute, Miss Ainslie!" a voice said. She turned, to see the good-looking face of a boy of her own age. A nice face, a striking face with its dark penetrating eyes, its firm chin. And the smile which suddenly flashed out at her was so friendly that she found her heart melting.

"I'm Tony—Tony Upton," he said. "Nephew of Mr. Upton. I heard—" He broke off. "You're Mary Ainslie, aren't you?" She liked his voice; she liked the interested note in it.

"Yes," she said. "I'm Mary Ainslie. Though"—with a smile—"I feel more like one of the Babes in the Wood now. Tell me, Tony! This is Christmas, isn't it?"

"Why, of course," he said, with a stare. "Why?"

"I had an idea it might be April the First," Mary said. "Somebody's been making an awful fool of me."

"In what way?" She told him then. She showed him the invitation card which she still carried in its envelope. He frowned.

"But this is one of uncle's invitation cards all right," he said quickly. "And the fact that its postmark is Rivershill, shows it comes from here. Anyway, it's nonsense to turn you away like this," he said indignantly. "You're coming back—"

She felt a glow of hope for a moment. Then she looked at him.

"But, Mrs. Hawkins—"
"Mrs. Hawkins, after all, is only the housekeeper," he said quietly. "I'm Mr. Upton's nephew, and I'm taking responsibility. You've been invited to spend Christmas at the Manor, and that's where you are going to spend it. And I hope," he added, in a burst of sincerity, "it's going to be the happiest Christmas you've ever had."

Mary smiled. With a grin Tony picked up her bag, with his free hand caught her arm and led her back to the house. When he rang the bell the door opened at once. Again it was Mrs. Hawkins who stood there.

"Thanks, Mrs. Hawkins," Tony said pleasantly. "This way, Mary."

"Master Tony," Mrs. Hawkins protested, "this girl—"

"She's my guest," Tony said firmly. "But—but she's not on the list of guests, and—"

"I've invited her. That's good enough," the boy retorted. "Miss Ainslie will stop, Mrs. Hawkins."

"But—but where am I going to put her? Every room's taken—"

"She can have my room. I'll occupy uncle's till he comes back on Christmas Day."

He spoke firmly, masterfully. More than ever Mary felt her admiration growing. But also she felt uncomfortable, felt just a little like an interloper, and rather sorry now for the humiliation she saw on the housekeeper's face.

"I know," Mary said quickly, "I'll leave tomorrow morning."

"Oh, no!" It was Mrs. Hawkins who shook

her head—vigorously. "If Master Tony says you're to stay—then you'll stay, Miss Ainslie, and I hope you enjoy yourself. I'm sure I'm sorry—very sorry, but, after all, I have my orders to carry out—"

"Of course," Mary said impulsively, and now felt thoroughly sorry for the worried-looking woman. "And I'm sorry, too—for being so much trouble. But still"—she laughed—"as you're my hostess, let's forget it, shall we? Look," she added, "I've brought these flowers for you!"

She was rewarded by the look of gratitude on the woman's face. She felt happier then. "I'll look after Miss Ainslie, Mrs. Hawkins," Tony said. "I shall need to shift a few things out of my room."

Mrs. Hawkins beamed with every evidence of pleasure. Mary revised her opinion of her as she followed her young host up the stairs.

"Well, there we are," he said cheerfully, after he had crammed his own things into a suitcase. "The room is yours now, Mary. I'll see you downstairs at dinner."

"Thanks a lot," Mary laughed, and felt hungry at the mere thought of a meal.

She had conquered that feeling that she was an interloper now. She was going to enjoy herself. She was going to have a real Christmas, after all.

Quickly she washed and changed her dress, and was tucking a clean handkerchief into her belt when the dinner-gong downstairs boomed out.

"Goody! I'm hungry," she smiled.

She tripped out of her room. The house was full of chatter and laughing voices. Stepping down the stairs into the great galleried hall, her eyes shone as she saw the great log fire roaring at the other end, saw the long, gleaming tables, the happy guests. But most of all they sparkled at sight of the great Christmas-tree, gay with twinkling fairy lamps, and each bough laden with strings of parcels and presents.

But half-way down the stairs she stopped dead.

Just below her, in the hall, was a waste-paper basket. And in that basket reposed the bunch of precious chrysanthemums which had cost her fifteen shillings of her hard-earned money. At the same moment she heard two girls underneath her, talking.

"Fancy having the nerve to force her way in after she'd been told to go. But I always did say these London girls had got the cheek of monkeys. Better watch what you leave around while she's about."

Mary's heart missed a beat at that. They were talking about her.

She felt suddenly chill. Uncertainty once more rushed upon her, and, with uncertainty that horrible feeling of not being wanted. But when eventually she reached the foot of the stairs there was Tony, his face cheery, and eagerly he caught her hand. Then, before she knew it, he had drawn her forward. And while she stood still, dazed, and a little wondering, he kissed her soundly on the cheeks.

"Tony!" she choked.

"Look above you," he chuckled. And she looked. Then she laughed. For above was hanging a great bunch of mistletoe. "Nice old English custom at Christmas," he said cheerily. "Whoops, how I love Christmas! But come forward, fair one, and let me introduce you to our other guests."

He led her into the middle of the room. She was introduced. All received her politely, some even warmly, a few others a little aloofly. But she knew by their faces that the story of her arrival had gone round. In spite of cheery Tony's protection, she could not altogether conquer that feeling that she was looked upon with some suspicion.

Had Mrs. Hawkins told them about her? she wondered. She glanced again, suppressing a wince, at the crumpled chrysanthemums in the basket. They seemed to tell a story.

Mrs. Hawkins, though pretending to be sorry, still resented her arrival.

But she felt better after dinner—a really excellent meal with Tony sitting beside her, and began to feel a thaw in the atmosphere, that at last she was thoroughly going to enjoy herself. And when, during coffee in the lounge, a huge hamper was brought in and proved to contain the costumes ordered for the charades—a late arrival owing to the weather—her excitement began to mount.

"But no trying on now," Tony warned. "These are for the Christmas Eve celebrations. Mrs. Hawkins, will you check them, please?"

Mrs. Hawkins did, reeling off the names from the list she kept in her pocket. There were whoops of delight from each guest as his or her name was mentioned.

"I'm afraid there's none for Miss Ainslie," the housekeeper said.

"Oh, never mind! We'll order another," Tony said.

"I'm afraid you can't. The shop will be closed," Mrs. Hawkins reminded him.

Mary felt disappointed. But she did her best not to show it.

"Well, never mind," she said. "I'll watch—or help the others. It'll be fun, whatever I do."

"Spoken like a Briton!" Tony applauded enthusiastically.

"I'm sure it's nice of you," Mrs. Hawkins said. "Now"—she glanced quickly at the new guest—"would you be nicer still, Miss Ainslie, and help me upstairs with this hamper to the changing-room, so that I can hang them up? A girl is more use than a boy on a job like this."

"With pleasure," Mary said. And she did, only too glad to help, but with an odd feeling that Mrs. Hawkins had picked upon her for this task in order to demonstrate that she still did not regard her as one of the guests.

But in the changing-room, with the dainty dresses smoothed out and hung in the long cupboard there, the housekeeper was all friendliness and cordiality. She asked questions—many questions—about Mary's life in London, and expressed the greatest sympathy when Mary told her how she had lost her parents.

"And now you work in a factory," she said, "and live in a boarding-house. Rather different from most of the girls here, isn't it? Most of them come from ever such nice families, you know."

"I'm sure they do," Mary said, a little shortly.

"Punny, wasn't it?" Mrs. Hawkins ruminatingly resumed. "How you got that invitation, I mean. I wonder who could have sent it?"

"I wonder," Mary said, and left it at that. But that puzzle was exercising most of Mary's mind. All the time she felt, somehow, that she would have been much happier if she knew. It was amazing that, for no apparent reason, she should have been invited to such a festivity as this. Disconcerting that her invitation should have turned out to be a mystery.

None of the guests downstairs had she even remotely recognised. None of them seemed to have come from London or anywhere near London. And yet the invitation had certainly come from this house—a house of which she had never heard before, owned by a man she most certainly did not know. What was the secret of it all? What was behind the mystery?

By now there were great sounds of revelry coming from the hall below. A radiogram was playing music, and from the laughing cries and the shuffling of feet it was obvious that the guests had swung well into the Christmas fun. Eagerly she hurried downstairs again, to notice that sofas and chairs had been pushed back to the walls, that the

floor had been cleared. A right merry "Lambeth Walk" was in progress. She hurried her steps.

Then she stopped. No one seemed to notice her. Tony was not there, and no inviting arm was held out to link her into the chain of dancers.

With a little sigh Mary sank into a near-by chair—a big, engulfing easy-chair which immediately enfolded her and almost hid her from sight. She had no heart at the moment for the fun that was going on, but she saw a jug of cordial and a glass on the table near to her hand, and poured out a drink.

There was a great deal of merriment in the hall now. The guests were preparing to play "Oranges and Lemons," and as Mary watched she saw them lining up. Then with a crash the radio music blared out once more, and the game got going.

And she—she was left out of it—lonely, unwanted, away from it all. She felt very small, very forlorn all at once.

She did not see the hand that suddenly sneaked round the door above her. She did not see the fingers that pressed the electric switch above her head. But suddenly she bounded to her feet as the lights went out, as the hall was plunged into darkness, only relieved by the red glow of the two great fires. A cry of consternation and dismay went up from everyone. Suddenly she felt a figure rush past her, heard a clink at her table as her glass was overturned. Instantly she swung round, hand outstretched.

Her fingers touched something—warm, coarse cloth. Then the intruder had vanished, and at the same moment:

Crash!
The noise of splintering glass echoed in the hall. It was followed by a girl's cry—by a shriek—and in a flash Mary guessed what had happened. The unknown intruder— whoever it was—had seized the bottle from her table, and had thrown it among the dancers.

Almost as soon as that realisation dawned upon her, another figure rushed past her, the lights were switched on. And there was a cry of horror from the assembled guests.

For there, in the middle of the floor, lay the jug that had been on the table beside Mary. It was smashed to atoms. And near it were half a dozen girls, all angrily eyeing the stains that had splashed on to their pretty frocks.

Furiously the girl Phyl rushed towards Mary.

"You cat! You—you hateful thing!" she panted. "You did that—because you thought we didn't want you in this party!"

"I didn't!" denied Mary.

"Yes, you did. You know you did! Where's Mrs. Hawkins?" she shrieked.

"I'm here." And the housekeeper, her face the picture of mystification, came through the door. "Wha— My gracious!" she cried in horror. "Who's done this?"

"She did!"

"I didn't."

But the voices were all against Mary. Mrs. Hawkins' lips compressed.

"I'm afraid," she said, with a return to her old hostility, "this is taking matters too far. Miss Ainslie—much too far. Against my better judgment I listened to Master Tony, but now—well, now, I really must put my foot down. I'm in charge here, after all. I cannot see my guests disturbed in this—this alarming manner. I am afraid, Miss Ainslie, that I must request you to go. There is a train from the station at midnight."

"But Miss Ainslie will not be catching it," said a quiet voice. "I am the head of the house while my uncle is away. Mrs. Hawkins. And I say—definitely—that Mary stays!"

And Tony Upton strolled on to the scene.

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The CASE OF THE FRIGHTENED GIRL

JUNE BECOMES SUSPICIOUS

JUNE GAYNOR, niece of Noel Raymond, the famous detective, and now his partner, was thrilled when she received her first clients, a girl named Mildred Henley, and her uncle.

Mildred asked June if she would guard a package for her. June agreed, and locked it in a cupboard.

During the night an attempt was made to steal the parcel by a black-bearded man wearing Indian clothes who called himself the Green Rajah.

