

## **The League of Vegetables**

### **Book 2 – Part 1: The Summer Garden Show**

#### **Chapter 1 – Arrival at the Summer Garden Show**

Several months had passed since the mystery of the garden meteor.

The giant vegetables were gone.

The runaway cabbage had been stopped.

Moonlight Pond sparkled peacefully at the bottom of the Green family garden.

And for the most part, life had become normal again.

Well...

As normal as life could be when you secretly possessed vegetable-themed superpowers.

Daniel Green sat beside Moonlight Pond, skipping pebbles across the water.

One bounced once.

Twice.

Three times.

Then sank.

"New record," he announced proudly.

Sarah looked up from the flower bed she was weeding.

"It was three."

"Exactly."

"I've seen you get six."

Daniel considered this.

"Then it's my best record today."

Sarah laughed.

The pond shimmered in the sunshine.

Dragonflies darted above the lilies.

Fish flickered beneath the surface.

Nobody looking at the peaceful pond would ever guess it had once been a smoking meteor crater.

Sometimes Daniel still found that difficult to believe.

It felt like years ago.

In reality, it had only been a few months.

A few months since the glowing seeds.

A few months since the strange powers.

A few months since Carrot Boy and Cabbage Girl had first appeared.

Sarah checked her watch.

"Come on."

Daniel groaned.

"Already?"

"If we don't leave now we'll miss the opening parade."

That changed everything.

Daniel jumped to his feet.

The Greenfield Summer Garden Show only happened once a year.

It was the biggest event in the village calendar.

People came from miles around.

There were competitions.

Games.

Food stalls.

Displays.

Prizes.

And according to the posters around Greenfield, this year there was also something called:

## **DUNK THE CLOWN**

Daniel had absolutely no idea what that meant.

But it sounded interesting.

Half an hour later they were walking through the gates of the showground.

Daniel stopped immediately.

The village green had been transformed.  
Bright banners stretched between lamp posts.  
Flower displays filled every corner.  
Brass music drifted through the air.  
The smell of burgers, cakes and freshly cut grass floated on the breeze.  
Children ran between stalls.  
Judges inspected giant pumpkins.  
Gardeners proudly displayed their prize vegetables.  
The whole village seemed to be there.  
"Wow," said Daniel.  
Sarah smiled.  
"Not bad, is it?"  
Daniel barely heard her.  
Something else had caught his eye.  
Across the showground stood a large crowd.  
Every few seconds the crowd cheered.  
Then came a splash.  
Then more cheering.  
Daniel pointed.  
"What's that?"  
Sarah followed his gaze.  
"Oh dear."  
"What?"  
"I think I've lost you already."  
Daniel was already walking.  
As he got closer, the crowd parted.  
And there it was.  
The Dunk the Clown attraction.

A huge water tank stood in the middle of the field.

Above it sat a narrow platform.

A volunteer wearing a bright clown costume perched nervously on a seat above the water.

No wig.

No face paint.

Just a colourful outfit with oversized dungarees and a giant bow tie.

Someone threw a ball.

The target was hit.

**CLUNK.**

**SPLASH.**

The clown vanished into the water.

The crowd erupted with laughter.

A few moments later the soaked volunteer climbed back out, laughing too.

Daniel stared.

Then grinned.

Then grinned even wider.

"This," he announced, "is the greatest invention in human history."

Sarah laughed.

"You haven't even seen the vegetables yet."

"Who cares about vegetables?"

Sarah gasped dramatically.

"You take that back."

Another splash echoed across the field.

Daniel folded his arms.

"Vegetables are good."

"That's better."

"But clowns getting dunked are better."

Sarah couldn't really argue with that.

Daniel watched another volunteer climb onto the platform.

The crowd cheered.

The ball flew.

**SPLASH.**

Daniel laughed again.

Then a dangerous thought entered his head.

A thought that would eventually lead to trouble.

He pointed towards the attraction.

"Mum?"

"Yes?"

"I think I'd quite like a turn."

Sarah looked at the water.

Then at Daniel.

Then at the sign.

Then back at Daniel.

"We'll see."

Daniel smiled.

That wasn't a no.

Unfortunately for Daniel, neither of them realised that before the day was over he would be wearing the clown costume himself.

Nor did they realise that the attraction was being run by somebody from Sarah's past.

Or that a group of animated scarecrows were quietly waiting for the perfect moment to cause chaos.

The Summer Garden Show had begun.

## **The League of Vegetables**

### **Book 2 – Part 1: The Summer Garden Show**

#### **Chapter 2 – Rachel Returns**

Daniel could have watched the Dunk the Clown attraction all day.

Every volunteer reacted differently.

Some laughed.

Some screamed.

Some tried desperately to stay dry.

Nobody succeeded.

