



CRABTREE
SCHOOL

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CRABTREE SCHOOL

The Case of
the Missing Cat




Lauren Pearson
Illustrated by Becca Moor

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For Maisy (AKA "Le Nez"), and
her mummy Daisy Donovan –
thanks for all of your help.





Chapter



1

A Meow for Help

The whole thing began because of the way Miss Moody went about eating her sweeties.

The Year Three teacher at Crabtree School for Girls always ate the red sweeties out of the pack first. Then she ate the yellow ones, then orange and the blackcurrant last of all. The green ones Miss Moody left in her desk. Her top drawer was full of green sweeties.

Miss Moody was sneaky with her sweeties. She popped them into her mouth between reading out words for spelling tests, or whilst her pupils were getting changed for PE. Miss

Moody ate them when she thought no one was looking, but actually someone *was* looking.

“Miss Moody,” said Lottie that morning, as the teacher popped a red sweetie into her mouth after taking the register. “How come you always leave the green ones?”

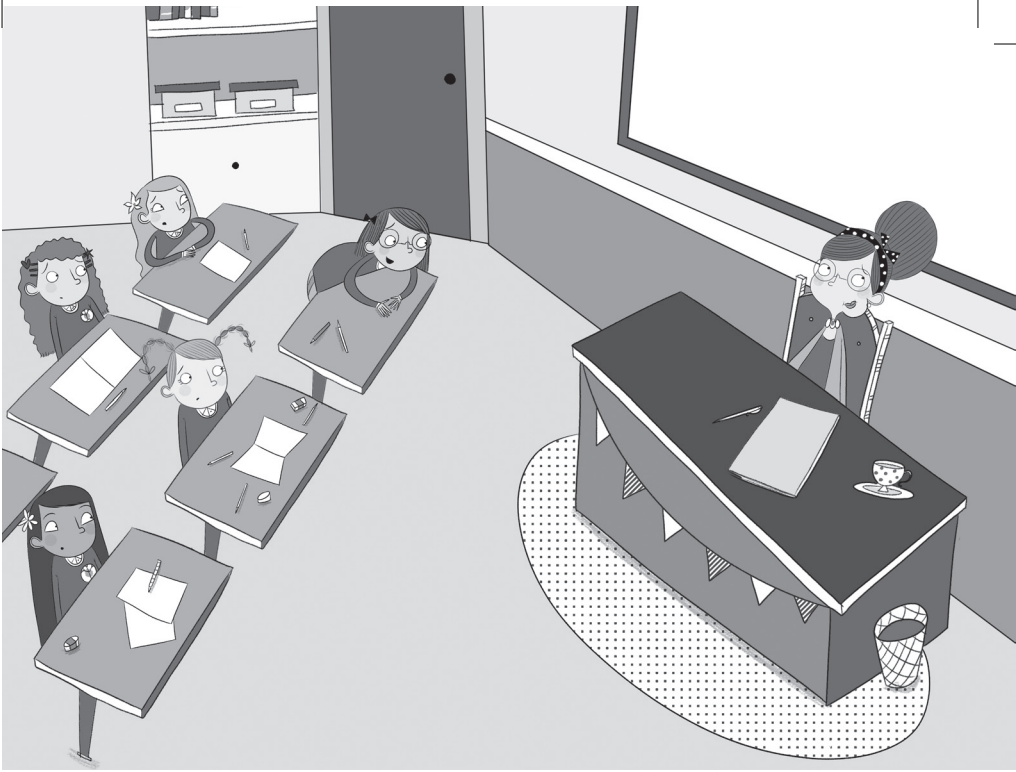
“Pardon, Lottie?” said Miss Moody in surprise. She swallowed her sweetie without chewing.

“I can’t work it out,” Lottie told her. “You have a green scarf that you wear nearly every day, so you like green, right, Miss Moody?”

“Yes, Lottie,” Miss Moody replied. “I do like green but I don’t see how—”

“And you like apples too, because I’ve seen you eat them,” continued Lottie. “Those green sweeties taste like apples. I’ve had them before.”

