

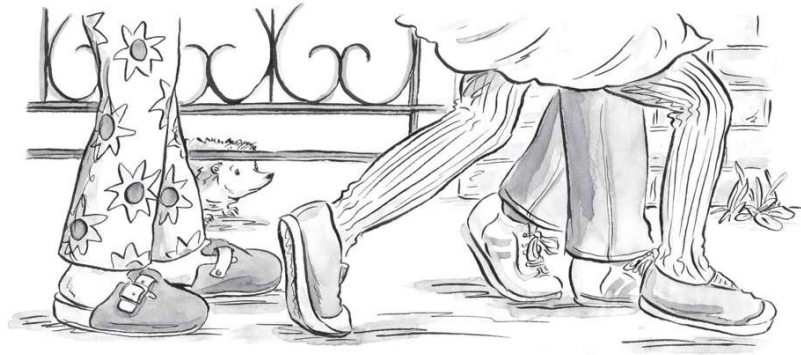
CHAPTER EIGHT



Max could hardly wait for the next dawn. Something inside him said that today he would at last be successful in his quest, and outside him every one of his five thousand spines tingled with excitement. The more he thought of his

conversation with Uncle B, the more he felt convinced that the answer to the problem lay with the small humans. Their crossing-place must be the safest. Follow them and he would find it.

He waited until the family were fast asleep, and then, blinking in the unaccustomed sunlight, he went along the path by the side wall of Number 5A to the front gate. He did not go under it but waited, watching beneath it. Already he had learned that you could tell the age of humans from the size of their feet, and he settled himself to wait patiently until a pair of small ones should come past. When at last they did, he was about to go out and follow but then another pair went by and then several pairs, and then, as the pavement filled up with school-going children, dozens and dozens of small feet went walking, dancing, skipping, hopping past his gate.



All of them were going in the same direction, to his left, up the road, which would take them, he knew, to the end of the row of houses and past the factory to the red man and the green man. Was that, after all, where all small humans crossed? He must follow, he must know for sure.

At last, when it seemed to him that no more feet were coming, Max crept under his gate and set out. Some way ahead he could see the tail of the procession and he hurried after. He had passed the last of the houses and reached the factory entrance when he saw that the crowd was taking no notice of the changing red and green men. They were going to a spot further on. And they were crossing over the road there!

He ran on (under the notice 'Max Speed 5 mph'—and he wasn't far short of it) until he was close enough to see exactly what was going on. And oh, what a scene it was!

'Oh, what a scene it was!' he told the family and Uncle B that evening. 'There was this great big human (it was a female, I could tell by the voice) and she was dressed in a long white coat and she had a black cap with a peak and she carried a long pole and on the top of the pole was a big white round disc with an orange rim and black marks on it — a magic wand it must have been, because she walked out into the middle of the street and held it up and all the traffic stopped dead!'

He paused for breath.

'Then what?' said Pa.

'Then all the small humans went across and the great big female just stood there until the very last one reached the other side safely. And all that time everything stood absolutely still. Buses, lorries, cars, motorbikes, not one of them dared move an inch for fear of the great female and her magic wand!'

‘Where did the small humans go, Max?’ asked Uncle B.

‘Into a huge building,’ said Max. ‘And I hid myself and watched all day, and at the end of the afternoon they all came out of the building again and there was the great female waiting for them, in her white coat and her black hat, and she waved her wand again and saw them all safely back across. I tell you, it’s the ideal place for us – the huge building’s right next to the Park. Nothing would ever dare touch us if we were under the protection of that great powerful human!’



‘But I don’t want to spend the daytime in the Park,’ said Pa. ‘Setting out in the morning and coming back in the afternoon – that’s no good to me. I need a good day’s sleep.’

‘You could still get that, old hog,’ said Uncle B. ‘You could go over in the morning, find a nice place to lie up – under the Bandstand, let’s say – get your eight hours, have a good night’s hunting, and come back the following morning. Do it once a week perhaps. You could take your wife and the girls – it’d make a nice outing.’

‘Oh please, Pa! Please! Please!’ cried Peony, Pansy and Petunia.

Pa considered this. ‘One of us ought to try it first. See if it works,’ he said. ‘And if anyone’s going, it’s me.’

‘Not without me,’ said Ma stoutly.

Task – please answer the following questions.

1. ‘Some way ahead he could see the tail of the procession and he hurried after.’ What do you think the author means by ‘tail of the procession’?
2. Why did Max think the lollipop lady’s stick was magic?
3. Why is Pa not sure about Max’s plan?
4. Why does Uncle B offer to go and try out the plan?
5. Do you think Max’s plan will work? Explain your answer.



‘Why not let me go,’ said Uncle B. ‘After all, I’ve had a good long life and if anything goes wrong, there’ll be no one to miss me.’

‘Oh yes there will!’ cried all the family.

‘Look,’ said Max. ‘You don’t know which way to go, how to get there, where exactly it is. None of you can go without me.’

‘Well, then,’ said Ma, ‘why don’t we all go?’