

a breakfast serials story

The Secret of Smith's Hill

Written by Nancy Garden

Illustrated by Marilynne K. Roach



Chapter 1 The Crash

Kelly sat straight up in bed. The crash had been loud enough to wake the dead, as Mom would say. And it was still going on in a clanking, rattling way. At first, Kelly thought she was still in Boston and that the noise was traffic, maybe even an accident. But there was no screeching of brakes or screaming of sirens.

Besides, it sounded as if it was inside the house, downstairs.

Kelly looked over at James, her twin. Much as she liked him, she couldn't wait till the paint in his new room dried because then for the first time in her life, she'd be able to have a room to herself. The Clavers had just moved to a house in a little coastal town in Rhode Island, to get away from the city. Gangs had moved into their old neighborhood, and one of them had been after James to join. When there was a drive-by shooting on their street, the twins' grandparents had helped the Clavers put a down payment on an old house--a "handyman's special," the real estate agent called it. Mom and Dad were going to plant a big garden to save on food. A construction crew had already dug a hole for a shed and a storage cellar under it for vegetables, and

Dad, who had a couple of weeks before his new job started, was going to help. Mom was excited because their house, on Smith's Hill, had been built in the 1700s; she liked history and wanted to learn about the people who'd lived back then. James was glad to be away from the gangs, and Kelly was excited about being in the country.

James seemed sound asleep, as usual. It was a family joke that he'd probably sleep through the end of the world.

The crash came again, less of a crash this time than a rattling, tinkling sound.

The bedroom door cracked open and Mom stuck her head in. "You guys all right?" she whispered, shining a flashlight around the room.

Kelly nodded and, giggling quietly, pointed to James.

Mom giggled, too. "Just like your father," she whispered fondly. "He didn't wake up either." Mom sat on the edge of Kelly's bed. "Did you hear it?" she asked.

"Yup. Maybe it was Sphinx." Sphinx was the Clavers' elderly orange cat.

"Probably." Mom patted Kelly's shoulder. "Let's go back to sleep. We can check it out in the morning. Good night, Kel'."

"night, Mom."

When Mom left, Kelly snuggled back under the covers. It had been a long day. First had come the flurry of moving men tramping in and out of their apartment, carrying furniture, lamps, and boxes of books and dishes and papers and knickknacks and toys. Sphinx got out into the hall twice. Cory, the twins' baby brother, almost had a tantrum when Dad packed away his beloved alphabet blocks. Then came the long, boring car ride. And at last the Clavers had turned onto Smith's Hill Road. At the very top of the hill, in fields with woods beyond, was Number 47, their very own house.

No more stuffy apartment, Kelly thought sleepily; no more fights on the way home from school, no more "You-can't-go-out-by-yourself-because-it's-too-dangerous." And she and James would have the whole summer to explore....

CRASH!

There it was again.

CRASH--rattle--tinkle....

This time James sat up. "Wh--where--who?" he mumbled.

From the room next door came Cory's thin, high-pitched cry.

Kelly jumped out of bed and switched on her Mickey Mouse lamp. "I don't know," she said. "It happened before. A big crash like that. Like something

dropped and broke," she added, realizing it for the first time. "Mom heard it, too."

James's eyes opened wide. "A window," he whispered. "Those guys...."

"Not here," Kelly said, trying to sound reassuring. "There aren't any gangs here." She hoped she was right.

The sound came again, louder and longer, followed by Mom's voice saying to Dad, "Roger, wake up!"

"It's inside," Kelly whispered, more nervous now. "Whatever it is."

James's eyes grew wider and rounder. "A break-in!" he whispered. "Robbers! Like in the apartment next door that time."

"Shhh," said Kelly--for suddenly she heard footsteps on the stairs.

Next Week: Mystery Stone

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