



Girl Sleuth

Bobbie Mason

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The Girl Sleuth is a book for anyone who fondly recalls her late-night adventures inside a bedspread cave with a flashlight, a handful of snatched cookies, and a savvy heroine who has just two chapters left in which to decode the message, find the jewels, unmask the impostor, and then catch the next express to the big city.

In this long-out-of-print work, which was first published in 1975, Bobbie Ann Mason examines the girl detective in her various guises through a combination of childhood reminiscences and insights as a fiction writer and observer of American popular culture. Mason ranges in her coverage from the Bobbsey Twins to the glamorous career-girl detectives Vicki Barr, Cherry Ames, and Beverly Gray to her own adolescent favorites—Judy Bolton, Nancy Drew, and Trixie Belden, a farm girl like herself. Mason's personal recollections of a rural youth spent longing for mysteries to solve represent a quintessential American girlhood experience.

Mason reveals Nancy Drew ("as cool as Mata Hari and as sweet as Betty Crocker") to be a paradoxical figure: on the one hand a model of independence and courage; on the other, a lady, eternally feminine and firmly devoted to the preservation of middle-class values. The girl sleuths "thrilled us and contented us at the same time," the author writes. Holding up Nancy Drew as a model of "the conventional and the revolutionary in one compact package," Mason shows how the series heroines encouraged young readers to "dream big" and stay open to life's possibilities, dished up antidotes to spoon-fed notions of traditional femininity, and amiably subverted the literary snobbery of child experts, librarians, and book reviewers.

Everyone who grew up reading mystery books will enjoy Bobbie Ann Mason's witty, sometimes nostalgic, observations on popular culture, childhood, and the pleasures of reading and writing.

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