



YEARLING

pictures of hollis woods



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CHAPTER 1

The house was falling apart. I could see that from the car window. But it didn't bother me. After a while the houses ran together, four now—no, five.

There was the green house where the door didn't quite close; the wind blew in and up the stairs, rattling the window panes. The white house: crumbs on the table, kids fighting over a bag of Wonder bread. The yellow house: sooty, a long-haired woman with braids, no rugs on the stairs, the loud sound of feet going up and down.

Ah, and the house in Branches. Steven's house. But that house was different. I'd never forget that one.

Don't think about it, Steven said in my head.

I did that a lot; I pretended Steven was right there next to me when I knew he was miles away in upstate New York. I wondered if he ever said to himself, "What is Hollis Woods doing right this minute?" And did he put my words in his head?

The driver turned off the motor. For a moment we looked out at the trees, the leaves with just a tinge of red this October afternoon. "We're here, Hollis," she said, a woman in sweats, a mustard stain on the front from the hot dogs we had eaten on the side of the road. Those hot dogs were a mean lump in the middle of my stomach, sloshing around with a Mountain Dew.

She'd tried to talk all the way, but I hadn't answered. I slumped in my seat, feet up on the glove compartment, wearing an A&S baseball hat with the brim yanked low over my forehead. If someone looks into your eyes, I read in a book one time, he'll see right into your soul.

I didn't want anyone to see into my soul.

I knew she was dying to tell me to get my sneakers off her dashboard, but she didn't. She was waiting to deliver her speech.

I could hear her getting ready for it with a puff of breath. "This can be a new start, Hollis. A new place." She licked her finger and scratched at the mustard

“He wanted you to have a chance to work at your drawings. He said it would be a crime if you didn’t.”

I tried to yawn, but then the front door opened, and a woman came out on the porch with a mangy orange cat one step behind her. I didn’t bother to give them more than a glance. What did I care what the woman looked like?

But next to me, the mustard woman took a deep breath. I cut my eyes in the direction of the house. I was good at that, seeing everything without turning my head, without looking up, without blinking.

I did blink then, of course I did. Anyone getting a first look at Josie Cahill would do the same. It wasn’t just that she was movie-star beautiful, or that she was wearing a blue dress made of filmy stuff that floated around her, and rings on eight of her fingers. It was this: She had a knife in one hand. She held it in front of her so it caught the glint of late-afternoon sunshine and became a silvery light itself.

“Lordy,” the mustard woman breathed.

I sat up straight, wondering if I should open the car door and run, or reach out to push the button down, locking myself in.

The knife woman came close enough for me to see that the movie-star face had dozens of tiny crisscross lines on its cheeks and across its forehead.

Hollis Woods

is the place where a baby was abandoned
is the baby's name
is an artist

is now a twelve-year-old girl

who's been in so many foster homes she can hardly remember them all. Hollis Woods is a mountain of trouble. She runs away even from the Regans, the one family who offers her a home.

When Hollis is sent to Josie, an elderly artist who is quirky and affectionate, she wants to stay. But Josie is growing more forgetful every day. If Social Services finds out, they'll take Hollis away and move Josie into a home. Well, Hollis Woods won't let anyone separate them. She's escaped the system before; this time, she's taking Josie with her.

Still, even as she plans her future with Josie, Hollis dreams of the past summer with the Regans, fixing each special moment of her days with them in pictures she'll never forget.

Patricia Reilly Giff captures the yearning for a place to belong in this warmhearted story, which stresses the importance of artistic vision, creativity, and above all, family.

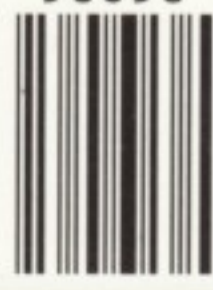
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