

Chapter 6

The Boathouse

Erin and Kim stayed the rest of the day, and well into the night, cleaning and straightening their new bedroom. They even got started on the third floor playroom, which they now called ‘Erin, Kim, and Annabelle’s Playroom.’ Dad said he would carve their names into the door as soon as they cleaned it up and proved that they could keep it clean.

“Whew!” exclaimed Erin, sitting down on one of the playroom chairs. “This is really hard work.”

“Look!” said Kim, pointing out the window. “There she is again.”

Erin got up from her chair and walked over to the window. Sure enough, the old woman was staring out her window at them. This was at least the fifth time they had caught her peering from behind the curtain.

“Maybe she’s friendly,” offered Erin, waving at her.

The woman immediately shut her curtain without returning the wave. The bedroom light behind the curtain turned off and the room went completely dark.

“Yeah, right. Real friendly!” said Kim, turning away from the window.

The two of them continued to work on the playroom for another hour without seeing the old woman again. Just as they were putting the finishing touches on the new playroom, their mom called up the stairs and informed them that it was time for them to take their showers and get ready for bed.

“Tomorrow we’ll find that treasure in the boathouse,” proclaimed Erin, patting the key that was still securely in her pocket. “And then we’ll be rich!”

The next morning they were up bright and early, ready to start out on their new adventure. After breakfast they hurried out the door, only to be stopped by Dad.

“Where are you two off to today?” he asked.

“We decided we would go down to the boathouse today and explore along the river,” answered Erin. “We also wanted to check out our canoe and see if there’s any damage by the movers.”

She didn't wait for an answer. She turned on her heels, scurried off the huge back porch and across the yard. Kim followed closely behind.

"You two be extra careful down by the river," cautioned Dad. "And don't take the canoe out without wearing your life vests. I stored them under the canoe."

He stood at the screen door and watched them cross the lawn toward the woods.

"And be careful," he added, loud enough to be sure they heard him. "Observe those rules of safety we taught you."

"We will," they both yelled from the edge of the woods.

When they had gone far enough into the woods to be out of sight, Erin stopped and turned toward Kim. "Give me five," she said.

Kim reached out and slapped her hand. "Let's get rich!"

They ran down the path toward the river. They emerged from the woods, glanced at their canoe by the shore, and headed immediately in the direction of the boathouse.

"Did you bring the key?" asked Kim. "Because I brought my flashlight." Racing ahead to the boathouse door, Kim grabbed ahold of the old padlock and gave it a tug. It held fast.

"Of course," answered Erin, pulling the key and note out of her pocket.

"I also brought the note in case there is a clue in it that we might have missed."

She took the key and slipped it into the rusty padlock. It fit perfectly. One quick turn was all that was needed to open the lock.

"Come on," she said, turning to Kim. "Give me a hand."

They pulled as hard as they could, and the huge door started to creak open. When they pulled it back far enough to enter, they peered into the old boathouse. Inside were all sorts of boating equipment and a few tools. There was an old wooden canoe hanging upside-down on a pair of concrete blocks and old life jackets resting neatly on the wall. Leaning up against the other wall was a set of paddles. On the back wall was a floor-to-ceiling cabinet with two big doors that had many small drawers on the inside.

"Let's get started," Erin said, stepping into the boathouse. "We won't find that treasure standing around and staring."

"Is that old canoe ours?" asked Kim.

“Of course it is,” answered Erin. “Don’t you remember what Dad said? Anything in here is ours, including Annabelle’s treasure when we find it.”

For the next half hour they searched the boathouse from top to bottom but couldn’t find anything. Inside the cabinet were more old tools but no treasure. Erin went over and sat down on one of the concrete blocks holding up the canoe. Kim came over and sat down next to her.

“Maybe it’s not here,” said Kim. “Maybe Annabelle took the treasure back a long time ago.”

“Then why would she leave the note?” asked Erin. She paused and thought about it for a moment. “Nope. I’m sure there is a treasure out here. We just haven’t found her hiding place yet. Remember how we almost gave up in the playroom?”

Kim nodded her head and then spun around, looking out the door of the boathouse. She heard a light scraping of pebbles on the shore. “What’s that?” she asked.

“Dad?” hollered Erin.

The movement stopped. There was nothing but silence now.

“Dad? Is that you out there?” Erin yelled a little louder this time. Now she was sure that her dad was out there playing a trick on them like he often did.

The two of them listened carefully but did not hear the scraping of the pebbles again.

“I’m scared, Erin,” said Kim, grabbing Erin’s arm.

“Come on,” whispered Erin. She stood up and started leading her sister toward the door.

Suddenly, there was a shuffling noise directly outside the door. Erin and Kim were so startled that they backed immediately away toward the rear of the boathouse. The door swung quickly shut and they heard the padlock click into place.

The girls rushed to the door and started pounding. “Let us out of here!”

