

THE OPEN DOOR

a children's story by John Boyne

When he was younger, Ralph couldn't get to sleep without the light on in his bedroom but now that he was four, he decided it was time for a change.

'Are you sure about this?' asked Ralph's mother, holding her hand over the switch and turning it on and off a few times.

'Of course I'm sure,' said Ralph. 'But you can leave it on until Dad comes up to say goodnight.'

He lay in bed and looked around the room. The doors of the wardrobe were closed and he wondered whether he should open them up and check that no one was hiding inside.

'Anyone in there?' he shouted, but no one answered.

A few minutes later, Ralph's father came up to say goodnight to him. 'What's this book you're reading?' he asked, picking it up off the bedside table.

'It's about pirates on the high seas,' said Ralph. 'I'm going to be a pirate when I grow up.'

'I thought you wanted to be an astronaut,' said Ralph's father.

'That was last week,' said Ralph. 'And I'm sleeping with the light off tonight.'

'Alright,' said Ralph's father, reaching for the switch.

'But you can leave it on until Grandad comes up to say goodnight,' said Ralph quickly.

He felt a little worried as he lay there. Ralph's bed had a big space below, where he kept a box of toys. He wondered whether he should check that no one was hiding under there.

'Anyone under there?' he shouted, but no one answered.

'Who are you talking to?' asked Ralph's grandfather, stepping into the room and sitting down beside him.

'No one,' said Ralph, who felt a bit nervous now. 'Grandad, did you sleep with the lights off when you were my age?'

'There weren't any lights back then,' said Grandad. 'Electricity hadn't been invented yet.'

Ralph didn't know whether to believe him or not. Grandad was old but he wasn't *that* old.

'I'm sleeping with the lights off tonight,' said Ralph.

'Good man.'

'Can I tell you something though?' he asked him.

'You can tell me anything,' said Ralph's grandfather.

'I'm a little scared,' said Ralph quietly

'But there's nothing to be scared of,' said Grandad. 'Tell me this, do you usually sleep with the door closed?'

'Yes, of course,' said Ralph, insulted. 'I am four, you know. Not three.'

'Well then how about you turn your light off, but leave the door open just a little, so some of the light from the hallway comes in too. How does that sound?'

Ralph thought about it. 'Sounds like a plan,' he said.

After Grandad had left, Ralph looked across at the wardrobe and held his breath. He couldn't hear anything.

Then he listened for anything moving under the bed but there wasn't a sound.

Then he closed his eyes for a moment – or for what he thought was a moment – and when he opened them again, it was morning time and the room was bright but the door was closed.

'Grandad never told me,' said Ralph's mother when he asked her over breakfast why the door was shut. 'I thought he'd left it open by mistake. But don't worry, I'll leave it open tonight.'

'That's alright,' said Ralph, shaking his head. 'I can sleep with the lights off *and* the door closed. I'm four years old, after all. I'm braver than you think.'