

## Leaving Sunny Hills

I couldn't believe my eyes when I first saw number 13 Crag Road. No wonder everyone at the Sunny Hills Children's Home had sniggered when I'd said it was going to be my new home.

Everything about number 13 was crooked. Its walls were crooked, its chimneys were crooked. Even its doors and windows were crooked.

It looked like it was



going to fall over any second.

But crooked or not, number 13 was my new home. You see, the two ladies who owned the place, Grizz and Wormella Mint, had adopted me.

My name's Anna Kelly. I don't have any parents, and I have never had a proper home. I've been at Sunny Hills Children's Home since I was a tiny baby. By the time I was nine, so many people had decided NOT to adopt me that I had grown used to the idea of spending the rest of my life at Sunny Hills.

But I wasn't happy about it, not one bit. Well, *you* try sleeping six to a room in a big old barn of a place, and see how much *you* like it. You couldn't call anything your own at Sunny Hills!

So when Grizz and Wormella turned up, promising me a pink-and-white bedroom with its own private bathroom, a posh new school, new clothes, weekly pocket money and my own TV, I felt like I'd won the Lotto!

They had been *so* sweet in Mrs Pegg's office. *So* sweet and *so* keen to have me. Very, very keen.

‘Anna, darling,’ the skinny one had cooed. ‘You’ll have the run of the house! You’ll be able to do exactly as you like!’

‘Thanks, Miss!’ I said.

‘Call me “aunty”, dear,’ she crooned.

The run of the house! Able to do what I wanted! That suited me just fine. I was used to a lot of rules and regulations at Sunny Hills. It was porridge at 7.00am, lights out at 9.00pm, that kind of thing.

But *now!* Now life was looking up! The two old dears’ only wish was to pamper me. I’d get new clothes, new toys ... and I’d be going to the nicest school in town, St Munchin’s!

I’d always *really* wanted to go there. The place had everything – outings, after-school clubs, and sports. Lots and lots of sports. This was brilliant because I was mad keen on football – and I wasn’t bad at it either, if I do say so myself.

All in all, St Munchin’s sounded like something out of a storybook.

‘It’s a brand new start for you, Anna Kelly,’ Mrs

Pegg said, as she bundled me into the cab with the two ladies. She bent and put her lips close to my ear.

‘*Don’t* muck it up!’ she hissed. ‘Do as you’re told. Keep your room tidy. And above all, Anna ...’ Mrs Pegg’s voice dropped to a whisper. ‘*Try* to keep that stubborn streak of yours under control!’

Stubborn? Me? Just because I had staged a sit-down protest to force the management to give us chips every Friday. It wasn’t my fault the whole of Sunny Hills joined in ...

So I promised Mrs Pegg I’d be a model child – and I had every intention of keeping that promise. This was my big chance, and it was going to get me out of Sunny Hills for good.

I must admit, though, I had a lump in my throat when I looked out of the back window of the car, and saw Mrs Pegg wiping her eyes with her hanky. She wasn’t a bad old stick, after all – and she was the closest thing I had to a mother.

But I swallowed hard, faced the front, and thought about the fantastic new life ahead of me.

It took exactly a minute after arriving at number 13 Crag Road for me to realise I'd made a mistake. A big, BIG mistake.

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As soon as the front door slammed behind me, my two new aunts changed. Especially Grizz, the skinny one.

In Mrs Pegg's office, Grizz had been kindness itself, all smiles in every direction. Now she planted herself in the hallway and pointed a long fingernail up the gloomy stairs.

'Right,' she barked. 'Show the girl to her room, Wormella.'

The *girl*? Was that meant to be *me*? What happened to 'Anna, darling'?

'Yes, sister,' piped Wormella.

In contrast to Grizz, who seemed to have grown taller and pointier since she got home, Wormella seemed to shrink into a small, pudgy ball. She pattered up the stairs in front of me, leaving me to



carry my heavy bags by myself.

My bedroom turned out to be a tiny, dusty little attic with bare floorboards. No TV, no wardrobe, and no bathroom. Just a hard little bed and a

battered cardboard box to keep my things in.

I was horrified.

‘Aunt Wormella,’ I began – but she had disappeared down the stairs without another word.

It didn’t take long to settle in – there wasn’t room to swing a hamster, let alone a cat. I wandered back downstairs to the brown, dirty kitchen and peeped through the open door.

The two sisters were sitting hunched over a wooden table, giggling like naughty schoolgirls. The air was foggy with the steam that poured from a huge, black cauldron bubbling on the cooker.

‘Now that we’ve got a dogsbody to do all the dirty work,’ Grizz was saying to Wormella. ‘Our spells are bound to start working!’

Dogsbody? Dirty work? *Spells*? What were they talking about?

‘Ahem!’ I coughed.

The aunts looked up, startled.

‘Have some nettle tea, dear,’ said Wormella quickly. She handed me a chipped mug and a plate.

‘Help yourself to bread and butter.’

I sat down and took a bite of the bread. It was gritty like it was made out of gravel or something, and the butter on top wasn’t yellow – it was *grey*.

I gulped a mouthful of tea. That was disgusting too, and tasted like nettles mixed with wee, but at least it washed down the bread.

‘Thank you,’ I said, and tried to smile as I pushed the mug and plate away.

‘Right, girl, rules of the house,’ barked Grizz. ‘Number one: you will work hard. Number two: you will work hard. Number three: you will work hard.’

Grizz howled with laughter at her own joke and then folded her arms.

‘That’s all,’ she said. ‘Goodnight.’

And that was that. The end of my first day in my new home.