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THIAGO DE MORAES

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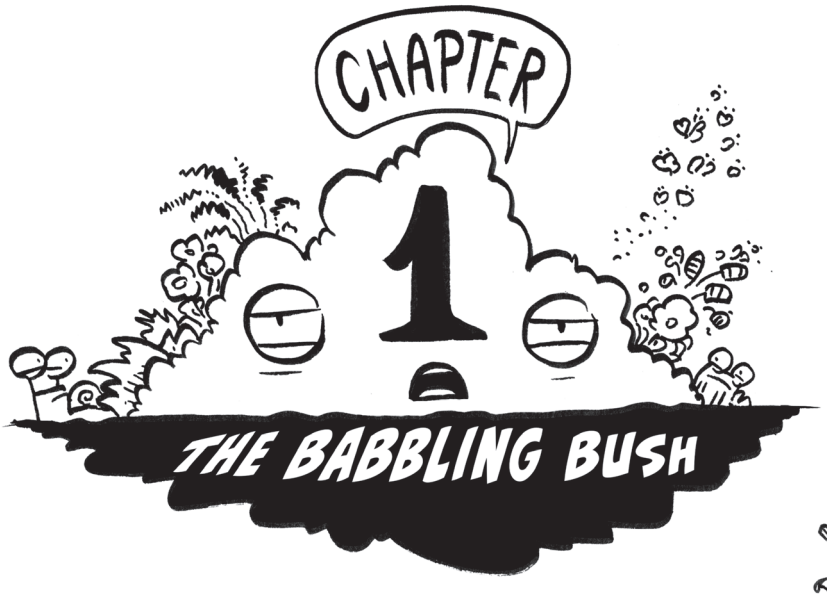
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To Ana, Tom and Billie
and with enormous thanks to Liz and Meggie,
who were very serious about making me
write something that is not serious at all



Olly Morris wasn't looking forward to the end of the summer holidays.

That's normal. Most kids, even the ones who *really* like school, don't like the end of their holidays. It's hard to say goodbye to mornings watching cartoons, late nights playing video games and all the time in between, filled with playgrounds, mates, crisps, ice creams, trading cards and, most probably, more video games.

Even harder is returning to the harsh reality of very early mornings (*sans* cartoons) stuffy uniforms, endless lessons, homework



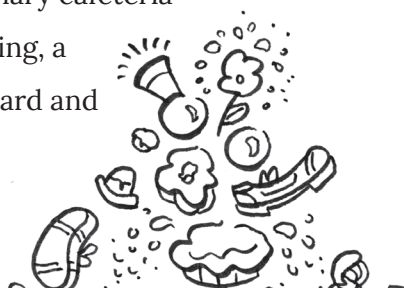
and all that comes with being back at school. Those are reasons enough to make any kid sadder than a clown who has lost their nose,* but they were not the reasons why Olly was sad.

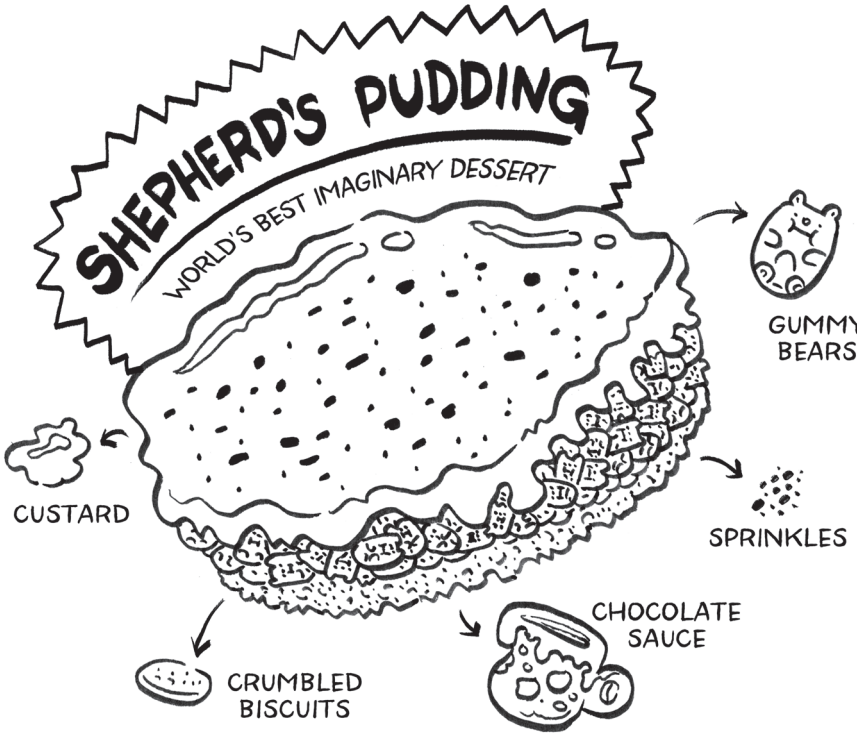
*Clowns are creepy enough with their big red noses, so sincere apologies for introducing the absolutely terrifying idea of a noseless clown. People usually say that difficult or scary things like this build character, but all this particular expression builds is a larger fear of clowns.

