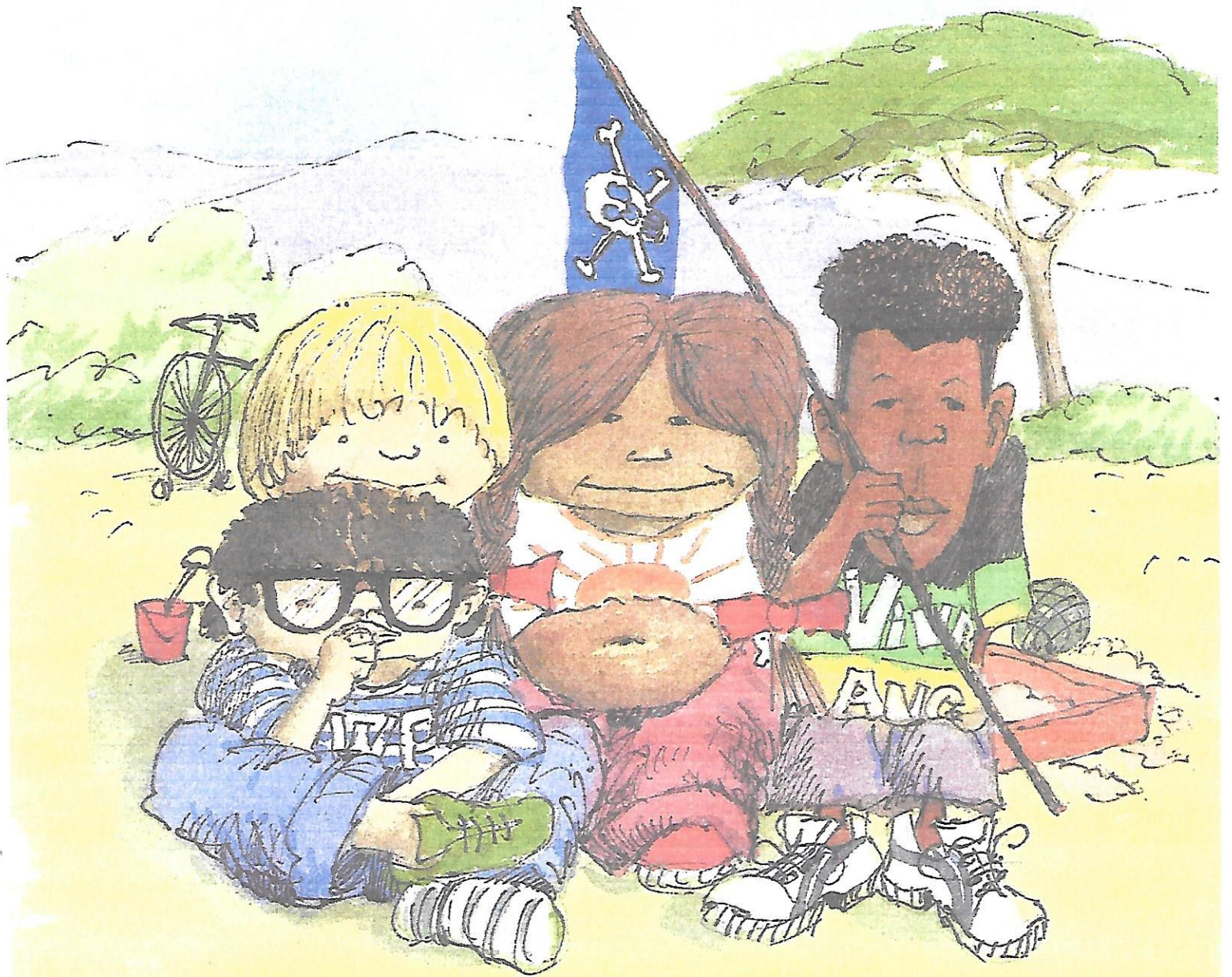


David goes to play-therapy



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A message to parents and professionals

Children tell their stories through play as play is a child's most natural medium of self-expression. Play therapy is the process whereby a child who is experiencing some difficulties is able to work through these problems in a permissive situation. Often children find release through various forms of play, as they cannot express their thoughts and feelings easily in words.