Next morning she received a letter from Uncle Noel, who was up north, asking her to go up there to take over his case. To June's surprise he said that he was staying at Glen Hall, which was tenanted by a solicitor named James Henley. June realised that the fugitive girl who had handed her the mystery package must be the daughter of Noel's host. She received a further surprise when she learnt that the case she was to take over from Noel Raymond concerned a spectral Green Rajah who was supposed to haunt a small island in the lake adjacent to Glen Hall.

Hardly had June finished reading Noel's letter than she received a telephone call from Mildred Henley, asking June to bring the mystery package to Hyde Park.

WHAT was the strange mystery which surrounded the heavy package which had been left in her custody?

Again and again June asked herself that question as she went to keep her strange appointment with Mildred Henley.

Seated in the back of the taxi, the heavy parcel resting on her knees, she shook her head in bewilderment. The secret was beyond her.

"But Mildred's bound to explain—especially when she learns that I'm going to stay at her home," she told herself, and June frowned again as she remembered the letter in which Noel Raymond had urged her to catch the late morning train to Cumberland on the morrow.

It was certainly a strange coincidence that the ghost who was supposed to haunt the

small island opposite the Henley's home was known as the "Green Rajah."

"I'll bet anything that the rascal who's playing ghost and the Green Rajah who tried to steal this package are one and the same," June murmured.

She tensed excitedly, for the taxi had entered Hyde Park and was drawing to a halt at the side of one of the main thoroughfares which intersected the green playing fields.

"This is as near as I can go, miss," the driver announced, turning and regarding her through the open window which divided the cab. "That's the rose garden over there." He pointed towards a winding, narrow path. "If you cut through those trees you'll see it right in front of you."

"Thanks," said June, as she opened the door and descended. "Wait for me, please. I shan't be long."

And she went hurrying up the path. The carefully tended rose garden was deserted. Beyond it was the big shelter where Mildred had arranged to meet the girl detective. Her heart beating with eager expectancy, June approached it, to peer through the dark doorway.

"Are you there, Mildred?" she called, and then involuntarily recoiled.

A figure had loomed out of the darkness, but it was not the figure of the girl she had expected to see, but the figure of a man—a short, rather sparely built man, immaculately dressed and wearing tinted, horn-rimmed spectacles.

Mildred's uncle!

June regarded him in dismay. Although he seemed a genial, inoffensive person, there was something about him which made her vaguely mistrustful.

"Where's Mildred?" she asked. "I came to meet her."

He nodded.

"I know, but unfortunately she's been called away."

"Called away? Why, it was only this afternoon that she phoned me."

"I know—but the telegram came immediately afterwards—from her father at Glen Hall. She had to dash off in order to catch the four o'clock train home, so she asked me to come along to see you instead." His voice was

smooth and plausible, and he smiled with approval at the package June was clutching. "You have the parcel safe, I see," he added. "Splendid! I knew we could rely on you. Now, if you will be good enough to hand it over, I will pay you your fee and our transaction will be at an end."

He took a step forward, but June made no attempt to hand over the package. Her obvious reluctance made the man frown.

"What's the matter, my dear?" he asked. June bit her lip, for how could she explain the troubled thoughts in her mind?

"N-nothing," she stammered. "It's only that Mildred gave me strict instructions to hand this package to no one except herself."

Roger Standish turned away, nonplussed by June's behaviour. He paced a few steps, then returned to confront her. June faced him determinedly. She had promised to give the parcel to Mildred only—and she would keep her promise. Roger Standish spoke.

"Of course. The contents of that parcel are exceedingly valuable, and, as I explained the other day, we have reason to believe that some rascal is trying to steal them. So, naturally, my niece didn't want any risks to be taken. But, of course, her warning doesn't apply to me."

He laughed jovially, as if amused by the very suggestion, and stretched out his hand as if to take the heavy package from her.

June, feeling that her suspicions were ridiculous, was about to hand it over when, abruptly, she froze.

For something on one of the fingers of that outstretched hand seemed to attract her like a magnet.

It was a signet ring, and the green seal carved on it was that of a bearded Indian!

June caught in her breath and her heart began to pound.

The ring was identical with the one worn by the Green Rajah who had broken into Noel Raymond's flat the previous night!

An amazing suspicion occurred to her.

Had that sinister Eastern figure really been Mildred's uncle in disguise? Had the man persuaded his niece to visit Noel Raymond's flat because he had known that the famous detective was away from home and because he had thought it would be a simple task to steal the mystery package from a young girl like June?

As these startling thoughts flitted through June's mind, she heard the man give an impatient snort.

"Come on, my dear—hand it over, please. I am in a hurry."

But June's mind was made up now, and resolutely her grip on the parcel tightened.

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I can't give it to you," she said. "Mildred entrusted this package to me, and I intend to return it to her personally."

"But—" The man's surprised ejaculation trailed away and he gaped at her, as if completely nonplussed by the girl detective's firm attitude, then he gave an angry frown. "Are you daring to suggest that I am not to be trusted with my niece's property?" he cried. "Don't you realise who I am? Roger Standish, of India. Look, here is my card—"

As he spoke he pulled a card-case out of his pocket. With it came something else—the end of a green cloth, which agitatedly he stuffed back out of sight. But not before June had recognised it.

The end of a green turban!

Then her amazing suspicion had been right. Mildred's uncle was the Green Rajah! Why he should seek to rob his niece of the mystery package June did not know, but of one thing she was sure—on no account should he gain possession of the package if she could help it.

Resolutely the girl detective faced Roger Standish.

SURPRISE ON SURPRISE



"IT'S no good arguing," she declared. "I'm not going to hand it over."

And hurriedly she turned and went running back down the path. From behind her came an agitated shout: "Wait! Just a moment!" But June's only response was to race on faster than ever. Still clutching the heavy package in both arms, she ran for the waiting taxi, and not until she was safely inside it again did she heave a sigh of relief.

As the taxi drove off she peered back through the rear window, but there was no sign of the self-named Roger Standish. She turned her attention to the package. Now, more than ever she was certain that its contents were of great value. But what exactly was the explanation of the strange mystery which surrounded it? She frowned puzzledly, then, as she realised that by this time tomorrow she would be on her way to Glen Hall, she smiled with satisfaction.

"When I see Mildred, she's bound to explain," she murmured.

On returning to Noel Raymond's flat June handed the package to Parker, giving him strict instructions not to let it out of his sight.

Although she knew she could rely on him implicitly, nevertheless, she knew no peace of mind until she was aboard the Cumberland train next day, with the package locked in one of the two suitcases on the rack in front of her.

It was late afternoon before she reached the wayside halt of Tarnbridge. Suitcase in each hand, she emerged from the tiny booking-hall and looked around eagerly for Noel Raymond had promised to meet her. But, to her disappointment, there was no sign of her uncle. Drawn up in the station yard, however, was a closed car with a uniformed chauffeur standing beside it. Seeing her, the man approached and gave an inquiring salute.

"Are you Miss Gaynor?" he asked. June nodded and the chauffeur smiled. "I'm from the Hall, miss," he said. "Your uncle has been called away, so the master asked me to meet you."

"Called away?" June echoed in surprise. "Where?"

"Northern Ireland, I believe, miss. A telegram came for Mr. Raymond this morning, and he caught the after-lunch plane. But if you will give me your luggage, miss—"

"It's all right Turner. I'll see to it," broke in another voice, and from the shadow of the booking-hall emerged a slim, boyish figure whom June had noticed get off the London train.

"Very good, sir." The chauffeur went walking back to the car and the unknown boy turned to the surprised June with a grin.

"So you are also joining the Henleys' party," he commented. "Then we'd better get acquainted. My name's Linton—Jack Linton. Did I hear Turner call you Miss Gaynor?"

June nodded. "Yes—that's my name—June Gaynor," she said.

The boy gave what, to her, seemed to be a startled gasp.

"Don't say you're Noel Raymond's niece!" he exclaimed.

His vehemence both astonished and amused June.

"Yes—why do you sound so dismayed?" she asked. "I promise I won't go delving into your secret past!" she added jokingly.

He laughed, but June had the feeling that, for some reason, he was still disturbed at learning her identity.

"No, I didn't mean that, of course," he said

hastily. "But—you haven't come up here professionally, have you?" he asked.

June gave another nod.

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have," she admitted. "Apparently some ghostly intruder is marring the Henleys' party, and it's my business to track down the Green Rajah!"

"You've come to capture the Green Rajah!" Again she thought she detected a startled note in his voice, then he laughed. "But that's absurd, you know. This Green Rajah chappie is only a stupid practical joker. You wouldn't want to waste time on a trivial matter like that."

June shot him a sharp glance. Was he trying to put her off going to Glen Hall? But what possible reason could he have for not wanting her to investigate the mystery of the ghost of Temple Isle?

"Trivial or not, I'm going to get to the bottom of it," she declared, and made to pick up her two cases, but he seized them first.

"Allow me," he said, and then, as he lifted the case containing the mystery package, he turned and regarded her quizzically. "I say, this is jolly heavy," he commented. "What have you got in it—gold bars?"

His voice was light and joking, but June thought she detected a keen gleam in his eyes, and her feeling that this curly-headed, cheery youth was somehow connected with the mystery deepened.

She did not reply to his question, and he did not press it, for without further comment he carried the cases across to the car, put them in the back then helped her aboard.

When they had both settled themselves in the rear seat, the chauffeur let in the clutch and the car went gliding down the incline. As it turned into a picturesque road, with rocky hills on one side and a shimmering lake on the other, Jack Linton began to chat pleasantly, and, despite herself, June was soon forgetting her vague suspicions. There was no doubt about it, he was a very attractive, likeable youth.

"You'll enjoy yourself at Glen Hall," he said suddenly. "Everyone there is a grand sport, and none of the party is taking this Green Rajah seriously. So you take a tip from me—forget the blighter. Make up your mind to have a good time."

There he was again, hinting that she should not investigate the mystery. What was his purpose? Could it be that he was in league with the Green Rajah? Had he any connection with Roger Standish?

June was still trying to make up her mind on those points when the car turned off the road and went shooting through a pair of open iron gates and up a broad carriage drive. Before her June saw a red-brick, ivy-clad house, fronted by a stone terrace overlooking the lake. Involuntarily her gaze went to the water, and she felt her pulses racing as, about two hundred yards from the shore, she saw a small tree-covered island, with a strangely Oriental-looking building rising from the centre.

"Is that Temple Isle?" she asked.

Jack Linton nodded.

"Yes—it takes its name from that Indian temple there." He pointed: "The original owner of Glen Hall had it built on the island. He used it as a museum. But you won't find anything of interest there. As for that ghost it—" He broke off as the car rolled to a standstill. "But here we are," he announced with that grin which June found strangely attractive. "You go on ahead and introduce yourself. I'll look after your luggage."

But June shook her head. She did not mean to let the suitcase containing the mystery package out of her sight for a single moment.

"Thank you all the same, but I'll take my cases with me," she said.

"But—"

"Please!" And firmly she took them from him.

He frowned, then grinned.

"Frightened I'm going to pinch them?" he laughed. "Well, I suppose detectives can't help being suspicious, but I can assure you I had no such intention." He held the door open for her, then, when she had descended, he grinned again. "If you don't mind, I'll get Turner to drive me on to the garage. I want to see if my mo'-bike's turned up," he added. "Cheerio. See you later."

As the car slid forward, June, case in each hand, mounted the stone steps to the front door and rang the bell. Her summons was answered not by a servant, but by a plump, jovial man with twinkling eyes and a sandy moustache, whom she correctly guessed to be James Henley, the solicitor, who was to be her host.

"Come in, my dear—come in," he said warmly. "I am very pleased to see you. It's a pity that your uncle was called away, but I will do my best to make you feel at home."

