



*WHEELers* No. 3

**Flying Fur**

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# Flying Fur

## Chapter One

Horace was a hungry hound.

In fact, he was famished. He was as ravenous as a forest fire on a windy day.

Joshua was meant to be feeding him. But Joshua was sitting at the kitchen table surrounded by hundreds of coloured pens and sheets of paper. He was busy drawing.

He'd been drawing ever since he got in from school. He'd been drawing all through Horace's tea-time.

Horace whined and put his paws up on the table.

Josh pushed them off.

"Go away, Horace," he said. "This is important."

Horace padded over to his food bowl, picked it up in his teeth and dropped it on Josh's foot.

Josh kicked it away.

Horace nosed open the cupboard door and dragged out the bag of dried dog food. Pulling it over to Josh, he whimpered in his best starving puppy impression.

"Later," said Josh. And he put the bag on the table, out of Horace's reach.

"Food!" howled Horace. "*Fooooo!*" Why couldn't Joshua understand him? He could easily understand his human owners.

He jumped up clumsily onto a chair. Josh took no notice.

So Horace bounded onto the table, his claws clacking and scratching.

"Horace! Get down. Bad dog!"

But Horace was already trampling across the pens and papers to try and reach the bag of dog food. Success!

Just as he grabbed the bag in his mouth, his feet began to slip. Sheets of paper slid beneath him. He slithered on papers and rolled on pens, teetering and wobbling as he tried desperately to regain his balance.

Now Horace was an Irish Dane; a big, leggy, heavy dog. As he lurched from side to side, the table started to rock beneath his weight.

“Stop it!” cried Josh.

But Horace couldn't stop it. The table groaned and creaked and thumped its wooden feet in protest. When one of its legs gave way, that was the last straw. The table keeled right over with a crash.

Horace slid off in an avalanche of paper. Pens rained down upon his head.

“Now look what you've done!” yelled Josh.

Horace could not move. He lay stunned and shaken on the floor.

Then, as he weakly raised his head, he saw something that stunned and shook him even more.

He was lying on a page torn from a magazine – and it showed a picture of a car.

Not just any old car. This was the most beautiful, the smoothest, the sleekest car that he had ever seen. Horace loved all cars, but this one beat the lot. It was like a gleaming golden arrowhead.

Horace's mouth fell open. Sprawling on the floor, he began to drool over the picture with his tongue hanging out. The bag of dog food fell from his jaws and spilled pellets everywhere.

“Oh my oh my oh my!” he yelped ecstatically.

“Get off my things!” wailed Josh. “You've made a terrible mess!” He tried to haul Horace away: but Horace was transfixed.

He could not drag his gaze away from that amazing golden car. He began to moan with longing.

“Oooooooh...”

“*Mum!*” yelled Josh. “Horace is being weird!”

Mrs Hay came bustling into the kitchen. “What's that dreadful noise?”

“It's Horace. He's ruined my competition entry!”

“He’s ruining my kitchen floor,” scolded Mrs Hay. “What competition is that?”

“In the magazine,” said Josh. “I’m trying to win a Golden Arrow car like the one in the picture. That’s the first prize.”

“Golden Arrow? Oh, yes! Oh, yes! I want one!” Horace whined.

“But now that stupid dog has trampled all over my entry!” cried Josh. “He’s covered it in paw prints!”

“How do you enter this competition?” asked Mrs Hay.

“You have to design a car that runs on alternative energy. You can draw one, or make one. I’m trying to draw a solar-powered car, only Horace keeps getting in the way!”

Mrs Hay pushed Horace aside and scooped up all the papers from underneath him.

“Take this lot upstairs to your bedroom, Josh, where the dog can’t get at them,” she advised. “As for you, Horace – out you go.” She grasped him by the collar.

“Arrow! Arrow!” Horace woofed, trying to seize the picture in his teeth. He couldn’t bear to give it up.

Josh snatched it away.

“Oh! It’s so be-*oot*iful!” howled Horace in longing and despair.

“Scoot!” said Mrs Hay. She gave Horace a shove and he scooted out into the hall.

There he spun round three times, feeling dizzy and dazzled by the radiant vision he’d just seen.

It had to be his! He was bewitched. He couldn’t live without it. How all the other dogs would gasp in admiration, as they saw him speeding along Tintern Road in that glorious gold machine...

