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Opening extract from

How Brave is That?

Written by

Anne Fine

Illustrated by

Vicki Gausden

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Chapter 1

Ta-ta-*ta-ta-ta-ta!*
Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!

Tom wants to join the *army*. He always has. Back when we were in nursery he'd head for the dressing-up box, root about till he found the soldier's cap, and ram it on his head. He'd pick up anything to use as a gun. They didn't let us play with proper toy guns in nursery.

Once Tom picked up Safira's doll and pointed it at the wall. "Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta," he shouted. "You're dead! You're all dead!"

Safira began to cry. Miss Lane made Tom give the doll back and say sorry.

"How can I join the army," Tom said, "if I don't learn to shoot?"

"No shooting in here!" said Miss Lane. "Only outside."



So when we were outside, that's what we did. We played at being soldiers. I used to get bored. (I don't want to join the army, like Tom. I want to look after forest trees, like my dad. Or run a cafe, like my mum.)

But that's all Tom wanted to do, and Tom's my friend. So we played soldiers with pretend guns.

We were still doing it when we moved up to primary school. On the first day, Mrs Dell gave us all some pencils and a ruler made of wood. Tom got a magic marker and he blacked out bits along the side of his ruler.

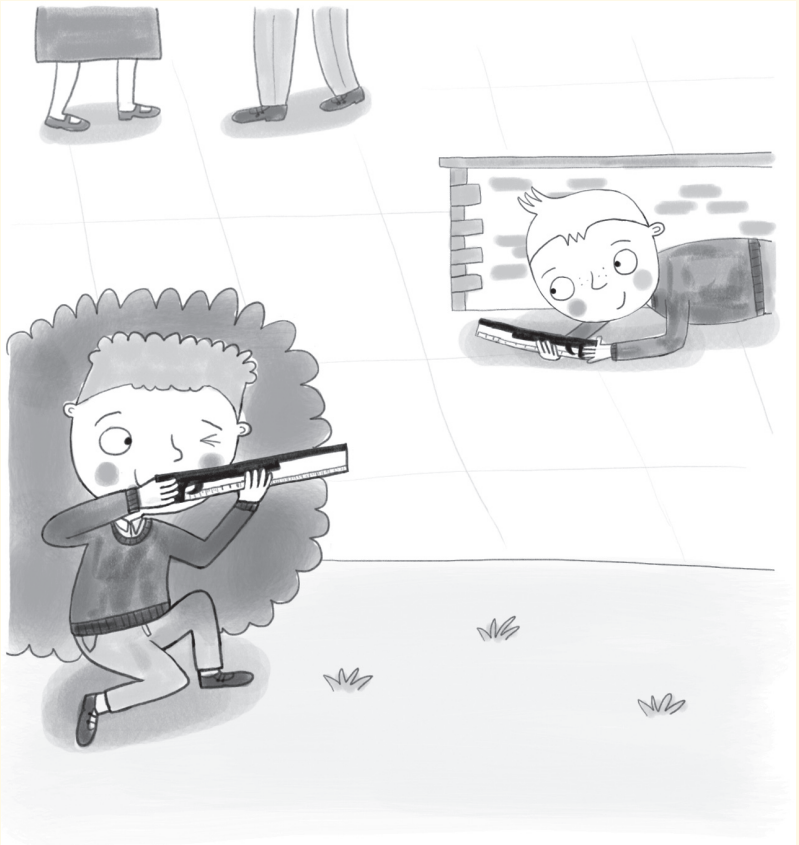
"What are you doing?" I asked.

Tom held it up. He'd made his ruler look as if it was a long, slim gun. It even looked as if it had a trigger.

"Do mine as well," I begged him.

So he did.

"Ace!" I said. As soon as the buzzer rang for break, we ran out into the playground. We crawled around and hid from made-up enemies and pretended to shoot back when they shot at us.



"Quick! Here they come again!"

"Ta-ta-*ta-ta-ta-ta! Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!*"

Mrs Dell heard the noise and asked what we were doing. Tom hid his ruler gun behind his back.

"Gary and I are just going round the playground measuring things with our new rulers," he said.

"That's not true, is it?" said Mrs Dell. "That would be a *quiet* thing to do, and you are making more noise than anyone else in this playground."

Tom hung his head.

"Now show me what you've got hidden behind your back," said Mrs Dell.

So Tom held out his ruler. It was all smudged from being held so tight. Tom's hands were black as well.

"Oh, Tom!" said Mrs Dell. "What a horrid mess you've made of that lovely new ruler."

"I have to practise shooting," Tom explained. "You see, when I'm old enough I want to join the army."

Mrs Dell looked stern. "If you want to join the army, Tom, you'll have to be brave," she said. "And brave people tell the *truth*."

After she'd turned away, Tom stuck his tongue out at her back. But I think what she said fixed in his brain because from that day on, Tom never, ever told a lie.