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# The Mystery of the Mystery Meat Sandwiches

or The Secret of the Old Picnic Basket

or The Clue in the **C**heckered Napkin

BY JOAN CONNOR

**N**ANCY DREW AND HER CHUMS, Bess and George, clambered out of the blue roadster. Bess' eyes sparkled. George's eyes twinkled.

"Let's go!" Nancy exclaimed exclaimatorily with an exclamation point.

Togo the terrier leapt excitedly into Nancy's friendly arms.

"Hypers," George, age 16, said, chuckling.

Suddenly Bess, eyelids fluttering, eagerly grabbed the picnic basket from the roadster. "We are going on a picnic. Hurray," Bess said with a giggle which is more difficult than you might think especially if it is a simultaneous action.

"Party picnic, party picnic," Bess hissed.

"I just love picnics, don't you?" George asked, chuckling.

"I do, I do," Bess replied, smiling.

The chums started down the grassy path, Bess swinging the picnic basket carelessly. Bess, blonde and plump, smiled happily at George who walked happily beside her, slender, dark, short-haired, a tomboy.

Our young sleuth, with blonde hair with reddish highlights, did not care that George was a lesbian, a butch lesbian. She, George, and Bess were chums and cousins besides. And Nancy had a boyfriend, Ned Nickerson, a tall, good-looking, athletic young man, 6'2", with dark hair and brown eyes. His eyes also sparkled. Ned was not with them on the picnic.

When Ned was not in school he lived with his parents, James and Edith in Mapleton. He sold insurance in the summer. It was summer.

A scream pierced the night. This was surprising because it was day, but something had to happen soon because this was a mystery.

Bess froze in horror. "Who screamed?" she asked fitfully. Nancy furrowed her brow. George answered fearfully, "Hypers, I don't know."

Nancy's heart pounded. "Keep walking,"

she ordered tersely. "Head for the old oak tree. On the hill we can be on the lookout for clues."

Bess whimpered fearfully, but the three chums kept walking toward the old oak tree. Togo the terrier tailed them tinily. His eyes also sparkled.

"Will we still have a picnic?" Bess wailed nervously.

"I hope so," George declared kindly.

"Keep walking," Nancy murmured dreamily.

The three chums climbed the hill. Togo ran merrily with them. His eyes still sparkled. (What did he know? He was a dog.)

At the top of the hill, Bess set the picnic basket down with a giggle. (Who knows why?) Nancy looked around. Sleuths always look around. They're sleuths.

Bess opened the picnic basket. She spread out the cloth. She removed the food and gaily checkered napkins from the basket and set them out on the cloth. "Are you ready to eat," she asked plumply.

"I am," George replied. She sat down next to Bess.

"I'll keep watch," Nancy said. She had to; you know why.

Bess ate her sandwich. George ate her sandwich. "What kind of sandwich is this?" George demanded.

"I don't know," Nancy replied.

Nancy did not pack the picnic basket. Hannah Gruen, housekeeper to blue-eyed Carson Drew, attorney, since Nancy's mother died when Nancy was ten (or three—it depends upon the version; Carolyn Keene had multiple personality disorder), packed the picnic basket.

The young sleuth removed a sandwich from the basket. She peeled it apart. She sniffed the mystery meat. "Hmm," she explained. "It is not chicken salad. It is not tuna fish. It is not red herring. It is not deviled ham. It," she declared, "is a mystery."

Bess noisily ate her mystery sandwich.

George put hers back in Hannah's basket.

"I wish that Ned Nickerson were here," Nancy said, "so we could picnic on angel cake and fruit juice, our favorite snack."

Ned Nickerson, who attended Emerson College (not the writing program one) and was two years older than Nancy, was not there.

A scream rang out. A violent storm approached the hill.

"Look out," Nancy called. "Take shelter under the old oak."

"I'm a wreck," Bess said, quavering.

The chums leaned against the trunk of the tree. The violent storm passed.

"Who or what was that?" George asked queerly.

"I don't know...yet," Nancy replied.

She wished Ned Nickerson were there. He spoke Cantonese. He lived in Hong Kong on college exchange. He maybe was in the U.S. Intelligence Service. A member of Omega Chi Epsilon fraternity with his friends Burt Eddleton and Dane Evans, he could help Nancy Drew solve the mystery.

Bess walked forward to get another sandwich. "Hey," she demanded. "Where are the sandwiches?"

Nancy looked around. Where were the sandwiches?

