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Miss Turner and I stood there for quite a while, totally frozen, like two surprised gnomes, as Mr Reet headed briskly out of the park.

“Surely the council wouldn’t shut the park,” I finally managed to say.

“You’d better believe it,” said Miss Turner. “They want to destroy my jungle! And even if I wanted to make it all neat, there’s no way I’d be able to do that in such a short timeframe. I’ve been growing everything here for years.”

“You won’t be able to do it by yourself,” I said, “but I know some people who might be able to help.”

I broke into a run.

As soon as I got home I raced to Dad’s laptop and started typing furiously. After printing out some sheets I had a pile of mini letters that said:

**DESPERATELY NEEDED:**  
**VOLUNTEERS TO HELP TIDY PORCHESTER PARK.**  
**IF THE PLACE IS NOT COMPLETELY NEAT AND TIDY**  
**VERY, VERY SOON, IT WILL BE SHUT DOWN!**  
**THE BIG CLEAN-UP STARTS TOMORROW (SUNDAY) AT 11 A.M.**

Half an hour after I’d finished delivering all of my letters on our street, Mrs. Collins from Number 51 knocked on our front door. “Good for you, Freya,” she smiled, holding the letter. “I think it’s a splendid idea and I will definitely be there at eleven tomorrow. I’m sure lots of others will join us. You’ll have an army! Together, we can do this!”

## The Porchester Park Project

She was right; we could sort the park out; I just needed that army.

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At 11.45 a.m. on Sunday, I was standing outside the clubhouse with Miss Turner, Mrs. Collins and Mr. Bradbury from Number 6.

That was my army.

Lots of people on the street had said they'd have liked to join us, but they had to fix their car/go shopping/paint their toenails. Dad had work to do and Vic was preparing for his ten-mile trek, though how he was doing it while playing computer games with his best mate, Robbie, was beyond me.

Staggered by the lack of response to my letter, I began cutting back overgrown bushes with the other three.



## The Porchester Park Project

"That's the spirit," Mrs. Collins kept saying.

"We're making progress," Mr. Bradbury kept declaring.

I kept my eye on the park entrance, hoping in vain that more helpers would show up.

Miss Turner said she had mixed feelings. On the one hand she knew we HAD to try and sort the place out, but on the other hand, every bit of tidying made her park feel a little less like the wild jungle she loved.

By 3 p.m., all we'd managed to do was pare back some bushes and cut down a section of weeds next to the clubhouse. As I ran my eyes over the park it was almost impossible to see the difference.

"Don't be down-hearted," said Mrs. Collins, reading my thoughts. "I'm sure if we meet up here again tomorrow after you've finished school we'll get more volunteers and start knocking this place into shape."

"Fine," I sighed. "I'll write another letter telling everyone we've started."

"Excellent idea," nodded Mr. Bradbury. "You'll be turning people away tomorrow."

I shrugged my shoulders. Even if a few more people did show up the next day, the job was so vast and so complex that we'd still only be able to tinker at the edges of what had to be done.

"Face the facts," I told myself. "My gardening army has a very, very, very long way to go."