Taking her cases from her, he led the way into the spacious, oak-panelled hall, then turned and regarded her in good-natured surprise.

"I must say you look a little young to be a detective," he declared, "but you look very capable, too, if I may say so. I am sure you will be able to end our worries for us. Actually, both your uncle and I are convinced that this ghost is only some stupid practical joker, but it's very upsetting all the same. However, we will talk about that later," he concluded. "You have had a long journey. You would like a wash and something to eat, I'm sure. I'll just introduce you to my daughter, and then you shall be shown to your room. I'm sure—"

He broke off as footsteps clattered on the uncarpeted staircase at the far end of the hall. Looking round, June saw a fair-haired, rather plump girl, with laughing eyes and a cheerful smile, in the act of descending the stairs.

Mr. Henley hurried forward and grasped the girl by the hand.

"Come and be introduced," he invited. "This is Miss June Gaynor, the famous young detective. She's going to solve our little mystery for us." He beamed at June then indicated the fair-haired girl with a plump hand. "Meet my daughter," he said.

June blinked incredulously, and for a moment she could not believe her own eyes, for the girl who was now smilingly holding out her hand was nothing like the Mildred Henley who had consulted her a couple of days ago.

"How d'you do?" she stammered, shaking the proffered hand, then turned to the jovial Mr. Henley. "But you have another daughter, haven't you?" she asked.

To her amazement he shook his head. June's eyes opened wider than ever.

"But—but this isn't Mildred, is it?" she gasped. "Not Mildred Henley!"

They both regarded her in puzzled astonishment.

"But of course I am." Mildred's bewilderment found relief in a laugh. "I am sorry if I'm a disappointment."

"Oh, it's not that. It's—" June's voice trailed away. She found it difficult to explain what she meant. This unexpected discovery had come as a staggering shock. Why should the frightened girl who had entrusted her with the mystery package have assumed another girl's name? Conscious that the Henleys were still regarding her curiously, she flushed in confusion. "I'm sorry to be so silly, but I met a girl the other day from here whom I thought was Mildred Henley, but it's obvious I must have got the name wrong," she said hurriedly.

"Yes, that must be it," Mr. Henley said easily. "Anyhow, no harm done."

June nodded, but her head was whirling. For a moment she could only stand there in silent bewilderment. The mystery had taken an amazing turn. Apparently the frightened girl had deliberately deceived her. She had not only given a false name, but also a false address.

But why? What had been her motive? And—June gave another gasp as she remembered the valuable package locked in her suitcase—what on earth was she to do with that? Now it would be impossible to return it to its rightful owner!

ON TEMPLE ISLAND



"If—if you don't mind, I'd like to go to my room," June murmured at last, anxious to be on her own to think this whole bewildering situation over.

"Of course! You must be tired." With a friendly smile, Mildred picked up the two cases. "Come with me. There's

time for you to have a nice rest before dinner." She led the way upstairs and along a wide corridor, to a charmingly furnished room at the front, the deep windows of which overlooked the grounds and gave a glimpse of the lake beyond.

After Mildred had seen that June had everything she wanted she departed, quietly closing the door behind her. Left alone, June's first action was to unlock her bigger case and take out the heavy brown-paper parcel. In perplexity she surveyed it.

"What am I going to do with it?" she asked herself. "And what does it all mean?"

Frowning, she seated herself on the edge of the bed and reviewed all the queer things that had happened since the frightened girl had first entered her office.

She remembered now that it had been Roger Standish who had first called the girl Mildred Henley, and in Hyde Park he had deliberately stated that his niece had returned to Glen Hall in response to an urgent telegram from her father. That, obviously, had been a lie, and the brazen way in which the man had deceived her made June mistrust him more than ever. She felt certain now that he was a rascal, and that there was some definite connection between him and the Green Rajah. Certainly both were out to get hold of the mystery parcel.

There was Jack Linton, too—where did he fit into this bewildering puzzle? That he did have some connection with the mystery of the parcel June felt positive.

Helplessly she shook her head.

"If only Uncle Noel were here!" she exclaimed. "He'd be able to advise me. As it is—"

Breaking off, she stretched out a tentative hand towards the intriguing parcel, feeling an almost unbearable temptation to open it. Then she remembered that desperate look of pleading in the frightened girl's eyes; remembered her half-promise to respect her secret.

"No—it wouldn't be right to disobey a client's instructions, except as a last resort," she told herself. "And that girl is a client, even if she has deceived me. I'll tackle the mystery from another angle. The key to it lies here, in Glen Hall—the appearance of the Green Rajah proves that. So if only I can run him to earth—" Again she broke off, and jumping to her feet, gave a nod. "Yes, that's what I'll do—concentrate on the ghost. Meanwhile, I'll hide the package. There are too many people interested in it for my peace of mind."

Speculatively she looked around the room. To the right of the window stood a stout-looking cupboard with a key in the lock but June was suspicious of cupboards, no matter how strongly they were constructed. She knew from experience how easily they could be

opened. Then, as she saw that the apartment was centrally heated, her gaze went to the big, old-fashioned fireplace. A fire screen hid the empty grate, and as she saw it, she gave a little nod of satisfaction.

"It'll be safe there," she murmured. "No one will dream of looking for it in the grate."

Carrying the heavy package across to the fireplace, she placed it behind the bars, then replaced the lacquered screen. Next she washed and changed into her prettiest frock. On going downstairs, she saw the rest of the guests in the hall, chatting in groups while awaiting the dinner gong to sound.

Mildred was not present, but Jack Linton was there, and at sight of the girl detective he came hurrying forward, his handsome face wreathed in a grin.

"Come and meet the crowd!" he invited. "This"—indicating a thick-set boy with a bulldog face—"is Ted Brandish. These"—grinning across at a couple of girls who looked exactly alike—"are the Smith twins. Dorothy is the one with the blue thingummybob in her hair," he added vaguely. "The other one's Anne. We make them wear distinguishing ornaments, otherwise we'd never tell them apart. And this solemn-looking goof is Goggles, otherwise Richard Montgomery."

One by one he introduced the youthful guests, and soon June was the centre of a happy, high-spirited crowd. As Jack had told her earlier, the house-party was a jolly collection of boys and girls, and they quickly made June feel thoroughly at home.

Knowing that she had come up to Cumberland specially to investigate the mystery ghost, they quickly gave her all the facts. It seemed that the Henleys had only lived at Glen Hall a few months. It had originally been owned by a Colonel Raikes, and Mr. Henley, who had been his solicitor, was occupying the place until his dead client's estate could be wound up.

Colonel Raikes had lived most of his life in India, and he had had the Indian temple built on the near-by island to house the large number of curios he had brought back to England with him. According to rumour, some of those curios had been obtained from an Indian temple and, resenting his possession of them, a bearded Indian, known as the Green Rajah, had travelled all the way to England to try to get them back. But the Green Rajah was said to have met with a fatal accident on the island while attempting to carry out his secret mission.

"And ever since," explained Billie Murdoch, a burly, cheerful youth with plump, red cheeks, "this Green Rajah chappie's supposed to haunt the island. Of course, personally, I think it's a lot of rot."

"Oh, it isn't!" put in one of the Smith twins. "Tons of people have seen him, and no one round here will ever set foot on the island."

"Yes—and some of dad's older guests have caught a glimpse of him, too," added Mildred Henley, at that moment joining the group. "They were scared stiff. That's why dad sent for you, June. Oh, I'm glad you've come! It'll be grand fun tracking down this spook."

"Rather!" grinned Ted Brandish, and, rather to June's surprise, Jack Linton gave a nod of agreement.

At that moment the gong boomed out, summoning them to the big dining-hall, still gay with Christmas decorations. Dinner was jolly meal, and after it was over Jack Linton, his handsome face flushed with excitement, suddenly looked around.

"I say, what about introducing our detective friend to his Highness?" he suggested.

June regarded him in astonishment. "You mean, we should try to track down the Green Rajah to-night?" she cried.

(Please turn to page 232.)



THE SKATING GIRL'S MYSTERY MASCOT

THE MISSING BALET DRESS

SHEILA MAYNE lived with her family at the little Canadian town of Juniper Bend.

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

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

M. Cuvier, an antique dealer, came into possession of a bear totem necklet resembling Sheila's.

Corinne bought it, but not before M. Cuvier had made tin copies of it, and given them to Sheila, who hid them in her ballet dress in her dressing-room at the theatre where the Bluebirds were putting on their ice ballet.

The following day—Christmas Day—when Sheila went to take the dress from her wardrobe, it was gone, and with it the important copies of the bear totem!

AS she stood there, baffled and dismayed by the disappearance of her costume, Sheila heard a faint movement in the corridor outside. Instantly she rushed to the door and turned the handle, but to her astonishment the door refused to move. Someone had turned the key which she had left in the outside of the lock, making her a prisoner.

Angrily she thumped on the panels. "Let me out! Let me out!" she called. But there came no response.

The rink men were too far away and too busy to hear the noise, and after another series of futile thumps on the door she sank down in despair on a chair.

"What am I going to do?" she asked herself. "And who—"

She broke off and jumped to her feet in surprise, for without warning, almost miraculously it seemed to her, the door had swung open! As she stared in incredulous delight, into the room stepped a fur-clad figure carrying a box.

"Red Eagle!" gasped Sheila in delight. The young Redskin regarded her in surprise. "Sheila!" he exclaimed. "What is the matter with my little paleface friend?"

By MARIE MATHESON

Quickly Sheila explained what had happened, and he frowned.

"So the door was locked deliberately," he commented. "That is bad medicine, but I did not realise you were a prisoner. I brought you a gift of flowers." Smilingly he held out the box. "The doorman let me in, and when I found the door locked I turned the key. I expected to find the room empty and meant to leave the flowers for you. But who could have locked you in?"

Sheila's lips set fiercely. "It must have been Corinne. No one else would be so mean," she declared. "It was a spiteful trick to make me let down the show, but, Red Eagle"—agitatedly she caught at his arm—"what am I going to do? That missing costume is essential for the last scene. Unless I find it I can't possibly appear. Oh, what a horrid thing Corinne is!" she finished angrily. "She's jealous because I was a success last night. And—" She broke off again as she remembered the vital copies of the bear totem which she had hidden in the pocket of the missing costume. "Corinne will have got those, too," she said, with a groan.

Red Eagle smiled reassuringly. "The antique dealer will still have the original mould," he pointed out. "It will be easy for you to have another copy made. As for Corinne, one day she will over-reach herself. I have managed to get back the portrait of my ancestor which was stolen, and when I have examined it thoroughly I will return it to whom it belongs."

Sheila looked up at him. "I know where you found it, Red Eagle. Corinne's house! It was burgled yesterday."

Red Eagle smiled and nodded. "You are right," he said. "Karl Olsen was very cunning, but I discovered that it was Corinne who collected the parcel from the railroad depot. So I entered her house, but I took nothing but the portrait. Even so, I was nearly caught. I am afraid Red Eagle is now really an outlaw."

She gave a gasp of alarm, all at once fearful for his safety.

"You mean the police are after you?" she faltered. "Then you must go. Quickly—please! After the ballet is over to-morrow we must meet and have a talk. Send me a message to Chinook Lodge."

"But—your dress?" he inquired anxiously.
"Yes, my dress," she repeated in dismay.
"There's so little time, I'll go and see Mavis. I'll get someone to help. I'm not going to let the show down, whatever happens. But, please go, Red Eagle! I'd never forgive myself if you were caught!"

"Red Eagle is fleet and these furs make a good disguise," he stated. "But I will do as you wish. May the good spirits show you a way to find the dress."

He pressed her hand, then slipped out through the door. Sheila sighed, buried her face among the bouquet he had brought, then glanced at her watch.

How time raced. She was already late for going back to the Poynters. They would be wondering what had happened to her.

