

CHAPTER 1

“Nick, do you have *any idea* where you’re going?” I asked.

“Of course I do, Sarah. I’m going *this way*,” he answered as he ducked down and disappeared under the fence.

The fence was high, way above my head, solid wood, peeling paint, topped off with a few strands of rusty barbed wire. I bent down, turned sideways and eased my head and shoulders under the fence. My brother was walking away.

“Nicholas, come back here! We can’t just walk through somebody’s property!”

He turned to face me. “Look around. Do you think anybody cares if we walk through here?”

He did have a point. He was standing in what

looked like an abandoned field. Instead of crops there were scattered weeds poking out of the rutted and sun-baked soil. Nobody had farmed this land for a while.

“Still, we shouldn’t be cutting across somebody else’s property. Let’s just go back and go home along the road,” I suggested.

“Sarah, you’re my older sister . . . not my mother. Our house is *that* way,” he said pointing in the direction he had been walking. “And if we don’t take this shortcut, that storm is going to get to us before we get to our house.”

Storm clouds were racing in from the east. Winds were picking up. The air was suddenly cooler and we could see lightning and hear thunder in the distance.

I didn’t want to follow him, but I didn’t want to get soaked in the storm. “I guess we have to go your way.”

“Good, maybe we can get home before we get wet.”

“Wet isn’t what I’m worried about, Nicholas.”

“It’s July, Sarah, so I don’t think it’s going to snow,” Nick said in his snarkiest voice. He had a smart-aleck answer for everything.

“I’m worried about . . . tornadoes,” I practically whispered.

“Tornadoes!”

“Be quiet!” I said

“Be quiet? Why, do you think if you say it too loud, one will show up?” Nick laughed.

“Yes . . . I mean, no. I mean . . . just be quiet. You know this is tornado country.”

“Since when?”

“Two weeks ago a tornado touched down just a few kilometres from here.”

“Are you sure about that?”

“Of course I am. It damaged some crops and overturned a hay wagon. I read it in the paper.”

While we'd been talking the sky had darkened and the wind had picked up. I anxiously scanned the horizon for funnel clouds.

“Get going and I'll follow,” I said.

Nick started off and I trailed behind him.

“Do you really know where you're going?” I questioned.

“Of course. I'm walking through an abandoned field.”

“But . . .”

“Don't worry, sis, it's all under control.”

The wind was now so strong it was pushing us along. Little pieces of dried-up stalks and leaves and dirt hurled through the air as we moved. It was getting darker. There was a flash of lightning, so bright that it lit up the sky, followed almost instantly by a clap of thunder.

I remembered from science class that if a burst of lightning and the sound of the thunder are that close

together, a storm is almost on top of you. Another jagged strip of lightning flashed, and in that second I caught sight of Nick's face. He looked as scared as I felt. I braced for another explosion of thunder, then the first few drops of rain began to fall.

"We're not going to make it," Nick said. He couldn't even pretend to be brave now. So maybe I had to be for both of us.

"Let's move it."

Nick started sprinting and then stopped suddenly, turning to face me. "Sarah, I can't remember, is it better to have on rubber-soled shoes or not?"

"What? What are you talking about?"

"The lightning, the lightning! I remember reading that it won't hit you if you have rubber on the bottom of your shoes . . . or was it that if you had rubber on the bottom of your shoes you *would* get hit? I can't remember!"

"I don't know," I answered, trying to remain calm in the face of his panic.

More flashes of lightning, immediately followed by the crashes of thunder.

"Maybe we should . . ." My mind raced ahead for an answer, ". . . maybe we should take off *one* of our shoes. Then at least we'll be safe half the time." As I said this I realized it was a ridiculous suggestion, but Nick was so scared he didn't even question me.