

The Chestertons and the Golden Key




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“They look like nice people,” Cece whispered. “But I don’t know them. Do you?”

“I don’t know them, but I know who they are,” Joan whispered. She spoke into Cece’s ear. “That man is the famous writer G.K. Chesterton! He’s Clare’s most favorite writer! And he’s come to our town! We must tell Clare!”



The Chestertons and the Golden Key

By Nancy Carpentier Brown
with Regina Doman
Illustrated by Ann Kissane Engelhart

TAN Books
Charlotte, North Carolina

To Mike, my Gilbert

N.C.B.

To my Joan and her sisters.

R.D.

To my Father, for his love of books,
and my Mother,
who made everything beautiful.

A.E.K.

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Summary: Young Clare has trouble writing a detective story until the famous mystery writer G.K. Chesterton and his wife come to town and befriend their family.

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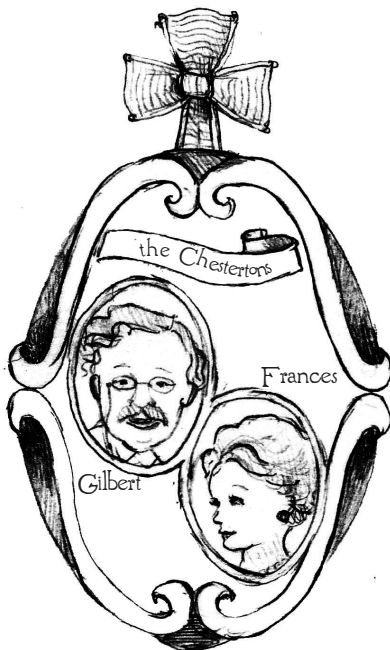
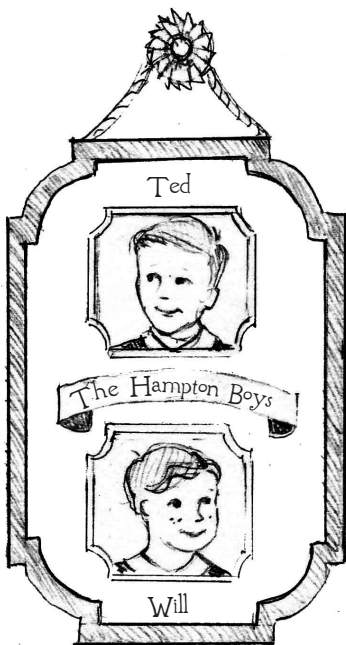
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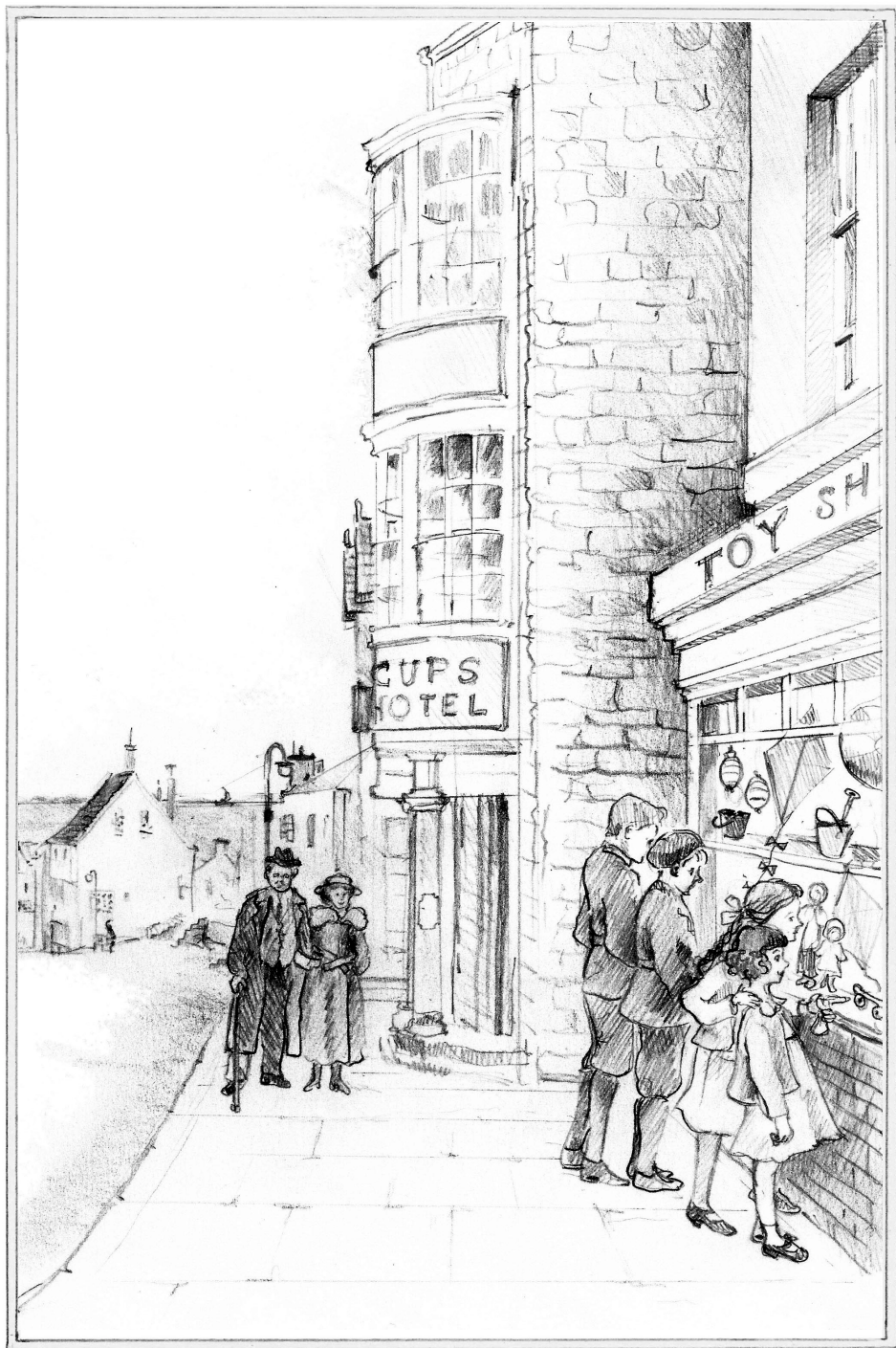
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Chapter One

