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Chapter 1

Trouble Creek

“Joel, Christopher! Hurry up,” Andrew urged. “If the girls find out we’re going to the creek, they’ll want to come too.”

He stuffed three bananas, a water bottle, and a package of crackers into a plastic grocery bag. Then he glanced out the window. Megan and Sharon were swinging in the backyard.

The boys would have to go out the front door and sneak around the house so the girls couldn’t see them.

Today was Andrew’s ninth birthday, which meant a holiday from homeschool and lots of free time. As a special treat, Aunt Helen and the cousins Joel, Sharon, and the two-year-old twins, Wesley and Marcelus, had come to spend the afternoon with Andrew and his family.

Mom and Aunt Helen were working on a special birthday supper. Andrew guessed they would decorate his cake while he and the boys were at the creek.

“Let’s go!” Andrew commanded. The three boys dashed around the front of the house to the side yard. Stopping short, Andrew pressed his back against the brick house and cautiously peered around the corner. If only the girls

would go inside, but they continued to swing and giggle.
That was something girls liked to do—giggle.

“Can we get to that tree?” Joel whispered.



The maple tree stood only a few feet away. Its large trunk would hide one person well.

Andrew nodded. "One at a time," he said. "I'll go first. You wait till I get to the chicken coop."

He took a deep breath and zipped to the tree.

"Andrew," Megan called. She had seen him! "What are you playing?" she asked. "Are you going to the creek?" She started toward the boys, with cousin Sharon close behind.



Then Megan spotted the other two boys behind the house. She put her hands on her hips. “You *are* going to the creek!” she said.

“Mom gave us permission,” Andrew said.

“We’re going too, right, Sharon?” Megan said. “We’ll have a picnic!”

“You can’t come,” Joel said, coming out from his hiding place. “Just we boys are going today.”

“Mom!” Megan wailed, running toward the back door. “May we go to the creek with the boys?”

Andrew and the boys made a dash toward the woods.

“Boys, wait!” Mom had stepped out onto the deck. “The girls may go with you,” she said.

“But, Mom!” Andrew wailed. “We’ll barely get there and they’ll want to come back. I just know it!” He swung his bag for emphasis.

“You don’t want to ruin your birthday by being selfish, do you?” Mom asked kindly.

Andrew sighed. “Oh, all right,” he said grudgingly. “Let’s go.”

“It’s still chilly out,” Mom called after them. “It might be a good idea to keep your sweaters on.”

The children had to cross the field behind the house to get to the creek nestled in the woods. Andrew stepped briskly over the stubble of last year’s corn. The April air was a bit chilly, but the sun warmed his back. He took off his sweater and tied it around his waist.

Soon the five children entered the cool stillness of the woods. Dead leaves crunched under their feet. Zigzagging through the evergreens and budding trees,

they soon came to the creek bank. Andrew looked down at the muddy water. The creek wasn't very wide. A tree had fallen across it, forming a bridge. Andrew untied his sweater from around his waist and dropped it into the brittle leaves. "Let's pretend we're explorers," he suggested. He inspected the ground for a good walking stick.

"Good idea," Joel and Christopher agreed.

"We'll be Indian squaws," Megan suggested, "and you can pretend to discover our camp."

Andrew said nothing. He didn't want to play with the girls. He turned his back to them, took out his pocketknife, and began to whittle a stick. The girls soon wandered off to find something to play on their own.

Good, Andrew thought. He slid down the creek bank. The water flowed swiftly past his feet. He poked his stick into the creek, but it only went in about a foot, he guessed.

"Let's explore the land across the creek," Andrew said to the boys.

The girls were playing house under some brush now, but there was no telling when they would beg to play with the boys again. He led the way along the bank to the log bridge. The three boys stepped carefully across to the other side.

The woods weren't very big, and Andrew knew all the trails and where they connected. He bravely led his band of explorers, pretending they were in unknown territory. When they got hungry, the boys ate their snack.

"Race you back to the camp," Andrew said, whipping his banana peel into the brush.