

Hidden Hollow Five Series

The Secret of Annabelle

Book 1

(Youth Illustration Contest Edition)

James R. Lewis



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Editing by Marisa Donnelly

Contributions by Laurie Lewis, Erin Voll, and Kimberly Tozer

Discussion Questions by Marisa Donnelly

Book Design by Kimberly Tozer

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my daughters. They have always been my inspiration and their keen interest in my storytelling kept me going throughout their childhood. When they were very little, they would always ask me to tell them a story before they went to bed and I would make up stories with them as the main characters. Erin, my middle daughter, sat next to me as I wrote the original first draft of Annabelle's story. We decided to write at least one page every time we sat down. Over a number of months, *The Secret of Annabelle* was established and this led to the birth of the Hidden Hollow Five Series. I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as we did writing it together.

Table of Contents

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
Chapter 1 – River’s End	1
Chapter 2 – The Secret Door	22
Chapter 3 – Annabelle’s Playroom	33
Chapter 4 – The Diary.....	42
Chapter 5 – The Secret Hiding Place	54
Chapter 6 – The Boathouse	66
Chapter 7 – The Dark Tunnel.....	78
Chapter 8 – The Old Woman	87
Chapter 9 – The Plan.....	100
Chapter 10 – The Discovery.....	111
Chapter 11 – The Banker	128
Chapter 12 – The Fire	144

Chapter 1 Discussion Questions

K – 2nd Grade

Kim and Erin are sisters; do you have a sibling (if not, do you have a cousin/best friend you see often)? Do you get along with him or her?

What is one thing you like about Erin and Kim’s new home?

3 & 4th Grade

What have you learned so far about Erin and Kim?

What do you predict is in the boathouse?

5 & 6th Grade

Who is the Smith family and what information did the author give us about them?

Compare and contrast Erin and Kim’s hometown of Racine, Wisconsin, to their new town of River’s End. From what we know about River’s End so far, how do you think the two places are similar and different?

belongs to us, sweetheart, so anything that is in it also belongs to us. So the answer is yes.”

“I’m hungry,” Kim interrupted. “Let’s eat!”

Chapter 1

River’s End

Thump squeak, thump squeak, thump squeak, thump squeak...
“Jim! Please turn off those windshield wipers!” pleaded Mom. “They’re driving me crazy!” Looking up from the map on her phone, she reached over and tapped Dad on the shoulder.

It’s about time, Erin thought, *that noise was driving me crazy, too.*

Erin closed the cap on the marker she had been using and threw it into the bin on the seat next to her.

“I’m bored,” she said as she raised her arms in a long, lazy stretch. Glancing back at Kim, she sat up a little higher in the seat to get a better look at the picture her sister was drawing.

“Daddy, when are we going to get there?” asked Kim from the back seat of the van. She held the picture up so that Erin could get a better look. “I’m hungry,” she quickly added before her dad could answer.

The picture had a bright rainbow across the page, with a house directly below it and woods covering the rest of the

background. A pretty good drawing of the family van was parked out in front and there were five people standing in the driveway: Erin, Kim, their older sister Jenny, Laurie, and Jim.

Although skinny as a rail, it seemed to Erin that Kim was always hungry. She never ate much at one time, but she was always eating or wanting to eat. Erin finished her inspection of the drawing, looked up at her sister, and smiled.

“That’s pretty neat,” she said.

Kim was tall for an eight-year-old girl and quite pretty. Her long honey-blonde hair was in a ponytail held by a scrunchie made of shiny red, white, and blue ribbon. With a huge smile, Kim stared back at her through her soft, brown eyes.

“Thanks. Do you want to play a game?” she asked, sliding the picture into a folder and putting away her markers. Before Erin could answer, they were interrupted by their dad.

“We’ll get there soon, honey.” Reaching over, he turned off the windshield wipers. “I’m a little hungry, too. Hey, who wants to have a picnic when we get to our new house?”

“We do!” shouted Erin and Kim together.

“Probably nothing,” answered Dad.

“If there is a beautiful boat in there... would it be ours?” Erin asked, surveying the river with a dreamy look on her face.

“I don’t think you have to worry about finding a beautiful boat in there, Erin. That banker, Charles Smith Jr., would have charged a lot more for the property if it came with a boat.”

“But if there is a boat in there, Dad, would it be ours?” pressed Erin.

Dad poked her in the stomach, and she giggled. He draped his arm over Erin’s shoulder and grabbed Kim’s hand. “Let’s go help your mom.”

They set off for the riverbank where Mom was already spreading a blanket for the picnic.

“Well?” asked Erin.

“Well what,” said Dad, laughing.

“Would a boat in the boathouse belong to us?” she asked again.

He looked into Erin’s eyes, and seeing that she was in one of her ‘Erin is serious’ moods, he answered, “The boathouse

“Look over there!” said Erin. “That must be the boathouse that Mom and Dad told us about. Let’s go see it!”

