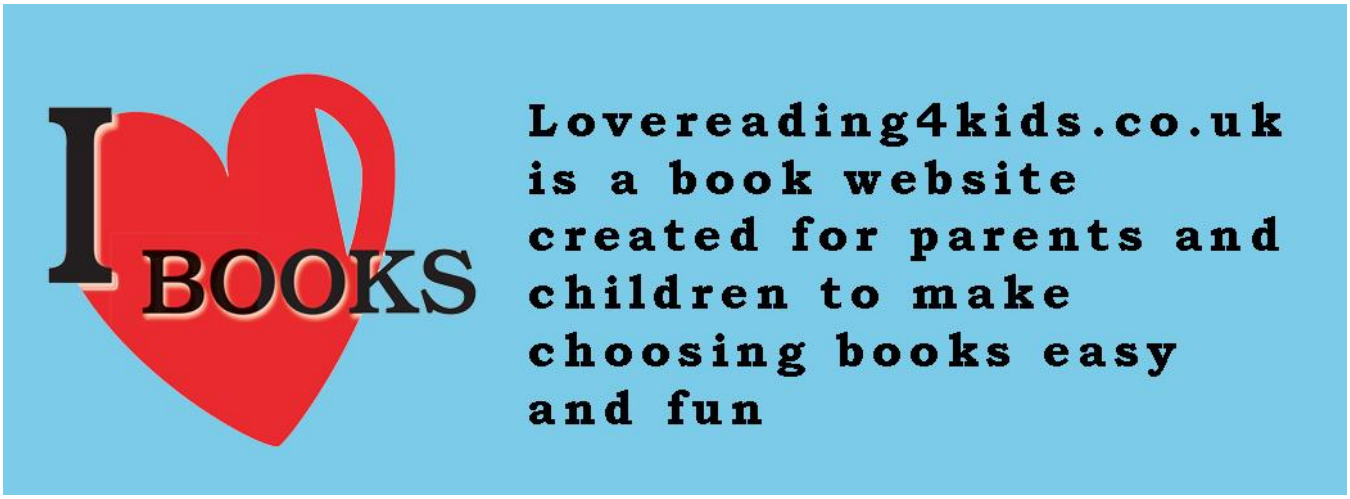


Opening extract from

The Great Chocoplot

Written by

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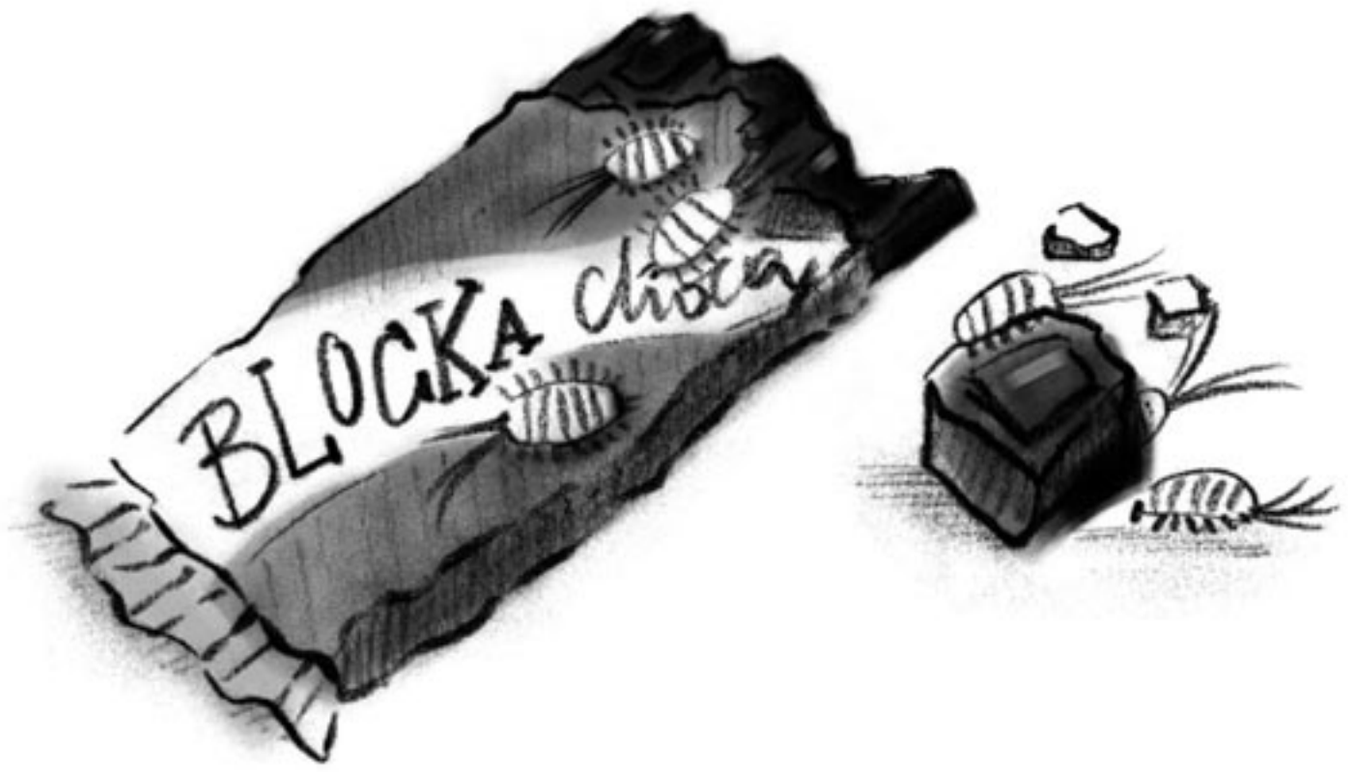
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CHAPTER 1

