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Imothy's eyes popped open, and he sat up in bed. The stars sprinkled in the dark sky told him that it was the middle of the night. Looking around the silent room, Timothy wondered what had woken him. Was it a dream? Timothy thought. Was it a noise? Yes, I think I might've heard a noise. But what was it?

He tiptoed to his window and looked out. A string of long gray clouds covered the moon,

but the light from the nearby city bouncing off the clouds dimly lit the yard just enough for Timothy to make out shapes. He saw the huge piles of lumber and the big backhoe that had arrived yesterday to start building the barn.

Faintly, oh so faintly, Timothy was sure that he heard the crunching of gravel outside as if people were walking on the road. A quick glance at the clock by his bed showed it was after one in the morning. He carefully cracked the window and leaned his ear to the opening. There were whispered voices outside—he was sure of it! He backed away from the window a few steps, still trying to get oriented from being jolted awake. His mind spun. What day is it? Oh yes, it's two days after Christmas. Nanna Rose and Papa George are here, and

so is Zoey. Mom, Dad, and Nanna Bell had to go out of town suddenly.

Timothy tiptoed down the hall as fast as he could to the door of the guest room, where Nanna Rose and Papa George were sleeping, but then he hesitated. Will they get mad if I wake them up? They are so nice, but I don't really know them very well. It feels weird to wake them up in the middle of the night.

I know I heard something, so I have to wake them up. Taking a deep breath, he knocked on the door.

Timothy heard the floorboards creaking, and then the door opened slowly.

"Timothy? Is everything OK?" Papa George whispered with concern.

"I don't know. I heard people walking

around outside and whispering," Timothy replied.

"Let's go check it out," Papa George responded quickly as Nanna Rose joined them.

Papa George peered out the window in Timothy's room. "Hmmm, you were right," he whispered. "I see some people, maybe three or four of them, huddled around that big rock over there."

Timothy was worried. "I wonder who they are and what they're doing. What should we do?"

Placing a reassuring hand on Timothy's shoulder, Papa George spoke calmly. "It's OK, Timothy. I don't think we're in any danger. Don't turn on any lights, but carefully go downstairs and get that basket of pine cones in the family room."

Timothy obeyed promptly. He made his way to the family room even though he didn't understand what good pine cones would be.

He returned a short time later with the basket.

Papa George quietly opened the window all the way. Without hesitation, he grabbed a pine cone from the basket and threw it out the window as hard as he could toward the shadowy figures. Then he threw another and another. Papa George turned to Timothy with a big smile on his face. "I haven't had this much fun in a long time! I'm not trying to hit them—just scare them off."

"Let's get out of here!" a voice called from outside, loud enough for Timothy to hear.

That didn't sound like an adult's voice, Timothy thought.

The sound of crunching gravel grew fainter and fainter as the people sped off.

Then all was still and quiet. With a little chuckle, Papa George said, "That was easy!"

Timothy smiled and hugged his grandfather.

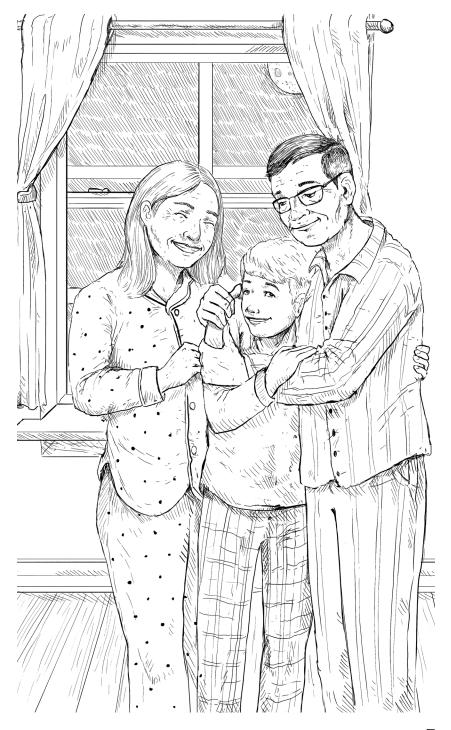
"Papa George, you are the best!"

