



JUMMY

AT
THE

RIVER SCHOOL

A MESSAGE FROM CHICKEN HOUSE

Iwish I'd gone to a boarding school as fun as this one! It's fantastic: there are wild animals, midnight feasts, friendships and rivalries. But as well as a rousing adventure, wonderful debut author Sabine Adeyinka has written a serious story with high stakes – poverty and lack of opportunity cause real danger to characters we grow to love. Luckily we have the resourceful Jummy to put things right in the end – she's a blast! More please, Sabine – back next term?

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Cunningham'.

BARRY CUNNINGHAM

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*For Ayo, Shindara and Seni; for believing
and therefore, understanding.*



CHAPTER ONE

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

I woke up startled by the shriek of the cockerel from the backyard.

Someone must have disturbed it. It was the laziest cockerel you could ever meet.

A tiny pebble hit one of the windowpanes.

I dragged myself from my bed, my khaki uniform crumpled from my afternoon nap, and got to my bedroom window just in time to see Owolabi's large frame disappear from view. He must have disturbed the cockerel again because it shrieked even more fearfully than before.

I rolled my eyes. Owolabi lived in the flat above mine and was the most annoying boy – no,

scratch that – *person* I had ever met. I was sure Caro's cockerel agreed with me.

Caro! That was when I remembered my problem. I needed to find my best friend fast. She would help me out of this trouble I was in.

I shuffled into my brown school shoes, stepping on the backs as usual, and peeped through the bead curtains that separated our bedrooms from the living room. Mummy was seated at the dining table, picking rice. First, she smoothed the rice over on the tray with the back of her hand, then she picked out the undesirable grains and put them into a tiny bowl. She was humming that tune that meant she was a million miles away.

I crept past the dining room and into the kitchen. Made it!

‘Hey, Jumoke!’

I jumped out of my skin.

‘Why haven't you changed or eaten since you came back from school, eh, why?’

Joy, Mummy's helper, was in the kitchen and was judging the ink marks on my uniform with her disapproving side-eye as she picked the beans that would go with the rice.

‘I cannot eat and I cannot even think about changing my clothes.’ I held out my hands towards her. ‘I am in hot soup!’

‘This girl, for someone so small, you get into a lot of trouble. What have you done this time?’

‘Nothing!’ I snapped, and left our flat at top speed. The mosquito-net door shook with just the right amount of gusto.

‘For someone so small, my foot! What does my size have to do with anything?’ I muttered angrily to myself. I had been going to tell Joy about my predicament, but not any more! I was so fed up of being treated like a small girl at home. When were they going to realize that I was eleven already and no longer a baby? Besides, Joy was not in my school: how would she know if other people got into trouble more than me?

I could not wait to get to boarding school. I tried to picture myself in the illustrious River School, the best secondary school for girls in Southern Nigeria. I had taken the entry exams and everyone who knew us was waiting to see if I would make it in. Baba and Mummy would be so proud if I did. I had worked hard for the first time

in my life but I wasn't sure I had done enough. I imagined myself in my River School dress doing stuff by myself. I would make my own way with no one trying to help me all the time. I thought of midnight feasts, giggling late into the night in the dorms, noisy meals in the big dining hall and, best of all, games and picnics by the river. The results would be out any time now and I was on edge with anticipation.

Owolabi had already received his results. The whole neighbourhood knew he was going to Kingswill College, the boys' school near the River School. He had run out of his flat with the admission letter in his hands, shouting, 'I passed! I passed!' Joy and I had rushed out on to the balcony to see him carrying Caro's brother in the air in celebration. Later they were found sitting in the large dustbin in front of our block of flats drinking soda. Those boys were so strange.

I could not wait to be rid of primary school with all its silly problems.

For today's particular task, we had been told to finish drawing a map of Nigeria during our short break before the teacher came into class. I was not

very good at drawing but that wasn't even what irritated me. It was one more day till the end of primary school, so the teacher was just being wicked. We should have been playing cards, skipping or doing backflips at the back of the classroom.

I was just about to carry on with my weak attempt at the map when I saw the hungry look in Chigozie's eyes as I slid the juicy mango slices that Joy had prepared for me down my throat. Chigozie was the class captain and good at drawing. He sat across from me.

'Do you want mango, Chigozie?' I stared deeply into his hungry eyes.

He nodded vigorously.

'Do you know how to draw the map of Nigeria?'

He nodded even harder.

I stretched out my hand with the bowl of mango in it, and he appeared beside me in a flash. I left my geography book open and went out to play. But the teacher caught him doing my work and gave me lines, one hundred of them.

So that's why I needed to find Caro. She would help me write my lines!