

Learn English Through Story

THE SECRET OF THE STONES

LEVEL 2



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BY VICTORIA HEWARD

**ENGLISH SHORT STORIES FOR
ELEMENTARY LEVELS**

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Chapter one

Holiday time

Laura and Max are twins. They live in London with their mum and dad. They always have interesting adventures on holiday. They visit different cities and countries.

This summer they are going to stay in a small cottage in the country. The cottage is in a village called Stonecross, near Salisbury. Max and Laura aren't very happy.

"Boring!" says Max. He looks at the map, "The cottage is in the middle of a field. What can we do in the middle of a field?"

"Why are we going there?" asks Laura.

Their dad is very tired. He says he wants to relax and to sleep a lot. Their mum loves the country. She wants to walk and paint. "It is a very beautiful part of England," she says, "Full of culture, tradition, mystery..."

"Mystery?" say Max and Laura together. "Mystery! OK, let's go!"

Chapter two

Stonecross

The next day Uncle Stephen and Aunty Barbara arrive. They have lots of suitcases. This year the two families are going on holiday together.

Mum drives her car. Dad sleeps... Dad always sleeps! Uncle Stephen and Aunty Barbara follow in their slow, old car.

Two hours later they arrive at Stonecross and find their cottage in the middle of a field. There are green hills, beautiful cottages, flowers, sheep and cows everywhere.

"It's lovely!" say Max and Laura.

"It's perfect!" say Mum and Aunty Barbara.

Dad says nothing. He is sleeping in the car.

"What do you think, Stephen? Do you like it?" Uncle Stephen doesn't answer. He is looking into the distance. His eyes are very black and strange.

"What's the matter, Stephen?" asks Aunty Barbara, "Don't you like the cottage?"

"Err... yes. It's wonderful," he says, "Come on everyone. Let's take these suitcases inside. Wake up, Andrew!" Dad wakes up.

"What? Oh... err... where are we?"

"Were here at Stonecross. Come and help. We must take the suitcases into the cottage."

They take the suitcases and go inside, but Uncle Stephen waits. He wants to talk to his wife.

"Barbara, I must tell you something," he says. His voice is very serious, "This place..."

"Yes, darling?"

"...This place is in my book! Do you remember? The book I am studying, about mysteries..."

"But Stephen, that book is very old. It's full of strange codes and secret messages!"

"Exactly. Don't you understand? This is the place where..."

"Come on, Barbara! Come on, Stephen!" shouts Mum from the cottage.

"We're coming," Uncle Stephen and Aunty Barbara answer. But when they walk to the cottage their faces are white. They look very worried.

Chapter three

Mr. Carter and Mrs. Black

The cottage is big. There are four bedrooms and two bathrooms upstairs. Downstairs there is a big kitchen, a living room and a study. Uncle Stephen wants to use the study. He must finish some work during the holiday.

Uncle Stephen is a historian. "What does Uncle Stephen do exactly?" Laura asks. Her mother replies, "He studies history."

Max is confused. "But I study history too... at school... but it's not my job!"

"Yes, but Uncle Stephen writes books about history. He thinks about history. He tries to understand the things that no one understands."

"For example?" asks Laura.

"Well," Mum replies, "for example, the mystery of Stonehenge."

"So, what about Stonehenge? What is its mystery?"

"No one really knows. Ask Uncle Stephen. Tomorrow we can go to see it."

Suddenly there is a knock at the door. Mum opens it and an old man comes in. He has white hair and an angry face. "My name's Carter," he says in an angry voice, "I look after this cottage. Is everything OK? There is wood for the fire in the garden. There are sheets and pillows upstairs. If you have a problem, tell me. Have you got any problems?"

Now Mum remembers. Yes, Mr Carter is the caretaker. He looks after the cottage when no one is staying in it.

"Thank you Mr Carter. It's very kind of you, but we have no problems."

