



## OTHER FAVOURITE DETECTIVES

### VALERIE DREW AND FLASH

by Dennis L. Bird

**SHE** was quick-witted, resourceful, resolute, attractive, with violet eyes and red-gold hair. ("Red-gold" was an inspired description, so much more distinctive than "ginger" or even "auburn".)

**HE** was intelligent, faithful highly-trained - and four-footed.

They were, of course, Valerie Drew and her Alsatian dog Flash, the detective duo who beguiled schoolgirl readers from 1933 to 1940. They were the creations of one of the Sexton Blake authors, John William Bobin (1889-1935), writing as "Adelie Ascott". From the first words of the first story ("That Amazing Room of Clocks", in the "Schoolgirls' Weekly", 7th January 1933) everyone knew that some high dramas were in store:

"Down, Flash - down!" Eighteen-year-old Valerie Drew sensed the coming of another mountainous wave through the mad, shrieking gale and the hissing torrential rain. She shouted frantically to the drenched Alsatian wolfhound, who was her companion."

Long complete stories and a 17-installment serial "Valerie Drew - Schoolgirl Detective" appeared at intervals over the next year or so, and then every week from May 1934 until Bobin's untimely death on 9th April 1935, aged only 45. His last story was published three weeks later ("The Sandbanked Ship", 27th April 1935).

For the next 116 weeks the tales appeared anonymously; Bill Lofts believes that some were by Lewis Carlton, with the majority coming from Reginald S. Kirkham

# VALERIE—the Girl Detective—Investigates the Mystery of THAT AMAZING ROOM OF CLOCKS



GRAND 10-PAGE  
COMPLETE STORY

BY

**Adelie Ascott**

Illustrated by C. MONTFORD.

The first Valerie Drew Story (*Schoolgirls' Weekly* No. 533)

("Hilary Marlow" and "Joan Vincent"). From July 1937 onwards the by-line was "Isabel Norton" (Kirkham). The 214 short stories ended the following year with "The Locked Library" (2nd April 1938), and the rest of Valerie's career was related in seven serials - in the "Schoolgirls' Weekly" until its demise in May 1939, and finally in "The Schoolgirl" until the wartime paper shortage brought that to an end too in May 1940. The last story, "Valerie Drew and the Avenging Three", was cut off after only 11 instalments, and was never concluded.

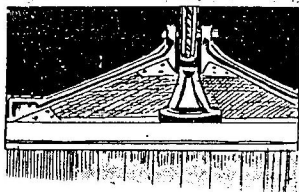
So much for what might be called Valerie's "vital statistics". But what were they really like, this unusual partnership of strong-willed girl and sagacious pet?

At first, Valerie appeared to be not much more than a schoolgirl, and was able to pass herself off as such in that first serial in 1933-34. She does not seem to have had any formal training in her profession; we are told in the first story that she had "earned the title of girl detective by helping her father in more than one intricate case before his recent retirement." In Story No. 4 ("Valerie Drew's Dilemma", 24th June (1933) John Drew is described as former "Chief Commissioner of Police at Scotland Yard." Presumably he was in fact Sir John Drew, for all the real-life Metropolitan Police Commissioners have had knighthoods (Sir Philip Game, Sir Robert Mark, Sir Kenneth Newman, Sir Peter Imbert). Knight or not, John Drew is kidnapped and has to be rescued by his intrepid daughter. After that, no more is heard of him apart from an isolated reference in "House of Hidden Peril" (25th March 1939), when Inspector Grainger tells Valerie "Your father and I were great friends years ago." As to Valerie's

other relations, no mention is ever made of her mother, but we do meet a cousin, Irene Wilson (Story No. 4).



Valerie suddenly started. A new hope sprang to life in her. The lift was moving—upwards! She knew then that Flash was responsible—that he was behaving with almost human intelligence!



From 'Valerie Drew's Double', September 1st 1934 (No. 619) drawn by C. Percival

The Drews were comfortably off. They lived in "a quiet, residential road of Kensington," in a house with a carriage drive, and they employed a butler, cook, and housemaid. Valerie stayed on there after her father faded from the series. Later she had a "delightful Park Lane flat" (a very expensive address), owned a powerful sports car, and flew her own aeroplane - a three-seat de Havilland D.H. 80A Puss Moth. By now she was a very sophisticated and competent young lady.

As for the other half of the partnership, he was a strong character in his own right. Flash was described as "old" almost from the beginning, so he must have been at least six. As Alsations normally live for only eight or nine years, he must have been a Methuselah among dogs, being still vigorously active in 1940. He would then have been about 13; Valerie was 25.

Flash liked to go driving with Valerie, and "at such times he was wont to look down pityingly at other dogs they passed... He considered every dog who had not a pretty mistress to drive him around unlucky and beneath his consideration" ("The Problem of the Red-headed Girl", 11th March 1933). He liked to be cock of the walk, and did not take kindly to other pets such as the parrot Columbus ("House of Hidden Peril", 1st April 1939):

"He was indignant, even a tiny bit jealous. He was sorry Columbus had ever appeared at Mull House. It was going to be more than a joke if the bird was always about the place."

On the job, for which he had been thoroughly schooled by Valerie from his puppyhood, he was a true professional, able to do almost as much as a human assistant, such as pressing the button to summon a lift at a crucial moment ("Valerie Drew's Double," 1st September 1934). Sometimes, of course, he could do more, his superior sense of smell enabling him to track down villains at Valerie's command. Sometimes he had

cases almost on his own - "Detective Flash" (21st April 1934), for instance, or "Flash - on Guard" (29th August 1936). We are told his innermost thoughts, which are often highly perceptive, but usually believably dog-like. A rare fellow is Flash!

Valerie Drew and her astute partner are among the most vivid personalities in the pre-war story papers, not only through the words of their three authors, but in the illustrations. At first the drawings were by C.E. Montford, but after only five stories he was replaced by the man who really breathed life into the dauntless pair: C. Percival.

From 11th November 1933 until the abrupt, war-induced end on 18th May 1940 it is his pictures which remain in the memory.

Opening Chapters of our Magnificent New Girl Detective serial, featuring—

## VALERIE DREW *and the* AVENGING THREE!



C. Percival illustration for unfinished serial in  
*Schoolgirl* No. 554, March 9th 1940

I had hoped to compare Valerie's detective methods with those of her contemporary rival, the "Girls' Crystal's" debonair male detective Noel Raymond, originated by "Peter Langley" (Ronald Fleming). Noel is always developing "theories which he was anxious to put to the test," and sometimes readers can work out his thought processes for themselves. But the Valerie Drew stories do not lend themselves to this analysis. Things just happen to her, and there is rarely any surprise about the identity of the villains. But what she and Flash may lack in mystery and reasoning, they more than make up for by their courage, charisma - and charm.

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For some of the information in this article I am indebted to Mary Cadogan's "Valerie Drew - Girl Detective" in "Collectors' Digest Annual" 1989. - D.L.B.