Then suddenly she stood up, giving vent to a cry of excitement and delight.

"Maybe I can manage yet," she exclaimed. "But I must hurry. If my guess is right I can still find a costume that will suit the finale. Oh, why didn't I think of M. Cuvier before? If anyone can help me, he can. I'm sure of it."

A few minutes later Sheila was outside, and after a brief phone-call to the Poynter household to say she would not be home for a meal, but would be going straight to the ice rink, she turned from the phone-box and hurried to the shop of the little antique-dealer.

She was remembering his words of the previous night.

"You are so like my little Celeste. Even your frock is like the one I have kept all these years in remembrance."

If she could obtain the loan of that frock for the last evening of the ballet, then Corinne's latest attempt to discredit her in the eyes of the Bluebirds would be squashed.

A SURPRISE FOR CORINNE



THE little shop was closed when Sheila gained it. She hammered at the door for quite a while knowing that each passing moment meant so much.

"Oh, I wonder where he lives?" she murmured agitatedly.

She inquired of a passer-by and learnt that Cuvier's house was three doors along the street. She ran there and knocked. A moment later a severe-looking woman dressed in black, peered out at her.

"Mademoiselle desirés?" she queried.
"Monsieur Cuvier, I must see him at once," she panted. "It is very important."

The woman looked at her suspiciously.
"M'sieur Cuvier is dressing for the ballet," she intimated. "Then he takes dinner. What name shall I say?"

"Tell him it was the girl who looked like Celeste," said Sheila desperately.

The woman stared, then closed the door. Somehow Sheila felt she was almost hostile. Nearly ten minutes passed, then the door opened and the woman beckoned to her.

"You are to come in," she said.

Sheila entered. It was a bright little house, though old-fashioned. French prints hung on the walls; burnished Louis Quinze warming-pans decorated the hall. The doors were all curtained to keep out draughts. There was an old-time savour about everything.

"M'sieur is upstairs in his bed-room," said the woman. "I will show you."

Sheila mounted the stairs and knocked on the door the woman indicated. A somewhat angry voice bade her enter, and she found herself face to face with a new Monsieur Cuvier, one who struggled to fit a collar to his dress shirt.

"Ma'moiselle, forgive me," panted the little old man. "As I grow older my collars grow smaller. Antoinette, my housekeeper, is a fool and cannot aid me. She has big, fat fingers—fingers like carrots!"

He moved towards her, perspiring, anxious.
"Perhaps you could help an old man?" he panted. "I do all this in honour of you."

Sheila raised her hands to aid him. In a few deft movements she had the stud in place, and the old antique-dealer sat down, gasping in gratitude.

"Now, my little one," he said softly, "what can I do to help you?"

Sheila started to tell him, slowly at first, then excitedly as she emphasised what the loss of time would mean, or the disaster it would be for the whole ballet if she could not appear in her special costume in the finale.

"I see," said M. Cuvier slowly. "You have been robbed. You came to me to borrow the gown of Celeste, who was so like you."

He rose and paced the floor, much moved. Then he whirled and smiled at her.

"I will fetch it for you, my dear. You shall try it on and see if it fits. It is indeed a shame that anything so beautiful should have been laid aside so long, unworn, in a dusty box full of soft tissue-paper."

He patted her shoulder and disappeared. When he returned he was carrying an old-fashioned dress-box and was explaining rapidly to Antoinette, who followed at his heels, speaking in rapid French.

Laying the box on the table, the antique-dealer started to open it. Delicately he removed the tissue-paper, then gently withdrew what it covered and held it up in front of Sheila.

It was a low-necked dress of rose satin, beautifully brocaded and cut in the style of the seventeenth century. It had apparently been seldom worn and it smelt of lavender.

Sheila, looking at it, drew an astonished breath.

"Why—why, it—it's like a dream!" she said, and stepped forward, touching it delicately, admiring the little ribbons, the embroidery, the filmy, flesh-coloured lace that formed a bodice beneath the low-cut neck.

"I am happy, so happy, Mees Sheila. I knew you would like it. If it fits, and you can wear it to-night, you will bring back what I treasure in my heart. My Celeste herself, if she were here, would want you to wear it, too."

He patted her shoulder.
"Go into the other room with Antoinette and try it on, ma petite!" he urged. "Then we shall see."

"Oh, thank you so much!" whispered Sheila. She followed the woman who had taken the box and the dress. There was a petticoat to match and Sheila put that on first. Then the gown. Antoinette, with deft fingers, got busy with pins here and there, then stepped back.

The hardness went out of her face and she raised her hands and covered her eyes for a moment before speaking.

"You are wonderful," she said at last. "So like my little lady, M. Cuvier's daughter. He will be delighted."

M. Cuvier was, and showed it in many ways. When Sheila refused to stay and dine with him he insisted she should take a cup of coffee at least, and some cake.

Sheila knew she had very little time now. But she sat down, so grateful to him, and was refreshed by the snack. Then, with the dress already packed by Antoinette, she bade a grateful farewell and left.

She had only half an hour now before the show was due to start. When she gained the ice rink most of the company were there, including Mavis.

"Oh, Sheila, where on earth have you been all this time, dear?" cried Mavis, running forward. "I was wondering whatever could keep you. I rang the nursing home, but you hadn't been there again since early afternoon."

Sheila flushed. She saw that the eyes of several of the other girls were upon her, including Corinne.

"Oh, I was just visiting a friend!" she apologised.

"Ha, we can guess who he was!" sniggered

Corinne. "Can't we, girls? When Sheila comes this mysterious stuff and won't give a direct answer the answer's Red Eagle, outlaw and thief."

Mavis Poynter went red and she whirled upon Sheila.

"That isn't true, is it, Sheila?" she gasped. "You haven't been meeting that rascal, have you?"

Looking round, Sheila saw that many of the Bluebirds were regarding her suspiciously, almost angrily.

"No, I didn't go to meet Red Eagle. I have been to see my friend Monsieur Cuvier."

As she spoke she opened the box she carried and carefully pulled out the gown.

"Is this the frock I wore in the finale last night?" she demanded of them all.

"No," said Mavis; "it's different. More old-fashioned—pre-tier. Where did you get it?"

"I'll explain," said Sheila bitterly. "When I called in at the rink here during the afternoon I found that my own dress had been stolen. I searched everywhere, but could not find it. It meant that someone had taken it out of spite."

They crowded round her, except Corinne, who stood aside, still sneering.

"I couldn't let the show down," went on Sheila. "I had to get a frock like the missing one. Fortunately, Monsieur Cuvier was able to help me. This is a frock his daughter wore long ago when she sang in opera in Montreal. He gave it to me so that I could still keep my place in the ballet. There's only one person who had any real interest in displacing me and who could have taken the original frock—and that's Corinne Lefevre!"

Corinne fell back, protesting, before Sheila's accusing eyes.

"That's a—a fib," she gasped weakly. "I know nothing about it. How dare you accuse me!"

"Because I'm certain that what I say is true!" retorted Sheila.

At that moment there came a knock on the door.

"That'll be Larry," said Mabel Rowan. "Stop quarrelling, you two. We don't want him to think there's anything wrong. It'll upset him."

There was a rush to separate the rivals, and a moment later Larry was admitted.

"All ready, girls?" he asked. "We start in twelve minutes. Why, Sheila, you're not in costume yet! Hurry, for goodness' sake!"

Sheila dashed off to her dressing-room and pulled on her first costume. She placed Monsieur Cuvier's frock in the cupboard, locked it, and took the key with her; then picked up her skating boots and left, locking the dressing-room door behind her.

Not again would she leave anything to chance.

This was the last night of the show. She must try to excel her previous performance, for to-night everybody of importance in Juniper would be present.

Larry ran about, checking everyone, seeing that they were in their proper places. The band started up the overture, and beyond the curtain that shut off the stage end of the rink the Bluebirds waited.

The overture ceased, there was a short silence, then, as the orchestra struck up again, the curtain went up. As it did so Sheila heard from somewhere in the balcony a news-boy shouting:

"Late final! Juniper 'Evening Journal'! Redskin arrested in connection with Lefevre robbery! Final hockey results! Late final!"

Sheila's heart seemed to turn to ice.

Could it be that Red Eagle had not managed to make his escape? Was he now under arrest?

It was a terrible thought, but even as it hammered on her brain the first line of skaters glided forward.

Sheila moved into line automatically. If Red Eagle had been captured by the police, what could she do now? The idea of unravelling the

mystery all by herself seemed an impossible one.

The Christmas Day show looked like becoming the most unhappy evening of her life.

FOUND IN THE PLUM PUDDING



"SHEILA, what's the matter with you?" Mavis Poynter's voice cut into Sheila's troubled thoughts.

"Wake up, there! Don't you realise the show's started?"

With an effort Sheila forced herself to concentrate on her skating. She could not let her

chums down. The ice ballet

must come before her private worries.

The rink was even more densely packed than on the first night. But it was gayer and brighter than ever with Christmas decorations, and a huge Christmas-tree, loaded down with presents from admirers, stood at one corner of the stage.

Jack Nelson's turn as Santa Claus made an even bigger hit this evening. His sled was piled with small souvenirs, which he sent whizzing all over the auditorium, where there was an instant scramble to catch them.

He received a thunderous cheer when he completed his turn, and then, after another rousing chorus by the whole company, the orchestra struck up in readiness for the skating exhibition of Sheila and Larry.

As she stood waiting in the wings Sheila saw that Larry was regarding her in concern.

"Well, Sheila, it's we two again," he whispered. "You did swell last time, but you're looking tired. Or is it worried?"

"Oh, I'll be O.K., thanks, Larry!" she told him.

They started off, and were just about to commence the final dance piece when Sheila saw two cinema cameras at work in the wings.

"Oh, Larry," she cried, "someone's filming us! What does it mean?"

"Dunno," said Larry. "They weren't here last night; but, then, they may be for a topical newsreel. Unless—unless—"

"Unless what?" she asked as skilfully they skated on.

"Unless Lee Farrell's heard about this show and has sent someone down to take some pictures," suggested Larry, his own face glowing at the mere idea. "Oh, Sheila, that would be a thrill! Now, let's make it wizard!"

They skated as if inspired, and at the end the applause was simply deafening. When they had made their bow, Larry made for the cameramen.

"Who're you from?" he asked. "Hollywood?"

"No; Hamilton Film Agency. We got orders to get up here and take some snaps of this show. It's pretty smart work for a bunch of youngsters," replied one of the men. "But I couldn't say who gave the order. 'Cept that some stills from these will be all over the U.S. and Canada to-morrow night and so on. A-t-a-b-o-y, keep it up!"

The Bluebirds didn't need telling. They were all keyed up to give of their very best and the cheers and applause which rewarded each item in the programme showed that the audience appreciated their efforts.

At the conclusion of the ballet the mayor came upon the stage. He thanked the Bluebirds, praised their skating, and then proceeded to distribute the presents from the Christmas-tree. When eventually all the excitement was over and Sheila, flushed and happy, went to change, she found her father and Jerry and Gracie outside her dressing-room.

"You'll have to take these home for me, please," said Sheila, handing over the presents and pointing to the bouquets. "I'll want some of them for Toddles to-morrow. I shan't be home until early morning because we've got a private Christmas party to celebrate the ballet. Oh, is that an evening paper, daddy?"

THE CASE OF THE FRIGHTENED GIRL

(Continued from page 228.)

He nodded, and her sense of bewilderment deepened. When Jack had first learnt of what had brought her to Glen Hall he had seemed dismayed—almost as if, for some strange reason, he did not wish her to investigate the mystery. How was his present change of attitude to be explained?

Blandly the boy regarded her. "The Green Rajah always shows himself round about nine, so there's tons of time," he suggested. "Tell you what, let's go across to the island early and lay an ambush. Then we're bound to catch him if he shows up. What do you say, June?"

