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Formerly titled *Elizabeth Gail and the Teddy Bear Mystery*

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Designed by Beth Sparkman

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Snowball Disappears

“SHE’S gone!” Elizabeth Gail Dobbs rushed into the house, slamming the door behind her. “Mom, Snowball’s gone! We gotta find her!”

Vera jumped up from the piano bench and took hold of Libby’s arms. “What? What’s wrong, Libby? Calm down!”

“Oh, Mom, Snowball is gone!” Libby cried. “We looked everywhere and she’s gone!” Hot tears stung her eyes. Her heart felt as if it might leap through her jacket.

Vera pulled Libby close for a quick hug, then released her. “A white filly can’t be that hard to find. She was in the barn this morning with the other horses when I let them out into the pen. Did you see if the fence was down?”

“Ben’s checking now. Susan, Kevin, and Toby are looking around the farm in different places.” Libby frantically grabbed Vera’s hand. “If Snowball gets on the road, she might get hit by a car.” Libby tugged Vera’s hand. “We’ve got to find her now!”

“We will, honey. Don’t worry.” Vera slipped on her blue spring jacket and zipped it up. She wrapped a scarf around her head and followed Libby out into the brisk air. “Hop in the car, Libby,” she said. “I’ll drive up and down the road, and you watch out for Snowball. A white filly should be easy to spot on a gray, gloomy day like today.”

Libby forced herself to sit still in the car as Vera drove slowly down the road. Libby wanted to run instead of ride. The car felt stuffy to her after being out in the cool, damp air.

As they drove past the Wilkens place, Libby saw Joe batting a ball in the front yard. Vera stopped the car and Libby rolled down her window. A blast of wind whipped her short hair back. “Joe, have you seen Snowball? She isn’t in the barn or the pen.”

Joe dropped his bat and ball and ran to the car. His nose and ears were red from the cold. “I haven’t seen her, Libby, but I’ll help you

look. Maybe she's on the state property behind our fence line."

"We'll let you know if we find her," said Vera as she eased the car off the shoulder and back onto the road. She drove slowly along the road, turned around at the mile crossroad, and drove back toward home.

Libby blinked back tears when she saw that Snowball wasn't back in the pen. She was glad when Vera drove past their driveway and continued down the road. Soon they stopped in Grandma Feuder's driveway.

"Libby, go ask Grandma if she's seen Snowball." Vera tugged her scarf off and lay it on the seat beside her. "Grandma has a sharp eye, and if Snowball came down this way at all, Grandma will know."

Libby hesitated. She wanted to find out about Snowball, but she hadn't met Grandma Feuder yet. Grandma wasn't a true relative, but everyone called her Grandma. "I don't know her and she doesn't know me."

Vera patted Libby's cold hand. "Would you feel better if I went?"

"Yes!" Libby hated meeting new people. They always asked how she liked living with the Johnsons and how it felt to be a "welfare kid." Some of them were polite enough to say

“foster child.” Libby didn’t want to talk about being a welfare kid and living with the Johnsons. She didn’t want to talk about Toby Smart or the fact that he would soon be adopted and become a real member of the Johnson family.

Vera got out of the car and walked up to the house. Libby squirmed in the seat, then quickly opened the car door and jumped out. She would meet Grandma Feuder, and she would not feel bad that she wasn’t a real Johnson, nor ever likely to become one.

A dog barked and ran to sniff Libby. She patted his head and talked softly to him. She walked around a mud puddle onto the wet grass. A movement beside an old barn caught her attention. She stopped, her head up and her eyes wide. A tall boy with light brown hair, dressed in a fleece-lined jacket, stood peering around the side of the barn. He jumped back out of sight when he saw Libby. She frowned. Who was the boy? Grandma lived alone. Was he here to steal something? Could he have stolen Snowball?

Libby dashed across the wet yard, the dog at her heels. “I want to talk to you,” she shouted. “Don’t run away!”