By hook or by crook, he had to make sure that Joshua won the Golden Arrow!

## Chapter Two

Rushing headlong into the living room, Horace barked frantically at the hamsters' cage. Although he couldn't see Tickety and Boo, he knew they were somewhere in there, curled up in the sawdust.

"Wake! Wake!" he barked.

A nose poked out of the sawdust nest.

"What for?" said Tickety. Her eyes were closed.

"Car! Car!" barked Horace.

Boo's nose appeared. "What sort of car?"

"A wonderful, amazing car!" cried Horace. "You've got to help me and Josh to win it in a competition."

"What's this wonderful car called?"

"The Golden Arrow!"

"Never heard of it," said Boo. He disappeared into the straw again.

"It's the most beautiful car you ever saw! It's as lean as a greyhound and as mean as a Rottweiler and as golden as a retriever," panted Horace. "And it looks as if it does about a hundred and fifty miles an hour!"

Boo's nose reappeared. So did the rest of him.

"Really? Hear that, Tickety?" He sat up and kicked the sawdust off his sleepy sister. "How do we win this Golden Arrow? Is it a prize for the smartest dog or the best stunt hamster?"

"It's a competition in Josh's magazine! We have to make a car that runs on... on... wait a minute." Horace scratched his head with his paw. "I know! Alternative energy! Whatever that means."

"That means no petrol," said Tickety with a huge yawn.

"Then it must mean diesel," said Boo.

“No, no, no!” said Tickety. “It means no petrol and no diesel either. No fossil fuel. You have to think of something else that will give the car enough energy to go.”

“Josh said he was trying to draw a solar-powered car,” remembered Horace.

“Exactly. That uses the sun for energy.”

“Does it?” said Horace.

“I get energy from oats and carrots,” said Boo. “And dried banana flakes. And raisins. Raisins are very good for stunt hamsters.”

“Could you run a car on raisins?” Horace asked.

“I don’t know how you’d get it to eat them,” said Boo. Deftly unlatching the cage door, he scampered out onto the table. From there he took a running jump onto the sofa. He bounced high off its cushions, did a back flip and landed on the carpet with a flourish.

“*Ta-da!* Now, how big does this car have to be to win the competition?”

“Car size, I suppose,” said Horace.

“Yes, but human car size? Dog car size? Or hamster car size?”

Horace scratched his ear while he thought about this. As the first dog in town that had learnt to drive, he prided himself on being able to handle any human vehicle.

Why, he had even driven a tractor! But he had to admit that a dog-sized car would be easier to control.

“Whatever works,” he said.

“Excellent!” Scuttling over to Joshua’s toybox, Boo dived into it and began to rummage. “Wheels, floor, windows,” he muttered, flinging out Lego bricks in a multi-coloured plastic shower.

“We tried to make a Lego car once before,” Horace reminded him. “It broke before I’d even driven it across the room.”

“But that was a dog-sized car,” said Boo. “It was way too big. I’m building one for hamsters. Come on, Tickety! Give us a hand!”

“I’m still asleep,” she grumbled.

Boo put his paws on his hips. “Don’t be such a lazy lemming. If you don’t help me build a car, I won’t let you have a go in my Golden Arrow when I win it!”

“What?” said Horace. “Hang on!”

Tickety sat up and glared at her brother. “Huh! If you’re going to be like that, I’ll just build my own car, you bossy Boo. I’ll win that Golden Arrow for myself.”

“Just a minute!” said Horace.

“And what’s more, Boo, I won’t let *you* drive it,” she added, before she fell back on her sawdust bed.

“Well!” said Boo indignantly. “You asked for it, sister. The challenge is on!” He plunged back into the toybox with a rattle of bricks.

“Wait!” cried Horace. “I didn’t tell you about the competition so that *you* could enter! I thought you’d want to help me win!”

“Why shouldn’t we enter?” demanded Boo. “It isn’t a dog-only competition, is it?”

“No – but – but – it was my idea!” stuttered Horace.

Neither hamster was listening. Boo was tunnelling in the toys and Tickety was burrowing in her bed.

Horace was horror-struck. He mustn’t lose his Golden Arrow to a hamster! What could he do?

He spun round three times in panic, and then galloped out of the house.

He knew the best place to get advice. Kimi, next door! She was a clever snake: she’d tell him how to win.

