

# The Secret Warrior

Sally Ann Carter





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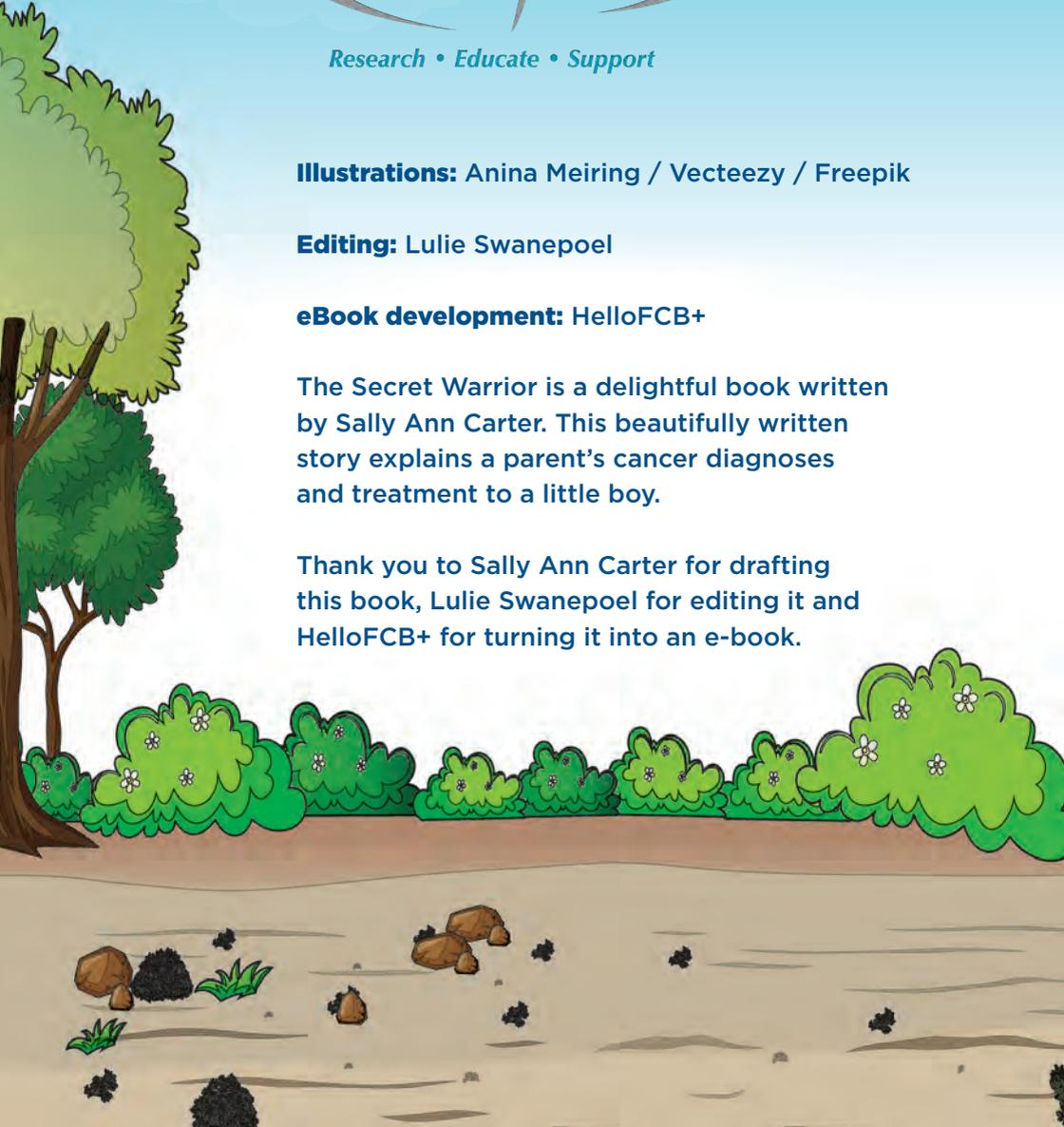
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**Editing:** Lulie Swanepoel

**eBook development:** HelloFCB+

The Secret Warrior is a delightful book written by Sally Ann Carter. This beautifully written story explains a parent's cancer diagnoses and treatment to a little boy.

