

Dig

This

by Julienne
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BUT, DAD, I don't *want* to go!" Austin said, slurping up the rest of his cereal milk and looking at his dad over the rim of the bowl.

His little sister, Payton, stood beside him in her grubbiest clothes. She was impatiently tapping her foot on the hardwood floor, making her blond ponytail bounce. "Hurry up, Austin! Uncle Ted'll be here any minute."

Their dad sighed. "Austin, we've been through this already. I have to work today, and there's no one else to watch you and Payton. You'll have fun on the dig with Uncle Ted! He and his friends are looking for geodes today. Did he tell you about how cool they are? They're—"



“Dad, he’s told me about rocks a million times. Uncle Ted is just so weird. I mean, you saw what he gave me for my birthday—an owl pellet kit! He actually thought it’d be cool to dissect owl puke!” Austin crossed his eyes and made a gagging sound. “Can’t I just stay here?”

His dad gave him *that* look: the one with his big, fuzzy eyebrows all scrunched up. Austin knew it meant “No. End of discussion.”

A horn honked in the driveway. Payton grabbed Austin’s arm and yelled, “C’mon, Austin, he’s here! Let’s go!” She bolted out the door. Austin grabbed his old, dirty coat and trudged outside.

“Hey, you guys! Good morning!” boomed Uncle Ted as soon as they opened the car doors. Austin sometimes thought that if his voice got any louder, Uncle Ted’s head might explode.

“Hi!” Payton shrieked as she put on her seat belt.



NOW THAT'S
A MUD BALL!



I THINK WE
HAVE TO
DISSECT,
CUT UP SOMETHING
IN ORDER TO LOOK
AT IT CLOSELY,
TO FIND SPIDER.



GOODIE!
I HAVE THE
KNIFE!



NOW, KIDS,
DON'T TRY
THIS AT HOME.



ALWAYS
REMEMBER
TO ASK AN
ADULT TO HELP
YOU WITH
CUTTING
MUD.



“Are y’all ready to get down ’n dirty and find some geodes today?” Uncle Ted asked, grinning.

“Yeah.” Austin offered a weak smile from the backseat.

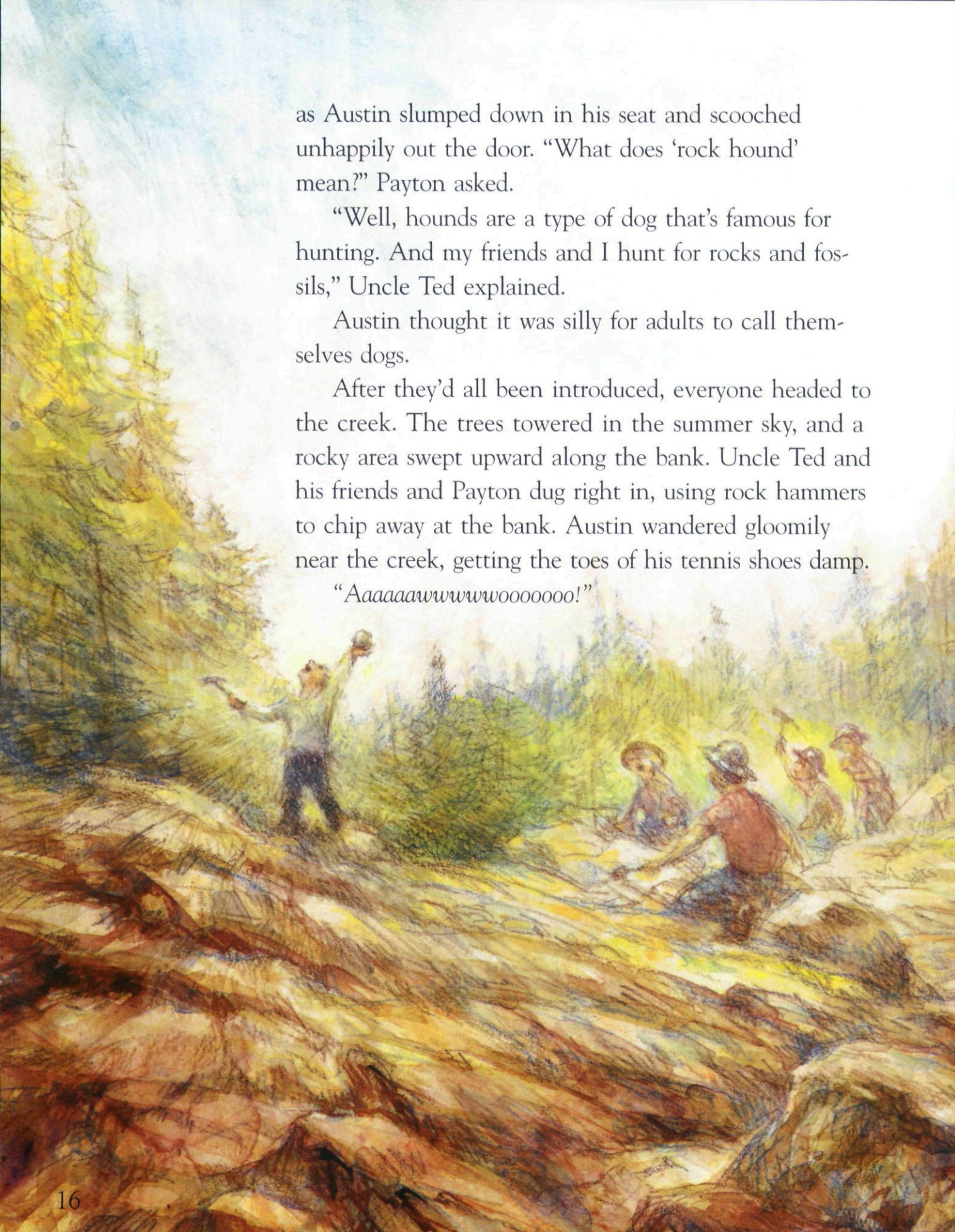
“O.K., guys. We’ll be looking for rocks that are almost perfectly round and feel sort of light compared to other rocks. The reason they’re light is because—”

