

# Hiding Places

Sample Chapters

by Erin Healy

releasing September 2015

with Thomas Nelson, a division of HarperCollins Christian Publishing

All rights reserved. No portion of this text may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

This novel is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. All characters are fictional, and any similarity to people living or dead is purely coincidental.

The Twix bar was for her grandfather. Kate sneaked into his workshop so she could tuck it into his toolbox, where he kept forbidden sweets from her grandmother’s watchful eye. Grandy had diabetes, and Gran feared it. But Grandy said there was nothing to fear about occasional indulgences, and Kate believed him. Why else would two little candy bars make him so happy? Besides, if she stopped smuggling Twix into his toolbox, he might stop leaving her thank-you gifts—“old junk” that was far more interesting than anything she ever got for birthdays or Christmases. Last month, when Kate turned eleven, her mother gave her a red velvet dress weighed down with sparkling beads. Kate hoped she might outgrow it before she had any chance to wear it.

Long ago the workshop had been a garage. And before that a carriage house for buggies pulled by horses. Kate remembered the old photos that once hung in the lodge even though Gran took them down a long time ago. Today wood dust coated the floor, and the air still smelled of stain, though Grandy had sanded and refinished the outdoor furniture way back in the spring. His domain was cozy and brightened by a line of windows and a view of pine trees.

Kate entered from the outside, where she was less likely to be spotted, and found his toolbox sitting atop a massive Masonite worktable almost as tall as she was and as wide as the queen-size beds in the lodge’s guest rooms. Here Grandy repaired broken chairs and rewired old lamps and restrung the frayed cords of miniblinds and curtain trolleys. Usually he stood. The tall stool that had been pushed under the tabletop was for her, whenever she asked if she could watch.

When Kate lifted the lid to put the Twix bar inside, a bright flash made her flinch and drop the candy. After blinking the stars from her eyes she carefully raised the top again.

A contraption of springs and wires attached to the lid moved a tiny tack hammer. This was poised over an old camera with a flash cube, ready to strike the shutter release and take another picture. A sticky note bearing Grandy's neat block printing told her the rest of the story.

CAN YOU BELIEVE THIS OLD BEAST STILL WORKS? SHE'S YOURS, AGENT K. DON'T LET THE FILM CANISTER GO TO THE BAD GUYS.

The camera was a plastic but weighty box just bigger than a card deck. She put her eye to the viewfinder and framed a picture of Grandy's powerful radial arm saw, but when she pushed the shutter button nothing happened. She turned the camera over in her hands. Her thumb brushed a small lever and moved it slightly. Would it break if she pushed on it?

When Grandy's voice reached her from outside the shop, she was still trying to decide.

Though Kate was welcome here, being caught in the act of exchanging gifts ruined the fun. She ducked under the big table into the shadows of boxes and boards stacked against its legs just as he opened the door. Kate flinched when the door hit the stopper and bounced off.

"What do you mean it's gone?" he demanded.

He slammed his desk chair into the nook under his computer, then turned to a small window that overlooked the side yard, his cell phone to one ear, his fist on one hip.

"How did you lose it?"

At the answer, Grandy kicked over a small tower of five-gallon buckets. They separated and rattled around the concrete floor. With one arm he swept all of the paperwork off his desk. A paperweight hit the wall.

Kate clutched her camera and made herself as small as one of the buckets that wobble-rolled past the workbench. She knew better than to hold her breath but found it hard to breathe quietly. She'd never seen her grandfather do much more than slap a table when he was upset.

“You had no right, Gorman. It wasn’t yours to risk.”

Mr. Gorman was Grandy’s best friend, owner of the Kwik Kash Pawn. Gran thought a pawnshop was a terrible place for a child to spend her time, so Grandy took Kate there at every opportunity, the easiest secret she ever had to keep. That and the one about Grandy’s motorcycle, which he kept at Mr. Gorman’s house. Grandy took her for rides in the summertime. Mr. Gorman, hairy as a yeti and nice as a teddy bear, always told her a knock-knock joke and then gave her a slug for the toy dispenser at the front of the store. It spit out plastic pods that held tattoo transfers, bouncy balls, and sticky men that could walk down the glass display cases that held the knives.