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Jack waited for his mommy at the school gate, but he could not see her car. Instead, it was Ben's mommy who came up to him. She always wore high heels and a dress, not like Jack's mom who wore slacks and sandals. "Your mom asked me if you could come and play with Ben this afternoon as she is not feeling well," said Ben's mommy.

Jack was surprised, he'd never known his mommy to feel unwell, but he was happy to go home with Ben, because Ben had the biggest Lego set, and they could build all sorts of things. Lucy, his dog, would miss him though, as she'd be waiting at the gate for him, but he would see her later.



Ben's baby sister was a bit annoying as she kept taking their Legos, but he had a fun afternoon and hardly thought about his mom not feeling well. So, it was a bit of a shock when Ben's mom dropped him at home and only Lucy was there to greet him. She wagged her tail to welcome him, making it go round and round like a propellor.

"Where's Mom, Lucy?" he asked, stroking her soft head.

"Yap! Yap! I've been looking after her, she's lying on her bed. Let's go and see her," yapped Lucy. Mom and Dad could not understand Lucy and said it was Jack's imagination, but he understood her. He followed Lucy up the stairs to Mom, where she lay on her bed.



Jack always snuggled in bed with Mom at night, but he'd never seen her in bed during the day.

“Hello, my boy.” It was the same words she always greeted him with, but her voice sounded different. He snuggled up to her and Lucy squeezed her way between them. Jack laughed and picked her up and put her on the floor. “My turn now, Lucy.” Lucy was up on the bed again and nudged Jack with her wet nose, “Ask her how’s she’s feeling.”

“How’re you feeling, Mom?”

“Not great, my boy. You’ll have to feed Lucy and help Dad with supper, okay?”



Lucy rolled on her back, laughing: “Dad can’t cook, he doesn’t even know where the kitchen is.” It was if Mom heard her because she said, “Maybe Dad will order pizza. You like that, don’t you?”

“Only if there’s bacon on it,” said Lucy wriggling closer to Jack.

When Jack was getting ready for school the next morning, Dad said: “Gran will pick you up from school today and you’ll spend the night with her. Mom is going to the hospital for some tests.”

Jack put on his socks and said to Lucy, “Mom doesn’t go to school, so what tests?” He’d heard the big kids talking about tests at school and how hard they sometimes were.



Lucy yawned, “Not that kind of test, Jack. Tests to see why she is sick.”

“How do they do that?” he wondered, while tying his shoelace.

“They take some of her blood. Tickle my tummy, please.”

Jack tickled her tummy and asked, “How do they get her blood?”

“Mm, lovely. Keep scratching,” said Lucy. “They pull the blood out with a needle. I had it once. It’s just a small prick, and it didn’t hurt much.” That didn’t sound quite as bad, Jack thought to himself.

When Gran fetched Jack from school, she had Lucy with her. Jack didn’t know who to hug first, but of course, Lucy won in the end. Gran was always so much fun – they baked cookies together and played lots of games of Rummy, which Jack always won.



When Dad fetched him the next day, he said: “You and Lucy wait in the car. I’m just having a word with Gran.” Jack fiddled with the car radio, and Lucy sat scratching herself and moaning that she got fleas from Gran’s cat. When Dad and Gran came out to the car, they both had red eyes and were blowing their noses. They had been crying.

“Surely, grownups don’t cry?” Jack whispered to Lucy. Lucy jumped onto Jack’s lap, cocked her head and looked at him.

“Why shouldn’t grownups cry, Jack? They can get very sad too. You cry when you’re sad.”

“I wonder why they’re sad. Could it be about Mommy?”

