

SCHOOLGIRLS'
WEEKLY

Wonderful Offer to Stamp-Collectors Inside

Schoolgirls' WEEKLY 2^p

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Every Wednesday



VALERIE ENTERS THE HAUNTED MINE: See the dramatic complete girl detective story inside.

HERMIT OF HAUNTED VALLEY



People said the place was haunted. It was—as Valerie Drew, famous girl detective, and her Alsatian dog assistant, Flash, discovered—but not by ghosts.

THUNDER IN THE AIR

"WHAT a weird spot it is!" reflected Valerie Drew, the famous girl detective, gazing from side to side at the rugged banks of rocks that bordered the uneven track she followed. "How desolate! It might be a thousand miles from anywhere! No wonder they call it the Haunted Valley!"

Thrilled, she pressed on. To Valerie, such a ramble was a tonic change from the bustling activity of London.

Ahead of her trotted Flash, her faithful Alsatian pet and assistant. Flash did not appear so much at ease. His manner showed that he was constantly on the alert. Every now and then he paused, lifting his head as though listening intently. Valerie herself could detect nothing, however, to explain why he should feel at all suspicious.

Did something of the very wildness of this barren valley put him instinctively on his guard? Certainly Drackensdale, austere grand even on a summer's day, looked grey and grim under the overcast November sky. The little patches of mist that came drifting along its scarred sides were ghostly in their stealthy approach.

Valerie found her mind reverting to the legend they told locally. It was said that Dracken, mightier than any giant who ever strode the earth, had fashioned the place with one devastating blow from his great hammer. Old people would even point to the scars it had made on the cleft rocks.

Valerie loved such fables as this. They reflected so well the minds of the honest, simple folk who fostered them. It scarcely mattered that a more likely explanation could be offered by the geologists, who would doubtless say that in the dawn of time this barren expanse had cooled out of the seething, red-hot mass that then formed the earth.

In sudden amazement, Valerie stopped dead upon the rocky path. She realised, even as she paused to listen, that all was not as still as she had believed.

A strange, quiet indescribable sound had reached her ears. There was something in it like a deep, prolonged moan. Even as she listened it changed to a sharper, rattling sound that was metallic, yet curiously muffled and indistinct.

"Whoof!" barked Flash challengingly. She looked at him sharply. He stood rigidly

Complete Story

By ISABEL NORTON

Illustrated by Shilton

at her side on the rocks, gazing up in puzzled inquiry.

"Goodness, am I dreaming?" Valerie asked herself dazedly.

She turned with a start. For a few moments she had just the same sensation as when she listened to the deepest notes of a mighty organ. It was as though heavy pulsations now filled the air. She believed that, for a second or two, she could actually feel this solid ground tremble beneath her feet.

Coming so quickly after her other thoughts, the grim valley suddenly seemed a most unsuitable place to linger in.

She turned to hasten on towards its lower end, believing that it would not only be safer, but might afford her a glimpse of what was really happening.

It was a sudden snatch at one foot, followed by the sensation of a sharp wrench, that caused her to pull up abruptly and stare in dismay at what had happened.

"Bother! I never noticed that crack in the rocks!" she breathed. "I caught my heel, and now I've torn it clean off! What a nuisance!"

She stooped and picked the heel out of the cleft in the rocks. All was still again; once more the Haunted Valley of Drackensdale was so silent and looked so deserted that she could almost have believed it had been all imagination.

Ahead of her she now saw a shoulder of rock she recognised, and knew that the village of Drackensdale itself was only a little distance farther on.

Walking naturally on one foot and on the toes of the other, she turned the bend of the path. In a distant depression she saw the cluster of cottages for which she was bound. Years ago they had housed the employees of a tin-mine until it failed to pay. Nearer at hand was a cottage that had previously always been empty. To her astonishment, Valerie now beheld a board that bore the inscription:

"JEAN SPRITZE.
Repairs of Every Kind."