He was upset for the exact *opposite* reasons.



Olly *wanted* very early mornings, uniforms, lessons, school dinners, homework, reports and all the stuff that comes with being at school. In fact, Olly wanted it all so desperately that he had spent most of his summer creating an imaginary school timetable, filled with imaginary lessons, imaginary teachers, imaginary after-school clubs and even an imaginary cafeteria menu (his best dish: Shepherd's Pudding, a layer of gummy bears covered in custard and





chocolate sprinkles, accompanied by chocolate sauce; served on Wednesdays).

It can be universally agreed that creating an imaginary school, regardless of how delicious its puddings might be, is an extremely odd way for a young boy to spend his summer. But Olly had a good reason for doing it.

Oliver Louis Morris, aged eleven-and-quite-a-bit, had never been to school.

He had walked past plenty of schools and even been inside a few for parties and whatnot, but he had never, in

his whole life, been a pupil at one. He had never heard his name called from the register, never waited in line to go back to class, never been sent to the headteacher's office for drawing farting bums on his desk.*

*A completely hypothetical misdemeanour, clearly not something anyone reading this book should ever consider doing.

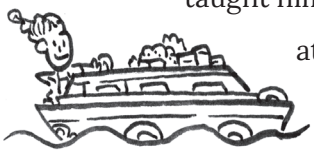
Olly's parents were the reason he had never been to school.

They weren't enemies of education, overly afraid of bacteria or incredibly forgetful. They were *musicians*. More than that, they were *travelling* musicians, who spent their lives going up and down the country in a big old canal boat, playing shows anywhere they could.

Some people like being *still*, they find their spot and stick to it like chewing gum on hair; others can't stop in one place. Martha and James Morris (for those were Olly's parents' names) were like that. They *loved* travelling. Nothing made them happier than being in a different place every day, playing their songs to a different crowd, closing the boat's curtains to a different view before bed at night.

It was a fun life, an *exciting* life, but it made it impossible for Olly to go to an ordinary school. That didn't

mean he hadn't learned anything, though. Olly's parents taught him all he would have been studying at school, and much more.



By age seven, Olly already knew how to steer a boat, cook his own dinner, sew, tap dance,







play several musical instruments (the keytar was his favourite) and imitate the calls of dozens of birds.



Olly liked living on the boat and didn't mind being taught by his parents, but he did find life on the move hard. It's difficult to make friends when you don't stay more than a few days in a single place, and friends were what Olly wanted most. But, despite trying hard, Olly had made a grand total of *zero* friends in life so far. He had lots of *acquaintances*, kids he'd meet and play with for a bit at the park or the playground, but they never spent enough time together to become proper mates.

That's why Olly grew up wishing that his family would settle somewhere, so he could go to school and finally make some real buddies.

He always felt saddest at the start of a new school year. The kids he'd meet during the summer holidays would all go back to school, and between the hours of nine and three thirty the world became a strange place, populated only by tiny babies and really old people, two groups united by being mostly bald and having trouble with nappies.*

*This might be offensive to babies and very old people, but they're not likely to be reading this story. Please don't tell them about it; both can be vicious. Especially the babies.

This year it was even worse. Olly was at the age where he should be going to secondary school. The other kids he had met during the summer seemed really excited about secondary school, and that made Olly sad. The idea that every other kid his own age was going off on some sort of big adventure whilst he kept on doing exactly what he had done all his life felt very unfair.

All of this was on Olly's mind as he plodded past an empty playground. He was walking by the canal towards his family's boat, thinking about the gross injustices of life, when something caught his eye. A bunch of fluffy

white clouds was moving across the sky. That wasn't odd, moving across the sky is something clouds regularly do. What was odd is that they were all moving in different directions, as clouds most definitely *don't*. Some clouds went up, others down, left or right, as if being pushed around by an invisible hand. Eventually, they slowed down and settled into a pattern. *More than a pattern*, thought Olly. The clouds had turned into letters up in the sky. They spelled:



That wasn't possible, Olly thought. He must be seeing things. He blinked a few times, looked down and up again and . . . the letters were still there. He shook his head, rubbed his eyes and had another look, but nothing had changed. There was still a great big 'OLLY' plastered across the summer sky.

That's it, he thought. *I've gone mad. Insane. Loco. Cuckoo. Bananas.*

Olly looked at the ground, hoping that the clouds would disappear if he ignored them long enough. He sped up towards his family's houseboat, eager to get away from the baffling writing in the sky. As Olly speed-walked along the banks of the canal, he heard a loud



from behind him.

He looked round, but the path was completely empty. Turning back towards the boat, Olly began walking even faster than before. Another



sounded again, louder. Olly spun on his heels and looked at the place where the noise had come from. There was nothing there besides a small round bush.

'Hey!' said the bush.

Olly stared at the bundle of leaves. First the clouds, now a talking bush. What was going on?

'Sorry, I can't stay to chat,' Olly told the bush. Then he turned round and ran away yelling:

