

The Time with Josie

CHAPTER 17

Steven stood next to me in that freezing phone booth, his eyeglasses steamy and small puffs of smoke coming out of his mouth. He talked the whole time. "I told Izzy not to worry, that you'd be home by Christmas." He wagged his eyebrows. "Of course I knew where you were."

"Wait," I said, dialing the number I'd memorized all those weeks ago. "I can't hear."

"And the day after Christmas is pretty close." He grinned at me.

Then Beatrice's sweet voice was in my ear, soft and a little breathless.

"It's me," I said. "Hollis Woods."

For a moment she didn't answer. When she began to speak, it seemed as if she couldn't stop. "I've been calling for days, Hollis," she said. "Where are you? Is Josie all right? Do you know where Josie is? Please know. I've been so worried." She paused, really out of breath now.

I closed my eyes: Beatrice worried, Josie unhappy, the Old Man looking for me. What had I done?

"She's with me," I said.

Steven's voice was still in my head even though he was standing right next to me. *If you hadn't made that mess, you might never have come home.*

"Josie wants to come home. She remembers home, but she forgets so much else," I told Beatrice. "The agency isn't going to let her stay there alone. And they want me to go somewhere else."

"I'm coming home, Hollis. I'm coming home right now. Don't worry. I'll move right in with Josie." Her voice sounded excited. "I'm already sick of painting the desert. I need some snow in my life. I need to see Josie and Henry."

Steven clapped his hands together for warmth. "By the way, we started on your room anyway," he said. "I told the Old Man we'd paint it green, green for holly."

"Beatrice, she'll be so glad to see you," I said, looking at Steven, listening to them both at once.

"But the Old Man wanted your room blue," Steven said. " 'Hollis loves blue,' he kept telling us. What does he know? French Blue, he calls it."

I grinned. The Old Man knew a lot. But maybe I wouldn't tell Steven that either.

I talked for another minute, telling Beatrice we'd go home soon, telling her we were all right, we were fine, and then I hung up the phone.

Steven yanked off his gloves with his teeth, reached for more change, and laid it out on the shelf. "I bet you don't even know our phone number," he said as he began to dial.

I could hear Izzy's larger-than-life voice. "Is that you, Steven?"

He handed the phone to me, then let himself out of the phone booth to stand outside, stamping his feet.

"It's me, Izzy," I said. "Do you think I could come home?"