

Wandering Through Nancy Drew: A Review of #68, The Elusive Heiress by Todd H. Latoski

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PLOT: Nancy must go to colorful Cheyenne, Wyoming to solve her latest mystery involving the missing daughter or aging millionaire, Arlo Winthrop. On the plane, Nancy and her friend Ned meet Jennifer Buckman, a lonely ten-year-old. When the plane lands in Cheyenne, the young detective faces another problem -- no one has come to meet Jennifer at the airport! Against the panorama and excitement of rodeos, parades, and a festive carnival, Nancy faces grave danger. Nearly fatal accidents involving an antique stagecoach and a bucking bull could prevent her from ever finding the long-awaited answers to the intriguing mysteries! (From the back cover.)

CHARACTERS:

Nancy Drew - everyone's favorite detective has an ominous dream that leads her into danger
Ned Nickerson - Nancy's boyfriend who accompanies her to Wyoming to help solve the mystery
Carson Drew - Nancy's father who follows a different lead in the same mystery to Canada
Jennifer Buckman - a ten year old little girl who is on her way to Wyoming to meet her mother
Lorna Buckman - Jennifer's mother who they discover to be missing upon their arrival
Grace Reed - an old friend of Nancy's mother with whom she and Ned stay during their trip
Arlo Winthrop - a millionaire who is seeking out his granddaughter before he dies
Clarinda Winthrop - the millionaire's granddaughter who has been missing for 40 years
Tom Matthews - the millionaire's nephew who has unsuccessfully searched for Clarinda
Joshua Webber - a friend of Grace Reed's who has some memory of a woman like Clarinda

REVIEW:

When Nancy is offered the chance to travel to Wyoming, to stay with her mother's old friend, Grace Reed, and to help her father find a missing heiress to the Winthrop fortune, she jumps at the chance. Plans change, however, when a mysterious telephone call sends Carson Drew to Canada to seek out clues to the whereabouts of Clarinda Winthrop, while Ned accompanies Nancy to Wyoming. At the River Heights Airport, Nancy and Ned are asked to accompany young Jennifer Buckman on the plane, as she is also going to Cheyenne to meet up with her mother, Lorna Buckman. Ned and Nancy readily agree, and on the plane trip, Nancy learns that Jennifer's mother was involved in an accident, so Jennifer was sent to a boarding school. The school received a call from Jennifer's mother asking for Jennifer to be returned home.

Upon arrival at the Cheyenne airport, however, Nancy and Ned are surprised to find that Jennifer's mother is nowhere to be found! Waiting instead are two suspicious-looking men

who are keeping an eye on Jennifer. Concerned for her safety, Ned and Nancy take the young girl with them back to Grace Reed's house. With Jennifer safe for the moment, Ned and Nancy visit Lorna Buckman's home - only to find no one there! After having no luck with the neighbors, they are prepared to return to Grace's home when Nancy notices a blue car drive by - one that she had seen before! Unable to get the license plate, the car eludes the two sleuths. They return without good news, and are informed that Grace has done some of her own sleuthing - calling the police, hospitals, hotels, and airports, but without any luck as well.

The next morning, Nancy and Ned take Jennifer to the Cheyenne Frontier Days Parade, and there Nancy is hopeful that another clue will aid in her search for Jennifer's parents - for Jennifer recognizes several children that belong to her pony club, and their parents may know where Jennifer's mother is! Before Nancy can investigate, however, hands from an unseen assailant shove her into the path of oncoming horses! Ned's quick action saves Nancy from certain harm, but Nancy is not concerned with herself at the moment! Jennifer! She and Ned race to find the child, when they hear someone cry out their names! As they round the corner, they see Jennifer being taken to a familiar blue car by a blond haired man. Jennifer begins kicking and screaming upon seeing Nancy and fortunately lands a kick on the man's knee, causing him to lose his grip on the girl. She struggles free and runs into Nancy's waiting arms. The man wastes no time in hopping in the car, which proceeds to take off!

