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CHAPTER 1

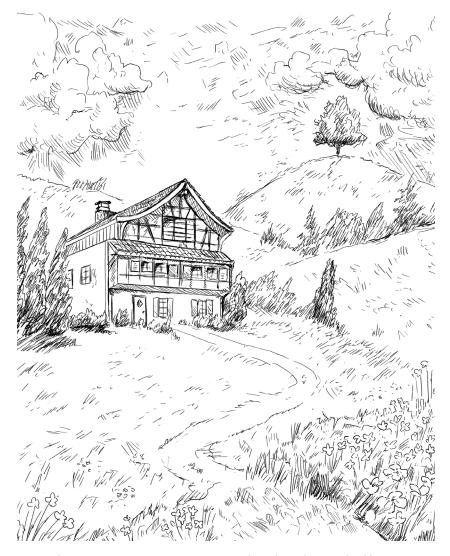
The Late April sunlight slanted through Timothy's bedroom window and shone on flecks of floating dust. The house was quiet; all the guests from Timothy's thirteenth birthday had just left.

Looking around his room, Timothy couldn't decide what to do. A half-read book by Johanna Spyri sat on his nightstand, and presents were piled on his bed: a paint set with a box of blank watercolor cards, a pair

of pajamas, and a pair of binoculars. His interest in birdwatching had grown after he'd seen a few rare varieties of birds on Badger Hills Farm, and he couldn't wait to use the binoculars for more birdwatching. But, at the moment, he wasn't feeling inspired to look for more birds.

Should I finish my book? Or should I use my new paint set? Suddenly, a painting on the wall caught his eye. So many times, he had studied the scene in the painting since he had found it in the hidden room. It showed a narrow path winding up a steep hill carpeted in tall green grass and sprinkled with small yellow wildflowers. Perched on the top of the hill was a white house with green shutters.

Rolling green hills rose behind the house, and



one huge tree grew atop the highest hill.

In a recent earthquake, the painting had fallen off the wall, and the frame had been damaged. Timothy and his father, John, had

been creating a new frame for the painting, and it was almost complete.

I still wonder what clue or clues this painting holds, but I guess I need to be patient. Maybe I'll take the painting out of this damaged frame so it will be ready to put in the new frame, Timothy thought.

Carefully, Timothy took the painting from the wall and set it on his desk. As he removed the painting, one side of the frame broke loose and clattered onto the floor. When Timothy picked it up, he gasped. There was writing on the back of the frame—writing that looked old and faded.

Timothy's heart began to beat more quickly. Is this a clue? Has a clue been on the back of the frame this whole time?

Timothy took apart all the pieces of the frame and turned them over. Each piece had four to five words on it, and when he put all the words together, they created this sentence:

The clue to unlock the secret of the clock is found on the backs of the photographs.



Timothy's eyes widened. It is a clue! It's a clue about the clock! I bet the photographs are the ones in Simon's photo album!

He read the sentence again and then wrote it down in a notebook:

The clue to unlock the secret of the clock is found on the backs of the photographs.

I've got to tell the others, Timothy thought as he shot up out of his chair. When he opened his door, he heard his father calling for him.

"I'm coming!" Timothy said, flying down the hall and then the stairs. He skidded to a stop in the family room and saw the other members of his family sitting on the couch: John, Lily, Zoey, and Nanna Bell. Sammy, Timothy's dog, was curled up on the rug. "I have something very exciting to tell you all!" Timothy cried.

"That's great!" Lily responded. She had been Timothy's stepmother for four months, and Timothy loved her with all his heart.

"But wait," John said. "Come have a seat on the couch. We have really big news to tell you first. Then you can tell us your news."

Timothy looked around and wondered why his parents had gathered everyone together. *It must really be important news*, he thought.

Timothy took a seat, and John cleared his throat. "I thought you would all be excited to know that Lily is going to have a baby."

"A baby?" Zoey squealed. "I can't believe it! I'm going to have a little sister!"

"Or a little brother!" Lily laughed.

CLUE IN THE CHIMNEY

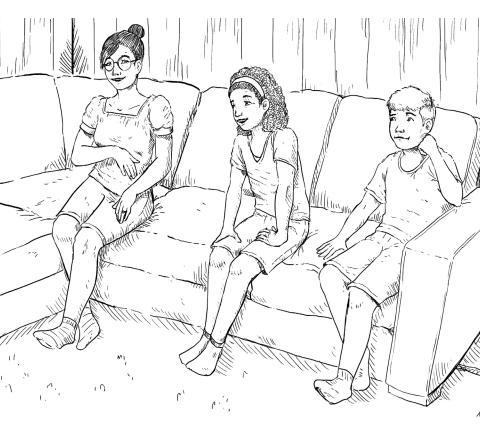
Nanna Bell pressed her hands together, a smile brightening her face. "Oh! How wonderful. How have you been feeling, Lily? When are you due?"

"I'm due in six months—in October. I've hardly felt sick at all," Lily responded.

Timothy felt excited and confused at the



same time. A brother? I think that would be neat, but he would be thirteen years younger than me. And my dad would have another son. That feels strange. Or maybe it will be a sister. That feels strange too. A baby will change things around here, and I love how they are right now.



"What do you think, Timothy?" John asked. Timothy looked back at his father and opened his mouth, but no words came out.

Everyone laughed.

"You look pretty surprised," Zoey said.

"I am," Timothy responded, finally finding his words. "But it's neat."

"It is soooooooo neat!" Zoey sang. She turned to Nanna Bell. "Can we make a baby blanket together?"

"We sure can!" Nanna Bell nodded. "In fact, it's only six o'clock. Maybe we should go into the city and look for fabrics. We could get a late dinner at Buttercup Bakery."

Lily turned to John. "What do you think?" John smiled. "I love the idea!"

"Let's make it a girls night," Zoey suggested

as she hopped up from the couch. Lily and Nanna Bell enthusiastically agreed, and they all scrambled to get ready to go.

John stood up, too, turning to Timothy.

"While the girls are out, I'm going to research what kind of crib I can make. I've really been enjoying woodworking recently, and I'm excited that I'll be able to make this baby's crib! Would you like to join me?"

Timothy shook his head. "Maybe another time."

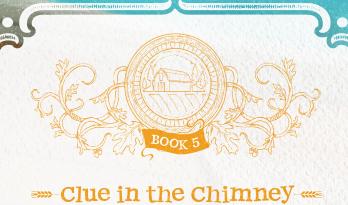
"OK," John responded. "I'm not too hungry right now, but if you want to eat, there are some burritos in the freezer."

John hurried out, and Timothy was left alone in the family room. Everyone had forgotten that he had exciting news to tell them.

CLUE IN THE CHIMNEY

Timothy stood up and made his way to the kitchen, trying not to feel bad that he'd been forgotten.

"I guess I'll go heat up a frozen burrito," he muttered.



The Todds have some exciting news to share and so much more to discover as they continue to unlock the mysteries of the objects found in the hidden room. No one could have expected that behind the bricks of their own chimney lay unbelievable surprises that would lead the family far from home on their biggest adventure yet!





