

# CAUTIONARY TALE

A new musical about growing up and growing glum

Book and Lyrics by Rebecca Atkinson-Lord  
Music by Rebecca Applin

With additional material by Mark Iles

## Script extract 5: The Bittingworths

### COPYRIGHT NOTICE

*Cautionary Tale* is a show about finding hope and spreading joy when all seems lost. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we've lost our chance, for the time being, to work on developing the show as we had planned but we'd still like to share the joy.

For a limited time, we're sharing extracts from the score, lyrics and script of *Cautionary Tale* online so you can get a flavour of this show by reading, rehearsing and performing some of it in your own home.

These works are copyright and the use of the materials included here is strictly for personal, non-commercial use. Please do not copy, share, publish or distribute them without explicit written permission from the author. Once we are ready to go back into production all online resources will be removed.

In the first instance, all licensing enquiries should be directed to Rachel Daniels at Berlin Associates [racheld@berlinassociates.com](mailto:racheld@berlinassociates.com).

*The Bittingworth sisters are pursuing the time-honoured childhood tradition of Building A Den; they are possessed of a remarkable strength that belies their tiny stature and so their den is of a structure and scale that towers over them.*

*We meet the sisters in the midst of a competition to move the biggest and heaviest object into place to construct their den. Perhaps an oak sideboard or a marble bust, a cast-iron sewing table or a plumply padded sofa. They lift these things with apparent ease. Ideally with just one hand or finger. As they move the objects into place, time slows down and a sort of air-ballet of objects takes shape.*

*The Doctors Bittingworth have their respective offices on either side of this entrance hall. As their daughters build, they pass back and forth intermittently, holding Very Important Papers to be discussed.*

*During the air-ballet, the Doctors Bittingworth enter and meet three times and have the following conversations before retracing their steps back to their offices. Don't be fooled: their conversations might imply that they'll actually do something about their daughter's behaviour, but just at the crucial moment they always spy a Very Important Thing that they absolutely must attend to immediately. One of the Very Important Things is probably having a large whisky and a sit-down.*

*Between each conversation there's a clear sense of time passing. Not minutes and hours but days and weeks. The point is to give the sense that conquering the mountain of stuff that the SISTERS build is a Sisyphean task.*

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: Fluffy's dead

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: What? How?

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: One of the girls dropped the sideboard on her.

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: Oh

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: They're heartbroken

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: I'll get my stethoscope

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: And a shovel!

*Time passes*

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: Have you seen the girls?

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: No. Why?

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: My desk has gone

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: It's in the garden

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: What?

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: Under the apple trees

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: Oh

*More time passes.*

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: I thought you'd gone out?

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: No. Why?

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: The car's gone.

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: What?

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: They've done it again

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: Oh Christ. Not the river!

*They see their daughters, but in that way that very busy and important people have, they choose to un-see and ignore what's going on until it is absolutely necessary to intervene.*

*Days later...*

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: Have you seen there's an elephant eating the borage?

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: A what?

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR: You heard.

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER: Oh!

*As the song begins, the parents begin to dismantle the den. While their children watch, they do it without the use of any special powers, straining with exertion to carry between them what a small child tossed carelessly into place with ease. When their daughters are distracted, however, DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR probably takes advantage of the opportunity to whizz things back into place with the power of his/her mind. The children suspect s/he's doing this but never quite catch her/him in the act.*

[SONG: THE BITTINGWORTH MARCH]

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR:  
Young ladies aren't supposed to do  
The things that make them strong  
I know it feels like fun to you  
But know it really is quite wrong  
I wish you'd understand that girls  
Are quiet, kind and meek

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER:  
Young gentlemen will much prefer  
You placid, pale and weak  
Don't give me lip! I will be heard  
It's time you all paid heed  
And if you don't do as I say  
Then it's a thrashing that you need

DR BITTINGWORTH THE DOCTOR:  
Of course it is quite different  
To see such strength in men  
But even then to go too far  
Is a danger now and then

Young ladies aren't supposed to  
Young ladies aren't supposed to

My father he was much like you  
As muscled as a stallion  
But Colonel Bittingworth was felled  
By carry'ng his battalion  
Unto the field of battle  
When from exhaustion they couldn't move  
I wish he'd paused to think and see  
The error that would prove  
You see my loves the Colonel failed  
To quite think through his plan  
His men were far too tired to fight  
So were slaughtered to a man  
And though the Colonel dear survived  
By hiding up a tree  
His nerves have never quite revived  
He's too shell-shocked now you see.

Young ladies aren't supposed to  
Young ladies aren't supposed to

DR BITTINGWORTH THE BARRISTER:  
Just sit and read we both implore  
Play hopscotch, jump a rope  
For if you stop this lifting now  
There might still be some hope  
Of growing into ladies who  
Conform to their birth gender  
Just stop with all these boyish games  
I beg you please surrender  
To a life of frills and party frocks  
To etiquette adhere  
There's no place left now in Gloaming for  
The muscled gender-queer.

*As the song finishes, with the den now cleared away, the Doctors Bittingworth turn sharply and go back into their studies, slamming the doors. The girls are left alone again in the hall with nothing to do.*

ADELIA: Dad was doing it again. Using his powers and pretending not to. Did you see?

EBBA: He always does. He thinks we don't know.

ADELIA: Why though? It must be so exhausting to do it with his hands.

EBBA: Sometimes when he lifts things the normal way, I'm scared that they'll crush him.

ADELIA: Why does he make it so hard for himself?

EBBA: He's scared of the Safe Keeper.

ADELIA: More scared of her than of being crushed to death.

*The NARRATOR removes his hat from where it has been resting on a side table and reveals a pinkly-wrapped present, all frills and love hearts and rainbows.*

ADELIA: Look.

*The Bittingworth girls open it with suspicion to reveal a set of Mexican wrestling masks – one for each of them. They pull them on and immediately begin a wrestling match of exceptional badassery. Through the window, the Safe Keeper's glasses twinkle menacingly.*

NARRATOR:

I won't bore you with my opinions of the kind of people who make little girls wear frills and bows and desperate smiles of unfulfilled misery. Or, for that matter, the sorts of

folk who insist that boys don't cry. And while I'm not predisposed to be optimistic, I might, at least, hope that the parental cruelty that the Bittingworth girls endure may one day give them the emotional strength to be the architects of their own destiny.

Hope, as they say, springs eternal.

DRAFT