Paul’s Family By Emily Slater

Paul awoke, groaning. Wednesday. He hated Wednesdays. A day of work and helping the whining Thomas with his French homework afterwards, which Paul hadn’t got a clue about – that would be the average Wednesday. But today was different. Today, he was leaving his family for three months to go to Egypt on a surveillance operation on a suspected terrorist encampment. He smacked the top of the alarm clock, which was blaring one of Sue’s favourite songs, a Take That one, in an attempt to turn the wretched thing off, but only succeeded to knock it off the bedside table and onto the floor, where it continued to blare. *Today this could be, the Greatest Day of our lives…*

Cursing, Paul half scrambled, half fell out of bed, glancing at the time as he hit it again, causing it to rattle and silence for a moment, then continue to scream, each word louder than the one before. *Before it all ends, before we run out of time…*

“Paul,” Sue murmured from the bed, turning over, still half asleep. “Turn it off. I’m trying to sleep.”

Paul hit it a third time, and the alarm clock fell mercifully silent. For good, as it turned out. The alarm clock never worked again, for some reason, but Paul never concerned himself with it again. Shopping and decorating was Sue’s job – let her worry about it.

Paul stumbled to the stairs of his attic bedroom and thumped down. In the next room, he heard Thomas groaning. “Dad,” he called, sleep evident is his voice, “shut up.”

“Charming,” Paul muttered, thudding down the next flight of stairs and into the kitchen. His cat, Noel, looked up at him with beady yellow eyes, as if he was expecting something. “No,” Paul told him. “I don’t have any food.”

Noel shook his sleek black head as if disappointed, then vanished out of the cat-flap, into the back garden. Paul sighed deeply, then pulled some Coco Pops out of the cupboard and poured a large portion into a bowl. Humming another Take That song, he tipped milk into the bowl, cursed when he spilt it on the table, and got up, muttering unpleasant things as he stomped upstairs. He met a bleary-eyed Thomas half way up.

“Dad,” said Thomas quietly, and Paul knew exactly what he was going to say next. “Can I play on my –”

“Yes,” Paul interrupted, pushing past his son and stamping up the rest of the stairs, Thomas following behind.

“Thanks, Dad,” Thomas said, before hurrying into his bedroom to turn his X-box on.

Paul headed into the bathroom, washed, then slogged his way up the next flight of stairs to his own bedroom. He quickly dressed, then packed up, as Sue lay snoring. He slammed down the lid of his suitcase and creaked back down to the ground floor. He stroked the cat, Noel, for the last time before yelling that he’d gone up the stairs to Sue and Thomas, before heading out of the front door with his things, slamming it loudly behind him in case Sue hadn’t heard his goodbye call.

He dumped his suitcase in the back of his car and climbed in, checking his watch as he did the latter. 06:47am. Paul sighed, and started up the car with his keys. He took one final look at his house, perhaps the last he would ever take. Then, he turned his head to the road, refusing to cry, and drove away, going South to Manchester Airport, where he’d take a private jet on a 5-hour spin, finishing up in Egypt, his home for the next three months. Paul sighed deeply.

He was already missing home, and being scared for his own life.

This was going to be a very interesting trip.