

A Season of Happiness Presents



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Story Eight – SIMPLY THE BEST

By Dave Hawkins

After having the Drumlins living with them for some time, Pronto and Wombat suddenly found themselves quite lonely. Although they had been enjoying their stay in The Valley, the Drumlins were missing their mother, Rainbow; and it had been decided that they should return to her for a holiday. At first, Wombat was the one who was finding it hard because his three Drumlins, Green Blue and Orange, had been doing the chores. Once they had gone, he was even having to make his own tea; and, as he was so lazy, his hole was very untidy with mess everywhere. Pronto, however, being the practical elf that he was, carried on much as he had before the Drumlins came; but without the help of Drumlins Red Purple and Yellow, he too was finding it difficult to fit in housework with his deliveries and other jobs.

There was also something else to do that the two friends regarded as very special. It was coming up to the time of The Annual Valley Show, and every year, Pronto and Wombat each put an entry in the vegetable-growing competition. They always grew vegetables in their gardens for eating, but they gave more attention to one in particular – the one that they thought would win them the competition. For Pronto it was a pumpkin that he had fed, watered and took extra care over; and it had grown so big that he was sure it would be a winner in The Show. Wombat's special vegetable was a marrow, and he had been doing the same as Pronto with the feeding and watering to make it the biggest marrow anyone had ever grown.

Usually, the two friends got on well together; but as the days wore on and The Show came closer, Wombat in particular took to spying on Pronto's pumpkin to see how it was growing; and when it seemed to be getting bigger than his marrow he became extra grumpy. "I don't know why you're bothering, Pronto," he said, leaning on the fence that divided their gardens, "You'll never beat my marrow – it's really huge already, and it will be enormous by the time I put it in The Show."

"Is that so?" said Pronto, walking to the fence and looking over into Wombat's garden. There was the marrow in the middle of the vegetable patch, and it certainly did seem large;

perhaps even bigger than his pumpkin, which was something he would never admit to. “It doesn’t look that big to me,” said Pronto, trying to smile, but not making a very good job of it because he was starting to feel jealous. “I’m sure my pumpkin is definitely larger than your marrow. Tell you what – why don’t we measure them to see which is the biggest?”

“Oh, no!” declared Wombat scowling, “You’re not coming near my prize-winning marrow! And you can stop looking over my fence.”

“And you can stop looking over mine!” snapped Pronto. With that, he turned and stomped back to his tree-house, muttering to himself.

A week passed, and then another. Pronto and Wombat had stopped being friends. They rarely talked to each other, and both were becoming very secretive about their special vegetables. Early one morning, Wombat peeked over the fence to check on Pronto’s pumpkin, but was unable to see it. “That sneaky elf!” grumbled Wombat to himself, “He’s gone and put a fence round it to stop me looking at it. Well, two can play at that game!” So, Wombat built a fence to hide his marrow from Pronto’s prying eyes.

High in the sky, Rainbow had been watching the rivalry of the former friends. “This is not good,” she said to her Drumblins, “I know there is some of your holiday still to go, but I think we ought to cut it short. Would you mind if I returned you to The Valley now? Pronto and Wombat really need to be friends again, and I’m sure you can help with that.”

Pronto and Wombat were so busy in their gardens that they failed to notice Rainbow’s hand bringing the Drumblins down and placing them near their homes. Then Red’s voice could be heard bellowing out: “Right, Drumblins, front and centre. There’s work to be done.”

For a moment it was like old times, and they were both so happy that the Drumblins were back that Pronto and Wombat briefly forgot that they were rivals. “Welcome home again,” said Pronto cheerfully, “Come and see what I’m growing in my garden.”

Wombat’s scowl quickly returned. “And when you’ve glimpsed his teeny-weeny pumpkin – if you can see it at all - come to my garden and I’ll show you what a real prize-winner looks like.”

The sudden change from friendship to definitely unfriendly quite shocked the Drumblins. Red had them huddle together, and for once his voice was very quiet: “Rainbow was right. This is not good. What can we do to help Pronto and Wombat become friends again?”

“Well,” whispered Purple, “It’s all because of this silly vegetable-growing competition.”

“And you’d know about silly,” said Yellow, “I imagine you almost won a competition once.”

Purple was about to answer when Red cut in: “Enough of that. We need an idea.”

“Green’s the, er, one for ideas,” said Blue.