This book is written so as to prepare both the child and parents for what to expect in the therapeutic encounter. The children who would most benefit from this book are between the ages of 4 - 9 years. The author adopts a non-directive approach to child psychotherapy and illuminates a vignette of what can be encountered in a therapy session.

It must be emphasized, that each therapeutic relationship is unique, as is the child with his/her difficulties. Often the child experiences anger or confusion in relation to the therapist, this is dealt with in the therapy. There are also different phases in therapy; the initial stage requires a build up of a trusting relationship in which the child is given the 'free and protected space' to express himself/herself and to feel secure enough to share some of his/her concerns. It is sometimes hard for the child to separate from his/her parent at this stage. Often during the working through phase, which

lasts a few months, the child experiences some ups and downs in therapy, and some resistance can be expected. Finally the termination phase, or stopping phase in therapy usually takes a few weeks and is often a difficult phase for the child, sometimes even the initial symptoms re-appear temporarily.

The text and illustrations hopefully convey some of the thoughts, feelings and experiences a child can anticipate during the process of play therapy, and at the same time answer some adult questions about play therapy.

The child's therapy should be regarded as his/her own private time with the therapist. Thus parents are requested to refrain from asking too many questions of the child regarding his/her therapy sessions.

When bringing the child for the first session, he/she can be informed that they will see the child therapist, who has many toys which can be played with, in any way that he/she wishes.

It is suggested that this book be read together with an adult in whom the child has complete confidence and that any questions can be openly discussed with the child before commencing therapy.

For Marion Joshua and Jessica Rose and all the
Children who need to share their own stories.



"My name is David. I live with my mom and dad and my sister Linda. I also have a dog named Tzotzi."

"Sometimes I feel sad and lonely and feel that no-one in the world can understand me. I feel just like my teddy bear who sits on my bed all alone and cannot really say anything to me."



"This is my school playground and these are some of my friends. Often I am not too sure why I feel so sad and angry and why my school work is not good any more. My friends do not seem to want to play with me, because I am not much fun anymore. I wish I could let someone know how I am feeling."

"I need someone to play with me and listen to me. Just like I talk to my teddy bear when we play together."



"David, you have not been looking so happy lately. You are often so angry with your father, your sister and myself," said David's mother. "Yesterday, you hit your father and broke your aeroplane on purpose; that's not like you!"

I know that things have not been that easy at home lately especially between your father and me. Maybe it will help if you visit this lady who allows children to play with the toys she has, as she helps children to talk about their problems. She is called a child therapist. Other children I know have been to see her when they have problems and she helps them sort out some of their feelings."

"I do not really have anything to talk about to a strange lady," said David.

"Well, I have heard that it can help to go and talk to a child therapist," said David's mother. "Jason was very angry and Sara worried a great deal before they went to play-therapy and their therapist helped them to understand some of their feelings."

"Well, maybe I will go and try it out," said David.

David's mother made an appointment for David to go to the play-therapist on Thursday afternoon after school.



David went to the play-therapist with his mother and father. David was feeling a bit scared. As they walked down the path to where the play-therapist worked, David could smell the sweet jasmine flowers growing alongside the path. He also felt some butterflies in his tummy.

When they arrived the play-therapist smiled and was friendly. She said: "Hello, my name is Julia. You must be David." She smiled a lot and that made David feel at ease so he said "Hello". "I like the T-shirt you're wearing, especially the elephant," she said. "How did she know that this is my favourite T-shirt? I like her better now," thought David.

"My wife and I have been having some problems lately and David has been very angry," said David's dad.

"Thank you for sharing some of your concerns before I see David in therapy. I shall meet with you from time to time during the next few months whilst I see David. It is nice to meet with you all and hopefully we can all work together to make David feel more comfortable about himself right now," said Julia

"David, I am going to take you to the playroom with me and your parents can come and fetch you when we are finished. We'll be busy for forty-five minutes," said Julia. "You look a little afraid, David. I am sure it is because you have never seen me before or been to my playroom before and that is often a little scary for children at first," Julia said. "I suppose she is saying that it is okay to be afraid. She must be an understanding person and she seems to care about me," David thought to himself.

