

The ICE-CREAM Villain

Chapter 4

It was very dark inside the van. Tara had a torch in her pocket; she always carried one at night. She flicked it on.

"Cool!" whispered Guy as he looked at the shelves illuminated by the torchlight. They were crammed with huge, see-through boxes filled to the top with sprinkles, toffee sticks and chocolate flakes. He opened one of the freezer units and stared in awe at the hundreds of lollies and ice pops inside.

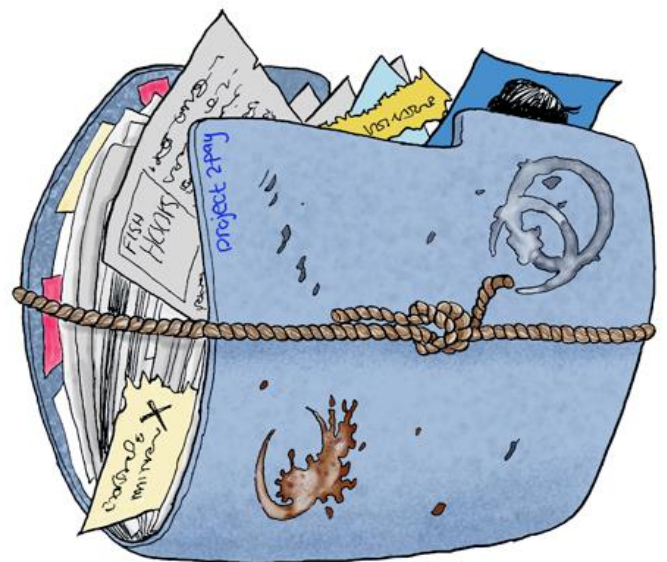
"We're not here to eat ice cream," Tara whispered.

"Of course not," he replied quickly, closing the freezer lid and reluctantly taking his eyes off all the delicious morsels.

Tara moved over to a cupboard on the wall and opened it. At the front were boxes of cones, huge sachets of powder for the whippy machine and various scoops and sprinklers.

She reached behind them and her hand came into contact with a big, hard-backed folder. She eased it out and laid it down on the serving hatch.

"What is it?" asked Guy, looking down at the folder.



Tara opened it and pointed her torch towards it. Inside were hundreds of plastic pockets. Inside each of these was a photo. They were all of the same thing: the back of a man's head. There must have been over a hundred of them, taken in all sorts of places: on streets, inside buildings, climbing up the steps to an aeroplane.

"Do you think she has another job as a hairdresser?" asked Guy.

Tara pulled a face. "It's clearly the same man in every photo," she mused, "but why on earth would anyone have a collection like this?"

"Maybe it's a photo of her number one customer and he doesn't like his face being photographed," replied Guy.

"Whatever the reason is, it's pretty weird, isn't it?" shivered Tara. She put the folder back into the cupboard and closed the cupboard door.

They slipped outside, hurried home and sneaked back into their own houses.

The next day, in school, Tara and Guy whispered to each other about Natasha almost constantly. What was she planning? What did all of the clues they'd seen so far mean?

They were told off several times.

By the end of the day, they had made a decision. They would wait until everyone else had bought their ice creams after school and then they would confront the mysterious ice-cream woman and ask what she was up to.

For some reason, Natasha was inside her van that afternoon, not on a flagpole or balancing on ropes. And so it was that after every single

customer had bought their treat for the day, Tara and Guy strode up to the van.

"What can I do for you?" demanded Natasha grouchily.

"Er... we're interested in your other job," explained Guy.

"Other job?" snapped Natasha.

"You know," said Tara, "climbing up the flagpole, sticking your things to the wall, the fishing rod, all of that stuff. We figured you must be working on a special project."

A stormy look crossed Natasha's face, complete with thunder and forked lightning. "That is none of your business!" she shrieked. "How dare you stick your noses in where they are most certainly not wanted?"

Tara and Guy swallowed nervously and began to back away from the van.

Natasha instantly reached into her jacket pocket and pulled out an enormous gun. On the side were the words "ICE CREAM FIRE MARK 5".



Tara and Guy immediately broke into a run. They hadn't got far when they heard the ice-cream van rev up and start chasing them down the street. They cut across a small patch of grass and on to the main road.

A few moments later, the van was at their side. Natasha had put it on auto-drive so she didn't have to steer it. Instead she was leaning out of her serving hatch and pointing her ice-cream gun out of the window.

"This'll teach you to stick your noses in where they're not wanted," she screamed, pressing down on the trigger.

A volley of tightly packed ice-cream balls shot out of the gun in the direction of Tara and Guy. They ducked and the shots crashed into a tree and exploded in a thunderous white cloud.

"You can run but you can't hide from the Ice-Cream Queen!" hollered Natasha, squeezing the trigger again. "And you will not stop my mission!"

Another series of shots hurtled forwards. Tara and Guy skidded on the pavement to get out of their way. One landed on top of a small bush, while another went through someone's letterbox.

"This way!" shouted Tara. She dived into a narrow alleyway. But the bullets kept flowing, smacking against the wooden fences on either side of the alley. They sped out into another long road. There was no sign of the van, but they hadn't got far when it leaped out from a side road.

"Take that!" shrieked Natasha, firing white shot after white shot. Guy took a hit in the leg. Tara was struck on the elbow. Both ice-cream bullets left a painful stinging sensation.

"How can we stop her if she has an ice-cream gun and we have nothing?" asked Guy.

"I'm working on it," replied Tara, but at that second, ice-cream bullets splattered straight into their chests and knocked them both clean off their feet.

Natasha revved the engine, slammed her foot down on the accelerator and shot off down the street.

"I'm on my way!" cackled Natasha, "and there's NOTHING you two fools can do about it!"

"NO!" yelled Guy. "SHE'S GETTING AWAY!"