





MIRACLES

There! I've started it. Well, I've written the name of the story, so that has to be a start. I've found this exercise book left over from school last year and ripped out the pages at the front with sums on. So I have the rest of the book to say what happened.

Here's my idea. I'm going to write this story, and when I'm finished, I'm going to put it in a biscuit tin with some bubble wrap around it and then plant it in the yard downstairs. You know? Like those time

capsules where they stick things in that might be interesting to someone in the future. A bus ticket, or a newspaper, or the football results – just ordinary stuff. So in about five hundred years there might be this team of people scratching away in the dirt with paint scrapers like they do on TV, and one might say, “Look at this.

This is a pretty interesting kid.”

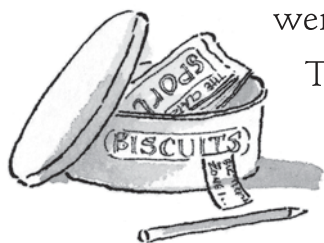
And they would read through my story and the rest of the things I put in there and get to the football results and say,

“Those East Side Rangers

were a pretty hopeless side.

They didn’t win a match.”

(The Rangers happen to be *our* local team.)



I might put just my story in the biscuit tin rather than all the other stuff. Or not, depending on how I feel.

Now I see the name of my story, I realize that what happened wasn't really a *miracle*, not like when those kids in France saw the Virgin Mary looking at them, so now grown-ups keep coming back to the spot to see if they can see her too. No, it wasn't like that.

It was just that my mum said it was a miracle and, well, occasionally you have to take notice of my mum; she can say things that are quite true – sometimes *really* true. Sometimes she seems to know what I'm thinking, like she's got X-ray vision into my head.

Like, every so often we see this bent old lady with long grey hair, and she looks pretty poor and pushes all her stuff around in a shopping trolley. She seems to spend

all day walking
around with
nothing to do
and nowhere
to go.



Mum heard me say once how sad and ancient she looked, which started her off on one of her quotes. It goes (with her finger wagging a bit):

*"When all the world is young, lad,
And all the trees are green..."*

And the poem rabbits on and then it goes:

*"When all the world is old, lad,
And all the trees are brown..."*

And something about *"all the wheels run down"*, then *"Creep home, and take your place there"*.

It gets to that bit and that does for me – it's a real downer and makes me feel pretty miserable and bad for calling someone old; but at the same time it's pretty wise, if you know what I mean (even if it's someone

else's poem, and my mum hasn't written it).

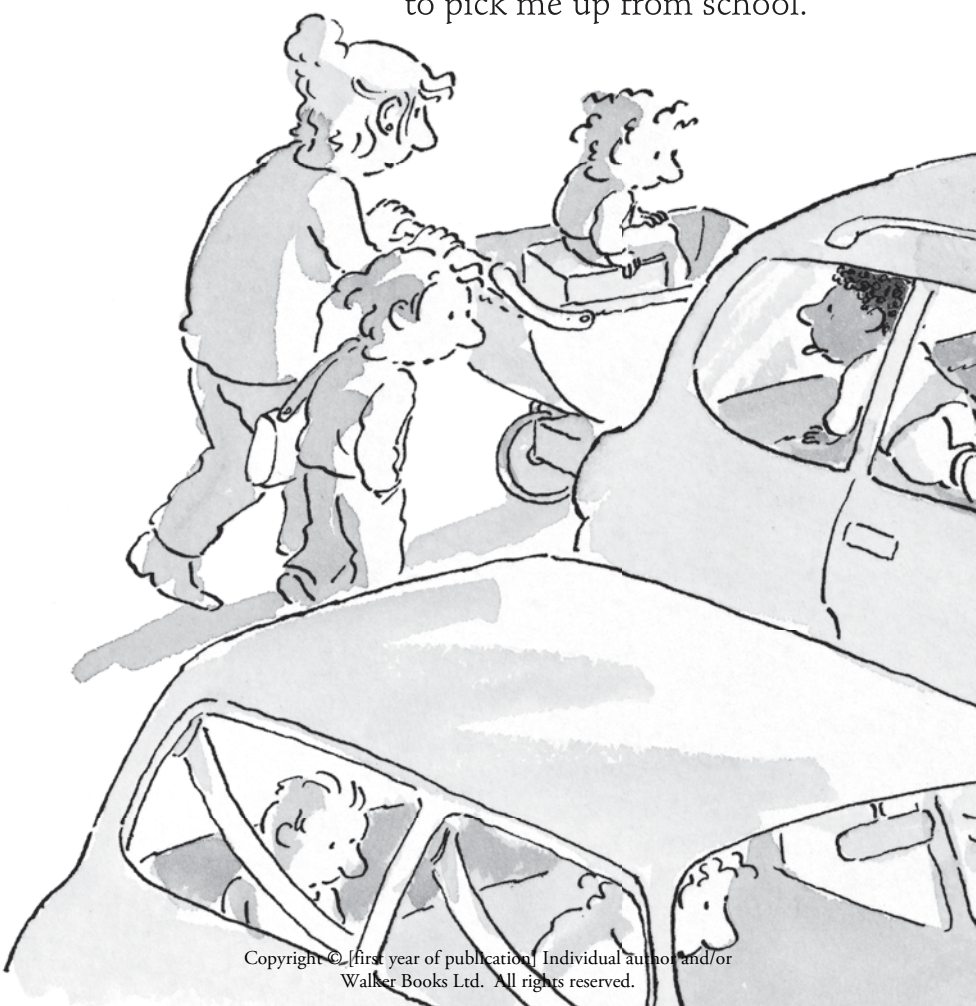
So what I'm about to tell you could have been a miracle, but I guess it depends on what you think is a miracle.

