

THE GRUMBLING GOBSTOPPERS

A Sugary Mystery Adventure

By

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DEDICATION

For everyone who has ever been told a whopping great fib by a grown-up and known, deep in their wellies, that something sticky was about to happen.



CHAPTER 1

A TOWN BUILT ON TOFFEE

Sweetwhistle-on-Toffee was the sort of town where the pavements were sticky on Tuesdays, the lampposts were striped like peppermint sticks, and the river ran the colour of melted butterscotch (don't ask — the council had Opinions about it).

It was also a town that produced the finest gobstoppers in the known world.

Now, gobstoppers, as any sensible child will tell you, are the round, jaw-cracking, tooth-defying sweets that change colour as you suck them. But Sweetwhistle gobstoppers were something else entirely. They were rolled by hand in the Whistlewerks Factory, polished by Mrs. Flummox, and sold by the

bucketload from a hundred striped shops along the High Street.

And in the middle of all this sugary splendour lived Pippa Muddlepudd, aged eleven and three-quarters, who carried a yellow notebook everywhere she went.

Pippa was the sort of girl adults described as too clever by half, which, as Pippa herself once wrote, meant she was clever and they weren't, and they didn't much like it.

On the morning our story begins, Pippa was sitting on the toffee-cobbled square, watching Mayor Bumblesnort give a campaign speech from the top of a giant marzipan podium.

"Citizens of Sweetwhistle!" boomed the Mayor, his waxed mustache (which was twirled into the precise shape of a sugar-spoon) twitching importantly. "I have NEVER raised your taxes! I have ALWAYS told you the truth! I LOVE every single one of you like my own DEAR CHILDREN!"

PLINK.

Pippa heard it before she saw it.

A gobstopper, sitting innocently in a barrel outside Mrs. Toodle's Sweet Emporium, had just grown. Just a little. Just by the size of a marble.

Pippa opened her notebook.

OBSERVATION #1: Mayor told three fibs in one sentence. Three gobstoppers got bigger. Coincidence? Muddlepuks don't believe in coincidences.

"And FURTHERMORE," the Mayor bellowed, his gold-plated dentures flashing in the sun like a chandelier in an earthquake, "I have ABSOLUTELY no interest in profit! Public service is my ONLY passion!"

PLINK-PLINK-PLONK!

Three more gobstoppers swelled, this time to the size of plums. One of them, a rather indignant-looking purple one, actually rolled off its shelf and bounced down the High Street, going BOING-BOING-BOING like a startled frog wearing tap shoes.

The grown-ups didn't seem to notice. The grown-ups, in fact,

were nodding along to the Mayor's speech, which was full of more porkies than a butcher's window.

"Bless their gullible turnip-heads," muttered Pippa.

OBSERVATION #2: The bigger the lie, the bigger the gobstopper. Need to test theory. Need more lies. Should be easy — adults fib like fish swim.

By lunchtime, the High Street was peppered with gobstoppers the size of grapefruits, and Mr. Snitchley (the greengrocer) had told seventeen customers that yes, those bananas were absolutely fresh, which was a blithering whopper, because they were green as a frog's elbow.

A gobstopper the size of a watermelon rolled past Pippa's feet, glaring at her (yes, glaring — it had developed a sort of squinty face on its surface).

Something was wrong in Sweetwhistle-on-Toffee.

Something deliciously, dangerously wrong.

And Pippa Muddlepucc, with her yellow notebook and her sceptical eyebrows, was going to find out exactly what.



CHAPTER 2

INSIDE THE WHISTLEWERKS

The Whistlewerks Factory sat at the end of Liquorice Lane, hissing and puffing like a kettle full of dragons. It had seven chimneys, each one belching out a different colour of steam, and a great brass sign over the door that read:

WHISTLEWERKS — Makers of Sweetwhistle's Finest
Gobstoppers Since The Year Of The Very Long Winter.

Pippa pushed open the door.

WHOOSH-CLANG-GURGLE!

Inside, enormous copper vats bubbled with rainbow syrups.

Conveyor belts clattered past, carrying gobstoppers in every stage of polishing. Workers in striped aprons hurried about like ants who had recently been promoted.

But something was off.

The gobstoppers on the belts were... watching.

Each one had developed a tiny squint of a face on its surface — two little dimples for eyes and a wobbly line for a mouth — and they were swivelling, ever so slightly, to follow Pippa as she walked past.

OBSERVATION #3: Gobstoppers now have FACES. Not friendly ones. Faces like grandmothers who have been overcharged for milk.

"Oi! No children in the works!" snapped a man in a tall hat. It was Mr. Crumblesworth, the factory foreman, whose nose was as red as a postbox and whose breath smelled faintly of pear drops.

"I'm doing research," said Pippa politely.

"Well, you can do your research ELSEWHERE," said Mr. Crumblesworth, "because the gobstoppers are perfectly NORMAL today. NOTHING unusual. NOTHING strange. Everything is TIP-TOP and SHIPSHAPE."