As she drew nearer she saw the front window of the cottage filled with all sorts of odds and ends of wood and metal ware. Amongst them also were two or three pairs of shoes.

"What luck!" Valerie reflected, in relief. "Yet it's the last place on earth where one would expect to find a shoemaker!"

She thrust the cottage door open and entered the little front room. There was nobody about, but the place was full of odds and ends. She saw tins and boxes, old ornaments that had been riveted, walking-sticks and umbrellas, and even a pair of crutches standing in one corner. On the battered counter was a bell, to which was attached a piece of card with the inscription: "Please ring."

Valerie rang the bell and waited. A minute elapsed, and she was wondering whether the proprietor of the strange shop was stone deaf when she heard a sharp step in the back room. The door opened, and a curious little man hastened behind the counter.

He was bent and wizened, with sparse fair hair and a little "goatee" tuft of beard.

"Vell? You vant something—eh?" he asked abruptly, looking at Valerie with beady, appraising eyes.

He spoke jerkily, like a man out of breath after some unusual exertion.

Valerie slipped off her shoe, and handed it to him with the torn-off heel.

"Can you make a job of that?" she asked. "Vv, surely!" Again the beady eyes were studying her artfully. "And dey send you here—hey?" the foreigner asked keenly.

Valerie's training was such that she seldom betrayed when she was surprised.

"I walked across the hills from Shorcombe-on-Sea," she explained.

The little man nodded his head.

"Sure! Dot's der vay dey usually sends dem!" he agreed. "Den dey makes no mistake about the shop! In a hurry—eh?"

"It's awkward being without a heel—"

"Ja, I knows!" Mr. Spritze declared, fingering the broken heel thoughtfully. He looked up with narrowed eyes. "Where you goes now?"

"Along to the village."

"Goot!" For such an isolated place, Mr. Spritze seemed a very brisk tradesman indeed. "Vun hour, and der shoe is ready! Vun second, now! I get you anodder to wear for der time beings."

He turned as he was speaking and darted

into the back room. He returned in a few moments with a shoe, not only in very good condition and the right size, but remarkably like the one Valerie was leaving.

"Thank you! Good-day!" said Mr. Spritze shortly, as he handed it over the counter; and, without even waiting for Valerie to put it on, he turned and vanished again into the back room.

"The funniest thing of all," Valerie reflected, in puzzlement, as she walked on to the village, "was that he seemed to think it quite natural for my heel to have broken off! In fact, he really seemed to be expecting me!"

VALERIE'S old friends, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, welcomed her heartily when she reached their cottage a few minutes later. When she mentioned her encounter with Mr. Spritze, they exchanged a meaning glance, then nodded their heads mysteriously.

"The amount of business he does there," declared Mr. Jones, "isn't nearly enough to keep him, cheaply as he lives. I know that a few people walking round this way call and give him jobs, but really he's a kind of hermit; never comes to the village."

Valerie went on to describe her astonishing experiences in the valley. Mr. Jones compressed his lips as he listened. His wife nodded her head, and regarded Valerie with a strange intension.

"We'd have warned you, if possible, not to walk over the hills and come through the valley, Miss Drew," declared Mr. Jones apologetically. "We've all heard the same strange stories there, and there's not a person in the village that will go near the valley now unless they have to. That valley's haunted worse than ever it's been!"

"And what's more," said Mrs. Jones, with conviction, "it's all since that Spritze came to live so close to it!"

Valerie laughed cheerfully. "I don't want you to think me unsympathetic," Mrs. Jones, she declared, "but surely nobody in these days really believes in ghosts!"

"There's been a curse on that valley," superstitious Mrs. Jones assured Valerie, "ever since old Dracken himself cleft it out of the rock with his hammer. It was the curse on it that thinned the old mine that was here years ago."

A short while later Valerie was taking a thoughtful stroll before looking up other old friends at the scattered cottages.

