

Meet VALERIE DREW the celebrated girl detective, and FLASH her clever dog assistant Inside!

SCHOOLGIRLS' WEEKLY 2¢

No. 655. Vol. XXVI.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

May 11th, 1935.



**"OUT OF THE DRUM
CAME
AUTOGRAPH ANNE!"**

An unusual incident from the magnificent Complete Story by MARGERY MARRIOTT inside.

To get on the track of a Party of Very Crafty Schemers, VALERIE DREW, the celebrated girl detective, decides that her Alsatian assistant shall become—

"LITTLE MISS FLASH!"



A SEASIDE MYSTERY!

"FLASH, you rascal!" Valerie Drew gasped in amazement. "What ever will you do next!"

Accustomed as the famous girl detective was to the sagacious ways of her clever Alsatian pet, Flash had succeeded in surprising her this time.

Valerie was at Shellsea Bay, enjoying the first delightful bath of the season. A powerful swimmer, Valerie was making the most of it. She had left Flash sporting in the shallows, which he preferred. Yet here was Flash paddling powerfully towards her with a white envelope grasped in his powerful jaws. He was holding his head as far out of water as possible in order to prevent the missive being damaged.

A letter for Valerie Drew—delivered to her at sea! No wonder Valerie's eyes opened so wide. Flash had often acted as postman in their cosy flat, but this was the first time he had ever played such a role as his present one.

Who could be writing to her now—and why? Valerie could not help feeling a thrill of mystified excitement. Not being engaged on a case at the moment, she had come to Shellsea for a delightful and well-earned rest. It seemed that the famous girl detective was never to be left in peace for long!

"This way, old boy!" Valerie called, making up her mind in her usual decisive manner.

There was a diving raft anchored quite near at hand. With powerful strokes Valerie made for it, and drew herself on to its matting surface. A moment later she was helping Flash to scramble to her side.

"Miss Valerie Drew—Urgent!" was printed boldly on the envelope.

Valerie stood perplexedly on the swaying raft, with Flash at her side shaking himself

Enthralling LONG COMPLETE Detective Story

vigorously. His red tongue was lolling out, and he panted joyously. His twinkling green eyes suggested he was thoroughly enjoying himself.

But Valerie, for once, had almost forgotten Flash. None of her friends would be likely to print the address on an envelope. It looked as though the writer had done so for a reason. Removing as much moisture from her hands as possible, Valerie carefully opened the envelope and delicately extracted the folded slip of paper inside.

A greater amazement than ever came over her as she read its truly startling contents.

"To Valerie Drew," it said. "This is a warning! Have nothing to do with the Tracey family. Keep out of our affairs if you want us to leave you alone. Any interference from you, and we shall see to it that your dog pays the penalty first. This message will prove to you how easily we can get at him."
(Signed) THE INDIGO MASK."

As though to make that amazing threat more uncanny, there was the drawing of a little dark blue mask just beneath the signature.

"Flash, who gave you this?" Valerie demanded, a touch of colour springing to her cheeks as she spoke, with unusual sharpness, to her pet.

Flash, wagging his bushy tail, looked up at her with sudden puzzlement and dismay in his faithful old eyes. What was the matter? He was asking himself. He thought he'd done something really clever—and Valerie wasn't

patting him for it at all. She appeared to be quite cross.

"Poor old Flash!" Valerie's passing displeasure had melted in a moment, and now she was caressing him fondly. "Of course, the old darling has done his best. He didn't know what they'd written inside."

She was thinking at lightning speed. It took a lot more than a threat like that to daunt Valerie Drew. A warm thrill of excitement suffused her; her determination was shown in the sudden narrowing of her violet eyes.

A threat—which meant some wrongdoer was afraid of her! Who were the Tracey family? She remembered hearing only that morning that a wealthy family of that name were staying in Shellsea; her landlady had spoken so interestingly of their charming little daughter, Columbine. Valerie's expression hardened as a disturbing suspicion flashed through her mind. She knew instinctively that she was on a new and strangely intriguing case.

"Come on, old boy!" she directed. She was already tucking the letter under her waterproof bathing cap. Drawing the cap down tightly over her red-gold hair, she poised for a moment, then took a beautiful leader into the sea. As she swam for the shore with powerful strokes, Flash leapt in and followed her at top speed.

A pity, Valerie was reflecting anxiously, that she hadn't been watching Flash more closely. But then, it was Flash's holiday as well. A long swim didn't appeal to him, as it did to her. He would paddle out to her every now and then, then surge back to fresh

with the kiddies, who naturally loved him. Flash had been glorying in every minute of it.

Valerie was soon ashore. Catching up her bright-coloured bathing wrap, she drew it around her wet costume. Flash, shaking in the shallows, came splashing after her. He began to shake more vigorously than ever at her side.

"Who was it, Flash?" Valerie whispered intently. "Who gave you that letter?"

But Flash, for once, only seemed vaguely to comprehend. It had been such a busy, such a jolly morning. He had made friends with a score of different people. There had been almost too much excitement for his active mind. His red tongue lolled out, his bushy tail stood erect. He barked perplexedly.

Before Valerie could make her meaning clearer three figures approached her. A stylishly dressed lady was leading a pretty girl of five or six by the hand. An elderly, grey-haired nurse, with a nervous manner, hovered beside them.

Flash appeared to-day to be in his most "seaside-ish" and joyous mood. His tail waving in the air, he ran, to Valerie's astonishment, straight towards the nurse, and barked excitedly.

"Oh, keep off, dog!" the woman cried, immediately backing nervously away. "I've done nothing to you, you silly old thing!"

"Isn't nurse funny, mamma!" the youngster cried, even as Valerie was hastily and rather crossly calling her pet back to her side.

"Fancy being afraid of that dear old doggie. I guess I wouldn't be afraid of him!"

The lady's smile, as she greeted Valerie, did not hide the fact that some painful anxiety was troubling her. Valerie could read it in her eyes.

"You are Miss Valerie Drew?" she inquired, with a pleasing American intonation.

"At your service, Mrs. Trancey," Valerie answered, as she pulled off her cap and shook her red-gold hair in the sunlight.

