

NANCY DREW MYSTERY STORIES®

*The Clue
of the
Tapping Heels*

BY CAROLYN KEENE

GROSSET & DUNLAP
Publishers • New York

A member of The Putnam & Grosset Group

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THE CLUE OF THE TAPPING HEELS

CHALLENGING questions confront Nancy Drew when she attempts to solve the mystery of the strange tapping sounds in the house of a retired actress. Who is the tapper? How does he gain access to Miss Carter's house, despite securely locked doors and windows? Why do the tapping sounds come in Morse code? Is there a sinister motive behind the prowler's actions?

While trying to learn the answers to these and other puzzling questions, Nancy finds her investigations complicated by the dishonest administrator of a will and by a thief who steals the actress's prize Persian cats.

How Nancy communicates with the ghostlike intruder by tap dancing in code, how she outwits the criminals wanted by the police, and how she brings happiness to Miss Carter in a romantic reunion with the actress's former leading man will thrill the lively young detective's host of fans.



Hopefully Nancy banged on the trap door

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Carolyn Keene, wrote the original NANCYDREW books

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CHAPTER I

Tap Code

TAP! TAP! TAP!

“Nancy,” said blond, pretty Bess Marvin, “that doesn’t sound like a regular tap dance.”

“It certainly doesn’t,” added George Fayne, a dark-haired, athletic girl, who was Bess’s cousin. “I could almost imagine it’s a code.”

“And you’d be right,” Nancy Drew replied with a broad grin.

The slender, titian-haired tap dancer stood in the center of the Drews’ basement recreation room. Her audience, besides Bess and George, was Mrs. Hannah Gruen, the kindly housekeeper. She had helped to rear Nancy since the death of Mrs. Drew when Nancy was three years old.

Mrs. Gruen said, “Nancy, why don’t you tell the girls about your new mystery? After all they’ve been invited to help solve it.”

“Another mystery?” Bess spoke up. “What’s this one?”

“It involves a strange tapper,” Nancy replied as she dropped into a chair. “Hannah has a friend named Mrs. Bealing. She’s a practical nurse. Recently she was called on a case over in Berryville to take care of a Miss Carter who broke her leg.”

“What does this have to do with tapping?” George interjected.

Hannah Gruen answered. “Mrs. Bealing is fed up with what’s going on at Miss Carter’s house. The woman lives alone and breeds Persian cats to sell. My friend didn’t bargain on feeding and taking care of a lot of cats. Now, to add to that, she has heard mysterious tapping sounds in the walls at night.”

“Ghosts?” George remarked.

“That’s what we’re supposed to find out,” Nancy replied. “Mrs. Bealing says the sounds are like tap dancing. The poor woman hasn’t had any time off and very little sleep. Miss Carter wants you and Bess and me to come out to relieve her and solve the mystery.”

“It sounds spooky,” said Bess, “and I don’t know a thing about taking care of Persian cats.”

“Cats are cats,” Mrs. Gruen stated.

“Well,” said Nancy, “would you girls like to go? Miss Carter wants us to visit her until we solve the mystery. You know, I’m to be in the Rivers Club play that’s being given for charity. We’re having rehearsals pretty often. I wouldn’t be able to stay in Berryville every night, but I could commute.”

Bess and George were eager to track down the tapper and said they would ask their parents for permission.

While Bess was telephoning upstairs, George said to Nancy, “You still haven’t explained about the

code tapping you were doing.”

Nancy laughed. “Recently I decided to study Morse code. I thought it would be fun to tap out messages with my heels.”

In a few moments Bess was back, smiling. “It’s all right for me to go. When do we start?”

“As soon as we can pack a few clothes,” Nancy answered.

After George had phoned her mother and was given a green light to work on the mystery, Nancy said she would pick the girls up at their homes in an hour. She telephoned her father at his law office to tell him of the plans.

“So you couldn’t resist the challenge of another mystery?” He laughed. “Best of luck, dear, and let me know if you need any help.”

Nancy and her father had always been very close and at times he asked her advice on some of his cases. On other occasions, like this one, a mystery had come to her directly.

