



» CHAPTER ONE «

The Leaf Olympics

“Strange things are afoot in the garden, girls,” called Grandma through the open back door as she kicked the mud from her wellingtons. Larch, who had been trying to balance on one wing on the rim of a glass of juice, *popped* back into the rabbit shape she normally wore when there were grown-ups around. Lola stifled a giggle.

“What do you mean?” Lola asked, turning to face Grandma. She picked up Larch, cradling the rabbit in her arms. Larch’s nose vibrated with curiosity.



Grandma stepped into her back porch, her arms laden down with greenery. She looked like she'd suddenly turned into a bush, with two small wellington-clad legs underneath. Lola's mouth fell open in surprise.

"All this," Grandma said, her voice muffled by the vegetation, "has grown *overnight!* I weeded the polytunnel after breakfast yesterday, and today when I went back to check on my prize marrows, what do I find?"

"The leaf Olympics," Lola said.

"Exactly!" Grandma laughed. "I'm going to have to find space for it in my composter. Honestly, if I try to squeeze in any more, the lid is going to come right off. *But...*" She grinned. "I can't wait to see Letitia Laverty's face when she sees the size of my marrows at the summer fete. That new mulch I bought must really be doing the trick!"

Grandma dumped the greenery back into her wheelbarrow, and Lola and Larch followed

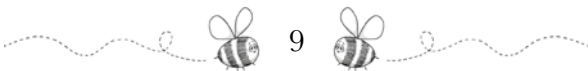


her around the rear of the house, towards the compost heaps and the bins. As they walked, Lola kept an eye on the cuttings in the wheelbarrow, which seemed to be slithering and sliding about in a way that looked rather odd. In her arms, Larch quivered. They looked at one another, and Lola knew she wasn't imagining her friend's wide-eyed stare. Because, as strange as the cuttings looked, Lola and Larch knew they'd seen something very similar before.

“Is it just me,” Lola whispered to the rabbit, “or do Grandma's cuttings look a *bit* like the vegetable patch in the fairy village – you know, the one you put a spell on, months ago?”

Larch's nose twitched indignantly, and with a tiny *pop* she switched to fairy-mode just long enough to stick her tongue out at Lola. “I was *trying* to make it grow!” the fairy pouted. “It's not my fault it went wrong.”

Lola looked at the wriggling greenery in



Grandma's wheelbarrow. "I know," said Lola gently. "You never *mean* to cause trouble." She and her fairy shared a wry smile.

"I think trouble just causes *me*," Larch sighed, raising her eyebrows. She popped back to rabbit-mode as they caught up with Grandma, who was peering into one of her composters.

"Oh, what a pickle," Grandma said. Lola



peeked in. The composter was almost full.

“I might have to ask your mum to bring some home with her.”

In the wheelbarrow, the cuttings continued wriggling, and in Lola’s arms, Larch let out a tiny *prfff*. Lola couldn’t smell anything, but she gave the rabbit a look of amused disgust anyway.





“What was that?” said Grandma.

“Oh – nothing,” Lola said, stroking Larch’s furry head and trying to ignore the greenery. She told herself not to be silly. *Just because you know a fairy doesn’t mean there’s magic everywhere*, she told herself. *Sometimes it’s just mulch!*

“Bunnies fart when they’re anxious, you know,” Grandma said, turning to Lola. “Is everything all right?”

Lola opened her mouth to try to reply, but she couldn’t find the words. Grandma believed in fairies, but she didn’t know Larch was one – and Lola wasn’t allowed to tell her. Lola sighed as she remembered The First Rule of Larch’s fairy clan: *Never Reveal Yourself to an Adult Human Creature, for they are Foolish and Not to be Trusted*. Even though Grandma was lovely, and she’d *definitely* be happy to know she had a fairy in the family, Larch was still too scared to break the most important rule of all. And if they couldn’t tell Grandma the truth about Larch, then they

couldn't tell Grandma there might be a magical problem with her prize marrows.

“Lolo!” Lola's little brother, Noah, shouted from the sandpit.

“Let's go and see what your brother wants, shall we, love?” said Grandma. She dusted off her hands and ushered Lola ahead of her.

Larch couldn't help but look back at the overfull wheelbarrow just as they turned the corner. It was wriggling again. As she watched, one of the biggest leaves lifted up just like a hand and waved goodbye!

