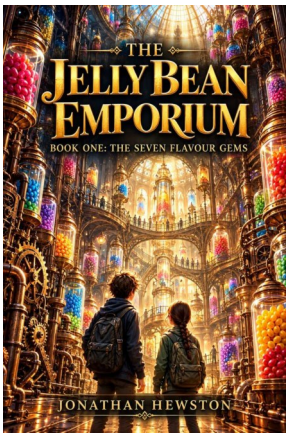
The Jelly Bean Emporium

The Seven Flavour Gems

Ages 9-14



Theo and Elsie discover a shop that was not there before. Read the complete opening chapter, then collect clues and make a prediction.

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The shop had not been there on Tuesday.

Theo Barnaby was entirely certain of this because Tuesday had been the worst day of his eleven-and-three-quarters years, and when you are having the worst day of your life, you tend to notice your surroundings with painful, razor-sharp accuracy.

On Tuesday morning, Theo had dropped his lunchbox in a puddle, failed an unannounced mental arithmetic test, and spent the entire lunch break hiding in the boys' cloakroom to avoid Marcus Gable, who had taken a sudden, malicious interest in the frayed cuffs of Theo's school blazer. To make matters thoroughly unbearable, the grey rain that had been threatening the northern mill town of Oakhaven for three straight weeks finally let loose, soaking through Theo's cheap plimsolls within four strides of the school gates.

When you are walking home in wet socks, nursing a bruised rib and a hollow stomach, you do not overlook a three-storey shop made of beeswaxed timber, spun-sugar fox weathervanes, and glowing bay windows.

Cobblestone Lane had always been a narrow, miserable dog-leg of a street tucked behind the railway embankment. On Tuesday, it had contained nothing more exciting than Mrs. Gable's overflowing rusted dustbins, a puddle that smelled faintly of old cabbage, three mangy pigeons arguing over a squashed chip, and the long-abandoned butcher's shop with peeling green paint and iron bars across its grease-smeared windows.

Yet on Wednesday afternoon, the butcher's shop was gone.

It had not been knocked down. There were no piles of broken brick, no skips full of plaster dust, and no yellow diggers churning up the damp mud. In its exact place—squeezed between two soot-stained brick terrace houses like a bright tooth in a crooked jaw—stood a tall, impossibly narrow building that seemed to lean forward over the pavement as if straining to whisper a secret.

Its timbers were a deep, polished chestnut, rich and glossy as horse-chestnuts fresh from their spiky husks. The upper storeys jutted out over the lane, held up by carved wooden brackets shaped like leaping hares and curling ivy vines. The roof was pitched at an angle so steep it made Theo's neck ache just to look at it, crowded with copper pinwheels that spun merrily in the damp air and miniature copper foxes whose bushy tails twitched whenever the breeze shifted.

Above the double bay windows, painted in looping, liquid gold script that caught the pale autumn light, hung a swinging wooden sign:

THE JELLY BEAN EMPORIUM

Purveyors of Extraordinary Sensations, Lost Moments, and Curiosities of the Tongue

Est. Long Ago (and Again This Morning)

"Well," said Elsie Higgins, coming to an abrupt halt on the wet pavement.

Theo, who had been staring so hard at the spinning copper foxes that his feet had forgotten how to walk, nearly ploughed straight into the back of her bright yellow mackintosh.

"That definitely violates several local council planning regulations," Elsie continued, pushing her round, tortoiseshell spectacles firmly up the bridge of her nose. "Section Four of the Town and Country Planning Act, for starters. You can't simply erect three storeys of timber-framed Tudor-revival architecture between nine o'clock yesterday morning and twenty past three today without a public consultation period."

Elsie was twelve, half a head taller than Theo, and possessed an encyclopaedic knowledge of structural engineering, local bylaws, and parliamentary procedure gained entirely from reading her father's trade journals over breakfast. She carried an olive-green canvas satchel that clinked with an assortment of screwdrivers, a metal tape measure, three

half-eaten apples, and a notebook full of pencil sketches detailing how their school's heating pipes were slowly failing.

"Maybe it was prefabricated?" Theo suggested, though his voice sounded thin even to himself. "Like those garden sheds at the garden centre. They bring them on a lorry and bolt them together."

"With hand-carved bracket hares and twenty-foot load-bearing chestnut beams?" Elsie shot him her trademark look—one eyebrow arched, her dark brown eyes gleaming with fierce scepticism. "Look at the footings, Theo. Look at the mortar."

Theo stepped closer to the shopfront, his wet shoes squeaking on the flagstones.

Elsie was right. The stone foundation blocks were coated in thick, velvety green moss that must have taken fifty years to grow. Ivy with thick, woody stems wound its way up the downspouts, gripping the timber with ancient, gnarled tendrils.

"The glass isn't flat, either," Theo murmured.

The bay windows were made of dozens of small, leaded panes, but the glass was thick, bowed, and slightly uneven, like water frozen mid-ripple. Inside the shop, bathed in a deep, honey-coloured light that spilled across the grey drizzle of the street, stood towering pyramids of glass jars.

There were hundreds of them. Thousands, perhaps. They climbed from the floor to the shadowed ceiling in dizzying spirals, resting on brass shelves that gleamed like polished trumpet bells. Each jar was stoppered with dark, waxed cork and tied with a length of twisted silk ribbon—crimson, indigo, buttercup-yellow, and moss-green.

