

OLIVER, AND GRANDPA: JUMPING WITH GRANDPA THROUGH THE BIKE PARK





On Saturday morning, when the yard still smelled of dew and of warm rolls drifting out of the kitchen window, Oliver wheeled the red mountain bike out of Grandpa’s garage. The tires whispered along the path, and the bell rang all by itself — out of pure impatience.

“Grandpa Ian, where are we going?”

Oliver was bouncing on the spot like a rubber ball.

Grandpa rolled out his own bike — big and dark green — and gave a sly little squint.

“Somewhere the asphalt looks like a frozen sea. To the pump track!”

“Pump-pump-track!” sang Oliver, and hopped into the saddle.

And the two bikes, the big one and the little one, rolled off down the street — straight into the waviest Saturday in the world.



The pump track really was like a sea — only made of asphalt. Waves, humps, steep banked turns: all standing still, all waiting.

Oliver got out his helmet — turquoise, a proper one, covering his whole face.

“Look, Grandpa! It’s even got a guard for your beard!”

“For my beard?” Grandpa peered inside.

“But you haven’t got a beard!”

“I will when I grow up. And my helmet’s ready already!” said Oliver importantly, and clicked the strap shut.

Grandpa laughed so hard he nearly dropped his own helmet in the bushes. Then he put it on, patted the saddle and said:

“Well then, Captain Beard. Shall we set sail?”



Grandpa went first — up, down, up, down — as if the waves were passing him along from one to the next.

“Watch and learn!” he called.

“Soft in the knees, eyes on the track — and the bike will carry you there and back!”

Oliver pushed off. The first wave lifted him, the second caught him, the third nudged him on. It was working! The wind whistled in his helmet, the red bike flew over the waves, and Oliver chanted in time:

“Soft in the knees! Eyes on the track!”

And then the waves ran out. Ahead, right by the bend, stood a jump — flat and high, like a table built for giants. Oliver squeezed the brake. And somewhere under his ribs, something gave a little flip.



His legs went soft, like a rag rabbit's. Oliver climbed off the bike and pretended to tie his shoelace. He tied it for a long, long time — even though the lace had no intention of coming undone.

Grandpa rode over and crouched down beside him.

“Want to know a secret? Nobody jumps a mountain on the very first day. First a bump, then a wave, then a flight.”

“And what if we start with the tiniest bump of all?”

“Then the tiniest bump is exactly where we'll start.”

And Oliver rolled off to the bump — a little thing, no bigger than a sleeping hedgehog. One! The wheels rolled over it, and nothing terrible happened. Nothing at all.



Then came a bigger wave. Oliver picked up speed, rose up on the pedals — and suddenly everything went quiet. Both wheels lifted off the ground! The flight lasted one heartbeat — thump! — and the red bike came down softly on the asphalt.

“I flew!” shouted Oliver.

“Grandpa, did you see? I really flew!”

He turned round and jumped again. And again. Each time, his heart drummed a little less “oh-oh-oh” and a little more “hoo-ray-hoo-ray”.

“Soft in the knees, eyes on the track — and the bike will carry you there and back!” Oliver sang to the waves.

And the waves didn’t seem to mind at all.



“Now watch this,” said Grandpa suddenly, and rolled off towards the big jump.

Faster, faster — whoosh! Grandpa flew up over the table: back wheel a little higher than the front, as if the bike were chasing itself. And he landed softly.

“Grandpa! You can FLY?!”

“It’s an old trick.

It’s called the Comet,” Grandpa winked. “And now for the news. On Saturday there’s a Duo Race at the Big Pump Track. A competition for a team of two.”

“Which two?”

“The two of us, Captain. We’re the team.”

Inside, Oliver felt hot and tickly all at once — the way you feel the night before your birthday.



That evening they washed the bikes in the yard. The red one gleamed, the green one sparkled, and the spray from the hose flew up all golden-red in the sunset.

“Grandpa,” Oliver asked quietly, “what if the jump there is... bigger than me?”

“Remember the secret? Bump, wave, flight. You’ve done the bump already. And the wave.”

“So only the flight is left?”

“Only the flight,” Grandpa nodded.

And then he went into the garage and quietly slipped a little tin box into his pocket. Oliver noticed. But Grandpa just kept a sly sort of silence — the kind only grandpas know how to keep.



On Saturday the Big Pump Track was humming like a fairground. Red, yellow and blue flags fluttered in the wind, a copper bell hung above the finish arch, and the waves here were high — real mountains of asphalt.

And right in front of the arch stood the one they all talked about. An enormous table jump, known to everyone as the Giant.

Oliver walked up to it and tipped his head back. Higher. Higher still.

His tummy went cold and hot at the same time: cold from the fear, hot from the thrill.

The Giant said nothing, and waited.

“Bump,” whispered Oliver. “Wave. Flight.”



“Team Oliver and Ian, to the start!” — and the race began.

The waves came rushing to meet them — up, down, up, down! The banked turns leaned over like walls, the wind whistled in their helmets, the flags clapped like hands.

“Come on, Grandpa!” Oliver shouted on the climb.

“Come on, Captain!” Grandpa boomed on the bend.

And on they rode — now Oliver in front, now Grandpa — and the words flew between them like a ball. With every “come on!” their legs pedalled harder and their hearts beat braver. A team is when even the wind takes turns pushing you from behind.



And just before the finish, the Giant was waiting.

Oliver stopped at the top of the run-in. His fingers seemed glued to the handlebars. Grandpa stood beside him — and didn't hurry him. He was simply there, and sometimes that matters more than any words.

“Bump...” Oliver whispered to himself.

“Wave... Flight.”

He breathed in. He breathed out. And then he said it — not in Grandpa's words any more, but in his own:

“Soft in the knees, eyes on the track — and the bike will carry you there and back!”

His fingers came unstuck from the handlebars. His heart knocked once: “Now.”

The Giant was waiting. But now Oliver was ready too.



Go! The pedals spun, the red bike flew downhill, faster and faster — and the Giant came rushing up to meet him.

Lift-off!

And then — silence. The kind you only ever hear in flight. Oliver soared above the Giant: back wheel a little higher than the front — a real Comet! The flags froze. Even the wind held its breath.

The wheels touched down softly on the asphalt — yes! — and Oliver shot under the arch and struck the copper bell.

CLANG!

“Finish! The Duo Race goes to team Oliver and Ian!”

And the only thing louder than the bell was Grandpa.



Under the arch, Grandpa took that very same tin box out of his pocket.

Inside, on a worn ribbon, lay a medal — an old one, with a bicycle on it.

“I won this when I was a boy just like you,” said Grandpa. “It’s been waiting ever since.”

“Waiting for what?”

“A medal like this can’t be bought. It’s won by whoever jumps over their own fear.”

He hung the medal round Oliver’s neck. It was cool and pleasantly heavy, and it rang almost as brightly as the finish bell.

Oliver hugged Grandpa — tight, tight — the way you hug the best team in the world.



They rode home into the sunset. The medal chimed softly on Oliver's chest — ding, ding — as if it were telling the road all about the Giant.

“Grandpa,” said Oliver, “next time let's swap. You jump your Comet, and I'll shout ‘Come on, Grandpa!’ louder than anybody.”

“It's a deal, Captain,” Grandpa smiled.

The sun rolled down behind the roofs, and the shadows of the bikes stretched all the way to the horizon. Soft in the knees, eyes on the track — and the bikes carried them all the way back.

Both bikes. The big one and the little one.