The only sound they heard was the footsteps of someone quickly moving away from the boathouse toward the woods. Erin put her face to the narrow crack in the door, but she couldn’t get a good look at whoever had locked them in. For the next few minutes, the girls pounded and continued to yell. Finally, Kim began to cry.

“What are we going to do?” she asked, sitting down on the concrete blocks next to the canoe.

“Don’t worry,” consoled Erin. “Dad knows we’re down here. He’ll come and get us out when we don’t come home for lunch.”

Kim immediately felt better at the idea of a rescue. “But what do we do till he comes?” she asked. “Lunchtime isn’t for hours. I’m hungry! And who was that, anyway? Why did they lock us in here?”

“Let’s continue to look for the treasure,” suggested Erin, ignoring all of Kim’s questions. She pulled a candy bar she had been saving from her pocket and handed it to Kim. She didn’t have a single clue as to who locked the door and she felt a shiver go down her spine at the thought of some stranger lurking in the woods behind their new house.

All of a sudden, there was a scratching sound coming from the back of the boathouse. Erin spun around and stared into the dark shadows beyond the canoe.

Kim stopped eating the candy bar and huddled closer to her big sister. She had also heard the sound.

“What was that?”

“Kim, hand me your flashlight,” requested Erin. It wasn’t nearly as bright now that the door was closed. Erin shined the flashlight where she detected some movement near the cabinet on the rear wall. She slowly reached over and grabbed one of the canoe paddles, gripping it tightly in one hand while holding the flashlight in the other.

“Alright! Come out of there!” she yelled, swinging the light back and forth. The sound stopped as they both crept toward the cabinet. Erin raised the paddle high above her head, ready to hit anything that moved.

Suddenly, a small rabbit jumped out from right next to the cabinet. Erin and Kim were so startled that they both fell backwards onto the dirt floor of the boathouse, dropping both the flashlight and paddle with a loud clang. The rabbit took two more short hops toward them and sniffed the air. Erin reached out her hand toward the rabbit and it hopped over to her, peeking into her palm for a snack. She slowly picked up the soft brown bunny.

“Let me see him,” said Kim, getting up and dusting off her pants.

“Be careful,” cautioned Erin, holding it out for her to pet. “He seems friendly, but you never know.”

Erin had been one of the student caretakers of the many small animals kept at their old elementary school. She knew that even small animals could give you a nasty bite when they were scared.

Around the rabbit’s neck was a collar with a tag on it.

“Kim, shine the light on this tag for me.”

The name ‘Sniffles’ was stamped on the faded leather. “Its name is Sniffles,” she said reading the tag aloud to Kim.

“But how did it get in here?” asked Kim. “And is it a girl or boy?”

“I don’t know,” answered Erin, “Probably a boy. I’ll bet he came in when the door was open.”

They sat down on the blocks and continued to pet the soft, brown bunny.

“Do you think Mom and Dad will let us keep him?” asked Kim, putting the bunny down on the floor.

“I don’t know,” answered Erin, “They will probably make us give him back to the person who owns him. He does have a collar, you know.”

“I know that,” said Kim, “but what if he doesn’t have an owner anymore. Or what if the owner is dead?”

“Then I guess Mom and Dad will just have to let us keep him,” Erin replied. It seemed as if Kim was always going to extremes when she thought about something.

Sniffles hopped over to the cabinet and snuggled himself along its side. One moment he was standing right next to the cabinet and in the next moment he was gone.

“Where did he go?” asked Kim, getting up and crossing the room.

Erin came over next to her and knelt down. There was a small hole toward the back of the cabinet in the wall.

“Sniffles!” yelled Kim, but there was no sound.

“Give me a hand,” commanded Erin.

She reached down and yanked on the side of the cabinet, attempting to pull it away from the wall. Kim reached in and pulled along with her. The cabinet groaned and swung away from the wall. It was attached by three large hinges.

Behind the cabinet were some steps leading down into a long, narrow tunnel. Kim aimed the flashlight into the tunnel.

It looked as if it went on for quite a distance and then curved slowly until they couldn't see anything.

“Sniffles!” called Kim.

Again, there was no sound except the hollow echo of her voice bouncing off of the stone walls and floor.

“I think we found where Annabelle hid the treasure,” declared Erin. She got up off her knees and stepped into the tunnel. “Let's get moving.”

“Where?” asked Kim.

“To find the treasure,” answered Erin, stepping further into the tunnel entrance and down the four steps. She stopped and turned around to look back at Kim.

“Are you coming?” she asked.

Kim shrugged her shoulders and stepped into the tunnel hesitantly after Erin. She grabbed ahold of Erin's hand and the two of them started off to hunt for the treasure.

Chapter 6 Discussion Questions

K – 2nd Grade

If you heard a scary sound, what would you do?

What do you think is in the secret tunnel?

3 & 4th Grade

Why do you think the girls were scared of the rabbit?

Make an inference: Who (or what) do you think locked the girls in the boathouse?

5 & 6th Grade

What do you predict the girls will find in the tunnel?

Map the girls' emotions throughout the chapter. How do you think the girls feel heading into the tunnel?