"Hey," Bess demanded. "Where is the picnic basket?"

Where was the picnic basket?

"And where," Bess demanded, "are the gaily colored checkered napkins?"

Where were the gaily colored checkered napkins?

And where was Togo?

Vanished. ■

Can Nancy solve the mystery? Find out online at [bit.ly/PMonthlyFictionJoanConnorPt2](http://bit.ly/PMonthlyFictionJoanConnorPt2). Joan Connor is a professor at Ohio University. She has published four collections of short stories and a collection of essays.



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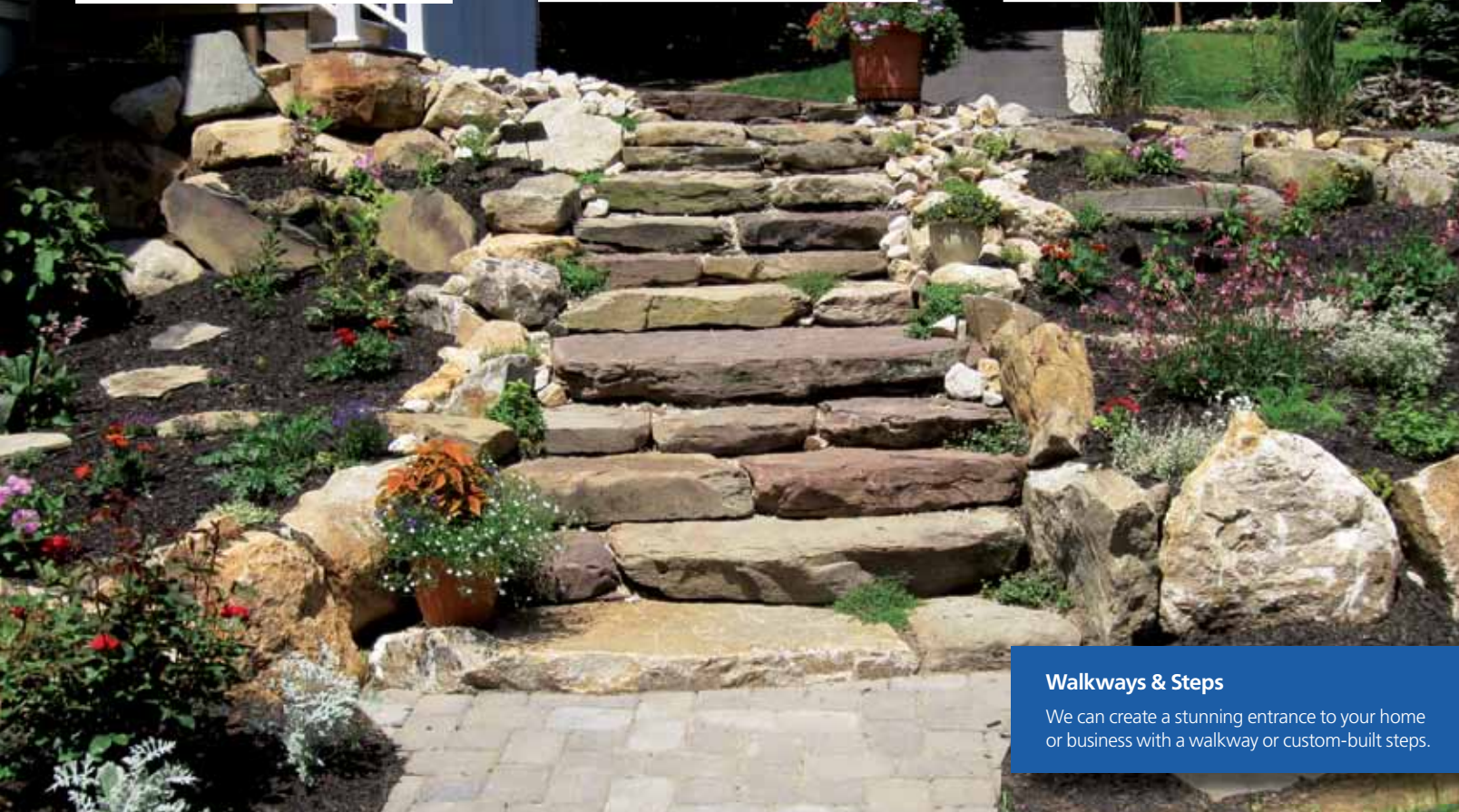
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