Spritze certainly intrigued her. She reflected, with increasing puzzlement, the fact that he had been so obviously out of breath. His behaviour towards her had been strange as well. How was it that a "repair shop" in such an odd spot could flourish at all? How had he been able, at a moment's notice, to produce a shoe so strongly resembling the one Valerie left with him? Why had she retained that odd impression that he had actually expected a visit from someone like her?

Other cottagers confirmed that all Valerie had heard from the Joneses was general talk, and local opinion as to the mystery foreigner was the same. It was only as she suddenly realised that dusk was falling that she glanced at her watch and saw that more than an hour had elapsed.

"Here, Flash, you can do a job for me!" Valerie declared, opening her purse and extracting a coin. Tapering off her borrowed shoe, she gave it to her pet to hold in his mouth, with the coin in the topiece, and pointed away across the darkening landscape to the distant repair shop. "Give that to the foreigner, boy, and bring my shoe back with you. Understand, Flash? My shoe!"

Laughingly she watched him, one ear raised intently higher than the other. His eyes so quizzical that she could almost follow the course of his thoughts. And—yes, he'd got it! With a triumphant wave of his tail he dashed away proudly on his important errand.

Valerie hobbled back to the Jones' cottage. The oil lamp was turned up, and a cheerful fire blazed on the hearth. She sat talking for some minutes, when strange sounds came suddenly from outside.

Valerie heard the sharp crack of a heavy stone striking the hard ground. Another followed it; then another. Instantly there came

a yelp of pain—a yelp that she knew was from Flash himself.

She rushed to the cottage door and flung it open.

"Where are you, boy?" she cried urgently. Suddenly she saw him emerging from the mist, her shoe grasped in his jaws.

He was running on only three legs. His right forepaw was held up, obviously in pain.

Quickly Valerie took the shoe from him. Then she gently lifted his injured paw, whilst Flash, wincing, but making no further murmur, turned his head uneasily away.

With mingled compassion and dismay, Valerie saw an ugly cut in her pet's foreleg.

One of the stones which she had heard, flung by an unseen hand in the misty night, had caused this injury to Flash!

VOICES IN THE MIST

MRS. JONES quickly fetched warm water, antiseptic, and clean bandages. Flash sat very still, watching his mistress with uneasy brown eyes, whilst she discovered, to her intense relief, that his hurt was not very serious, and should heal within a day or two.

The little hug of sympathy she gave him as she finished dressing the wound, showed how deeply she was moved.

She was perplexed as well. On the face of things he had carried out his errand perfectly. The shoe that Flash had brought back, which she now had leisure to examine, was certainly her own. An entirely new heel had been made for it, and fitted with such neatness that it was obvious the mystery man in the cottage workshop was an expert at his job.

Even as she slipped her foot into it and fastened the laces, Valerie was making up her mind.

Anger lit her eyes as she reflected that the little foreigner might have stoned Flash merely in a fit of uncontrollable temper.

"I'm going along to see Spritze straight away," Valerie abruptly decided.

And she left the cottage briskly, declining Mr. Jones' offer to accompany her. Outside the mist was thicker, but as soon as her eyes became accustomed to the gloom she found she could follow the path without difficulty.

A dim light glowed in the front room of Spritze's cottage. Valerie walked straight in and stepped across to the bell. Before she could touch it, little Mr. Spritze had darted out from the room at the back. He regarded Valerie with an anxious, uncertain grin.

"Your shoe, missy—"

"I sent my dog to fetch it!" said Valerie sternly.

"Dot! I know already so well," Mr. Spritze warmly agreed. "A most fierce, dangerous dog, dot snatches at my work before it is properly done. Noddings dot I say to him—"

"You admit you threw stones at him?" Valerie hotly challenged.

The little foreigner spread his hands anxiously.

"Dot vos is der pile of stones!" he vowed. "Outside dere is der pile of stones. Der dog jumps through dere window on to them. I am all grieved. You give back to me der shoe now, please!"

