



Chapter 10

The Fair

The day of the fair came soon enough without much to report at school. Although the fair didn't start until 12pm, the children had been there an hour earlier to get everything set up and ready before the paying customers arrived.

The school field had been completely transformed. Stalls, tents, vehicles and inflatables took up every corner of the space, and everywhere colourful flags flapped in the warm breeze. The same breeze carried the aroma of cooking burgers and hot coffee, and the sugar which hung in the air around the

pick 'n' mix stall wriggled up the noses of passers-by. A wonderfully busy hum filled the field, rising up from ice cream vans, cash boxes, food wrappers and busy conversations, not to mention the music blaring from the hall speakers, which had been dragged outside to provide entertainment. One of the parent volunteers was fiddling with a microphone on a long wire and every now and then it created a piercing whistle, forcing his hands to fly up to his ears.

The fair boasted a hook-a-duck, tombola, bouncy castle, inflatable slide and a 'throw the sponge at the teacher' stall, meaning that there was a plethora of games to choose from. Amidst all of these, under a canopy near the bouncy castle, was Benji and Freya's 'Splat the Rat'.

While setting out their table and arranging the 'rat board' with the pipe attached, the pair kept their eyes peeled for Miss Higgins and Mr Jay. Occasionally, they saw them nipping in and out of the 'teachers only' staging area at the side of the building. More often, they were carrying chairs, putting up bunting or pointing other children in the direction of where help was needed. Nothing caught Freya's attention or Benji's imagination – much to their disappointment.

After the gates opened at noon, people came flooding onto the school playground and field. All of the stalls were quickly bustling with customers, including lots of people attempting to splat the rat. It became a little trickier to keep track of the two teachers but Freya and Benji had agreed a plan in advance to make sure that they didn't let any more opportunities pass by.

With both of them running the stall, it was easiest for one person – Freya – to take the money from customers and work out any change, and the other person – Benji – to be in charge of dropping the rat into the top of the pipe, ready for the customer to try to splat it at the bottom. However, if Mr Jay or Miss Higgins did anything which looked even a little fishy, the children would say that they 'needed more change', in which case one of them would stay at the stall and the other would use the excuse to follow or spy as necessary.

Distracted by their work and their endless queue of customers, they were beginning to think that their plan would never be needed. Eventually, Benji spotted the two teachers near the edge of the staging area, speaking in a hurried kind of way that caught his eye. Mr Jay pointed into the distance; Miss Higgins looked carefully at her watch, then pointed at Mr Jay with some kind of instruction. If only Benji were

close enough to hear the conversation! He sensed that something was afoot, and he was ready to act.



Chapter 11

More Change

“Need more change!” he announced urgently, snatching up the pot of money as Freya served another customer.

“What? Ah! OK, I’ll manage here!” she said, reading the look in Benji’s wide eyes that told her all she needed to know. She glanced in the direction of the teachers, as Benji headed off quickly towards them.

Benji made a tremendous effort to look natural as he weaved his way between running infants, parents carrying ice creams and discarded paper cups in the direction of his teachers, but he needn’t have worried

about being conspicuous; as he approached the stage, Miss Higgins turned and began to walk away in the direction of the cake stall. Mr Jay appeared to be in more of a rush and began to jog purposefully away from all of the stalls. Benji looked from one of them to the other, knowing that without Freya, he could only follow one of them. His instincts told him that it was Mr Jay who should be his priority.

Intent on following at a safe distance, he hung back slightly, and as he did, he noticed Miss Higgins drop something on the grass as she walked towards the crowds of people between her and the cake stall. Benji hesitated, and screwed his eyes up to look closer. It looked like a small bag of money, not heavy coins but notes, and it seemed that she didn’t realise she’d dropped it. She was supervising lots of stalls and must have collected it in for safekeeping.