Mr Carter wants a problem to solve so he is not very happy. He goes to the door. Then he stops suddenly, turns around and looks at them. "Mrs Black is coming," he says, "Mrs Black is coming soon. Be careful!" He opens the door and goes out.

"What?" asks Mum.

"Who is Mrs Black?" asks Max.

"And why 'be careful!'? Is she dangerous?" asks Aunty Barbara.

"Probably a witch from Stonehenge," says Laura. Everyone laughs.

"Don't talk about things you don't understand!" says Uncle Stephen.

There is another knock at the door. They all stop. There is silence in the room. Max opens the door. No one speaks.

"Hello everyone," says a happy voice. A woman comes into the cottage. She is quite old, fat, but she is pretty. She has blue eyes, silver earrings and a big pink face.

"Hello! My name's Mrs Black."

Mrs. Black is a housekeeper: she helps with the cooking and cleaning. When a family comes for a holiday in the cottage she helps them. She lives in a different cottage in the village with her son.

Mrs. Black is very nice and they start to relax. Later they eat a big dinner and then say goodbye to their new friend, the housekeeper. They are very tired and soon everyone is sleeping. Everyone but Uncle Stephen. He can't sleep because he is thinking about the book he is studying.

Chapter four

Laura and Max explore the village

On the morning Laura and Max decide to explore the small village of Stonecross.

"Bye. Have a nice time! Come home for lunch at 1 o'clock," says their mother.

In the square there is a post office, a baker's, a greengrocer's, a newsagent's and some other small shops.

"Let's buy something to drink in this newsagent's," says Max, "It's very hot."

A woman is working in the shop.

They say, "Good morning!" and smile at the woman but she does not smile at them. She looks at the twins with cold eyes.

"You two aren't from Stonecross. What do you want?"

The woman is not very friendly.

"Err... two cans of coke please," says Max.

"1.60 pounds."

She gives them two cans of coke and they give her the money.

The woman's cold eyes do not change.

"Tourists don't usually come to Stonecross," she says. Her voice is cold too. "It's not a good idea, remember that!"

"Err... yes... OK. Thank you. Err... goodbye," says Laura. They run out of the shop very quickly. In the square the sun is shining. Everything is normal again.

"Wow, there are some strange people in this village," says Max.

They walk along another street and suddenly a man appears. He is not very old. He is wearing a dark suit and a tie with a strange design on it. The twins stop. The man smiles. He says, "Hello, hello... two explorers in Stonecross. Are you on holiday? Are you having a nice time?"

"Yes, yes, thank you," replies Laura.

"My name's Martin Knight. What are your names?"

"Max and Laura Marel," they say together. (Sometimes twins understand what the other is thinking. Sometimes they speak together.)

"Hmmm... Marel...? Is your father the famous historian, Stephen Marel?"

"No. He's our uncle, not our father. He's on holiday with us in Stonecross. Do you know him?"

The man doesn't answer Max's question. "I see, Stephen Marel is here in Stonecross. Very interesting. And tell me, what is he studying at the moment?"

"Oh, a really old book about mysteries and secret..."

"Sorry, Mr. Knight, but it's very late. We must go home and have lunch."
Laura stops him, "Come on Max, it's time to go."

"Can we meet tomorrow?" says Martin Knight, "You can tell me about your uncle's old book."

"OK!" says Max.

"Come on Max!" says Laura and the twins go back along the road.

"Sorry, Max, but I don't like that man," explains Laura, "He wants to know about Uncle Stephen and his books."

"But Uncle Stephen is very famous. Lots of people want to know about him."

"I know, but this man is different. I can't explain why."

"Not everyone is strange in Stonecross. Think of Mrs. Black. She's a nice, normal woman."

"Yes, you're right. Sorry. But now it's quarter to one and we must go home."

Chapter five

A visit to Stonehenge

When the twins get home everyone is waiting for them. Mrs. Black is there too. "What do you think of our little village?" she asks.

"The village is lovely, hut some of the people are strange," replies Laura.

Mrs. Black laughs. "I know, I know. Don't worry about the people. They don't see many tourists. Not many people come to Stonecross."

