

The Smugglers' Tunnel

1. It Happened at 17.04 Hours

One day Ralph burst into the Airport waving a letter. He read it out:

Dear Ralph,

I read all about your adventures in the newspaper and how your 'Black Hand Gang' caught a thief and found the stolen jewels in a preserving jar. Well done, all of you.

Your loving uncle,

Paul

P.S. Why don't you all come up to my farm in the mountains for a holiday?

The Black Hand Gang were delighted and, a fortnight later, on the Saturday, they took the train to Green Willow.

'This journey seems to take forever,' grumbled Keith W.S.

Ralph looked at his watch: 'It's 17.04 already.'

A clergyman sitting opposite him smiled and said: 'We shall be going through a long tunnel presently and then we're almost there.'

As the train rattled into the tunnel, their compartment was plunged into total darkness – lit only by glowing cigarette ends. Suddenly a woman's voice cried out.

'Ow! My foot! Watch where you're treading!'

The carriage door creaked as it opened, letting in an acrid smell of smoke. Then it slammed shut again.

'Who was that at the door?' whispered Frank.

As soon as they re-emerged into daylight Angela murmured: 'I know who it was.'

How did the traveller give himself away?



2. The Mysterious Suitcase

The Black Hand Gang eyed the man suspiciously, for he was holding [redacted] upside down. Presently Keith W.S. tugged at Frank's sleeve.

'Look! A suitcase!' he whispered, rolling his eyes upwards at the luggage rack above the man's head. 'When we went into the tunnel there wasn't one there.'

As the train drew into Green Willow station the strange traveller got out first, quickly followed by the Black Hand Gang.

* 'Hallo, children,' came a shout and a man waved his hat. It was Ralph's uncle, Paul Boller. But the Gang slipped past him in pursuit of their suspect who had left the station.

'See what the number is on his case,' Frank ordered.

Only then did they say hello to their host and to Fred, the driver of the pony-trap.

'Get in, all of you,' called Uncle Paul.

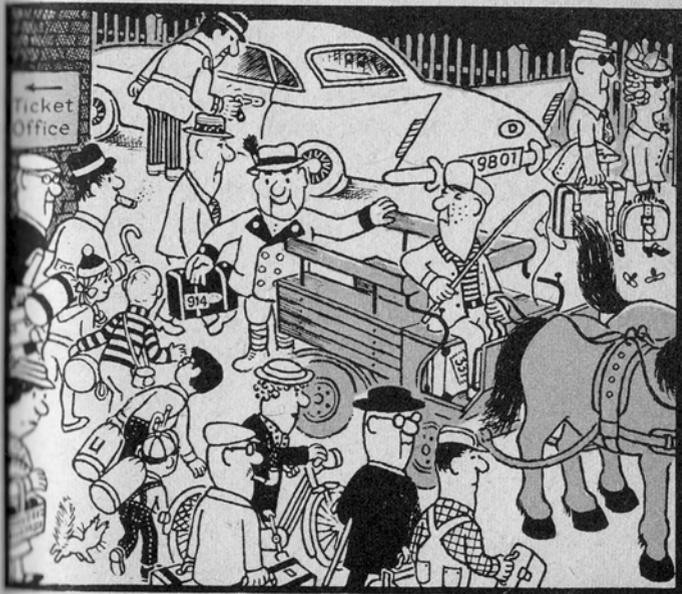
But the Black Hand Gang were still watching the traveller who had now climbed into his car.

'What about the case?' asked Ralph.

'In the boot?' Angela suggested.

But Keith W.S. pinched her arm and winked.

'Don't worry. I know where the case is.'



Where had the man left his case?

3. The Peephole

Ralph was very puzzled about the case, now safely hidden in the [REDACTED], and he worried about it all evening. As the church clock struck ten, a sound of footsteps outside made him sit up in bed.

'Wake up!' he hissed.

The others sat up too.

'What's the matter,' said Angela, yawning.

'It's Fred, with the case!'

They were all immediately wide awake.

'Put your socks on,' Frank ordered.

They all crept out and into the loft. They hadn't gone far when Ralph held up a warning hand.

'There's a light there.'

