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IRENE HUNT THE LOTTERY ROSE

*"A deeply affecting,
affirmative story..."*
ALA Booklist



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He bent over the book on his desk, hunching his shoulder blades together so that the partially healed cuts on his back would not be stretched apart, carefully keeping his shirt away from the raw wounds underneath, where even the slightest friction caused a burning pain.

He was seven and a half years old and although he had been in first grade for almost two years, he had not yet learned to read. The open book on his desk, however, was the one thing in school that he loved. On two occasions he had tried to steal it.

"I lost it," he had answered the school librarian when she questioned him. He had learned to lie without blinking.

"No, Georgie, you took it home with you because you like it so much," Ellen Ames said calmly. "Bring it back to the library and I'll let you check it out as often as you wish. One of our rules is that a book can only be checked out for two weeks, but since this book means so much

to you—" She did not finish her sentence. Georgie knew that Miss Ames was one of the few people in school who liked him.

The book was made up of page after page of brightly colored flowers, many of which Georgie recognized because sometimes Miss Ames sat beside him in the library and helped him pronounce the names of the different flowers. There were bushes full of red hibiscus blooms, and golden allamanda which reminded Georgie of little faces peeping from the glossy leaves around them; there was bright ixora—hedge after hedge full of orange clusters seeming not to mind the heat of Florida sunlight in the least; and there were masses of tangled carissa holding up tiny white blooms which looked, Miss Ames told him, a good deal like the snowflakes she had once seen flying down from the sky when she lived in a strange place called up north.

There were pictures of gardens, too, where flowers and trees grew everywhere and the colors were so many that they seemed to run together until Georgie's head spun as he tried to count the many different ones which the artist's brush had spread out over the page. And after the gardens there were fields where flowers raised their heads in the summer grass, where rivers made winding paths through woods and under bridges.

Finally there came the pages Georgie loved

most, those glowing with roses, thousands of them, bushels and tons of roses so beautiful that he ached to be among them, maybe to whisper to them if there was no one around to make fun of a boy who loved flowers. As he looked at these pages, Georgie's fears left him for a few safe minutes; he was able as he stared at the roses to draw a long breath and to feel something quiet and good stealing all through his body. His mother and Steve seemed to get lost in his thoughts, so did all the kids in the classroom. So did Miss Cressman.

Miss Cressman didn't like Georgie much. She got mad at kids who didn't know the words she pointed to when she wrote a long list on the blackboard; she got especially mad at Georgie because he played hooky and lied and set fires.

Once he set a fire under Miss Cressman's new car and there was a big row in the principal's office with the principal and Miss Cressman and later the police, all yelling at Georgie and trying to make him say yes, that he had done it and getting madder every minute because he wouldn't say it and they couldn't prove that he was lying.

After that day, Georgie got so mean that Miss Cressman moved his desk away to the back of the room where he couldn't bother the other kids, and sometimes the whole day would go by when she wouldn't say a word to him or even try

THE LOTTERY ROSE

WHO SAID GROWING UP WOULD BE EASY?

Abused by his mother and her boyfriend, Georgie Burgess learns to hide his hurt. He withdraws into a safe and secret world of beautiful gardens filled with roses; just like those in the library book he treasures.

When Georgie wins a small rosebush in a grocery store lottery he gives it all the love and caring he has never had. Georgie's life begins to open up for him when the courts send him to a home for boys where he will be safe. Slowly, and not without pain, Georgie learns to give—and to receive love.

ISBN 0-425-10153-3



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\$5.99 U.S.
\$8.99 CAN