Berryville, a small suburban community not far from River Heights where Nancy lived, was filled with cars and shoppers.

“Miss Carter’s home is about half a mile from Main Street,” Nancy said. “Girls, watch for Amity Place.”

A minute later they saw the sign and turned down the tree-shaded street. Flowers bloomed in every yard.

“Look for number thirty-two,” Nancy requested.

They had almost reached it when without warning she slammed on the brakes. Bess and George swung forward on the front seat of the convertible.

“What—?” Bess began.

Then she saw why Nancy had stopped so abruptly. An exquisite Persian kitten was wobbling slowly across the road!

“Oh!” Bess cried out. “I’m glad you didn’t hit the poor thing. Isn’t it darling?”

“I wonder if it belongs to Miss Carter,” Nancy replied. “In any case I think we’d better pick up the kitten and take it to her.”

She parked the car at the curb and jumped out. As Nancy cuddled the tiny animal, it seemed content and fell asleep at once.

“It’s precious!” Bess exclaimed, stroking the titian ball of fluff.

The three girls went up the front walk and rang the bell of the colonial brick house. A plump, white-haired woman opened the door.

“Hello, Mrs. Bealing,” said Nancy and introduced her friends.

“I’m so glad you came,” the nurse said. “Things are so spooky around this place. Why, where did you get that kitten, Nancy?”

When she heard that it had been found in the roadway, Mrs. Bealing declared the little creature

must be one of Miss Carter's valuable cats. "We'll carry it upstairs and ask her."

The house had a center hallway with wide doorways to adjoining rooms. The furnishings were a pleasant conglomerate of antique and modern pieces. Draperies and fiberglass curtains hung at each window.

Miss Carter sat in a cheerful, sunny bedroom. She was slight in build with gray hair and bright laughing brown eyes. She welcomed the girls cordially with both hands from a couch. Her right leg was in a cast. A wheel chair stood nearby.

"You were so good to come," she said, and added with a trilly little laugh, "Oh, have you brought me a kitten?"

Nancy shook her head and explained where she had found the animal. "I thought perhaps it belonged to you."

Miss Carter took the kitten on her lap. "Why, I believe this is one of mine," she said quickly. "But how in the world did it get out of the locked garage and caged area where I keep my pets?"

Though she had not been downstairs in weeks, Miss Carter insisted upon going out to her back yard to investigate. Nancy and George carried the frail woman to the first floor, and Bess brought the wheel chair downstairs.

The first floor was on ground level so there was no difficulty in wheeling Miss Carter across the rear lawn toward the garage. On the way she explained that after purchasing the house she had had no money left to build a cattery for the Persians.

"But my pets seem to be content to sleep on hay on the floor of the garage or up on shelves around the walls. A friend gave me several Persians and thought I might breed them. They do sell for good prices."

By this time they had reached the garage. The big double front doors were locked as well as the entrance door on the right side.

Attached to the left wall of the building was a large cage stretching parallel to the lawn. Several beautiful reddish-haired Persians were strolling about inside.

"They're gorgeous!" Bess burst out.

Miss Carter smiled. "My pets like to sun themselves. They come out of the garage through the doorway that leads into the cage."

Mrs. Bealing handed Nancy the key to the side door. "Open it carefully," she warned, "so none of the cats can get out."

They all went inside. At once several red Persians leaped outside to the wire enclosure.

"They're really not unfriendly," Miss Carter explained, "just wary of strangers." She began to count her pets.

There was silence for a couple of minutes, then she announced, "Five of them have been stolen!"

"How dreadful!" Nancy exclaimed. "Miss Carter, does that count include the kitten we found on the road?"

“No, that makes one more. Let me see the kitten again.”

Mrs. Bealing handed it over. The little Persian was still sound asleep and to everyone’s horror did not respond to its mistress’s cajoling to wake up.

“This kitten acts as if it has been drugged,” Miss Carter said. “Nancy, what do you think?”

