



ONE THOUSAND LOLLIPOPS

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CHAPTER ONE

Alone at last...

Sam crept into his bedroom and closed the door tight. Then he listened.

Outside, he could hear the usual Saturday morning noises. Mum was whistling as she dug the garden. Laura was squealing happily in her buggy. Dad was singing to her out of tune, as he pushed her down the drive and off to the park.

At last the house was empty. It was Time.

Time for Sam's secret...

Sam dived under his bed and pulled out the shoebox hidden far beneath.

The label on the lid said:

SAM'S CARS

KEEP OUT! THIS MEANS YOU!!

Sam had stopped collecting toy cars when he was seven. The label was just to put his parents – and especially Mum – off the scent.

Mum must never know what was inside Sam's box... because Mum was a dentist, and she would be horrified.

Sam paused with his hands on the lid. He could feel *eyes* watching him.

He glanced round guiltily. Tufty Toothbrush was glaring at him from the far end of the bed. Tufty Toothbrush was, of course, not real, but that didn't stop him from being very disconcerting.

Mum had made Tufty herself, out of horrible blotchy orange and purple cloth. He was like a cross between a toothbrush and a bad-tempered fox. He had stumpy legs, stiff white bristles sticking out of the back of his head, and a badge saying

CLEAN YOUR TEETH!

"Get lost, Tufty," muttered Sam. He reached over and shoved Tufty under the pillow so that only the stumpy legs were sticking out. When Sam was little he had been a bit scared of Tufty. He had certainly never been very fond of him. Now that he was older, he couldn't stand him.

He couldn't throw Tufty away, though, because Mum was so proud of her creation. She used to tell Sam Tufty stories when he was small. She'd even had hundreds of Tufty leaflets printed to give out to all the children whose teeth she checked. Sam privately thought that the sight of Tufty snarling **CLEAN YOUR TEETH!** would put them off toothbrushes for life.

However, that wasn't his problem. Sam tried to forget about Tufty, and turned back to his box.

At last! It was time for sugar, candy, lollies, chocolate! His mouth was already watering. What should he choose today?

A sherbet fizz? Jellybeans? Liquorice allsorts? Fruit gums or chocolate raisins?

Hungrily Sam opened his box. He tossed aside the pictures of cars that hid his treasure, and saw—

— a few grains of sherbet and an ancient, woolly wine gum.

“Oh, bother!”

Sam remembered now. He'd polished off the chocolate raisins a few days ago, and eaten the last jellybean yesterday.

“One measly wine gum!” grumbled Sam. He stuck it in his mouth anyway. “I need to restock. I need more sweets — now! *I want lollies!*”

Angrily he rammed the lid back on the empty box and kicked it under the bed. Then he rattled his money-box and prised out the contents. Two buttons and a paper-clip.

“But today's Saturday,” Sam reminded himself. “Pocket money day!” As long as his room was tidy, Mum would give him his pocket money.

Then he could run down to the shop owned by Hanif's Dad, to buy his weekly hoard of wonderful sweet treats.

Mum thought he just bought comics there, because he always came back with a bundle of them. She didn't realise that Hanif's Dad gave him last week's comics for free — and that all Sam's money went on toffees, mints and gobstoppers.

Now Sam zoomed around the bedroom like a human vacuum cleaner, scooping up crayons, socks and comics and stuffing them into his drawers.

There! Tidy. He galloped downstairs to demand his pocket money from Mum. As he was about to run outside to find her, the doorbell rang.

“Mum!” shouted Sam. But Mum was still in the back garden, and couldn’t hear. So Sam opened the door.

“Sam Hunter?”

“Yes?”

The man on the doorstep was as round as a football, with a grin as wide as Tufty Toothbrush’s. Next to him stood a teetering tower of cardboard boxes – five of them in a tall pile.

He beamed at Sam. “Twizzo Treats!”

“What?”

“I’m from Twizzo Treats! You entered our Super Colouring Competition!”

“Did I?” Sam vaguely remembered colouring a picture in a comic, and sending it off. But that was months ago.

“You certainly did! What’s more – you won! Congratulations, Sam! You won first prize!”

“Me? First prize?” gasped Sam. “I’ve never won a first prize in my life! What is it?”

The man lifted the top box from the pile, and thrust it into Sam’s arms.

“Twizzo’s Super Giant Rainbow Lollipops!”

“What? You mean I’ve won a whole box of lollipops?”

“No, no!” laughed the Twizzo man. “Not *one* box! All these boxes! Sam, you lucky boy – you’ve won a thousand lollipops!”

CHAPTER TWO

Sam panted upstairs with the five big boxes, one at a time. He was desperate to hide them in his bedroom before Mum saw them.

But outside, Mum was whistling as she whacked the weeds with her hoe. She hadn’t seen the Twizzo man arrive or leave. She didn’t know about the prize.

She had no idea that Sam had a thousand Giant Rainbow Lollipops heaped upon his bed.

Eagerly Sam tore open the first box.

Lollipops! Fat, round, lickable lollipops! They were covered in swirly stripes of orange and purple. He used to dream of having a shoebox full of treats – and now he had five huge cardboard cartons crammed with them!

Sam couldn't wait. He tore a wrapper off a lollipop and stuffed it into his mouth. It felt wonderful.

“Mm,” said Sam. “*Mmmm.*”

For the first few seconds, he was blissful. Then he began to wonder – what flavour was this lollipop? It tasted a bit odd.

“Cherry?” thought Sam. “Gooseberry? Rhubarb? Never mind. It's sweet – that's what counts!”

