

COOL AS A CUCUMBER



THE ABSURD TALES OF MR GRIFFS

By J & K Joseph

About *Cool as a Cucumber*

When there's a cockroach outbreak in the town of Cornville, only one man is as cool as a cucumber.

Mr Griffs isn't at all fazed by the cockroaches – not when he has a garden full of cucumbers. When news of his alternative remedy gets out, Mr Griffs is faced with an angry mob. Led by Steve Moran, Mr Griffs' arch nemesis, the cucumber thieves will stop at nothing to get what they want. Mr Griffs is forced to put aside his scientific research on wild bush turkeys and must do whatever is necessary to protect his flowerbeds, his garden, his house and his friends. Even if it means teaching Steve a lesson or two and setting the local council straight.

'Yes, the rumours are true. I do have home grown cucumbers and their skins deter cockroaches. They're also quite delicious, if I do say so myself. You can pickle them, put them in salads or even just eat them whole.'

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Dedication

To Mr Griffs' cheekiness



Chapter 1

Checking that her husband wasn't anywhere nearby, Mrs Griffs reached into her apron pocket and pulled out an unmarked jar. She opened it and smelt its contents. 'Hmmm, it's got a nice kick to it.'

Although the secret dressing was merely a blend of mayonnaise, soy sauce and vinegar, Mrs Griffs knew all too well that her husband hated these ingredients. Despite this, she carelessly splattered half of the mixture into a large salad bowl. Even that was too much; the salad inside drowned.

Needing a way to conceal the dressing, Mrs Griffs threw a handful of fresh herbs into the salad. In her hurry she forgot to cut the woody stalks off the herbs or to wash the leaves. 'That'll soak it up,' she said.

Only then did she notice that the pungent salad dressing had splattered all over the kitchen counter. She let out an alarmed squeak. 'Whoops!'

Mrs Griffs grabbed a bunch of paper towels and cleaned up her mess. Once the spilt dressing had been soaked up, she tossed the soggy towels into a nearby bin.

Moving to the dining table, she placed the salad bowl next to the fish and beans her husband had made earlier. 'I hope he flavoured that fish. He always skimps on the spice.'

She, on the other hand, was always liberal with her seasoning. In fact, she often made extra.

Returning to the kitchen, Mrs Griffs opened the freezer door and moved aside some frozen packages. This revealed a line of jars filled with leftover salad dressings. 'One day I really should clean up the freezer and use up some of these mixtures.' Shrugging, she said, 'Oh well,' and then placed the greasy jar of salad dressing beside its counterparts and covered them all up again.

She banged the door shut.

Several objects that had been sitting on top of the fridge thudded to the ground. Grumbling under her breath, Mrs Griffs picked up the random items and shovelled them into a side drawer. 'That's better. I like it when things are tidy.'

The drawer, however, caught on a protruding object and bounced back. Mrs Griffs sighed. 'This house is so cluttered! Why Mr Griffs insists on buying junk from yard sales, I'll never know.' As she tried to flatten the object back into the drawer, she heard a tinkling sound.

Digging into the drawer, she found the source of the noise. 'How did a cow bell get here?' Truth be told, though, nothing her husband bought surprised her anymore.

All of a sudden, an idea took shape in her mind.

Mrs Griffs looked over her shoulder to make sure that she was alone. Then, lifting up the cow bell, she shook it like a maraca. She even started doing a little jig to the sound, swaying her hips from side to side and kicking out her feet.

At that moment, Mr Griffs opened the kitchen door and burst in. Mrs Griffs let out a squeal, embarrassed that he'd caught her dancing so inelegantly.

They paused and looked at each other.

Mrs Griffs took in her husband's appearance. His grey short-sleeved shirt was torn around the collar and his loose pants had brown and green splotches on them. Though Mr Griffs' clothes were usually baggy, as he claimed to enjoy the airiness and the freedom of movement that loose-fitting clothes gave him, this was messy even by his standards.

Mr Griffs was the first to speak. Smiling, he said, 'Why did you stop? You don't have to be embarrassed around me.' His Northern English accent was very strong and, even after thirty years of marriage, Mrs Griffs still hadn't gotten used to it. She had to concentrate when her husband was speaking.

When she didn't reply, he continued. 'What's with the bell? I was studying the bush turkeys, trying to figure out how to keep them from digging up our garden, when the noise made them run away.'

Not knowing whether Mr Griffs was being serious or not, a confusion shared by many, Mrs Griffs decided that he was being rude. She snottily replied, 'Get a grip. I wasn't being that noisy. Did you at least bring me any cucumbers from the garden?'

Handing over the home grown cucumbers, Mr Griffs looked suspiciously around the kitchen. He sensed something was out of place; his face contracted and his lips thinned. 'What's that smell?' he asked. He ran his fingers along the sticky countertop. 'You didn't put any vinegar in that salad, did you?'

As was her usual tactic when she was questioned about her cooking, Mrs Griffs tried to distract her husband. 'Look, dinner's ready. You've kept me waiting long enough and we don't want the meal to get cold.'

Shaking his head, Mr Griffs said, 'What are you on about? Nothing needs to be heated up. The fish and beans are meant to be served at room temperature.'

He made his way to the dining room, sat down and peered cautiously into the salad bowl. He saw that it was filled to the brim with wilted herbs that hadn't been tended to properly. An unpleasant aroma came from it. Grunting under his breath, Mr Griffs said, 'Not again with the vinegar.' He sighed loudly. 'I'll have to eat around it.'

'Stop complaining,' Mrs Griffs swiftly retorted. 'There's nothing wrong with my salad dressing. All my friends love it.'

Mr Griffs' eyes widened. 'They must be really good friends. Really, I'm not joking.'

'Okay, fine,' Mrs Griffs said. 'Next time, you make the salad and I'll do the mains.'

Never one to shy from a challenge, Mr Griffs straightened in his seat. 'Sure. But I'm having none of this fancy salad dressing. Maybe a squeeze of lemon juice, but that's it.'

Mrs Griffs' lips twitched. Both she and her husband enjoyed a good game of wits.

They began eating in companionable silence and, after a while, Mr Griffs turned on the radio. The two of them would often listen to it as they ate, and Mr Griffs' favourite program, *The Garden Report*, was about to begin.

However, the usual programming was interrupted by an urgent local news broadcast.

Attention all citizens. We apologise for the inconvenience; unfortunately The Garden Report has been cancelled for this evening as we bring to you a special news bulletin. Cornville's Council has just received some alarming news from an unidentified source. Our town is now in a state of emergency due to infestation problems. We have an outbreak of cockroaches on our hands and our local shops will be unable to keep up with the demand for cockroach poison. An emergency call has been made and the council is negotiating with the proper authorities to restock Cornville's supplies. Meanwhile, we urge everyone to stay calm and maintain order. These creatures are especially attracted to unclean areas, so please ensure that you clean up all scraps and food related messes.

The radio broadcast cut off abruptly.

Mrs Griffs switched off the radio. 'Oh no! Did you hear that, Mr Griffs?'

His fists clenched. 'I can't believe it.'

'What are we going to do?'

Mr Griffs reached over and shook the radio in frustration. 'I don't believe it. Why did they cancel *The Garden Report*?'

Confused, Mrs Griffs' eyebrows furrowed. 'Huh?'

'Tonight's episode was going to be on managing your compost. I've been looking forward to it all week and now I'll never hear it.' He set down the radio. 'Who gives the council the right to cancel *The Garden Report*? Bloomin' bureaucrats.'

Mr Griffs picked up one of his home grown cucumbers and bit into it. Immediately, he felt calmer. There was nothing like a good cucumber, fresh from the garden.

‘Who cares about your silly program!’ Mrs Griffs cried out. ‘Didn’t you hear what the announcer said about the cockroaches? Why aren’t you doing anything?’

Mr Griffs squeezed some lemon juice over his half eaten cucumber. ‘Beautiful. Fresh. Crispy. Just the right amount of crisp.’

‘What? Why are you going on about cucumbers?’ Mrs Griffs just couldn’t understand why her husband wasn’t more concerned about the cockroach outbreak. ‘Quick, close all the doors!’

Looking up at Mrs Griffs, he rolled his eyes. ‘You do know that cockroaches can creep under doors? Isn’t it obvious?’

Mrs Griffs hated it when her husband said that – not everything was as obvious as he made it seem. Fuming over his insensitive comment, she heatedly replied, ‘Why is it obvious, Mr Griffs? Not everyone was brought up on a farm like you, you know.’

Mr Griffs took another bite from his uncut cucumber. Juice ran down his chin. He didn’t understand why people always insisted on cutting them up when you only got the full flavour of the cucumber when it was eaten whole. After wiping the excess residue from his face with the back of his hand, he said, ‘If you’re that worried, you should really stop spilling salad dressing everywhere.’

Mrs Griffs blushed. To hide her embarrassment, she firmly said, ‘I cleaned it up, thank you very much.’ Her tone then lightened. ‘Well, if you aren’t going to do anything about it, I’ll just go and ask Steve for his help.’

Knowing that his wife was just trying to get back at him for his earlier comment, as any mention of his arch-nemesis would generally rattle him, Mr Griffs continued to munch on

his cucumber. He kept his body relaxed and his legs crossed. Taking one final bite, he held up the tip and waved it in the air.

‘There’s no need for that; we’ve got everything we need right here.’ He flicked the cucumber tip and watched it as it sailed in the air before it landed in the corner of the room. Chuffed with his perfect throw, Mr Griffs smiled cheekily.

Then his face became serious. ‘Hmm, are cucumbers a fruit or a vegetable? I must look it up.’

Chapter 2

Early the next morning, Mr Griffs was crouched under a tree in the local park. As there were no people about, the bush turkeys were free to roam around undisturbed, making it the perfect setting for his research.

Because of an unusual cold front that had hit Cornville the night before, Mr Griffs had come prepared for this morning's chilly weather. He took his tea flask out of his rucksack before sitting on the damp ground. Although he tried to be quiet, as he didn't want to unsettle the turkeys, Mr Griffs growled when his gloves just couldn't quite get a firm grip on his flask. 'I knew I shouldn't have bought these snow gloves. They're so chunky that I can't even clench my fists.' After a great deal of muttering and a few ungentlemanly grunts, Mr Griffs finally managed to unscrew the cap.

He poured himself a warm drink and settled back to watch the troublesome birds. His beanie, already slightly askew, slipped further on his head, causing his left ear pop out. The lobe soon turned red from the cold, but Mr Griffs was so intent on watching the turkeys that he failed to notice.

Not wanting to make any sudden movements and scare the turkeys away, Mr Griffs carefully wrote down a few observations in his journal. He had been recording them in this fashion for the past month, trying to determine the best way to stop these aggravating animals from destroying his garden.

All this work made Mr Griffs thirsty. He paused and took a fortifying sip of his tea.

Straight away, some curious turkeys lifted their heads. Their beady eyes suspiciously turned to Mr Griffs. It was clear to him that the turkeys did not like the moist sound that his lips had just made. He raised his flask, saluting the birds, and then took another sip of his drink. This time he purposely made an even louder slurping sound.

The turkeys began marking their territory. They kicked their feet at the ground, flicking dirt and leaves at Mr Griffs. The ones closest to him began making hissing sounds.

Mr Griffs smiled. Now knowing that sound was his weapon against these frustrating creatures, he puckered up his lips and called out, 'Shhhhht.'

All the turkeys scrambled. They bumped into each other in their desperate attempts to flee.

Curious to see whether he could hurry them up, Mr Griffs flapped his arms up and down from his seated position while continuing to make the 'shhhhht' sound.

Soon the park was completely empty of turkeys.

Relishing in the fact that he had discovered a solution to the turkey problem, Mr Griffs stood up and brushed the grass off his baggy pants. 'And to think, I nearly left my tea flask at home this morning.'

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From the park, Mr Griffs headed straight to the local nursery. He was keen to have first pick of some newly brought-in plants, so he made sure that he got to the store early.

When he arrived at the front gate, he waited impatiently for the nursery to open, getting more and more restless as time went by. When it came to 8.03 am, exactly 3 minutes after the store should have opened, Mr Griffs let out a frustrated huff.

'Ahh geeze, what's the delay now?'

When he looked down at his watch, Mr Griffs' patience came to an end. It was 8.04 am and he just didn't have all day to wait on Carl, the store's manager. Deciding to take matters into his own hands, Mr Griffs forcefully shook the gate that barred his entry and fiddled with its lock. When that didn't work, he called out, 'C'maaan! They should be trying to get customers in, not lock them out.'

With an intense look of concentration on his face, Mr Griffs reconsidered his approach. Maybe instead of breaking the lock, he should simply go *through* the gate. After a quick glance about to make sure that no one was watching, he tried to squeeze himself in between the bars on the gate. He had managed to get one leg through when his oversized pants caught on a rusty hinge. In an effort to free them, Mr Griffs tugged at his trousers. He pulled so hard that the fabric tore.

Yanking his leg free, Mr Griffs swung his hands down, placing them beside the jagged rip in his pants. Bent in this stiff and awkward position, he shouted, 'Ahh, no! My favourite pair of pants; they had the perfect amount of bagginess.'

Upset that Mrs Griffs now had a legitimate excuse to throw them out and annoyed that the nursery still hadn't opened, Mr Griffs made his way to the back in search for another entrance.

Rounding the corner, he saw a door with the words *Employees Only* written atop it. He grumbled to himself, 'If the nursery can't follow their own trading hours, then why should I follow this ridiculous sign? It just doesn't make any sense.'

Mr Griffs assertively knocked on the door.

Moments later, Carl, who was munching on a raspberry muffin, appeared. Even though Mr Griffs was a regular customer, Carl was so surprised to see him that he began to choke.

Ever the hero, Mr Griffs thumped Carl on his back. 'Are you okay there, Carlitos?' Always one for giving people nicknames, Mr Griffs had begun calling him Carlitos when he'd first moved to Cornville years ago. Carl had instantly taken to his nickname and to Mr Griffs' warm demeanour, though there was no getting used to his eccentricity.

Having barely regained his breath, Carl wheezed out, 'Mr Griffs, what are you doing here? This entrance is only for staff members.'

‘Its past 8.00 am; why isn’t the store open yet?’ Mr Griffs asked. ‘You have people waiting out front.’ Although this wasn’t the case, he was prepared to say anything to get inside the nursery.

Knowing full well that Mr Griffs was exaggerating, Carl replied, ‘I was just waiting on a delivery and I didn’t think that there was any rush to open. Quite frankly, Mr Griffs, I didn’t expect anyone to come in today, and I was questioning whether I should even open at all.’

Seeing Mr Griffs’ irritated expression, Carl hastily continued. ‘But, as you’re a loyal customer, I’ll make an exception. If you make your way to the front entrance, I’ll open up for you.’

Mr Griffs didn’t see why he couldn’t just go through the staff entrance. It was, after all, already open and right in front of him. ‘Carlitos, no need to inconvenience yourself. I can just come through here.’

Pointing to the sign above his head, Carl said, ‘Rules are rules, Mr Griffs. You know that.’

Mr Griffs was about to make a biting comment about how Carl only followed his signs when he wanted to, but a quick glance at his watch stopped him. Enough time had been wasted. ‘Okay, Carlitos.’

Smiling at Mr Griffs’ nickname for him, Carl jokingly said, ‘One day you’re going to have to start calling me by my actual name.’

Already heading over to the front entrance, Mr Griffs called out over his shoulder, ‘I’ll tell you what, when you manage to open the shop on time, I’ll start calling you Carl.’

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Mr Griffs was making his final rounds of the nursery when he realised how unusually quiet the store was. At this time of the morning there would normally be a line at the register and

he would be battling it out for the best cuttings. Today, though, he and Carl were the only ones in the shop.

After picking up his last item, a pot of mondo grass, Mr Griffs headed to the register and spoke to Carl. 'Where is everyone? Did I forget another public holiday?'

Ringling up his items, Carl looked at Mr Griffs in confusion. 'Don't you ever listen to the radio?'

'Of course I do. In fact, I'm packing right now.' He pointed to his pocket radio, which was as usual clipped onto his belt. He never left the house without it. 'What of it?'

'Then you should know that Cornville is in a state of emergency,' Carl replied. 'The cockroaches are everywhere and the authorities have done little to contain them.'

Mr Griffs thought for a moment. Personally, he was still more concerned about the wild bush turkeys and he didn't understand why people were so worried about the cockroaches. But he agreed with Carl on one thing – the council definitely lacked common sense.

'Between you and me, Carlitos, cockroaches aren't the biggest problem around here.'

When Carl asked him what he meant, Mr Griffs explained. 'The council only takes action when it suits them. A couple of weeks ago my application for a grant to go towards my research on the local wildlife was rejected. Instead, they decided to use the funds to buy a public vending machine. It's utter madness!'

Despite these claims, Mr Griffs wasn't willing to get into politics at the moment; he had a garden to oversee and a journal to transcribe. Shrugging his shoulders, he gathered up his purchases.

'See you later, Carlitos.' Mr Griffs left the nursery, giving Carl the thumbs up and making a clicking sound with his mouth in farewell.

Astonished as always by Mr Griffs' quirky ways, Carl bit his lip to keep himself from laughing.

Chapter 3

With his rucksack stuffed full of his newly bought plants, a few shoots even sticking out above his head, Mr Griffs made his way home. En route he saw that empty chip packets and chocolate wrappers were littering the streets. Shaking his head at the way the council's vending machine was ruining the environment, Mr Griffs complained, 'And these people wonder why there are so many cockroaches. It's common sense, no?'

Seeing a long stick by the sidewalk, Mr Griffs picked it up and proceeded to spear the trash. When the stick was full of garbage from end to end, he looked around for a bin. The wrinkles on his face became even more pronounced when he saw that the only one nearby was overflowing. He grizzled, 'Ahh c'maaan, isn't it obvious? The cockroaches must be having a feast.'

He decided that the only course of action was to use the rubbish-laden branch as a walking stick until he got home. There, Mr Griffs thought to himself, he'd ring up the council and report the incident.

He turned onto his street, Pickle Mouse Crescent, and continued along.

But, when he neared his house, Mr Griffs stopped in his tracks. Much like the bush turkeys he had scared earlier, he lifted his head in alarm.

His eyebrows curled as he took in the large group of people in front of his house. They were trampling on his flowerbeds and digging up his front garden. Some held threatening signs while others were shouting, 'We want cucumbers!' over and over again. The elderly members of the crowd were banging their shovels to the beat of the chant.

As Mr Griffs approached, he heard one person claim that Mrs Griffs had promised them all cucumbers, and that Mr Griffs must be held accountable. 'That sounds about right,' he moaned to himself.

While he was annoyed that Mrs Griffs had blabbered about the cucumbers, he was more upset about his ruined garden. ‘Ahh, no. Not my petunias. I just planted them. Well, they won’t be getting to my fruits and vegetables! They’re safe in the backyard.’

Thinking that the neighbourhood had gone mad, Mr Griffs cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled out, ‘Whop, whop. Hey. Ho.’

Hearing these strange sounds, the crowd turned around to face Mr Griffs. They took in his torn pants, his lopsided beanie, the shoots of grass that stuck out from his rucksack, and his rubbish-laden walking stick. Silence descended.

Only once they were fully quiet did Mr Griffs make his way through the crowd to his balcony. Once there, Mr Griffs took off his bag and beanie. He ran a hand through his hair, not out of vanity but to keep the crowd waiting. They were, after all, on his property.

Facing his onlookers, Mr Griffs said, ‘Now, I want one person, and one person only, to tell me what the problem is.’ Even though Mr Griffs knew exactly why they were there, he wanted to bring some order to this exchange.

Not surprisingly, Steve Moran, Mr Griffs’ intrusive neighbour, stepped out from the crowd. As soon as he heard that there was going to be a gathering outside Mr Griffs’ house, Steve had put on his best outfit, a blue designer suit with pinstripes and a pair of pointed black shoes, and headed straight there. He liked to think that the better he looked, the more he could intimidate Mr Griffs and other people into doing what he wanted. And right now, all he wanted was some cucumbers.

In an authoritative voice, Steve spoke. ‘In the past you’ve proven to be an absurd man. You parade down the street with your scruffy appearance. You bombard us with your random conversations and unusual experiments. And we’ve endured it. We’ve accepted your eccentric behaviour. In return, the least you can do is share your precious cucumbers.’

Steve was working the crowd, using elaborate hand gestures and appropriately timed statements to emphasise key points. Like a great illusionist, he kept his audience enthralled.

Steve continued, this time making threats. 'If you keep them all, your selfish behaviour will ruin our community. Now, you can either cooperate with us and we can do this nicely, or we'll just have to take matters into our own hands. The cockroaches are here, and we will have your cucumbers!'

The crowd cheered for Steve. A couple of protesters even pumped their fists into the air and someone almost fainted in hysteria.

When this happened, Mr Griffs knew that it was time to respond. He and his petunias had been through enough. Lifting up his walking stick, which was still covered in trash, he banged it against the porch railing. The knocks grabbed the attention of the crowd.

'How long did it take you to write that one up, Steve?'

Steve's jaw dropped. As a sales executive, he wasn't used to being told off, let alone in front of other people.

'Next time, Steve, I'd hire a scriptwriter,' Mr Griffs said.

Suddenly self-conscious, Steve loosened his tie and undid the top button of his shirt. He slicked back his already oiled hair and cleared his throat. He tried to ignore the way some members of the mob were now talking amongst themselves.

Behind him, someone whispered, 'It did sound a little rehearsed, didn't it?'

Steve began to sweat.

Before he could regain his composure, Mr Griffs addressed the crowd. 'Yes, the rumours are true. I do have home grown cucumbers and their skins deter cockroaches. They're also quite delicious, if I do say so myself. You can pickle them, put them in salads or even just eat them whole.'

Some of the protesters looked at each other in confusion, thinking that Mr Griffs was just talking nonsense. For Mr Griffs, however, his ramblings were usually a ploy to tire his opponents and to make them see things his way.

‘But I digress,’ he said. ‘When I was walking home from Carlitos’ nursery, what did I find? Food scraps and empty packages everywhere.’ Mr Griffs lifted up the rubbish-laden stick to prove his point.

‘All of your littering has caused this cockroach outbreak. Take some personal responsibility!’ He paused for a moment. ‘And another thing, coming here in this fashion, ruining my front garden and demanding cucumbers is no way to address the situation. If you had just asked me nicely, I would have gladly shared them. But the way you have all acted has put a sour taste in my mouth. Be gone.’ He flicked his wrist dismissively. ‘Get off my property and go fend for yourselves.’

Mr Griffs then put on his beanie, picked up his rucksack and turned away.

Chapter 4

Later that afternoon, Steve decided that it was time to have a chat with his gardener. Even though he saw that Englebern was busy trimming his hedges, Steve couldn't wait.

'Englebern, a word.' Wanting Englebern to come to him, he crooked his fingers.

Englebern immediately stopped what he was doing and took off his wide-brimmed hat. As was the trend amongst young gardeners, he had grown out his beard and his shoulder-length hair was tied at the back.

Even though he was a confident young man, the stories he had heard from gardeners who had previously worked for Steve always kept him on edge.

'Yes, Mr Moran.' Englebern rested his clippers on the hedge and approached him.

'I want to talk to you about cucumbers. I want to start growing them,' Steve specified.

'Umm, Mr Moran, I'd love to help you out but it's not the right time of the year to plant cucumbers,' he cautiously replied.

'Time of year? I don't care what you have to do. Build a greenhouse if you need to. Make it happen, Englebern,' Steve demanded.

Even though he knew that it simply wasn't possible, Englebern said, 'I can't make any promises, but I'll try my best.'

'See that you do,' Steve said ungraciously. 'And another thing, I know you've only been with us for a month, but I expect you to get those hedges perfectly straight. There's a spirit leveller in the garage. Use it.'

Ignoring the way that Steve always patronised him, Englebern nodded. 'I'll suss it out.'

Frowning, Steve said, 'You do that.' He walked back into his house.

Alone again and extremely frustrated, Englebern made a promise to himself. 'One more insult and I'm out of here.'

Chapter 5

The next night, Mr Griffs turned to his wife. He was holding up a black industrial-strength garbage bag filled with cucumbers.

‘Now, do you remember what the story is?’

Mrs Griffs stubbornly jerked her head. ‘Yes, yes. If anyone asks, I’ll tell them that you’ve just gone to take the trash out.’ Although she felt guilty that her talkative nature had led to yesterday’s fiasco, Mrs Griffs was only reluctantly going along with her husband’s plan.

‘By the way,’ she said, ‘I was looking up cucumbers today on the internet and I couldn’t find anything to prove your theory. Why don’t you just tell everyone that the cucumber skins might not work against cockroaches? Maybe they’ll back off.’

Not one to immediately trust everything he read online, Mr Griffs said, ‘Well, I’ve always used cucumbers. Besides, it’s the principle of the thing. Now back to the plan, what are you going to say if anyone comes here while I’m gone and demands cucumbers?’

Rolling her eyes, Mrs Griffs replied, ‘I’ll tell them to go to the market.’

Worried that she would ruin his clever ruse and make more careless promises, Mr Griffs said, ‘Remember, the more cucumbers you give away the greater the chance that this house will be overcome by cockroaches.’

Her face went pale.

Mr Griffs nodded decisively, satisfied that she would now stick to the plan and be his lookout.

Mrs Griffs peered outside the window. ‘It’s pretty dark outside, Mr Griffs. Maybe you should take the torch with you?’

Opening up his garbage bag, he checked to see if he had enough cucumbers and whether the rubber bands that kept them in bundles of three were holding. 'No. No,' Mr Griffs said to his wife. 'This is a covert operation and the light will give me away. I can't be seen out there.'

Going to the kitchen, Mrs Griffs pulled out a small torch from the side drawer. Returning to her husband, she said, 'Just in case. Who knows what those protesters left in our garden for you to trip over?'

Seeing the sense in her argument, Mr Griffs agreed to take it. He put the torch in his breast pocket, where he usually kept his most important items.

Looking back outside the window, Mrs Griffs checked to see if the coast was clear. Then, facing her husband, she signalled with her hands and yelled out, 'Go, go, go!'

Mr Griffs was taken aback by his wife's enthusiasm. His face crinkled, making him look as though he'd just tasted a drop of Mrs Griffs' acidic salad dressing.

At the door, he turned back to her. Straightening his hunched shoulders, he said, 'If I don't make it back, just remember to water my plants.'

Leaving the house, Mr Griffs made his way through their garden. He stepped over numerous crumpled signs and the odd shovel, and more than once he had to take out the small torch from his pocket as he navigated over the mess that the mob had left. 'Ahh, Mrs Griffs was right. These people are animals. This is private property!'

When he reached the edge of his garden, he paused for a moment to pay his respects to his flowerbeds. Wincing, he averted his eyes. No longer able to look at the state of his ruined petunias, Mr Griffs continued on.

As he did so, he put on his sun glasses; their large frames swallowed his face. Although it was night time, he felt that he needed to disguise himself when travelling these days. Especially as he was worried that the light of his torch would give him away.

Once he had cleared his garden, Mr Griffs pressed himself up against a couple of fences and a few trees. Jumping from shadow to shadow like a cat burglar and ducking whenever he saw oncoming cars, he went undetected.

Eventually he reached the Berendorff's home, which was just two doors down from his. Not only were the Griffs' good friends of Mike and Ellen Berendorff, but they frequently looked after their two delightful daughters, Ruby, who was ten, and Lucy, who was eight. They loved Mr Griffs for his quirks and saw him as an uncle, and he in turn had a soft spot for them.

Rather than using the door knocker, Mr Griffs tapped his knuckles three times on the door, paused, and then knocked twice more. Earlier, on the phone, he had settled on this code with Ruby and Lucy.

When the door was cautiously opened, Mr Griffs removed his sunglasses and checked behind him to see if he was being followed. He then slipped inside and shut the door behind him.

'Mr Griffs, hello. I'm so glad you made it,' Ellen greeted him as Mike shook his hand.

Ruby and Lucy called out together, 'Hey, Mr Griffs.'

After a few pleasantries, Ruby and Lucy helped their dad serve tea and biscuits to their guest. Having not expected any snacks, Mr Griffs beamed and, wanting to show his genuine delight, said, 'Waaaaow!' Mr Griffs often liked to add extra vowels to words as a way to express himself fully.

As the biscuits were quite crumbly, and as he didn't want to make a mess, Mr Griffs gently tapped the excess crumbs off the biscuit onto a napkin. Whenever he did so, his little finger would extend.

Ruby and Lucy noticed this and began to copy him. While Lucy giggled between bites, Ruby was more thoughtful. She thought that Mr Griffs looked like he was conducting an orchestra.

The three adults briefly spoke about yesterday's debacle, commenting in particular on Steve's behaviour.

Mr Griffs then got down to business. 'Mike and Ellen, both of you have been such great neighbours. Mrs Griffs and I consider both you and your lovely daughters to be a part of our family. And so, I'd like to give you some of my freshly picked and home grown cucumbers.'

'No disrespect, Mr Griffs, but the word on the street is that you decided not to share them,' Mike carefully said.

Shaking his head, Mr Griffs explained, 'The thing is, those ruffians never once asked if they could have my cucumbers. Instead, they chose to form a mob and ruin my flowers, and my day. I will not be giving *them* cucumbers. However, with my dearest friends, I will of course share.'

Taking out two bundles of cucumbers from his bag, Mr Griffs removed the rubber bands, which he stretched over his wrist like bracelets. He then handed the loose cucumbers over to Mike.

'Ahh, yes. These are the ones that are good for pickling, right?' he jokingly asked.

Mr Griffs agreed. 'Yiz.'

Used to Mr Griffs' strange ways, they all understood that he had meant 'yes'. Even as Mike and Ellen shared a smile, Ruby and Lucy chuckled.

'Mrs Griffs also likes to put them over her eyes. You wouldn't believe it but apparently I stress her out,' Mr Griffs told them. 'I, on the other hand, suggest that you eat them whole. A little lemon juice or olive oil can't hurt. Just a simple dressing will do.'

'Mmmh, sounds tasty,' Mike said.

Ellen pointed her finger at her husband. 'Hang on, has everyone forgotten about the cockroach outbreak? Before anyone eats the cucumbers we have to take the skins off them.'

'Yes, she's right,' Mr Griffs said. 'Just a small piece in the corner of every room will do.'

After thanking him for his generosity, they offered him more biscuits. Mr Griffs uncharacteristically declined, saying that he had more deliveries to make. 'Nancy and Sophia are expecting me.'

Ruby and Lucy helped Mr Griffs carry his garbage bag to the back door. There Mr Griffs pulled a chocolate bar from his pocket and told the girls to share.

They thanked Mr Griffs and, together, gave him a hug goodbye. Ruby then reminded him to put his sunglasses back on, saying, 'No one will recognise you with them on.'

Lucy agreed, adding, 'They really make you look like a wasp, you know?'

Remembering how many times his wife had told him just that, Mr Griffs smiled and said, 'So I've been told.'

Waving goodbye to Mike and Ellen, he turned to the girls and made a 'zzzzhfff' sound before leaving.

They laughed at Mr Griffs' wasp impression.

*

Even as Mr Griffs made his cucumber deliveries, Steve was holding a meeting in his living room. All of his supporters were gathered around him as he made a rousing speech about the cockroach epidemic. He had just shared with them his plan to infiltrate Mr Griffs' property and take the cucumbers for themselves.

'Are you with me? Do I hear a *yes* for Cornville?' Steve shouted to his followers. His face was flushed and he was heaving with exertion. His starched white shirt was rolled up to his elbows.

A handful of people yelled back, 'Yes!'

When the group settled down, a hesitant voice came from the back of the room.

'Excuse me, Mr Moran. I have a question.'

'Who said that? Speak up, will you?' Steve commanded.

The crowd parted, and a teenage boy stepped forward.

'I don't get it, Steve. Isn't that stealing? Why don't we just ask him for some cucumbers?'

Pressing his fingers against his temple and then rubbing them across his forehead, Steve sighed in exasperation. 'Why do I have to deal with these fools?' he asked himself. Then, addressing the room at large, he aggressively said, 'There's no place in this plan for weakness. I'm not going to take stragglers with me. We have to stand up against this tyrant. Do any of you have a problem with this?'

Mr Higgins, an older member of the community who owned the local ice cream shop, stood up from the couch. 'Mr Griffs? I don't have a problem with that man. He's a good customer. I'm sure all of us agree that he's a bit unusual, but we don't hate him. He's no tyrant.'

Steve was bewildered. 'What are you on about? Are we talking about the same Griffs here? The same man who mispronounces words and names, promises the community avocados from his tree but never delivers, and damages the integrity of Cornville by wearing the most awful clothes imaginable to man? That Mr Griffs?'

Mr Higgins answered Steve. 'Wait a minute! Is this even about the cockroach outbreak, Mr Moran? Because it seems to me like you're using all of us to carry out your personal vendetta against the man. I'll not be your puppet, Steve. I'm out of here.'

Mr Higgins left the room and a few other people, including the teenager who had spoken out our earlier, followed suit.

Victoria, Steve's wife, who had been calmly sitting through everything, perked up. 'I agree with Mr Higgins. You're taking this way too far, Steve. I know you don't get along with him, but Mr Griffs has been nothing but nice to me over the years. A real gentleman.'

Steve attempted to convince his wife otherwise. 'Victoria –'

But she just held up her hand and interrupted him. 'No, Steve. If you go ahead with this, you're on your own.'

Shaking her head, Victoria walked out.

Talking a moment to collect himself, Steve turned to the loyal few that remained. He counted twelve supporters. 'The plan doesn't change. Are you with me?'

His fans cheered. One even called out, 'We're with you, Moran. All the way.'

Feeling like he was born to lead, Steve rallied his troops and said, 'Let's go.'

Chapter 6

When the last of his cucumbers had been distributed amongst his friends, Mr Griffs headed back home. After his night of hard work, he was looking forward to a relaxing cup of tea.

When he neared his house, though, he began hearing some unusual sounds around his garden. Listening carefully, he tried to make out what the noises were.

Still unsure as to what creature could be lurking in his garden, Mr Griffs quietly removed the torch from his breast pocket and turned it on.

Under the beam of light, he saw that a group of people were digging up his front garden. Two or three others were trying to pick the lock on his back gate, which protected his fruit and vegetable patch.

Shocked by the bright light, all the intruders froze.

‘Oy, what’s going on here?’ Mr Griffs called out.

Immediately a voice that sounded familiar to Mr Griffs yelled out, ‘Run!’

The intruders began to scatter, and Mr Griffs pulled the rubber bands that were around his wrist and started flicking them at the trespassers. After scoring some hits and hearing a few high-pitched yelps, Mr Griffs shouted, ‘And stay out!’

A distant voice yelled in return, ‘We’ll be back.’

But Mr Griffs had the last word. ‘If you’re so hard pressed, there’s a grocer down the road!’

Moving his torch around, Mr Griffs inspected the latest damage to his garden. ‘My poor petunias. Why can’t they leave them alone? Stomp on the weeds for all I care.’ Huffing, Mr Griffs said, ‘Next time I’m planting cacti.’

Seeing a particularly large hole in his garden, Mr Griffs kicked the dirt over it to flatten it out. 'If that's the way they want to play it, so be it.'

Taking matters in to his own hands, Mr Griffs spent the rest of night laying various booby traps in his front garden. As it was late, all the shops were closed, so Mr Griffs had to make use of what supplies he had. He scattered compost scraps, and made use of the sensor lights and video camera he had bought months ago to keep the wildlife from eating his flowers and vegetables. He weaved trip wire around his front garden just for good measure. He also sprayed the grass with an excessive amount of organic fertiliser that he had sourced from his farmer friend, Pete.

After securing his garden in this way, Mr Griffs put his hands on his hips. Nodding in approval, he said to the neighbourhood at large, 'Good luck trying to get through this.'

Chapter 7

Days later, with a petition in his briefcase, Steve walked into Cornville's Council Chambers. Wearing yet another fancy suit, this one charcoal-grey, he fully expected to be taken seriously.

Approaching a young secretary, who was on the phone at her desk, Steve interrupted her conversation. 'I'd like to speak to a councillor.'

Looking up at the rude man in front of her, the secretary tried her best to be professional. She held up her hand, indicating that he should wait.

Instead, Steve forged on. 'Look here, I have an urgent matter that needs to be dealt with.'

The secretary covered the phone with her hand and said firmly, 'I'll be with you in a minute, sir.' She had a slight Danish accent but, in his impatience, Steve didn't notice.

His jaw clenched. Steve wasn't used to being dismissed. Glancing at the name tag that was pinned on her brown jacket, he saw that her name was Gritta. He slammed his briefcase on the desk and told her off. 'Do you know who I am, Gritta?'

Barely stopping herself from rolling her eyes, Gritta hastily wrapped up her conversation on the phone. 'How can I help you, sir?'

'My name is Steve Moran and I have an emergency. I need to speak with a council member immediately,' he barked.

Gritting her teeth, she politely asked, 'Do you have an appointment?'

'Listen here. I want to speak to someone now. Make it possible,' Steve stubbornly insisted.

‘Look, Mr Moran. There’s nothing I can do for you if you don’t have an appointment. I can make one for you, if you like? The next availability is in two months.’

‘Two months?’ Steve repeated after her. ‘That’s not good enough! Griffs needs to be dealt with today. I want to speak to your manager.’

Just then a door behind her desk opened and a council member that Steve recognised came out. John Parker had run in the last election, though Steve had voted for the other candidate. Mr Parker was leaving for the day, but that wasn’t enough to stop Steve.

Not even bothering to thank Gritta for her help, he made for the councilman.

‘Hey, Parker, I want to have a word with you.’ Steve cornered the unsuspecting man and said, ‘Look, I need your help with something important. My neighbour has an unkempt garden.’

John looked at the crazy man accosting him. ‘Ah, sorry, sir. But a person’s garden isn’t really a concern of ours. They’re not part of our jurisdiction. Unless of course it’s out of control and affecting the neighbourhood?’ John tried to sidestep him, but Steve blocked him again.

‘But it is! You see it’s a dangerous place. Diseased animals are living in his overgrown grass and they’re even attacking the local residents. Look at my arm.’ Steve pulled up his sleeve and showed John his scars. He conveniently didn’t include how he had acquired them. Steve then lied and said, ‘I even saw an elderly lady trip at the edge of his garden the other day.’

Before John could say anything, Steve quickly whipped out the petition from his briefcase. Most of the signatures had in fact been forged by him. Normally Steve would never even consider breaking the law like this, but the thought of a horde of filthy cockroaches taking over his house was enough to send him over the edge.

John pretended to peruse the petition. 'I see your problem. However, a matter like this may take several months to process.'

Steve was desperate. He didn't think he could last that long. 'What do you want? Name your price. Money? A donation to the council? Some of Nancy's jam? Whatever you want, I can get it for you.'

For the first time, John Parker looked interested in Steve's problem. 'Jam? Nancy's? The best jam-maker in Cornville? Up until now I've only heard of her jam. You're saying that you can get me some?'

Steve smiled. 'Yeah, I know her granddaughter, Sophia. She works for me.'

Excited by the prospect of finally getting his hands on a jar of the famous jam, John agreed to the bribe. 'Just hand over your paperwork to Gritta and she'll see it through. She's amazing – this place wouldn't run without her, I tell you. Have you met her yet?'

Chapter 8

The next day, Mr Griffs travelled around Cornville once again. This time, he went in broad daylight and didn't bother to hide the fact that he was checking to see if any of his friends needed more cucumbers. His last stop for the day was Nancy, the best jam-maker in Cornville. She was also the grandmother of Sophia – the local newspaper delivery girl.

Nancy and Mr Griffs were talking outside her house when he asked how her spirited granddaughter was doing.

'Sophia's only eleven years old, but I swear she's busier than me,' Nancy said. 'When she's not at school, she's riding her bike all around Cornville delivering the paper or just getting up to some mischief.' With a loving smile, Nancy added, 'That girl's always in the thick of it.'

Mr Griffs grinned. He wished that more kids these days had the adventurous spirit that Sophia, and Ruby and Lucy seemed to have. 'Well, if you find the time, Mrs Griffs and I would love to have the both of you over. I've got some hilarious surveillance tapes that I think Sophia would love.' Thanks to his security camera, Mr Griffs now owned numerous videos of Steve's group's witless attempts to steal his cucumbers. Every night, the thieves came, only to slip on the food scraps, fall over the trip wires and be scared senseless by the powerful sensor lights.

Smoothing out her cardigan, Nancy sent Mr Griffs a ferocious look. 'Those wretched thieves! I've never thought much of Steve, but I didn't think he would resort to this.'

'Don't get me started on him. Victoria has been coming over every morning to apologise for her husband's behaviour, but I keep on telling her that it's not her fault. Steve's a loose cannon, that's what he is.'

Nancy's voice quivered as she said, 'Loose cannon? He's a scoundrel! I still can't believe that you have to deal with his supporters every night. And all for what? Cucumbers!'

Mr Griffs was agreeing with her when, all of a sudden, he spotted Steve in the corner of his eye. He was standing nearby on the street and was blatantly eavesdropping on their conversation.

Steve was close enough for Mr Griffs to see that his neighbour's arms were covered in scratches and a nasty looking rash. Confident that these markings were from his grass, Mr Griffs felt extremely satisfied.

Mr Griffs winked a few times at Nancy and jerked his chin towards Steve.

Quick to put things together, Nancy inclined her head regally, indicating to Mr Griffs that she would take his lead on this one.

Wanting to rattle Steve, Mr Griffs raised his voice when he next spoke. 'I'll tell you one thing Nancy, there are plenty of vultures roaming around this neighbourhood.'

Nancy, going along with Mr Griffs, replied, 'They're all crooks. They should be locked up for life!'

Always one to intrude on other people's private conversations, especially when he was being talked about, Steve approached the two. He smiled thinly at Nancy and said, 'You're keeping bad company these days.'

Nancy harrumphed at him.

Mr Griffs, eyed Steve's Polo shirt. 'I'm a little confused, Steve. What's with the shirt? Don't you usually wear suits?'

Steve sent him a withering glare. 'You know, I love what you've done with your garden, Mr Griffs. Truly, I do. Your unkempt grass now matches your appearance.' Pleased with himself for that put down, he continued with an arrogant smirk. 'Of course, if I have any say

about it, the council will soon order you to mow it down. Though I doubt they can do anything about your raggedy clothes.'

Mr Griffs wasn't at all fazed by Steve's criticism. His baggy clothes might not be to anyone's taste but his own, but Mr Griffs appreciated the level of comfort that they gave him. Plus, over the years, he had developed thick skin when it came to his attire – Mrs Griffs had never shied away from an opportunity to ridicule them.

Instead of giving Steve the response he wanted, Mr Griffs took another approach. 'Steve, I have a question for you. Is a cucumber a fruit or a vegetable? If you answer correctly, I'll consider giving you one.'

Knowing where Mr Griffs was going with this trick question, Nancy chuckled softly beside him.

Without even thinking it through, Steve took Mr Griffs' bait. He quickly answered, 'Vegetable.'

Shaking his head at his neighbour, he said, 'Isn't it obvious? It's a fruit. Surely you would have known that, Steve?'

Seeing that he was quite annoyed, Mr Griffs decided that a compliment was in order – even a sarcastic one. 'You know Steve, I've got to thank you. You and your posse have really entertained us. Have you ever considered a career in acting?'

Steve gave Mr Griffs a confused look. 'What's that supposed to mean?'

'The other day you seemed to work the crowd really well. And let's not forget your starring role on my security camera. Don't worry, I won't give it to the police as proof of your trespassing. What are neighbours for?'

Suddenly worried that he had the evidence to destroy his reputation, Steve warned Mr Griffs, 'You better watch it. Your time is up, old man.' He then stormed off.

Waving his hand, Mr Griffs said to Nancy, 'What did I tell you? A loose cannon.'

She nodded decisively. 'I'll tell Sophia to stay away from him while he's acting this way.' Then a look of pride washed over her face. 'Mr Griffs, I loved it how you fooled him with that sneaky cucumber question. But what are you going to do when he finds out that they can be considered either a fruit or a vegetable?'

Mr Griffs smiled cheekily. 'If I know Steve, he'll never bother to look it up.'

Chapter 9

Having successfully foiled the cucumber invaders for a week, Mr Griffs was more confident than ever. He knew that he had the upper hand in Operation Zap, as he now called his fight against Steve Moran and his gang of thieves. All the booby traps had worked, and now because of the fertilizer, the grass was so dense that the invaders simply couldn't pass through it.

Mr Griffs was just watching last night's footage when he noticed something unusual. 'What do we have here?'

Squinting at the screen, he watched as the cucumber thieves used garden shears to cut a pathway through the tall grass to his back gate. As they were moving at a slow pace they had gone unnoticed by the sensors.

Mr Griffs scowled. 'These people never learn, do they?'

Pausing the video and zooming in, he wasn't the slightest bit surprised to see his neighbour, Steve Moran. In fact, this was the third time that Steve had been caught on his camera. 'Steve, Steve, Steve. Never content with your lot in life. Why you always try to get the better of me, I'll never know.'

When he heard a couple of enthusiastic voices coming his way, Mr Griffs turned the security footage off. Seconds later, Mrs Griffs came into the room with Ruby and Lucy.

'Mr Griffs! Did you hear the news?' Ruby happily asked.

'What? Has Steve been arrested?' Mr Griffs gleefully guessed.

Lucy giggled. 'You'd love that wouldn't you?'

'No, no, no,' Ruby said over the top of her sister. 'The council managed to get more poison in, so the cockroach outbreak is over.'

Mrs Griffs cried out joyfully, 'The war is over! The war is over! Salad anyone? We've now got cucumbers to spare.'

Mr Griffs thought for a moment before saying to himself, 'Come to think of it, I haven't even seen a single cockroach since the outbreak was announced.'

Turning to Ruby, he asked, 'Where did you hear this?'

'A postman was trying to deliver you a letter but his motorbike got stuck in your grass,' she explained. 'After we helped him, he asked us if we could give you the letter instead. That's when he told us the good news.'

Mrs Griffs took this opportunity to tell her husband off. 'You should really do something about that dreadful grass. If you don't, I'll hire a professional to cut it.'

Not liking at all the idea that someone other than himself would touch his garden, Mr Griffs took the letter from Ruby and grumbled, 'I'll do it when I'm good and ready.'

Using a letter-opener, Mr Griffs split open the envelope. But, having trouble getting the tightly jammed letter out, he blew into it. All the frayed bits flew away and the letter finally dislodged.

Then, unfolding the letter, Mr Griffs scanned it. 'I don't believe this,' he said, deeply shocked and insulted by what he read. 'Apparently the cucumber invaders signed a petition for me to mow my front garden and then took it to the local council. Steve must be behind this!'

Reading that he only had 48 hours to cut his grass or he would be heavily fined, Mr Griffs realised that once again the council was being crafty. As it was late on a Friday afternoon, they were already closed for the week – so he couldn't call them and challenge their ruling.

'Why would the council even care about your garden?' Lucy asked Mr Griffs.

‘The petitioners claimed that the grass gave them rashes and that it was also a hotbed for diseased animals. They argued that it was a matter of public health and safety,’ Mr Griffs summarised.

He scoffed under his breath. ‘They forgot to mention to the council that they got their rashes while they were trespassing on our property and trying to steal from us. How convenient.’ Checking the letter again, he saw that it had been signed by Councilman John Parker. Mr Griffs had a moment of regret for voting for him in the last election.

Nervous that once again the neighbourhood was talking about them, Mrs Griffs asked, ‘But of course, you will mow it down? Won’t you?’

Neatly folding the letter, Mr Griffs opened the drawer that he reserved for council complaints. It was so full that there was hardly any room left but he managed to squeeze it in. ‘Only on my terms. Now where’s that cow bell?’

Chapter 10

Rising at dawn the next day, Mr Griffs put his last plans into place. He grabbed his protective earmuffs – the ones he generally reserved for cutting the grass or when he just wanted some quiet time to himself. ‘If they want me to mow my grass, I’ll mow it.’

Mr Griffs had called up all of his friends the night before and told them to wear ear plugs to bed. He was all ready to follow the council’s orders; however, he chose to do it at the most inconvenient of times – early Saturday morning. The cucumber hooligans had caused him to lose sleep all week and Mr Griffs felt that it was only fair to return the favour.

After securing his earmuffs in place, he rang the cow bell. Of course, he had made several modifications to it the night before. As it was now hooked up to an amplifier, the loud ring echoed through the entire neighbourhood and woke everyone up. Everyone, that is, that wasn’t wearing ear plugs.

Still half asleep, many of his neighbours stumbled to their windows, lifting up their blinds and squinting to see what was going on.

The sound was so sharp that all the wildlife that had been living in Mr Griffs’ overgrown grass began to flee the area. Standing in the corner of his garden, Mr Griffs directed the animals to Steve’s property by making the ‘shhhht’ sound that had previously worked so well on the bush turkeys.

Then, after pulling the cord to start the mower, Mr Griffs began to cut his grass. He took his time, pacing back and forth over one spot and making sure that it was completely flattened before he moved on to another patch of grass. He took particular care to be as noisy as possible alongside the hedges that separated his property from Steve’s.

Mr Griffs was going over the same area for the fifth time when he looked up at the Moran’s double-storey house. There, he saw Steve, looking furious, standing at his bedroom window. In his pyjamas and with his hair wild from sleep, Steve lost all control.

'GRIIIFFFFS!'

Understanding that Steve had just yelled something, as the window panel directly in front of his mouth had gone foggy, Mr Griffs sniggered and tapped on his earmuffs.

When Steve realised that he wasn't being heard, he shook his fist at Mr Griffs. Again, the glass went foggy.

With a huge grin splitting his face, Mr Griffs decided that another round or two along the hedges wouldn't hurt.

The End

Cool as a Cucumber is the second story in *The Absurd Tales of Mr Griff's* series. On the next page, you will find a sneak peek of the third story in the series – *The Unwanted Guest*.

For more information, please visit www.mrgriff's.com.

About *The Unwanted Guest*

When Steve Moran, Mr Griffs' troublesome neighbour, throws a lavish party, everyone in the neighbourhood is invited. Everyone, except for Mr Griffs.

Although he has no intention of attending Steve's pretentious party, Mr Griffs' curiosity gets the better of him. When he comes to the aid of a party-bound and cake-bearing old lady, Mr Griffs gallantly offers to escort her (and her cake) inside. Within no time at all, Mr Griffs finds himself sipping champagne and sampling Steve's expensive canapés.

All at once, Steve's carefully laid-out plans unravel, and no matter how much he tries, he just can't keep Mr Griffs away. When all of his friends, and even his wife, begin to flock around his neighbour, Steve is left to wonder, who in fact is the unwanted guest?

'I love a cake. And this one's got the perfect amount of cream!' Mr Griffs salivated over the dessert. Although he considered sneaking a piece, he realised that the only way to get a bite would be to infiltrate the party.

Acknowledgement

Although *Cool as a Cucumber* is the second story in *The Absurd Tales of Mr Griffs* series, it was the driving force behind the entire series. The inspiration for this story, let alone the series, came about when we walked past a house with overgrown grass. One comment led to another, and soon our banter became something more.

So thank you to everyone who listened to our developing ideas, encouraged us to write and then publish our stories. *The Absurd Tales of Mr Griffs* might have been born out of that moment, but it was you that sustained it.

A special thanks goes to Emily Paget for her editorial assistance. Also, thank you to [John Martinez](#) (cover page illustration), Kim Evangelista (cover page title design) and [Arthur Dunderale](#) (cover page format).

We'd also like to thank our readers, new and old, for their interest and growing support. Contact us at hello@mrgriffs.com if you would like to say hello or if you have any questions. We'd love to hear from you!

Lastly, thank you to our family for always supporting us.

For more on *The Absurd Tales of Mr Griffs*, including backstories and character profiles, please check out www.mrgriffs.com. You can also find us on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

About the Authors

Jonathan and Keren Joseph are a brother and sister team from Sydney, Australia.

Jonathan likes jam donuts, tennis and the colour of autumn leaves. He dislikes it when laptops break down too quickly and the fine print to a sale. His favourite thing about Steve Moran is how his obsession with taking down Mr Griffs has consumed his life.

Keren likes eggplant pizza, books and peppermint scented lip balm. She dislikes bad chai lattes and pushy salespeople. Her favourite thing about Steve Moran is how quickly the polished facade he presents to the world unravels when Mr Griffs provokes him.

If you have any questions or feedback, or just want to say hello, please email

hello@mrgriffs.com.

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