"He is the best," agreed Nanna Rose, hugging both Timothy and her husband.

Timothy felt an instant bond with these two wonderful people.

"Now, time for bed, Timothy," Nanna Rose said gently. "We're just down the hall if you need us again."

Timothy suddenly felt scared about staying in his room alone, but he couldn't tell them that. I am twelve years old. What would they think of me if I told them I was scared?



Nanna Rose studied Timothy's face and then turned to her husband. They smiled at each other and nodded.

"You know, I'm not feeling so tired anymore," Nanna Rose said. "I think I need to knit for a while first. Would you mind if I sat in one of these big, cozy chairs in your room? I know my knitting so well that I can even do it in the dark. It's quite relaxing, actually."

"Sure, no problem," Timothy said. Relieved, he slipped into his warm bed and turned toward the window, which Papa George had closed.

Papa George cleared his throat. "I'm not tired either. I'd like to go sit by the fireplace downstairs and read."

Nanna Rose soon returned with her

knitting and sat in one of the cozy chairs. The faint clicking of her knitting needles was so comforting that Timothy quickly drifted off to sleep.

HEN TIMOTHY AWOKE IN THE morning, he could tell by the bright sunshine pouring into the room that he had slept longer than normal.

Downstairs, he found Zoey putting on her boots and coat and Nanna Rose and Papa George all bundled up.

"Come on!" Zoey called to Timothy. "Papa George told me what happened last night. He went outside this morning to check on things, and he found something!"

"What did you find, Papa George?" Timothy asked as he took his jacket from the hook by the door and shoved his arms into the sleeves.

Papa George frowned. "I'll show you. It's on that rock where we saw the people last night."

Things sure seem much less scary in the day, Timothy thought as they walked out into the sunshine. A few quail strutted across the gravel path, and a bushy-tailed squirrel scampered up a tree. It's hard to believe it snowed just a few days ago. It's not even that cold today.

As they approached the large rock across from their home, Timothy and Zoey gasped. Red and black squiggly lines of spray paint covered the rock.

"It's so ugly!" Zoey said. "I loved this rock."

"Who would do this?" Timothy asked. "And

why?"

"Those are good questions," Nanna Rose said. "Has anything like this happened before?"

"Never!" Timothy declared. "We haven't had any problems with trespassing."

"I was thinking of calling the police," Papa George stated, "but I doubt there is anything



they can do. It was probably just some teenagers. I doubt they'll come back."

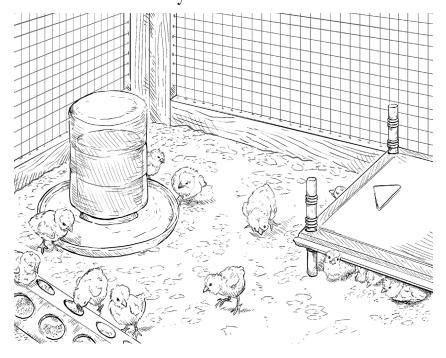
Half an hour later, the family was eating breakfast by the blazing fire. Zoey and Timothy had made oatmeal with diced apples, cinnamon, and cream.

After breakfast, Zoey and Timothy ran out to the garage to see the chicks that had arrived the day after Christmas.



"Oh! They are so adorable," Zoey gushed as she looked into the large cage John had made. The fluffy little chicks chirped and chirped as they walked around the wood shavings and took occasional drinks from their water before darting back under the heating plate.

"They look so happy," Timothy commented.
"I want to hold them, but Mom said we have to wait a few more days."





----- Message on the Stamps -----

Come back to Badger Hills Farm, a large tract of peaceful land nestled right inside a bustling city. Tag along with Timothy, Zoey, and their family as they uncover clues, scare invaders off the farm, and get help from their friends to solve the mystery of an old stamp collection found in the hidden room.



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