

# Sample #1

# I

## NARROW ESCAPE

EMMA KNELT ON the sidewalk next to Taffy, her cream-colored Golden Retriever, and snapped on the leash. The summer morning sun warmed Emma's skin, filling her with energy. "Taffy, we're going to see our new town! Maybe we'll get to stay here a long time, but wherever we go, at least I'll have you. I love you so much." She glanced around their neighborhood. The homes varied in size, but most were tidy and—

"EMMA!"

Emma looked up and saw her eight-year-old brother, Ethan, several driveways ahead. He'd probably found some treasure in the trash. She glanced back and noticed Mom walking by the moving truck. "I'm coming!" Emma began to run for Ethan, while Taffy kept close.

She stopped next to Ethan, who pointed to a lawnmower and said, “Can you believe it? It says ‘Free.’ Dad and I can fix it up!”

“I knew you’d found something,” Emma said. “Remember, you already have two mowers to repair.”

Ethan shrugged. “I can’t pass up another free one! I’ll sell it after I get it running.”

“Halllooooo there!”

Emma jumped, not realizing someone was watching them, and shielded her eyes to see where the voice came from.

“I’m over here,” the lady said.

Emma spotted a woman, who looked to be in her eighties, on a porch, cuddling a black and white cat. Her sleeveless dress hung around her body like a limp flag. “Welcome to Hill Top! I saw you pulling in last night. Barb said you’re from Texas! My sister’s husband’s brother went to school in Texas—Lubbock, I think it was. Or was it Houston? I can’t remember. You can have that mower. It leaks a bit of oil. I decided I was done mowing, so that’s why I’m getting rid of it. Barb will be pleased if you keep up her yard. Is that your mother? You look so much alike.”

“That’s Mom,” Emma agreed, thinking: *the lady must see well for her age, because it’s true. Mom and I do look a lot alike. Except for our hair. Hers is curly, and mine isn’t.*

The neighbor continued talking: “You seem like a nice family. I hope you like our town. A safer place you won’t

find! Your dad must have gotten a job at Hildebrand's. What are your names?"

"I'm Rachel," Mom said, catching up and introducing herself. "And these are my kids, Emma and Ethan. We're glad to be here. Yes, my husband got the job at Hildebrand's and starts tomorrow."

Emma petted Taffy. "This is Taffy. She's the best dog in all the world! What's your name?"

"Miss Karr," the lady said.

"I like it!" Emma replied. "Your name will be easy for me to remember. A car!"

"No. It's K-A-R-R not C-A-R. A lot of people get it wrong, so if you can spell it right, you'll be one of the few! Well, have a nice day." Miss Karr finished as the cat squirmed and inched its way out of her arms. Miss Karr made an exclamation while it shot away.

*Apparently, Emma thought, the cat wanted down.*

Emma turned to see Ethan dragging the mower from Miss Karr's trash pile, junk tumbling to the cement. "I'm going to take this home," he puffed. "I'll be right back!"

Emma and Mom re-stacked the trash, while Taffy sniffed around. She began licking a pile of cat food bags. "Ewww!" Emma exclaimed. "Don't do that."

"Miss Karr must love cats," Mom observed. "I'm glad Ethan found a mower. He likes projects with Dad."

"He does," Emma agreed. She checked to see if Miss Karr was still watching them, but the lady was sitting

in a tall, brown wicker chair, kind of like an oversized basket without a lid, a newspaper blocking her face.

When Ethan returned, they set off again. Turning the corner onto Main Street, they followed the sidewalk down the hill and past an empty lot. The downtown buildings rose up in various heights, and some had little awnings, but all had a pretty plant near the door. Emma trailed behind, trying to take it all in. One store in particular interested her, and she stopped. Lettering on the window said *Finder's Keepers, 9am-5pm Closed Sunday*. Inside, she saw shelves packed with books and knick knacks and all kinds of things.

Emma asked, "Mom, may we go in?"

"Hmmm. Not today. We'll come back another time to explore. I told Dad we wouldn't be too long so we could help unload."

"Okay," Emma agreed. She started walking again and looked across the street. *Egerton and Sons Law Firm*, she mused. *I guess they need*—SMACK! She bumped into something hard and stared at the sign someone had placed in the middle of the sidewalk.

Ethan straightened the sign. "This is where you get coffee. Would you like a Turtle Mocha? That's today's special. You okay?"

"I'm fine," Emma responded, rubbing her knee. "You know I don't like coffee."

Mom glanced at the window. "This may be the right place for the gift card Aunt Shannon and Uncle Dan gave us. But where's the name?"