PLONK. PLONK. PLONK-PLONK-PLONK!

Three gobstoppers on the nearest belt swelled visibly. One popped a button off Mr. Crumblesworth's waistcoat.

"AHEM," said Pippa.

Mr. Crumblesworth went purple. "That was a — a draught. A factory draught. Perfectly normal."

PLONK!

Another swelling.

Pippa scribbled furiously.

OBSERVATION #4: Lies confirmed = lies cause growing.
Possibly also cause rolling. Possibly also cause GLARING.

She slipped behind a great copper vat and watched. From her hiding place, she could see Mayor Bumblesnort himself, standing in the doorway of the foreman's office, deep in whispered conversation with Mr. Crumblesworth.

"...double the production..." the Mayor was murmuring, his sugar-spoon mustache quivering like an angry caterpillar that had been poked with a knitting needle. "...I shall sell them abroad at TWENTY times the price... my campaign coffers shall OVERFLOW..."

"But Your Honour," whispered Mr. Crumblesworth, "the gobstoppers — they're behaving strangely. They've started rolling about on their own. One bit Mrs. Flummox yesterday."

"NONSENSE!" snapped the Mayor. "They are sweets! Sweets do not BITE! Sweets do not ROLL! Sweets do not GLARE!"

THREE enormous PLONKS rang out across the factory floor.

Behind the Mayor, an entire crate of gobstoppers swelled to the size of cricket balls. One of them, a wicked-looking green one, hopped — hopped, mind you — out of the crate and rolled

silently towards the Mayor's polished shoes.

It nudged his ankle.

"Get OFF, you ridiculous confection!" bellowed the Mayor, kicking it away.

The gobstopper rolled into a corner. And — Pippa could have sworn it — it winked at her.

She winked back.

OBSERVATION #5: The gobstoppers know. They KNOW. And I think — though this sounds barmy as a beehive in a bowler hat — I think they're on MY side.

Pippa tiptoed out of the factory, her notebook bulging with secrets, her brain whirring like a clockwork mouse on espresso.



CHAPTER 3

THE GREAT LIQUORICE LANE STAMPEDE

It happened on a Wednesday, just after elevenses, which (as everyone in Sweetwhistle knows) is the second-most important meal of the day after second-elevenses.

Pippa was sitting on a bench outside the Town Hall, eating a fizzy bootlace, when she heard it.

A rumble.

Then a RUMBLE.

Then a RUMBLE-RUMBLE-RUMBLE-CRASH-BOOM-WH
EEEEEEEE!

Around the corner of Liquorice Lane came a tidal wave of gobstoppers. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them. They ranged in size from gobstoppers (small) to gobstoppers (medium) to gobstoppers (the size of beach balls) to gobstoppers (the size of a small family car).

And they were ROLLING.

They rolled like a herd of wildebeest who had recently discovered tap shoes. They rolled like marbles down a banister. They rolled like — well — like enormous angry sweets bent on causing AGGRO.

"RUN!" shrieked Mrs. Toodle, fleeing past the bench with her wig flying behind her like a startled poodle.

KA-BOOM! A gobstopper the size of a hat-box knocked over a lamppost.

SPLORCH! Another one squashed Constable Wibley's bicycle into a metal pancake.

CRASH-TINKLE-CRUNCH! The window of Mrs. Flummox's

haberdashery shattered as a watermelon-sized gobstopper sailed clean through it, taking three rolls of ribbon with it on the way out.

Pippa scrambled onto the bench, then onto the Town Hall steps, notebook clutched to her chest.

OBSERVATION #6: Gobstopper Stampede triggered by — what? Worked it out: Town Council had emergency meeting this morning. Adults probably told ENORMOUS fibs. Quantity of fibs = quantity of rolling sweets.

From the top of the steps, Mayor Bumblesnort emerged, looking flustered but determined. He raised a megaphone.

"CITIZENS!" he boomed. "DO NOT PANIC! This is a perfectly natural meteorological phenomenon! It is called — er — a SUGARSTORM! Yes! A sugarstorm! Common at this time of year!"

PLONK!

A gobstopper as big as a sofa appeared out of nowhere and

rolled directly at the Town Hall steps. The Mayor leapt sideways like a startled flamingo.

"It is NOT my fault!" he bellowed. "It has NOTHING to do with my speeches! Anyone who SAYS so is a TROUBLEMAKER and a LIAR!"

PLONK-PLONK-PLONK-PLONK-PLONK!

Five more gobstoppers swelled. One of them detached from a shop awning and rolled menacingly towards the Mayor's left ankle.

"GET AWAY!" he shrieked, swatting it with his megaphone. The megaphone bounced off and clonked him on the forehead.

CLANG!

Pippa nearly fell off the steps from giggling.