"Are you ready to go to Stonehenge this afternoon?" asks Aunty Barbara.

Mrs. Black says, "Ah, you're going to Stonehenge. It's nothing special. A circle of old stones. That's all."

Stonehenge is near the village of Stonecross. They take the cars and in twenty minutes they are there. Laura suddenly shouts, "Look, there it is! There it is!" And down in the valley they see Mrs. Black's "circle of old stones".

"It's spectacular," says Uncle Stephen.

"It's incredible," says Mum.

"It's magnificent," says Aunty Barbara.

"Wow!" says Laura.

"It's not very big!" says Max.

"Shut up Max!" says everyone.

"Andrew, what do you think? Do you like Stonehenge? Andrew...?"

Dad doesn't answer. He is sleeping in the car.

"Andrew! Wake up now!" This time Mum is very angry.

Around the stones there is a fence. People can't touch them hut they can go very near and take photographs.

"Let's get an audio-guide," suggests Mum, "You listen and it tells you the story of Stonehenge."

Everyone gets an audio-guide and they start to walk around the enormous stone circle. Uncle Stephen walks in the opposite direction and looks at his old book of mysteries. He reads something and then looks at the stones. Then he walks away. He looks at the hills and the trees near the stones. "Hmmm... three hills around the stones... yes... it is a type of triangle," he says to himself. Then he looks at the stones again. Uncle Stephen is thinking.

Half an hour later the others return.

"Stonehenge is fantastic," they say, but Uncle Stephen is not listening. He is reading his book again and looking at the stones and the hills around them.

"Time for something to drink," says Mum. They all walk to the small café near

the tourist shop. "Come on Stephen. Are you coming with us?"

Finally Uncle Stephen puts his book in his bag and follows the others.

Chapter six

A thief

The family finally gets back to the cottage. Everyone is very happy but they are also tired.

The sun is shining and everything seems in perfect order. They park the cars and go to the cottage.

"That's strange," says Dad, "I can't move the key. I can't open the door."

"Let's try the other door," Mum says.

They walk to the small door at the back of the cottage. Suddenly everyone stops. The door is open!

"Impossible!" says Laura, "Only Mrs Black has got a key."

Mum and Aunty Barbara scream. "Thieves!" they say.

Inside the cottage there is chaos. The cupboards are empty, the drawers are open and things are on the floor.

"Our money!" says Dad.

"My jewellery!" says Mum.

Uncle Stephen says, "What's missing? We must phone the police."

They look in all the rooms but nothing is missing!

"Look, our money is here. The thief doesn't want money!" says Dad happily.

"And look, my jewellery is here. He doesn't want my diamond ring," says Mum.

"So why? What is interesting for a thief here?" asks Max.

Uncle Stephen's face is very serious. "I think I know the answer to that question. This is what the thief wants," he says, and takes the book of mysteries from his bag.

"That old book! But why?" asks Max.

"I am studying the mystery of Stonehenge. Some people think that it is an ancient computer," Uncle Stephen explains.

"I don't understand," says Laura.

"Ancient people understand lots of things that we don't understand now. Things about the stars, about energy, mathematics and communication! We think that Stonehenge is an enormous computer. It connects information to other ancient computers round the world."

"Like the pyramids?" says Laura excitedly.

"Exactly... perhaps these computers communicate with spacemen too."

"Wow!" says Max.

Uncle Stephen continues, "My old book of mysteries has a secret code, but there is a symbol I don't understand. I want to understand the symbol because I want to understand Stonehenge. This computer can be very dangerous because bad people can use the information. We must protect the book. Do you understand?"

"Yes," they all reply.

"Now, let's tidy the house. Everyone must keep their eyes and ears open."

"Yes," they all reply.

The twins are tidying the house. Suddenly Laura stops and says, "Max, look... What do you think this is?" She gives her brother a small silver object. It is round with a triangle and a strange cross in the middle.

"It's got a pin at the back. It's a brooch."

