

VALERIE DREW, THE FAMOUS GIRL DETECTIVE, APPEARS INSIDE!

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EVERY WEDNESDAY.

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**"LOOK! THE MYSTERY
MAID!"**

*A dramatic moment from this week's
LONG COMPLETE STORY.*

*featuring
The Mystery Maid of the Mountains.*

RED HEARTS meant DANGER



THE SYMBOL!

FLASH was bored. With front legs stiffly braced, he sat on the mat in the hall and yawned portentously. Catching a sudden, unexpected glimpse of his own tail a moment later, he abandoned the yawn, made a swift but fruitless snap at it, and rolled over on the mat. He stayed where he had sprawled, shamming dead.

A dog's life! Not the life, Flash was thinking, for a dog who considered himself rather a cut above the average quadruped. If this went on much longer—

Flash stirred. His pointed ears were suddenly raised alertly; a bright gleam came into his greenish eyes. That was the postman approaching the house. Flash, with his keen senses, knew the step of everyone who visited them regularly.

"The letter-box rattled; a white envelope flew through and fell on the mat. And 'Got it!' the wag of Flash's bushy tail implied as he dabbed a triumphant paw on it.

But letters, of course, weren't playful things. There was no need to hold it down. They just lay where they fell. Rather dull things, Flash thought, except that they made such an odd appeal to his beloved mistress, Valerie Drew, the famous girl detective. He wondered whether she would be glad to receive this one. He cautiously removed his paw and sniffed inquiringly.

Splendid! A faint scent crept from the letter, a scent that Flash's keen senses instantly appreciated. He had a vague, stimulating vision of galloping horses, weird-looking elephants with the clumsiest feet, and people splashing vigorously.

"That was fine!" Flash, in his own doggy way, had "read" the letter already, and approval of its contents. He picked it up carefully in his mouth and bore it swiftly to his

Enthralling COMPLETE Girl Detective Story

mistress. He laid it in her lap just as she was pouring out her second cup of tea.

"Only one, Flash!" Valerie inquired smilingly, as he sat with his knowing old head on one side and waited for the usual pat to reward his cleverness. "I don't know the writing." A light of interest came into Valerie's keen violet eyes. "Wonder if it's a new case?"

Whoof! barked Flash softly, meaning, as clearly as any dog could say: "Well, I hope so, anyway. Life's getting a bit dull!"

Two sheets came from the envelope. One bore a printed address, but it was the other sheet that Flash, his head thrust forward interestedly, tried to sniff again. Valerie, however, did not appear to be aware of the appeal its scent made to him.

The letter was a long one, obviously written in a state of some excitement, and Valerie's eyes narrowed as her keen mind took in the strange story it had to tell her.

It was a Mrs. Dalrymple who was writing to her. She explained that for the last week the most mysterious occurrences had been taking place in her house. Every night she bolted the windows and barred the doors, yet in the morning she found that books had been moved and papers disarranged, as though someone had been conducting a leisurely search through her rooms.

There were only four people in the house, her letter went on to explain. Mrs. Dalrymple had a daughter aged ten, and kept an elderly housekeeper, Mrs. Forbes, who had been with her for many years. The fourth person was Judy, an interesting little girl of five, whom Mrs. Forbes was looking after whilst her mother was in hospital.

"This afternoon," the letter concluded, "I heard an unexpected sound, and hastened to my room. To my amazement, I found, on my writing-desk, a half-written letter left by someone I evidently disturbed. The writing is quite unknown to me, and how the person escaped from my room is a mystery. In the hope that it will assist you to arrive at some theory I am enclosing the letter."

What a queer case it promised to be! Thrilled already, Valerie at last picked up the enclosure that had so interested Flash. Never had Valerie read a more curious letter.

"Dear Comrade," it ran,— "Although my difficulties in corresponding with you are multitudinous I feel it incumbent on myself to inscribe this epistle to acquaint you with the progress of operations. I have, naturally, to conduct myself with great circumspection, and you will readily conclude that my progressive endeavours—"

It was evidently at that very point that the mysterious writer had been interrupted, for the writing ceased abruptly with a startled blot.

But what did it mean? Valerie's brows contracted with perplexity as she studied that very strange wording. She had never seen so many long words used so close together. And really it was only the preamble to what the writer intended to say. In actual fact it told Valerie Drew practically nothing at all.