“Maybe,” said Lucy and started to scratch again.

“Did Mommy pass her test, Dad?” Jack asked when Dad got into the car. Maybe he was sad because she’d failed her test.

“Mom’s sicker than we thought, Jack, but the doctors know how to help her, and she will be starting treatment soon. I’m sure she’ll get better.”



Jack sat quietly in the back seat of the car, then Lucy snuggled up to him. “What’s the matter, Jack? You look sad.”

“I think it’s my fault Mommy’s sick.” He was trying hard not to cry.

Lucy nudged him gently, “Why do you think it’s your fault, Jack?”

“She said the other day, ‘I’m sick and tired of telling you to put your toys away’, and now she’s sick. It is all my fault, Lucy.”

Lucy put her paw on Jack’s arm, “I promise you, Jack, that’s just something adults say; it doesn’t mean you really made her sick.”



“But think how often I’ve had to sit in the naughty corner. I really do think it’s my fault. If I’m good, will she get better, do you think?”

“The doctors will make her better, Jack, and Dad knows how to look after her. You and I can help by trying to be good, okay? But you are not really a naughty boy.”

Dad looked at Jack in the car mirror. “Are you talking to yourself again, Jack?” he asked.

“Lucy wants to know what’s the matter with Mom, Dad?”

“Oh, that dog is so nosey. Tell her it’s a sickness called cancer if she must know.”



Jack shrugged and looked at Lucy, who just shook her head as if to say I don't know what that is.

Mom was asleep when they got home and Lucy said they should see if Muesli, the cat next door, knew what cancer was.

Muesli was lying in the sun on top of the wall and jumped down when she saw them. She curled herself around Jack's legs purring. Lucy was jealous but decided not to say anything.

Jack went down on his haunches and asked Muesli: "My mom's got cancer. Do you know what that is?"

"Hm. Rowdy the Rottweiler had cancer. He had an operation and had to wear a funny collar, but he's fine now."



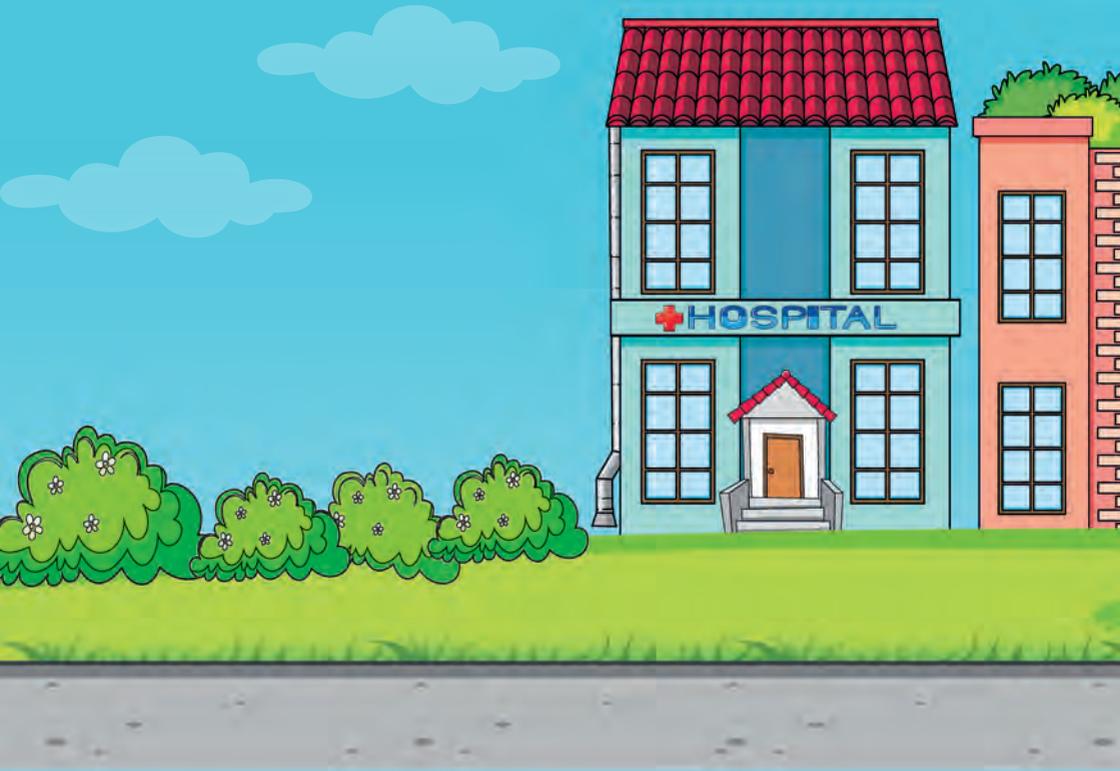
Jack looked at Muesli in horror. Would his mom have to wear a collar, he wondered. Muesli rubbed against his legs.

