

# THE PHANTOM LOLLIPOP MAN

PAMELA BUTCHART

THOMAS FLINTHAM

## Chapter 2

### Bad News

When we arrived at school on Monday, Maisie said, “Who’s THAT?” And then she pointed to the LOLLIPOP man.

That’s when I saw that it wasn’t our NORMAL LOLLIPOP man and that it was actually a LOLLIPOP LADY.

So we all went over and Jodi said, “Who are you, please?”

And I knew that she said “please” because of one time when we went to the takeaway around the corner from Jodi’s house and there was a new person serving the food and Jodi said, “Who are you?” and the new person said, “None of your business. Who are *YOU!*” And then Jodi’s mum made us wait outside while she “HAD WORDS” with the new person and then she didn’t have to pay for the chips that day and she told Jodi that she should always say please when she asks who someone is.

So anyway, the LOLLIPOP lady smiled at us and said, “I’m Mabel. Pleased to meet you.”

And we all just looked at each other because the old LOLLIPOP man NEVER smiled at us and I don’t think he was really pleased about meeting any of us.

So we asked Mabel if she knew what had happened to the old LOLLIPOP man but she said that she didn't and that she was sorry and we said that was OK because it wasn't her fault she didn't know.

Jodi said that maybe the LOLLIPOP man was off sick or something and I thought that she was probably right because the LOLLIPOP man was REALLY old and I was sure that he must've been almost one hundred years old.

Maisie said that she hoped the LOLLIPOP man was OK because even though most people do not like the LOLLIPOP man because he's REALLY GRUMPY and he shouts at us and waves his LOLLIPOP stick about if he doesn't like the way we're crossing the road, he seems to like Maisie and he even speaks to her a bit and asks us where she is when she's not with us.

So I said that he had probably just gone away for a long weekend like my gran does when she goes to Blackpool and Maisie smiled and said she thought I was right and that she hoped he had gone to Rome.

But the LOLLIPOP man wasn't back the next day. Or the day after that. And when we arrived at school on Friday and the LOLLIPOP man STILL wasn't back Maisie said that she thought something had GONE WRONG in Rome and that she could feel it in her BONES and that maybe the LOLLIPOP man had been KIDNAPPED.

Jodi looked at me and I looked at Jodi because we were both thinking the same thing. And that was that the LOLLIPOP man HADN'T been kidnapped in Rome and that he had probably been SACKED and REPLACED by the new, younger LOLLIPOP lady who actually SMILED at people and seemed not to hate everyone like the old LOLLIPOP man did.

But before we could say anything Zach said, "I'll ask Miss Jones," and he got up and wandered over to Miss Jones's desk.

Maisie STARED at Miss Jones when Zach spoke to her and so did we because Miss Jones had a WEIRD LOOK on her face and then she went a bit RED like the time she accidentally said a SWEAR when she couldn't fit the school minibus into any of the parking spaces at Tesco when Gary Petrie needed a wee and people kept tooting their car horns at us.

When Zach got back from Miss Jones's desk he said that she didn't know if the LOLLIPOP man was sick or not and that Miss Jones had seemed really CONFUSED when he asked her and that it seemed like she didn't actually KNOW who he was talking about.

We all thought it was a bit WEIRD that Miss Jones didn't know who the LOLLIPOP man was because he'd been here since we were in Year One and maybe even before that.

But Jodi said that Miss Jones probably never needed his help to cross the road because she always gets here really early and parks her car right outside the classroom.

Then Jodi said she wasn't sure grown-ups were even ALLOWED to use the LOLLIPOP man and that LOLLIPOP people were probably only allowed to help people who were under sixteen cross the road and that they probably even asked to see their passports as PROOF OF AGE.

That's when Maisie said we needed to ask EVERY SINGLE PERSON IN THE SCHOOL why the LOLLIPOP man was missing and what hospital they thought he might have been taken to so that we could all go and visit at the weekend and take him some Lucozade and grapes.

So at break we wandered around the playground asking people about the LOLLIPOP man. But nobody knew where he was.

Then Jodi said, "That's it. We're going to have to ask the OFFICE LADIES. They'll definitely know."

Maisie GASPED. Even though Jodi was very right to say that the office ladies would know (because the office ladies know EVERYTHING!) it was still a bit of a dangerous thing to do because:

1. The office ladies are SERIOUSLY SCARY!
2. They make you wait at the glass window for AGES while they pretend that they can't see you.
3. The office ladies HATE being asked any questions (even though answering questions is their job).

When we got to the school office, Jodi said that she wasn't going to be the one to go up to the glass window because she had been the one who came up with the idea to ask the office ladies and that it was someone else's turn.

So I just looked down at the ground and didn't say anything because I was hoping Zach would say he would go because usually we just make him do it anyway.

But then nobody said anything for ages and when I looked up I saw that Zach was looking down at the ground, too. And also that Maisie was covering her face with her hair.

So that's when I said, "Fine. I'll go," and I took a deep breath and walked over to the glass window and knocked on the wall beneath it because the window is too high up to reach. And my granddad says that that's what the office ladies DEMANDED when the school was first being built and he knows that for a FACT because he helped build my school ages ago when he came back from The War.

So anyway, the glass window slid open but before I could even say ONE WORD it SLAMMED SHUT again.

I looked over at Jodi and she did her WIDE EYES at me so I took another deep breath and knocked on the wall again.

When the glass door opened, I shouted, "I'M DOWN HERE!" before it could shut again.

That's when one of the office ladies stuck their head out and I saw RIGHT up her nose.

My hands were SWEATING but I just wiped them on my skirt and said, "I'm really sorry but I need to ask you a question."

The office lady sighed REALLY loudly and then muttered something to one of the other office ladies inside the office and then THEY sighed, too.

The office lady didn't say anything after the sigh, but she didn't close the glass door either, so that's when I said, "Where's the old LOLLIPOP man gone, please?"

The office lady leaned out of the window further and I could see that she had a long, dark hair under her chin which was a bit weird because she was a lady and also because it was just one long hair and I wasn't sure how it got there or why she didn't just pull it out.

Then she said, "Who?!"

So I said, "There's a new LOLLIPOP man that's a lady. What happened to the old LOLLIPOP man?"

The office lady slid the glass door shut and started whispering to the other office ladies inside. So I put my ear against the wall to see if I could hear what they were whispering about but I couldn't.

Then the other office lady stuck her head RIGHT out of the window and said, "The LOLLIPOP man has moved on."

And then she slammed the little door shut.

And that's when I heard SCREAMING.