"Yes, perhaps it belongs to the thief. Let's give it to Uncle Stephen."

They tell their uncle the story and he looks at the small object. He puts it in his desk and his face is serious. He doesn't say anything.

Max and Laura go into the living room.

"There's something strange about that object Laura," says Max, "I know that symbol..."

"Yes," says Laura, "Me too. I recognize it, but where from?"

Chapter seven

A noisy night

At seven o'clock Mrs. Black arrives. She helps cook the dinner and listens to the story.

"Terrible," she says, "Every summer there are thieves in Stonecross. They know there are lots of tourists, you see."

"But you say that tourists don't come here," answers Laura. "Ahh... yes... err, well, it depends. Some summers there are a lot, some summers there aren't a lot."

Suddenly a telephone rings. It is Mrs. Black's mobile phone. "Excuse me," she says and smiles at everyone. She goes to the hall and speaks in a soft voice, "Yes... yes... OK... Don't worry. Everything's alright... I don't know... Perhaps tonight, perhaps tomorrow night... OK, bye."

"My son," she explains, "He's twenty-seven and he doesn't know how to cook! Can you believe it?"

Mum laughs. "I'm sure he prefers your wonderful cooking!"

Later that evening everyone is playing cards together. Mum is winning: she always wins. Mrs. Black says, "Who wants a nice cup of hot chocolate?" (During the evening and at night it is cold in the house.)

They say, "Yes please, Mrs. Black!" But Laura says, "No, thank you." The housekeeper seems offended. "Why not?" she asks angrily, "Hot chocolate helps you sleep."

"I can sleep with no problems, thank you," replies Laura. Mrs Black is not very happy but goes to the kitchen to make hot chocolate for the others. It is creamy, chocolatey and delicious.

"This is wonderful, Mrs. Black. What is the special ingredient? Do you have a secret recipe?" asks Mum.

"It's my Grandmother's secret recipe," she says and laughs. She says goodnight and goes home. Soon, everyone is very sleepy and goes to bed. Only Laura isn't tired.

It is the middle of the night. Outside, the sky is full of stars but there is no moon. Everyone is sleeping. Mum is dreaming and Dad is snoring. Suddenly Laura sits up in her bed. There is a noise. Someone is downstairs! She relaxes. It is probably her father. He sometimes gets up and sleepwalks... But no... She can hear her father. He is snoring in his bedroom.

She gets up very quietly. Yes, there is someone. The noise is in the study. She

goes downstairs. She is very quiet. When she is outside the study she stops and listens. She hears the sound of paper.

"I must be brave," she says and pushes the door open quietly.

"Stop thief!" she shouts, but to her surprise she sees Mrs. Black. She is sitting at Uncle Stephen's desk reading his notebooks.

"Oh... Mrs. Black... it's you," says Laura.

"Err... Hello Laura... I can't find my car keys. Perhaps they are here. I don't want to disturb everyone."

"Oh alright," says Laura, but then... she remembers... Mrs. Black hasn't got a car!

At that moment Dad and Uncle Stephen arrive. They think there is another thief. Dad smiles and laughs. "Phew! It's Mrs. Black. Hello, Mrs. Black, you're working late tonight."

Uncle Stephen doesn't laugh. "What are you doing in my study, Mrs. Black?" he asks.

She tells him the story of the car keys. Uncle Stephen replies, "Tomorrow we can all look for the keys together. Now it's time to sleep. Goodnight Mrs. Black." He opens the door and the housekeeper goes out. She doesn't look at Uncle Stephen when she says, "Goodnight, everyone."

Chapter eight

Now I remember!

For two or three days everything is normal and everyone is happy. Mrs. Black says her son has got the car keys and they aren't lost after all. Laura looks at Mrs. Black but decides not to say anything.

On Wednesday afternoon Mum and Dad go walking. Dad wants to sleep hut Mum says, "No, Andrew. You can't sleep all holiday!"

"Alright!" he replies, but he is not very happy. "What about you Stephen? Come with us!"

