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SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY 2^p

**WITH FLASH TO
HELP HER,**

Valerie Drew, the 18-Year-old Girl
Detective, tricks the schemer!

*A tense moment from this week's
thrilling 10-page complete story.*



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VALERIE DREW'S

DILEMMA

HER FATHER MISSING!

"WELL, here we are, dear, and I think I'm rather glad to be home again. I haven't seen dear old daddy for over a fortnight."

Valerie Drew, the girl detective, threw open the door of the taxi that had brought her cousin, Irene Wilson, and herself, from Paddington Station. They had just drawn to a halt outside Valerie's London home in a quiet, residential road of Kensington.

The girl detective sprang out, and Irene, who was about fifteen, and overjoyed to be with Valerie, followed, her hazel eyes aglow with enthusiasm and pleasure.

Irene's home was in Devon, and Valerie had spent the final week of her holiday there. This was a return visit.

"Don't forget my suitcase, Renee," said Valerie, opening her handbag to pay the taxi-driver.

"If it hadn't got all your belongings in it, I'd forget it for the purpose," laughed the younger girl. "It's a positive disgrace."

"Wouff."

From out of the taxi sprang Flash, Valerie's faithful and intelligent Alsatian watchdog. He, too, appeared pleased to be home again. The faithful dog darted across the pavement, leaped the gates in a flying bound, and disappeared up the shadow-filled drive in search of his young mistress father, John Drew.

Valerie made an entrancing picture as she stood for a moment under a street-lamp, waiting with the driver.

The light gleamed in her red-gold hair and showed up an elusive touch of violet in her sparkling blue eyes.

There was a strong bond of affection between the girl detective and John Drew, her father, who before his retirement, had been Chief Commissioner of Police at Scotland Yard. And it was good to be back and to feel that in a few moments she would be with him again.

"Were you being rude about my suitcase?" she asked as the cab drove away and she and Irene were passing in at the gates.

"Well, isn't it a dreadful old thing for a pretty and well-dressed girl like you to carry?" demanded her cousin, raising the worn and battered case she carried and making a grimace.

"It's father's, as a matter of fact," Valerie answered. "Before I went on my holiday, I intended to buy one, but forgot. I grabbed that at the last moment. Listen! What's wrong with Flash?"

Both girls halted, puzzled, by the steps.

From somewhere at the rear of the house they could hear Flash baying furiously. He seemed wildly excited.

"Probably he ran into the cat and it scratched him," said Valerie, shrugging and moving on up the steps. "He would be indignant about that."

She pressed a gloved finger on the bell-push.

They heard the bell ringing in the house and waited.

But to the surprise of Valerie, nobody came to the front door.

"Queer!" she murmured. "Old Andrew, our butler, must have heard Flash and, in the ordinary way, he would have been to the door to let me in before I rang."

"Perhaps he's out, Val."

"Even if he were, Tessie the maid, or the cook would be in. Both of them. Are they going on up the steps?"

Once more she rang the bell. Again she and her cousin waited.

But no footfall sounded in the hall. There was no sort of response, and at the back of the house, the barking of Flash grew more loud and persistent.



The happy light died out of Valerie's eyes. Suddenly that strange sixth sense she possessed told her that something was wrong—very wrong—here at her home. She paled. Had anything happened to her father since she had been away?

"Let's run round to the back, dear," she said, keeping a note of anxiety out of her voice with an effort. "I can't understand this."

She turned and sped down the steps. Irene followed. Almost together, they reached the back door giving into the scullery.

It was there that Flash was barking. Not only that, he was throwing himself at the door and scratching at it furiously. And somebody on the other side was pounding on it.

"Help!" cried a voice Valerie recognised as belonging to the butler. "Let us out of here! Help!"

"All right, Andrew," called Valerie, snapping open her bag, after trying the door and finding it locked.

She took from the bag a tiny metal implement, the end of which could be adjusted to any angle by means of a screw. It was a

cracksman's tool which Valerie had secured as a trophy after bringing about the arrest of some notorious international jewel-thieves.

She inserted the end in the lock, tried it, withdrew it again, and gave the screw a couple of turns. When she again inserted the little tool and gave a twist of her supple wrist, the lock clicked back and the door opened before her.

Valerie stepped in, followed by Irene and Flash.

In the scullery stood the grey-haired butler, the motherly cook, and Tessie, the housemaid. The butler looked queerly perturbed and dishevelled. The faces of the woman and girl were ashen and scared.

"What's the matter? Who locked you in here?" Valerie queried, trying the handle of the door giving into the kitchen and finding that also locked.

All three servants began to explain at once. "It was two masked men, Miss Valerie," panted the butler.

"They came in by the back and took us unaware, like," nodded the cook, gulping. "One had a revolver!" said Tessie, clapping her hands and shivering. "They locked

THRILLING 10-PAGE COMPLETE STORY, DESCRIBING THE BREATHLESS ADVENTURES OF VALERIE DREW, THE 18-YEAR-OLD GIRL DETECTIVE, AND HER ALSATIAN DOG—FLASH—WHEN VALERIE'S FATHER WAS KIDNAPPED BY A GANG OF HIS OLD ENEMIES.



By ADELIE ASCOTT.

(Illustrated by C. Montford.)

the scullery door and took the key after making us come in here. Then they went through the kitchen and locked that door, too."

"And we couldn't get out as the window is barred," the butler said, nodding towards it. "I have been hammering on the door since Flash started to bark, miss, but I expect you didn't hear at once, because of the noise he was making."

"Where was my father when this happened?" asked Valerie quickly.

The butler looked troubled and avoided her searching eyes. He was silent, and icy fingers clutched at Valerie's heart.

"Tell me, Andrew!" She was catching at his servant's arm. "Come on! What—what is it?"

"I—I don't want to scare you, Miss Valerie, and I might have been mistaken," the butler faltered. "But your father was in his library and—and after the men had left us here I thought I heard the sounds of a struggle and a call for help."

Valerie stared at him for one moment in silence, with the last drop of colour draining from her cheeks. Then a distressed cry burst from her lips.

"Had something she had always vaguely dreaded happened?"

During his service at Scotland Yard, her father had personally foiled endless criminals and sent many dangerous people to well-merited penal servitude.

More than once these evildoers had vowed to be revenged on him when their sentences were over.

John Drew had always laughed, and playfully ruffled his daughter's pretty hair when, in her love for him, she had urged him to be on his guard. Valerie wondered now if her fears had been as groundless as he had pretended to think.

She pluckily shook off the anguished doubt that had temporarily caused her to feel weak. Darting to the kitchen door she swiftly set to work on it with her lock-picking implement.

Flash, who seemed to share her misgivings by some canine instinct, bayed menacingly and rushed past her. He was at the door of the library and scratching at it when Valerie ran to it, with Irene close at her heels and the servants following timidly.

With Flash at her side Valerie dashed the door open and drew a sharp breath.

The room was in wild disorder. A bearskin rug had been kicked up as if by scuffling feet, and lay partially in the fender. Two chairs were overturned, and one was broken.

The glass door of a small bookcase was shattered. The contents of the central table were scattered. An inkwell lay on its side, and a great pool of ink had saturated the blotting-pad.

"Father!" Valerie called, her voice broken queerly in her agonising suspense and fears for him. "Father!"

But she was met with only an ominous silence, and again her heart turned cold.

Where was her father? What had happened to him? And who were the mysterious, masked men who had invaded the house?

FINGERPRINTS!

IRENE saw that Valerie's hands were clenched hard, and her blue eyes were weary. She ran to her and took her hand.

"Oh, Val, what do you think has happened?" Irene asked in tremulous tones.

Valerie patted her hand and pluckily pulled herself together.

"I don't know, dear. But I mean to find out," she said, throwing up her head and looking sharply about the room. "Let's see if those men have been anywhere else in the house."

Valerie sped from the library.

Her cousin and Flash raced after her. It was soon evident that the masked raiders had been in both the sitting-room and drawing-room. Though nothing like the wild disorder of the library existed there, several chairs had been drawn out from their usual positions, and other articles of furniture disturbed.

Valerie hurried on upstairs.

There, too, were signs of the recent presence of the raiders.

Wardrobes and cupboards stood wide. The edges of the bedclothes on more than one of the beds had been tossed up as if the men had hurriedly peered beneath them.