Although Nancy had demonstrated her powers as an amateur detective upon many occasions, she had never been asked so soon after accepting a case for an explanation to yet another mystery. Nevertheless, she hazarded a guess.

“Perhaps the thief who took the five larger cats tried to take the kitten also and drugged them all. The man must have dropped this little fellow.”

“Then that means the thief wasn’t here very long ago,” Miss Carter remarked. “Otherwise the kitten would have gone farther away.” The others agreed.

Nancy offered to telephone the police and within ten minutes Detective Keely arrived. He and the girls looked for clues to the thief but found none.

“That kitten does act as if it has been drugged,” the officer said. “Suppose I take it along and have a veterinarian examine the little fellow.”

After Keely had gone, Miss Carter was taken into the house and Mrs. Bealing started preparations for supper. While waiting, Miss Carter told the girls a little about Persian cats.

“In this country most of the so-called Persians are a crossbreed of Persian and Angora. However, the cats resemble their Persian ancestors more than they do the Angora. You probably noticed that most cats have short, compact bodies and a ruff around their necks.”

Bess nodded and giggled. “And I love their little round heads, stubby noses, small ears and bushy tails.”

During supper Miss Carter said she was worried that the thief might return for more of her cats.

“Suppose I sleep in the garage,” George offered. “I don’t mind a bit, and nothing would please me more than to catch that thief!”

Bess spoke up. “I’m not going to let you stay out there alone. If you sleep in the garage, I will too.”



“Five cats have been stolen!” Miss Carter announced

“You won’t mind if I don’t join you?” Nancy asked. “I’d better stay in the house and try to catch the tapper.”

“Good idea,” said George. Later she and Bess carried cots and bedding to the garage and the two girls took up their vigil. Miss Carter had already been put to bed. Mrs. Bealing had said good night to the others and gone to her room.

Nancy remained on the first floor. She was too excited to sleep and wondered if the tapper would make a visit to the house that night.

“I think I’ll stay right here in the living room and listen for a while,” she decided.

One by one Nancy put out the lights, turned off the TV, and curled up in a big chair to wait. Half an hour went by. Nancy finally became drowsy. She was about ready to give up her watch when she suddenly was aroused by tapping sounds. They seemed to be coming from directly beneath her feet!

Nancy’s pulse started to race. Was the mysterious tapper in the basement?

CHAPTER II

Animal Uproar

NANCY sat tense, her mind in a quandary. Should she investigate the basement at once?

“I’d better not go alone,” Nancy thought. She was tempted to awaken Mrs. Bealing to accompany her but decided against disturbing her.

Nancy had noticed that the tapping sounds were uneven. It occurred to her that possibly they were code. She could not translate any of the tapping sounds into words, but on a hunch she stood up, crossed to a bare spot on the floor, and in Morse code tapped out:

“Who are you?”

There was no answer. Nancy waited two minutes before moving. There was not a sound from the basement. Had the tapper left?

Nancy dashed from window to window and looked to see if anyone were hurrying from Miss Carter’s. Nobody was in sight.

“That tapper must be in the house still,” she concluded.

Although certain that the door from the kitchen to the basement was locked, Nancy went to make doubly sure. The bolt was in place.

She returned to her listening post and sat in the chair for another hour. There was no recurrence of the tapping, so finally Nancy decided to go to bed.

“Tomorrow morning Bess and George and I can investigate the basement thoroughly.”

She was just dozing off when a shriek from outdoors awakened her. Nancy rushed to the window of her room, which was in the back of the house. All the lights in the garage were on and she could hear excited voices.

Wondering what had happened, Nancy grabbed her robe and slippers and hurried into the hall. Even this time the disturbance had started a couple of dogs in the neighborhood barking.

The din had awakened both Miss Carter and Mrs. Bealing. The nurse rushed into the hall demanding to know what was going on.

“I don’t know,” Nancy said as she dashed past the woman and down the back stairs. Mrs. Bealing followed her.

When Nancy opened the outside kitchen door, she saw a man running across the back yard of the house next door. It was too dark to distinguish his features, but he seemed to be rather short and stocky.

