



The Mokee Joe "Hooked on Books" Competition
www.peterjmurray.co.uk

Starter Story

STRICTLY OUT OF BOUNDS
BY PETER J MURRAY

‘Are you thinking what I’m thinking?’ Jake asked with a sly smile on his face.

‘Too true!’ Julie frowned. ‘I always know what’s going on in your head!’

The twins stopped outside the boarded-up old house. The rusted iron gate was slightly open...beckoning the two eleven-year-olds to enter in.

‘Do you think they’re true...the rumours and the spooky stories?’

Julie looked even more serious than before. ‘I’m not sure about vampires and stuff like that. I think that’s just kids making things up. But the idea that someone weird might be living in there...well you never know.’

An icy chill ran down Julie’s spine. Jake shivered at exactly the same time.

‘Well...I still think we should go in? I’m not scared!’

Julie shook her head. Her and her brother might be identical twins...but she knew that she was much more mature than Jake.

She stared up the overgrown path towards the crumbling old house. ‘Even if we did dare to go in...it would be really dangerous,’ she said, putting on her most sensible grown-up voice. ‘The floors might be rotten or the ceiling might cave in on us. And in any case, Mum would go mad if she knew!’

'But that's just it...' Jake said defensively. '...She wouldn't know...unless you told her. I wouldn't say anything.'

Julie glanced up at the house again. It looked like something out of a horror film. Really spooky! All the windows and doors were boarded up...obviously to keep people out...*or maybe to keep something in!*

Julie shivered again. She might act more mature than her brother, but she was just as imaginative...and just as brave, she told herself.

'Well? What do you say?' Jake asked in a challenging way.

Julie hesitated...her sensible side arguing with her adventurous side. 'Strictly out of bounds!' her mother had said. But then again...just a little look... 'Well...I suppose we could at least sneak up the path as far as the door...'

'Now you're talking,' Jake said, looking up and down the road; it was deserted...no one around. He pushed on the rusted gate and it made an awful whining sound. 'Come on...follow me!' he whispered.

The two adventurers crept up the path, the garden either side a jungle of tall weeds and nettles. The house loomed before them, grey, grim and uninviting.

As they approached the half-rotted doorway, Julie's heart began to beat more quickly. She knew they were wrong to be there. Mum had said to keep away, the teachers at school had said to keep away, and now every one of her instincts was telling her the same thing...KEEP AWAY!

'Look! The door's boarded up, but there's a gap...we can get through!'

Julie was about to say 'NO!' but her brother was already through the dark hole and inside.

His voice sounded hollow from the other side of the door, 'Come on...I'm in. It's really dark in here. Good job I brought my torch. The kids at school are going to be so impressed when we tell them about this.'

Julie looked around...still all quiet...no one about. She looked back to the rusted gate and yearned to go back... to get as far away from the house as possible. She longed to be at home...watching TV in her room...with Jess, her Persian cat cuddled up on her knee.

'Come on...you're not chickening out now are you?'

Julie bit her lip and swallowed hard. She might be some things...but she was definitely no chicken. She took a deep breath and crawled through the gap.

The next instant she was inside, crouching by her brother's side as he shone the torch around. They both looked in awe at their surroundings.

Much to their surprise, the house still had furniture...a few old armchairs, a sideboard, a table and a couple of old standard lamps...all draped with cobwebs and covered in years of dust. There were other objects too; hiding in shadows and round corners...too many things to take in.

'See... there's nothing to be scared of really. It's just an empty old house,' Jake whispered bravely. But Julie noticed the slight tremble in his voice. Her heart began to race again. She said nothing and remained quite still.

Jake crept over to the bottom of a tall flight of stairs. 'Come on!' he said confidently. 'I'm going up.'

Before Julie had chance to follow, something ice cold touched her shoulder and a ghostly voice whispered in her ear, *'Whatever you do, child...don't go upstairs...'*

All the hairs on Julie's neck stood on end.

She swung round – there was no one there!

She wasn't sure who or what had spoken to her... but she knew that she had to stop her brother from going upstairs. 'Jake! Stop!'

But it was too late...he was already on his way up. 'Come on...don't be a wimp. Follow me. I'll protect you,' he giggled nervously.

Julie crept over to the foot of the stairs and looked up. Her brother was almost at the top.

And then she looked past him...to the landing...and saw the huge shadow lurking there...crouching...waiting...

This starter story is 844 words...complete the story in another 1000 words or less, and submit them to us no later than 14th October 2008)

Good luck!

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