June's eyes were sparkling, and eagerly all the other young guests approved the idea.

So it was arranged. After dinner hats and coats were donned, and eagerly the boys and girls set out for the landing-stage at the far end of the grounds. Here were moored a number of boats, and, crowding into three of them, the party set off.

When the island was reached the boats were beached, then, led by Jack and Mildred, the party of ghost-hunters made their way through a maze of great boulders until at last the garishly ornamented, bulbous-towered temple loomed in sight. Jack raised his hand, motioning them all to halt.

"According to legend, his Nibs always appears through that door," he said, pointing across at the brass-studded front door of the temple, "so I suggest we form a ring round the whole place. There're plenty of trees and rocks behind which we can hide."

Billie Murdoch nodded. "Good idea," he said. "Come on, let's scatter."

In ones and twos the boys and girls went off. June, still intrigued by Jack Linton, made to follow him, but Billie Murdoch caught her by the arm.

"You come with me," he urged. "We'll get a grand-stand view from over there."

A little reluctantly June allowed herself to be led away, and soon she and the plump Billie were crouching behind a great jagged boulder that stood on the right of the path which led to the temple. The others also hid themselves, and a tense, expectant hush settled over the island.

Slowly the minutes ticked away. It was deathly quiet on the island. Eerie, moving shadows glided over the silver ground. Black and forbidding, the temple loomed before them. Then, at last, from across the lake a church clock began to chime.

Nine o'clock!
Involuntarily June felt her muscles tensing. In breathless expectancy she crouched there, her fascinated gaze fixed on that brass-studded door ahead. At her side she could hear Billie breathing heavily, and then, suddenly, her heart gave a leap.

What was that?
The unexpected sound came not from the direction of the temple, but from the near-by lake. As she listened she frowned in surprise. For that faint, stealthy noise sounded like oars creaking in rowlocks. But who could be rowing across the lake at this time of night?

At that moment the boy at her side gave a startled cry.

"Look! Oh, jumping mackerel, look!" he panted, and, leaping to his feet, Billie pointed with an awe-struck, quivering hand.

What can be the cause of Billie's excitement? Can it be that he has seen the Green Rajah? Be sure not to miss a word of next Friday's splendid instalment of this exciting serial.

He nodded and handed it to her. Only when they had gone did Sheila dare look at it. The news about the arrest was brief. The report stated that a suspicious Red Indian had been taken into custody, but gave no name.

It might be Red Eagle—on the other hand, it might not. Somehow she would find out. In any case, he could not be charged till after Boxing Day. Worried and anxious as she was about Red Eagle, she could not excuse herself from the Bluebirds' Christmas celebration without arousing Corinne's suspicion. Perhaps—

Her thoughts were snapped as the dressing-room door burst open and Mavis danced in. Hastily Sheila thrust the newspaper out of sight.

"Aren't you ready yet, Sheila?" she cried. "Just coming," Sheila answered, and whirled her friend from the room.

Now, still costumed, the Bluebirds piled into sleighs for their special Christmas dinner at the Hermitage, Juniper's famous little restaurant. Everyone was so happy and jolly, Sheila could not help feeling so, too.

The show had been a success in every way, including financially. They were sure now to make a big hit at the ice carnival when Lee Farrell came.

"Take your seats, boys and girls," ordered Larry. "Get the crackers going and let's all be merry and bright."

They sat down at a long, beautifully decorated table. Sheila found she was directly opposite Corinne. But Corinne seemed quite gay and reconciled now. If she felt at all spiteful about Sheila she concealed it.

The crackers banged and they all sat and joked till the first course came in. Soup was followed by turkey, and then four of the boys retired to carry in a huge Christmas pudding. At that moment one of the guests slipped out of the room. It was Karl Olsen; but he returned a few minutes later as the pudding was being served out.

"Now, don't start hunting for sixpences and things till we can all start at once," cried Larry. "Everyone served now?"

A shout satisfied him.

"Then to it, lucky ones!" laughed Larry. Sheila took dessertspoon and fork and started on hers. Everyone was doing the same, joking and laughing, when suddenly, for no known reason, the lights suddenly went out.

"Breakdown, surely!" called Jack Nelson. "But there are candles round the Christmas cake on the sideboard. I'll get them."

There was about two minutes of darkness and then the lights went on, so the candles were not needed. Now shouts came on all sides. Some had found sixpences, others the usual lucky emblems. On all sides there were compliments and laughter.

Sheila, poking, had disinterred a sixpence, and after eating a piece of pudding she again encountered something hard. She unearched it to see that it was a ring wrapped in tissue-paper.

"Oh, isn't this a lovely one!" she cried. "It looks like a ruby and two diamonds, but, of course, they're just paste."

She held it up, on her finger, for all to see. Instantly Corinne Lefevre jumped up.

"That's my ring!" she cried. "It was amongst the things stolen when that rascally Redskin broke into our house the other day!" Her words created a sensation, and Corinne was quick to follow it up.

"Fancy you having to pretend you found it in the plum pudding!" she exclaimed. "You must have got it from Red Eagle. This is the last straw. I don't want to make scandal for the club or call in the police, but I want my ring back. And if Sheila isn't kicked out of the club, I and my friends will leave and form a new one of our own!"

What a shock this is for the Christmas-revelling Bluebirds! How will they react to Corinne's startling accusation? See next Friday's dramatic instalment.

The MERRYMAKERS at College



By DAPHNE GRAYSON

THE CLUE IN THE PICTURE

"LINDA, you couldn't have brought us to a lovelier place for Christmas," said Sally Warner.

"Hear, hear!" came in a chorus from her three chums, and as they descended from the train, Fay Manners, Don Weston and Johnny Weston looked about them with enthusiasm.

The view from the wayside station certainly was magnificent. On every side the snow-capped peaks of the Rockies towered to the sky, and along the snow-covered road outside the station could be seen horse-drawn sleighs.

The Merry-makers had travelled all the way from California to spend Christmas at the mountain chalet owned by Linda Carson's uncle, and Linda's eyes sparkled as she saw how delighted they were.

"Let's get the luggage, then we'll see who's come to meet us," she said.

Don and Johnny volunteered to collect the baggage, and so the three girls walked on ahead. Sally was first to pass through the barrier, instantly to be hailed by a homely looking man.

"Ah, there you are, Miss Linda!" he cried. "Your uncle told me to meet you and your friends. I'm his houseman—Mullet's the name."

Sally laughed at his mistake.

"Oh, I'm not Linda," she said. "I'm only one of her friends. This is Mr. Carson's niece."

"Sorry, miss." The man looked a trifle taken aback, but he smiled pleasantly at the real Linda and touched his hat. "This way, please," he said. "I have a sleigh outside."

He led the way outside, and Linda gave a disappointed start, as she saw the two horses harnessed to the waiting sleigh.

"Hallo, where are Susie and Socks?" she asked.

"Pardon, miss?" asked Mullet, looking blank.

"Susie and Socks—uncle's two-in-hand," explained Linda. "Aren't they at the house?"

"No, miss—not at Moose Gap. Your uncle thought these two would be enough, as the chalet is only opened for a short spell at Christmas and is closed for the rest of the year."

Linda nodded, but she still looked a little puzzled as she climbed into the sleigh. When the boys had stored away the luggage, they also got aboard, and with a tinkle of bells the sleigh glided forward. Up the steep, winding

mountain road it went, and suddenly Linda gave a cry of surprise as it turned off to the left.

"Surely it's straight on for the bridge at Moose Gap!" she exclaimed.

Mullet looked puzzled.

"Bridge, miss?" he said. "You are mistaken. There's no bridge at Moose Gap. This is the only way to the chalet."

Linda laughed.

"I must have mixed up what uncle told me," she said. "Of course, I've never been here before."

Nothing more was said, but as they swept over the snow, Sally looked covertly at the man on the driving seat. She felt that there was something a little queer about his behaviour.

Five minutes later there came an excited cry from the chums as before them loomed a charming, turreted house, rising like a picture out of the snow, and on its green gates a name-plate bearing the seasonable title: Noel Chalet.

Standing in the open doorway was a motherly looking woman. This was Mrs. Mullet, who acted as housekeeper, and she gave the Merry-makers a hearty welcome, quickly making them feel at home.

The Merry-makers were shown to their rooms, and Fay and Sally went with Linda to help her unpack. As she opened her trunk, Linda gazed with shining eyes across at the other two girls.

"Uncle won't join us until Christmas Eve, you know," she said. "But I know we're going to have simply a wizard time."

As she spoke she took out of the trunk a small oil painting. This was the valuable Debroy picture which her uncle had lent her to copy, and which while they were at Roxburgh College, where they were all students, had been mysteriously lost for two days. Seeing the painting reminded Sally of what had happened.

"Do you know, Linda," she said, "I'm sure we wronged Nat Piggot for once. It couldn't have been he who hid that picture for a jape."

"Of course it was Piggot!" retorted Fay.

"Even his own house-mates knew it."

"Rex Walpole, for one," Linda reminded her.

"Rex Walpole was just as upset as I was, Sally, although he is in Piggot's house."

"Yet I'm sure he was wrong, and so were we," insisted Sally.

She gazed perplexedly at the painting Linda

was holding, which represented a girl sitting at a spinning-wheel.

"You see," she went on, "whoever took it, hid it in the Santa Claus sack. But Piggot didn't know where that sack was. Not the real sack. He couldn't have known, otherwise he wouldn't have made a chump of himself by opening the spoof sack in front of the coil. So it proves it wasn't Piggot, but someone else who hid it. Look out, Linda, you'll drop it!" She broke off with a jump as Linda's fingers slipped along the edge of the heavy frame.

Click! And a section of the frame sprung open. A small secret panel was revealed inside the woodwork.

"Wh-what—" And then Sally gave a cry. "Look! There's something written there! A message!"

Fay and Linda stared bewilderedly at the message, written in tiny letters inside the secret panel of the picture frame:

"Look in the turret room of Noel Chalet. The silver cup holds the secret."

The words spun wildly before Sally's vision.

"Come on, let's show the boys!"

In a few moments they were in the boys' room, explaining what had happened.

"Then it's here! In this chalet! A secret!" Don cried excitedly.

"In the silver cup!" Johnny's gaze leapt to the painting. "Look, the cup's in the picture. On the shelf over the spinning-wheel!" he burst out. "Don't you see? The room in this picture is the turret room itself. Look at the little tower windows. That room's here, in this very house, and the silver cup on the shelf must be the cup that holds the secret!"

It was plain that the room in the picture was the turret room. The chums could see the background of mountains faintly etched behind the tiny windows.

"I'm sure now it wasn't Piggot who smuggled this picture away from you, Linda," insisted Sally, breathless now with conviction. "It was no japer at all. It was someone who was after the secret!"

For a moment the chums stared incredulously at Sally, then slowly Linda nodded.

"I believe you're right, Sally," she said. "We've got to find the secret mentioned on the picture frame—and we've also got to discover who tried to steal it at Roxburgh College."

"Rather!" cried Don. "Come on, let's go in search of that turret room."

"No, let's unpack first," said Sally. "We'll all meet downstairs in ten minutes."

This being agreed, the Merrymakers separated. Sally, alone in her room, carefully put away her clothes, also the Christmas presents she had brought with her. She opened another drawer of the old-fashioned chest of drawers, and then smiled as she saw lying there an old photograph album. Curiously she began to flick over the pages, and then suddenly she stopped, staring in surprise, for on one of the pages was the photograph of a bridge, and underneath were written the words: "THE BRIDGE, MOOSE GAP."

"Then—then Mullet fibbed to Linda!" Sally exclaimed. "He deliberately told her there wasn't a bridge, but here's a photograph of it. Now what on earth could have been his motive?"