"You know me?" the lady ejaculated, in plain astonishment.

"Perhaps it was half a guess," Valerie replied, with a smile. "I have a way of anticipating. So this is little Columbine? A pretty name, Columbine, for a very pretty little girl!" Then, in one of those swift asides that showed the speed working of her mind, Valerie whispered: "Does the little girl suspect anything yet?"

Mrs. Trancey, for the moment, looked astounded. Valerie seemed to know everything.

"About the threat to kidnap Columbine?" Mrs. Trancey asked, swiftly recovering from her bewilderment. "Yes, Miss Drew. Her father knows she is a brave little girl, and he thinks it is better for her to be on her guard as well."

"I guess I'm not afraid of the kidnapers?" little Columbine agreed; and she had such a cheeky, cheery, lovable little smile that

Valerie simply had to pat her golden curls and laugh as well.

"Do you know who is behind the Indigo Mask?" Valerie whispered, in an even swifter aside.

"I have not the slightest idea," gaped Mrs. Trancey. "Perhaps you are going to tell me, as you know so much already!"

"Unfortunately I know little more," Valerie replied. "I had reason to believe you were going to ask for my assistance, and that was why I was prepared to meet you. Are they demanding money?"

"Ten thousand pounds, Miss Drew!" Valerie whistled under her breath. It sounded like an unusually determined conspiracy.

"And if you don't pay, they've threatened, I presume, to kidnap Columbine. When did the first demand come?"

"Yesterday, Miss Drew. My husband was disposed to treat it as a joke at the time. But a man rang him up on the phone last night and repeated the threat. This morning there was a letter actually waiting for him on the breakfast-table."

"What was the last message?" Valerie asked keenly.

"That we were to agree to their terms by twelve o'clock this morning, and signify the fact by hanging a white handkerchief out of the window, Miss Drew. The message said that if we refused, Columbine would be gone before midnight!"

Valerie glanced at her waterproof watch and saw that it was past eleven already. Then, unable to help herself, she found her eyes straying compassionately to little Columbine. And a wave of indignation rose within her at the cruel, cowardly threat that hung over that innocent, curly head—the threat of kidnaping—surely the meanest crime of all!

But a man rang him up on the phone last night and repeated the threat. This morning there was a letter actually waiting for him on the breakfast-table."

There was a threat against Flash, too! Somewhere on the crowded beach a pair of eyes were watching her even at this moment; someone in the seaside throng knew that Valerie had already defied the warning of the Indigo Mask, sent to her so dramatically whilst she was actually out to sea!

Valerie's mouth hardened. It was the call of duty. She must risk even peril to Flash, the intelligent, loving creature who meant almost more to her than anyone else on earth, if she was to protect this trusting, plucky little youngster from her sinister enemies.

"Where is your hotel, Mrs. Trancey?" Valerie asked, with a crisp decision.

A suspicious brightness came into the lady's eyes.

"I guess I know you'd help me, Miss Drew," she declared, with a catch in her voice. "I've got such confidence in you. You can't think what a weight you've taken off my mind already. We're stopping at the Empire Hotel, right opposite."

Valerie's shrewd eyes scanned the promenade. She saw not merely a policeman on duty, but a police patrol car leisurely proceeding up and down. And the time limit had not yet expired.

"I will join you in twenty minutes' time, Mrs. Trancey," Valerie announced.

Valerie was as good as her word. She had not only dressed at lightning speed; she had commissioned two intelligent boys to make inquiries to discover who it was who had given Flash a note to take to her whilst she was still at sea. There would be a generous reward for the boy who succeeded.

She did not blame Flash for not being more successful, nor begrudge him the care-free, joyous roll he had had in the sand whilst she was putting on her clothes. All Flash's sagacity might be called for before very long now.

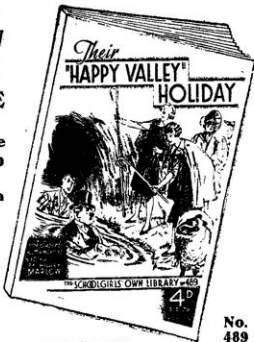
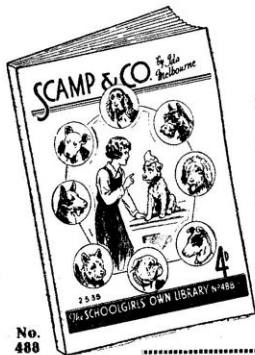
It was an elegant hotel in which Valerie found herself, and she was quickly escorted to a beautiful suite on the first floor. Just as Valerie entered the charming lounge of the suite, she found Mrs. Trancey in conversation with one of the hotel maids. A pretty little clock, obviously quite new, stood on the table.

"The gentleman who brought it wouldn't

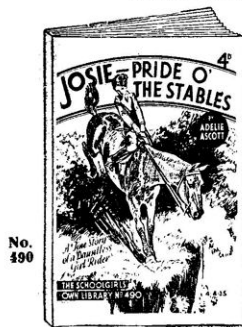
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give his name, ma'am," the maid was explaining. "He said he was a friend of yours, and you'd guess who it was from."

Mrs. Trancey's brows contracted for a moment, but she had more pressing considerations than a present to concern her. Putting the clock aside, she dismissed the maid with a smile and introduced Valerie to the stern, anxious-looking man who stood near to the open balcony window.

"This is my husband, Miss Drew," she explained. "He has just returned from the police station. I know you will not mind him seeking all the help he can get."

Valerie laughed. She was always on excellent terms with the police, and never thought of them as rivals. It was merely that her methods differed from theirs.

"Not at all," Valerie replied. "I would like to see the letters, and have all the evidence you can show me." Valerie replied.

"It was quickly produced. With her magnifying-glass she studied the letters intently by the strong light at the window. It took her but a short while to decide that she was dealing with crooks who knew what they were about. The letters, rough and threatening in tone, gave no possible clue to their senders.

"Excuse me, ma'am." It was the elderly, nervous nurse who suddenly broke the oppressive silence in the room. "I'm so concerned about poor little Columbine. Have you and the master decided anything about what is to be done? You'll see it's nearly twelve o'clock, begging your pardon."