Mum's always telling me, "Jack, don't keep saying things are *brilliant* or *amazing* or *gross*, because they aren't." She says, "Those words are just too much; you've got nowhere to go after you use them." I'm never really sure what she means by that. All I know is that it was *her* – my mum, I mean – who came up with the word *miracle* at the time, which seemed pretty extreme to me, but there you are. That's what I'm calling my story.

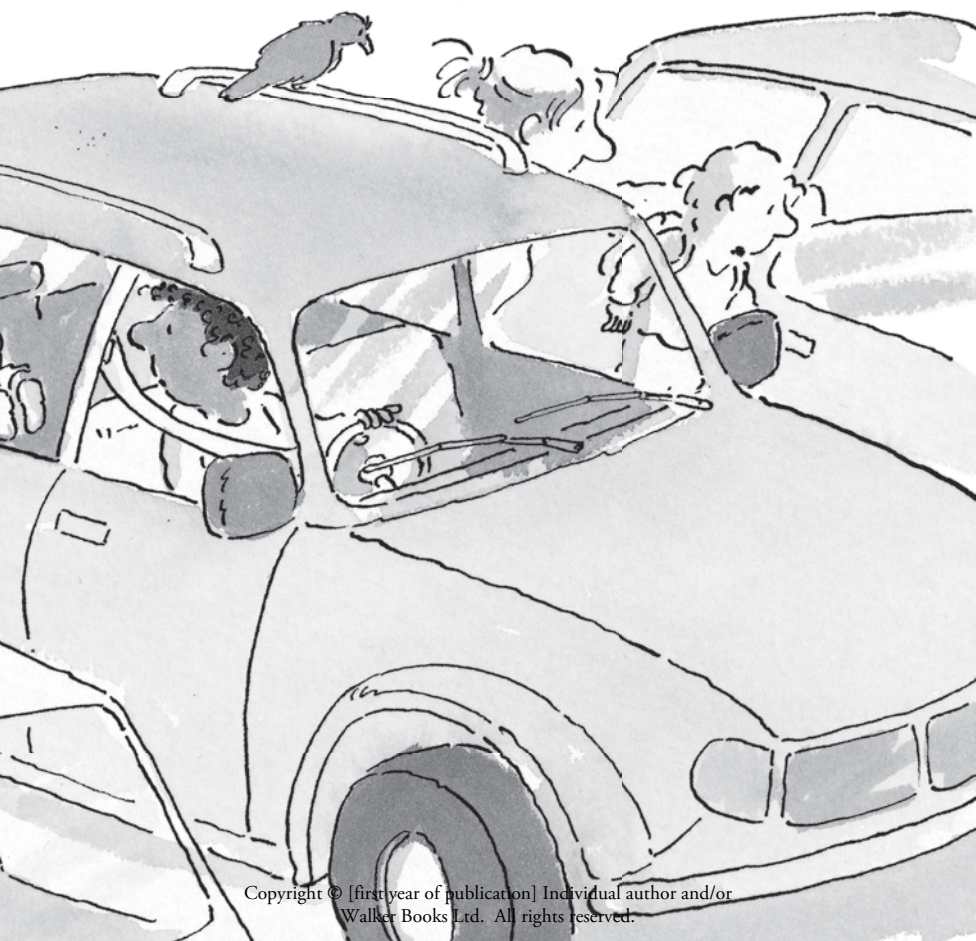
The Separation Street bit is true, because that's where we live; and so is the story, because it happened to us a few years ago – our family, I mean. That's my mum, my dad, my little brother (Duggie) and me – not counting Madam Brown, the guinea pig.