She shook her head in bewilderment, and putting the book back in the drawer, went downstairs. Linda must be told of her strange discovery, she decided. Linda, Don and the others were in the hall, and after a quick look around to satisfy herself that neither of the Mulletts were about, Sally beckoned to her chums.

"There's something I want to show you," she said in a low voice. "Come upstairs to my room."

Her mysterious manner intrigued them, and wonderingly they followed her up.

"What is it, Sally?" Linda asked.

"It's about that bridge you expected to cross at Moose Gap."

"But there isn't a bridge. Mullet said so."

"Yes, there is!" Sally said in suppressed excitement, leading them into her room and softly closing the door. "Mullet fibbed. Look!"

She put her hand in the drawer as she spoke, and took out the album. Then a startled gasp rose to her lips. For where, when she had left the room, had lain the photo of the bridge, was now blank space. The photo had been taken out—it was gone!

A STARTLING DISCOVERY



"THE bridge!" Sally gasped, staring incredulously. "It's missing!"

"We know it's missing!" grinned Johnny, winking at Don. "Come on, Sally, no more jokes like that. Let's—"

"But it's not a joke," Sally burst in impatiently. "I tell

you the bridge exists—there was a photo of it in this album—and it's been taken out while I went down to fetch you."

Linda alone looked earnestly at Sally. "I knew I couldn't have been mistaken—uncle distinctly said there was a bridge, and Mullet denied it," she said in worried perplexity. "Do—do you think Mullet has taken the photo out?"

"Well"—and Sally paused helplessly—"there's only himself and Mrs. Mullet in the house besides ourselves."

"But why—" Linda gave it up. "Queer!" she muttered.

Don grabbed both her and Sally eagerly by the arms.

"Come on, let's get on with the real mystery!" he urged them. "The mystery of the turret room."

He and Johnny propelled the girls swiftly downstairs, where they found Mrs. Mullet preparing a sumptuous spread for them in the dining-room.

"Whoops! Look at these mince-pies!" Sally cried, remembering how hungry she was. "Mrs. Mullet, you're going to spoil us with kindness!" she laughed, then paused. "Before we tuck in, will you tell us something? Where's the turret room?"

"The turret room," repeated Mrs. Mullet, looking puzzled. "But there's no such room in the house, Miss Sally!" was her astonishing answer. "We have a small tower, a turret, as we call it, but there's no room there."

"Wh-what?" The boys looked as stupefied now as Sally.

Mrs. Mullet laughed and led them through the hall, opening a narrow door at the end.

"Here's the turret," she said, "but it's nothing more than a staircase, as you see. Pr'aps you'd like to go up?"

Sally & Co. stared speechlessly. All they could see was a spiral staircase curling upward. They climbed it, round and round, till they came to another door at the top.

Sally pushed it open, and stepped out on to the open roof of the house.

"Th-there's no turret room at all. That message in the painting was a spoof!" In Johnny's voice was a note of disappointment.

Sally gazed around her in bewilderment. Had the room in the picture existed only in the artist's imagination? Had the secret of the cup, described in the message, also existed only in the writer's imagination?

"Come on, Sally, we've been sold a pup!" Don's rueful laugh roused her. "Let's get some tea."

Sally followed him down the spiral stairs slowly at Linda's side.

"I say, Linda," she said softly, "your uncle lives at Colorado all the year round, doesn't he—while this house is closed up?"

"At Colorado, yes?" And Linda looked at her inquiringly.

"And Mullet and all the servants would be with him there? No one here?"

"No one at all—except at Christmas," nodded Linda. "Why, Sally?"

Sally shook her dark head.

"Oh, nothing!" she murmured. A vague idea was forming in Sally's mind. She said nothing about it to the others. But she put it to the test later that evening, after some hilarious fun hoisting up the decorations, in which Mr. and Mrs. Mullet watched smilingly from the door.

"I bags charades now!" Sally sang out, echoed enthusiastically by all the chums. "You'll join in, won't you, Mrs. Mullet? You and Mr. Mullet," she chuckled, "you'd better not say no, because we'll make you, anyhow!"

"But our place is the kitchen, you know," protested Mullet, yet looking highly pleased.

"Oh, go away with you, Arnold! If the young people want us, of course we'll play!" protested Mrs. Mullet, whose one delight, it seemed, was to keep everybody happy. "What do we have to do, Miss Sally?"

"Just dress up and act parts, the same as in theatricals," laughed Sally. "But first of all we'll want lots of costumes. Can you lend us some things, Mrs. Mullet?"

"Certainly, Miss Sally—you can choose anything you like out of my wardrobe," beamed Mrs. Mullet, and she took Sally to her room.

It was quite enough for Sally. Her suspicion was confirmed at one glance inside Mrs. Mullet's wardrobe. There on the pegs hung dresses for every season, and one of them was a summer frock, which still bore inside it the cleaners' label. The cleaners were a local firm at Denver, only five miles away.

What could it mean but that the Mulletts had been in this house the whole year. They had not newly arrived for Christmas. Could they be impostors?

"Take anything you want from here, my dear," Mrs. Mullet was saying with her indulgent smile. And then the door opened and her husband peered in, seeming to cast a searching glance towards Sally.

"Are you ready yet?" he asked quickly.

Sally smiled. "We're just coming," she said. She grabbed some clothes from the wardrobe, thanked Mrs. Mullet, and walked out. Mr. Mullet lingered behind to speak to his wife.

A chuckle from the boys greeted Sally as she rejoined them.

"We've solved the mystery of the turret room, Sally," explained Don lightly. "The picture was painted in this house—on the roof, in fact, and the artist invented the room just to make a colourful setting."

"Did Mullet tell you that?" Sally asked slowly.

"Yes. He and his wife were here when the artist painted the picture. It was last summer," said Don.

Sally's wits somersaulted. Was this the answer to her suspicions? Had she wronged the Mulletts? After all, they had been awfully good to them. Somehow she must make up for it—give them the happiest evening of their lives.

And there was no doubt whatsoever that she did. The Mulletts enjoyed themselves immensely, and everybody retired for the night in a happy, Christmasy frame of mind.

When the chums awoke next morning it was

to discover that during the night there had been a gentle fall of snow, which now lay, crisp and white, everywhere.


"It's just right for tobogganing," Linda cried when they were at breakfast. "I'll ask Mullet if there's any toboggans he can lend us, and—"

There was a step at the door, and Mr. Mullet came in with a tray of steaming coffee and corncakes.

"I'm sorry," he said earnestly, "but I'm afraid there'll be no tobogganing for you to-day. No hope of getting outdoors at all. We're snowed up!"

"Snowed up?" Sally & Co. echoed him in a daze.

"There's been a heavy snow slide," he explained in tones of grave warning. "All the passes are blocked. All the treacherous gaps and crevices are covered—not a safe footing anywhere. Mrs. Mullet has lit a big fire in



Wishing You A
VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS

To Co. Our Readers
From The Editor

Peter Langley	Gail Weston
Rayl Armitage	Daphne Grayson
Renee Frazer	Name Matheson
Heather Gandy	Euse Probyn
Aaan Maitland	Anne Gilmore
Enid Boyten	

the library, and made it nice and comfortable for you."

He set down the tray, and with a little gesture as if to convey to them that it was not his fault, he went out.

Johnny turned to the window, gazing out over the snow-covered scene.

"But there's no sign of a snow slide," he pointed out.

Sally didn't say much, but after breakfast she slipped unnoticed out through the front door. Her doubts of Mr. Mullet were rising again. She felt an unshakable conviction that there was no snow slide.

For perhaps a quarter of a mile she walked beyond the gate. The track was as clear as it had been yesterday. The gently falling snow had not even obliterated the trail of the sleigh. She turned back at last, flabbergasted.

Why should Mr. Mullet deliberately lie to them?

She turned, came back to the gate, and pushed it open. The name-plate wobbled under her hand. It seemed to have been newly nailed on, and rather hurriedly. One of the nails dropped out, and the plate swung down vertically, held by only a single nail.

Sally made to fix it right again, then stopped, eyes wide. For there was another name painted across the gate where the plate had covered it. "Loneway House," she read.

"Loneway House? But the name on the plate was Noel Chalet! How could the house have two names?"

In a sudden turmoil of enlightenment Sally rushed back to the house, and burst into the library, where her chums were disconsolately seated around the fire.

"Linda—everybody—listen!" Closing the door behind her, she told them breathlessly: "We're in the wrong house. This is not your uncle's house, Linda. And these Mullets are frauds!"

"S-Sally!"

"This is not Noel Chalet," repeated Sally firmly. "It's a place called Loneway House."

"Wh-what's given you this crazy idea, Sally?" stammered Don.

"The name's on the gate—Loneway House," Sally told him. "The other name has been nailed over it—a fake—put there by the Mullets—"

Don made a dash to the door before she could finish, meaning to verify that startling statement for himself. He wrenched at the knob—but nothing happened. He wrenched again, but only the panels rattled.

"The door—!" He fell back with a gasp. "The door's locked! We're locked in!"

OUTWITTING THE MULLETS



IN a moment the chums had rushed to his side. But it was true. They were locked in.

"This proves it!" panted Sally.

"It's Mullet's work—he must have been listening outside," guessed Johnny.

Don's eyes blazed. He wasted no more time, but whipped a jack-knife out of his pocket, wrenched open the marline-spike, and got to work on the lock.

"But—but I don't understand." Linda sounded confused. "Mullet brought us here, and you say it's the wrong house, Sally. Now he's locked us in. Why—why? What is his game, anyhow?"

Sally had been looking thoughtful.

"It's something to do with the picture—that painting of your uncle's, Linda!" she burst out now. "Someone at the coll, was after the secret. That secret's real. So is the turret room. But it's not in this house. That's why Mullet deceived us here."

"You mean—he's in league with the person at coll, whoever it was?" gasped Linda.

"Yes. A confederate! It's all part of the same plot," Sally said, convinced now that she was right, "to stop us getting hold of the secret, Linda. To cheat you and your uncle of whatever secret the silver cup holds—"

"Got it!" The triumphant cry came from the door, as, with a final twist of his knife, Don burst open the lock and wrenched open the door. Without more ado the chums rushed out into the hall, only to pull up abruptly at sight of Mr. Mullet confronting them, back to the front door. Mrs. Mullet beside him.

"We had to take precautions, my dears, for your safety," she said, smiling falsely.

"I assure you it is quite impossible to go out," stated Mullet calmly. "It is too dangerous. There may be another snow slide."

"We'll see about that!" cried Don, and then stopped.

A broad iron slat was padlocked right across the front door.

"All the doors and windows are sealed that way," Mr. Mullet told them, noticing Don's baffled gaze.

Sally stepped forward, facing Mullet with angry eyes.

"The house is not snowed up!" she accused him. "There's no danger outside. But you and Mrs. Mullet are playing some funny game. You're trying to keep us shut up in this house for—"

"For your safety," he interrupted smoothly. "Until the danger is cleared, in perhaps another day."

Sally drew a tense breath as Mullet and his wife, smiling smugly, withdrew to the kitchen.

It was sheer waste of time trying to escape. Every exit was sealed and padlocked.

"Except one!" Sally whispered to the others when they adjourned to the library. "There's one chance left. And I'm going to take it. But not yet. Not till we've got the pair well off their guard. Meanwhile—just in case it comes off—let's get our things ready for a quick getaway."

The Mullets heard nothing of Sally's whispered plan. All they heard were the furious chums going angrily about the house doing their packing, then a loud bumping as their trunks were bundled downstairs into the hall.

Then, after making sure that the Mullets were not about, Sally disappeared through the arched door of the turret. Softly she sped up the spiral staircase to the roof.

Heart thumping, she gazed down at the flat roof some twenty feet below. The pipe running down to that roof was slippery with ice and snow. Dared she risk it? But she must! There was no other way.