Nancy raced after him. By the time she reached the neighbor’s driveway onto which he had turned

he was out of sight. The young sleuth went all the way to the street but saw no one. Not a car was parked nor was one leaving the area. Nancy turned back.

“I wonder if he could have been the mysterious tapper at Miss Carter’s,” she thought. “I wish I had a better look at him.”

When Nancy reached the garage, Bess and George were telling Mrs. Bealing what had happened.

“I didn’t dream it,” Bess was saying excitedly. “That side door to the garage was locked but I heard it squeak. When I looked that way, it was being pushed open.”

George took up the story. “I was asleep, but when Bess shrieked, I woke up and turned on the light and saw the door opening. But slowly it closed and the lock snapped shut.”

How had the intruder managed to open it? Had he jimmied the lock? Nancy wondered. A quick glance revealed it had not been tampered with. She concluded that the stranger must have used a skeleton key!

“Did you see anyone?” Nancy asked.

Bess and George shook their heads, and George said, “There was such a commotion among the cats we didn’t have a chance to hunt for whoever tried to get in here.”

“I think maybe I saw him,” Nancy told her and explained. “Since I lost track of him so soon, he must have scooted around some other houses and disappeared.”

The animal uproar continued. Two dogs came bounding into the Carter yard and yelped at the cats in the wire enclosure. The Persians in turn arched their backs and hissed at the tormentors.

“Get out of here!” George shouted at the dogs.

One of them slunk away but the other became defiant. He clawed at the wire cage, and when George rushed outside and tried to yank him away by his collar, he turned and would have sunk his teeth into her arm if she had not pulled it away in time.

Meanwhile, Nancy had found the garden hose. She turned it on and aimed the stream of water at the angry dog. For a few seconds he caught the water in his mouth as if playing with it, then gave up the fight and ran off.

The excited cats refused to settle down. Some had scooted up the sides of the enclosure and were clinging to it. Others had dashed into the garage and hidden under any available object.

Mrs. Bealing was wringing her hands. “I don’t think we’ll ever get these animals quieted down,” she said. “Perhaps I should bring Miss Carter out here.”

“That’s a good idea,” Bess agreed. “I’ll help you.”

As soon as Miss Carter arrived she began to call each Persian by name.

“Don’t be so naughty, Abatha,” she said to one.

The ball of fluff clinging to the top of the cage disengaged itself and climbed toward her.

“Come down here, Rosemond,” she told another, and it obeyed instantly. The girls were amused by the names and amazed that the woman had such good control over the cats.

“She just loves them,” Bess whispered to Nancy. “I should think she’d hate to sell any of her

darlings.”

At that moment they heard a shout from the house next door. A second-floor window was raised and a man stuck his head out.

“What are you trying to do?” he thundered. “Miss Carter, don’t you know people around here want to sleep? I’m not going to put up with those cats of yours any longer! I’ve stood them for six months!”

“I’m dreadfully sorry about what happened,” Miss Carter called to him. “It wasn’t the cats’ fault. Someone tried to break into the garage and that upset them.”

“What’s that got to do with the dogs?” the man shouted.

“I’m sure it won’t happen again, Mr. Bunce,” Miss Carter assured him.

“That’s a lot of talk!” the man exclaimed. “You’re not going to get away with this. I’ve told you before to get rid of the cats.”

Miss Carter looked worried. She said to Nancy, “This is the first disturbance we’ve had.”

The conversation, which was too low for Mr. Bunce to hear, seemed to anger the man. “What are you conniving now?” he cried angrily. “Whatever it is, it won’t do you any good!”

Bess stared at the man in disgust. “What a creep he is!” she whispered.

Mr. Bunce continued his tirade. “I’ll tell you, Miss Carter, what I’m going to do—inform the authorities these cats are a nuisance and a menace, and I’ll see to it that you get rid of them at once. He slammed the window shut.

Miss Carter had turned ash white. In a tremulous voice she said, “I love my cats and selling the brings me a nice livelihood, which I need. Mr. Bunce will ruin my business!”