So he ran round to the back of next door’s house. When he jumped up at the window, he could see the black and white striped snake coiled neatly in her tank.

Horace barked through the glass.

“Help me, Kimi, help me!”

Kimi’s head shot up. She fixed him with her keen yellow gaze. “What is it?”



“Trouble!” barked Horace. “Double trouble! Hamster Hassle!”

Pressing her head against the lid of her tank, Kimi prised it up and oozed out of the gap. Then she disappeared from Horace’s sight until she suddenly flowed out of a broken airbrick by his feet.

“Ow!” Horace jumped back, startled. “Do your humans know you can do that?”

“Of course not,” said Kimi. “They’ve no idea what I get up to while they’re out at work.” She curled herself in a neat pyramid to listen to him. “Now, what’s the matter with your little furry friends?”

“I don’t think they are my friends at all! They want to steal my Golden Arrow!” wailed Horace. He poured out his news about the competition.

“I need to design a winning car, but now one of those hamsters is going to beat me to it. They’ll win the Golden Arrow – and I bet they’ll never let me drive it!”

“Dear me,” said Kimi calmly. “What a disaster.”

“It is! I’ve got to win!”

“Then you’ll just have to design an unbeatable car, won’t you?”

“How?” yelped Horace. “I don’t even know what alternative energy is! Apart from raisins.”

“Raisins?”

“No, hang on,” said Horace. “I do know! It’s the sun, and dog-biscuits! But Joshua’s already designing a car that gets energy from the sun.”

“Don’t tell me,” Kimi said. “You want to make a car that runs on dog-biscuits.”

“I can’t think of anything else!” said Horace in despair. “Can you?”

The snake spiralled thoughtfully around a flowerpot. “I can think of many, many things. Nuclear power, for a start. Then there’s geothermal energy. Water power. Windmills—”

“Stop, stop!” barked Horace frantically. “Too many ideas! I only need one. Where do I start?”

Kimi put out her forked tongue to lick delicately at a beetle. "It's your car. Your choice. But I'd say the first thing you need is a set of wheels."

"I've got wheels!" cried Horace joyfully. "I've got Joshua's old baby buggy, in the shed. Now can we build a nuclear powered car?"

"Certainly. The next thing you need is a brain. Luckily you've got mine."

"Does that mean you'll help me?"

"Well, I suppose I could – for a small fee." Kimi held herself quite still, eyeing the beetle, and then struck at it almost too fast to Horace to see. The beetle vanished.

"Oh, do help, please!" begged Horace. "What fee? I'll do anything."

Kimi spat the beetle out again with a grimace. It scuttled away into the flowerbed. "Bleah! Untasty. As you know, I really want to travel to my home in the desert: to see the lands of my youth."

"When I win the Golden Arrow, I can drive you to any desert you like!" he promised her.

"*If* you win, I'll hold you to that. But in the meantime, I want payment up front. I want chocolate."

"Chocolate?"

"Those chocolates you gave me last month were delicious," said Kimi dreamily. "Much nicer than beetles or dead rats. Get me some more!"

"And then will you help me design a winning car?"

"Horace," sighed the snake, "for a big enough box of chocolates, I will design you the car of your most incredible dreams."

### Chapter Three

Horace had a list in his head. Kimi had told him everything he needed before they began to make his car.

“A big box of chocolates,” he muttered to himself. “Tartan paint. A left handed hammer. A dozen straight hooks, and a bucket of steam.”

Unfortunately he had no idea where to get any of these things, apart from the box of chocolates. So Horace decided that he had better start with that.

Last time he had needed chocolate for Kimi, he had ended up stealing it from the supermarket and being chased out. He shuddered at the memory.

“Never again!” he vowed. “I don’t like being a thief. I’ll get the chocolates honestly this time. Maybe I can buy a box off Jellybean at the sweet-shop.”

So he trotted down the road to the shop where Jellybean lived.

Jellybean was a spaniel, but he was shaped like a giant jellybean with little fat legs. Walking made him wheeze, and he much preferred lying around.

On seeing Horace, he got slowly to his feet and waddled over the floor of the sweet-shop. “Hallo, driver-boy! What can I do for you?”

“Chocolates, please,” said Horace. “Your biggest and best box. I can pay you in dog-biscuits.”