“That was to stop him pulling out his stitches.”

“Whew!” Jack let out a sigh. He knew his mom wouldn’t try to pull out her stitches. She’s had stitches when she fell off her bike once and she never tried to pull them out.

“Dad didn’t say Mom will be having an operation. But what is cancer, Muesli? Lucy said you know everything.”

Muesli started to wash her face. “Well, not everything. But we can go and ask Cheeky tomorrow if you like.”



“Who is Cheeky?” Lucy asked.

“Cheeky owns the doctor down the road. He sits in the waiting room and hears everything that’s going on. He knows everything... ooh here comes that naughty Jack Russel...” Muesli jumped up onto the wall as the dog came walking past.

Muesli stayed safely on the wall but asked, “Shall we visit Cheeky when you get out of school tomorrow, Jack?”

“I have sports practice, but I don’t think I’ll go to it because Mom is sick.”

“Of course, you must go, Jack”. Lucy stood up on her hind legs against Jack’s leg. “Mom would really want you to. We can go to the doctor when Dad gets home.”



“Right,” said Jack as he stroked Lucy’s soft head. Jack, Lucy and Muesli set off down the road the following afternoon. Jack told Mom he was going to the park, so they went and played for a short while so that it wasn’t a lie. Lucy dropped the ball she was carrying behind some bushes in the park. Jack rang the bell and a lady waiting inside at the doctor’s door said, “Come inside and take a seat. The doctor will see you soon.” Carefully, Jack opened the door. There was no one in the room except a parrot in a large cage. It turned its head and said, “Take a seat, please.” In a very different voice it said, looking at Muesli and Lucy. “No pets.” Muesli looked down her nose at the parrot and said: “We have come to talk to you, not the doctor. We understand you know everything.”

“Hmph,” said the parrot, looking incredibly pleased with himself. “Then you must take me out of the cage.”



