

# Tilly!



The Mysterious Mrs. Middleton  
A Conley Twin Mystery

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## The Mysterious Mrs. Middleton A Conley Twin Mystery



*TILLY!* is a five chapter Christian mystery and adventure story told aloud in fifteen minute segments. The first four chapters end at an exciting point encouraging students to return the next day and discover how yesterday's situation was resolved. The mystery is solved in the fifth chapter.

### Prepare!

Read the story aloud privately before telling it to the students. Become familiar with the words and phrasing. Tell the story with enthusiasm. Do not rush! Allow each scene to unfold easily for the listeners. Fill the fifteen minute time period fully.

### Read and Flip!

Learn the story and tell it without reading it. Or, read the story, flipping illustrations at the appropriate time. If you decide to read the text, attach individual sections to the back of the appropriate illustration. This method allows you to read comfortably as students are looking at the picture. Or, take the workbook apart and place individual pictures on an easel as you read from the text.

## Review!

At the beginning of each session, review the story. Returning students appreciate the update and new students hear the entire adventure without missing important story details.

## Color!

The story illustrations are printed on white card stock. To feature details, color each illustration. Do NOT allow students to color the pictures. This project is best completed by someone who enjoys artwork and does it well. Color highlights on each page to make the illustration interesting. If preferred, do not color the pictures. Leave the drawings intact in black and white.

## Enjoy!

This story is fun, mysterious and meaningful. Enjoy yourself as you tell each chapter. Avoid sing-song reading. Involve yourself in the excitement. Encourage the students to come back the next day to hear the next chapter. Get them involved in the story line and prepared for the surprise ending. Keep the plot secrets a surprise. Kids love true suspense!

## Story Synopsis

A mysterious guest arrives without fanfare at Shadow River Inn. She comes with much luggage and stories of the old Victorian inn that fascinate the Conley family. There is something mysterious about Tilly Middleton. She shows up at the right times. She has the right advice. She disappears whenever it suits her to the amazement of the twins. She becomes an eccentric friend that delights Chip and Clare. Who is the mysterious Mrs. Middleton?



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# TILLY!

## The Mysterious Mrs. Middleton

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”

~Matthew 13:44



### CHAPTER ONE

**ILLUSTRATION ONE:** Most days no one notices the charming old Victorian mansion. The huge house blends into the trees as if it has always existed. Today? There is a warm, sunny glow and Shadow River Inn seems to smile in all its historic ‘painted lady’ glory. An early morning rain washed away the dust. The tall, clean windows glisten from every angle. The Inn is sparkling as it awaits new bed and breakfast guests.



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“Cut it out, Chip.” Clare Conley snapped at her twin brother while he chewed on his fingernails. “I hate that. Find something else to do.” Chip stopped but laughed at his sister. “I love driving you crazy. It’s my favorite hobby.” Clare gave him the look that only a sister can give a brother and splashed water from her glass into his face.

The Conley twins were enjoying their first morning of freedom from school. Summer vacation in Shadow River meant breezy mornings along the river, hot days, mowing grass, rowing to the cabin on Toothpick Road, meeting friends in the village and most of all eating hot dogs and s’mores around the campfire with folks from the Inn.

"You can't be bored already, brother," Clare snipped. " Watch what you say. Mom and Dad will give you a bunch of jobs if you're bored." He looked out the kitchen window and sighed. "I am so ready to go fishing. I didn't think we would have to take care of guests so soon."

The twins went back to eating their breakfasts silently. "Hey! We forgot to pray for breakfast," said Clare. "Rock, Paper, Scissors for who gets to pray out loud." Chip was happy to play or pray. He was like that. He was a young man with a deep sense of being thankful for Jesus in his life. Many times he and Clare were saved from dangerous situations with their favorite 'Breath' prayer: "Help me!" The Lord always gave them wisdom and help to get out of any situation.

"Rock crushes scissors. Paper covers Rock. Scissors cut paper." Always a stickler for rules, Clare set the game rules and away they went. Tie! Tie! Tie! Finally Clare threw 'Paper' and Chip threw 'Rock'. That meant Clare won and Chip was the pray-er for the day. "I don't think I lost," he said. "Let's pray. Dear Lord, bless our breakfast and help us meet people this summer who will teach us to trust You more. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

Known for solving mysteries, this summer looked like it would be calm. Not a problem in sight. No detective work of any kind to keep them busy. At least their parents would be relieved about that.



**ILLUSTRATION TWO:** She breezed through the huge front door. The bell rang as if by order of the queen. Luggage appeared instantly in the old hallway. Her voice could be heard like a tinkling melody all the way to Shadow River Inn's quaint kitchen. "Yoo-Hoo! I have arrived! Come and greet me. Hello! Anyone?"

2. Chip and Clare Conley jumped from their chairs and ran to receive the guest. It was early and they were surprised to hear a bell and a voice. Chip called, "We're here! We're coming!"

The twins' mom and dad had put them in charge of the Inn's registration desk. Signing in guests, carrying luggage and serving beverages filled their time instead of dangling their feet off the dock and fishing in their little boat. That fun would have to wait until the work was done.

Waiting quietly in the main hall was a tiny sprite of a woman. Smiling ear to ear, she filled the air with delightful expectation. This was no run of the mill guest. This was someone who was used to excellent treatment but did not demand it. She waited patiently for the twins to welcome her. A soft aroma of lilac and lavender wafted around her. It was refreshing to be in her presence.

"Good morning," said Clare. "We can check you in at the desk. Your name please?" The little woman looked Clare up and down and said quietly, "I never 'check in', my dear. I am merely 'expected to arrive'. Please take my luggage to the Butterfly Suite. You know, the room with the beautiful stained glass butterfly window. I am used to that lovely space."

Clare looked at the desk book. The Butterfly Suite guest page had a handwritten question mark beside it. She tried again. "I'm sorry but I don't seem to find your name in my book. Did you make a reservation?"

"I'm certain it must be there. Look again," the guest said with a wink. Clare opened the book and ran her finger down the listing to the same line she had just checked. This time she saw a neatly written name, "Mrs. Matilda Madelena Middleton". She read it out loud and once she was assured it was correct she apologized. "I'm so sorry. I must have misread the guest list. My brother will carry your luggage to the Butterfly Suite right away."



**ILLUSTRATION THREE:** Chip took one step toward the neatly stacked luggage and jumped back three steps! Sitting on top of the suitcases sat a large metal bird cage. Inside the cage was a head bobbing, noisy, colorful parrot. It moved quickly from one side of the cage to another, chattering in an unknown language that only other parrots can understand.

Not being a big fan of big birds, Chip tried to get Clare to carry the cage. She shook her head and mentioned that he had promised his parents to complete ALL tasks cheerfully while they were away.

The bird began to whirl it's wings wildly as Chip tried to lift the cage. Flapping and trying to bite Chip's fingers made for a scary introduction. Mrs. Middleton put her hand on the cage, silently looking the bird in the eye. An amazing thing happened. The parrot calmed down, sat on the perch and spoke in a plain, clear voice. "I'm okay," he squawked. "I'm okay."

Chip and Clare tried to act as if this was an everyday occurrence at the Inn but the truth was that they had never seen anything like this in their life!



**ILLUSTRATION FOUR:** "How did you get all this stuff in here by yourself," asked Chip. "I can hardly lift one suitcase. You must have had a driver." He glanced beyond the large porch looking for a bit of help. No car waited in the drive. No assistant was present.

"I'm stronger than I look," Mrs. Middleton said. "I like everything 'just so' and the easiest way to do it is to carry my own load. I will let you help just this one time, young man. Lead on, sir! The Professor and I have places to go, people to see, things to do."

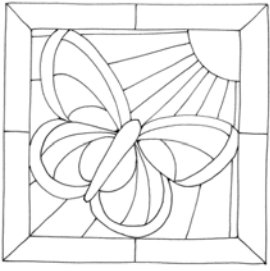
"The Professor," asked Clare? She quickly checked the book again. "I don't see another name here. Are you expecting a friend? Your husband?" The new guest laughed a whispery little laugh behind her hand. "Oh no," she twinkled, "You have misunderstood. This is The Professor."

She waved her hand toward the cage. "He is my best friend and my constant traveling companion. Smart as a whip. Never tells my secrets to anyone. Speaks words of wisdom. Thus his name, 'The Professor'."



The twins laughed. Of course this delightful lady would have a delightful companion. Her parrot was perfect. Their summer was about to get much more interesting with Mrs. Middleton and The Professor at the Inn.

“By the way,” she said, almost as an afterthought, “Matilda Madelena Middleton is much too difficult to remember. Mrs. Middleton is much too formal so for the remainder of my visit, please feel free to call me Tilly. Just plain Tilly. All my friends call me Tilly. By the looks of the two of you, I think we can be considered friends.”



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**ILLUSTRATION FIVE:** Turn left at the top of the elegant staircase, walk to the open double doors at the end of the carpeted hallway and there is the beautiful Butterfly Suite.

Straight ahead is a large stained glass window featuring a single butterfly. When the sun shines just right through the trees outside the window, the glass butterfly appears to flutter its wings and fly along the wall in rainbow colors.

Under the window is a huge four poster bed with a soft white bedspread, patchwork quilt and huge fluffy pillows. A large, old dresser is polished and waiting for clothing to fill its deep drawers. Ceramic butterfly sculptures balance delicately on every surface.

A magnificent floor to ceiling oak bookcase graces one corner. The soft green carpet looks like grass. Antique tables and lamps complete the room.

“Ahh, just as I remembered it,” Tilly exclaimed. She clapped her hands and spun in a circle like a young girl. “It’s just the same. Even the furniture is the same. I am so glad I came!”

Chip looked surprised. He did not remember Tilly. He would certainly remember The Professor. The Conley family brought Shadow River Inn back to life. Before their hard work, the stately old home had been a wreck. More than a wreck, it had been a heap of trash and mold. Long ago, the house must have belonged to a single family.



Chip was certain this was Tilly's first visit to the Inn. She was a bit eccentric. Perhaps she just thought she remembered The Butterfly Suite. He must be very careful to respect this lovely lady. He kept his opinion to himself as he dropped her luggage in the room.

Tilly forgot Chip was present. She jumped on the big bed and cuddled between the fluffy pillows. Her eyes closed and immediately she was in another world. She looked right at home in The Butterfly Suite. Strange and mysterious, light and lovely, old yet young. Who was this delightful person who seemed to drop out of the sky?

As Chip quietly closed the doors to give Tilly some rest and privacy, he breathed in that lovely fresh fragrance that smelled like spring rain on new flowers. He could hear The Professor shouting from the cage on the dresser, "I'm okay. I'm okay."

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# CHAPTER TWO

## REVIEW YESTERDAY'S CHAPTER.



**ILLUSTRATION SIX:** "Finally, a fun day" shouted Chip! He spun around the old wooden dock in his bare feet with his arms spread wide and his head lifted to the sun. The Conleys' little row boat, 'Fish Guts and Glory' bobbed in Shadow River with its old wooden oars balanced carefully on the edge. Rods and reels, tackle boxes and a stuffed lunch basket waited in the bottom of the boat.

Clare laughed, "You waited a long time for this vacation day, Chipster. It's time to go fishing and bring home dinner." She carried her bag of lotions, sunglasses, sun hat, a small radio and her favorite book. Fishing was not Clare's favorite activity but any day on Shadow River was a good day. She was game to go along for the ride and keep her brother company.

She sighed, "This summer vacation feels like all work and no play. They say 'All work and no play makes a bored girl'." She thought about the stacks of dishes she washed, the towels she folded and placed in guest rooms and the beds she helped her mom make every day. Shadow River Inn, after all, was a family business but she longed for a lazy hazy vacation.

**ILLUSTRATION SEVEN:** The twins understood what a gift the old Inn was to their family. When their dad lost his job, life looked grim. They bought the old place for a mere paper promise from Shadow River Bank who trusted Jack and Elise Conley to pay their debt. The twins understood their family depended upon faithful upkeep of the Bed and Breakfast and a constant stream of paying guests.



"Forget about it, Clare. We have one 'Fish Guts and Glory' day to fish, row and enjoy the sun. Don't remind me that I have to paint the back porch tomorrow. And why mom chose that bright red color is beyond me. Yuck!"

"Race 'ya", shouted Clare. She took off toward the end of the dock. She got a quick head start and before Chip knew it, his sister was far ahead, racing faster toward the boat.



**ILLUSTRATION EIGHT:** Neither of them noticed an older man standing on the far edge of the dock staring into the water. Just standing and thinking and definitely not paying attention to the two kids running toward him at top speed.

In a flash, Clare, who had been looking over her shoulder at Chip, ran into the man. Not only did he fall but he fell into the water with a huge splash. Taken off guard, he had no time to catch himself or brace for the impact.

Clare fell into the water behind him. Chip raced into action. He dove into the deep water and pulled the struggling man to the edge of the dock. He headed back for Clare who was sputtering and trying to catch her breath. She gasped for air and grabbed for Chip's neck. The older man swam back to the twins and dragged them both back to the dock. Many apologies were offered as the three pulled themselves up from the water to rest on the edge of the dock.

"What were you thinking," asked the man. "I never saw you coming. Don't you look where you are going? That's the problem with kids today. They never look where they are going."

Clare was crying. "I'm so sorry. I was racing my brother to our boat. It's a private dock so I never imagined anyone would be here."

Chip laid back on the dock and shook his head. "And this was going to be a great day. What was I thinking?" He thanked the stranger for coming back to get them. The twins were strong swimmers but the confusion caused them to struggle in the water.

The stranger questioned them. "Who are you? By any chance are you part of that Conley clan?" His eyes flashed in anger as he stood to confront the twins.

"I'm Chip Conley and this is my sister, Clare. Our parents own Shadow River Inn." Chip was a little fearful and held Clare's hand, backing them off the wet dock.

"So you say," said the man. "Your parents are low down, rotten cheaters. They don't own that inn! It's my treasure. I will have my treasure."

Just as the twins were about to protest, they heard a familiar sparkling voice from across the lawn. "Hello! Yoo Hoo! Oh, there you are! I've been looking for you all morning." Tilly was wearing a white dress with a little summer hat. She carried a ruffled umbrella. Her little white ballerina shoes were no match for the rocks along the shoreline but she seemed to float across the little stretch of sand to the dock.

"My goodness," she chirped, "You two look just about drowned. What happened, my little angels?" Her eyes looked surprised. She took in the whole scene and did not miss a silent anger rumbling from the man.

"Tilly, you always show up at the least appropriate times," whined the old man. "Take yourself and your little smile away from me. I will deal with these hooligans on my own."

Tilly just smiled and said, "Why hello, Will. It has been a long time. What are you doing back in Shadow River?" It was as if the man had merely said, "Good morning, dear Tilly. So nice to see an old friend."

"None of your business, Tilly Middleton. Hit the road." Chip and Clare's eyes got big, silently begging Tilly to stand her ground and not leave them alone with this angry man. They said they were sorry several more times in a desperate attempt to calm him and repair their reputations.

Tilly's peaceful voice worked wonders. "Will, I know you got scared in the water and I know you are wet and uncomfortable. Please take a moment to think about how awful these kids feel. It was an accident. Now, pick yourself up and start your day again. It has to get better. And, I have a boat ride to take. Don't ruin it for me!"

As if hit by a sudden fresh breeze, the man took a deep breath and mumbled that he would take her advice....THIS time. He huffed off toward Shadow River Inn in his wet shoes and clothing.

"Tilly, why is he so angry? He said our parents don't own Shadow River Inn. I know we do. My folks are pleased to have people enjoy it after so many years of emptiness." Clare was weeping openly. She felt terrible that she was the cause this outburst.

"Get in the boat, kids. Take me for a quick row and I will try to explain my old friend, Will Powers. You might be interested to know that I am here because I knew he was coming for a visit to Shadow River."

Without changing their wet clothes, they jumped into the boat carefully seating Tilly in the small middle seat. Off they rowed, catching the slow, down river current. The breeze soon dried the twins' summer outfits and Tilly seemed to be in no hurry as she trailed her hand in the water alongside the oars.



**ILLUSTRATION NINE:** Chip and Clare felt a "whoosh" and heard a "squawk". A fast moving patch of color buzz bombed their heads. Tilly did not react or look up but merely pointed to a low hanging tree along the shore. There, in all his parrot glory, perched The Professor. He repeated, "I'm okay. I'm okay." The twins were in shock.

"How did The Professor get out of his cage," asked Clare. "Aren't you afraid he will fly away? Should we catch him?" She put her finger in the air hoping the bird would fly to sit on it so Tilly could grab him.

"Oh no," said Tilly calmly. "He's fine. He won't leave me. He knows who fills his little food cup every morning. He loves his freedom and he is my eyes and ears in the big, wide world. Why, without The Professor, I wouldn't have a clue how to help you."

"Help us?" questioned the twins together. "We don't need help. We are doing just fine. We know our way up and down the length of Shadow River." After all, they had lived in the village all their lives. Why they needed the help of Mrs. Matilda Madelena Middleton was far beyond anything the twins could imagine. This odd little lady was interesting but not truly important.

"There is a bit of trouble ahead," she sighed quietly. "I don't want you to panic but I know something you don't know. Will Powers is here to take Shadow River Inn away from your family. He is prepared to do everything he can to make it happen." Tilly frowned as she delivered the bad news.

"How do you know that? Why would he want to do that?" Chip was in a panic. "That man cannot possibly take our Inn away from us. We have to get back to mom and dad. We have to tell them." He turned the boat around and rowed as fast as his arms could pull the oars.

Tilly put her hand gently on his knee. "No need to hurry, Chip. Mr. Powers cannot do anything right now. He is missing something very important. He's missing the key to the solution of all his troubles. He doesn't know what to do about it." She smiled and added with a wink, "But, I do!"

