

To: CAIRO

■■■■■¹ told me I can send this through the 'diplomatic bag' to avoid the censors. I hope it works. If not: *hello censors!* After you told me last night, I looked it all up online & it left me speechless. I know you are cross with me because of what I said about the word 'massacre' so let me try again... I meant that the word is meaningless to me because it's entirely beyond my frame of reference. It's a word, begins with M, after that my brain collapses, really. A line from your Glasgow letter sticks in my mind: 'There you are sitting next to your Christmas trees with your family but your trees may fall down, it's not as far away as you think.' Which is what my new book is about. (**don't you see how guilty I feel when I say I can't clearly comprehend it?**)

You of all people know how I feel about massacres involving children, or anyone. You asked me to tell you about the dream so I will: Scout woke early, 5am, I let her come into bed with me & we fell back to sleep. I dreamt we were together in a dark, narrow house & I could see into a courtyard area where bodies were being dragged across the floor, bleeding & dead. The corpses being pushed by a big broom. It was terrifying. I'm ashamed to admit this but I couldn't speak to ■■■■■ online last night because I was worried these dreams would continue. 'You are safe in Sussex,' she says & I can't tell how she means it. I told you before that whenever relationships in my life go wrong all the war zone dreams start up again. It took me 2 years to stop the Velvet Revolution ones! ■■■■■ & her sisters alone every night, she is too scared to have a bath now she told me.

Here's what I think about your house situation in ■■■■■: if the ■■■■■ family stay there, at least the house won't be empty [sidenote: empty houses during war are very vulnerable]. I'm glad you've got someone you trust in the apartment, with your book contract & all of your books. Definitely don't tell the cousin who works for the first lady!! I'm in the middle of writing this book & everything flows into it, as if there's no filter system whatsoever. This is why I have to be careful about the dreams, about talking to ■■■■■ at midnight, about fully understanding the word 'massacre'. Is this selfish? (Yes.) I miss you.²

Suzy³

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¹ Some names and locations in this letter have been redacted at the request of the author.

² We asked Suzy for some background to her letter. She sent us this:

'For the last five years I've been writing to friends in the Middle East, mostly Syria, Lebanon, Morocco and Egypt, either by letters or on Facebook. When the Syrian revolution occurred it was very dangerous to email as the Syrian regime had access to all servers and so we began to correspond using real letters via the British internal diplomatic mail service. This letter is a fictionalized version of a long and on-going correspondence between various women. We regularly exchange drawings and cards between our children. We tell each other secrets, dreams and obsessions. Sometimes there are misunderstandings and frustrations, guilt and full-blown arguments. The theme of stranded houses, of the vulnerability of homes and the trauma of losing houses comes up a lot. I'm not sure whether the letters are censored or not now but anyway, there is always an internal censor. Words can still be dangerous and we don't forget that. Still, regardless, we spill our secrets and doodle drawings of cats. One day we'll meet up in person again.'

³ Suzanne Joinson's debut novel, *A Lady Cyclists Guide to Kashgar*, was published by Bloomsbury in 2012 and has been translated into 14 languages. It was longlisted for the 2014 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award and the Authors' Club Best First Novel Award. From January 2014 she will be writer in residence at the Al Qattan Foundation in Ramallah. She is currently working on a new novel, which is partly set in the British Mandate era Palestine and partly in Sussex and London.