She watched as the townsfolk hid in doorways, peering out at the rolling chaos. Old Mr. Tipplebottom claimed loudly that his garden gnomes had warned him about this. (PLONK.) Mrs.

Snitchley swore she had predicted it last Tuesday. (PLONK.)
The vicar announced it was DEFINITELY not because of his
sermon. (PLONK-PLONK.)

Every fib. Every single fib. Another gobstopper swelled.

The grown-ups, Pippa realised, were making it worse with
every word they said.

She had to get them to stop lying.

Which was, she reflected, rather like asking a duck to stop
quacking, or a custard to stop being yellow.

A gobstopper rolled gently up to her foot and stopped. It
blinked at her — once, twice — and then nudged her shoe like
a friendly cat.

"You want me to figure this out, don't you?" Pippa whispered.

The gobstopper rolled in a small, encouraging circle.

OBSERVATION #7: Confirmed: gobstoppers are SENTIENT.

Also possibly ALLIES. Also possibly hungry — small one just tried to nibble my shoelace.

The Mayor, meanwhile, was sprinting back inside the Town Hall, the sugar-spoon of his mustache flapping wildly above his upper lip.

He had to be stopped.



CHAPTER 4

GOLD-PLATED DENTURES AND OTHER CLUES

The Mayor's office, Pippa discovered, was on the fourth floor of the Town Hall, behind a door painted the colour of overcooked egg yolk.

She got there by climbing the ivy at the back of the building, which is the sort of thing that adults always tell children NOT to do and which is therefore always the right answer.

The window was open a crack. Pippa wriggled through.

PLOMP. She landed on a rug shaped like the Mayor's own face. (Vanity, thought Pippa, was clearly Bumblesnort's hobby.)

The office was magnificent in a perfectly horrible way. There were portraits of the Mayor on every wall. There was a desk shaped like a giant boiled sweet. There was a cabinet labelled SPARE DENTURES (GOLD) in curly letters.

And there, on the desk, was a folder marked TOP SECRET — DO NOT READ — ESPECIALLY NOT YOU, MUDDLEPUCK GIRL.

(He had clearly anticipated her. Pippa felt rather flattered.)

She opened the folder.

Inside were letters. Many letters. From a place called the Foreign Sweet Syndicate of Far-Off Lands.

Dear Mayor Bumblesnort,

We confirm our order of TEN THOUSAND giant Sweetwhistle gobstoppers, at the agreed price of ONE GOLD COIN per gobstopper. We are particularly interested in the new LARGER variety. Please advise how you are achieving such impressive growth.

Yours sweetly,
The Syndicate

Pippa's eyebrows climbed to the top of her forehead like two startled caterpillars.

OBSERVATION #8: Mayor is SELLING the giant gobstoppers. Making heaps of gold. Telling fibs ON PURPOSE to grow them bigger and bigger. The whole campaign is a SCAM.

She flipped through more papers. There were maps of the town with red circles where gobstoppers had been collected. There were schedules — Tuesday: lie about taxes. Wednesday: lie about love for orphans. Thursday: lie about hair (not a wig). There was a great big chart titled PROFIT PROJECTIONS with a line going up like a rocket.

And there, at the bottom of the folder, was a small black notebook. The Mayor's own notebook.

Pippa opened it.

Day 47: The gobstoppers seem to be developing personalities.

Mr. Crumblesworth says one of them BIT him. Ridiculous. Sweets cannot bite. (Though I confess, I did see one snarl at the postman yesterday.)

Day 52: Production is at an all-time high. My speeches alone are growing the stock by 14% per week. By Christmas, I shall be richer than a duke who married a duchess who inherited a chocolate mine.

Day 58: SLIGHT problem. The largest gobstopper now has TEETH. I told the foreman to paint over them. He says they grew back.

Pippa whistled silently.

OBSERVATION #9: Gobstoppers growing TEETH. Mayor doesn't care. Mayor will keep lying until town is buried under glowering, dental-equipped confectionery.

Footsteps in the corridor!

CLOMP-CLOMP-CLOMP.

Pippa stuffed the small notebook into her pocket, dived behind a curtain, and held her breath like a goldfish in a thunderstorm.

The door BANGED open.

In strode the Mayor, his sugar-spoon mustache quivering like an angry caterpillar that had stepped barefoot on a thistle. His gold-plated dentures clacked irritably.

"Crumblesworth!" he barked into a brass speaking-tube.

"Double the lies! Triple them! I want gobstoppers the size of HORSE-CARRIAGES by Friday! The Syndicate is willing to pay DOUBLE for the giant ones!"

A tinny voice replied: "But sir, the townsfolk are getting squashed! Mrs. Flummox was flattened into a sort of human pancake yesterday — we had to peel her off the cobbles!"

"Then they should LEARN to dodge!" snapped the Mayor.

"Now — I have a speech to give. I shall tell the town that I am DEEPLY CONCERNED for their safety. Hah! That should grow us another fifty!"

