

# PIZZA PETE AND THE PERILOUS POTIONS

***The Times Children's Book of the Week***

'A lively, upbeat story that is as enjoyable as a  
Sloppy Giuseppe with all the trimmings'



**GUPPY  
BOOKS**

CARRIE SELLON

**PIZZA**  
**pete**  
AND THE  
**PERILOUS**  
**POTIONS**

ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH HORNE



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is a GUPPY BOOK

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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.'

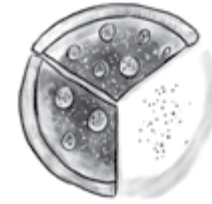
I frowned. Dad had opened the shop at exactly eleven a.m. and closed at precisely eleven p.m. seven days a week, for as long as I could remember. 'What if we get a customer? I thought we were desperate for money?'

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.



## Chapter Two

I was pulling cans of food out of the larder and piling them up on the kitchen table when the doorbell rang.

Anna pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose and grinned at me through the shop window. She lived opposite, with her mum. We'd been friends ever since my first day in Reception, when I'd squirted ketchup on my face by accident. I'd sat there dying of embarrassment with nothing to wipe it off, until Anna picked up the ketchup and squirted it all over her face too.

When I let her in, her dog, Useless, shot past me and started snuffling around for crumbs. Like her owner, Useless had clearly never heard of a hairbrush – her grey fur was so long and straggly, you could barely tell which end her head was.

I glanced outside to see if any food inspectors



were lurking, then locked the door. 'We'll get in trouble if anyone sees a dog in here. Regulation number—'

'Eight hundred and fifty-two. I know, I know.'

Anna clomped into the kitchen in her Doc Martens, her guitar swinging from her shoulder. As usual, she was wearing her purple cardigan and black boilersuit even though it was about thirty degrees out there. 'I had to get out. First day of the summer holidays and already Mum's nagging me about my French project.'

'That's because it was meant to be in before the end of term.' I'd finished mine ages ago. Mr Shah, my form teacher, emailed me every morning with my schoolwork for the day. I didn't mind. There are only so many hours of *Dragon Street* you can play without feeling like your eyes are going to pop out.

Anna opened the larder and reached for the biscuit tin, then plonked herself down at the kitchen

table. 'What's all this?' she asked, waving her hand at the piles of food.

We finished off a packet of Jammy Dodgers while I told her what Dad had said, about moving out unless we could come up with ten thousand pounds.

Her eyes widened. 'You can't move! Whose homework would I copy?'

'We're not moving, not if I can help it. I've got an idea.' I went back into the larder, and climbed up on the bottom shelf so I could reach the naughty food at the back. 'Dad's been doing the same old toppings for years. Everyone's bored of mozzarella and pepperoni and olives. We need something new. Something surprising. Something unexpected.'

'Like what?'

I flung a packet of marshmallows onto the table. 'Marshmallow and anchovy?'

'Disgusting!'

'Pringles and beetroot?' I asked.

'Horrible!'

'Peanut butter and tuna?'

'Eww! I'm going to be sick!'

'How do you know until you've tried—'

My phone buzzed. It was a message from Dad.

*Granny bit wobbly. I'd better stay. Will open shop when back – zish. Love you.*

I looked at the clock. 'We've got ages. The dough will be ready soon, then we can play around with new toppings. We have to find something *mind-blowing* to steal our customers back from Fox Pizza.'

Anna's face lit up. 'Have you been there yet?' She put her hands out stiffly in front of her and said in a robotic voice, '*Han-nah, your pi-zza is rea-dy.*'

I glared at her. 'You're not called Hannah.'

'I know, but—'



'They use frozen dough. And their toppings aren't fresh.'

'Listen, your pizzas are way better. It's just that everyone's forgotten about you, stuck down here.'

She was right. The Little Pizza Place was the only shop on Harwood Road. The high street was just at the end of the road, but no one walked past our shop unless they lived down here.

She clapped her hands. 'I know. Let's go up and down the high street with flyers to drum up business. We could dress up as pizzas!'

I scowled at her. 'I can't!'

She glanced at my reward chart on the fridge. Dad had pushed all his fridge magnets to the bottom to squeeze it on. I was meant to tick it whenever I left the house. Dad said he'd give me *Dragon Street 2* when I got five ticks. So far I had a grand total of zero.

Anna's face softened. 'You still haven't been out, have you?'

I shook my head, biting the side of my thumb. Anna was the only person, apart from Dad, who knew the real reason I hadn't been going to school. The *terrible* thing that happened.

It was a Saturday morning, the day after the English lesson when Miss Cameron asked us our favourite word. Dad took me and Anna to Accringham Leisure Centre for my twelfth birthday. They had this obstacle course in the pool which we did a zillion times until my skin was all wrinkly. We were just about to leave when Anna persuaded me to go on the high diving board. All these kids from school were in the queue, shouting at me to jump.

But I couldn't do it. The longer I stood there, the more freaked out I got.

And then, completely out of nowhere, my heart started thumping like crazy, like it was about to explode. I had all this sweat dripping down my face. I didn't know what was happening to me. I thought that was it – the *End*. I was going to die, right there, in my *Star Wars* swimming trunks. Next thing I knew, I was on my hands and knees crawling back along the board. That's when Archie Boyle started shrieking and pointing like it was the funniest thing he'd ever seen.