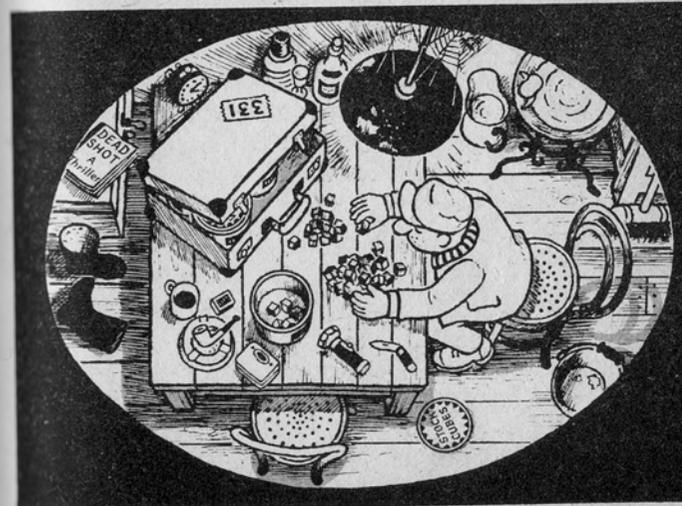
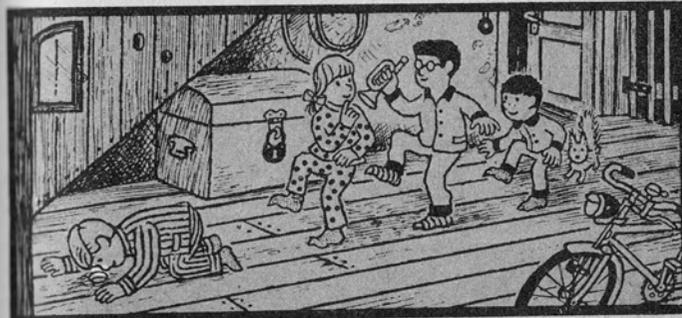
Light was shining up through a knothole in the floor. Ralph tiptoed forward, holding his breath. He could see directly into Fred's room.

Fred had just opened the suitcase and was taking out a round tin. He prised open the lid with his penknife, shook the contents out on to the table and began to count them.

'Anyone know what those things are?' Ralph asked in a whisper.

They each looked in turn through the knothole, Angela last. She got to her feet, clutched her forehead and groaned.

'You'll never believe it! Do you know what he's counting?'



What was in the tin?

4. The Key

Printed clearly on the tin lid were the words [REDACTED]

'I'm not convinced,' said Ralph when they were back in bed. 'We'll have to organize a watch.'

The Black Hand Gang kept Fred under observation, but apart from sucking an occasional raw egg in the hen-house he did nothing suspicious. But one evening, while they were collecting glow worms behind the garden hedge, they saw him set off towards the village.

'Come on, after him,' said Frank.

They shadowed Fred as far as a pub called *The Blue Knight*.

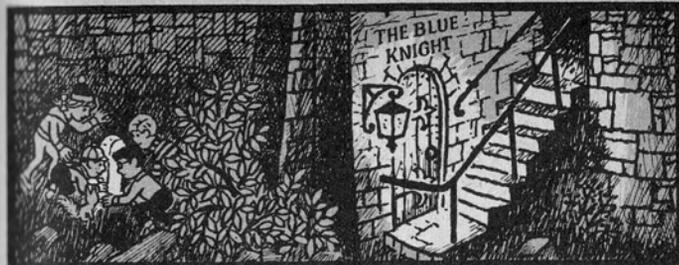
'I can hear music,' said Keith W.S., pointing to a window.

They all crowded round and Keith W.S. pressed his nose to the pane.

'It's very smoky inside,' he whispered. Then he gave a startled cry. 'There's Fred,' he gasped. 'He's with a man who's giving him money. Fred's handed over a little key.'

'A key,' said Angela, puzzled. 'Why a key?'

Keith W.S. watched quietly for a while, then he said: 'It's very strange – putting stock cubes in a secret cupboard. You'll never guess where the cupboard is.'



Where was the cupboard?

5. Seek and Find

'Well,' said Angela, 'one thing is clear enough. The stock cubes are distributed from that secret cupboard hidden in [REDACTED],'

'But why go to all that trouble?' asked Frank thoughtfully.

Next morning they all went back to the pub. Round at the back a woman was cleaning up.

'Should we just go in?' Frank asked.

But Keith W.S. had spotted something interesting among the refuse and held it up triumphantly. It was a small cube. Angela unwrapped it and sniffed it.

'It doesn't smell of anything.' She licked it. 'Ugh! Bitter,' she exclaimed, spitting it out.

