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# THE GIRLS' FAVOURITE



2<sup>d</sup>

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CHUM'S ESCAPE

A tense moment in our enthralling new romance,  
"PEARL OF SHIRAZ"

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# The RIVALS of MORCOVE



Tells of the mystery of the old mill near Morcove, and the strange influence it exerts over the destinies of Ethel Courtway and her staunch chum, Cyril Dudley

BY MARJORIE STANTON

## The Stronger Will.

ETHEL slept on, all unconscious of what was happening.

The woman, in the meanwhile, unfolded the letter and slowly perused what Mr. Courtway had written.

"My dear Douglas,—The bearer of this note is, as she will tell you herself, my daughter Ethel, and you need not hesitate about trusting her to the fullest extent.

"The circumstances that have laid me up she will relate to you, also other particulars of the events that have taken place at Winchmoor Down.

"In about ten days' time all will be ready for placing the particulars of your invention in the proper quarters, and once that is done we shall have no need to worry any more about Messrs. Thorne, Brindle and Chuddleton. This precious trio are back once more at Morcove, and they may be relied upon to make one final desperate effort to discover your whereabouts.

"Great caution, therefore, is necessary on your part. On no account show yourself above ground. Place your trust in no one but my daughter. Thorne and Co. are staking their all on this affair, and no doubt have employed some highly-paid spies. If you are in need of funds communicate with my agents in London, enclosing this letter. Yours very sincerely, Rupert Courtway."

The woman read the latter-portion two or three times before she laid the letter down. Then for several moments she gazed into space, absorbed in thought.

After a while she turned to Ethel to make sure she was still asleep. The elongated shadow of the woman's figure hovered above Ethel menacingly and sinister—thoroughly in keeping with what she had done, and what she intended to do.

Satisfied that Ethel still slept on, she searched about until she found an odd blank scrap of paper. This she folded into four, and opening the envelope which had contained Mr. Courtway's letter, she thrust the piece of paper inside.

The original letter she placed in her pocket, and the envelope with its new contents she put back in Ethel's coat.

There was a faint suspicion of a grim smile lurking around her hard mouth. Her thoughts were not difficult to guess. She evidently reckoned that the letter she had stolen would be likely to possess considerable value if she could get in touch with Messrs. Thorne, Brindle and Chuddleton.

These three were at Morcove now—so the letter said—and Morcove was on the route the caravan was going. It would be fairly easy to find these individuals and negotiate a sale.

Thus ruminated Martha Banyard, always on the look-out to obtain money unscrupulously or otherwise.

Wrapped as she was in the soundest slumber, yet Ethel's dreams had a subtle resemblance to that which had just taken place. Vague, indistinct happenings flashed through her brain—visionary tokens of coming disasters—her own and Cyril's—born no doubt of the

experiences she had lately gone through, yet curiously prophetic of what was to come.

She seemed to see Cyril, but was powerless to approach him.

Once she half woke up and muttered his name. Curiously enough, at almost this identical moment Cyril himself had Ethel's name on his lips, as he peered with the keenest anxiety through the gates of Morcove school.

Where was that light she had promised to exhibit in her study window as a sign that she had safely arrived?

Not a glimmer to be seen anywhere!

For a while he tried to persuade himself that in reality it was there but the drifting snowflakes obliterated all traces of it. He peered again and again; but always with the same result.

Should he go and call at the school?

No, that would never do. Doubtless the enemy, too, had the place under observation, and they would see what he did, and so learn of Ethel's presence here.

The enemy! Where were they?

Certainly they had kept well out of sight. On alighting from the train Cyril had purposefully lingered about in full view so that he could be easily followed and thus leave the coast clear for Ethel when she arrived later on.

He fully believed he had been shadowed to Prior's, and it was only during the last half-hour that he had taken any precaution to conceal his movements.

"I can't understand it," he muttered. "Something's evidently gone wrong somewhere. Suppose—suppose they haven't followed me after all! Followed Ethel instead!"



## WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.

ETHEL COURTWAY is the head girl of Morcove, and her boy chum is CYRIL DUDLEY, at one time secretary to her father, but dismissed in disgrace. Many adventures befall the two friends at the mysterious old mill in the lamplit at Morcove, and Ethel learns that her father has three enemies, who are seeking to wrest the secret of the old mill from him. Her father and Cyril are reconciled, when Cyril saves his life, and Ethel and her chum are entrusted with a mission. Ethel is given an important letter to take to Mr. Douglas, who is working on an invention in the lamplit, and she is shadowed by her father's enemies. She jumps out of the train at a tiny wayside station fifteen miles from her destination, and attempts to walk through the snow. Overcome by fatigue, she seeks refuge in a gipsy's caravan, and when she is asleep the gipsy woman discovers the letter and opens it.

