

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.

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Book 2 – Part 2: The Summer Garden Show

Chapter 6 – New Friends and New Mysteries

The applause seemed to go on forever.

Carrot Boy and Cabbage Girl stood at the edge of the showground watching the celebrations.

The scarecrows were gone.

The giant pumpkin had been returned.

The flower displays had been rescued.

The brass band had recovered.

Although the trombone player was still enthusiastically telling anybody who would listen how he had bravely survived an attack by a giant pumpkin.

Nobody appeared to believe him.

Carrot Boy smiled.

"Looks like everything's back to normal."

Cabbage Girl laughed.

"If your definition of normal includes twelve-foot scarecrows."

"Fair point."

The heroes slipped quietly away before anybody could ask awkward questions.

A few minutes later Daniel and Sarah emerged from opposite sides of the showground in their ordinary clothes.

As far as anyone knew, they had simply been elsewhere during the excitement.

Daniel wasn't entirely convinced anyone would believe that.

Unfortunately, he was right.

The moment Sophie spotted him, she pointed dramatically.

"There he is!"

Daniel stopped walking.

"Oh no."

Oliver turned around.

A huge grin spread across his face.

"Oh yes."

Rachel folded her arms.

Sarah suddenly became very interested in a nearby flower display.

Daniel noticed immediately.

"Mum."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You absolutely do."

Sophie marched over.

"Let's review today's events."

Daniel groaned.

"We don't need to review anything."

"I think we do."

Oliver nodded.

"We definitely do."

Sophie began counting on her fingers.

"You volunteered."

"Yes."

"You put on the clown costume."

"Yes."

"You climbed the ladder."

"Yes."

"You were about to sit down."

"Yes."

Then Sophie pointed dramatically.

"And then you vanished."

The others nodded.

Even Rachel.

Even Sarah.

Daniel sighed.

"I had an emergency."

"A gardening emergency?" asked Sophie.

"Yes."

Oliver folded his arms.

"You know, that sounded ridiculous the first time."

"It was a real emergency."

"Sure."

"It was."

"Of course."

Daniel looked around.

Nobody believed him.

Not even slightly.

Eventually he gave up.

There was no point arguing.

The evidence was against him.

Unfortunately, so was everybody else.

A short while later the group settled beneath the giant oak tree near the edge of the showground.

The afternoon sun was beginning to sink lower in the sky.

The crowds were thinning.

Workers were starting to dismantle some of the attractions.

Rachel returned carrying a tray of ice creams.

"Peace offering."

Daniel accepted one immediately.

"You are forgiven."

"For what?"

"I'm not entirely sure yet."

Everyone laughed.

For a while they simply sat together enjoying the warm evening.

The excitement of the day felt strangely distant now.

Almost unreal.

Daniel glanced around the group.

Rachel and Sarah were chatting happily.

Sophie was trying to stop her ice cream melting faster than she could eat it.

Oliver was attempting to balance his cone on one finger.

It lasted approximately three seconds.

The ice cream fell off.

Nobody looked surprised.

Including Oliver.

"You know," Rachel said, smiling at Sarah, "we should do this more often."

Sarah nodded.

"I was thinking the same thing."

"Next weekend?"

"Definitely."

Sophie's face brightened.

"Really?"

"Really."

Oliver grinned.

"Excellent."

Daniel smiled.

When he had arrived that morning, Sophie and Oliver had been complete strangers.

Now they felt like friends.

Good friends.

The sort of friends who made even an ordinary day more fun.

Well...

Mostly ordinary.

Oliver suddenly pointed at Daniel.

"By the way."

Daniel immediately became suspicious.

"What?"

"I owe you a thank you."

Daniel blinked.

"A thank you?"

Oliver nodded.

"For the second clown shift."

Sophie's eyes widened.

"Oh yes."

Rachel laughed.

"This should be good."

Daniel looked confused.

"I thought you were doing me a favour."

"I was."

"But?"

Oliver grinned.

"It was brilliant."

Daniel stared.

"The tank?"

"The tank."

"You got dunked."

"Seven times."

"Seven?"

"I counted."

Sophie shook her head.

"You actually counted?"

"Of course."

Rachel laughed.

"He spent most of the shift laughing."

Daniel looked horrified.

"Why?"

Oliver looked genuinely puzzled.

"Because it was fun."

"You fell into cold water seven times."

"Exactly."

Daniel shook his head.

He would never understand Oliver.

Oliver leaned back against the tree.

"Honestly, I think you missed out."

"I did not."

"You definitely did."

"I really didn't."

"You were wearing the costume."

Daniel covered his face.

"I'd forgotten about the costume."

"You looked ridiculous."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

Sophie nearly dropped her ice cream laughing.

Then Oliver pointed at him.

"But don't worry."

Daniel immediately became suspicious.

"Why are you smiling like that?"

Oliver's grin widened.

"Because there'll be a next time."

"There will not."

"There absolutely will."

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"Yes."

Sophie nodded.

"I'm with Oliver."

Rachel nodded.

"So am I."

Sarah nodded too.

"Me three."

Daniel looked around.

Every single person had joined the conspiracy.

"This feels unfair."

Oliver folded his arms.

"A promise is a promise."

Daniel narrowed his eyes.

"What promise?"

"The one where you said you'd make it up to me."

Daniel groaned.

"I knew that was coming back."

"Oh, it's definitely coming back."

The others laughed.

Oliver pointed towards the Dunk the Clown attraction.

Workers were already dismantling it.

"One day, Daniel Green."

Daniel shook his head.

"Not happening."

"We'll see."

As the sun slowly dipped towards the horizon, the two families began making plans.

There would be another visit.

Another day out.

Another chance to meet.

Old friendships had been renewed.

New friendships had begun.

Neither family realised just how important those friendships would become.

Eventually it was time to go home.

Goodbyes were exchanged.

Promises were made.

Then the two families headed in opposite directions across the village green.

The Summer Garden Show was over.

But the story wasn't.

Because beneath the roots of the giant oak tree, hidden deep underground, a tiny fragment of meteor crystal pulsed softly.

Once.

Twice.

Three times.

The roots around it began to move.

Tiny green shoots emerged from the soil.

Leaves unfurled.

Branches twisted.

Something was growing.

Something connected to the meteor.

Something that had survived the battle.

And somewhere beneath Greenfield, a new mystery was beginning.

The End

Or perhaps... only the beginning...