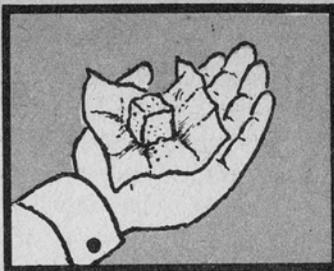
Half an hour later the Black Hand Gang were standing in the local chemist's shop waiting hopefully for Mr Hancock to examine the stock cube. Suddenly he gasped: 'Good heavens!' and reached for a reference book.

'Can you tell us what it is?' Angela asked politely.

'Tell you!' snapped Mr Hancock. 'This is nothing to do with you. This is a matter for the police.'

He went to the telephone, but Ralph whispered.

'Come on, let's go. I know what's in those cubes.'



What was the substance in the cubes?

6. What the Postman Brought

The stock cubes were [REDACTED], as the Gang had suspected.

'The whole thing falls into place now,' said Angela. 'That queer business with the suitcase and all Fred's coming and going. It's drug smuggling!'

'What shall we do now?' Ralph asked.

'Wait and see,' suggested Frank.

The Gang were very busy helping Ralph's uncle on the farm, but they still kept their eyes open. One afternoon a boy arrived.

'What do you want?' asked Keith W.S.

'I'm looking for Fred. I have a letter that I have to deliver to him personally.'

The Black Hand Gang were immediately on the alert. They watched the boy hand over the letter. Fred put down his barrow and went quickly to his room. Watching through the window, the Gang saw him tear open the letter.

'Look,' muttered Keith W.S. Fred had torn the letter into little pieces which he threw out of the window.

It took the Gang ten minutes to gather up the bits and piece them together in a quiet corner of the barn. Then followed a long silence.

'I've got it!' Frank exclaimed. 'This is an important message. We shall have plenty to do now.'



What was the first word of the message?

7. A Threefold Meeting

██████████' was the text of the message. The Black Hand Gang were on time at the meeting-place. Fred was the first to arrive, with the suitcase, and he was soon joined by the man from the train. They waited near the café. A few minutes later the cable car swept into the reception hall and the passengers streamed out.

'Look!' Frank whispered.

A stranger had approached the other two. He nodded to them and they all went to sit down in the café to have a beer. They looked round cautiously before they began to speak. Behind the hedge, however, crouched the Black Hand Gang, listening as hard as they could.

Keith W.S. muttered softly: 'I can't catch what they're saying.'

'Shhhh!' whispered Angela. She repeated: '17.10 - 17.10 - 17.10?'

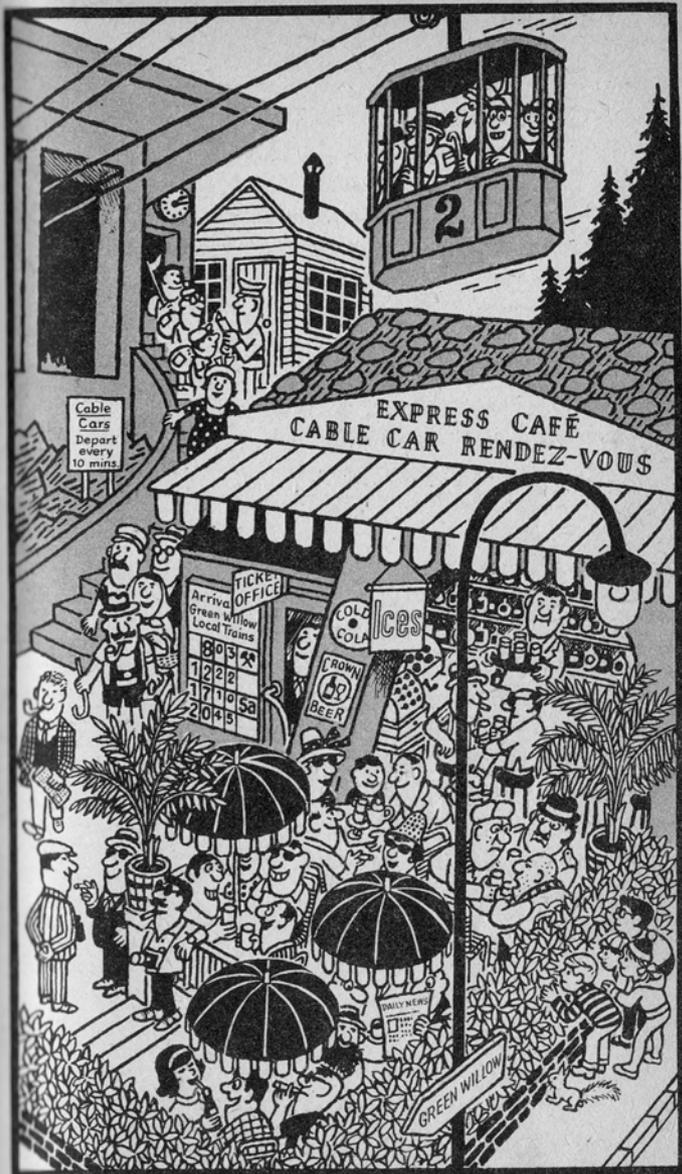
'What's happening at 17.10?' Frank asked when the men had finished their beer and left.

