

BESS MARVIN AS ALWAYS revered autumn in her hometown of River Heights. Something about the cooler weather and the fallen leaves scurrying about on the ground, a time causing her to feel a bit melancholy for no apparent reason that she could think of, seemingly not to mind. Despite how the season made her feel she liked the fashions displayed in downtown shop windows. About this time per usual, Bess's father would give her an inconceivably large clothing allowance permitting her to indulge on her outfits.

Coming from a shopping trip and sitting in the backseat of Nancy Drew's sedan, she looked up from her reverie to become aware of how late it was getting. Peering out the window, she witnessed the Muskoka River turning a murky purple in the dusky evening light.

"Come on Ned, are you almost finished?" Bess called worriedly.

From in front of the hindered automobile and under the open hood, a muffled response made its way to her ears. With Nancy holding a flashlight, George Fayne and Ned Nickerson were fixing the problem. The three were tinkering with battery cables.

Presently, Nancy came around the car, climbed into the driver's seat and inserted the ignition key. "Wish me luck!" she said.

The girl detective turned the key, and nothing happened. The young friends became alarmed at once, and then suddenly the battery started to click and within a second began turning the starter motor. The engine roared to life, garnering a weighty and audible sigh of relief from the entire group. Ned quickly shut the hood.

"Hurry... Get in!" George virtually screamed over her shoulder at Ned, speeding to the back seat. The two scrambled hastily to get inside and as the last door slammed, Nancy pushed the power locks for an ambiance of protection.

The passengers were eager for Nancy to put the shifter in drive when they noticed her peering acutely out the windshield. Her three friends dreadfully followed her gaze seeing with foreboding what spectacle could hold the young sleuth so spellbound. A lone pine tree's top branch by some means unimaginable, selfishly coveted a last and solitary splinter of crimson sunlight-- an austere contrast to the dark and shadowy woods surrounding this dismal and isolated stretch of River Road. *Less than a minute's turn and the sun would be utterly below the horizon!*

"Let's go Nancy!" Bess cried out. Approaching hysterics and looking out the back window she said, "The sun is about gone. They will be coming, if not already!"

Nancy sprang into action putting the auto in drive and suddenly causing the wheels to spin while kicking up gravel, almost miring the sedan. Everyone was in such a state of

terror, they were now grateful the vehicle was finally moving! The young people kept their eyes peeled looking intently out all sides. There was not much to see now; everything pitch black except the road ahead, brightly lit by the headlights of the automobile. The young friends would not be out past dark this night, had the stalling of the automobile not delayed them.

"I don't see any." Ned said unsteadily, turning his head to look out of as many windows as possible. Apparently, to the others he was trying to sound calm though obviously very tense. "I hope the car doesn't break down again. Somehow, we'll make it!"

"I wonder why we don't see some of them." George solicited impatiently. She took up the vigil to survey out the back window, given that Bess anxiously sat low in her seat to avoid looking outside. "The sun is completely down, we could see some pretty soon!"

"Cousin, please! I'm petrified enough already," Bess wailed. Though she tried to avert her gaze from the windows, she could not help peeking out.

"OK, everyone, please try to stay calm!" Nancy staunchly interposed when it became obvious someone had to take a hold of the situation. "We need to think as clearly as possible and not let our fear get a grip on us. There are a few more minutes left, since the sky still has some radiance, and you know before..."

In that instance, Bess let out a piercing shriek, when at the same time everyone noticed a sinister shadow moving in the headlights! The figure seemed to vanish in the thick of bushes by the unpaved road. "Was that one of those, uh... *things*?" Bess managed thirsty for air.

"I don't know, it could've been," said Nancy clicking on the automobile's high beams. In just another mile, she would come to an intersection where turning the corner led home. She did not slow the motor vehicle but on this road instead, put her foot to the gas pedal pressing as fast as regulations permitted!

"We're almost there!" the strawberry blonde sleuth said, sounding largely composed under the circumstance. Just passing Kenwood Drive she vaguely perceived a couple of wraithlike silhouettes to her left behind the cars parked there at the curb. No one else seemed to notice; hence, Nancy did not breathe a word lest she startle her already apprehensive friends.

"The streets appear deserted...doesn't look like anybody's around." George stated. She seemed edgy; knowing at any moment things could easily change. "They could be around any corner, at any time," she thought, all the while her heart racing faster

on the approach to Nancy's home. *The group would have to get out, rush into the house trying hard not to let those horrific looking things glimpse or catch them!*

Ned suddenly balked in the passenger seat and exclaimed, "Don't look now but there are some on this side of the road!"