(Now read on.)

The idea for the moment induced panic; although dimly at the back of his mind this possibility had always shadowed his thoughts. Yet, surely, he argued, they would never think a mission of this sort would be entrusted to a girl. It was a man's job—they could reason no other way.

He shot one final glance at the Morcove building, only to meet with the same result as before. Then cautiously he crept away towards Barncombe. It was useless to call at the station, for an hour ago he had heard, in the distance, the arrival and departure of the train, so he knew that it was not a case of the train being delayed.

He must return to Prior's.

His way went past the old-fashioned Commercial Hotel, and as he walked beside the lighted windows of the dining-rooms, something prompted him to peep inside. One of the windows had its blinds drawn not quite fully down, and thus a view of the interior could be obtained.

The stean on the panes made it difficult to see the features of the diners clearly. As far as he could make out, three of the tables were occupied by various parties.

For a while he hung about outside the entrance. From top to toe he was smothered with snow which, though unpleasant enough, at least served the useful purpose of disguise. Indeed, he was so blended with the uniform whiteness of the surroundings that, a few yards away, he was a perfect example of the art of camouflage.

That he was not the only snow man, Cyril was soon to discover, for all at once a pedestrian bumped into him, and with such suddenness that they were forced to cling to each other to avoid falling.

"Silly ass! What'd you mean by blocking up the pathway?" grunted the stranger. "Why don't you show a light or ring a bell or—"

Cyril gripped him with a force that made the fellow half cry out. " Maurice!" muttered Cyril fiercely. " Maurice—do you know me—oh!"

Maurice Thorne—for it was he—gave a slight gasp.

"My word you—Cyril!" he murmured. "How's jolly old Prior's going on? D'you know I may not be coming back next term. Uncle's going to—"

"Never mind about uncle. Have you and your precious lot seen Ethel Courtway? The truth, now."

"Seen the fair Ethel—"

Thorne suddenly found himself spinning off the pavement and subsiding into the gutter. With clenched fist Cyril bent over him.

"Listen!" he breathed. "I'll give you the biggest shilling of your life unless you answer me properly. More than that, I'll lug you to the police-station and charge you with breaking into Mr. Courtway's house last September. I'm in earnest."

For a few seconds there was a loaded silence.

"Where is Ethel?" demanded Cyril.



"I—I don't know," returned the other. "Let me get up—"  
 "You do know."  
 "I don't—I don't—really I don't. Don't be silly, Cyril. If you'll only let me get up and—and be reasonable, I'll tell you everything."  
 "Get up, then," said Cyril; "but, remember, I'm in earnest about the police. I let you off that night and took all the blame. It was different then. Now, with Ethel concerned, it's another matter. I'd sacrifice fifty such as you for her."

Maurice slowly got to his feet. "The others are in there," he whispered, indicating the hotel.  
 "You were going to see them?"  
 "Yes—I've been scouting around after you. You see, we all arrived by the last train—"  
 "Then you didn't come by my train?"  
 "Oh, no!"

"Maurice," said Cyril sternly, "you came by the same train as Ethel—therefore you must know where she is."  
 "Word of honour I don't."  
 "Word of what!" contemptuously.  
 "Well, word of any old thing you like. She got into the train at Winchmoor Down; but she certainly wasn't in the train when we arrived here. Really and truly, Cyril, I'm speaking the truth."

Cyril gripped his arm.  
 "Come along!" he muttered.  
 "N-not to the police," pleaded the other; there was a distinct whimper in his voice. "Not there, Cyril, old chap. I can't help not knowing where Ethel's got to. She certainly didn't get out at Moddington Junction. That was the only place the train stopped at, although it did slow up at some petty little place for a second or so. She might have jumped out. Look here, Cyril—don't be a beast—all the things I've done others have made me do. I—I say, you're only kidding me, aren't you, about the old police? You aren't really going to take me there, are you?"

"Why not?" returned Cyril, in a hard, cold voice.  
 "Oh, well, but, you see, if you do I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb—and hold my tongue. I'm ready to tell you everything. Cyril, old lad. Come, I can't say fairer than that, can I?"

"We'll compromise then," said Cyril after a pause, "and you'll come with me to Prior's. Having got you I mean to keep an eye on you. You'd better agree—I warn you, now, my patience is exhausted. With Ethel in possible peril it now seems quite a small thing to contemplate getting up in a witness box and giving evidence against you!"  
 "Quite so—quite so," mumbled Maurice. "I quite understand your feelings, and I'll willingly come with you to Prior's. Ethel's a jolly fine girl, and I'm a jolly old outsider."

