

Chapter 4

The Diary

That evening, Kim could hardly contain her excitement. At the dinner table, she kept hinting to Mom and Dad about the secret door and playroom they had discovered. But Erin had sworn her to secrecy, and it took a swift kick under the table to get her to keep her mouth shut. Mom and Dad exchanged a quizzical look but didn't try to guess what was going on.

After dessert, Erin stretched and yawned loudly. "Boy, I'm really tired," she proclaimed. "I think I'll go to bed early tonight."

She glanced over at Kim, hoping she would take the hint and follow her lead. Kim just stared at her without saying a word.

"How about it, Kim? Shall we go to bed nice and early tonight so we can get an early start on our room tomorrow morning?" she urged, hoping Kim would catch on.

“I’m not tired,” answered Kim.

Erin gave her another swift kick under the table. This time Kim let out a howl and grabbed her leg.

“Okay,” said Dad. “What’s going on?” He looked from one girl to the other.

“Oh, nothing,” answered Erin, trying to sound as innocent as she could. “We’ve got a surprise for you and Mom. And Kim was about to ruin it.”

She hadn’t *really* lied because she figured when they finally did show their mom and dad the secret playroom, it would actually be a surprise.

“A surprise?” asked Mom, raising one eyebrow. She looked first at Erin and then at Kim. “The only surprise I want to see is your room straightened up and the rest of those boxes emptied. By the way, where were you two this afternoon? When I came up to check on you the first time, you were not in your room. You were supposed to stay in your room until it was finished. There were at least a couple of times we could have used your help.”

Erin didn’t know how to answer her mom. She didn’t want to tell her about their discovery just yet, but by the look

on Mom's face, it was clear she expected an answer. Mom must have come into their bedroom while she and Kim were up in Annabelle's playroom! Just as Erin was about to tell her the whole story, Mom held up her hand and, exchanging a look with Dad, said, "Never mind. Keep your surprise."

"One question," Dad interjected. "Will we like the surprise?"

"Oh, yeah!" they both chimed in.

"Okay," said Dad. "There will be plenty of time tomorrow to finish your bedroom."

Erin let out the breath she had been holding. Kim smiled at her. They knew their secret was safe for the time being.

"Can we be excused?" Erin asked, jumping up and grabbing her plate.

Without waiting for an answer, both she and Kim put their dishes in the sink and raced up the back stairs to their bedroom.

The large, white canopy bed was set up against the wall directly across from the circular room's windows. There were no curtains on the windows yet, and a huge moon splashed a bright white glow throughout the room.

“Don’t turn on the light, Kim,” Erin said as she crossed the room to the windows. She hung her head out the window and looked down at the lawn below. The moon was so bright that it almost looked like daytime outside. The shadows from the trees danced back and forth across the grass, pushed by a gentle August breeze.

“Gee, Kim, the moon was never this bright back in Racine. Half the time we could hardly even see the stars! Just look at all of them up there!”

Kim stuck her head out the window and looked up. “Wow! Are there more stars here than back at our old house?”

Erin giggled. “No, silly, there are the same amount here as back in the city. It’s just that we can see them much better because there are a lot less lights here compared to Racine.”

They sat there for a long time, staring up at the sky and pointing out the different types of patterns the stars made.

“Come on, Kim,” said Erin, poking her head back into the room. “We’ve got to find out what’s in Annabelle’s diary.”

The two of them quickly undressed, got into their pajamas, and brushed their teeth. A few minutes later, they

were snuggled together in bed, with Erin holding the old diary and Kim shining the flashlight.

“We’ve got to read Annabelle’s diary closely and look for any clues that might help us figure out why she left all her stuff here,” said Erin.

“Then start reading!” squealed Kim.

For the next two hours, Erin read all of Annabelle’s entries. They found out that Annabelle had gotten the diary for her eleventh birthday from her real father and that she had a best friend named Kristina. Annabelle and Kristina did everything together. They played with their dolls and had tea parties up in the secret playroom for hours and hours. In the summer, they would go down to the river and fish off of the dock. They would even sneak down and swim alone in the river (even though Annabelle’s now adoptive parents forbade them from swimming without an adult because the current was too swift). There were also many sharp rocks and deep pools in the river, but Annabelle and Kristina believed they were good enough swimmers to stay safe.

“Why didn’t they listen to their mommy and daddy?” asked Kim. The part about sneaking out to the river and swimming without permission really bothered her.

“How am I supposed to know?” answered Erin. She had a feeling that something bad was about to happen. “Let’s keep on reading.”

They heard their Mom call from the bottom of the stairs. “Are you two in bed yet? It’s way past your bedtime!”

“Come on, Mom! Can’t we stay up just a little longer?” Erin whined. “It’s summertime.”

“Yeah,” said Kim reinforcing her sister.

Mom and Dad came upstairs and entered their room. Erin quickly slipped the diary under the covers before they noticed.

