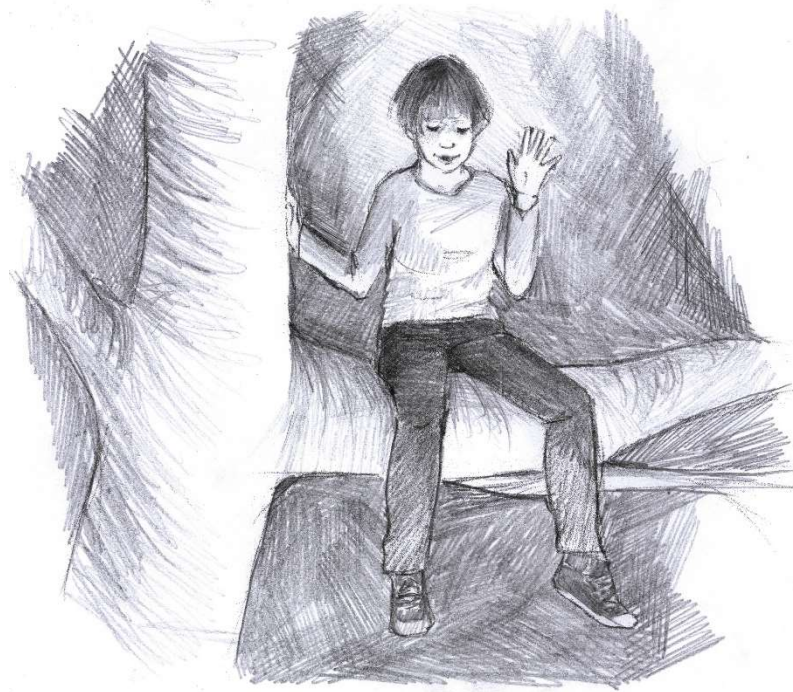


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A free Anne Katrine Activity Book is available at
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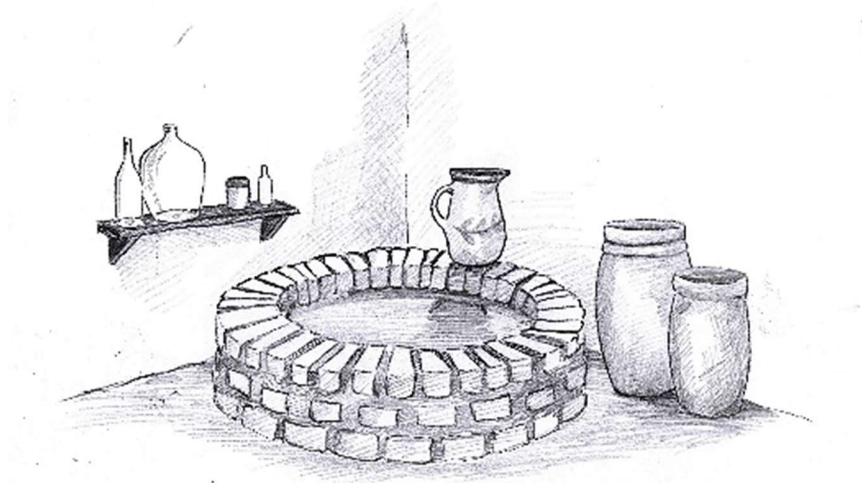


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One: The Horribles



My name is pronounced Ann-eh Kah-treen-eh. It's a Danish name. I was named after my Grandmother. She didn't like nicknames and said I should never allow anyone to call me anything but my proper name. She felt very strongly about this – so I do, too. Grandmother was one of my favorite people. She took care of me while my Mom and Dad were working. We did all kinds of cool things together.

Grandmother grew up in Denmark. She met Grandpa while they were in college. Not long ago she promised to tell me an incredible secret when I turned eleven on my next birthday. She said it was a secret that would change my life forever. But, before that happened, she died, and when she did it turned my life upside down. Not only did I have to figure out how to get along without her, but Mom and Daddy had to leave for Denmark to sell some property that she owned there. So, they said I had to spend the summer in Pennsylvania with my Uncle Oskar and Aunt Jess and my two cousins Neena and Leena. I met them, for the first time, when

they came to Grandmother's funeral. Grandmother and Aunt Jess had "had words" a long time ago. They never made-up. My cousins and Aunt Jess talked to each other, but not to me.

I told Mom and Daddy a hundred times that I was old enough to travel with them to Denmark and that I wouldn't be a bother. But they wouldn't listen. I finally said, "Please, Daddy, let me go with you. Neena and Leena don't like me." His answer was, "Nonsense, they don't even know you. We will be back before you know it." And that was that.

