



Every day after school that week, I raced straight to Porchester Park to join up with Miss Turner, Mrs Collins and Mr Bradbury in continuing the salvage operation. A teenager called Patrick Short showed up on Tuesday, but when he discovered we wouldn't be paying him for his work, he scooted off as fast as he could. No one else volunteered to help us.

All the time I worked at pulling up weeds or trying to repair the tennis court nets, I was on edge, aware that Mr Reet could show up at any time.

By Wednesday at 6.30 p.m., the place still looked a complete mess. The grass needed cutting, there were millions of weeds to pull up and the children's play park looked extremely grotty.

"What's with the sulky face, Lemon?" asked Vic at supper that night.

"Don't call me Lemon!" I snapped.

"There, there, you two," said Dad. "There's no need to shout at each other. Freya is just feeling a bit downhearted about the situation with the local park. It looks like, in spite of her efforts, it still might be closed down."

"Why don't you speak to Clive Benson's mum?" suggested Vic. "She's a local councillor. She has a bit of power. And the Bensons only live round the corner."

I dropped my fork and eyed my brother in a new light. "Nice idea," I nodded, looking at Dad hopefully.

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“Fine,” he sighed. “You can go and talk to her, but be back in half an hour at the latest. It’s a school night.”

“Of course,” I agreed, haring out of the kitchen and hitting the street.

In less than a minute, I was knocking on the Bensons’ front door. Mrs Benson herself opened it.

“Hello,” she smiled, “aren’t you Vic’s little sister, Lemon?”



“My name’s actually Freya,” I said through gritted teeth, “and I’m here to see you in your role as a local councillor. It’s about Porchester Park.”

“It’s facing an inspection soon, isn’t it?”

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"I'm desperately trying to save it and I need your help," I blurted out.

"Well, I appreciate the park has a very important role to play in local life but, to be honest, hardly anyone uses it anymore and it is very, very overgrown."

"I know," I nodded, "but with a bit of help we can spruce it up."

"I think it needs more than sprucing up."

"OK," I replied, "it needs a major overhaul, but it can be done. Surely the council can put some money into tidying it up before the inspection happens."

"Sorry, Freya, but the council has no money to spend; we actually need to earn money."

"But where do you stand on the issue?" I asked.

"I'm in the middle. If the park really is completely cleaned up and receives a lot more visitors then I'd be more than happy to keep it. But if it's not by the time this inspector shows up, I don't think it ever will be, and I think the land should be sold. There are people at the council who are already planning for that situation."

This really wasn't the answer I'd been hoping for but at least she hadn't been entirely negative.

On Thursday after school, as well as Mrs Collins and Mr Bradbury, Dad showed up and the three of us spent a good couple of hours trying to scrub paint off the swings and slides in the kids' playground. Miss Turner was nowhere to be seen, which I thought was a bit strange. We worked until it was nearly 8 p.m. and Dad said we'd all done a good job and he could really see the difference all of our hard work was making.

I wanted to believe him, I really did, but somehow I just couldn't make that leap. Sure, we were making small steps and small steps were better than no steps, but they were very small small steps, and we needed to make much bigger ones.

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Back home, we were watching a cop chase show on TV when the phone rang. Dad answered it. The call was brief.

"That was Miss Turner," he told me.

"Has the inspection been cancelled?" I asked hopefully.

He shook his head. "She's come down with terrible flu. That's why she wasn't there today. She has to take a few days off."

"A few days off?" I shouted. "She can't take a few days off! This is SO not the time to take a few days off!"

"She can't help being ill," replied Dad. "I'm going to nip over to hers now and get the key to the park. She wants you to have it while she's off work."

I groaned and stamped my foot in despair.

Miss Turner was the park.

With Mr Reet breathing down our necks and an inspection imminent, I needed her there more than ever.