They came over to the bed and sat on the edge. “You two have had a really big day,” said Dad. “It’s time for you to go to sleep. There will be other nights for you to stay up late.”

He bent down and gave them each a kiss and hug. Mom tucked them in and noticed a lump next to Kim. “What’s this?” she asked, tapping the flashlight.

“Oh please, Mommy,” pleaded Kim. “Can’t we have a flashlight on our first night? Please!” She sat up in bed and put her arms around her mother’s neck.

“You’re not going to read, are you? I really want you two to go to sleep. Tomorrow you have to finish this bedroom.” She gestured toward all the boxes that the two girls had not yet opened.

“Just an extra ten minutes,” said Erin. She gave her best pleading look, first to Mom and then to Dad.

Mom nodded her head. “Ok, just ten more minutes. But what are you going to read? The books are still packed away.”

“I know exactly where they are,” said Erin, jumping out of bed and rushing over to one of the boxes. “Right here,” she said pointing down.

She ripped the top open and looked in. Inside were knickknacks and pictures. “Oops,” she said. “Wrong one.”

“Why don’t you read this one,” said Dad, reaching down under the covers and picking up Annabelle’s diary. He started to glance through it.

“No!” shouted Erin, startling everybody in the room. She ran over to her father and snatched the book away. “That’s my diary, and you can’t read it.”

“Well, then, why don’t you put an entry in your diary tonight if you can’t find a book?”

Both Kim and Erin looked at each other and smiled. This was perfect. It couldn’t have worked out any better if they had planned it. “Good idea, Dad,” they both said at the same time.

Mom and Dad tucked the two of them in and left the room. On their way out, Mom reminded them again that they had only ten minutes and then lights out.

When they were finally gone, Erin opened the book to where they left off.

“How much more is there?” asked Kim.

Erin paged through the book to the end. They only had about twenty pages left.

“That’s strange,” said Erin. “Most of the book is empty. If we’re going to find any clues about what happened to Annabelle and why she left all of her stuff up here, the clues had better be in the last few pages.”

“Well, then, start reading!” prompted Kim.

Once again, Erin began to read the diary. There was just more of the same about Kristina and Annabelle.

“No clues so far,” she said, turning to the second-to-last page.

“Today is the worst day of my life,” she read out loud.

Kim, who had been lying on her side and dozing off, sat up straight in bed. “What did you just say?” she asked.

“I think this is it,” said Erin excitedly, reading on.

“Come on, Erin, what does it say?”

“Let me read it to you,” answered Erin. She could feel the prickle of tears in her eyes.

July 13th

Today is the worst day of my life. Kristina slept over last night because she wanted to go swimming this morning. We got up early and went down to the dock. The river was running faster than usual because of all the rain we've been having lately. I begged her not to go into the water, but she just wouldn't listen to me. She always had such a strong will of her own. I refused to go in with her, and I'm so sorry. She was swept away from the shore almost immediately. There was nothing I could do.

She kept screaming for me to help her and all I could do was run back to the house and get my adoptive father. By the time he got down to the river she had disappeared beneath the surface. It was hours before they found her body miles down the river. I can't stop crying. If only I wasn't such a chicken, I would have been in that river with her. Maybe I could have saved her life. Now I've lost my best friend forever. Love, Annabelle

The page was smeared toward the bottom. Annabelle must have been crying pretty hard because there were large water stains. Kim began to cry. Erin reached over and gave her a hug.

“It’s okay, Kim,” she said. “That all happened a long time ago.”

“But I was beginning to really like them, Erin! What happened to Annabelle?”

“I don’t know,” said Erin. “Let’s keep on reading.”

There was only one more entry. It was dated four days later.

July 17th

Yesterday was Kristina's funeral. I've decided that I will make no more entries in this diary after today. This morning Kristina's mom came over to visit me. She brought over the silver tea set that I gave her for her eleventh birthday. It was very expensive and I told her Mom that she should keep it, but she refused. She said it hurt too much to see it in her house because it was Kristina's most treasured possession. I accepted it from her, but I've decided I will put Kristina's tea set in our secret hiding place in the playroom. Also, in the secret hiding place are all of Kristina's and my most treasured items. I've also decided to put this diary up in the playroom for someone to find someday. Whoever finds this diary and finds the secret hiding place, you are welcome to our treasures. I've decided that early tomorrow morning I will run away from here forever. I love you, Kristina, and will miss you always. Love, Annabelle

“You mean she just ran away and left all her possessions behind?!” asked Kim.

“That's what it says,” answered Erin, “and we're going to find that treasure tomorrow morning.”

Chapter 4 Discussion Questions

K – 2nd Grade

How do you think Annabelle was feeling when writing her last diary entry?

Why did the diary make Kim cry?

3 & 4th Grade

Have you ever done something dangerous and regretted it?

What emotions do you think Annabelle was feeling writing her last diary entries?

5 & 6th Grade

Why do you think Annabelle ran away?

Have you lost a friend or loved one? Can you relate to some of the emotions Annabelle expressed in her diary?