

CHAPTER 2

## *A Heavy Secret*

By Doreen Tamminga

“We seen a big bird out by the pond!” the boys said eagerly. Nick and Lucas were standing on Mrs. Robinson’s front porch with their snow shovels ready.

“Seen?” the neighbour lady asked loudly. “You seen?!” She shook her head. “Saw!” she said. “You *saw* a big bird.” Then she laughed. “I’ll bet it was yellow and talked to you!”

The brothers just stared at her. They didn’t know what to say.

“Now! Start shoveling,” Mrs. Robinson said through the screen door, “and be *careful* around the lamppost! Don’t knock it over!”

It was not hard work, as the snow was light and fluffy. The small driveway was soon clear, and the brothers began shoveling the porch.

Over the hedge they could see two other boys watching them from their driveway. A new family had just moved into the house next door.

“What are your names?” Lucas called to the boys as they biked back and forth.

“I’m Adam,” the bigger boy said, “and this is Steven. He’s four years old, and I’m six.”

“Oh,” said Lucas. “I’m seven. My brother Nick is four.”

Just then Mrs. Robinson opened the door to check on them. “Are you almost finished?” she asked loudly through the screen door. She peered out at the driveway and saw the neighbour boys over the hedge.

“What are you kids doing with your bikes out in the snow?” she hollered. “Can’t you see it’s winter?! They’re going to rust!”

Adam and Steven disappeared into the garage with their bikes.

“It looks good,” Mrs. Robinson told Lucas and Nick. “Here’s your money, so finish the sidewalk and you can go.” The door closed firmly behind her, and Lucas stuffed the money into his coat pocket. Grabbing his shovel, he backed up to clear some snow. *Bang!* The handle of his shovel hit the lamp, tipping it over.

“Good thing it landed in a snow pile!” Nick said. His eyes were big with fright.

“Help me put it back!” Lucas said. “The bottom of the post is really heavy.”

Together the boys lifted the heavy base and stepped over to where it belonged. Lucas thought Nick was still holding on as he lowered



it, but Nick thought Lucas had it. *Smash!* The lamp base hit the sidewalk and a big piece broke off. Nick stared in horror at the lamp tilting wildly to one side.

“We need a big stone to put under here!” Lucas said urgently, looking around.

“Mr. Lawson has that big pile of rocks that he finds in his vegetable garden,” Nick said.

“We can get one of those.”

“Yeah!” Lucas agreed, and the boys hurried off.

Adam and Steven followed as the brothers crept through Mr. Lawson’s backyard. Lucas pointed to a window on the back of the house; it was covered with boards. “That’s where Mr. Lawson keeps the stuff that he steals!” he whispered loudly to Adam and Steven.

Choosing the biggest rock in the pile, Lucas and Nick rolled it under the fence. They had just scrambled over the fence themselves, when the old man came striding down his driveway with a box in his arms.

“See!” Lucas whispered. “He probably stole something and hid it in that box.”

But they didn’t have time to talk, for a moment later Mr. Lawson was in the backyard. He waved cheerfully at the boys and pulled open the box to remove a bag of bird seed.

“Beautiful day!” he said.

And it was. The sun shone brightly off the fresh layer of snow. Tiny forked footprints dotted the snow around the bird feeder, in neat little pairs. Chickadees and a nuthatch fluttered in the branches, waiting for food. Below the

feeder, fluffy dark juncos in dark suits and white shirts kicked empty seed shells back, flinging them out the way in their search for fresh sunflower seeds.

“I just love all the different birds,” Mr. Lawson said cheerfully. He reached up to pour seeds in the top of the feeder. The boys watched to see if the snow hat perched atop his head would fall off, but it didn’t.

“My brother used to call me a magpie,” the old man went on, “because I talked so much. You could hear me coming from a mile away, he would say!” Mr. Lawson laughed. “Ever since then, I can’t help matching people to birds.”

He pointed to Lucas. “You, young man, look like a bright-eyed junco in your grey coat!”

Nick laughed, but Lucas began to back away. They had to hurry up and fix that lamp!

