

*a breakfast serials story*

# The Secret of Smith's Hill

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## Chapter 2 Mystery Stone

**The story so far:** On their first night in the country, the Clavers heard loud crashes. As the twins, Kelly and James, wonder what caused them, they hear footsteps on the stairs.

For a few horrified moments, the twins huddled together. But the footsteps faded away downstairs. "It must be Mom and Dad," Kelly whispered. "Let's go see."

"Maybe we shouldn't," James whispered back.

"Maybe they've got guns."

"Mom and Dad don't have guns."

"I mean the robbers."

"Mom thought the noise was Sphinx," Kelly said.

"Me, too. Cats are always knocking things over."

"Kelly..." James began, hesitating.

But he went with her when she left.

All the lights were on downstairs. The twins followed their parents' voices--and stopped in the kitchen doorway, staring. The kitchen table was on its side, and Mom's good dishes, which she'd unpacked and

left out ready to be put away, were all over the floor, shattered into what looked like a million pieces.

Dad was holding Cory, who'd obviously been crying, and Mom had Sphinx in her arms.

"Well," Mom was saying bravely, "at least we've never really liked these dishes. And it wasn't Sphinx. He was with me this time."

"Maybe we have mice," Dad said, but he didn't sound convinced. Then he seemed to notice the twins. "What are you two doing up?"

"We heard the crashes," Kelly explained.

"Do you think it was robbers?" James asked anxiously.

"I doubt it." Dad picked up a china fragment--and Cory burst into tears. Sphinx gave an eerie yowl and leapt out of Mom's arms. He ran out of the room, with his tail puffed up to twice its normal size.

"Weird," Kelly said. "It's like the piece of china scared Sphinx."

"It scared Cory, too," said Mom. "It's okay, little one," she said soothingly, taking him from Dad and carrying him out of the room.

"Maybe the wind knocked the table over," Kelly said, noticing that one window was open.

"There isn't any wind," James muttered. "Someone must've climbed in." He examined the windowsill closely.

Kelly ignored him; she was studying the pieces of china on the floor. "Look," she said. "Some of them are in a row, like someone put them that way."

"Ummm," Dad said, sweeping up the fragments.

"Or maybe the dishes were in a row on the table and the edge of the table knocked into them when it fell and smashed them in a line."

"Maybe," Kelly said skeptically.

"Anyway," Dad said, pushing the shattered china into a neat pile, "let's go to bed. The construction guys are coming early tomorrow to work on the shed. And there's lots more unpacking to do. Come on."

There were no more noises that night, and the next morning, Sphinx no longer seemed upset. Cory was his usual cheerful self, too, banging one of his alphabet blocks on the tray of his highchair. Dad, dressed in work clothes, had already greeted the construction crew by the time Mom announced that breakfast was ready.

"Let's explore the woods," Kelly said to James after breakfast. "Maybe we'll find something there that'll explain the crashes."

"Do we have to?" James answered nervously. "I didn't see any sign of a break-in, but that doesn't mean there wasn't one. What if someone's hiding there? Let's look for footprints around the house."

But Mom asked them to unpack their clothes instead. It was nearly lunchtime before they were able to go outside. Slowly, they circled the house, hunting for footprints.

"Nothing." Kelly stopped in sight of where Dad and the construction men were standing near the square hole that had been dug for the storage cellar that would be under the new shed. A big pile of dirt was behind it.

"Maybe something from inside made the crashes."

"You wouldn't think that if we were still in Boston," James retorted.

"I might," Kelly told him. "Rats, for instance. Remember that one in the hall? Anyway, we're not in Boston." She walked toward the dirt pile.

"Stay out of the way, kids," Dad called. "The crew's going to pour concrete into the forms right after lunch." He pointed to a low double fence made of rough wood that ran around the perimeter of the cellar hole. "Kelly! Better come away from there!"

Kelly had spotted an odd chunk of grayish stone on the dirt pile. She took it over to James.

"Look!" Excitedly, she held the stone up. "There are marks on it, almost like writing!"

"Let's see," James said.

But then Mom shouted, "Calling all Clavers! Lunchtime!"

### Next Week: Nothing—Or Something?

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