The Secret of the Old Clock

Carolyn Keene · *1930 · original English text*

Nancy Drew, a bright young woman of River Heights and the daughter of a lawyer, tries to find a missing will that would give a fortune to two deserving young women instead of a greedy family. Her search takes her through a storm, a lonely bungalow, a robbers' hideout, and a clue behind a clock face. It is the first of the Nancy Drew mysteries.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can a smart, brave young woman find the truth when the grown-ups have given up?

Nancy proves that she can. She is helped by her father's law practice and by her own courage, curiosity, and common sense. The villains are petty and greedy, and the solution is satisfying. Under the plot is a plain moral: honesty and kindness win in the end, and one person's work can set a wrong right.

KEY CHARACTERS

Nancy Drew
A bright, brave young woman of River Heights.

Carson Drew
Her father, a lawyer who helps.

the Horner sisters
Two young women who deserve the inheritance.

Abigail Rowen
An old woman who knew Crowley and helps with a clue.

the Tophams
Greedy relatives of the dead man.

Jeff Tucker
The Tophams' caretaker, who helps Nancy.

Grades 5–8
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01
The Lost Will
CHAPTERS I–II

Nancy hears her father talk about the missing will of Josiah Crowley. The Tophams, his greedy relatives, will take the estate if no later will is found.

- Carson Drew is a noted lawyer and former district attorney.
- The Tophams are rich and unpleasant.
- Nancy has no clue at all, but she is determined.

02
A Storm and the Horner Girls
CHAPTERS III–VII

On an errand for her father, Nancy races a storm and takes shelter with two young women, the Horner sisters. She hears their story, and their misfortunes begin to weigh on her.

- The errand to Judge Hartgrave in Masonville starts the chain of events.
- The Horners' story is the one that moves her most.
- After an unpleasant meeting with the Tophams, Nancy turns sleuth.

03
Abigail and the Clock
CHAPTERS VIII–XII

Nancy visits the old farmhouse and Abigail Rowen, a frail old woman. The striking of a clock leads Abigail to say something important. Nancy visits the Tophams and learns of a clock at their bungalow at Moon Lake.

- The cottage is rundown, and Abigail is easily confused.
- The Tophams' house is pretentious and cold.
- Moon Lake is forty miles away, and the problem is how to get there.

04
Moon Lake and the Closet
CHAPTERS XIII–XVII

Nancy spends days at camp with friends, then goes to the bungalow. A robber locks her in a closet and leaves her to starve. She gets out and meets Jeff Tucker, the Tophams' caretaker.

- The camp is a light interlude before the danger.
- The bungalow seems deserted but is not.
- The closet is the low point and the turning point.

05
Notebook and Robbers
CHAPTERS XVIII–XXII

Nancy notifies the police and follows the robbers. She hides in a manger, finds a blue notebook behind the face of the clock, and the robbers are captured.

- The drive with Jeff Tucker is the book's great race.
- The clock is the one clue that matters.
- She must keep the clock out of the marshal's sight.

06
The Will and the Reward
CHAPTERS XXIII–XXV

The notebook leads to the will. Nancy and her father plan to read it to the family. The Tophams try to claim forgery and lose. The Horner girls and Abigail receive their inheritance.

- Carson Drew will be administrator of the estate.
- The Tophams are nearly bankrupt.
- Nancy's reward is a mystery she keeps to herself.

Detection · Justice · Courage · Clues

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 5–8

1. Watch how Nancy collects evidence. Which clues matter?
2. The clock is in the title. Notice every time it appears.
3. The book was written in 1930. Look for details of its time, including the way a Black character's speech is written.
4. Look at how each chapter ends. How does the author keep you reading?

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