As soon as the first lollipop was finished, he unwrapped another, popped it into his mouth and lay back on his bed to enjoy it.

This lollipop had a funny taste too. Sam sucked his way through it as fast as he could, and rummaged in the box for a different sort. But the lollipops all looked exactly the same, all with orange and purple swirls.

Sam unwrapped a few more, and licked them cautiously. They all tasted the same as well.

“I don't care,” said Sam, as he started to suck a third lollipop. But somehow it didn't taste as good as the first two.

With the stick poking out of his mouth, Sam hunted for a label on the box. He read:

TWIZZO TREATS

TWO HUNDRED SUPER GIANT RAINBOW LOLLIPOPS

PRUNE AND MANGO FLAVOUR

“Oh,” said Sam. He studied the labels of the other four boxes.

PRUNE AND MANGO said each one.

Valiantly Sam finished the third lollipop. Slowly he unwrapped a fourth, took a deep breath, put it in his mouth – and the terrible truth hit him.

He didn't like these lollipops. He didn't want another. He couldn't stand prune and mango flavour. And he was starting to feel a bit sick.

There was a sharp knock on his bedroom door.

“Sam?” said Mum's voice. “Is your room tidy?”

Sam spat out the lollipop. “Not quite!” he shouted. “Don't come in!”

“I’ll be back in two minutes,” called Mum through the door. “You’d better be ready by then!”

Sam gazed in horror at the five big boxes on his bed. They looked like a cardboard mountain advertising Twizzlo Lollipops. Where could he hide them? He spun round frantically, looking for a place.

There was no room for them under his bed, or in his toy box, or behind his curtains. The only possible place was inside his wardrobe.

Throwing open his wardrobe door, Sam began to pull everything out. He dumped his shirts, jumpers and trousers on the floor, and piled the boxes up inside. The last one only just squeezed in at the top. Sam slammed the wardrobe shut.

“Time’s up!” called Mum. “I hope it’s tidy!” She opened his door and walked in.

Her mouth fell open as she stared at the piles of clothes strewn all over the floor.

“*Sam!* It looks like a jumble sale in here! Is this the best you can do? No pocket money for you this week!”

“But Mum! It’s because I need the wardrobe for – for a surprise that I’m making for you. Only it’s a secret! You mustn’t open the wardrobe! You mustn’t look inside! You *mustn’t!* Promise!”

Mum began to smile. “A surprise for me? That’s lovely of you, Sam. But your room is a terrible mess. How long is this surprise going to take?”

“At least a week!” Sam said desperately.

“Well... all right. But right now you can fold all those clothes up. And by *next* Saturday they must be back in your wardrobe. I will want your room to be absolutely spotless. Do you understand?”

Sam nodded. As Mum left, he flopped on to the bed, weak with relief.

Safe – for a week. He had seven days to get rid of the boxes filling his wardrobe, without Mum realising what they contained.

But what on earth was he going to do with a thousand prune and mango lollipops?

CHAPTER THREE

It was Monday morning. Sam lugged his rucksack into the kitchen and tried to hide it behind his chair while he got his breakfast.

“Your school bag’s bulging this morning,” said Mum.

“I’m taking some old comics in to lend Alex,” said Sam quickly.

“Let me see!” shouted Laura.

“Not now! We’re eating breakfast,” said Sam.

“Want a comic!” Laura toddled round the table and grabbed at Sam’s rucksack. A lollipop fell out.

Mum picked it up and looked at Sam.

“It came free with one of the comics,” he said. “I thought Alex could have it. I don’t eat lollipops.”

Mum beamed. “Good boy, Sam!” she said. “I’m so glad you don’t like that nasty tooth-rotting stuff. Talking of teeth – have you got room in your bag for these posters?”

She unrolled two sheets of paper and held them up.

A picture of Tufty Toothbrush grinned fiercely from each poster. On the first was written:

**Tufty says, brush twice a day
And keep the dentist’s drill away!**

while on the second was:

**Tufty says, don’t eat that sweet!
Carrots are a healthy treat!**

This poster showed a threatening Tufty brandishing a carrot like a club.

Sam shuddered. “Lovely,” he said.

“They’re for Mrs Vernon,” Mum explained. “She wants them for the school fair on Saturday. I’ve told her I’ll do a display all about how to look after your teeth.”

Sam rolled the posters up and slid them carefully into his bag, on top of the forty lollipops he already had in there.

They seemed to have got a bit sticky over the weekend. At school, during the morning break, he had to peel the posters off them before he handed them over to Mrs Vernon.

Mrs Vernon took the sticky posters gingerly. “Thanks, Sam. Do you think your mum could bring us some leaflets on Saturday as well?”

“I’ll ask her,” said Sam, edging away. He was in a hurry to get outside. He needed to find a good spot in the playground to start up his business...

Running across the playground with his bulging bag, he picked a sheltered corner where the teacher on duty couldn’t see him. Then he spread his coat on the ground and laid out his wares on top of it – forty giant rainbow lollipops.

“Lollipops!” Sam didn’t dare shout in case the teacher heard, so it came out in a loud whisper. “Get your lovely lollipops here!”

A few children came over to inspect them.

“They’re really cheap! Only 10p each!” croaked Sam, and more children gathered to see what he was selling.

“What’s wrong with them?” Alex asked suspiciously.

“Nothing! They’re lovely!”

“My dad sells that sort in his shop,” said Hanif. “I’ve tried one. They’re yucky.”

“I only like green lollies,” said a little kid from Year One. “Have you got any green lollies?”

“Have you got any fudge?” asked another.