Another thought occurred to Nancy. If Miss Carter should decide to move away, the mystery of the stolen cats and the tapper might never be solved. She was determined to clear up both mysteries so this could not happen.

CHAPTER III

Actor's Surprise

ALTHOUGH Bess was a bit fearful she agreed to spend the rest of the night in the garage with George.

"It's very comfortable here," she admitted, "and cooler than inside the house."

Mrs. Bealing made lemonade for the group, then they all went back to bed. At breakfast time Miss Carter insisted upon coming downstairs to the table.

Nancy said to her, "Do you think Mr. Bunce really intends to make trouble?"

Miss Carter shook her head. "He's hot-tempered but I'm sure his bark is worse than his bite. Let's forget him and concentrate on finding the tapper in this house."

"I'm afraid," said Nancy, "that I can't play detective tonight. I must go home for a rehearsal. And there's another one tomorrow night."

"Oh dear!" Mrs. Bealing spoke up. "Bess and George, do you have to go, too?"

"Well, n-o-o-o," Bess said after a pause, "but I hate to stay here without Nancy. I'm not much of a sleuth."

Miss Carter patted the girl's hand. "You were the one who saved my cats last night," she reminded Bess. "If you hadn't awakened, I might have lost several more of my prize Persians."

Flattery had its effect and Bess consented to stay if George would.

"I'm game," her cousin said.

Mrs. Bealing heaved a sigh. "I feel much better now. Thank you."

Miss Carter expressed interest in Nancy's rehearsal. "Is this for a concert or a play?"

"A play. I take the part of a dancer. I don't have many lines, but I do have three tap numbers."

Miss Carter leaned forward across the table. "Nancy, I'm terrifically interested. I used to be an actress myself." She looked off into space. "I loved it and felt sad when I had to retire."

Bess asked what plays Miss Carter had been in.

The actress named several and added, "My greatest role was in *The Dancer and the Fool*. I played the part of the dancer. You know, I believe that with a few changes that play could be modernized and produced right now."

She asked Nancy, "Have you ever thought seriously of going on the stage? You'd be perfect in the role I played."

Nancy laughed. Before she had a chance to answer, Bess said, "Nancy wouldn't give up her detective work for anything. Now and then she does other things, like this play, but she spends most of her time on the stage."

her time solving mysteries.”

Miss Carter smiled. As she was about to make a comment, the telephone rang. Mrs. Beal answered and said that the police wanted to speak to her patient. The actress was wheeled to the hall and picked up the phone.

She listened for a few minutes, then said, “Oh, the poor thing! That was wicked! ... Yes, I’ll send somebody to pick up the kitten. And how are we going to find the person who did this?” She went out to tell about the attempted intrusion the night before.

There was another long pause, then she said, “All right. I’ll sleep better if I know the police will stop here regularly on their rounds.”

When Miss Carter came back to the table she reported that laboratory tests had shown that the “sleepy” kitten had indeed been drugged. There was no doubt now in anyone’s mind that the thief who had taken the five older cats had also drugged them.

“I’ll be glad to run over and get the kitten,” Bess said.

“I’d certainly appreciate it if you would,” Miss Carter said.

During Bess’s absence, Nancy and George went to the basement hoping to find a clue that would explain the reason for the tapping sounds. Nancy carried a flashlight in her left hand, a small hammer in her right. The girls found the two small windows and outside door bolted shut.

“First, let’s look directly under that chair where I was sitting last night,” she suggested.

George was carrying a small stepladder. She set it in place and Nancy climbed up. Seeing nothing suspicious, she tapped lightly with the hammer to detect any hollow spots.

“It all sounds the same to me,” George commented. “Do you think the mysterious tapper was hunting for some secret hiding place in the ceiling of the basement?”

Nancy shrugged. “I haven’t the faintest idea,” she replied. “I have been wondering, though, whether or not he and the fellow who broke into the garage are the same man.”

She explained that this possibility had occurred to her because there had been such a short interval between the two mysterious events.

“Frankly,” Nancy went on, “I’m amazed that he would dare make so much noise with people in the house.”

