Pizza Pete and the Perilous Potions



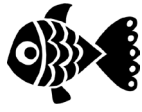
GUPPY BOOKS

CARRIE SELLON

PIZZA PETE

AND THE PERILOUS POTIONS

ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH HORNE



GUPPY BOOKS

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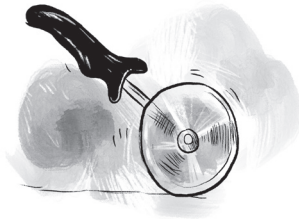
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For Immie, Freddie and Tallulah.
I promise never to put pineapple on your pizza again.





In my last English lesson, Miss Cameron asked us for our favourite word. Eight people said 'football'. Three said 'fart'. One said 'onomatopoeia'.

I didn't put my hand up, but I carefully wrote four letters in my exercise book.

H-O-M-E.

That's my favourite word. The cosiest word in the English language. Home. A place where no one laughs at me for the stuff I'm rubbish at, like football and diving. And I have hours and hours to get on with the stuff I'm good at, like making pizzas and building interplanetary warships out of Lego.

That English lesson was the last time I was at school. It was twenty-five days ago. Something *awful* happened the next day, and I made a promise to myself.

Never to leave home again.



Chapter One

I pushed the last Lego brick into place in my Imperial Star Destroyer and stepped back to admire it. The most awesome spaceship in the entire *Star Wars* universe, completed in approximately nineteen hours, thirty-two minutes and fourteen seconds.

'Oi! Pete!'

My stomach flipped as I looked out of my open bedroom window and saw Archie Boyle. He was in the middle of the road, kicking a football with Zach Manson.

'Where've you been all term?' called Archie, picking up the ball. 'You're not at school. You're not delivering pizzas. What's wrong with you?'

'It's his brain,' said Zach. 'He's eaten so many pizzas his brain's turned to cheese.'

Archie stared up at me, shielding his eyes from the

sun. 'I'm not going till you tell me.'

Heat spread up my neck. Archie was the last person I'd tell. 'Just go away, or I'll . . . I'll . . .'

'You'll what? Attack me with your lightsaber?'

I flung the curtains shut to block out the whoops of laughter, accidentally knocking my Lego shelf. The Star Destroyer wobbled towards the edge. I lunged for it, both hands out. But not fast enough. It smashed into a million pieces – well, four thousand, seven hundred and eighty-four to be precise – clattering onto the wooden floor like hailstones.

'Pete?' Dad shouted up the stairs. 'Are you OK?'

'Yup,' I groaned, digging my knuckles into my eyes to stop myself crying. Part of me wished I'd never won the stupid spaceship in the first place.

'You're on dough balls this morning, remember?' called Dad. 'I'm back in an hour. Love you.'

Pulling on my favourite hoodie, I went downstairs. There was no sign of Archie or Zach outside the shop. They must have gone around the corner onto the high street. My shoulders dropped a couple of inches.

I checked the time – nine o'clock. Two hours till opening time. I loved it when The Little Pizza Place

was closed, and I had the shop to myself and all was peaceful and quiet.

A loud crackle came from the huge, domed, brick pizza oven in the corner, behind the service counter. I pulled on Dad's welding gloves and carefully added a few logs to the fire, using the shovel to move them around. The key to making the oven super-hot was to make sure all the wood was burning and the entire oven floor was covered.

Now for the dough balls. In the kitchen, at the back of the house, I measured the flour, yeast and



salt into the giant mixer. Then I stirred in the olive oil and milk, and gradually added the warm water. Flicking the switch, I watched the dough hook going around and around. There's something strangely relaxing about watching dough being kneaded until it changes consistency, becoming smooth and elastic. When it was ready, I divided it into sixteen balls and put them in the proving drawer to puff up.

Dad came back while I was sitting at the service counter eating toast and destroying dragons on my phone. Usually his curly hair was covered in flour and a bandana was tied around his forehead. Today there was no flour and no bandana. He looked like he'd been scrubbed with a washing-up brush.

He peered into the pizza oven then squeezed my shoulder. 'Make your old man a coffee, will you?'

When I came back from the kitchen, he was sitting at the counter staring into the middle distance. He smiled at me as I slid his favourite mug in front of him.

I pulled up a stool. Something wasn't right. Usually when Dad smiled his eyes twinkled and you couldn't help but smile back. This time it was different. Like the light had gone out.