He swept out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Pippa emerged from the curtain, white as a sugared almond.

OBSERVATION #10: Plan needed. Plan needed FAST. Step one: get the truth OUT. Step two: get the Mayor IN — into trouble, that is, up to his gold-plated eyebrows.

She slipped back out of the window, the Mayor's secret notebook tucked safely into her cardigan.



CHAPTER 5

RECRUITING THE RESISTANCE

If you have never tried to organise a meeting of eleven-year-olds in a treehouse at sundown, you have never lived.

Pippa's treehouse was wedged in the branches of a great toffee-apple tree at the bottom of her garden. It had a rope ladder, a lookout window, a tin of emergency biscuits, and a sign that read NO GROWN-UPS, NO EXCEPTIONS, NOT EVEN NICE ONES.

By seven o'clock, the treehouse was packed.

There was Toby Whifflepuff (good at climbing). There was

Nora Snodgrass (good at shouting). There were the Sprocket twins, Iggy and Aggie (good at building things that exploded). There was little Bessie Muddlepuck, Pippa's seven-year-old cousin, who had insisted on coming and had brought her guinea pig, Mr. Pickles, who was good at moral support.

Pippa stood at the front, notebook open.

"Right," she said. "Here's what we know."

She read out her observations, one by one.

When she finished, there was a silence as thick as treacle.

Then Toby said: "So the Mayor is making the gobstoppers grow by LYING, so that he can sell them ABROAD, while we all get squashed flat?"

"Exactly," said Pippa.

"That," said Nora Snodgrass, "is the rottenest thing I have ever heard."

"Rottener than week-old fish in a sock," agreed Iggy Sprocket.

"Rottener than Auntie Maud's cabbage soup," added Aggie.

Mr. Pickles squeaked indignantly.

"The grown-ups won't listen," said Pippa. "I've tried. Mum told me to stop being dramatic. Dad said gobstoppers don't have feelings. The Vicar told me to pray about it (PLONK — another one swelled in the churchyard). We can't rely on them. We have to fix this ourselves."

"How?" asked Bessie, wide-eyed.

Pippa took a deep breath.

"Two things. First — we have to make the grown-ups stop lying. Even just for ONE hour. Long enough for the gobstoppers to settle. Second — we have to expose the Mayor with his own notebook, in front of EVERYONE, at Saturday's Big Sweetwhistle Speech."

"How do we make grown-ups stop lying?" said Toby. "That's

like asking a fish to stop being wet."

Pippa grinned. It was the kind of grin that made wise people back away slowly.

"We make them tell the truth," she said, "by making it IMPOSSIBLE to lie. We'll surround them with gobstoppers. The gobstoppers KNOW when lies are told. They glare. They roll. They GROW. If every adult in Sweetwhistle is surrounded by an army of judgmental sweets — they'll have to think twice."

"You want us to..." said Aggie slowly, "...HERD the gobstoppers?"

"I want us to BEFRIEND them," said Pippa. "I've already met one. They're not bad. They're just — done with the nonsense. Like the rest of us."

OBSERVATION #11: Plan named: OPERATION HONEYTRAP. (Bessie suggested SUGAR AMBUSH. Toby suggested THE BIG STICKY. We voted. Mine won.)

They got to work.

The Sprocket twins built tiny gobstopper-sized carts with wheels, to ferry the smaller ones around. Toby drew up maps. Nora practised her shouting voice (which was already, frankly, world-class). Bessie taught Mr. Pickles to sit on top of a medium-sized gobstopper without falling off. Pippa wrote, and wrote, and wrote, gathering every fib she had ever heard a Sweetwhistle adult tell.

By midnight, the treehouse was crammed with diagrams, plans, and seventeen gobstoppers who had rolled themselves up the rope ladder of their own accord. (One was wearing a tiny paper hat that Bessie had folded for it. It seemed pleased.)

The biggest gobstopper — Pippa named him Geoffrey — was the size of a bowling ball and had a face like a wise old bullfrog. He sat on top of the biscuit tin and watched the proceedings approvingly.

"Geoffrey," said Pippa, "are you with us?"

Geoffrey rolled forward an inch, then back. It looked,

unmistakably, like a bow.

"Splendid," said Pippa.

The Sweetwhistle Resistance had begun.



CHAPTER 6

OPERATION HONEYTRAP

Friday night, the children moved.

They moved like shadows. Like cats on socks. Like ninjas who had recently graduated from ninja school with honours.

Toby and the Sprocket twins crept down the High Street with sacks of biscuit crumbs (gobstoppers, Pippa had discovered, were enormously fond of biscuit crumbs and would follow them anywhere). Behind them rolled an army.

Geoffrey led the procession, dignified as a duke.

Behind him rolled Glinda, a glittery pink gobstopper with

attitude. Behind her, Big Boris (the size of a beach ball, with what looked suspiciously like a moustache of his own). Behind him, dozens more — peppermint stripes, fizzy yellows, deep purples, a few mysterious blacks that nobody quite trusted but had agreed to bring along anyway.

