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### PLOT:

While Nancy and her friends from River Heights are enjoying spring vacation in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, the young detective is approached by a wealthy elderly woman who asks for her help. Her house has been burglarized frequently, but the would-be thieves only ransack the home - nothing is ever taken! As Nancy sets off to find the culprits, she must also take on another assignment. An international ring of stamp forgers and smugglers are discovered in Southern Florida, and Nancy must find a way to stop them. Almost swallowed by one of the frightening "sink holes" of Florida, the young detective persists in her quest for a solution along Ocean Boulevard. (From the back cover.)

### CHARACTERS:

**Nancy Drew** - everyone's favorite detective has an ominous dream that leads her into danger

**George Fayne** - Nancy's tomboy-ish friend who is always eager to help out her friend

**Bess Marvin** - George's timid cousin who is an eternal flirt with the boys

**Ned Nickerson** - Nancy's boyfriend who is headed to Florida for spring break

**Burt Eddleton & Dave Evans** - George's and Bess' own male friends

**Senor Ricardo Segovia** - a consultant for the U.S. Government who is tracking stamp smugglers

**Susan McAfee** - the personal secretary and companion to a wealthy woman in Ft. Lauderdale

**Eleanor Palmer** - a 93-year old, wealthy socialite whose house is being burglarized

**Andre** - Senor Segovia's chauffeur and bodyguard for the teen sleuths

**Carson Drew** - Nancy's father who has been kidnapped by the time she arrives in Florida

**Otto Stroessner** - the big man behind the syndicate involved in the stamp smuggling

**Errol Bigley** - Mrs. Palmer's faithful butler who has served her for 33 years

**Angus Campbell** - Senor Segovia's handsome, red-headed neighbor across the water

**REVIEW:**

Nancy's latest adventure begins with a nightmare - being chased by cars, boats, and airplanes, as well as dogs, all the while with a vision of a shadowy vulture before her. Convinced that it is nothing more than a dream, Nancy, Bess, and George wake up, ready to head for the airport - they are heading to Fort Lauderdale, Florida for sun and fun. For Nancy, however, it's more than just a vacation, as her father is working on an important case for Senor Ricardo Segovia involving stamp smugglers, and Nancy hopes to help out. The mystery starts before they leave River Heights, however, when the girls are followed to the airport!

Thankfully, the woman following the girls works for Eleanor Palmer, an elderly socialite who lives in Fort Lauderdale who seeks Nancy's help in stopping some unusual burglaries - her house is repeatedly broken into, but nothing is stolen! The girls agree to help, and Nancy promises to contact her upon their arrival in Florida. As they head for the plane, a mechanic passes them, his cap pulled low over his face. At first, Nancy is curious, but puts her suspicions aside as they take off for their vacation. Flying down the coast is a thrill for the girls until, when they reach the coastline of South Carolina, the engine starts to sputter! The plane is out of gas! Nancy is forced to make an emergency landing on the choppy waves of the Atlantic, which she manages to do without mishap. As luck would have it, an acquaintance of Nancy's father had recently built a home along that very coast and brings the girls safely to shore, towing the plane behind them. Once ashore, the girls are shocked to discover a decal of a dark vulture pasted to their plane - the very vulture from Nancy's nightmare!

Staying overnight, the girls take off again the next morning after the plane is refueled. They enjoy watching the coast of Florida go by beneath them, reminiscing about prior cases solved. They arrive in Fort Lauderdale, prepared to enjoy their vacation, only to arrive to the news that Nancy's father, Carson Drew, has been kidnapped by the stamp smugglers! Senor Segovia informs Nancy that a tip about Carson's whereabouts was leading them to an old building tonight, and she insists on joining the raid.

They reach the abandoned building to find it just that - abandoned. No sign of anyone, including Nancy's missing father! Nancy is disheartened until she finds a clue that her father left behind - a stylized "D" written on a carton. Sure that he was once there, Nancy, Senor Segovia, and the police leave. The more Nancy dwells on it, she knows the "D" was more than just on that carton to say Carson Drew was there. Nancy then remembers that the carton had the name "Belfont" on it, and through some quick investigation, discovers that there was once a Hotel Belfont in a bad area of town that has been closed for years.

