

"I DON'T KNOW WHY I DID IT, BUT—"

The Story of the Girl Who Saved Her Life by Playing Truant

"I DON'T KNOW why I did it," said nine-year-old Helen Marks, "but—"

She paused, awed by the realization that she had saved her life by playing truant from school.

When the recent horrible fire disaster at Collinwood, Ohio, plunged that pretty suburb of Cleveland into mourning and shocked the nation, it was announced that every one of the thirty-nine pupils in Miss Grace Fiske's third-grade room had perished with their teacher. As 175 little ones met death that day, the statement seemed probable.

But it was incorrect. There was one survivor from Miss Fiske's class—Helen Marks. She had saved her life by playing "hookey."

School children have played truant, perhaps, since the torment of schooldays was devised by their elders. They have gone fishing and swimming, have played ball on remote lots or enjoyed stolen liberty in other ways that appeal to boys and girls, but few have saved their lives by dodging school.

In this story Helen Marks tells, in her own youthful way, of the escapade that kept one victim off the death roll of the Collinwood horror.

Like returning from the dead, Helen Marks surprised her father by slipping on behind him and throwing her arms about his neck while he was prodding among the ruins for her body. The girl had played truant from school. Not returning home, her parents supposed that she had perished. In despair her father was searching in the ruins, when the girl cried: "Guess who I am, papa?"

Mr. Marks was nearly overcome with joy. News dispatch on day of fire.

SCORES of little bodies were lying in the temporary morgue, about which a crowd of heartbroken parents clustered. The bunch of guards at the front door parted. A man, with face wan and lined with grief and crying quietly, came in.

"Was it a boy or girl?" the sympathetic guards whispered.

"A girl," he sobbed. "My Helen."

They motioned to the left, where lay a long line of little shapes, covered with blankets, tarpaulins, sheets and newspapers. "Those are the girls," they said.

Down the long line the sorrowing man went, his grief eating his heart away. The tears came faster and blinded him as he uncovered the still, ghastly forms

one by one. He staggered before he reached the end. The guards caught and supported him.

"I guess she isn't here," he moaned. "Maybe—they haven't got her out yet." For all the victims had not been recovered from the schoolhouse death trap.

"Look again," they told him. "Look at the dresses; possibly you will find her that way."

He shook his head, but started at the head of the line again anyway. He examined a score of bodies, then sank to his knees to pray. At that juncture—

A little girl squeezed her way in. Her face was dirty, her white apron was rent and muddy. Before they could stop her she ran silently down to the kneeling figure of the man.

Quick as a flash she put her hands over his eyes. "Guess who it is, papa," she said.

With a fierce cry of joy, he spun around. "My God, Helen," he gasped. Then he fainted.

There were thirty-nine pupils in Miss Grace Fiske's third grade room at the Lakeview School, Collinwood. Thirty-eight answered to roll call on that fatal Wednesday morning. Helen Marks, 9 Fourth avenue, was marked "absent."

An hour or so later every one of the thirty-eight was dead. With their teacher, they lost their lives in the frantic rush to escape the flames that made the flimsy building a charnel house.

NO WHIPPING THIS TIME
Helen Marks lives because she was a naughty little girl and played "hookey."



Her Body Was Not Among the Victims.