Austin clicked on his Walkman and settled back into his seat. It was going to be a long drive, and he didn’t want to hear any more about rocks than he absolutely had to.

An hour later, they pulled up to an area by a creek where several other cars and beat-up trucks were already parked.

“Here we are! Let’s grab the buckets and digging tools from the trunk, and then I’ll introduce you to my rock hound friends.” Uncle Ted’s eyes flashed with excitement.

Payton hopped out of the car

A watercolor illustration of a rocky creek bed. In the foreground, large, brown and tan rocks are scattered across the path. In the background, several people are visible, some sitting on the rocks and others standing. The scene is set in a wooded area with tall, thin trees. The overall style is soft and painterly, with a focus on natural textures and colors.

as Austin slumped down in his seat and scooted unhappily out the door. “What does ‘rock hound’ mean?” Payton asked.

“Well, hounds are a type of dog that’s famous for hunting. And my friends and I hunt for rocks and fossils,” Uncle Ted explained.

Austin thought it was silly for adults to call themselves dogs.

After they’d all been introduced, everyone headed to the creek. The trees towered in the summer sky, and a rocky area swept upward along the bank. Uncle Ted and his friends and Payton dug right in, using rock hammers to chip away at the bank. Austin wandered gloomily near the creek, getting the toes of his tennis shoes damp.

“Aaaaaawwwwwwoooooo!”

Austin jumped and whirled around. One of the diggers had just let out a piercing howl.

