

My name is Jeremiah Shank; I'm eight and in grade two.  
I have an awful problem, and I don't know what to do.  
I'm here at school, it's recess time, and I'm behind a tree;  
I'm hiding from the others 'cause I know they don't like me.

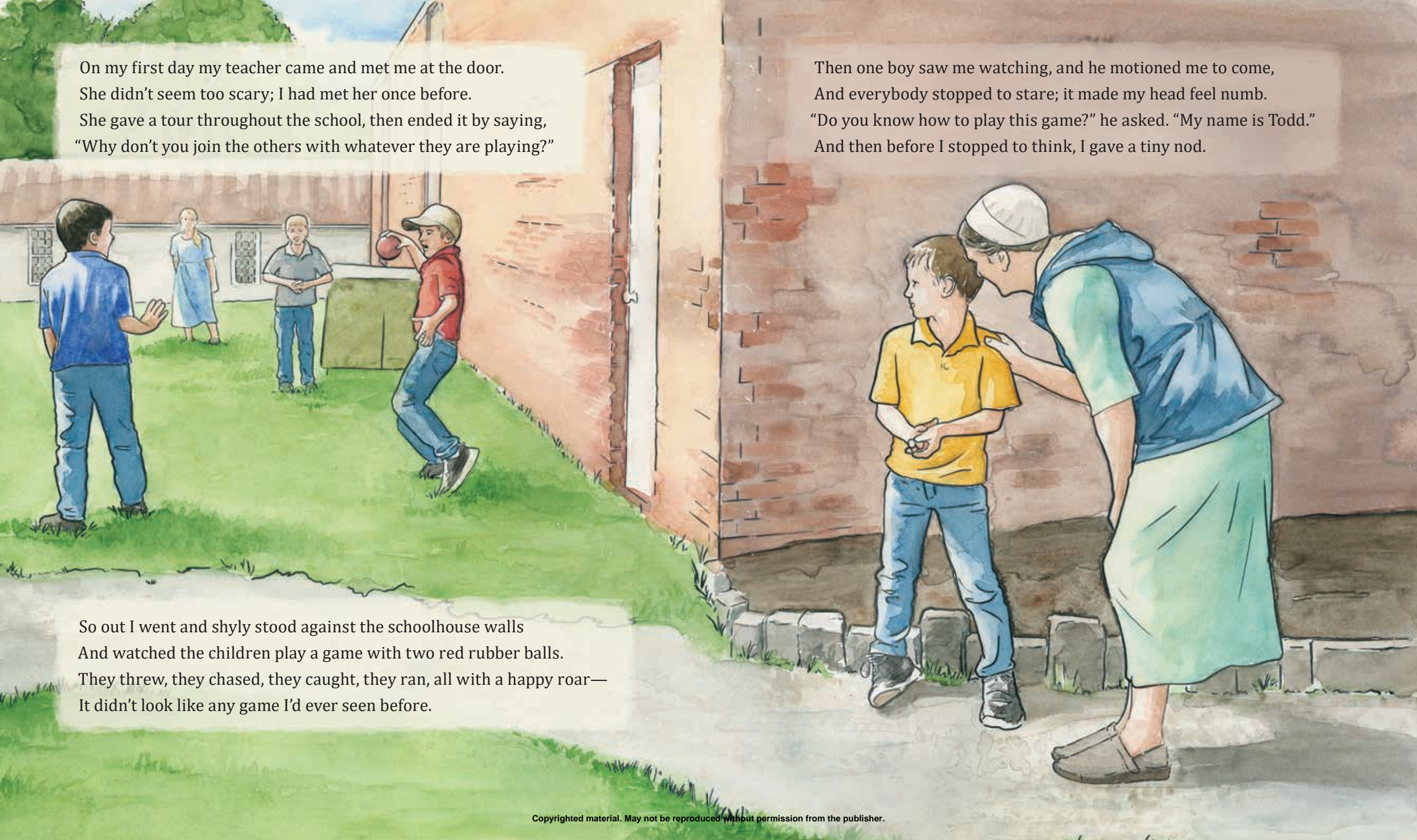
You see, this is a different school from where I took first grade;  
We moved and now I'm far away from all the friends I made.  
My mother said I'd make new friends and think this school is great;  
I guess things sure were different when *she* was a boy of eight!



On my first day my teacher came and met me at the door.  
She didn't seem too scary; I had met her once before.  
She gave a tour throughout the school, then ended it by saying,  
"Why don't you join the others with whatever they are playing?"