Anxious to find her father and not considering the danger, Nancy takes off by

herself to find her father! She finds the hotel, dark, lonely, and desolate. Braving the danger, she sneaks into the hotel and finds her father being held captive - but before she can react, she herself is taken captive by the same men!

Thinking quickly, Nancy preys on the weakest of the captives, warning them the police is on the way. They doubt her story until they hear a loud crash, and they make haste to get out, leaving Nancy and her father behind, unguarded. Nancy wriggles out of the bonds that were tied loosely and quickly frees her father. They escape the building without any further chase, Nancy revealing to her father that no police were on their way, she has simply bluffed, hoping something would happen. The rats in the basement must have knocked something over, answering her prayers in the nick of time.

When they arrive safely back at Senor Segovia's house, everyone is amazed at the escapade, and Senor Segovia reveals the story of the stamp smugglers, headed up by Otto Stroessner, who is not only stealing stamps and smuggling them into the United States, but he is counterfeiting them and selling numerous copies at the same time, stealing large sums of money by selling worthless copies while keeping the originals.

Tired, Nancy heads for bed, but not before she receives a phone call from Mrs. Palmer who bawls her out for having arrived in Fort Lauderdale and not having contacted her! She sets an appointment for the next day, and when Nancy, George, and Bess arrive at the woman's home, Mrs. Palmer immediately recognizes Nancy by her Titian hair. "Your great-grandmother had hair like that, too, you know," smiles Mrs. Palmer. She then proceeds to tell the girls about the break-ins, how her house has been ransacked time and time again, but nothing was taken. When asked about her staff, Mrs. Palmer reveals she has a butler, a maid, and a gardener, but she is insistent that all of them are above suspicion and that she trusts them implicitly. In fact, her butler, Erroll Bigley, was at home on the night of one of the break-ins and ended up getting hurt as a result.

For Nancy, two mysteries at the same time only makes her more determined. She and her friends are nearly mowed down by a truck, overhear an incriminating conversation in an empty restaurant, find an out-of-place magazine aboard Angus Campbell's boat, discover the identity of Mrs. Palmer's robbers through a clever stake-out, race against time in an exciting boat chase, and ultimately uncover the secret to the sinister omen locked in a hidden safe in Mrs. Palmer's house!

### **PERSONAL THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS:**

Obviously, this book was fun to read for me, since it is set in my home state of Florida.

In a nice reference to one of the original 56 books in the series, Nancy and her friends are flying down the coast of Florida, and as they pass Cape Canaveral on page 44, Nancy is reminded “of another adventure the girls had there. At the time, Bess and George had been involved in a car accident and Bess had narrowly escaped being nipped by an alligator.” A clear reference to the revised text version of *Mystery of the Moss-Covered Mansion*. I note, however, that they don’t refer to the mystery by name (since Grossett & Dunlap still holds the rights to those titles!).

This book was written by Richard Ballard, who also wrote the *Captive Witness*. Both *Captive Witness* and *Sinister Omen* are filled with espionage / spy type stories that, to me, seem more on the lines of a Hardy Boys mystery rather than a Nancy Drew tale. And, apparently, I’m not alone in this thought - the editors missed a few errors that glared out at me when this first went to print. On page 79, when Senor Segovia is talking with Nancy’s father, he addresses him as “Fenton” - which is the first name of the Hardy Boys’ father!

Then, just five pages later on page 85, as they are discussing the latest stamp to disappear, the text says that Mr. Hardy is doing the talking, when it was in fact Mr. Drew! Now, I can only guess that either the author was used to writing Hardy Boys’ tales and inadvertently slipped or perhaps this tale was originally meant to be a Hardy Boys’ title and switched to a Nancy Drew story and not all the references to the Hardys were taken out! Either way, it was an obvious error that I’m very surprised the editors missed!

One detail I did enjoy reading about was the fact that Mrs. Palmer recognized Nancy by her Titian hair because Nancy’s “great-grandmother had hair like that, too.” Apparently Mrs. Palmer knew Nancy’s great-grandmother. Unfortunately, no name is associated with her, so Nancy’s heritage remains somewhat undefined.

These paperbacks are not the original texts - they may not be as rich in details and the characters may not be as multi-dimensional, 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!