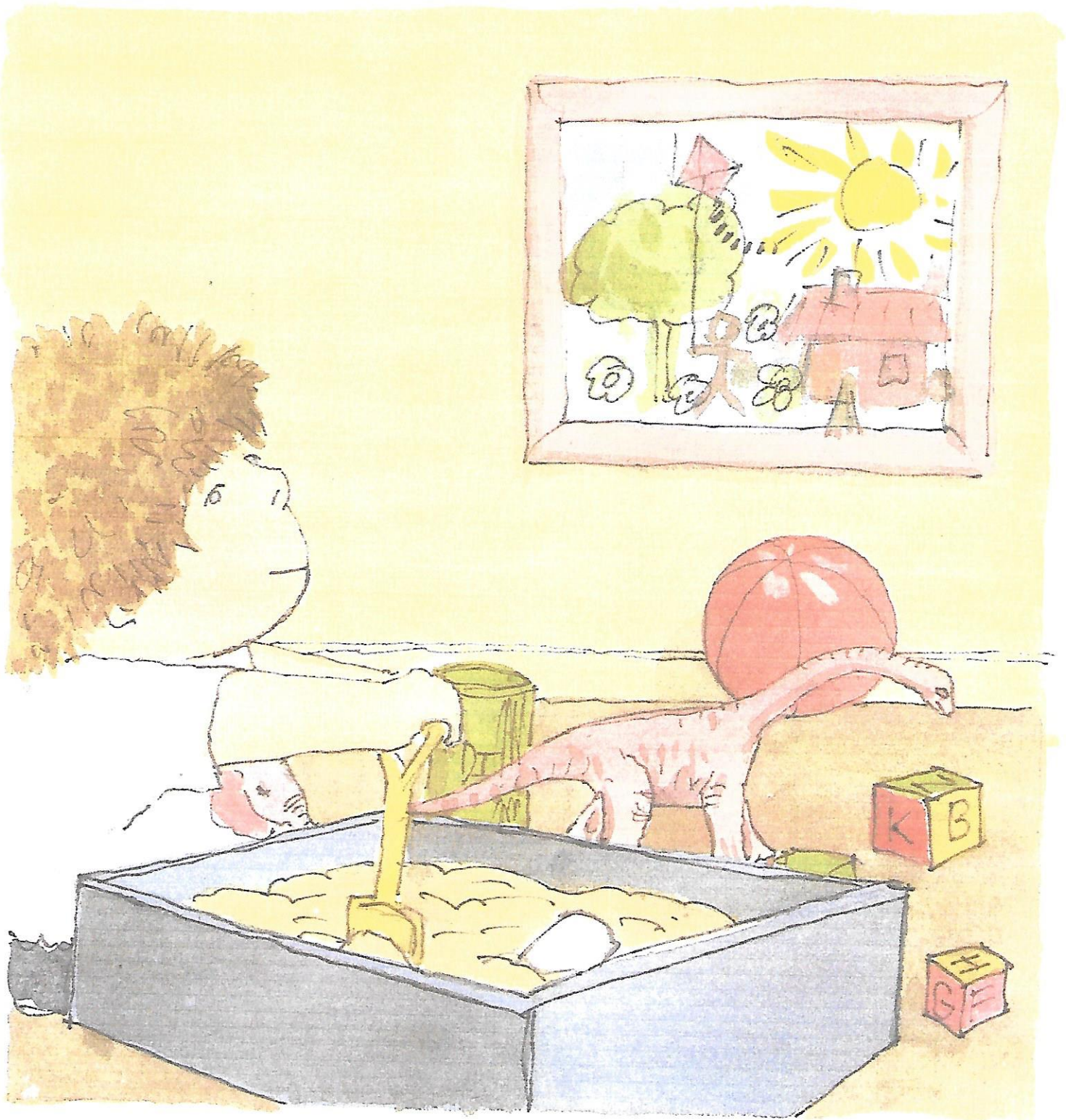


Julia showed David her special playroom. David was so surprised to see the playroom. "There are so many great toys in here, it is so nice," David said.

"You like the toys!" said Julia.

Julia put her hand on David's shoulder and showed him around the playroom, pointing out where everything was kept.

David noticed the dinosaur toys first, they looked scary. Then he saw some puppets, blocks, cars, a big red doll's house, a few dolls, even a baby's bottle, some soldiers and an army tank. "There is even a sand tray and a bucket of water, with some cups over there in the corner," David said as he walked around the playroom.