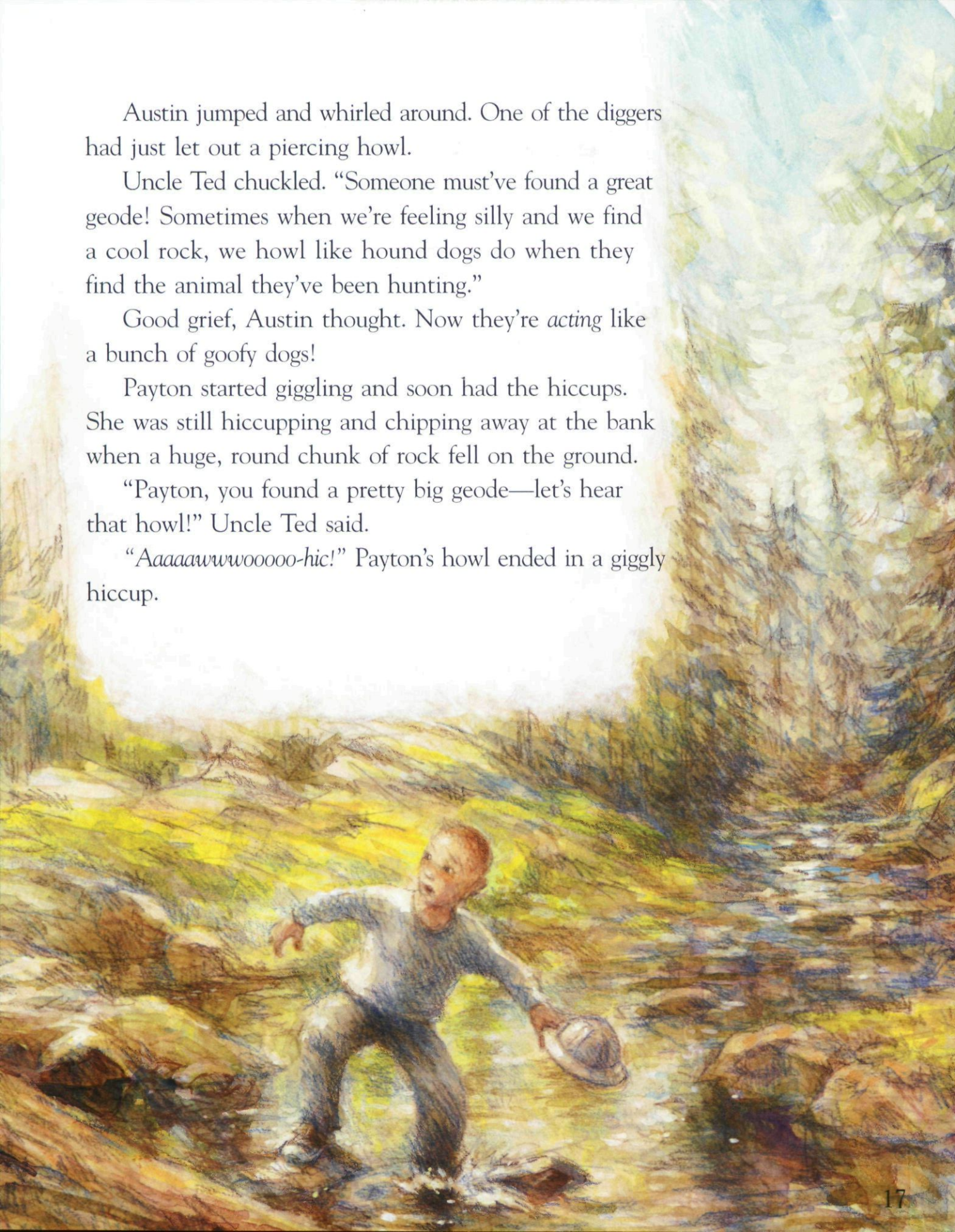
Uncle Ted chuckled. “Someone must’ve found a great geode! Sometimes when we’re feeling silly and we find a cool rock, we howl like hound dogs do when they find the animal they’ve been hunting.”