Cyril returned no answer to this placating speech; but the exact value he placed upon it was fairly obvious by the firm way he continued to grip Maurice's arm as he led him onward through the blinding snow.

Only once did they pause.  
 "Maurice," said Cyril, "if all this is simply a trick—I mean that, if you're trying to do me out of discovering the whereabouts of Ethel—it'll be the worst night's work you ever did. I'd better thoroughly understand that. Once more—you really do not know where she is?"

Maurice threw all the conviction he could conjure up into a most decided and expressive assurance that he did not.

Cyril swung him so that the light from a flickering street lamp fell on his face. Intently he scrutinised every feature.

"Humph!" he muttered. "I believe for once you are speaking the truth. At any rate, I'll give you the benefit of the doubt."

"Thanks," returned Maurice feebly. Thus they went their way—one, an upstanding figure; the other, with a hang-dog droop of the shoulders. And each attitude was typical of their different natures.

At "Wreck Point."

CURIOUSLY enough, it was the sudden stoppage of the caravan that awoke Ethel. All through the jolting and bumping she had slept the sleep of utter fatigue; but now

that all motion had ceased she opened her eyes and gazed wonderingly upon her surroundings. Then memory returned, and, aching in every limb, she sat up.

"So you've woke up at last," said Mrs. Banyard, pausing in her preparation of breakfast. "Reckon you must have walked far last night to make you sleep like that."

Ethel nodded. Mrs. Banyard in the daylight was even more unpossessing than Mrs. Banyard in artificial light, and Ethel decided that the less she had to do with her the better.

Painfully she rose to her feet.  
 "Are we anywhere near Morocco?" Ethel asked.

"A mile or so," granted the woman. "We've halted just on the outskirts of Cobby village. Maybe you know it?"

Ethel's eyes brightened. Of course she knew Cobby, the small fishing village that lay on the coast just by the boundaries of the landslip. Many a time on a half-holiday had she taken a jaunt over here to explore the caves, and amongst them was the very cave that contained the secret entrance which was her objective.

"Excellent news this!" thought Ethel. "You'll have a bite o' something?" queried Mrs. Banyard, indicating the sausages sizzling in the frying pan.

Ethel was ravenously hungry, but also she wanted to get away as quickly as possible.

But there were plenty of signs of the mischief they had done. The beach and the rocks were strewn with fragments of wreckage. Shattered spars, splinters of wood, bits of sails and rigging, and all kinds of odds and ends, had been thrown up by the sea, and a few of the inhabitants were busily engaged in collecting them, and sorting out what they considered were worth keeping.

About a quarter of a mile from the shore were a couple of wrecked fishing boats. It was low water and the hulls were plainly visible.

Ethel looked upon the poor wrecked boats, and pictured the scene that had caused their destruction. However, she did not linger, for the fisher-folk cast curious, half-antagonistic stares at her. They were not quick to trust strangers at Cobby. She picked her way through the layers of rock, and soon a jutting portion of the cliff hid her from view.

As she walked along a smooth stretch of sand, her thoughts became equally occupied between conjecture as to Cyril's whereabouts and those of the enemy.

Had she but possessed supernatural vision, capable of penetrating space, she would now have seen Cyril and Maurice Thorne trudging along the road which the Banyard's caravan had traversed the previous night. They were bound for the little wayside station where Maurice declared Ethel had possibly alighted. Cyril



Ethel, knowing the fierce swirl of the currents, and the danger of the sharp, jagged rocks, was well aware that she would not attempt to find escape by swimming. The men only withdrew when the water was breaking into the cave.

Still, food was important to keep up her strength for possible ordeals to come, and therefore after a moment's hesitation she accepted the woman's offer.

While Mrs. Banyard was dishing up the breakfast, Ethel put on her cloak. As she did so she thought of the letter. How foolish of her to leave it in the pocket! Suppose these people had stolen it!

With a quick intake of breath she felt for it. Joy! It was still there!  
 "That's all right," muttered Ethel, sighing with relief.

Of course, it was not at all "all right," but Ethel was not to know that. The envelope was still firmly stuck down, and she had no suspicion that it had been tampered with.

There followed a hurried meal, and a rather slow financial settlement—for the Banyards talked about Treasury notes in reply to Ethel's suggested shillings—ending in a compromise greatly in favour of the hosts. Ethel set off in the direction of the sea-shore, intent on seeking the cave without further delay.

The sun was shining brightly as she strolled along the beach. The sea was calm, and one would never have believed that the waves, rolling over each other so lazily, were the same that she heard a couple of fishermen describing as they talked about last night's storm.

had hopes that Ethel had put up at some cottage for the night.