Mr. Trancey turned sharply, a determined look in his eyes. He was desperately fond of little Columbine, who was even now sporting bappily with Flash in one corner, but he had an iron pride. "My answer will soon be known to those who are watching for it outside!" he declared. "They can whistle for their money. I shall never think of paying them a penny."

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than the mystery gift clock began to strike the fateful hour. At seven o'clock, to strike the hands happened something that caused the elderly nurse to give a shrill scream and raise her hand to point.

"Look, look!" she cried, in fearful tones. "The clock!"

Valerie glanced in the direction indicated, and dashed instantly across the room. Mr. and Mrs. Trancey following her breathlessly. A truly amazing thing had happened. The clock was a trick one; it had been sent as a "present" for a purpose.

The top had burst open, to allow a spring inside to shoot out. Attached to the spring was a card that bore a message. And Valerie's pulses quickened; and she had a fear and by no means pleasant thrill, as she read:

"You have defied our warnings. Columbine will now be stolen from you before midnight. The price for her return will be double what we asked at first. The Indigo Mask."

A BATTLE OF WITS!

FLASH could sense that his beloved mistress was deeply disturbed in her mind. He followed her everywhere about the suite, nuzzling his soft muzzle against her hand whenever he had the opportunity, taking sharp side glances that showed how alert his doggy senses were.

But alas, this was a side of detective work where Flash could scarcely be expected to assist vitally.

The schemers were clever! Guessing that Flash's assistance might be obtained, they had even sprayed the clock and the warning card with a scent that Flash detested, in order to give no clue in that direction. Precisely the same thing applied to the letter that had been left so audaciously, by unknown hands, actually on Mr. Trancey's breakfast table.

What did this extra precaution mean? Valerie reasoned shrewdly and swiftly. In a case like this she knew she must suspect everyone. Was there someone actually employed by the family who had a secret to hide?

The personal servants the Trancey family had with them at the moment were three in number. Valerie, knowing that she must suspect everyone, interviewed them each in turn.

Mrs. Neem, the nurse, had been employed by



good families all her life, and had come to them with such excellent credentials that Valerie was soon finished with her.

The other two were Jordan, the chauffeur, and Arnold, the valet. Here, Valerie seemed up against a different proposition. Neither of the men could claim that he had a perfect record; each, to her dismay, owned up to a "slip" that had landed him in trouble earlier in life. They had been frank about it, however, when they were engaged. And Mr. Trancey was a man who not only believed himself to be a good judge of character, but was sporting enough to give a repentant man another chance.

Soon after those interviews were concluded, the two boys from the beach reported. They had made inquiries everywhere, they said, but no one remembered seeing anyone hand an envelope to Flash!

Valerie, though very disappointed, rewarded them generously and sent them away. A stern light grew in her violet eyes as she settled down to think out one of the biggest problems that had ever come her way.

She could have no doubt whatever that the would-be kidnapers were in earnest. What was to be done?

The Tranceys were anxious to return to their London home as soon as possible, and Valerie could raise no objection. In the additional assistance of Scotland Yard. But how was Columbine to be taken to London?

Valerie rose suddenly, a light of resolution in her eyes. A quick glance showed her that the three employees of the family were all within earshot, packing for the journey already being in hand.

"Mrs. Trancey," she exclaimed, "I am going to get my car at once. I intend to trust Columbine to no one else. I shall take her to London myself."

"But—" Mrs. Trancey began, only to check herself suddenly at the swift, warning glance that Valerie was giving her.

"You think she will be quite safe under your protection?" Mr. Trancey asked, in a quiet drawl that betokened that he had also observed her faint signal.

"Perfectly," Mr. Trancey, Valerie agreed coolly. "I shall follow the main road, but to make quite sure you know all my plans, I will write a detailed route first."

She sat down quickly, and for a minute was busy with pencil and paper. Then, rising briskly, she handed the instructions to Mr. Trancey.

Valerie took the letter from Flash's mouth and helped him from the water. She was mystified. Who could have sent this strange message?

"Come along, Flash!" Valerie exclaimed, as she turned to the door.

And Flash, ears instantly alertly cocked, leapt up eagerly and bounded to her side. Better than anyone else, Flash understood that tone of voice. Valerie needed him. In some way in which only Flash could serve her, he had decided to employ him. Action—even breathless excitement—for Flash at last.

In the doorway he paused, for a last glance back at Columbine, his new playmate. His mouth was half open, his intelligent green eyes were glowing. One could almost imagine what Flash was thinking.

"You can leave things to Valerie and me. We shan't let you down!"

Softly Valerie let in the clutch of her powerful sports car. It was a lovely vision of blue and chromium plating, as speedily at times as a racing vehicle, yet embellished with all those touches of refinement that spoke of taste on the part of its owner.

Crouched at her side was a small figure, wrapped up with rug and veiled around the face.

Valerie had chosen to start from an inner court of the hotel, where, under cover, she could reach her car within a few feet of that exit.

Smoothly the car turned as it reached the esplanade; and, gazing from the first floor windows, the nurse, chauffeur, and valet employed by the wealthy American family, saw the elegant Valerie Drew and the figure of Columbine Trancey as they started off for London.

"It doesn't seem safe to me," muttered the elderly nurse anxiously.

How smoothly that car zipped along the even road.

Valerie could drive "all out" when urgently impelled to do so, but that was because she was a perfect driver.

Here, where holidaymakers abounded, she was especially careful.

But soon she was away from the town; the road stretched ahead of her, a lovely dark ribbon that curled away up the sides of the rolling downs. Now for speed and safety!

The car purred as smoothly up the winding ascent as though they had been on level ground.



Valerie was gazing intently ahead, her reddish hair caught by the breeze, her keen concentration shown by the narrowing of her violet eyes.

Occasionally the muffled figure stirred fitfully at her side, as though in a troubled sleep. Valerie murmured softly, her slim hands never leaving the wheel, and the figure became still again.

It was a good time of day for travelling easily, for there were very few cars on the road. Valerie looked like making a record journey to the great metropolis. She had covered more than ten miles when she reached a long, straight section of the road. Ahead of her she espied a motor-cycle and sidecar proceeding in the same direction as herself. It appeared to be going all out, for she glimpsed it for only a few seconds before it disappeared around the distant bend of the road.

Little more than a minute later Valerie was on the bend herself.

Suddenly, as an astounding sight burst upon her vision, her foot moved anxiously to the brake pedal.

This lonely section of road had just been the scene of a dreadful accident!

Evidently the motor-cycle had taken the bend too fast. Disaster must have befallen it a few seconds after it disappeared from Valerie's vision.

A painful horror filled Valerie as she saw the machine lying overturned at the side of the road. The two unfortunate men who had been riding in it were sprawled on their faces, motionless, on the grass verge at the side.

In an instant Valerie took in the situation. She knew no one was following her. Ahead the road was entirely deserted. Her car came to a smooth, silent stop beside the wrecked

A metallic voice snapped over the wires: "This is 'The Indigo Mask' speaking! Valerie tensed. What fresh trickery was this?"

vehicle. She snickered open the door beside her seat and sprang out.

And instantly, with a suddenness that might have caused her senses to reel, an amazing thing happened.

The figures suddenly stirred. Without the slightest warning, they sprang to their feet. It was all a trick!

The faces of the men, now that Valerie could see them at last, were full of grim intention! "Got you this time, Miss Clever Drew!" one of the men declared, with a harsh chuckle. "And we've got your little passenger, too. Columbine will be much more secure in our charge than in yours!"

"If you want to get off lightly," the other man added, "get busy and let all the air out of your tyres quick. I'll save us the trouble of strapping holes in them to make sure you can't follow us!"

Only a sibilant hiss escaped Valerie's lips as the two desperate rascals moved eagerly towards the still slumbering figure in the car. The girl detective was standing as still as though turned to stone.

"Well, what are you going to do?" one of the men demanded, suddenly observing that there was something very unusual about her manner.

"I'll show you!" Valerie answered; and an order, as sharp as the snap of a knife, left her lips.

"Now, boy, show them!"

The figure in the car jerked to life. The rug fell away; the veil flew into the air. And a scream of amazement and horror left the lips of the men simultaneously as a snarling Alsatian, with bared white teeth, flew out of the bundle of clothing that had concealed him until that moment.

"Whoof?" bayed Flash, as, like a streak of gold, he sped over the side of the car.

Valerie had been expecting that hold-up all the time!

"Keep him off, Jim!" one of the men was shouting desperately. "I'm getting the bike up! Look out he doesn't get you!"

If the situation had not been so serious, its meaning so grim, Valerie could almost have laughed at the dismayed plotters on whom she and Flash had turned the tables so neatly.

Escape was the only thought in their terrified minds. And they little guessed, in their painful panic, that Valerie fully intended that they should actually get away as soon as possible.

Flash, although he was growling and looking as ugly as he possibly could, was really obeying a tone of voice that had told him only to scare the men.

The man who flourished a cudgel wildly and believed that he was keeping Flash at bay was, in fact, in no real danger at all! Valerie was not a policeman; it was no part of her nature to wish to fight with men. Her keen sense of daring would sometimes get her into a tense situation like this, but she had her own methods of dealing with it.

Left alone, one of the rascals quickly had the motor-cycle and sidecar righted again.

Even as he started the engine the other man took a last desperate swing with his cudgel in Flash's direction. Then he turned abruptly. The motor-cycle was already moving. A mighty leap took the man straight into the sidecar. Even as he collapsed into his seat the machine roared as it gathered furious speed.

"Good boy! Here!" Valerie called instantly to her pet.

She was back in the driving seat herself. Even as Flash sprang over the side she was moving forward.

A chase now—and that certainly was in Valerie's line. She had planned all this in the Tranceys' suite at the Empire Hotel. There was clearly a spy amongst those three servants as she had already suspected, and here was the proof she had required. Her declaration that she would personally take Columbine to London had only been to provoke such a situation as this!

Valerie did not believe that the men she was now so closely pursuing were the chief plotters, but they were undoubtedly important members of the gang with which she had to reckon.

Though they were going all out, Valerie's powerful car was easily able to keep them in sight, and that was all she wanted to do.

As a soft touch touched her cheek, she snatched a second to glance at her pet. And at the expression on Flash's face she laughed aloud.

It was just as though the adoring old creature was saying:

"Well, that really was a fine bit of fun! I really didn't mind having to sit so still at all; it was well worth being patient to be able to make these two rascals believe I wanted to tear them to bits!"

And Columbine, as Valerie could confidently predict, was by now safely aboard an express train to London.

It was all part of Valerie Drew's plan.

Her declaration that she would write out her route in full had only been a ruse to hoodwink the listening servant, who was also a spy. Actually she had written secret instructions to the Tranceys, warning them not to breathe a word aloud of what she really intended.

Columbine had certainly been brought to the waiting car, but she had then been hidden in a specially reserved room when Flash took her place. And Valerie had started her car journey confident that the kidnappers, having already made other plans, would be utterly misled.

"At last, old boy!" Valerie suddenly breathed, as a roadside telephone-box appeared ahead. "Now for it!"

She pulled up, allowing the fleeting motor-cycle to race into the distance. Dialling "0," she snapped her instruction to be connected instantly with the police. Then, swiftly but distinctly, Valerie gave details of the fake accident, described the men, and gave the number of their machine. With a sigh of satisfaction, she hung up the receiver.

The motor-cycle combination had disappeared, but Valerie was content to leave the rest to the efficient road patrols to whom her message was even now being transmitted. There was very little doubt in her mind that the runaways would be apprehended before they could get very much farther.

"And now for London, old boy!" Valerie murmured, as she found leisure at last to give her affectionate pet the hug he so

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thoroughly deserved for his cleverness. "London—and Columbine! And if those rascals carry out their threat to kidnap her before midnight, it won't be our fault!"

And Flash, listening to her with his head cocked knowingly on one side, his eyes shining as though he guessed exactly what she was telling him, replied emphatically:

"Whooof!"

THE "INDIGO MASK" SPEAKS!