And inside the jars, things were moving.

Theo rubbed the back of his sleeve across his eyes, convinced the damp mist was playing tricks on his vision. But when he looked again, the contents of the jars were still tumbling, drifting, and glowing.

They were jelly beans, but they were unlike any sweet Theo had ever seen in the sweet-shop jars down by the bus station. They did not look sticky or mass-produced. They were smooth, glowing ovals that held their own internal weather.

In one tall cylindrical jar on the lower shelf, dozens of midnight-blue beans tumbled slowly over one another like river stones, each one speckled with microscopic flecks of silver that drifted and settled like falling snow inside the sugar shell. Beside it, a squat hexagonal jar contained beans the fierce, crackling orange of a November bonfire, pulsing with a faint, embers-like glow that cast warm flickers across the timber windowsill. Higher up, near the top of the arch, floated translucent green beans that drifted upward like bubbles in ginger ale, bobbing gently against the cork before sinking back down.

"They look... alive," Theo whispered, his breath fogging the bowed glass.

"They're confections," Elsie said, though she had taken two involuntary steps forward, her nose almost touching the pane beside his. "Suspended in some sort of low-density sugar solution, probably. Or maybe there's a magnetic coil under the shelf. Though I can't imagine where they're drawing the current from; the street main on this corner was disconnected in 1994."

"Smell that," Theo said.

The aroma wasn't drifting through an open door; it seemed to breathe straight through the heavy timber walls, warm and impossibly dense.

It was sugar, yes, but not the tooth-aching sweetness of penny chews. It was toasted marshmallows over a crackling cedar-wood fire; crushed peppermint leaves bruised by summer rain; the crisp, sharp scent of fresh snow falling on cold pine needles; old paper from library books; and warm vanilla custard simmering on a stove while a kettle whistled in the background.

And beneath all of that, there was another smell—something quiet, warm, and safe that caught Theo in the throat like a swallowed marble. It smelled of Sunday mornings three years ago, before his dad had taken on the evening shift at the distribution warehouse, before the hospital letters had started arriving in stiff brown envelopes, and before his mum had stopped humming while she tied her apron strings.

It was the smell of a home when nobody inside it was afraid.

Theo's hand moved toward the heavy oak door before he had consciously decided to walk.

"Theo, wait," Elsie warned, grabbing his blazer sleeve. "We don't know who owns this place. It could be an unlicensed pop-up venture designed to collect consumer demographic data from minors. My mum read an article about guerilla marketing tactics in the Daily Chronicle."

Theo didn't stop. For six months, ever since his mum had come home from her second hospital stay looking pale and quiet as a winter shadow, Theo had felt as though he were walking through the world wrapped in layers of grey felt. When Marcus Gable shoved him against the lockers, it barely felt real. When his dad tried to make cheerful conversation over burnt toast at six in the morning, Theo could only nod and stare at his plate. He had stopped taking his sketchbook out from under his bed. He had stopped tuning his grandfather's old acoustic guitar. He felt like an outline of a boy—a faint pencil sketch that someone had started and then forgotten to colour in.

But standing on the threshold of this impossible shop, the tips of his cold fingers began to prickle with a strange, sharp warmth.

Above the heavy iron latch, hanging from a brass bracket shaped like an oak leaf, was a neat card written in clean, black ink:

WANDERERS, WORRIERS, AND THOSE WHO HAVE LOST THEIR TASTE FOR TUESDAYS ARE CORDIALLY INVITED TO STEP INSIDE.

(Please wipe your feet. The floor is sensitive to puddles.)

"See?" Theo said, glancing back at Elsie over his shoulder. "It's practically an invitation."

"It's a liability nightmare," Elsie muttered, but she didn't let go of his sleeve as he reached for the brass handle.

The metal was not cold. It was smooth, heavy, and radiated a steady, pulsing warmth, like holding a mug of hot cocoa between both hands on a freezing night.

Theo pressed his thumb against the latch and pushed.

Above the door, a tiny brass bell shaped like a hollow acorn gave a clear, liquid chime. It didn't sound like ting-a-ling. It sounded, quite distinctly and impossibly, like a warm, familiar voice whispering directly into Theo's ear:

"Ah. There you are. We've been keeping the kettle on."

The heavy oak door swung inward without a creak, and the smell of cedar wood, thunderstorm ozone, and lost afternoons rolled out into the November drizzle, pulling both of them across the threshold.

The shop that was not there

Find one detail that makes the shop seem unusual. What does Theo think? How does Elsie respond? Use a detail from the chapter to support your prediction.

A clue from the chapter

What the clue makes me think

My prediction - and why

Speak, point, draw, write, sign, use AAC or ask someone to scribe. You can skip a question.

A little guidance for adults

Begin with a choice

Offer the activity and explain what it involves. Let the learner choose how to take part, take a break or stop.

Read and notice

Use the included extract or the real page previews on the book page. Invite observations before giving your interpretation.

Make space for a response

Allow processing time. Accept speech, gesture, pointing, drawing, signing, AAC or silence. Avoid turning a shared story into a test.

Try one small next step

Use the supplementary activity. Notice the learner’s ideas and adapt the materials, pace and response method.

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