

Rosie and the Boredom Eater

Rosie Barker was bored. As usual. She had been bored ever since the Barkers had moved house. The old house had had a garden. The one they had moved to had only a cobbled yard. None of the houses in Latimer Street had a garden.

"I'm bored," Rosie told her mother.

"Why can't we have a garden?"

"Because," replied Mrs Barker.

"That's not a proper answer," Rosie told her.

"It's the only one there is. And you can be bored when you do have a garden, as well as when you haven't."

"At least there's *company* in a garden," said Rosie. "Birds and snails and ... centipedes ... and worms, and things."

"I must say, Rosie," said her mother, "that I never noticed you playing much with worms."

"At least they're alive," said Rosie obstinately. "They're company. They wriggle about."

"Oh, *do* stop going on about worms!"

Mr Barker came in.

"What's all this about worms?" he asked.

"Oh, she reckons she wants some to play with. She says she's bored."

"She always is," he said. "Why don't you go out, Rosie? Find some kids to play with. Make some friends."

"If I'd got any brothers and sisters, I wouldn't have to," said Rosie.

Mrs Barker sighed.

"Here we go again!"

"It ought to be against the law to only have one child," Rosie told them. "There ought to be no such things as onlys. It's cruelty to children."

"There's no point in going over all that again, Rosie," her mother told her.

"I fought cat and dog with my brother and sister," Mr Barker said.

"At least if you're fighting you're not *bored!*" said Rosie. ➡



“Listen!” said Mrs Barker. “I don’t want to hear that word again today. Do you hear me, Rosie?”

“What word? Bored? You mean you don’t want to hear the word bored again? Or do you mean some other word besides bored? You mean you’re bored with –”

“Rosie!” Mr Barker warned her.

“I’m going *out!*” said Rosie. “To find a friend!”

She went out the back door and banged it behind her. She went across the little cobbled yard and through the gate that led to the back alley. She looked left and right. She saw only the blank windows of terraced houses, and rows of chimney pots. Even they were lifeless, with not so much as a puff of smoke.

“Where *is* everybody?” she wondered.

Rosie knew that the house next door to hers was empty. She also knew that her parents would not approve of her nosing around it. She did it, just the same. It was the only thing she could think of to do.

“And if I don’t do something soon, I might actually *die* of boredom,” she told herself. “Here lies the body of Rosie Barker, aged nine, died of boredom.”



She lifted the latch of the back gate of number twenty-seven and pushed. It swung slowly open, with the kind of creak you get in a horror film.

Rosie went in and shut the gate behind her. She looked around. As far as she could see, the yard of number twenty-seven was identical to the yard of number twenty-five. Nobody there – no birds, no worms. Just a dustbin.

“Boring boring boring!” she said out loud. “I might as well be sitting in that dustbin with the lid on!”

She stared at the bin. She knew it was empty, because the people next door had moved out weeks ago. It actually occurred to her that to climb inside it and pull the lid on after her might be quite an interesting and unusual thing to do. At least it wouldn't be boring.

Then the dustbin moved. It didn't move forward or backward. It just rocked, ever so slightly.

“Now I'm seeing things!” said Rosie.

She knew, of course, that dustbins don't move. They just stand around waiting to be filled with rubbish.

The dustbin moved again. This time, Rosie was sure she hadn't imagined it. She stood and boggled. Again the dustbin rocked.

Rosie cleared her throat.

“Is there – anybody there?” she asked.

There was no reply. Rosie felt extremely silly, standing there talking to a dustbin.

“Stupid old bin!” she muttered.

Then the dustbin really took off. It began to rock violently, back and forth, back and forth. It was as if there were someone inside there, working it to and fro. It rocked so wildly that its lid began to rattle and threatened to fly right off.

“N-not an earthquake!” thought Rosie Barker. “N-nothing else is jumping. I'm going mad, that's what it is. I've gone mad with boredom!”

At that moment the dustbin lid *did* fly off. It dropped to the cobbles with a clatter. The bin stopped rocking. Silence.

“The thing to do now,” thought Rosie, “is to go and see if there's anyone – or anything – inside ...”

Somehow she did not feel much like doing this. ➡

“Just *tiptoe* up,” she told herself. “Really pussyfoot up, so that whatever it is won’t hear!”

This is what she did. Slowly, slowly she tiptoed forward. It was like playing Grandmother’s Footsteps by herself. The dustbin was stock still now, stiff and ordinary as any other dustbin. She was nearly there now. Nearly ... nearly ...

“Eeeech!”

Rosie screamed and nearly jumped out of her skin. There was somebody in the dustbin!

“OOOOEEH!” quavered Rosie Barker. “Help!”

“What d’ye mean, help?” The voice was high and cracked. “What d’you think I’m *here* for?”

Rosie gasped. She craned forward. All she could see was a pair of skinny hands that seemed to be clasped over a tangle of grey hair. An old, old man must be hunched up in there. It was impossible. She knew it. Nobody’s grandfather that *she* knew went hiding themselves in dustbins, all hunched up.

“Well?” the voice snapped, and at the same time the skinny hands flew up, and all at once there was a *face* in the dustbin.

Rosie Barker boggled. She boggled till her eyes nearly popped out. She was looking at the oldest, wickedest face she had ever seen, chalky white and powdery looking. Round it flew a halo of grey hair and beard, all tangled with cobwebs and dust.

“G-good morning!” said Rosie. She said it with extreme politeness. She did not know whether whoever it was had any toes. If it had, she didn’t want to tread on them.

No reply. She was being watched by black beady eyes.

“Who are you?”

She was not sure what she expected him to say. Certainly she did not expect him to say “I’m your long lost Uncle Arthur from Australia.” She did not even *have* a long lost Uncle Arthur, as far as she knew.

“The Boredom Eater!” The hoarse whisper ran echoing about the bin.

“Boredom Eater?” echoed Rosie blankly.

“Boredom Eater!”

Answer in sentences.

- 1 Why was Rosie so bored?
- 2 What did Rosie mean when she said “there ought to be no such things as onlys”?
- 3 What was the number of Rosie’s new house and the name of the road?
- 4 How could Rosie be sure that the house next door was empty?
- 5 The yard of the house next door was identical to Rosie’s yard. What does “identical” mean?
- 6 Explain how Rosie knew that she wasn’t in an earthquake when the dustbin started to rock about.
- 7 The old man in the dustbin said that he was there to help Rosie. How do you think he will help her?
- 8 What facts do we learn about Rosie in this passage? (Look for information about her home, her family and her age.)
- 9 What do you find out about what Rosie’s personality is like from this passage? Include all the details that you can find.
- 10 What does “quavered” mean?