“No,” Grandy said impatiently. “I don’t know. Don’t ask me to understand, ’cause I don’t. I can’t.”

Grandy threw the phone down onto the clean surface of his desk and continued swearing, a loud rush like snow running off the mountain in spring. The desk chair rattled and squeaked as he pulled it back out and sank into it.

“I’m gonna kill him,” he muttered.

Silence finally filled the workshop and lingered until Kate’s tailbone ached. Her big toe began to tingle, and when it spread to her other toes and she couldn’t stand it anymore, she wiggled her foot. Her shoe tapped the table leg and a nail rolled off the workbench, striking the floor like a gong.

Her grandfather sighed.

“You’ve been detected, Agent K.” He swiveled in the chair as Kate crawled out on all fours, uneasy though he smiled. It wasn’t his usual smile somehow.

“It’s all right.” He extended an arm to her and she stepped into a one-armed hug, nothing like his usual bear squeeze. “Even grown-up friends have fights now and then.”

“I didn’t mean to spy.”

“I didn’t mean for you to have to.”

“What’d Mr. Gorman do?”

“Something stupid.”

“Will it be okay?”

Grandy looked away.

“Long as you’re here for hugs, girl, yes. Everything will be okay.”

She showed him the camera. “It took my picture.”

“Can’t wait to see that one!”

“But now it won’t work anymore.”

“You have to advance the film first.” The lever made a noise like a zipper as he pushed it farther than Kate had dared.

“Mr. Gorman should say he’s sorry so you guys can make up.” Kate took the camera back, and her grandfather rose to collect the scattered buckets. “That’s what we have to do at school when someone does something stupid.”

“Yes. Yes. I remember giving plenty of students advice like that in my day.”

“Back when you were a teacher?”

“That’s right.”

“But grown-ups don’t have to do what kids have to do,” she said.

“Maybe that’s true. But here’s my experience: the older you get, the more you want. You think you’re smarter, you think you can do what you want, get away with more.” Air huffed out of the buckets as he nested them.

Kate’s grandfather stared at the buckets. She lifted her camera to frame him once more but decided she didn’t like this picture. Her mother often stared out the window with the same flat mouth,

the same dull eyes. The expression made Kate feel unbearably lost, as if the people she loved had vanished to someplace she couldn't go and left her behind to fend for herself.

“You aren't really going to kill Mr. Gorman, are you, Grandy?”

“What?” He blinked and set the buckets on the floor. Dust floated through the faint morning light behind him. “No! Of course not. You know that's just a figure of speech. Tell you what: the truth is, I'm smarter when you're with me. So after I cool off—let's say lunchtime?—you come with me and we'll visit the Kwik Kash, and maybe you can talk some sense into me and Gorman both just by standing there and smiling. Would you do that for me?”

She nodded and kept her fears to herself. Because the Grandy who spoke to her looked like the man who put cameras in his toolbox for her to find, even sounded like him and wore his hair with the same crooked part down the left side of his head, but his eyes belonged to someone Kate didn't recognize at all.

Charlie left his latest home with less than when he'd arrived: the clothes on his back, his favorite knit cap, and a harmonica in the cargo pocket of his outdated pants. And more: a split lip and a bruised cheek, both of which were swelling.

Home was a bridge that spanned the South Platte River and supported Interstate 25. Charlie slipped out of the cramped spaces framed by girders and plywood scraps, cushioned with sleeping bags and deteriorating foam rubber, thinking about how quiet a dozen people could be when one of their own was taking a beating. When Merridew gave Charlie the ultimatum and the fist across his face, Charlie's brothers and sisters had looked away.

Overhead, hundreds of cars hummed across the freeway slab, causing the steel arches to vibrate like a musical tone under his fingers when he played his harmonica. He half walked, half scooted down the gentle slope to the riverbank. The bridge supports framed a view of the Denver Broncos' Mile High Stadium. Tomorrow the traffic and the crowds would pour into the vast parking lot, and the bridge would hum with a different energy.

