

NEVER ASSUME



THE ABSURD TALES OF MR GRIFFS

By J & K Joseph

About *Never Assume*

Mr Griffs loves everything his neighbour hates.

While Mr Griffs enjoys wearing baggy clothes, Steve Moran only dresses in designer suits. Mr Griffs relishes his privacy and Steve regularly snoops on people. Mr Griffs appreciates wildlife whereas Steve sees wild animals as pests.

Their long-standing rivalry escalates when Steve accuses Mr Griffs of digging holes in his garden. In response, Mr Griffs uses a particularly hot batch of his wife's spicy nuts to get back at Steve.

Mr Griffs and Steve Moran rarely see eye to eye, but they do have one thing in common. They're both guilty of assuming.

Absurd and quirky – this is just a typical day in the life of Mr Griffs.

Confirming his suspicion that Steve had in fact been spying on him the other day, Mr Griffs said loudly, 'Next time you decide to snoop around my garden, you ought to change your cologne. It's a dead giveaway. It's so stinky!'

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Dedication

To the Griffs in all of us



Chapter 1

It was early on a Thursday morning and Mr Griffs was sprawled out in his backyard enjoying an unscheduled nap. With each exhale, his lips would make a drawn out popping sound.

‘Poooahp . . . Poooahp . . . Poooahp.’

His pocket radio, which was on top of his bare chest, was moving up and down in time with his breathing. Before falling asleep he’d been listening to his radio with a pair of flimsy headphones. They had quickly fallen off his ears and were now awkwardly sitting on his head.

Turning around in his chair, Mr Griffs stirred slightly. He began to mumble; even in his sleep his Northern English accent was pronounced. ‘Don’t throw out my shirts . . . I love the bagginess . . . It gives me room to move.’

Draped over the back of his chair was one of his many loose-fitting shirts. As he was always afraid that Mrs Griffs, his wife, would throw them away, he had begun to hang his clothes on all the chairs and door knobs in the house. Mrs Griffs would still try and get one up on her husband. She would sometimes move the shirts around and turn them inside-out.

Still asleep in his backyard, Mr Griffs murmured, ‘Sooooo stinky! Change your cologne, Steve. It stinks. It stinks.’

As an eccentric and quirky man, many people misunderstood Mr Griffs. Although he considered himself to be a man of the people, Steve Moran, his confrontational neighbour, often said otherwise.

Everything about Mr Griffs aggravated Steve. The way he dressed, his behaviour and his nonsensical ramblings. Whatever he did, Steve would take his neighbour’s antics as a direct insult. He was obsessed with proving Mr Griffs wrong and took every opportunity to show his superiority. In fact, just the other day, he had dared Mr Griffs to solve a Rubik’s

cube. Although this challenge was relatively minor, this was just one of the many ways in which Steve tried to undermine his neighbour.

Mr Griffs, in turn, wondered why everything had to be a competition. Why was Steve so caught up in his life?

After all, why would Steve care about what a sixty-something year-old retiree, who liked to occasionally sunbake shirtless in the privacy of his backyard, was doing? What could he possibly get up to?

Still dreaming about Steve's designer cologne, Mr Griffs' nostrils flared. His face twitched and the wrinkles in his face deepened, making him look even more grumpy than usual. Although Mr Griffs did in fact have a very cheeky smile, at this time there was no trace of it.

Mr Griffs' left arm rolled off his chest, pulling the headphone's cord with it. His fingertips grazed the ground, and the cord became tangled around his outstretched arm.

A loud thudding noise interrupted his sleep.

Startled awake, Mr Griffs jerked upright. The sudden movement strained his headphones, causing the cord to snap. 'Ahh geeze! My last good pair – they had such good cushioning around the ears.'

The cord was wrapped around his arm so tightly that he struggled to free himself. When he finally got rid of it, Mr Griffs stood up and put his hands on his hips. One of his legs bent awkwardly and his bare chest heaved with exertion.

He took a moment to gather himself. Glancing around his backyard, Mr Griffs saw that his fruit and vegetable garden seemed to be in good order. His avocado tree was growing nicely and his cucumbers were just about ready to be picked. Everything seemed to be in the condition he left it.

He ran an impatient hand through his tousled white hair. Clumps of it stuck out at awkward angles, making him look even more dishevelled than usual. ‘Why did I take the bait? I should know better by now than to listen to Steve. That damn Rubik’s cube kept me up all night. My sleeping patterns are all over the place!’ As Mr Griffs loved his routine, this greatly agitated him.

Wondering how long he had been napping, Mr Griffs checked his watch. ‘Oh nooo! I’ve nearly missed *The Garden Report!*’

Without delay, Mr Griffs pulled out the broken cord and prepared to listen to his favourite radio program without headphones. His hazel-green eyes honed in and his bushy eyebrows lowered in concentration.

Absentmindedly, Mr Griffs turned to his now lukewarm cup of tea on the table beside him. Whenever he went to his backyard to relax, he would take with him a hot beverage and something to eat.

But before he could even reach for his tea, Mr Griffs froze. A small bush turkey was perched on the table and was leisurely pecking at his bowl of nuts.

Staring at the offending animal, Mr Griffs said, ‘You’re the one that woke me up, aren’t you?’

Still watching the turkey closely, he noticed that it was using its beak to crack open a pistachio nut. ‘What a smart animal. The bird’s got good taste. I’d do the same thing if I were a turkey.’

When the bird went for another pistachio, Mr Griffs’ expression darkened. ‘Hey, those are mine!’

Mr Griffs launched into action. After clipping the pocket radio onto his belt, he pulled his red shirt from the back of his chair. He then waved it with both hands, as though he were airing out a dusty rug, and began to chase the bird away.

'Get your own nuts,' he yelled out.

Chapter 2

Mrs Griffs had just gotten off the phone with Mike Berendorff. He and his wife, Ellen, lived on their street, Pickle Mouse Crescent, with their two daughters. Ruby, who was ten years old, and Lucy, who was eight, loved spending time with Mr and Mrs Griffs. Even when they weren't expected, they were always welcomed.

With Mike and Ellen going out of town for the weekend, Mr and Mrs Griffs were just asked to babysit the girls. Excited at this prospect, Mrs Griffs rushed to tell her husband the good news. In her haste she didn't see that one of Mr Griffs' shirts, which usually hung on a chair in the dining room, had fallen onto the floor. She stumbled over it ungracefully.

'That man! How many times have I told him not to leave his shirts all over the house? I ought to rip them up and use them as rags! He doesn't even use half of them.' After regaining her balance, Mrs Griffs marched towards the open back door, set on telling her husband off.

As she neared it, she heard his angry voice. A weird flapping noise followed. Peering out, she saw Mr Griffs chasing a bush turkey out of the backyard while waving his shirt above his head. Not surprised at all, as this absurd behaviour was normal for Mr Griffs, she groaned. 'Crazy man. The things he gets up to!'

Having had enough, she called out, 'Mr Griffs! Stop that at once. What are you doing to that poor turkey?'

Mr Griffs spun around to face his wife. 'Poor turkey? You know I love animals, but that thing was eating my nuts!' Seeing that his wife was not impressed by his explanation, he changed tactics. 'Nuts aren't good for them, you know. I was just trying to save the animal from having high cholesterol.'

Mrs Griffs raised her eyebrows, not believing a word of what her husband was saying. Then, shifting her attention, she said, 'Mike and Ellen are going out of town on Friday. And

seeing as though you're not really doing anything important, I want you to clean up all of your shirts before you pick the girls up from school tomorrow. They're a hazard!

Mr Griffs was used to his wife dismissing him. All he could do was try and change the conversation in his favour. 'We've got plenty of time. In any case, I've got to plant a bunch of petunias in the front garden first. And we don't want the girls to trip on those, do we?'

Annoyed that her husband had gotten out of cleaning, Mrs Griffs narrowed her brown eyes. 'Well make sure you get to it quickly.' She was about to turn around when Mr Griffs stopped her.

'You don't happen to have a spare set of headphones, do you?'

'No, I just broke my last one this morning in my roller derby class.' Though in her late fifties, Mrs Griffs had always enjoyed being active. She used to be a semi-professional figure skater, and roller derby was just the latest of her many fitness fads.

'Ahh, just my luck. Are you sure?' Mr Griffs asked.

'Yes, I'm sure,' she snapped. 'Besides, you shouldn't be wearing headphones anyway, they're not good for your hearing.'

'I know, but they keep my ears warm.' Mr Griffs sighed. 'Oh well, I'll just have to listen to the radio without them. The whole street, I'm sure, will love *The Garden Report*. The morning session is the best.'

It was now Mrs Griffs' turn to sigh. As she closed the door behind her, she said to herself, 'My roller derby class was less exhausting than this.'

Chapter 3

Standing outside of his front door, Steve Moran, Mr Griffs' troublesome neighbour, swore under his breath. The newspaper girl, Sophia, had thrown his morning paper into his water fountain again.

'So careless! Kids these days have no respect for anything,' he barked. At forty years of age, Steve liked to think that he was old enough to demand respect from everyone. At the same time, however, he never thought to give Mr Griffs the same consideration.

After aggressively tying the belt of his gold-lined silk dressing gown, Steve huffed. He forced himself to go off his neatly laid stone path and walk across the dewy grass to retrieve *The Cornville Times*, the local newspaper.

He had just picked up his soggy paper and was shaking it out when he noticed that there were several small holes in his garden. 'These indentations are very unusual,' he noted to himself. As a sales executive at an advertising agency, Steve Moran often used big words to describe little things, a characteristic of his that greatly irritated Mr Griffs.

Annoyed that his usually pristine garden was far from perfect, Steve reminded himself to tell off his gardener, Englebern. Although he'd only started working for him recently, Steve expected excellence from all the people he encountered. He wanted everything to be a certain way.

His deep thoughts were interrupted when he suddenly heard voices coming from his neighbour's front garden.

'Rubbish, absolute rubbish!' Mr Griffs exclaimed. 'This Mr Eric Westerbeak is speaking hogwash. You don't need to give off positive energy to make your plants grow. All you need is a good-quality organic fertiliser. Who is this guy?'

Realising that Mr Griffs was behind the row of dense hedges that separated their properties and that he was talking to his radio, Steve mumbled under his breath, 'That man! How inconsiderate to have the radio on so loud. Hasn't he ever heard of headphones?'

Mr Griffs continued to complain to himself. 'Instead of this random guy, *The Garden Report* should have my friend Pete on the show. He'd tell them about how his chickens and cows provide the finest fertiliser available! I tell you, you've got to source it from the best.'

Steve then heard Mr Griffs say something else but it was muffled. He leaned in closer, pressing himself up against the shrubs. It was then that he heard some digging sounds.

Steve softly whispered, 'What's he up to now?'

He couldn't help it. He just had to find out what Mr Griffs was doing. Carefully, Steve parted the hedges and peered through them.

He could vaguely see his neighbour's tousled and knotty hair bobbing up and down. Right then, Mr Griffs yelled out, 'Cotch. Oh no, I've hit the pipe again.'

Steve's eyes bulged and his lips parted. Even knowing as he did that Mr Griffs would often intentionally mispronounce words, Steve just couldn't understand how one would get 'cotch' from 'ouch'. 'What does "cotch" even mean?'

After shaking his head at his neighbour's nonsense, Steve pushed himself deeper into the shrubs. He was so fixated on Mr Griffs that he didn't notice his wife, Victoria, approaching him from behind.

'Steve!'

Startled, he lost his footing and fell down onto the wet grass. Swearing heavily, Steve looked up at his wife. Her expression immediately made him cower.

Hissing, Victoria said, 'What do you think you're doing? You're not snooping on Mr Griffs again are you?'

Steve put his index finger on his lips. 'Shhhhhh – don't let him hear you.' Signalling with his hands, he indicated that he wanted her to crouch down next to him.

Victoria, who was, as always, elegantly dressed, straightened her shoulders. Frowning at her husband, she said, 'I just don't know why you have such a big problem with Mr Griffs. He's a lovely man.'

Steve scowled, 'He's a menace to society, that's why.'

'He may be an eccentric man, but we all have our little quirks. I mean, you're the one with your head in the bushes spying on him.'

Before Steve could defend himself, Victoria asked, 'And was it really worth it? I mean, look at what you've done to your favourite robe.'

Steve looked down slowly. At first only seeing the grass stains, he wasn't fazed. His face then went pale when he saw the large tear at the hem. 'What? What am I going to do? My tailor is already backed up as it is mending my other outfits. What am I going to wear?'

Slowly turning his head towards his neighbour, Steve's jaw clenched. Not even bothering to whisper this time, he said, 'Griffs better pay for this!'

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Mr Griffs was completely unaware of what was happening just a few meters away from him. He was still listening to the morning session of *The Garden Report* and happily planting his flowers.

He was no longer worked up about what Mr Westerbeak had just said a few minutes ago. In fact, his mood had changed drastically. He couldn't help but smile and admire his newly-bought plants. Removing the petunias from a pot, Mr Griffs said, 'Wow. Look at these beautiful colours. Wow!' He pronounced the word 'wow' quickly and abruptly, shortening the vowel.

Suddenly, Mr Griffs paused. He thought he had heard a thump – the sound of someone falling to the ground.

Perking his head up, he caught a whiff of something familiar. He sniffed the air and instantly recognised Steve's pungent cologne. It might be designer, but Mr Griffs didn't see the point of it. He always thought there was nothing wrong with going natural.

Returning to his flowers, Mr Griffs vaguely heard Victoria telling her husband off. The thought that Steve was being reprimanded made him grin.

Mr Griffs compressed the soil around his freshly planted petunias. As he did this, he said to himself, 'Mr Westerbeak could teach Steve a thing or two – that man definitely needs some more positive energy!'

Chapter 4

The next morning, Steve cautiously turned on the hose in his front garden. Picking up the dirty robe that he had left outside overnight, he began to gingerly clean it. Though he had wanted to throw it away, Victoria had insisted that he keep the robe and wash it himself.

Running the hose over the grass stains, Steve complained. ‘This is an outrage. These hands weren’t made for cleaning!’

He poured some liquid soap onto the garment and then hosed it off away from his body. He was careful to not get any water on his expensive suit. Although Victoria had cautioned him not to wear it while he was cleaning, Steve wanted to save time – he was soon off to work.

Steve had just finished wringing out his robe when he heard a bell ring in the distance. Not caring anymore, he tossed the robe to the side where it landed on the wet grass.

He began to follow the stone pathway that carefully made its way from his house to the road. As he did so, he tightened his tie and buttoned his jacket. He wanted to appear authoritative.

He was about half way there when he saw the newspaper girl, Sophia, ride by. Without even looking his way or stopping her bike, she lobbed the newspaper over her head. It landed in the middle of his garden.

Steve’s lips thinned and his face went stiff with anger. ‘Again?’ Just as he had done yesterday, he would have to stray off his dry footpath and walk on the damp grass. ‘Why did it have to rain last night? Now everything is going to get dirty.’

Raising his voice, Steve called out, ‘Young lady, stop there right now. I want to have a word with you.’

Annoyed that Steve was going to mess up her tight schedule, as the other residents in the neighbourhood expected her to deliver their papers at particular times, Sophia shook her head. This wasn't the first time that Steve had inconvenienced her.

After rolling her eyes, Sophia hit the brakes. Still on the sidewalk, she turned to him, not bothering to get off her bike. Even though Steve was waving his clenched hands above his head, Sophia wasn't scared. She knew that he would never leave his clean pathway and cross onto the muddy ground to confront her.

'How many times have I told you, little girl, not to throw my paper onto the grass?' Steve scolded her.

When Sophia looked away and began fidgeting with the bell on her bike, Steve said. 'And another thing, stand up and approach your elders when they talk to you!'

Sophia didn't appreciate the way he had spoken to her. Though her nanna, Nancy, had taught her manners, even she made an exception when it came to dealing with Steve. But if Steve wanted her to come to him, boy would she.

Sophia adjusted the front of her bike, aiming it directly at Steve. She then pedalled forward quickly. Her face was determined and her pony tail, which stuck out the back of her bike helmet, flew out behind her.

Steve, not used to being challenged by kids, was stunned. 'Wh...ah...ah...ah...ht.'

He started running towards his house, but she was too quick for him. Sophia circled around Steve and then slammed on her brakes, skidding to a stop. Mud and shredded grass flew at him, landing on his precious suit.

Sophia then asked sweetly, 'Is this close enough for you, Mr Moran?'

Steve, not wanting to appear weak in front of Sophia, forced himself to look her in the eye. Resisting the urge to inspect his suit for damage, he lifted his arm and pointed to the road. Hoarsely, he said, 'Just go.'

With a huge grin, Sophia sped off, ringing her bell in goodbye.

Now that she was gone, Steve hesitantly looked down at his filthy suit. He began to hyperventilate. 'This is just too much. I don't have any more suits. What am I going to wear to work?' The thought that he would have to go into work without wearing a suit was a reality he couldn't face. There was nothing left for him to do. He had to call in sick – he had no choice.

Having made this decision, Steve quickly regained himself. His breathing evened out.

Although there was nothing he wanted more than to head back indoors, he still had to retrieve the newspaper that Sophia had thrown. As his shoes were still somewhat clean, Steve didn't want to risk them. Without using his hands, as he thought that there was no need to get them dirty, Steve took off his shoes. He used his toes to wedge off one shoe and then repeated the process with the other. Leaving his expensive footwear on the pathway, he tiptoed his way across the wet grass.

Steve was nearing the newspaper when he tripped over something. In an effort to regain his balance, he placed both of his feet firmly on the ground. His socks instantly became soaked. Increasingly frustrated, Steve whinged, 'What's happening to me? What has my life become?'

Wanting to see what he had tripped over, Steve inspected the area around his feet. 'Another hole?' Glancing around, he was surprised to see even more of them. 'My garden is ruined! Look at all of these holes – they're even larger than yesterday!' Wanting to blame someone for this, Steve said, 'Where is that Englebern? He should have had this fixed already. I pay him good money to take care of my garden.' Still looking at the holes, Steve completely forgot about the newspaper.

With a tone of incredulity, he asked, 'Where are these holes coming from?' Just as he said that, Steve heard voices coming from his neighbour's property.

Lifting his head, Steve looked over the hedges he had used to spy on Mr Griffs yesterday. In this particular position, Steve could see clearly over the foliage and into his neighbour's garden. Mr Griffs was talking to Sophia, who was standing next to her bike with her helmet by her side.

'Oh, Mr Griffs. You're so funny. Why can't more people in Cornville be like you?' Sophia was saying.

Mr Griffs smiled and joked, 'Can you tell my wife that?'

Sophia laughed. She then said, 'I know that you're a busy man and I don't want to keep you waiting, so here's your newspaper.' She handed *The Cornville Times* to him directly.

Steve was flabbergasted. 'What? Griffs gets his hand delivered?'

'And before I forget, my nana knows that you love her organic jams and relishes. She made this batch of cherry jam just for you.' As she said this, Sophia pulled out the jar from the basket, which was at the front of her bike.

'Waaaaow!' Unlike the last time he had said 'wow', Mr Griffs lengthened the word to show his delight. He often extended or abbreviated words as a way to express his emotions. 'It's not the perfect season for cherries, but I bet that this batch will be sooooo sweet!' Mr Griffs said. Although his remark could be interpreted negatively, Sophia was used to his indirect compliments.

When she happily handed over the jam, Mr Griffs noted that the jar was still warm. 'Did she make it this morning?' he asked.

'Sure did,' Sophia responded.

With a huge grin on his face, Mr Griffs said, 'I tell you what. It's nice when it's hot.'

Seeing and hearing this ridiculous exchange from his garden, Steve snorted. Not only did Mr Griffs get his paper hand delivered, but he got jam from Sophia's grandmother, Nancy, the best jam-maker in Cornville.

Steve turned his attention back to the exchange and saw that Mr Griffs was holding the jar up in the air so as to allow a faint stream of sunlight to pass through it. ‘What a fool,’ Steve muttered.

After patiently waiting for Mr Griffs to finish rambling on about how pure the jam was, Sophia looked down at her watch. She said, ‘I better scram. I’ve got papers to deliver – Steve held me up all morning.’

About to leave, Mr Griffs held up his hand to stall her for a moment longer. ‘Before you go, I have something for you.’ He handed her a brown paper bag and said, ‘This is for you. Enjoy.’

Mr Griffs usually gave her a chocolate bar or some other type of treat at least once a month to thank her for her work. Knowing this, Sophia gladly accepted the present and then put on her helmet. As she clipped the straps around her chin, she said, ‘Say hi to Mrs Griffs for me. And don’t eat all the jam by yourself – you’ll get a stomach ache.’

As she sped off on her bike, she rung her bell twice. Mr Griffs waved goodbye.

To Steve, everything now made perfect sense. ‘He’s been paying Sophia off to make my life miserable!’ Steve was convinced that he had just witnessed a bribe.

At his breaking point, Steve stormed over to his neighbour. Mr Griffs had just opened his newspaper and was reading it on his front porch.

‘Griffs! How dare you bribe Sophia?’ he bellowed.

Mr Griffs took one look at Steve and immediately noticed his dirty clothes and waterlogged socks. Steve sure wasn’t looking his best this morning. Mr Griffs calmly replied, ‘Bribe? What bribe?’

‘Don’t give me that. I saw it with my very own eyes. She purposely destroyed my newspaper and then hand delivered yours along with some jam. And in return you payed her off! This is just typical of you.’

Even though Steve had just insulted him, Mr Griffs was unfazed. ‘Why Steve, you weren’t just spying on me, were you?’

Before Steve could make up some excuse, Mr Griffs continued. ‘Look at yourself! I’ve never seen you in such disarray. Usually, you’re impeccably dressed. How do you expect anyone to respect you now?’ Mr Griffs joked.

Not understanding his sarcasm, Steve couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Mr Griffs, who was wearing an oversized shirt and a pair of raggedy jeans, was telling *him* off about his clothes? ‘Me? You dare criticise my fashion sense? You’re the one who always dresses like a hobo,’ Steve countered.

Mr Griffs just shook his head at Steve. Sometimes he wondered about him. ‘Tsk-tsk. I expected more sophisticated insults from you. Aren’t you in advertising?’

Steve was just about to ridicule Mr Griffs in response, by asking whether he had successfully completed the Rubik’s cube, when something else occurred to him. He remembered Mr Griffs’ presence at his property-line yesterday. Steve quickly assumed the worst of his neighbour once again. ‘And about these holes in my garden. I heard you yesterday digging around my property with a shovel. I’m watching you. I know you’re up to no good.’ With that, Steve turned around and began stalking off.

Mr Griffs, who had no idea what Steve was accusing him of, called out, ‘Oy Steve, maybe next time you should wear some flip-flops. Cashmere socks don’t go very well with wet grass.’

When he reached his house, Steve slammed the door behind him. He took a deep calming breath and steadied himself. He was just about to go clean himself up when Victoria asked him, ‘Steve, where’s the morning paper?’

Chapter 5

Mr Griffs was waiting outside Ruby and Lucy's school, *Cornville Public*, when he saw a man loitering about. The man had bright red hair and was wearing tracksuit pants and a plain white t-shirt. On first impression, Mr Griffs thought that his clothes could be a bit baggier, but he seemed friendly enough.

Mr Griffs approached the unfamiliar man and struck up a conversation. 'What time do kids get let out these days?' he asked.

The man looked at Mr Griffs distrustfully. 'Why do you want to know? Who are you here for?'

Mr Griffs smiled. He didn't disapprove of the other man's cautiousness. In fact, he liked the idea that such an astute fellow was watching out for the kids.

'Good man. Well done for being protective,' Mr Griffs said, not realising at all that his comment could come across as being patronising. 'I'm friends with Mike and Ellen Berendorff. We're bee-bee sitting Ruby and Lucy tonight,' Mr Griffs continued. He often intentionally mispronounced words to liven up the conversation or to test whether people were listening.

The man struggled to understand what Mr Griffs had just said. A moment passed before he recognised the word. 'Ohh, you mean babysitting, right?'

Mr Griffs replied, 'Yiz.'

Again, the other man had to decipher what Mr Griffs had just told him. His scrunched-up face relaxed when he figured out that Mr Griffs had meant 'Yes.'

The man couldn't help but chuckle. Feeling more at ease with this eccentric man, he introduced himself. 'My name's Raymond and my son, Harry, is in the same class as Ruby. He's a bit young for his grade, so he's only nine. Ruby's ten, right?'

‘Rainfall? Sorry, did you say your name was Rainfall?’ Mr Griffs asked. He knew very well that the man’s name was Raymond. He liked to give people nicknames and he was just being his usual quirky self. Mrs Griffs, on the other hand, thought that her husband had selective hearing.

‘No, no. It’s Raymond. Or Ray if you prefer,’ he corrected.

Mr Griffs thought for a moment and then said, ‘Ray, like the sunshine?’

Highly amused, Raymond shook Mr Griffs’ hand and said, ‘Sure, why not?’

Just then Ruby and Lucy appeared.

‘Hey look, its Mr Griffs,’ Lucy squealed. She rushed over to hug him.

Ruby said goodbye to one of her friends and then joined her sister. ‘Mr Griffs, good to see you,’ Ruby greeted.

‘Hi, girls. Your parents already dropped off your things. I hope you’re excited for the weekend,’ Mr Griffs said.

‘Did Mrs Griffs make any of her spiced nuts for us?’ Ruby asked.

‘Well, I should hope so. The oven was on all morning,’ Mr Griffs complained.

He then turned to Raymond. ‘See ya later, sunshine.’

Ruby and Lucy laughed. Although they had no idea why Mr Griffs was calling Harry’s dad ‘sunshine’, they thought that Mr Griffs was being funny.

Raymond and his son waved goodbye to Mr Griffs and the two girls, both thinking that Mr Griffs was certainly peculiar. But they quite liked him.

As they walked home, Mr Griffs held Ruby and Lucy’s hands. He couldn’t wait to tell them about what had happened that morning and so he immediately began filling them in.

They were sorry to hear about how Steve had behaved. But then again, they had come to expect this sort of behaviour from him. Ruby was disappointed though that she had missed Sophia. According to Ruby, she was the coolest eleven-year-old on the block because she had a job that allowed her to ride her bike every day.

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When they reached Mr and Mrs Griffs' house, they went straight to the kitchen. Mr Griffs gave each of the girls a handful of his wife's spiced nuts as an afternoon snack.

However, they were just too spicy!

Lucy spat out an almond and cried, 'Water, quickly. Get me water.'

Mr Griffs hurriedly ran to the fridge and said, 'No. Water won't do the trick. You need some yoghurt.' Taking out a carton of his favourite brand, along with a spoon from a nearby drawer, he handed them over to Lucy. 'Here, try some. Yeleena is my favourite yoghurt.'

Lucy frantically stuffed a heaped spoon of yoghurt into her mouth. With her mouth still full, she let out a muffled, 'Thank you'.

While her sister was busy with the yoghurt, Ruby asked Mr Griffs if he wanted her to throw the nuts out.

Not wanting to make any decisions without sampling them first, Mr Griffs bit into a macadamia nut. 'Ahh that lady, always over-spicing the nuts.'

Ruby took that as an affirmative. She was about to tip the jar of nuts into the bin, when suddenly Mr Griffs had a brilliant idea.

'Whop, whop,' he said to stop her. 'I know what to do with them. Although they're too spicy for my standards, I know who'll love them. Besides, this way we can teach that Steve a lesson.'

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After setting up an obstacle course, which consisted of empty jars, hula hoops and other random objects placed all around his living room, Mr Griffs began teaching Ruby and Lucy how to throw nuts. The two girls were wearing camouflage outfits and were listening intently to Mr Griffs.

‘Now girls, remember the technique I taught you. You need to take a handful of nuts, hold them in the palm of your hand, and shuffle them around until you have one between your thumb and index finger. When you’re ready, swing your hand back like you’re bowling, aim at your target and then release the nut.’

As her sister practised Mr Griffs’ nut-throwing technique, Ruby turned to Mr Griffs and asked, ‘You sure do know a lot about nuts, don’t you?’

Mr Griffs was pleased to see that Ruby was taking an interest in one of his hobbies. ‘Yes, I love nuts. Cashews, walnuts, almonds, macadamias, oh, and my favourite, pistachios. There are just so many of them. The problem is that once I start eating them, I simply can’t stop.’

‘Where did you learn this throwing technique?’ Ruby enquired.

Mr Griffs smiled. ‘Well, actually, it’s how I eat them. You see Ruby, this technique allows me to keep my other hand clean. That way, when I use the remote, read the newspaper or flatten my hair, I won’t get oily stuff everywhere.’

Intrigued, Ruby then asked, ‘So what’s this got to do with Steve?’

Lucy, who had been concentrating on throwing a handful of nuts, stopped to hear Mr Griffs’ answer to her sister’s question.

‘Remember how I told you about how he accused me of digging up holes in his garden? He assumed that it was me. Well, just the other day, I learnt that bush turkeys love nuts – almost as much as I do. I’m going to use this to my advantage, and the both of you are going to help me.’ Mr Griffs leaned in and told the girls his plan.

A few moments later, Mrs Griffs walked into the living room. Her cheery greeting was cut short when she saw the mess that Mr Griffs had made. Her empty nut and salad dressing jars were everywhere and the hula hoops that she and her fitness friends used were scattered around the room.

She let out a gasp and then cried out, 'Oh my. What on earth are you doing?'

Seeing his wife's alarmed expression, Mr Griffs rushed to explain. 'Hold on. Before you panic, you need to know that all I am doing is teaching the girls how to throw and hit a target.'

Mrs Griffs scanned the room again, horrified to see that her nuts were on the floor. 'What have you done to my nuts? They're meant to be eaten, not thrown,' Mrs Griffs told them.

Only then noticing that Ruby and Lucy were wearing camouflage outfits, she asked, 'And why are the girls dressed like that?' Increasingly suspicious, Mrs Griffs asked her husband, 'What are you up to?' She squinted her eyes at him.

Mr Griffs was about to tell his wife that they were rehearsing for a play, an outlandish excuse that he had prepared earlier, when Lucy, who couldn't tell a lie, firmly said, 'We're going to teach Steve a lesson. The three of us are going to plant these spicy nuts in his garden and the bush turkeys will dig them up. His garden will be a mess, but he won't be able to blame Mr Griffs anymore.'

As Lucy was talking, Mr Griffs was waving his hands behind his wife's back. He was trying to signal to her that she shouldn't tell Mrs Griffs any more information. He didn't want her to interfere with his plan.

Turning to her husband, Mrs Griffs shouted, 'What do you think you're doing, old man? We're supposed to be taking care of these kids – not leading them towards a life of crime!'

Mr Griffs swiftly retorted, 'Well, at least it's a job. You know about the high unemployment rates at the moment. Besides, we have to stand up to bullies. Just like that man with the feather.'

Mrs Griffs looked at her husband in confusion. 'Who?'

'You know, the man with the feather and the cap. The hooded man.'

'What are you on about?'

Mr Griffs' hands flailed about. 'He wore tights and lived in a forest.'

Mrs Griffs' bewildered expression melted into a reluctant smile. She couldn't help but laugh. 'You mean Robin Hood, don't you?'

'Ahh yes, the English fellow from my country. That's the one.' Mr Griffs happily said, 'I'm glad we solved that mystery.'

Mrs Griffs' anger had evaporated. Her husband's funny expressions always made her smile and she knew that the best course of action was just to let him be.

But Ruby, who was worried that Mrs Griffs was still angry with them, added, 'We actually watched a movie about Robin Hood at school the other day. He was pretty cool.'

Mr Griffs grinned and told his wife, 'If it's good enough for the school, it's good enough for me. Well, anyway, we've got to get back to work. Thanks for stopping by.'

Slightly perturbed that he was kicking her out of her own living room, she said, 'Alright. But if Steve catches you, don't be calling me for help. I know nothing about this.' Mrs Griffs then turned to the two girls. 'Be safe and remember your coats. Don't let this one keep you up too late.'

Ruby and Lucy said goodnight to Mrs Griffs and told her not to worry. 'We'll take care of him,' Lucy said.

When his wife left the room, Mr Griffs turned to the girls and gathered them in a huddle. 'Right. I think you've both practiced enough. Shall we take some non-spicy ones for the road?'

Chapter 6

A shrieking sound abruptly woke Steve up. Turning around in his bed, he moaned. 'Be quiet. It's Saturday,' he said half asleep. Just as he was about to bury his face back into his pillow, Steve heard another high-pitched screech coming from outside of his bedroom.

Steve's eyes snapped open. Panicking, he wondered if a group of street hooligans were running riot in his garden. When he heard some thumps and scratching sounds coming from his roof, Steve reached out to wake up his wife. 'Victoria, there are weird noises coming from outside. I think Sophia might have rounded up her friends. We had a little misunderstanding yesterday. Can you go and deal with them?'

Victoria woke up long enough to say, 'Go sort it out yourself, Steve', before falling back to sleep.

Steve was still frustrated with his bad luck over the last few days and this was the last thing he wanted to do. He whined, 'Why me? What have I done to deserve this? I'm just a normal guy!'

Victoria didn't say anything; she was already asleep.

Steve got out of bed. Though he wouldn't usually leave the house unless he was fully dressed, he wasn't willing to risk another outfit around Sophia. And he also refused to wear his robe until it had been mended. So, after putting on his wife's fluffy purple gown, he made his way to the front door and cautiously opened it.

Expecting to see a group of hoodlum kids, Steve was gobsmacked when he saw what seemed to be hundreds of bush turkeys on his property. Of course, there were only twenty or so, but Steve always loved to exaggerate.

The turkeys were digging holes in his garden, and even fighting and pecking at each other. In shock, Steve's knees buckled. He had to hold onto the door knob to remain upright. Not knowing what to do, he called for help.

'Victoria! Come quick. You have to see this.'

Used to her husband's hysterics over nothing, Victoria was in no rush to see what he was on about. She took her time and, when she finally managed to reach the front door, told him to calm down.

Steve pointed to the garden and cried out, 'Turkeys! Look what they've done to our garden. Look at all those holes! And who knows what they've done to our roof. They must've escaped from the zoo.'

Although Victoria was shocked by the state of the garden, she was more concerned about how her husband had made a fool of himself, yet again. 'But you told me that Mr Griffs was responsible for the holes. Steve, I can't believe that you blamed that innocent man. Go to him right now and apologise for your behaviour.'

Steve's head dropped and his shoulders slumped. If there was anything in the world that he hated, it was having to apologise and to admit that he was wrong to anyone. But especially to Mr Griffs.

Resigned, Steve said, 'Okay, fine,' and then walked off.

As he began to make his way across his garden, Steve grouched, 'Silly turkeys, silly holes, silly Griffs . . . wrecking my Saturday.'

He was carefully walking along his pathway when he noticed that one of the menacing creatures that crowded his garden was coughing.

Stopping in his tracks, he looked at the bird. 'It better not be sick.' Not wanting to be infected by some vile disease, Steve covered his mouth with his left hand. The turkey then coughed up something before quickly running away.

‘What an ugly creature,’ he commented.

Out of curiosity, Steve warily left the footpath. He approached the spot where the turkey had been and looked to see what the bird had spat up. It was covered in some sticky, phlegm-like substance and he couldn’t make out what it was. Looking around, Steve saw that there were more of them. ‘What are these things?’

With his hand still covering his mouth, Steve squatted. He picked one up and inspected it. ‘Are these nuts? How did they get here?’

Not wanting to touch the dirty nut any longer, Steve threw it away. Instantly, a flock of bush turkeys flew down from his roof and began fighting over that single nut. ‘Dumb creatures. Playing fetch are you?’

As he had no idea how to deal with bush turkeys, Steve decided that he would call the pound after he apologised to Mr Griffs.

Leaving his garden, he made his way over to his neighbour’s house, only pausing to mock Mr Griffs’ flowerbed. ‘Wilted. Ha,’ he sniggered.

When he reached the front door, he began to impatiently knock.

Soon Mrs Griffs appeared.

‘Steve? What are you doing here so early? Don’t you usually sleep in on the weekends?’ She was worried that he was here to complain again about her and Mr Griffs being too loud, as he had done on many other occasions. Hoping that he wasn’t going to yell at her, she said, ‘We’re going to have to keep our voices down, Ruby and Lucy are asleep at the moment.’

‘Hello, Mrs Griffs. Good to see you too,’ Steve sarcastically said.

Mrs Griffs wasn’t confused at all by Steve’s greeting – he never actually listened to what she, or anyone else, had to say.

Before she could respond, Steve asked, 'How is Mr Griffs coming along with that Rubik's cube?' At that moment, he didn't really care about it but he liked to have control over the conversation.

'It's going well, I think. It kept him busy the other night. Though it just adds to the clutter in the house now,' Mrs Griffs told him.

Again not really listening, Steve said, 'Good, good. Might I have a word with your husband? I want to apologise to him. It turns out that the holes in my garden were made by some wild bush turkeys.'

'I'm sorry to hear about your garden, Steve, but unfortunately Mr Griffs isn't here. He's at the shops buying some nuts at the moment,' Mrs Griffs replied without hesitation.

Steve perked up. His shoulders lifted. 'Nuts? What nuts?'

Mrs Griffs, realising that she had just given her husband away, hastily tried to back track. 'Did I say nuts? I meant . . . ah . . . coco . . . coconuts. He's out . . . buying . . . coconuts. That's it . . . coconuts,' she stuttered.

Steve was beside himself with glee. He had known all along that Mr Griffs was responsible for the holes in his garden. Steve prided himself on having developed an instinct for Griffs related problems over the years.

Trying to contain his satisfaction, Steve calmly asked, 'Do you know when he'll be back? This type of situation calls for a direct apology. I'd really love to give it to him.'

Mrs Griffs, not liking Steve's lopsided grin, knew that she had said too much. Not wanting to be blamed, and worried that Mike and Ellen would never allow her and Mr Griffs to babysit again, she rushed to say, 'I don't keep track of what that man gets up to. I have nothing to do with anything he does. Good day to you, Steve.' In a panic, she quickly shut the door in his face.

To the door, Steve said, 'Enjoy those coconuts. Oh, and by the way, I'll be back. Be sure to tell Mr Griffs that.'

Chapter 7

Stopping by his favourite grocer, Mr Griffs' eyes lit up. He loved it when they set up sample stations. Although he usually shopped at the supermarket nearby, as they often had cheaper fruit and vegetables, he always liked to see what specials the grocer was running.

'Ah, look at these red grapes. They're so plump. I bet they're juicy. They sure will cool my mouth after yesterday – those nuts were too spicy,' Mr Griffs said to himself. Despite having given himself an excuse, Mr Griffs never needed a reason to nibble.

As he was munching on a grape, the worker behind the station started to spruik the product. He had just begun to rant on about the antioxidants in red grapes when Mr Griffs cut into the conversation. 'Sure, sure. It's obvious, no?' He had long ago stopped listening to pushy salespeople and often used this phrase to pacify them.

He then asked the worker if he had any green grapes.

The worker, whose name was Jerome, replied, 'Let me check out back for you.' Jerome was confident that he would get a commission from this sale and so he left his station. A rookie mistake. You should never leave a food stand unattended when Mr Griffs is around.

Saying to himself, 'Just a few for the road,' Mr Griffs then proceeded to grab a bunch of grapes. After putting a few loose ones in his pocket for later, Mr Griffs walked away.

Heading towards the supermarket, he continued to munch on the grapes. Thinking of his revenge on Steve last night, he subconsciously began to use the nut throwing technique he had taught Ruby and Lucy to eat his grapes. As he did so, he gawked at the shops he passed. Mr Griffs was always on the lookout for a sale and loved to check out anything that looked new.

When he finally reached the supermarket, Mr Griffs was almost out of grapes. He was biting into a particularly crisp one when an older supermarket employee approached him. His name tag read Stanley and he looked to be quite a number of years older than Mr Griffs.

‘Sir, you do know that you’re not allowed to sample the produce?’ Stanley asked.

Mr Griffs frowned. ‘I haven’t even reached the produce yet. I’ll need to see what you’re offering today before I can promise you anything,’ he half-joked.

‘Don’t lie to me, sir. I can see you’re eating them. Shame on you. I expected more from a man your age. I should report you to my supervisor,’ Stanley said.

‘What are you on about? I got this from the grocer. And believe me, they’re basically handing them out over there. You could learn a thing or two from them. It’s called marketing,’ Mr Griffs replied. This time, he was conscious of sounding patronising.

‘Excuse me –,’ as Stanley was about to tell Mr Griffs off further, he saw that a few people were entering the supermarket carrying green grapes. Though, unlike Mr Griffs, they had actually paid for their grapes. Stanley knew that he had made a mistake, but was not willing to apologise. ‘Well, make sure you don’t take any of my produce. I’m going to keep my eye on you.’ He then stomped off.

‘Miserable old man.’ Mr Griffs shook his head, putting Stanley out of his mind. He had better things to think about; he was a little bit upset that the green grapes he had asked for would be eaten by other people. ‘They look so good. Ah, I should have waited.’

*

At the checkout, Mr Griffs was struggling to lift a jumbo-sized bag of mixed nuts onto the register. Although Mrs Griffs had only asked her husband to buy a medium-sized bag, he couldn’t resist up-sizing. Not only was it on special but Mr Griffs always liked to keep some extra nuts handy. Especially if Mrs Griffs kept on over-spicing them and if Steve kept on bothering him.

Eventually, Mr Griffs managed to place the bag on the counter.

‘Are you okay there, Mr Griffs?’ Megan asked.

Megan had been serving Mr Griffs at the supermarket for a while, and Mr Griffs always appreciated how she separated the cold products from the canned foods without him having to ask. Megan was quite young, only twenty years old, but Mr Griffs valued her common sense. As such, he was her best customer. She, in turn, always enjoyed Mr Griffs’ random conversations and, even though he mispronounced her name, calling her ‘Meegan’, she never had the heart to correct him.

Mr Griffs told Meegan that he was fine and then asked her not to put the nuts in a plastic bag today.

‘Are you sure, Mr Griffs? It’s awfully heavy. In fact, I would recommend that you double-up,’ she helpfully said.

Mr Griffs declined her offer. ‘No, no, its packaging is strong enough to get me home. Besides, plastic bags are bad for the environment, you know?’

After paying for his nuts, Mr Griffs said, ‘By the way, Meegan, there is an older fellow harassing customers in the shop. You might want to report him to your supervisor.’

‘You mean Stanley?’ Megan asked.

‘Yes, the old man.’

Megan barely suppressed her laugh. Stanley couldn’t be that much older than Mr Griffs. ‘Sure, I’ll look into it.’

After saying goodbye, Mr Griffs heaved up the bag of nuts and walked out of the supermarket.

Before he left the shops, however, Mr Griffs made another pit stop. As he was going past the same grocer that he had visited earlier, he saw that another person was manning the

sample station, which was filled with green grapes. Mr Griffs said to himself, 'Why not? I could use the antioxidants.'

Chapter 8

Turning onto his street, Pickle Mouse Crescent, Mr Griffs continued to walk at a leisurely pace. It was still quite early and, as Ruby and Lucy wouldn't be awake for a while, he was in no rush to get home. Plus, his jumbo-sized bag of nuts was weighing him down.

After walking further along his street, Mr Griffs couldn't resist the temptation any longer. He opened the bag, which proved no easy feat whilst on the move, and then dove right in. He ate a few cashews and then went on the hunt for some pistachios. There weren't that many, so Mr Griffs had to dig deeper and deeper into the bag to find his favourite nut.

As he approached his letterbox, Mr Griffs' agitation rose. 'Ahh c'maaan. Why do they always skimp on the pistachios? It's a crime, I tell you.'

His fist was buried half way down the bag when all of a sudden the packaging split open. Nuts began pouring out in a stream onto the pavement. The tear was so large that Mr Griffs had no hope of salvaging the nuts.

'Oh nooo! Not my nuts! What a waste! Why didn't I listen to Meegan?' Mr Griffs called out.

It was at that moment that he heard laughter. Turning around, Mr Griffs saw Steve Moran strutting towards him. Steve, still in his wife's purple robe, had a triumphant smirk on his face.

Mr Griffs was about to ask him about his choice of attire when Steve butted in. 'The turkeys should be here any moment.'

Mr Griffs was still unaware that Steve had figured out his ruse from the night before. He had assumed that Steve would be too busy with his clothing issues to solve the mystery about his garden.

‘Really? You don’t say. I had no idea that bush turkeys liked nuts. There you go Steve, you taught me something for once,’ Mr Griffs lied.

‘Oh, I bet I did,’ Steve sneered. ‘And by the way, it’s such a shame your flowers aren’t growing so well. It must be all the negative energy coming from you.’ Steve then turned around and began walking away with a self-satisfied laugh.

Confirming his suspicion that Steve had in fact been spying on him the other day, Mr Griffs said loudly, ‘Next time you decide to snoop around my garden, you ought to change your cologne. It’s a dead giveaway. It’s so stinky!’

*

After quickly grabbing a bucket from his garage, Mr Griffs started to carefully pick up any nuts that hadn’t touched the ground. As the bag of nuts had been so big, Mr Griffs soon realised that he would be there for a while.

‘I’m going to be out here all day,’ he exaggerated. ‘I may as well listen to *The Garden Report*.’ Mr Griffs pulled out his pocket radio, which had been clipped to his belt. As he had forgotten to buy a new pair of headphones at the shops, he just let it run normally.

Mr Westerbeak was back on air and was taking calls from listeners. After talking to a guy about his fungi problem, he took another call.

‘Mr Stevens, you’re on the line,’ Mr Westerbeak greeted.

‘Hi, Mr Westerbeak. First-time caller, second-time listener here. I’ve got a negative energy problem. My neighbour is very a grumpy man, and his miserable personality seems to be killing off his flowers. What do you suggest I do?’ Mr Stevens queried.

Mr Griffs continued picking up his nuts. The voice on the radio sounded familiar, but he couldn’t place it.

‘That’s terrible to hear, Mr Stevens. What type of plants are they?’ Mr Westerbeak asked.

Mr Stevens paused for a moment. It was almost as if he had no idea what type of flowers they were. ‘Umm . . . they’re . . . um . . . these small colourful ones.’ In an aggressive tone, he asked, ‘Why does it matter, anyway?’

Mr Westerbeak answered him calmly, ‘Well, actually it does. The more colourful the flowers are, the greater the distance from which they can absorb negative energy.’

Mr Griffs had never heard of this strange phenomenon but quite liked the way that Mr Westerbeak was contradicting this Mr Stevens.

‘What are you getting at?’ Mr Stevens demanded.

‘It basically means that the source of the negative energy affecting these plants might not necessarily be coming from your neighbour,’ Mr Westerbeak clarified.

Mr Stevens gasped loudly and then started to tell Mr Westerbeak off. He was in the middle of his outburst when a female voice said in the background, ‘Steve, who are you on the phone with? Have you apologised to Mr Griffs yet?’

The phone line went dead.

Mr Griffs turned off the radio and then stood up. Using his nut-throwing technique, he tossed one of the clean pistachios up in the air, caught it in his mouth and then gobbled it down.

He gathered his nut bucket and then headed home.

The End

Never Assume is the first story in *The Absurd Tales of Mr Griff's* series. On the next page, you will find a sneak peek of the second story in the series – *Cool as a Cucumber*.

For more information, please visit www.mrgriffs.com.

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.'

Acknowledgement

The Absurd Tales of Mr Griffs started off as a collection of random ideas. Whenever we saw, heard or experienced something funny or unusual, we immediately took note of it. It wasn't until we saw a house with overgrown weeds that we started putting all of our ideas together into outlandish and crazy storylines.

Mr Griffs, a man of absurd logic, soon came to be. Developing him as a character gave us the impetus to start sharing our stories with other people. We couldn't keep Mr Griffs to ourselves.

So thank you to everyone who embraced Mr Griffs during the early stages. It was your enthusiasm and positivity that drove us to publish this.

We are grateful to our readers and to all the wonderful people that gave us constructive feedback. A special thanks goes to Emily Paget for her excellent proofreading and attention to detail.

Thank you to [John Martinez](#) (cover page illustration), Kim Evangelista (cover page title design) and [Arthur Dunderale](#) (cover page format).

And lastly, to our very spirited family for supporting us in every way possible.

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 lychees, whistling and comfy booths at cafés. He dislikes back to school ads, fenugreek and clothes that lose their elasticity quickly. His favourite thing about Mr Griffs is his cheekiness, humour and carefree approach to life.

Keren likes non-greasy sunscreen, the chocolate dusting on coffee and sweet peaches. She dislikes tags on shirts, sardines and creepy mannequins. Her favourite thing about Mr Griffs is how other characters respond to his idiosyncrasies with complete and utter confusion.

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

hello@mrgriffs.com.

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Never Assume by Jonathan & Keren Joseph

First published in 2016

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Cover page illustration by [John Martinez](#)

Cover page title design by Kim Evangelista

Cover page formatting by [Arthur Dunderdale](#)

Proofread by Emily Paget

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