



# ONE

Oliver Crisp was only ten years old, but they had been a busy and exciting ten years, because Oliver's mother and father were explorers.

They had met on the top of  
Mount Everest.



They had been married  
at the Lost Temple of  
Amon Hotep, and had spent  
their honeymoon searching for the  
elephants' graveyard. And when  
young Oliver was born they simply  
bought themselves a back carrier and  
an off-road baby buggy and went  
right on exploring.

MEH.



But at last there came a day when Mr and Mrs Crisp realized there was just nothing left to explore. They had trekked to the headwaters of all the great rivers, and stood on the summits of all the unconquered mountains. Thanks to them, the Lost City of Propacopaketl was lost no longer; the Mystery of the Mokele Mbembe Marshes had been solved. There were no more blank spaces left on the map.

So they packed their belongings aboard their explorermobile and drove home to the house which they owned but had hardly ever lived in, by Deepwater Bay, near the little



seaside town of St Porrocks. ‘No more exploring for us,’ they told each other sadly. ‘It’s time we settled down.’

Oliver wasn’t sad, though. He was excited. He was tired of living the explorer’s life. The house he was coming home to was one he’d only seen on holidays; brief two-week breaks before fresh expeditions. Ten years on the move! No time to make friends, or feel at home anywhere. No time to go to school. He’d never even had a proper bedroom of his own, just a bunk in the back of the explorermobile, and all his things were hidden away in trunks and storage boxes in the spaces under the explorermobile’s seats. He thought it would be exciting to have a whole house to live in, and wake up every day to the same view. At Deepwater Bay he would have his own bedroom and bathroom, and he would be starting next term at the school in St Porrocks. (That might

not sound so good to you, but Oliver had never been to school, and he was excited about that, too.)

He perched between his parents as Mum steered the explorer mobile carefully along the winding lanes. He was waiting for the moment when Deepwater Bay came in sight.

‘It’s not a very pretty house,’ his mother reminded him. ‘It’s really rather old and creaky, and the wind blows right through it. It needs lots of work doing, but we never found the time. Or the money. There’s not a lot of money in exploring.’

‘OK,’ said Oliver, but he didn’t stop feeling excited.

They came over a sudden headland and there it was; the blue bay all dotted with shaggy, steep-sided islands. The house stood at the top of the beach. It was big and grey, with orange lichen dappling its roof.

‘Wow!’ said Oliver.