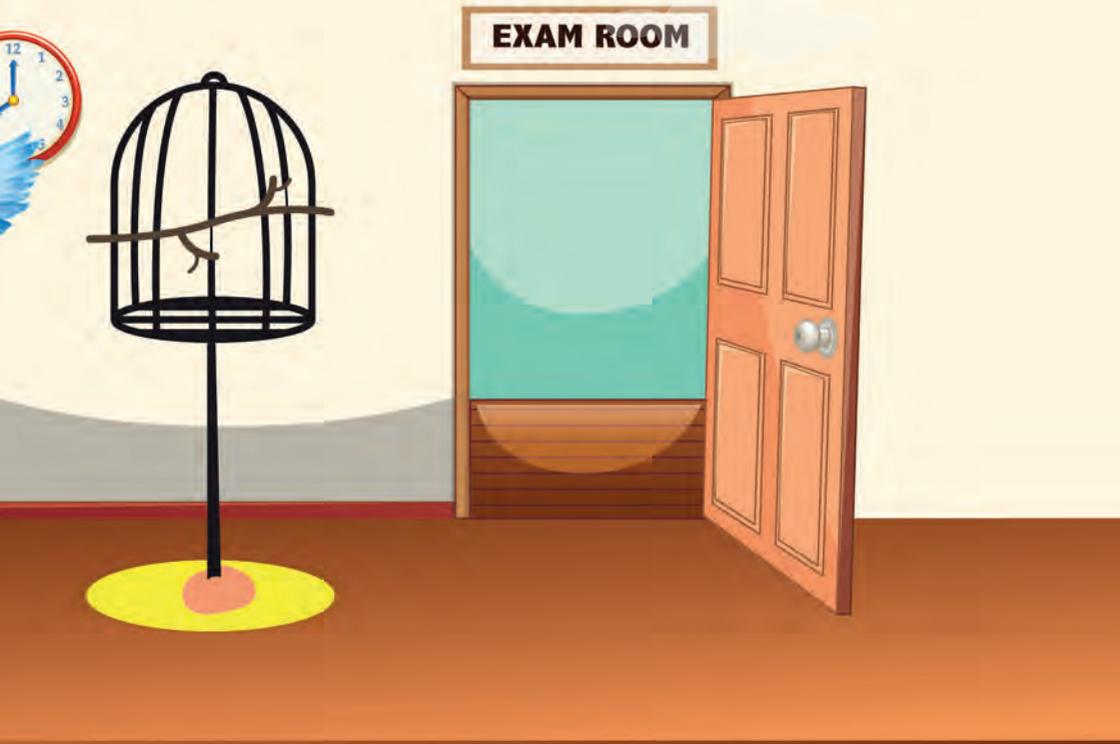
“What, me?” Jack looked at Lucy and Muesli. Lucy nudged him, “Go on, don’t be scared.”

“Open the door and put your arm in,” the bossy parrot instructed.

Jack hesitated. That beak looked pretty scary.

“I won’t bite you. Now open the cage.”

His heart was beating so hard that he was sure everyone could hear, but Jack opened the door and Cheeky stepped onto his arm. His claws hurt Jack’s arm a bit as he steadied himself and Jack gently pulled his arm out of the cage. To his surprise, the parrot rubbed his head against Jack’s shoulder before gazing up at him with his small eyes. “Rub my head first, then tell me why you are here.”



With two fingers Jack rubbed his little head, then said: “Please can you tell me what cancer is, Sir.” He thought it best to be polite.

“I know all about cancer,” said Cheeky while fluffing out his feathers proudly. “Put me on the back of the chair and all of you sit down, then I’ll tell you.” Jack was very relieved to have the parrot climb off his arm. He didn’t trust the sharp beak. “Boy, get me peanuts in that drawer, before I start.”

Jack thought he could have at least said “please”, but he got the peanuts and handed one to Cheeky.

“Your bodies are made up of cells. All of your bodies,” he nodded at them. “The cells are all joined together – sort of like Legos. You play with Legos, don’t you?” Jack nodded, while Muesli and Lucy shook their heads.



“Cells are like lots and lots of tiny Legos. You know when you try and make something, sometimes a piece of Lego just won’t fit?” Jack nodded – that often happened to him.

‘Well, it spoils the whole thing, doesn’t it?’ Jack knew that very well.

“So, cancer are bad cells that stop the good cells from doing their job. Sometimes the bad cells form an army and fight the good cells that then form a lump and move to other parts of the body. This is what makes someone sick.”

“Can these bad cells jump onto my body and make me sick?” Jack asked.