# CHAPTER THREE

## REVIEW YESTERDAY'S CHAPTER.



**ILLUSTRATION TEN:** Chip and Clare told their parents, Jack and Elise Conley, about Mr. Power's threat and Tilly's warning. Jack and Elise comforted their children with the knowledge that the bank assured them the old Victorian mansion had been abandoned years ago. It was auctioned fair and square to the highest bidder.

"We own Shadow River Inn," said Dad. "It's just the detective in you that makes you want to see a mystery in every situation. Stop over thinking it and go about your business."

Mom agreed with a smile. "I like Mrs. Middleton," she said. "But she doesn't know our family. She doesn't have the answers to everything. Mr. William Powers is a guest here and you will give him the same respect you give every guest. I won't hear another word."

"He's a guest here?" Chip was not expecting that. "He said he would ruin us. You can't let him stay here."

"But Tilly said..." started Clare. Her father stopped her. "Didn't I say, 'Go about your business?' Didn't mom say, 'I won't hear another word'?" Dad was serious as he stared down his headstrong twins. "Chip, you have a red porch to paint and Clare you have a garden to weed. Get going. No more tales of woe today. I will speak to Mrs. Middleton myself."

"Yes, Dad," they said sadly. They knew their parents well. Every time a mystery came their way so did chores. "They just want to keep us busy," complained Chip. "The busier we are, the less time we have to poke around grown up stuff." The only problem is that this time the fate of the entire Conley family was at risk.





**ILLUSTRATION ELEVEN:** At the very moment the twins felt the most helpless, they heard a familiar cheery voice. "Hello! Yoo Hoo! Anybody here?" It was Tilly calling from the main hall. She stood by the desk and called the family to come to her. How did Tilly always know how to show up at just the right moment?

The Conleys greeted a dazzling Tilly Middleton, wearing yet another bright dress and scarf with a tiny summer hat perched on her wavy curls. Holding a perfectly wrapped gift with a big bow, she lifted it up to her face and called out, "Presents! Don't you just love presents? I have a wonderful present for all of you! Somebody open it. I can hardly wait to see what I gave you." She was smiling and jumping up and down as much as she could for a lady of her advanced years.

Clare's mom said, "Oo, we LOVE presents! We didn't expect a present today. It's not our birthday or anniversary." Clare added, "And it's not a holiday! What could it be?"

Tilly said, "Open it. Open it. I can hardly wait to see what it is. It must be a treasure hiding in there!"

Chip stared at Tilly and then the wrapped present and then back at Tilly. "YOU are giving us a present and YOU don't know what's in the box?" For the first time Chip was concerned that Mrs. Middleton was seriously off her rocker. Who gives a present and doesn't know what's inside the box?

Jack Conley put his arm around Tilly and said, "Mrs. Middleton, what a nice thing to do. We cannot accept a gift from you. You are OUR guest. We are the people who serve you. But...thank you for the gracious thought."

"Pish posh! Open it! You cannot refuse a gift given in love. That is exactly what this is; a gift given in love. It was given to me long ago to give to you! Open it! What could it be? A treasure?" She was so excited about this gift that the family could hardly keep refusing.

Elise Conley took the mysterious gift from Tilly. "Thank you, Mrs. Middleton. This is very generous of you." She let Clare remove the big bow and then she carefully slipped her fingers under the finely wrapped paper. It slid off easily. Under the paper was a very old navy blue velvet box with a small white pearl clasp.

"Lovely," said Tilly. "I just knew it would be lovely. Open it!" By now, the family was very nervous. Could it be that this little lady had stolen a treasured antique from another guest? What should they do?

Jack frowned, "Well Elise, you might as well open it and then we will deal with the 'fall out' later." He figured he could sort it out with another guest if need be. Until they knew what was in the box, they had little to go on to accuse Tilly of a crime, even a minor crime.

**ILLUSTRATION TWELVE:** The pearl clasp sprung open as soon as Elise touched it. The blue velvet lid popped open and sitting in a soft lining was one item. It was a golden key. The large, fancy key looked old, very old. Elegant, tiny scroll work made the key look delicate and the lock had a small Cross shape at the base. It was a beautiful piece of art but did it open something?



12.

The Conleys leaned in for a better look. Tilly leaned back and just looked self satisfied. They oo'ed and aah'ed. Clare picked up the key and turned it over in her hand. It was heavy, gold, old and large. The key had simple, printed engraving on it. They looked at the neat printing. It read: 'Matthew 13:44'.

"It's a Bible verse," said Chip. "What does that verse say? Somebody grab a Bible." Jack grabbed an old Bible stored under the registration desk. He quickly flipped pages to the first book of the New Testament. He ran his fingers down the page. "Let's see. Matthew 13:44. Here it is. It says, "

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field.  
When a man found it, he hid it again and then in his joy  
went and sold all he had and bought that field."  
~Matthew 13:44

Chip tapped his finger to his head. "Hmm, a treasure hidden in a field. I think we have a clue to a mystery. Do we have a field?" No one could think of any place where a treasure could be hidden. The only field they knew of was full of overgrown weeds at the edge of their property but it was near the woods and hadn't been a true field in years. No history of a treasure that anybody mentioned.



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**ILLUSTRATION THIRTEEN:** For the first time, Jack and Elise took their children's concerns seriously. Chip and Clare might be amateur kid detectives but they had common sense and people sense. They sent the twins off to complete their chores. They invited Mrs. Middleton into their old fashioned parlor for a little chat. Elise prepared hot tea and served it on a silver tray just the way Tilly liked it.

The Conleys looked concerned but Tilly's smile and sense of calm never left. She knew who she was and why she was in Shadow River. She had promised to deliver this gift and she had done her duty.

"You must suspect that we have questions for you, Mrs. Middleton," started Jack. He wondered if she was playing games with his family and he was determined to hear her story and send her on her way as soon as possible.

"Please, call me Tilly. Mrs. Middleton is so formal. I'm happy to tell you what I can. There are a few things I cannot say." She put her little hand over her mouth and with a twinkle in her eye hinted at a few secrets she would keep forever. "You must discover what I cannot tell you."

"Mrs. Middle...Tilly, if you are playing games, we don't have time for it. We have a business to run and children to raise. We live in a small community where others know our secrets. Please stop." Elise pleaded for this little adventure to end.

"I assure you, Mrs. Conley, this is no game. I was sent to help you. I was sent to warn you that danger is ahead. Be aware that Mr. William Powers is here to upset life as you know it. I cannot tell you more. You must search and find the answer for yourselves.

Where I came from and where I will go is of no concern to you. Just heed my warning and all will be well." Tilly's ever present smile faded and her soft violet eyes stared seriously into Elise's eyes.

The golden key in its antique blue velvet box sat near the tea pot on the table between them. Tilly looked at the key and at the Conley's. "Take that verse seriously," she said. "It is important to find the hidden treasure as soon as possible." Tilly rose to leave. "The Professor and I have people to see and places to go. We will leave you to your thoughts. Just let me remind you that keys usually open doors." Jack and Elise stared at the beautiful golden key and when they looked up Tilly Middleton was gone. Just gone.

As if that wasn't enough of a surprise, Mr. Powers was standing in the parlor doorway looking at the old key with a puzzled look in his eye. He pounced before they could say a word and grabbed the key. "It's mine!" he said. "I have always owned this key. Tilly Middleton could not take it from me then and she cannot take it from me now. It's mine!" He ran from the room and out the front door of the Inn leaving the Conleys stunned in the silence of the empty room.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## REVIEW YESTERDAY'S CHAPTER



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**ILLUSTRATION FOURTEEN:** Chip sat on the edge of his bed. It was late at night and he was worried. Tilly did not show up at bed time. Her Butterfly Suite was empty. The Professor was missing and so was the golden key. What did it all mean? He didn't have the heart to get his pajamas on and crawl under his quilt so he just sat and tried to figure out what was happening.

"Think, Chip, think," he said aloud. "Pray, Chip, Pray," he thought. "Dear Lord, help me think my way through this mystery. What does the Bible verse mean? Hidden treasure...in a field...sell everything....buy the field. I know You have sent Miss Tilly to us. She said she was here to help. She is missing. You must help me, Heavenly Father. Amen."

As Chip finished his prayer, he thought he heard a slight noise. It wasn't a footstep but more like a shuffle or a sliding sound. The Inn was quiet. All the guests were asleep. He sat very still and listened. There it was again. Someone was definitely moving something. He opened his door and listened. Nothing. It must have been his imagination.

Clare opened her bedroom door and whispered, "Did you hear that, Chip?" She was still dressed too. They met in the middle of the hall and waited. Nothing. It was totally quiet. She whispered again, "I thought I heard someone moving around on the second floor. Should we go look?"

Chip shook his head. "If Tilly is coming in late we will scare her. Just go back to bed." As soon as he said that, they heard a muffled sneeze. It was definitely a man and they jumped. It didn't seem to be coming from any of the rooms. It was too close to them in the family area. "Okay, we should check this out. Come with me," he said.