Sally drew a deep breath, and climbed over the edge of the roof, gripping at the iron gutterway. She felt with her feet, and found to her joy that under the snow the wall was trellised. Vines grew there in summer days. Slowly, carefully, she began lowering herself down the trellis work. All went well till she was half-way down. Then suddenly the trellis broke in her hand.

The wall seemed to shoot away from her. Sally had a horrible sensation of falling through space. Her limbs were doubled under her awaiting the fateful crash on the roof below.

Instead, a pleasant sinking sensation enveloped her, and she found herself reclining in six feet of snow.

Sally picked herself up, trembling with relief. She didn't bother to look for any more trellis. She stepped to the edge of the roof and jumped lightly down to the soft, snow-covered ground below.

Next moment she was dashing across to the stable. It took her only five minutes to harness the horses to the sleigh. Holding her hand firmly over the bells to silence them, she drove out across the grounds to the front of the house.

Once near the door, she released her hand and let the bells jingle merrily. Jumping down, she ran up to the door and gave the iron knocker a hearty thump.

From within she heard hasty, confused sounds. Evidently Mullet had not been expecting a caller. The padlock clicked hurriedly, and the iron bar rattled in its sockets. The door swung open.

"Wh-what the—"

Mullet just had time to recognise Sally. Only just. Then he was being rushed out into the snow, propelled by Don and Johnny who pushed him with all the weight of one of the packed trunks. That trunk struck Mullet like a battering-ram. He went rolling over in the snow, unable to stop himself, while Linda, Fay and the boys, luggage with them, leapt on the sleigh.

(Please turn to the back page.)



The Unwanted Guest at the CHRISTMAS PARTY

(Continued
from
page 224.)

TONY PLAYS FATHER CHRISTMAS



IN a moment he had made himself master of the situation. Quietly he stepped to Mary's side, and stood there as though protecting her. Mrs. Hawkins glared.

"Miss Ainslie is my guest" he announced. "You hear, Mrs. Hawkins?"

"I hear, but if your uncle

knows—"

"I'll answer to my uncle," Tony said crisply.

"But what about my frock?" Phyl glared. "What about the rest of the holiday? If she's going to be allowed to start throwing things around every time she feels bad tempered. Really, Tony—"

There was a murmur among the guests. One or two of them plainly were on Phyl's side. But Tony only turned to Mary.

"Did you throw that jug, Mary?"

"No."

"That's good enough!" Tony said briskly. "Mary, perhaps you'd like to come and have some roast chestnuts in the lounge with me?"

Mary didn't want roast chestnuts particularly. But most definitely she did want to be out of that room with all those puzzled, hostile faces staring at her. There was a murmur as Tony took her arm, and a decided sniff from Mrs. Hawkins as she flounced out of the room. Mary, gulping a little, felt glad of his nearness as he escorted her to the door.

"Sit down," he said gently, when they reached the deserted lounge. "Now, Mary, tell me about it."

She told him—what little she could. His eyes flickered slightly.

"And you've no idea who the figure was who passed?"

"None, except that it was rather a big person. And I don't think it was a girl or woman, because the clothing I touched was too coarse. But, Tony, why should anyone do a thing like that?"

He smiled at her.

"Do you mind if I explain that—later?" he asked gently. Abruptly he leaned forward. "Mary," he asked surprisingly, "do you happen to have a photograph of yourself?"

"Why, no!" she said surprised.

"A pity," he murmured. He looked at her again. "Do you mind if I ask you a question or two? I don't mean to be rude, of course, but—well, I'm interested. Mary, did you ever hear your parents speak of my uncle, or this house?"

"No," she told him. Mr. Upton and Upton Manor had been completely unknown names to her. "But why do you ask?" she added.

"Just curiosity," he smiled. "I'm a frightful quizzer, you know. Shall we go back now? It'll be fun having a dance together."

They went back into the lighted hall with its gay decorations, its glittering Christmas-trees, its roaring fires. Everybody was

dancing now, and as Tony whirled her on to the floor, Mary felt happy again.

It was fun, after all—despite that unpleasant, mysterious incident which had so marred the early part of the evening, despite the fact that she still couldn't be rid of that feeling that she was a sort of gatecrasher.

With a whirl the dance came to an end. A delightful buffet supper of sandwiches, fruits, and nuts, followed, and suddenly Tony got to his feet and made an announcement:

"Ladies and gentlemen—"

"Hurrah!" somebody cried.

"You know—or don't you?—probably don't—that the custom of the house on the day before Christmas Eve is the custom of the First Pick—meaning a pick from the Christmas-tree. As Mrs. Hawkins is acting hostess, she will perform the ceremony, so stand around, everyone, and get ready to grab."

There was an excited cheer. With a smile at Mary Tony disappeared, and immediately Mrs. Hawkins came in, looking rather self-conscious, but very festive with a Santa Claus hat perched on her greying head.

All eagerly clustered round as she stood in front of the Christmas-tree, with all its winking lights, and importantly produced a list from her pocket. She cleared her throat.

"Now will you all step forward as I call your names?" she said.

Her husband came in, carrying a pair of steps, and wearing a paper cap upon his head. Solemnly he placed the steps by the side of the tree; ponderously he mounted. And there was a breathless hush as Mrs. Hawkins called the first name—Phyllis Games—and Phyllis went forward to receive her present as Mr. Hawkins cut it from the tree.

She opened it; there were cries of delight and envy as the box in which the present was contained was seen to hold a necklace and a bracelet to match.

Mary's eyes shone. This was the sort of Christmas she had always envisaged in her dreams—and to think at last that dream should come true! She stood on the edge of the crowd, eagerly craning forward as each pleased guest unwrapped her present, and breathlessly she waited for her own name to be called.

It seemed a long time in coming.

One after one the others stepped forward. There were cries of pleasure as parcels were opened—each gift to Mary seeming better than the last. There were riding-stocks, cuff-links, chemical sets for the boys; manicule sets, handbags, and dainty ornaments for the girls.

Mary got almost as much fun sharing the delight of the recipients as she got from her own tingling sense of anticipation. Surely her name would be called out next!

But, no, she reflected. As the last guest she would naturally be the last on the list.

Nearly everybody had presents now. Mary felt her excitement growing. And then suddenly Mrs. Hawkins crumpled the list in her hand with a decisive snap and looked around.

"And that," she announced, "is all."

Mary stood still. All! Her name had not been called out. She had not even been mentioned. Surely there was—there must be—some mistake!

She was aware that the housekeeper's eyes were slightly narrowed as they moved towards her. Aware that the girls and boys were glancing at her.

"I'm sorry, Miss Ainslie, but that is the end

of the list. "You—er—don't seem to have been mentioned," Mrs. Hawkins said primly.

There was a pause—a pause which expressed both sympathy and curiosity. Mary, flushing crimson, turned away. Now she knew definitely that she was not wanted. It was not the gift that mattered. It was the hurt—the sense of crushed pride, the obvious implication that she was not looked upon in the same light as the other guests, which stung her. She suddenly wanted to be away from it all.

"Hey, look at this!" cried an astonished voice.

Mary turned as a bell rang from the doorway. Then she stared as a figure came forward—a figure dressed from head to foot in the crimson fur-trimmed garb of Santa Claus. He held three parcels in his arms—all wrapped as the Christmas presents from the tree—and his white-bearded face was beaming. But in spite of his disguise, Mary was sure she recognised him from the very way he walked. It was—Tony!

And Tony was making a direct beeline for her. He came forward, gravely bowed and examined the tab on his first parcel.

"I am Santa Claus," he said solemnly. "I come to do honour to our guest from London, Mary Ainslie. I bring her special gifts in token of our happiness at having her among us. Mary, here is the first."

With sudden joy Mary took the parcel—a small one—and unwrapped it. A gasp came from the onlookers as they saw the neat wrist-watch it contained.

"And here," the disguised Tony announced, "is the second. Unwrap it, Mary."

She did. She stood astounded as a glittering bracelet was revealed to her eyes.

"And the third," Santa Claus announced into a silence that could now almost be felt. "Take it, Mary."

She did. With trembling fingers she opened it. It was a bigger parcel than the other two, and it proved to contain—

A beautiful leather handbag!

There were gasps. Eyes widened. Out of the corner of her eye Mary could see Mrs. Hawkins looking sour and disapproving. Santa Claus bowed.

"My mission is finished for the time being," he said gravely. "I retire."

"But—but I haven't thanked you," stammered Mary.

From Santa Claus, however, came an incongruous wink, and he shuffled backwards and out of the door. Mary, crimson, but once more lifted up to the skies with happiness, looked at the presents he had bought.

Tony! He had done all this, she guessed, so as to make her feel welcome. More than ever her heart melted towards him. More than ever she realised the sterling worth of his friendship. As soon as she could she went off to her room.

Again with a sense of breathlessness she examined her presents. Again she looked at the neat handwriting in which they had been addressed to her. And all at once something familiar about that handwriting struck her. Suddenly she dragged out the mystery invitation card.

The two handwritings were the same!

Her brain in a whirl, Mary stared at them, comparing and matching. No, there could be no mistake. Both handwritings were the same.

Then if Tony had written her name on the presents, that meant Tony—Tony, no other!—had sent the invitation which had brought her to Upton Tor Manor.

But why—why?

It was all maddeningly mysterious. It was the next morning that she asked Tony about it.

But, in spite of Mary's pleadings, Tony would admit nothing; and even though Mary felt certain in her own mind that Tony was

indeed her benefactor, it still did not solve the mystery. Why had he asked her here for Christmas? And how had he known her name and address?

But later in the morning, even these thoughts were expelled from Mary's mind.

A walk had been planned, and Nan Games, Phyl's sister couldn't find her handbag. When eventually it was discovered tucked under a cushion of the settee in the hall, Nan accused Mary of having hidden it.

Then in the afternoon when Tony, Phyl, and half a dozen others were seated round the low, circular table which held the tea, someone suddenly kicked the table from underneath, and the teapot shot into Phyl's lap. In a perfect fury, Phyl jumped to her feet.

"That was you!" she quiveringly accused Mary.

"I say, go easy, Phyl!" Tony protested. "Of course it wasn't!"

"It was! Who else?" Phyl was in a temper now. "That's the second frock of mine she's spoiled since she's been here. And I'm going to speak to Mrs. Hawkins."

Phyl did speak to Mrs. Hawkins, and the result was that again she demanded Mary should be sent packing. But Tony shook his head.

"Mary is not going!" he said firmly. "And the only orders I'm accepting from anybody in this matter are those of uncle himself."

"Well, I'll see about that!"

Mrs. Hawkins glared. And she flung off with a look that somehow disturbed Mary.

To her relief, Tony invited her to play table tennis in the games-room for the rest of the evening. After which she did not see him again until nearly bed-time. Then he smiled at her rather quaintly.

"It's all coming right," he said cheerfully.

"What is?" she asked.

"Things that matter." He smiled. "Uncle will be back on Christmas Day, so all's well," he added.

And that was all Mary could get out of him.

TONY SPRINGS A SURPRISE



MARY got little sleep that night. One part of herself was enjoying itself immensely under Tony's kindness. The other part was miserably unhappy. Not yet did she feel one of the party. Not yet could she feel completely carefree. She knew that the guests eyed her askance. She knew that Phyl and Nan now regarded her with definite hostility.

And then Monday—Christmas Eve—dawned. It was a day of great excitement at the Manor. A breakfast such as Mary never remembered in her life before was served in the great hall, and there were cheers when, during the meal, it was seen to be snowing.

A snow-battle was the high spot of the morning, but Mary was not asked to join in. When the party got back into the snug, Christmassy hall their talk was principally of the charades which were to take place in the afternoon.