“Dog-biscuits?” Jellybean wrinkled his nose critically. “I’m surrounded by sweet treats here! Toffees and lollies and sherbet surprises. What would I want with boring old dog-biscuits?”

“Well, what else can I pay you with? Please, Jellybean! I really need those chocolates!”

“Let me think.” Jellybean lay down and closed his eyes. Horace thought he had gone to sleep, but after a moment he growled,

“A cat.”

“A *what?*”

“I want a cat.” Jellybean looked up, his lip curling. “That big, bossy, orange cat that thinks he owns the whole street!”

“You mean Marmaduke,” said Horace.

Jellybean’s little eyes narrowed in hatred. “That’s the one. He bit my tail last week and then made fun of me because I couldn’t catch him. He called me Roly-Poly! The cheek of it!”

“How unkind,” said Horace, immediately thinking that Roly-Poly was a perfect name for Jellybean. “He’s never done anything like that to me.”

“Well, I expect he’s scared of you. You’re a big, strong dog,” said Jellybean. “Not like poor little delicate me. That’s exactly why I want you to catch him, and then wreak terrible revenge.”

“What sort of revenge?”

“Twist his tail off,” snarled Jellybean.

“Ow! That would hurt!” yelped Horace.

“It’s meant to hurt!” the spaniel snapped. “That’s the whole idea! Tell him it’s from me – and then I’ll give you the biggest box of chocolates you can carry.”

Horace trotted away, downcast. He was not keen on twisting Marmaduke’s tail, not least because Marmaduke had very long, sharp claws.

However, he desperately needed chocolate.

So he set off to the most likely place to find an insolent ginger cat. He didn’t need to think twice about that. *Mordle’s Modern Motors*, the car showroom, was where the cats hung out.

Horace both loved and hated the showroom. Although he loathed the cats who lived there, he adored the smells of paint and petrol and car polish. And as for the cars themselves – well, they just made him dribble with desire.

His favourite was the stylish, gleaming Kazlo Burlap. There were some Siren Sprinters parked in the forecourt too – though fewer than there used to be before the cats crashed two of them on Race Night. Mr Mordle had never realised who was responsible.

Gazing at the cars, Horace sighed in longing. Then the hairs stood up on the back of his neck as he spotted the gang of cats, lounging on the wall and flicking lazy tails at each other.

There were four of them. Fang, Demon, Pibbles – and Marmaduke.

“Well, well!” said Fang the white cat, sitting up on the wall. “If it isn’t Horace the Horrible Hound! Come to admire our cars, Horace? You’re not getting your dirty paws on them.”

“I did ninety miles an hour in the Kazlo the other night,” said Pibbles, the black cat, casually examining his claws. “What will your car do, Horace?”

“About nine miles a week, I expect,” sneered the tabby, Demon. “Horace drives an old tin can. He wouldn’t know what to do with a real motor.” She yawned widely in contempt.

“Have you seen our latest?” enquired Marmaduke. “The green car over there? Isn’t it a beauty? And it’s *ours*. You can look, but you can’t touch.”

“I don’t care about your rotten old cars,” growled Horace. The Sirens weren’t a patch on the Golden Arrow. How jealous these cats would be when he won his prize!

All the same, he couldn’t help swivelling his head to look for the latest car. His eyes nearly popped out as not one, but two new motors caught his startled gaze.

They were very eye-catching indeed. They were trim, elegant saloons, and very classy – apart from their colour, which was bright green. They were as green as a football field. As green as a traffic light. As green as a bean.

When Horace padded closer, drawn as inexorably as if by a giant bone, he saw that only one of the pair was a real car. The other was a cardboard cut-out, almost life size, with words written on it.

Horace had learnt to read when Josh did, by resting his head on Josh’s knee and studying the words that Josh spelt out. Carefully he read this sign.

***Test drive our new Green Car!***

“Doesn’t it come in any other colours?” he wondered aloud.

“Oh, dear me,” said Marmaduke. “That Green doesn’t mean *green*. It means *Green*.”

“What?”

The ginger cat sniggered. “Don’t you know what *Green* means?”

“It means not pink,” said Horace.

“*Green* means good for the environment,” put in Pibbles. “No fumes. No pollution. No petrol.”

“No petrol?” yelled Horace. “Then what does it run on?”

“Electricity.”

