



Polly gazed in wonder at the jewels laid out on Lady Mountjoy's dressing table. Dozens of emeralds set in a long, looped necklace glittered green in the gas light; pearls glowed softly white in delicate earrings; and rubies, set in gold rings, shone a deep, warm red. But best of all, so beautiful that they quite took her breath away, were the diamonds sparkling like stars on a silver headband. Where the band rose to a point at the front, a single stone, bigger and brighter than all the others, flashed with cold fire. It was so lovely that the young servant girl was almost hypnotized by it. Dreamily, she stretched out her hand. As her fingers almost reached the glittering jewel, she was jerked back into reality by a harsh shout from behind her.

“Oi! Skivvy! Keep your filthy paws off them sparklers!”

Polly jumped as though she had been stung and pulled her hand away, letting out a little squeal of surprise.

“What d’you think you’re doing?” The voice belonged to Violet, Lady Mountjoy’s maid, who had just come into the room. Polly blushed a deep crimson as the older girl advanced towards her.

“I-I weren’t doin’ no harm,” Polly stuttered. “I was only lookin’.”

“No you wasn’t,” Violet snapped. “You was going to touch ’em. Look, don’t touch. That’s something you better learn if you’re going to get on in service.”

“Yes, Violet. But it’s so beautiful. What is it?”

“That, my girl, is the famous Mountjoy tiara.”

“What’s a tiara?”

“That is. That crown thingy. And it’s worth a king’s ransom.”

“What’s a king’s ransom?”

“Don’t you never stop asking questions? It’s a lot of money – more’n the likes of you and me

will ever see in a lifetime. Now, hurry and get that fire made up. I want you out of here before her ladyship comes back from the bathroom. She'll be wanting to get ready for the duke's ball."

Violet gathered up a large white towel that was warming by the fireplace and hurried out as she heard her mistress calling her. Left alone, Polly couldn't resist looking at the jewels one more time. Glancing quickly over her shoulder to make sure no one was watching, she stretched out a finger and let it rest for a moment on the big diamond in the tiara. Then, sighing deeply, she turned away, picked up her heavy brass bucket, and began placing lumps of coal on the fire in the ornate little grate.

Stepping out of Lady Mountjoy's room when she had finished, Polly almost bumped into the portly figure of Mr Harper, prowling noiselessly along the corridor. The butler let out an annoyed grunt and straightened his tailcoat.

"What are you doing up here, girl?" he demanded in his light Scottish accent.

Mr Harper was so grand that Polly found it hard not to curtsy to him. Instead, she swallowed hard and answered nervously, "Makin' up her ladyship's fire, Mr Harper. She rang for more coals."

"Very well. See to the fires in Mr Gerald's room and also the library and drawing room before you go back below stairs."

"Yes, sir."

"Just a moment."

"Yes, sir?"

"Where are your gloves? You've been told before, when you are handling coals you must wear gloves."

Polly looked down at her hands. The fingers were black with coal dust. Blushing, she tried to wipe them on her apron.

"Sorry, Mr Harper, sir. I forgot."

"'Forgot' is not good enough, my girl. You must have clean hands at all times in this household."

"Yes, sir."

"I shall speak to you about this later. Now, get on – and look sharp about it."

Polly was quite out of breath when she got back to the kitchen after making up the fires, and she was nervous about what Mr Harper would say to her. Mrs Ford, the cook, was busy dusting flour from her hands, having just put the pastry top on a large, round pie. Mrs Ford was famous for her pies – steak and kidney, veal and ham, plum and apple – they were all delicious, and she always seemed to be baking them. She looked up and scowled at Polly.

“You’ve took your time, young lady. What have you been up to?” she snapped.

“Nothin’, Mrs Ford. Only what Mr Harper told me to do – makin’ up the other fires.”

“Hmmpb! And just look at you. Keep those filthy hands away from my pastry. Get them washed and then start clearing up in here.”

“Yes, Mrs Ford. Sorry, Mrs Ford.”