“No, just lollipops,” said Sam.

“Do you have any jelly babies?”

“Can I have some chocolate?”

“What about humbugs?”

“No! Just lollipops!”

Rebecca from Year Six marched up to examine his stall. She was the biggest and bossiest girl in school.

“They’re ever so bad for your teeth!” she declared. “They’re terrible! Your teeth will all turn black and fall out.”

The smallest children dropped the lollipops they had picked up and began to back away.

“Half price!” cried Sam. “Have one free! I’ll give them away!”

“I’m surprised at you, Sam Hunter,” said Rebecca sternly. “I thought your mum was a dentist! Does she know you’re selling lollipops? Did Mrs Vernon say you could?”

“Well – sort of, I mean I spoke to Mrs Vernon, but I didn’t really...”

Sam’s voice tailed away. He was saved by the bell.

“I bet you didn’t get permission at all. If you’re back here next playtime, I’m going to tell!” Rebecca flounced away.

As the other children scattered, Sam gloomily unstuck the lollipops from his coat and shoved them back into his bag. Only three had gone – and he hadn’t even got any money for those.

Hanif lingered behind. “Where did you get all those lollipops, Sam?” he asked.

“I won them in a competition,” groaned Sam. “A thousand of them.”

“A thousand!” Hanif’s eyes widened.

“And now I don’t know what to do with them! I don’t like them, and Mum and Dad will go spare if they find out!” As an idea struck him, he turned eagerly to his friend. “Hanif! Do you think your Dad might want them for his shop? He could have them really cheap!”

Hanif shook his head. “No chance. He can’t even sell the ones he’s got. Nobody likes them.”

Sam sighed. “I’ve got to get rid of them somehow,” he said miserably. “But I can’t even give them away!”

“Why don’t you just tell your Mum and Dad about them?” asked Hanif.

“I can’t!”

Hanif looked puzzled. “Why not? They won’t be all that mad, will they? I mean, I know your Mum’s a dentist, but it’s not your fault you won a prize.”

“Yes, but she would say I should never have entered the competition,” said Sam. “I’m not supposed to like sweets.”

“What, not any sweets? But you’re always buying sweets in our shop.”

“Mum doesn’t know that! As far as she’s concerned, I couldn’t tell the difference between a mint and a Mars Bar. She thinks my favourite food is celery.”

“You’ve got a problem,” admitted Hanif.

“I haven’t got *a* problem,” Sam said gloomily. “I’ve got a thousand of them!”

CHAPTER FOUR

Sam took thirty-seven sticky lollipops home in his bag. After tea, he managed to eat five lollipops before he began to feel sick. By the time he finished the fifth, he never wanted to taste prune and mango again. *Ever.*

Tufty Toothbrush, lounging on the bed, smirked at him with a “serves you right” expression. Sam threw a lollipop stick at him.

That night, Sam dreamt of lollipops. They hopped through his dreams on little stick legs. He dreamt of Tufty Toothbrush too, lurking behind a pile of cardboard boxes to jump out and clobber Sam with a carrot...

Next day in school, all he could think of was lollipops. Maths, science, spelling – it was all just lollipops to Sam.

In the afternoon, his class were allowed to make sideshows for the school fair. Everyone was busy sticking together cardboard tubes to roll marbles down, and cutting holes in boxes to throw beanbags through.

Sam couldn't think of any ideas for sideshows. His head was too full of lollipops.

“Give me a hand with mine!” coaxed Alex. He had a box full of ice lolly sticks – the big, flat sort. Sam winced. It seemed as if he couldn't get away from lollipops.

“So how does your game work?” he asked.

“I've got this tray full of sand, right, and we put all these lolly sticks into it. But we need to paint some of the ends green because it's ten pence to pull out a stick, and if you pull a green one out, you win a prize.”

Sam's heart leapt. “A prize? Would you like some lollipops to use as prizes?”

“Well, I've already got a load of stickers, but I suppose we could have some lollipops as well,” said Alex.

“Excellent! I'll bring you some!” Sam was elated. For a wonderful moment he thought his problems were over. He could bring all his lollipops to the school fair – and if he couldn't sell them, he could give them away as prizes!

Then he remembered. Mum was going to be at the school fair. She would have a stall there all about dentists and cleaning your teeth. How could he possibly arrive with five huge boxes of lollipops – let alone sell them at the fair?

His heart sank back into his boots. Even if he could somehow hide a thousand lollipops from Mum – how could he get them to school in the first place? It was impossible! Those boxes were far too big to carry all that way...

“Sam?” said Alex. “Are you listening? I said, when people pull out the lollipop sticks, you mustn’t throw them away. You have to bury them in the sand again.”

“*Throw them away,*” muttered Sam, his eyes gleaming strangely. “*Or bury them...*”

“Sam? What’s wrong with you? You’re going loopy!”

“I know,” said Sam. “Totally loopy. I’ve got a head full of lollipops.”

But another plan was growing in his head. Maybe now he had the answer...

*

When he got home from school that day, the first thing he did was fill a carrier bag full of lollipops. Then he sneaked through the kitchen, where Dad was chopping onions. It was Mum’s day for working late.

“What’s in the bag, Sam?” asked Dad.

“Just rubbish,” said Sam. “I’m tidying up. I’ll take it out to the bin.”

“Well, good for you!” said Dad, rather surprised.

Sam sidled past him out of the back door, and ran down to the wheelie bin.

The wheelie bin was full. Sam managed to hide eight lollipops amongst the dirty yoghurt pots. That was all he could fit in. The bin wouldn’t be emptied until next week.

