

The Masquerade Mystery: A Two Minute Nancy Drew Mystery by Kay R. Olynkeen

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Someone in the room was a thief.

Eighteen year old Nancy Drew gazed upon all of the masquerade attendees that were in the library of the stately Rawlings estate with her. All of the attendees were dressed in a variety of costumes, from conservative (such as the school girl, complete with books and brown bag lunch) to outlandish (a Goth-Martian with antennae and a tail). The night was a grand masquerade ball to celebrate seventy-five years of such parties held to benefit the children's ward of the River Heights Hospital. Only tonight's benefit had come to a screeching halt when it was discovered that the three largest donations, totaling more than \$100,000, were missing!

"Well, Nancy, who do you think did it?" asked Nancy's best friend, Bess Marvin. Always conscientious about her appearance, it was no surprise to Nancy that Bess had come dressed as a Southern Belle from the 1800's. Nancy had taken a cue from her friend and dressed from a bygone era, wearing a blue frock from the 1930's with matching hat.

"Well, I know two people who DIDN'T do it," Nancy smiled at her friend. "You and I are definitely out of it, and I am pretty sure that Chief McGinnis is also out of it." Nancy nodded her head to the man dressed in a Dracula costume who was moving from person to person, writing notes in a small notepad. "But as far as the rest of these people, it could have been any one of them!"

Nancy carefully studied each person. Daniel Rawlings, the heir of the multi-million-dollar Rawlings fortune, was sitting comfortably in an overstuffed chair, wearing a Zorro costume, his hat resting in his lap while waiting his turn to be searched and questioned. Peter McNamara, an old school friend of Daniel, who was currently being questioned by the Chief of Police, fidgeted in his ape costume, the ape mask held tightly in his hands. Peter's girlfriend, Tanya Michaels, in her school girl outfit, stood behind him and in front of the bookshelves that were filled with volume after volume of old texts, eating some kind of chips from the brown bag she was holding. Marcus Lender, a teacher at a nearby university, leaned against the wall near the fireplace in his black and white striped prison outfit, tapping his foot impatiently with his hands shoved in his pockets. Shane Anderson, the university's star quarterback, sporting his Goth-Martian costume, continually eyed Tanya, but each time their eyes met, he would look away. Deirdre Shannon, who Nancy knew all too well, moved around the room in her princess

gown, a sparkling tiara on her head. It was apparent from the reactions of everyone she spoke with that she was making a nuisance of herself. To Nancy, this came as no surprise.

"Isn't Mr. Lender getting ready to be fired from the university?" Bess whispered into Nancy's ear. "I heard something about him giving passing grades to students who gave him enough money."

"That's what the Board of Regents for the university uncovered," Nancy agreed. "But it is also public knowledge that Daniel and Peter have been rivals ever since high school. Perhaps Peter is wanting to make Daniel look bad since it is his party that is raising the money for the hospital."

"What about Shane Anderson?" Bess asked. "I know that he is having problems paying for school since he lost his football scholarship last year."

"That's true," Nancy admitted, "and from the way he keeps eyeing Tanya Michaels, I have to wonder if he still has some feelings for his ex-girlfriend. Maybe he thinks that by stealing the money, he can push the blame off on Peter."

Bess smirked as she watched Deirdre chatting with Tanya. "Maybe Deirdre is looking for some more money to buy a new, bigger crown to fit her big head!"

Nancy had to stifle a laugh, knowing the Chief of Police would not find anything about the situation humorous. She saw that Deirdre had moved on, and the Chief was now questioning Tanya Michaels. She strained to hear what the girl was saying.

"...real shame," Tanya was saying. "He's a great teacher, even if he does grade hard. Peter and I both love his class, although neither one of us is making good grades. Daniel, of course, has an 'A' in the class, which, if what they say about the teacher is true, comes as no surprise." The Chief of Police thanked her and moved on to talk to Daniel. Tanya, who had finished her chips, threw the paper bag from which she had been eating in the wastebasket by the desk. Nancy continued to stare at the wastebasket, her mind turning over all that she had seen and heard that evening.

"Well, Nancy," Bess asked, "do you have any ideas as to who stole the money?"

Realization dawned on the young, titian-haired detective, and Nancy grinned. "Actually, Bess, I believe I do!"

DO YOU KNOW WHO DID IT? HAVE YOU PICKED UP ON THE CLUES TO REVEAL WHO STOLE THE CHECKS TO BE DONATED TO THE HOSPITAL? WHY DID THEY STEAL IT AND WHERE DID THEY HIDE THE CHECKS?