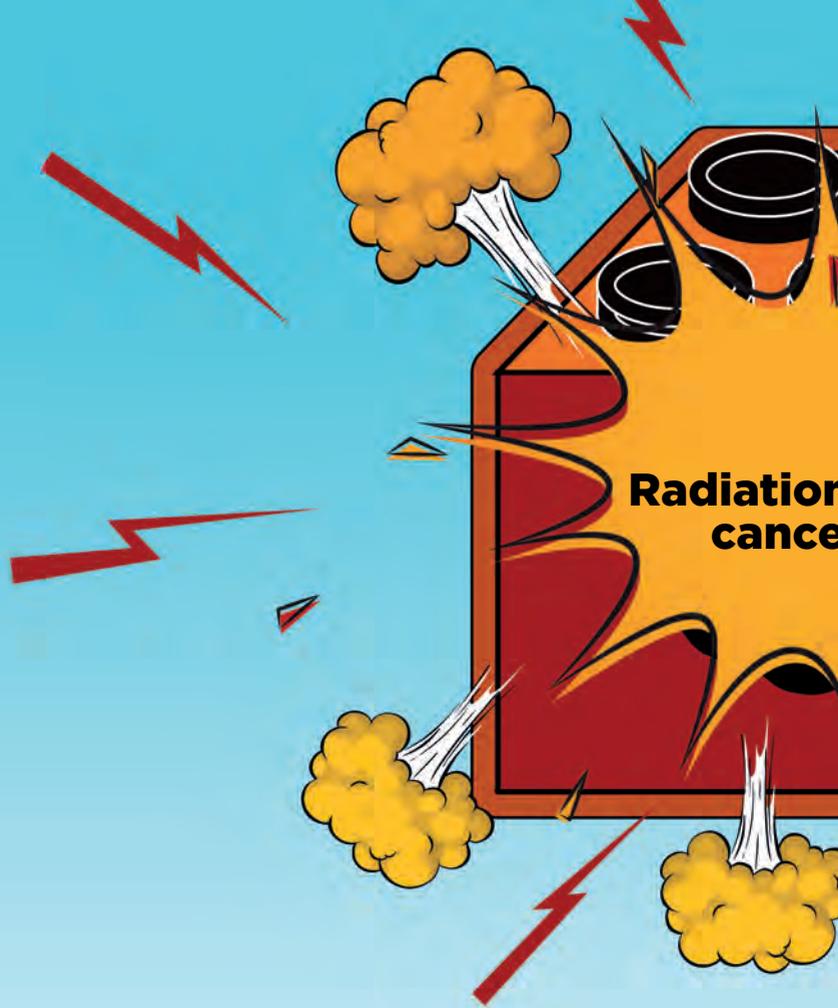


“No fortunately they are only interested in working in one body; they can’t jump onto to yours, even if they wanted to.”

“How can someone stop them from fighting the good ones?” Lucy asked this while snuggling up to Jack.

“Chemotherapy comes to the rescue! It goes into the body and makes all the bad cells go away. Sometimes it can’t make them all go away, so the person has to go every few months.” Jack imagined teeny weeny little warriors with swords, slicing up the bad cells.

“How do they get into the cells?” Muesli wanted to know. She was sitting as far away from Cheeky as she could, careful not to come too close to Cheeky’s sharp beak.



“The doctor puts up a drip, then puts a needle into the person’s arm and slowly the warriors march into the person’s blood.” Jack shuddered at the thought.

“They could also squeeze into pills, which the person swallows, and they get in that way.”

“Is there any other way the bad cells can be killed?” Jack imagined himself as a fighting warrior, but he didn’t fancy being swallowed or going through a needle.



“Yes, there is radiation. There the person lies on a bed and a machine sends radio rays onto the spot where the cells are fighting and zap – it either sends them scattering or kills them all off! More nuts, please Jack.”

“That sounds pretty cool.” Jack carefully put out his hand with some nuts on it, giving a few to Cheeky.

“There is another way, and that is cutting out the lump which the bad cells have made.”



“Wow! Then what happens to the hole left behind?”

Lucy snorted, “Silly Jack, they sew it up with stitches.” Jack shrugged, “I knew that of course,” even though he didn’t.

“So, if all the bad cells are killed, does the person get better?” Jack asked hopefully.

