

# MARELLA'S SECRET KEY BY SYDNEY BASH

“No! Stop! Don't!”

“Why? What's so special about it?”

“Everything! Give it!”

“What's the magic word?”

“Please!”

“Nope.”

“Thank you!”

“Nuh-uh.”

“Abracadabra!”

“Ding-ding-ding!”

“Now hand it over!”

“Hmm...let me think about it. Nah.”

“UGH!” Marella stomped off to her room. She flopped on her bed and buried her face in her squishmallo. Why did Sam have to be so mean? Doesn't he know how special it really is? Marella thought about telling her mom. But Sam would call her a tattler. Then she would just have to steal it. She went to her desk and got out a pencil and paper. She had to feel really far back for a pencil. Dust. Dust. Du—wait, no that's not dust. She felt holes. Heart-shaped ones. Connecting. Four of them. Smooth. A stick came out of one end. No, not a stick. Just, a line, sort of. Smaller parts extended out. Marella pulled it out of the drawer. A key!

*What does it unlock?* She wondered. It looked familiar, but she couldn't place it. All she knew was that she's seen the keyhole it fits in.

Marella found a pencil. She sketched out the floor plan, then drew a dotted line to represent where she will go. Sam isn't too bright. He wouldn't notice for days that it's missing. She could go while he's at basketball practice and he will forget all about it. All he cares about is basketball and impressing girls.

Next, Marella went out in the hallway and looked at all the keyholes and tested the key. No dice.

She slipped the key in her pocket and went back to her room. All that was left was to wait.

And wait.

And wait—Oh, and do her homework. That's important, too.

Just after Marella finished her homework, her mom called from downstairs. “I’m taking Sam to basketball practice! I’ll be home in about ten minutes!”

Go time.

Marella tiptoed down the hallway until she remembered that no one was home, so she didn’t have to tiptoe. She opened Sam’s bedroom door to find – clothes. LOTS of clothes, all over the floor, his bed, and on the chairs. Some dirty, some clean. And they were EVERYWHERE. That’s what you get for having a brother who’s a freshman in high school.

Marella dug through the clothes until she found it.

Mr. Mousey-face. Her beloved stuffed animal. He was wearing the same plaid trousers as always. He was a part-rat, part-dog, part-teddy bear combination. He had a rat face, dog ears, and a teddy bear body. She can’t remember why she named him Mr. Mousey-face, since there is no mouse in him, but she loved him anyway. Marella got him when she was first born, and barely any bigger than him. She’s loved him all the way through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. She heard her mom’s car, and went back to her room.

Mr. Mousey-face is the last thing Marella has of her biological parents. They collectively made it for her. When she was about a month old, they realized they didn’t have enough money to take care of her. They wanted her to have a better life than they could offer, so Marella’s current mother adopted her. A few months later she adopted Sam.

Marella decided to inspect the key more. She put her hand in her pocket, but there was no key. She searched all around her room. Nothing. *It must be in Sam’s room!* she thought. She was about to back, but her mom told her it was time for dinner.

By the time she was finished with dinner, Sam had already come home. Marella had no choice but to go to bed and hope Sam doesn’t find the key.

\* \* \*

“Hey, Mom, are you missing any keys?”

Marella nearly choked on her oatmeal. *Did he find it?*

“No,” her mom replied.

Sam nodded. “Well, I found a key in my room, on the floor.”

*He did!* “Oh, um, that key’s mine,” Marella told him.

“Really? Well, you can’t have it,” Sam said.

“Why?”

“Cuz finders keepers!”

“But I found it first!” Marella exclaimed.

“Do you even know what it unlocks?” Sam asked.

“No,” Marella admitted.

Honk-Honk! “There’s the bus,” their mom said. Marella’s bus, that is. “Finish this conversation later, with my help.”

Marella grabbed her backpack and got on the bus.

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After school, with a little help from their mom, Sam and Marella decided that Marella can keep the key because she found it first. Marella kept trying to find the keyhole for the key. She didn’t find anything.

When Marella went to bed, she realized that Mr. Mouse-face fell underneath the bed. *Again.* Once she pulled Mr. Mousey-face out from in between her bed and the wall, she saw a keyhole.

*This is the one! The one the key unlocks! I recognize it!*

Marella tested the key and – click! A secret compartment tried to open, but her bed was in the way.

Knock-knock! “Marella, can I borrow the key? I think I found the keyhole!” Sam asked.

“No, you didn’t, ‘cuz I did!” Marella answered.

Sam walked in. “Well, can I at least try it?”

“Fine.” Marella handed him the key. He went to wherever he was going while Marella tried to move her bed to let the compartment open.

“It works! And you’ll never believe what’s inside!” Sam exclaimed.

Sam led Marella to his room. She saw part of the wall open and inside were lots of pictures and a second identical key.

“Um . . . yeah! I can’t believe it!” Marella was clueless.

“Ugh, you have no idea what this is. Let me explain. Do you know who Mom bought this house from? My biological parents. And do you know who my parents bought this house from? Yours! My parents ran into the same problem as yours, they couldn’t handle a toddler and a big house. So, Mom adopted me and bought the house. Apparently, they both built in secret compartments for us with pictures of them. I think my parents told yours that you were moving in

here, and they all built these things. Do you want help moving your bed so you can see yours?" Sam asked.

The two of them went back to Marella's room and moved her bed. He was right. There were a ton of pictures.

Marella's parents cradling her, them making Mr. Mousey-face, her cuddling him, and a whole lot more.

"Oh, I get it! My desk came with the house. They must've put the key in there, hoping that someday we would find it," Marella realized.

"Guys, are you in bed?"

"Sorry, Mom, but you gotta see!" Sam apologized.

**\*TWO WEEKS LATER\***

A lot has happened in the past few weeks. Sam has been nicer to Marella. He realized how special Mr. Mousey-face is to her. They also both rearranged their rooms to make the pictures the center of attention.

Marella reconnected with her biological parents. She found out they moved to Australia! They told her that they won't have another child because they felt that it wouldn't be fair to her.

Marella was very satisfied with her life. It had gotten much better in the past few weeks. (Not that it was bad before, but it went from a plus to a double plus.)

**THE END!**