

THE PADDLING POOL

a children's story by John Boyne

There were lots of things that Ralph liked about going to visit his grandfather but the best thing of all was the fact that he lived in a big house with five floors and Ralph could slide down the banisters from the very top of the house to the front door and feel like he was flying.

Down from the attic where the spiders lived.

Down through the fourth floor where Grandfather kept his trains.

Down through the third floor that had the room with the ghost in it.

Down through the second floor where Ralph slept when he stayed over.

And down to the ground floor where he'd finally fly off – THUD! – in front of the living room door and Grandfather would storm out as if the noise had just woken him up.

'I've told you time and again not to slide down those banisters,' Ralph's grandfather would say, hopping from foot to foot in irritation. 'You'll do yourself a mischief one of these days.'

But Ralph never listened. He *liked* sliding down the banisters. It was more fun than he could ever have at home because he lived in a bungalow where there was nothing to slide down at all.

One day, Ralph arrived just as Grandfather was coming home from the shops and, to his delight, he was carrying a blow-up paddle pool. Ralph could hardly believe his eyes.

'Did you buy that for me?' he asked, and now it was his turn to hop from foot to foot, but this time it was through excitement. 'Is it a present?'

'In a manner of speaking,' said Grandfather, smiling at him.

'Can we blow it up now?' asked Ralph. 'And fill it with water? It's a sunny day and we could set it up outside.'

'All in good time,' said Grandfather. 'You go on upstairs and play and I'll get it ready and call you when it's full.'

Ralph ran to his room and tried to keep his mind off the paddling pool by reading a comic but he couldn't concentrate on the words. Finally, he shouted downstairs, '*Is it ready yet?*' and Grandfather shouted back '*Ready when you are! I've filled it up!*'

Never one to miss an opportunity, Ralph didn't come straight downstairs but ran up to the top floor of the house, where the spiders lived, and climbed on board the banister.

'Bye bye spiders!' he cried as he sailed through the fifth floor.

'Bye bye trains!' he screeched as he passed through the fourth floor.

'Bye bye ghost!' he whispered as he flew through the third floor.

'Bye bye bedroom!' he called as he slid through the second floor.

'Bye bye —'

SPLASH!!!

Ralph lay flat out in the paddling pool. His grandfather had placed it on the floor in front of the living room door, just at the point where Ralph always came off and landed with a thud. Ralph had tumbled straight into it and was lying there now, soaked to the skin. He looked up at his grandfather, who was grinning back at him in delight.

'I told you to stay off those banisters,' he said.