The girl detective made that search in tortured uncertainty, her heart pounding so that she seemed almost to hear its distressed beats.

She half-expected to find her father lying badly injured and unconscious, or bound and gagged in one of the rooms. But they reached the last, and there was no sign of him.

"They came to search for something. What?" Valerie murmured.

"But what about uncle?" breathed Irene. "Did he run out after them, and will he soon be back? Or—did they take him away with them?"

Valerie wished she could be sure. It would have relieved some of the terrible doubts now tugging at her heartstrings.

She shook her head and returned to the ground floor. Thence she passed to the front door, opened it, and ran down the steps.

If her father had been carried away by force, or in an unconscious condition, his enemies would hardly have risked taking him out through the drive-gates, where any chance pedestrians or a patrolling constable might see them.

They would have had a car, and would have brought it into the drive, she reasoned.

The light from the hall streamed out on to the grassed stretch and there had been no rain earlier that day which had made the surface susceptible to impressions.

Yes, there were the marks of a car's tyres. And the car had been run up to beside the steps.

Valerie moved around them. She snatched an electric torch from her handbag as she thought that a clump of bushes lying in the shadow had an unusual look.

Her cousin heard her breath hiss in.

"What's the matter, Val?" she asked, realising that Valerie had made some startling discovery.

"My father was brought from the house either bound and gagged or drugged," the girl detective answered huskily.

"But, Val, how can you possibly know that?" asked Irene.

"A car was brought into the drive, turned, and backed close to the steps," replied Valerie, pointing to the gravel. "If you look, you will see the marks left by its wheels. Then my father was put down by the men for a moment or two after they had brought him out."

She indicated the bushes, which were crushed and flattened down.

"That's where they laid him, before they lifted him into the car and drove away," she added. "Renée, I'm—frightened!"

"That doesn't sound like you, Val," said the younger girl, shaking her head. "Cheer up, dear. You'll soon find out where they've taken him, and they'll be arrested as they deserve."

"I'm scared because my love has so," Valerie said, and for the moment the light from the hall picked out the moisture that trembled on her long, dark lashes. "I'm

scared because he made a lot of dangerous enemies while he was head of the police. But—"

She paused.
"You're right, Renee. It's not like me to lose my head, and I'm not going to do it now. If I will find daddy! Come along! Let's see if they left any clues in the house." She hurriedly against her anxiety, Valerie returned to the library.

She began to go over its disordered contents methodically.

Suddenly, as she moved the bearskin rug that had been kicked into the fender she gave a cry.

Irene saw her pounce. When Valerie straightened up she held a cotton glove, which had been lying in the fender behind the head of the rug, and which was saturated with ink. "They were known criminals who came here and attacked my father, Renee," she said. "Or, at least, one was."

"The girl detective held up the glove. It was of the cheap cotton variety.

"There would hardly have been the need for this, otherwise," she said. "At Scotland Yard, you know, they have what they call their fingerprint department, and keep records of the impressions of the fingers and thumbs of all men and women who pass through the hands of the police.

"This glove was worn by one of the criminals who came here so that he should not leave his prints about. Yet—and her eyes gleamed—"he might have left some, after all, unthinkingly."

"After he got the glove soaked with ink from the inkwell that was overturned on the table and tore it off," said Irene.

"Yes," Valerie nodded. "Look at this glove. It is soaked right through, and he must have got a good deal of ink on his hand. What would you do if you got your hand coated with ink?"

"Wash the ink off," said her cousin.
"Precisely!" Valerie rapped. "And in doing that he might have made the one little fatal slip that criminals often do make. Come up to the bath-room, dear!"

With Flash trailing after them, they ascended to the landing where the bath-room was situated.

"He did wash his hand!" cried Valerie. "He let the water run out of the basin afterwards. But the little moisture left in it is tinged with blue."

She was at the hand-basin to one side of the bath and nodded down into it. She was busy at her handbag. She took from it a small tortoise-shell box divided into two compartments.

Irene, who was keenly interested in spite of her concern for her uncle, saw that, in one was a deep black powder, in the other a whitish powder.

"Lamp-black for bringing out fingerprints on light surfaces. Powdered chalk and mercury for doing likewise on darker backgrounds," said Valerie. "It's a right good job. Now, did he have the flashlight to use his good left hand to turn the hot water tap on and off? A lot depends on that."

She bent over the chromium tap and was filled with eager excitement.

Valerie could see that the bright metal had been recently handled. She dusted the handle of the tap with some of her lamp-black, drew back, and waited for a few seconds.

Then she craned forward again and blew away the superfluous powder.

A thumbprint, clear and blackly outlined, appeared on the tap.

"What will you do now?" asked Irene. "Ring up Scotland Yard and ask them to send somebody along who might be able to identify that print?"

"We might be able to do that without leaving the house—though we must tell the police what has happened," Valerie replied. "Come with me."

Back to the library they went. Valerie took some keys from a drawer in her father's table and unlocked a glass-fronted bookcase near the window.

"Daddy lived for his work," she said, gulping at the lump that wanted to rise in her throat. "He kept careful private records of

all the cases he personally had anything to do with, and compiled his own little fingerprint department."

She ran her finger along the books lining one of the shelves. Then she drew out a bulky volume and carried it to the table. As Valerie seated herself and began to turn the pages, Irene saw that the book was filled with the photographs of thumb and finger impressions with minutely written details under each set.

"These are the marks of all the people my father arrested and carried to the table. As Valerie seated herself a small thumbprint we have to look for. Did you notice how small the one on the top was?"

Irene shook her head. Valerie went on turning the pages.

"If he was attacked by somebody who meant to be revenged on him, the thumbprint should be large," she said. "Yet they also searched the house for something. I can't quite understand that—that."

She reached the end of the book and her white forehead creased in a puzzled frown. Valerie began to go through it for a second time.

"That print in the bath-room could be a woman's thumb impression—it's strikingly small," she said. "It was men the servants saw, but some woman might have been here, too!"

"It's a man's glove," Irene reminded her. "Yes. But any glove would do wear to avoid leaving fingerprints. If a woman was with the men, one of them might have loaned her a pair of gloves before they entered the house. Ah!"

She had ceased to turn the pages of the book, and was staring down at a thumbprint with her breath bated.

Irene moved nearer, and peered over her shoulder.

Together with finger-prints, the thumbprint was set on two pages given over to a woman whom, by the notes in John Draw net, precise hand, Irene saw was named Rosa Biretti, alias "the Countess."

On the opposite page was a photograph of the notorious foreign adventures.

She was dark-haired and undeniably beautiful, with dark, expressive eyes which, in the picture, held a languid, slightly bored smile, harmonising with that on her finely chiselled lips.

At the time the photograph had been taken she seemed to have been exquisitely dressed. It was only when one studied the woman's face that the hint of cruelty and ruthlessness behind the smile in the eyes was realised.

"I wonder," murmured Valerie. "Rosa Biretti—the Countess! My father was the first man to prove enough against her to put her behind prison bars. How she must have hated him!"

The girl detective leaped up.

"Do you think it's her thumbprint on the bath-room tap?" she asked her cousin.
"There are points of similarity in the loops and whorls," Valerie answered. "But I've got to compare the print with the impression in the book to be sure. I reckon she would have served her sentence and be free again by this time."

Flash barked in excitement as they raced up the stairs and into the bath-room.

Valerie held the book close to the tap. The two girls compared the impressions, and together they gave excited exclamations.

"They are the same, aren't they?" Irene breathed.

"Yes," Valerie agreed. "Now we must ring up the police."

On the way back down the stairs, Valerie crisply told Irene some of the particulars of the notorious woman's career.

"She's an Italian," she said. "She and her accomplices got away with cunning swindles amounting in nearly every big city in the world, and laughed at the police when they tried to bring their crimes home to them—until the Countess came to London and made her bid for the famous Blainworth tiara."

"It's tremendously valuable—or, perhaps, I ought to say it was. The diamonds and some of the other stones in it were worth a king's ransom. It was an heirloom, and belonged to the present Lady Blainworth."

"Why do you say it was valuable?"

"Because, after the Countess had posed as an Italian princess, and helped her husband and gang to steal it from Lady Blainworth's house during a reception, it totally disappeared, and has never since been found."

"But Uncle John arrested the Countess for the theft, Val?"

Valerie nodded.