"Certainly not!" Valerie refused. "I sent money for the repair. So far as Flash is concerned—"

Something caused her to stop sharply. At the selfsame moment Spritze threw an apprehensive glance towards the back room. Both of them had heard a slight scraping sound.

Next moment their eyes met in unspoken challenge.

Valerie felt decidedly uneasy.

She was convinced, by his very manner, that he knew that someone else was hiding there, listening to every word they said!

Valerie suddenly realised that she was in a very lonely spot, and how greatly she missed her pet's protective presence. Perhaps, after all, she had been unwise to come alone.

"I'll go again in the morning," she sharply decided. "Flash will help me to get at the truth!"

She turned at once and left the cottage.

Outside, to her dismay, she found that the mist had gathered more thickly whilst she had been talking. It was difficult to discover the return path at all. When she found it at last, she could proceed only one step at a time.

It was seldom that Valerie was actually afraid, but a most unusual stir of uneasiness assailed her now as she started to make her way along the lonely track.

Who was hiding in the mystery workshop? Who, so anxious not to miss a word, had made that telltale sound in moving nearer to the door?

What had been the cause of Spritze's obvious agitation?

Suddenly Valerie paused, and glanced uneasily back. She could see only a few feet through the clammy mist, and there seemed nothing to account for her presentiment of danger.

She moved on again, and, even as she did so, she beheld a vague darkening of the mist at her side.

Valerie stopped again. This time she was sure she also heard a faint scuffling on the rocky ground behind her.

"Who's there?" she called challengingly.

Her voice seemed to be swallowed up almost instantly by the mist. No reply came to her ears. She waited uneasily.

Then her heart gave a sudden leap. She was sure she had heard a quick step not six feet from her.

From the vagueness of the mist came a curt, sharp command.

"Now!" said the crisp voice of a man.

Almost instantly Valerie heard a patter of footsteps. At two different points the fog darkened momentarily, then resolved itself into figures bearing down upon her. She leapt back, but in vain.

Before any cry could leave her lips, a woman's hand was clapped over her mouth, and a sharp thrust sent her reeling to the ground.

In a flash determined fingers fastened on the handbag she carried under her arm, and tore it from her grasp. At the same moment she felt hands tugging at the laces of her shoes.

She kicked out wildly but unavailingly. Both shoes were torn from her feet.

"Fine!" she heard a man utter.

Another push sent Valerie reeling to one side. As she struggled to recover herself, she heard retreating footsteps.

Something lightly thudded to the ground.

"Leave it!" muttered a man's voice.

"Don't be an idiot!" the woman softly hissed, and a scratching sound on the ground told Valerie she was fumbling for what she had dropped.

The great detective had by then regained her feet. Now, angry and bewildered, she turned in the direction which her mysterious assailants had taken. After only a few steps she pulled up in pain and dismay. It was out of the question to try to run after them in her stockinged feet.

Within a few moments their footsteps had died away to silence.

Confusedly Valerie groped her way towards the path back to the Jones' cottage. Why had her handbag and shoes been stolen from her?

Her natural assumption was that they had been removed to make pursuit impossible.

But Valerie's ears had missed nothing. The thud on the path had sounded exactly like her handbag falling. The man's voice had distinctly said:

"Leave it!"

Why?

Obviously, to Valerie's keen mind, there could be only one explanation. He hadn't really cared about the handbag at all!

They had been after her shoes—in particular, the one that Spritze had "repaired."

Flash had obviously first seized it in the shop, and they had been unable to make him release it. He had then been stoned in an attempt to make him drop it as he ran away.

Spritze himself had professed that his work was unfinished, and had been most anxious for Valerie to leave the shoe with him, and angry when she refused.

Now they had got it back, after all, and

Valerie had been the victim of the most amazing robbery in all her experience!

VALERIE was up next morning soon after it was light. A breeze had sprung up at dawn, and the mist was entirely dispelled by the time breakfast was served. Immediately after breakfast, Valerie strode from the cottage, leaving Flash to rest his injured leg.

