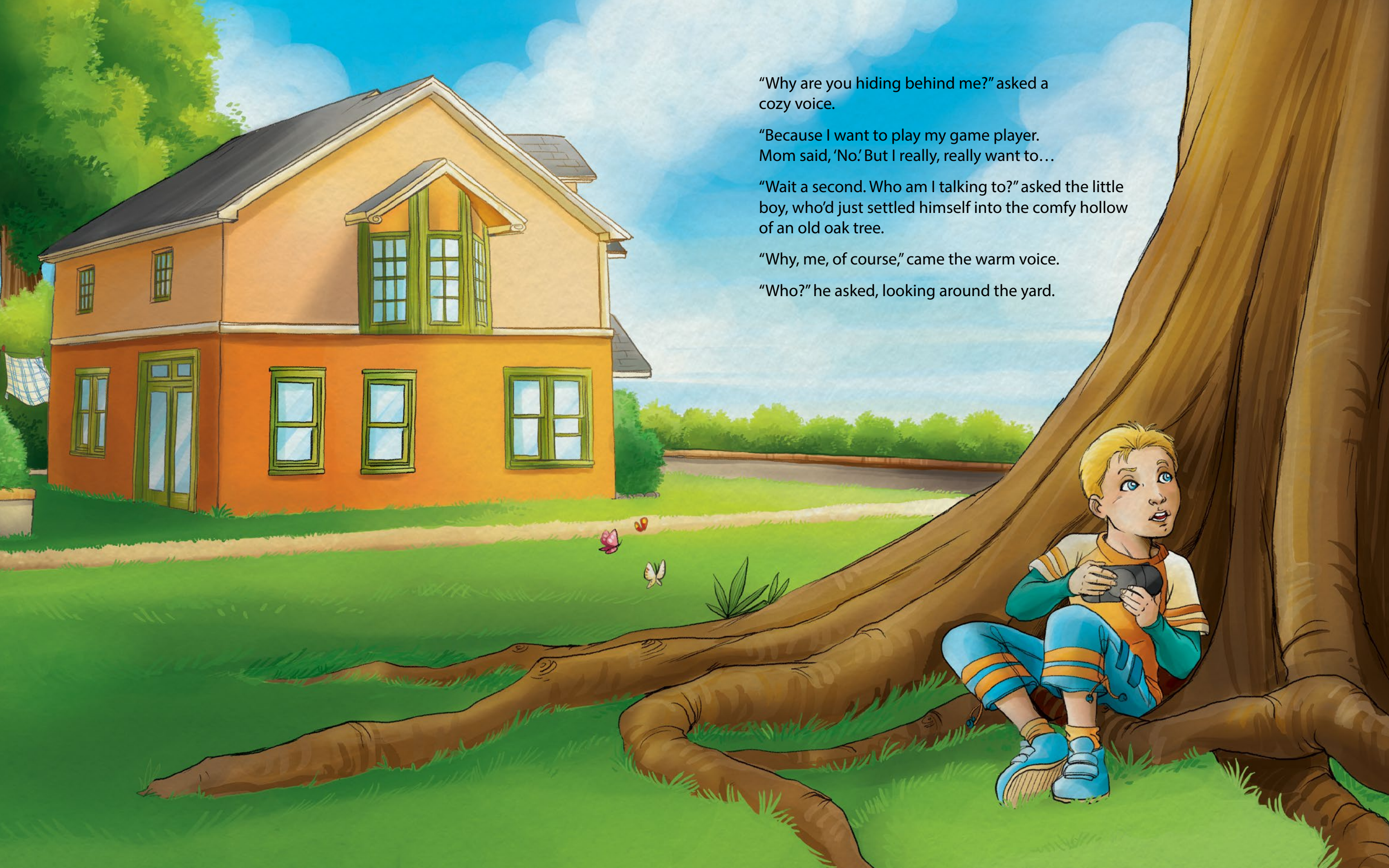


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Be Proud



"Why are you hiding behind me?" asked a cozy voice.

"Because I want to play my game player. Mom said, 'No.' But I really, really want to..."

"Wait a second. Who am I talking to?" asked the little boy, who'd just settled himself into the comfy hollow of an old oak tree.

"Why, me, of course," came the warm voice.

"Who?" he asked, looking around the yard.



"Me. The tree. Right here.

"I've been watching you grow up, just like I watched your daddy before you. And it's time I speak up," said the tree.

"You watched my daddy grow up?" asked the boy, who was so interested, he forgot to be surprised that the tree was talking.

"Oh yes. I watched your daddy and his daddy before him. You're a lot like your daddy, you know," the tree said with a nod of her leaves.

"I am?" he asked.

"Yes. He liked to play outside too. And he sat here one day, just like you, hiding from his momma. Only he was crying," she explained.



"My dad never cries!" exclaimed the boy.

"Saw it with my own eyes," said the tree.


"Why was he crying?" the boy asked, still doubting his father was ever a little boy, much less one who cried.

"Well, he was very sad because he sneaked a toy when his momma had told him not to play with it," the tree explained.

"But my dad never does things he shouldn't," the boy said.

"Everybody makes mistakes. Oh, believe me, I've watched people make lots of mistakes—small ones, big ones, silly ones, serious ones.

"Making mistakes is part of growing up. It's how you learn who you want to be," she said.



"That day, your dad learned an important lesson. Mmhmm, he did," said the tree.

"Yeah. He learned not to get caught 'cause mom will be mad!" cried the boy.

"Oh, he didn't get caught," said the tree.

"Then why was he crying?" asked the boy.

"Because even though his momma didn't know what he'd done, his conscience did," she said.

"What's a 'conshunts'?" he asked, a little worried now.

"A conscience is that voice in your head, and that feeling in your heart, that tells you if something is right or wrong, even when no one is looking," the tree explained.

I think I might know that feeling, the boy thought, looking at his game player.

"Oh no, I have a conscience!"

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