After the weekend, I refused to go to school. Dad took me to see Dr Shannon. She was really kind and

told me I'd had a *panic attack*. She explained what to do if it happened again: sit somewhere calm, slow my breathing, and remember – it would end soon. But the next day, I refused to go to school again. The thought of having another panic attack, at school of all places, was unbearable. I pretended to have a sore head. The day after that, sore ears. Before I knew it, it was the weekend again, and I'd barely left my room. It was my safe place. My cocoon.

That Sunday night, I wiped the steam off the bathroom mirror and made the promise to myself.

Never to leave home again.

Anna was chewing the manky sleeve of her cardigan, watching me. 'Let me get this straight. You've got four days to come up with an ingenious idea to make loads of money, without even stepping out the door?'

'Yup.'

She adjusted her glasses. 'You need a gimlick, like Fox Pizza.'

'I think you mean a gimmick.'

'Yeah, one of those. What could you do? Come on, you're the king of crazy ideas.'

I thought for a moment. 'Pizza boxes that say your name when you open them?'

'Impossible.'

I rubbed my chin. 'Cricket pizzas?'

'Ewww!'

I shrugged. 'We'll all be eating insects in the future. Gobbling up crickets and mealworms for breakfast.'

'I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that.'

'OK. How about flying pizzas?' I said.

'What?'

'We attach the pizzas to a drone and they fly through the air to people's houses. There's a pizza shop in New Zealand doing it.' I googled it on my phone and showed her. 'Their sales have gone up eighty-four per cent.'

Anna smiled. 'You'll do anything to avoid going outside, won't you?'

My cheeks reddened. 'We could launch the drone from the attic. There's a window up there.'

She mulled it over. 'I'd buy a flying pizza. Let's go up and have a look.'

We put the food back in the larder, then went

upstairs. On the landing in between my bedroom, Dad's bedroom and the bathroom, I reached up to pull a hook in the ceiling and the staircase unfolded. I clambered up first, followed by Anna and Useless. I hadn't been up to the attic for years. It was hot, cramped and dusty, filled with suitcases and bulging cardboard boxes. Everything was covered in cobwebs. The only light came from a filthy window overlooking the street.

'We'll have to move some of this stuff to get to the window.' I started stacking boxes on top of each other. 'Are you going to help me? Anna?'

She closed the lid of an enormous trunk and grinned at me. She was wearing a baseball cap with *I Love Spain* written in sequins, and a huge tasselled scarf around her neck. Useless was sitting next to her wearing a snorkel mask.

'What do you think?' she asked, striking a pose.

Anna loved dressing up, singing and acting, all that stuff. She persuaded me to join Drama Club soon after we met. In the first lesson, we had to do an action that reflected our personality. I pretended I was duelling with a lightsaber. Everyone else



did a TikTok dance. I switched to Chess Club the following week.

I glared at her. 'Take it off. It's Mum's.' It made me feel weird, seeing her in Mum's stuff. I don't know why. It wasn't like I remembered her – she died on my second birthday. It had just been me and Dad ever since. Not easy, as he liked to remind me, having to potty train me for nursery while running a pizza shop.

Sometimes I wished Mum were still alive. I'd never told Dad but part of the reason I loved being at home so much was because it made me feel close to Mum. After all, this is where she'd lived. There were memories of her all over the place – in the photos on the stairs, in the stories Dad told about her, even up here, in the attic. If we moved out, I worried we'd completely forget about her.

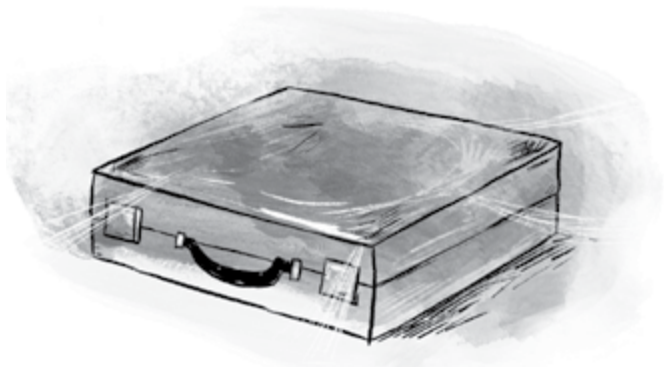
Anna blinked. 'Sorry.'

She carefully folded the scarf and put it in the trunk, then lay the baseball cap and snorkel mask gently on top of it. Together, we pushed the trunk under the eaves. Useless sniffed the floor where the trunk had been, then frantically scratched the floorboards.

‘What’s under there?’ I got down on my knees. One of the floorboards wasn’t nailed down properly, so I pushed on one end and the other end tipped up. Anna caught it and lifted it to the side.

Useless went mental, scrabbling with her paws and getting her nose right down into the space between the floorboards. Like she’d found something. I pushed her out of the way.

There, tucked under the floorboards, covered in cobwebs, was a briefcase.



## Chapter Three

It was made of brown leather – hard and sturdy with scuffed corners.

‘Treasure!’ Anna knelt beside me and wiped the cobwebs off the briefcase. ‘Can I get half?’

‘Don’t be silly. You don’t find treasure in real life. Not in Accringham, anyway.’

I unfastened the two metal clasps. The briefcase split in half easily, like a clam. It was full of small identical brown glass bottles, each with a black dropper cap, neatly arranged in rows. They were labelled with curly, old-fashioned handwriting in jet-black ink. I counted them – fifteen in total.

Anna ran her fingers over the labels. ‘What are they? Medicine?’

‘They look a bit like eye drops.’ I took out a bottle labelled *Grow*, unscrewed the cap, and squeezed the