Horace stared. “An electric car! Is that alternative energy?”

“You bet,” said Pibbles.

Horace’s ears and tail all stood on end. What a brilliant idea! If only he could design an electric car as stunning as this one...

“Come and take a look,” said Pibbles, jumping down from the wall.

“Oh, don’t waste your time on that daffy dog,” complained Fang; but Pibbles was already strolling over to the car to open the bonnet.

“See? There’s no engine inside, just a drive motor. The batteries are at the back,” the black cat explained. “It goes like stink. High torque. Want a try?”

“Don’t let that mutt drive it!” screeched Demon.

“Why not?” said Pibbles. “He’s not bad behind the wheel. For a dog.”

But Horace shook his head reluctantly. “I’d better not,” he said. “I can’t risk driving a car around the town by daylight. I’ll get reported to the police.”

“Who cares about the police?” sneered Marmaduke. “*We* don’t!”

“I’ll drive. Just wait there while I get my disguise,” said Pibbles. Dashing into the car showroom, he returned a minute later with a large yellow beanie hat and a car key.

“Mr Mordle’s having his lunchtime nap,” he reported. “Snoring like a chainsaw. He’ll never miss us. Hop in the back, Horace.” He pulled the yellow hat so far down over his head that it covered his shoulders.

“How can you see through that?” asked Horace.

“Plenty of holes,” said Pibbles’ voice, sounding rather woolly.

“Marmaduke? Pedals!”

“Why can’t you use Mr Mordle’s stick to work the pedals, like you usually do?” complained Marmaduke.

“Because he’s lying on it,” said Pibbles.

“Well, why can’t I steer?”

“Because you’re rubbish at it. Move!”

Marmaduke moved. He jumped into the green car and disappeared in the footwell.

Horace squeezed himself onto the back seat. He made sure to fasten the seat belt; for he knew that Pibbles was the fastest driver of all the cats. And he expected this lean green bean of a car to spring away like a bad-tempered tiger.

“All aboard?” said Pibbles. “Let’s see what this Green Machine can do!”

## Chapter Four

The Green Car did not spring away like a maddened tiger. It crept out of the forecourt like a weary wombat.

There was no tiger’s growl: no throaty roar. In fact, there was hardly any sound at all. The car glided slowly onto Tintern Road with the merest of purrs, no louder than a kitten.

“Come on, Marmaduke,” Pibbles said impatiently. “Stamp on the accelerator!”

“I can’t see where we’re going!” whined the ginger cat down by his feet.

“You don’t need to. *I’m* steering. Step on it!”

All of a sudden, the Green Car jolted off down Tintern Road in a series of spurts. Horace found himself bouncing backward and forwards in his seat.

People turned to stare at the lurching car with its yellow-headed driver. Horace tried to crouch down in the back, feeling very conspicuous. There was far too much traffic around for his liking; and the Green Car was drawing plenty of attention.

For now it was hopping down the busy road like a drunken frog determined to get run over. It speeded up one second, and then slowed to a feeble crawl the next.

“Keep it steady, idiot!” Pibbles yelled at Marmaduke.

He was having trouble steering. Every time the car put on a burst of speed, he had to swing the wheel to avoid crashing into something.

The car began to zig-zag to and fro with more twists and turns than a monkey in a maze. Shooting forward in spasms, it swerved round three cars, two trucks and a bicycle, before nearly colliding with a van.

“Stop bouncing on the pedals, Marmaduke!” shouted Pibbles.

In answer, the car lurched and zigged and zagged even more wildly than before. Horace was very glad he had his seat belt on: without it, he might have gone straight out of the window.

“Yikes!” he yelped as they dodged a truck by centimetres.

“Whoa!” he cried as a pedestrian dived out of their way just in time.

“Eek!” he whimpered as a bus pulled out in front of them.

The bus was too big to dodge. It took up the whole road. The Green Car was hurtling straight towards it. They were going to crash...

“*Brake!*” cried Pibbles, recklessly spinning the steering wheel.

The car skidded sideways. Horace was jammed up against the window as the car tore round the corner with an ear-splitting screech of tyres.

It was charging straight at a narrow side street. Too narrow, surely! And they were going far too fast! They’d never make it through that gap. Horace hardly dared to look.

The Green Car nearly made it – but not quite.



First it hit the kerb. Then it tilted on its side and hit the wall. Then it took off into the air.