His bag was still three quarters full. He couldn’t put lollipops in any of the bins inside the house, in case Mum or Dad found them.

“Throw them away, or *bury them,*” Sam muttered. “Let’s put Plan B in action!”

He knelt down by Mum’s newly weeded flowerbed. Unwrapping a lollipop, he thrust it into the earth, pushing it right down until it disappeared.

He unwrapped a second and carefully buried that too: and then another, and another – twelve lollipops in all, between the pansies and petunias.

“What you doing, Sam?”

It was Laura. She squatted down next to him. Sam tried to hide the bag of lollipops behind his back.

“What’s that, Sam?”

“Ssh!” he said. “It’s a secret experiment. I’m burying things to see if they’ll grow.”

“What you burying, Sam?”

“Just little sticks,” said Sam. “See! Little sticks, that’s all.” He pointed to the end of a lollipop stick, pointing up from the flowerbed.

“Grow now,” said Laura. She reached out and pulled at the stick. A giant rainbow lollipop came up, covered with soil.

“It grew! It grew!” cried Laura in delight. “It grew a lollipop!” She put her tongue to it.

“No, don’t! It’s dirty!” exclaimed Sam.

“Daddy wash it for me,” announced Laura, and she stood up.

“No, no! It’s – um – it’s a magic lollipop. You mustn’t eat it in case it turns into a dragon and burns your tummy.”

Laura’s face screwed up. She began to whimper.

“Don’t tell Dad!” begged Sam. Laura threw down the lollipop and ran to the house. Sam grabbed his bag and ran after her.

Luckily, Laura ran straight past Dad without mentioning lollipops and hurtled off to rummage in her toybox. Sam smuggled his bag carefully upstairs, and sat on his bed with a pencil and paper.

He wrote down:

“Eaten – 9

Given away – 3

Dustbin – 8

Garden – 12”

He drew a line under them, and gazed out of the window at the garden.

Laura was out there again, burying a plastic pig.

“Total – 32,” wrote Sam. He bit his pencil and did some careful working out. Thirty two seemed like a lot – but it wasn’t nearly enough.

He still had nine hundred and sixty-eight lollipops inside his wardrobe. How was he ever going to get rid of them all by the end of the week? His stomach began to tie itself in knots.

At tea-time, when Dad served up the shepherd’s pie, Sam could hardly eat.

“Are you feeling all right, Sam?” asked Dad, concerned.

“I’m fine. Just not very hungry,” mumbled Sam.

“I’m going to grow piglets,” announced Laura.

“That’s nice,” said Dad. “Sam, how about some jelly? It’s lime – your favourite. And it’s sugar-free, so it won’t hurt your teeth.”

“Sam buried a secret in the garden,” said Laura.

“That’s nice,” said Dad.

Sam glowered at her with his most disapproving frown. Laura put her head on one side, looking innocent.

“It was a *secret*,” she told Dad. “Do you want to know what it was?”

Sam could think of only one thing to do. He knocked his bowl off the table. All his green jelly flopped out onto the floor like an alien’s accident.

“Oh, Sam!” Dad was exasperated. “How clumsy. What a mess! Scoop it all up and put it in the sink.”

“It was a dragon,” said Laura loudly. “It burnt my tummy. Ow.”

Sam scooped his jelly back into his bowl with trembling fingers, and tipped it in the sink. He turned the hot tap on, and watched the jelly melt away. If only he could wash his troubles down the drain as easily!

And then a brainwave hit him. This was the best idea he’d had so far. This one was foolproof!

Wash his troubles down the drain? That was exactly what he’d do...

CHAPTER FIVE

“Dad!” said Sam urgently. “Can I have a bath early tonight?”

“Don’t you mean a shower?”

“No, a bath! I just feel like one. Can I have one now?”

“If you want,” said Dad, surprised. “Shall I run it for you?”

“No! I’ll do it.”

“What about washing your hair?”

“I can do that too! I don’t need any help.”

Dad shrugged. “All right,” he said. “Are you sure you’re feeling okay?”

“I’m fine! Never better!” Sam assured him, as he ran joyfully upstairs.

When he'd turned the bath taps on, he went into his bedroom and pulled the topmost box out of the wardrobe. Piling lollipops onto his towel, he gathered the towel by the corners and hurried back to the bathroom.

With the door firmly closed, he tore off wrappers and counted as he dropped the lollipops into the steaming water.

One, two, three... twenty-four, twenty-five... fifty six, fifty-seven...

Eighty-three lollipops plopped into the water. Sam was delighted. Nearly a hundred in one go!

He crumpled all the wrappers up small and shoved them in the bin with some tissues on top of them.

When he turned back to the bath, the lollipops were already dissolving. Swirls of orange and purple eddied across the water. The air was filled with a sickly prune and mango smell.

Sam pulled off his clothes and jumped in.

It wasn't very comfortable, sharing a bath with eighty-three lollipops. They nudged at his legs and stuck to his sides. Sam swished his hands round to make them dissolve faster. Gradually the bright colours merged into a dark, murky brown, like paintbrush water that needed changing.

At last all the lollipops had melted. Lollipop sticks bobbed on the surface like tiny white logs floating on a muddy river.

Sam soaped himself, and the muddy surface turned to brown froth. He decided he had better get out before it stained him brown. But first, he ducked his head underwater and gave it a quick rinse, so that Dad would think he'd washed his hair.

Then he pulled out the plug, and with great satisfaction watched the liquid lollipops gurgle down the plug-hole. He had never heard such a wonderful sound as eighty-three lollipops being sucked away.

