

Improper Circumstances

by Frances Greenwood and Katy Waller 10W

The enormous shadow of the mansion spread out eerily across the small hilltop, casting odd shapes between the old, twisted trees, making the monsters in the branches more prominent and terrifying. The humungous, grey stone building was cloaked in creeping ivy, straggling and half-dead; covering the large, cracked panes of glass they called windows, and casting the rooms inside into a foreboding darkness. The grounds were covered in scattered gravel, leaves and twigs; it was unruly, unkempt, and wild. In the middle, on a small piece of perfectly mowed and trimmed emerald green lawn, was a small rosebush, which had only one, deep red rose growing on it.

Spring; the arrival of new growth everywhere – except this place. The frail and timid old lady sat precariously on her floral chintz armchair, delicately sipping at her best china teacup, the pattern of which matched the sickly old armchair design. A plate of buttered toast rested sweetly at her elbow, and the comforting tones of her gramophone with old vinyl records playing filled the lavender-scented air. Her name was Mrs Binkett, and she had lived in this old, dreary house for over 60 years. Mrs Binkett was a small, plump and wrinkled old lady, with the kind face of a saint, and pure white, wispy hair that framed her rosy cheeks. She was the sort of person who acted like a home-made cookie machine on legs.

“Hello dear, did you sleep well?” Her husband was the male equivalent of Mrs Binkett – he was the perfect grandfather-type person, and as far as she was concerned, he had never done a bad deed all his life.

“Yes thank you, dear. Care to share?” She gestured generously at the toast on the arm of her chair. Taking a seat next to her, in the identical armchair, he settled in and helped himself to toast.

“Go on, kiddo, I dare you! Or are you...chicken?! Bwok bwok bwok!” Johnny danced around teasingly; flapping his arms like a mother hen flaps her wings, and making those horrible chicken noises. Henry blushed and scowled in Johnny’s direction, yet not daring to stare him in the eye. Johnny was, of course, the leader of the gang, and Henry wanted in.

“I’m not chicken! It’s just...look, would *you* go in there if you were only 9? No you wouldn’t!”

“Henry’s scared, Henry’s scared!” chanted the rest of the boys jeeringly. Johnny smirked smugly, “I’ll come with you then! I’ll protect you from the big bad monsters, diddums!”

Henry was trapped – his only way out of this excruciating humiliation was upwards, up the hill and towards that house.

“Fine. I guess I’ll go...but only if you stop calling me a chicken!” he reluctantly agreed. Johnny grabbed Henry’s hand, like an angry mother leading her naughty child to school, pulling him towards the hill and the house. The crowd of boys behind jeered and wolf whistled as they ascended out of sight.

Crouching down silently, the two boys ran towards the base of the house; gazing inside the cracked and filthy basement windows, a noise behind them made them leap up

and run panicking towards the old trees. Henry tripped, and fell in an agonizingly slow curve, before his face hit the ground and slid a few feet, the rest of his body following. Johnny stopped, and ran back towards him.

“Get you up, you crazy little lump! Do you want to get caught by that old geezer?!” Johnny yelled, grasping Henry roughly by the scruff of his neck and hauling him upwards.

Henry made no move to get up – his terrified face, completely pale but highlighted with the crimson of blood trickling down his cheeks; his eyes stared in nameless fear, at something just past Johnny’s right shoulder. Johnny swivelled slowly on his heel, to see a muscled chest wrapped in a checked shirt. His gaze moved upwards, past the neck with an irritated twitch in the muscle, to heavily drooping jowls, and finally to the face of Mr Binkett. Mr Binkett smiled an odd smile.

“Hello boys. I wonder, did you know...you’re trespassing!” His smile tightened and turned downwards, his face was angry and spittle formed, bubbling at the edge of his mouth.

“How dare you?! You will come inside at *once* so that we can phone your parents! NOW!” Spittle flew everywhere, and Henry fought back an urge to tell him to ‘say it, not spray it’, or to ‘spray that again’. He giggled nervously inside. Mr Binkett pinched their ears and marched them into the house.

Mrs Binkett looked up from the floor she’d been scrubbing vigorously as her husband walked in, the axe hanging down his back where he held it lazily.

“Hello dear. I was just thinking – could you be more careful next time please? Blood is so *terribly* hard to remove and stop from staining.”

“Yes dear, of course, sorry. So...what’s for dinner?”

“Meat pie. It’s just cooking.”

THE END