



# Tom's Boring Day

A CHILDREN'S STORY  
BY GAIL TAGARRO ©



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Tom was bored. His sister and brother were both at school, he was sick with a cold and his mother was at work. Dear old Mrs Murray, their widowed next-door neighbour, was looking after him at her house.

She loved looking after the children when Ali, Tom's mother, was working, and she had been fussing over Tom like a mother hen, making him lemon and honey drinks and playing Scrabble and other games with him. Tom had been wonderfully entertained but now, Mrs Murray was on the telephone ... and Tom knew what *that* meant. She just loved chatting, almost as much as she loved children. Ali said she could talk the leg off an iron pot.

He sighed, stuffed his hands deep into his pockets and started wandering about the house. It was three storeys high, had a long winding staircase of dark polished wood, many rooms and stained-glass windows like a cathedral. At the very top was an attic where he liked to sit on the window seat and look out over the roofs of other houses onto the sea beyond. He walked up the stairs to the attic and sat down to watch the sailing boats. From this distance, the people looked like miniatures and the boats like toys.

Except for the faraway echo of Mrs Murray's voice, it was silent up here, and so warm with the sun streaming through the casement window that Tom began to feel very sleepy.

He must have dozed off because he awoke suddenly to see Mrs Murray floating up the stairs. At least he *thought* it was Mrs Murray but instead of her apron and floral dress and pink slippers, she was wearing a great tall black cathedral-spire of a hat and a long robe to match.

Tom rubbed his eyes hard. He thought he must be dreaming and so he pinched himself to make sure he was awake. He pinched so hard that he cried out. Mrs M stopped floating, and Tom closed his eyes and opened them again, expecting to see her back in her homely dress and cosy slippers. But there she was, just as before, floating up the stairs towards him.

‘Help!’ yelped Tom, but barely a sound came out. ‘Help!’ he cried again, but only managed a puny squeak. He started to panic, looking wildly around for somewhere to escape, but the only way out was back down the staircase, and the floating Mrs M was blocking the way. That was it! His escape route was in front of his very eyes! Mrs M was floating, so he would go underneath her. Tom launched himself at the top stair and did the limbo beneath Mrs M, her black pointy shoes lightly brushing his forehead as he passed below her. Almost losing his footing, he grabbed onto the banister, sped down the stairs as if pursued by a pack of wild animals and came to a skidding halt at the front door. He reached up and touched the door handle, but suddenly pulled his hand away with a yelp. It was too hot to touch. Looking behind him, he saw Mrs M’s hands in the hocus-pocus position, pointing at the door handle, with smoke coming out of her fingers.

All this time, Mrs M had not uttered a word. Just as Tom was thinking this, he saw her mouth open and thought she was going to say something to him. But the sound that issued from her lips was not human; it was a thin, keening sound like the wind whistling and wailing through tiny gaps in doorways and window frames on a stormy night. At the same time, Tom noticed that the black pointy shoes he had seen earlier had disappeared. They,

along with the lower half of Mrs M's long black robe, were swallowed up in a swirling pale-blue mist. Perhaps they are still there, thought Tom, only they're all covered up by the mist. With this thought, Tom's fear and panic gradually turned into fascinated curiosity. After all, Mrs M hadn't actually *done* anything to him, had she? Sure, she'd made a weird sound, and floated, and she was wearing strange clothes, and her feet and half her robe had disappeared under a veil of mist, and she'd made smoke come out of her fingers ... but all that was pretty harmless.

He decided to try something.

'Mrs M!' he yelled.

Still floating several centimetres above the stair, Mrs M looked at him. Ah, she definitely is Mrs Murray, Tom thought.

*Of course I'm Mrs Murry, dear,* said Mrs Murray.

Tom looked at her again. His mind was playing tricks on him. He had *heard* the thought – Mrs Murray's lips hadn't moved – and she had heard his thought and answered it. This was definitely weird.

*Not really,* her thought answered him in his mind. *You can speak to people with your mind, and they can answer you. I call it thought conversation. You are very good at it, you know. Most people have to practise for years before they can do it. Most people never learn at all!*

Tom decided to keep playing this thought game. It was much more fun than cards. *Mrs Murray, how did you do all those cool things, like floating and making smoke come out of your fingers and...?*

*Time to wake up now, Tom,* came her answer.

*But I'm already awake, Mrs Murray.*

She began drifting away from him, slowly, slowly moving further and further away until all that remained was the fine blue mist.

‘Mrs Murray! Mrs Murray!’ he called.

‘Wake up, darling!’ His mother’s voice. He looked around but could not see her. Why had he heard his mother’s voice in his mind?

‘Wake up, darling, you’ve been dreaming,’ she said again.

Tom opened his eyes, blinked and looked around him. He was curled up in the window seat and his mother was bending over him, looking a little worried.

‘Are you all right, darling?’ she asked. ‘You were calling out for Mrs Murray and in such a deep sleep that we couldn’t wake you.’

Tom looked over his mother’s shoulder and saw Mrs Murray standing at the top of the stairs with her sweet-little-old-lady smile. She was wearing her floral dress, her apron and her cosy pink slippers.

‘What were you dreaming about, dear?’ echoed Mrs Murray. ‘I heard you calling me, then your mother arrived and we both came up to see where you were.’

‘You were floating up the stairs wearing a long black robe and pointy shoes and a hat and smoke was coming out of your fingers and we were having thought conversations and...’

Mrs Murray and Ali looked at each other and raised their eyebrows.

‘I think you’ve been reading too many Roald Dahl stories,’ Ali grinned. ‘Maybe you should take a little break from them.’

‘What a good idea,’ Mrs Murray said sweetly. ‘I can lend you some books I used to read as a child, and still read to my grandchildren. I’m sure you’d

love *The Secret Seven* books, they're wonderful adventure stories. A good change from magic and fantasy.'

Tom stared at her. He was beginning to believe it *had* all been a dream. He *did* feel awfully sleepy. How else could all those strange things have happened?

'I think it's time I got you home,' Ali said. 'A warm bath, a nice hot cup of cocoa, then early to bed with a story. I'm sure you'll feel much better tomorrow.'

Mrs Murray beamed. 'And if you're not well enough to go to school tomorrow, I'd be delighted if you came over to keep me company again!'

Ali took Tom's hand and they walked downstairs together, Mrs Murray leading the way. As Ali reached for the door handle, Tom gasped and pushed her hand away.

'Whatever is the matter, dear?' she asked.

'The handle's burning hot, Mum, you'll burn yourself.'

Mrs Murray and Ali again exchanged glances, and Ali put her hand on Tom's forehead.

'It is definitely a good idea for you to have another day at home tomorrow,' she said, 'you must have a bit of a fever.'

She reached for the door handle again, firmly holding Tom aside, and opened the door.

'Thank you so much, Mrs Murray, for looking after Tom and for offering to have him again tomorrow.'

'It's a pleasure, my dear. Now don't you worry about a thing.'

Ali walked down the front steps towards the gate, as Mrs Murray said to Tom, 'Well Tom, I shall look forward to your company again tomorrow. Bye bye for now, dear,' and began closing the door.

Tom turned back to wave to her, then opened his eyes wide. The door was still open a crack, and he saw Mrs Murray on a floating broomstick with her black cat behind her. She was all dressed in black again, with that great cathedral-spire of a hat.

She winked at him and closed the door.