He jumped the last six feet onto small round stones that shifted when he came down.

They weren't really his brothers and sisters, all those boys and girls sitting in awkward quiet up there at the top of the arches. They were just a ragtag bunch of homeless kids. It was time he moved on anyway. He was twenty-one and hadn't even needed a family—just a place to sleep and a little help pooling resources for food. That much he could find somewhere else.

"Charlie." The whisper belonged to a girl, the light-footed Eve, who was as pale as a ray of light. Her call floated down on his head.

He scooped up the South Platte in his palms and tried to hold the cold on his puffy lip. The

water turned pink in his palms. She descended without a sound, and the rocks didn't even register her weight as she crossed them.

But Charlie didn't give her his attention until she moved away, upstream, and fished something out of the river. A gold and blue beer can. She brought it to him.

"Hold this on your cheek," she ordered.

It worked better than the water, which had already wet his shirt. The fact that the beer belonged to Merridew also helped.

"I know you don't want to rob that shop," she said. "But we can't do it without you."

Eve barely cleared five feet. She had fine gold hair, hummingbird bones, and translucent skin that combined to create a deceptively delicate package. But Charlie knew as well as anyone that she was entirely capable of taking care of herself.

He turned and walked away, pressing the numbing can to his face. The wobbling river rocks made swagger impossible, which was annoying.

"Please." Eve followed like a stray dog. "Merridew's going to make us do this whether you help or not. There's a million ways it could go wrong. I know you pretend not to care, and we all hate Merridew, but we need your experience here. Tell me I'm wrong."

Charlie didn't have to tell her anything.

"We all know you have a record, breaking and entering. It's no secret."

He began the short climb from the river up to Walnut Street, which made a hairpin turn under the bridge. From here it was only a couple of miles to downtown Denver, where he could stake a corner with his harmonica and panhandle enough for a meal and time to come up with a plan.

"Charlie, don't be a jerk."

He stepped out onto the road. Eve caught up and jogged to match his long stride.



“Drogo’s still just a baby,” she said. “He and Ender have never done anything like this before. Who knows what might happen?”

“So convince Merridew to change his mind.”

Eve reached out and took a fistful of Charlie’s T-shirt, jerking him out of stride.

“The guy who gave you that right hook doesn’t change his mind. Look at me.”

Charlie twisted toward her but she didn’t let go of his shirt. Stepping in close, she lifted her other hand to his eyes. It contained a wad of cash, wrinkled ones, maybe ten, twelve dollars. Pocket change.

“It’s all I’ve got,” she said. “Take it. Get something to eat and calm down. Then help us out. Do it for Ender. He’s the closest thing you’ve got to a brother.”

“Not a brother who’d step up when Merridew was going at me.”

“Well, Merridew’s the dad now.”

“Not my dad.”

“C’mon, Charlie. He earned the right and now’s not the time to challenge him, is it?”

“You think there’s such a thing as the right time? You don’t even know what you’ve lost yet.”

Until three days ago, the street family Charlie and Eve belonged to had always abided by a strict code of nonviolence. This was not the way of most street-family cultures. He had seen, during long days of independence, the ways other Denver families enforced compliance and loyalty. Taxing a member’s personal belongings or privileges was common. Punishment could be physical. Beating, starving, isolating, excluding. Street-family fathers with cult-like authority punished with ritual abuses. Branding, burning, cutting. Others created elaborate fantasy worlds in which members learned to play specific roles—worker, enforcer, ruler—until it became their reality. Violence was expected and necessary, both as punishment and, meted out to enemies, proof of allegiance. Violence was power.

But the man who had originally invited Charlie to join them operated differently. His approach to governing was at the same time passive and effective. In his family, no one was an enemy. Don't bother us and we won't bother you. Live and let live. Every man for himself.

It was a philosophy Charlie could subscribe to. A large enough group of people living together agreeably this way could, in theory, protect itself from the risks of living alone. Until Merridew forced his way into the ranks and proved it wasn't enough.

A drop of blood from his lip dripped onto Charlie's shirt. He touched his fingertips to the cut.