All the travelers' gulped air as they sighted the macabre ghouls caught under the pallid glow of a nearby lamppost. The ghastliest grouping the young sleuths ever seen assembled, fiendish figures stopping to watch Nancy's car while hungrily staring at the people inside, a most gruesome grin on their smudged faces. They quickened their listless pace on the cobbled sidewalk seeking to keep up with the passing car.

"Hurry Nancy!" Bess frenetically urged. "They've noticed us!"

"I'm going as quickly as I can, one more block and we will be at my house," Nancy said directly. "We have to be quick! I will rush to unlock the back door. The rest follow as rapidly as you can. I will hold the door open for you to enter."

"We'll have to be fast!" Nancy's special friend Ned said with importance. "There's another loathsome group of them down the street. Do you see them? There... just past little Tommy's house-- and it looks like they see us too!"

"OK, everybody. Ready?" Nancy asked excitedly, turning into the driveway pulling the front bumper near the garage as possible. "Let's go!"

The young detective quickly opened her auto door making a mad dash to the back of the house while the others keenly watched. Appearing nervous, she sought to insert the correct key unlocking the door. "Hurry," Nancy subtly called. "There are a few coming up the drive!"

Procuring no time turning around to confirm these assertions, Nancy's friends perceived the incidental intensity of the moment and scrambled for the door she held open. Swinging the door shut almost at once, she shockingly noted Bess did not get out of the sedan. Forestalling her gaze, Nancy saw Bess leaning over the front seat doing something in the glove box. There, she was pressing the button that opened the trunk apparently wanting to get those shopping bags!

"Bess, what are you doing?" Nancy called excitedly to her friend. She sped to the side of the vehicle where she observed the trunk open and caught up to Bess grabbing her friend's arm.

"Come on Bess. We need to get in the house, they're at the front yard already!" Nancy said through clenched teeth. Several of those phantomlike zombies were lumbering idly up the front lawn toward the pair! How dare she put herself in such a

predicament? Unexpectedly, Bess's curious bravery suddenly inspired Nancy, a quality her friend quietly reserved for the worst of occasion it would seem.

"Help me to get some of these bags," Bess said in a spirited tone. She clutched many of the bags, as Nancy also filled her arms. "Hurry they are right behind us!"

"Leave the trunk up, it won't matter," Nancy called racing to the backdoor with Bess in tow.

Reaching the house corner, Bess made out one of the most hideous among them unpredictably swaggering through the adjacent hedges in the back yard area. This one had what gave the impression of being small lacerations at the neck wherefrom drying blood once dripped upon the front of its ragged and tattered shirt, a path drawn from the saturating wound. She scarcely made it inside sooner when the repulsive creature nearly snatched her billowing hair, his bloodied hand insolently extended! Ned adroitly slammed the back door bolting it secure. The atrocious form outside, all but crashing into the shuttered door.

"They know we are here and want in!" George sadly protested.

The group became aware of incessant banging on the front door that, with the thudding from the backdoor reverberating together more or less as it were, causing imagined echoes of dual drums wickedly tolling a horrid death march. BOOM...BOOM...BAM! BOOM...BOOM...BAM! On and on it went, as Nancy and Bess deposited bags on the dining table.

While the friends huddled together discussing amongst themselves a plan, none noticed a mysterious ghostly profile descending the stairs. Hypnotically entranced and allegedly under a cursed enchantment by the pounding rhythm made as a result of the eerie fiends outside-- there appeared motherly housekeeper Hannah Gruen nary seen by a soul, slowly creeping to the front door furtively making her way. Ned had just happened to notice her there at the end... whilst setting her hand upon the door's knob.

"NO, Hannah!" he shouted. The three girls looked up in time to hear the agitated housekeeper... "I can't stand it anymore, *I'm going to let them in!*"

The young detectives recoiled in a peculiar timeless horror, stunned as the blameless housekeeper unlocked the bolts allowing the door to swing wide open! Before their eyes but what should they see? There appeared the haunting specters having a rendezvous at the Drew home. In attendance frightfully imminent at the foyer... vampires, zombies, ghosts, witches, skeletons, and pirates, all vying fiercely to get inside... "Trick or Treat!" chorused the smiling neighborhood children adorned in their utmost scariest Halloween finery!

“Thankfully you thought to get those bags of candy and snacks, Bess!” Nancy beamed. She and Bess emptied the contents into bowls, as George and Ned prepared beverages. “This should prove one of the best Halloween parties in River Heights!”