Nora and Bessie went door to door, slipping notes under every adult's letterbox. The notes read:

DEAR GROWN-UP,

TOMORROW AT THE SPEECH, TELL ONLY THE TRUTH.
NOT EVEN ONE LITTLE FIB. THE GOBSTOPPERS ARE
WATCHING. THEY KNOW. SIGNED, A FRIEND.

(Pippa had not signed her name. She was eleven, not a fool.)

By dawn, gobstoppers had been positioned on every doorstep, every windowsill, every shop counter, every park bench in Sweetwhistle-on-Toffee. There was no escape. There was no privacy. Everywhere a grown-up looked, a sweet was looking back.

When Mr. Snitchley opened his front door that morning to fetch the milk, he found seven gobstoppers in a semicircle, glaring at him like a tribunal of disappointed grandmothers.

"Er — morning," he said.

The gobstoppers did not move.

"Lovely day," said Mr. Snitchley nervously.

The gobstoppers narrowed their eyes.

"...Actually it looks like rain," he corrected hastily.

The gobstoppers seemed to nod approvingly.

This sort of thing was happening all over Sweetwhistle.

OBSERVATION #12: It's WORKING. By 9am, the town is the most honest it has ever been. Mrs. Toodle just admitted her cakes are "a bit dry, actually." The vicar told the milkman his sermon last Sunday was "perhaps overlong." NOBODY is fibbing.

OBSERVATION #13: Even better — no new growing! Existing gobstoppers are SHRINKING, slowly, as the truth-pressure rises. Geoffrey has lost half a pound already and looks rather pleased.

By midday, the High Street was buzzing.

People were telling the truth to one another for what felt like the first time in living memory.

"That hat does not suit you, Marjorie."

"I have never actually read a book all the way through."

"I owe you eighteen years of birthday cards."

"Your soup is, frankly, a war crime."

It was wonderful. It was disastrous. It was, Pippa thought, EXACTLY what Sweetwhistle had needed for about a hundred years.

But there was one grown-up the gobstoppers couldn't surround.

One grown-up too pompous, too protected, too smug to listen.

Mayor Bumblesnort.

He arrived at the Town Square at one o'clock sharp, riding a carriage shaped like a giant marshmallow, escorted by six grumpy councillors and one very confused dalmatian.

He climbed onto the marzipan podium.

He cleared his throat.

He looked out at the crowd — which today, Pippa noted with great satisfaction, included a remarkable number of gobstoppers in the front row, arranged in tidy little rows like the world's stickiest jury.

The Mayor's sugar-spoon mustache twitched.

"My DEAR citizens," he began, "today I bring you GLORIOUS news—"

PLONK!

A gobstopper in the front row swelled the size of a tennis ball.

The Mayor faltered.

"Er — that is — I bring you news that I, personally, have NOTHING to do with the recent gobstopper troubles—"

PLONK-PLONK-PLONK!

Three more.

The crowd murmured.

The Mayor's gold-plated dentures clacked nervously.

Pippa, standing at the back with her notebook open and her heart hammering like a woodpecker on a biscuit tin, smiled.

It was time.

She stepped forward.

She raised her hand.

"Mayor Bumblesnort," she said, loud and clear, "I'd like to read aloud from a notebook I found. YOUR notebook."

The Mayor went the colour of beetroot soup.



CHAPTER 7

THE READING OF THE NOTEBOOK

A hush fell over Sweetwhistle Square.

It was the kind of hush that you get in libraries, except sweeter, and stickier, and with the faint hum of several hundred gobstoppers vibrating with anticipation.

Pippa Muddlepuddle climbed onto an upturned barrel.

She looked very small up there. Pigtails askew, cardigan sleeves too long, yellow notebook clutched in both hands. But her eyes were as bright as a freshly polished penny.

"This," she said, holding up the small black book, "is Mayor

Bumblesnort's PRIVATE notebook. I'd like to read you a few entries."

"DON'T YOU DARE!" shrieked the Mayor.

PLONK! (A gobstopper at his feet grew big enough to make him stumble.)

"Day forty-seven," read Pippa. "The gobstoppers seem to be developing personalities."

The crowd gasped.

"Day fifty-two," Pippa continued. "Production is at an all-time high. My speeches alone are growing the stock by 14% per week."

"LIES!" shouted the Mayor. "FORGERIES! Those aren't my words!"

PLONK-PLONK-PLONK!

Three more gobstoppers grew. One of them — a grim-faced

grey one named, Pippa later learned, Reginald — began rolling slowly towards the Mayor's polished shoes.

"Day fifty-eight," Pippa went on, her voice ringing clear across the square. "The largest gobstopper now has TEETH. I told the foreman to paint over them."

The crowd turned, as one, to look at the Mayor.