David was puzzled. "I wonder if I can play with these toys," he thought.

"You can play with all the toys in this room. This is your special time and you can decide what to do and what to play with," said Julia.

"You will be coming here once a week for the next few months until the school holidays, to help you to understand some of your feelings. What you do or say in here, I am not going to tell anyone. You may tell your mother or father what you wish to share with them and may keep private what you wish to, as this is your special time."

"I am not sure I want to come every week for so long. I would rather be playing soccer," David thought to himself. "But maybe I shall come again because I think I am going to like coming and maybe it will help me feel better about myself."



Julia noticed David looking at the crayons and said: "Sometimes it is hard to decide just what to do at first but in this place you can decide what to do."

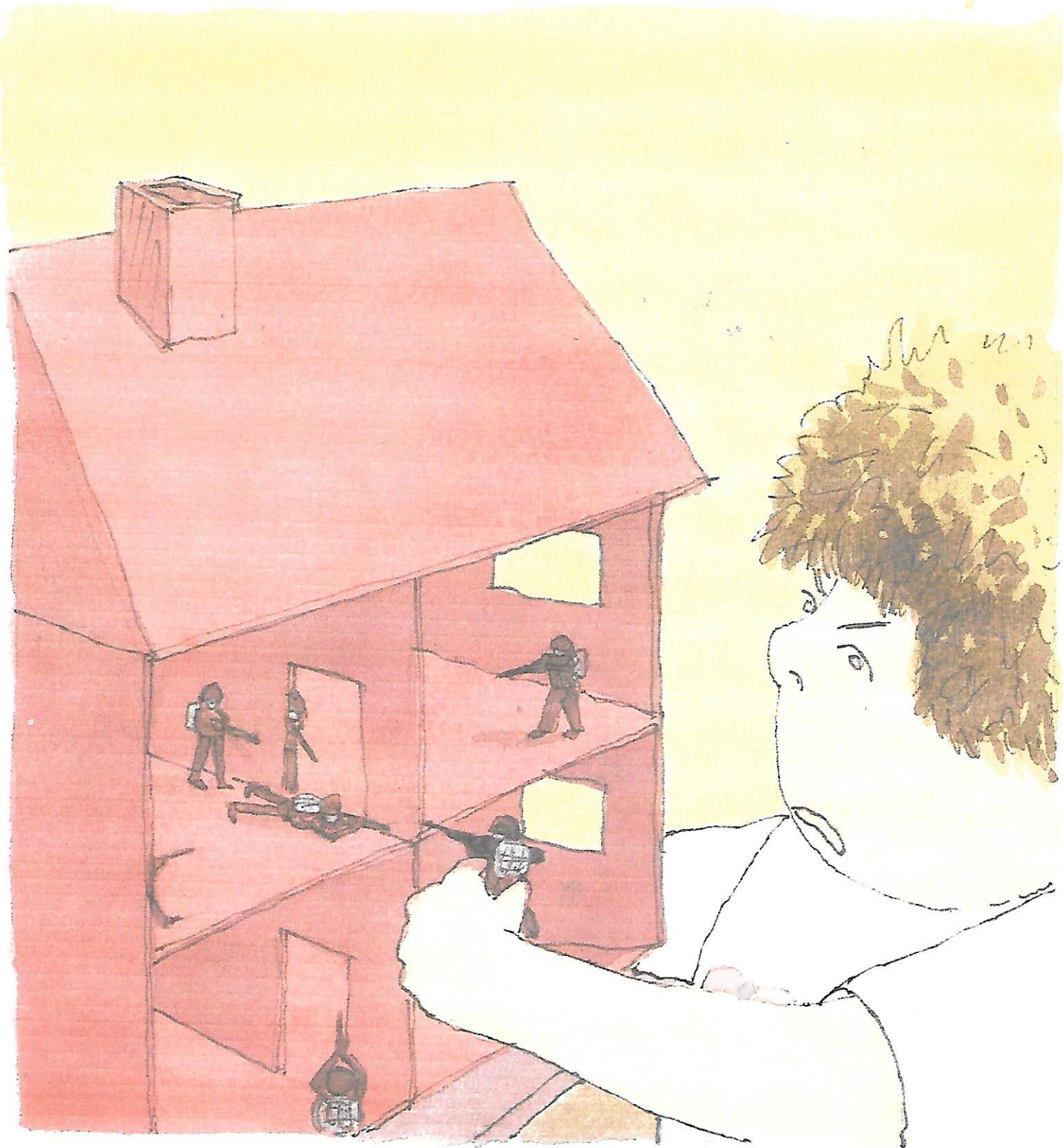
"This whole play-therapy thing sure is different," thought David.

