

Chapter 7

The Dark Tunnel

The tunnel became darker and darker as the two girls moved closer to the curve. Kim huddled next to Erin, gripping her hand tighter with every step.

“Ouch!” cried Erin, wincing in pain. She pulled her hand away.

Her yell echoed loudly, bouncing back and forth in a deafening roar. The eerie sound of the echo frightened Kim even more, causing her to huddle closer. They stood there quietly until the sound died away.

Just around the curve they could hear the soft sound of something moving.

“What is that?” asked Kim, her eyes wide with fear.

“It’s probably just Sniffles,” answered Erin, trying to make her voice sound as convincing as she could. She really wasn’t too sure what was making the sound, but it definitely was

something alive. And it seemed to be moving away, leading them deeper and deeper along the path.

Taking the flashlight from Kim, Erin shifted forward. “Come on.”

Speeding up their pace, they followed after the sound. “He’s getting away!”

Kim grabbed a hold of Erin’s shirt, following closely behind her sister. When they rounded the curve, Erin stopped and flashed the light down the tunnel. Kim peered around her shoulder.

They could see that the tunnel continued on for quite some distance. Tapping on Erin’s shoulder, Kim excitedly pointed to a spot on the tunnel wall about fifteen feet ahead of them.

“Look!” she exclaimed.

There on the wall was an ‘A’ carved into the stone in the same beautiful script that they had found on the door of Annabelle’s playroom. “That proves it,” she whispered. “This tunnel has got to be Annabelle’s hiding place. There’s her ‘A’ just like on the playroom door!”

In the excitement of the moment, Kim forgot her fear and rushed toward the end of the tunnel. Erin followed close behind. It only took a moment before they arrived at an old, wooden door blocking the end of the tunnel. There was a small hole along the bottom edge where Sniffles had obviously squeezed through.

“I bet both the treasure and Sniffles are right behind this door,” declared Erin. She reached up to pull down on the brass handle. There were cobwebs on it and she brushed them away.

“See,” she said, wiping her hands on her pants, “these spider webs prove that nobody has come through this door in a long time.” She pulled down hard on the handle but the door wouldn’t budge.

“It’s locked tight!” she said, unable to hide the disappointment in her voice. She stepped away from the door and leaned against the wall, planning their next move.

Kim examined the handle closely. It was shiny brass with a beautiful floral design imprinted on it. Below the handle was a large keyhole with a little metal cover. Kim swung the cover

back and tried to see what was on the other side of the door, but it was too dark.

“Take a look at this!” she squealed. “This keyhole is just like the one on the boathouse lock!”

Erin took the key from her pocket and slid it into the lock. It fit perfectly. When she turned the key, the lock made a loud clicking sound as it opened the tumblers. Now the brass handle easily turned, allowing the door to swing inward. Behind it was a large room and there, in the middle of the room, was Sniffles staring back at them.

“Sniffles!” exclaimed Erin, rushing over and scooping him up.

The rabbit buried his nose in her jacket, wiggling himself under her coat. He quickly twirled around and poked his nose back out of the zippered opening.

“He must be cold,” said Kim, reaching up and tickling Sniffles’ nose. He wiggled his whiskers and then jerked his head back into the coat. The movement of the bunny tickled Erin and she giggled.

“Where are we?” Kim looked around the room. There were shelves surrounding them, all with large boxes neatly

stacked. In one corner was a furnace and a water heater with a brick chimney. In another corner was a washing machine and dryer with an ironing board set up on the side. On the ironing board was an iron, plugged into a socket high above on the ceiling.

Erin walked over to the ironing board and held out her hand. She could feel the heat rising from the iron. "It's still hot," she whispered. "This is someone's house!"

"Whose house is it?" asked Kim, walking over.

"I don't know," Erin answered. "Let's look and see if we can figure it out."

For the next few minutes the two of them searched the basement. They could not find anything that revealed who owned the house or where they were. Next to the tunnel door was a set of stairs leading up to the first floor of the building.

"I guess we just have to go on up," said Erin, reaching for Kim's hand.

Kim jerked her hand from Erin's, backing away toward the tunnel door. "No way," she whispered shaking her head. "I want to go back to the boathouse and wait for Mom and Dad to come and get us."

"Don't be silly," said Erin, starting up the stairs. "We can just explain to whoever lives here what happened. And then we can go home from here."

"Oh yeah? And what if the person who lives here is the one who locked us in? Then what do we do?"

Erin stopped and turned around. She hadn't thought of that. She started back down the stairs, but before she reached the bottom, the door at the top flew open with a bang.

"Who's down there?"

A woman's voice startled the girls. The bright light at the top of the stairs framed the woman in a dark shadow, concealing her identity.

Erin quickly rushed down the remaining steps and grabbed Kim's hand. Just as the basement lights turned on, she pulled Kim behind some shelves in a dark corner of the basement. They could hear the footsteps of the woman coming down.

When she reached the final step, Erin and Kim peeked out at her from behind a cardboard box on the shelf.

"Look!" whispered Kim.

A chill ran down Erin's spine when she recognized the old woman from the house next door – the woman from the window. She held out a broom in front of her for protection.

Kim began to cry softly. She squeezed Erin's hand.

"I know you're back there," said the old woman sharply. "Come on out from behind those boxes."

The two girls leaned back into the corner as far as they could. Erin looked toward the door of the tunnel and tried to figure how she and Kim could get past the old woman and through it without getting caught. It seemed like an impossible task, but it was their only chance for an escape.

The woman stepped off the stairs and started walking in their direction. Kim let out a wail and began to sob. Just as Erin had decided it was time to make their move, Sniffles jumped out from under her coat.

"Sniffles! Come back here!" hissed Erin.

She let go of Kim and sprang out from their corner hiding place in an attempt to recapture the rabbit. As her hands encircled Sniffles, she tripped and fell to the basement floor. Sniffles wiggled free and scampered to the other side of the basement. Erin gasped and looked up. The woman, holding a

broom high above her head, towered over her. The woman's hands twitched, poised and ready to strike Erin.

Kim shrieked and dove in front of her sister. "Nooo!"

Chapter 7 Discussion Questions

K – 2nd Grade

What do you think will happen next?

Do you think the old woman is nice or mean?

3 & 4th Grade

What do you predict will happen next in the story?

What in the basement gives the girls a clue that someone lives there?

5 & 6th Grade

How do you think the old woman is feeling in this moment? How are her feelings similar or different from the girls?

Kim shows loyalty to her sister at the end of this chapter. What does she do to support her sister?