Then one boy saw me watching, and he motioned me to come,  
And everybody stopped to stare; it made my head feel numb.  
"Do you know how to play this game?" he asked. "My name is Todd."  
And then before I stopped to think, I gave a tiny nod.

So out I went and shyly stood against the schoolhouse walls  
And watched the children play a game with two red rubber balls.  
They threw, they chased, they caught, they ran, all with a happy roar—  
It didn't look like any game I'd ever seen before.







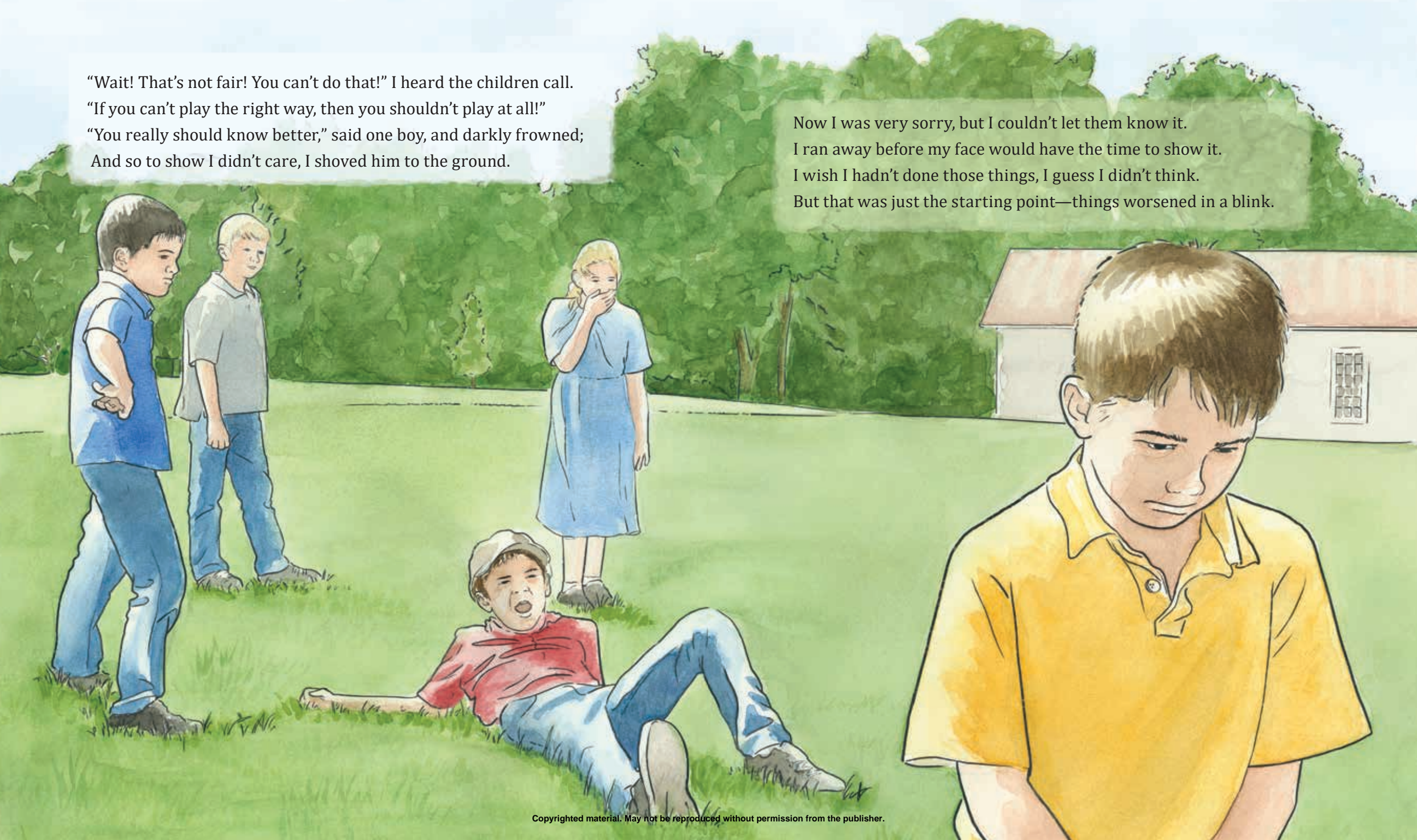
“That’s great!” said Todd. “Then join my team! Come on and jump right in.  
The other team is far ahead. We need your help to win!”  
They all resumed their lively game with energy and cheer.  
But I was frightened, wishing I were anywhere but here.

I watched in silence, since I had no inkling how to play,  
And when a ball was thrown to me, I kicked it far away.  
My team was quite astonished, and they stared at me, dismayed.  
And even though I stared right back, I felt a bit afraid.

