

**Beginnings...**  
**by Eloise Williams**

We have moved. A new house, a new life.

Dad is unpacking and singing in the kitchen. He is happy with his new job. I want my old life back.

'Go and play in the garden.' He puts our things into the cupboards.

'I'm hungry.'

He makes me a sandwich and directs me outside like I don't know where outside is.

There is an old woman in the neighbouring garden. She scowls and scurries inside. I sit and sulk. Pick the seeds out of my bread and flick them because they are gross. A robin hops over and eats them. Dad comes out, bringing me a drink.

'The woman next door is horrible,' I whisper.

'Why? What happened?' He looks concerned.

'She pulled a nasty face and went inside.'

'Maybe she just likes to be left alone.'

'Maybe she's just awful.'

He goes in. I would stomp to my room, except it's not my room. My room is in the city, it has stars painted on the ceiling and a view of other people's lives.

The robin hops about. It has missed a few seeds, so I toss them closer. When I turn around the woman next door is looking out of her window. She draws her curtains quickly.

Later, in bed, I cry. Quietly, so Dad won't hear me. I miss my friends Amina and George. I stop suddenly because I hear something else. There's crying coming from the neighbour's house too.

'I found out she's quite recently widowed,' Dad says at breakfast. 'Leave her alone.'

I take my toast outside. The robin is on the fence between mine and hers. I pick out my seeds and put them close to it. Other birds swiftly fly in. Turning, I see the woman at the window. She disappears again.

I go back indoors. 'I need some birdseed.'

Dad says it's good I'm taking an interest in wildlife and gives me some of the seeds he usually sprinkles on cereal. I take a plate, balance it on the fence, fill it. I'm sure I catch a glimpse of the woman but then she disappears. The next day, she's at the window and the day after that too. At the end of our first week here, there isn't any crying from either side of the wall. I sleep soundly.

The next morning, I find that the plate is gone. She has taken it. I can see it in her garden. How dare she? I go inside in a rage to get another one.

When I go back out, she's there, nailing a bird table to the top of the fence. Half on her side and half on ours.

She puts apples and nuts on. I add seeds.

'Hello,' I say.

'Hello,' she replies, passing me the plate.

We watch the birds squabble and fuss while dad sings happily inside. Though I know alone doesn't need to be lonely, I'm glad that we are friends.

#ReadForEmpathy



#EmpathyDay