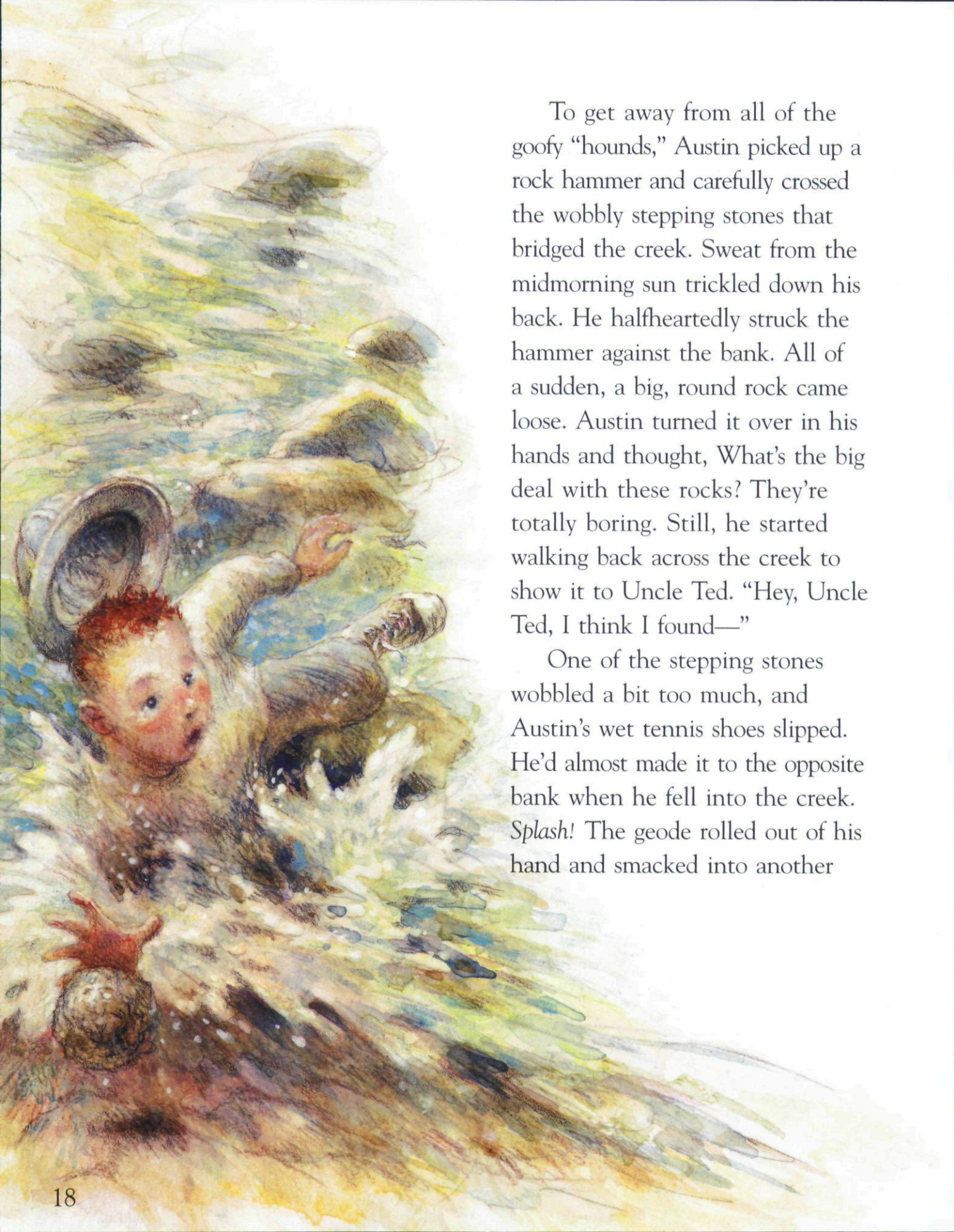
Good grief, Austin thought. Now they’re *acting* like a bunch of goofy dogs!

Payton started giggling and soon had the hiccups. She was still hiccupping and chipping away at the bank when a huge, round chunk of rock fell on the ground.

“Payton, you found a pretty big geode—let’s hear that howl!” Uncle Ted said.

“Aaaaawwwooooo-hic!” Payton’s howl ended in a giggly hiccup.





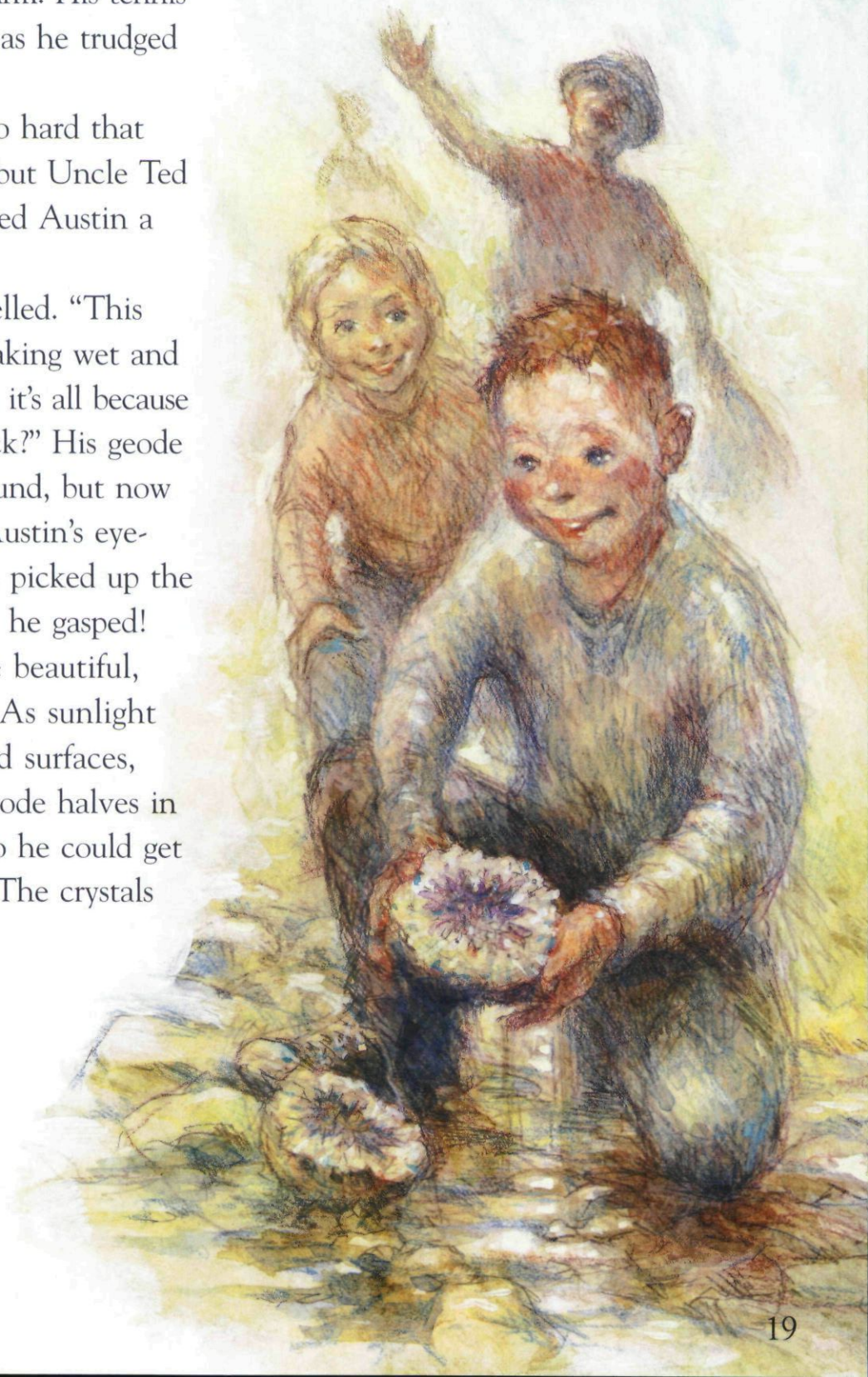
To get away from all of the goofy “hounds,” Austin picked up a rock hammer and carefully crossed the wobbly stepping stones that bridged the creek. Sweat from the midmorning sun trickled down his back. He halfheartedly struck the hammer against the bank. All of a sudden, a big, round rock came loose. Austin turned it over in his hands and thought, What’s the big deal with these rocks? They’re totally boring. Still, he started walking back across the creek to show it to Uncle Ted. “Hey, Uncle Ted, I think I found—”