She had borrowed a pair of shoes from Mrs. Jones, and she hurried along to the shoemaker's shop.

The door was shut. Though Valerie knocked several times, she received no reply. Either the mystery foreigner was not yet up, or he was in no mood to answer questions.

Undeterred: Valerie went on to the Haunted Valley. It might help her if she could find out why it had become so much more unpopular since Spritzae had come to the neighbourhood.

The valley, however, lay silent and deserted. Though Valerie climbed from end to end of it, not once did she hear even a murmur of the eerie noises that had puzzled her yesterday.

Valerie grew more thoughtful as she returned.

Her theories regarding the mystery of her shoe were taking definite shape.

She was sure now that yesterday Spritzae had been expecting someone to bring a shoe to him to be repaired.

"If I hadn't lost that shoe," Valerie reflected. "I'd treat the hovel off now and find out what he actually did to it. By the worst of luck they got it back. And my handbag, even though they probably didn't want that at all—"

She broke off, startled at a fresh thought. Her visiting-card, as well as other evidence of her profession, were in the bag. They would know now who she really was. Fearing that their secret activities were suspected, they might already have jumped to the conclusion that Valerie had trailed them here deliberately.

Flash, she reflected, must help her, after all. Nothing could have disturbed their trail as yet, and it should be an easy matter for him to locate it and follow. She must try to do so as soon as possible.

In a quarter of an hour she was back at the Jones' cottage. The front door stood open. As she looked inside she gave a murmur of amazement.

"Why, Mrs. Jones," she cried, "where ever is Flash?"

Mrs. Jones looked at her in surprise and bewilderment.

"Miss Drew, he went out as soon as you whistled for him! About ten minutes ago—"

"When I whistled?" Valerie, blankly repeated.

Mrs. Jones, her homely face full of concern, nodded with conviction.

"The little silver whistle you use when you're a distance away, Miss Drew. I know the sound of it so well. Flash recognised it instantly. He jumped up and rushed off—"

She broke off, for the look of consternation on Valerie's face had told her the truth at last.

The silver whistle had been in Valerie's stolen handbag. The person who had blown it to-day could only have been one of her assailants.

Suspecting nothing, limping gamely in his eagerness to join his beloved mistress, Flash had been decoyed away by a foe!

THE NOISES AGAIN

AMONGST a cluster of hove, broken rocks, high up on the side of the Haunted Valley, Valerie Drew keenly surveyed the lonely countryside around.

Her heart was full of concern for her missing pet. She would have been anxious for him under any circumstances. The fact that his injury put him at such a natural disadvantage increased her fears tenfold.

In a mood of bitter self-reproach she gazed down on Spritzae's isolated cottage, now lying many hundred feet below her.

For all signs of activity she saw there, it might have been a house of the dead.

Away to her left stretched the valley. From here she could see right along it, and could watch every tortuous turn of the winding path she had been following yesterday when she had heard the eerie sounds that came from the depths of the earth.

No single figure moved anywhere in that wilderness of scarred rock. Nowhere could she descry the limping form of Flash.

Her gaze turned instinctively back to Spritzae's cottage; her keen brain began to re-examine everything she knew about him.

With increasing wonderment she recalled how she had waited more than a minute for him, and he had appeared to be out of breath when he emerged from the back room of the cottage.

side might arouse the oddest clangour to any one not expecting it!

Suddenly she came to a stop, catching a quick breath of excitement as she did so. Right in front of her was a jagged hole that went down into the depths of the earth. Without a doubt the reverberations that filled the valley with their echoes, were coming from it.

It was an entrance to the old tin mine that had long since been abandoned, and someone was working in the old mine at this very moment!

Valerie had been right when she believed that mysterious sounds came out of the very earth itself; but there could be nothing super-



BEFORE she could resist, a hand was placed over Valerie's mouth and at the same time she felt her handbag torn from her grasp.

Obviously he had been summoned by the bell from a spot some distance away. He could not have been outside the cottage. Her mind made a sudden leap, and excitement thrilled her nerves. Had he been—underneath it?