"No thank you. I must work."

Aunty Barbara laughs and says to Mum, "Sarah, your husband sleeps all the time and my husband works all the time."

"Don't laugh, Barbara," replies Uncle Stephen, "My work is very important."

Everyone laughs. Sometimes Uncle Stephen is very funny.

"Hmpf. Today I want to work a lot. Please don't disturb me," he says and goes to the study.

"Can I come with you two?" asks Aunty Barbara.

"Of course!" they reply. They all put on their walking boots and say goodbye to the twins.

Max and Laura decide to explore a different part of the village. In the village there is a small hill. It is a strange shape and on the top there is a stone cross.

"The village probably has the name Stonecross because there is a stone cross on the hill," says Laura.

"Very clever, Sherlock," says her brother.

They look up to the cross on the hill. Two people are talking near it. The sun is behind them and the twins can't see very well.

"Who are those two people?" they ask together.

"Mrs. Black and Martin Knight. Let's go and listen," says Max.

"No Max!" says Laura, "We mustn't listen to..." Suddenly she stops. Her face is white. "Max... now I remember..."

Max's face is white too. He remembers the same thing. "I know... me too. The symbol!"

"Yes... I know where it comes from..."

"Yes, Mrs Black's earrings. It's the same symbol."

"What? I remember it from Martin Knight's tie."

"What? This means Mrs Black and Martin Knight know the thief. Perhaps one of them is the thief. Do you remember Mrs Black reading Uncle Stephen's notebook? Do you remember Martin Knight's questions? What can we do?"

"Come on, Laura, follow me," says Max. They start to go up the hill but Mrs. Black and Martin Knight aren't there.

"Were too late! Where are they now?" says Laura.

"I don't know," answers Max, "Come on. Let's go home and tell Uncle Stephen what we know."

They start to walk home but on the hill two dark shadows are watching them from behind the stone cross.

Chapter nine

Uncle Stephen understands

Uncle Stephen is happy. Finally he can work in peace. He makes a cup of tea and goes into his study. On his desk there is the old book of mysteries and the silver brooch with the strange symbol. He takes the brooch in his hand and looks at it. He knows it is part of the mystery. But how? The circle is similar to Stonehenge, the triangle is similar to the hills around it. But what does the cross mean? Uncle Stephen recognizes the symbol, but where from?

He drinks some more tea. He thinks. He looks out of the window. From the window he can see the strange hill in the village and the strange stone cross on the top of it... "Wait a minute," he thinks, "The strange stone cross!" He looks at the brooch... Yes, it's the same. He quickly turns to a page in his old book of mysteries. He reads something and shouts, "Yes! Now I understand. Now I understand... I must telephone Professor Johnson in London."

He takes the phone and calls the number. "Hello, Professor, it's Stephen Marel here... Listen, we must meet. Can I bring the book to you in London? It's not safe here... There's a train at 5 o'clock this evening. It gets to London at 7 o'clock... Yes! See you at the station... Goodbye, and thank you."

He puts the phone down and picks up his cup of tea.

"I'm sure that tea's cold now," says a cold voice behind him. He turns quickly and sees the shadow of Mrs Black in the door.

"What are you doing here?" he asks angrily, "You don't work today. What do you want?"

Mrs. Black's earrings shine in the sun.

"You know what I want, Marel," she says, "Give me that book!"

Chapter ten

A doctor's visit

Max and Laura play near a river for some time but later go back to the cottage. Everything is quiet. They don't have a key so they knock on the door. Nobody answers. They knock again and Mrs. Black answers the door. She is wearing an apron and she has a rolling pin in her hand.

She says, "Hello children. I'm making a delicious chocolate cake for lunch. Your Uncle Stephen doesn't feel very well. Your parents aren't here, and I want to help."

"What do you mean? Uncle Stephen's fine," says Max.

"He has a headache and a temperature," Mrs. Black replies, "He works too hard."

