

The Curse of Cogston House

Jack strode up an overgrown path away from the park as though relishing a mission through the jungle, dodging the occasional stinging nettle with an effortless skip or jump.

“Come on, Luca. This is going to be epic!” Dipping his head and swiping away leaves like some intrepid explorer, he manoeuvred under a tree branch, which hung over the narrow track.

Luca dawdled behind. Only a few minutes earlier, he had been perfectly happy practising his limited gymnastics moves upside down on the monkey bars. Now, he was torn between making the effort to keep up with his friend and deliberately getting left behind.

“Speed up – we’re nearly there!” Jack called eagerly over his shoulder.

Luca wasn’t at all sure that they should be leaving the park swings, where they had been allowed to hang out without their parents since both recently celebrating their eleventh birthdays in the same week. He was even less sure that he wanted to be venturing towards ‘The Top End’, as everyone called that part of the park grounds. He spun round to look behind him. The monkey bars were now way out of sight and the watery evening sun above was being muscled out of position by ever-darkening shades of grey, layering over each other in the sky like a collage.

“Maybe it’s getting too late for today. We could go another day,” Luca suggested hopefully. He looked down towards his watch. Scowling at the time – 10:31 – he shook his wrist vigorously. Clearly, the watch wasn’t working, as it was only just beginning to go dark. He was going to need a new excuse. “Why don’t we come back tomorrow, when it’s lighter? I think it’s going to rain, from the look of those clouds, and Dad’s making bolognese for tea. We don’t want to miss that!”

Being two days older than his friend clearly gave him no superiority at all.

“Forget about your stomach for a minute! I can see the scaffolding through this gap!” enthused Jack, trampling undeterred over the thorny undergrowth.

Luca followed him unhappily along the



gradually dwindling path. Hands up in front of himself and elbows tucked in, he was now having to place his trainers precisely onto prickly stems to pin them down with his soles and avoid any contact with his bare arms or legs.

On the other side of a tangled row of bushes, the broken-looking building loomed. Fifty-foot-high scaffolding encased the crumbling walls of Cogston House like a rusty exoskeleton. The long, metal poles, bolted together at regular right angles, seemed as though they were the only things keeping the whole house from falling apart.

About a hundred years ago, the house had apparently been quite a grand sight, belonging to a rich family who owned the entire park. Until about thirty years ago, it had still been inhabited but, for decades now, it had wasted away, shedding scraps of brickwork and hiding itself under a cloak of creeping ivy. Even from the outside, it had a look of being infested with sadness.

Everyone had a story about Cogston House. No one quite knew what was true and what was rumour, and Luca didn't want to stick around to find out.

"Ow!" he squealed, as Jack reached back and hauled him through the gap he had just made in the twisted greenery. Luca rubbed at a fresh, pale scratch on his arm.

Unconcerned, Jack stood triumphantly, his hands on his hips, admiring the enormous house. His eyes swept over the building as if they belonged to an ancient explorer who had finally unearthed a once mythical monument.

"Told you it would be epic," Jack grinned.

"Epic? Looks like it's barely still standing up."

At home, Luca had heard his stepmum say that it was about time Cogston House was renovated, and that it would be good for the area if it was properly restored with access opened up again. In reply, his dad had said that it would be better to take a wrecking ball to it, after everything that had gone on. Luca didn't know exactly what 'everything' meant, but he was now regretting mentioning the place at all to Jack.

Extract from the Twinkl Originals short story 'The Curse of Cogston House'

