

THE  
TANGLEWOODS'  
SECRET

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## About Ourselves



Philip and I lived with our Aunt Margaret in a white house on the side of a hill. It was a lovely home, with a garden and an orchard of apple trees. We slept in two attic bedrooms at the top of the house and had our doors open so we could shout across to each other. Philip's window looked out on the garden with the hills behind it, and it made me feel very safe. My window looked out over the countryside of Worcestershire, with the hills of Herefordshire in the distance, where I had never been. My view made me long for adventure.

I loved looking at the hills, and when Philip came to sit on my bed in the morning to listen to the first bird songs or watch the sun rise, we used to make up

stories about strange animals that lived on them.

Philip was a year and a half older than me, and I loved him more than anyone else on earth. He was gentle and thoughtful, and once he had made up his mind about something, he wouldn't change it! He had always been my friend and protector, and we were never apart, except when we were at school. We were so different. Philip was a big, strong boy with a round face and blue eyes. I was small and thin with dark, untidy hair and a pointed chin. Philip was good and obedient, but I was naughty and hated being told what to do. Aunt Margaret really loved Philip, but she shook her head sadly when she looked at me.

At the time of this story, we had been living with Aunt Margaret for five years. We had forgotten what Mum and Dad looked like. They lived and worked in India and they had sailed away when I was just four years old. Mum was going to come home, but the war stopped her.

I was worried that Mum wouldn't like me if she did come back, as Aunt Margaret kept telling me how disappointed she would be with me because I was so bad. In her letters, Mum sounded as if she loved me very much, but I thought that must be because she didn't know what I was like. I was sure she would like Philip much better than me because he was a good boy, and grown-ups always liked him. Philip would like Mum, too, because Philip likes everybody. I wanted Philip all to myself, so I tried not to think about Mum coming home. I didn't want to share him with anybody—not even our mother.

But Philip could remember her, and sometimes he talked to me about her. I remember one evening, when I was about eight years old, I had been sent to bed without any tea because I had been naughty. I was lying on my bed feeling hot and angry and very hungry, waiting for Philip to climb the stairs on his way to bed. As usual, he came straight into my room. He bent down and struggled to get something out of his sock. It was a sugar bun that looked rather squashed, and it had lots of wool sticking to the sugar. Philip was very proud of it, as he had managed to get it into his sock, under the table, without Aunt Margaret seeing him. I ate it happily while Philip sat on my pillow and put his arm around me.

“What else did you have for tea?” I asked, with my mouth full of bun.

“I’m afraid we had meatballs,” he replied, “but they were too squashy to put down my sock. They weren’t very nice. You didn’t miss much.”

“It’s very unkind of Aunt Margaret to send me to bed without my supper,” I whined. “If Mum was here, she wouldn’t be unkind to me like that.”

“No, she wouldn’t,” agreed Philip. “But then, you see, you were really, really rude to Aunt Margaret, and you would never have been rude to Mum.”

“How do you know? I might,” I said.

“Oh, no, you definitely wouldn’t,” said Philip. “There wouldn’t be anything to be rude about. You’re only rude when you’re cross, and we were never cross with Mum. She was so happy and bright. If we were a bit naughty, she used to pick us up in her arms and tell us lovely stories. Then we’d forget

all about being naughty. I wish you could remember her, Ruth.”

I was just about to ask Philip more about Mum, but he suddenly hopped off my bed and dived across to his own room like a frightened rabbit. I heard Aunt Margaret’s footsteps on the attic stairs.

She went into Philip’s room, and I heard her cross over to him and tuck him in. I heard him say, “Good night, Auntie” in a breathless sort of voice. Then she came across and stood in the doorway of my room.

“Good night, Ruth,” she said.

If I had answered and said I was sorry, she would have come over and tucked me in, too. But I hated saying sorry, so I pretended to be asleep and gave a very loud snore. Of course, she didn’t believe me.

“I’m sorry you are still in such a naughty temper,” she said in a cold voice, then she turned away and went downstairs.

“Did she see you weren’t undressed?” I whispered across to Philip.

“No,” answered Philip. “I pulled the bedclothes around my neck. Good night, Ruth.”

“Good night, Phil,” I answered, then turned over toward the window and stared out into the darkness. I kept thinking about what Philip had said about Mum. Mum would have come across and kissed me, whether I was sorry or not, and then of course I would have really been sorry, and Mum and I would have looked out at the stars together. She would have told me stories. As I fell asleep, I could almost feel her arms around me, but in my dreams she ran away from me, and she and Philip went away together, and I was left behind.

## Holiday Plans



This story begins two years after the night I told you about in Chapter One.

I was now nine and a half, and Philip was nearly eleven. On the first day of the Easter holidays, Philip came into my room in his pajamas at half past six in the morning. He curled up on the end of my bed with a notebook and pencil in his hand. Together we leaned our elbows on the windowsill to watch the birds and to make plans.

Bird-watching was our great hobby that holiday. We had a notebook in which we recorded each different kind of bird we saw and everything we noticed about it—its song, its nest, its habits. Philip had made the book himself, and it was very neat. He did