“It sometimes takes a long time, but when the good cells win, the person will feel much better!”

“Whew, I’m so glad.” All of a sudden, he felt much better about Mom’s illness. “Can we go home now?” he asked Lucy and Muesli.



“Hey, what about putting me back in my cage, young man? Where are your manners?”

“Oops! Sorry, Sir.” He put out his arm for Cheeky to jump on. He pulled a face as the sharp claws dug into his arm, but he didn’t say anything except, “Thank you for teaching us about cancer”, as he opened the cage door and Cheeky climbed in.

The parrot scratched his head and ruffled his feathers: “That’s a pleasure, come any time.”

Muesli ran ahead of them and took shortcuts through other people’s gardens. Jack and Lucy went home through the park to get Lucy’s ball, but they couldn’t find it, leaving Lucy feeling sad while they walked back home.



Mom was up and making supper, so Jack was surprised when Dad said, “Mom is going to the hospital tomorrow to have treatment. Gran will be staying with us for a few days as Mom will probably be tired.”

Jack said: “So the chemo warriors are going to attack the bad cells so the good cells can get stronger. That’s a good thing.”

Dad’s mouth fell open and he looked at Jack with wide eyes, “So you know all about it then?”

“Yip,” Jack nodded.

“The school is amazing what they teach the kids these days,” Dad said, looking at Mom and shaking his head.



Jack nudged Lucy with his foot under the table and giggled quietly. No one would know how they knew so much about cancer.

It was great having Gran stay. Lucy enjoyed it too as Gran sneaked titbits to her under the table. Jack didn't want to go to football practice; he thought he might be needed at home when Mom was not feeling well, but Gran said he must go because Mom would want him to. Lucy came along, hoping she might find her ball.

Jack practiced really hard and was chosen to play for the team. He couldn't wait to get home and tell Mom. "I'm so proud of you Jack, you've practiced so hard, you deserve to get into the team."