'It's something to do with the trains. They're planning to deliver something. Presumably in the tunnel.'

'But when?' said Ralph impatiently.

Angela shrugged. 'I couldn't hear.'

'But I know,' said Keith W.S., chuckling. 'There's only one day it can be.'



Which day had the men chosen?

8. A Dark Passageway

Only on [REDACTED] was there a 17.10 train arriving at Green Willow. Keith W.S. had read the timetable.

'What happens next?' Ralph asked.

'We must go to the tunnel,' Frank said.

So on [REDACTED] afternoon the Black Hand Gang were on the embankment walking towards the tunnel. Its entrance was very close to the border.

'Keep close to the side as you go,' Frank ordered.

Inside the tunnel it grew darker and darker until Angela had to switch on her torch. When they had reached the middle of the tunnel, she suddenly stopped dead.

'Shhh! Can you hear?'

'It sounds like water,' said Keith W.S. 'Shine your torch over there.'

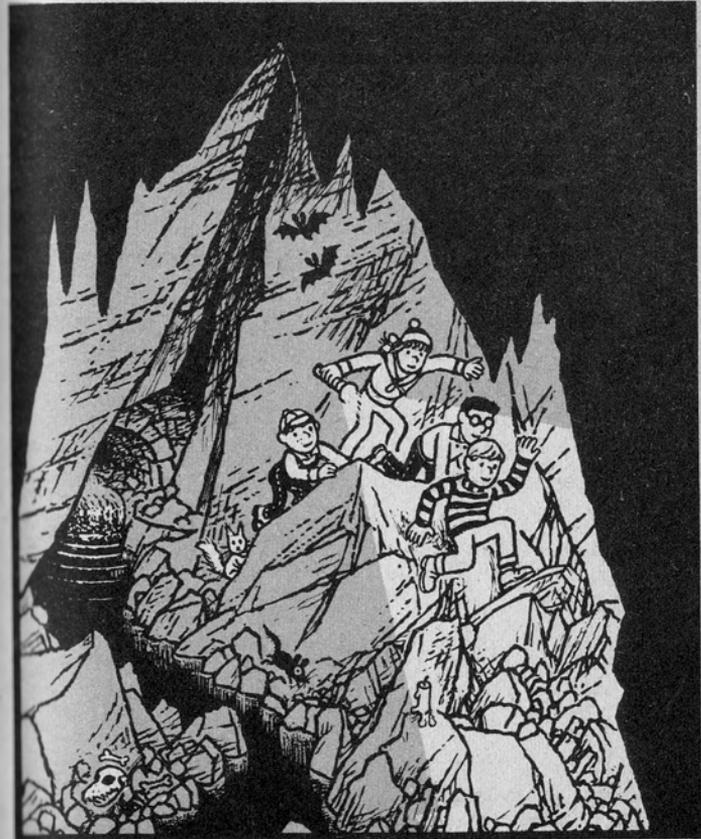
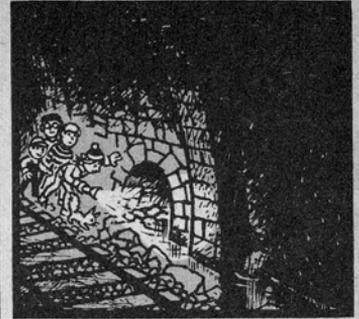
The torch beam played over the opposite wall, illuminating an opening in the rock. The Black Hand Gang stepped across the rails.

Keith W.S. bent down and exclaimed in surprise. He put his squirrel into the narrow opening and he and the rest of the Gang followed it cautiously. A few yards further on the passage opened out into a cave.

'What a find,' said Ralph. 'Do you think the smugglers use this as a route to the railway tunnel?'

