



hat I had in mind that summer was no homework and easy money. Instead, I ended up with a valuable stolen painting, various death threats and more pizza than

I could handle. Perhaps I should have just done a paper round or walked someone's Labrador. But I chose to be a private detective.

It was my grandpa – G-pops – who started it. He sat there watching this grainy film starring some actor he called 'Bogey', who snooped after gangsters in a flappy cream coat.

'He's like you, kiddo,' he would rasp. 'You're

always so good at deducing things like a detective!’

By ‘things’, he meant deducing that the plague-puddle in his fridge was once a cucumber. Or that his glasses hadn’t been kidnapped but were on his head. Or that his monthly pills had been snaffled by Dinnergloves, his dog. And that Dinnergloves needed his stomach pumped. ASAP.

‘My little detective,’ he would cackle, ‘my little Bogey.’ This might sound like a weird thing to call your grandson, but I got the reference.

For my birthday he handed me a duffed-up green-and-white paperback called *The Big Sleep* (something he was partial to). Inside the cover, alongside a library fine from 1978, he had written:

For Colin. don't ever stop being a detective.

After that, his words started pinballing around my head. I did like deducing things. Spotting things. Remembering things. The doctor once said

my brain was ‘like a film camera’.

What if I *was* a detective?

I mean, yes, I was a pizza delivery boy. But couldn’t I be both?

A pizza detective?

So I got hold of a flappy cream coat. I made some laminated calling cards. I began snooping, not expecting much. After all, Rufflington-on-Sea isn’t exactly a hotbed of crime. Someone might walk off with the Post Office biro. Or prank call the old phone box. Or a badger might knock over your bins.

But everything changed with one fishy password . . .

CAESAR PIZZA



Chapter 1



It began with three suspicious pizzas. We were in Caesar Pizza, an Ancient Rome-themed pizzeria run by my parents, Cosmas and Irma Kingsley. Nice names, I know – but they went and called me Colin. Anyway, it was about eight and we were waiting for the orders to come in.

My dad was mopping up stray clouds of flour, grunting to himself. I was thinking about my school trip to Italy the next day – or trying to think, over the noise of my sister Alicia practising her double bass upstairs.

My mum babbled on the phone in her super-polite, high-pitched voice, ‘Yes, yes, Colin can come around, yes, yes!’

She wrote down the orders and gave them to me.

‘Is that my trench coat you’re wearing, darling?’ She knew it was. I just shrugged and didn’t tell her that there was no point being a detective if you didn’t have a trench coat. I read the orders:

- Major Marjorie
- Buckdean Hall, Seabury Road
- 1 x 7" Mark Anchovy Pizza, extra anchovies

- Mr Stirling Biggs
- 40 Weeping Willow Way
- 1 x 14" Mark Anchovy Pizza, extra anchovies

- Patrick Moore
- Hut 37, Shingle Row
- 1 x 12" Mark Anchovy Pizza, extra anchovies

For most people, this would read like a fairly harmless list of pizzas.

But if you looked closely, you would know that it was a cry for help.

'Extra anchovies?' said my mum, adjusting my collar as I squirmed away. 'People are funny.'

I didn't think it was funny at all. Because no one asks for extra anchovies. Unless, that is, they had seen one of these:



The cheesy, salty-fishy smell of cooked Mark Anchovy pizzas halted my train of thought.

I packed the satchel and wheeled out my bike. My dad stood in the doorway.

‘Be back by nine,’ he said.

‘Go safely, darling,’ called my mum.

‘Okaaaaaaaaay!’ I shouted, before pedalling off.

The sun was setting behind the oak trees, casting shadowy splashes on the bungalows. I picked up the pace as the tarmac blurred beneath me in a jerky flurry. I focused on my first port of call – Buckdean Hall. I’d only ever seen it from a distance, poking up from the clifftop like an elaborate tombstone. It used to be an all-girls boarding school, but we’d heard on the grapevine that someone lived there now. Who it was had been a mystery, until now. Major Marjorie . . . What kind of a name was that?

A sea mist hit my nostrils as I sped towards the

railway arches. It was cool under there, like a cave. I looked around at the traffic lights and saw a lonely kebab shop. Its neon sign, bludgeoned by a moth, spelt:

K-I-N-G--S-K-E-W-E-R

Inside was a girl with big dark eyes, rolling up wraps at lightning speed. At the till stood a bulky man wearing a paper crown. Was this the 'King'? He shouted to be heard over the din of the deep-fat fryer, 'One more lamb shawarma!'

I watched the girl as her nimble fingers flew over the pickled chillies.

A car horn honked behind me.

BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP!!!

Something banged against my handlebars and I capsized onto the pavement. A bus lurched past with an insulting *TOOT!* Then I saw the crime scene splattered on the kerb: my satchel had gone

flying and the pizzas were everywhere. And I do mean everywhere. Quick as a flash, I peeled them off and nursed them back into their boxes.

‘Holy shish, you’re not actually going to serve those, are you?’

I looked up at the sneering voice. The girl had come outside, hands on hips. Her dark eyes were now especially big, glowering with disgust.

‘I . . . I have to . . . I’ll be late otherwise! Anyway – come on, three-second rule!’

‘It’s actually the no-second rule, pizza boy.’

She picked up my satchel and dusted it off with a good thwack.

The King peered out at us, adjusting his paper crown.

‘Is he your dad?’ I whispered.

She gave a loud, harsh cackle that got under my skin like a splinter.

‘No. But you *must* call me “Princess Skewer”.’

She made a throat-slitting gesture with her finger.
'Or else.'

'I'm Colin,' I mumbled as I reattached the satchel. 'And I really need to go.'

She just shrugged. What was her problem?

I sped off, passing a procession of unnaturally neat houses and gardens. Twilight fell and bats squeaked overhead. Finally, I was up onto Seabury Road, with the whole of Ruffington twinkling below and the wind in my face. The distant waves drummed a chaotic beat. To the left was a chalky driveway, winding like spilt milk. I crunched up it, and there was Buckdean Hall. Only one window was lit, but another flashed dimly. Who'd want to go to school here? No wonder they closed it down.

I went to grab the very-slightly-germy pizza. But I was holding something else entirely: a King Skewer satchel, full of kebabs!

'Pizza-heeeeeeeeeeeead!' An angry wail bounced

up the driveway. ‘Princess Skewer’ launched in on her bike, her ponytail swishing like a cobra. ‘You took the wrong delivery, you fluff-brain!’

She whipped away the satchel and handed mine back.

‘We just had to make up a whole new batch, thanks to you!’

‘I’m really sorry,’ I garbled. ‘I don’t know how –’



‘What are you even *doing* in this place? No one ever comes here!’

I sighed and rattled a doorknocker shaped like an angry lion.

‘Listen . . . promise to keep a secret?’

Princess raised her hand and looked solemn.

‘I swear. I swear on my mum’s tahini sauce.’

‘I’m not really a pizza delivery boy,’ I whispered, trying to inject some seriousness into my voice. ‘I’m a private detective.’