It was all to do with cars. Well, no.
I should say it was all to do with us not
having one. We went everywhere on foot,
or Mum took that old pram with Duggie
and Madam Brown inside it, and I was
always really embarrassed when they came
to pick me up from school.



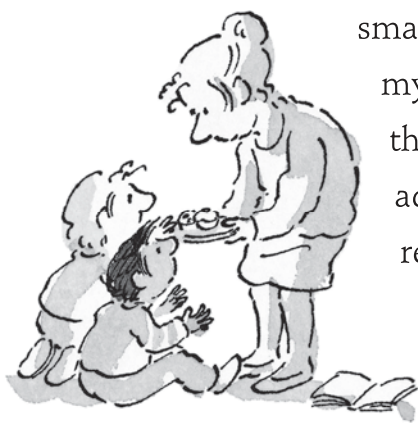
Most of the other parents had these big cars, and they would drive around in them and say to my mum, "You're lucky not having a car *really*. They're so expensive. More trouble than they're worth." And then they would zoom off. And the word *really* used to annoy my mum for some reason.



Don't get me wrong; we were pretty happy. We did things on the weekend, and sometimes my mate Sam came along. Sam's OK. He lives over on Arcadia Avenue, which has big houses and lots of trees. He's got a dad I've hardly ever seen, a mum with a red spot right in the middle of her forehead who's also at work a lot – oh, and he's got Space Freaks II, which we sometimes play until our thumbs hurt, and a really big trampoline in his back garden.

Yes, Sam's all right and he seems to like it at our place more than his. I don't know why, because ours is so much

smaller. I think he likes my mum, and most of the time, as much as adults can be, she's really fun. She bakes us fairy cakes with heaps of cream on and



plays wild games and makes Sam laugh a lot. But sometimes when it's raining and we're all cooped up together and us kids are busting to get out and there's all this energy building up in our flat and Dad's not home from work yet, I can see that Mum's getting pretty strung out with it all. Not that she ever *shows* it much, but I can tell; I can see ... me, Jack, with my Special Powers. It might be something like a long strand of hair starting to hang over her face, but she doesn't brush it back with her hand. She blows it away through the corner of her mouth and the hair just dances round a bit. Then I know she's getting edgy. Adults think you don't notice these things, but you do.



So that's
when we bust
out of there (even if
it's raining a bit) into the
courtyard and bang around
with the ball or something
until the Angry Lady in the flat
upstairs lifts up her window and tells
us to be quiet. It's dumb, she's telling us to
keep quiet but I bet she can hardly hear us
over the noise of all the big trucks and traffic
and stuff going past.



I bet she wouldn't order the Mob to be
quiet, but I'll tell you about them in a minute
because now I need to get on with
my story.



That's me, really. When I begin to explain things, I get sidetracked. My dad says, "Jack, you start out on the motorway and you finish up on a tiny one-way country lane."

Anyway, what was I saying? Oh yes, I've got to tell you about the Wall. I love going there; I could hang out there all day if I was old enough to go on my own. Sometimes on Saturday mornings my dad would say, "Let's go see Decco surfing the Wall."

