The Perfect Photo

School photo day made Connor's stomach churn. The process was unpleasant from start to finish. You had to wait for ages for your turn. You had to sit still and not fidget. You had to smile sweetly while the camera stared threateningly at you.

Then, even worse than all that, was Connor's dad. His dad took school photo day very seriously. "Make sure you smile properly. Sit up straight. Keep your jumper clean. And avoid making your little sister cry like last year."

Connor thought this was unreasonable. He hadn't made Ellie cry. She had started crying because she didn't like the carrots in her lunch. It had ruined the photo. The picture had been hung up in the living room for a whole year as an unfortunate reminder of the day.

But none of that was going to happen this time. Ellie wasn't going to cry. Connor would resist pulling a silly face. His dad would have a nice photo to put in a frame and give to Connor's grandma on her birthday. Everything would be as it was supposed to be.

Except Connor couldn't find his school jumper.

A bundle of nerves, Connor checked the wardrobe and found nothing. Then he ransacked the large pile of dirty clothes on the floor next to his bed. Still nothing. Refusing to give up — he knew it must be somewhere — he upended the laundry basket and then ran downstairs to look in the washing machine. Nothing.

"Connor!" his dad's voice boomed from somewhere in the house. "Come to the kitchen — I'm making breakfast!"

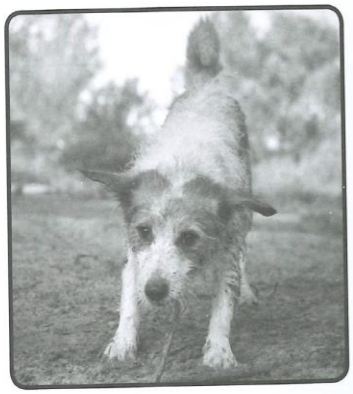
Connor hesitated. He could hear his sister giggling as she played with her toys, and Pepper the dog running about in the garden. Connor imagined turning up to his photo without his jumper, thinking of how much his dad cared about the picture, and gulped.

"It has to be here somewhere," he muttered to himself, still sure that he would find his jumper. "Think, Connor." He had only been wearing it yesterday. How had he managed to lose it since then?

Connor headed back up to his room, lay himself down on the cluttered carpet and peered under his bed. There was a grimy pair of socks, a few discarded wrappers and a trainer that had been the loser in a savage battle with Pepper. But there was no school jumper. He was running out of time.

"Connor!" his dad called again. His voice had a more severe tone this time.

"Coming!" Connor called back. He sighed, deciding to stop searching for his jumper, thinking he'd never find it. As he grabbed his schoolbag from the bed, his red school jumper tumbled out. "Aha!" he shouted, picking it up and holding it aloft like a trophy. He wrenched it over his head and sprinted back down the stairs.



In the kitchen, Connor's dad was buttering slices of toast. The dog was still in the garden, making light work of the flowerbeds. "Pepper!" his dad opened the window and shouted at her from the kitchen. "Leave the flowers alone!"

Pepper ignored him. "Connor, can you bring her back inside?"

Holding a slice of toast in one hand, Connor went into the next room and pulled the back door open. Pepper looked up at the sound. She barked excitedly and bounded towards him.

"Oh no," Connor said, realising what was about to happen. He dropped the toast and thrust his hands out in front of him.

But it was too late. Pepper sped through the door and leapt up to greet him. Soil flew everywhere. Connor was spattered with dirt and mud and even a few flower petals. There were two brown paw prints right on the front of his jumper.

At the noise, Connor's dad poked his head out of the kitchen. Connor turned to him in horror. His dad looked at Connor with wide eyes. Then he pulled his phone out of his pocket and took a picture. "Best school photo yet," he said, laughing.