Benji didn’t want to lose track of Mr Jay, but he had to let his teacher know she had dropped the money, otherwise it might be stolen or picked up by someone who wasn’t honest enough to hand it in. The right and honest thing to do was to retrieve it for her and catch her up. Again, he glanced from the back of one teacher to the back of the other, as they became gradually further apart. Miss Higgins was almost disappearing

into a crowd of people near the bouncy castle; Mr Jay was reaching the corner of the school building, about to leave Benji's line of sight.

"Aaargh!" he screeched in frustration, knowing what he had to do.

Setting off at a sprint, he quickly covered the ground to where the bag of money was lying and scooped it up. He picked up speed and hastily weaved his way into the crowd of people to catch Miss Higgins. Breathing heavily, he tapped her on the shoulder and handed her the money.

"You dropped this, Miss!" he panted.

"Oh, did I? Thank you so much, Benji. What a disaster it might have been to lose all this money that we've worked so hard to raise! That's really kind and honest of you. Well done!" she beamed at him, making his ears feel hot and his cheeks turn a little purple. "Shouldn't you be on your stall, though?"

"Erm, yes. Just needed some more change," he said. As Miss Higgins promised to be over in just a moment with some more change (which they really didn't need), Benji turned and looked towards the corner of

the building where he'd last seen Mr Jay. There was no sign of the teacher now.

With heavy feet and slumped shoulders, Benji trudged back to Freya and explained how the plan had unravelled. Soon afterwards, Miss Higgins arrived and poured a bag full of mixed coins into their tin, giving them a slightly confused look when she saw how much change was already in there. She didn't say anything, though, and happily headed off to see how the cake stall volunteers were doing further along the field.

Chapter 12

Heroes Arrive

“I can’t believe it,” Benji was still shaking his head and grumbling some time afterwards. The fair was still in full swing and plenty of customers were still trooping in through the gates. “That might have been our best chance. We’ve blown it again.”

Freya had listened to what had happened and had reassured Benji that he’d definitely done the right thing. It hadn’t made him feel any better. Now, she had become distracted by a small din rising from a not-so-small crowd of onlookers forming over to their left. It consisted of mostly children but the attraction was obscured by some adults; whatever it was appeared to be inciting lots of cheering and whooping.

As many more heads turned to see what was drawing all the attention, the children in the crowd began to sit down on the grass one by one, and it became easier to see what was at the centre of it - a pair of superheroes! Surrounded on all sides by younger children, the duo were in full costume: masks, capes, boots and spandex suits. They were exchanging high fives with adoring fans and throwing out treats.

Of course, both Benji and Freya recognised the costumes



as well as the people disguised underneath them.

Like the flicking of a switch, something triggered inside Benji and he pushed past Freya, marching in the direction of the small crowd.

“I know who you really are!” Benji confronted the brightly-coloured pair upon forcing his way into the crowd of children, almost all of who were younger than him.

At first, the pair at the centre of the attention tried to ignore him but he wasn't letting it drop. He couldn't hold it in any longer.

“I know your secret. I know your identities!” he shouted.

From underneath the mask, Mr Jay tried to calm him down quietly.

“Benji, stop!” he whispered from the corner of his mouth, trying to continue smiling at everyone else.

“See, I knew it was you. I know what you're both up to!” He wagged his finger towards them both.

“Of course it's us,” replied his own teacher from underneath the other mask. “But don't spoil it for the younger children.”

“Yes, but I know your real secret. It's not just a costume, is it? You're superheroes – both of you are. We both know it!” Benji pointed behind him at Freya, who didn't really know what to add.

In an effort to calm the situation, Mr Jay waved to the crowd around him, telling everyone that he would see them soon. Quickly, he broke away, ushering Freya and Benji along with him.

“I think you'd better come with us,” the teacher said. He beckoned Freya and Benji to follow him, and after asking Mr Wilstead to kindly look after the Splat the Rat stall, the disguised Miss Higgins accompanied them into the school building.