Upon returning to Grace's home, Nancy's hopes are dashed further when none of the parents of Jennifer's Pony Club friends can offer any help as to Lorna Buckman's whereabouts. Further, she realizes that she hasn't even begun to work on her real reason for being in Cheyenne - to find Clarinda Winthrop! Fortunately for her, Grace has already schedule an appointment for her to meet Joshua Webber, an old-timer who may offer some assistance. Additionally, she is able to offer Nancy a place in the next parade riding in a stagecoach! Ned, meanwhile, will ride with Jennifer and her friends in the Pony Club to help keep an eye on her. But none of the news is able to calm her fears regarding her father, who has failed to call her from Canada as he promised. She goes to bed wondering what could have happened to him! The next morning, however, her concerns grow more when she talks to Hannah Gruen back home who informs her that she has not heard from him. When Nancy attempts to track down his hotel, she is greeted by a harsh man on the other end, who informs her that her father is unavailable and he will call back, then breaks the connection! Not too long after, she finally receives a call from her father - who is not only distant with her, but very abrupt and offers no explanations as to his strange behavior!

Matters grow worse when, after a day at the rodeo on the next day, they return to Grace's home to find that someone has been there! And Grace's dog had been let outside, only to return with a threatening note warning her to leave Cheyenne or someone will be hurt! More determined than ever, Nancy sets out to solve both mysteries set before her! She makes headway with the Clarinda Winthrop case the next day when Joshua Webber recognizes the girl in the photograph of Clarinda - only he knew her as Lindy Thorpe! It seems she married a young man named Leroy Caitlin, but a scandal involving a bank robbery occurred nearly thirty years ago, and they left town never to be seen again! Not discouraged, Nancy now has names to work with and has a greater hope of finding the missing heiress. But when she calls her father in Canada, the man rudely tells her that Carson Drew checked out that very morning! Nancy now is certain something is amiss regarding her father, but what is she to do?

The stakes are high as Nancy finds herself in danger at every turn! A runaway stagecoach, a warning in the carnival midway, an unfinished note by Jennifer's mother found in the Buckman home, unexpected clues from the man who helped the Caitlins' leave Cheyenne 30 years ago, a desperate escape from a charging bull, a rushed kidnapping, a daring rescue, and a sudden trip to Canada all lead Nancy and Ned to not only uncover the whereabouts of Jennifer's mother, but to find the long-lost heiress of the Winthrop fortune, to rescue Nancy's father from the hands of criminals, and to reveal the identity of the mastermind behind it all! Nancy once again proves that no mystery can elude her for long!

PERSONAL THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS:

This book was an enjoyable mystery, but I do notice a definite pattern in the Wanderers (and perhaps this is also the case in the original 56 as well, but I don't recall it as much). It seems that each book has Nancy embroiled in two separate mysteries that coincidentally end up being connected and part of the same mystery. Talk about amazing luck on her part that every time she is trying to solve one mystery, another falls into her lap that appears unrelated but ultimately leads her to solving the first mystery!

As in the *Sinister Omen* (#67), there is another reference to Nancy's ancestry. In Chapter One, when Nancy is wondering where she will stay when she goes to Wyoming to help her father on the case, he asks her if she remembers Grace Reed, to which Nancy replies, "Of course. She's an old friend of Mother's from before you and she were married." Apparently Nancy's mother and Grace Reed had been best friends. Then, in Chapter Two, when Ned and Nancy arrive at Mrs. Reed's house, she remarks to Nancy, "Don't you look more like your mother every day?" Still, however, no mention is made of Nancy's mother's name.

Another interesting fact - when Nancy goes to call Hannah about her father, she is able to call early in the morning because she knows that there is a *two hour time difference* between Cheyenne and River Heights. This would put River Heights in the Eastern Standard Time zone (which would negate Illinois or Iowa as choices for the state in which River Heights is located - at least, for this book!).

These paperbacks are not the original texts - they may not be as rich in details and the characters may not be as multidimensional, but the stories are entertaining and original, and the cover style and the art are definitely high standard. Give them a chance - start "wander-ing" through these first Nancy Drew paperbacks - you might just find you like them!