Mr. Snitchley dropped his hat.

Mrs. Toodle gasped so hard she swallowed a peppermint.

Even the dalmatian looked appalled.

"He's been LYING ON PURPOSE!" shouted Toby Whifflepuff from the front row. "To make money! He's been making the town DANGEROUS for GOLD!"

"It's not TRUE!" bellowed the Mayor, his sugar-spoon mustache quivering like an angry caterpillar caught in a hurricane. "I have ONLY EVER served this town with — with — UTMOST INTEGRITY!"

PLONK-PLONK-PLONK-PLONK-PLONK-PLONK-PLONK!

Seven gobstoppers swelled at once.

But — and this was the marvellous bit — they didn't swell randomly anymore.

They swelled IN A CIRCLE.

Around the Mayor.

Pippa watched, breathless, as the gobstoppers — Geoffrey, Glinda, Big Boris, Reginald, and dozens more — rolled, swelled, and arranged themselves in a perfect ring around the marzipan podium.

It was as though they had agreed, by silent gobstopper-vote, that ENOUGH was QUITE ENOUGH.

The Mayor looked down.

The gobstoppers looked up.

A small, gleeful, terrified little squeak escaped from somewhere underneath his waxed mustache.

"Now, now," said the Mayor, raising his hands. "Let's all be REASONABLE. I am, after all, your beloved MAYOR. I have done SO much for this town. I once — er — I once gave a coin to a beggar. Yes. ABSOLUTELY did that. Definitely."

PLONK!

The biggest swell yet. Geoffrey, who had been the size of a bowling ball just yesterday, was now the size of a small armchair.

He rolled forward.

He was no longer a sweet. He was a JUDGMENT.

"I CAN EXPLAIN!" shrieked the Mayor.

"I am sure you can," said Pippa kindly. "But I think the gobstoppers have heard enough."

She climbed down from the barrel.

She took Bessie's hand.

The crowd, every last one of them, took a step backward.

Geoffrey, Big Boris, Glinda, and Reginald — the Four Generals of the Resistance, as Bessie had christened them — began to roll.

Slowly at first.

Then faster.

Then FASTER.

Then very, very fast indeed.

CHAPTER 8

A MAYOR IN A MILLION PIECES (OF SWEET)

What happened next went down in Sweetwhistle history.

It is still talked about in pubs and parlours, in school playgrounds and grandmothers' kitchens. The Day The Mayor Got His Just Desserts. The Great Bumblesnort Splatting. The Sticky Reckoning of Sweetwhistle-on-Toffee.

It went like this.

Geoffrey rolled FIRST.

WHOOSH-RUMBLE-THUNK!

He thumped into the base of the marzipan podium with the force of a small cannonball. The podium WOBBLED.

Big Boris was next.

KA-BOOM!

The podium WOBBLED MORE.

Glinda spun in from the left, sparkling viciously, and SMACKED the front of the podium with a noise like CRUNCH-SPARKLE-TINKLE!

Reginald rolled in from the right, grim and silent, and CRUNCHED the podium from the other side.

The marzipan podium, which had stood proud in Sweetwhistle Square for forty-seven years, finally gave a great groan and TIPPED.

"NOOOOOOOO!" wailed the Mayor.

His gold-plated dentures flew out of his mouth and SAILED

through the air in a glittering arc, landing — KER-PLOP! — directly into Mrs. Toodle's open handbag.

(She kept them, by the way. She had them mounted in a small frame and hung them above her fireplace. She said they reminded her not to vote for villains.)

The Mayor TIPPED.

He WOBBLED.

He WAVED HIS ARMS like a windmill that had just been given some very bad news.

It did not help.

The Mayor of Sweetwhistle-on-Toffee toppled backwards off his ruined podium and fell — SPLOOSH-SQUELCH-GLOOP! — straight into the enormous vat of Premium Whistlewerks Toffee that he had been planning to sell as Mayor's Own Honest Recipe (it was neither his own, nor honest).

For a moment, nothing happened.

Then a single golden bubble rose to the surface and went blop.

The Mayor surfaced, gasping, coated head to slippers in glistening toffee, looking exactly like a toffee apple that had grown legs and a grudge. His magnificent moustache — what was left of it — quivered like an angry caterpillar that had been dipped in syrup and was deeply regretting its life choices.

"GET ME OUT!" he bellowed, which was a mistake, because the moment he opened his mouth the toffee got IN, and the toffee — being genuine Sweetwhistle toffee — immediately began to set.

His jaws stuck. SHTUCK.

He could only make small, sticky, outraged noises. "Mmph. MMPH. Mmm-mmm-MMPH."

(For the first time in his entire mayorship, the Mayor could not tell a single lie. He could not tell anything at all. The whole square agreed it was a tremendous improvement.)

The four gobstoppers — Geoffrey, Big Boris, Glinda, and grim,

silent Reginald — rolled into a neat little row in front of Pippa and, for the first time in weeks, stopped grumbling. They had been grumbling, you see, because nobody likes being made out of LIES. But a town built on toffee, once you scrape away the fibs, is really rather sweet underneath.

Pippa knelt down. "Thank you," she whispered. "All of you."

Geoffrey changed colour from sulky grey to the warm pink of a sweet that has finally been understood.

Pippa opened her notebook and wrote:

OBSERVATION #54: A lie is like a gobstopper — it gets bigger and harder the longer you keep it in your mouth, and sooner or later it makes you choke. The truth is stickier going down, but it never, ever cracks your teeth.

And the moral, gloopy and golden, was this: you cannot build a town, a sweet, or a Mayor out of fibs — sooner or later the whole sticky lot gives way, KER-SPLAT.

CHAPTER 9

IN WHICH SWEETWHISTLE GETS ITS JUST DESSERTS

They had to chip the Mayor out with a chisel. It took three days, two toffee-hammers, and one very brave dentist named Mr. Crackjaw, who later wrote a book about the experience.

The Mayor was, by unanimous vote, replaced. The new Mayor of Sweetwhistle-on-Toffee was none other than Mrs. Toodle (yes — the handbag one), who governs honestly, fairly, and with the gold-plated dentures still framed above her fireplace as a warning to all future fibbers.

The Whistlewerks Factory reopened under new management — Pippa's — with the gobstoppers as official Quality Inspectors. Their sweets now change colour not by magic, but by mood,

and they only ever grumble when somebody tells a whopper nearby. (It is, the town agrees, an excellent early-warning system.)

As for Pippa, she keeps her notebook in her left welly and a single warm-pink gobstopper in her pocket — Geoffrey, who flatly refused to be sucked and insisted on coming along for the adventures instead.

He has, so far, caught eleven liars, two cheats, and one very surprised fishmonger.

He is, everyone agrees, the finest gobstopper in the known world.