One of the stepping stones wobbled a bit too much, and Austin’s wet tennis shoes slipped. He’d almost made it to the opposite bank when he fell into the creek. *Splash!* The geode rolled out of his hand and smacked into another

rock. Austin was absolutely drenched, and mud streaked across his right cheek and down his arm. His tennis shoes *squish-squashed* as he trudged back up the bank.

Payton laughed so hard that she started to snort, but Uncle Ted just smiled and handed Austin a towel.

“Gah!” Austin yelled. “This totally stinks! I’m soaking wet and muddy and gross, and it’s all because of this stupid . . . rock?” His geode was lying on the ground, but now it was split in two. Austin’s eyebrows furrowed as he picked up the halves, and then . . . he gasped! Inside the rock were beautiful, milk-white crystals! As sunlight glinted off the jagged surfaces, Austin turned the geode halves in different directions so he could get a better look. Cool! The crystals



reminded him of the rock candy he'd made in school, only these were way more impressive.

"Wow, Austin! That's a huge geode! After I shine those two halves on my machine at home, you'll have an awesome set to put on the shelf in your room," Uncle Ted said.

Crystals in his room? Austin grinned. "Uncle Ted?"
"Yeah, buddy?"

"Aaaaaawwwwwwoooooo!" 🕷️

Geodes are round, hollow rocks that have crystals inside. Scientists aren't exactly sure how they formed, but they think that geodes began as bubbles in volcanic rock or as animal burrows, tree roots, or mud balls underground. As the outer shells hardened, minerals that had been dissolved in water built up on the inside. Over thousands of years, as temperatures cooled and water evaporated, these minerals hardened into beautiful crystal designs.

Geode crystals come in all kinds of amazing colors—pink, purple, orange, red, brown, white, or even clear—and can be found in many places, including throughout the United States, Brazil, and Mexico. In fact, the biggest geode ever found was discovered in Brazil and weighed 70,000 pounds! You can visit 400 pounds of that geode at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., or you could just go out and find some small geodes of your own. Your state's geological survey Web site will tell you where to find them. Happy hunting!



WHAT AN
IMPRESSIVE,
AWESOME,
DISSECTING JOB,
THISTLE!



IT'S AN
ARACHNI-GEODE!



I HOPE YOU'VE
LEARNED YOUR
LESSON NOW.



NO MORE
MUDSLINGING!

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