There was a brown line around the bath, but he wiped that off with his flannel.

Then he gathered up all the little sticks that lay like driftwood in the bottom of the bath. He could hide those in his bedroom. They looked innocent enough – just like part of a craft kit.

Sam grinned in relief. Eighty-three lollipops down the drain!

There was a hammering on the door.

“Sam? Are you all right in there?” called Dad. “You’ve been an awfully long time.”

Hastily pulling on his pyjamas, Sam opened the door a crack.

“Just finished!”

“Good.” Dad sniffed. “What’s that funny smell?”

“Must be the new shampoo,” said Sam.

Dad pulled a face. “It smells like you used the whole bottle! Don’t forget to brush your hair.”

“Ok, Dad. Then can I read in bed?”

“No TV? Are you quite sure you’re feeling all right?”

“I’m fit as a fiddle,” said Sam happily. He had decided he’d be safer in his bedroom. If he went downstairs, Laura might start asking him about secrets buried in the garden.

So he waded across the pile of clothes on the bedroom floor, climbed into bed with some comics, and snuggled down.

At least, he tried to snuggle down. His feet stuck to the sheets. Now matter how he wriggled, Sam just couldn’t get comfortable. He felt prickly and itchy.

He began to read a comic, but he had to keep stopping to scratch. And something was starting to worry him.

He’d got rid of thirty-two lollipops before his bath. With eighty-three down the drain, that was well over a hundred lollipops gone.

But that meant he still had nearly nine hundred of them left. That was at least nine baths. And today was Tuesday. There were only four days to go before Mum checked his room.

“This won’t work!” thought Sam. His joy was melting away as fast as the lollipops. “There isn’t enough time. I can’t have nine baths before Saturday! It’s impossible! What am I going to do?”

CHAPTER SIX

Sam woke up with a jolt.

“What’s happened?” he thought. “I can’t move! I’m glued to the bed!”

His pyjamas felt as stiff as armour. They were welded on to his skin. When he moved, he felt the cloth crackle. His head was stuck to the pillow.

His fingers were glued together. He put them to his mouth, and tasted prune and mango.

“I’ve been candied!” thought Sam, as he lay there helplessly. “I’ve been coated like a toffee apple. I’ve turned into a human lollipop!”

With a mighty effort, he pulled his head away from the pillow, leaving a clump of hair behind. The rest stuck up from his head in sugary spikes.

Tufty Toothbrush sneered at him from the end of the bed. Sam tried to hurl him away, and only succeeded in sticking Tufty to his hand.

He managed to shake Tufty off. Then he tried to remove his pyjamas, and failed. They were attached to him as firmly as if they were sewn out of sticking plaster.

“There’s nothing else for it,” he groaned. “I’ll just have to wash all over again!”

Luckily, it was so early that nobody else was up. Sam tiptoed to the bathroom, stood under the shower in his pyjamas and turned on the water.

As the pyjamas soaked through, they slowly and reluctantly unglued themselves from his skin and set him free.

Once he had dried himself and dressed, Sam carried the sodden pyjamas downstairs and crept outside to hang them on the washing line. He’d have to tell Mum he’d tipped his breakfast over them, or something.

“I can’t take much more of this,” he thought, as he pegged them on the line. “I can’t have nine more lollipop baths. I can’t fit any more in the bin, and I certainly can’t eat any more!”

At least he could bury a few more lollipops now, before anybody else got up. There was plenty of room in Mum’s flowerbeds.

Sam glanced at the patch where he’d planted twelve lollipops yesterday.

He gasped. “Oh, no!” he breathed.

It was like a scene out of a horror movie.

Slugs. Huge, fat brown slugs. Sam had never seen so many slugs before. Evidently slugs loved prune and mango. They had left long, slimy trails all over the lollipops' burial ground – and had eaten most of Mum's flowers on the way.

"I don't think I'll bury any more just now," decided Sam with a shudder.

Besides, it was too late. When he plodded back inside he could hear voices. Upstairs, Dad was complaining that someone had used all the hot water. Laura was telling Mum a complicated story about a baby pig that hatched out of the flowerbed and grew up to be a dragon.

Sam got his cereal and forced himself to eat. The knots were back in his stomach again.

Then he trudged down the road to school beneath heavy, gloomy clouds. They matched his mood.

There was a shout behind him. "Sam! Wait for me!"

Hanif ran up to him. "What's the matter, Sam?" he panted. "You look like you've swallowed a spider!"

"I feel like it, too," said Sam glumly. "It's those lollipops. The horrible prune and mango ones."

"What about them?"

"I've got to get rid of them all by Saturday or my Mum'll go crazy. Could you look after them for me, Hanif?"

He asked without much hope, and Hanif shook his head. "You know what my room's like. There's only just enough space in there for Rafiq and me. Why don't you take them to the school fair?"

"I thought of that," sighed Sam. "But how can I? Mum's doing a stall there. Everyone knows she's a dentist. I can't turn up with five boxes of lollipops!"

"Tell you what," said Hanif. "We could pretend they were a donation from my Dad's shop. He's already donating some fizzy drinks, so nobody would think that was strange."

Hope began to grow in Sam's heart. "But how would we get the lollipops there?"

"Easy. My Dad can take them in his van," said Hanif. "He could pick them up on Saturday morning and take them straight to school."

"Would he really do that?"

"I'm sure he wouldn't mind," said Hanif.

Sam couldn't believe it. Suddenly the clouds parted, and the sun shone down, warm and bright.