'Don't be silly,' Angela said. 'No one's been through here in years.'

'Oh, yes, someone has,' Frank answered. 'And here's the proof.'



What was the proof?

9. A Man is Missing

The [REDACTED] showed that someone *had* been in the tunnel.

Angela said: 'It must be smugglers.'

'How do they get in?' asked Ralph.

'No idea,' answered Frank, 'but I'm sure this cave must span the border. Do you suppose the smugglers...'

'Shhh!' hissed Keith W.S.

They all listened.

'Voices,' said Ralph, after a few moments.

They all crept further along the passage. The sound of voices grew clearer and now they could see a faint light on the damp walls. The passage gave on to a vast cave, electrically lit.

'Stalactites,' Angela whispered. 'I bet the entrance is on the other side of the border.'

They could now see the group of tourists and the guide whose voices they had heard. The children watched closely as the group was led around. But when it stopped in front of a stalactite called the 'witch's nose', Ralph gave a smothered exclamation.

'One of them is missing.'

Angela looked at the group again. 'You're right and I remember what he had in his hand.'



What had the missing tourist been carrying?

10. The Train

'The missing man was carrying a [REDACTED],' said Angela.

'Quick, let's go back to the tunnel,' Frank said.

They hurried back down the dark passage. It was not long before they heard a distant rumbling.

'It's the train,' said Keith W.S., looking at his watch. 'It's 17.04. This must be the smugglers' train.'

The rumbling came nearer and nearer, and as they crawled out into the tunnel, the train came thundering towards them. They saw the man with the suitcase leap on.

'Duck!' shouted Frank, as the train went by.

But the man didn't jump off.

'He's seen us,' Angela shouted. 'Let's follow him.'

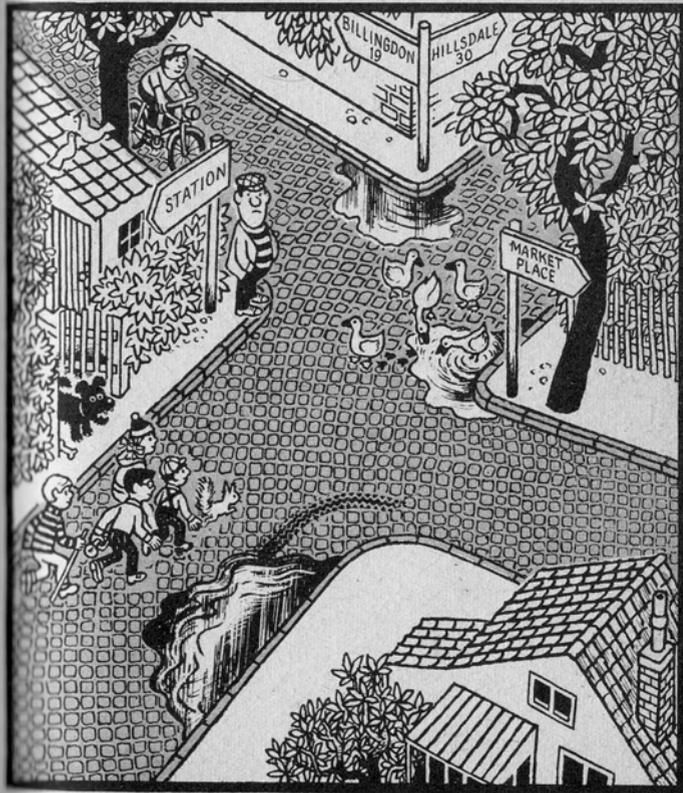
The Black Hand Gang ran the short distance to Green Willow, stumbling over the sleepers, and sprinted breathlessly into the station.

'Look!' Keith W.S. gasped, pointing. 'The getaway car.'

Even as he said it, the engine revved up and the car took off at top speed. The Black Hand Gang chased after it, but came to a halt at the crossroads.

'It's hopeless,' said Ralph.

'No,' said Angela, 'wait a minute. They took that street.'



Which way had the smugglers gone?

11. Dark Deeds

Angela had noticed a skid mark on the street leading to the [REDACTED]. When the Black Hand Gang arrived there, however, there was no sign of the car.

'I expect they've gone to find Fred,' suggested Keith W.S.

'What are we waiting for then?' asked Frank.

It was dusk when they reached Uncle Paul's farm. Keith W.S. stopped.

'Look, I can see a ghost.'

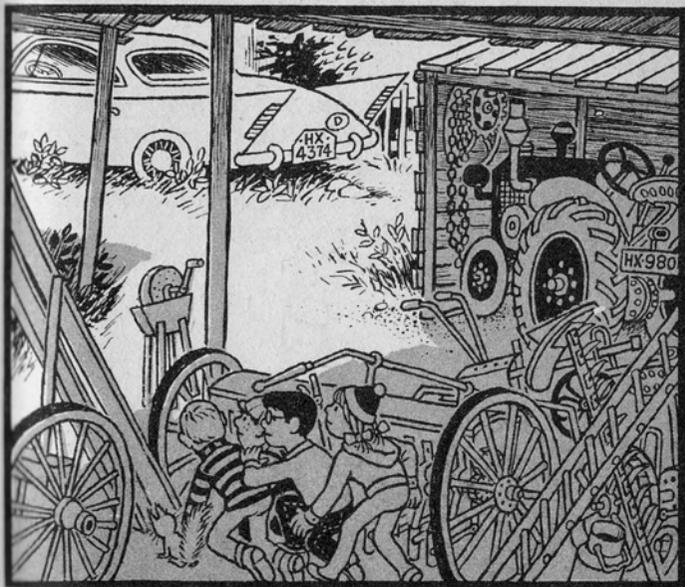
Fred was slinking along by the wall of the house. He went into the tractor shed and the Black Hand Gang followed him.

'Hush!' said Angela softly. She had seen the smugglers' car.

'Keep your heads down or they'll see us,' Frank ordered.

They all ducked down. A faint murmur of voices and clatter of tools was all they could hear. After a while there was a silence. They peered out cautiously. The car was still there and they could see nothing suspicious.

Suddenly Ralph caught his breath: 'What a nerve! I know what they've been doing.'



What had the smugglers done?

12. Fine Feathers

When the Black Hand Gang noticed that [REDACTED], they decided they ought to tell Uncle Paul about it.

'Let's go and find him,' said Ralph.

Mr Boller was in the living room doing the books. When the children told him about the smugglers he burst out laughing.

'What a story! Fred's not a criminal. I can't believe it. Let's go and talk to him.'

'Supposing he's armed?' asked Angela hesitantly.

'There are no firearms on my farm. In fact, there isn't so much as a firework.'

Uncle Paul, still laughing, led the way to Fred's room. He knocked, and would have opened the door but it was locked. The key turned on the inside and the door opened. There stood Fred, dressed in his best clothes.

'Hello,' said Uncle Paul. 'Where are you off to?'

'I - I - I'm going to the cinema,' he replied awkwardly.

'Well, we won't bother you now. It was all a lot of nonsense anyway,' said Uncle Paul cheerfully.

But Ralph tugged at his sleeve and whispered something to him. Mr Boller started, gave a low whistle and said sternly. 'That's a different matter.'



What did Ralph point out to Mr Boller?

13. Send for Habel

Ralph had caught sight of the [REDACTED]. Mr Boller sighed as he left the room with the children. Then he said softly, 'Go and fetch the police. Tell Constable Habel the whole story. Get him to come quickly while I keep an eye on Fred.'

'Can't we phone him?' asked Angela.

'We'd better not. Fred might hear. His room is next door to the living room.'

The Gang stole out of the house and as they went they saw Fred watching them through the window.

'Run for it!' shouted Frank.

In two minutes they had reached the police station. Constable Habel did not waste any time. He pulled on his jacket, picked up his gun and bundled the Black Hand Gang into his car.

When they reached the farmyard they all jumped out.

'He's still inside,' whispered Uncle Paul, who had been keeping watch outside the door.

'Let's have him out here, then,' said Constable Habel, taking a firm hold of his gun.

'Oh, no!' cried Frank. 'We're too late. He's escaped.'



How did Frank know Fred had escaped?

14. By the Milestone

Frank was right. Fred had climbed through the window, overturning [REDACTED] as he jumped. The constable and the Gang ran across to the tractor shed, but the car had gone.

‘What make of car?’ snapped the Constable.

As Keith W.S. was about to tell him, Angela interrupted.

‘Come here a minute, Constable.’

‘What’s the matter?’

‘I’ve found this,’ she said, giving him a scrap of paper.

‘This is bad news,’ he muttered. ‘This comes from a cartridge wrapper.’