"Lead, old boy!" Valerie exclaimed crisply, as she made up her mind in her usual decisive manner.

Flash bounded joyfully away to do her bidding, and was carrying his lead in his mouth

as Valerie, having donned her hat and coat, ran downstairs beside him.

Her smart blue sports car was ready always to leave the garage at a moment's notice. Soon they were humming along suburban roads, Valerie repeatedly eyeing the speedometer to see that they did neither more nor less than their legal thirty miles an hour. Outside a pleasant-looking detached house standing in its own grounds Valerie brought the car to a standstill and alighted briskly. It was just as she was approaching the front door that she had a momentary glimpse of something which glittered in the sunlight, apparently falling at that moment from an upper window, Flash saw it, too, and bounded forward.

Accustomed as she was to Flash's playful ways, Valerie thought little of the incident as she walked to the front door and rang the bell. As she waited a soft, cold nose pressed against her hand. Glancing swiftly down, she saw that Flash held something in his mouth. He had found the falling object.

"Well, I'm bothered!" Valerie murmured, in astonishment, as she took the "find" from her pet. "It's the first time you've ever brought me such a present as that, Flash!"

For what her intelligent pet had picked up was nothing less than a short piece of scarlet lipstick wrapped in silver foil!

"You say nothing has been stolen, Mrs. Dalrymple?" Valerie asked keenly. "Until the actual finding of the letter which you sent me you had little more than suspicions to go on!"

"That is perfectly true," Mrs. Dalrymple agreed.

Valerie found her a keen-eyed, alert little lady to whom she took a liking at once. She also found herself favourably impressed by Mrs. Forbes, the grey-haired housekeeper whose manner showed how obviously worried she was by the mysterious happenings of the last few days.

Further explanations had convinced her that the mystery was indeed one that had most unusual and baffling features. For Mrs. Dalrymple had not the slightest idea why anyone should have any reason to carry out such a strange, secret search on her premises.

"I should like to look round the house thoroughly for a start," Valerie decided. And she paused for a moment, smilingly to pat

Flash's silky head. For disappointed Flash had evidently had an idea in his doggy mind that they were going somewhere far more exciting than what seemed to be quite an ordinary house.

"Certainly!" Mrs. Dalrymple agreed. "I think Joan is getting up now. Poor little Judy is still asleep, no doubt. I feel worried to think we have not had the doctor to the poor mite."

"But I know she is quite all right, madam," Mrs. Forbes put in anxiously. "She had a similar turn a year ago, and the doctor said that if she had sufficient sleep it would put her right. He was quite correct. It's ever so kind of madam," she added, turning to Valerie, "to let me look after my little niece whilst her mother is in hospital."

Flash accompanied them as they went upstairs, his ears still drooping as though he felt that what had at first promised to be a very good case was going to prove a very dull one.

"As I ought to be getting on with my work, Miss Drew," Mrs. Forbes suggested, as they reached the top of the stairs, "perhaps I might be allowed to show you my room first."

She opened a door softly as she spoke, and stood aside for Valerie to enter. Valerie's sensitive heart was stirred instantly as she heard the feeble, complaining voice of a child coming from a cot that stood near to the window.

"Oh, aunty, don't say it's time to get up!" protested the fearful little voice. "I'm so tired, and you promised me I could stay in bed this morning."

A small, curled-up figure moved fidgetily beneath the blankets. Disordered curly hair lay on the pillow. Valerie could glimpse a flushed little cheek and tightly closed eyes.

Valerie stepped sympathetically back. Swiftly she took in details of the room, then retreated to the doorway. She smiled at the grey-haired housekeeper.

"We detectives have to make sure we miss nothing," she explained. "There is no need to wake Judy—we could not expect the poor mite to answer any questions in a way that would help. I need not bother you again for the moment, Mrs. Forbes."

Mrs. Dalrymple threw a cautious glance over her shoulder as the housekeeper returned to her duties in the kitchen.

"There is one thing I have not told you yet, Miss Drew," she murmured. "I do not like speaking of it even in front of Mrs. Forbes. There is a queer legend—concerning our family. We always call it, amongst ourselves, the Warning of the Red Heart."

In spite of herself, Valerie Drew was conscious of a strange thrill at those words.

"What exactly is the legend?" she asked, her eyes narrowing slightly as she reflected how complicated her cases sometimes became through these odd, superstitious beliefs she encountered.