He picked up the crayons and drew a picture of a scarecrow, because he thought he felt a bit sad and alone at times. But it came out all wrong, it looked so stupid and that really made him cross.

Julia noticed that David was cross. "You look angry about your drawing," she said.

David did not answer straight away, but said quietly to himself: "Well I am. But how did she know? Nobody else ever knows how I'm feeling. She is so right."

"Yes, I am cross," said David.



David left the crayons and played with some of the soldiers in the doll's house. He pretended it was a fort and there was a battle going on.

"I see this one soldier seems to be pushed down all the time by these other soldiers," said Julia.

"Yes, everyone is against that soldier," said David.

"Funny," thought David, "this lady called the play-therapist seems to notice everything that I am doing. I am actually enjoying what I am doing. She is paying a lot of attention to me and I like it. She even talks about things that I play with. She seems really interested in me and in what I am doing. It is not often that a grown-up spends so much time noticing me. My mom and dad are so busy worrying about other things they don't have time for me right now."



"I wonder what to do next. Mm . . . I think I will play in the sandtray with the cars and jeep."

"I would like you to play in the sandtray with me," David said to Julia.

"I will just watch you play in the sandtray," Julia replied.

"I like the way she is so honest; most grown-ups would just say: "I shall play with you in a few minutes" and then they forget all about it," thought David whilst he drove the car over the sand hill he made and crashed it into the jeep.

"My mother and father are always fighting," said David.

"Your parents have been fighting a lot lately," said Julia.

"It makes me feel so upset," said David as he walked away from the sandtray.



He sat for some time in silence and then he said,
"I feel a bit mixed up inside.

Sometimes the feelings and thoughts make you feel
unsure of yourself," said Julia.

"Yes" nodded David. "I think I will play with the
puppets now," said David.

"You like being able to choose what to do by
yourself," said Julia.

"I will be the zebra. Will you be the lion?" David asked
Julia.

"Sure, but you must tell me what to say and do,"
Julia answered.

"Fine," said David. "This is really fun because we can
play and talk at the same time."



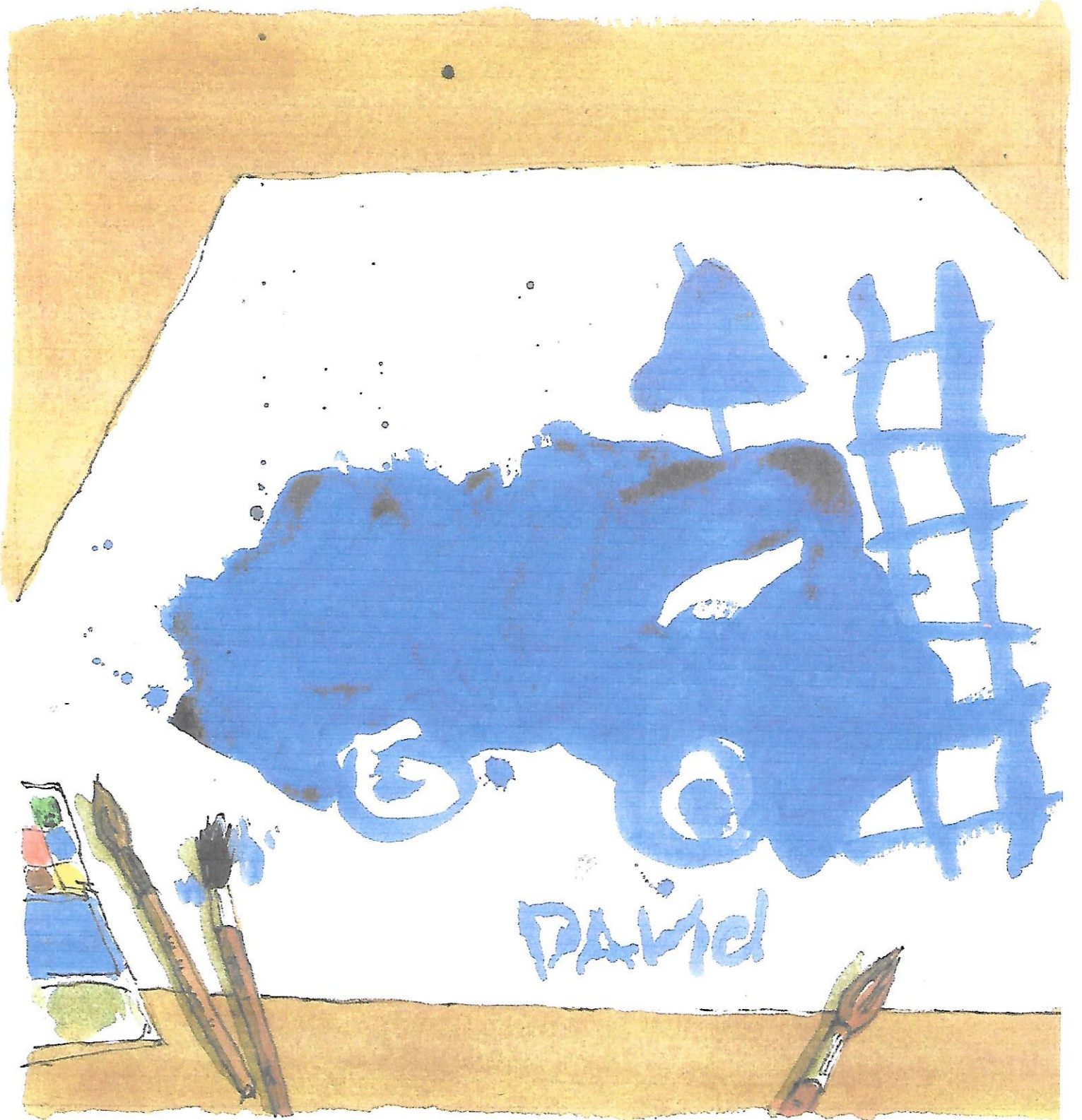
"This lady, she is not bossy, she waits for me to decide what to do. She does not criticise or praise me, she sure is different. I am really enjoying spending time with this person they call the play-therapist. She believes I can do things without her help," David thought to himself.

"Will you help me pour the water into smaller jars as I am afraid I shall spill?" David asked Julia as he started painting.

"You should try first," Julia replied.

So David did, and you know what? He did not spill.

"I wish I knew I could do things outside this playroom. Maybe I can start to do things more for myself at home now; it feels good to do things all by myself just the way I want," David thought.



"We have ten more minutes together in the playroom today and then it is time for you to go," Julia told David.

"Time goes so quickly," David thought to himself. He picked up the paint brush and splashed blue all over the paper. "It feels good — I have made it into a blue fire engine. I like the way this turned out. In this place I can please myself and do things my way," said David.

"You feel good about yourself when you can do things that make you happy," said Julia. "Sure, it is not often I get to do things my way. My mother and father and teacher are always telling me what to do, and think what I do is not good enough," said David. "So I am beginning to think that I am not good at anything anymore, you know. I worry that I am to blame for all my parents' fighting because sometimes I am naughty. I am scared they will get divorced. Sometimes I worry so much my tummy even hurts," said David.

"You are feeling very upset David," said Julia. "Yes," replied David with tears in eyes, "and they are always shouting at me".