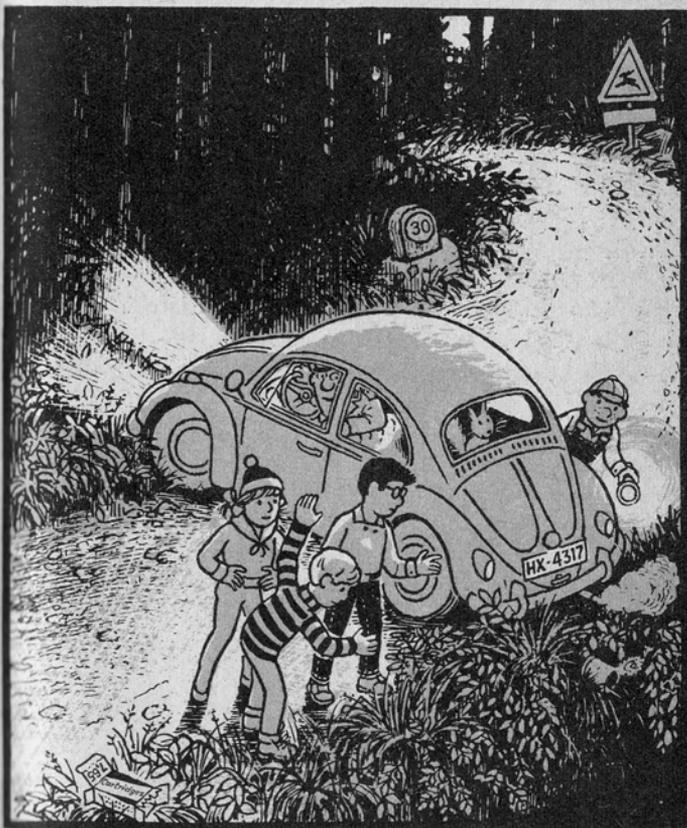
The Constable acted swiftly, telephoning round all the other police stations in the district. Then he ordered the Black Hand Gang back into the car and roared off towards Newtown. They had gone about thirty miles before he slowed down and said: ‘There’s no point in going on. They must have taken another road. Climb out while I turn the car.’

The Black Hand Gang climbed out and watched to see that the car didn’t back into a ditch.

Suddenly Angela cried, ‘Stop!’

Constable Habel braked sharply and called, ‘What’s the matter?’

‘This *is* the right road. The smugglers *did* come this way.’



What had Angela seen?

15. Roadblock

The Constable inspected [REDACTED] that Angela had found.

'This is the box that scrap of paper came from,' he said.

They all got back into the car and set off in pursuit again.

'If we can't catch them before they reach the bridge, we'll have lost them.'

A few minutes later they saw the blinking of a red light. Constable Habel skidded to a halt.

The Black Hand Gang jumped out and Frank cried: 'What luck. It's another police car.'

The policeman, somewhat surprised, asked: 'Where have you come from?'

'We're chasing the smugglers.'

'We've caught them,' he said. 'They tried to run me down, but we had scattered nails right across the road. All the tyres burst and we arrested these two men here.'

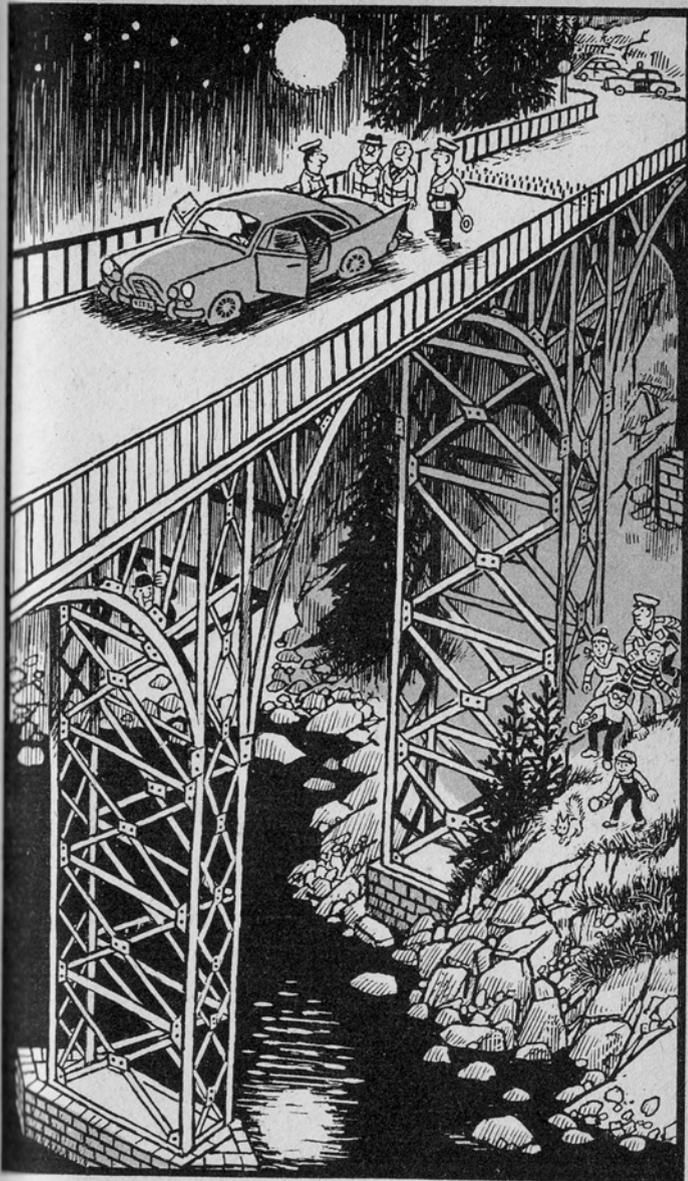
The children recognized them immediately.

