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Greyhound of a Girl

Written by

Roddy Doyle

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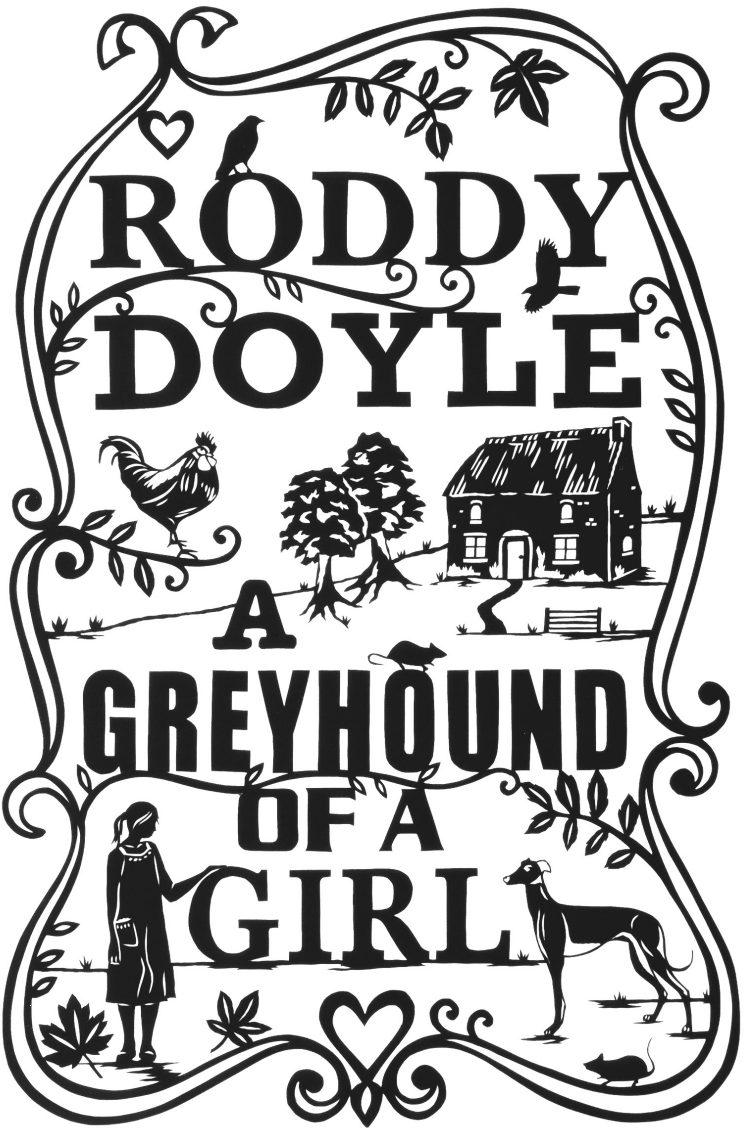
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RODDY DOYLE



A GREYHOUND OF A GIRL

Paper cut illustrations
Julene Harrison

mlb
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"But your dad wasn't a stranger."

"Yes, he was. He must have been."

"He wasn't strange," said her mother. "He was nice."

"Nice?" said Mary. "The nice fellas are the ones you should be worried about."

Her mother laughed.

"What's so funny?" said Mary.

"Who told you that?"

"Granny."

"I should have known," said her mother. "Well, never mind your granny."

"Don't talk to strangers, never mind your granny," said Mary. "I'll have no one left to talk to."

"But you know what I mean," said her mother.

"About strangers?"

"Yes."

"Don't worry," said Mary. "I won't talk to any."

But she did – now.

"How do you know about my granny?" she asked the woman.

"Ah sure, I just do," said the woman.

She stood back, and shimmered – kind of – as if she was stepping behind a sheet of clear plastic.

"It's life," she said – and she was solid again, and smiling.

But Mary was a bit scared, and cold.

"I have to go," she said.

"Right, so," said the woman.

She didn't step out of the way. She didn't seem to

move at all. But, even so, she must have, because she wasn't in front of Mary any more.

Mary walked quickly to her gate. She heard the woman behind her.

"Do one small thing for me, Mary."

Mary turned.

"Tell your granny it'll all be grand," said the woman – she was still smiling.

"How did you know my name?" Mary asked her.

"Sure, half the girls in Ireland are called Mary," said the woman.

"No, they aren't," said Mary. "I'm the only one on our road."

"Well, they were all called Mary in my day," said the woman. "Off you go, so. I'll see you the next time."

The next time? Mary should have been worried, even frightened. She *was* worried, and a bit frightened. But not nearly as much as she thought she should have been. This woman had come out of nowhere. She knew Mary's name and all about her granny – Mary should have been terrified. But she wasn't. Something about the woman, the way she spoke, her face, her smile – she seemed familiar. Mary didn't know her – but she *did*.

She wasn't terrified. But, still, she ran to the front door and rang the bell instead of getting her key from her school bag. As she rang the bell she turned. But the woman had gone.

She heard the door opening.

"Mary!"

It was her mother.
"How was school?!"
"Stupid."
She went straight past her mother, into the hall.
"What's your hurry?!"
"I'm starving."



Losing your best friend was heartbreaking but some things about it weren't too bad. So far, Mary had been promised new jeans, two new tops, a trip to the cinema, and French toast for her lunch two days in a row.

There was no smell of French toast when her mother opened the door but that was okay, because Mary was the one who was going to make it. She'd decided to become a chef.

"Great idea!" said her mother.

"Stop talking like that," said Mary.

"Like what?!"

"Like !!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Oh, no!" said her mother, whose name was Scarlett. "I don't talk like that! Do I?!"

"Yes, you do."

"What?! Always?!"

"Yes!"

"I'm sorry!" Scarlett whispered.

"Even your whispers end in !!!s," Mary whispered back.

"You said you wanted to be a chef."

"That's right."

"A world famous chef, I think you said."

"Right again."

"So, what do you concentrate on first?! 'World', or 'famous', or 'chef'?!"

This was the kind of question Mary loved, so she gave it some thought.

"Chef," she said, after about ten seconds.

"I think you're right!" said Scarlett.

"I know I am," said Mary. "You have to be a chef before you can be a famous one."

"Yes!"

"The same way, like, I'd have to murder someone if I wanted to become a world famous murderer," said Mary. "Not that I'm looking at anyone in particular."

Cheekiness was often a sign of intelligence. So Scarlett usually liked it when Mary was being cheeky. *My brainy daughter has insulted me yet again!* Sometimes, though, it was just tiring, and even Mary's snores sounded cheeky.

"Oh, shut up, Mary!" said Scarlett.

And Mary did. Because, if cheekiness was often a sign of intelligence, so was keeping your mouth shut.

The plan was, Mary would cook something different