

# THE LATE CREW - BITS OF THE STORY

## LET'S START WITH AN ALIEN!

'What was that?' asked Levi. He was the only one brave enough to mention it aloud without fearing sounding silly.

'**She was saying hello,**' said a deep musical voice behind Tyler. Alisha gaped open-mouthed over his shoulder.

Tyler spun around. Behind him, there was something that looked sort of like a man. A man who had emerald eyes and a lizard-like face.

A man who had four legs, and hooves.

A man with scales rather than skin.

A man with long arms that ended in three-fingered hands.

A man with a swishing tail behind him.

He was 100%, definitely, undoubtedly, fantastically, terrifyingly, an alien!

## TYLER IS A YOUNG CARER WHO HELPS HIS BROTHER...

‘It’s time to get up now,’ Tyler said to his younger brother, Levi.

‘*Mrmppphhh*,’ said Levi, still in bed.

Tyler suspected Levi had got out of bed in the night to look at the stars again. Levi loved astronomy, and he’d left his round glasses on the windowsill.

‘Come on, Levi,’ said Tyler, trying to stay calm. ‘It’s only my third week of secondary school. I don’t want to be late again.’

Levi kept his eyes shut. Tyler knew he was only pretending to be asleep.

‘You have maths today. That’s your favourite lesson. You’d feel rotten if you missed it,’ said Tyler.

Levi opened one eye suspiciously, but didn’t get out of bed. Tyler needed to *really* get his attention.

‘We can talk about space on the way to school,’ said Tyler.

That did it! Levi jumped out of bed, suddenly full of energy. He was wearing rocket-ship pyjamas.

‘We have to talk about space,’ Levi announced brightly. ‘You’ve said.’

‘Pinky promise,’ Tyler said.

‘Pinky promise,’ Levi repeated.

The brothers hooked pinkies.

‘Come on now,’ Tyler added. ‘Let’s do your morning routine.’

Levi put on his glasses and gave Tyler a double thumbs up.

Tyler did Levi’s morning routine with him every day. It went like this:

1. Wash their faces.
2. Brush their teeth.
3. Chat while getting dressed.
4. Levi: pour out two bowls of cereal.  
Tyler: pour the milk.
5. Tuck kitchen roll into Levi’s collar, to stop any milk getting on his top.
6. Eat breakfast together.
7. Tyler: wash the dishes.  
Levi: dry and put away.

Even when they were late, Tyler never rushed the routine. They had to do it all properly, or Levi became very upset.

Levi was autistic. This meant he thought in a different way to Tyler. One part of this was that Levi liked patterns, and he needed certain things to be done the same way every day. The morning routine was one of these things.

On this day, by the time they got to Number Seven on the list and Tyler was putting their dishes in the sink, the digital clock read 8.40 a.m. That was when he was meant to start school. He sighed as he ran the water hot. He still needed to bring Mum her morning cup of tea. He was *definitely* going to be late.

## TYLER ALSO HELPS SUPPORT HIS MUM

### Part 1

Mum had an illness called chronic fatigue syndrome. Sometimes it was also called ME, said like 'em' 'ee'. The letters stood for two long words that Tyler couldn't pronounce, but what it meant was that Mum was exhausted all the time. Tyler knew it caused her pain as well, which made him sad to think about.

Mum had explained it once by talking about spoons:

Mum wakes up in the morning with twelve spoons – that's how much energy she has for the whole day. Every activity costs her some of her spoons. For example,

- ☞ Get out of bed
- ☞ Get dressed
- ☞ Take her medicine
- ☞ Talk to Tyler and Levi in bed
- ☞ ☞ Shower
- ☞ ☞ Make and eat lunch
- ☞ ☞ Do her online course (Mum was learning about art)
- ☞ ☞ ☞ Prepare a home-cooked meal for them to eat together for dinner
- ☞ ☞ ☞ Hoovering, or dusting, or mopping (because of this Tyler did nearly all the cleaning)
- ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ Play board games with Tyler and Levi

### Part 2

On Saturday, all Tyler could think about was going back to the school in the evening. Mum was too ill to get out of bed, so it was just him and Levi together for the day.

Tyler had lots of jobs to do on weekends. On Saturday morning, he:

- Put his, Levi's and Mum's clothes in the wash.
- Hoovered and dusted the house.
- Took the clothes out of the washing machine and hung them up to dry.
- Went to the shop and used Mum's purse to buy food for the week, from a list she'd texted him.

## IT CAN BE FRUSTRATING BEING A YOUNG CARER, IF PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND...

‘So, here you all are. I’ll call you all The Late Crew,’ said Miss Penn. ‘Every one of you was late today. Now, you’re going to write an essay on what you did wrong this morning and how you’ll be on time in future.’

Tyler glared at the blank paper in front of him. He felt his jaw clench with anger. What was he supposed to write? That he shouldn’t have helped Levi with his breakfast, or taken Mum her tea?

He’d *tried* to explain it to Miss Penn before. She didn’t understand *anything*.

‘I’ll be back in ten minutes. I expect you to have all started writing by then,’ said Miss Penn.

As soon as she left, Jayden turned to Grace. ‘Didn’t expect you here, four eyes. Thought you never did anything wrong.’

Grace looked as if she was about to cry.

‘Leave her alone,’ said Tyler.

‘What you going to do about it, pipsqueak?’ snarled Jayden.

Tyler was already annoyed, and he curled his hands into fists without even thinking about it.

Jayden jumped to his feet. His chair skittered along the floor behind him. ‘You want a fight then?’

Tyler stood up lightning fast. He’d never been in a fight before, but today he’d had enough of people being mean. He wasn’t going to get pushed around.

‘You’ll get us in even more trouble,’ wailed Grace. She was properly crying now.

‘Yeah, just leave it,’ said Alisha.

Jayden raised his fists, so Tyler did the same. They faced off, both waiting for the other to make the first move.

That was when the school fell down.