The End

MEET THE CHARACTERS

PIPPA MUDDLEPUCK



Clever eleven-year-old sleuth with a yellow notebook

MAYOR BUMBLESNORT



Pompous, fibbing mayor with gold dentures

BESSIE MUDDLEPUCK



Pippa's wide-eyed seven-year-old cousin

TOBY WHIFFLEPUFF



Wiry, climbing-mad boy of the resistance

MR. CRUMBLESWORTH



Red-nosed factory foreman in a tall hat

GEOFFREY THE GOBSTOPPER



Wise, bowling-ball-sized sentient gobstopper

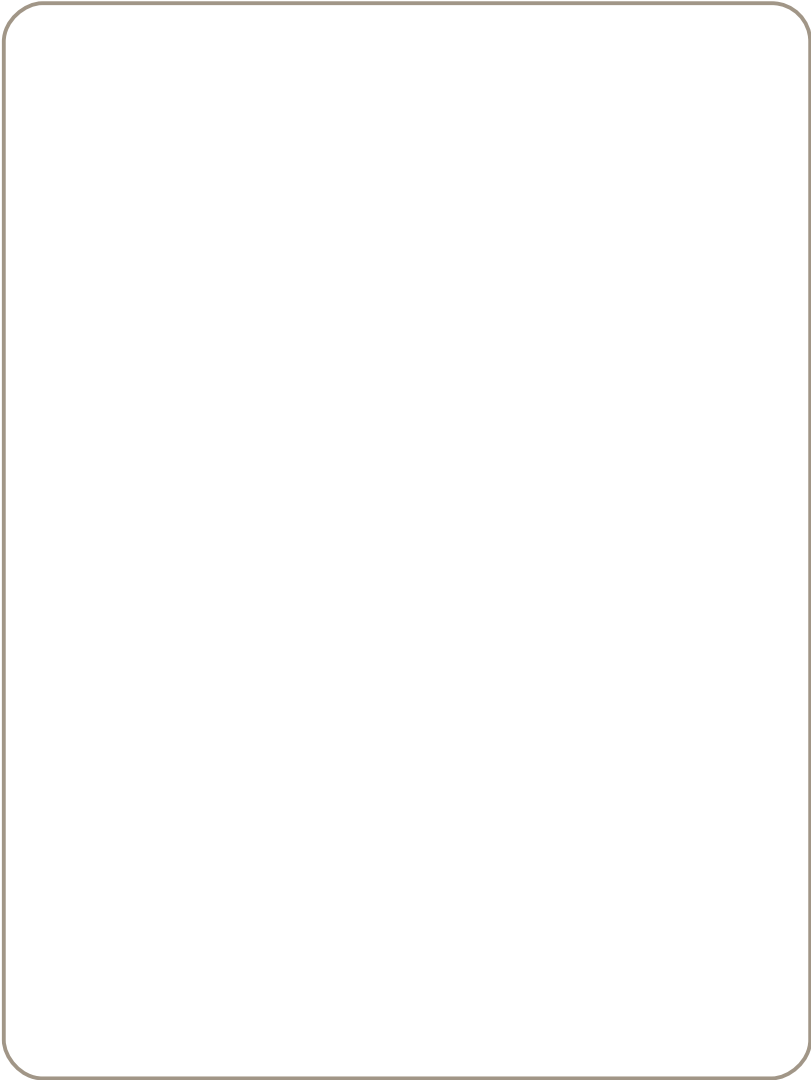
MRS. TOODLE



Bustling sweetshop owner with a wild wig

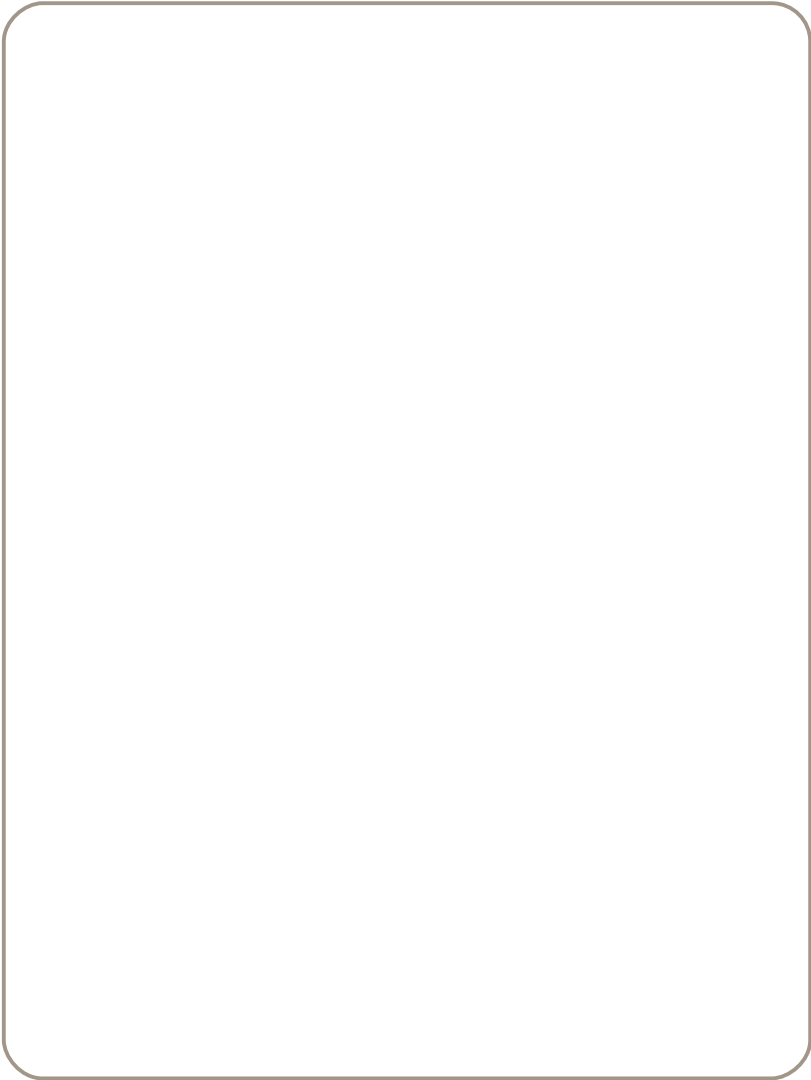
YOUR TURN TO WOBBLE

Draw Pippa Muddlepudd!



YOUR TURN TO WOBBLE

Draw your favourite moment from the story!

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for drawing. The box is outlined in a thin, dark brown line and occupies the central portion of the page, providing ample space for a child to draw their favorite moment from the story.

YOUR TURN TO WOBBLE

Design your very own Wobble character!



MORE FROM WOBBLE BOOKS



Muffin Man

Sammy Sprocket thought the villain business was over — until a secret message turned up baked inside his breakfast muffin. Now Sammy and his crumb-detecting best friend Penny must follow a trail of clues, catastrophic baking, and impending doom before Jellybean Junction gets itself into another sticky mess. Whatever you do, don't trust the muffins.

ALSO BY M.C. WOBBLE



The Baffling Bubblegum Beast

Giant pink blobs are oozing through Sweetwhistle, and the grown-ups are blaming children (as usual). But twelve-year-old Mia Muddlepuck has spotted something the adults haven't — the blobs grow bigger every time someone grumbles, and one of them just squeaked at her. Can Mia crack the gloopy mystery before the whole town gets stuck for good?

ABOUT M.C. WOBBLE

M.C. Wobble writes books about the sort of characters nobody ever puts in books — blobs, beasts, and things made entirely of baked goods. The stories are silly on the outside and surprisingly warm on the inside.

Every Wobble Book is designed with dyslexic readers in mind — not as an afterthought, but from the first word. Because every child deserves a book that feels like it was made for them.

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