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Chapter 1

Teddy

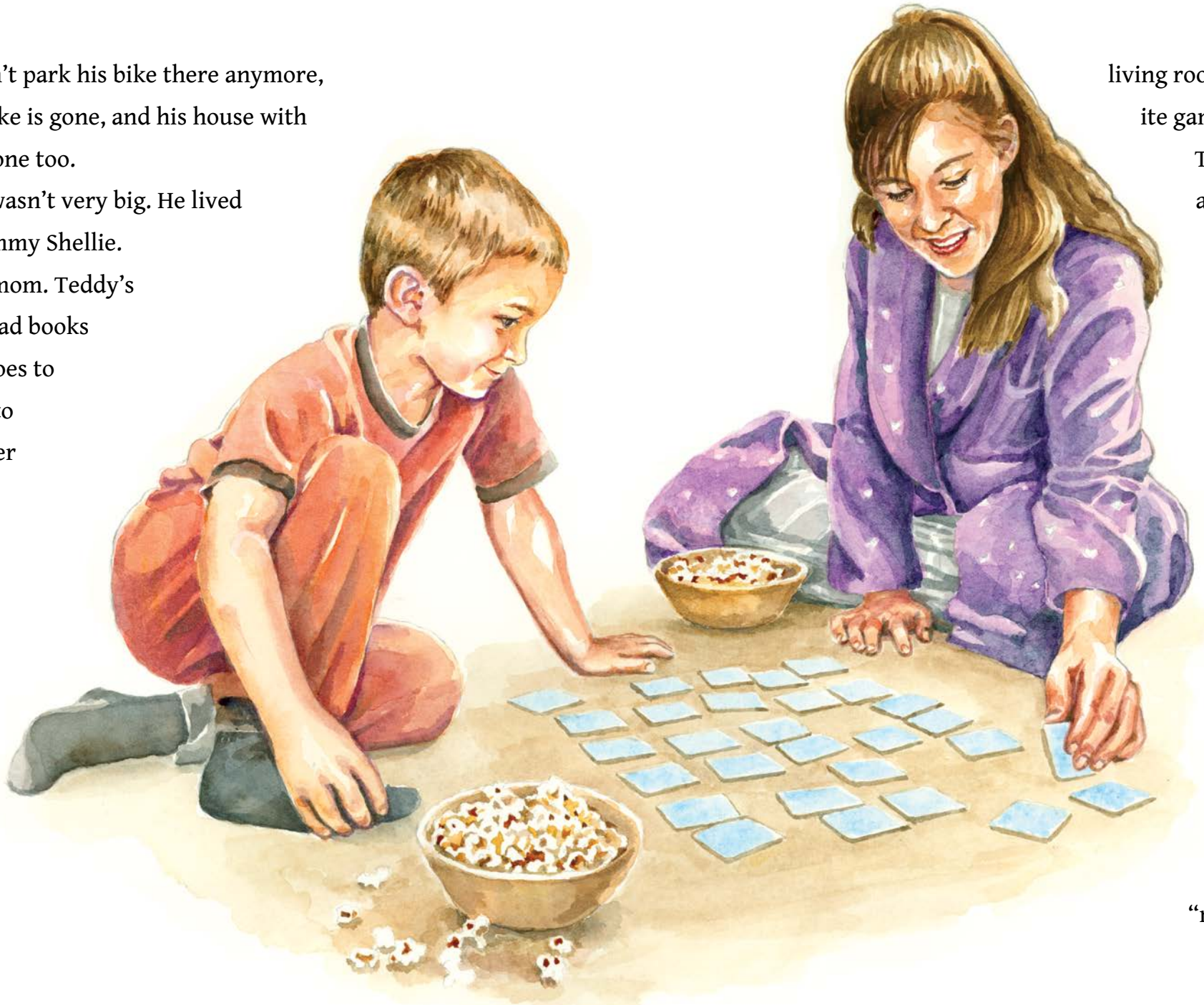
Teddy is six years old. He has brown hair and a wide grin with a gap in the middle where he knocked out his front tooth when he crashed on his bike. Teddy's old bike was red with black tires. He used to park it in the space under his front deck. He pretended the space was his garage, and that his bike was a motorcycle.



But Teddy doesn't park his bike there anymore, because Teddy's bike is gone, and his house with the front deck is gone too.

Teddy's house wasn't very big. He lived there with his mommy Shellie.

Teddy likes his mom. Teddy's mommy likes to read books to him before he goes to bed, and she likes to play in the sprinkler with him. Sometimes on weekends she doesn't have to work. Then Teddy and his mommy stay up late and eat popcorn and have pillow fights and play Memory on their



living room floor. Teddy's favorite game is Memory.

Teddy's mommy works at WalMart. She used to stay at home with Teddy, but Teddy's daddy died when Teddy was three. "He had cancer," Mommy explained. "He was sick on the inside." Teddy doesn't remember his daddy very much. But Teddy remembers his daddy ruffling his hair and calling him "my little Ted."



Teddy lives in a valley called Cherokee Valley. He goes to school in the town of Ringgold, Georgia.

Teddy likes Georgia. He likes the hot, hot summer days when he can play in his little pool. Even if the water only comes up to his knees, he likes to pretend his pool is a big ocean full of sharks and octopuses. And Teddy likes the rainy, drippy winters. He carries his umbrella out to the school bus and listens to the rain-drops dripping and splatting above his head.

When Teddy comes home from school, he stays with Mrs. Helen until Mommy gets home from work. Then Teddy walks with her across the yard and down the lane to his own house. Teddy tells his mommy everything that happened in school that day. “Mmm-hmm,” she answers. “Shall I make you a peanut butter and jelly sandwich?” She always puts lots of jelly on it, and the jelly drips down between his fingers and makes his hands sticky.