There was almost nothing going on at Crabtree School that Charlotte “Lottie” Lewis didn’t know about. Lottie snooped, she spied and she eavesdropped. She hid behind doors



and crept up on conversations. Lottie knew everything that *had happened* in Crabtree's history, everything that *was happening* at Crabtree right now, and even lots of things that were *about to happen*.

For more than three years, since even before she could write properly, Lottie had filled pages and pages of purple notebooks with all of these happenings. Lottie's current notebook was like a treasure chest of information: you could find

out who was friends with whom, and who wasn't, who had been to fun play dates and who hadn't. There were lists of what each year group got up to, maps of the school and the playground, and schedules of what was coming up in the calendar. Even the teachers asked Lottie for information, when they needed it. It was very useful to have her around, most of the time. Unless she happened to be gathering information on *you*.

“Lottie, what on earth—” Miss Moody should have known that Lottie would catch her with her sneaky sweeties, but Lottie had only been in Year Three for a couple of months. Miss Moody had a lot to learn about just how much her nosiest pupil noticed.

“If you like green *and* you like apples,” Lottie continued, “then how come you eat sweeties all day, but not the green apple-flavoured ones?”

Ever since they had begun Year Three, Lottie

had been keeping track of Miss Moody's sweetie activity in her notebook, on the page labelled **SUBJECT: MISS MOODY**. The Case of the Green Sweeties had been driving Lottie mad. Why did Miss Moody not eat the green ones?

SUBJECT: MISS MOODY.

Real Name: **RACHEL!!!**

Likes to move desks round too often
why????

Hole in left sleeve of coat.

SNEAKS SWEETS!!!!

Doesn't eat green sweeties-**WHY???**

~~Doesn't like green?~~

~~Doesn't like apple?~~

Takes No.39 bus to school.

Wears trainers in the morning instead of
proper teacher shoes!

Age: ~~100?~~ 29.

Friends with Miss Cheeky and

Mr RockanRoll.

Has a photo of her dog on her phone -

FIND OUT NAME.

Always has salad for lunch, no tomatoes.

Home Address: **NEED TO FIND THIS**

OUT! Follow her?

A hand went up in Year Three.

“Miss Moody,” asked Lottie’s best friend Isabel from the front row. “Do you really eat sweets *all day*? That’s bad for your teeth, you know. My mummy says too many sweets make your teeth turn black and fall out.” Isabel couldn’t believe that a teacher would do something so unhealthy.

The whole of Year Three leaned forward for a closer look at Miss Moody’s teeth.

“No, not *every* day, Isabel,” said Miss Moody. “Occasionally, as a small treat, I have one or two sweeties—”

“But, Miss Moody,” said Lottie, looking down at her notebook. “Yesterday you had five red ones, three orange ones—”

“LOTTIE! THAT IS QUITE ENOUGH!” said Miss Moody. “Yes, Ava?”

“Miss Moody,” said Lottie’s friend Ava, who had been waving her hand wildly at the back of the room, “I once heard a story about a boy who ate so many sweeties that the sweetie-making people rang him and said he’d eaten all he was allowed to have for his whole life. He could never have any more of their sweeties ever, ever again for as long as he lived.”

“That can’t be right,” said Zoe from the second row. “But if it is right, then how many sweeties are you allowed in your life? And how could the sweetie company keep track of who ate what sweeties?” There was a murmur as everyone considered this.

“I don’t know how many sweeties *that* boy

had,” said Lottie. “But Miss Moody has had forty-seven sweets already this month.”

“Lottie!” said Miss Moody, turning as red as the sweet she had just eaten. Having Lottie tell the world about her sneaky sweetie habit made Miss Moody embarrassed. “Do me a favour, Lottie, and take this note down to Mrs Peabody’s office, please. RIGHT NOW.” Miss Moody scribbled a note, folded it in half and handed it to Lottie.

“Don’t open it!” said Miss Moody as Lottie went to unfold the note. “Just go!” Lottie heard Isabel telling Miss Moody all about healthy snacks as she closed the classroom door behind her.



Lottie made it down the staircase and through the front hall of Crabtree School without anyone spotting her. Not Being Spotted was an actual game that Lottie played, and she was very

good at it. She knew every door to crouch behind, every shadow to hide in and every secret passage to take. (Yes, Crabtree School has secret passages. But they really are *very* secret and can't be described in any further detail. Not yet.)

Because of her exceptional Not Being Spotted skills, Lottie had been at Mrs Biro's side in the school office for some time before the secretary noticed her.

"Goodness gracious, Lottie!" exclaimed Mrs Biro, jumping up from her chair in fright. "How long have you been standing there, dear?"

"Miss Moody gave me a note for you," said Lottie. "It says: 'I thought Lottie could use a little walk'."

Mrs Biro peered down at Lottie through her glasses. "Did Miss Moody give you permission to read that note, Lottie?"

Lottie peered back up at Mrs Biro through her own glasses. "Miss Moody said not to open

the note,” said Lottie. “And I didn’t, I promise. It’s just that I could see her writing through the paper.”

Mrs Biro frowned.

“Are you going on holiday, Mrs Biro?” asked Lottie. “How come there are loads of pictures of beaches on your computer?” Lottie leaned in for a closer look. “Is that your daughter on the beach? Is that your grandson? How old is he? What is his name?”

“Oh,” said Mrs Biro, going a bit red. “Oh, that. Yes. . . Shouldn’t you go back to class now, Lottie?” Mrs Biro clicked her mouse and the beaches were gone.

“What’s this?” Lottie asked Mrs Biro, forgetting about the beach and pointing to a note stuck on the secretary’s desk. Lottie struggled to read the secretary’s handwriting. “Does this say nits? Does someone in Year One

have nits?! Who is it?” Lottie reached for her notebook.

“Lottie!” Mrs Biro was about to talk to Lottie about minding your own business (a talk that the secretary had given Lottie many times before) when there was a noise from the room next door. It sounded like a cat crying for help.

When they went to investigate, Mrs Biro and Lottie saw something very strange: the headmistress of Crabtree School for Girls was crawling around on the floor of her office. Mrs Peabody was peering under the furniture and making kissing noises. Then she stopped and meowed. She shook something in her hand that made a jingling noise.

“Mrs Peabody?” said Lottie and Mrs Biro together.

“Oh, we must *do* something!” cried Mrs Peabody, looking up at them. Lottie could see



that the headmistress was holding a toy mouse with a bell on it. “I haven’t seen hide nor hair of Lady Lovelpaws in four days! She won’t even come out to play with her favourite mouseie.”

The headmistress meowed a few more times. Lottie had seen her do this before, and usually Lady Lovelpaws, the official cat of Crabtree School, came running. It was as if the cat and the headmistress spoke the same language. But today Lady Lovelpaws did not appear.

“You see?” sobbed Mrs Peabody. “Nothing! Lady Lovelpaws is gone! She has vanished!”

If it hadn't been for her investigation into the green sweeties, Lottie would never have been sent down to the office that day. Which would have meant that Lottie wouldn't have been there with Mrs Biro to hear Mrs Peabody's meow for help.

But as it happened, Lottie landed herself right at the centre of a true-life, for-real, missing-cat mystery.



Chapter

2

Oi! Have You Seen this Cat?

Lady Lovelpaws had vanished into thin air. As soon as Mrs Peabody declared the cat missing, Lottie helped to organize a school-wide search. They checked all of Lady Lovelpaws's favourite places. She was not snoozing in the paper tray on Mrs Peabody's desk. She was not perched on the high landing at the top of the staircase, watching the goings-on in the front hallway. She was not curled up in one of the fuzzy beanbag chairs in the Rainbow Room, waiting for the Crabtree girls to come into the best room in the school to hear a visiting author

or watch a movie.

Each year group checked their classroom from floor to ceiling. Every girl, from Reception to Year Six, looked under every desk and in every cubbyhole. Lottie watched Year Three as they dug through the smelly socks in their PE kits and rummaged through the bits of paper and old spelling tests in their school bags. No one found so much as a whisker.

Colonel Crunch, who was the school groundskeeper, scoured the playground. He looked at the top of the slide, in the tree house and amongst the flowers that lined the playground. He climbed the famous crab apple trees and peeked around in





the branches. All he found were a few old chewed-up toy mice and a nest full of very cross birds.

Colonel Crunch rummaged around in his tool shed, searched the area where the scooters were kept, and checked the garden patch where the Green Thumb Club grew vegetables for school meals. But it was all for nothing.

Mrs Crunch, who was the school dinner



lady and Colonel Crunch's wife, emptied the cupboards in the school kitchen. She looked in every sack of flour and in every basket of apples waiting to be made into her famous crumble. Together, the Crunches even searched the cottage where they lived next door to the school, thinking that perhaps Lady Lovelpaws had fancied a bit of a wander. She was not there either.

The music teacher, Mr Rockanroll, did not find Lady Lovelpaws hiding under the drum set, nor under the lid of his piano. Mrs Potion did not uncover her in the science lab, nor did Mrs Method, the drama teacher, find her backstage amongst the scenery and



costumes.

By the end of the day, Lottie's friends in Year Three were beginning to give up hope.

"Maybe," said Ava, "aliens came and took her. Or fairies. Or ghosts." Ava had the craziest imagination of anyone that Lottie knew.

"This is a true-life investigation," said Lottie. "What we need are CLUES and, except for the toy mice, there aren't any."

"I wonder," said Isabel helpfully, "if we should

try to work out who saw Lady Lovelypaws last?”

That was a good idea. Lottie wished that she had thought of it first.

“How will we do that?” asked Zoe, who was a bit dusty from searching the floor underneath their coat hooks. “Counting the teachers and every student, we would have to ask...” Zoe did a bit of thinking. “One hundred and seventy-one people when they last saw Lady Lovelypaws.” Zoe loved maths, especially when it could be used in real life.

“Hmmm...” said Lottie, tapping her chin with her index finger. “That would take ages. It’s nearly going-home time.”

“Sometimes, at mine, we write notes to each other,” said their friend Rani. Rani had four brothers, so her house was like a small school. A small boys’ school. Even though Rani was the new girl and had only just joined their class, she loved Crabtree School more than any of

them, partly because it had no boys.

“When something goes missing at my house,” Rani went on, “one of my brothers will leave a note by the door that says, ‘Oi! Has anyone seen my football boots?’”

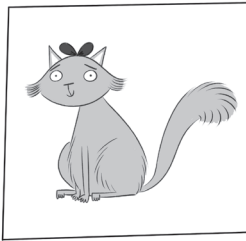
“That’s a good idea,” agreed Lottie. “Let’s make a missing person poster! We can ask if anyone has seen Lady Lovelpaws since last week!”

“You mean a missing *cat* poster,” corrected Isabel.

Lottie, Isabel, Zoe, Rani and Ava hurried off to see Ms Mess in the art room. “Oi! Has anyone seen this cat?” didn’t sound quite right, but in no time they had come up with this instead:

MISSING

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS CAT?



NAME: LADY LOVELYPAWS, CRABTREE SCHOOL CAT

LAST SEEN BY MRS PEABODY NEAR THE KITCHEN
LAST WEDNESDAY MORNING HAVING HER FOOD

PEOPLE WITH ANY CLUES SHOULD TELL LOTTIE, AVA,
ISABEL, RANI OR ZOE OR MRS PEABODY

IF YOU HAVE SEEN HER SINCE LAST WEEK, PLEASE
TELL US

HER LIFE DEPENDS ON IT!

“Do you really think her life depends on it?”
asked Ava fearfully as Lottie added the last bit.

“Yes!” declared Lottie. “Lady Lovelpaws
could be in real, true-life danger. She could
be trapped in a big hole and she can’t jump
out. She could be lost, and not know her way
home. We have to find her!”

The friends decided to make lots of posters. Isabel, who was very good at crafts, drew a picture of Lady Lovelpaws at the bottom of each one. Then she added some glitter. Lottie wasn't sure about the glitter, but Isabel thought that the prettier the poster was, the more people would look at it.

Once they'd finished the posters, the girls put them up all around Crabtree School. Isabel was president of the Crabtree School Jolly Neighbourhood Helpers Club, and she promised to get the club members to tape a few posters up in Crabtree Park across the street. Perhaps someone might have found Lady Lovelpaws there, and not known where to return her.

Lady Lovelpaws's glittery face was everywhere by the time the bell rang for home time.