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Opening extract from

War Games

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For the Fallen

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Keep off the Grass

England, June 1944

Five years after the beginning of World War 2

Chapter 1
A Seaside Town in the North

"You're going to the country, George," my mum told me.

"What for?" I asked.

She gave a sigh and wiped her hands on her apron. "Don't argue, George. That nasty Mr Hitler is dropping doodlebugs on all the big towns. We may be next. You don't want a bomb landing on your head, do you?"

"Better than going to the country," I sniffed.

“There’s lots of grass in the country,” Mum said.

“There’s lots of grass growing in the cracks in our road. And we’ve got the beach nearby.”

Mum sighed. “You’re going, and that’s it.”

“Aw, Mum.”

“Don’t argue. I’ve packed your suitcase. You’re leaving tomorrow.”

I wandered out into the back lane and kicked at the cobble stones. My mate, Jimmy came out of his back gate and ran up to me. “I’m getting excavated tomorrow,” he said.

I stared at him. “You mean sent off to the countryside,” I said. “*Evacuated*.”

“Yes,” he nodded. “That as well. Are you getting excavated?”

“You mean evacuated. Like I said.”

“Well? Are you?” He was so excited his eyes were shining and his cheeks were as red as his hair.

“Yes,” I groaned.

“It’ll be good, won’t it?” he asked.

I’d heard the stories about children being sent away from home because of the war. Some kids had a very bad time. They stayed in strange houses and the people that looked after them were cruel. They made them work on farms and do all the dirty jobs. I looked at Jimmy. He was so excited.

“It’ll be great,” I told him.

“Shall we have one last game of cricket before we go?” he asked.

“Get the bat and ball, then,” I said.

The bat was a thin piece of wood we used to play with on the beach. That was before they

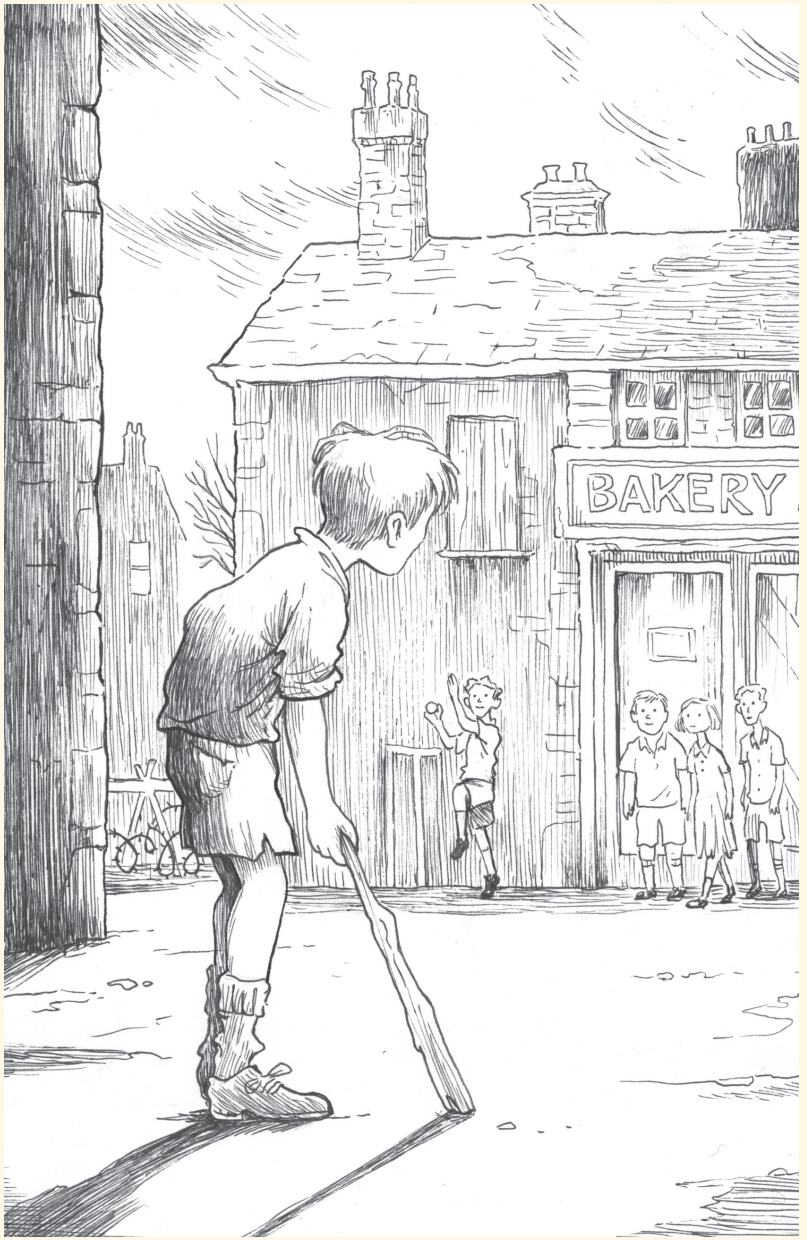
put barbed wire up and stopped us going onto the beach. The barbed wire was there to stop the Germans landing. Why Mr Hitler would bother with a scruffy little town like ours I never knew.

The ball was a tennis ball. When you played cricket in our street, the ball would hit the cobble stones and bounce off anywhere. You had to be good to hit it. For a wicket we drew a line with some chalk on the sooty, brick wall of Mr Jackson's baker shop.

As we played other boys and girls came to join us. "Are you being evacuated?" they all asked.

"It'll be good," Jimmy told them. "George says it'll be good."

Soon we had enough people playing to make two teams of five and we started a game. I was good. That evening I was the best. I scored fifty



runs in no time and the other team was getting fed up.

Jimmy never gave up though. He bowled the ball at me so slow I'll bet it got dusty on its way to my bat. I tapped the ball gently up into the air and back to Jimmy. He caught it and held onto it, holding it up close to his body, next to his ragged, grey jumper.

"I caught it!" he shouted. "I caught it. You're out, George, I caught it. You're out."

I tried to look sad about it. "I thought you'd drop it, Jimmy," I said with a sigh.

"*You* thought I'd drop it?" he laughed. "*I* thought I'd drop it. I've never got you out before, George."

"No. Well done, Jimmy. Well done."

His eyes were shining and he looked towards the setting sun. "Tomorrow we'll be

playing cricket on grass," he grinned. "Won't we, George?"

"I hope so, Jimmy," I told him.

But things never work out the way you think they will, do they?