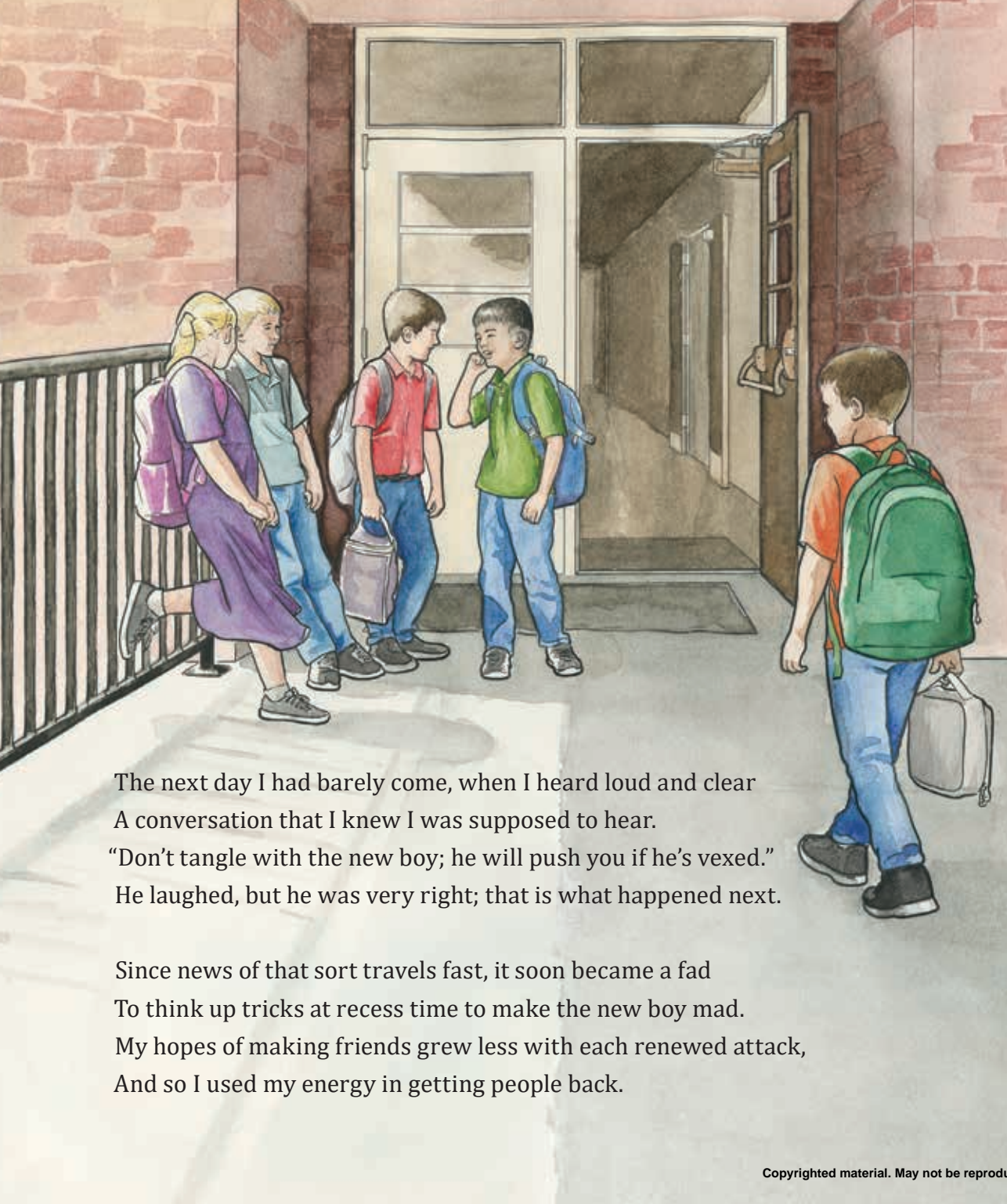


“Wait! That’s not fair! You can’t do that!” I heard the children call.  
“If you can’t play the right way, then you shouldn’t play at all!”  
“You really should know better,” said one boy, and darkly frowned;  
And so to show I didn’t care, I shoved him to the ground.

Now I was very sorry, but I couldn’t let them know it.  
I ran away before my face would have the time to show it.  
I wish I hadn’t done those things, I guess I didn’t think.  
But that was just the starting point—things worsened in a blink.







