

Chapter 2

The Secret Door

After lunch, Erin and Kim were banished to their room until they had unpacked all of their stuff. After about an hour, Kim sat down on the bed and let out a big sigh.

“Get back to work, Kim!” exclaimed Erin. “We’ll never get done if you keep on taking breaks.”

“I don’t care,” said Kim. “We’re never going to get done anyway. We are going to be up here forever and ever with all of these boxes.”

“Well if you don’t help, we *will* be up here forever. And we’ll never be able to explore the rest of the house.” They had already crafted one of their famous, elaborate plans to search for the entrance to the secret room they saw in the attic on the third floor.

Ever since they were little, Erin and Kim were always trying to solve mysteries. Even if some mysteries were only pretend mysteries. Almost every night, they would have Mom,

Dad, or their big sister, Jenny, read to them. Mysteries were their favorite books, and now that Erin could read, she took over the task of rereading all of their favorite stories out loud to Kim at night. Both girls dreamed of being great detectives and planned for the day when they were older and could open the ‘Erin & Kim Detective Agency’.

“We’ll never finish,” Kim sighed again as she flopped back on the bed.

“Okay,” said Erin, “we’ll take a short break.” She walked into the circular sunroom. The afternoon sun lit the room beautifully. She went over to the window and looked out toward the next-door neighbor’s house. She was certain that she saw the old woman looking at her from a bedroom window, but by the time she got Kim’s attention to come take a look, the woman had disappeared behind the curtain.

Erin stood there for a moment and felt a shiver of fear travel down her spine.

“Why does she keep staring at us?” asked Kim, looking out toward the neighbor’s window. “I’m scared, and I don’t like her.”

“How can you say that? You don’t even know her. Besides, Mom said that she just wants to be left alone.” Erin opened one of the windows and hung her head out. Leaning as far out as she could, she looked up at the windows of the attic room above. “I wonder how you get up there.”

Erin could see some old lace curtains hanging on the windows, but that was about all. “There’s got to be some way to get into that room.” She slid back into the sunroom.

Kim was standing next to the window looking up at the ceiling. “But how?”

“I’ve got an idea,” said Erin, as she walked over to the far wall. “Maybe there is an entrance in this room with stairs up to the attic, just like those back stairs we saw earlier.”

She ran her hand across the wood paneling on the curved wall. “I’ll bet I’m right. Look at how thick this wall is!”

She stood in the doorway between the sunroom and the bedroom and showed Kim how the wall thickened up from one side to the other. To show how wide it was, she tried to stretch her arms across the opening, but she couldn’t. “There has got to be a secret entrance somewhere here,” she said. “Let’s knock on the walls and see if we can find it.”

For the next half hour, Erin and Kim knocked and pushed every inch of the sunroom's paneled walls but couldn't find anything. Kim went from their sunroom to their bedroom on the other side of the wall and started to search in there. After a few minutes she called out to Erin. "Come quick! I've found something!"

When Erin came into the room, she saw Kim kneeling next to the curved wall on the bedroom side.

"What did you find?"

"Listen," said Kim. She knocked on the wall three times. It sounded pretty solid.

"So..." said Erin, coming a little closer.

"Just listen to this."

Thump, thump, thump. Kim knocked in the same spot. Then she slid over about two feet and rapped on the wall again. *Boink, boink, boink.* It sure sounded different.

"Do you think this could be it?" asked Kim, knocking again.

"Let's see if we can find a secret handle, or a latch, or something that will open this wall," said Erin, sliding down next to Kim.

They both poked and prodded the old wood. After a few minutes of searching, Erin felt a loose piece of trim. She twisted it, and it slid easily on a smooth metal pin.

“Kim! Look at this!”

Erin twisted hard on the trim and immediately there was a scraping sound from the hollow portion of the wall. A panel slid back to reveal a dark tunnel. Kim stuck her head into the opening and saw a narrow set of stairs leading up to the third floor attic room.

“Let’s go up there!” said Erin, leaning over Kim’s shoulder and looking up the stairs.

“It’s too dark,” answered Kim. “Go get my flashlight. It’s next to the bed.”

Erin quickly got the flashlight and slid into the narrow tunnel in front of Kim. “Stay close.”

Erin crept up the first three stairs and then turned around and shined the flashlight back toward the opening. Kim had not entered into the tunnel yet.

“Come on, scaredy-cat! We’ve got a flashlight.”

“What if there are ghosts and goblins up there?” stammered Kim, backing away from the entrance. “Or maybe

there's somebody up there. Maybe there's even a dead body or something! We should go get Mom and Dad."

Erin shined the flashlight down on the steps. There were footprints in the dust where she had just stepped but no others.

