

Chapter 9

The Plan

“Miss Peterson must be Annabelle!” exclaimed Erin. She took the handkerchief from Kim and closely examined the embroidered letter. The stitching was beautifully handmade, and it was a perfect match to the ‘A’ carved on the door of the playroom and the tunnel wall.

Kim stepped off the porch and started down the back path toward the gate that separated Annabelle’s backyard from theirs. “I’ve had it!”

“Where are you going?” shouted Erin. She stood up but didn’t follow her sister.

“I’m going back over there to ask her,” Kim answered over her shoulder. She continued on without stopping until she reached the gate.

Erin thought about it for a moment and then stepped off the porch to follow. Kim saw her following, so she waited at the gate for her. By the time Erin reached Kim’s side, she

began to have second thoughts. “Wait a minute, Kim,” she said, reaching up and holding the gate shut.

“What?” The irritation in Kim’s voice came through loud and clear. She had made up her mind to confront the old woman one way or another, and she was upset that Erin wasn’t letting her get her way.

Erin chose her words carefully. She wanted to be sure about a few things that bothered her before they confronted Miss Peterson. “How do you know we can trust her?”

Kim stopped pulling on the gate and looked up. “What do you mean?”

“If she really *is* Annabelle, then why didn’t she say so when she had the chance? You blabbed out her name right in front of her in the basement.” Erin paused just long enough to take a breath and then continued before Kim could comment. “And who was the one who locked us in the boathouse? It could have been her, you know.”

“Well, then what should we do?”

Erin bit her lower lip and stared intently at her sister. Kim knew that look well. Erin usually only bit her lower lip like that when she was about to spring one of her elaborate (and often

crazy) ideas on her. “I’ve got a foolproof plan that will catch the person who locked the boathouse door on us! Then we will know for sure if it was Miss Peterson.”

“Oh no, not another one of your crazy ideas,” Kim groaned.

“But this one’s different!” Erin said excitedly. “Didn’t I say this one is foolproof!?”

“Like the foolproof plan you had to make us rich by raising frogs in the bathtub?” asked Kim. “Or the foolproof plan you had to stop Mom and Dad from moving to River’s End?”

Erin raised her hand to protest. “That one wasn’t my fault. The post office just refused to...”

Kim cut off Erin’s explanation and began listing some of the many failed plans Erin involved her in over the years.

“Enough! Enough!” exclaimed Erin. She bit down hard on her lower lip again. “Those plans were different. This one *can’t* fail.”

Kim shrugged her shoulders and leaned her back against the fence post. She knew there was no stopping Erin when she got like this.

“Okay,” she finally said, “what’s the plan?”

Erin smiled and then quickly outlined what they would do after lunch to catch the person who locked them in the boathouse. Just as she was putting the finishing touches on the plan, Mom called from the back door telling them it was time for them to come in for lunch.

“What were you two doing out there by the fence when I called you?” asked Mom as they sat down at the table.

“Oh, nothing,” answered Kim, “just playing.”

The tricky part of Erin’s plan was that Mom and Dad wouldn’t find out about the tunnel until Erin and Kim had claimed the treasure.

“I thought you were going down to the river to play this morning,” Dad commented as they ate.

Erin looked across the table at Kim. She gave her the best ‘keep your mouth shut’ look and peered up at Dad. “We met the old woman who lives next door.”

“You did? Down by the river?” Dad stopped eating his sandwich and looked questioningly from one girl to the other.

Kim had one of those looks on her face that said she was hiding something, so Erin quickly distracted her dad. “No,

silly,” she said. “We met her at her house. She invited us to have some chocolate chip cookies and milk with her.”

“That’s amazing,” commented Dad. “The banker, Mr. Smith, told me she was a cranky, old recluse and had not left her house in many years.”

He looked over at Mom and shrugged his shoulders. “How in the world you two got invited into her house for some milk and cookies is beyond me.”

Mom looked disapprovingly at the girls. “The next time you are invited into anyone’s house you give us a call and ask permission first. You both know the rules!”

Erin knew they had made a mistake. Mom and Dad had told them countless times not to go into someone’s house without first asking permission. She could not think of a single thing to say, so she just lowered her head.

“We’re sorry. We won’t do it again.”

The rest of the meal was uneventful, and as soon as Kim and Erin were finished, they raced up to their bedroom and grabbed Erin’s cell phone from the bedside table. It was time to begin their plan. When everything was ready, they went out

the back door and started down the wooded path toward the boathouse.

After they had gone a short distance into the woods, Kim stopped and asked, “Are you sure this plan is going to work?”