Spurred to instant action by the thought, she started to move amongst the rocks. Scarcely had she progressed a dozen feet than she stopped abruptly.

An eerie whining sound filled the air. Dull reverberations were being echoed by the scarred rock faces all around her. Once more the Haunted Valley was full of the eerie sounds that had scared the villagers away from it.

Valerie Drew's lips set in a line, and her eyes shone with determination.

This time she intended to find out why the valley had changed so much since Spritzae came to live at the cottage.

Step by step she made her way amongst the piles of jagged boulders.

Allowing for the tricks that echoes could play upon her ears, she was sure that the sounds actually proceeded from some spot straight in front of her.

To the rumble that had yesterday been so unexpectedly disturbing, there was now added a dull metallic clatter. But, though it reached Valerie's ears in a series of weird reverberations, she no longer felt any fear—only a keen desire to find out more.

She knew now that it was the formation of the rocks that sent so many conflicting echoes ringing from side to side of the valley until they mingled in one confusing blur of sound. Why, even a pail being rolled down the hill-

natural about them when a character as odd as Spritzae was about.

Was it here, in these long-deserted, underground labyrinths, that Valerie would find her missing pet?

Her electric torch had vanished when her bag was stolen; but she had taken the precaution to bring a box of matches with her. Striking one, and shielding it with her hands, she gazed tensely down into the darkness of the opening she had found.

To her joy she saw roughly hewn steps in the solid rock, leading to the mysterious regions below.

Valerie hesitated no longer. With a lighted match in one hand, she lowered herself into the cavity. Step by step, feeling every inch of the way before she moved, she descended until she reached a flat platform at least twenty feet from the surface.

The metallic clatter had ceased some time ago. Now a rasping sound, like that of a plane being used on a piece of wood, came to her ears. Valerie judged that the mystery worker could be no great distance away.

Since everything was still in darkness, she ventured to strike another match.

It was an eerie place in which she found herself. The steps had led her down to a chamber in the rocks, roughly circular in shape, from which low galleries ran in five or six different directions. But for the industrious sounds that reached her ears, Valerie would have been at a loss to know which way to go next.

But there was no mistaking the passage from which the sounds proceeded.

Taking a shrewd, discerning look along it,

Valerie extinguished the match and crept stealthily forward.

Her hands touched first roof, then rocky sides, as she made her way along. Of a sudden she came to a spot where the passage abruptly changed its direction. With redoubled caution she crept around the corner.

A minute later she was hiding in the shadows at the end of the gallery, gazing upon the most astonishing workshop she had ever seen.

Lit by a swinging oil-lamp, it was situated in the middle of a lofty cave of natural formation. Stacked around its walls were piles of timber of all kinds. Sheets of different metals were thrown about the floor.

At a well-equipped work-bench, his beady eyes bent in anxious concentration on the work in hand, was none other than Spritze himself. What he was finishing at that moment was a boot of odd appearance. With its inch-thick sole and heel, it was apparently intended for a man suffering from the deformity of one leg shorter than the other.

Valerie caught her breath as she watched. Spritze, critically examining the heel, touched a secret spring. Instantly the lower part of it slid softly back, revealing a hollow space inside. Satisfied, he restored it and manipulated the sole of that amazing boot. Exactly the same thing happened. A cavity of even larger size was revealed at once.

With a sharp nod of evident satisfaction, Spritze placed the boot to one side. He was about to pick up a metal tube, when there came the sound of a step on the far side of the workshop. As he turned, with a nervous gesture, a tallish man appeared in the light of the hanging lamp.

"Is der dog all right?" Spritze anxiously asked.

The tall man glanced to a shadowed corner of the cave; and Valerie, looking in the same direction, thrilled at what she beheld.

The motionless grey shape lying on a dimly discernible pile of sacking was that of her missing pet, Flash.