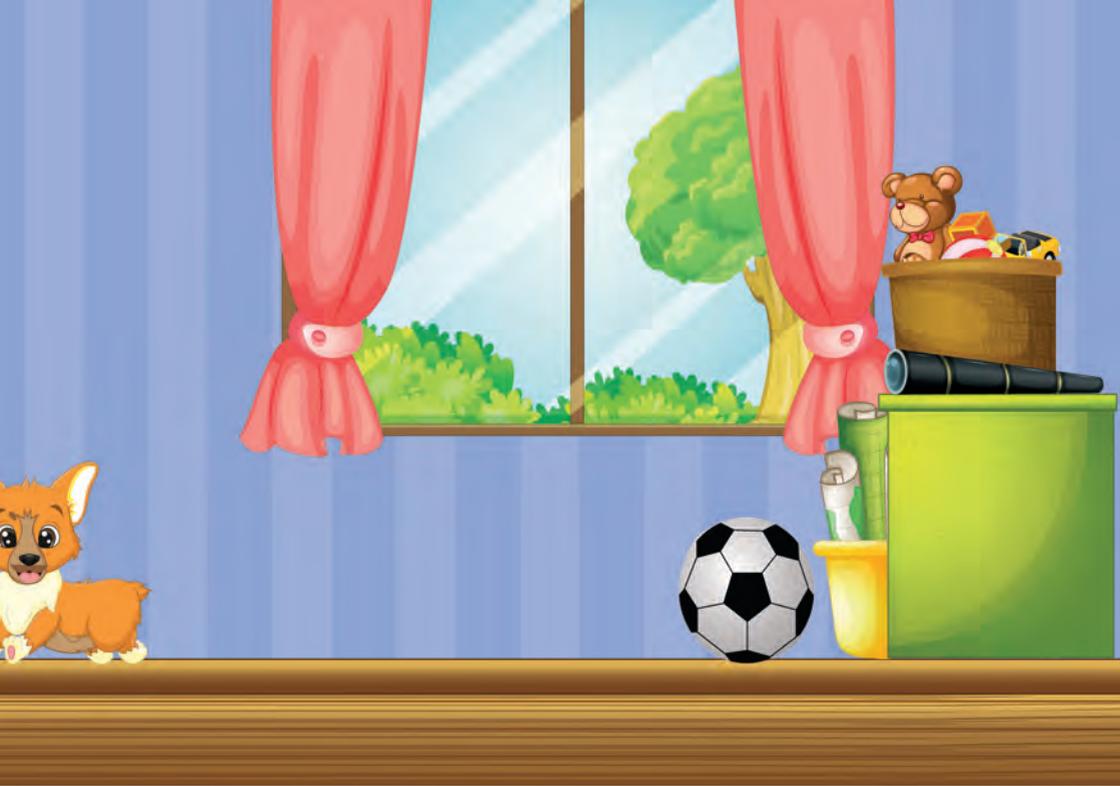


“Will you be able to come and watch me play and bring Lucy with you?” He picked up the little dog who was looking up at him, her tail wagging frantically.

“I hope so, Jack, but we will have to see when my next chemo appointment is. I can’t miss that,” Mom said as she ruffled Jack’s hair.

Jack knew how important chemo was, after all, it was going to make Mom better, but he still hoped it would not be on the day of the match.

The next day, at school, it was announced that the football match would be the following Wednesday. Jack was so proud when his name was read aloud as one of the team members. He kept his fingers crossed that his mom would not have chemo on that day.



When he told his mom when the match would be, she said: “Oh no, it is on my chemo day. I was looking forward to watching you play.” Jack was scared he was going to cry and he could feel his lip trembling.

“But I tell you what, we’ll ask Dad to video the whole game, then he can put it onto the TV and we can all watch it together with Lucy, and we’ll have snacks as well.”

That sounded pretty good – he could pretend he was a real TV star.

Muesli was sitting on the wall, washing herself, when he left for school with Dad on Wednesday.



“Good luck, Jack. Make sure you beat those Green Park Boys this afternoon. Cheeky says he wishes he could come and watch you.” Jack was rather glad Cheeky could not come; he imagined him running down the sideline giving orders.

“Just do your best, Jack. I know you will,” Mom said as she waved him goodbye. He felt a lump in his throat, knowing that she would not be watching, but she would see the whole game on the video anyway. Gran was there to take her to the hospital, and she would be home before he was.

The Green Park Boys football players looked so much bigger than his team and he could feel his insides turn to jelly. Then he thought of Mom and the chemo warriors getting rid of the bad cells. Today he was going to be a chemo warrior too and fearlessly fight the Green Park Boys. He would chase after that

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TEAM 2

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ball and kick it with all his might, just as those warriors kicked the bad cells away from the good ones. It was as if his legs had wings. He was able to get to that ball before anyone else every time. He could hear the crowds shouting, “Go, Jack, go!” He was able to shoot two goals and grinned happily when his team members slapped him on the back. He bulged his arm muscles and said: “Warrior Jack, that’s me.” His team gave him a funny look, but he didn’t care. He knew all about warriors even if they didn’t. Dad gave him a thumbs up from where he was standing on the sideline, video in his hands.

Jack’s school won the match by three goals to two, and the coach said Jack was the star of the game – he’d never seen Jack play so well. Jack just smiled, not telling anyone (except maybe Lucy and Muesli, and maybe even Cheeky) that he was a secret warrior.



Jack followed his team into the locker room when he saw something red under one of the benches. He got onto his hands and knees to look, and there was Lucy's ball. Jack had no idea how it got there, but he did know that one little dog would be covering him with kisses when he got home and would be as happy as he was.

The best was yet to come! Mom said she was feeling so much better and Gran stayed to watch the video. Mom had made his favourite blueberry muffins and strawberry milkshakes, and it was as if he was playing the game all over again, but without feeling as tired and the warriors safely back in their territory.

The end