

When You Reach Me

By Rebecca Stead

Your first note was written in tiny words on a little square of stiff paper that felt like it had once gotten wet. I was packing my backpack for school when I noticed it sticking out of my library book- which was a about a village of squirrels, or maybe it was mice. I had not bothered to read it.

M,

This is hard. Harder than I expected,
even with your help. But I have been
practicing, and my preparations go well.

I am coming to save your friend's life,
and my own.

I ask you two favors.

First, you must write me a letter.

Second, please remember to mention the location of your house key.

The trip is a difficult one. I will not be myself
when I reach you.

I was freaked. Mom was freaked. She took the morning off and had the locks changed, even though she said that "M" could be anyone, that this had nothing to do with our missing key, and that the note could have been stuck in that book by anyone, years ago probably, and we'd never know why.

"Isn't it weird, though?" I said. "Our key was just stolen on Friday, and now on Monday we find a note asking where our key is?"

"It is weird," Mom said. She put her hands on her hips. "But if you think about it, one thing really can't have anything to do with the other. Someone with the key wouldn't have to ask where the key is. It makes no sense."

She was right, of course. It was backward. But somewhere in my head a tiny bell started ringing. I didn't even notice it at first.