



Stolen by Vivian Vande Velde

Subjects: Amnesia; Missing children; Witches; Family life

Book Lists: North America, Reluctant Readers

Props: Dog barking, growling sounds

J

At first there was just the running, her feet slapping against the forest ground, (*run in place off and on*) right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot. She wasn't thinking. Her body was moving on its own. Then a piece of brush caught the hem of her dress and the thought came: I am running. And the next thought—several long moments later—was: Why? She couldn't remember that anything or anyone was pursuing her; neither could she think of any place she needed to get to. And if she had started running for enjoyment's sake, then the ripped hem and the ache that had started in her side, had ended the fun.

"Why am I running?" she asked herself. But no answer came. Neither did she seem to know where she was nor who she was. And though, before, she had not been frightened, now she was. "What DO I know?" she asked herself. Obviously she knew how to run. She knew that running long had caused a pain in her side. But for the moment, her mind seemed blank beyond that.

Then, she recognized the sound of yapping dogs in the not-too-distant distance. (*Turn on dog barking, raise volume appropriately*) The sound was getting louder, even though she had stopped moving. So the dogs were approaching her. They were coming, she realized, from behind. She had no memory of a reason to be afraid of dogs, so for several long moments she stood where she was, thinking she might follow the dogs after they passed her, thinking they might lead her to some human habitation.

But it was more than just one dog, or two—and suddenly she was afraid. Then she remembered: dogs can't climb trees. She didn't have personal recollection of having

climbed a tree, but she knew what to look for: low sturdy branches that gave access to higher sturdy branches. Just as her hands grasped a branch, the dogs—four of them—broke into the area where she was standing. (*Dog growling/tearing sounds*) She pulled herself up, raising her body off the ground. But she wasn't high enough and she didn't have enough momentum to get her legs up. One of the dogs jumped off the ground and caught at her skirt. She screamed. No words, just pure, hopeless terror. Her sweating hands slipped. She felt teeth sink into her leg, and the pain and the extra weight of the dog hanging from her own body was enough to loosen her grip entirely. She fell to the ground, and the blackness closed in on her. (*Turn off dog sounds*)

When she awoke, there was a throbbing pain in her leg. She focused her eyes, and saw that she was no longer in the forest. Someone had laid her on a mattress by a fireplace, in a neat and clean little cottage, with golden afternoon sunshine streaming in through the open window. It was a home on the edge of the forest and belonged to Avis, Browley, and a little girl named Ravyn. It was Browley's dogs who had chased the girl up the tree. He felt terrible. He had gone into the forest hunting and never expected to hunt a young girl who didn't know who she was. The woman, Avis, couldn't help but think of another young girl from the village—she had disappeared six years ago. Some say she had been stolen by a witch. That little girl's name was Isabelle. Could these two be the same person? Has Isabelle returned? Has she escaped from the witch? Or was she sent by the witch? Was she just pretending not to remember anything? Who is she? The answers lie here in (*Hold up book*) *Stolen* by Vivian Vande Velde.