

The Secret of the Old Clock: Nancy Drew's Original Mystery

Based on the novel by Carolyn Keene

A play by Kristen Caldwell

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DEDICATION

For my mom, who showed me how to be like Nancy.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Meet the Nancy Drew audiences know and love: brave, independent, curious, and never afraid to challenge injustice. This one-hour stage adaptation brings the pioneering heroine to life as a determined young detective who trusts her instincts, champions the underdog, and refuses to accept that “the way things are” is good enough. When Josiah Crowley’s missing will threatens to strip a deserving family of their rightful inheritance, Nancy is drawn into a tangled mystery involving would-be heirs, long-buried secrets, and a community full of suspects. What follows is a clever, fast-moving puzzle that keeps audiences guessing while delivering plenty of humor, heart, and satisfying twists. This adaptation offers an inviting introduction to live mystery theater while giving longtime Nancy Drew fans a fresh opportunity to see their favorite detective take the stage.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The show was first produced at Portland Christian Jr/Sr High School in Portland, Oregon, on May 20 and 21, 2026, and included the following cast and crew:

Nancy Drew - Willa Covey	Thief 2 - Jonathan Withrow
Carson Drew - Enoch Vice	Thief 3 - Kaden Kirkwood
Hannah Gruen - Emrie Thompson	Jeff Tucker - Mason Smith
Helen Corning - Cielle Swenson	Bank Manager - Piper Curtis
Miss Miller - Elizabeth Andresi	Attorney - Kaden Kirkwood
Isabel Topham - Saige Fisher	Sheriff McGinnis - Isaac Anderson
Ada Topham - Colette Drechsler	Artie - Mason Smith
Saleswoman - Corra Miller	Deputy Patrick - Jonathan Withrow
Salesman - Kaden Kirkwood	Director - Kristen Caldwell
Butler - Isaac Anderson	Asst. Director/ Stage Manager -
Mrs. Topham - Ainara Colón-Collazo	Yuriel Colón-Collazo
Grace Horner - Abigail Jemberu	Asst. Stage Manager - Corra Miller
Allie Horner - Sibrat Tunka	Lighting Tech - Karsten Lowe
Abigail Rowen - Joy Crisan	Sound Tech - Isaac Schroder
Thief 1 - Isaac Anderson	Sound Tech - Melody Singleterry

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 10 w, 7 flexible, extras, 3 optional m roles)

NANCY DREW: Girl detective, 16 (F)
MR. CARSON DREW: Nancy's father, a lawyer (M)
HANNAH GRUEN: Beloved housekeeper of the Drews (F)
HELEN CORNING: Nancy's classmate and dear friend, 16 (F)
MISS MILLER: Telephone operator (F)
ISABEL TOPHAM: The worst, until you meet her sister, 18 (F)
ADA TOPHAM: She's the worst, 17 (F)
SALESWOMAN: Frazzled, but friendly (F/M)
SALESMAN: Frazzled, but friendly (M/F)
TOPHAMS' BUTLER/ MAID (F/M)
MRS. TOPHAM: The snobbish mother of Ada and Isabel (F)
GRACE HORNER: Kindly heir to the Crowley fortune, 19 (F)
ALLIE HORNER: Grace's outgoing sister, 17 (F)
ABIGAIL ROWEN: Elderly; a relative of J. Crowley (F)
THIEF 1: Mean and in charge (F/M)
THIEF 2: A follower (F/M)
THIEF 3: Another follower (F/M)
JEFF TUCKER: Quaint country man; recently drugged (M)
BANK MANAGER: By the book... mostly (F/M)
TOPHAMS' ATTORNEY (M)

*Optional scene and characters

SHERIFF MCGINNIS: Sheriff of River Heights
ARTIE: Owns the hardware store in River Heights
DEPUTY PATRICK: Law enforcement officer in River Heights

Extras with no scripted lines

3-5 Girls at the Moon Lake Camp for Girls
3-5 Shoppers at the dress shop

Casting Note: Since the Nancy Drew story is rooted in the lived experiences of growing up as a woman, Nancy should be played by a person who presents as female. Any other characters could be played by an actor of any gender. Simply changing a few pronouns and identifiers would adapt the script to work this way. The camp scene and the shop scene will benefit from extras. You can double actors from other scenes for these parts.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Staging

For the sake of pacing, this script has quite a few scene changes. The 1930 novel includes many short, plot-driven chapters; light on descriptive detail and heavy on clues. This play is the same. We kept it light, using furniture on wheels, and live set changes whenever possible. If you have a stage that is large enough, area staging could be used. With a little imagination, even a bare stage and rehearsal blocks could be used very effectively.