"He and his men almost caught her and her husband redhanded after the theft," she said. "Tony Biretti—the husband—vanished. But daddy traced the Countess, and found that she was staying in an assumed name and disguised as an elderly lady at a London hotel."

"Feeling sure Biretti would communicate with her, my father and a detective-inspector who was assisting him, booked the next room, and waited and watched."

"And did he join her or write to her?"

"He wrote. Daddy felt he had the tiara, and if he could find out where it was he could recover it as well as arresting Biretti. But when they tried to take the Countess by surprise, she rushed out of the room in the hotel on to the balcony with the letter."

"Daddy and the inspector lost her for a few minutes. When they arrested her, she no longer had the letter. They thought she had tossed it into the fire in the room where they found her hiding. A few days after her arrest it was learned that her husband had collapsed in the middle street of Deepmore, a small town in Devonshire. He had died suddenly from heart failure."

"Lady Blainworth has offered several rewards. But nothing has ever been heard of the tiara, and it is thought that the Countess's husband hid it somewhere. But we must telephone Scotland Yard, dear."

She hurried into the library with Irene, turning towards the telephone, which stood on the table.

Before Valerie could raise the receiver Irene uttered a loud cry.

"Valerie! Look!" she gasped. "The face at the window—the Countess!"

Valerie spun on her heels, her eyes going towards the side window at which Irene was pointing.

To her amazement she saw that her cousin was right.

The beautiful but calculating face of the Italian adventures was for a fleeting instant pressed close to the glass.

The next it had disappeared, and they heard the women dashing down the drive.

Valerie dashed for the door.

THROUGH THE BANISTERS!

THE girl detective leaped to the front door and snatched it open.

Her pulses were racing. She was filled with eagerness and suspense. If she could keep track of the woman she might learn almost at once the whereabouts of her father.

But as Valerie stepped the steps, with Flash giving her a deep-throated bay and hurrying past her, Valerie heard a car start away.

It went humming up the quiet, residential road, and in the fleeting glimpse the girl detective caught of it through the privet hedge she saw that it was a taxi, and noted that it was painted royal blue.

"She's gone off in a cab," Valerie rapped, spinning on her heel and almost colliding with Irene. "We've got to go after her. Run back to the house and tell the butler to phone Scotland Yard that my father has been attacked and carried off by the Countess and her gang."

She whistled to Flash, who was crouching to leap the drive gates. Then Valerie raced to the garage at the side of the house, dragged open one of the doors, and vaulted into her neat and speedy sports model.

Irene rejoined her in time to open the second door, and jumped to the running-board. As her cousin sank into the seat beside her Valerie was pressing her foot on the self-starter and fervently hoping that the car would be in running order while she had been away.

To her relief the engine purred into life.

The car leaped forward. Valerie took it speeding down to within a few feet of the drive gates, and Irene jumped out to open them.

A bound carried the eager Flash to the seat beside Valerie, which Irene had just vacated.

He sat there with his tongue lolling, and studiously ignored the gasp of rather indignant surprise which Irene gave as she returned from throwing the gates wide.

With Irene in the rear of the car Valerie took it swiftly into the road. A twist of the steering-wheel and it was round and tearing the way they had gone.

They could no longer see anything of it. But Valerie drove on until the High Street, Kensington, was reached. Even then she did not quite give up hope.

Her eyes alert and seeking the distinctive royal blue of the cab, she guided the sports model in and out of the other traffic at a pace which caused a constable on point duty to frown in disapproval until he recognised her.

"Then, realising that the famous girl detective was possibly engaged on some case, he saluted. Valerie's brakes screeched as she slowed.

"Has a royal blue taxi passed you, constable?" she asked.

"No, miss. There have been one or two cabs by the last few minutes, but they were just the usual black taxis. Anything wrong?"

"Yes; but I haven't time to explain now," Valerie answered. "The cab must have gone the other way," she said to Irene.

"Are you sure it was a taxi, Val? Wouldn't the driver get into trouble for helping criminals?"

"If it could be proved—yes. But he is probably some taximan who worked for the Countess before she went to prison, and ready to take risks in return for getting paid well."

Watching her opportunity, Valerie turned the little sports model and hummed away in the opposite direction.

But her heart was heavy now. Her fears for her father were multiplying.

She spent another quarter of an hour in driving and keeping a sharp look-out for the blue cab, hoping that it might have been delayed or that she would meet it returning this way after setting down the Countess.

She turned the girl detective drew blank.

She tried to recall the names of the men from Scotland Yard, who she expected would be awaiting her.

After running the car into the drive and mounting the steps with Irene and Flash, to her mild surprise Valerie saw that the front door was open.

Hearing a step on the gravel, she turned and saw old Andrew, the butler, approaching the steps.

"Did you leave this door open, Andrew?" Valerie inquired.

"Yes, Miss Valerie. I only slipped out for a few minutes—to go to the telephone call-box at the end of the road."

"The call-box? Why? Why couldn't you communicate with the police over our own telephone?"

"It's dead, miss. I tried and tried to get the Exchange, then found that the wire had been cut where it runs outside the house."

"Cut before those masked men took you by surprise, of course," she commented. "They were thorough and took no risks. You have phoned the Yard?"

"Yes, miss. An inspector is coming to the house at once. They seemed dreadfully concerned to hear that Mr. Drew had been carried away, especially when I mentioned it was the Countess behind it, as Miss Irene told me to say."

Valerie bit her pallid lip.

Then Scotland Yard felt as she did, that some dire vengeance was intended against her father!

Tortured with suspense again, Valerie walked a little dully into the library.

Irene saw her lips quiver for a moment as she mechanically seated herself. Flash appeared to know by instinct that danger threatened his master and that his beloved Valerie was the prey of mental anguish.

He walked up to her, rested his muzzle on her hand, and looked into her pale face with his faithful eyes moist and full of loyal sympathy.

"What's that?" Valerie suddenly started.

"What's what, Val?" asked Irene.

"There's somebody in my bed-room—it's

A VITAL CLUE!



Valerie suddenly bent down and picked up a glove she had not previously noticed. "Ah!" she exclaimed. "There was a known criminal among the intruders! He wore this glove to prevent leaving fingerprints!"

directly over this room," Valerie said, rising to her feet. "Didn't you hear that floorboard creak?"

"It's possibly only one of the women servants."

"It might be, but we'll go up and make sure," Valerie said.

She went on swift, silent feet to the staircase and mounted it. Irene, who in her heart thought that Valerie had been mistaken about the creaking board, followed softly, with Flash.

The girl detective turned on to the three stairs that led to the higher landing and stole along it to the door of her room, which she saw was closed.

Pausing outside it for an instant Valerie listened. Her highly trained ears detected movements in the room which were inaudible to Irene. Abruptly she seized the handle and sent the door swinging inward.

"So we meet again, Countess!" Irene heard her say, to her utter amazement, as Valerie stepped into the room.

For just a breathing space, Irene stood rooted to the landing.

She realised that the adventuress was desperate and that she probably was armed. Irene went cold at the thought, and her heart played quiver tricks.

Then she set her chin and stepped into the room after her cousin. No matter what danger there might be, she was going to stand by Valerie.

The scene in the bed-room was inexplicable to Irene.

One of the servants had brought up the old suitcase which the girl detective had had with her on her Devon holiday, and it lay open on the bed.

Valerie's personal belongings lay scattered all over the bed.

The beautiful Italian had started up from bending over the case. She held a penknife in one hand. In the other was a stamped envelope which had been through the post. The lining of the suitcase had been slit.

"No, just a moment, Flash!" Valerie exclaimed, catching at the Alsatian's collar as he growled down in his shaggy chest

and started towards the Countess menacingly. "The police shall deal with her, old chap."

"So that's it!" she continued. "You're only recently out of prison, Countess, and once with accomplices and twice alone you have come to this house to-night in search of that old suitcase belonging to my father. It was not here at all during your first visit. I had it on holiday with me."

"Stand away from that door, Miss Drew!" the Countess breathed, and made a snatch for her handbag, which lay on the bed.

The girl detective's hand shot out from where she stood at the opposite side of the bed. She was a fraction the quicker, and she whipped up the handbag.

From its weight, Valerie knew that it held a small revolver. She smiled grimly and tossed the bag out of reach under the bed.