Although Horace opened his mouth to bark, he could not make a sound. Instead, almost as loud as the screeching tyres, he heard the screeching of two frantic cats.

“I said *Brake!*” yelled Pibbles.

“Stop shouting at me!” screamed Marmaduke.

Tied down by his seatbelt, Horace sat helpless with his mouth wide open and his ears flapping. He stared out of the window in disbelief – for the world had slowed down and was started to revolve around him. The car was doing a lazy roll in mid-air.

“This must be what flying feels like!” he thought, upside down.

The road was skimming past his head. The gliding flight seemed to last for ever.

It ended with a mighty THUMP as the Green Car landed on its roof. Then, still upside-down, it bounced and scraped and rasped along the road for another fifty metres.

At last it grated to a halt. For a thankful moment, there was silence.

Not for long. Mews and yowls broke out.

“Get me out of here!”

“Get yourself out, turnip-head!”

“Weasel-face!”

“Bird-brain!”

The two cats struggled out of the upturned car, spitting at each other.

Horace unclipped his seatbelt and fell onto the car ceiling. With some difficulty, he opened the door and wriggled out. When he stood up on the tarmac, his legs felt as if they had turned to strips of lettuce.

A distant siren made him jump to attention.

“Police!” cried Marmaduke. “Run, before they get here!”

“I thought you didn’t care about the police?”

But the two cats were already racing away. Horace staggered after them to the end of the road.

There, he looked back with regret at the battered, dented, upside-down car. It was very squashed and sorry-looking now; a green bean that had been chewed and spat out by a giant rabbit.

Pibbles tore off his yellow hat and flung it to the ground. “Flea-brain! That’s that time I let you do the pedals for me!” he snarled at the ginger cat. “How could you get it wrong?”

“I didn’t get it wrong,” whined Marmaduke. “*You* got it wrong!”

“I got it right. *You* made us flip over.”

“It wasn’t my fault. It was that dog’s fault,” complained Marmaduke. “He’s too heavy! You should never have let him ride in the car. He’s a big lumbering lump!”

Horace wasn’t putting up with that. Despite his spinning head and lettuce legs, he stood up straight and barked at Marmaduke.

“Don’t blame me, you ginger whinger! I’ve just remembered why I came to see you. I’ve got a message for you, from Ro– from Jellybean at the sweet-shop!”

Marmaduke looked disdainful. “Fat little Roly-Poly?” he sneered. “What does he want?”

“Revenge!” cried Horace. “You’ve tormented him once too often. You can out-run him, but you can’t out-run me! I’m going to twist your tail off!”

With that, he sprang at Marmaduke.

The ginger cat leapt away with a yowl of alarm. Horace sprinted after him, determined to show the cat that he was no lumbering lump but a hunting dog.

Although the cat ran fast, Horace was faster. He was pumped up with the excitement of that slow roll through the air.

In fact, he felt as if he was still flying inside the Green Car. Launching himself in a mighty leap, he pounced on Marmaduke.

The cat dodged aside, squalling horribly as Horace's paws missed him by a whisker-breadth. Marmaduke hurtled up the street towards the shops with Horace charging after him.

This was Marmaduke's mistake. He could have found safety by slipping through a gate or climbing up a tree; but on a straight road, Horace was always going to out-run him.

Sure enough, he caught up with the panicky cat just outside the sweet-shop, where Jellybean stood yapping in delight.

"Twist his tail off! Twist his ears off! Get him, Horace!"

Horace grabbed the ginger cat by his collar and dragged him round the corner into a back-yard full of bins. There he dropped him on the ground and stood over him menacingly.

Marmaduke cowered behind the bins. "Please don't do it!" he wailed. "I didn't mean it about you being a lump. Please don't twist off any bits of me!"

"Of course I won't. What do you think I am?" said Horace. "That would *hurt*. But you've got to yowl."

"Yowl?"

Horace dropped a dustbin lid on his head. Marmaduke yowled.

"Excellent," said Horace, and he trotted back to the sweet-shop to report the supposed twisting to Jellybean.

"Excellent," said Jellybean, and he presented Horace with an enormous box of chocolates. Horace could barely pick it up in his jaws to stagger home.