The building was grounded in the side of the riverbank. It had no windows and only one large set of double doors on the river side. The doors were locked tightly with a huge, rusty padlock. An old wooden pier was in front of the building and stuck out about fifteen feet into the river. The girls got up onto the pier and walked to the end. Through the cracks between the planks, they could see small fish swimming lazily back and forth.

“Be careful out there,” called Dad as he and Mom came out of the woods.

“Can you open up the boathouse, Daddy?” yelled Kim.

Mom and Dad came over to the boathouse and looked questioningly at the heavy, rusted padlock. Dad grabbed it and gave it a tug, but it didn’t budge.

“To tell you the truth, honey, we don’t have a key for this lock. I’ll have to cut it off as soon as we finish unpacking.”

“What do you think is in there?” asked Erin, pressing her face against a small crack between the doors. She was trying to get a look inside, but it was too dark to see anything.

“Then a picnic it will be.” He said as he smiled over at Mom.

She smiled back, returning her attention to the map. “We should get there just in time for lunch.”

“Let’s have the picnic down by the riverbank,” suggested Dad. “What do you say, Laurie?”

“Sounds good.” Mom clicked off her phone and tucked it into the side pocket of the van door.

Erin and Kim smiled with delight at the thought of their very own river and woods to explore and play in. Although they had never actually seen their new house, Mom and Dad had told them about it many times.

“Tell us about the new house again,” pleaded Kim. In the excitement she had forgotten all about the offer to play she had just made with her sister.

Erin put away the rest of her markers and pad of paper and slid forward as far as her seatbelt would let her. She loved to hear about their big, new house and especially about their new bedroom with a special, round sunroom attached.

This was going to be their best house ever. They would have their very own woods and a river that ran right through

the middle of their land. Even the name of the river sounded mysterious – *Hidden Hollow River*. She and Kim just loved the sound of it. On the riverbank where they were going to have the picnic, there was an old boathouse with a pier. Dad and Mom told them that they would be able to fish, swim, and canoe off of the pier. They would have to be very careful, though, because the currents along the Hidden Hollow could get pretty swift and dangerous at certain times of the year.

Both Erin and Kim started canoeing almost before they could walk. Mom and Dad had drilled them about canoeing safety rules, and they never went canoeing without their life vests on. Mom and Dad trusted them enough that they were allowed to canoe together without supervision because they were so experienced.

“Will our canoe be delivered today?” asked Erin.

“Maybe,” answered Mom. “But probably not until tomorrow afternoon.”

“Tell us about the house again,” pleaded Kim, changing the subject.

“Well, the house was built in 1875 by the Peterson family,” said Mom. “The Petersons and the Smiths were the

“Well, let’s have that picnic,” said Dad, after they got back to the kitchen.

They all went outside to the van, got the cooler and food basket, and carried it down to the river.

It was exciting for the girls to travel down the wooded path to the river. It was just as they had imagined. They ran ahead of their mom and dad, stopping only long enough to look for interesting climbing trees or at some small animal darting into the woods. On one such stop, Kim looked up and saw the corner of the neighbor’s white house through the trees.

“Look, Erin,” she said, pointing up at a second floor window. “Someone is watching us.”

Erin glanced up just in time to see a white-haired, elderly woman disappear behind a curtain.

“Come on, Kim,” Erin said, grabbing her sister’s arm. “Mom said to leave her alone.”

The two of them raced forward to the river, not noticing the curtain move ever so slightly again as the old woman watched them disappear down the path.

When the girls reached the bank of the river, they tore off their shoes and waded into the cool, clear water.

hallway. Their dad explained to them that this stairway was used many years ago by the domestic help so they could go around the house unnoticed and get their chores done.

“What’s domestic help?” asked Erin.

“Domestic help are the people who were hired to clean the house, make the meals, make repairs, and tend the yard,” answered Dad.

Kim had a quizzical look on her face. “Are we going to have some of those?”

“I don’t think so,” answered Mom, chuckling. “We don’t make nearly enough money to hire any domestic help.”

“Aww, too bad,” sighed Kim.

Off the back hallway was a door leading to the basement. The walls of the basement were made of heavy stones, unlike the blocks Erin and Kim were used to. There was furniture, tools, a couple of old-fashioned bikes, and quite a few spider webs down the steps. The basement was divided into many smaller rooms and most of them were dark and spooky looking. After a short time down there, both Erin and Kim got a little scared and wanted to go upstairs.

founding fathers of River’s End. They were also the two wealthiest families in town. We met Charles Smith Jr., a descendant of the original Smith family, when Dad and I signed the mortgage papers at the bank.”