He rubbed the back of his neck. 'I've just been to the bank.'

I squirmed. I never usually asked for anything, but last night I'd asked why my pocket money hadn't gone up on my birthday.

He'd said, 'Money doesn't grow on trees, you know,' which I said was a ridiculous thing to say because *obviously* money doesn't grow on trees. But then I'd felt bad because Dad said the cost of flour had gone through the roof, and *then* the conversation moved onto Fox Pizza, like it always did.

Fox Pizza was the new takeaway place in the shopping centre, run entirely by robots. There were hundreds of Fox Pizzas. Dad had been tracking their growth with pins on a huge map in the kitchen. The first few opened in London, then Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow. And then they exploded, all over the country. It was only a matter of time before one came to Accringham. It opened to huge fanfare and excitement. Everyone was *obsessed* with it – most of our customers had deserted us. Yesterday, we only sold three pizzas. One to Mr Campbell at number seventy-four and two to Mrs Afolabi on the high street.

Dad slowly stirred his coffee, the spoon clinking on the inside of the mug. 'There's no easy way to say this, but the truth is . . . the truth is we've run out of money, and I've fallen behind with the repayments to the bank.'

I squeezed his hand. He was always worrying about money, and we always managed somehow. 'I could sell some of my Lego?'

He closed his eyes for a second, then looked straight into mine. 'They're going to evict us.'

'Evict?'

'They're throwing us out of our home, love.'

I jumped up, knocking the stool over. 'What? They can't do that! Where are we going to live?'

He put my stool the right way up. 'Craig said we can stay at the pub until we find somewhere. This place is falling apart anyway. It needs someone to come in and smarten it up.' I followed his gaze to the peeling paint next to the pizza oven. When Dad wasn't making pizzas he was fixing taps, patching up walls and filling cracks. I didn't notice the cracks. It was home. I'd never lived anywhere else.

He reached over to take my hand. 'Maybe it'll be good for us. It'll force you to—'



'Don't say it!' I pulled my hand away, anger knotted through my body.

He paused, a tiny muscle flickering in his cheek. 'You can't hide in your room for the rest of your life. You've stopped going to school, despite my best efforts to make you go. You've stopped helping me with deliveries. You've stopped *living*. There's a whole world out there, waiting for you. How are you going to see it if you're hiding in your room playing video games all day?'

I crossed my arms. 'I'm not hiding. I *can't* go outside. There's a difference.'

He sighed. 'I'm afraid we've got no choice. The bank's got a possession order to take the house in four days.'

'Four *days*?!'

He looked down, biting his lip. 'They did give us six months, but that was . . . er . . . six months ago.'

'Why didn't you tell me?'

He shrugged. 'I didn't want to worry you.'

'At least I'd have had time to get used to it!'

'Unless—'

'Yes?' I said.

'Unless we can magic up ten thousand pounds.'

'Ten *thousand* pounds?!'

He nodded. 'Ten thousand pounds would get the bank off our backs for another six months. Give us some breathing space.' He took his car keys out of his pocket and went to the door.

I glared at him. 'Where are you going now?'

'Flowerdown. Granny Tortoise had another funny turn this morning.'

I blinked. I missed Granny Tortoise. She used to

live in a tiny cottage with a tortoise called Sid, until she started having funny turns. Then she moved into Flowerdown Care Home. *Flowerdown.* Dad and I thought it was the most depressing name for a care home ever.

He checked his phone then looked up at me. 'She'd love to see you.'

I rolled my eyes – *good try* – and glanced at the clock. 'You'd better be quick. It's only forty-eight minutes till opening time.'

'I might be a bit late, love.'

I frowned. Dad had opened the shop at exactly eleven a.m. and closed at precisely eleven p.m. seven days a week, for as long as I could remember. 'What if we get a customer? I thought we were desperate for money?'

He gave me a weary smile. 'We're never going to make ten thousand pounds in four days.' He came over and ruffled my hair. 'It's going to be OK. We'll always have each other, right?'

As I locked the door behind him, I felt a pressure on my chest, like a long string of mozzarella was wrapping itself around my insides, squeezing tighter

and tighter. It was obvious. Dad wasn't even *trying* to come up with the money.

If I wanted to save our home, I'd have to do it myself.