"Excellent!" crooned Kimi, when Horace delivered the chocolates to her. "Oh, wonderful! So many to choose from! Now, what shall I have first? The nut cluster or the strawberry cream?" She twined herself lovingly around the box.

"When do we start building our nuclear powered car?" asked Horace.

Kimi didn't answer. Flicking her tongue over the chocolates, she closed her golden eyes in bliss.

"Come on, Kimi! You promised to help me!"

"So I did," murmured Kimi. "Have you got the tartan paint?"

“Oh, bother!”

“Never mind,” replied the snake. “I’ve got a new list for you. Ready? You need uranium oxide, heavy water, some cadmium control rods and a nice big steel tank.”

Horace was taken aback. “A steel tank? Will it fit on my buggy wheels?”

“Certainly,” said Kimi. “Although you will have to cover it with concrete a metre thick.”

“A metre thick? But that’ll never work!” howled Horace. “I thought you said I could have a nuclear-powered car!”

“In your dreams,” retorted Kimi. “In your most incredible, unbelievable dreams.” She grabbed the chocolate box in her fangs and shot away.

Horace slumped to the ground. Glumly, he decided that the snake had been having him on. There was no such thing as heavy water and all that other stuff.

Then he sat up. “Never mind,” he muttered. “I don’t need a snooty snake to tell me how to build a car. I’ll do it by myself!”

## Chapter Five

Maybe nuclear power was a little hard for a beginner, Horace thought.

But what about an electric car? The Green Car had gone pretty well, in bursts, until it decided to turn over and bounce along on its roof. Even upside down, it had gone quite fast.

And electricity was easy to find. Every house had it, hiding in the walls: Horace knew that. All you had to do was push a plug into the wall, and bingo! Things would start spinning or buzzing or lighting up, or doing whatever they were supposed to do.

Horace had a fair idea how electricity worked, since he had once heard Mr Hay trying to explain electrical amps and watts to Joshua. However, Horace knew that those weren't real words. Mr Hay had got it a bit wrong, and had probably meant ants and wasps.

So there must be hundreds of electric ants scurrying through the cable to set the food mixer in motion. And it was most likely a horde of very small electric wasps that swarmed into the vacuum cleaner and made it hum.

"I shall have to be careful," said Horace to himself. "I don't want those ants and wasps to escape everywhere. But I do want them in my car."

He lolloped over to the shed to find his wheels. Joshua's old baby buggy was stored in there somewhere.

At first he could not see the buggy. Instead he found himself looking at a pile of jam jars, margarine tubs, yoghurt pots and lollipop sticks. None of them was very clean.

"Who's left all this rubbish here?" wondered Horace, as he explored a yoghurt pot with his tongue. There was still quite a lot of yoghurt in it.

Then he leapt back with a yelp. An orange juice carton had bounced up from the pile and hit him on the nose.

"What are you doing here?" said Tickety, glaring at him. She grabbed the yoghurt pot off him. "Leave my car alone!"

Horace looked around. "Your car? Where is it?"

"I haven't made it yet," said Tickety.

"What sort of car will it be?"

"I'm not telling you! You'll steal my ideas!"

"No, I won't. I only want the baby buggy," protested Horace. "And I need that long electric wire that's coiled up over there."

Tickety stared at him. "The extension cable? What do you need that for?"

"Not telling you either," said Horace, and seizing the cable in his teeth he dumped it in the buggy. Then he fled before she could ask him any more awkward questions.

He had used the old baby buggy once before to try and make a car. It hadn't been very successful, possibly because of the number of bricks and stones he'd piled into it.

But this time, he knew better. His car would be streamlined – no bricks, or maybe only one or two. Out in the garden, he unwound the cable. There was an awful lot of it: about ten metres.

Horace wasn't sure what he ought to do with each end. One end had the brass pins which plugged into the holes in the socket; while the other end had a socket with the holes to plug into.

He gazed at it for a while, puzzling it out. Then he wound the cable several times around the buggy. There was just enough cable left for him to push the plug end into the socket end.

As soon as he plugged it in, Horace jumped back, so that he would not get in the way when his buggy started up.

But his buggy did not set off with a gentle purr. It did not buzz or spin or light up either. It did not do anything.

Horace was baffled. He sniffed the cable all over, in case this would give him a clue about what was wrong. It smelt of wire and plastic and Mr Hay.