“Oh, yes he is,” whispered Orange more quietly than usual, “What about it, Green?”

“I haven’t had much time to think,” said Green, “But the way I see it, Pronto and Wombat have become very selfish. They are only thinking about beating each other in this vegetable-growing competition. They haven’t considered that someone else in The Valley might win.”

“That’s not very likely,” explained Red, “We’ve seen the pumpkin and the marrow from the sky and they are both very big.”

“But are they the best?” questioned Green.

“If they’re the biggest, they must be the best,” chirped in Purple, trying not to get too excited.

“Big isn’t always best,” said Green, and he began talking as if to himself: “What is it, I wonder, about vegetables that makes them so good? It is the way they look, to be sure; but how they taste is far more important.”

“Quite right,” said Blue, stroking his tie to help him think of the right words, “And I, er, heard somewhere that, er, vegetables that, er, get bigger than they, er, really should be often don’t, er, taste good at all.”

“Not at all, at all,” Green agreed. “So, if we help Pronto and Wombat to grow their vegetables even bigger, they will probably taste awful and neither of them will win. That might teach them the lesson that friendship is worth more than winning.”

“I’ve also been thinking,” said Purple. “We have to be fair about this...”

“Drumlins are always fair,” cut in Red.

Purple frowned at him and continued: “...and we have to make sure neither Pronto nor Wombat win; which means we have to find someone else in The Valley who we can help to grow a vegetable that will beat theirs.” The other Drumlins were so amazed that Purple could actually think about something other than jumping that they had fallen silent. They were even more surprised with what she suggested next: “Red and myself can help Wombat to grow his marrow even bigger, while Yellow and Blue will give Pronto a hand to grow the mostest-ever large pumpkin. In the meantime, Green and Orange can go around The Valley looking for someone to help who really deserves to win.”

“I am truly astounded,” said Yellow, “I never thought Purple could come up with an idea that good.”

“Stand fast!” commanded Red, seeming a little put out by Purple’s suggestion. “As the Drumlin leader, I am supposed to give the orders.” Clearing his throat, he stood to attention and growled softly so that Pronto and Wombat didn’t hear: “Drumlins, front and centre. I order you to carry out Purple’s clearly well thought-out plan.”

Yellow groaned. “Purple actually doing something, and not even almost. We’ll probably never hear the last of this.”

The day of the competition eventually arrived. Everyone brought their vegetables into the big tent at the show-ground to be judged. There were potatoes and carrots, onions and beans; plus, of course, Wombat’s massive marrow and Pronto’s perfectly enormous pumpkin. Next to them was Miss Koala’s entry – a small bowl of the tiniest peas imaginable. “I feel very sorry for her,” Pronto whispered to Wombat, “Miss Koala has no chance of winning with those tiny peas.”

“No chance,” agreed Wombat, looking back to his marrow with a satisfied smile.

The judging began, and Mrs Kangaroo hopped from table to table, checking out the various vegetables. When she came to Wombat's marrow she was sure she had found the winner; then she saw Pronto's pumpkin which was just as magnificent, maybe more so. While Mrs Kangaroo stood scratching, unable to decide which was the best, her Joey leaned out of the pouch, took one of Miss Koala's peas and began to eat it. Then he took another, and another. His mother noticed and told him it was naughty to take things without asking. "But, Mum," said Joey, "They're great! They are the best peas I've ever eaten."

"Perhaps, Mrs Kangaroo," suggested Green, "You might like to taste the other vegetables to help you decide the winner."

Mrs Kangaroo took Green's advice and tasted all of the vegetables that had been entered in the competition. Most of them were very nice, but not Wombat's marrow or Pronto's pumpkin. Both tasted dry and stringy. It seemed Blue had been right – big wasn't necessarily best. In fact, because Green and Orange had helped with the growing of them, the sweetest-tasting vegetables in the show were actually the smallest; and the prize went to Miss Koala for her excellent peas.

"We've been pretty silly, haven't we?" said Wombat afterwards. "I'm glad we lost the competition."

"So am I, Wombat," said Pronto. "We're friends again, and that's better than any prize." Then they went together to congratulate Miss Koala on winning the competition.

As they were walking away, Wombat said quietly: "You know, Pronto, those peas have given me an idea. I was thinking for next year's show we could see which of us can grow the smallest, best-tasting marrow and pumpkin..." He could hear Pronto starting to growl and added: "Don't get all uppity – I only said I was *thinking*."