'In six days there will be no more chocolate in the world ... ever!'

That's what it said on *The Seven Show*.

Jelly had nearly reached the next level of Zombie Puppy Dash, but hearing this made her plunge the pink puppy into a huge tank of zombie dog food.

'Woah! What was that about chocolate?' she asked, putting her tablet down.

'Something about it running out,' said Mum, popping a chunk of chocolate into her mouth. 'Oh, you can't beat a Blocka Choca, eh!'

Jelly and her mum and dad loved Blocka Chocas.

Who didn't? Once a week Mum bought one bar for each of them, and they all curled up on the sofa together to enjoy them before Mum started her night shift at the supermarket.

'Chocolate's always mysteriously running out in this house,' said Dad, who'd already finished his Blocka Choca and was now eating cheese and onion crisps. 'I'm sure there was a Chunky Choc-Chip Crispie in the cupboard yesterday, but today it has vanished!'

'I don't know why you're looking at me,' Mum said, poking him in the belly, which was stretching the buttons of his checked shirt to their limit.

'Oh, that's right, blame me.'

'I do.'

'Good!'

'Good!'

'Ssh!' said Jelly. 'I'm trying to listen!'

The Seven Show's chirpy and very tanned presenter Alice was saying, 'And now over to our man in the jungle and the scary chocolate prophecy!'

The screen cut to a lush green tropical paradise, like Jelly had seen on documentaries about endangered species, or advertising a holiday her parents

could never afford.

The caption on the screen read 'Easter Egg Island', and the reporter was a man called Martin who had a wonky but fake-looking smile which always made Jelly lick her front teeth and wonder if hers were as white and shiny. He did the silly bits on the show, like the old steam train found buried on a beach in Wales and the dog that fell in love with an owl. Today he was standing next to an old man with wild, grey hair that stuck up in patches.

Behind them was what looked like a huge stone



egg, twice the height of Jelly's dad and covered in jungle vines. It looked like it had been sprayed with green party streamers.

'Thank you, Alice,' said Martin. 'I'm here on Easter Egg Island. This is the little island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean – *not* Easter Island in the Pacific, folks.' He chuckled. 'Here with me is chocolate expert Professor Fizziwicks from the University of Shambridge. He is convinced that he has



discovered a prophecy by the ancient civilization which once lived here and, if you can believe it, worshipped chocolate!'

The camera zoomed in to the egg-shaped stone. It was covered with weird-looking marks and scratches.

'Yes, indeed!' said the professor, who spoke like his tongue was too big for his mouth. Jelly could see it was lolling out like a thirsty dog's, and he was spraying spit everywhere!

'Ew!' said Jelly, wrinkling her nose.



'The ancient Chocolati tribe who lived on this island over a thousand years ago created this egg, and others like it scattered throughout, as part of their worship, and it is believed,' he chuckled, 'that if you break one open, you'll find a tiny bag of chocolate buttons inside!'

'Cool!' said Jelly.

'However, more importantly, these markings here and here' – Professor Fizziwicks pointed at the egg – 'clearly indicate that during the sixty-sixth cycle of Cacao-Cacao, which refers of course to the movement of the stars on the Summer Solstice,

there will be a—' He paused and Martin the reporter wiped the spit from his face with a tissue before leaning in.

