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There is No Dog

Written by

Meg Rosoff

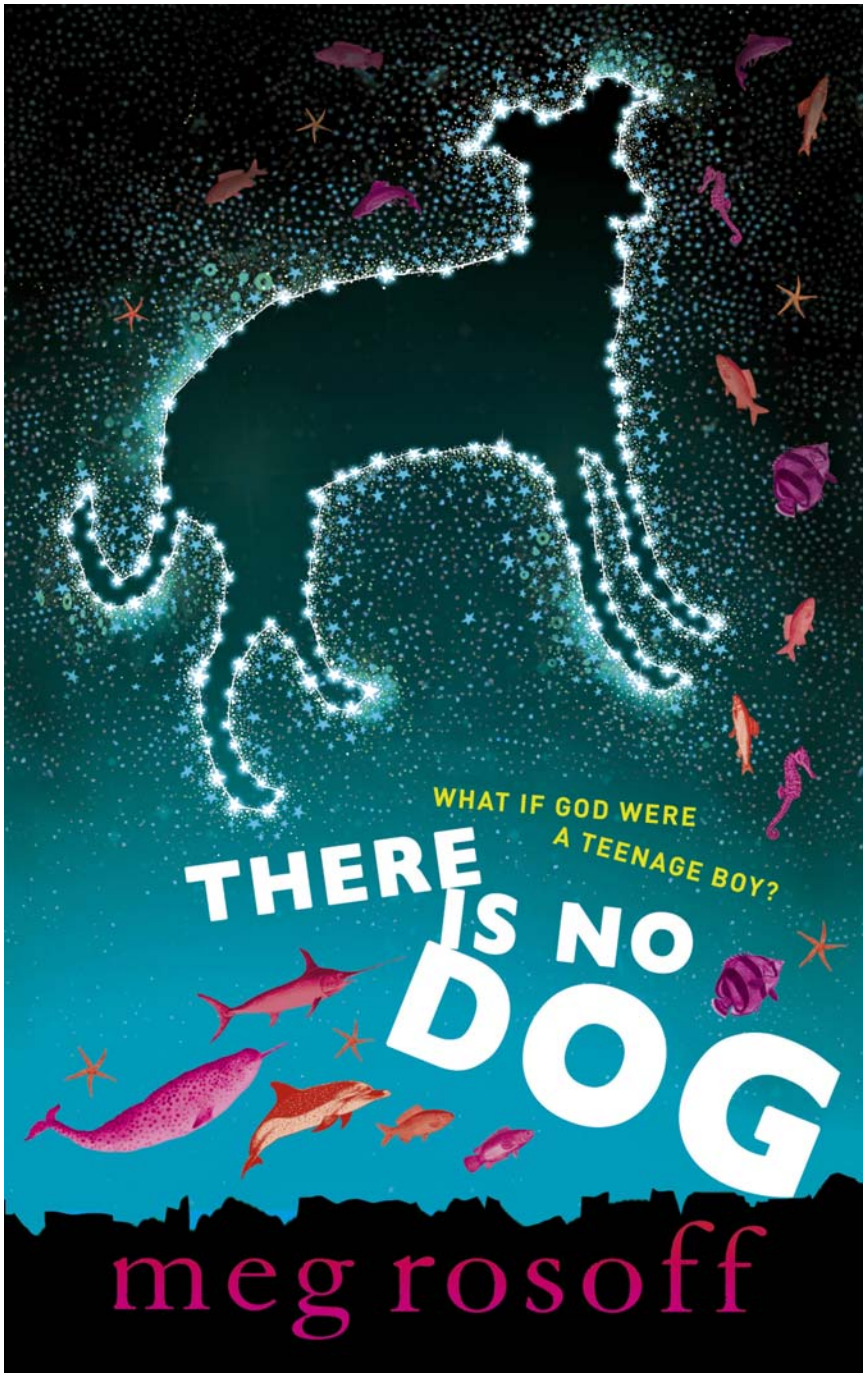
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WHAT IF GOD WERE A TEENAGE BOY?
THERE IS NO DOG
meg rosoff

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1

Oh glorious, most glorious glorious! And yet again glorious!

The sun spreads warm and golden on Lucy's face and arms. Pale new leaves unfurl so fast she can almost hear the little sigh they make as they open. Birds tweet and twitter their social networks, like city workers seeking potential mates. A few tipsy clouds punctuate the sweet blue sky. The world reels, drunk with happiness.

Lucy nearly laughs out loud. What a wondrous day. The most wondrous day ever, since the very beginning of time.

She doesn't realize how much she herself adds to its perfection. Is it the summer dress printed with roses, which the breeze catches and flips up against her legs? Or merely the fact that Lucy is as perfect as a rose herself, a flower newly opened – so perfect, you can imagine the sun breaking every rule of impartiality to beam down upon her, alone.

What heaven, she thinks. What bliss! Whoever is in charge of the weather today has (for once) achieved perfection.

Her step is light. The distance from bus stop to work is short. She smiles, a half-grown girlish womanish smile that illuminates her lovely features. The sun paints soft highlights on her cheekbones and well-shaped mouth, sets her pale hair

alight. She dreams about the summer months to come, the bright conversations, the long pink evenings, the possibility of love. Her youth, her smile, her happiness all combine, at this moment, to make her the most irresistible woman on Earth.

A young man walks some distance behind her. If he hadn't already made up his mind not to fall in love – with her or anyone else, ever again – he might run to catch her up. Instead, he slows his step and turns away, disliking her, for not very good reasons of his own.

Lucy fairly skips along, joyous. She passes a fountain and leans over into the spray, delighted by its sparkling rainbows. Then she straightens up and resumes her walk, humming a little prayer, which is not so much a prayer as a hope, a private incantation: '*Dear God*,' she prays, '*I should like to fall in love*.'

But wait . . . what's this? Such luck! God (who almost never bothers listening to his people) overhears her prayer. Lucy's prayer!

Transported by her loveliness, he decides to answer it himself.

What a miracle! How much more than glorious! God, himself, is about to fall in love.

2

'Wake up!'

God is dreaming of water. In his dream there is a fountain, and a naked girl, and (of course) there is him. The water is warm, the girl willing; her flesh is soft. He reaches out a hand to caress her breast, curls his fingers instead round one slim arm . . .

'Wake. Up.' An edge of impatience accompanies the request.

Oh, Christ. It's that dreary Mr B – his assistant, private secretary, God's very own personal bore. And surprise surprise. B's spectacles have slipped down to the end of his nose and he has his sourpuss face on.

God is awake. He cracks open one eye. '*What?*'

'Go to the window.'

His head hurts. 'Just tell me.'

'Get up. Feet on the floor. Walk to the window. Look outside.'

With a huge sigh, a brain thick and slow as a pudding, the boy sits up, swings his legs on to the floor, stands, sways for an instant and runs one hand through his hair (which he can tell, with annoyance, has all migrated to one side

of his head, as if he's been standing in a high wind). Groaning, he turns and pads wearily to the window, his feet bare and cold. The rushing noise is louder than it was. To his surprise, there is water where the streets used to be and for a moment he feels quite relieved that his bedroom is not on the ground floor of the building. 'Water,' he says, with interest.

'Yes, *water*.' Mr B's manner is mild, but he trembles with unexpressed feeling.

God struggles to make sense of the scenario. Why is there water in the streets? Did he make this happen? Surely not. He's been sleeping.

'Look over there.'

He looks.

'What do you see?'

Off the bedroom is a large bathroom, complete with toilet, sink, white marble tiles, large rolltop bath.

Bath.

The bath! God remembers now; he was running a bath and then, as he waited for it to fill, he lay down. Just for a moment. He must have fallen asleep. And while he slept, dreaming of that beautiful girl, the girl in the fountain, the bath overflowed.

'Oh.'

'Oh? Just *oh*?'

'I'll turn it off.'

'I've turned it off.'

'Good.' The boy heads back to bed, collapses.

Mr B turns to God with his customary combination of resignation and rage. 'I don't suppose you'd like to do

something about the mess you've made?' Outside the window water rolls through the streets.

'I will,' he mutters, already half asleep. 'Later.'

'Not later, *now*.'

But God has pulled a pillow over his head, signalling (quite definitely) that there is no point going on at him.

Mr B fumes. God is dreaming of soapy sex with his fantasy girlfriend while the rest of the world drowns in the bath. His bath.

It is always like this. Day after day, year after year, decade after decade. And on and on and on. Mr B (more than a personal assistant, less than a father figure – a fixer, perhaps, facilitator, amanuensis) sighs and returns to his desk to go through the mail, which (despite being dealt with on a daily basis) has a tendency to pile into vast teetering towers. He will choose one or two prayers and make an attempt at urgent action. He does not show them to God, for the boy's ability to concentrate is minimal at best.

Occasionally a voice leaps out from the torrent of prayers and moves him by simple virtue of its sincerity. *Dear God, I should like to fall in love.*

An undemanding little prayer. From just the sort of sweet girl he would like to help, in the first place, by making sure God never lays eyes (or anything else) on her.

But God has a bloodhound's nose for a gorgeous girl, and before Mr B can hide the prayer the boy is out of bed and peering over his shoulder, snuffling at the prayer as if it's a truffle, practically inhaling it in his anxiety to get his hands on . . .

'Who is *she*?'

'No one. A dwarf. Short, hairy, old. A troll. She grunts, she snores, she stinks.'

But it's too late. He's seen her. He watches Lucy in her thin summer dress as she walks through the dappled morning light – *his* light – her round hips swaying, her pale hair aglow. She is exquisite. Flawless.

At that exact moment, there is a blinding flash of light. It is so intense that for a moment the world disappears.

'I'll have her,' says God.

When Mr B manages to open his eyes once more, the expression on God's face makes his heart sink. It is twelve parts moony love, eighty-three parts sexual desire, and ten and a half million parts blind determination. Oh, *please*, Mr B thinks, not a human. Not *another* human.

He is filled with despair. God's passion for humans always leads to catastrophe, to meteorological upset on an epic scale. What is wrong with the boy that he can't get it up for some nice goddess? Why, oh why, can't he pursue a sensible relationship, one that will not lead to catastrophe?

Mr B could weep. Attempting to talk God round is as useful as trying to reason with a squid. He will pursue Lucy until his lust wears out, or until some vast geological disturbance erases her from the Earth. Mr B has seen it all before. Earthquakes, tsunamis, tornadoes. God's unique inability to learn from his mistakes: yet another wonderful trait he's passed on to his creations.

Happy now, the boy drifts back to bed, where he dozes, conjuring filthy scenarios around the girlfriend he hasn't yet met.