Polly scurried across to the big stone sink and turned on the tap. She had just put her hands in the water when the whole house echoed to the sound of someone screaming.

“That’s her ladyship!” said Mrs Ford. “Quick!”

She bustled out of the kitchen, Polly following, and they rushed up the stairs as fast as they could go. Mr Harper was just ahead of them, panting with the effort. As they all reached the top, they found Lady Mountjoy standing on the landing with her hands pressed to her head. Violet was behind her in the open doorway. Lady Mountjoy's brother, Gerald, came out of his room, half dressed, and hurried to his sister.

"What is it, Belle?" he asked. "Whatever's up?"
"My jewels!" she cried. "They've gone. Someone's stolen my jewels!" And she fell to the floor in a faint.



STOP THAT GIRL!

“Sweep! Swee-ee!” Wiggins and Gertie could hear the chimney sweep’s cry echoing along the street before they saw him. He was wearing a battered top hat and dusty black tailcoat – the traditional sweep’s outfit – and pushing a handcart loaded with brushes and poles and sacks.

“Wotcha, Charlie,” Wiggins greeted him. “How’s tricks?”

“‘Allo, young Wiggins,” the sweep replied mournfully. “Not so good – nobody round ’ere wants their chimbleys swept. Can’t even find a good weddin’ to go to.”

“What d’you want to go to a weddin’ for?” Gertie asked, puzzled.

“Don’t you know nothin’?” Charlie gave her a withering glance.

“People think a sweep brings good luck to the happy couple,” Wiggins explained. “Ain’t that right, Charlie?”

“Right. And they slips me a nice tip for turnin’ up outside the church.”

“What, just for turnin’ up?”

“That’s right. I even gets to kiss the bride, sometimes,” he grinned. “Just a peck on the cheek, mind. For luck.”

Gertie pulled a face at the thought of being kissed by Charlie, who had to be at least forty years old – his skin was wrinkled and pitted with years of soot from the chimneys he swept.

“Some folk’ll do anythin’ for luck,” she said. “My da and me used to flog bits of heather and say they was lucky. They was for us!”

“Yeah. Money for old rope,” agreed Wiggins.

“What’s rope got to do with it?” Gertie asked.

“It’s just a saying. Money for nothing.”

“Oh, right. Yeah, it was.” Gertie laughed. “Money for old rope... It was just bits of heather we picked on the common.”

“You a gipsy, then, lad?” asked Charlie.

“No, I’m not. My da’s a tinker.”

“And she ain’t a lad, neither,” said Wiggins.
“She just likes to think she is.”

“Well, I never,” said Charlie. “You could have fooled me, right enough.”

Gertie grinned. She was pleased to be mistaken for a boy, as she usually was, wearing ragged trousers and a jacket instead of a dress, and with her hair cut short. “I can do anythin’ a boy can do – an’ better,” she liked to brag. And so she could. After her mother had died when she was little, her father had always treated her like a boy. Gertie had learned to climb and swim, to ride and fish and hunt for food in woods and lakes and rivers, while they travelled the country lanes in their caravan, mending pots and pans and doing odd jobs.

“And where might your father be now?”
Charlie wanted to know.

“In prison.”

“What for?”

“Takin’ pheasants and fish off some lord’s land.”

“Right. Poaching, eh?”

“It ain’t fair, so it ain’t. Didn’t they have plenty

to spare, and us with our bellies empty?"

"That's life, love. Most of the time it ain't fair. You has to make the best of it." Charlie took hold of the handles of his barrow again, ready to move on. "So long, now. Be good – and don't go poachin' no salmon outta the River Thames, eh? You might end up in the Tower of London!" Chuckling at his own joke, he continued down the street, calling "Swee-eeep! Swee-eeep!" again.

