# A Boy Called BAT

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WITH PICTURES BY
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First Edition

*For Max,*
*my wonderful boy*

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# CHAPTER 1
# After School

Bixby Alexander Tam stared into the refrigerator, trying to decide what to eat. He knew that the longer he took, the more energy he was wasting, and Bixby Alexander Tam did not like to waste energy. But he also didn't like to eat leftovers, or cheese that had to be sliced, or any of the yogurt flavors in the fridge.

"Bat, close the refrigerator door!" yelled his

sister, Janie, from the kitchen table, where she sat cutting out pictures from a pile of old magazines. Janie, he was sure, had eaten all the lemon and vanilla yogurts. And she *knew* he only liked the creamy ones, not the fruit-on-the-bottom kind.

"Bat" was what almost everyone called Bixby Alexander Tam, for a couple of reasons: first, because the initials of his name—*B*, *A*, and *T*—spelled Bat.

But there were maybe other reasons. Bat's sensitive hearing, for one. He didn't like loud sounds. What was so unusual about that? And if Janie's old earmuffs happened to make an outstanding muffling device, was it that funny if he liked to wear them?

There was also the way he sometimes flapped his hands, when he was nervous or excited or thinking about something interesting. Some of the kids at school seemed to think that was *hilarious*.

And, of course, bats have wings, which they flap.

So, between the initials and the earmuffs and the hand flapping, the nickname had stuck.

And, truthfully, Bat didn't mind. Animals were his very favorite thing. Better even than vanilla yogurt.

"Janie, did you eat all the vanillas?"

"Not *all* of them," Janie answered. She curved the scissors around the bent arm of the boy she



was cutting out. "I saw you eat at least two or three of them."

"Did you eat the *last* vanilla?"

"Yes," said Janie, and with a final *snip*, she freed the shiny paper boy. "It was delicious."

Of course it was delicious. All the vanillas were delicious.

"Well," said Bat, closing the refrigerator door a little harder than he needed to, "now there is nothing to eat."

"I wouldn't say there's *nothing* to eat," teased Janie. She knew she wasn't supposed to tease him.

"Well, *I* would," said Bat. "Nothing I want to eat."

"Then you must not be very hungry."

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, after Mom drove Bat home from school, she had to go back to work for a couple more hours. It was Janie's job to watch Bat. Thursdays were the hardest, and today was a Thursday.

"Make me a snack," Bat demanded.

"Make me a snack, *what*?"

"Make me a snack *now*."

"No," said Janie. "Make me a snack, *please*."

"I don't have to say please," said Bat. "Making me an after-school snack is part of your job. You don't have to say please to get someone to do their job."

"You do if you want them to do it well," said Janie, but she pushed back the magazines and stood up.

Bat felt his elbows beginning to bend. He felt his hands getting ready to flap. "I'm *hungry*," he said again. His voice sounded higher.

"Okay, okay," said Janie. "Don't fly away. I'll fix you peanut butter and jelly."

"Without the crusts," Bat said. He felt better already.

# CHAPTER 2
# Bat's Cave

After finishing his snack, Bat went to his room. Bat's room was his favorite place in the whole world. In his room, Bat felt completely comfortable. Here, he knew where everything was. If something was in the wrong place, it was his own fault, because no one messed with his room but him.

In the rest of their small house, Bat's mom and sister knew to put anything that needed to go

to Bat's room in one of three baskets: his clean laundry basket, his book basket, and his miscellaneous stuff basket.

"Miscellaneous" was a great word, and one of Bat's favorites. It meant all the extra stuff, so the miscellaneous stuff basket could have almost anything (except clean laundry and books) in it.

When the baskets were full, Mom placed them in the hallway outside Bat's door. He took them into his room and unloaded them himself.

Once, Mom had tried to reorganize his dresser drawers because she thought he could "use some help." After, when he was so upset he couldn't even speak, she said, "I'm sorry, Bat, but your drawers were just a mess. Your hats mixed in with pants and sweaters. I don't know how you find *anything*."

But the drawers weren't a mess. Not at all. If

Mom had looked more closely, she would have seen that his knit caps were in with his long pants and his sweaters, because he always wore those things together on cold days.

Shorts and T-shirts were in another drawer because he wore those things together on warm days.

"But what about *this* drawer?" Mom had asked, pulling open the bottom right drawer, which held a pair of pants, a wool sweater, and two T-shirts.

"Those are the things I never wear," Bat told her when he finally calmed down. "Because they're itchy and uncomfortable."

Then Mom cut the tags out of the T-shirts and Bat moved them to his warm-days drawer. After that, Mom "left him to his own devices," as she liked to say.

Once in his room, Bat closed the door. There

was a sign on the outside that said "Please Knock." Janie had written it for him, because her writing was much neater than his. Janie could do all the hand things better than Bat: write things, cut things out, smooth peanut butter on bread.

The clock told Bat that Mom would be home in forty-six minutes. Mom was a veterinarian, which was what Bat intended to be, too, one day. Mostly she treated cats and dogs, but sometimes she had "unusual patients." Once she had taken a BB pellet out of the wing of a hawk. The pellet had broken one of the bones and Mom had done surgery to mend it. She'd brought home X-rays to show Bat.

"Why would anyone shoot a hawk?" Bat had asked. "Do you think they were going to eat it?"

"No," said Mom. "Sometimes people do stupid things." She had been very angry about the hawk, angrier even than when Bat and Janie got

into loud screaming fights. Seeing the X-ray of the hawk's broken wing made Bat angry, too.

But his room always made him feel better. It had a roll-down bamboo window shade and a fine closet full of shelves and a pull-out trundle in case someday a friend came to spend the night. It had a ceiling fan and a reading lamp and a rug with a picture of a train track printed on it.

Bat felt like looking through his animal encyclopedia, which he often did after school, so he



pulled it down from the bookshelf and dropped comfortably onto his beanbag. His stomach was full of sandwich and Mr. Grayson hadn't assigned any homework. For this moment, at least, Bat felt perfectly content.