"Look at this, Kim," she said. "If there were any ghosts or goblins up here, they would have left some footprints and there aren't any except mine. Stop being such a scaredy-cat and come up here with me!"

Kim stuck out her chin boldly and then stepped into the opening. "I'm not a scaredy-cat."

"Well then come on! Let's go."

Erin stepped onto the next step when suddenly, behind them, the door to the secret entrance slammed shut.

"Yeeeeeeeeee!" squealed Kim, bursting into tears. She started to pound on the door.

Erin stood there for a moment, frozen in fear, and unsure of what to do next. She shined the light up and down the dark stairway but nothing moved. She had no clue as to who or what had shut the door.

"Kim, did you shut the door?" she asked, already knowing the answer.

“No,” wailed Kim without turning around. She continued to pound on the door. “Help!”

Erin came down the stairs and stood next to Kim. She shined the flashlight all around the entryway. She couldn’t find any way to open the door.

“Help me, Kim,” she exclaimed. “We’ve got to find some way out of here!”

Kim stopped her pounding and looked up. “Maybe if we yell loud enough, Mom and Dad will hear us.”

“They’ll never hear us in here, Kim. They’re all the way downstairs.”

“Then what do we do!?”

Erin gently wiped the tears from Kim’s face. Taking a deep breath to calm down, she gave Kim a hug and said, “I’m scared, too.” She knew she had to think of something quickly or else both of them would panic. “I know,” she stated bravely, “let’s go up to the secret room. Then we’ll open a window and call down to Mom and Dad.”

She wasn’t sure if her plan would work, but it was the best she could come up with at the moment. Taking Kim’s hand,

she gave her a tug and started back up the stairs. When she stepped on the fourth step, the door magically slid open.

“Look! It opened!” Kim shouted as she raced back down and zipped through the opening. “Let’s get out of here!”

“We must have done something to make it open.”

Kim peered back into the secret entrance and looked up at Erin. “Aren’t you coming out?”

Erin ignored Kim’s question and carefully studied the steps leading up to the attic. On the fourth step, she could see a small metal spring attached to the board. “I’ll bet this is it, Kim. Step back away from the opening, and let’s see if it closes.”

Kim shook her head. “No way! I’m getting out of here.”

She backed away from the entrance but stopped for a moment to look at her sister. “Are you coming?”

“Just stay out there. Away from the door. I’m going to try something. If it shuts and I can’t get it back open, then open it from the outside with the latch.”

“Okay...” answered Kim hesitantly.

Erin stepped down on the fourth step. The door immediately slammed shut. She listened carefully, but she could barely hear Kim's muffled voice through the wall.

“Erin! Erin! Can you hear me?”

“Yes, I can barely hear you,” she yelled back. “Stay away from the door.” She stepped off of the fourth step and immediately stepped back on it. The door slid quietly open and Kim appeared back in the entry.

“What did you do?”

“There is a secret latch on this step,” said Erin, pointing at the fourth step. “Watch this.”

She stepped up and down on it. The door opened and closed each time.

“That's neat,” said Kim. “Let me try it.”

Kim came up the stairs and stepped on the corner of the step. The door closed. She stepped on and off and the door opened and shut each time.

“Well, we solved that mystery,” beamed Kim.

“We?” asked Erin. “I don't think so. *I* solved this one.”

“So what,” said Kim, forgetting her earlier fears. “Let's go up to the attic room and see what's up there.”

The two of them continued up the steps and around the curved wall. When they reached the top, there was a closed door. On the door was a huge heart carved in the wood. At the center of the heart were some words. Erin shined the flashlight on the heart so that she could get a better look.

“What does it say?” asked Kim.

Carved into the wood in the center of the heart were the words, “Annabelle’s Secret Playroom.” Erin read the words aloud. The ‘A’ on the name Annabelle was carved in a beautiful fancy shape.

“Who’s Annabelle?” asked Kim. “Do you think she might still be in there?”

Erin gave her sister a strange look, then shrugged her shoulders as she reached up and turned the knob. The door opened with a loud click and swung noisily back on squeaky hinges. It obviously hadn’t been opened in a very long time.

The two of them stood and stared into the room beyond.

Chapter 2 Discussion Questions

K – 2nd Grade

Kim doesn't like unpacking. What's a chore you don't like?

Do you have a playroom at home (or, if you don't, can you imagine a dream playroom)? What toys are in it?

3 & 4th Grade

How do you think Erin and Kim felt when the secret door slammed shut on them the first time?

What do you predict is in the playroom?

5 & 6th Grade

Why do you think Erin felt a shiver of fear when she saw the old woman in the window? Would you be scared?

Describe the scene where Erin and Kim discover the secret door. How are both of the girls brave in their own ways?