'A ... what?'

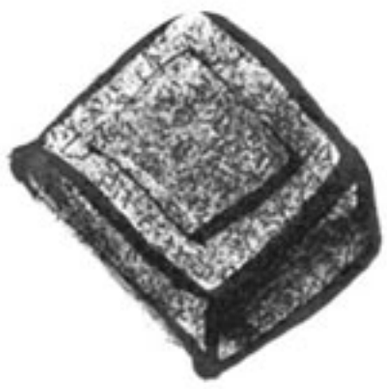
'A cataclysmic cacao catastrophe!' the professor spat. 'A Chocopocalypse!'

'A choco-what?' Martin asked, his face shining with fresh saliva.

'A Chocopocalypse!' grinned the professor. 'This amazing stone predicts the total and complete disintegration of cocoa products at a precise predetermined point in time—'

'You what?'

The professor sighed. 'It means that on the Summer Solstice – the twenty-first of June, this very Sunday – chocolate will simply cease to exist. A Chocopocalypse means what it means – a chocolate apocalypse. It's the end of chocolate!'



Jelly, her mum and her dad looked at each other with open mouths.

'That's mad!' Jelly said.

'It also predicts,' continued the professor, pointing to more scratches on the egg stone, 'that during

the countdown to the catastrophe, a shower of chocolate shall rain down upon Easter Egg Island.'

Martin the reporter turned to face the camera with his wonky smile. 'A shower of chocolate,' he chuckled. 'I'd like to see that. Anyway, there you have it. The Chocopocalypse is coming! And on that bombshell, back to the studio to find out why dogs dream and cats don't ...'

'Well it wouldn't affect us here in Chompton anyway,' said Dad, switching off the TV. 'There's more chocolate shops here than there are people.'

It was true – their town of Chompton-on-de-Lyte was famous for being the world's biggest chocolate centre. They had more chocolate shops, factories and warehouses than any other country. And even though Dad and lots of his friends had recently lost their jobs at the Big Choc Lot because of 'cutbacks' (though nobody knew what that really meant), it was still the largest chocolate warehouse on earth. Enormous (but not pretty) ships came in and out of the river port, loading and unloading chocolate cargoes.

Local Chompton legend told that in 1522, the intrepid explorer Sir Walter Waffle returned from

an epic expedition with Britain's first shipload of chocolate. But instead of sailing down the Thames to London to unveil his new treats to King Henry VIII (who had an extremely sweet tooth), he lost his bearings and ended up on the River de Lyte instead. Chompton had been at the centre of the chocolate world ever since.

Jelly stretched out on the sofa, her legs across her mum and dad's. 'But how could chocolate just run out?' she said. 'I mean, chocolate comes from ... plants. Doesn't it?'

She flicked open her tablet again and typed: 'What is chocolate?'

'Chocolate is derived from cacao beans, more commonly known as cocoa beans, from pods on the cacao tree,' she read out. She knew her mum and dad loved to listen to her read, and she often read to them in bed to help them go to sleep. 'The Mayan and Aztec civilizations drank a form of chocolate known as *Theobrama Cacao* – meaning "Food of the Gods" – centuries before it was shipped to Europe and developed into solid bars.'

'So even if the cacao tree did die out,' Mum said, 'there would still be tonnes of chocolate left in the world.'

'Yeah, and let's remember that was *The Seven Show* we were watching, not the Open University,' added Dad. 'Last week they said that eating lots of bacon will give you a sun tan. Well, when me and your mum were first married, I had a bacon buttie every day, and did I look like I lived in the Bahamas? No, I did not!'

'There's an app for it already!' Jelly said, still looking at her tablet.

'For what?' asked Dad, looking interested. 'Bacon butties?'

'No! The Chocopocalypse. "*The countdown to the end of chocolate*", it says here. It's free. Can I? Please?'

Dad nodded. 'All right then, give it here. I'll put the password in for you.'

'I already know the password,' said Jelly, feeling insulted. 'I'm not a baby.'

But once the app had downloaded, Jelly suddenly didn't want to look at it. She slid the tablet back down the side of the sofa and tried to forget about the Chocopocalypse.

She was always being told (usually by her mum) to stop worrying. But it wasn't as simple as that. You

can't stop worrying about something just because someone tells you to stop worrying. Even if you want to stop, it doesn't mean you can. To be told that she was always worrying made her think she did worry too much, and this worried her even more.

Could the world really run out of chocolate?

Jelly was worried!

