

THE FIRST MORNING

a children's story by John Boyne

The night before Ralph's first morning at the play-school, he found it hard to sleep. There was a part of him that was very excited and a part of him that was very scared. He was going to be there for three full hours every day and that seemed like a long, long time to be away from home.

'Look at you!' said Ralph's grandfather when he came downstairs. Grandad was taking him to the play-school and collecting him afterwards.

'Do I have to go?' asked Ralph. 'Can't I just stay with you and go out for the day instead?'

'Don't worry,' said Ralph's grandfather. 'You'll love it once you get started.'
But Ralph *was* worried.

After breakfast, Ralph's grandfather took a photograph of him and started to tell him about how things were when he was a boy, hundreds of years ago.

'We didn't have play-schools back then,' he said. 'You're lucky, you know.'

'I don't feel lucky,' said Ralph.

'Trust me,' said Grandad. 'You won't want to be at home at all once you start.'

But Ralph *did* want to be at home.

On the way there, Ralph kept worrying about what lay ahead. 'I think we better turn the car around,' he said after a few minutes. 'I'm not feeling very well.'

'What's the matter with you?' asked Ralph's grandfather.

'I'm under the weather,' said Ralph.

'Ha!' said Grandad. 'Well, look on the bright side. It's only for a couple of hours.'

But Ralph *wasn't* looking on the bright side.

As they got closer, Ralph thought of something else. 'What if I promise to keep my room clean?' he asked. 'And what if I go to bed on time every night and don't keep tormenting baby Lucy? If I'm very good, can I stay at home then?'

Ralph's grandfather pulled the car into the side of the road opposite the play-school and as he did so, Ralph looked out the window and saw Katie, his friend from next door, walking through the gates with her dad. Ralph had forgotten that Katie was starting the play-school today too. Katie was always good fun and they were going to be in the same class together. Just then, she turned around and saw Ralph and waved at him.

And then as he unbuckled his seat-belt, he saw Jamie, the little boy who lived at the end of his road walking in too, pulling at his scarf and trying to stop his mum from kissing him in front of everyone and making a show of him. Jamie could do magic tricks. He'd once pulled a fifty cent coin out from behind Ralph's ear. As he pulled away from his mum, he saw Ralph and waved at him too.

'Maybe we should wait another few days,' said Ralph's grandfather. 'If you really think you'd prefer it.'

'We will not!' said Ralph quickly, opening the door. 'I can't miss the first day!'

'Oh!' said Ralph's grandfather. 'What made you change your mind?'

But he was already gone, walking carefully across the road and then charging through the gates. He didn't want to be late, especially if he wanted to sit with Jamie and Katie. Maybe it would be fun after all. He decided to give it a go.