THE GREAT DOG Disaster

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SIMON AND SCHUSTER

Thanks to Alan, and my Mum and Dad,
and to Clare at Conville and Walsh and
Venetia at Simon and Schuster

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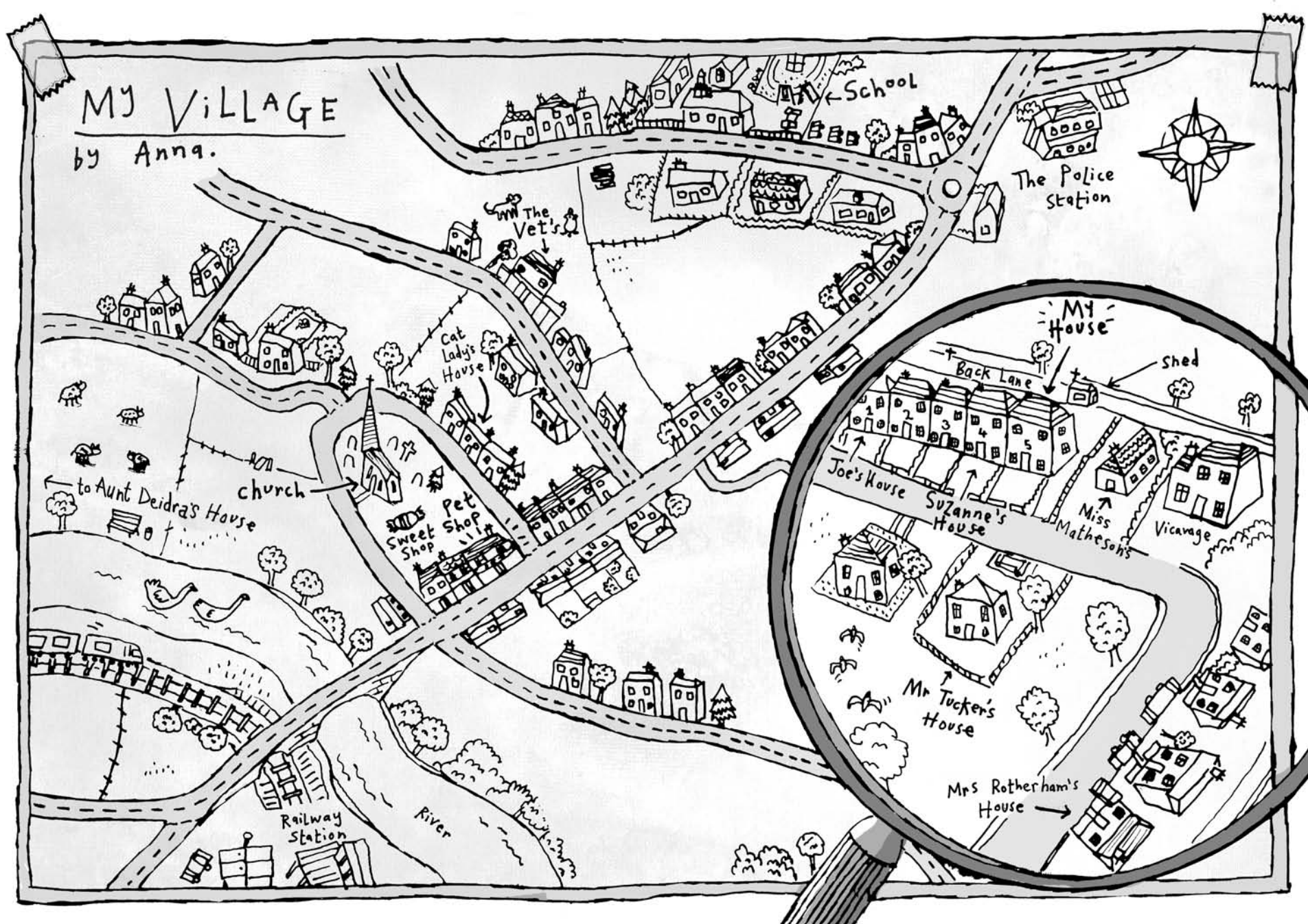
For the Davis boys,
before you're all too big


MY VILLAGE
by Anna.
School
The Police Station
The Vet's
Cat Lady's House
church
to Aunt Deidra's House
Sweet Shop
Pet Shop
Railway Station
River
MY House
Back Lane
Shed
1
2
3
4
5
Joe's House
Suzanne's House
Miss Matheson's
Vicarage
Mr Tucker's House
Mrs Rotherham's House