This is very strange. Uncle Stephen is never ill. Max and Laura don't believe the housekeeper.

"I want to talk to my uncle," says Laura.

"Me too," says Max.

Mrs. Black is a big woman. She stands in the door and the twins can't pass.

"It's not a good idea," she tells them, "Your uncle is upstairs. He's resting."

"I want to see my uncle! Now!" repeats Laura.

"You can't see him. There is a doctor with him now," Mrs Black shouts.

Laura pushes the woman and she falls to the floor. Max runs past her too. They go to the study hut their uncle is not there. They run upstairs. "Uncle Stephen! Are you alright?" shouts Laura but there is no answer.

Max opens the bedroom door. Uncle Stephen is lying on the bed. He cannot move his arms or legs because there is a rope around them. There is a big hump on his head and his eyes are closed.

"Is he dead?" asks Laura in a frightened voice.

"No, he's sleeping," Max replies, "Look he's breathing."

"Yes, he's sleeping," says a familiar voice. They look up and see a man in the room.

"Martin Knight!" they say together.

"Oh yes," he laughs, "Your uncle is sleeping... Now we can take his book and discover the secret of the stones. Now no one can stop us... especially two stupid children."

At that moment Mrs. Black arrives. "I see you know my son," she says. She is holding the rolling pin. Suddenly Max understands what she wants to do.

"Quick, Laura!" He pushes his sister to the floor. The rolling pin misses Laura's head. Max jumps up. He tries to take the rolling pin from Mrs Black. Laura gets up and starts to run away. Martin Knight tries to stop her but she is very fast.

Suddenly outside they hear the sound of a siren. It is a police car.

"Quick, the police!" shouts Martin. He and Mrs Black run. When they arrive at the door there are two policemen waiting for them. They put handcuffs on the two criminals and push them into the police van. Laura telephones for an ambulance for Uncle Stephen.

Max speaks to the policemen. "Thank you," he says, "but I don't understand... why...?" He stops. Under a tree in the garden he sees an old man. "Mr Carter!"

Mr Carter comes and talks to Max. "Remember hoy, you must tell me your problems," he says, "I know these people, I know this place... I know when there's a problem!"

"Thank you!" says Max.

"You're welcome." The old man smiles, "Now... how about a nice cup of tea?"

Chapter eleven

The secret of the stones

The next day everyone is at the hospital. Uncle Stephen is in bed. The doctor says that there is only one problem: the big bump on Uncle Stephen's head.

Uncle Stephen opens his eyes. "Hello Barbara, what day is it?"

"It's Thursday, darling."

"Oh, hello Andrew, hello everyone. What are you doing here? Don't you have school today, children?"

"It's the summer holiday," Laura replies.

"We're in Stonecross, remember?" says Max.

"Stonecross? Holiday? No I don't remember. We're in London... I think..."

Uncle Stephen doesn't remember. He doesn't remember about the holiday, about Mrs Black and Martin Knight and, most important of all... he doesn't remember about the secret of the stones.

"You remember the symbol, the brooch, the old book of mysteries...?" they ask him. He smiles and says, "No. Sorry!"

A policeman arrives. He tells them that the two criminals, Martin Smith and his mother, Dorothy Smith, are part of a secret organisation. "The name of the organisation is the Black Knights," he says, "They want to find the secret of Stonehenge and use the secret to become rich and powerful. Mr. Marel is the only person who knows the secret and..."

"But I don't know the secret!" says Uncle Stephen, "I'm sorry everyone, but I can't remember."

"Perhaps it's the best thing," says Auntie Barbara, "The stones can keep their 5,000-year-old secret. It's not right to take it from them now."

Everyone agrees.

"Perhaps we can find another secret next holiday," say Max and Laura together.

"Perhaps next holiday I can stay in London," says Uncle Stephen. He rubs the bump on his head.

Poor Uncle Stephen. Everybody laughs.

"No more adventures this summer...", says Max. "But perhaps at Christmas...", says Laura.

Who knows?

- THE END -

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