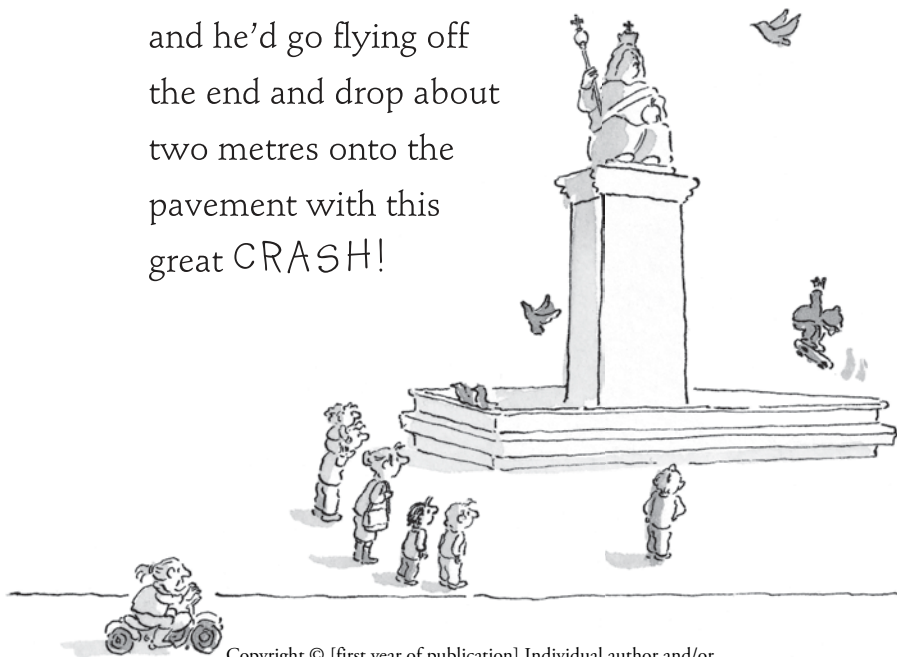
I would say, "Don't bring the pram, Mum. Madam Brown can stay at home."

"Oh, sad!" Mum often said. "I'll put her in my handbag instead."

Dad would lift Duggie onto his shoulders, and Duggie would be up there looking down on all these white spots in Dad's hair left over from yesterday's work (Dad helps a bloke paint houses). So picture this: along with the spots, Dad's jumper or shirt is also covered with all these little bits of white tissue left

over from the washing machine and he'd look like he'd been walking in the snow.

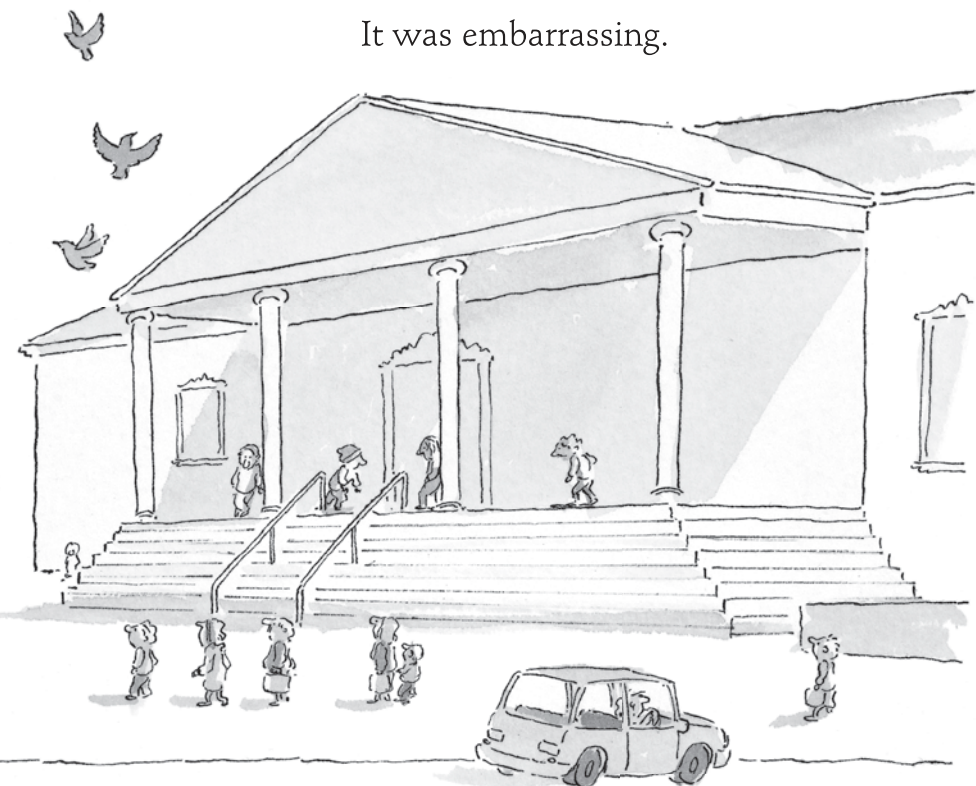
We would collect Sam from his house and walk to the town hall, and this really tough-looking older kid in a hood would be there hanging out with these other kids. And they'd all be really cool, some doing little flipping movements with their skateboards. Suddenly there'd be Decco (the tough-looking one) flipping up onto this stone wall and racing along the top like he was on a wave, and he'd go flying off the end and drop about two metres onto the pavement with this great CRASH!