"What a pity you can't take part, Mary Ainslie!" the girl Phyl mocked. "Because you haven't a costume, have you?"

Mary was silent. Pointedly she was ignored as happy plans were made. She rose and went to her own room, still puzzling over the whole mystery which seemed to surround her Christmas.

But suddenly—even that was banished from her mind when she entered her room. The leather bag which she had received last night from Tony was open on her dressing-table—not where she had carefully placed it on top of her case—and she saw at once that there was an envelope inside. With a sense of

wonder she extracted it. She withdrew the plain card it contained; read the message which was typed on it:

"Come along to Mr. Upton's study at 3 p.m. Tell nobody," it said simply.

"What on earth——" breathed Mary, in blank amazement.

The message was not signed, but she guessed it was from Tony.

The study was the room next to the one which contained the charade costumes. There was, in fact, a communicating door. Why should Tony want her to meet him there, of all places?

She decided to question Tony about it when she saw him at lunch, but Tony was not at lunch.

Mary was disappointed. But she wondered if Tony's absence was connected with the secret meeting that afternoon.

Seeing that Tony had not appeared after lunch, Mary took her coffee into the library, and there sat by the window staring into the darkening afternoon, which was now filled with scurrying white snowflakes. And suddenly—about half-past two—she started up. There was Tony.

She saw him for a moment crossing the grounds, his hat and coat covered with snow, as though he had walked a great distance. She saw him look quickly, furtively round before letting himself in through the little side entrance visible from the window. Her heart jumped then. She felt there really was something big and mysterious behind this message of his.

She could hardly wait for the next half-hour to pass. She was tense with excitement when finally she mounted the stairs and crept along to Mr. Upton's study. After a glance to right and left, she turned the handle. Softly she stepped inside.

"Tony!" she breathed.

But there was no Tony there—no sign of him.

She closed the door and went farther into the room.

It was cold, for no fire burned in the grate. The electric light, when she tried it, would not switch on. Well, she'd wait, she decided. She knew that Tony would not let her down.

She sat in the armchair, shivering a little. The daylight was dim and growing gradually darker. Minutes passed. In other parts of the house she could hear sounds of revelry and a great hustle and bustle and scraping of chairs as the floor in the hall was cleared for the forthcoming charades—timed to start at half-past three, she now remembered. And then suddenly she saw something—a triangular edge of a card projecting from beneath a heavy cupboard in one corner of the room. Something urged her to pick it up.

The card, she saw, was a photograph—a stiff, old-fashioned photograph whose back was coloured dark blue. Curiously she turned it over.

And then she had another shock.

For she found herself staring at a picture she recognised immediately—a picture which she herself possessed back at her Bayswater boarding-house. It was a picture of her mother and father and herself, as a kiddie five years of age.

Where had that come from? How had it got there?

In fascination, she stared at it. She felt shaken suddenly. It was all so extraordinary. Suddenly she heard the sound of footsteps from the door which communicated with the costume-room adjoining. In a flash she spun round. The next she tried to cry out.

But, before she could even catch her breath, the figure she saw had leapt—a figure covered from head to foot in a long, flowing garment of black. The next instant it was upon her. A strong arm had thrown itself around her,

pinioning her arms to her side; a hand had clamped suffocatingly upon her mouth.

Then she was carried, struggling to the adjoining room. To her gasping bewilderment, she was hurled into the other room, while the communicating door was locked upon her. And, even as she wondered if she were dreaming, she saw that she had been trapped.

For in front of the cupboard where she had so carefully helped to hang them yesterday were the charade costumes, tumbled, dishevelled, torn, and slit, some of them ruthlessly torn into pieces.

"Oh, my goodness!" Mary managed to gasp.

And then there was a rush of feet at the door. Before she had time to collect her scattered senses it had burst open. Into the room swarmed an excited crowd, headed by Phyl, Nan, and Mrs. Hawkins.

But the laughing faces became wide-eyed with horror as they saw the costumes, as they saw Mary standing there. A dozen voices shattered the silence together:

"Look! Our costumes!"

"Look! what she's done to them!"

"This is revenge for being left out of the charades!"

"Oh, please listen to me!" Mary cried. "I tell you I didn't——"

But the others were furious. They gave her no chance to tell them anything. They were finished with her, they declared. None of them would ever speak to her again. Finally, Mrs. Hawkins gave her verdict.

"I shall telephone Mr. Upton at once!" she said. "I shall ask him to telegraph his order that you are to be sent away. Even Tony will not dare to disregard his direct instructions."

The telegram came just before midnight that night. It said tersely:

"Get rid of the girl—at once."

CHRISTMAS morning!

White, even snow lay over the ground. A few shy flakes were still falling, billowing in the breeze that whipped up from the hills. In the village the church bells were filling the air with a message of joyful cheer.

But there was sadness and despair in the heart of Mary Ainslie.

Suitcase in hand, she stood on the steps of the Manor. Ordered to leave at once, she was an outcast—shunned, a girl despised!

"You'd better go!" said Mrs. Hawkins' disapproving voice at her elbow.

Mary did not turn. She went forward, heavy-hearted, into the snow. There was a choke in her throat, a tear in her eyes, though she would allow none to see it.

Nobody to say good-bye to her. Not even—Tony!

Her lip quivered as she thought of him. What had happened to him? Since his furtive entry into the Manor yesterday she had seen nothing of him—just nothing.

She walked on, head bowed, heart breaking. On, on, blindly, unseeing, while the bells grew louder and her eyes dimmed with tears.

"Stop! Stop!" shouted a voice behind her.

"Not on your life!" yelled another. "Mary!"

She jumped on hearing her name. In a flash she had wheeled. And then suddenly her heart bounded as she saw the figures whizzing towards her—a coatless figure, pressed low on a toboggan, the snow flying around it. It was Tony!

And after him, running in the clinging snow, came Mrs. Hawkins, her husband, Phyl, and Nan.

"Tony!" Mary cried. "Tony!"

"Mary!" he panted. Expertly he shot alongside, stopped, and, catching her hand, dragged her down beside him. "Quick—on to the toboggan!" he hissed. "They're after me!"

"After you?"

"I've escaped! Dodged them!" He chuckled.

"But hurry! We're going to meet uncle."

"Uncle—"

The words were snatched from her breath as the toboggan jerked forward and crashed on. But suddenly the world was changed again. Suddenly new hope and joy were uplifting her. On the swift toboggan swept.

"Hey!" came a sudden voice, and a car braked swiftly.

Tony slowed as he swished round the toboggan, burying its nose in a snowdrift. Breathlessly he helped Mary to rise to her feet.

And at the same moment a man stepped out of the car. Tony grinned.

"A Merry Christmas, uncle! Allow me to introduce you—"

Mary gazed at him, something about him striking her as familiar. She drew back as she met his gaze. But he was staring at her now—as if he, too, recognised her.

"Gad, who—who is the girl?" he stammered.

"Your niece, uncle—the girl you've been searching for ever since you heard that her father and mother were killed. Uncle Roger, this is Mary Ainslie."

"M-Mary!" He stared, and Mary, staring at him like a girl in a trance, began to remember things—childish things; talk she had heard between her father and mother of Uncle Roger, her mother's brother, whom she had not seen for many years.

"Mary!" he whispered. "Mary! Yes, you're Phoebe's child all right. You're the image of your dear mother. I have searched everywhere, trying to find you, ever since I returned from the East. And now—"

"Now you've found her," Tony said. "You see," he added, "I happened to see Mary's photograph in a Bayswater paper some time ago. She was the leader of her factory savings group or something. I was struck then with the likeness and also her name. And so I sent her an invitation for Christmas. You see," he added to Mary, as a dawning light began to break on her, "I wanted uncle to meet you, as a surprise, on Christmas Day. Instead of that—"

"Instead of that," Mary said, "uncle sent a telegram telling them to send me home—"

"Eh? I did? I never!" Uncle Roger protested. "What's this—"

"Uncle didn't," Tony interrupted. "Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins fixed that. Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins have fixed a lot of things. Because," he added, seeing the mystification on Mary's face, "Mr. and Mrs. Hawkins and their nieces, Phyl and Nan, were hoping to inherit under uncle's will. And a niece, naturally, would have rather upset all that. It didn't matter about a nephew—me. For they knew my own parents are quite well-off, and so I don't stand to gain anything from Uncle Roger. Their one idea was to get you off the scene before uncle had a chance to see you—"

"And they nearly succeeded!" gasped Mary.

"But not quite, thank goodness! They guessed I suspected their game. That's why they had me followed when I went to the village yesterday to get the photograph I wanted you to identify, Mary. I left you that message in your room, but they must have found it. That gave them the idea of kidnapping me and hiding me in the cellar, because they nabbed me while I was on my way to keep the appointment with you. But why explain any more now?" he added gaily. "Why wait here when there are other things to be done? Mary, my charming cousin, allow me to be the first to salute you on this happy Christmas!"

And he pulled a sprig of mistletoe from his pocket!

THE END.

JEAN AND HER WONDER DOG—that is the title of next week's long complete story.

THE MERRYMAKERS AT COLLEGE

(Continued from page 236.)

"Arnold!" With an anxious cry Mrs. Mullet came rushing to the front door.

She was just in time to see the sleigh whizzing out through the gate, all the chums aboard.

Skimming along at a speed that defied all pursuit, they came to the cross tracks. There they swerved on to the other track, the one which Mullet had avoided with more cunning than truth. Before Sally had driven a mile along its course, a great gap loomed across the pass, and over the gap a picturesque-swing bridge.

"This is the bridge—the bridge uncle told me about," cried Linda excitedly.

Sally laughed in delight. Now something else was rising out of the snow ahead. A house! A turreted house resembling an enormous Swiss chalet.

"D'you see the flag? D'you see the name on it, Linda?" Sally cried suddenly.

"Noel Chalet!" came a breathless chorus from all.

The sleigh swung in through the gates, and the jingling sleigh-bells were heard from the house. A plump, smiling manservant opened the door. Another figure suddenly appeared behind him.

"Uncle!" cried Linda, astonished. "Uncle's here already!"

What astonished Sally was the lack of surprise on Mr. Carson's face as he came cheerfully to meet them. They were twenty-four hours late in arriving. Hadn't he worried about them?

"Hallo, young Merry-makers!" he greeted them heartily. "Didn't expect you for another day at least. Don Weston got here before you, and explained that you were held up at college."

"But Don's only just got here, uncle, with us," Linda said blankly.

"Eh? You mean that that chap who was staying here is an impostor?" cried Mr. Carson.

"Impostor's the word!" gasped Sally, and with the words leapt out of the sleigh. "He's a fraud and impostor, sir. He's after the secret. The secret of the picture. Linda will explain. But first of all, Mr. Carson, where's the turret room, please?"

Linda's uncle led the way quickly into the house, while Linda gave him a breathless account of what had happened. Up the stairs of the tower they all dashed, till Mr. Carson opened a door near the summit.

"This is the turret room," he told them, "but—"

Sally didn't wait to hear the rest. Her eyes were flashing searchingly about the room. A room identical with the scene in the painting.

Then she gasped.

"The silver cup!" she cried in dismay. "It's gone! We're too late!"

"Oh, no, my dear!" remarked Mr. Carson.

"The silver cup is quite safe. It happens to be the custom always to present it to the winner of the annual sleigh race, held in the Denver Ice Carnival every Christmas. The cup is at the moment safe in the hands of the committee.

Sally broke in, her eyes shining now.

"If we enter the sleigh race and win, will we get the cup? Is that it, Mr. Carson?" She turned to her chums, a gleam of determination in her eyes. "Merry-makers, we're going into this race, and we've just got to win that silver cup."

(End of this week's story.)

In next Friday's grand story you will read how Sally & Co. entered the sleigh race and will learn the secret of the silver cup.