

PEG KEHRET

author of *Abduction!*

Stolen Children

Will this be Amy's last
babysitting job?



Chapter One

Amy's babysitting course taught her basic first aid, bedtime tips, and how to change a diaper, but it did not cover what to do if two thugs with a gun showed up. She had to figure that out by herself.

The trouble started with a phone call, on a Monday late in June.

"Is this Amy Nordlund?" a woman asked.

"Yes."

"This is Elyse Edgerton. I got your name from Mrs. Montag at the community center. She said you've completed the babysitting class."

"That's right." The name meant nothing to Amy. Later she would learn that the Edgerton family owned a tugboat company, a custom sailboat company, and many acres of prime waterfront property, including the Raven building—a high-rise of luxury apartments overlooking Puget Sound, with upscale boutiques on the ground level. They also owned a resort hotel in Hawaii.

"Mrs. Montag told me you are fourteen," Mrs. Edgerton said. "Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"I don't usually hire anyone that young, but I'm in a bit of a bind. My mother just fell and broke her leg; I need to go to the hospital, and I don't have anyone to watch my daughter, Kendra.

I don't want to take a three-year-old with me to the emergency room. Could you come right now, and stay for about four hours? I can pick you up."

"I need to call my mom first, to be sure it's okay."

"While you do that, do you have any references I can check?"

Amy gave the names of the only two people who had hired her so far. Mrs. Edgerton said she'd call back after she had talked with them.

Amy's mom was in a meeting, so Amy called Mrs. Montag to be sure she had given Amy's name to Mrs. Edgerton.

"Oh, yes, dear," Mrs. Montag said. "I hope you can help her out. You're lucky to get such a job."

When Mrs. Edgerton called back, Amy said she could come. She left a message on her mom's voice mail, giving Mrs. Edgerton's phone number. She changed into clean jeans, combed her hair, and put a monkey hand puppet into her purse. Ten minutes later, a silver sedan pulled up in front of her house, and Amy ran out to meet her new employer.

Mrs. Edgerton was pleasant, elegant, and clearly worried about her mother. Kendra, a dimpled toddler in yellow overalls, was strapped into a car seat in the backseat.

"Hi, Kendra," Amy said.

The little girl gave her a drooly grin and continued to play with a grubby-looking stuffed cat.

"I like your cat," Amy said. "What's your cat's name?"

"Tubby," Kendra said. "This be Tubby."

"Hi, Tubby," Amy said.

"I'm sorry this is such short notice," Mrs. Edgerton said. "Usually my nanny would be with Kendra but Darielle got invited on an impromptu trip, so I gave her this week off, and I took vacation time. Kendra's had lunch and it's almost time for her nap.

Her schedule is posted on the fridge; I keep that up-to-date. There's a list of any phone numbers you might need, including my cell phone. My husband's out of town, so I'm the only contact today, but I'm sure you won't need anything."

She glanced in the rearview mirror. "Kendra's a sweetheart. She won't give you any grief."

The car pulled into a circular driveway and stopped before an impressive brick house. While Amy admired the manicured lawn and lush flower beds, Mrs. Edgerton took Kendra out of her car seat.

As soon as they were inside, Mrs. Edgerton said, "I hate to just dump you like this, but I have to rush. Be a good girl, Kendra. Amy's going to play with you and give you some ice cream." She gave her daughter a quick hug, thanked Amy for being there, and promised to be home by six o'clock. A trace of expensive perfume lingered in the air after she left.

"Ice cweam?" Kendra said, heading toward the kitchen.

"Sounds good to me," Amy said. She opened the freezer compartment above the refrigerator and saw six pints of Ben & Jerry's finest. Amy's mom bought the store brands on sale; Amy liked this job already.

"What kind do you want?" she asked. "Vanilla? Strawberry?"

"Choca Chip Cookie Dough," said Kendra. "Tubby want Choca Chip Cookie Dough."

Amy found bowls and spoons, and sat down to enjoy the treat. While they ate, Kendra pretended to feed ice cream to the toy cat, and Amy read through the instructions that were on the fridge. No surprises there.

After they ate the ice cream, Amy took Kendra to her bedroom for her nap, making sure Kendra used the bathroom first, as directed.

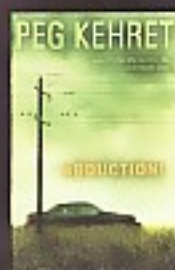
A babysitting job gone terribly wrong

Babysitting for sweet little Kendra is easy—at least Amy thinks so, until two men show up and kidnap both of them. The girls are taken to a cabin in the woods, where the kidnapers film videos and send them to each of the girls' parents. At the end of one week, they will ask for a ransom. Amy decides to hide clues in the videos, but will the girls' parents and the police understand her messages before it's too late?



"Fast-paced, plot driven... A sure hit." —*Kirkus Reviews*

Don't miss these thrillers from Peg Kehret!



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