My backpack was packed so full the zip barely closed. Inside were my pyjamas, toothbrush, clean socks, and my stuffed dog I had had since forever. I stood by the door, rocking on my heels, hands stuffed into my pockets.

Mum crouched to double-check the bag. “Got everything you need?” she asked, brushing invisible fluff off my shirt.

I gave a quick nod.

“If you want to come home, just call, okay?” She gave me a long squeeze before letting go.

Liam’s mum opened the door. “Hey! You made it!” Liam popped up behind her, already bouncing on his injured toes.

“Come on! The new, amazing racing game’s ready!”

“We battled through game after game until our fingers went numb.”

Inside, the house smelled like garlic bread and chocolate. Family photos covered the walls. Their dog, Shadow, wagged her tail like crazy, then followed us upstairs.

Liam’s room looked like a comic book exploded. Superhero posters, shelves full of Lego, and a glowing rocket lamp in the corner.

He threw me a red sleeping bag. “This one’s yours!”

We played until our hands ached. We built a Lego tower taller than my arm and laughed so hard I spilled my fizzy drink on my shirt. Dinner was pizza, garlic bread, and ice cream with chocolate sauce.

Then the lights went out.

Liam climbed into bed and pulled his superhero blanket to his chin. I lay in the sleeping bag. It was soft, warm… too quiet.

The rocket lamp flickered. Shadows danced across the walls. A creak came from the hallway. Was that Shadow? I held Max tight against my chest and listened.

My backpack sat in the corner. The phone was in there. I could unzip it. Just one quick call. Mum would come.

But I did not move.

The glow from the rocket lamp settled into a soft light. Liam’s breathing was slow and steady. I matched mine to his. In, out. In… out...

I blinked, and the ceiling blurred.

Then sunlight.

“WAKE UP!” Liam shouted at my face in a friendly tone. “Mum made warm pancakes! With sweet choc chips!”

I sat up, rubbed my eyes, blinking several times to get used to the light and smiled.

I stayed. All night.

And it was awesome and pure magic.