

Disney

CHILLS

Second Star to the Fright

were hazel, a mixture of brown and green that he liked. But basically, he looked like any ordinary twelve-year-old.

Well, *almost* twelve-year-old.

'I wish I could stay a kid forever,' he whispered to his reflection.

As he got dressed, he caught a whiff of his wardrobe and scrunched up his nose. Okay, maybe his sister did have a point about the smell. Of course, his mum had told him like a *bazillion* times to clean it out, but he always seemed to have better things to do, like play video games or skateboard in the park with his friends or read his pile of mystery books.

He could worry about having a clean wardrobe when he got older, couldn't he?

Barrie slammed the wardrobe door and grabbed his backpack then bounded downstairs to the kitchen. He was still half asleep, but luckily, he could navigate his house on autopilot. They'd lived there since he was born.

Before he could pour himself cereal or sit down

at the table, Dad caught his eye. That pile of bills next to him somehow looked even taller than it had last night.

'Did you finish your homework?' his father asked. Another terrible thing about growing up. Homework.

Every year, it got harder and took longer, too. He was one week away from finishing primary school and moving up to Year 7. The graduation ceremony was next Friday. He'd be attending New London High School in the autumn. But first, he'd have a glorious three months of summer holiday, where he didn't have to worry about anything other than being a kid and having fun.

'Uh, yeah mostly,' Barrie said, fudging. The truth was... he hadn't done any of it. He'd just got so caught up in his new book. He'd have to try to copy off Michael and John, his best friends. He just hoped they had actually done the homework and not slacked off like him.

'Well, if we find out you didn't,' Mum chimed in cheerfully, 'you'll get grounded again.' She took

a sip from her giant cup of coffee.

Barrie eyed his parents over the breakfast table. They both looked... *tired*.

Despite them insisting that waking up early was a good thing, they both had dark circles under their eyes and chugged coffee like their lives depended on it. Even now, his mum was downing her fresh cup in a few swallows. Her coffee intake had definitely risen since the redundancy and transition to working from home and the living room had become her office. It was covered in random pieces of paper and draped with power cords for various electronic devices. Everything had changed and not for the better.

'Just wait for secondary school,' Rita said in a snarky voice, pouring a bowl of healthy cereal and adding almond milk. 'It gets a lot harder. You'll have even more homework – plus *algebra*.'

The way his sister pronounced *algebra* made it sound like a curse word. His eyes darted to her backpack, slumped by the front door. It was overflowing with thick textbooks.

'Uh, I'm not even sure what that is,' Barrie said, bypassing the healthy options and pouring himself a bowl of his favourite sugary cereal with a friendly-looking cartoon pirate gracing the box. 'Fractions are bad enough.'

'It's like fractions times a million,' Rita said, aiming her milk-encrusted spoon at his face. 'Trust me, you'll hate it.'

'Rita, don't scare your little brother like that.' Dad cut her off, slurping coffee. 'Algebra is great fun.'

Rita looked horrified. 'Uh, how is algebra fun? Are you losing it? Nobody likes algebra. It's like a scientific fact. They've proven it in actual studies.'

'Right... let's see now... things we couldn't do without algebra...' Dad mused. 'It's how we got to the Moon.'

Barrie shot his father a sceptical look. He knew for a fact that parents lied to kids a lot. Like *white* lies. Little lies. It was almost like they didn't want kids to realize the truth about what it was really like to grow up.

'The Moon?' Rita said with a snort. 'Uh, that's the best you've got? Can algebra get me out of driving Barrie to school too?'

'Rita, we discussed this already,' Mum called from across the kitchen, shooting her a chastising look. 'We had an agreement, remember?'

But then she brightened and tapped the family wall calendar. 'Excited for your birthday next week, Little Guy?'

She pointed to the square for Monday. On it was a crude drawing of balloons and a birthday cake, along with the scrawled words:

Barrie's 12th birthday

The week was packed with other appointments, including his graduation ceremony on Friday. It promised to be excruciatingly boring, featuring a cameo by his annoying Aunt Wendy and his twin cousins, who were both drooling, snotty toddlers.

But then there was also the one thing that he'd been looking forward to for months. His eyes locked on the square for Tuesday and he felt a rush

of excitement jolt through him.

'Yeah, how would you like to celebrate?' Dad chimed in. 'I mean, besides going to the Lost Boys concert with your friends on Tuesday night and rocking out.'

Barrie cringed when his dad said *rocking out*. Somehow it sounded cool when his friends said that kind of stuff. But not when his father tried it.

The Lost Boys were their favourite band. His parents had gotten him a ticket as a gift for his birthday and agreed to extend his curfew since he was turning twelve and graduating from primary school. Michael and John had also convinced their parents and scored tickets to the sold-out concert. They were all going together. It was like some kind of sign – his favourite band coming to town the day after his birthday. Barrie couldn't wait.

'Let's see... oh, I know!' Dad went on, tapping at his tablet with great enthusiasm. 'What about a family trip to the maritime museum this weekend?'

His father smiled at him expectantly. Barrie frowned, fiddling with his spoon. While not as bad

as algebra, that didn't sound like much fun.

'Uh, what's a... *maritime museum*?' he asked cautiously.

'Oh, it's super exciting!' Dad said in a voice that made Barrie pretty sure that it was the exact opposite.

His father pulled up the website on his tablet, then flipped it around for Barrie to see. Images of old ships flashed across the screen, under the heading: *'The New London Maritime Museum – Where History Comes To Life!'*

'It's located out by the marina,' Dad said, tapping again at the screen. 'It's a museum dedicated to naval history.'

'What's that mean?' Barrie said.

'It means boats, Goober,' Rita said snarkily. She loved showing off how much more she knew than he did.

'And not just *any* boats,' Dad added, flipping through the website. 'This museum specializes in pirate history.' He pointed to a ship with a black-and-white flag printed with a skull and

crossbones. The name was painted across the hull in ornate script:

Folly Roger

Barrie studied the image, feeling unsettled. The skull seemed to stare into his soul.

'You can even tour an old pirate ship,' Dad went on. 'Doesn't that sound amazing?'

'Uh... maybe,' Barrie said, not wanting to disappoint his dad. But what he really wanted to do was to go to the skate park with his friends, not tour some boring old boat museum.

His father was a big history buff. He loved anything tied to the past. But most of that stuff was just boring if you asked Barrie – or saw all of his B minuses on his history tests. It all happened a long time ago, so why should he care?

'Great, then I'll grab tickets,' Dad went on, oblivious to his son's total lack of interest. 'The whole family can go on Sunday. We can have some nice family time.'

Now it was Rita's turn to look stricken. 'But I