"It is said, Miss Drew," Mrs. Dalrymple replied, a slight tremor in her voice, "that the Red Heart always appears when someone belonging to our family is in danger. They say it means that we should leave the house and not come back until we are sure the danger has passed."

"Has anything been seen of this Red Heart?" Valerie asked.

"Yes, Miss Drew—yesterday morning!" came the quiet admission that brought all those strange feelings back to Valerie. "It was on my blotting-pad—drawn roughly in red ink. On the very pad where, yesterday afternoon, I found that odd part of a letter you already have."

Valerie's brows contracted. A red heart could not appear by itself. Yet, counting that sick mite in the housekeeper's room, there were only four people regularly in the house.

"You shall see the drawing, Miss Drew, when you have met my daughter Jean," Mrs. Dalrymple promised, as they reached a door at the end of the corridor. "Jean!" she added, raising her voice. "Are you awake yet, dear?"

"Yes, mummy—just getting up!" a girl's voice responded. "I'll be downstairs in ten minutes."

"Put on your dressing-gown and open the door, dear," Mrs. Dalrymple responded. "I want you to meet a lady friend who has called here to show you a dear old doggie!"

"Coming, mummy!"

There were excited sounds in the room. Slipped feet ran to the door to open it. A pretty, smiling child of ten appeared in the doorway.

But for a second or two a cry of sheer consternation threatened to burst from Valerie's lips at the sight she beheld.

The child's appearance had one astounding thing about it that seemed to hit Valerie momentarily as hard as a physical blow.

In the very centre of the child's forehead was the bold, crimson symbol of—a red heart!

AT THE FAIR!

"HOW—how do you do, Jean?" asked Valerie, with her pleasantest smile.

Training and experience had taught Valerie Drew to be able to disguise her feelings as few normal people could do. There were many times, on some of her most important cases, where she had to be sure that her face did not give away what she was thinking.

"Fine, Miss Drew!" the little girl declared. "Oh, what a darling!" she cried, as Flash, his bushy tail waving, ran up to her.

Breathlessly, unnoticed by the child, she drew Mrs. Dalrymple aside.

"Does she know about it?" Valerie whispered tensely.

"I'm sure not, Miss Drew. I'm terribly glad you said nothing. Poor child, she'd be scared out of her life if she saw herself in the mirror now!"

"Leave it to me," Valerie decided instantly. "I'll get it off without her suspecting anything. How long has it been there?"

Mrs. Dalrymple still looked shaken by the dreadful shock the youngster's starding "decoration" had given her.

"I looked into her room half an hour ago, Miss Drew," she murmured. "She was asleep then. I'm sure if there had been anything on her forehead I should have noticed it."

Valerie pursed her lips. With a fresh thrill she recalled that bright object she had glimpsed falling from the upper window eaves as she reached the house and the piece of



The onlookers gasped as Valerie darted towards the sleeping child. What ever was she going to do?

hipster Flash had brought her. Had the mystery person who haunted the house been actually engaged in this amazing manner only a few minutes ago?

"Jean, would you like to see Flash do one of his tricks?" Valerie exclaimed, whilst the unsuspecting youngster was still fondling her pet.

"Oh, rather, Miss Drew!" the little girl answered eagerly. "I expect he does all sorts of clever things."

"Tell Flash to beg, dear," she said, and added, as though quite casually: "Hallo, how did that little smut get on your forehead, I wonder?"

Defly she moistened her handkerchief with spirit from a tiny phial in her handbag and dabbed lightly at Jean's forehead. And whilst Flash was proudly performing all his best tricks, the last vestige of that uncanny mark was removed without Jean suspecting anything.

But it had given even Valerie, accustomed as she was to surprises, a distinctly unpleasant shock.

Unless there was some hiding-place in the house where some stranger could lurk entirely unsuspected, she knew that she must suspect one of the four people in the house.

It seemed absurd. Little Judy was a mere child, and Jean would hardly do it herself and the family for years, and the mother herself was obviously quite innocent of any deception.

"I'll look over the house at once," Valerie murmured.

She called Flash back to her side and left the room. Swiftly, her keen eyes missing nothing, Valerie carried out the most thorough explorations.

But, to her growing dismay, they continually drew blank.

What was even more bewildering was the fact that Flash, eager though he was to assist, did not even seem suspicious. He seemed to be treating it all as just some zew and jolly game of hide-and-seek.

