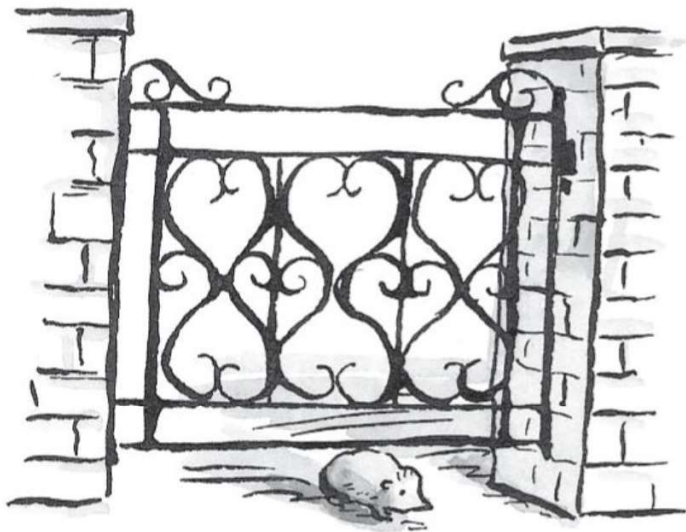


CHAPTER TWO



Max began his research the very next day. He slipped out of the garden at dusk, ambled along the path by the side wall of Number 5A and crept under

the front gate. Immediately, he found himself in a sea of noise.

It was the evening rush-hour and the home-going traffic was at its heaviest. Cars and motorbikes, buses and lorries thundered past, terrifyingly close it seemed to him, as he crouched outside the gate, and he was confused and dazzled by their lights. The street lamps too lit up the place like day, and Max, nocturnal by nature, made for the darkest spot he could find, in the shadow of a tall litter-bin, and crouched there with hammering heart.

Gradually, he grew a little more accustomed to the din and the glare and, though he dared not move, began to observe the humans, for numbers of pedestrians passed close by him. They were all walking on the narrow road on which he sat, a road raised above the level of the street itself by about the height of a hedgehog. 'They're safe,' said Max to himself, 'because the noisy monsters aren't allowed up here.'



He looked across the street, and could see that at the far side of it there were other humans, also walking safely on a similar raised road. He did not, however, happen to see any cross the street.

‘But they must cross somewhere,’ said Max.
‘There must be a place further along the street.’

A part of him, for he was very young, said that he would find out about that another time and that it would be nice to creep back under the gate to his family. But then another part of him determined to set off to see if he could find this human crossing-place. The street was on a slight slope, and perhaps because of this Max chose to go in the downhill direction. He moved very slowly, keeping close to

the outer walls of the front gardens where there was some shadow, and he froze, stock-still, whenever a human passed. No one noticed him.

Soon, the houses gave way to a short row of shops, one of them that very newsagent’s opposite which his Great-Aunt Betty had breathed her last, and here his progress was more difficult. The shops were still open, and Max had to choose his moment to make a dash across each brightly lit entrance.

‘Phew! This is tiring. Perhaps I should go back home ...’ he said, but then suddenly, not far ahead, he saw what he was seeking. There were humans crossing the street!

Sometimes singly, sometimes in twos and threes, sometimes in quite large groups, they stepped down from the narrow raised road and walked straight across the street with hardly a look to left or right, and stepped up again on the far side, and off they went. And every time that anyone wanted to cross, all the traffic stopped, and waited respectfully until the way was clear again.



This, then, was the magic place! Here humans could cross in perfect safety! 'If humans can, why not hedgehogs?' reasoned Max. But how do people know the exact spot? How do the cars and lorries

know when to stop?

Cautiously, he shuffled nearer, keeping close to the wall, until he found himself beside a tall chequered pole on top of which was a glowing orange globe. Across the street, he could see, was a similar pole, and between these two poles the humans walked while the traffic waited.

Biding his time till a moment when there was no one about, Max crept forward to the edge of the raised road and peered down at the surface of the street. It was striped! It was striped, black and white, all the way from one side to the other. This was the secret!

Task—please answer the following questions.

- 1) What research is Max carrying out?
- 2) What does the verb 'ambled' mean (p.1)?
- 3) Can you use 'ambled' in a sentence?
- 4) Why do you think Max 'made for the darkest spot he could find?' (p.1)
- 5) When Max says 'noisy monster', what is he describing?
- 6) 'It was striped! It was striped, black and white, all the way from one side to the other.' (p.3)

Why is Max not calling this a Zebra crossing?