

# ROS ROBERTS

# EVERY CLOUD

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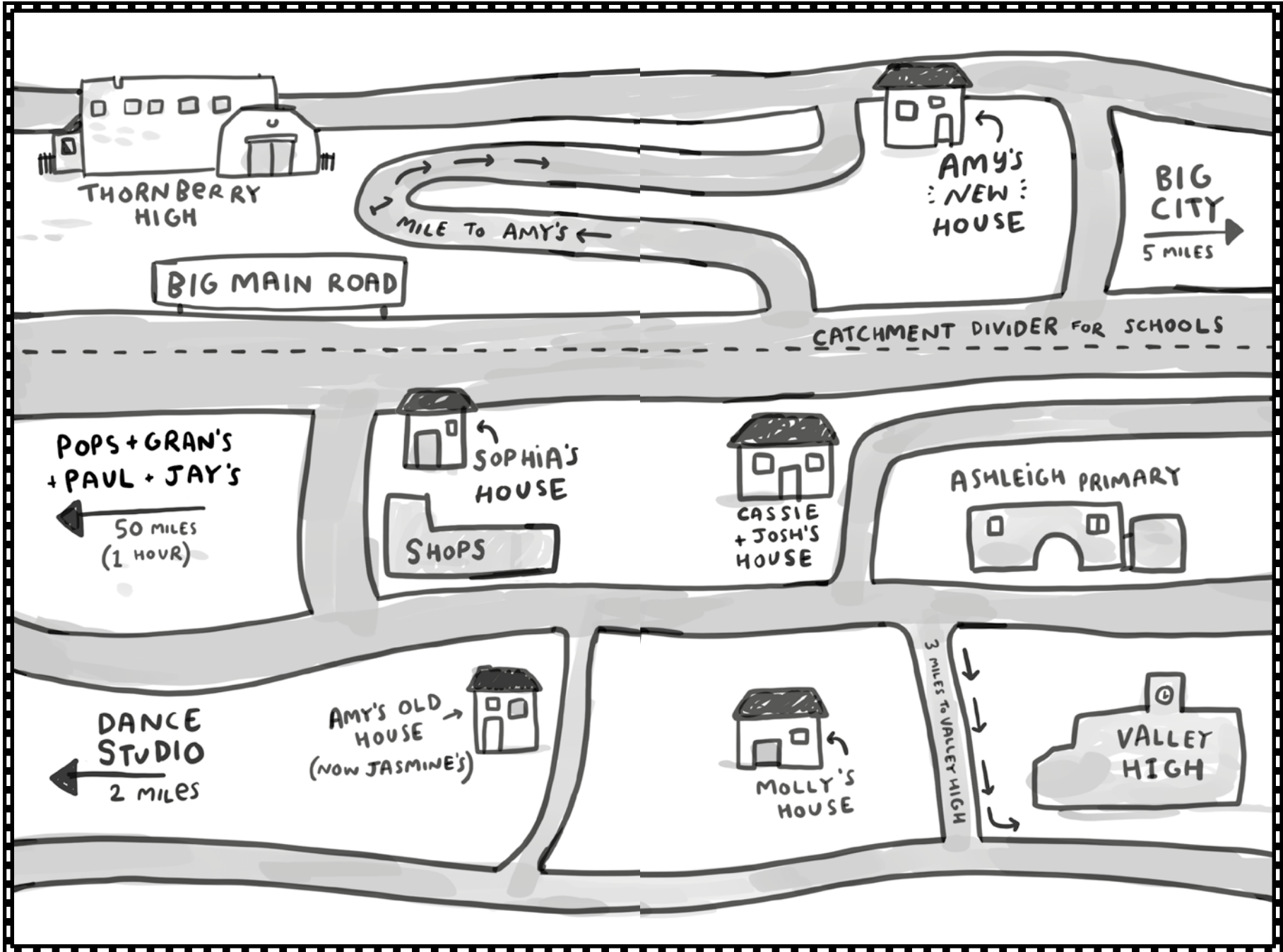
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LITTLE TIGER  
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*For my eldest son – inventor of home sw—*





## One

“The thing I can’t understand,” says Cassie, slanting her eyes at me and redoing her ponytail as if she needs to drag this out a bit, “is how you’ve got a place at our high school. I mean, Sophia actually lives *in* the catchment area, right on the edge near the road, and she’s only *just* got in. So how can you have a place when you’re miles away?”

I look down at the playground tarmac and roll my shoe over some loose pebbles.