"MISS DREW, we can never thank you sufficiently for what you've done already!" Mr. Trancey declared.

"We have absolute confidence in your judgment. I guess you have only to say the word, and the ball to-night is most definitely off!"

Valerie would not have been human if she had not been conscious of a little glow of pride at those unstinting words of praise.

Flash, standing nobly at her side, waved his bushy tail, his manner indicating that the adventure so far had been completely to his taste.

They had reached the Tranceys' beautiful town house in Mayfair.

Nix of a most cheering nature had awaited them. Not only had little Columbine been brought hither safely; the efficient road police had done their work well, and the two crooks with the motor-cycle combination had already been caught. So far, however, they had refused to make any confession.

The famous girl detective was too well aware of the serious nature of the conspiracy to think of resting on her laurels yet.

"What time is the ball, Mr. Trancey?" she asked quietly.

"Seven-thirty, Miss Drew. The guests will arrive in fancy dress. It was all arranged some days ago. I guess we had no idea then that Columbine might be in any danger."

Valerie thought anxiously. The hours of greatest peril to the rich American's little daughter. She knew instinctively that the heartless crooks, who intended to make a fortune out of the anguish of mind of Columbine's loving parents would strain every nerve to carry out the grim threat they had made.

"I see no reason to cancel the ball, Mr. Trancey," Valerie decided all at once.

Columbine, her face wreathed in smiles, clapped her hands excitedly.

"Oh, lovely!" she declared. "I'm sure glad you're not afraid of the kidnapers!"

Valerie's hand rested affectionately on the plucky little girl's curly head; she shook her head slowly, with infinite regret, as she made her next decision.

"Columbine won't be able to be at the ball, dear," she said.

"Oh!" The disappointment showed in the youngster's eyes. "Why not?" she asked, with the tiniest pout of her resolute little lip.

Valerie picked her up impulsively, and gave her a warm hug.

"Because you're too precious for us to run any risk of losing you, darling," Valerie declared, with deep feeling. "We're going to try to make you as safe as the Bank of England. We'll have another lovely dance all for your sake, pet, when the danger's over."

"And you really feel it's safe to hold the ball, Miss Drew?" the American asked, still with just a tinge of uneasiness in his voice.

Valerie nodded.

"Yes, Mr. Trancey. And I'll tell you why. In a way, we've got to run a certain amount of risk to force the crooks to show their hands."

"Sure. That's common sense," Mr. Trancey agreed. "Whilst they're at large I realise the danger will remain."

Valerie lowered her voice.

"I feel certain in my own mind that the ringleader of the gang will find some means of coming here to-night," she said. "We must face the danger of admitting him. We shall have police hidden in the grounds. You must vouch for all the guests you know personally; then we'll have a force of plainclothes detectives—"

"In fancy dress! Gee! What a cute

scheme!" Mr. Trancey breathed admiringly, seeing at last what Valerie had in mind.

"Say, that's dandy!"

Valerie smiled.

"The ball certainly gives us a great advantage there, Mr. Trancey, and we must make the most of it. Our plain-clothes men will keep all suspects under observation. We shall fix up a system of alarms so that they can act instantly, if necessary. The Indigo Mask is going to have all his work cut out to beat them!"

A warm, furry shape pressed against Valerie's side. She looked down quickly and almost laughed as she saw the puzzled look in her famous pet's eyes. It was just as though Flash was asking:

"Are you forgetting me completely in all these arrangements? Haven't I shown that I'm quite as good as any of these rascals up to the present?"

Valerie set little Columbine down again, and impulsively patted Flash's faithful old head.

"There'll be plenty for you to do, old boy!" she assured him.

She straightened up briskly.

"Mr. Trancey, I now want to be sure that there is a room in which we can keep Columbine safely out of everyone's way until midnight."

"Sure! I guess her own room will be as good as any, Miss Drew. I'll show it to you."

He led the way up the richly carpeted stairs. Mrs. Trancey met them as they reached an upper corridor, and accompanied them to a room almost at the end of it.

It was a simply furnished, but sweet little boudoir, that had been provided for the little girl. Mrs. Neem, the elderly nurse, was busily making the bed and putting everything in order.

"What decision have you come to about the ball to-night, sir?" she asked, with a slight tremor of apprehension in her voice.

"We're having it, but I can't go!" Columbine informed her, in tones of the greatest dejection.

"Poor mite!" cried Mrs. Neem, sympathetically. "Never mind, duckie. Nanny will find some clothes, and we'll both dress up and have a little dance all on our own."

Valerie had glanced quickly, appraisingly, around the room, and was moving towards the window, when she suddenly checked herself and murmured sharply:

"Come here, old boy!"

Flash, despite the fact that the nervous nurse obviously distrusted him, had been on the point of making another excited overture towards her!

Flash obeyed, but with obvious reluctance, and Valerie was more puzzled than ever. What was the matter with him? Had the general air of mystery and suspense in the house disturbed his usual keen perceptions? As a rule, Flash was usually well aware when his attentions were not appreciated.

Valerie was standing by the window, gazing down into the garden some thirty feet below, when there was a tap on the door, and a maid appeared to announce:

"Miss Drew is wanted on the phone, please!"

Valerie turned sharply. Her amazement showed in her eyes. How did anyone else even know that she was in the house?

"What name?" she asked crisply.

"The gentleman didn't give a name, miss," the maid answered. "He said it was an urgent matter, and I must find you immediately."

Valerie excused herself, and hurried from the room, Flash padding along at her heels. An odd thrill fluttered her nerves; a strange presentiment stirred in her mind. She picked up the instrument sharply and said:

"Hallo! Who is that?"

"Is that Miss Valerie Drew?" a voice with a strong nasal intonation inquired.

"It is," replied Valerie tensely.

Back came the reply that caused her hand to tighten in incredulous amazement on the receiver, whilst her eyes narrowed as she realised the caller's audacity.

"Listen closely to what I have to say!" the voice directed her dramatically. "You are now speaking to the Indigo Mask!"

THE IMPOSSIBLE!

"THE Indigo Mask!" Valerie repeated, in breathless astonishment.