Ethan stood on the edge of the sidewalk and pointed up the building. “It says Sandy’s Coffee Shop.”

“Yes, that’s the one.” Mom pushed a strand of hair away from her face. “You can mail Grandma’s postcard while I get some coffee. Meet me back here, and I’ll get you a treat.”

“Yum. Thanks,” Emma said. “That sounds much better than a mocha. We will be back soon.”

Mom went inside the coffee shop.

Ethan looked around. “Where’s McDonalds?”

“Dad told us they didn’t have one here,” Emma explained. “But look. Over there. Hill Top Diner. I guess there is one place to eat.”

They approached the crosswalk, and Emma checked both ways. *Woooooo, wooooooooooooo*. A train whistle sliced the air. Without warning, Taffy bolted, yanking the leash from Emma’s hand and sprinting down Main Street. “Taffy!” Emma hollered, running down the sidewalk. *Taffy never runs off like this*, Emma thought. *She’s spooked by that silly train*. A few blocks away, a train rattled by, blowing its warning whistle once more. Taffy whirled around, terrorized by the train. “Taffy, you’re okay, girl! Come!” Taffy finally trotted toward Emma, but at that moment, a silver car sped around the corner.

The squealing of brakes and blaring of a horn made Emma panic, and she raced blindly into the street to save Taffy. A bark from Taffy propelled her forward, and she realized she couldn’t see her dog anymore. Her eyes blurred with tears, and she tried to wipe them away to

# Sample #2

# 5

## THUNDER OF TRUTH

THUNDER RUMBLED, a sprinkle hit Emma's arm, and she glanced up at the sky. *The storm is coming fast.* They crossed the street to a brick building with a little ramp by the entrance. *That's for people who use a wheelchair or have a walker and can't walk up the steps,* she thought. *Everyone I've seen around here has been walking fine.* As Emma followed Mom in, she remembered one thing she didn't like about libraries—the quiet rule. Mom said it was to help those studying to concentrate. But it sure made it hard on kids like her—kids who really liked to talk and otherwise make noise—to have to be quiet. If people would wear headphones, that would solve the problem. They stopped at the front counter, but no one was there. Emma asked Mom, “Now what do we do?”

“I'm sure Ashley will be back soon.”

“Ashley? Who's she?”

“Brooke’s mom. It’s funny. Even though they live next door, I first met her at church.”

“Hello,” a quiet voice greeted them, and a thin lady with red hair and blue-rimmed glasses came over.

“You’re Brooke’s mom? You don’t look at all like her!” Emma exclaimed.

“We don’t, do we? But I sure see the similarities between you and your mom!” Ashley’s smile made Emma feel right at home, and there was something so peaceful about her face.

“Thanks,” Emma replied, realizing what she’d said probably wasn’t too polite.

Mom leaned on the counter. “How has your day been going?”

“It’s been wonderful,” Ashley said. “Busy as always! May I help you set up your library cards?”

“Yes, please.”

“You’ll love our selection of books.” Ashley waved toward the back of the library. “For a small town, we have a big budget. I’ll need some basic information— Oh, hi, Pam,” Ashley said, without looking up. “Coffee’s done!”

Ethan pressed himself against the counter as Pam gave them her lopsided grin. She carried a silver-and-black thermos and proceeded past.

“We offer complimentary coffee to our patrons,” Ashley explained. “Pam likes hers fresh, and she knows about the time I get the afternoon’s brew ready.” Ashley stared at the computer screen. “I apologize. The Internet is

having trouble. That's another perk of our library. We have several computers in the main area, and you're welcome to use them to access the Internet."

"Thanks!" Mom exclaimed. "That'll be handy."

"Hi." Brooke appeared next to Emma. "I saw you walk by the window. C'mon. I'll show you around. Hunter's here, too."

Mom decided she had enough time to go around the corner to Saver's, the grocery store, before the storm let loose so she left Emma and Ethan under Brooke's care. Brooke showed Emma to the section with dog training books, and Ethan to the do-it-yourself titles on machines and woodworking. "I'll be close if you need me." Brooke pointed to the area on the other side of the shelves with chairs and a small table.

Emma piled books onto her lap and began reading one on dog tricks. After a while, she heard Brooke talking, and something she said caught Emma's attention. Emma leaned onto the shelf and peeked out. Since Brooke was facing the other direction, Emma could listen without being seen.

Pam slurped from her thermos. "I didn't miss it."

Brooke said, "I saved a spot for you."

"But I was too tired to go," Pam responded.

Brooke nodded, and Pam said, "Well, I was!"

Brooke was quiet, and Pam offered, "God wants me to get enough rest. Sundays are my day to sleep in."