"Should we get mom and dad," Clare asked. Chip shook his head slightly. "No need. It's probably nothing but our imaginations. Let's just take a look and get to bed."



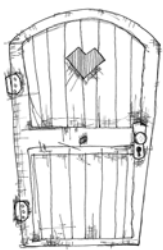
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**ILLUSTRATION FIFTEEN:** The twins tiptoed along the carpeted stairs to the second floor. They saw Tilly's open door and noticed a light beside her bed. They gave each other a relieved glance and tapped lightly on her door to say goodnight.

Tilly's summer hat was on the bed and her suitcases were neatly stacked in one corner. The Professor was not there and neither was she. Immediately they noticed the antique bookcase in the corner had been moved. It was tipped outward into the room. Everything else was in perfect order.

Chip peeked behind the bookcase and his eyes grew large. There was a hole in the wall! A big, people sized hole in that wall! Clare followed his eyes and then slowly backed out of the room. She mouthed the words silently, "Get...out...of...here!"

Not Chip! He barged ahead and stepped through the jagged hole. It was dark but he could make out a hulking shape a few steps inside the wall. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust and then he saw it.



16

**ILLUSTRATION SIXTEEN:** It was a door. A large wooden door that looked like it was from another day and age. The door was heavy and appeared handmade. It was built between the walls and it appeared there was a room behind the door. Chip turned the metal knob but the door was locked. He tried to look inside the hidden room through a peep hole and through a small knot hole but saw nothing. He heard nothing.

It was time to get his mom and dad. He backed away silently and left everything in place. He met Clare in the hallway and together they made their way to their parents' bedroom. It was a relief to jump into their bed and tell the entire story about the Butterfly Suite, the bookcase, the jagged hole and most of all the locked door behind the wall.



Together, the family decided to check it out. Jack and Elise led the way. When they got to the Butterfly Suite, they found the bookcase and the hole and the locked door just as the twins said. Jack said, "I painted this room myself. I never saw a hole. No one ever told us about a hidden room in the wall. Someone has been tampering with the Inn. We have to find a way inside this room."



**ILLUSTRATION SEVENTEEN:** Turning around, they were surprised to find Will Powers standing alone in the doorway. This time the older man was smiling. He wore a baseball cap on the back of his bald head and dusty work clothes. He seemed very pleased with himself.

"So, you found my little secret," he smiled. "Little did you know I know Shadow River Inn like the back of my hand."

"Who are you, Mr. Powers?" asked Elise. "We have never done anything to harm you. We invited you to stay at the Inn even when you frightened our children. We have tried to be kind. We don't know you. Why would you think chopping a huge hole in our wall was a good thing to do without telling us the plan!" She was truly puzzled with the anger and threats and now the damage. Until now, just words. Putting a hole in their wall took this to the level of calling the Shadow River Police Department.

He thundered, "I own this place. You are trespassers in my home. I was born here. I lived here all my life. You did not buy the Powers Estate because I'm not selling it. In fact, I sold everything I own to come back and take possession of my family home. The Powers Estate is my one and only treasure."

Jack stood his ground with the angry man. "We purchased a tumble down wreck of a house and property covered in weeds. We did not steal anything from you. Ask the bank. Ask the village leaders." No one was going to take this house from the Conleys.



Right on time, yet again, came the familiar tinkling call, "Hello! Yoo Hoo! Anybody here? I'm home!" Tilly was climbing the stairs carrying The Professor in his cage. She didn't seem the least shocked to find a group standing in her room, furniture moved and a hole in the wall. She laughed, "I guess the party is in my room tonight. I didn't know or I would have brought cake."

"My, my, I see you found the door! Took you long enough," she twinkled. "I gave you enough clues and I even gave you the key!" The Professor squawked, "The key! The key! The key to treasure."

Chip and Clare jumped into action. "Where is the golden key, Mr. Powers? That key may hold the answer to all our questions. You must have unlocked the hidden room. What is in there?"

**ILLUSTRATION EIGHTEEN:** He replied, "I was just coming to open the lock when I found all of you in here. Trespassing again!" He pulled the key from his pocket. "You are not getting inside that room. That was my own mother's room and I hid it behind a wall years ago. You will not put your feet in that place."



18

Jack said, "If we do not enter that room, our next phone call will be to the police. Or, we can settle this privately. Open the door, Mr. Powers. Open the door."

The threat of police being called caused Will to re-think his plans. He looked at the golden key in his open hand. Turning it over and over, he considered his options. "You stole this house. You took my treasure. It is mine! I have nothing else, nowhere to live, no job. This is all I have in the world. I sold everything I own to get my treasure hidden in the wall."

Tilly said, "Will, this is a good family. They won't steal anything from you. If there is valuable treasure behind that door, be assured they will treat you fairly. Just open the door."

"I can hardly wait to see your mother's bedroom. I visited when she was sick and read stories to her. So many years. So many memories. I was told you were coming to make a claim on Shadow River Inn. I had to meet you here. Her room was always called 'The Butterfly Suite'. When I saw it was so much smaller, I was disappointed."

"When my family left, I came back and plastered the wall. I didn't have the money to buy the house so I just kept her room hidden, like a treasure, behind a wall. No one would ever know about the treasure, just me. When I saved enough money to buy it back, I came." Will remembered quietly how brokenhearted he was to give up the old Powers Estate.

Jack Conley looked at the key shining in Will's hand. "It's time to let go of the past and open that door, Mr. Powers. I have no idea what we will find but now is the time."

Will Powers silently approached the old wooden door, so beloved from his childhood, inserted the golden key and turned it slowly in the ancient lock. Everyone heard a loud click and the door swung open, spraying dust everywhere.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## REVIEW YESTERDAY'S CHAPTER



19.

**ILLUSTRATION NINETEEN:** "I'm okay! I'm okay!" shouted The Professor. He picked the bird cage lock with his beak and flew in an elegant swoop through the jagged hole and into a closed, musty smelling, old bedroom. He perched on the top of the dusty curtain rod. "I'm okay. I'm okay. Get the key. Get the treasure."

Tilly tried to grab her feisty bird. "Not now, Professor. Fly home. Fly home." The Professor took to flight one more time. He flew in a tight circle and landed on a small leather pouch laying on a chair. Repeating, "I'm okay. Get the treasure," he dove over the heads of the group. His colorful wings carried him out of the room and back to his open cage.



20.

**ILLUSTRATION TWENTY:** The room was so dark. A small window was shuttered and boarded from the inside. The air was thick with dust and mold. It was definitely true that the room had been locked and hidden for many years.

To the surprise of everyone, Will Powers clicked the switch on a small, ruffled bedside lamp and the room was filled with a warm glow. What they saw was an amazing time capsule. The large bed in the center of the room was draped with blue velvet curtains and neatly made as if the owner had just left for the day.

The walls were wallpapered creamy white with tiny blue forget-me-not flowers artistically scattered here and there. Two lovely antique tables stood beside the bed with tiny butterfly sculptures covered in dust sitting neatly in their places. The hardwood floor was covered with a round braided blue rug. Delicate slippers sat beside the bed.

"It's just as I left it," said Will. "My mother passed away just days before I closed the wall. It still smells like her perfume." He brushed a tear from his eye and touched every picture on the wall and every item in the room.



21

**ILLUSTRATION TWENTY ONE:** Chip and Clare, ever the detectives, noticed the fabric pouch on the chair. Chip asked for permission to check it out. He opened it carefully and found it held only one yellowed piece of paper. It crackled as he carefully removed it.

Tilly smiled as if she knew all along that there was a surprise waiting for Will. How would she know? She looked at Chip as he opened the pouch but remained silent and watched the story unfold.

"This isn't mine," said Chip. "He handed the paper to Mr. Powers. You should read this."

*(To reinforce the existence of the letter, consider making a separate copy of the letter and age the paper if possible. Pass the letter around the group so they can see it and touch it as you read it.)*

**ILLUSTRATION TWENTY TWO:** Will's old hands shook as he held the fragile paper with his dear mother's final message. Why had he not searched her room before he closed it? So many years wasted. He could have read her message years ago.

**My Dearest William,**  
I have no idea when you will read my last message to you. If it is soon, please know I have loved you forever. If it is far in the future, please know I still love you forever.

You are mightily disappointed that our beloved mansion must be sold. I wish with all my heart I could leave it for you. You would only lose it in the end. My decision is to let it be sold to people who will give it the care you and I both desire. Live your life free of the burden.



22

Fear not, son. I do not forget your faithfulness to me. Sitting on the edge of the Powers Estate is a small cottage. That is your home. Hidden Cottage will be your place to live in the sun. Hidden Cottage is your golden treasure. Take care of it, love it and make it your home. Remember me fondly.

I love you with all my heart,  
Your Mother  
Matilda Powers

PS. Forgive Tilly

Clare knew exactly where that cottage stood. "I know where it is! I know that place. It is a very small house in the woods just beyond the weedy field." Chip and their parents nodded their heads.

