

NANCY DREW MYSTERY STORIES®

*The Secret of the  
Old Clock*

BY CAROLYN KEENE

GROSSET & DUNLAP  
Publishers • New York

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*"The Crowley clock at last!" Nancy exclaimed*



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# CHAPTER XV

## *Nancy's Risky Undertaking*

“I MUST notify the police at once!” Nancy told herself as she recognized the three thieves.

Turning away from the window, she crept noiselessly from the porch. She was about to make a dash for her car when a sudden thought occurred to her.

“If the gang have parked their van in the barn, now's my chance to look for the Crowley clock. I'm sure those men will be eating for a while, or they may even be staying overnight.”

Acting on the impulse, Nancy sprinted to her car. Hastily she snatched a flashlight from the compartment, since it was now dark outside.

She made her way cautiously to the rear of the inn. Reaching the barn, she tried the closed doors, her heart pounding. They had not been locked!

As she slid back one of the doors, it squeaked in an alarming fashion. Anxiously Nancy glanced toward the inn, but so far as she could tell, her actions were unobserved. There was no one in sight.

Focusing her flashlight, she peered hopefully into the dark interior. A cry of satisfaction escaped her lips.

*In front of her stood the moving van!*

“What luck!” she exclaimed, snapping off her light.

With a last cautious glance in the direction of the inn, she hastily stepped inside and closed the barn door. With it shut, the interior of the barn was pitch dark.

Nancy switched on her flashlight again and played it over the moving van. She saw that its rear doors were closed.

Securing a firm grip on the handle, she gave it a quick turn. To her dismay the door did not open. The thieves had locked the van!

“Oh dear! Now what shall I do?” she wondered frantically. “I’ll never be able to break the lock.”

Desperately Nancy glanced about. She dared not remain many minutes in the barn, lest the thieves return and find her there. But she had to find out whether the Crowley clock was in the van.

“Perhaps the keys were left in the ignition,” Nancy thought hopefully.

She rushed to the front of the van and clambered into the driver’s seat. But there were no keys hanging from the ignition lock.

Nancy’s mind worked frantically. She must find the keys! Perhaps the men had not taken them into the inn but had concealed them in the truck. Suddenly she remembered that people sometimes hide automobile keys under the floor mat. It was barely possible that the thieves had done this.

Hastily she pulled up a corner of the mat. Her flashlight revealed a small ring of keys!

“Luck was with me this time,” she murmured, and quickly snatching up the ring, she ran back to the rear of the van.

After trying several of the keys, she at last found one which fitted the lock. Turning it, she jerked open the door. Nancy flashed her light about inside the truck. To her joy she recognized the van’s contents as the furniture stolen from the Topham cottage!

“What will I do if the clock is on the bottom of the load?” Nancy wondered as she surveyed the pile of furniture. “I’ll never find it.”

Dexterously she swung herself up into the truck and flashed the light slowly about on chairs, tables, rugs, and boxes. There was no sign of the Crowley clock.

Then the beam rested for a moment on an object in a far corner. With a low cry of delight, Nancy saw that her search had been rewarded. Protected by a blanket, an old-fashioned mantel clock rested on top of a table in the very front of the van!

The young sleuth scrambled over the pieces of furniture as she tried to reach the clock. Her dress caught on something sharp and tore. Finally she arrived within arm’s reach of the blanket. She grasped it and carefully pulled the clock toward her.

One glance at the timepiece assured her that it fitted the description Abby Rowen had given her. It had a square face and the top was ornamented with a crescent.

“The Crowley clock at last!” Nancy whispered almost unbelievably.

But as she stood staring at it, her keen ears detected the sound of voices. The thieves!

“I’ll be caught!” flashed through her mind. “And I won’t be able to escape a second time!”

Clutching the blanket and the clock tightly in her arms, Nancy scrambled over the piled-up furniture as she struggled to get out of the truck before it was too late.

Reaching the door, she leaped lightly to the floor. She could now hear heavy footsteps coming closer and closer.

Nancy shut the truck doors as quickly as possible, and searched wildly for the keys.

“Oh, what did I do with them?” she thought frantically.

She saw that they had fallen to the floor and snatched them up. Hurriedly inserting the correct key in the lock, she secured the doors.

But as Nancy wheeled about she heard men’s angry voices directly outside. Already someone was starting to slide back the barn door!

“Oh, what shall I do?” Nancy thought in despair. “I’m cornered!”

She realized instantly that she could not hope to run to the front of the car and place the keys under the mat where she had found them. “I’ll just put them on the floor,” she decided quickly. “Maybe the men will think they dropped them.”

Then, glancing frantically about for a hiding place, Nancy saw an empty grain bin. Running to it, still holding the clock, she climbed inside and dropped the blanket over her head just as one of the barn doors slid open.

One of the men was speaking loudly. Nancy recognized the voice instantly. It belonged to Sid, the ringleader of the thieves.

“You had enough to eat,” he growled. “We’re goin’ to get out of here before we have the cops down on our heads.”

He climbed into the cab and turned on the headlights. Nancy held her breath. Would her hiding place be discovered? But the men apparently did not even look toward the bin.

In a moment Sid cried out, "What did you do with those keys? Thought you put 'em under the floor mat."

"I did."

"Well, they ain't here."

"Honest, boss, I—"

"Then come and find 'em, and don't be all night about it either!"

"All right. Get out of the way and give me a chance!"

As Jake went to the truck and began a careful search for the keys, Nancy listened fearfully from her hiding place.

"Say, if you've lost 'em—" the leader did not finish the threat, for at that moment the third man announced:

"Here they are on the floor! You must have thought you'd put 'em in your pocket, Jake, and dropped 'em instead."

"I didn't!" the other retorted.

The thieves were obviously in a quarrelsome mood. Just then the leader interposed:

"Cut out the yaking! We ain't got no time for a fight unless we want to land behind bars!"

"And if we do, it'll be your fault, Sid Sax. You left that girl to starve—"

"Shut up!" the leader snarled.

After a few more angry words, the three thieves climbed into the front seat and in a moment the engine started.

In relief Nancy heard the men go. The moment they were a safe distance from the barn, she climbed out of the bin.

Nancy watched long enough to make certain that the van had taken the road to Garwin. Then, enatching up her flashlight and clutching the precious clock in her arms, she turned and ran. "I'd better cut through the woods," she decided.

As Nancy darted among the trees, she cast an anxious glance over her shoulder, but to her intense relief she saw that she was not being followed. There seemed to be no one in the vicinity of the Black Horse Inn.

“I had a narrow escape that time,” the young sleuth told herself as she ran. “I hate to think what might have happened if I had been discovered!” She clutched the mantel clock more tightly in her arms. “But it was worth the risk I took! I found the clock and maybe the secret of Josiah Crowley’s will!”

Reaching the car, Nancy sprang inside. She took the key from her pocket and inserted it in the ignition lock.

“I’ll notify the police as fast as I can,” she decided. “Perhaps the state troopers can catch those men before they dispose of the furniture.”

Then, just as Nancy was about to start the motor, her glance fell upon the Crowley clock which she had placed on the seat beside her. Did it contain old Josiah’s mysterious notebook as she suspected?

“Oh, I must find out!” She got her flashlight.

Since the clock was too unwieldy to open inside the car, Nancy stepped out and laid it on the ground. She unfastened the glass door and ran her hand around the walls. There was nothing inside. She tried the back. Only the mechanism of the timepiece was there.

“Gone!” Nancy groaned. “Oh dear! Has my luck run out?”

Could it be, she wondered, that the Tophams had discovered the notebook only to destroy it? Nancy discarded this thought as quickly as it came to mind, for she recalled the conversation she had overheard between Ada and Isabel. No, the Tophams were as ignorant as herself concerning the location of a later will.

It was more likely that Abby Rowen had been confused in her story. After all, she had not declared that the notebook would be found inside the clock. Nancy herself had made the deduction.

“I was almost certain I’d find the notebook,” she murmured in disappointment. But a moment later she took heart again. “It must be here somewhere,” she told herself.

Turning the clock upside down, Nancy gave it a hard shake. Something inside moved. Hopefully she repeated the action.

“Unless I’m wrong,” Nancy thought excitedly, “there’s something inside this clock besides the works!” She examined it more closely. “An extra piece of cardboard back of the face! And something in between the two! The notebook maybe!”

After a vain attempt to remove the heavy cardboard face with her fingers, Nancy took a small screw driver from the glove compartment. With the tool it required but an instant to remove the two hands of the clock and jerk off the face.

As the cardboard fell to the floor, Nancy peered inside and gave a low cry of joy.

There, at one side of the clock, attached to a hook in the top, dangled a tiny dark-blue notebook!

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