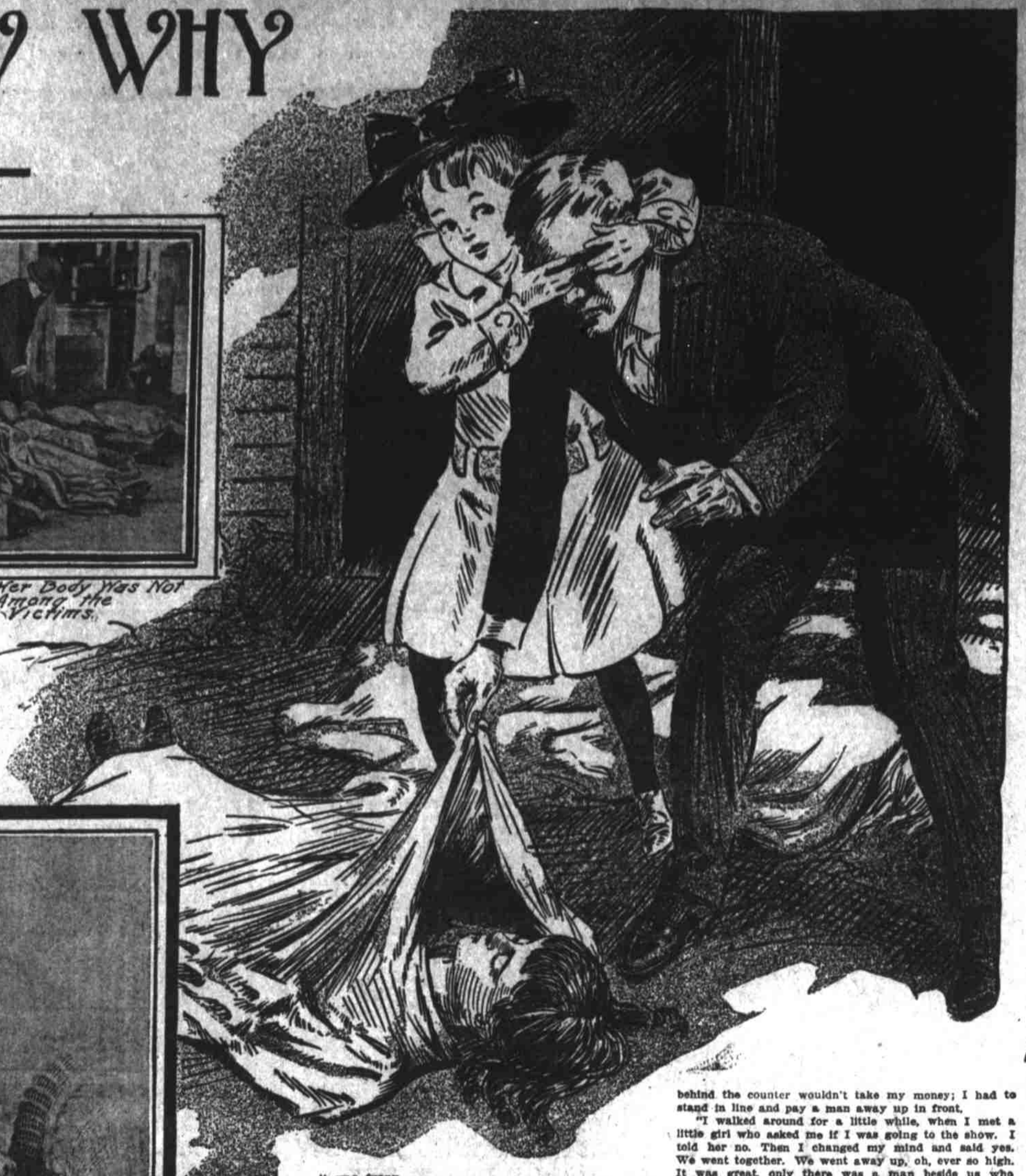
extracted 25 cents. Helen admits it, and an examination of the bank by her parents, who now would care not if it had been \$50, is corroborative evidence. With that 25 cents Helen had the time—but let her tell it herself: "I didn't want to go to school that morning. Funny, I always hate to go to school on a warm, sunny day like that was. I liked teacher, and I like lessons, too. But I just didn't want to go to school. "Gee, but I had a hard time getting that money out. I did it upstairs as I got dressed. I thought it would never drop out. I wanted more, but mamma was calling for me to come down to breakfast. I tied all the money I had got out up hard in my handkerchief, so it wouldn't



Helen Marks, the Girl who Played Truant



The Marks Home in Collinwood



It was funny. "I was sure that mamma was watching me all the way. I thought I could feel her eyes on my back. She wasn't looking, though. I was glad I didn't meet Miss Fiske on the way. I would have had to go right into school with her.

"When I got to the front door I didn't go in. I went around to the back. The last bell was just ringing. There wasn't any one out there; not even any boys. I waited around there until I heard the scholars saying the Lord's Prayer, then I ran across to the car line like sixty.

"I had to wait a long time for the car. There wasn't any place to hide—just a big open space—and I was afraid that some one would see me and tell on me. I was going to go out to Euclid Beach and spend the morning. I could get back home by dinner time, I thought.

CONSCIENCE ACCUSED HER

"But the car going that way didn't come. One going toward Cleveland came along first. I don't know what possessed me to do it, but I climbed on.

"I forgot about where I had my money until the conductor came around. Then I had to stick my hand way down my neck to get it. The other people laughed fit to kill. One old man didn't, though. He kept looking at me kind of stern like. I was afraid he was a truant officer. Anyway, I'll bet he just knew I was running away from school.

"What did I do downtown? Why, I just walked around and looked in the windows, and bought candy and peanuts and things and watched the people. Before I knew it it was noon. I saw it on a big clock on a post out in front of a store.

"I didn't know what to do then. I knew that I'd get a whipping when I got home, and probably papa would send me to bed without any supper. Then I thought that I might just as well stay away all day. I'd get the whipping anyway; I could eat that doughnut before I got on the car to last me over supper.

"So I stayed. I got some doughnuts and coffee in a restaurant. Gee, but those stools were high. The man

behind the counter wouldn't take my money; I had to stand in line and pay a man away up in front.

"I walked around for a little while, when I met a little girl who asked me if I was going to the show. I told her no. Then I changed my mind and said yes. We went together. We went away up, oh, ever so high. It was great, only there was a man beside us who chewed tobacco and spit on the floor.

"I never saw anything like that play. It was grand. They did lots of the grandest things. A man swam a big river with a girl with the prettiest yellow hair, and got her away from the bad man—and oh, just lots of things. I cried once when he said he was going to kill her—the bad man, I mean.