"Of course he's all right—and safer than that sniffling rover after us!" muttered the tall man. "And it'll give that interfering detective something better to think about than spring on us. Have you made the trunk with a false lining in it yet?"

"Yes. And a very good run, too!" Spritze eagerly responded. "I show you it after here!"

They stepped together to one side of the cave. In an instant Valerie saw her clasp. Moving with the silence of a shadow, she crept around the fringe of the cave and reached her pet at last.

Tense with anxiety, she sank to one knee beside him.

He was seemingly tired with cords, but his eyes flickered open instantly as she kissed his presence. The baulage was still on his

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Tell all your chums!

injured paw. Apart from the bonds that reduced him to his present helpless condition, she saw, with immense relief, that he had sustained no other injury.

Frantically she tackled the knots that bound him. The men were conferring together on the far side of the cave, but might return at any moment. One knot came free, then another. Flash was already able to move his cramped limbs. With trembling fingers, she was undoing the last of the cords when the men turned back.

"What's that?" came a startled shout from the taller man.

Flash was freed from his final bond at the same instant. He tottered to his feet, growling fiercely. But Valerie's heart throbbed with anxiety. Stiff and weary as he was, he was no match against two desperate men already arming themselves with heavy tools.

A desperate glance showed her a passage only a short distance away, with a flight of wooden steps leading upwards from it. As she guessed its destination, she realised that it was her only hope of escape.

"Off, Flash!" she cried, pointing.

And then, even as he turned to obey, she stooped swiftly and grasped a heavy stone.

"Drop that!" shouted the tall man, diving her intention.

But Valerie's arm was already drawn back; with unerring aim she hurled the stone fall at the lamp. There was a crash of breaking glass, and the cave was plunged in darkness.

Stumbling through the gloom, Valerie blundered after her pet. Behind her, she heard shouts of rage, followed by a yell of pain, as one of the men caught his foot against something in the darkness and plunged to the ground.

Her outstretched hands touched the wooden stairs. With Flash pausing ahead of her, she scrambled up them as fast as she could. Behind her a light suddenly gleamed; a stone whizzed ominously past her head and crashed against the rock.

The match luckily went out before the man could throw again. Valerie caught a breath of relief, and climbed even faster. The faint gleam had just been enough to show her a wooden door at the top of the steps.

She reached it in two or three seconds. A thrust sent it open, and she and Flash clambered through, to find themselves in the back room of Spritze's cottage workshop!

Behind her she heard the sound of someone running furiously up the wooden staircase. In the flick of time she slammed the door and thrust a heavy bolt into position. Spritze and his companion were prisoners in their own secret den!

THE sequel of the police raid that followed, when both men were apprehended whilst still endeavouring to destroy the manufactured articles in the workshop cave, was as thrilling for the cottagers of Drackobald as it was gratifying to Valerie. The evidence still remaining against Spritze was so complete that, in his terror, he turned on his former employers and confessed everything.

His cottage, in reality, masked the secret workshop where he made all the necessary appliances for the most successful gang of diamond smugglers in existence. Shoes with hollow heels, hollow walking-sticks, and even crutches, and other aids for the infirm, were all cunningly manufactured to provide hiding-places for gems on which the authorities would normally have received a heavy duty.

The fact that Valerie had so unwittingly become involved was easily explained. The smugglers, to avoid suspicion, employed fresh assistants now and then, and Valerie's accident to her heel had quite innocently led Spritze into the belief that she had been sent to him in order to be provided with a hollow heel intended to carry precious stones inside it.

Her "repaired" shoe, when she eventually recovered it, contained such a neatly concealed cavity in its heel that she decided to keep it as a valued souvenir—or even, if necessary, for use herself—though certainly not for its original purpose.

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

"THE STRANGE CASE OF JACQUES DAUDAIN" is the title of next week's fine story featuring Valerie Drew, famous girl detective. The scene of this intriguing tale is laid in Paris, and it is a story that will hold your interest from the first word to the last. Don't miss it.

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