It was astounding, unbelievable.

For the space of a second or two she suspected that someone was playing a ridiculous hoax on her. Then her startled wits returned. The message must be genuine. There could be no point at all in anyone playing such a trick on her!

"You heard me first time!" the decisive nasal voice declared, with a threatening sneer she did not miss.



Together Valerie and Flash hauled on the rope. Slowly the lift rose into view.

"I heard," agreed Valerie, as a swift indignation mounted within her at the thought of the true nature of this callous rascal. "Have you decided to slip off back to America before you see the inside of an English gaol?"

A soft, mocking laugh came floating over the wires.

"I guess, sister, that I'd be more glad to see a little pack of notes totalling fifteen thousand pounds" the cool voice declared.

"Five thousand more than you asked at Shelsea," commented Valerie.

"Sure! And five thousand less than I'll get if you force my hand!" came the other's boasting retort. "Listen, sister! I've given you a ring because I don't fight girls as a rule."

"Very generous of you!" Valerie was stung to reply bitterly. "You contemtable cur!"

And again that easy, chuckling laugh.

"Sister, hard words don't break no bones!" her mocker assured her. "I guess you've got influence with these obstinate Tranceys, and that's why I'm giving you this big chance. Promise to pay me fifteen thousand pounds to-morrow, and I cry off! But if you don't accept this offer I'm making you—"

"What then?" asked out Valerie. "Columbine will be gone, and you'll be just the biggest laughing stock in London! Yes, miss, I'm telling you the truth. The big bubble of the clever girl detective will be exploded. They won't even employ you to solve the mystery of the missing sixpence-piece! And you'll be out buying a new dog!"

"What's the teeth at. At that sinister threat, so confidently and ruthlessly made, her blood seemed to run cold.

"Hold the line!" she gasped, as though suddenly overcome with uncontrollable agitation.

She laid the instrument down. In a moment she was racing downstairs to where she had noticed there was a second telephone. Desperately she dialled "0", and waited for the operator's reply. In crisp tones she demanded to know the number that was calling her on the other line.

But, alas, the crook on the telephone had already been too cute. To Valerie's intense disappointment, she was told that the caller had already gone. The call had merely come from a public phone-box at a railway station.

Replacing the receiver, Valerie hastened tenderly to Columbine's room. Her hand rested tenderly on Flash's noble head as he trotted at her side. The repeated double threat, to little Columbine and Flash as well, had shaken her badly. But Valerie's fearless, resolute mind had been made up from the moment she received that first strange "warning." Nothing could cause her to swerve from her purpose now.

"My, miss, how white you look!" cried Mrs. Neem, the moment the girl detective re-appeared in Columbine's boudoir.

"Not bad news, I hope, Miss Drew!" gasped Mrs. Tracey, as Valerie bit her lip sharply at the tactless woman's foolish remark.

"I have been speaking to one of the gang, Mrs. Tracey," Valerie answered, with a studied calm that hid the anxious fears that flashed through her mind. "I've offered to make fresh terms, which is an excellent sign that they are not as confident as they were."

"Not with these American crooks, I'm afraid," sighed Mrs. Neem, with an anxious shake of her head.

"In this case, Mrs. Neem, I hope you will prove to be wrong!" Valerie answered sharply. "We shall be able to do our best only if we're determined not to be beaten!"

Valerie Drew was on guard, with Flash at her side. From below came the strains of the band that was playing in the beautiful ball-room. At least sixty people, clad in gorgeous fancy-dress costumes, were enjoying themselves in this home over which such a dark and sinister menace still hung.

Of all the strange cases in which Valerie had been times before engaged, she had never known one quite so queerly contradictory as this. Merry-making, when such peril threatened an innocent youngster, was the last thing one would expect in the ordinary course of things. Yet Valerie felt satisfied.

Columbine was safely in her room, and

Valerie was sitting not a dozen paces from the door of it.

The room itself was now as secure as a fortress. Every foot of the floor and walls had been examined to make certain that there could be no unsuspected trap-door or moving panel. The simple furniture had been ransacked to see that no person or dangerous object was concealed anywhere. The chimney had been stopped up, and the metal-framed windows were bolted, to make sure they could not be forced from outside. Even if the glass were broken, there was no room for any intruder to wriggle through. But how could anyone even reach the window when police were guarding the grounds?

On the face of things, it seemed that Valerie had as good as created a place of security for Columbine that was, in her own words, as safe as the Bank of England.

With so many precautions taken, with plain-clothes detectives mingling with the guests below and a ball-room full of loyal friends of the Tracey family, it seemed almost fantastic to believe that any peril could still menace little Columbine to-night.

Yet Valerie sat attentively on guard in the corridor, and Flash crouched at her side, his ears constantly pricking up alertly at the slightest unusual sound, his keen eyes flashing as his head jerked around in sharp suspicion wherever Valerie moved.

Flash didn't know what had been written in those notes; he couldn't understand the words that had been spoken over the telephone. But he knew Valerie's mood. He knew there was some strange, mysterious peril that might lurk in the very air—a black, intangible menace that hung, suspended, over the innocent curly head of the rich little girl.

The Indigo Mask had boasted that, despite every precaution they could take, Columbine Tracey would be stolen from this heavily guarded house before midnight.

Why was he so confident of himself?

What plan could he have in his mind? Was there any ingenious possibility that she had still overlooked?

Valerie racked her brain, going over every detail of the case again, striving to find some loophole in the precautions which she had devised, and then in her plan which she was still too rash enough to declare perfect.

She could find none.

At a sudden movement at the end of the corridor Valerie started up. An electric bell-push, connected to alarms that would ring all over the house, was close at hand, and she did not intend to move far from it. Flash, bristling slightly, was instantly up as well.

Two figures were coming towards her. In the distance they appeared to be those of Mr. and Mrs. Tracey, but an odd suspicion stirred in Valerie's mind.

The crooks might be adepts at disguise. And the most audacious plan they could devise would surely be to dress up actually as the father and mother, and attempt to take the child openly!

"See, who they are, boy!" whispered Valerie.