I'd lived in the Pennsylvania house when I was little but when we got there, I didn't recognize anything. Large trees made a shady canopy over the long, bumpy driveway and made it hard to see the potholes. Big holes, little holes, no matter which way Daddy swerved, the car fell into them. Mom said, "My goodness!" and grabbed the dashboard even though she was wearing a seat belt. Daddy drove so slowly it seemed to take forever. When we got through the woods, we felt jostled half to death. After emerging from the woods, the driveway sloped up a hill and I saw the house.

The yard around the house looked huge. The grass behind it sloped down into a meadow. At the bottom of the meadow was a creek. Daddy once told me that the house was built before the Revolutionary War. It was a big house for that time in history: two full stories and an attic. It was built of stones that were dug up from the surrounding fields. Everything looked really, REALLY old.

Inside the house there was a place where the paint had chipped off the wall and you could see layers of different colored wallpaper underneath. The basement floor was dirt. It had been packed down so hard it felt like cement. In one

corner of the basement there was a small, cold-water spring used by the early settlers. There were lots of springs around here in Colonial days. They popped up from underground streams and bubbled around rocks in the ground. The colonists would drink from them or use the icy water like we use a refrigerator. Sometimes, they would build a little stone house around a spring. This house never had a separate springhouse, instead, the whole house had been built on top of a spring. Bricks had been put around this one. It was just like a wishing well or a big tub, right in the basement!

When Daddy took me to see it. I dipped my hand into the clear water. It was freezing cold. Daddy said that the house was built over the spring so that if the farm became a battle ground, the family could hide in the basement and they would have water to drink. Then he laughed and said that Grandmother told him that elves who lived in the woods sometimes snuck into the basement and used the well as a bathtub.

After Mom and Daddy left for Denmark, I told this story at dinner one night; Aunt Jess sneered. She said there were no such things as elves. She said that my Dad and his mother (Aunt Jess won't call her Grandmother) had filled my head with a bunch of nonsense. She said that only crazy people talked about elves as though they were real. If Daddy were here, she wouldn't dare say that. I spoke up and defended him.

I looked straight at her and said in a polite but definite sort of voice, "I know my Dad was joking...the water in that well is much too cold to take a bath in." Uncle Oskar's sudden laughter surprised me. Wiping a speck of mashed potatoes from the side of his mouth with his thumb he said, "Anne

Katrine, you crack me up!” Neena started laughing and then glanced at her Mom. Aunt Jess was glowering at Uncle Oskar, so instead of laughing Neena crossed her eyes at me. Uncle Oskar went quiet, put his head down and ate his mashed potatoes. We finished dinner in silence.

My first week at the house, I tried to help Aunt Jess without even being asked. It was dark and spooky down in the basement which scared me. Although I was afraid, I went down there to bring my clothes up from the dryer. I folded my clean clothes and made a tower, pressing my chin against the socks and my new diary, so they wouldn't fall off the stack. I didn't see Cousin Neena standing at the top of the stairs. Neena didn't mind it being spooky and cold. She was like a snake and kept her exercise equipment down there. She clattered down the steps as I was starting up and stood in front of me.

“Back up brat.”

When I moved to the side she hopped back and forth so I couldn't get past. She jumped down the last two steps and bumped me. I lost my balance and fell, hard. I started to cry. Her long face split into a thin-lipped grin.

“Cry-baby, cry-baby.”

As I picked up my diary and the scattered clothes, she hit her punching bag. It went thumpity-thump and hit me on the head. Now I was mad. I ran upstairs into the kitchen and told Uncle Oskar and Aunt Jess what had happened. Aunt Jess said, I was being a tattle-tail in a *don't bother me* tone of voice. Uncle Oskar, who was reading the paper, didn't even look up. He just said, in his soft voice, “Try to get along,

Sweetie.” Aunt Jess pursed her lips and glared at Uncle Oskar and spat out, “What did I tell you? She’s a troublemaker, just like her snobby, high-fallutin’ mother!” She slammed the cupboard door so hard the dishes rattled. Uncle Oskar put down his newspaper. He didn’t raise his head or look in my direction but studied the floor as if searching for ants. The air in the kitchen was exceedingly quiet and very unpleasant. Uncle Oskar said I’d better go outside.

I dumped my laundry on a chair and snatched up my diary. As the screen door banged closed behind me. Aunt Jess shrieked, “Don’t slam that door! And look at those clothes...they’re all dirty!” I didn’t stop but ran into the back yard and launched myself onto the lawn swing. After getting settled, I pushed against the opposite seat with my toes to start swinging. Swinging usually makes me feel better, but the unhappy thoughts wouldn’t stop.