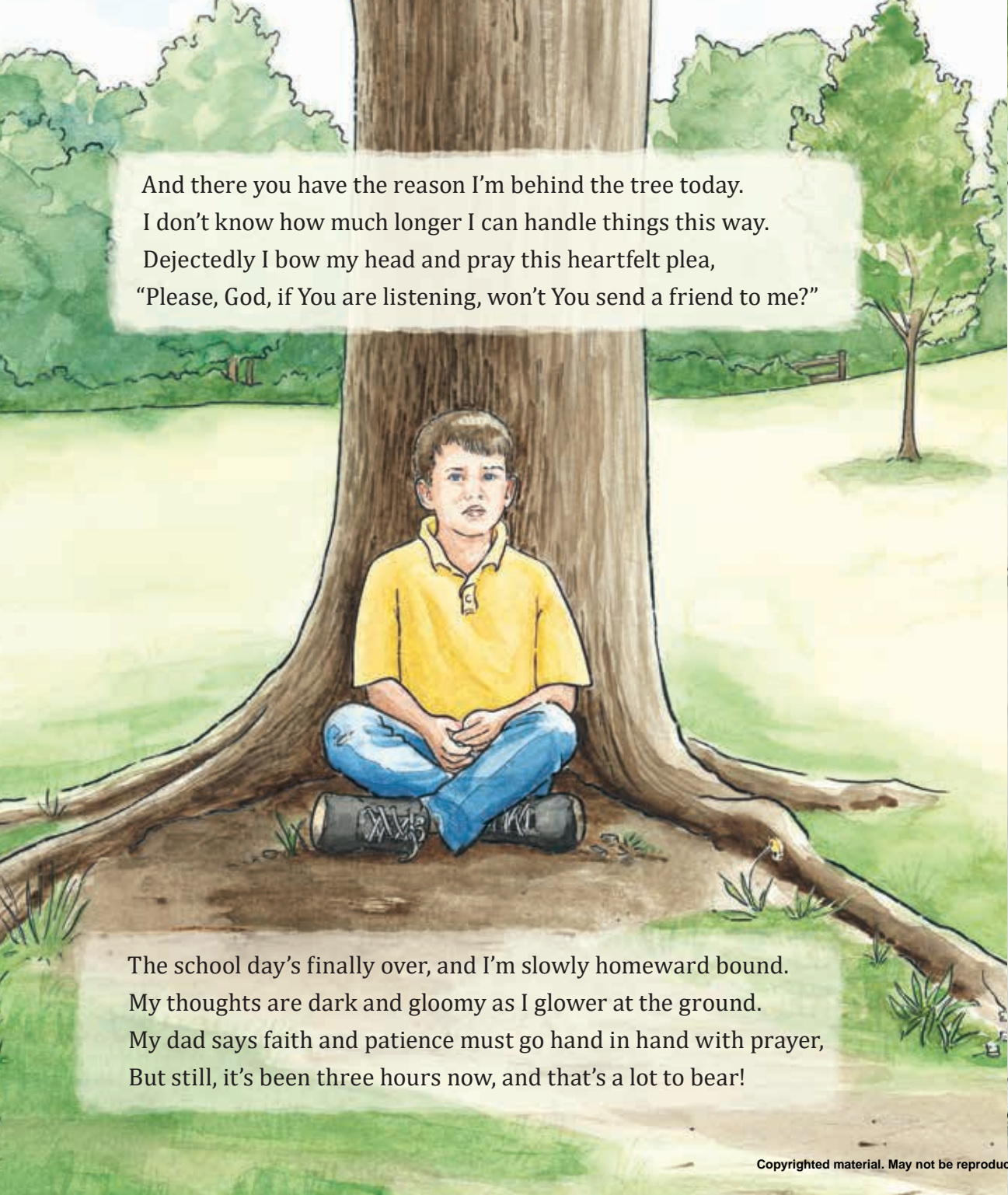
The next day I had barely come, when I heard loud and clear  
A conversation that I knew I was supposed to hear.  
“Don’t tangle with the new boy; he will push you if he’s vexed.”  
He laughed, but he was very right; that is what happened next.

Since news of that sort travels fast, it soon became a fad  
To think up tricks at recess time to make the new boy mad.  
My hopes of making friends grew less with each renewed attack,  
And so I used my energy in getting people back.

When Thomas hid my ball glove, he got mud inside his boots.  
When I was tripped by Floyd, I pulled his hair out by the roots.  
But all these hurts were building up and crippling me inside  
So soon instead of fighting back, I just began to hide.



