

The Following is a Critique Sample for the Story Below:

What a great start! It looks like you've done a lot of editing on this already, so it was easy to read. I loved the intensity of each situation. There's always something happening and the mystery behind it all was a blast to read. The characters are smart. They act. They don't stand around thinking, shouting the question "What are we going to do?" The plot twist at the end was great too!

That being said, here are a few things you might want to think about as you go forward on your next draft. The introduction is a bit sudden. It could be beneficial to spend more time describing the scene and pulling the reader into the characters. You could start with a conversation between the couple as a storm rolls in. You might even want to play around with a perspective from the child. I would have liked to see more of Jackson and his reactions/emotions towards the situation, and I don't think the child would choose to cling to him if a "bad man" were after her. One last thing, you may want to describe the sounds and mood in the woods more to really ramp up the intensity! Good luck!

"Who's at the door?" Alicia barely heard herself over the rain pounding on the roof and the thunder rumbling. Her husband replied from the kitchen, but his voice was too distant. She laid her open book in her lap and rolled down the covers. Hitting her head on the headboard, she groaned when she didn't receive a reply. "I didn't want to come downstairs." Pulling on her robe, she stomped down the staircase. The doorbell continued ringing. Jackson sat at the kitchen table with a mug of coffee. "I told you to answer the door."

"It's probably a salesman."

Alicia whipped open the door and paused with her mouth open. She prepared to yell, but didn't expect to see a child soaking wet with tattered clothes. "Oh my God!" She kneeled to scoop the girl in her arms.

The girl shivered and sobbed.

"Jackson, get some of Hailey's old clothes. We need to help this girl!"

Jackson raced upstairs, then returned with a pink pajama set and a towel. He went to the kitchen to make a cup of hot chocolate.

Alicia dried the girl and helped her change into the baggy pajamas. When Jackson came back with the hot chocolate, she quickly drank it sitting upright on the couch. Alicia and Jackson sat across from her on the coffee table.

"What's your name, sweetheart?" Alicia asked.

"Maggie." Her voice echoed in the mug.

"Where's your Mommy and Daddy?"

Maggie shrugged. "I never met them."

"She must be from that group home down the street," Jackson whispered.

"I think I have their number from when Hailey volunteered there. I'll give them a call."

"Don't call anyone! There's a bad man after me." Maggie cried and jumped into Jackson's lap. He cradled her, stroking her thin hair. Her skin was icy.

"In that case, I'll call the police." Alicia grabbed her cellphone, but there was no signal. "The storm must have fried the cell towers. Let's drive you to the station." Alicia grabbed Maggie, but she squirmed and screamed. "I'm trying to help you, sweetheart."

Maggie bit her arm, forcing Alicia to drop her. She landed on all fours, then ran to the door. Darting out of the house, she headed for the forest across the street. Alicia and Jackson looked at each other, then ran after her.

She was quick for a young girl who had been caught in a storm, winding around trees and screaming wildly. The couple caught up to her as she collapsed by the mouth of a cave. Emerging from the dark were two adults with flashlights.

Alicia was breathless, and Jackson placed his hands on his thighs to rest.

“Maggie, are you okay?” Alicia asked.

“Well done, Mags,” the woman in a heavy raincoat and her hair in a ponytail said, “I told you she was ready.”

The man picked Maggie up to put her on his shoulders.

Alicia pushed matted hair from her face and scrunched her brows. “What’s going on?”

“This is Mommy and Daddy,” Maggie giggled, “And you’re going to be my new playthings.”

The woman struck Jackson with her flashlight. Alicia screamed and turned to run before the woman grabbed her. “Don’t get any ideas,” she whispered into Alicia’s ear, “I would do anything for my daughter.” She hit Alicia with the flashlight. Alicia collapsed.

“I love my new dolls!” Maggie clapped her hands while her parents dragged the limp bodies into the cave.

***This piece does not reflect any existing book or persons. It is a sample created specifically for the purposes of my portfolio.*