"Least Ender could've done was come ask me for himself."

"I'm asking for him," Eve said. "*I'm* asking you."

The chill of the beer can and the pure November air started to clear Charlie's head. In another time or another place he might have done it for Eve, because she had more guts than the rest of them put together, and it would be easy to care for someone like her. But she belonged to Ender. She was his to look after. What right did they have to ask him for anything?

He took the crumpled money. She used both hands to make sure he got it all.

"I'll think about it."

Kate left Grandy's workshop by the other door, the one that led into the dim old hallways and updated slate floors of the Harrison Lodge.

Ages and ages ago the lodge had been a private mansion, a summer getaway for a rich businessman. Her great-great-grandfather. Or maybe it was three greats. No one talked much about him. Then, long before Kate was born, someone had turned the mansion into a hotel. There was an occasionally popular restaurant on the first floor, well-appointed guest rooms and a library on the second, and a third-story event center with full-circle views of peacefulness. These days the Harrisons worked like the servants they'd once employed.

The hall that Kate entered ran the full length of the lodge, front to back, and if she had gone all the way to the end she would have passed Gran and Grandy's private suite, and Great-Grandma Pearl's room opposite theirs. Here on the main floor the old people didn't have to climb stairs or venture outdoors when the weather got mean.

But instead of going that way Kate turned left and ducked under a velvet privacy rope and entered the lodge's public foyer. Light from two-story windows filled the entryway, making it the brightest space in the lodge. She looked out the window through the viewfinder of her new-old camera, wondering if this would be a good spot for snapping proof of the guests who said they had no pets and then smuggled them in anyway. She decided she could get better pictures from the library's balcony upstairs.

The hard gray floors were covered with thick area rugs to reduce noise and absorb tracked-in snow. Beyond the leaded glass double doors was the reception desk: a shiny dark wood face, speckled granite counters, sleek new computers. An island of empty mailboxes stood in the center of the floor, and behind these, hidden from customers, a clutter of paperwork topped a second desk under the

windows. Kate's mother sat here staring down the winding driveway, a paperback novel parted under her fingertips.

A red silk scarf hung from a hook just behind the counter, at the end of the old mail slots. The scarf was a recent gift to her mother from a guest who visited once a month and smelled like fish. Kate did not like him, and she was sure her mother had only accepted the gift to be polite. The horrible color gave her mother's skin the sick hue of Chef's hollandaise sauce.

Today Kate used her mother's preoccupation with her book to lift the lid on the wooden comment box attached to the wall by the front door. She pulled out two cards. As far as she could tell, the sloppy handwriting of the first card praised Chef's eggs Benedict, which was Kate's *least* favorite menu item. That oozing yellow sauce and yolk killed her appetite every time. But she put the card back in the box. It would make Gran happy for a while. The other card, written in tight, microscopic print, was a complaint about a draft in one of the rooms. Kate put this one in her jeans pocket and closed the lid just as Gran appeared from the opposite hall and crossed to the reception desk.

Kate stepped into the shadow of the potted tree standing next to the box, and when Gran called her mother's attention away from daydreams and over to a computer screen, Kate slipped away.

As she passed the desk she stretched her long arms over the hinged half-door and pulled the long red scarf off its hook. She imagined herself a magician as the silk fluttered along behind her, then stuffed it up the sleeve of her turtleneck.

Beyond the reception desk was a staircase that made two right-angle turns up to the second floor. Across from this flight was the dining room, with its views of the silvery creek that cut the property in two, and of the lodge's six private cottages lined up like a crescent moon. And at the other end of the lodge were the kitchens, the family dining area, and a private keeping room where Kate often did her homework.

No one called after her as she passed the dining room, entered the kitchen, and paused to take deep breaths of sautéed onions and carrots. Then she turned into the keeping room, where the fireplace was cold and books and games were askew in their shelves and the mismatched afghans were piled in lumps on the sofa and chairs. Her older sister Olivia, dressed in the black slacks and white blouse of a waitress, stood before a wall mirror and was trimming the ends of her false eyelashes with tiny thread scissors, one lash at a time.

