

Excerpt from Chapter 1 of "Mr Skip" by Michael Morpurgo



I was forever finding things in that rusty old yellow skip. It was on the corner of the estate by the phone box. Whenever they wanted to get rid of stuff, people from all around used to come and dump things in our skip. I'd go and have a look and a good mooch around in there whenever I felt like it.

At first Mum told me I shouldn't do it because there might be something in the skip that could cut me or prick me or whatever. So I promised her I'd be careful, and after that she was always fine about it. What made her really happy though was when I brought things home. We didn't have much in our flat - we couldn't afford to buy much at all - so quite a lot of what we did have came out of that rusty old skip.

I found the blue china horse for the mantelpiece, and Mum was thrilled to bits with it, even though it had a chipped nose and only three and a half legs. Her favourite armchair came off the skip too, as well as the electric radiator. All we had to get was a plug for that and it worked perfectly. But best of all was the twenty-six-inch Sony Trinitron television set that I brought home in a wheelbarrow - my cousin Barry gave me a hand. It worked fine except that one of the knobs was missing and the colour was a bit fuzzy. Mum didn't mind. She was over the moon about it.

Mum often told me I was "a terrible little jackdaw". And each time she said it she thought it was really funny, because my name is Jackie Dawson, which sounds a bit like jackdaw - if you see what I'm saying. It's not exactly hilarious, is it? But Mum thinks it is. Mum loves a laugh, but there's one thing she takes very seriously indeed. Mum likes to keep up appearances. She doesn't like other people looking down on us or laughing at us - nor do I come to that - which is why she never liked the idea of the neighbours seeing a child of hers crawling about on the skip after other people's cast-offs. That was why I only ever went rummaging around the skip at dusk or after dark.