"We can do without gun-play, Countess," she said. "Of course, I understand now. My father had that suitcase with him some years ago when he stayed at the hotel to watch you, and there was no doubt a break in the lining."

"When you received the letter from your husband, telling you where to find the Blain-worth tiara, and were then in danger of arrest and hard pressed, you doubled back into my father's room and hid the letter in his suitcase before you concealed yourself elsewhere."

Irene listened in breathless and fascinated astonishment to Valerie's lightning deductions.

She saw from the vindictive hardening of the beautiful woman's face that Valerie had hit upon the truth.

"The cunning of it! To hide the letter in the Commissioner's own suitcase! Irene thought. Who would dream of seeking it there?"

"You are clever, Miss Valerie Drew!" sneered the Countess, starting slowly round the foot of the bed. "Well, supposing I admit that this is the letter? It makes no difference. I am going to walk quietly out of this house with it and—"

"You're going to be arrested!" cut in Valerie sternly, restraining the struggling and growing Flash with difficulty.

"Indeed?" The Countess laughed mockingly. "I think not. If I do not return safely to

CAUGHT!



The woman straightened up with a startled cry as Valerie burst into the room. In her hand was the missing letter! "Stop!" Valerie cried desperately. "Give me that letter!"

certain friends of mine, you will never see your father again! Do you hear me?"

Her dark eyes were suddenly blazing, her passionate hatred broke through her mask of sneering indifference.

"It was he who sent me to years of misery in one of your English prisons! It was he—"

"You deserved it!" flashed Valerie. "My father only did his duty. And you dare not harm him. If you did, you would have the whole police force moving against you, and I would not rest until I had brought you to justice!"

"Your threats leave me unmoved," shrugged the Countess. "I know the captain of a tramp steamer who will do almost anything if he is paid well enough. In the South Pacific is a tiny island not marked on charts and surrounded by such dangerous reefs that only a small row-boat can creep through.

"How would you like to think that your father had been marooned there—dumped there to drag out the rest of his life in utter solitude, with only wild fruits and shellfish to eat? For the island is uninhabited, Miss Drew. It would be a worse fate than that to which he sent me for a stated number of years—and an unending one!"

Fear gripped at Valerie. She knew the Countess was quite capable of carrying out her terrible plan. Her father would just disappear off the face of the earth and languish on the uninhabited isle for the remainder of his days.

"That's what will happen to him unless you quieten that dog by telling him I am a friend," the Countess said, with a soft, exultant laugh. "That's what will happen to your father unless I am free of the house with this letter within one minute."

"And then it would happen to him just the same," cried Valerie. "You do not know the meaning of the word honour. Do you think I would take your word if you promised to free my father in return for your own freedom?"

"You little fool, you are playing a dangerous game!" hissed the Countess, and suddenly clutched at the bedclothes.

In the twinkling of an eye, the coverlet and

a blanket under it were snatched off. Flash let out a furious bay on the Countess making her sudden move, twisted his collar free of Valerie's fingers, and sprang for the woman.

She hurled the bedclothes over Flash as he rose into the air.

The dog's second angry bay was muffled. He thudded to the floor for the moment helplessly enveloped and mixed up with the blanket and quilt. The Countess darted past him, eluded the clutch Irene made for her, and made a leap for the door.

As she went, she tore Irene's handbag from where she had it on her wrist. The woman guessed it would hold money, as it did, and her own handbag was out of reach under the bed.

But she was not to get away so easily. She tried to thrust Valerie on one side. The girl detective ducked under her, thrusting hands and caught at one of her wrists.

Together they staggered out on to the landing.

Flash was disengaging himself from the bedclothes. The Countess heard the rumbling growl he gave as he emerged. With her free hand she made a desperate clutch at the handle of the door and slammed it on the dog.

The Countess then tried to trip Valerie. The latter wound her arm about the woman's neck and they lurched again.

Valerie's back was brought into violent contact with the banister rail. The house was a pre-war dwelling and the banisters were growing old.

The girl detective heard the rail snap at her back. Some of the banisters broke, too, and she felt herself pitching out over the main staircase.

She freed her hold from the woman and clutched wildly to save herself. One hand it sagged out further over the well of the house and was torn through Valerie's fingers.

She fell with a crash near the foot of the stairs below, and struck the back of her head stuningly against the edge of one.

She rolled limply into the hall. . .

BY NIGHT EXPRESS!

"MISS VALERIE! Miss Valerie! Oh, what's happened?"

The girl detective's first dizzy impression after her crashing fall to her from a great way off.

Then, as her throbbing and pain-racked head began to clear, she found that the faithful servant was quite near, after all, and kneeling beside her while he raised her in his arms. He was trembling with agitation and anxiety.

"I—I fell through the banisters, Andrew," faltered Valerie. But she and she moved her limbs a little dazedly—"I don't think any bones are broken. Please help me up. My head's swimming."

With shaking hands he assisted her to her feet and steadied her, as Valerie swayed. "That woman!" she panted suddenly. "The Countess! What happened to her?"

"The—the Countess, miss?" Old Andrew gazed at her anxiously. He plainly wondered whether the fall had affected his young mistress' mind.

"Yes, the Countess," the girl detective repeated impatiently. "She was here again. How long have I been unconscious?"

"Only about a minute, miss. I rushed here when I heard the noise of your fall from where I was at the rear of the house. I did fancy I heard the front door close, but—"

"Of course you heard it, Andrew," Valerie nodded, and winced at the movement of her head, as he excruciating agony. "But—Irene and Flash. Why didn't Irene send Flash after her and—ah! Listen!"

From above sounded the drumming of fists upon wood and the baying of Flash.

At a staggering run, the girl detective returned up the stairs to the landing. Irene and the Albatian were still in her bedroom. Valerie understood when she saw the key that was in the door on the other side.

She turned it and Irene opened the door from inside the bedroom.

"She looked us in," she gasped. "Did she get away? And what was that dreadful crash I heard? Was it—"

"It was me imitating an acrobat minus the usual net," said Valerie grimly. "We fell into the banisters, they broke and let me through. The Countess has got away."

"Oh, Valerie!" breathed Irene, paling and clasping her hands. "And she said—"

She stopped awkwardly on seeing the desperate dread that came fleetingly to the girl detective's eyes.

"Yes, she said that she would send my father to a firing death, dear. And she meant it. I am convinced of that," Valerie said. "Somehow, I've got to pick up the threads that her escape has forced us to drop—to rescue daddy before it is too late, and to prevent the Countess and the men working with her from getting away with the Blainworth tiara. But, how to do it—how?"

Valerie held a hand to her throbbing forehead, and looked about the disordered room in search of inspiration.

"The Countess' handbag!" she cried suddenly. "Get it for me, Renee. I don't think I could do myself, just at the moment."

Her cousin crawled under the bed and emerged with the bag.

Valerie opened it.

In the hope that there might be some clue that would give her a hint as to her enemy's immediate plans, she swiftly checked the contents: some twenty pounds in notes, a little silver and a few coppers, a powder compact, a lipstick of an expensive make, a handkerchief, and a little nickel-plated revolver.

The clue she needed so urgently was certainly not in evidence. But something she had hoped to find was there—the handkerchief.

"Come along. We'll have her yet!" she said, starting for the stairs.

The girl detective made her way out into the drive.

"Why, what are you doing?" inquired Irene, as she saw Valerie holding the Countess' handkerchief to the muzzle of Flash.

It was daintily perfumed, and Flash drew back, shaking his intelligent head in distaste.

"I want him to get on her trail," Valerie said, glancing up at her cousin. "Come here,

Flash! I know you don't like scent, but you've got to find her, boy. Good Flash—seek!"

The Alsatian understood now what was required of him. He gave an eager whimper, mastered his dislike of the perfume, and sniffed at the handkerchief.

After that, he dropped his muzzle to the gravel and nosed around in a circle.

While he was doing that, Valerie fastened to his collar a stout lead which she had taken from the hallstand.

Suddenly Flash's movements grew quick and eager. He threw up his head, and gave a triumphant bay. Dropping his nostrils to the ground again, Flash made for the gates.

"He's picked up the scent," breathed Valerie. He'll lead us after her for as far as she went on foot."

Out on to the pavement went Flash, straining on the leash and almost tugging his slender mistress off her feet.

On he pressed until the High Street, Kensington, was once again reached.

"I don't understand this, Val."

Irene spoke as Valerie's progress grew slower and less certain. The feet of other pedestrians had crossed and recrossed the trail of the Countess in this bustling area.

"What don't you understand?" the girl detective inquired.

"Why, the Countess came back the first time with a taximan, who was an accomplice—or so you deduced. Why didn't he bring her back the second time? I mean, why has she walked so far?"

"The most simple deductions can explain that, dear," said Valerie. "The man's cab was of a distinctive colour, and they would know that I probably glimpsed it. Apart from the driver himself possibly refusing to risk returning and being mixed up in this affair, the Countess would hardly use the blue cab again. There would be the danger of our seeing it and instantly being put on our guard. Hallo!"

Flash was turning into the road. He passed by a coffee-stall set against an "island" in its centre.

The stout and happy-go-lucky-looking man behind the counter eyed them curiously.

"You had a taxi pull up here not long ago," said Valerie.

"That's right, miss," the proprietor agreed. "And a well-dressed lady engaged it?"

He nodded.

"She seemed all in a flurry like," he volunteered. "The driver had only just ordered some grub, and she offered him double fare if he'd not stop to get outside it."

Valerie's blue eyes glistened with eagerness. "You didn't, of course, hear where the woman told the driver to go?"

"I did, miss. Not that I pry into other people's business," he added hastily. "But I was a-standin' behind here, polishin' some cups, an' I couldn't help hearin' what she said. She told the taxi-bloke she wanted to get to Ludgate Circus as fast as he could."

"Thank you," said Valerie, and turned away.

"Isn't this lucky—to find out where she went so easily?" asked Irene, when they were back on the pavement.

Valerie gave a mirthless smile. She was still haunted with thoughts of what might be happening to her father.

"You wouldn't say that if you were experienced in the ways of criminals, Renee," she said. "The Countess would be on the alert to throw off any possible pursuit. If she really went to Ludgate Circus—and didn't change the destination after the cab had got away from the coffee-stall—it was only a blind."

"You mean she'd take another cab to where she really wanted to go from there?"

"Yes. But come along! Ludgate Circus must be our destination, as it's the only lead we have."

A taxi chanced to be crawling along in search of a fare.

Valerie threw up her hand and brought the cab running in by the kerb. She told the man they wanted to go to Ludgate Circus. They entered, and the cab whirled away.

They alighted, and Valerie paid off the man under the railway bridge that faces the entrance to Fleet Street.

"We might be miles from where the Countess actually was set down," she said. "But we can only hope for the best, and sound every possible chance. She might have felt fairly confident that she had left me out of the running and not have been too careful."

"And if she really left her cab here, she might have gone over to the cabs you see on the rank there, in New Bridge Street, and engaged another from there. Let's try it, Renee."

With Flash still on the leash, they crossed over to the rank.

A nondescript youth, with a cap pulled over one eye and a "choker" about his neck, instantly threw open the door of the foremost cab for them. He was accustomed to hang about there, and perform similar services for intending travellers in the hope of a few coppers by way of tips.

"Wait a moment," said Valerie. "I am not sure we want a cab. How long have you been about here?"

"Two years, miss," grinned the young fellow. "You see, I'm out of work, an'—"

"I mean to-night," Valerie gave a gesture of impatience.

"Oh, best part of the evening, miss. Why?"

"Cried the girl detective described the Countess.

"She's an Italian, and has a dark foreign look," she concluded. "Can you say if she took a cab from here?"

The hearts of Valerie and Irene leaped. The youth was nodding.

"I'm almost sure it was 'er," he said, with no particular worry as to grammar. "She told me to tell the driver Paddington Station, and she gave me half-a-dollar."

"Here are two half-dollars," the girl detective said, causing him to gasp and beam with joy, as she slipped two half-crowns into his unclean hand. "We do want a cab now. And you can tell the driver Paddington Station—also that it's trouble fare if he breaks records."

"Yes, miss. Certainly, miss! Gosh! I wish I could meet ladies like the Eyetalian an' you every night!"

He hardly knew whether to touch his ragged

FLASH ON THE TRAIL!



With his second bound, Flash, snarling dangerously, was on the Italian, bowling him backwards. Tensely, Valerie watched from the window, with Flash's help, she thought, grimly, they'd win through yet.

cap first, or to reopen the door of the foremost taxi.

"All right. I heard what you said," called the driver, who had already started his engine. "Jump in, young ladies, an' I'll shoot you along on Patton as fast as I can make the old bus hum!"

With a throaty purr, the taxi carried Valerie, Irene, and Flash from the rank and into Fleet Street.

The driver, who was an elderly man, skilled in weaving in and out of the congested London traffic, kept his word. The girls and the faithful dog were at Paddington before they realised that it could be possible.

Valerie gladdened the man's heart by thrusting the promised treble fare into his hand. She then hurried to the booking office.

"Is there a train bound for Deepmoor leaving soon?" she asked the clerk.

"One in three minutes, miss," he said. "You want tickets?"

"In a moment," answered Valerie, and drew Irene aside.

"Now, Renee, I wanted you to make a quick decision," she said, in a low tone. "Tony Biretti, the Countess' husband, died suddenly at Deepmoor, remember. I half-guessed she might be making for there as soon as I established that I had driven to this station.

"I am sure that I find there is a train due to leave in ten minutes that I've reasoned correctly, and that the Countess is on it. Her husband no doubt hid the Blainworth tiara somewhere in the Devon moor district about Deepmoor, and the Countess, now she has the train, telling her just where it is, is going there to get it. There might be danger—very real and desperate danger. Would you prefer to go back to my home and let me go alone?"

"No, no!" Irene cried, almost indignantly.

"How could you ask such a thing, Val? I've always longed to be with you, and perhaps helping you a little in one of your cases—and now you want to freeze me out. No fear! If you are going to Deepmoor, I go with you."

"Good for you, dear!" said Valerie, giving her shoulder a quick pressure.

She turned back to the booking office and purchased tickets.

"Hurry up!" urged the booking clerk, as she slapped the tickets and Valerie's change on the counter before his small window.

They ran for the platform. There was little time to spare. The guard was preparing to blow his whistle, to send the train rushing through the night over the mile upon mile of gleaming metals into the moor country.

"I hope the Countess doesn't glimpse us," said Valerie anxiously, when they were seeking a compartment. "It would spoil everything if she did."

The girl detective kept an alert check on the faces of the passengers peering from the windows of the coaches they passed. If the Countess was on the train, as she deduced and hoped, she was possibly well forward; for Valerie saw nothing of her.

They reached a "Ladies only" compartment, fortunately, was one of the few unoccupied. They gained it without Flash's presence being in the last-moment rush that was taking place.

As Valerie slammed the door after them the guard's whistle shrilled. With long-drawn-out snorts from the engine, the train started to leave the station.

Soon after London was left behind a white-coated attendant made his way along the corridor, announcing that supper could be served for any passengers desiring it in the restaurant car.

Until then Valerie had been sitting with an expression on her charming face that told Irene she was thinking deeply, and she had not broken in on her thoughts.

Now, as the attendant passed, Valerie roused herself and squared her slender shoulders.

"I'm worried, Renee," she said, with a grave shake of her red-gold head. "We might be rushing away from where my father is being kept a prisoner. But our only course now is—cling to the Countess, who should eventually lead us to him—and, with luck, we are doing that."

"Can't we find out for certain, Val, whether she is on the train?"

"Yes, in a few minutes. She will probably

go into the restaurant car. One of my father's notes about her in his case-book was that she loved the good things of life—and she's no doubt making the most of them now she's out of prison again. But we've got to move warily, Renee."

Valerie sat with her eyes on the neat little yellow-writhed chair she wore. When some five minutes had passed away she rose, opened the sliding door, and stepped into the corridor.

"She should be in the restaurant car now if she's going to be there at all," she whispered. "Come along, But, whatever you do, don't let her see you."

Valerie held her fingers linked through the collar of Flash.

They walked along the swaying corridor, with the speed of the express ever on the increase, until they were at the entrance to the restaurant car.

Valerie peered cautiously in, then shot out her arm to make sure of holding Irene back.

"I'll give you an order to an attentive waiter, the notorious Rosa Biretti—otherwise the Countess—at a table just inside.

The waiter had his back turned; the woman's eyes were bent upon the card. Her handbag, or, rather, the bag she had stolen for convenience from Irene—lay on the seat beside her.

The girl detective stared at it for a moment with bated breath.

The Countess would have thrust into it the long-lost letter revealing the hiding-place of the costly tiara when she had made her escape. The girl detective could be in the bag.

Was there any way of securing it without the cunning adventures becoming aware of the fact?

Valerie and Irene seated themselves unnoticed at a table opposite. Flash followed and squatted down beside his mistress. That gave Valerie an idea. But it was a risky one—terribly risky.

If he were told to get the bag, Flash would steal across and take it. Valerie had long since trained him to bring to her any article at which she pointed.

But at a table level with that of the Countess on the other side of the train was a benign-looking gentleman, who was whiling away the time while he waited to have his order taken by looking about him. If he saw Flash take the bag, and raised the alarm, it would not only be very awkward, but the Countess could not fail to know that they were on her heels.

Would the man never study the menu, or the newspaper he held in one of his hands?

Unless the thing could be done before the waiter left the Countess' table, and she ceased to have her attention riveted on the menu, it could not be accomplished at all.

Ah!

At last! The man had picked up his menu, and was adjusting a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez to inspect it.

It was now or never!

"Flash," whispered Valerie, stooping and speaking with her lips close to the Alsatian's pricked ear, "get it, boy! Get Renee's bag! Careful, old fellow!"

Flash, who knew that Flash was to commit his "theft" without allowing anybody to see. Understanding something of what was going to happen, Irene held her breath, as the sagacious dog crouched low and started to crawl across the restaurant car.

Oh, the suspense of it!

He, the waiter, took the menu, and he completed taking the order and turned he would be likely to stumble over him.

Now Flash was within reach of the bag; he was furtively raising his head to take it in his teeth; his jaws were actually closing on it. But, to the consternation of Valerie and Irene, the waiter was straightening up, about to swing round from the table to the door.

A collision with Flash, who was backing from the seat with the bag in his mouth, seemed inevitable. Then the waiter noticed that the Countess had placed a cigarette between her daintily curried lips.

He paused to strike a match and to hold it for her. The situation seemed saved to some extent. The benign gentleman lowered the menu and removed his glasses.

He actually saw Flash.

The "unconscious" of thrills surged through Valerie. She expected the man to notice the bag in the dog's mouth and to utter a shout that would raise an alarm and bring an accusation of being professional train-thieves against herself and her cousin.

Any such position could be eventually explained away. But the Countess would be on her guard. She would see that they had no further chance to find either the tiara or the captive John Drew.

"Hallo, old boy!" said the man, leaning from his seat and patting Flash, on his turning away from the table with the handbag. "Nice old fellow!"

And then, to her intense relief, Valerie realised that without his glasses the man must be short-sighted. He had not seen the bag in the hound's mouth—and Flash was stealing towards them with it.

Valerie and her cousin left the car and retreated to a friend's waiting compartment. As Flash rose in a begging position the girl detective took the bag quickly from his mouth and gave him a rewarding pat.

"Good lad," she breathed, snapping open the handbag.

Almost the first thing she saw was the envelope she had found with the Countess' name. Valerie took out the folded sheet of paper it held and straightened it out.

Irene saw the eagerness die out of her eyes. For this was what was pencilled in block letters on the sheet of paper:

"UBUYRJB GEZ SVSUG PNIK
GUERR CNYRF SEBZ RAGENAPR."

The letter was in cipher!

THE HOLLOW TOR!

"WHAT'S wrong, Val?"

"It's in code, Renee. Quick! read it out letter for letter, and tell me where the spaces are! I want to get this bag back to the Countess. If she misses it she'll be suspicious at once."

The girl detective gave the paper to her cousin in she spoke. She slipped from her own bag a small notebook and pencil.

Breathlessly, Irene read out the mysterious symbols. Valerie's pencil flew over the page of the book.

"All right—I've got it!" she said. "Deepmoor is only a small place, and though we've taken risks we've done the right thing as long as we can return this bag without her knowing it was temporarily in our possession. It would be practically impossible to shadow her unseen when she leaves the train, especially if she takes to the moors and the moon remains bright."

Valerie refolded the paper and returned it to the envelope. She slipped the latter back into the bag and closed it.

"Hold Flash and wait for me," she said, after a lady and gentleman had passed them on their way to the restaurant car.

Close behind the other passengers Valerie caught the car. Luck favoured her. The train rushed into a turn and the noise of its thundering wheels was trebly magnified.

The faint sound that the bag made as Valerie tossed it just behind the heels of the male passenger as he was passing the Countess' seat failed to attract the adventures' attention.

Valerie drew swiftly back. She returned to Irene.

Soon the Countess must miss the bag. She would, however, see it lying on the floor of the car, and conclude it had merely fallen there. And, in the meantime, if she had any luck at all, she—Valerie—would be mastering the cipher.

Do you think you can make anything of it, Val? asked Irene, when back in their compartment.

Valerie perked over her notebook.

"I don't know—yet," said the girl detective. "I've made a study of ciphers, but it all depends whether this is more or less simple or complex and. The first thing to do in trying to decode a cipher is to determine what stands for E."

BENEATH THE TOR!



The cavern was lit by the fitful yellow light of an oil lamp. By its rays the two criminals were searching—searching for the hidden jewels. Valerie did not move. But her heart beat fast. Would the search never end?

"Because that's the most-used letter in almost any message," nodded Irene. "Can you spot it in that one?"

"The letter R crops up six times," said Valerie, after counting. "And it occurs twice at the end of 'GUERR.' If R stands for E, perhaps these letters are reversed, and E means R. That would give us REE as the final three letters of that cipher word."

"Is it 'THREE!'" cried Irene, in fascination.

"Just what I was wondering. That would make G stand for T, and U for H. Wait a moment! If the alphabet is split in halves, and the first half ranged over the second half, E comes over R. I know that from studying such things. Let's try it."

Her pencil went to work. The result was:

"A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z."

"Eureka!" Valerie cried. "This is it, Renee! You can decode the message for yourself now. All you do is to read the top letter for the one beneath it, or vice versa, as the case may be. Try it!"

Her eyes awoke, Irene took the book and the pencil. Slowly at first, then faster, as she grew accustomed to the method, she wrote:

"HOLLOW TOR FIFTH CAVE
THREE PACES FROM ENTRANCE."

Irene read the message aloud. "What's it mean, Val?" she whispered, in tense excitement.

"That the Blainworth tiara is buried or hidden in some way three paces from the entrance of the fifth cave in the interior of a hollow tor," returned Valerie. "I certainly had no idea that Deepmoor Tor was hollow, but it would seem to be."

"Is there only the one tor, then?"

"As far as I know—yes. It's a mighty, towering pile of granite and rocks near the center of the moor. We passed it last year, when daddy and I went on that motoring tour," Valerie said, her lips unsteady for a moment.

"Tony Biretti must have known he was dying from his grave heart trouble. He sent this letter in code to the Countess so that she could recover the tiara from where he had hidden it after his death. No doubt he deemed her too clever to be arrested and sent to prison for a number of years as she was."

For hour after hour the train crashed its way over the lines. Both Irene and Flash nodded drowsily, then slumbered.

But there was no sleep for Valerie. In her corner she sat thinking, thinking.

The Hollow Tor!

What if they took her father to these sinister hidden caves in the heart of the tor?

They would have to find a cunning hiding-place for the intended victim of her revenge until arrangements could be made to ship him to the lonely isle in the Pacific. There were quiet spots on the Devon coast whence he could be quietly got aboard the tramp steamer the adventuress had boasted about.

"The train will reach Deepmoor before the car," murmured the girl detective. "Perhaps it would be as well to play a waiting game with some of the Devon police when we reach there. We might surprise them taking daddy to the tor."

But Fate was to step in.

Suddenly the train pulled up in the deep shadow between two embankments and remained at a dead halt, even the hissing of steam from the engine ceasing.

Irene awakened with a start.

Flash, also, raised his head and blinked sleepily.

"Are we at Deepmoor?" Irene asked, rubbing her eyes.

"No. We've stopped somewhere on the line, for some reason," said Valerie. "I hope nothing is wrong—that there isn't going to be any great delay," she added anxiously.

Presently the guard came along the corridor. He paused as Valerie opened the door of the compartment and made inquiries.

