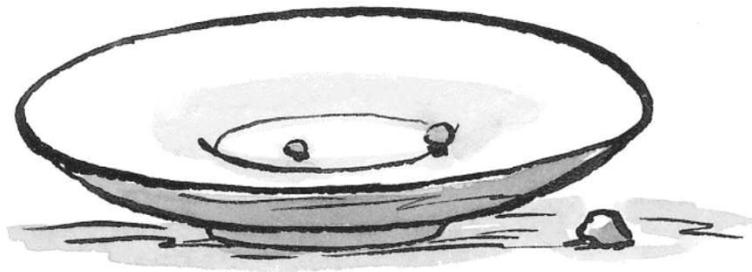


CHAPTER SIX



Meanwhile, back at Number 5A, Pa had had a bonanza. Sneaking next door and finding a full saucer of dog food and no sign of his neighbour, he had scoffed the lot.

He came staggering back, very full of himself and Munchimeat, and fell into a deep, bloated sleep.

Ma woke him just before dawn. 'Pa,' she said. 'Wake up. Max hasn't come back.'



Pa opened his eyes and saw her worried face and the three smaller but equally worried faces of Peony, Pansy and Petunia.

'He's been gone all night,' said Ma. 'Oh, Pa, do you think something's happened to him?'

Pa got to his feet. 'I don't know,' he said, 'but don't fret, Ma. I'll find him.'

'But he could be anywhere. How are you going to know where to look?' Before Pa could answer, he heard a strange voice, coming from the hedge that

divided 5A and 5B.

‘Excuse me,’ said the strange voice, and out poked the head of their neighbour. Pa bristled, his spines standing on end. It’s that Munchimeat, he thought. He’s found his empty saucer and he’s going to cut up rough about it. Well I can play rough too. I don’t like the look of him anyway and if he wants a fight, he can have one. We’ll soon see who’s the better hog.

But before he could think of anything to say, the hedgehog from 5B came out of the hedge and said again, ‘Excuse me.’



‘Well?’ said Pa.

‘I couldn’t help overhearing what you were saying.’

‘Family matter,’ growled Pa.

‘Exactly. You’re worried about your little lad.’

‘Oh!’ cried Ma. ‘Have you seen him?’

‘Yes, I have. At least I met a young chap in the Park who said he was lost and looking for the way back to 5A. Unless of course it was a 5A in some other street.’

‘Did you notice anything ... different about him?’

asked Ma quickly.

The neighbour looked a trifle embarrassed.

‘Well, yes,’ he said, ‘now that you mention it. He seemed to be having a little bit of difficulty with his speech – muddled some of his words now and then.’

‘Like “hodgeheg”?’

‘Yes.’

‘That’s our Max!’ cried Ma.

‘Was he all right?’ asked Pa. ‘Not hurt or anything?’

‘No, he was fine. I told him the best way to go home. He’ll be along soon, I’m sure. Try not to worry.’

Pa cleared his throat awkwardly. His neighbour’s kindness greatly added to his feelings of guilt.

‘It’s very decent of you,’ he said.

‘Glad to help. That’s what neighbours are for.’

‘Can we offer you something?’ said Ma. ‘Some bread and milk?’

‘Oh, no thanks,’ said the neighbour. ‘I had a pretty good night’s hunting in the Park. Just as well, because when I got home I found that something had eaten all my Munchimeat.’ He looked directly

at Pa, and his eyes were twinkling. ‘It was a cat, I expect,’ he said, and back through the hedge he went.

‘Wasn’t that nice of him!’ said Ma, and Peony, Pansy and Petunia chanted, ‘Nice! Nice! Nice!’

Pa grunted. A part of him thought that he should confess his sin to his neighbour. But then another part of him, for he was very worldly-wise, thought that least said was soonest mended. Life was full enough of headaches without inviting any extra ones.

The same thought occurred to Max when at last he came to his senses. The door of the telephone booth had knocked him out cold, and the neighbour from 5B had not noticed the still, small figure as he hurried to cross the deserted street before the morning rush-hour began.

Oh, thought Max, has any hedgehog ever had a more horrible headache? The last bang I got made me talk a bit funny and I expect this one’s made things even worse. I’d better try saying something.

‘Oh,’ said Max, ‘has any hedgehog ever had a more horrible headache?’ Max considered this. It sounded fine. Suddenly he felt fine. Even the ache

already felt much less.

‘My name,’ he said softly, ‘is Victor Maximilian St George, and,’ (he said more loudly), ‘I have three sisters called Peony, Pansy and Petunia and I live with Pa and Ma at Number 5A, and,’ (he shouted at the top of his voice), ‘I am a very lucky HEDGEHOG!’ and without thinking, without listening, without a single glance to left or to right, he dashed across the street, straight in front of the first of that morning’s vehicles – the milk van.

The noise that followed was enough to wake the whole street.

First there was a screech as the milkman braked and swerved, and then came the shattering sound of dozens and dozens of bottles smashing. Lastly came the sound of the milkman’s voice cursing every hedgehog ever born, as he danced with rage in a sea of Gold Top and Silver Top, of Semi-skimmed and Skimmed, of Orange Squash and Grapefruit Juice and Fresh Farm Eggs.



Ma and Pa had sent the girls to bed and were waiting up in the growing light of dawn. They were crouching side by side listening, when suddenly the dreadful racket burst upon their ears.

‘Sounds like something’s got run over,’ said Pa heavily. ‘Brace yourself, old lady. It could be our Max.’

Ma buried her head and rolled herself into a ball of misery.

At that moment they heard a cheery voice.

‘Now, now!’ it said. ‘What’s all the fuss about? There’s no point in crying over spilt milk!’

Task – please answer the following questions.

1. Why was Ma beginning to worry?
2. Why does Pa feel guilty?
3. Does the hedgehog from 5B really think that a cat ate his Munchimeat? Explain how you know.
4. Why were there eggs, milk and juice all over the road?
5. How did Ma react to the noise they heard near the end of Chapter 6?