Wiggins and Gertie headed back towards HQ, the secret cellar where they lived with the other Baker Street Boys. But they had not gone far when the front door of a nearby house was flung open and a girl of about their own age ran out and careered down the steps, hitching up her brown servant's dress as she ran. Her white cotton cap flew from her head and her dark ginger curls tumbled down her back as she raced off along the street as though her life depended on it. A moment later, a middle-aged police sergeant and a fat constable came out of the door, waving and shouting.

"Stop that girl!" the sergeant yelled. Seeing the

two Boys, he pointed and called to them, "After her! A shilling if you catch her!"

"A bob?" Wiggins responded. He winked at Gertie and jerked a thumb in the direction the girl had taken. "Right, sir. Leave it to us!"

They set off quickly and soon disappeared round the corner, leaving the two policemen puffing behind them. When the cops rounded the corner a few moments later, they found Wiggins sitting on a pile of sacks beside Charlie's barrow, nursing his left foot, while the sweep bent over him making sympathetic noises.

"Ow, ow," Wiggins groaned loudly. "My ankle – I done my ankle in..."

"Never mind that," the sergeant said. "Which way did she go?"

"Ooh, ooooh..." moaned Wiggins, holding his foot. "What about my shilling?"

The sergeant dug into his pocket and produced a sixpence, which he held out to Wiggins.

"You haven't caught her, but you can have a tanner for trying. Come on, lad. Which way?"

"That way, sir. Look, there she goes!" Wiggins pointed down the street to where Gertie

beckoned excitedly before disappearing round the next corner. The sergeant tossed the sixpence to Wiggins and set off again, followed by the puffing constable. When they were safely out of sight, Wiggins got to his feet and pulled back the sacks to reveal Polly crouched beneath them.

“It’s OK,” he told her. “They’ve gone.”

“Oh, thank you, thank you both,” she panted, still out of breath.

“That’s all right,” Wiggins grinned. “Ain’t it, Charlie?”

Charlie shook his head and gave him a wry look. “You’ll get me hanged one of these days,” he told him. “Go on, get out of ’ere afore they comes back.”

“They’ll not be back in a hurry. Not with Gertie leading ’em astray.” Wiggins turned back to Polly, who was starting to cry.

“Now then, there’s no need for that,” he said. “You’re with friends now. We’ll see you right.”

“I don’t think you can,” she sobbed. “I don’t think anybody can.”

“Why? What you done?”

“I ain’t done nothin’.”

“Why was they after you, then?”

“They think I’m a thief. But I’m not. I’m innocent, honest!”

“In that case, love, you’ve come to the right person.”

“Why? Who are you?”

“Arnold Wiggins, at your service. Captain of the Baker Street Boys, special assistant to Mr Sherlock Holmes, the greatest detective in the world. You can call me Wiggins – everybody does. Come on, let’s get you to HQ and you can tell me all about what it is you ain’t done.”

“Is this where you live?” Polly asked as Wiggins led her down the steps.

“That’s right,” he replied, opening the door with a flourish. “This is headquarters – HQ for short. And here’s the rest of the Baker Street Boys.”

Polly stared around in surprise at the cellar and the boys and girls gathered there. Queenie, the eldest girl, was busy cooking a stew, which smelt surprisingly good. In one corner, two boys, Shiner and Sparrow, were locked together in a wrestling match that was probably friendly,

though it was hard to tell since they were both putting all they had into it. Acting as referee was a bigger boy, Beaver, who wore an old-fashioned furry top hat on the back of his head. At the big old table in the middle of the room, Rosie, a pretty, golden-haired girl, was clearing faded bunches of flowers from a tray.

“Everybody!” Wiggins called out. “Listen. This is Polly. She needs our help.”

The Boys all stopped what they were doing and looked at their visitor, excited at the prospect of a new case. Polly smiled nervously at them.

“You’ll be safe here,” Wiggins told her. “It’s our secret hideaway. Nobody knows where it is, specially not the coppers.”

“Can I stay?”

“Course you can. Right, everybody?”

The others agreed and gathered round to greet her, but Shiner hung back. “Depends who’s after ’er,” he grunted. “And what she’s done.”