"The engine's broken a piston, miss," was the man's explanation. "I'm afraid we'll be stuck here for a goodish while—till a fresh engine can be got to us."

Valerie said nothing. But the little colour that had returned to her face faded as she resumed her seat in the corner.

"A goodish while." When a railway official spoke like that it might mean hours before they were again on their way, she thought.

The car could reach the tor, and her father might even be taken from it and put on board the vessel before she had a chance to find him! To Valerie every dragging minute was like an hour. Her hands clenched tighter, tighter in her mental anguish and suspense. Would she ever see her father again?

"Don't worry too much, Val!" whispered Irene, understanding, and laying a sympathetic hand on hers. "You'll win through! You'll rescue him all right. I feel it, somehow!"

"I wish I could be certain you're right, Renee!" Valerie said huskily.

When an attendant inquired if they would like some coffee and sandwiches which were being supplied free of charge in view of what had happened, Irene insisted on their being brought.

"Now you nibble a sandwich and drink some coffee. You've got to, Val," she said. "You don't know what dangers and difficulties lie before you, and you'll be fit for nothing if you don't eat and drink."

"You're right, dear," admitted Valerie, and tried not to show, when the sandwiches and coffee were supplied, how the food almost choked her.

At last!

From in front there was a great deal of noise and jolting. The substitute engine had arrived. Within a few minutes the train gave a jerk forward, and once more they were on the move.

It seemed ages to Valerie, in her keyed-up suspense, before the express slowed, she looked from the window and saw "Deepmoor" on one of the lemps of an ill-lighted station.

"Here we are—and this is where we have to be cautious," she said. "We must avoid the Countess seeing us. Let me go first."

Deepmoor was perhaps one of the train's most unimportant halts. To make the task of Valerie more hazardous, only the Countess alighted.

That meant that Valerie had to restrain Flash and only a light, with the hound and Irene, after the woman had gone through the door.

They jumped out hurriedly then, on the train beginning to leave the station. As they moved down the platform they heard a motor of some sort starting up.

The vehicle sped from the station, and the Countess was in it without a doubt.

"Is there a chance to get a taxi or any sort of cab?" the girl detective asked of the yawning porter who took their tickets.

"No, miss. You're late. We only have one taxi here, an' the lady who come out just before you has taken that. A pity you didn't catch up with her an' arrange to share it."

"How fortunate I induced Flash to get her bag and that letter!" breathed Valerie, as they walked away from the station. "We should have lost her completely otherwise, and had no idea for where she was making. Well, Renee, we've got to walk. Come along!"

Valerie strode out so briskly, that her cousin had almost to run to keep up with her.

They passed through the sleeping town and up to the fringe of the lonely and barren moor.

It was bathed in cold moonlight, and all about the girls and the dog was a great eerie silence and desolation.

Valerie pressed on up a slope, and then in the distance they could see the harsh shape of the tor towering high above the grass-land and silhouetted blackly against the moonlit sky.

"That's the tor," said Valerie, and quickly told her cousin what she had reasoned in the train. "I wonder if daddy is there?"

On they went, with Valerie murmuring a firm "Quiet, boy!" to Flash.

They saw nothing of the taxi. After setting down the Countess, the driver had doubtless gone home by some other route.

Though they had been able to see the tor almost from the moment they gained the moor, it was much farther away than it looked.

They walked for over half an hour before they grew really close to its mighty base of tumbled rocks and granite. There was still not a sound on the moor. The night hush was depressing and absolute—a little terrifying to Irene, though she would not have admitted it for untold wealth.

"Look, Val!" she whispered suddenly. "There's a light at the foot of the rocks. I believe it comes from the window of a cottage."

"It does," answered Valerie, straining her eyes. "Is it just a shepherd's cottage, or does it belong to the Countess and her gang? Renee," she added excitedly, "it might give into the secret way into the caves in the tor! Not a sound, dear! We've got to find out."

They rose on tiptoe, and crept noiselessly on to the tiny dwelling nestling in a hollow in the bushes under the massive tor.

Valerie put her hand on Flash's collar and stood at the head. She reached the lighted window, treading gingerly on the strip of gravel under it, for fear she should kick against some of the small stones and create a sound.

There was a linen blind, but it was old, and there was a tiny break in it.

The girl detective peered through, and the first thing she saw was Irene's handbag lying on the table.

A thrill shot through her. So this was the property of the dangerous gang!

Now Valerie saw a man, with reaven-black hair and a sallow skin, rising from an armchair. Somehow his air seemed to be tense and startled, and he was staring at the far wall.

The girl detective followed the direction of his gaze. She understood, and drew a sharp breath as she discerned a massive tor.

A grey-green light was twinkling in a bulb set in the wall, and she realised that she was the cause.

It was an alarm signal. There must be something cunningly hidden under the gravel on which she had been forced to tread to peer in at the window. It was

pressing on a switch and creating the warning light.

In another moment the Italian was springing for a bell-shaped net the light, on the point of pressing it to warn the Countess and any other members of the gang who were, without doubt, somewhere in the secret caves.

It meant failure—life-long loneliness and a living death for her father—if the man reached that bell.

A MESSAGE FOR SCOTLAND YARD!

VALERIE acted like lightning in her desperation.

There was a neglected rockery at her side. She grabbed a heavy piece of clinker, heaved it up, smashed it at the window and its framework.

Crash! Glass and woodwork were hurled into the room.

The girl detective seized the blind and tore it down. The Italian paused to spin on his heels.

"At him, Flash!" cried Valerie, stepping to one side.

The Alsatian needed no second bidding. He growled and crouched, and then took a flying bound through the window.

In a flash he was rising again and hurtling for the man. The fellow gasped in terror as he saw the menace in the dog's green-glowing eyes.

Flash struck him in the chest. Stumbling back, he got his legs mixed with a chair, and tumbled to the ground.

His temple came into sharp contact with the wainscoting.

"Guard him, Flash!" Valerie panted, starting to climb through the window, and hoping fervently that the noise had not carried to the Countess and any other accomplices who might be with her.

For the moment there was, however, no need for any vigilance on Flash's part. The Italian lay motionless, with closed eyes.

Valerie swiftly studied the man's face. He was not going to be unconscious for long, and would have to be made a prisoner.

"Now if you can't find some rope," she said, hearing Irene drop softly through the window.

In a cupboard there were two coils.

Valerie used one to tie the hands of the Italian together behind him and to secure his ankles. It was no time to be too scrupulous. She formed a rough gag of his own handkerchief, and forced it between his teeth.

"Now if you can't get into the caves," she said. "I don't know how it's done, but try that matting on the floor."

Irene lifted the wide strip of matting and looked under it.

"Good for you, Val!" she whispered. "There's a trapdoor here."

Valerie turned from the Italian, who was already beginning to stir. She saw a ring-bolt in the trap, and raised it with an effort of her supple strength. It was a massive and heavy trap.

The girl detective peered into the black void below.

"There are steps hewn out of the rocky ground. Best not risk showing a light," she said. "Irene, I am not sure whether I ought to take you any farther with me."

"Stuff!" scoffed her cousin. "If you're going down—and, of course, you are—I shall be coming up. I'm going through with this now."

Valerie pressed her hand. Carrying the spare coil of rope, which, she felt, might come in handy, she crept down the steps. Flash was directly at her heels, and Irene brought up the rear.

The darkness was intense. Valerie stood for a breathless moment, listening, when she found herself on level, rocky ground.

Not a sound reached her strained ears. The girl detective took her electric torch from her bag and discreetly flashed the light about her.

Irene stifled an ejaculation of amazement at what she saw.

All about them were rocks that glistened and

dripped with water, and forming dark hollows in the boulders, were caves.

There were six, and, one by one, Valerie and Irene investigated them. Five were comparatively short, and they found themselves brought up short against rocky walls.

In the last they entered it was different. The opening was more a winding tunnel than a cave, and they pressed on and on until at length the murmur of voices fell on their ears.

Tiptoeing on, they sensed that the tunnel had ended in a wide, open space honeycombed the base of the lowering tor. Through some fissure above, short of moonlight was stealing.

It picked out five further dark openings in the rock before them.

The one on the right was the smallest of all, and so low that a person would have to go down on hands and knees to crawl through.

"S-sh!" Valerie whispered, and moved on silent feet towards it.

