

# The Case of the Changing Icon

THE AUSTIN  
CHRONICLE

By Anna Hanks

**SEPTEMBER 8, 1998:** Nancy Drew ruined my life. There, I've said it. Now I've voiced my resentment of one of America's most beloved female icons. Nancy Drew gave me false hopes - by pretending to be just an average girl when she was really a goddess in disguise. Oh, there were aspects of Nancy's life that ought to have clued me in: She was tall, slim, Titian-haired, perfectly dressed and possessed of both a wealthy and indulgent father and a seemingly infinite number of new convertibles. It was really the convertibles that ought to have tipped me off - like multi-headed Hydra, one convertible only had to be cut down for another to appear in her driveway.

**BOOKS** Since Nancy was supposed to be just an average girl, I thought that when I was old enough to drive my life would be just like Nancy's. I too would be trailing short, dark Eastern European men with limps through my hometown, receiving letter bombs which I would inevitably manage to throw out of the mailbox seconds before they exploded, receiving threats to "mind my own business or else," and having my brake lines cut every time I drove down a hill.

I was expecting excitement.

But alas, excitement is not what I have received. The biggest excitement in my life is The Case of the Missing Keys or The Mystery in the Meat Drawer. And despite being almost twice Nancy's age, the closest I've ever been to international intrigue was an ugly altercation in customs over some undeclared apples.



Despite my disappointment I should have known that Nancy lived in a fantasy world. After all, her college football hero boyfriend Ned never pressured Nancy for sex. That's good, because The Case of the Missing Virginity might have been ... er, a hard one to solve.

But despite the effect she has had on my life, Nancy is no longer to be feared as the perfectly dressed River Heights goddess in her open-top gasoline-powered chariot. Nancy has been sent down to earth. She is everyteen.

This downturn in Nancy's fortunes took place shortly after the "real" Carolyn Keene died.

There is no lack of evidence to prove this fall of Nancy to earth. One easy example comes from

weekly  
WIRE



NEWS & OPINION



FILM & TV



MUSIC



ARTS & LEISURE



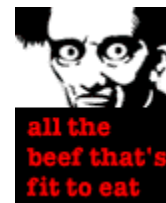
BOOKS



COMICS

---

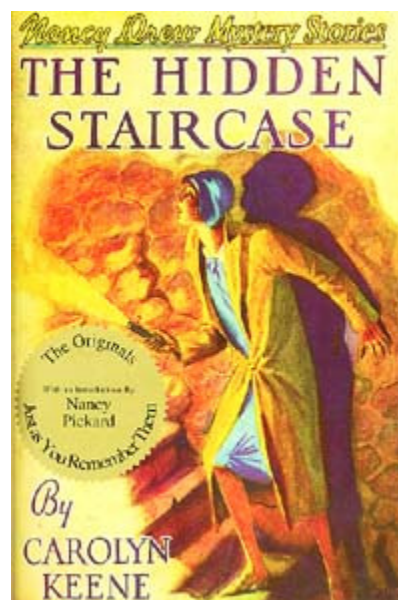
Plato. And while you think that Nancy and Plato have no more business together than "tuna" and "helper," let me explain that Nancy no longer inhabits Plato's world of ideal forms. To wit, a blue roadster is a perfect form, a GM Mustang convertible (as it is described in the later books) is but a shabby copy of the ideal.



Likewise, Nancy is no longer described as Titian-haired, a term coined for the strawberry-blond Renaissance tresses of the women in Titian's paintings. These days Nancy is "reddish-blond," a term that is culturally significant only on the Isle of Clairol.

Nancy's clothing has also descended to earth. Instead of wearing stylish, elegant dresses, she is described as wearing tight designer jeans that accent her slender figure. Instead of perfect dresses appearing magically in her closet, Nancy has to go to the mall like everyone else. From couture to trend de jour.

Another indication of Nancy's loss of goddess status is the loss of her powerful female triumvirate. Here the goddess status of her associates is diluted, and the power of the trio is obliterated by the addition of other characters. In the earlier books, Nancy is surrounded by George, an Amazon warrior, and Bess, the plump blond figure of Venus. In the earlier books, George is described as enjoying her mannish name and wearing tailored clothing. Her name was seen as an extension of her personality.



Now it is carefully pointed out that "George likes boys just as much as Bess does," lest the specter of lesbianism hang over River Heights.

The Amazon figure of George is balanced by the figure of Venus, aka Bess. As the soft, blond, boy-crazy, and reclining friend, Bess could hardly be anything but the goddess of love. Now she is the goddess of perpetual dieting.

In the recent books, the power of the trio is broken by the addition of new characters, a group one acquaintance refers to as "Nancy's rainbow coalition of friends."

Yet despite what Nancy Drew did to my life, perhaps it is best if our young stick with the pre-fallen Nancy. After all, the world is short on goddess figures. The next closest thing we have is Pamela Anderson, and we all know that she can't be real.

---

Anna Hanks is a graduate student in the UT Journalism program. As a result of Nancy's influence she reviews murder mysteries for the *Chronicle*.

## weekly wire suggested links

- [Austin Chronicle's Extra Feature Archives](#) **AE**



Books: [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [10](#) [11](#) [12](#) [13](#) [14](#) [15](#)

[Cover](#) . [News](#) . [Film](#) . [Music](#) . [Arts](#) . [Books](#) . [Comics](#) . [Search](#)



© 1995-99 DesertNet, LLC . [Austin Chronicle](#) . [Info Booth](#) . [Powered by Dispatch](#)