Daddy said I’d like spending a whole summer in Pennsylvania. He said I would love the woods – that I might see some wild animals. Huh! The woods are scary, and the only wild animal I’ve seen around here is squinty-eyed cousin Neena. I rubbed my new black and blue spot. It hurt. I leaned back and watched the fluffy white clouds moving across the sky and thought of the promise I’d made Grandmother. I had promised to write in my diary every day. This is the very first diary I’ve ever owned. She gave it to me. It is red leather and has a little gold lock with a real key. She said I should write about everyday things – about what I was feeling. She said it would plant things in my memory. She gave me three reasons to write every day: she said that if I were sad, it would make me feel better, if I were perplexed it would help me see

things more clearly, and if I were happy, it was a great way to remember what made me feel that way.

“OK,” I said to myself, “it’s not the same as talking to you or as much fun as writing make-believe stories, but I’ll do it!” I suddenly felt terribly angry and fierce. I took a deep breath, I turned the golden key, opened the lock, and began:

June 28 Sunday.

This place stinks!

I hit the period so hard my pen almost tore through the page. I giggled. Grandmother was very proper. She said I shouldn’t use a word like *stinks* – she said it was vulgar and lacked imagination. She said that someone as smart as me should be creative with language. I didn’t feel creative. I felt angry. I didn’t even care if anyone heard me. I sort of shouted it out (but not too loudly):

“This place stinks! Stinks! Stinks! Stinks!”

I almost felt cheerful. I continued writing:

I am spending the summer with my cousins Neena and Leena – THE HORRIBLES.

Neena is mean. She is two years older than I am. She is tall and skinny. The muscles in her arms are as hard as rocks. She says I was Grandmother’s pet. She teases me and won’t say my name right. She calls me Annie Pee-Treena or Ka-Tinkle. She makes me so mad sometimes I cry.

Cousin Leena is six. She is beautiful. She looks like an old-fashioned doll. She has big blue eyes, and curly, red hair that Aunt Jess combs into long sausage curls. She always wears a big bow in her hair. I’d like to have hair like

that. My hair is brown. It is short with straight bangs. Mr. George, the hairstylist at Mom's salon, calls it a Dutch Boy Cut. When Leena wants something, she begs with silly baby talk. She says, "Pweeze, pwitee-pweeze, can I have it Mummykins?" And she gets what she wants. She is so spoiled. Aunt Jess thinks she is perfect. DUH!

Uncle Oskar is Dad's younger brother. I like him. He's nice to me. He smokes a pipe. He lost his job and is looking for a new one.

When Mom and Daddy got married, Grandmother gave the Pennsylvania house to them and they promised to take care of her when she was old.

We moved to Chicago when I was three because Daddy got a new job there. Grandmother came with us. Uncle Oskar and his family needed a place to live, so Daddy and Mom said they could live here.

I like to make up stories. The fireplace in the kitchen is awesome. It is so big I can stand up in it. Yesterday I put a chair in it so I could write there.

Aunt Jess says I drive her crazy with my writing, so now I do it in the lawn swing. I'll stay out here and write while Aunt Jess and Uncle Oskar are fighting.

Aunt Jess just yelled that my Dad cheated Uncle Oskar out of owning this house. That's a lie! Daddy wouldn't cheat anyone.

Something crashed. It sounded like dishes breaking.

Oh, oh! Neena came around the corner of the house and saw me. Before I could get out of the swing, she grabbed my arm. "What's happening, Ka-tinkle?" She held on to me so tightly it made white dents in my arm where her fingers dug into my skin.

"I don't know." I squirmed, trying to get away, but she squeezed tighter and tighter.

"Your Mom's mad about something." I didn't want to cry but tears came anyway.

"Look out, Wimp." Neena shoved me aside and then ran across the backyard and bounded up the steps. There is nothing she likes better than watching a fight - unless it's starting one. Leena followed her sister. She skipped across the grass singing a new song in her baby voice, "Wimpy, wimpy, wimpy, ka-tinkle, tinkle, tinkle." She can be so annoying.

I realized that if Neena finds out I've been complaining about her, I'm in for it. I grabbed my diary and made a "bee line" down the path, past Uncle Oskar's flagpole. I ran through the meadow and into the woods. At first it was dark and scary, but after a while my eyes adjusted, and it didn't seem that dark at all. The woods felt a lot safer than being up at the house. I decided I would stay hidden until the shouting stopped. I don't like fighting. I don't like it at all.