The enemy, however, was practically in the vicinity of Ethel, being at the present moment on the cliff tops overlooking the beach. Already they had spotted her, and the three were sufficiently curious about her identity to decide that they would hurry along to where there was a winding path leading to the shore, descend it, and thus get a nearer view of the solitary girl. They immediately put the project into execution.

Ethel's objective was a huge promontory that ran out from the mainland, called by the sinister name of "Wreck Point."

At high water the sea washed its base; and the deep caverns, the work of centuries, told how fiercely the waves had lashed themselves against it, and had gradually worked their way into the hard rock.

About a hundred feet from the level of the sea stood out a ledge of rock which was covered with a stunted kind of brushwood. Above this ledge, the cliff rose up another hundred feet; and the summit, like the ledge, bent out towards the sea, so that the side between the ledge and the top was shaped something like a bow.

This was the wildest and most desolate part of the coast. The rocks were called the "Giants' Stepping Stones," and the fishermen never



(Continued from previous page.)

ventured to take their boats near, even in calm weather, for the many different currents formed by the huge masses of rock made steering very difficult.

When the water was low a person could easily walk on the shore round "Wreck Point," and so reach the landscape where the old mill was situated; but it was a rather hazardous walk, for the tide came up at this place very quickly.

Ethel had no intention of walking round. The huge cave, that even now she could see, was what she was making for. In a quarter of an hour's time, she reckoned, she would reach it and then interview Mr. Douglas the inventor.

She walked along with little thought of any interruption, when all of a sudden the figure of a man emerged, from where a narrow path ran down from the cliffs.

"Oh, bother!" thought Ethel. "Looks like some tourist. I hope he isn't going my way."

The newcomer seemed undecided which way to go. Finally, however, to Ethel's annoyance, he strolled towards her.

"Excuse me!" he called out. "Can you tell me in which direction is Cobley village?"

Ethel gave the desired information, relieved to discover that his way was not her way.

As she spoke she naturally glanced at him, and noted that he was a tall, lantern-jawed, middle-aged individual with bushy, iron-grey eyebrows, and whose clothes had a certain fashionable cut about them that spoke of a London rather than a country tailor.

And then, all at once, a thrill passed through her. She knew him! He was one of the three men—one of the enemy!

"Thank you, young lady!" he said politely. He smiled and added: "Thank you, Miss Courtway."

Ethel shot a swift glance round, calculating the chances of flight.

The other, guessing her thoughts, gave a little gesture of protest.

"In my younger days I was a bit of a sprinter," he murmured, "and even now I think I could give you ten yards in a hundred. Besides, Miss Courtway, why hasten away? I and my companions, who are quite close at hand, intend

you no annoyance. Our only desire is to glance at a certain letter we believe you are carrying."

"Isn't that an annoyance?" asked Ethel, spiritedly.

"I prefer to call it an unfortunate necessity. I observe you do not deny that you have such a letter."

"Would you believe me if I said no?" demanded Ethel.

"Certainly I should," he returned gravely. "I am sure you are incapable of telling an untruth."

"Well," breathed Ethel, "say I refuse to show you this letter—what then?"

He put his fingers in his mouth and gave vent to a low and shrill whistle. Immediately his two companions appeared from behind a huge boulder at the base of the cliff.

"I want you to see exactly how matters stand," he said. "You see the forces that might enter into the dispute should you refuse to give up the letter. Now, I am perfectly sincere when I say that it would cause me the greatest distress to use anything like force. You are, I am sure, sensible enough to reckon up your exact chances. So—please!"

He held out his hand.

Ethel backed away. He advanced. She backed still farther and then, with a sudden desperate resolve, turned and took to her heels.

For twenty yards she led; but at that distance a hand clutched the sleeve of her coat in a grip she could not shake off. Not to be done, she wrigged out of the garment, leaving it in his hands. Alas, a piece of slimy seaweed lay in her path, and pitching over it, she fell headlong.

In a second the man was bounding over her. His face was still as expressionless as ever.

"A gallant attempt," he observed, "though not very wise. You see that now, don't you? Quite so. He turns out to be a companion who came running up. I trust what we want is in here," he said, indicating Ethel's coat.

Thrusting his hand in either pocket, he drew out the letter.

"Ah!" he ejaculated. "This saves a lot of trouble."

Ethel could have cried aloud with vexation as she saw him tear open the envelope and take out the contents.

The slight smile of satisfaction on the man's face suddenly evaporated. She saw his jaw drop for an instant, then as quickly he recovered his wonted composure.