Flash started bounding forward at once, his ears cocked, his tail rigid with inquiry. And instantly Valerie recalled the threat that had been made against Flash. Supposing she had actually sent her pet to his fate!

Her strange fears proved, luckily enough, to be groundless.

Flash ran straight to the couple, sniffed at them each in turn, and gave a soft, approving bark. He knew them! All was well!

Valerie felt tiny beads of moisture gathering on her brow as the lady and gentleman came nearer.

The case was getting on her nerves. Of course she had been unjustified. Men had been left on guard at the foot of the staircase, fully prepared for such an audacious trick as the one Valerie had momentarily suspected.

"Say, Miss Drew, I'm glad to see you're taking no chances," Mr. Tracey drawled, in soft approval.

"I'd rather be certain than sorry, Mr. Tracey," Valerie replied, with a forced smile. "How is the ball going?"

"Famously!" the American answered. "And those detectives are smart guys. They've got their eyes fixed on a couple that will well repay watching. One is one of my

own countrymen, though I guess I'm not likely to be very good of him."

Valerie thrilled at the tidings. She had little doubt in her own mind that the daring individual who styled himself the Indigo Mask would have the temerity to come to the house in some disguise or other. But if he was actually in the building, what unsuspected assistants had he also got ready to do his sinister bidding?

"All the electric light switches are being watched, Mr. Tracey?" she asked keenly.

"Surely. And the emergency lighting will be ready even if the house current fails," the American replied.

It seemed that every possibility had been considered.

"And you little darling—is she still all right?" Mrs. Tracey whispered, a flutter of anxiety in her tender voice.

Valerie smiled.

"Mrs. Neem put on a crinoline, dressed Columbine up, and they've been dancing together," she told the mother. "And now Columbine is fast asleep—as safe as she's still going to be in the morning!"

"Let us take a peep, just to make sure!" murmured the father.

They tiptoed to the door and looked cautiously, fondly, inside. Yes, all was well. The little girl was sleeping securely, happily, in her bed.

"We shall always be grateful to you, Miss Drew, the father whispered, with deep feeling, as they prepared to return to the ball-room.

Valerie sat down again when they had vanished. It was odd, uncanny, how her fears still persisted. Was she really the victim of some strange intuition that was striving to warn her of—she knew not what? It seemed incredible. Her nerves were playing her tricks! They had been strained all day—now they were mocking her.

At the end of the corridor a figure in a crinoline appeared. It was that of Mrs. Neem, who had just descended the staircase leading to the attic. Valerie, earlier on, had inspected those upper regions carefully. She had doors locked and screwed up so that only Mrs. Neem could possibly use that staircase.

"It's all right, all right," Mrs. Neem whispered, as she went into Columbine's room.

It was about two minutes before she came out. Flash roused himself as the elderly nurse reappeared, but Mrs. Neem smiled and held up a warning finger. She pointed back into the room to indicate that Columbine had not awakened.

Slowly the nurse returned along the corridor and went upstairs. Save for the distant sound of dance music, silence reigned. Flash had settled down again. Valerie, in spite of the strange disturbance of her mind, began to convince herself at last that her odd fears had been groundless.

A quarter of an hour had passed when Mrs. Neem came down from the attic again. She opened the door of Columbine's room and took one step in. Then she stopped dead. And in that instant it hit Valerie like a dazing blow. Even as Flash scrambled up suddenly, startled, from the soft carpet, Valerie knew the worst had happened.

A shrill, frightened scream led Mrs. Neem's lips. Her shaking hand was raised to point to the body by the window.

"Columbine—where is she?" was the astounding question that burst from the trembling nurse. "Columbine has gone! She's been kidnapped after all!"

FLASH IS RIGHT!

FOR the space of a second or two Valerie Drew seemed to be paralysed with horror as that dreadful cry rang in her ears. Then, even as Flash bounded forward, she was galvanised into action.

She raced to the doorway and gazed, with eyes that were suddenly distrust, across the room. A sick dismay seized her at the horrifying confirmation that her vision gave her.

The door was empty!

Where Columbine had been peacefully sleeping the clothes had been tossed aside. Like magic, as though she had actually vanished into thin air, the golden-haired youngster had disappeared.

"Find her, Flash!" Valerie jerked out hoarsely.

Yet, even in that moment, she had the most dreadful sensation of utter bafflement she had ever experienced in her whole career. The room was a fortress. She searched every inch of it. The stopped-up chimney was still as she had seen it last. The windows had not been touched. The furniture was all exactly as it had been. There was no door except the one Valerie had believed she was guarding. Only the rumpled bed remained as evidence of the dreadful thing that had just happened.

Madly Valerie tossed the bedding to one side. She stooped and bent in every direction. A few seconds were enough to convince her that there was no place in the room where a child as big as Columbine could possibly be hidden.

"Find her, Flash!" she found her desperate lips repeating almost automatically.

She was brought to herself by a sharp cry from Mrs. Neem. Astounded, Valerie gazed at her faithful pet. Instead of obeying her orders to search, Flash was jumping up at the old nurse, pawing at her crinoline skirt, giving sharp, excited barks.

"Keep down—do keep down, you silly old thing!" Mrs. Neem cried. "This is no time for a game! Where's the little girl gone, you old boy!"

"Down, Flash!" Valerie ordered, her confusion greater than ever. "Mrs. Neem, go downstairs at once—fetch Mr. and Mrs. Trancey here instantly."

"Yes, Miss Drew," the nurse quavered. "Flash!" ordered Valerie, and as he came to her reluctantly, baffled, almost cringingly, her seared brain seemed to start working properly at last. "What are you trying to tell me, old man?" she breathed. "What is it you've known all the time? What haven't you been able to make me understand?"

She could see what a state of suppressed excitement her pet was in. He ran whimpering to the bed, then to the door, then came back to her, barking frantically.

Valerie picked up Columbine's coat and held it to his nose. An amazing suspicion had come to her in a dazing flash. In that brief, deciding instant she suddenly suspected that the most daring of tricks had been played on her, under her very nose. She only wanted Flash's confirmation.

He sniffed at the garment, ran towards the door, headed for the attic stairs, and barked excitedly.