The crowd loved it.

Daniel loved it even more.

Another clown climbed onto the platform.

A ball flew through the air.

**CLUNK.**

**SPLASH.**

The crowd erupted with laughter.

Daniel grinned.

"Can I have a go?"

Sarah laughed.

"We've been here five minutes."

"So that's a maybe?"

"It's a definitely-not-yet."

Daniel sighed dramatically.

Life could be very unfair.

Another splash echoed across the showground.

The volunteer emerged from the tank looking like a drowned scarecrow.

Daniel laughed.

Then Sarah stopped paying attention.

Something had caught her eye.

Standing beside the attraction was a woman handing balls to the waiting queue.

There was something familiar about her.

Very familiar.

Sarah frowned.

The woman turned around.

For a moment both women simply stared.

Then their eyes widened.

"Sarah?!"

"Rachel?!"

The two women hurried towards each other.

A moment later they were hugging and laughing in the middle of the showground.

Daniel blinked.

He had absolutely no idea what was happening.

When they finally stepped apart, both were smiling from ear to ear.

"You haven't changed!" Rachel laughed.

Sarah shook her head.

"That is a ridiculous lie."

"It's true."

"It absolutely isn't."

"It absolutely is."

Daniel quickly realised this argument might continue forever.

Rachel noticed him standing nearby.

"And this must be Daniel."

Daniel nodded politely.

"Hello."

Rachel smiled.

"Oh dear."

"What?"

"You really do look like your mother."

Daniel looked horrified.

"Really?"

"Afraid so."

Sarah laughed.

"Sorry, Daniel. She's right."

Daniel decided to change the subject.

Fast.

"So... how do you know each other?"

That was all the invitation they needed.

The stories began immediately.

"Oh, we were best friends at school," Rachel said.

"The teachers dreaded seeing us together," Sarah added.

"We weren't that bad."

"We absolutely were."

Rachel grinned.

"Fair point."

Daniel folded his arms.

This sounded promising.

"What did you do?"

Sarah and Rachel exchanged a look.

The sort of look that usually meant trouble.

"We entered every competition we could find."

"We volunteered for every fundraiser."

"We joined every school event."

"And occasionally improved them."

Sarah laughed.

"I think the teachers used a different word."

"What word?"

Sarah thought for a moment.

"Survived."

Both women burst out laughing.

Daniel was beginning to enjoy this.

Rachel pointed towards the refreshment tent.

"Do you remember the Ice Bucket Challenge?"

Sarah immediately groaned.

"Oh no."

"Oh yes."

"What happened?" Daniel asked.

The grin on Rachel's face widened.

"We organised the school's fundraising challenge."

"It got slightly out of hand," Sarah admitted.

"Slightly?"

"Very out of hand."

Rachel laughed.

"We spent most of the afternoon pouring freezing water over each other."

"And over ourselves."

"And occasionally over completely innocent people."

"They weren't completely innocent."

"They were standing nearby."

Daniel couldn't stop laughing.

"You volunteered for that?"

"At the beginning."

"And afterwards?"

"Not so much."

Rachel nodded.

"We raised loads of money."

"We also caught colds."

Daniel decided that sounded about right.

Then Rachel's eyes lit up.

"Oh! The fancy-dress competitions!"

Sarah immediately covered her face.

"No."

"Oh yes."

"No."

"Oh yes."

Daniel sensed another excellent story approaching.

"What happened?"

Rachel looked delighted.

"We always entered as a pair."

"Rachel..."

"Pirates."

Sarah groaned.

"Astronauts."

"Rachel..."

"Detectives."

"Rachel..."

"And one year..."

Sarah closed her eyes.

"...we entered as a carrot and a cabbage."

Daniel burst out laughing.

"You what?"

Rachel pointed at Sarah.

"Your mum was the cabbage."

Daniel nearly dropped his drink.

"You were the cabbage?"

Sarah nodded reluctantly.

"Unfortunately."

Rachel folded her arms proudly.

"And I was the carrot."

Daniel laughed so hard he had to lean against the barrier.

"A giant cabbage?"

"Yes."

"With leaves?"

"Yes."

"Actual cabbage leaves?"

"Fabric leaves."

Daniel wiped tears from his eyes.

"I need to see a photograph."

Sarah immediately pointed at Rachel.

"Don't you dare."

The grin on Rachel's face suggested that somewhere, somehow, a photograph definitely existed.

Then Rachel pointed towards the attraction.

"Of course, our greatest achievement was the school fair dunk tank."

Sarah groaned again.

"Not this story."

"Definitely this story."

Daniel immediately became interested.

"What happened?"

Rachel leaned closer.

"We volunteered to run it."

"That sounds sensible."

"It started sensibly."

Daniel had a feeling he knew where this was going.