“Ames used to live in the village,” says Molly, resting her head on my shoulder. Her hair smells of peaches. It always does. “Right near me. Surely that’s enough, and she goes to Ashleigh, like us. She *has* to come to Valley High.”

“I am,” I say, shuffling on the bench. “Mum and Dad told me right at the beginning that they would make sure it was all OK.”

Cassie shrugs and looks across at the field. “I don’t know how, that’s all,” she says. Molly lifts her head off my shoulder.

I feel her elbow Cassie to make her stop. "Of course I hope you *do* have a place with us," says Cassie. "But the rules are you have to live in the catchment area in October and you moved *ages* ago."

*The rules are...* Who does Cassie think she is? The prime minister?

"It wasn't ages ago," says Molly.

"It was last summer," I say.

"Oh," says Molly. She turns to me. I'm looking at my shoes but I can feel her staring at me, as if she's just got really worried about it.

"My parents promised," I say quietly, as if I don't quite believe them myself now. "They said when we moved, they would make sure I still got in. Lots of kids go to Valley High from far away."

"Yeah," says Cassie. "But my mum says they've built tons of new houses since then and that changes everything."

I bite my lip. I want to tell Cassie to shut up. *My mum says...* Who is she today? The queen of high school placements?

But I am feeling uneasy in my tummy.

"It'll be hard," says Cassie, jumping off the bench, "for us to stay triple besties if we're not together." She glances at me and Molly, but we just stare ahead and don't say anything.

One of the lunch staff opens the big door and props it open, about to call us in.

"Well, I'm just saying," says Cassie, "you weren't on the list this morning for Wednesday's Year Seven visit. I saw it on Miss Riley's desk." She walks over to the doors and waits with Sophia.

*Well, I'm just saying...* I mimic under my breath.

"I wish she'd stop with this triple bestie thing," says Molly. "She told Jess the other day that she couldn't hang out with us. It's not right."

"I know," I say and I lean in to her.

"You must be on the list," she says. "Let's ask this afternoon. Come on." But I can't move. I feel sick. I stare at the ground, at my feet. I'm cold all over. Why wasn't I on the list? Last week I gave Mum the letter to order my uniform and it's still on the side, under her diary. Molly showed me her bus pass that arrived yesterday. I don't know anything about a bus.

We walk over to join the others. I don't think I can eat a thing.

"Are you sure you moved in the summer?" asks Molly, her arm wrapped in mine. "I think it was later."

"I'm sure," I say and I remember the removal men, dripping with sweat in the summer heat, coming up to my

room to take all my boxes, me tucked in the corner of my bed, staring at the clouds painted on the ceiling for the very last time. Mum promised my new bedroom ceiling would have clouds. Bigger, better, whiter, fluffier clouds but the ceiling is still mucky white and cracked.

“Actually, you’re right,” says Molly, hugging her packed lunch box to her chest. “We had that sleepover in the new garden before school went back.” I nod. “And we came to your house at Halloween, do you remember?”

How could I forget?

“We hid in that cupboard,” says Molly, “and scared ourselves silly. And Cassie screamed when the floorboards squeaked.” I smile a little, as if I remember it as fun. But it wasn’t fun to me. It was horrid. I hated the new house. I still do. It’s old and ugly and the shower works in one tiny spurt, like a broken hosepipe.

“It was so fun,” says Molly, laughing out loud. “Maxi wore that pumpkin Babygro with the matching hat.” I smile at that. He did look super cute. “Remember your mum hung doughnuts on the washing line and we had that race to see who could eat the most? And Sophia won. And then we wrapped your dad in toilet paper, like a mummy. We did his crutches too. And your gran was there, in her giant witch’s hat and she made those eyeball cakes!”

I smile and nod and I’m glad Molly has a good memory of that night, even if I don’t. I think it was one of the first times we really knew Pops wasn’t well. He ate a whole plate of biscuits, every one of them. And then he got really upset at the costumes and noise and Gran had to take him home early, her witch’s hat shoved on the back shelf of the car, its pointy top all twisted.

We sit in our usual Year 6 spot. Cassie is up at the counter. We open our packed lunches. Mum’s put a note in.

*Amy – sorry there’s no yoghurt. Love you x*

“I wish you hadn’t moved away,” says Molly.

“Yeah, me too,” I say and I take out my tuna wrap and I feel suddenly very tearful thinking about the list of names for Valley High. The list I’m pretty sure my name’s not on.