She guessed this was the "fifth cave." It was from behind the rocks at the low mouth that the voices were coming, and she could hear somebody working with a shovel.

"A nuisance, this rock falling from the roof since Tony hid the sparklers!" growled a man's voice. "Still, I've nearly shovelled it all away now, Countess."

"Be so good as to answer the tones of the adventuress responded. "The steamer will be anchoring off the coast at any moment now, if it isn't already there. I think I shoo off that meddling girl. But I've heard stories of her cleverness, and I'm anxious not to take risks."

"She'll find me and get you, Rosa Birretti!" exclaimed a third voice, which caused Valerie almost to start.

Her father was in the cave!

"You think so, signor?" the Countess uttered a soft, sneering laugh. "I fear you are a trifle too optimistic. I just want to unweath the Blainworth tiara and to dangle it before your eyes."

The laughter died out of her voice, and was replaced by malicious hatred.

"It's the last jewels of any sort you see will be on this earth, John Drew. During the years you will drag out on the island you will be able to recall their flashing beauty and to remember that the Countess beat you in the end. You—What is it, Burke?"

"My shovel's struck something. It feels like a jewel-case."

Valerie had been standing with her fingers clasped hard about the arm of Irene.

Realising that all the attentions of the Countess and the man with her would be centred on the tiara, she fell to her knees and looked through the opening into the cave.

It's height was normal once the dwarfed entrance was passed. A hurricane lamp was standing in a niche in the wall. By its light Valerie looked upon a dramatic scene.

By a pile of debris which had obviously fallen from the roof the two criminals stood.

The Countess was watching a soiled jewel-case which the man had just taken from a shallow hole in the cavern's floor.

Her hands trembling in mingled greed and eagerness, the adventuress tore open the lid. A cry of exultation broke from her.

She lifted out the famous long-lost heirloom; its glittering and shimmering Blainworth tiara, and regarded it, drawing a breath of ecstasy.

Valerie looked past the woman and the man. Her eyes flashed indignantly.

Propped against the wall of the cavern was her father, bound hand and foot.

He wrenched impotently at his bonds.

"You say you shan't get away with it!" he said, through his teeth.

Valerie had been thinking swiftly. Now she was completing the making of a slip-knot and noose in the rope she carried.

Suddenly she crawled through the opening. Her father's eyes widened in astonishment on sighting her.

He flew to leap upright; saw her make a snatch over the Countess's shoulder, saw the tiara whipped from the woman's hold; saw Valerie down on her hands and knees again in a flash and backing through the opening.

The daring thing so took the Countess and the man Burke by surprise that for the space of two or three seconds they stood, stunned and

inactive. By that time Valerie was disappearing.

Then the Countess uttered a cry of rage. It was echoed in a bull-roar from the man. "After her!" he raved. "She's not got the police with her! They'd have been in here and on us if she had! Quick, Countess! Get her!"

Valerie had known that pursuit would come swiftly. She also had known that, whichever of the two criminals came through first would be in a crawling position and at a disadvantage. She had banked everything on that.

The Countess was the nearer to the cavity. She ducked and started to crawl through, under the impression that Valerie would be speeding away. She was so enraged and excited that she did not use her ears to make sure, and did not know that Valerie was tensely crouched at one side of the opening.

The Countess' head and shoulders appeared through the gap.

A white hand shot down, and a noose was slipped over her right wrist. She tried to snatch it out of danger. Before she could do that her left wrist was caught and dragged against the other. The noose encircled both. It was drawn taut, and the Countess, half in the cave, half out of it, and preventing her accomplice from following to aid her, was a prisoner.

She realised that she was impeding Burke. Despite her wrists being bound, she scrambled through the gap, and tried to rise.

Valerie brought the rope tightly around her legs as she half-rose, dragging down her hands and still further tightening the slip-knot. The Countess stumbled and fell, and Valerie knotted the rope after passing it completely around her.

Burke was coming through.

He halted half-way with a gasp of terror. A furry, snarling head was near his own.

Flash pounced, seized his collar and tugged.

The man sprawled forward and struck the bridge of his nose painfully against the rocky floor. He gave a snuffling yell—and yelled again as Flash continued to tug him out, and slid his already damaged countenance over the rough rock.

"Hold him, Flash!" panted Valerie. "Irene, knot that woman up a bit more securely. I'm going through to daddy."

"You brute! Leggo!" Burke snarled.

"You brute!" answered Flash, who was enjoying himself.

"Call him off! I'll shoot him if you don't!" the ruffian threatened. "Ooh! He's got a bit of my neck as well as my coat! I'll—"

Valerie made sure he did not carry out his threat by stooping and relieving him of the gun she found in his hip-pocket.

"You'd best keep quiet, or he'll bite you—and badly!" she warned.

Then she whirled round, as an alarmed cry came from Irene.

"Val! Look out! The Countess has broken free!"

Valerie saw that her cousin had spoken only too truly. Her hurried knots had apparently been too insecure. The Countess had disposed of the bonds and had rushed for the exit of the cave.

Valerie sped in pursuit.

Out of the inner cave they went into the large one which formed the entrance. The Countess obviously knew the interior of the tor very well. Valerie was amazed at the way in which she ran through the darkness.

Then the woman ahead turned a sharp corner.

The girl detective switched on her torch and saw that she had turned into a narrow cleft between the rocks. She followed and found that the ground led upward. In a surprisingly short while she was in the open. The Countess had disappeared!

Valerie gave a groan of disappointment.

"I must find her," she vowed—"I must! Ah! What's that?"

She flashed her torch in the direction from which she had heard a sudden cry.

It picked out the form of the Countess. Valerie started forward, and then paused again, horrified.

The woman criminal had stumbled into a bog! Even as the girl detective watched, she saw the Countess sinking rapidly into the soft mud which sucked horribly at her struggling body.

"Keep still!" cried Valerie. "If you struggle you'll sink!" and rushed forward. Criminal the woman might be, but Valerie could not see her in danger without helping.

Reaching the edge of the bog, Valerie threw herself flat and wormed her way towards the woman, who reached frantically for her hands. Then began the grim battle.

Valerie pulled at the woman, straining backwards, fighting grimly for every inch of ground she could gain. The Countess' face was deadly white with fear, her clothes black with mud. The whole thing might have been part of some horrible nightmare.

It seemed hours before Valerie was able at last to drag the woman on to the firm ground again, and then the girl detective, weary beyond relief, flung herself down, panting, unable to sustain herself another minute. The

Countess was unable to escape, though. Although Valerie did not discover it for some minutes after, she was inconspicuous!

Then Valerie half-carried, half-dragged the woman back to the tor. She found Irene almost distracted. Unable to find her way from the caves, she had been terrified for Valerie.

"Now I must release daddy," the girl detective whispered, and made for the cave where Flash was still growling above the figure of Burke.

Through into the cave Valerie crawled. In another moment she was loosening the bonds about her father.

As he stood upright they looked at one another for a moment, and John Drew saw Valerie's lips quivering and how suspiciously bright were her eyes.

He could not say anything just then. He gathered her into his arms, and for a long moment held her close.

"I knew you'd find me, Val!" he said, and his voice was unsteady and husky. "Jove, I'm proud of you, little girl. But let's use these ropes to make sure of that man out there. Then we must find a telephone and communicate with the local police."

It was half an hour later that Valerie found an isolated farmhouse where there was a telephone, and succeeded in knocking up the inmates.

After being assured that the local police were on their way to take the Countess and her accomplices into custody, she put a trunk call through to Scotland Yard.

A whimsical little smile twitched at her lips when, after some delay, she heard the inspector she had asked for responding.

"This is Valerie Drew," the girl detective announced.

"I'm dreadfully sorry to have to say it, Miss Drew," the inspector said uncomfortably, "but we've no news yet of your father."

"But I have. I've found him," said Valerie quietly. "I thought I'd phone you to tell you he was safe, and to save you further trouble."

"Yes—'you've found him?'"

"Yes. And I've captured the Countess and two accomplices, and regained the Blainworth tiara as well. 'Bye-bye!'"

Valerie smiled again.

"Poor old Scotland Yard!" she laughed, stroking Flash, who was waiting and watching her with adoring eyes. "But, then, Scotland Yard hasn't the same chance to do things as I have. It hasn't got you to help, old boy!"

"Wouff! Wouff!" said Flash, who thought a good deal of himself.

THE END.



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