That was enough for Valerie. Side by side they raced to the corridor. With Flash taking scrambling leaps, and Valerie ascending two and three stairs at a time, they reached the attics.

There were only three small rooms to be examined. Two were barely furnished bedrooms; the third was a little kitchen, with gas-oven, sink, and a service lift in one corner.

Straight for the lift went Flash; up went his paws to the opening in the framework of its construction, and he bayed loudly.

"Whoof, whoof!"

The lift was not there. Her mind dazzled by an amazing suspicion, Valerie seized the rope that worked the lift and started to pull it.

Instantly Flash was doing the same, leaping up to seize it with his strong teeth, then hanging on to throw all his weight into the business of hauling it down.

The lift appeared at last.

With a cry of heartfelt joy and relief Valerie rushed to it, tenderly to take out of it the curled up, bound figure of the missing little girl.

Columbine was found!

In an instant Valerie was removing the soft gag from her lips, and a cry of distress burst from the rescued youngster.

"Oh, Miss Drew, I've been so frightened!" the tearful youngster confessed. "It was nappy all the time. She woke me up and said you wanted me to move secretly to another room. She told me to hide under her skirts in case anyone was watching."

"Poor darling! And, of course, you trusted her!" Valerie breathed tenderly. "All the time Flash has been trying to warn me against the woman, and I never guessed it."

"Whoof!" joyously bayed Flash, in confirmation.

Valerie knew that the mystery was all but solved, her strange case was more than half

completed. But it was no time to rest on her laurels. There was much still to be done.

"Down, Flash!" she ordered. "Find nurse—find Mrs. Neem! Quick as you can!"

Flash raced ahead of her, skidding down the stairs in a breathless flurry that turned into a somersault as he reached the corridor below. But he was up in an instant, and—

"Whoof!" he roared.

A woman screamed. Valerie raced after her pet as he leapt and snapped at the crinoline skirt of the woman he had just cornered.

"Miss Drew—" the woman began, only to tail off in horrified dismay as she saw the youngster Valerie carried in her arms.

"Yes, it's Columbine—we've got her back!" Valerie announced grimly. "And the game's up with you, after all. If you make a single move now you'll regret it. You first made Flash's acquaintance on the beach the morning when you sent me that note, but he won't be so friendly to you now."

"I—I don't understand a word you're saying!" "Mrs. Neem" quavered desperately. "If you'll just let me go down and explain to my mistress—"

"You'll wait here and explain!" Valerie cut in, as she pressed a bell in the wall. And, as Mr. Trancey came running to the spot, she said crisply: "This is one of them, Mr. Trancey! Tell the police to get the others in the building!"

"Look out, Len!" was the desperate scream that left the woman's lips, intended to warn her confederates downstairs.

But her cry proved, little though she intended it to be, so the dramatic conclusion to Valerie's strangest case. For the warning yell was heard in the ball-room—but the men for whom it was intended were already marked men. Even as they turned to beat a retreat, hands fell grimly on their shoulders.

And only too eager were Mr. Trancey's loyal guests to see that the struggling crooks in fancy-dress were carried off to a place of safety.

The game was up!

Columbine was sleeping safely in her bed again, tenderly watched by her mother. The time of danger had passed, the threat of kidnapping had gone. Downstairs, in a room where there were plenty of police to guard them whilst Valerie asked her shrewd questions, three furious crooks were snarling at each other, giving the game completely away by their mutual recriminations.

One of the men, beyond the slightest doubt,

was the daring rascal who had posed as the Indigo Mask; a rubber stamp capable of making just such an impression on paper was found in a secret pocket in his jacket.

The woman who had posed as "Mrs. Neem" was now, her clever disguise removed, revealed as quite a young woman, a competent actress who had ill-advisedly turned her talents to such a bad purpose.

Their scheme for stealing Columbine Trancey had nearly succeeded in spite of all precautions taken, and it had rehed for its success on sheer audacity.

A panic had been expected when the loss of Columbine was discovered, and if Valerie had pressed the emergency bell that raised the alarm their plan might have succeeded after all.

The crooks, thanks to "Mrs. Neem," were evidently well acquainted with the house. The two conspirators at the ball had intended to make their way to the lower kitchen, whilst the servants were joining in the hue and cry, take Columbine from the lift that had brought her down from the top floor, and smuggle her away to a high-powered car waiting near at hand.

"It's one of the best worked-out schemes I've ever encountered," the police inspector declared, when sufficient evidence had come forth to make it clear to the three plotters that their gang was smashed and the game was absolutely up. "And it's very largely through Miss Valerie Drew—"

"And Flash!" Valerie instantly and loyally put in.

And Flash, hearing his name, sat up with ears erect and brightly gleaming eyes, and let his red tongue loll lazily from his mouth. Praising him, were they? Well, that was all right with Flash! Why shouldn't he come in for his share of the credit? Flash wasn't modest like that! If he was entitled to any number of friendly pats on the head he would be only too happy to accept them.

"Whoof!" said Flash, as though to imply: "Well, here I am, and if you want to make a fuss of me, start right in!"

Valerie chuckled, and patted him. "Good old Flash!" she murmured. "And now we'll see about packing, shall we?"

"But, Miss Drew," put in Mrs. Trancey. "You're not going to leave us so soon!"

Valerie nodded vigorously.

"Oh, yes I am!" she replied. "It's terribly kind of you to want me to stop, but you see"—she smiled—"I'm rather anxious to finish my holiday!"

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

"GUARD IT, FLASH!"



There he stands, vigilant, alert, resourceful, guarding something which holds the secret of a girl's happiness and his beloved Valerie's reputation as a famous girl detective.

While the storm rages—

While enemies draw nearer—

While Valerie herself is helpless—

Flash stays at his post. He knows, as well as those who are out to trap him, that everything depends upon him.

... Nearer and nearer come the foe . . . Flash's fur bristles. He has seen them!

THEY HAVE SEEN HIM!

On no account miss this wonderful Valerie Drew adventure. It is packed with drama and excitement.

See Next Wednesday's
Enthralling Long
Complete Girl Detective
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