"I hardly think this is the letter your father gave you," he said, handing it to Ethel.

Ethel gazed at the thumb-marked, blank sheet of notepaper Mrs. Banyard had substituted, and it was her turn to show astonishment.

"No, certainly it isn't!" she cried.

"Don't you believe her!" shouted one of the others. "She's got the real letter in that attaché case of hers. This one's a plant. Let's search that case of hers—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" out in the lantern-jawed man peremptorily. "She's speaking the truth. It's the other one who carried the letter, after all."

"How can you tell she's speaking the truth?"

"By the same token that I know when you and Joe are telling lies. A knowledge of varied human nature, my son. As a matter of fact, this isn't altogether a surprise. I felt all along that servants were playing us false. Old Courtway's far too cute to entrust his messages to a girl." He turned to Ethel. "I'm afraid we shall have to confine your movements for some hours or so," he said. "Our own safety requires it. What I propose to do is this: There's a large cave a little way from here, and in this cave we shall leave you. The tide completely blocks the entrance, but if you remain as far as you can, you will be in no danger of the water reaching you. Come—the tide is on the turn, and we have just time to get there."

For the moment Ethel found it difficult to keep pace with these rapidly changing events. That extraordinary affair of the letter! How on earth had the contents been changed? For changed they had been, she was certain of that.

Where and when had her father's letter been substituted by this blank sheet of paper? Those caravan people—

"Are you doing me the honour to listen to what I am saying?" broke in the lantern-jawed

man, for the first time allowing a touch of asperity to creep into his voice. "I mentioned a certain cave that we are going to take you to. Did you hear me?"

"Oh, yes, I heard," said Ethel, shortly.

"Very well. Come along; we've no time to waste."

Cave?

Ethel scarcely dared hope that the cave they were taking her to was the very one she desired to enter. And yet, no other cave that she knew, answered to this description. It must be the one. The Fates indeed were fighting on her side.

With Ethel in their midst, the party walked over to the base of Wreck Point, and, long before they reached there, Ethel saw that her hopes were not to be blighted. They were going in a direct line for the cavern mentioned by her father.

"There," said the lantern-jawed man, pointing to the opening, "that is your residence for the next two or three hours. I should get in before the tide reaches it. We, of course, intend to remain on guard until the last possible moment."

Success I attempt to swim away," said Ethel, pretending to be desperate. "As it happens, I'm a pretty good swimmer."

"I doubt if you'll attempt such a mad thing."

And Ethel, knowing the fierce swirl of the currents, and the danger of the sharp, jagged rocks, was well aware that she wouldn't.

So without further words she turned on her heel and entered the mouth of the cavern, for such it was rather than a cave, and sat down on a large boulder.

The men stood some thirty yards away and remained on guard until the advancing tide lapped their feet. By this time the waves were already breaking into the entrance to the cavern, and Ethel had withdrawn from the view of her captors.

"Truly an excellent prison," remarked the lantern-jawed man with a short laugh. "Our young lady being safe, we will now set out on the track of the Master Cyril."

"What about Maurice?" asked one of his companions.

"It's certainly strange where Maurice could have got to. But there, the fellow was always a blunderer, and no doubt he's got himself into some scrape or other."

"I say," broke in the third man, "suppose that letter's written in invisible ink? It might be, you know."

At the mention of this possibility the lantern-jawed man whipped out the piece of blank paper and peered earnestly at it. His companions did the same. Then it was held up to the light, held sideways, held at various angles. But with the same result. It remained as blank as their faces.

Their leader shrugged his shoulders.

"We have no more time to waste," he grunted, "but I think this really is blank. No, it's certain in my mind that Cyril bears old Courtway's letter to Walter Douglas, and Cyril's whereabouts we must immediately discover."

The other nodded, and without further ado the trio made all haste towards the narrow path, which wound its way to the top of the cliffs.

And so, within a few minutes, the Wreck Point wore its customary deserted aspect, and the roar of the advancing breakers, and the shrill cry of the gulls, seemed to mingle in a rejoicing note that their territory was once more in their undisturbed possession.

"So, girl, with tempest and wind'd with thunder, And clad with lightning and shod with sleet, And strong winds treading the swift waves under"

The flying rollers with frothy feet—"

These words came back to Ethel as she paused midway in the cavern and turned to gaze upon the picture framed in its jagged entrance.

Then, forward into the darkness!

What of Martha Banyard, the woman who holds the all-important letter? What is her object in taking it from Ethel, and to what use will she put it? For the solution of the mystery, read the fine, absorbing instalment of "Silver Moon" which appears in THE GIRLS' FAVOURITE next Wednesday.

**3**

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