"It was nearly dark when I got out. I was getting afraid. I was all alone, too, for somehow I had lost the other girls coming down the stairs. But I just ran to where I knew the Collinwood cars passed. I got on the first one that came.

"People were all talking about a fire somewhere. Lots of people had been killed. A newsboy got on the car. Everybody bought his papers. I had a penny left and bought one, too.

"On the front page it told about a big fire in the 'North Collinwood' school. I didn't think anything of that. Our school was the Lakeview School. Then I started to read the names of the children who were burned. Down in the middle of it was my name, Helen Marks. It had my address, age and everything. Newspapers always get things wrong, I've heard papa say.

"Well, anyway, I just got scared to death. I knew that papa and mamma would be almost crazy. That old car was awfully slow. It seemed to stop at every block. Every time it stopped more people got on. They were all talking about the fire.

"When we finally got there everybody got off at the Lake Shore shops. I met a girl I knew, and she told me that papa was in the shed where they had all the dead children looking for me. I was supposed to be dead, too, you know.

"I ran right in. Some men tried to stop me, but I went anyway. There was papa, kneeling down there. I just ran up to him and played blindman's bluff with him. "I didn't get whipped, after all. Mamma and papa made me sleep with them that night. They hugged and kissed me for most of the night. In the morning papa gave me a dollar; he says mamma is to take me in to a play every week now. But I ain't going to run away from school any more. "I guess that's all."

Dramatic Art for Moving Pictures...



FROM Paris comes the announcement that five of the greatest dramatists of France have been engaged to write plays for moving pictures. They are Victorien Sardou, Edmond Rostand, Alfred Capus, Henri Lavedan and Maurice Donnay.

Lovers of the drama are asking: Will the theater pass away? Will the drama of the future be produced, not on a stage, but on a white canvas? Already the cinematograph as a popular amusement has become world-wide and famous.

Granier, Coquelin, Mounet-Sully, Le Bargy and Guity—among them the best actors of France; nay, of the world. Sarah Bernhardt acting for the camera! Coquelin posing for a dumb show! Would you believe it? But, explains the manufacturers, the demand for this amusement is so great that they can afford to pay big money—and they are paying large sums to these stars. They declare, further, that the moving picture is the coming amusement of the future; that nothing too good can be secured. And so they have engaged the best talent. In the United States, according to a prominent manufacturer of films, three of the best known humorous playwrights in New York write plays for the camera. Their names are not used for advertising purposes. "But," continued the moving-picture man, "the day is very near when we shall compete with one another because of the authors of our plays. The time

is not far off when we shall bid for the best talent to write our plays and the best known actors and actresses to appear in them." The idea of writing plays for the moving pictures occurred to M. Henri Lavedan, the famous author of the "Marquis de Priola." His suggestion was quickly taken up by the cinematograph manufacturer, and M. Lavedan was engaged to write a historical drama. No sooner did other dramatists learn of this than they professed their willingness to write plays, and they were quickly engaged. Edmond Rostand has been commissioned to write three fairy dramas; M. Alfred Capus will write a play depicting the financial life of Paris. In these plays, of course, as in all moving-picture dramas, what is required is action. Emotions expressed on the stage in words, for the cinematograph must be translated into movement and expression. While appearing before the camera, the actors usually enter into conversation in order to give verisimilitude to

the show. Otherwise, the movements would naturally be strained. Rehearsals for the moving pictures are conducted just as rehearsals for the stage. There must be spontaneity, for the camera's record is unerring.

Employment by the French manufacturers of well-known actors is certainly an innovation in the production of these dumb shows. Le Bargy, one of the most vital of actors, will take the leading part in M. Lavedan's play.

A series of short scenes representing phases of Parisian life will constitute the play to be produced by M. Capus. Mile. Eva Lavalliere, of the Varieties, and De Feraudy, of the Francis, will take the leading roles. It is said the supporting actors are to get \$40 for each rehearsal and \$300 for the final performance. The leading parts, of course, will draw larger—and, it is said, extremely large—sums. Capus, it will be remembered, is the author of "La Veine" and "La Chatelaine," the leading successes of two successive seasons in Paris. For several years he was the idol of the French, in popularity matching Rostand.

Rostand! Think of the author of "Cyrano de Bergerac"—the most popular play of period, in Russia, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Serbia, the United States and the countries of southern Europe—writing plays for moving-picture production. Possibly the "Divine Sarah" and Coquelin will be engaged to take the leading parts.

Writing a play for a moving-picture production is simple to the expert. The recipe is lots of action, expression of emotion by pantomime, sensational escapades, half-breath escapes, humorous situations.

A mere outline of the play is written, divided into scenes. When rehearsing the actors fill in their parts with conversations. Occasionally the author will write the dialogue, although this is not the usual method. The average length of the play as written is 905 words.

In the United States most of the moving-picture manufacturers employ men to write their subjects. Many are purchased from outside contributors, and from \$5 to \$50 is paid for a play or good suggestion.