“Maybe,” George speculated, “he wants to be thought of as a ghost and scare everyone away.”

“He won’t succeed,” Nancy declared. “Well, let’s get on with our investigation.”

The two girls made a minute search of the ceiling, side walls, and floor. They found no indication of an opening in the paneled walls or in the cement floor.

“Perhaps,” said George, “the tapper is a nut and just comes here to have fun scaring people.”

“I’m sure there’s more to it than that,” Nancy replied.

By the time she and George went upstairs, Bess had returned with the kitten. They all patted the little animal, which had recovered completely and was very frisky.

Miss Carter had been taken to her bedroom, so the pet was carried up there. She fondled the kitten

lovingly, then asked Mrs. Bealing to put it out in the garage.

The nurse went off. As she descended the stairway, the front doorbell rang. The others heard her open the door but almost instantly close it again. Then she carried the kitten out the back door before returning to the second floor.

“Who rang the bell?” Miss Carter asked her.

Mrs. Bealing smiled. “A tall, handsome gray-haired man. Too bad he had the wrong house. He wanted to know if a Miss Violette lived here.”

“What!” Miss Carter exclaimed. “Oh, find him! Find him! He wants me! I’m Miss Violette!”

The others stared at the actress and finally Mrs. Bealing said, “I’m sorry. You never told me your name was Miss Violette.”

Tears came to Miss Carter’s eyes. She opened a bureau drawer and pulled out a picture.

“He’s the one,” Mrs. Bealing said. “Only he’s older looking now.”

Miss Carter cried out, “He was the man who played the part of the fool in the play I told you about. He and I were going to be married and through an odd circumstance we became separated and now I’ve lost him again!”

Instantly Nancy sprang into action. “We’ll try to find him for you, Miss Carter. Did he have a car?” Mrs. Bealing?”

“Yes, a bright-red convertible.”

As the three girls dashed down the steps, Bess said, “Oh, isn’t this romantic and exciting!”

Suddenly it occurred to Nancy that they did not know the man’s name and she hurried back upstairs to find out. “He’s Toby Simpson,” Miss Carter told her.

“Which way did he go, Mrs. Bealing?” Nancy asked quickly.

“Toward Main Street.”

By the time Nancy reached the car, Bess had it running. She slid over and Nancy got behind the wheel. The convertible sped down Amity Place. When it reached the intersection of Main Street, Nancy stopped and the girls looked in both directions.

“I see a bright-red convertible!” George said, pointing to the right.

Nancy drove as fast as she dared. The car she was chasing had the top down. The man at the wheel was threading his way expertly through the traffic.

“Oh, we mustn’t lose him!” Bess urged.

Nancy was doing her best to catch up with the gray-haired Toby Simpson, but as she came to a signal light, it turned red. The convertible had gone ahead and was making good speed.

The girls chafed under the delay and the instant the light became green Nancy shot ahead. By now the chase was hopeless. Toby Simpson and his car had disappeared, and though the girls rode up and down various streets, they could not find the red convertible.

Bess sighed. “What luck! Mr. Simpson has probably gone out of town, never to return. Poor Mi

Carter!”

When the girls gave Miss Carter the disappointing news, the actress sighed deeply. Apparently she did not want to discuss the unfortunate happening and changed the subject.

“Did you detectives find anything in the basement?” she asked.

“No,” Nancy replied, “but this afternoon I want to look around the second floor and up in your attic.”

Mrs. Bealing revealed that she had heard muffled tapping sounds from the third floor.

“Then let’s go up there first,” George proposed.

Miss Carter said with a smile, “Don’t be too surprised at what you find.”

The three girls were not prepared for the amazing assortment of objects stored in the attic. Evidently Miss Carter had collected souvenirs from various plays in which she had appeared. There were chests, a battered white wooden horse, forms with costumes on them and covered with plastic bags, and a mummy case standing upright.

“O-oh, this place gives me the creeps,” Bess remarked. “I could almost imagine some of the figures coming to life.”

Nancy suggested that the girls separate and each hunt for a clue to the tapper or to what he might be looking for.

