Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Helping you choose books for children

0-5 5-7 7-9 9-12 12+

opening extract from

Girl 16: Pants on Fire

written by

Sue Limb

published by

Bloomsbury

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

1

HONOUR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER, PARTICULARLY THY FATHER, BECAUSE IF YOU DON'T, NOBODY ELSE WILL

Fred and Jess were sitting under their tree in the park. They'd worked a bit on their latest script, based on the Queen delivering her Christmas message as a rap artist. They'd shared a chocolate ice cream the size of a small piano. A cute dog had visited them and refrained from pooing. Everything was just about as perfect as it could be, except that they had to go back to school tomorrow.

'Did your dad send you a Commandment today?' asked Fred. Jess located it on her mobile and handed it over. Fred read it and laughed. 'It's ironical really,' he said. 'Your dad is just about the least commanding guy I've ever met.'

'True,' said Jess. 'If you were looking for somebody to play God in a Bad Mood, Dad would be the last person you'd choose.'

'You'd probably choose Irritable Powell,' said Fred thoughtfully. Mr Powell, universally known as Irritable, would be their new Head of Year when they got back to school tomorrow. A treat in store.

'I hope I never irritate him,' said Jess. 'His shouting fits can cause structural damage.'

'I wish we were back in St Ives with your dad,' said Fred. 'That was such an amazing trip. I was astounded that he accepted me as your … gentleman companion. And frankly, rather disappointed. I was expecting him to horsewhip me or throw me into the sea.'

'Yeah, it was a brilliant holiday,' sighed Jess. 'I sort of hoped that Dad would be OK about us. But even my mum seemed to tolerate the idea. It was immensely cunning of you to compare her to Jane Austen, you ruthless charmer!'

'We learnt that in our first week at gigolo school,' said Fred. 'It's an appealing career choice, I'm sure you'll agree.'

'Just make sure the next old lady you fascinate is a tad richer than my mum,' said Jess. 'God, it was so embarrassing when Dad and Phil had to pay for the birthday curry!'

Jess's sixteenth birthday had been celebrated in an Indian restaurant the previous week among towering piles of popadoms and seven different vegetable dishes. Her mum, however, had behaved badly by losing her purse and having a panic attack. The purse had turned up later that night, back home under a pile of dirty laundry.

'Thank God Phil had one of those flashy gold credit cards!' said Jess in rapture. 'In fact, he's completely divine. What could be better than a camp stepfather with a boutique and a boat? I can't wait to get back to school tomorrow and boast about my dad being gay.'

Jess sent her dad a text message saying **PICNIC IN THE PARK WITH FRED. WISH YOU WERE HERE. SCHOOL TOMORROW. YOU'LL BE FAMOUS BY LUNCHTIME. OR SHOULD I SAY INFAMOUS?**

'I don't know how to say this,' said Fred suddenly. There was an odd, sad note to his voice. Jess's heart missed a beat. He looked up at her, his head resting on his hand.

'What? *What?*' said Jess. 'You're not ill or something, are you? You're not going to die? I have nothing to wear that would be suitable for your funeral.' Inside, she was suddenly *really worried*.

'You're going to hate me for this,' said Fred.

'I already hate you more than anyone else on earth,' said Jess. 'So go for it! Spill the beans.'

'The thing is,' Fred rolled over on to his back and stared up through the branches of the tree to the sky, 'I have real problems about going back to school.'

'God, don't we all?' said Jess, though really she was looking forward to it. It would be so cool. Her dad was gay, which would enormously increase her prestige. And, even more wonderful, everyone would know she and Fred were together. She was going to be so immensely proud, she might just have to sell their story to the newspapers.

'No, I mean ...' Fred hesitated, and rolled over on to his chest. 'I don't mean just the routine back-to-school nausea and boredom stuff. I mean, I have problems, with ... you know, our so-called relationship.'

An invisible spear hurtled down through the air and pinned Jess's heart to the earth.

'What do you mean?' She tried for a light-hearted tone but somehow it came out in a desperate gasp, as if she was a fish that had suddenly found itself out of its beloved water and trapped in the horrible dry burning air.

'I'm sorry to be such a prat,' Fred went on, not looking at Jess, but staring instead at the grass just

below his face, 'but the thought of everybody at school giving us a hard time ... You know, uh – the ridicule ... the jokes ... Foul! The thought of it makes me want to walk over to the railings over there and hurl my recent lunch into the nettles.'

'Don't be stupid,' said Jess. Her hands had started to shake. 'Nobody'll be even the slightest bit interested.'

'It's just,' said Fred, suddenly taking refuge in a silly posh voice, 'that I've got my reputation to think of, my dear. My identity, you know? I'm the – how can I put it? Eccentric loner. I am historically unable to form relationships. If everybody knows that we're together I shall lose whatever street cred I ever had and be despised as a doting nerd.'

Jess's arteries were now pumping to maximum.