If there had been even the scent of some stranger in the house, Valerie was sure that her pet would have given her, by a questioning bark, some indication that he had picked it up.

As the search was practically finished when, reaching the top of the stairs again, Valerie saw one tiny cupboard that she had missed. Though it was obviously too small for any normal person to be concealed inside, Valerie opened the door. Experience had taught her never to take anything for granted.

And how glad of that instinct she was a moment later.

With an eager little Flash sprang forward the moment the door was opened, and dragged out to the back of the cupboard, and dragged out a small brown-paper parcel.

"Why, that's mine, I—I believe!" a voice gasped at Valerie's side.

Instantly assuming an expression that gave away nothing, Valerie turned to see that Mrs. Forbes, the housekeeper, was at her side.

She had spoken eagerly, but with a strange nervousness.

An suspicion filled Valerie at once, but she was most anxious not to betray it. Yet how could she see what was inside that parcel without insisting on inspecting it?

"Flash, give it here!" she commanded, as she stooped and quickly grasped one end of the parcel.

Flash gave a playful little growl, and hung on to the other end. For Flash knew that that tone of voice was the one that Valerie always used when they were having a merely playful game.

"I'll just take the paper, as it is tore right across—and Valerie's purpose was accomplished. Yet to those looking on, it appeared by the merest accident that the parcel had burst open.

Except that Flash by his cheerful, satisfied manner, might have given the game away to anyone who knew him better.

"Why, it contains a frock!" ejaculated Mrs. Dalrymple. "And some pieces of note-paper." "Surely they are not yours, Mrs. Forbes?"

was a different parcel. I certainly don't know how these things got into the house."

Valerie stooped and lifted the contents of the parcel to a table. And there were more astonished cries than ever as the full nature of their unexpected discovery was revealed.

"Why, what a tiny frock it is!" young Jean cried, in amazement. "It wouldn't fit even me."

Mrs. Dalrymple took it in her own hands and held it up to the light.

"Yet it doesn't look like a child's frock at all!" she declared wonderingly. "It's like a miniature of a woman's dress made to go on a tiny model in a shop window!"

"That, no doubt, madam, is exactly what it is!" Mrs. Forbes agreed instantly. "But how it got into that cupboard beats me completely!"

In their excitement they neither of them noticed that, for the moment, Valerie was apparently ever more interested in the newspaper that had also been in the parcel. She held a sheet of it up to the light, and her lips were suddenly compressed, her violet eyes narrowed, as she read the watermark.

It was exactly the same newspaper as that on which the strange, long-voiced fragment of a letter had been written!

So near—and yet so far!

Beyond the discovery of that parcel, which Flash had so cleverly and unexpectedly brought to light, Valerie had found nothing else of any significance in the whole of the house.

A miniature model dress, and half a dozen sheets of note-paper, were interesting finds—but where did they lead?

Valerie Drew was feeling baffled.

Her clues, strange though they were, evidently led her nowhere at all. She was as far as ever from discovering the motive of the mystery person whose activities had baffled everyone.

A puzzled frown disturbed Valerie's brow as she sat in the sunlit garden, intently studying that odd little dress. Flash sat at her side, mystifying her by his manner. For ever and again he sniffed at it, then looked at her with such pleading green eyes that she seemed to be saying:

"If only I could talk, you know, I really believe I could help you quite a lot!"

Affectionately Valerie patted his faithful old head. What was he trying to tell her?

In a sudden flash of recollection she remembered his intent behaviour when he first brought the letter to her. He had sniffed as though there was some odour clinging to it which he recognised.

Seeking for the same scent, Flash had brought the parcel so unexpectedly to light. He had deliberately thrust it on her notice because of its particular scent which his keen nostrils instantly detected.

Valerie was conscious of a new thrill. Flash had been helping her on this case far more than she had realised. If only he had the power of speech, how much he could tell her!

"What is it, old boy?" she asked him tensely. And as he sat, with head on one side and tongue rolling out questioningly, she urged him to show her, old boy. What do you want to tell me? Where do you want to go? Tell me!

One ear dropped; the other stood stiffly erect. As hard as he could, Flash was, in his doggy way, trying to think. And suddenly he had the inspiration he sought.

Round her chair he raced. In a circle, now leaping, now ducking, but keeping steadfastly on and on, Flash raced round her at least half a dozen times.