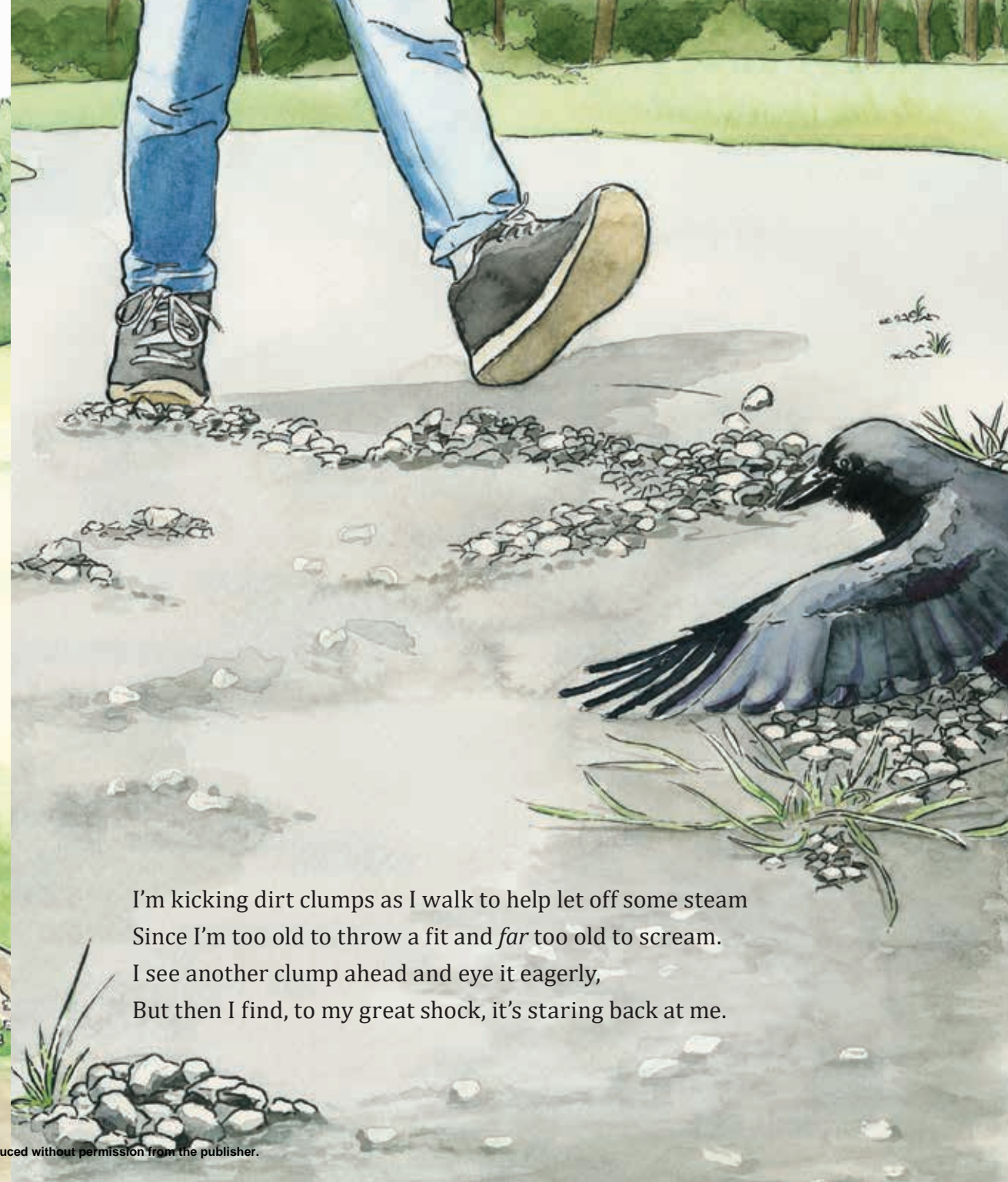


A young boy with brown hair, wearing a yellow polo shirt and blue jeans, sits cross-legged on the ground at the base of a large, thick tree trunk. He has a somber expression. The background shows a green lawn, other trees, and a wooden fence in the distance.

And there you have the reason I'm behind the tree today.  
I don't know how much longer I can handle things this way.  
Dejectedly I bow my head and pray this heartfelt plea,  
"Please, God, if You are listening, won't You send a friend to me?"

The school day's finally over, and I'm slowly homeward bound.  
My thoughts are dark and gloomy as I glower at the ground.  
My dad says faith and patience must go hand in hand with prayer,  
But still, it's been three hours now, and that's a lot to bear!

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I'm kicking dirt clumps as I walk to help let off some steam  
Since I'm too old to throw a fit and *far* too old to scream.  
I see another clump ahead and eye it eagerly,  
But then I find, to my great shock, it's staring back at me.