The sandy-haired boy stepped out and

stood with his arms folded in a hostile stance. His jeans and jacket looked new.

“Yeah, what do you want?”

Libby stopped in front of him. He stood a head taller than she did and was just as thin.

“My horse is missing. She’s all white and almost a year old. Have you seen her?”

“No.” He turned away.

“Wait!” Libby wanted to jerk him around and make him talk to her. “Are you sure? You might have seen her since you weren’t in school today. At least you didn’t ride our bus.”

“I told you I didn’t see a horse.” He looked bored and impatient.

“I gotta find Snowball! I’d just die if she got hit by a car.”

“You should take better care of her.” He picked up a stick and broke it with a snap. He tossed a piece of it and the dog raced after it, barking happily. “You got other horses. What do you need with this one?”

Libby took a deep breath before she burst with anger. “Snowball is mine. The Johnsons gave her to me for my twelfth birthday.”

The boy frowned. “You talk like they aren’t your family.”

Libby’s face flamed as she looked away. “They are now.”

“You’re adopted?”

Libby glared at him. “That’s none of your business!”

“I see. You’re a poor relative that they were forced to take in.”

“I am not!” Libby’s hazel eyes glittered angrily. “I’m a foster child, but now I belong to the Johnson family. They want me! Chuck and Vera are my parents now.”

“Hey, you don’t have to get mad,” he said, surprised by her fiery response. “What’s your name? I’m Adam Feuder.”

“Is Grandma Feuder your real grandma?”

“She’s my great-grandma.” The boy stuffed his hands deep into his pockets and hunched deeper into his coat. “I’m 13 years old. Who’s the oldest Johnson boy?”

“Ben’s the oldest. He’s 13, like you. Susan is almost 12. I’m 12 and Kevin is 10 and Toby is 9. Toby’s the redheaded little boy and Kevin’s the blond.” Libby looked down at the tips of her muddy boots. “I’m Libby.”

“I watched you all get on the bus this morning and get off this afternoon.”

Libby frowned. Adam sounded as if he resented their going to school. “Why don’t you go to school?”

He shrugged. “I take correspondence

classes. Sometimes I'm home-schooled. I'm never in one place long enough to go to a regular school. I probably won't be here for long."

"I sure wish you had seen Snowball." Libby's shoulders drooped as she turned toward the house. "Maybe your grandma saw her."

Adam followed Libby to the front porch, where Vera and Grandma Feuder were talking. Two dogs crowded around Grandma's legs.

Vera slid her arm around Libby. "Libby, I want you to meet Grandma Feuder. I see you've already met Adam."

Libby managed a smile as Grandma firmly shook hands with her, telling her how glad she was to finally meet the girl whom the Johnsons had prayed into their home.

"I'm sorry about Snowball. I believe Jesus will show you where she is." Grandma's wrinkled face glowed happily. "There's nothing that he doesn't know, and he loves doing good things for you."

Adam made a sharp sound, then abruptly walked away.

"Adam doesn't believe in a personal relationship with God," said Grandma, watching

him walk away. She turned a smiling face again to Libby. "You pray for him, OK?"

"I will." Libby suddenly felt warm all over as she remembered how she'd asked Jesus to be her personal Savior just a short time ago.

Grandma patted Libby's hand. "Snowball will be found, Libby. God will answer you."

Vera kissed Grandma's cheek. "I haven't seen any of your prayers go unanswered yet. It would be wonderful to have your faith."

"You have it, Vera. Even Libby does. God's Word says that he gives each of us a measure of faith. We have to learn to put it to use, that's all. Put it to use and it'll grow."

Libby thought about that, then nodded. It made sense. God had answered her prayers before. He would answer her prayer to find Snowball.

"Come see me again, Libby," said Grandma, tugging her coat closer around her thin body. "I'd like to get to know you, and I'd like you and Adam to get acquainted."

"I'd be happy to come back." Libby was surprised at her words, and even more surprised when she realized she meant them.