He laughed with relief. "That's brilliant! Hanif, you're a genius. You've found the answer. I can get rid of all the lollipops – and Mum and Dad will never know a thing about it!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Saturday morning had come round again, and the doorbell was ringing.

"I'll get it!" shouted Sam. As he ran to the door, for a dreadful moment he feared that last Saturday was about to replay itself – and that the man from Twizzo Treats would be standing on the doorstep, grinning, with another thousand lollipops...

But it was Hanif and his Dad. Sam hurried upstairs to fetch the five lollipop boxes down, one at a time. He had carefully stuck Tufty Toothbrush leaflets over the Twizzo labels on each box. Although Mum had already set off to school, he still needed to get the boxes past Dad.

It was just as well Sam had disguised the boxes. As he was carrying the last one out, he collided with Dad and Laura in the hall.

"What have you got in there?" asked Dad.

"Present for me!" yelled Laura.

"Oh, it's just, er, some old toys and stuff that I'm taking to the school fair for the toy stall," panted Sam. "Hanif's Dad's giving me a lift."

"Toys!" squealed Laura.

"Old cars," Sam said quickly. Laura didn't like cars.

"Want a present," pleaded Laura. "Slugs ate all my baby pigs. Poor pigs."

"I'll buy you one at the fair," Sam promised, trying to edge out of the door with the last load of lollipops.

"Hold on!" said Dad. "Can you open up that box?"

Sam's heart raced. "Wh – Why?"

“Mum rang from school to say she needs more leaflets,” said Dad. “She says she’s got a great big table in the school hall and not enough to fill it. Oh, and she wants you to take Tufty Toothbrush along as well. Shall I pack those leaflets for you?”

“No! It’s all right. I’ll get them!”

Sam lugged the box over to the cupboard where Mum kept her leaflets. He stuffed three fat handfuls of them into the box on top of the lollipops.

Then he galloped upstairs to fetch Tufty Toothbrush. He supposed Tufty might look nice on Mum’s stall.

Well, not *nice* exactly – nobody could call Tufty *nice* – but at least he was eye-catching. She’d certainly need something to liven her stall up. Nobody was going to stop and read those boring leaflets otherwise.

“Your room should be nice and tidy after that big clear-out,” said Dad when he came back down.

“Oh, it is!” Sam assured him. “I’ve got rid of hundreds of things I didn’t want.”

“Good lad! You’ve been very helpful,” Dad said, smiling. “Here’s your pocket-money – and last week’s, too. Buy something nice at the fair.”

As Sam took the money, he felt Tufty’s accusing stare burn into him.

“Bury Tufty in the garden,” Laura said.

“Good idea,” Sam muttered.

“Slugs eat him up, instead of my poor piggies.”

“If only,” said Sam.

He carried the last box out. Hanif’s dad winked at him as he loaded it into his van. Sam climbed into the front seat next to Hanif, and they set off. When the van finally trundled away, he felt like bursting into song. He’d got past Dad without him suspecting a thing. It was the end of the lollipops at last!

School was transformed. It was draped in red and yellow bunting, and erupting with children and noise. Kids charged excitedly around the playground, shouting.

At one end of the games field, several Dads were building an assault course out of crates, while at the other, a bouncy castle slowly heaved itself into the air. From inside the school came awful honks and wails as the school band tuned up.

Sam, Hanif and his Dad each carried a box of lollipops into school. They handed one box over for the bran tub and gave two to the sideshows. Sam's heart was singing as he returned to the van.

Hanif took the fourth box. Sam hefted up the last one, with the leaflets inside and Tufty Toothbrush balanced on the top. He was so happy that he began to run across the playground.

As he ran, Tufty Toothbrush slid off the top of the box and dived to the ground. Sam tripped over Tufty and went sprawling across the tarmac.

The cardboard box flew through the air. It came down with a mighty CRUNCH.

"Ow!" said Sam, sitting up painfully. "*Ouch!*"

He rolled up the legs of his jeans to inspect his knees. They were both badly grazed.

But when he looked up, he realised that wasn't the worst of it.

There had been a lollipop explosion. The box had broken open, and two hundred lollipops had burst out. They lay scattered around him, along with all the Tufty Toothbrush leaflets.

In the middle of the lollipop disaster was Tufty himself, upside down, eyeing Sam with an indignant glare.

Children stopped running around to point and giggle.

"Ooh, Sam! Have you got loads of lollipops again?" asked one.

"There are thousands of them!" yelled another.

"Sam, Sam, the lollipop man!" chanted a third.

Before Sam could answer, he heard a horrified voice behind him. "Sam! What on earth are you doing with *all those lollipops?*"

It was his Mum.

"I was just carrying this box inside for Hanif's dad," said Sam.

"For Hanif's Dad? I don't think so! That's *your* box, Sam! It's got Tufty pictures stuck all over it! Dad told me it was full of your old cars – but it's full of *lollipops!*"

"It's not my fault –" Sam began.

"You've made me look a fool!" said Mum in a low, angry voice, as she swept up a handful of sticky leaflets. "I've come here to tell everyone not to eat sweets, and I find you throwing lollipops all over the playground!"

"Mum, you don't understand –"

“I understand perfectly! I heard what that child was singing. *Sam, Sam, the lollipop man!*”

“It’s just a silly nickname,” said Sam helplessly.

“Is it indeed?” snapped Mum. “And is that why they were saying you’ve *got loads of lollipops again?* You’ve got some explaining to do! I am really cross, Sam. I’ll talk to you later – and I’ll want the truth!”

Mum turned her back on him and strode into school. Sam was left sitting dejectedly with Tufty Toothbrush in the middle of a carpet of lollipops.