“It can’t fail,” answered Erin. “We just have to be really quiet so that whoever is locking us in the boathouse doesn’t see us set my phone to record.” She patted her back pocket where she had tucked the phone.

Before they reached the final turn in the path, Erin stopped and held her finger to her lips to signal for Kim to be quiet. She stepped off of the path and started to move sideways through the woods toward the rear of the boathouse. Although the woods were thick here, it was not impossible for them to get through.

When they had reached the back of the boathouse, Erin quietly parted the few remaining bushes that were hiding them. It was a perfect spot for them to get a clear view of the door.

She climbed up to the first branch of a nearby tree.

Kim stayed below as Erin had instructed her to do. She was supposed to be the lookout. She didn’t see anyone, but

then again, she was too busy watching Erin climb up into the tree to be a good lookout in the first place.

Erin placed the cell phone on a tree branch and propped it against a couple of sticks she wedged into the bark. The phone was aimed at the boathouse door. She checked the angle one more time and then started recording. She gave Kim the ‘thumbs up’ sign and then carefully climbed back down.

“That’s it,” she whispered. “We’ve only got a couple of hours before the battery runs out, so we need to hurry.”

Kim nodded and the two of them retraced their footsteps back to the main path.

“Come on, Kim! Let’s explore the boathouse again,” she said loudly, as they emerged from the woods and headed toward the river front. “It’s a good thing Dad came down at lunch and let us out of there, or we would still be locked in!”

Erin hoped that if someone was listening, they would believe her little fib. She had no idea if someone was watching them or not, but she was not about to take any chances. That tunnel was their only escape.

Erin took the key from her pocket as they approached the boathouse door. She quickly unlocked the padlock and took a moment to glance around the area before entering. Although she couldn't see anybody watching them, she felt an eerie chill run down her spine.

“Come on, Kim. Let's get started!”

The girls entered the boathouse and walked toward the back wall. They immediately began to empty the cabinet and place the tools and equipment neatly on the floor in front of the doors.

From the corner of her eye, Erin thought she could see the bushes on the far side of the boathouse part ever so slightly, but she wasn't so sure. Unbeknownst to her and her sister, a pair of dark, sinister eyes peered at them until the girls were completely out of sight. After a short time, a person emerged from the woods and crept silently toward the side of the boathouse.

“Did you see anybody?” asked Erin after a short time.

“Nope,” answered Kim. She had just placed an old screwdriver on the floor. “How long do you suppose we will have to wait?”

“If I’m right, not long at all,” Erin whispered.

As soon as the words left her lips, the door to the boathouse swung shut with a bang, startling the two of them. “See!” exclaimed Erin. She got up and ran over to the door, just in time to hear the lock clicking shut.

“You let us out of here!” she screamed as she pounded on the door.

The only sound outside was a sinister laugh that sent shivers up her back and goosebumps down her arms. It was definitely a man’s laugh. Although terrified, Erin immediately felt reassured that the villain wasn’t Annabelle.

“I’m scared,” whispered Kim as she came over to Erin’s side. “Who would do a thing like that?” She had heard the laugh, too, and it was scary.

Erin held her finger to her lips and listened intently. There were no sounds coming from immediately outside the door. Further away, she could faintly hear the rustling of bushes as the man disappeared into the woods.

“I hope he didn’t see us put my cell phone up in the tree,” she whispered. “If he didn’t, then we’ll have a clear picture of him.”

Erin turned to Kim and led her back to the rear of the boathouse. “Come on,” she urged. “Give me a hand.”

Kicking the tools out of the way, she and Kim pulled the cabinet from the tunnel entrance.

“Let’s get out of here!” she said, stepping into the tunnel and turning on the flashlight.

The two of them went only a few feet before Erin went back into the boathouse and retrieved the screwdriver that Kim had laid on the floor. “For protection,” she whispered as she returned to Kim’s side.

Chapter 9 Discussion Questions

K – 2nd Grade

What do you think will happen in the tunnel this time?

If you were Erin and Kim, how would you feel going into the tunnel?

3 & 4th Grade

Think about a time you were brave. How did you feel and act? Is that similar or different to how you feel Kim and Erin are thinking and acting in this chapter?

Make a prediction: Do you think the girls will figure out who locked them in the boathouse?

5 & 6th Grade

The girls didn't tell anyone (including Miss Peterson) about their plan. Why do you think they kept their plan a secret?

Do you think the person who locked the girls in the boathouse knows about Erin's cell phone? Why or why not?