“Shiner!” Queenie scolded him. “If she needs our help, she’s welcome.”

“It’s the coppers that’s after her,” Wiggins

answered. "And she ain't done nothing. Which is what we're gonna prove."

"If she ain't done nothin'," said Beaver, looking thoughtful, "then why are the coppers after her?"

"Good question, Beav," said Wiggins. He turned back to Polly. "What do they say you've done?"

"They say I stole her ladyship's tiara."

"What's a tarara?" asked Rosie.

"I know a song about that," Sparrow piped up. "*Tarara-boom-de-ay, tarara-boom-de-ay...*" he sang. "I heard Miss Lottie Collins sing it on the stage once. Brought the house down, as they say."

"No, no. Not *tarara*, it's a *tiara*," Queenie corrected.

"What's that, then?"

"It's what posh ladies wear, like a sort of little crown, only just on the front half of the head."

"Sort of half a crown, then," Sparrow grinned. "Half a crown, two shillings and sixpence..."

The others groaned at his weak joke.

"Sparrow!" Wiggins admonished. "This is serious."

“Is it worth a lot of money?” Shiner wanted to know.

Polly nodded miserably. “A fortune,” she said. “It’s all silver and diamonds. The most beautiful thing I ever did see.”

“Ah,” said Wiggins. “So you have seen it?”

Polly nodded again.

“On Lady Mountjoy’s dressin’ table with all the rest of the jewels. While I was makin’ up the fire in her bedroom.”

“Cor,” exclaimed Rosie. “Fancy havin’ a fire in your bedroom!”

The Boys all looked impressed at the thought.

“And servants to make it up for you,” added Beaver with a dreamy expression on his face.

“Never mind that,” said Wiggins. “Where was her ladyship while you was looking at her sparklers?”

“In the bathroom, with Violet. Violet’s her maid.”

Wiggins stroked his chin thoughtfully as he tried to picture the scene.

“I see,” he said. “You was on your own in the bedroom with the jewels?”

“Yes.”

“So you could’ve taken ’em?”

Polly burst into tears. “That’s what they all say,” she sobbed. “But I didn’t. I’m not a thief, I’m a good girl.”

Queenie put her arm round Polly, and sat her down at the table.

“Yes, of course you are, my love,” she said. “Wiggins, how could you?”

“I’m not saying she did it,” Wiggins replied calmly. “Only that she could’ve – if she’d wanted to.”

“But I *didn’t* want to,” Polly cried. “What would I do with a diamond tiara and all them jewels?”

“You could sell ’em,” Shiner said.

“That’s right,” added Beaver, his eyes lighting up. “If they’re worth a fortune like you said, you could take ’em to a jeweller’s shop and he’d give you lots and lots of money and you wouldn’t never have to be nobody’s servant again and you could buy a nice house and we could all come to live in it with you and have plenty to eat and bedrooms with fires in ’em and...”

“Beaver!” Wiggins said, stopping him before he got completely carried away “She ain’t got them.”

“No, course not. I was just thinkin’...”

“Well, don’t.”

“Oh. Sorry, Wiggins. Sorry, Polly.”

The servant girl managed a weak smile. “‘S’all right, Beaver. I know you didn’t mean it.”

Beaver turned bright red, but his blushes were saved by Rosie.

“Ssh!” she said, holding up her hand. “Somebody’s comin’...”

Everyone held their breath and listened. They heard feet on the steps outside, and then the door opened.

“What’s up with you lot?” demanded Gertie as she entered. “You look like you seen a ghost or somethin’.”

“We thought you might be the coppers,” said Rosie, relieved. “Lookin’ for Polly.”

“No chance,” Gertie laughed. “They’re miles away. I led ’em all over town ’fore I left ’em the other side of the park.”

“Well done, Gertie,” congratulated Wiggins.

“You done a great job.”

“Yes,” Polly said gratefully. “Thank you. Thank you both. They’d have caught me, sure as eggs is eggs, if you hadn’t come to my rescue. They’d have locked me up in prison for years and years.”