And there'd be people looking round
wondering what was going on and he'd
just walk away all casual like nothing had
happened. I don't care what Mum says,
I call that *extreme*!

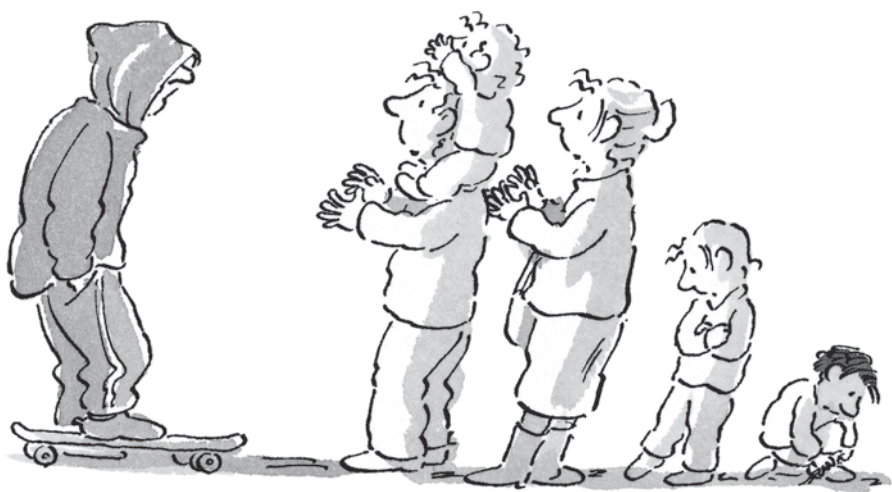
Sam and I got the idea a long time ago
that it was very uncool even to show you
were looking. But my mum and dad never
did get it. They'd clap and whistle.

It was embarrassing.



One time when they did that, Decco (you couldn't see his eyes back there under his hood) just stood there and stared at them for what seemed ages, and I was getting pretty uneasy. Then he nodded.

You could hardly see his hood move, but he definitely nodded.



How cool was that? I think *that* was some kind of miracle.



Other times Sam and I just hung around the flats with our own skateboards. Once, Dad made us a ramp out of wood and we lined up six of Duggie's cars in front of it and tried to jump over them.

Sam landed right on top and dented Duggie's London bus, and one of the wheels came off and he was not at all pleased. In fact he yelled so loud that he stopped the Mob mid-game.

Now, if you don't know the Mob, they can seem pretty scary. Certainly the Angry

Lady never sticks her head out of the window and tells *them* to stop playing ball in the courtyard, like she does with us. I mean, some people say the Mob are responsible for all the writing on the walls, but I've never seen them. What I *did* see, though, was that Duggie's name had been added to the graffiti on the wall. It said *Duggie Rocks!* and I know it wasn't Duggie; he was too young. It probably *was* the Mob, because they are pretty keen on Duggie, and I remember when it started.

This was all a few years back, as I said, and Duggie was a tiny little kid. He'd always had trouble saying his "r"s, but he got a bit better, although they sometimes came out as "w"s. But he still couldn't say his "l"s at all. His tongue just wouldn't do it. So one morning, Duggie was watching the Mob play basketball in the courtyard and he just walked up to them – he's a pretty brave



little kid – and they
stopped playing
and he looked at
them and said,
“Can I pray
with you?”

Sam and I
were watching,
and Sam
smacked
his hand
over his
mouth and
whispered,

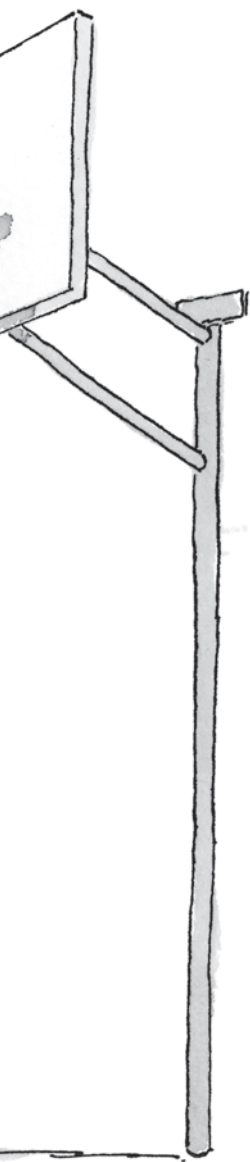
“Oh, no!” And it all went quiet.