As he sprawled at last on the grass, panting from his wild exertions, an amazing thought came to Valerie.

"A circus!" she breathed to herself incredulously. "That's what the funny old fellow's been trying to tell me! He could smell something about the circus; in that letter, and in the dress. He's seen other dogs running round and round in the circus ring!"

She thought quickly. There was no circus performing anywhere near at hand, but there was a fair—the scent could be more or less

the same to Flash—within quite reasonable distance. Valerie made up her mind instantly.

She told Mrs. Dalrymple that she would be away for a short while, promising to return as soon as she had discovered something. Then, with the little frock in a parcel, and Flash at her side, she started up her car and sped away in the direction of her fair.

Parking her car, Valerie approached the amusement grounds, fully prepared to spend a long while making her inquiries and meet numerous disappointments. To her amazement, almost the first woman to whom she showed that little frock appeared to recognise it immediately.

"Why, yes!" she exclaimed, and, unthinkingly for Valerie, she turned her head just in time to conceal the strange light that sprang into her eyes. "I've seen it, of course. It's a frock that Jim Magger had made for his little daughter."

Valerie thrilled instantly. Her case seemed almost too easy. She had never expected to have the good fortune to strike a clue as quickly as this.

"Can you tell me where I could meet Jim Magger?" she asked swiftly.

Her informant, who was in charge of the first coconut-stall, nodded cheerfully.

"Certainly, miss!" she agreed. "I've no doubt Jim will be glad to have his little girl's dress back again, so I'll come with you. It's this way."

With Flash trotting at her heels, Valerie followed as the woman led the way quickly across the fair ground. Flash's bushy tail was waving slowly from side to side; there was something about the pungent air, with its confused smells of cookery and animals, that pleased and satisfied him.

Right through the grounds they went until they came to the exit gate. Beyond was an open space and a further still was a railway viaduct. Beneath the arches Valerie saw a number of showmen's vans, stored there until they should be wanted to take to the road again.

"Jim's in the middle arch, I believe," Valerie's informant muttered, as she hurried ahead again. "Yes, there he is. I'll just tell him what you've brought."

She hastened on to speak to the solitary man who had appeared amongst the vans. By the time Valerie drew near, the man's little eyes were bright, and he greeted her with a smile that threatened to spread nearly from ear to ear.

"Alice tells me you've brought my little girl's frock back, miss!" he exclaimed. "It's one that was specially made for her as a present, and it's been a fair mystery to all of us where it's got to. Where did you find it?"

Valerie eyed the man closely. There was something about him she did not like, and she was glad to feel that Flash was at her side.

His cordial manner did not deceive her; for that matter, she had not believed that either of them were telling her the truth! There were such strange suspicions forming in Valerie's mind that she replied cautiously.

"I'd like to know, first of all, when you lost the frock, to know, answered coolly, meeting his eyes steadily."

"Certainly, miss," Jim Magger agreed, with the same outward show of cordiality. "Naturally you want to satisfy yourself that it's really mine. Some show people have a name for claiming things that don't belong to them at all, but I'm not one of that sort. Just step into the van, miss, and I'll tell you all about it."

He led to the nearest van, and stood respectfully aside as he reached the steps. Flash bounded up instantly, and disappeared within.

Valerie was following him when a sudden caution came over her.

"Just a minute—"

Her sentence was never finished. In that instant, at a sharp signal from the man, the woman Al appeared upon her like a tigress.

A fierce push, and Valerie was sent staggering up the last step and plunging into the darkness beyond. And, even as she collided with the startled shape of her pet, the door was slammed heavily behind her, and a bolt was thrust into position.

ANOTHER LETTER!

"Oh, mother, look!" It was a shrill, frightened cry that left Jean Dalrymple's lips. "The Red Heart! Look at it there—on the wall!"

Startled and dismayed, the mother followed the direction of the trembling hand that Jean had raised to point. As though with the anguish of some physical pain that suddenly filled her, Mrs. Dalrymple found herself gazing upon that dreaded symbol painted right in the centre of her study wall!

"Good gracious!" she gasped, scarcely knowing what she said in the agitation that came over her. "What a stupid trick someone has been playing on us!"

Who had done it? With the most dreadful feeling of fear and bewilderment she had ever experienced in her life, Mrs. Dalrymple asked herself that question, well knowing that it was less than a quarter of an hour since she had gazed at that very wall and seen it bare.

The mystery intruder, despite the fact that famous Valerie Drew had been called in on the case, had shown this fresh audacity.

"Mumsie!" Jean was clinging to her. "Mumsie, her little frame shook with terror. "Mumsie, you know what it means! It's a warning to us. You remember the story about poor Aunt Louie—"

"Hush, dearest!" The mother desperately tried to soothe her. "That is only a story. And this is a trick—a mean trick—"

"Madam!" an astounded voice gasped in the doorway at that very moment. "How dreadful! When did you find it?"

Mrs. Dalrymple was dumb as she faced her housekeeper.

A quarter of an hour ago the three of them had been in this room; since then they had been together in the kitchen. In that brief interval of time the mystery person who haunted the house—the person so cleverly concealed that even Flash could not scent them out—had been at work again.

"Mumsie, can't we go away?" Jean asked fearfully. "You know what they say about the Red Heart, mumsie. It means danger for someone, mumsie! And it might be you, dear—"

"Darling, it's only a stupid, horrid trick!" Mrs. Dalrymple whispered, and even as she uttered the words she recalled, with a new sense of shock, the astounding sight that she and Valerie had beheld only that morning.

The Red Heart printed right on Jean's forehead!

A chill disquiet seemed to steal all over her as she associated the two "warnings" in her mind; unconsciously she held Jean more closely to her, as though she feared, even then, that some uncanny danger might be threatening her.

"Miss Drew hasn't come back yet, madam," Mrs. Forbes murmured factually, yet in the tones of a woman determined to face the truth. "She told us she wouldn't be long, but it's more than four hours since her car drove away. Is it possible that she's gone to another case?"

Mrs. Dalrymple compressed her lips.

Had Valerie really let her down? Or was the mystery one that was too deep even for the celebrated girl detective?

"Mumsie, couldn't we go away—just for a day or two?" Jean whispered, in her mother's ear.

"Madam, look out!" Mrs. Forbes cried out in sudden agitation at the very same moment.

Mrs. Dalrymple stiffened instinctively as she caught a glimpse of something white sailing suddenly through the open window. It fell, a paper dart, practically at her feet. She stooped to pick it up, half unfolded it, then suddenly crumpled it convulsively in her hand.

Printed on the paper was—another Red Heart!

"Well go away, Jean!" Mrs. Dalrymple decided. "Mrs. Forbes, please start packing our things immediately!"

The ring came the sound of the front door bell ere the words had scarcely left her lips.

"Shall I see who it is, Mrs. Forbes murmured as she hastened downstairs.

She opened the door. And outside—though dusty, and clearly in pressing need of a good tidy-up—Valerie Drew stood on the top step.

With ears erect and red tongue lolling out, Flash stood beside her!

"Oh, Miss Drew," the housekeeper ejaculated, "I'm afraid you've left it rather too late! Mrs. Dalrymple has decided to shut the house up and go away for a few days."

A curious gleam came into Valerie's eyes as she stepped into the house.

"Come with me!" she directed, and when the housekeeper, with a sudden trepidation she could not entirely conceal, followed, she led the way straight to her room.

"Oh, Miss Drew, not in there, please!" begged Mrs. Forbes, laying an agitated hand on Valerie's arm. "Little Judy's just gone off to sleep. She's had a dreadful day of it. She knew there was something queer going on—"

She broke off abruptly as Mrs. Dalrymple, with Jean holding tight to her hand, came along the corridor.

"I fear you are rather late, Miss Drew," the lady said coldly. "I have decided to close the house. The police will be instructed to watch it during my absence."

"Pardon me, but that will be unnecessary now," Valerie answered, with her most baffling smile. "I'm just going to solve the mystery for you—"

Ignoring the housekeeper completely, she threw the door open and strode across to the cot by the window.

The feeble, pathetic little cry that came from the figure huddled beneath the blankets was one that fell, this time, on deaf ears.

With a sharp gesture, Valerie's hand moved to the pillow and jerked at golden hair. An astounded gaze came from Mrs. Dalrymple as Valerie held aloft—a wig!

"Now, get up!" Valerie's voice was as sharp as the snare of a whip as she rapped out that order. "Miss Midget, the game's up at last! You've played your tricks once too often!"

Like lightning she threw the bedclothes aside, and, even as a little figure leapt up as though impelled by a spring, Valerie caught her and held in her arms—a screaming dwarf!

"Why, she's no child at all!" Mrs. Dalrymple cried out, in tones of consternation.

It was perfectly true.

Lying in her cot, with her eyes tightly shut, and only one flushed cheek visible, Miss Midget had passed easily for a child. Now, clearly revealed to their astounded gaze, they could see that she was actually a woman in everything but size.

"I did you!" the furious dwarf shouted, making vain efforts to hit at Valerie with her tiny fist. "And someone's given me away! It's you, Mrs. Forbes—"

"Now, now!" Valerie interjected sternly, even as she saw the livid-faced housekeeper collapse, trembling with fear, into a chair. "Miss Midget, you have chiefly yourself to blame. When next you write a letter you might remember not to leave it about. "And if you do so, don't use the longest words you can think of! You're by no means the first little person who's tried to look very big on paper!"

"There wasn't anything in that, either!" Miss Midget shouted, in a fresh burst of rage.

"Not sufficient to tell me a lot," Valerie agreed. "But finding the dress you came here in was much more important, especially as Flash immediately knew that it came from the circus or fair. I had me suspicious then, and if I hadn't allowed your employer, Jim Mager, to strap me, I'd have been back long before you had time to frighten Mrs. Dalrymple any more. Who forced you to bring this horrid little fraud into the house, Mrs. Forbes? Valerie exclaimed, suddenly addressing the housekeeper.

The trembling woman raised her lit-

stained face, and made a desperate effort to speak.

"It was Jim Mager as well, Miss Drew," she faltered. "I was terrified at the idea, but my poor daughter is unfortunately in his debt, and he threatened to tell the police if I didn't do what he said. And he assured me that Miss Midget would be very careful and only search for the paper at night, so that no one would ever suspect her."

"Miss Drew, it seems I was on the point of misjudging you terribly!" Mrs. Dalrymple exclaimed shakily. "You say you were trapped by someone. I hope it was nothing serious."

Luckily the van was an old one, and Flash managed to scratch a way through the rotten boards and take a message for help," Valerie answered. "But that scarcely matters now, Mrs. Dalrymple. What concerns me most is the messages about the Red Heart. Why were you so heartless as to do such a thing, Miss Midget?"

"Miss Midget had unexpectedly quite recovered her calm. It was clear now that she was an old, very self-possessed little person, and proud rather than otherwise, of what she had been doing.

"That was to speed things up," she declared. "Mrs. Forbes mentioned the Red Heart to me one day, and I thought it would be a good idea if I could scare Mrs. Dalrymple and Jean away and get the house empty so that I could get to work properly. I tell you, I was just about fed-up with having to lie in bed all day, pretending to be a kid whenever anyone came into the room!"

"And the paper you agitated—how does that come to be here?" Valerie asked quickly.

"It's a plan of where some gipsies hid some stolen jewels, and it's in a book that was sold at an antique sale," the midget owned up, at once. "We found out that this lady bought it, and Jim Mager thought it would be quite easy for me to pretend to be a kid and get it without anyone suspecting it. But I've searched and searched—"

"Was it a paper," Mrs. Dalrymple struck in, "with a lot of red circles on it?"

"The midget woman jumped excitedly on the bed.

"Yes, that's it!" she cried. "Give it to me, and we'll let you share half of what we find—"

"Your offer, young woman, comes too late!" Mrs. Dalrymple interrupted, coldly. "The best possible thing has already happened. Not knowing what the paper was, I burnt it weeks ago!"

Valerie was home at last, at the conclusion of what had proved one of the most unusual cases she had handled for a long while. Mrs. Dalrymple had proved herself to be a great-hearted lady by not merely allowing the mischievous midget to return safe free to the fair, she had even found it possible to forgive the repentant Mrs. Forbes as well.

On the mat, even as Valerie opened the door, lay a letter. With a joyous "Whoof?" Flash bounded forward to pick it up.

A moment later, with the oddest, most crestfallen drooping of his ears, he dropped it again.

And Valerie, giving her faithful pet an affectionate pat on his silky head, laughed to herself.

No wonder Flash found nothing interesting in their latest present from the postman. It wasn't a letter, like the one that had come on the first post, whispering of some strange, intriguing place like a circus.

It was merely the gas account!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY

Another magnificent COMPLETE Girl Detective Story next Wednesday— "LITTLE MISS FLASH!"—See pages 74 and 88 for full particulars.