The Car

We had fun coming up with a way to show that Nancy drove around town and knew her way around a car without actually showing a car. Our solution was a combination of lighting and sound effects. We used narrow beam flood lights clamped to a rolling cart. The "headlights" shone on the back curtain briefly when the car was in action. The effect was like the roadster was rolling up and parking. Antique car sounds completed the effect. However, this is not necessary. Nancy and Helen, wearing driving goggles and scarves at a few entrances, would work perfectly well and not necessitate any effects.

The Closet

It is important that Nancy is seen by the audience during her bungalow closet monologue. To create the effect of Nancy locked in a closet, we placed a rolling door unit stage left at an angle and had the robbers open the door and push her behind it. The audience could easily see Nancy on the other side of the door. A pantomimed door, lighting effects, sound effects or a combination of these could also be used in place of a door unit.

Scene 1 - Opening Scene

(AT RISE: The Drew house living room. NANCY and MR. DREW are sitting on the sofa next to each other. Mr. Drew looks comfortable reading his evening paper. Nancy, also reading a section of the paper, sighs loudly. Mr. Drew peeks at Nancy over his paper, then goes back to reading. Nancy grunts in frustration from behind her paper. She lowers her paper a bit and looks at Mr. Drew. He is reading.)

NANCY: *(From behind her paper.)* Ohhh...

(There is a beat. Simultaneously, NANCY and MR. DREW pull their papers to their laps. Mr. Drew, with a knowing "what is it this time?" smirk. Nancy, with a serious, "something must be done about this" scowl.)

MR. DREW: What's the trouble, Nancy? You've been having a full conversation with that paper for the last five minutes.

NANCY: It's this business with old Josiah Crowley's will! Did you read that the Topham family is to inherit his money?!

MR. DREW: Yes.

NANCY: And?

MR. DREW: And?

NANCY: And I think if those snobbish Tophams fall heir to all of Josiah Crowley's fortune, they will become even less bearable than they are now. Can't something be done about it?

(MR. DREW removes his horn-rimmed spectacles and carefully folds the paper. He regards NANCY with patience.)

MR. DREW: I'm afraid not, Nancy. A will is a will, you know.

(HANNAH, their housekeeper, enters to tidy the room. She is not a maid, but a motherly caretaker of Nancy and Mr. Drew.)

NANCY: But it does seem unfair that all the money should go to them. Especially when they never treated Josiah Crowley like a human being!

MR. DREW: The Tophams were never noted for their charitable dispositions. *(Smiles.)* But they did give Josiah a home.

HANNAH: Only because they knew he was going to leave all his money to them. If I'd been Josiah, I wouldn't have stayed there.

NANCY: Folks say they treated him like a prince until he made his will in their favor, and then they acted as though he were dirt under their feet.

MR. DREW: The Tophams aren't very well-liked in our little city, are they?

NANCY: Who could like them, Father? Richard Topham is an old skinflint who made his money by gambling in the stock exchange. And Cora, his wife, never has a kind word. The two girls, Isabel and Ada, are even worse.

HANNAH: I will say that I do not like the way old Josiah Crowley was treated, and it is true that that is what most people say of the Tophams, but Nancy, you mind yourself and do not gossip.

MR. DREW: Hannah is right, Nancy.

NANCY: It's just too infuriating! He was a kindly old gentleman, even if he was a bit odd.

HANNAH: You would be odd, too, had you lived in his shoes, Nancy. Josiah's wife died during the influenza epidemic following the World War, and since that time, Crowley made his home with various relatives. Although he was well-to-do, he preferred not to live alone.

MR. DREW: I don't think the Tophams knew he was rich at first. He stayed with poor relatives, and I heard he had planned to make his will in their favor.

NANCY: That's when the Tophams experienced a sudden change of heart.

HANNAH: He quickly learned what the Tophams were like. It was whispered that he frequently slipped away to visit his old friends and relatives and that he intended to change his will again, cutting the Tophams out entirely.

MR. DREW: I believe he took to his bed suddenly. Dr. Waterly told me that he tried to communicate something just before his death, but that his words were unintelligible. After the funeral, only one will came to light, and to the surprise of everyone, it gave the entire fortune to the Tophams.

NANCY: What do you suppose he was trying to tell the doctor just before he died? *(A beat.)* Do you imagine he was trying to disclose something about his will?

MR. DREW: Yes, that's a possibility, of course. Josiah Crowley was a bit strange in many ways.

NANCY: Perhaps he hid the will somewhere.

HANNAH: If he did, I'm afraid it would never come to light. The Tophams will see to that.

NANCY: What do you mean?

HANNAH: The fortune is large, dear. Can you imagine Mr. Topham would allow a cent of it to go to anyone else?

NANCY: Do you mean that if they discover another will, they would destroy it?

MR. DREW: We're not making any accusations, Nancy. But I do know that Richard Topham is shrewd, and he isn't noted for his honesty.