Looking back at the two girls, she saw that they were still listening, so she continued. “Charles Smith’s father, Charles Smith Sr., bought the original Peterson home in foreclosure after John Peterson mysteriously vanished on a business trip overseas many years ago. Charles Smith Sr. and his wife adopted John Peterson’s only daughter and raised her as their own. The Smith family lived in our house until Charles Smith Sr. died a couple of months ago.”

“Charles, the son, still owns quite a bit of the property around our home,” Dad added. “He told us that he is out there often checking for trespassers, so we’ll probably see a lot of him.”

“But he doesn’t own our house, does he, Daddy?” asked Erin.

“Or the boathouse?” asked Kim.

Dad glanced in the back seat and smiled at the two of them. “No, kiddos, we own the home and the ten acres of

woods, land, and river frontage, including the boathouse and pier. They're all ours."

"Wow!" said Kim. "Ten acres! That's a lot."

"Look!" exclaimed Mom, pointing out the front window of the van at an approaching road sign. "'Ten miles to River's End.' We'll be there in about ten minutes and you two will finally be able to see it for yourselves."

The time seemed to drag on forever before they finally came over the top of a high hill and saw the city of River's End spread out before them.

"There it is, kiddos," said Dad, sweeping his hand out in front of him. "Our new home."

Erin wrinkled her nose. "It's not very big, is it?"

The city of Racine, Wisconsin, where they just moved from, had almost one-hundred thousand people. The sign for River's End said: *Population 1,112.*

"It's big enough for us," said Mom, "and I'm sure you'll both find enough eleven-year-old and eight-year-old kids to play with in a town of over a thousand people."

She looked back at Erin who was staring out the window at the city limits sign as it raced by. Mom marveled at how

"But what about finding friends?" wailed Erin. "I thought we might check out some of the houses down the road to see if they have any kids our age."

"Not today, ladies. You've got to get this room in order before dark so that you can sleep in here tonight."

"Please, Mom," pleaded Erin. "I know! How about if we just check out that house over there?" As she spoke, she pointed at a white, wooden house that was visible from their sunroom window.

Mom shook her head. "That house is owned by a very old woman who wants to be left alone. There are no kids over there, so stay away from her house and respect her privacy."

"But..." interrupted Erin.

"No buts," said Mom ending the argument. She turned and walked out of the room. "Come on, we've got the rest of the house to explore."

The rest of the house was pretty ordinary for Erin and Kim. There were two more bedrooms on the second floor and two big bathrooms. One of the neat things they found was another long, narrow set of stairs on the other side of the house, which led down to the first floor and ended in the back

nothing at all. If we can't find an entrance, we might have to open this wall up. But for now, we have a lot of unpacking to do. Besides, you two haven't even seen your bedroom yet."

The girls rushed down the stairs with Mom and Dad trailing behind. They burst through the door and then suddenly stopped. It was the most beautiful bedroom they had ever seen. The room was at least twenty feet long by thirty feet wide, and the ceilings were a full nine feet high. Across the room and through an archway was the second floor sunroom that was lit up by tall, narrow windows. Their bedroom furniture and boxes of clothes and toys were stacked everywhere.

"You two have your work cut out for you," commented Mom, surveying the huge pile of boxes. "After we see the rest of the house and have our picnic, Dad and I will set up your bed. And then you two are in here until everything is put away."

Both Kim and Erin groaned. They obviously had other ideas.

much Erin had grown in the past year. Her hair was getting darker and she was shedding that 'little girl' look and slowly turning into a beautiful, young adolescent. Erin had an ear-to-ear smile and her sense of humor was legendary among her friends back in Racine.

Jenny, Mom's oldest daughter, had gone through the same kind of changes at around twelve. Erin was only a little over a month from her twelfth birthday. It was interesting just how much the two older sisters looked alike; in fact, if you looked at pictures of Jenny at this age, it was difficult to tell them apart.

"I just wish Jenny could have made the trip with us," Mom said.

"She'll come for Thanksgiving and semester breaks," answered Dad. "And, of course, she will be here next summer," he quickly added.

Jenny, the oldest of the three daughters, was a sophomore in an exclusive private boarding high school in Wisconsin. She had worked hard to gain admittance and earned a full scholarship. She had thought very carefully before finally deciding to finish the remainder of her sophomore year. Mom

was sad that she didn't come with them for the rest of summer, but the school had offered her a job at the campus library and Jenny didn't want to give it up.

Dad reached over and gently touched Mom's hand. "Working at Saint Clement was a difficult decision for her, but I think it was a good one."

"I hope you're right," said Mom. "But it doesn't stop me from worrying or missing her."

"Me too," he said, patting her hand. "Me too."

It didn't take them very long to drive through the entire city and come out on the other side. On the main street, which was also the main county highway, there were only a half-dozen stores, two restaurants, a bank, and a movie theater. Anchoring one end of town on the river was an old mill, which looked like it had been shut down and boarded up for many years. There was a park next to it that spread out with a playground and picnic tables all the way to the edge of the water. In the center of town was a courthouse and police station, and on the other end of town was a huge brick building with 'River's End Elementary and Middle School' carved above the front entrance.