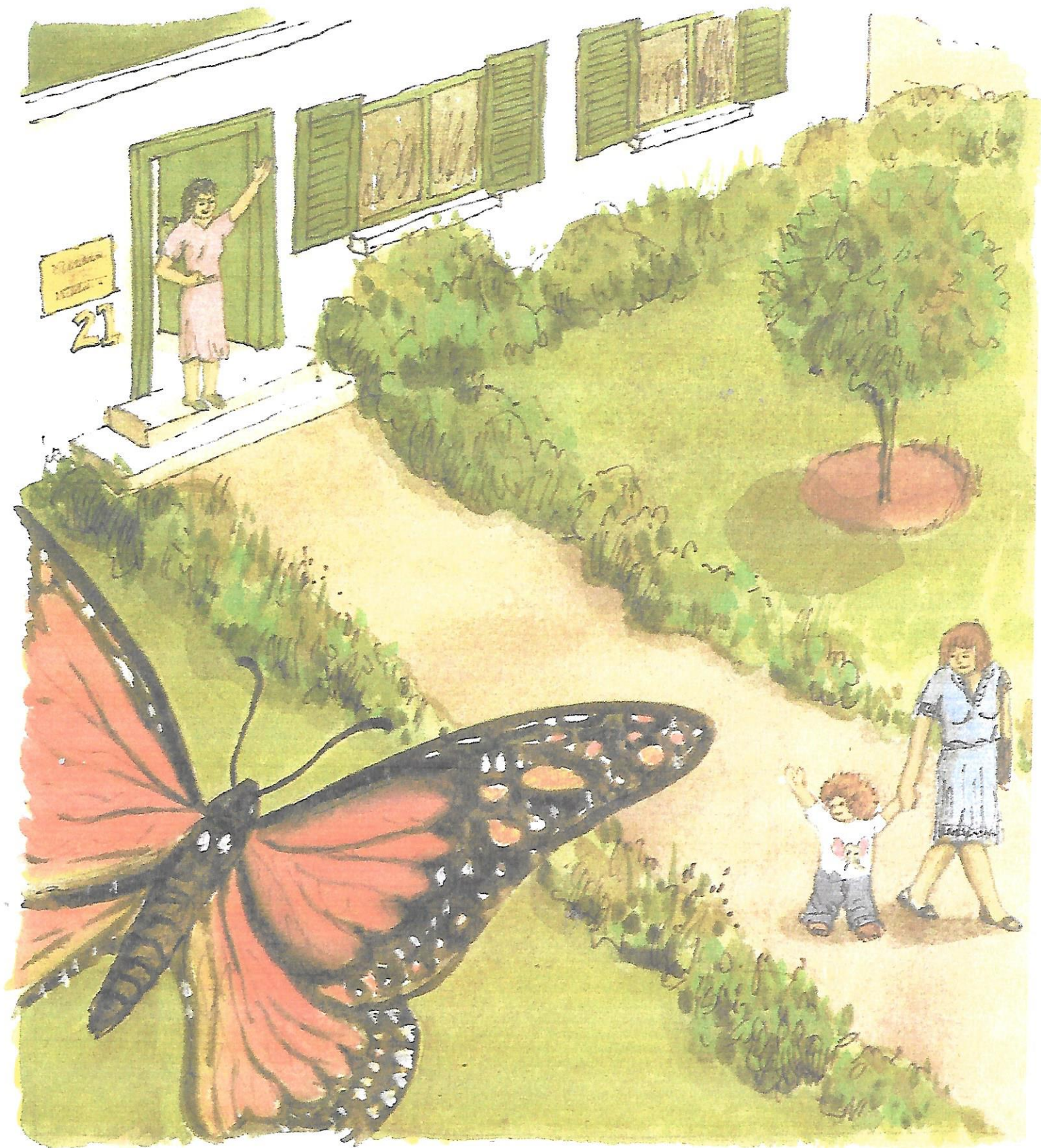
"Sometimes it is not easy being a child and not understanding what your parents are fighting about," said Julia.



"I wish it was not time to leave now. There are so many things I want to still tell her, but have not had a chance to say yet. It is funny how sometimes it is so hard to tell my mother and father just little things. But I feel I can tell anything to the play-therapist."

Julia said: "I look forward to seeing you again next Thursday at the same time and spending more time with you. I shall be seeing you for a few months, till you feel more sure about yourself and then we shall stop these play-therapy sessions. However, if you feel you need to see me again once we stop play-therapy, your parents can arrange for you to visit me."

"I feel good right now because she really understands me and sees me as a person, not just a child. I do want to come again next week," David thought happily.



Julia watched David walk down the path towards his mother. David noticed a beautiful butterfly flying past them and said goodbye to Julia. David was really pleased to see his mother and to tell her some of the things he had done.

"This special time in play-therapy is important to me, but my mother is still very special to me too," thought David. "I'd really like to play with my soldiers in battle with my father when he comes home from work tonight," David said to his mother as he took her hand and walked to the car.



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