NANCY: Can't the present will be broken?

MR. DREW: I doubt it.

NANCY: The Tophams don't deserve the fortune. It just doesn't seem fair.

MR. DREW: No, it isn't fair. But it is legal.

HANNAH: There are two girls who live down on river road that were great favorites of Crowleys when they were children. It seems to me that they should have had something, and there may be other relatives who deserve a portion of the fortune.

NANCY: Father, do you believe Josiah Crowley made a second will?

MR. DREW: You sound like a trial lawyer, the way you cross-examined me. To tell the truth, Nancy, I don't know what to think, but I did see Mr. Crowley at the office of Henry Ralsted.

HANNAH: Isn't he an attorney?

MR. DREW: Yes, and he specializes in wills and other estate matters.

NANCY: Oh! That looks as though Mr. Crowley had made a new will, doesn't it? But why didn't Mr. Ralsted say something?

MR. DREW: Well, just meeting with a lawyer doesn't mean you've made a new will, Nancy.

HANNAH: And even if he had, the old man might have changed his mind and torn it up.

NANCY: Father, won't you please ask Mr. Ralsted if he drew up a will for Mr. Crowley, or knows anything that might solve this mystery?

MR. DREW: That's a rather delicate question, young lady. He may tell me it's none of my business!

NANCY: Will you do it? Will you ask Mr. Ralsted? Please!

MR. DREW: Why the sudden interest in this case, Nancy?

NANCY: Oh, I don't know. A mystery always interests me, I guess, and it does seem to me that someone ought to help those poor relatives.

MR. DREW: I suppose I could invite Mr. Ralsted to have lunch with me tomorrow.

NANCY: That would be a splendid opportunity to find out what he knows about a later will.

(The scene transitions smoothly from the living room to the kitchen. NANCY and HANNAH appear to walk through one room into another. Preferably, the living room is DS and the kitchen is US, perhaps behind a curtain or movable set of flats that can be peeled away.)

Scene 2 - Advice from Hannah

HANNAH: What are your plans for this morning, Nancy?

NANCY: I thought I'd do a little shopping this morning. Do you have any errands for me?

HANNAH: Yes, dear. I'll make you a list. Nancy, I've been thinking about this mystery of yours. I know you made enemies with those two Topham sisters at school. They've always been jealous of you.

NANCY: I think you're right. If it weren't for loyal friends like Helen, Ada and Isabel Topham would have made me miserable in school.

HANNAH: I think it's time for you to keep your friends close by your side, Nancy, unless you're willing to leave this mystery alone — and I know you're not.

NANCY: That's good advice, Hannah. I'll give Helen a phone call.

HANNAH: Here's my list of errands. And good luck with your detective work. *(SHE hands NANCY a list.)*

NANCY: Thanks, Hannah.

(NANCY gives HANNAH a hug.)

HANNAH: Whatever you do, Nancy, beware of those Topham sisters. They'd be only too happy to make things difficult for you.

NANCY: I promise to be on my guard.

HANNAH: Good. *(Begins to exit and doubles back.)* Oh, Nancy, don't forget your father is going to telephone after his luncheon with Mr. Ralsted. He said he'd ring you here at 1:00.

NANCY: I won't forget. You're a peach, Hannah.

(HANNAH exits, and NANCY picks up the earpiece of the candlestick telephone and waits. LIGHTS up on OPERATOR DL.)

OPERATOR: *(In a melodic, practiced tone.)* Number, please?

NANCY: Get me nine-one-C, please.

OPERATOR: Nine-one-C. One moment, please.

(SFX: A series of metallic clicks and the faint sound of a plug being shoved into a wooden switchboard.)

OPERATOR: *(Cont'd.)* Connecting to nine-one-C.

NANCY: Thank you.

OPERATOR: Your party is answering...

(The line clicks open, and the LIGHTS fade on the OPERATOR.)

NANCY: Hello, Helen? Are you free later today?

(BLACKOUT.)

Scene 3 - Dress Shopping

(LIGHTS up on a boutique clothing shop. There is a side chair on each end of the "shop" and a changing screen near the SL wing. We see a rack or two of dresses and a mannequin wearing a party gown. A SALESWOMAN is helping one CUSTOMER, a SALESMAN is helping another group of CUSTOMERS. NANCY enters and peruses the party dresses. Before she notices ISABEL and ADA TOPHAM who are also in the store.)

ISABEL: We've been standing here for nearly 10 minutes.

SALESMAN: Thank you for your patience, ladies. As you can see we are very busy —

(SALESMAN exchanges a worried look with the SALESWOMAN and continues helping the CUSTOMERS he is already with. The saleswoman is nearest ADA and ISABEL.)

ADA: We demand to be helped immediately!

End of Freeview

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