"Of course!" said Horace. "It should smell of electric ants and wasps. They can't get into it because it's not plugged into the wall."

Tugging the plug out with his teeth, he trotted off to the house with it.

He didn't want Mrs Hay to catch him borrowing her electric ants, so he sneaked into the kitchen while she wasn't there and found the nearest socket. It was nicely hidden in the dark gap behind the washing machine, which was busily churning a load of soapy clothes.

Horace carefully pulled out the washing machine plug and pushed in his own. As the machine fell silent, he dashed back to his buggy to see if it would start rolling, or possibly washing clothes.

It did neither.

"Poodles," said Horace.

“Are you trying to make an electric car?” Tickety had come out of the shed to watch him. “What happens when you drive it away?”

“I don’t know,” said Horace. “What *does* happen?”

“You lose your cable, is what happens. It gets pulled out.”

“Oh, no!” howled Horace. She was right. Now that he thought of it, the Green Car had showed no sign of any cable trailing from its bumper.

“That car is a no-hoper,” said Tickety.

“No, it’s not! I’ve been in an electric car. I *know* they work.”

Then Horace remembered what Pibbles had said on lifting the bonnet of the Green Car.

*The batteries are at the back...*

Light dawned. Of course! He didn’t need a cable. He needed batteries!

“Tickety, where can I find some batteries?”

“Don’t know, don’t care. I’ve got a super-duper car to build. And I bet it’ll go further than that old buggy!” She scampered off to the shed.

Back to the house trudged Horace, to look for batteries.

On entering, he carefully unplugged his cable from behind the silent washing machine and tried to coil it up. Mrs Hay liked things tidy.

The cable kept tying itself in knots despite his best attempts. Dumping it behind the back door, Horace went on a battery hunt.

There were none in the kitchen drawers. There were none under the sink. There were none in the fridge.

So he stole into the living room.

Boo was sitting in the middle of a scattered pile of Josh’s Lego bricks and wheels. He looked extremely grumpy.

“Hallo, Boo! What sort of car are you making?”

“I’m not making, I’m breaking,” growled Boo. “The bricks won’t stay stuck together. Stupid things!”

“You need to use Meccano,” Horace said. “Where do the Hays keep batteries?”

“Dresser drawer,” Boo grunted.

Horace tried to pull the drawer open with his paw. At first it stuck. When he pulled harder, the drawer slid right out and fell onto the carpet with a thud, showering him in paper clips and cocktail sticks and rubber bands. As he began to nose through them, Boo ran over and shoved him aside.

“Aha! I’m having those!”

“There’s no need to push,” said Horace. “I only want batteries. What are you using the rubber bands for?”

“Mind your own business,” said Boo. “I don’t want you stealing my ideas.”

Horace felt quite hurt. Ever since they decided to enter the Golden Arrow competition, his friends had got so secretive and touchy. They wouldn’t tell him anything.

“Well, why do you want batteries anyway?” said Boo.

On the point of answering, Horace hesitated. He didn’t want the hamster to borrow *his* idea.

Boo sniffed. “Don’t tell me then!” he said haughtily. “I don’t care.”

Clutching an armful of rubber bands, he marched off to his collapsed car.

There were no batteries amongst the pile of stuff on the carpet. Horace was about to give up when he spotted Mr Hay’s torch lying there.

A torch had batteries! Carefully he unwound the base. Three long, thin batteries slid out and rolled across the carpet. Triumphant, Horace gathered them in his mouth and set off back to his car.

This time, Mrs Hay was in the kitchen. There seemed to be a lot of water on the floor. Luckily, she was busy pulling clothes out of the washing machine into a basket, and muttering, so she did not notice Horace creeping through the puddles past her.

Outside, he lolloped over to his buggy and dropped the batteries into its hood. Then he stood quite still and waited.

So did the buggy.



“Ah, now I remember! Pibbles said the batteries go in the back,” said Horace. He moved the batteries to the back. Still nothing happened.

“Bother,” he said. “Those batteries must be flat.” He decided he might as well take them back into the house.

When he put his head round the kitchen door, he saw Mrs Hay poking around behind the washing machine with a torch. The torch did not work.

Mrs Hay said something rude to it, stood up and stamped out of the room. He heard her enter the lounge. An instant later there was a shriek.

*“Who’s made this mess?”*

Horace felt a twinge of guilt. