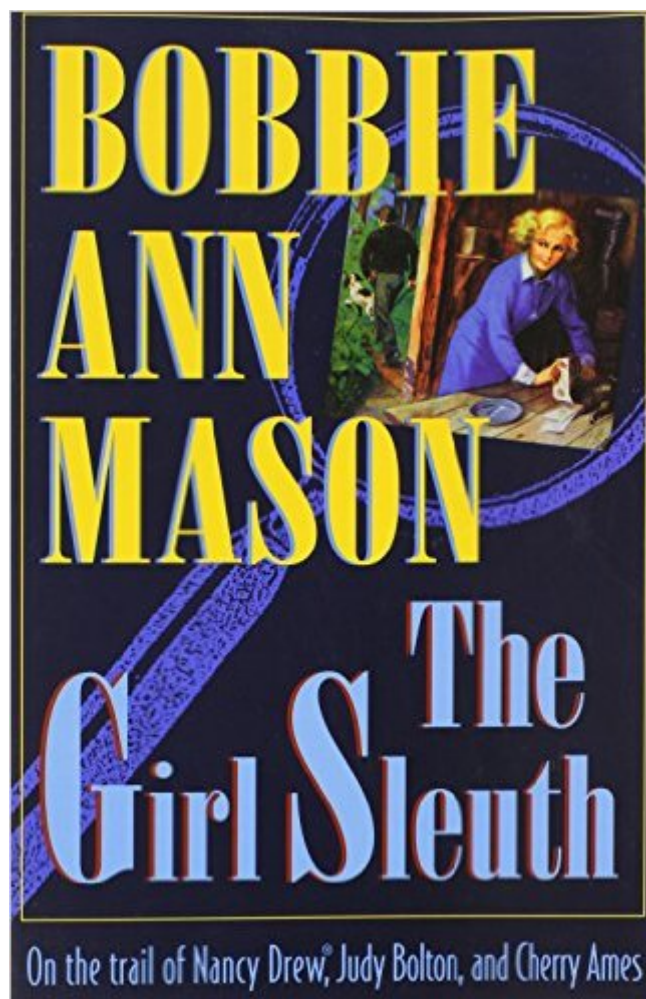


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The Girl Sleuth



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

From Aunt Jane's Girls to Sweet Valley High, series books for girls have been a staple of girls' literary diets. Bobbie Ann Mason (author of "In Country") is one of many who devoured series like The Bobbsey Twins and Nancy Drew. She looks back at the books with affection and the amused rememberings of adulthood, but also acknowledges some of the faults of the book - especially in matters of racism, stereotyping, bourgeois entitlement and sexism. She also brings some of the lesser-known girl detectives into the spotlight - especially Judy Bolton, a far more satisfying heroine than the rigid, frigid Nancy Drew. If a college course can be taught on Madonna, then this genre definitely deserves study and reflection for its influence on generations of little women.

Reading The Girl Sleuth was like getting in a car with a friend at the wheel and going back to the neighborhood where we lived from ages 10 - 12. Together we uncovered the probable reasons why my mother and the school librarian disapproved of Nancy Drew and what those series mysteries did for our self images as women. The overt mainstream racism of the earlier editions of the series books is shocking; it gives me some comfort to think that our culture has grown up in the last few decades to understand how very wrong that thinking was. This book was completed in 1975 when Mason was a young post-doc coming off a Nabokov dissertation. It is relatively free of scholarspeak, though the feminism and Freudian references are starkly of their time. It's not dated, however: Mason writes from the heart as well as the mind and this slim book is a timeless good ride.

Bobbie Ann Mason's book on Girl Sleuths crystallized for me why I loved Trixie Belden and why Nancy Drew left me kind of cold. Any girl that grew up on these series books will find a lot to love and relate to in this volume. As well as very illuminating, it is, at times, laugh out loud funny. You will find yourself cringing and shaking your head in wonder at some of the excerpts from the unrevised versions of the stories from the 30's and 40's. If only I had been introduced to Judy Bolton instead of Nancy Drew! Where was she? Did my library even have her? Did I just overlook her? It's a mystery, but I am sad for my younger self for being deprived of her adventures when I really would have just gobbled them up and waited in suspense for the next one. Well, this book has made me think maybe it's not too late...I'm bidding on a lot offered on ebay today!

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