The Mob, they looked at each other – and
to be fair, they didn’t make fun of him or
burst out laughing or anything like that,
although they were raising their eyebrows
and trying not to smile. The big one, he said,
“I think this cat wants to *play* with us.”

And they did. Played with Duggie, I mean, and you could see they were all pretty chuffed by him. I would have given anything for them even to notice me, and here they were including Duggie in their game. I wouldn't use the word *jealous*, but let me say this: I would have loved to be there instead of Duggie, doing that stuff with the ball.

So after that they all treated him as if he was some kind of mascot – you know, like when football teams



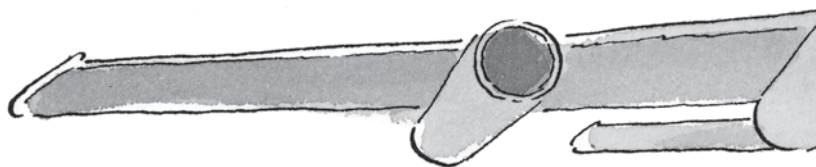


have a little kid who runs out in front of the team to start the game, like he or she is good luck or something.

There's one called the Human Tower, or Tower for short, or shorter still they call him Tow (that rhymes with *how* or *cow*). He's so tall, he can just drop the ball down into the basket. "Yo, man! What's up wit' ya?" he'll say. Once, he lifted Duggie right up and sat him on the ring and Duggie perched there for a minute, saw Tower with his big hands stretched wide so he wouldn't fall, and then he burst out laughing.

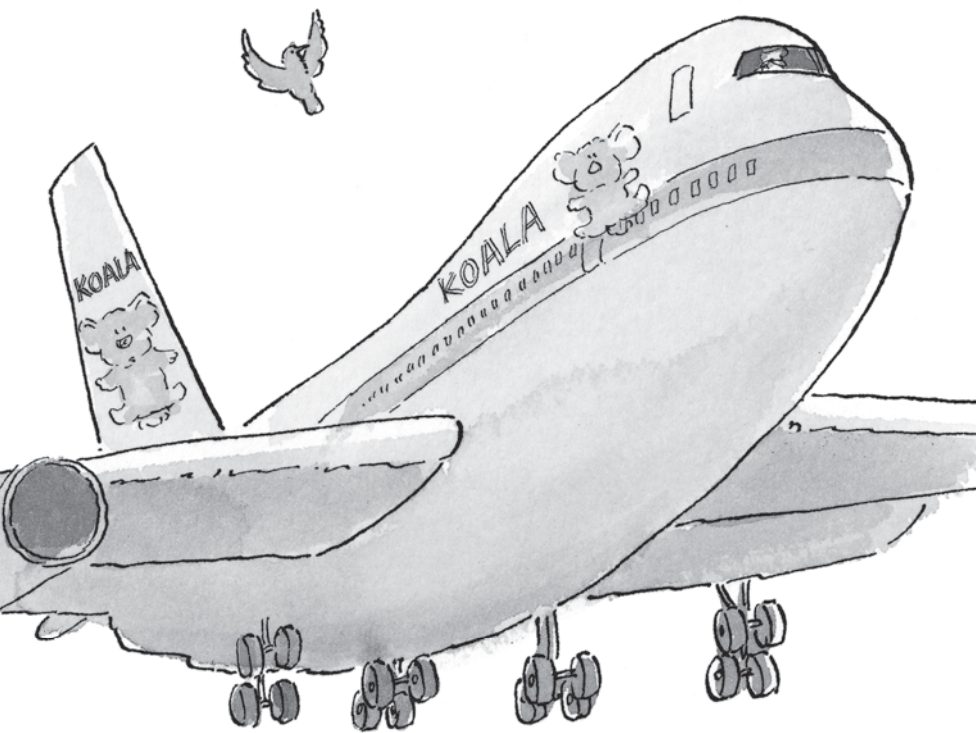
That's the sort of stuff we did without a car.

Then Mum got it into her head (and I'm talking a few years back here), she had this idea that we could get away a bit, have fun on the weekend, if we had a car.