I can NOT do it!" Clare Nicholl crumpled up her paper. She threw it over her shoulder, and stared out of the window at the green sea, tapping her pencil on the desk. *I'm eleven-going-on-twelve, she said to herself, and I ought to be able to write at least one paragraph of my story. And yet, she looked behind her at the pile of crumpled pages, all I've got is a mess.*

Clare sat in her corner bedroom in the seaside cottage where she lived with her mother and sisters. It should have been the perfect time to write the mystery she had been dreaming of all during the last week of school.

It was a perfect summer day, and the house was quiet. She had a stack of paper and two sharp pencils. But yet, she didn't know where to begin. She couldn't think of how to start.

She paced around the room and took a book off the shelf, and turned to her favorite story, "The Blue Cross." It was by a man named G.K. Chesterton. There was a photograph of the author on the inside cover. "Mr. Chesterton," Clare said to the photograph, "I suppose you never have any problems writing your stories!"



"The skates—the roller skates—they're still here!" Cece Nicholl called to her big sister, her short brown hair fluttering as she jumped up and down. "Do we have enough money to buy them?"

Cecelia, or Cece, loved running and bicycling as much as any British eight-year-old could, but had recently set her heart on roller skating.

Her ten-year-old sister Joan brushed back her long braids as she unclasped her purse and dug inside. "Let me see." She had made a secret resolve to save up her money for music lessons, but she knew how badly Cece wanted the skates.

