



The Dog Snatcher: Guardians of Time Book 1

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Chapter 1

I'm Jake. I'm eleven. I love my parents, my dog, and my know-it-all twin sister. I'd do anything for them.

But sometimes I can't resist doing the wrong thing. That can lead to big trouble for everyone.

One summer evening, I stood at the end of our suburban driveway, staring. Something glittered on the pavement. It lay next to the big trash can I had just dragged out to the street.

Even in the shadow of the trash can I could tell it wasn't round like a coin.

What was it?



I picked up the strange object: a large silver and black key, its head covered with shiny seashell. It looked like the key to a pirate treasure chest. This is not the sort of thing you find in my neighborhood in St. Louis.

Maybe a rich person dropped it. No, there weren't any rich people in this neighborhood, full of small houses and big, old oak trees, now brushed by the warm winds of May.

But who else? I could see no one but Nicky, our little dog who shadowed my every move and even now nosed around the base of the trash can.

I stuck the key in my pocket and gave Nicky a pat. We walked back up the driveway. Nicky wagged his tail—he knew it was time for tennis balls in the backyard.

Do pirates throw tennis balls for their dogs?

I'd read and re-read *Treasure Island*. But maybe I'd been reading too much about pirates, I told myself as I stood on the backyard patio and threw the ball toward the fence, hard. Nicky raced after it, a blur of black, white, and brown, ears flying.

He brought the ball back, sat at my feet, and lifted his chin.

Nicky, a miniature Australian shepherd, was just the right size to pick up. But he hated being picked up. He was no lap dog and wanted to be in the thick of everything. He loved being alive.

He asked a question with his large bright eyes and dropped his tennis ball with a little thud onto the concrete.

My twin, Ava, poked her dark, curly head out the back door. People hardly ever guessed we were twins since I have blond hair. And even though we were both eleven, people told me I looked younger than her.

"Hey Jake, actually don't forget to take out the trash," she said.

"Already did," I said, and shrugged.

She closed the door and vanished, working on her chores no doubt.

I took a moment to pull out the key and admire it. It looked special. Very special. I'd never seen anything like it. It felt cold and smooth in my grip. My heartbeat sped up. It must be valuable. Would it make me rich?

This strange, ancient thing, maybe hundreds of years old—was it now mine? It seemed so. I turned it over in my hand twice.

I should show it to Dad, give it to Dad.

But I wanted it.

And I stuck it back in my pocket.

I just wanted to keep it.