“Nobody’s gonna lock you up in prison,” Beaver told her. “Not now you got the Baker Street Boys on your side. Right, everybody?”

The others nodded their agreement.

“You’re very lucky,” Wiggins said. “We don’t happen to have a case on just now. So we can start right away.”

“Can we have somethin’ to eat, first?” Gertie asked. “That stew smells good and I’m starvin’ after all that runnin’ about.”

“Good idea,” said Shiner, who was always hungry, even when he hadn’t been running about. “Polly can tell us all about it while we’re eatin’.”

Queenie served up the stew and everyone tucked in apart from Polly, who was too upset and worried to eat. She told them how she had been in service at Mountjoy House for about six

months as a skivvy, the lowest of all the servants. She had been taken on as a 'tweeny – a between-floors maid – but soon found that she had to do the work of a scullery maid and general dogsbody as well, as Lady Mountjoy couldn't afford to keep a full staff.

“So how many servants they got in that house?” Wiggins asked.

“Just the four of us since Lord Mountjoy died,” Polly said. “The butler, Mr Harper; the cook, Mrs Ford; Violet, her ladyship's maid; and me.”

“Sounds like a lot of people to look after one lady,” said Rosie.

“There's her brother as well. Mr Gerald. And her stepson, Maurice, but he's away at boardin' school most of the time.”

“Still sounds a lot to me,” said Sparrow.

“It's not enough for a house that size. I have to work all the time, from the crack of dawn till last thing at night.”

“Was everybody in the house when the jewels went missing?” Wiggins asked.

“Yes. 'Cept Master Maurice, of course.”

“And nobody else?”

“No.”

Wiggins looked serious as he considered this.

“So if you didn’t take the jewels, it must have been one of them.”

“I s’pose so, yes.”

“Ain’t no suppose about it. It had to be.”

The Boys all stared at Wiggins, deeply impressed. Shiner even stopped eating, his spoon halfway to his mouth.

“Cor,” Beaver said. “That’s dead clever, Wiggins. You solved the case already! Mr Holmes couldn’t have done no better.”

Wiggins looked at him and sighed. “I only said *one* of ’em, Beav. I didn’t say which one.”

“Oh. Right. So which one was it?”

Wiggins closed his eyes for a moment and shook his head gently.

“I dunno,” he replied. “That’s what we gotta find out.”

Then he had a sudden thought and turned to Polly. “If there was all them other people in the house, why did the police think *you* done it?”

“They said it had to be an inside job –

somebody what was inside the house, like you said. And they said because none of us had been out since the jewels went missin', they must still be somewhere in the house."

"That sounds right," said Wiggins. "So what did they do then?"

"They said they needed to search the house. They started at the top – that's where I sleep, in the attic, with Violet. And they looked in my box by my bed, and ... and..."

Polly broke off, sobbing so hard she couldn't speak. Queenie squeezed her shoulder comfortingly. "What did they find?" she asked gently.

"I didn't put it there. I don't know how it got there, honest..."

"What did they find?" Queenie repeated.

"They found ... they found one of her ladyship's pearl earrings. In my box, where I keep all my things."

There was a gasp from all the Boys.

"What was it doin' there?" Rosie asked.

"I dunno," Polly sobbed. "Really I don't."

Wiggins nodded solemnly. "Somebody's trying to frame you," he said.

“What, like make a picture of her?” asked Sparrow.

“No. Framing somebody means planting evidence to make ’em look guilty when they ain’t.”

“Right,” said Beaver. “So somebody must’ve planted that earring in Polly’s box.”

“Exac’ly. It was put there on purpose so the coppers would find it ...”

“... and think Polly had pinched it?”

“Exac’ly.”

The Boys were silent.

“That’s awful,” said Gertie. “Who’d want to do a terrible thing like that?”

“The one what really pinched the jewels,” Wiggins said. “And *that’s* the one we gotta find.”