

Tunneling in the Closet

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Secret passageways are important. David knew this in his heart. Secret passageways are how pirates get from one end of an island to another. They are how spies sneak across borders. They are the best part of the board game *Clue*. Without secret passageways, life would be just a little bit less fun. But as wonderful as secret passageways are—as important as David knew them to be—he never expected to find one inside his own house.

“Elissa,” he said. “I found something fantastic.”

“I don’t believe you.”

Elissa was David’s sister, an eight-year-old with squinty eyes who had recently decided not to believe anything her brother said. For that matter, she’d decided not to believe anyone—not her parents, teachers or her friends. The only person she trusted completely was Patricia Gold, Private Investigator, the hero of her favorite series of novels. She was reading the latest book, *Patricia Gold and The Runaway Mountain*, in the big chair in the living room when David announced his discovery.

“That doesn’t matter,” said David. “You don’t believe anyone.”

“Correct. Patricia Gold says that you have to be skeptical.”

“Okay, sure. But you’ve got to believe me! I found something *amazing*.”

“And what is it that you claim to have found?”

“A secret passage. And before you even say it, I know you don’t believe me.”

“You’re right.”

“I wouldn’t believe me either. But it’s true! I was crawling around in the back of my closet, near the coats, and—”

“Why?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Patricia Gold says that every detail matters. Why were you crawling around your closet?”

“I was bored.”

“I see,” said Elissa—another of her irritating new catchphrases.

“So I was crawling around my closet. I pushed my hand up against where the wall is supposed to be, but there was no wall there! I fell right through my coats.”

“Hmmm.”

“Oh, quit saying hmmm, and come check out my secret passageway!”

“No. I’m reading, and you’re lying.”

David felt like his head might pop. He was older than his sister. He was also bigger and faster and (he thought) smarter. So why did she always have to ruin his fun? “Fine,” he said. “Forget it. I’ll have the secret passage all to myself.”

David was leaving the room when he heard his sister cough quietly—the way you do when you want someone to look at you, but you’re too embarrassed to say so.

"You know," she said, "in *Patricia Gold and The Forgotten Cave*, she finds a secret passage that takes her all the way from under the Washington Monument to the White House."

"So what?"

"So...it was pretty cool. And even though I still think you're lying, I believe that Patricia Gold would want me to find out for sure."

"Come on."

She followed David to his bedroom, which was always the messiest part of the entire house. Counting carefully, she noticed 19 comic books and seven different kinds of socks strewn about his floor. Elissa wasn't sure how that information might come in handy later, but Patricia Gold would expect her to pay attention. Patricia Gold was always counting things.

"Okay," said David, pointing to a spot just outside his closet door. "Wait here and I'll give you a demonstration."

Elissa put on her most skeptical face and watched her brother crawl into the darkness of his closet. She saw him shut his eyes as the coats pushed against his face, and then he disappeared.

"Very funny, David," she said. "I know you're just hiding in there behind your parka. You can come out now, already, and quit wasting my time." When David didn't answer, she walked slowly into his closet, and gave the parka a poke with her toe. There was nothing behind there. There was nothing behind any of David's coats. It didn't even feel like there was a wall.

"Come on, David. This isn't funny. Where did you go?"

Elissa backed out of the closet and tried to think about what Patricia Gold would do. At first she was frightened, but then, as she counted David's coats just in case, she realized that secret passages weren't scary. They were fun things that started some place boring and led to somewhere exciting. That there could be one inside her own house meant anything was possible, and all of the stories she loved felt real again. For a moment, it was like Patricia Gold was standing in the room next to her. She got down on her hands and knees and crawled toward the coats.

"All right, Patricia, let's find out where this passage takes us."