CHAPTER EIGHT

When Sam stood up, lollipops stuck to his trousers.

“Stupid things,” he muttered. He kicked at the pile, and lollipops stuck to his shoe.

Half of them had come unwrapped as they bounced around the playground in the lollipop explosion. They were sticking to *everything*.

Hanif hurried over to him with his own carton of lollipops. He put it down. “Your Mum was mad, wasn’t she?” he said sympathetically. “I can see why you didn’t want to tell her.”

Sam closed his eyes and groaned. Mum had said she wanted the truth – but when she heard it, the truth would make her even angrier. How could he tell her that he’d entered a competition to win a thousand lollipops, and then tried to eat as many as he could before giving the rest away?

“She’ll never forgive me.”

“Don’t worry! She’ll get over it,” said Hanif. “Mums always do.” He picked up a clump of lollipops. They were all stuck together, like a rainbow hedgehog with white spines.

“I don’t think we can put these in the bran tub,” Hanif said ruefully. “They’re so sticky you could build models with them. No glue needed. Twizzo lollipops – the modelling kit you can eat!”

Sam knew Hanif wanted to cheer him up, so he tried to laugh.

“Look, I’m making a monster,” said Hanif, jamming lollipops together. “Here’s its head, and here’s its tail!”

Sam gazed at the blotchy, spiky lump of orange and purple lollipops in Hanif’s hands.

“A monster,” he said thoughtfully. Then he looked at Tufty Toothbrush. Blotchy, spiky, orange and purple. “Could we make *him*?”

“I don’t see why not,” said Hanif cheerfully. “They’re both yuck colour. Let’s have a go.” He began to tear the wrappers off lollipops.

Sam stared hard at Tufty Toothbrush. Then he picked up lollipops and began to stick them together. Hanif was right: they didn’t need glue. Some of the small children gathered round to watch.

Sam carried a sticky armful of lollipops over to the bench nearby. He sat Tufty up on it and began to build in earnest.

He built two stumpy legs, and a blotchy body on top of them. As fast as Hanif unwrapped lollipops, he added them to the model. It grew two fat arms and eight lollipop fingers.

Last of all, he shaped a head, with twenty-four lollipop sticks pointing at the sky – just like Tufty’s bristles.

Sam’s lollipop monster was twice the size of the real Tufty, who stared at it, appalled.

“It needs a face,” said Sam. “Have you got a pen?”

“Wait a minute,” said Hanif. He ran inside, returning with a felt tip pen. Sam used it to draw a fearsome face onto a piece of cardboard torn from the box. It had round, glaring eyes, and a manic grin even scarier than the real Tufty’s.

He stuck the cardboard to the monster’s head. Last of all, he slapped a Tufty leaflet on each sticky lollipop hand.

By now he was surrounded by a giggling crowd of infants. More and more came pouring out of school to see the lollipop monster.

“What’s that?” they wanted to know.

“It’s Tufty Toothbrush.”

“He’s funny! Can we eat him?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“My Mum will tell you why not,” said Sam. “She’s got a stall inside, all about looking after your teeth.”

“Seen it,” said the smallest infant. “It’s boring. This is much better.” He poked the lollipop monster, and laughed. “Do you know a story about Tufty Toothbrush?”

“My Mum does,” said Sam. “She knows loads of stories. You should go and ask her.”

As he spoke, he saw Mum walking across the playground towards him.

“What’s going on? Nobody’s coming to my stall,” she complained. “I was just trying to get some of them interested, when they all ran outside!”

Then she saw the lollipop monster. She stopped dead and stared at it in amazement. “Sam? Is this meant to be some kind of joke?”

“This is the surprise I was keeping in the wardrobe,” said Sam with dignity. “You didn’t give me time to explain. I thought a Tufty Toothbrush made out of lollipops might get the little kids interested in your stall.”

“Mrs Toothbrush!” yelled the smallest child. “Tell us a Tufty story!”

“What?” Mum was bemused.

“Tufty Toothbrush story!” insisted the infant, clinging to Mum’s legs.

“Now’s your chance,” said Sam. “They’re all listening to you.”

Mum sat down on the bench next to the lollipop monster. She sat the real Tufty on her knee, took a deep breath, and began.

“Once upon a time there was a little toothbrush called Tufty. He had lovely clean, white bristles. But, oh dear! He was very unhappy. Nobody wanted to play with him...”

“Heard this one,” Sam muttered to Hanif. “All the bunnies and squirrels get toothache, until Tufty comes to the rescue. Come on! Let’s go inside.”

“I want to go on the bouncy castle,” said Hanif. “I haven’t been on one in years. Are you coming?”

Sam shook his head. He didn’t feel at all bouncy – quite the opposite. He felt shattered. He was worn out – and totally sick of lollipops.

CHAPTER NINE

Sam mooched around the fair. He picked over the books on the bookstall, and listened to the school band honking like a group of grumpy geese.

Mum's stall was deserted. Sam slunk past it to the toy stall, where he found a fluffy pig to buy for Laura. At least she would be happy...

Mum should be happy now too, with her Tufty Toothbrush monster and her audience of children. But Sam wasn't happy at all. His day had been ruined by Mum's anger. He felt dreadful. It wasn't fair!

He ought to feel better now that he'd made the Tufty monster, and given her a good excuse for all the lollipops. *She* should be feeling guilty now, not *him*.

Sam sighed.

He knew what the real trouble was. He'd lied to Mum. He'd tricked her. Even though it was to save his own skin, it still made him feel awful.