They stepped up into the dimly-lit attic. There was nothing there except an empty wooden crate and a dusty, broken rocking chair. On two of the walls were large multi-pane windows with curtains draped loosely over them. Across from the door was a circular wall with no openings.

"What's behind this round wall?" asked Erin, crossing the attic to the other side.

She walked from one end of the wall to the other, running her hands over the smooth, plaster surface before she spoke again. "When I looked up from the outside, I could see a lot of windows on the third floor. How come there aren't very many up here?"

"I don't know, honey," answered Dad. "There ought to be a way to get in there. Perhaps there's another entry into it from somewhere else in the house. We'll have to look for it when we finish unpacking."

"Let's drill a hole in the wall," suggested Erin. "Then we can see what's in there."

"It's dangerous to just drill holes in the walls of these old houses, Erin, because you never know what you might hit," said Dad. "There could be electrical wires, plumbing pipes, or

Erin stopped and tried to peer into the darkness. “What’s up there?” she asked, pointing up the narrow stairway.

“Ghosts and goblins,” answered Dad. “So don’t ever go up there without an adult, or they will grab you and turn you into one of them!” He reached down, grabbed Erin, and tickled her until she squealed.

“Yeah, right!” said Erin, her voice full of sarcasm.

Kim huddled close to her mom and peered up the staircase, her eyes as big as saucers.

“Ahem!” Mom cleared her throat and pointed down at Kim.

“I’m only kidding, honey,” said Dad. He held out his hands for her to come. Kim ran over and he swung her into his arms.

“The only thing up those stairs is a very dusty and dirty attic. Come on, I’ll show you.”

He went up to the top of the stairs, stopped, and opened a small door. Kim hid her head on his shoulder, still not sure whether she should trust him. Erin peered around her dad to try to get a better look as the door swung slowly inward. The old door creaked on its hinges making a loud, squeaky noise.

“And that’s where you will be going to school,” said Dad. He and Mom had been pointing out all of the buildings and as if they were tour guides. “We already enrolled you.”

“Yeah, yeah, we already know all that,” Erin cut in. “You told us that a thousand times. We start school in about four weeks, and we both have wonderful teachers.”

“Where is our house?” asked Kim, turning around and looking out through the rear window as the city disappeared behind them. She had studied each house very carefully as they drove through. Not one of them had a huge porch with a round castle tower on the front like her Daddy and Mommy had described.

“We live about a mile out of town,” said Mom. “And only six miles from Hidden Hollow Community College where Dad will be teaching.”

They drove for just a short distance longer before the kids felt the car slowing down. On the final bend in the road, Kim and Erin saw a long cobblestone driveway sandwiched between two tall willow trees. Below the trees stood two brick gateposts with a cast iron lion mounted on the top of each. A decorative iron gate to the driveway stood open.

“Look!” exclaimed Kim, pointing to the castle tower looming over the treetops in the front yard. “Is that it?”

“Yes, that’s our new home,” answered Mom.

They drove in and parked the car on the circled driveway. The front walk led to the stairs of a huge porch that stretched across the entire front of the big, old house. In the center of the porch was a carved oak entry door.

“Where’s all our stuff?”

“It should have been delivered by the moving company yesterday afternoon,” answered Mom as she got out of the van.

Kim and Erin didn’t really hear their mom’s answer because they were already scrambling up the stairs toward the front door. Erin grabbed the handle and turned, but the door was locked. Kim went over to the windows and pressed her face against the glass. Erin followed close behind. Inside they could see the front room piled high with boxes.

“Come on! Hurry up!” they cried.

When the front door was finally opened, Erin and Kim rushed inside. They ran from room to room, quickly exploring everything on the first floor. There was a large kitchen with an

adjoining walk-in pantry. Just off the kitchen was a huge dining room that led to the living room through big, glass doors. On the other side of the house and across the front foyer, was a parlor and a large library with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. Most of the shelves were empty except for a single row of books, covered in dust, on the far wall.

“Whose books are these?” asked Erin, pulling one off of the shelf and running her hands over the cover.

Dad walked over and she handed him the book. “They must have been left by the Smiths,” he said, paging through the volume. “I guess they now belong to us now.” He slid the book back into place and turned toward the kids.

“Where’s our bedroom?” asked Kim. She was eager to see the large bedroom and round sunroom attached to it.

“Come on, we’ll show you,” Mom said. She took Kim’s hand and walked up the large, curved stairway to the second floor. Erin and Dad followed behind them. When they got to the second floor, Mom and Kim turned and walked down the hallway. There was another set of stairs that continued up to the third floor. This staircase was much narrower than the stairs from the first floor.