The old cottage was used by various renters during their time at Shadow River but no one ever really had time to fix it up or think much about it. It was just a tumbled down cottage. Ignored by anyone who passed by or lived in it, the cottage was always the house nobody loved.

Will looked at Tilly. Their eyes met. In their silence the Conleys could tell that forgiveness was happening and whatever the rift had been between them, it was healing in that moment.



23.

**ILLUSTRATION TWENTY THREE:** Early the next morning Chip and Clare led the group through the woods to Hidden Cottage. Clare laughed, "I wish I had known the old cottage had a name. How neat to know it is called 'Hidden Cottage'. All the old furniture is still in it."

Tilly said, "I remember this place. It has been here so long, Will. Do you remember it?"

Will looked around the woods and as they came into the clearing saw it standing there like a gem from another place and time. "I can't say that I do, Tilly. Can't say that I do."

Small and ragged after years of little maintenance, the cottage looked solid. Charming and sweet, the place still had an air of welcome about it. Will approached the door only to find it locked tight and windows boarded shut.

Jack Conley said, "I forgot. The last renters never used a key and I didn't realize it was locked. I never had a key for the house. How can we get in?"

Will pulled the shining golden key from his pocket. "I have a feeling my mother thought of everything," he smiled. Sure enough, when he put the key in the lock the door opened. They walked into a perfect little home just waiting for someone to scrub it back to life.

"Tilly," he said, "What do you think? Should I live here?" Tilly mentioned that since the property belonged to the Conleys the decision should be theirs.

After a short discussion, it was decided that William Powers should take immediate ownership of Hidden Cottage. Not only that but Tilly also mentioned that she noticed the Conleys desperately needed help keeping Shadow River Inn in tip top condition.

They needed a handyman and Will was the perfect choice. He knew every nook and cranny of the place. He had been a builder all his career. He was the best choice.



24.

**ILLUSTRATION TWENTY FOUR:** It was a happy summer in Shadow River. A party was in order and a big cake was baked to celebrate a new member of the Shadow River Inn family.

Will Powers proved to be a man of his word. He painted that wicked back porch it's brilliant red. He swept the sidewalks clean. He helped Clare weed the gardens. Most of all, he settled happily into Hidden Cottage and used that golden key every day.

Tilly, Mrs. Matilda Madelena Middleton, settled into the Butterfly Suite until the party. It was a mystery begging to be solved. A delightful mysterious guest, a golden key with a scripture verse clue, an old man with a problem and a parrot that made everyone laugh with his, "I'm okay! I'm okay" message.

Turns out they really were okay. Tilly's visit was a joy. It was only after thinking about it the twins wondered about her name. Will Powers' mother's name was clearly printed on the old letter. Her name was Matilda Powers. Tilly's name was Matilda Middleton. Was it a coincidence that the names were the same? Was there a closer connection?



**ILLUSTRATION TWENTY FIVE:** The celebration party began. Chip and Clare found Tilly contentedly seated in the parlor. They asked so many questions. "Who are you, really? Your name is Matilda. Will's mom was Matilda. How did you know he was coming to Shadow River? Why do you know so much about Shadow River Inn? Tell us why Will's mother said 'Forgive Tilly' in her letter."

25.

She replied, "Maybe I kept the key hidden too long, too many years, but I was following orders. It's long forgotten, children. Best to let old hurts go and allow new joys to take their place. There is much you want to know but I am not one to tell tales out of school.

"Let's just be glad that William Powers has come home at last. He sold everything he had to find a hidden treasure in a field that belonged to him all the time.



She smiled, "By the way, William's mother was wise to leave him the Matthew 13:44 key as a clue. *'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.'* All these years he thought his treasure was Shadow River Inn. He sold everything he owned to get back here to claim it. She knew his real joy and his true treasure is a Hidden Cottage in a field. She was so smart! Now, get me a piece of that celebration cake."

They raced to the dining room to cut the cake, pour hot tea for their Tilly and place her napkin on the silver tray just the way she liked it. When they returned to the parlor, Tilly was gone. Her favorite chair was empty. They called her name. Looked for her but did not find her. They checked The Butterfly Suite to discover her luggage was missing. The Professor and his cage were gone too. They looked down the long driveway but no car was in sight.

Tilly disappeared! The twins' parents were surprised but Will said with a slight smile, "That woman has always been a mystery. Shows up when you need her. Disappears at a moment's notice. I guess we'll never know much about Tilly Middleton. Now pass me another piece of cake."

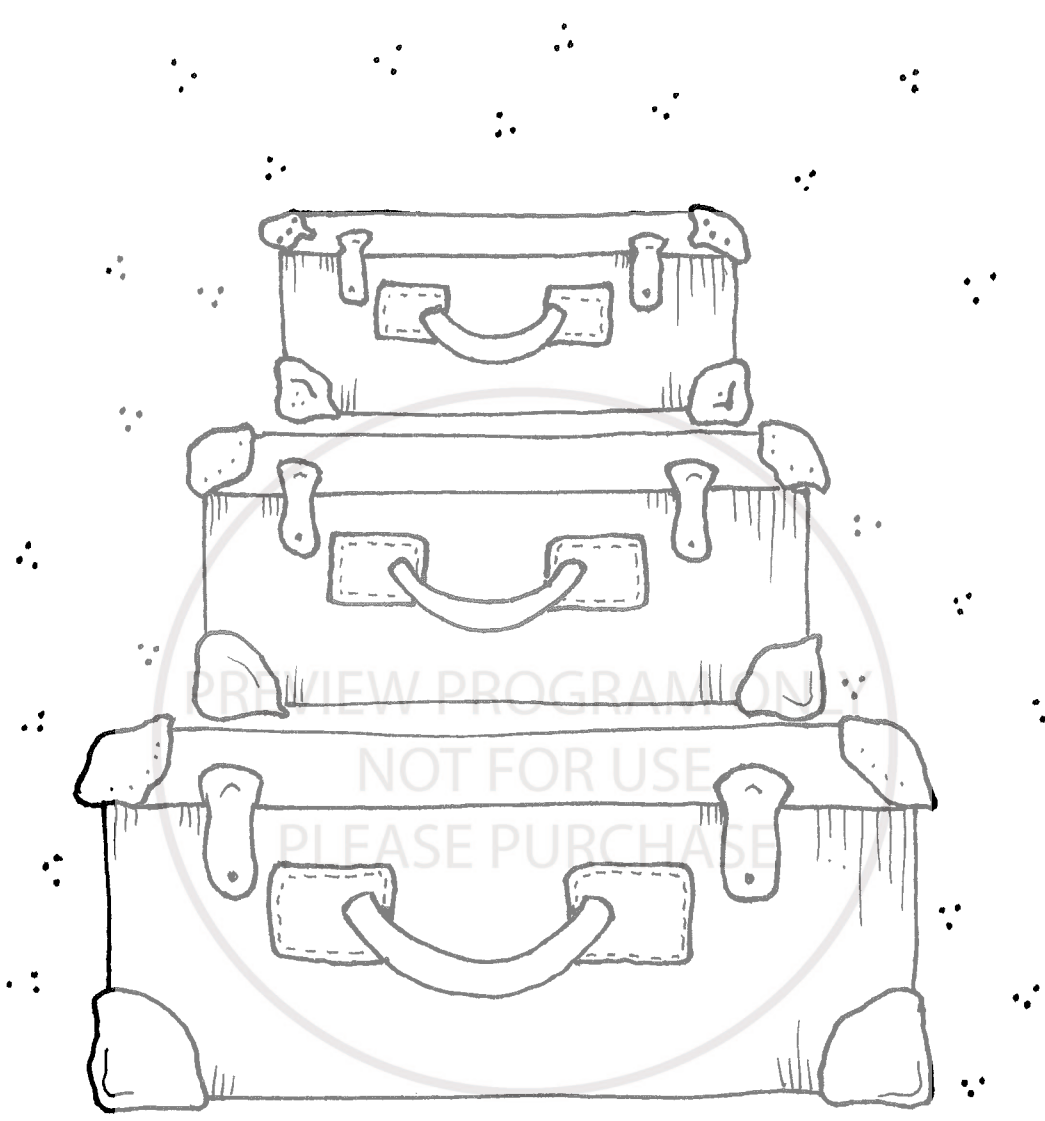
*(As time allows, enjoy a few minutes of discussing who they think the mysterious Mrs. Middleton really was. Was she a delightful, childhood friend of William and his mother, Matilda Powers or...was she one of God's messenger angels? The answer to the mystery is up to you. God doesn't let us know and angels aren't talking!)*