He supposed he should have told her as soon as he won the lollipops. But she would have been so horrified at the idea...

Mrs Vernon called out from the raffle table.

"Do you want to buy a raffle ticket, Sam? You could win the biggest bar of chocolate in the world!"

Sam looked at the prize. It was a truly enormous bar of chocolate. For a moment he was tempted. But just imagine what Mum would say if he won *that*!

Glumly, he shook his head and trudged away. He steered clear of the bran tub and the sideshows, where children were sucking the giant rainbow lollipops they'd just won and pulling doubtful faces. The sickly smell of prune and mango hung in the air.

Sam sighed. It wasn't as if he wanted a lollipop himself – but why did he have to be the only child in the whole school who couldn't eat one? Why *couldn't* he enter a lollipop competition, if he wanted to?

"Sam! Sam!"

Mum was waving at him across the school hall.

"Oh, Sam," she exclaimed as she hurried over to him. "That went really well! They were all spellbound. They asked loads of questions about Tufty. It was a brilliant idea of yours!"

“It was Hanif’s idea really,” said Sam.

“Well, it worked! There’s just one problem... Sam, you might not be very happy about this...”

“What?”

“The little ones liked Tufty Toothbrush so much that I had to give him to the school.”

“The real Tufty?”

“Yes. *Your* Tufty! Do you mind very much?”

“Not *very* much,” said Sam. “I was getting a bit old for him anyway.”

“Thank you, Sam.” Mum put an arm round his shoulders. “So you bought all those lollipops off Hanif’s Dad, just for me? That must have cost a lot of money!”

“Not exactly,” said Sam. He hesitated. It would be so easy to say that Hanif’s Dad hadn’t wanted them. It wouldn’t even be a lie.

But it wouldn’t be the real truth, either. And the real truth was – that he was tired of hiding his love of all things sweet.

Sam took a deep breath. “Mum?”

“Yes?”

“About those lollipops? Actually, I won them in a colouring competition. I won a thousand of them.”

“A thousand lollipops?” Mum gasped in disbelief. She let go of his shoulder and turned to stare at him. “You entered a competition, knowing that the prize would be *a thousand lollipops*? But, Sam – I thought you didn’t like sweets!”

“I love sweets!” Sam burst out. “I love most sweets, anyway. But those lollipops were horrible. I couldn’t eat them.”

“Just as well!” said Mum sternly. “Imagine what a thousand lollipops would do to your teeth! Oh, Sam! I’m very disappointed.”

Sam felt more miserable than before. He’d told Mum the truth – and just as he’d feared, the truth had made things even worse.

He wanted to defend himself. But just then Mrs Vernon stood on a chair and rang a bell, so there was no chance to say anything.

“Attention, please!” shouted Mrs Vernon. “It’s time to draw the raffle. Tickets ready, everyone? Then let’s see who the lucky winner is.”

She held out a box of tickets to the smallest infant, who pulled one out.

Mrs Vernon unfolded it. “And the winner of the first prize, the biggest bar of chocolate in the world, is...”

She paused.

“... everybody’s favourite dentist. Mrs Hunter!”

All the children turned and stared at Mum, amazed. So did Sam.

“What?” he said. “You entered a competition to win *the biggest bar of chocolate in the world?* Oh, Mum! I’m very disappointed.”

Mum had gone red. “I didn’t think I’d actually win,” she said in a small voice.

“You’ll have to give it back,” said Sam.

“Oh! But – but I haven’t had chocolate in years!”

“Of course you haven’t. You don’t like chocolate.”

“No-o... Not really,” said Mum longingly.

Sam’s eyes widened. “Mum? Are you trying to tell me you secretly like chocolate?”

“I know I’m not supposed to,” groaned Mum. “I am a dentist, after all. Oh, dear!”

“So that’s why you bought a raffle ticket!”

“It was a moment of weakness. I just couldn’t resist – but this is so embarrassing! What on earth will everybody think? What should I do?”

“Don’t worry,” said Sam. “I’ve got experience in dealing with unwanted prizes.”

He marched up to Mrs Vernon, who handed over the mammoth bar of chocolate. Cradling it carefully in both arms, Sam turned to face the crowd.

He spoke out firmly.

“Because the little children listened to her stories so politely, my Mum’s decided to share the chocolate with them,” he announced. The children began to cheer as he went on. “You can have a piece each – as long as you promise to practise cleaning your teeth as soon as you get home, just the way she told you!”

“I promise!” “I promise!” shouted the infants, rushing forward eagerly.

“Hold out your hands!” said Sam. He broke the enormous bar into chunks and doled them out.

At last, when everybody had a piece, he went back to Mum.

“Well, at least I’m popular,” sighed Mum. She looked wistful.

Sam grinned. “Hold out your hand!” he said. “There’s still quite a lot of it left.”

“Oh!” said Mum longingly. “But I shouldn’t.”

“Yes, you should. I think we should both be allowed sweet treats – not every day, but maybe just on Saturdays. There’s nothing wrong with liking chocolate.”

“I suppose once a week wouldn’t be *too* bad for us,” said Mum. She popped a piece of chocolate in her mouth and rolled her eyes in ecstasy. “Mmm! That tastes so good!”

“Better than celery,” he agreed.

“But Sam, if we do have sweets on Saturdays, I’m going to set a rule. We have to clean our teeth straight afterwards.”

“Fine,” said Sam. “I’ve got a rule too.”

“What’s that?”

Sam grinned as he broke off a piece of chocolate for himself. “Absolutely NO prune and mango lollipops!”

THE END

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