

## **On Bended Knee by Lizzie Brooks**

If she was going to run away from home, this was the place to go, thought Lucy MacKinley. Though it was nearly summer, the cool morning air smelled like early spring, all pine forests and waking earth. If there were ever a better place for fresh starts than this small Northern town, Lucy couldn't imagine it.

Though she stood in a parking lot, Lucy could turn her back on the small office building, lift her chin and believe she was in the middle of nowhere; it was practically the truth. Thick evergreen forest spread as far as she could see from the small rise the town stood on. The greenery was uninterrupted by roads, houses or any other sign of human habitation.

Lucy could hear a car, though, and turned to see one headed her way. Once parked, Lucy's friend Violet bum-shuffled her way out of the driver's seat, maneuvering her eight-month belly around the steering wheel. Lucy jogged to meet her.

"Have you got it?" asked Lucy after saying her hello's.

"Right here." Violet patted her purse.

The two women walked through the outer door of the office building, then stopped before an inner door that read 'Violet Herbertston, Physiotherapist.' Lucy resisted the urge to hop from one foot to the other as Violet dug in her purse for a key, then pressed it into Lucy hand.

"Take good care of my baby," Violet said.

"You'll be far too busy taking care of your actual baby to care what I'm doing with your clinic," Lucy teased. She took the key and stood in front of the door, pausing to take a deep breath.

"Are you waiting for me to take a picture?"

"This is a big moment! Don't rush me." With a sense of ceremony, Lucy slid the key in the lock and turned the handle.

### **Editor's Critique:**

Hi Lizzie,

Thank you so much for sending through the first page of your manuscript, *On Bended Knee*. Lizzie, I really enjoyed reading this!

The first thing that stood out to me is that your first line is instantly intriguing – it's interesting and different, and immediately sets up a sense of mystery about Lucy's past. Your writing style is also very evocative, and the phrase "the cool morning air smelled like early spring, all pine forests and waking earth" really brings the scene to life in the readers' mind – it's always a great idea to include as many of the senses as you can when you're setting the scene!

Your dialogue also feels nice and natural, and it's lovely to see your heroine interacting with a friend at the very beginning – this is a fab way to make her identifiable and likeable, and to set her up as someone who the reader herself would want to be friends with.

Just one thing to watch is that the story doesn't start to feel too claustrophobic because of its isolated setting. If Lucy really is practically in the middle of nowhere, you'll need to think of ways to make sure the storyline stays contemporary and fun, and to make it feel relevant for the average modern-day reader.

I'd also recommend introducing the hero as soon as you can, especially if the heroine isn't going to be interacting with many other people, just to make sure you're getting in a lot of dialogue and action scenes, and not spending too much time inside Lucy's head, which could start to feel too heavy and introspective.

Generally, Lizzie, I very much enjoyed reading your opening and think you have a fluid, natural voice, and I certainly wanted to read on! Good luck with the contest!