Seventh Picture

Izzy

Two of Izzy's candies filled my mouth as I went around the side of the house. I didn't mean to listen or to be sneaky. Ordinarily I did that a lot. I'd stand still in the hall to hear what the stucco woman had to say to her telephone friend. I'd flip pages on the teacher's desk to see what disaster of a mark I'd gotten in social studies or social attitude. I'd pass by classmates in the schoolyard to find out what they had to say about that kid Hollis Woods.

But this time I was on my way to find Izzy, to give her a picture I'd drawn: Izzy flipping a pancake that would land on my plate. Izzy's pancakes were wonderful: covered with apples cut into small sweet chunks, the pancakes themselves so light I must have eaten a half dozen. In the picture Izzy is laughing, the turner in one hand, just under the cross-stitched motto on the wall: LOVE THE COOK.

I'd changed the motto, though. I'd written: I DO LOVE THE COOK. I'd drawn the I DO in the palest pink so that you'd have to study it, study it hard, or you wouldn't notice.

One afternoon Izzy and I had walked up to the old cemetery on the hill where her parents were buried. We picked white daisies and Queen Anne's lace and put them in the jar in front of a small stone next to her parents' grave. Izzy ran her hand over the inscription on the bottom: JOSEPH REGAN, SIX DAYS. "I always wanted more children," she said.

"For me, for John, for Steven." She patted the stone. "I wanted a baby for each corner of my house. It just never happened after this."

Down the hill I could hear the Old Man bellow at Steven. "Do they always fight?" I asked. "Or …"—I hesitated, trying to sound as if I didn't care, as if it weren't important—"do you think it's because I'm here?"

Izzy grinned at me. "It does seem worse this summer," she said. "But they have to find their own way."

I'd thought about that for days, "worse this summer," *but now, as I rounded the house, I stepped back against the wall, warm from the sun, smelling faintly of paint, and closed my eyes.*

"How can we let her go?" Izzy was saying.

"We can't," the Old Man said.

My heart began to pound so hard I thought it would come through my chest.

A mother, I thought. M.

"She belongs here," Izzy said. "Steven feels it too."

B, *belong.* G, *girl.* S, *sister.* W *for want,* W *for wish,* W *for Wouldn't it be loverly? My head was spinning.*

"I've been thinking about it," Izzy said. "The winter house in town is too small. We'd have to put a room on for her."

I don't need a room. A couch. A sleeping bag.

"Without the room, I don't think the agency would let us keep her. She has to have space for herself."

For a moment they were quiet.

I leaned my head back, my hand to my mouth.

"How about this?" Izzy said. "You could call Lenny Mitchell to work with you. There's space in the back for a great room for Hollis."

"A big window for her," the Old Man said. "We could do it in weeks."

"Sooner than weeks," Izzy said. "Early fall."

"Yes. Even Steven would help."

"I'll call—" "You'll call the agency."

"How long will it take them?

"She'll have to go back first," Izzy said, the words tumbling over each other.

"But just for a short time."

I leaned my head against the wall. I'd never been so happy.

"A daughter," Izzy said.

"Yes," the Old Man said. "We'll have a daughter."

From where I stood I could see the mountain towering over me. The stucco woman's voice was in my head: "She's a mountain of trouble, that Hollis Woods."

Before the end of the summer, I decided, I was going to climb that mountain, get to the top, raise my arms, and shout to the whole world, "I have a family. I belong."

In back of me there was a noise. "Ya-hoo!"

Steven. I jumped a foot.

The voices stopped, but no one knew I had heard.

Early fall and I'd be a daughter.