CHAPTER 1

An Actual Disaster

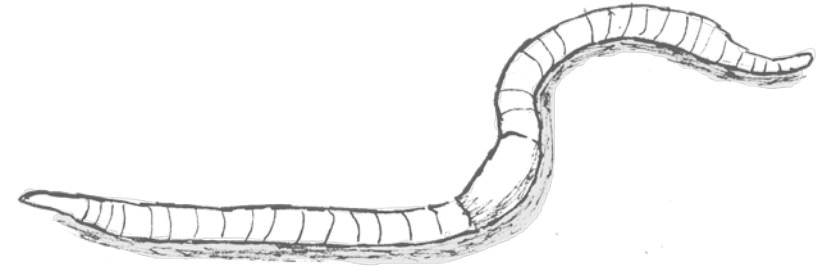
This is a story about my friend Suzanne, and her dog, and me, and Tom, and the Great Dog Disaster. Most of the time, when people say, "Oh, it's a disaster!" it probably isn't. Like when Dad's watching football, and they're one nil up, and the whistle's going to go, and the keeper gets an own goal. Or when Mum's been to the shops, and put the bags in the boot, and slammed it shut, and locked the car keys inside it. Or when it's Mrs Constantine's Sunday

School Concert, and Emma Hendry starts her solo, and her hair gets set on fire by Graham Roberts' christingle candle. Those things might be bad (especially for Emma Hendry, because her hair had never been cut before and she had to have a bob), but they aren't actual disasters. Because I looked 'disaster' up, in my dictionary, and this is what it said . . .

disaster [di-zas-ter] ✦ *noun*
a calamitous event, occurring suddenly
and causing great harm, or death

The Great Dog Disaster *was* an Actual Disaster though. It got on the news, and in the paper, and me and Tom and Suzanne had our photos taken and everything.

Tom is my brother. He's five. He's four years younger than me. I'm nine. My name is Anna. I've got another brother and a sister too, but they're not in this story because they're older than me and Tom and they don't really care about dogs, and disasters, and things that me and Suzanne do. Anyway, even though lots of people have heard about the Great Dog Disaster, it's only me who knows exactly what happened. Because there are some things about it that I have never told anyone. And I'm going to put those in this story as well. And when it's finished I'll put my notebook in the shed, on the shelf, where no one will see it, behind the worms, and the wasp trap, and the piccalilli jar that's got all Suzanne's stitches in.



CHAPTER 2

The Guillotine

Suzanne lives next door. Her surname is Barry. Mine and Suzanne's bedrooms are right next to each other. The wall between our house and the Barrys' house is so thin that if you put your ear against the wall in our house, you can hear all the things the Barrys' are doing on their side. When Mum sees me with my ear against the wall, she says, "For goodness' sake, Anna, can't you think of anything better to do than eavesdropping on next door?"

And I say, "No." Because if I *could* think of something better to do, I would have done that in the first place. Listening in on

the Barrys is pretty good because you hear lots of things, like when it's time for lunch, and whether it's lentil soup, and how afterwards Suzanne's Dad can't come out of the toilet, and if Suzanne's that desperate she'll have to,

'GO IN THE GARDEN!'

Anyway, like I told Mum, I'm not the only one that eavesdrops. Because Suzanne listens in on *us* from her side of the wall as well. And in the morning, when we're walking to school, we tell each other all the things we heard happen through the wall the night before.

Me and Suzanne don't just listen through the wall. We talk through it too. It's not that

easy talking through a wall, unless you shout, but me and Suzanne can't do that because most of the things we need to say are secrets. We've tried millions of ways of talking through the wall. We put them on a list and pinned it up in the shed. The shed is out the back, in the lane, and only me and Suzanne are allowed to go in it. Except Tom, when he wants to, but most of the time he's busy doing other things, like talking to Mr Tucker, or collecting gravel, or trying to walk in a straight line with his eyes closed.