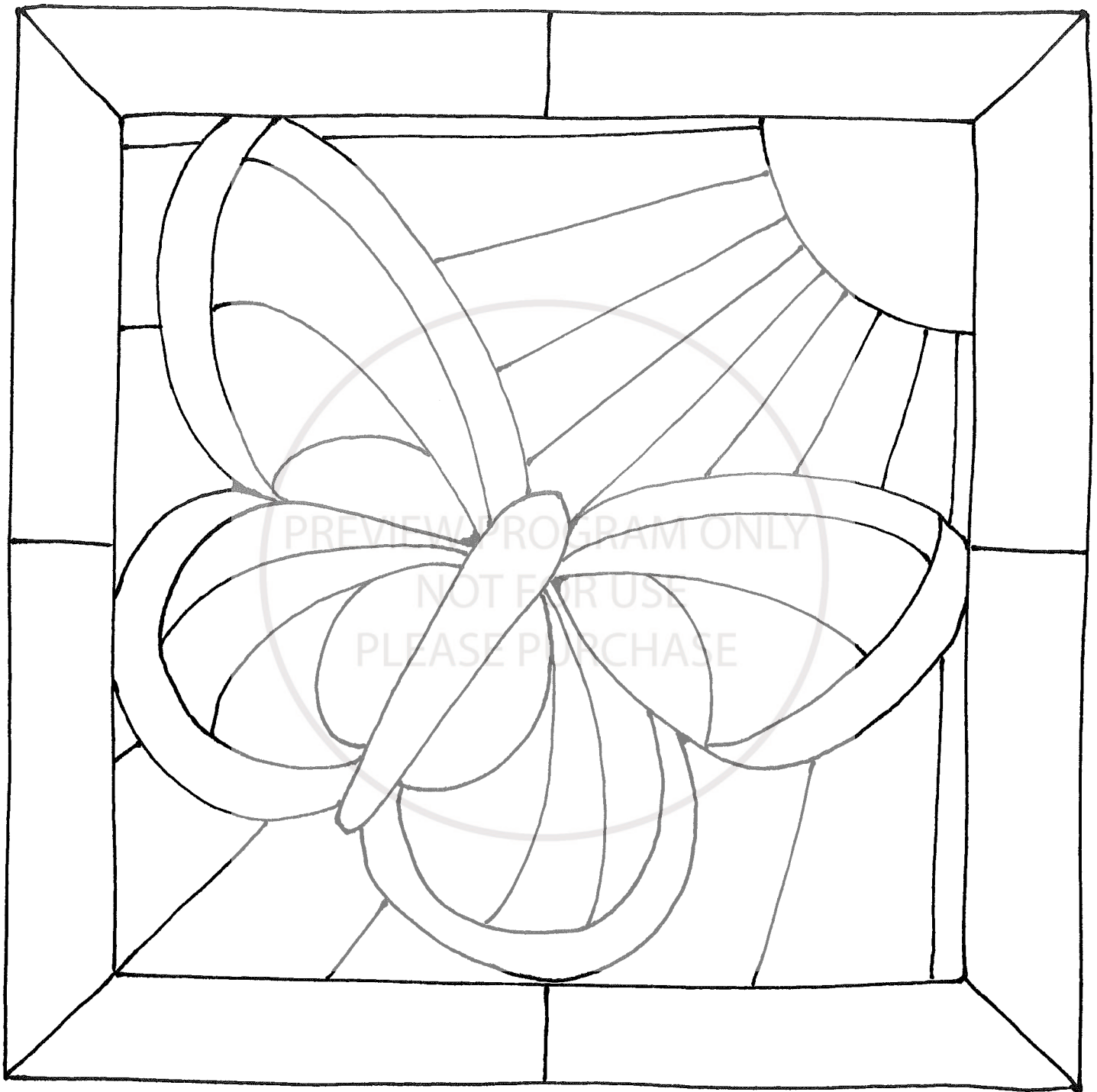


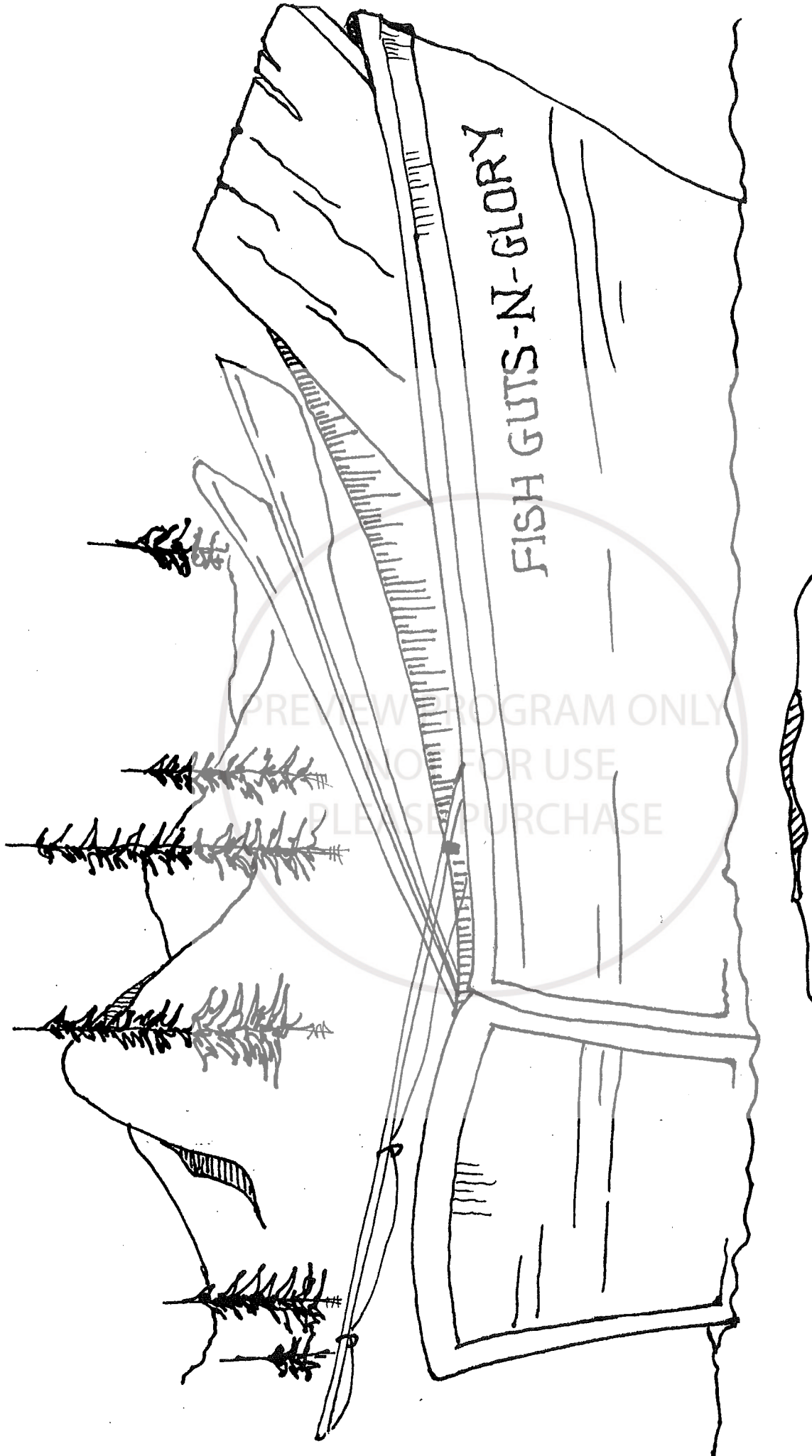














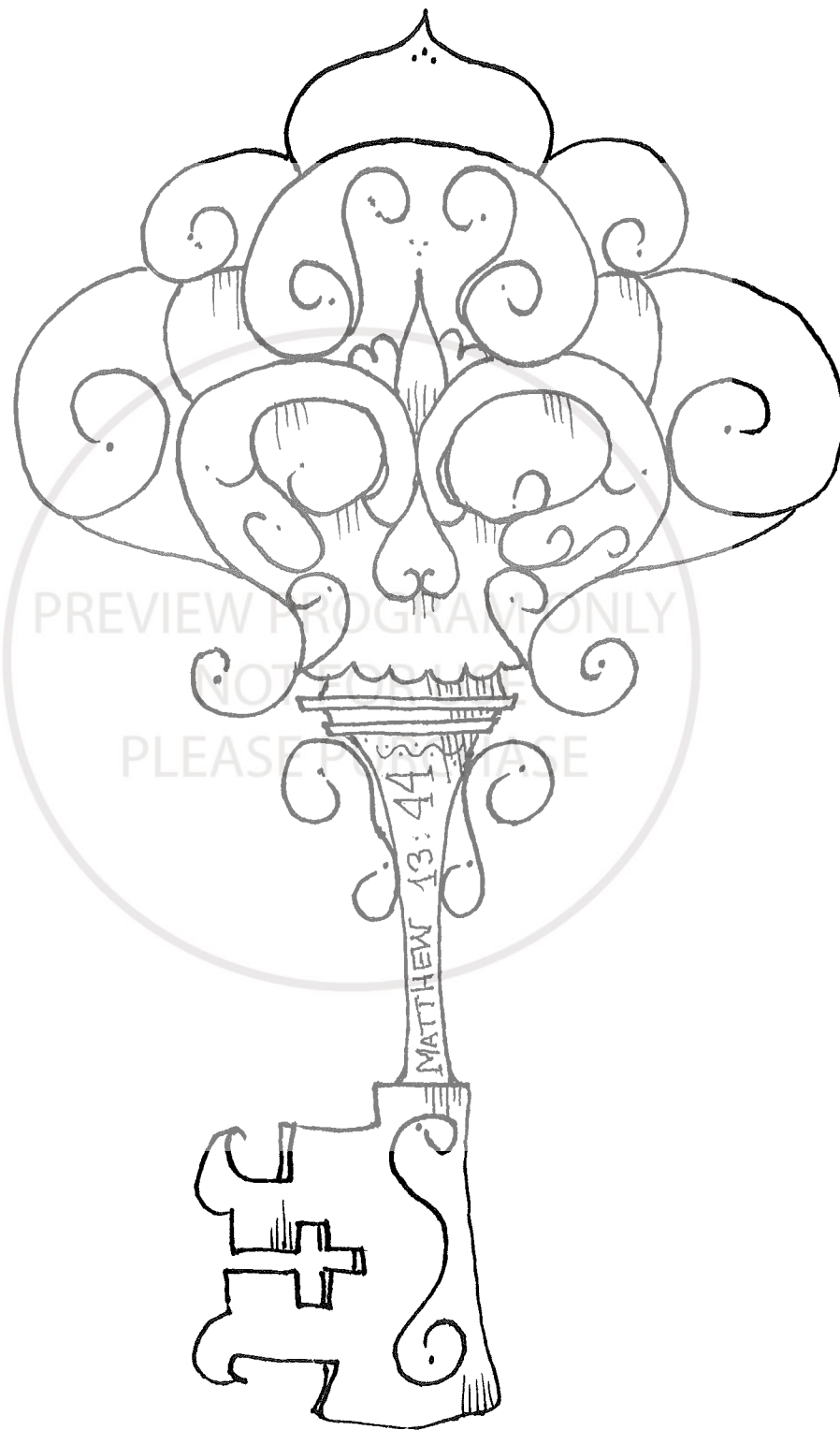










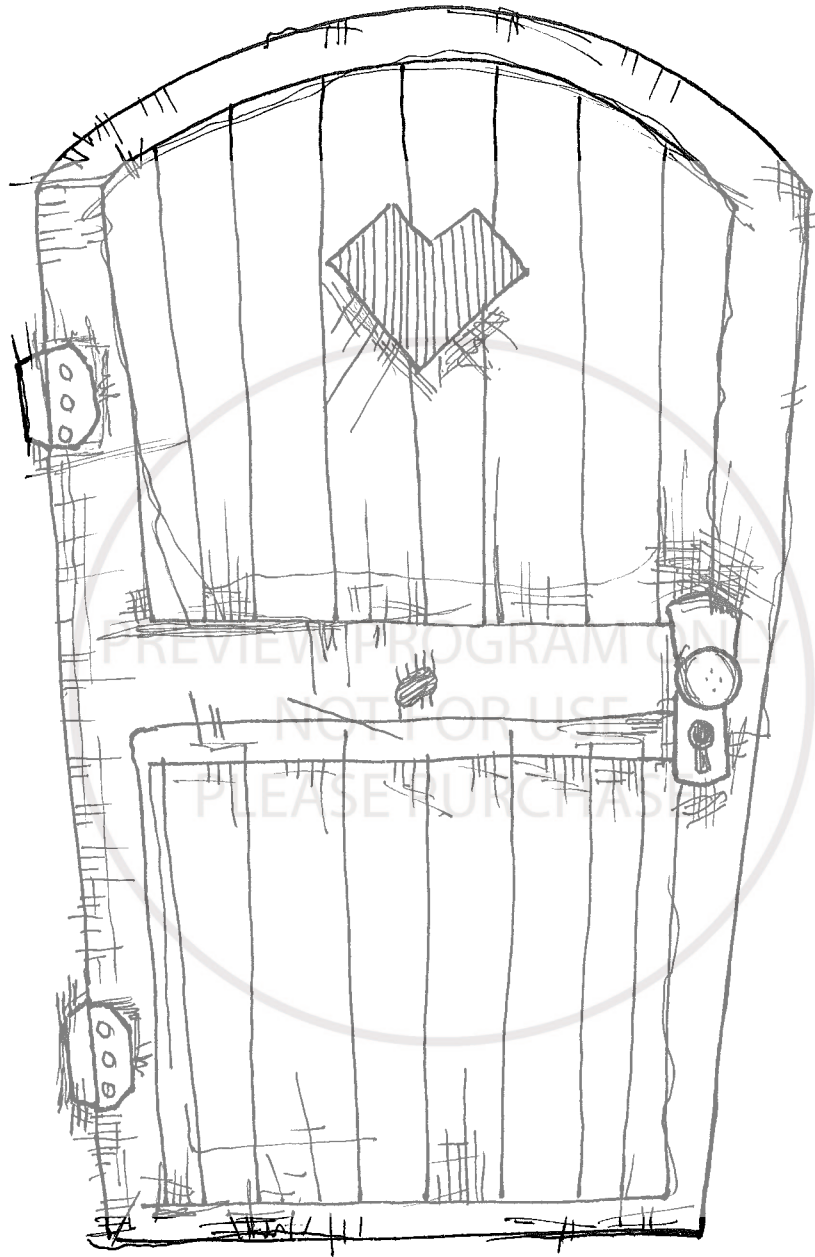




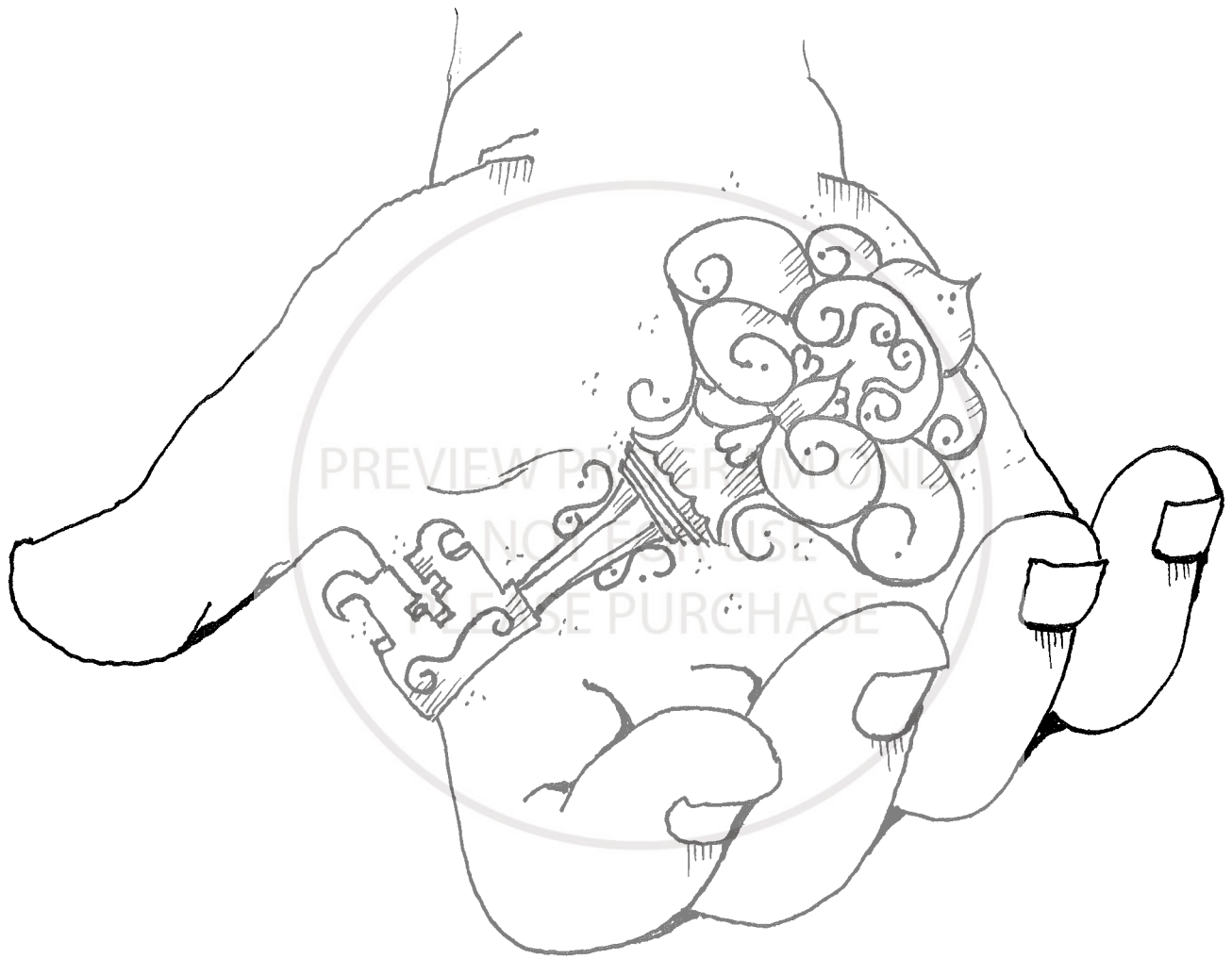




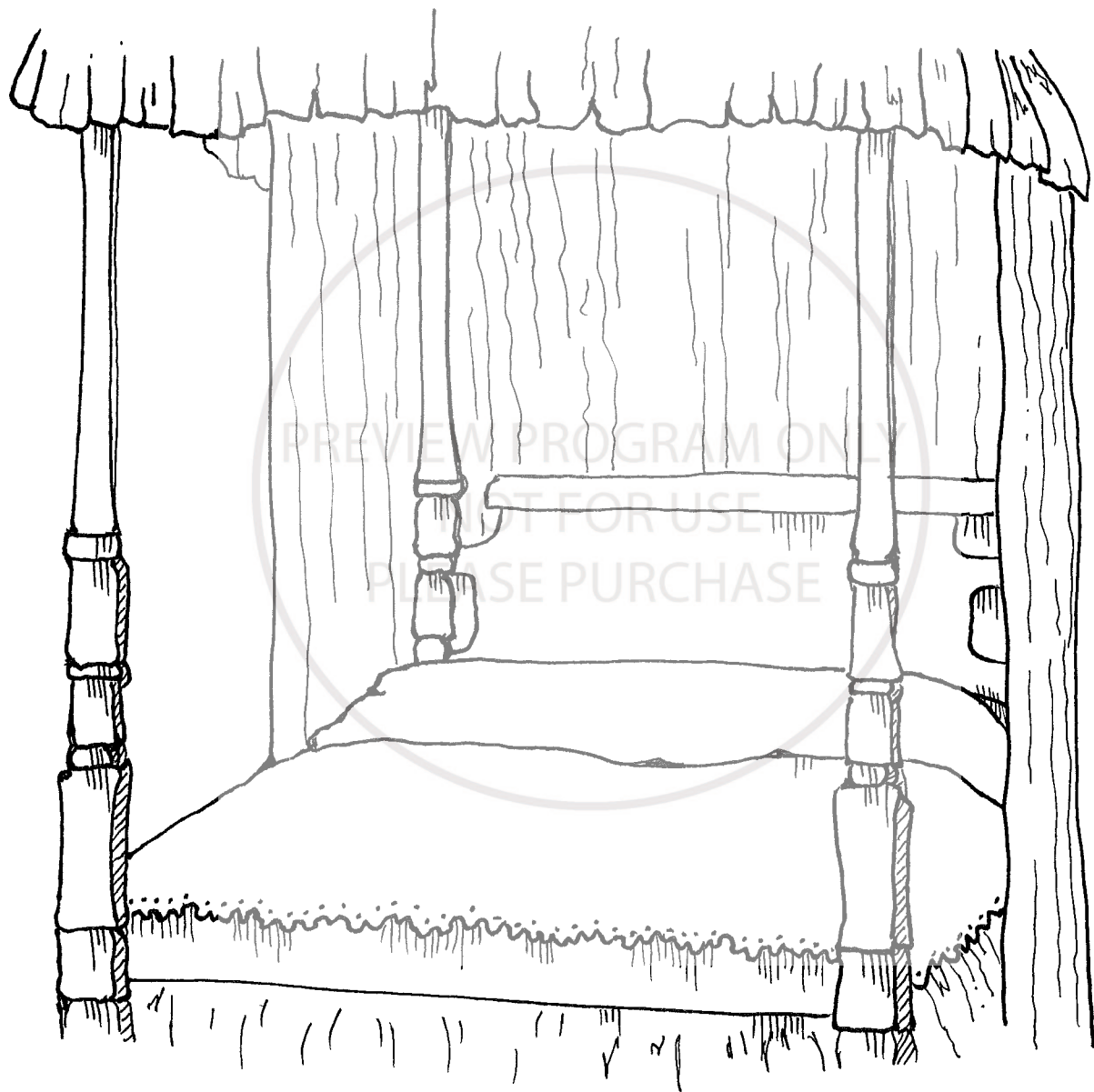




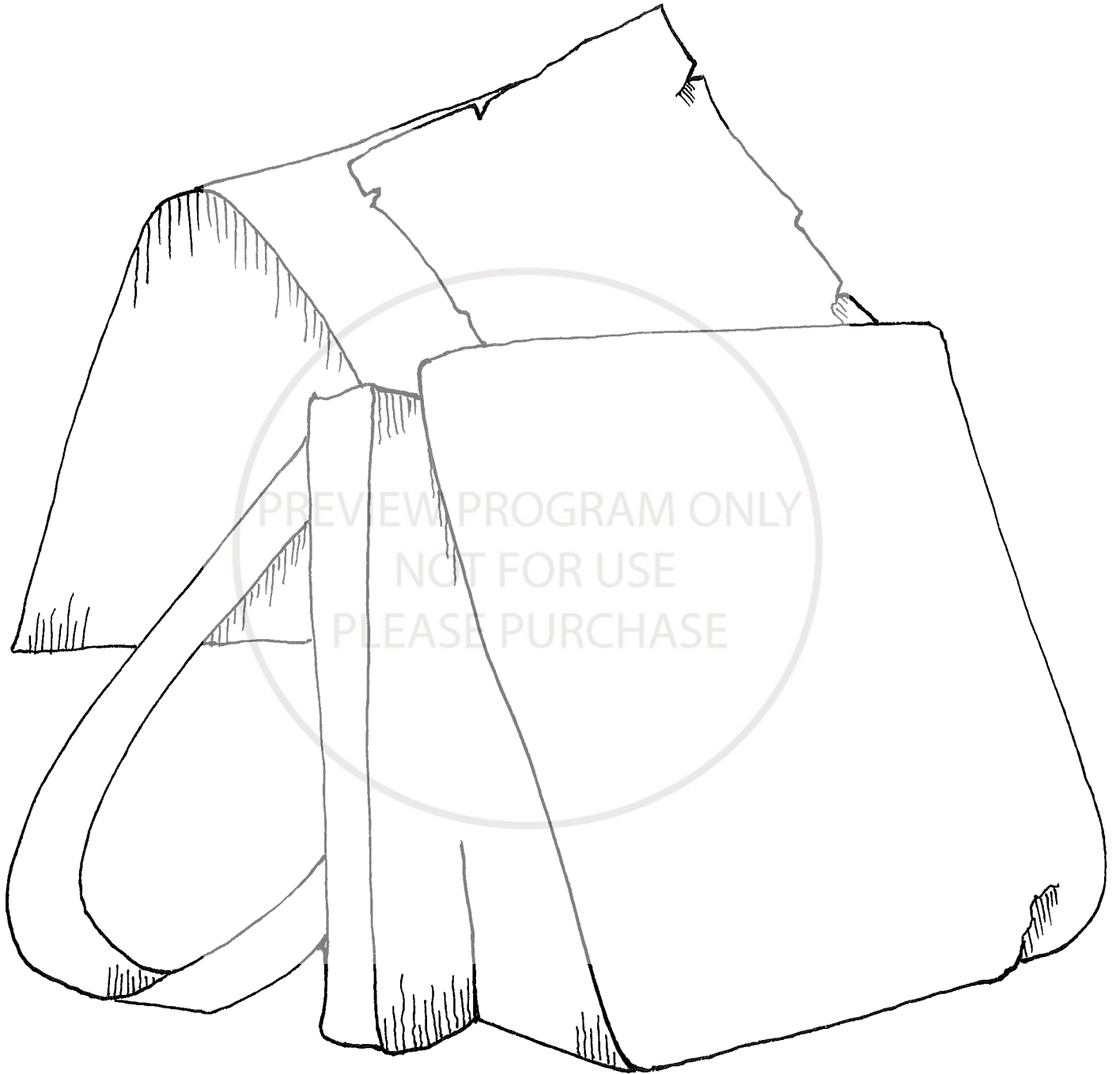












My Dearest William,

I have no idea when you will read my last message to you. If it is soon, please know I have loved you forever. If it is far in the future, please know I still love you forever.

You are mightily disappointed that our beloved mansion must be sold. I wish with all my heart I could leave it for you. You would only lose it in the end. My decision is to let it be sold to people who will give it the care you and I both desire. Live your life free of the burden.

Fear not, son. I do not forget your faithfulness to me. Sitting on the edge of the Powers Estate is a small cottage. That is your home. Hidden Cottage will be your place to live in the sun. Hidden Cottage is your golden treasure. Take care of it, love it, make it your home. Remember me fondly.

I love you with all my heart,

*Myama*

XO

Your Mother  
Matilda Powers

P.S. Forgive Tilly!