It was a windy Saturday morning in June 1926, and the sisters were in town shopping for their mother. But they just had to stop at the toyshop in the center of Lyme Regis to see if the new roller skates had been sold yet.

"Don't look now," Joan said, glancing over her shoulder, "but those bothersome neighbor boys, the Hamptons, are coming over here."

"Oh fiddlesticks!" Cece sighed.

Will and Ted Hampton walked up the street towards the girls, hands in their pockets. The girls pretended not to notice them.

"What are you girls looking at?" asked Ted, the older brother, who was nearly twelve and growing tall. He turned to look in the window,

combed his fingers through his red hair, and quickly yanked Joan's braid.

"Hey!" Joan exclaimed. As she pulled her braid over her shoulder in front, she noticed an older couple halfway down the block. *If Ted misbehaves any more, I'll complain so loudly that they'll hear,* she decided.

"Look, Will, roller skates! They're exactly what we need!" said Ted, pointing to the window. "Think of how quickly we could get to school if we had those! They'd be great for racing!"

No! thought Joan. It was just like the Hampton brothers to spoil everything.

"But I'm going to buy them!" Cece said indignantly to the brothers. "I've been saving up my money. And they're too small for you!"

Ten-year-old Will laughed. "Well, they're too big for you! There's no way those skates would fit your little feet." He jingled the change in his pocket.

“No, we can make them fit,” Joan corrected Will. “All we have to do is buy a skate key. Then Cece can make them just the right size.”

“But I’ve already got a skate key: I found one the other day!” Ted said. Reaching into his shirt, he pulled out a black rusted object dangling from a string around his neck. He swung it in front of the girls so they could see the square hole at the base that would fit the clamps on the skates. “So there. First come, first served as they say!”

“And just where did you get that skate key anyway?” Joan asked Ted. “I bet you found it when you were digging for treasure in our back garden.”

“It doesn’t matter where I found it: it’s mine!” Ted said, combing his hand through his hair again. Joan wondered if he thought himself handsome. “And as for the skates, they’ll belong to the first person who buys them: fair’s fair.” He and his brother went into the shop.

“Joanie,” said Cece, as she peered through the window to watch the boys stroll up to the counter, “can we please get the skates before they do?”

The boys bent over the counter, and then huddled together, counting their shillings. “It doesn’t look like they have enough,” Cece said hopefully. “Maybe there’s still a chance. Do you have enough money to buy the skates?”

“Not quite,” Joan said with a sigh. Cece had talked of nothing else for the last two days but those skates. It would be a crushing blow to her if the vexing Hampton boys bought them first.

“Oh, what will we do?” Cece cried, “I simply *must* skate! Otherwise I’ll never get to be a champion skater and win the Olympics!” That was her latest dream.

“Perhaps you’ll be given money for your birthday, and we can buy them,” Joan said. As she gave a regretful glance at the skates, she noticed something in the reflection of the window.

The couple she had seen before were now standing down the street from them. The man was looking at them, and whispering to his wife, who nodded with a smile. And Joan suddenly knew who they were!

“Oooh, look!” Joan gasped, but then quickly added, “But don’t make a show of it! Cece, do you know who that man is?”

Cece looked in the window reflection and saw a very big, very tall man who looked like a jolly elephant. A smile was beaming on his round face. He wore a large flowing cloak and a soft crumpled hat, and carried a walking stick. Beside him was a short woman with a beautiful coat all lined with fur. She had a sweet face framed by brown hair. Cece liked her right away.

“They look like nice people,” Cece whispered. “But I don’t know them. Do you?”

“I don’t know them, but I know who they are,” Joan whispered. She hoped the couple could not hear her.

She spoke into Cece's ear. "That man is the famous writer G.K. Chesterton! I've seen his photograph in the paper tons of times. He's Clare's most favorite writer! And he's come to our town! We must tell Clare!"