Rachel continued.

"We spent the whole day encouraging people to have a go."

"Big mistake."

"Very big mistake."

"What happened?"

Rachel pointed at Sarah.

"She got dunked seven times."

Daniel laughed.

Sarah pointed back.

"She got dunked nine."

Rachel folded her arms proudly.

"A record that still stands."

"Nobody was trying to break it."

"They should."

Daniel couldn't stop smiling.

The image of his mother repeatedly falling into a dunk tank was far too funny.

At that exact moment a familiar voice shouted from somewhere behind them.

"Mum!"

A girl climbed out of the tank.

Or more accurately, emerged from it.

Her bright clown outfit was dripping.

Water streamed from her sleeves.

Her ponytail was soaked.

Her trainers squelched loudly with every step.

She looked as though she had spent most of the afternoon underwater.

Which, judging by appearances, was entirely possible.

Rachel smiled.

"Perfect timing."

The girl folded her arms.

"This is all your fault."

Rachel laughed.

"Sarah, Daniel, this is my daughter Sophie."

Sophie rolled her eyes.

"Apparently I'm today's official clown."

Daniel looked at the soaked costume.

"Looks fun."

"It isn't."

"You don't look convinced."

"I'm not."

Rachel ignored this.

"Sophie's just started at Greenfield High School."

Sophie sighed.

"And I've spent the last thirty minutes falling into water."

Daniel couldn't argue with that.

A moment later another boy appeared carrying two cups of lemonade.

Unlike Sophie, he was completely dry.

"And this is Oliver."

Oliver handed one drink to Sophie.

"You got dunked again."

"I noticed."

"You looked surprised."

"I was hoping people would miss."

"Nobody misses."

Oliver finally noticed Daniel.

"Hi."

"Hi."

Rachel smiled.

"Oliver's the same age as Daniel."

"Really?" Daniel asked.

Oliver nodded.

"Yep. But I go to St. Mark's Academy."

"That explains why we've never met."

"Probably."

Oliver grinned.

"Or maybe I've been avoiding you."

Daniel blinked.

Oliver laughed.

"I'm joking."

"Good."

"Mostly."

Sophie shook her head.

"Ignore him."

Rachel smiled.

"Oliver did the morning clown shift."

Daniel stared.

"You were in the tank too?"

Oliver nodded proudly.

"Half an hour."

"How many times did you get dunked?"

Oliver thought for a moment.

"Twenty-three."

Daniel's eyes widened.

"Twenty-three?"

"It was brilliant."

Sophie looked horrified.

"You are not helping."

Rachel clapped her hands.

"Right. Sarah and I have several years of catching up to do."

She pointed toward the refreshment stalls.

"Why don't you three go and get something to drink?"

Sophie smiled.

"Best idea you've had all day."

And with that, the three children headed off together, completely unaware that this would be the beginning of a friendship that would change all of their lives.

## **The League of Vegetables**

### **Book 2 – Part 1: The Summer Garden Show**

#### **Chapter 3 – New Friends**

A few minutes later, Daniel found himself walking across the showground with Sophie and Oliver.

Behind them, Sarah and Rachel were already deep in conversation.

Daniel glanced back.

The two women were still standing beside the Dunk the Clown attraction.

Still talking.

Still laughing.

Still completely ignoring the fact that the children had left.

"How long do you think they'll be talking?" Daniel asked.

Oliver snorted.

"Hours."

Sophie nodded.

"Definitely hours."

Daniel frowned.

"Seriously?"

"My mum once bumped into an old school friend in the supermarket," Sophie said.

"They talked for nearly an hour."

"What happened?"

"They blocked the breakfast cereal aisle."

Daniel shook his head.

Adults were strange.

The three wandered deeper into the Summer Garden Show.

Everywhere they looked there was something happening.

A brass band played cheerful music near the bandstand.

Children ran past carrying balloons.

The smell of burgers drifted across the field.

Judges inspected enormous vegetables.

Gardeners proudly showed off flowers that looked almost too perfect to be real.

The whole village seemed to be enjoying itself.

Oliver pointed towards a stall ahead.

"Guess the weight of the pumpkin."

The pumpkin was enormous.

It sat on a wooden table like a small orange car.

Daniel stopped.

"That can't be real."

"It is."

"No."

"It is."

"No."

Oliver grinned.

"Let's find out."

A few minutes later all three had entered guesses.

Daniel guessed 180 kilograms.

Sophie guessed 140.

Oliver guessed 5,000.

The stall owner looked at the entry form.

Then looked at Oliver.

Then looked back at the form.

"Five thousand kilograms?"

Oliver nodded confidently.

"It looks heavy."

The stall owner laughed.

"That's one way of looking at it."

As they walked away Sophie shook her head.

"You know you're supposed to try to win, right?"

Oliver looked disappointed.

"Oh."

The next attraction involved throwing hoops over garden gnomes.

Daniel won a packet of flower seeds.

Sophie won a keyring.

Oliver somehow managed to throw every hoop in completely the wrong direction.

Nobody knew how.

Not even Oliver.

"That was impressive," Daniel said.

"Thank you."

"It wasn't supposed to happen."

"I know."

"Then why did you do it?"

Oliver shrugged.

"It seemed funny."

Daniel was beginning to understand Oliver.

Not completely.

But enough.

A little later they arrived at the refreshment area.

Rows of wooden tables sat beneath a huge oak tree.

Families relaxed in the shade.

Children ran between the tables.

The air smelled of lemonade, ice cream and sunshine.

Sophie pointed.

"Ice cream."

Daniel nodded.

"Excellent idea."

Oliver nodded even faster.

"Best idea all day."

Five minutes later the three were sitting beneath the oak tree with ice creams and cold drinks.

For a while nobody said very much.

Meeting new people was always slightly awkward.

Fortunately Oliver solved the problem.

By dropping half his ice cream onto his own shoe.

There was a moment of silence.

Everyone looked down.

Then everyone burst out laughing.

Oliver sighed.

"Not again."

Sophie stared.

"Again?"

"This happened earlier."

"How?"

"I don't know."

Daniel laughed.

"You dropped an ice cream on the same shoe twice?"

Oliver looked genuinely annoyed.

"When you say it like that, it sounds silly."

"It is silly."

The awkwardness disappeared instantly.

Soon they were chatting as though they had known one another for weeks.

They talked about school.

Teachers.

Homework.

Football.

Video games.

Books.

And everything else that came to mind.

Daniel soon discovered that Sophie loved adventure stories.

Especially treasure-hunting stories.

"My favourite is The Lost Island of Captain Black," she said.

Daniel nearly dropped his drink.

"That's my favourite too."

Sophie's eyes widened.

"No way."

"Seriously."

For a moment they simply stared at one another.

Then both laughed.

Oliver rolled his eyes.

"Books."

"You don't read?" Daniel asked.

"I read."

"What?"

"The football scores."

"That doesn't count."

"It absolutely counts."

Sophie laughed.

"No it doesn't."

"It does in my house."

The conversation drifted towards hobbies.

Daniel made the mistake of mentioning his secret headquarters.

Unfortunately Sophie immediately noticed.

"Your what?"

"My secret headquarters."

"You have a secret headquarters?"

Daniel hesitated.

This sounded much better inside his own head.

"Well... designs for one."

Oliver grinned.

"One?"

Daniel sighed.

"Six."

Sophie nearly choked on her lemonade.

"Six?"

"I like being prepared."

"For what?"

Daniel considered this carefully.

"Adventure."

Oliver burst out laughing.

Sophie wasn't laughing.

She actually seemed interested.

"What sort of adventure?"

Daniel brightened.

Finally, somebody understood.

"Hidden treasure."

"Secret tunnels."

"Lost maps."

"Ancient mysteries."

Sophie nodded.

"Okay, that's actually quite cool."

Daniel smiled.

For some reason, that made him feel surprisingly pleased.

The conversation continued.

The afternoon slipped by.

The three wandered through the showground together.

They visited the giant vegetable tent.

They explored the flower displays.

They watched the brass band.

Oliver somehow won a coconut.

Nobody knew why.

Not even Oliver.

Then, as they passed one of the competition tents, Daniel noticed something.

People were gathering around the Dunk the Clown attraction again.

A fresh volunteer was climbing onto the platform.

The crowd cheered.

The ball flew.

**CLUNK!**

**SPLASH!**

The clown vanished into the tank.

The crowd erupted with laughter.

Daniel stopped walking.

Sophie immediately noticed.

"Oh no."

"What?"

"I know that look."

Daniel grinned.

"What look?"

"The look that means you're thinking about the tank again."

Daniel pointed.

"It does look fun."

"You've been saying that all afternoon."

"Because it does."

Oliver folded his arms.

"You should do it."

Sophie nodded.

"Definitely."

Daniel looked towards the attraction.

Then towards the water.

Then back towards the attraction.

The idea had been quietly growing in his mind all afternoon.

Maybe he should have a go.

After all...

How bad could it be?

He looked at Sophie.

Then at Oliver.

Then at the tank.

Finally he made up his mind.

"I think I want a turn."

Sophie stopped walking.

Oliver stopped walking.

Both stared at him.

"You what?" said Sophie.

Daniel pointed towards the attraction.

"I want to do it."

Oliver's grin widened.

"Oh, this is going to be brilliant."

And for the first time all afternoon, Daniel wasn't entirely sure whether that was a good thing.