“Still too long?” Kate asked.

“Gran doesn’t know what she’s talking about,” Olivia muttered.

Kate walked through the room to the sliding glass door, pushed it open, and stepped out onto a small patio.

The cottages at the Harrison Lodge were more popular and more expensive than the rooms upstairs. They were duplexes, and each unit had a view of the creek and was tucked among evergreen trees and shrubs and vines that bloomed in summertime. The miniature houses had a pretend quality—always clean, always perfect, never as warm as a real home. Kate liked to imagine the guests as lifelike dolls.

The units were named from east to west for the order of the day: the Rising Sun, the Morning Glory, the High Noon, the Twilight, the Nocturne, and the Full Moon. Kate lived with her mother and two sisters in the Rising Sun. It was built before the others, the first and oldest cottage, which a housekeeper and a cook once shared in the pre-hotel days.

But Kate aimed for the neighboring building, the Morning Glory. Bear Creek bisected the property, ran all the way into Evergreen, filled its tiny lake, and then continued its downhill journey right out of town. Right now, in November, the creek ran low, so she decided to cross on the rocks rather than on the footbridge because it was more of a challenge. A successful crossing involved seven

rocks and no slipping. That proved too much to ask this day, because she'd chosen a pair of slick-bottomed cowboy boots when she dressed that morning. The third stone was almost fully submerged, and she went into the water, lost her balance, and fell to one knee. The creek flooded both boots. But even that she considered a great save, because she thought to keep the camera out of the frigid water.

She slogged up the other side of the bank, smiling.

Behind the Morning Glory was an old pine tree, sticky with sap. Above the lowest branch was a forgotten birdhouse that no one tended any more, not even Grandy, its wood warped and long stripped of its paint. It had a hinged lid like Grandy's toolbox, like Gran's comment box, and if Kate stood on the metal unit that supplied the Morning Glory with cool air in the summertime, she could just lift the lid and reach inside.

Her fingers seized a plastic bag and she lifted it out. It was a clear sandwich bag with a zip top, and it was a third full of a dried green weed.

Kate jumped down with the herblike stuff in her fist, picked up the camera she'd set beneath the tree, wrapped both in the red scarf, and peeked out from behind the Morning Glory to make sure Olivia hadn't seen her. Olivia couldn't have known Kate had discovered her hiding spot, or she would have picked a different place. After this, she probably would. But not long ago a little bag like this got Olivia into big trouble with the sheriff, and Grandy had to pick her up in town, and when Kate started asking questions her grandfather said they should never mention it to the girls' mother. This was easy enough for Kate. She loved Olivia, who had pretty eyes and was nice. Much nicer than their other sister, Alyssa.

When the coast was clear Kate broke into a wet, squishy run. Her boots were made for riding, not walking, and they slipped around on the layer of fallen pine needles until she reached the pea gravel

path that led to the Rising Sun. She clutched her red bundle with both hands, wishing she could do more. Wishing she could help Grandy the way she helped everyone else.

At her home she passed the front porch and was rounding the corner to the back of the cottage when the front door opened.

“Hey, Kat with a K!”

Kate pulled up. There was nothing nice about that voice, and the last thing Kate wanted was for her oldest sister, Alyssa, to follow her. Alyssa pulled the door closed and locked it.

“You’ve got your key with you, don’t you, Killer Kat?”

Kate wished she were brave enough to snarl. In truth, Alyssa scared her with her sleek gray suit and pointy high heels and long fingernails turned into daggers of purple shellac.

“Is that Mom’s scarf?” Alyssa accused, crossing the porch.

“Just bringing it back for her.”

“I don’t believe you.”

Alyssa never did.

Kate felt half as tall as her sister, half as strong. Alyssa reached out and pinched the scarf and yanked it away from Kate’s arms.

“Hey!”

The camera and Olivia’s bag of weed tumbled to the ground. The bag bounced softly and came to rest under the edge of the porch. The camera fared worse. The flashbulb broke off and rolled in the opposite direction. The camera’s door popped open, exposing the flimsy brown film beneath.

