



"We catch
CRIMINALS
after school!"

Meet the young crime fighters who are taking the private investigator world by storm. DOLLY chats to them about catching cheats, fraudsters – and even murderers!

Follow that car!" shouts a detective, diving into the back seat of a taxi. The driver roars off in hot pursuit and they speed through the city as rain beats down against the windows. The detective reaches for a long-lens camera and tells the driver to stop. The suspect jumps out of a car and is photographed entering a door by the side of a sex shop. "Got him," exclaims the detective triumphantly. Another case solved.

But this detective isn't a former police officer or a government spy; she's Angel Reece, 15, from Perth. Angel is one of a new team of young female private detectives – the surprising new faces of the fight against crime.

"It makes schoolwork seem really boring," admits Angel, who moved to England as a child. "Mum always said I was observant as a baby, but she's amazed I became a private detective!"

Angel was chosen for a week's work experience at Answers Investigations agency in Surrey, England, last year. They were so impressed by her detective skills that they offered her a part-time job tracking down criminals and solving mysteries – but only on weekends and school holidays, of course. "I've worked on cases

involving missing people, divorces and even murder," Angel says. "It's the most exciting Saturday job in the world!"

JOBS FOR THE GIRLS

The owner of Answers Investigations, Nigel Parsons, explains how he accidentally discovered that teenage girls make fantastic private detectives. "The company launched in 1995, but we only had our first girl join the company in 2005. She started off doing boring things like photocopying court documents, but then one day she went on a real undercover job for experience – and we realised that she was simply brilliant." The agency quickly recruited a whole team of young, smart girls as detectives. And then the fun began!

Nigel says that with excellent social networking knowledge, computer skills and observation abilities, teen girls are better than many grown-up detectives at serious investigations. He thinks the reason why they make such excellent detectives is because they're above suspicion. "Who would suspect a teenage girl of being an undercover investigator?!" he asks. There are definitely some situations where adults would stand out in the crowd, but young girls have the ability to blend right in.

SECRET GADGETS AND HIDDEN CAMERAS

Marnie Higgins, 22, has been a private detective for six years, starting when she was just a 15-year-old school girl. "My cases have taken me to France, Spain and all over the UK," she says. "One client wanted to find his biological mother who had given him up for adoption as a baby. I tracked her down in Spain... I love jobs where I get to pack a bikini!"

Left to right: Marnie, Angel, Emily, Lise

"Doorstep surveys are my speciality," explains Marnie. "I turn up wearing my school uniform and say I'm doing a survey for my geography class. Sometimes it's too easy and suspects just spill the beans." If a target is claiming disability allowance, Marnie will innocently ask them what they do for a living. "One guy, who was meant to be unable to even walk, told me he worked on the building site down the road and he had no idea I was secretly filming him with a camera hidden in my school bag."

MURDER MYSTERIES

Angel was desperate to get involved in more serious investigations, so Marnie and the older girls took her under their wing. "They call me their sidekick," says Marnie, "but I prefer protégée!" In July 2011, two British men were accused of attempted murder while enjoying a holiday in Spain. The guys' families and friend enlisted the agency's help and it became Angel's big break.

While the boys were held in a Spanish prison for four months without charge, Marnie flew to Spain and Angel stayed in England to work on putting a case together. "We had to collect all the evidence, prove there was no way the boys could have been at the crime scene

and establish alibis. We believed the police line-up was unfair too, because it featured only local Spanish men and our clients," Angel explains.

Angel and Answers Investigations put together such a brilliant case that in February, the boys were freed from jail and returned home to England where TV cameras and supporters mobbed them at the airport. "It was such a buzz to get a result," says Angel. "I watched it on TV and I was so proud!"

FINGERPRINTS AND DNA EVIDENCE

Nigel says the girls have worked on some pretty big, confidential cases. Recently, they investigated a suspect who was accused of contaminating products at the pharmaceutical company where he worked. The girls had to collect his fingerprints so they were sent in to get a chocolate bar he'd touched. The perfect job for a young investigator!

"We have all the tools of the trade," says Angel. "We have handbags with cameras hidden in them, also coffee cups and even cigarette packets with camera recording devices hidden inside." The girls also have a room full of dress-up outfits, which allow them to blend into any situation. Their costumes cover anything and everything, and range from school uniforms to high-visibility jackets.

ADRENALIN RUSH

Emily Swatton, 24, has been a detective since she was 19. "I do get a rush of adrenalin on the more exciting cases," she admits. "I've trailed suspects across London, diving in and out of shops. Often I'm dressed in a school uniform and have to tell taxi drivers, 'I'm a private detective, I'm going to sit on the floor where no one can see me!'" Hiding out of sight often involves squeezing into some pretty uncomfortable spaces. Marnie says the drivers' reactions are mixed. "Some of them get really into it and I can ask them, 'What are they doing now?' Although others just freak out!"

But it's not only taxi drivers who get suspicious. Marnie says most guys also think she's lying when she tells them she's a private detective. "People usually just say, 'You're joking!' Or they ask, 'Are you stalking me, then?'. I do have a boyfriend and he'd be pretty foolish to cheat on me – I've got skills!"

The young detectives all say their unusual job has changed their lives in the real world. "My observation skills are so sharp now," says Angel. "I can spot someone acting strangely a mile away. I practise my peripheral vision all the time. Even when I'm not working, I watch people out of the corner of my eye."

So beware, because there are secret spies among us – and you'll never know exactly who's watching!



When she's not at school, Angel's hunting the bad guys.



Sneaky situations are all in a day's work for Marnie!



Emily's always on the lookout for suspects.