

The Porchester Park Project



By Jonny Zucker

Illustration By Brett Gowlett



“Don’t call me Lemon. My name’s Freya!”

I glared at my older brother, Vic. He’d started calling me Lemon a few months before following an argument over who “owned” the last chocolate teacake in the packet.

“I only do it when you have that sour look on your face,” he laughed.

If there’s one thing that drives me madder than Vic calling me Lemon, it’s him laughing at me.

“Why are you doing press-ups?” I asked, deciding not to leap at him with my fists flailing.

“I’m starting the St Peter’s Award with school next Friday,” he replied. “We’re doing a ten-mile night trek. A few weeks later we’re carrying out a really big good deed and then we’re going on a camping trip. I’m getting myself into shape.”

“You could do with it,” I muttered. “Where’s Dad?”

“He’s gone shopping, Lemon.”

“Don’t call me Lemon!” I hissed, leaving him to his stupid press-ups.

It was Saturday afternoon and I was looking for something to do. I put on my favourite baseball cap (it’s red with a white peak and it’s ultra cool) and set off to our local park.

The park is called Porchester Park and there’s a really brilliant park keeper there called Miss Turner. She’s pretty old but she has the

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energy of a kid and the enthusiasm of a puppy. Even with that amount of energy, though, the place is completely wild. The grass is waist-high, the tree branches loom over you like witch's hands, the kids' play equipment is covered in graffiti and the weeds are so giant they have their own weeds.

But she likes it that way. "Think of all the insects feeding and growing in the long grass and the overgrown bushes," she says. "Think of all the adventure stories you can make up while you climb between the twisting trees. In a neat park you wouldn't find any of that. I like my park being an overgrown jungle."

Because it's so wild and overgrown, not many people visit, which is ridiculous. I mean there are great places to hide for Hide and Seek and amazing plants and flowers to discover. There's even an old and battered wooden clubhouse where you can buy ice cream from Miss Turner in the summer. Plus there are two tennis courts. They're not in great shape but as tennis is my game and I rarely have to queue for a court, this set-up suits me fine.



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Over the years we've become good mates, Miss Turner and I. Sometimes, I give her a hand with planting flowers or cutting back a few weeds and sometimes she lets me sell ice creams. At other times, I hang out in her office in the clubhouse and we chat about things, like annoying older brothers (she's got one too!).

As I arrived that Saturday afternoon, I walked past the gates and down the entrance path. When you reach the end of this you turn a corner and the park comes into view. It's big, it's long and, like I said, it's wild.

I couldn't find Miss Turner, so I went to the kids' play park and headed for the Flying Fox. It's been my favourite thing in the park for as long as I can remember. I know it's just a length of metal that takes you zipping along a wire, but it can go really fast and it still gives me a big buzz.

Reaching for the metal, I dragged it back, held on tight and pushed myself off the wooden platform. Hurling forwards, the wind whipping past me, I shouted out in delight.

I was just about to have my seventh go when Miss Turner strolled over. She was wearing her green overalls and carrying a handful of empty brown sacks.

"Hey, Miss Turner, how's it going?" I asked.

"Very well," she smiled, "fancy giving me a hand clearing out some leaves next to the tennis courts?"

"Sure," I nodded, jumping off the wooden platform.

We followed the crooked path that leads behind the tennis courts. We'd only just started work when we heard some crunching footsteps walking over the leaves. When we looked up we saw a tall man in a smart grey suit, grey tie and extra shiny black shoes approaching. He was carrying a large briefcase and he looked very stern.

"Are you Miss Brenda Turner, the park keeper of Porchester Park?" he asked.

"Indeed I am," smiled Miss Turner, "how can I help you?"

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“My name is Anthony Reet and I am here to tell you that at some stage in the next two weeks I will be carrying out an inspection of this park.”

“An inspection?” asked Miss Turner.

“The local council has informed me that this park has fallen into a serious state of disrepair and I can see they’re right. If things do not improve radically by the time I return some time in the next two weeks, I will have to recommend that the place be closed down.”

“You’ve got to be joking!” I cried out in sheer disbelief. “This is our local park. You can’t just get rid of it.”

“I’m not joking,” replied Mr Reet sternly. “If this place is not turned round sharpish and made to resemble a normal park, then I’m afraid it’s game over.”