'That just leaves Fred,' said Angela.

'That's right,' replied the policeman, 'the third man escaped.'

The Black Hand Gang climbed down the river bank.

'Look!' said Keith W.S. 'There's our friend, Fred.'



Where had Fred hidden?

16. The Old Coach House

Keith W.S. had spotted Fred [REDACTED], and they ran down to the river's edge, closely followed by Constable Habel and the policeman.

'Come down!' he shouted.

Fred did not answer.

'I'll give you three seconds!'

The Constable had counted to two when Fred dived into the water. There was a great splash, then silence.

'He's getting away!' Angela cried.

'Come on,' said the Constable. 'There's nothing moving in the water. We must cross the bridge and cut him off.'

The Black Hand Gang crossed to the other side, and pushed their way through the bushes. There was no sign of Fred.

'What shall we do now?' Ralph asked.

The Constable scratched his chin. 'I think we'd better send for reinforcements. There are too few of us.'

But Frank pointed to a building from whose windows shone a flickering light. 'Could he be in there?'

'That's an inn called *The Old Coach House*,' said the policeman. 'It's a very rough place. We'd better take a look.'

They peered through the pub window.

'There you are,' said Frank, 'There's slippery Fred. Can't you see him, Constable?'



How did they recognize Fred?

17. A Shot

'Good lad!' exclaimed the Constable when Frank pointed out [REDACTED]. 'We'll get him this time, but you had better stand clear.'

The Constable opened the door of *The Old Coach House* and stepped into the porch. The Black Hand Gang followed him. Fred must have noticed the sudden draught, for his hand leapt to his pistol. He fired. There was a tinkle of glass and the room was plunged into darkness.

'He's escaped again!' The Constable's angry voice made itself heard in the darkness. The silence was broken by the slamming of a door.

'There's a door on the left,' called Angela.

Someone at the bar struck a match and the Constable saw the door for himself. Pistol in hand, he rushed through it, followed by his companions.

A short passage led them into a private room. Keith W.S. put the light on.

'He's vanished,' said the policeman.

'The window!' exclaimed Angela. 'He means to come back, though.'

'How do you know that?'

Ralph answered: 'Angela's right. Fred's left the suitcase behind.'



Where was the suitcase?

18. Beware of the Dog

Constable Habel heaved the suitcase [REDACTED] and opened it. It was full of stock cubes. He pursed his lips. 'These are supposed to be full of drugs?'

Frank said, 'Have a taste.'

The Constable tasted one and shuddered. They had to use all their strength to get the suitcase shut again. Then he said: 'I'm very grateful to you all. Let's go back to the car and fetch help. We shall need all we can get if we're going to catch Fred.'

He took the case and started towards the door. At that moment a dog set up a frantic barking. The Black Hand Gang rushed to the back door and into the yard.

'Call the landlord!' cried Angela.

Keith W.S. ran to fetch him.

'That's my dog,' said the landlord, turning on the outside light.

They saw the dog scrabbling away at the trunk of an apple tree. Fred, his trousers in shreds, was clinging to the branches.

'Take care!' shouted the policeman. 'He's armed.'

But Ralph only laughed. 'Don't worry. He's dropped his gun, and he's scared to death.'



Where was the gun?