

First published in 2024 by
Andersen Press Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA, UK
Vijverlaan 48, 3062 HL Rotterdam, Nederland
www.andersenpress.co.uk

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

The right of Guy Bass and Lee Cosgrove to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work has been asserted by them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

Text copyright © Guy Bass, 2024
Illustrations copyright © Lee Cosgrove, 2024

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available.

ISBN 978 1 83913 418 0

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



A HUGH DUNNIT MYSTERY

TAKING SHELTER

STORY BY
GUY BASS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
LEE COSGROVE

Andersen Press



1.

Shelter

This case . . . this *crime*. Where to start?

I guess I should begin at the beginning, and work back from there.

Yesterday, otherwise known as Tuesday, I was in the park. Rain had started to fall. It was heavier than my tummy after a baked potato, so I picked up my bag and took Shelter under a tree. Shelter's the name of my dog. She's my best friend. She's the only person I trust in the whole world, and she isn't a person, she's a Staffordshire bull terrier.

Shelter's called Shelter because that's where I found her – a bus shelter. That was almost a month ago. It was raining on the day we met,

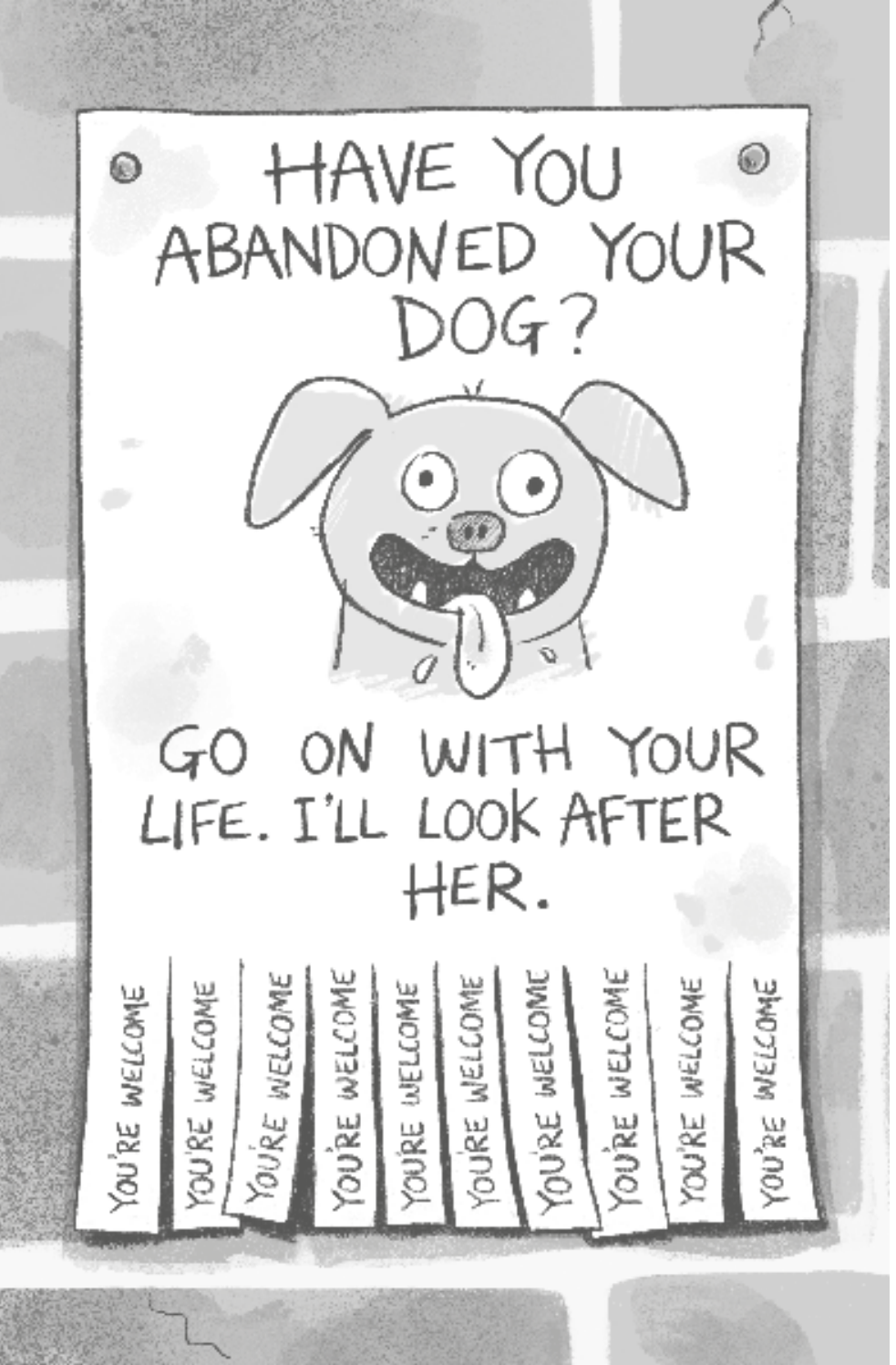


too. The rain hit the ground like soggy fists. I was on my way home from school. I ran to the bus shelter for cover . . . and that's when I spotted her. She was spotted – two of them, on her rump. Her spots were as white as good teeth, but the rest of her was greyer than a bad mood. She huddled in a corner, trying to stay dry, and possibly waiting for the Number 13 bus. I took one look at her, and she took one look at me. Then she took another look at me, exactly the same as before. *I know that look*, I thought.

As soon as I picked her up, I could feel we had a connection. Turns out she'd got her claws snagged on my coat. But more than that, I just had a feeling. In that moment, I knew this dog was going to be my best friend. I picked her up and sneezed. Turns out I'm allergic to dog hair. Allergies really get up my nose. But that didn't stop me carrying Shelter home.

After a bit more sneezing, I explained to Dad what had happened. Then Mum came home and I explained all over again. I hate having to repeat myself. Seriously, I hate having to repeat myself.

Anyway, Mum and Dad said I couldn't just take a dog. Which was ridiculous, because that was what I'd just done. I had to put up posters all over the village to check if Shelter's owners were looking for her. I made them myself.



Mum and Dad made me take them all down. Then they put up their own, which just said:



. . . But no one called. Mum said we should take Shelter to the shelter. I said, Why would I take her back there? Mum said, No, the *dog* shelter. I said I know Shelter's a dog. I was stalling. I knew there was only a faint chance I could keep her, but I wasn't holding my breath. So I held my breath until I fainted.



After I woke up, Mum said I could keep Shelter as long as she didn't cause any trouble. I said, What do you mean, trouble? Mum said, You know what I mean. I said, What do you mean, I know what you mean? Then Mum made that noise she makes when she doesn't want to say words any more. Dad shook his head. I sneezed.

And that's how I ended up with my best friend.

But this isn't the story of how I found Shelter.

This is the story of how I lost her.

2.

The Crime

They say there's no such thing as victimless crime. But what about blowing up a ghost? They're already dead.



But *this* crime did have a victim . . . and that victim was me. I didn't even see it coming. When bad things happen, they don't often let you know they're on their way. They sneak up on you like a soundproofed ninja in soft socks.

It was Wednesday. I was halfway through the week but my troubles had only just started. In the morning, I went downstairs, ate breakfast, and then headed back up to my bedroom to get my bag. It had my maths homework in it, and today was the day I had to hand it in.

Maths is my second favourite subject. I don't have a first – I don't like to choose favourites. Everybody knows I'm best at maths. Once, around six days, seven hours and forty-three minutes ago, my teacher, Miss Adwell, was talking us through a maths question in class.



'So, if we take this seven-sided shape,' she began, 'otherwise known as a . . . ?'

I put up my hand. Everyone looked down, like Miss Adwell's stare could turn them to stone. My hand was still up when Miss Adwell added, 'Anyone? Connie B? You know this.'

'. . . Septagon?' said Connie Baffle.

I did not put my hand down.

'Good – Connie B is *Math-magician* of the Day,' said Miss Adwell. 'So, in order to calculate the area of—'

'Miss?' I said.

Miss Adwell's sigh sounded a bit like my mum's.

'. . . Hugh?' she said.

'A seven-sided polygon is called a heptagon,' I said.

Another sigh. That one sounded a *lot* like my mum's.

'Both are acceptable, Hugh,' said Miss Adwell.

'But a heptagon is from the Greek "heptá" and septagon is from Latin "septa" but all other polygon names come from Greek, so—'

'*Both are acceptable, Hugh,*' Miss Adwell said

again. She sounded like she wanted the ground to swallow me up, but I just sat there, so I guess the ground wasn't hungry. But the fact was, I knew I was right, and Miss Adwell knew I was right, and everyone in the class knew I was right.

Something impossible had happened, and it had happened to me.

I was righter than my teacher.

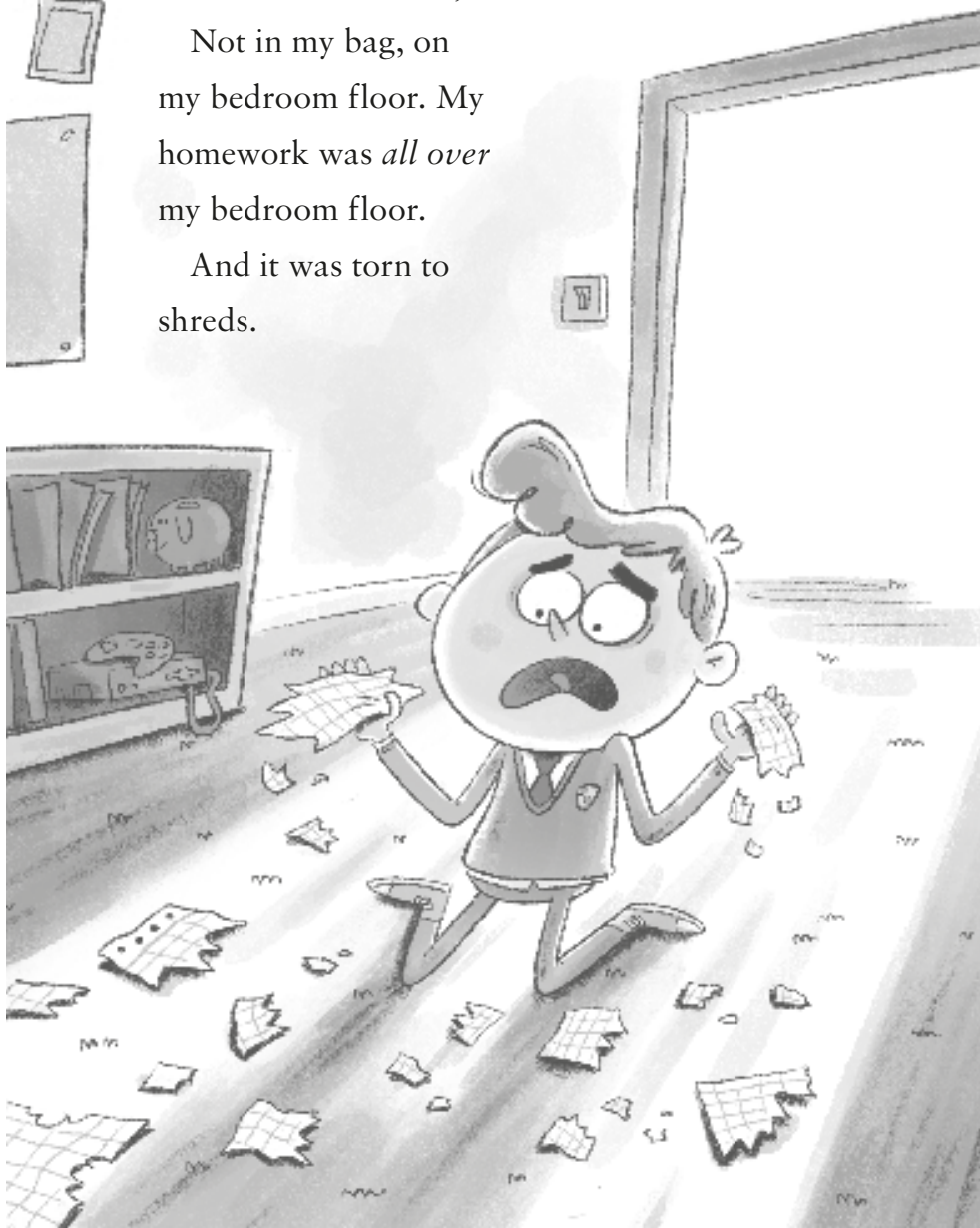
Miss Adwell just carried on with the lesson, but I could tell she was shaken. Her whole world had come crashing down around her ears, and I'd swung the wrecking ball. I could have lived in that moment for a week. Apart from meeting Shelter and that time I discovered I could raise one eyebrow, it was the best thing that ever happened to me.

The point is, I'm good at maths – copy-my-homework good. I'd already done my homework in Tuesday's lunch break, so I'd have more time to play with Shelter after school. Home is no place for homework.

Anyway, as I was saying, I went back to my room after breakfast, and there it was.

Not in my bag, on my bedroom floor. My homework was *all over* my bedroom floor.

And it was torn to shreds.



I'd spent a whole hour on it. Well, half an hour. The point is, I worked hard on that homework for a full thirteen minutes, and then, on the morning I had to hand it in, I found it ripped into considerably more than a hundred tiny pieces.

I was in trouble . . . but little did I know, my troubles had just begun.

'Hugh, school! Do you want a lift or not?' Mum shouted in her shouting voice. 'Do not make me late!'

Mum is a tennis coach. I don't know much about tennis, but Mum knows how to make a racket.

Before I knew it, she'd appeared in the doorway.

'Coat. Bag. Car. Now,' Mum said. 'I cannot be late agai— Oh, not *again*! Is – is that your homework?'

'*Was*,' I replied, inspecting the tattered paper. I could see random parts of numbers and

equations. 'It used to be my maths homework, but now something doesn't add up,' I added. 'Who did this?'

'What do you mean, who did— You know full well who did this!' Mum howled. She isn't usually one to point the finger, but today it pointed straight in the direction of my best friend.



I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

'Who, Shelter?' I asked, also not able to believe that I was saying what I think my mum was saying. Shelter barked at the sound of her name. She probably couldn't believe what she was hearing either.

'What are you saying? That Shelter ate my homework?' I asked, now not able to believe my own disbelief.

'Oh, come on,' Mum said, throwing up her arms. 'It's not like she doesn't have previous form when it comes to getting her teeth into things . . .'

'She wouldn't,' I said, staring at the scraps of paper on the floor. 'She wouldn't do that.'

'She *has* done that,' Mum replied. 'She's chewed my shoes. She's shredded my bed. She's munched my lunch.'

'But—'

'She's gnawed my keyboard, my cheeseboard, the floorboards . . . and what's worse, she ate

my purse! All that money! Do you think it's funny?' Mum continued. 'The *whole house* is covered in teeth marks, Hugh. This is the last straw – and she chewed my last straw! It's not even like she's our dog – not really.'



'She *is* our dog,' I corrected her, with a stifled sneeze. 'She's *my* dog.'

'And I told you, Hugh, if we had one more "incident", she was going to have to go.'

The pause hung in the air like damp laundry.

'Go?' I repeated. 'Go, where?'

'You know where,' Mum replied. Her words were as sharp as scissors, and her meaning was as blunt as safety scissors. 'If you – if *we* can't cope with her,' she continued, 'then we'll have to take Shelter to . . . the shelter.'

'No!' I protested. I glanced down at Shelter. If you believe what you read, dogs can understand up to one hundred-and-sixty-five words. I hoped Shelter wasn't paying attention.

'It wasn't her, Mum,' I said. 'She didn't do it. She *didn't*.'

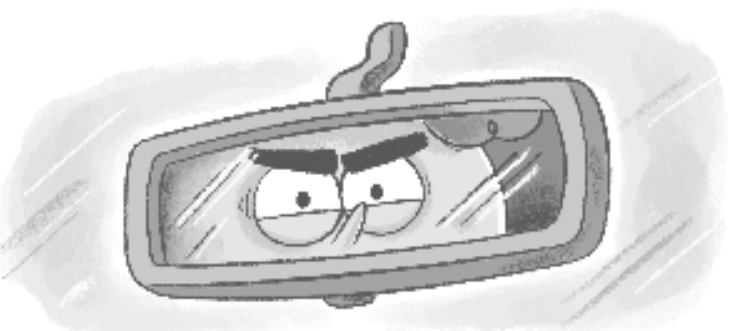
'Then who did, Hugh?'

'I – I . . .'

'Exactly,' interrupted Mum. She tutted and rubbed her eyes. She looked tired, like an old jumper or a song no one plays any more. 'Let's get you to school,' she said at last. 'But this conversation is not over, Hugh.'

And just like that, the conversation was over. Mum didn't say a word on the way to the car, but she'd already said it all. Her words rang in my

head like an unanswered telephone. They made my blood boil and chilled me to the core. Mum wanted to get rid of my best friend. I couldn't let that happen. That's when I realised, I had to clear Shelter's name. Just after that, I realised I had to do more than clear Shelter's name. Not only did I have to prove that Shelter had nothing to do with destroying my homework, I had to find out who did – I had to bring the real culprit to justice.



As we drove to school, I glanced in the rear-view mirror. *There's no looking back*, I thought. It was up to me to solve the Crime.

I was on the case.