

# Joanne's puzzle

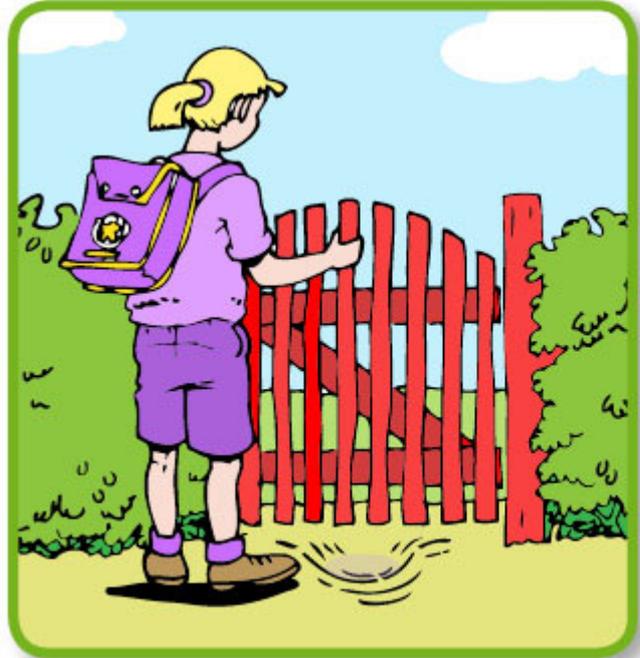
There was an eerie silence in the street as Joanne walked home from school. Puzzled, she looked around. Everything seemed normal. Some kids were chasing each other up ahead, and a truck rumbled noisily along the road. Just an ordinary afternoon, so why did everything seem stiller than usual?

Joanne dismissed the feeling of disquiet and began planning her afternoon. She decided to take Zeppo, her dog, for a walk before settling down to hours of homework.

She looked at the familiar old red gate and stopped. Something was wrong. The hollow of dirt underneath it was empty. She dropped her bag on the footpath, pushed open the gate and rushed around to the back door. Bursting into the kitchen, Joanne shouted at her mother, 'Where's Zeppo?'

'Oh, Joanne,' whispered her mother. 'We should have done something about that gate. He got out under it again and ran out on the road. The driver took him to the vet, but . . .'

'Is he dead, is he?' Joanne's voice was harsh.



'Sorry darling.' She stretched out her arms but Joanne pushed past her and ran to her bedroom.

The words were swirling around in her brain. 'Sorry darling.' And after the words there was only emptiness.

Her mother came to the door. 'I've made your favourite cake,' she said. Joanne didn't answer. 'You might feel like eating it after a while.' She put the plate down and left Joanne alone.

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