“You really should be more careful,” Alyssa said. As Kate scrambled to pick up her things, Alyssa folded the scarf into a neat square and carried it off to the lodge, where she’d probably tell their mother a lie worse than Kate’s.

Kate's throat tightened as she held the camera against her stomach and groped under the porch for the bag, then continued to the back of the cottage, where she had just enough room to walk between the house and a low wall of dry stacked rocks. She ran her fingers along the rustic board-and-batten siding, counting panels. She was so upset that she had to count twice. But at the right place she pushed against the wall and a narrow door sprang open, exposing a small storage room.

On the inside of the door a simple handle allowed her to pull it closed. The door worked on a kind of magnetic spring, which she could secure with a hook-and-eye latch.

The old supply closet wasn't wide enough for Kate to fully extend her arms. With a palm on each wall her bent elbows formed a *W*. But it was long enough to accommodate an old olive-green cot, and there was room for stacks of library books, and partly empty Gatorade bottles, and boxes of graham crackers, and a rusty gas lamp that she used when the flashlight batteries wore out, though it hissed loudly and made the room stink.

Still clutching the broken camera with one hand, Kate turned on a small flashlight, put it between her teeth, and lifted the cot to rest against the wall. Then she raised the trapdoor underneath, leaned it against the erect cot, and descended the iron rungs of the ladder that dropped down into an underground tunnel. It hurt to hold the light between her teeth, and she hoped someone would get her the mini headlamp she'd put on her Christmas list.

The narrow tunnel that started here ran a long way off in the direction of the lodge as if hollowed out by a very big marmot. Kate knew, because she had explored it, that the cavern led to nowhere. It eventually terminated at a set of wood stairs that climbed to a blank wall. Even so, though nothing but bugs and spiders could come or go down here, Kate still paused to shine her light into the blackness until she was certain it held no surprises.

The lodge was full of such hiding places where an eleven-year-old could spy out all the secrets



that no one wanted her to know. And of all the things Kate knew, this fact rose above the rest: when you are eleven in a world where everyone else is twenty and up, way up, the grown-ups will try to keep you from knowing anything important at all.

Important things like these: She knew that her father was not Alyssa and Olivia's father, and that he had run off before she was born. So far she hadn't learned his name.

She also knew that Great-Grandma Pearl danced in her nightie beside the creek when she thought everyone else was asleep, even though the cottage guests would see her if they just lifted the curtains in their windows. At least one guest had complained about it on a card.

A battered army locker that had once belonged to Grandy sat at the base of the iron ladder, and it brimmed with all the things she'd hidden from her family for their own good. Kate opened the locker and set Olivia's bag on top of an old parking ticket she'd swiped when her mother fretted over the fee. This sat atop a stack of romance novels that she'd taken from her mother's bedside table, because they always made her cry, and then she was sad for days after. Why did grown-ups like stories with sad endings?

She pulled the stolen comment card out of her pocket and placed it on a stack of others, all finding some fault in the Harrison Lodge or in the Harrisons themselves. Next to these was a piggy bank that held Kate's savings, which had been nearly wiped out when Kate replaced the money Alyssa had stolen from the petty cash box before Gran could notice it was missing.

At the moment Kate regretted parting with her money. Maybe she should have let Alyssa get caught. Because Alyssa stole money from petty cash at least every other week, usually when she was in charge of the bank deposit.

She put the camera and its flashbulb on top of her favorite sweater, a gift from Gran that had snagged on a tree and quickly come unraveled. She didn't want Gran to see the damage, and now

Grandy would be disappointed in her as well. Kate sighed.

Of all the secrets Kate hoarded, she had never shared any of them with anyone, not even her best friend, Reece. But today as she rearranged her stash, she wondered if she should tell her mother about the conversation between Grandy and Mr. Gorman. She knew what a figure of speech was, of course. Alyssa in particular was always threatening to kill someone. But Grandy's reaction worried Kate for reasons she couldn't name.

She had good instincts, Grandy always said. Kate hoped that this time they were bad. There was nothing she could collect for this locker that might spare Grandy the consequences of murder.