It was not long before Nancy found a crossbeam in a side wall which, she thought, was not necessary to the construction of the building. She tugged at it and presently the beam came away. One part of the underside had been hollowed out into a square and the lack of dust in the empty space indicated that something had recently been removed from it.

“A square box, I’m sure,” Nancy told herself.

She called Bess and George over and pointed out her discovery.

George remarked, “When Mrs. Bealing heard the tapper, he must have been hammering lightly on the beam to pull it loose. I wonder what was hidden in it.”

“We must find out who lived in this house before Miss Carter,” Nancy said. She glanced at her watch. “It’s getting late. I’ll have to leave in a few moments. Do you girls want to continue looking or come downstairs with me?”

Bess and George said they had had enough sleuthing for one day. Besides, they had promised to help feed the cats and give them fresh water.

When Nancy told Miss Carter about the movable beam, the actress was amazed. She had purchased the house from people named Smith who had not lived there long. A lawyer had attended to everything, and Miss Carter did not know who the previous owners were.

“But I’ll try to find out,” she said.

Nancy said good-bye to everyone and went to her car, which was parked in the driveway. As she pulled into the street and turned in the direction of River Heights, she noticed a black sedan behind her. It followed her down the street. When Nancy reached the highway out of town, the same car was

still behind her.

At first Nancy thought this was merely a coincidence, but as she rode along, it occurred to her that the man, whom she could not see very well, was deliberately following her. She went down a street to a new housing development, then turned, and came back to the main road. The other driver did the same.

“I’m sure now that he’s after me,” Nancy thought. “I’d better not take any shortcuts or deserted roads.” She jammed on her brakes, so the trailing car came closer rather suddenly and she caught a glimpse of a pudgy, double-chinned man. He looked to be in his mid-twenties.

“I certainly don’t know him,” Nancy thought. “Could he be the tapper or the cat thief?”

She made a mental note of the license number of his car. “I’ll find out who he is!” she determined.

As they neared River Heights, the young detective decided that somehow she must shake her pursuer. She watched for an opportunity.

CHAPTER IV

Car Thief

INSTINCT told Nancy not to go directly home.

“No doubt that man behind me wants to find out where I live,” she said to herself. “Well, I won’t let him!”

She knew that anyone could find out from the license bureau who owned the car, but this would not necessarily prove that the driver was also the owner. Turning abruptly down a side street, she headed for a parking lot.

Nancy quickly found a spot, locked the convertible, and started making her way among the many parked cars. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw her pursuer looking vainly for her out of his window. She smiled that her ruse had worked, then headed for her father’s office.

“I’ll tell Dad what happened and get his advice about this.”

To avoid detection Nancy rode in the elevator to a floor above, and walked down one flight to Mr. Drew’s office.

“If that pudgy man saw me come into the building, I guess he’s pretty confused by this time.”

Mr. Drew’s secretary, Miss Hanson, looked surprised but glad to see Nancy. “Hi!” she greeted her. “Something’s on your mind—I can see it in your eyes.”

Nancy laughed. “You’re right. I’ve just shaken off a man who was following me.”

Miss Hanson gasped. “How terrible! You did the right thing coming here. Your father has a client in his office but I think the man will be leaving any minute. Please sit down and tell me about your new mystery.”

Nancy had just started to explain when the door of her father’s office opened. Mr. Drew shook hands with his client, saying he would call him in a couple of days. Then he turned to Nancy.

“Hello, dear. Nice to see you, but I have a feeling this isn’t a social call.” His eyes twinkled.

When Nancy reported what had happened to her since leaving Miss Carter’s home, the lawyer frowned.

“I don’t like this,” he said. “As you said, the man can trace you. But we’ll even things up. I’ll call the license bureau right away to find out who this pudgy individual is and if he has tried to trace your license.”

Mr. Drew asked Miss Hanson to put in the call and soon he was talking to a man at the motor vehicle bureau. Within a short time he had his answer.

“The name of the owner is Barton Trask,” he told Nancy. “Barton is a friend of mine.... Mi

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