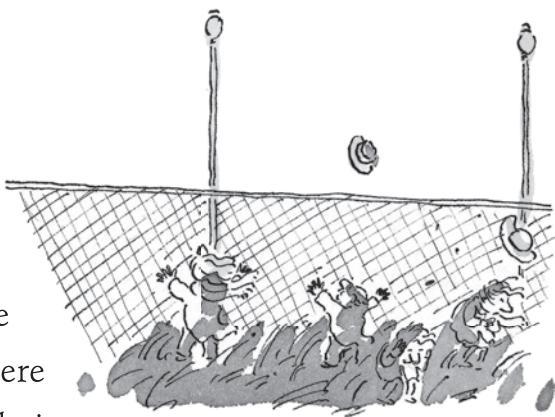


She said even if it was raining, *especially* if it was raining, we could bust out of our flat and drive somewhere interesting that we couldn't get to by train or bus.

I'd heard at school about this place out on the far side of the airport where all these people go with their cars, and some even take a picnic. They stop by the side of the road and watch the planes taking off one after the other and they come over this spot ... almost on top of your head. You can't



hear yourself
think and your
head is going to
be knocked off
any minute, and
all the while people
are just standing there
sipping tea out of their
Thermos flasks. WICKED!!!



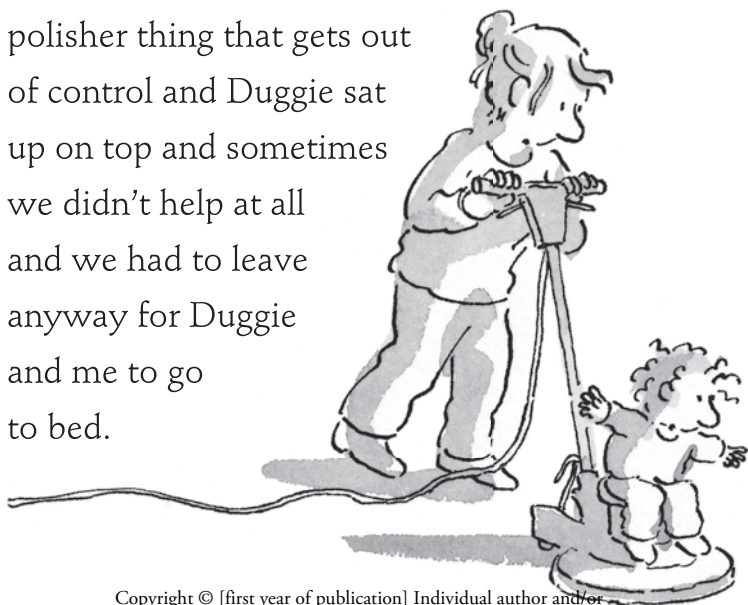


Of course, we all agreed with her. “Get the car! Get the car!” we yelled – everyone except Dad. He wasn’t so sure and asked, “Can we afford this, Kate?” My mum said that she had a bit of money put away and she would work for the rest. And then we could get it.

You have to hand it to my mum – when she wants to do something, there’s no stopping her, even if she’s just making a chocolate cake (and we don’t try and stop her doing that anyway). It might be going all wrong in the kitchen (sometimes it does), but she just keeps on until it’s right. When

she comes out, she might have a whole lot of chocolate over her where it shouldn't be. But she has done it. She *perseveres*, I think that's what it's called. So she had this idea and then she did it – got a job, I mean.

It was at our local store, the Corner Emporium, and she mopped the floor and stuff at night when it was all closed up, and we used to go down there and look through the window, then take her in a cup of tea, and this went on for months and we got to going in and Dad did some mopping and mum worked that scrubby polisher thing that gets out of control and Duggie sat up on top and sometimes we didn't help at all and we had to leave anyway for Duggie and me to go to bed.



(I suppose I should have put a full stop in there somewhere but it doesn't matter because it's not a school thing and I'm not going to get a mark or anything like that for it. It's just for me in my own book at home. And maybe for the biscuit tin.)

Anyway, what I was saying was that we visited Mum at work for ages, until Duggie and me eventually got sick of going down there, because Mum wouldn't let us have anything out of the Slush Shlime drinks machine. She said she didn't want us going to bed "all sugared up" as she called it.

So to cut a long story short (even though I've got loads of pages left in this book), she finished the night job and came home and said...



"Right! CAR!"