“Well, I’d better run along,” Mr. Lawson said. He picked up the bag of bird seed.

“You have yourself a good day!”

Lucas waited till he was gone, then lifted the big stone and



squeezed it into his jacket. The boys followed as he hobbled down the sidewalk to Mrs. Robinson's house.

"Why are you stealing a big stone?" Steven asked. "You said he is a robber, but *you* are robbers!"

Lucas didn't answer. "Come on, Nick," he said, as Adam and Steven watched from the hedge again. "Hold the lamp post straight while I put the rock underneath."

The post wobbled but stood straight again, and Lucas pushed some snow over the broken base and rock. Grabbing their shovels, the brothers hurried home for supper.

It was hard to eat. Lucas's stomach hurt. He wished Nick would stop looking at him with

frightened eyes. *What would happen if Mrs. Robinson found out?* he worried. *Were they really robbers for stealing an old stone?*

A weight settled on Lucas's chest—a weight as heavy as the stone he had lugged under his jacket. Lucas's thoughts wandered as Dad read the Bible. He kept seeing the wobbly lamp. But suddenly, he heard Dad's words—God's words—as if he was speaking right to him. "The truth shall set you free," Dad read.

The words echoed in Lucas's mind as he and Nick walked down the street to Mrs. Robinson's house after supper. Nick pulled a wagon for returning the stone to Mr. Lawson's house. "Aren't you scared?" he asked.

"Yeah," Lucas said, "but we have to tell the truth..."

Mrs. Robinson was as angry as they expected. "When you break something, you come right away and apologize!" she blustered loudly.

The boys nodded silently and backed towards the porch steps.

"Did you *hear* me?!" she demanded. "Apologize!"

The boys jumped, then hurried to speak. "We are very sorry about breaking your lamp..." they said.

"And for not telling me!" she added.



“Yes,” the boys nodded looking down at the floor. “We are sorry about that too.”

Lucas dug the money she had paid them, from his pocket. “Here is some money for a new lantern,” he said. “We will get you some more money when we have some.”

“Good!” Mrs. Robinson said, suddenly beaming. “Keep the money; I don’t need it. But that apology had better come from the bottom of your heart! Now wait right here, I have some *huge* chocolate chip cookies for you.”

The boys could still hear her talking as she disappeared into the house.

Adam and Steven were watching from the other side of the hedge again, but Lucas and Nick didn’t even notice. The heavy weight had rolled off Lucas’s chest, and he sat down suddenly on the top step of the porch in relief. Telling the truth was the best thing they could have done. He wondered why he hadn’t done it right away.

Mrs. Robinson was still talking as she came back to the door. “These are HUGE,” she said, “and if I eat them all, *I’m* going to be huger than I am!”

How she laughed as she brought out two cookies for each of the boys. The boys looked at each other. They never knew what to expect from Mrs. Robinson.

“Thank you!” they called as they bounded down the porch steps. The air was frigidly cold, and tiny snowflakes were sifting down. A crow fluttered into a tree overhead and cawed raucously.

“Hurry up and eat them before the crows get you!” Mrs. Robinson called waving her arms. “And give one to the nosy neighbours!” The black sleeves of her sweater flapped as she shooed the boys away and closed the door.

Lucas and Nick hurried to the hedge to share the cookies with Adam and Steven. The boys watched the noisy crow as they munched the cookies. Adam grinned at Lucas. “Mr. Lawson said he’s a magpie and you’re a junco,” he began.

“That means Mrs. Robinson is—” Nick continued loudly.

“Shh!” Lucas said with a frown. “Mrs. Robinson is a very kind lady. She forgave us when we were bad, remember?”

Nick nodded, but he couldn’t help grinning at the crow.

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### *TALK ABOUT IT*

*Why did Lucas and Nick try to hide their accident with the lamp post from Mrs. Robinson? Did hiding their accident make them feel better? Facing your mistakes can be hard but a clear conscience is always lighter to carry than a hidden sin. What does the Bible say about deceiving others, in Proverbs 20:17?*