ANNA'S AND SUZANNE'S LIST OF ALL THE WAYS WE HAVE TRIED FOR TALKING THROUGH THE WALL AND WHY WE HAD TO STOP AND TRY SOMETHING ELSE INSTEAD

WAY FOR TALKING THROUGH THE WALL:	WHY IT DIDN'T WORK:
Dig a tunnel through the wall to join our bedrooms together	Suzanne's Dad looked under her bed, and saw where we had started digging, and banned us from Suzanne's bedroom
Climb out of our bedroom windows and sit on our window ledges and talk out there	Mum got bolts put into our window frames, and now we can't open them wide enough to climb out

WAY FOR TALKING THROUGH THE WALL:	WHY IT DIDN'T WORK:
Talk on the walkie-talkies that Mrs Rotherham gave us	Suzanne's Dad confiscated them to stop us talking on them at night
Get the wall knocked down by doing a petition	Only me, Suzanne, and Mrs Rotherham signed it, so Suzanne's Mum said it didn't count

WAY FOR TALKING THROUGH THE WALL:	WHY IT DIDN'T WORK:
Climb up in the loft, and talk through the hole where the bricks are missing	Mum put a lock on the loft hatch after we made the ceiling fall in

After all the ways on the list stopped working, me and Suzanne had to find a new way to talk through the wall. What we do now is knock three times to check the coast is clear, and then we open our bedroom windows as far as they will go, up to the bolts, and stick our heads out. It's not that good talking with

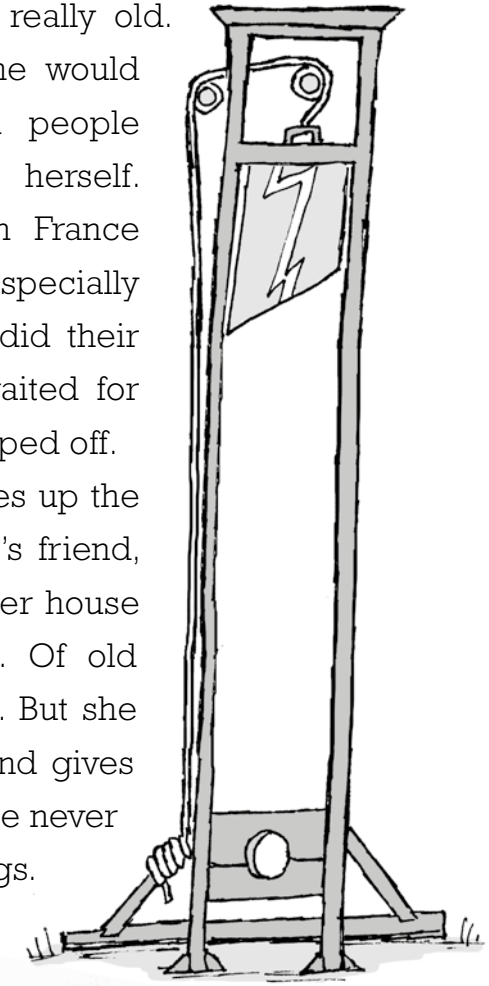
your head hanging out of the window. Because you have to bend right over, and the window frame digs into your neck, and if it's raining your head gets wet. When Mrs Rotherham walked past and saw me and Suzanne with our heads sticking out, she said, "Hello up there. You girls look as though you're about to be guillotined. Beautiful morning for it!"

I know all about guillotines because we did them at school with Mrs Peters. This is what it says a guillotine is in my dictionary...

guillotine [gil-uh-teen] ◆ *noun*
a device for beheading a person by means of a heavy blade dropped between two posts: widely used during the French Revolution, particularly the Reign of Terror between 1793 and 1794

Mrs Rotherham is really old. If she was French she would probably have seen people getting guillotined herself. Because everyone in France went to watch. Especially the old ladies. They did their knitting while they waited for the heads to get chopped off.

Mrs Rotherham lives up the road. She was Nanna's friend, before Nanna died. Her house smells a bit strange. Of old things, and mothballs. But she always asks you in, and gives you ice cream, and she never tells you not to do things.



Anyway, after Mrs Rotherham said we looked like we were in a guillotine, me and Suzanne started pretending that we were, and saying things in French, like ''bonjour'' and ''zut alors'', and ''OFF WIZ ZER 'EADS!'' And making the sound of the blades dropping down. And Suzanne pulls her head inside so it looks like it's been sliced off. And I scream, and make choking sounds and pretend my guillotine's gone wrong, and my head's still hanging on. Only I have to do it quietly, because if Mum hears she comes in and says, ''Don't play guillotines please, girls. It's not a good game.'' (Which isn't actually true, because it *is* a good game and, like Suzanne said, Mum wouldn't know because she's probably never played it.)

Sometimes, when we're in the guillotine, me and Suzanne can see Mr Tucker opposite. Mr Tucker is old as well. Even older than Mrs Rotherham. He was in The War. Flying planes, and fighting, and blowing stuff up and all that. Mr Tucker doesn't fly planes anymore. Apart from pretend ones with Tom. Most of the time he just goes up and down the road, picking up the litter, and checking how much rain there is in his rain gauge and spotting what kind the clouds are.