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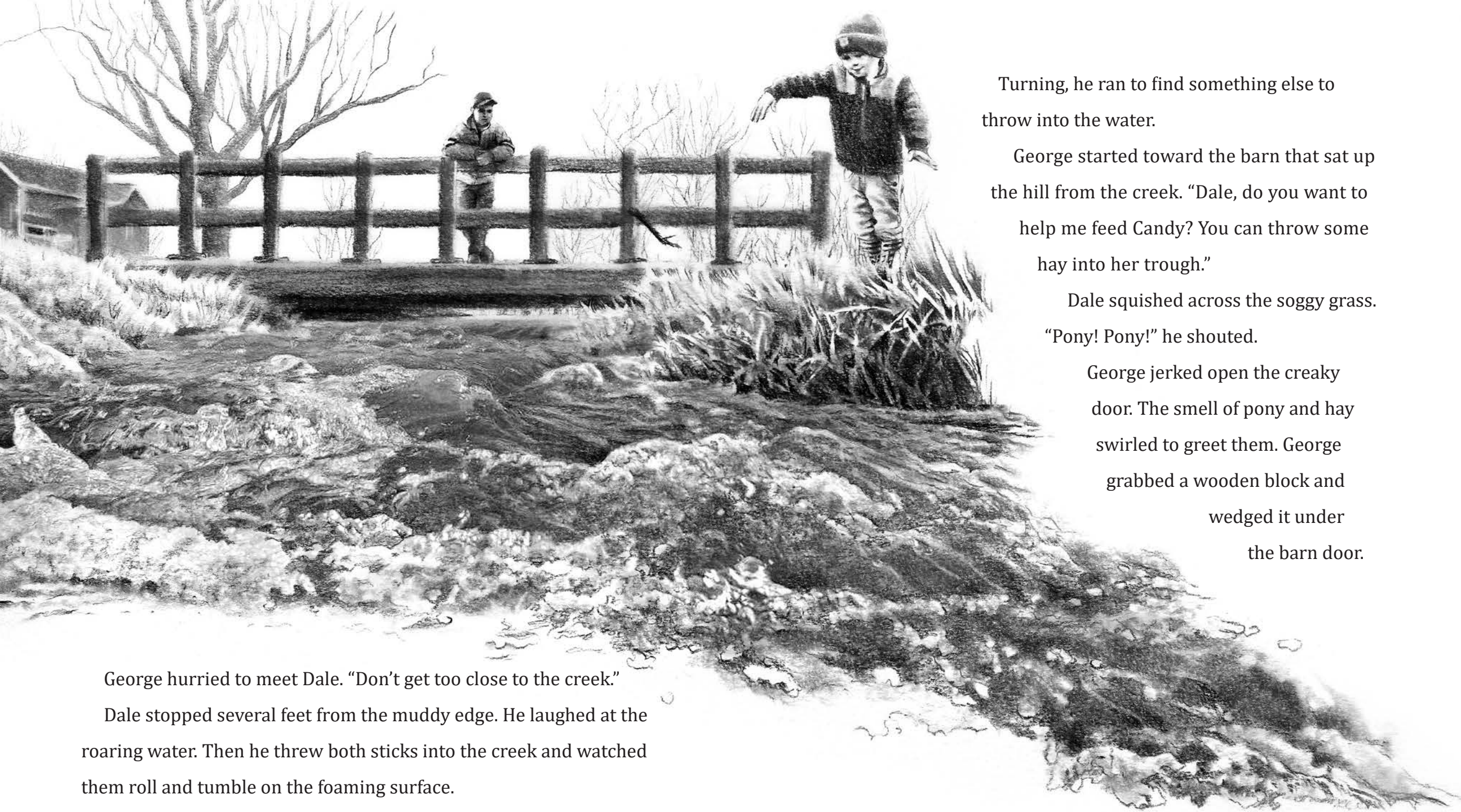
CHAPTER 1

The Missing Boy

George leaned on the railing of the wooden footbridge and looked down at the rushing water of the creek. Yesterday it had rained all day, melting the snow and filling the creek with icy torrents.

But this afternoon the sun was bringing the first warmth of spring. George heard a happy shout from the house. He saw his little brother Dale tramping toward the creek in his blue boots, waving a stick in each hand.

“Watch him carefully,” Mom called from the porch. “The creek is high.”



Turning, he ran to find something else to throw into the water.

George started toward the barn that sat up the hill from the creek. "Dale, do you want to help me feed Candy? You can throw some hay into her trough."

Dale squished across the soggy grass. "Pony! Pony!" he shouted.

George jerked open the creaky door. The smell of pony and hay swirled to greet them. George grabbed a wooden block and wedged it under the barn door.

George hurried to meet Dale. "Don't get too close to the creek."

Dale stopped several feet from the muddy edge. He laughed at the roaring water. Then he threw both sticks into the creek and watched them roll and tumble on the foaming surface.



“We’ll prop this door open and let some spring breeze in for Candy,” he said.

Dale laughed.

The brown pony whinnied a thank-you from her stall. George reached for a handful of hay. “Here, Dale. See if Candy will eat from your hand.”

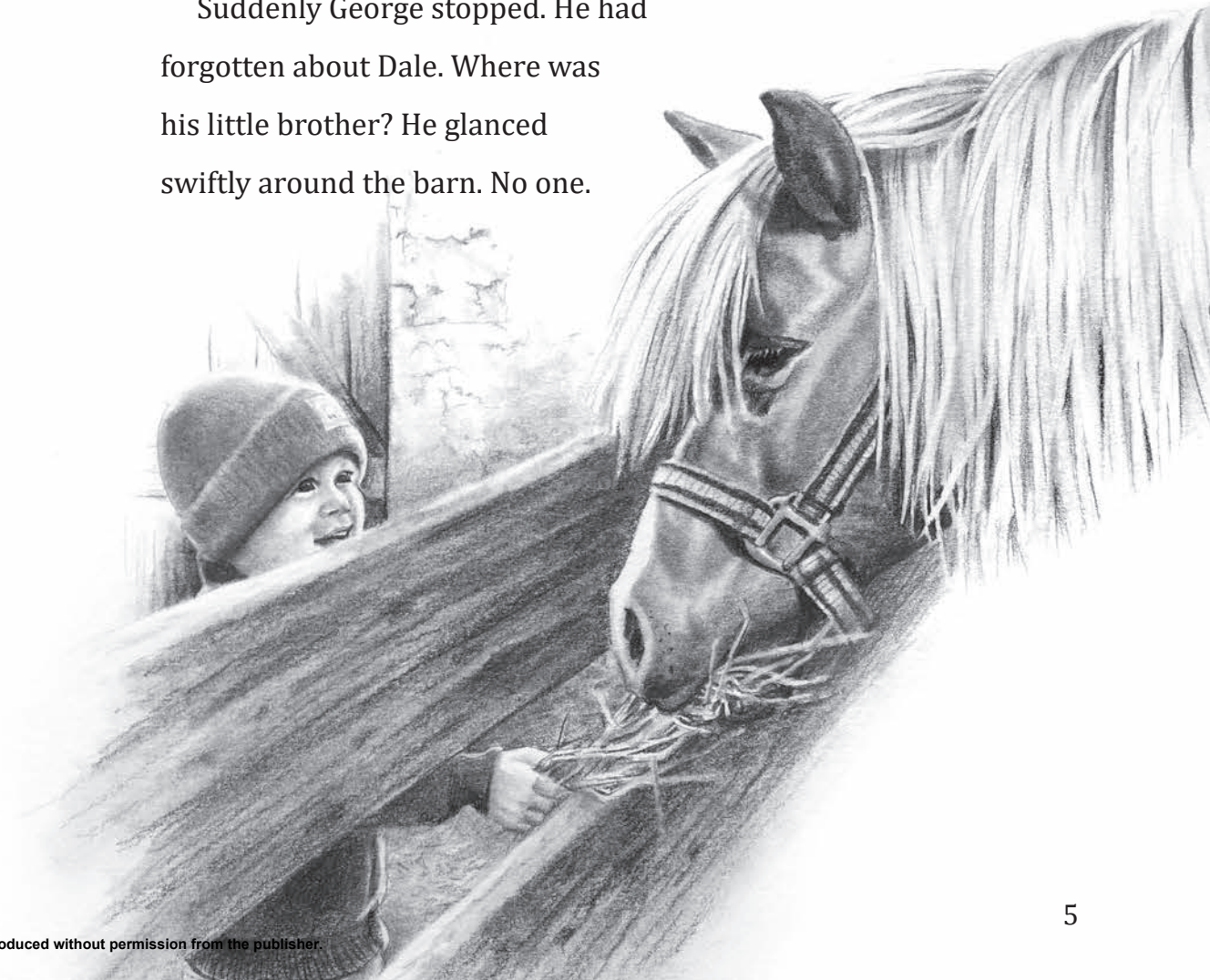
Dale wriggled the hay between the boards of the pen. Candy lowered her head to sniff it. As she took the hay, her soft lips kissed his fingers. Dale squealed.

George threw two armfuls of hay into the manger. Then he walked to the other end of the barn and filled a bucket from the feed bag. He carried the feed to Candy and emptied it into her trough. Stepping to the hydrant behind the hay bales, he ran cool water into the empty bucket. Candy

snorted at the sound of splashing water. When George lowered the bucket into her pen, she drank deeply.

George snatched a currycomb from a nail and began working out the tangles in his pony’s mane. He hummed a tune while Candy crunched her feed.

Suddenly George stopped. He had forgotten about Dale. Where was his little brother? He glanced swiftly around the barn. No one.



“Dale!” he yelled. Charging out the open door, he ran down the hill toward the creek. “Dale! Where are you?” No answer.

George pounded across the bridge and scanned the clearing on the other side of the creek. No Dale.

Panic gripped George. What if Dale had fallen into the rushing creek?

Panting, George ran back over the bridge and bolted up the hill toward the house. He slipped on the soggy grass and stumbled to his knees. Staggering to his feet, he charged up the porch steps into the kitchen.

“Mom! I can’t find Dale. He was with me in the barn, but he disappeared. I’m afraid he fell into the creek.”

Mom gasped. “He never came in here. Did you check the sandbox or the swing?”

“No. But he loves the creek.”

George’s big sister Kate leaped up from scrubbing the kitchen floor. “We have to find him!” she blurted.

All three raced outside. “Where did you last see him?” Kate asked.

“He was helping me feed Candy. But I propped the door open, and he must have wandered outside.”

“I’ll check the barn again.” Kate raced barefoot along the hill to the barn.



Mom and George ran around the house and looked up and down the road. No Dale. They checked the swing and the sandbox. Both were empty.

Kate came out of the barn, shaking her head, and they all hurried to the creek. The roaring torrent swept along faster than they could run.

“I’ll check along the bank to the edge of the property,” Kate cried.

“Dale! Dale!” she screamed as she searched downstream to where a wire fence blocked her way. The creek rushed under the fence, curved behind the neighbor’s house, and then swirled on through



ragged pastureland. Kate stood by the fence, staring at the muddy creek and praying for God's help.

Mom and George hurried back to the house.

George looked up at Mom. "He's not anywhere."

"I know," Mom said, her voice quavering. "I'm afraid he's in the creek."

"Mom!" George sobbed. "He'll drown."

Mom hugged George close and then sat on the top porch step. Bowing her head, she said quietly, "We must pray."

"Dear Lord, we need Your help to find Dale. Please keep him safe wherever he is. Give me wisdom to know what to do. In Jesus' name. Amen."

Mom reached into her skirt pocket for her phone. "I must call for help." Her fingers trembled as she dialed 9-1-1.

"Union County 9-1-1," said a woman. "What's your emergency?"

"My two-year-old son Dale is missing. I fear he fell into the flooded creek that flows through our property. We need help to find him."

"Did you check all the buildings and everywhere?"

"We searched but can't find him. I'm sure he fell into the creek."

“I’ll send someone over. What’s your address?”

George huddled on the step, sobbing into his hands. He barely heard Mom giving their address to the 9-1-1 operator. His thoughts raced. *Why didn’t I watch him better? It’s all my fault. Maybe he’s drowned and dead, and I’ll never talk to him again. Why didn’t I make sure he stayed back from the creek? Oh, God, save him!*

Mom touched George’s hair. “Help is on the way. Now I’ll call Dad. I hope he’ll soon be home from his truck run.”

Mom called Dad, and George listened to her side of the conversation.

“We can’t find Dale. He was outside with George, and then he disappeared. We’re afraid he fell into the creek . . . Yes, I called 9-1-1 . . . No. No one has arrived yet . . . I feel so helpless. What more can we do? Okay, I’ll try to stay calm . . . Yes, I’ll get Kate to alert the church families so they can all pray . . . When will you be home? Oh, you’re still four hours away! I just wish you were here . . . Yes, we’ve been praying, and we must keep trusting God . . . Right. I’ll call you when we find him. Goodbye.”

CHAPTER 2

The Search

Neighbor Randy tied his black shoes. He shrugged into his suit jacket and grabbed his truck keys from the hook beside the door. It was time to leave for the Wednesday evening prayer meeting at his church, Grace Baptist.

As he stepped out the door onto the covered deck leading to the garage, he heard a scream. Startled, he noticed his young neighbor, Kate, running along the muddy bank of the creek. She screamed again. It sounded like she was calling someone’s name. *Someone over there is in trouble*, Randy thought.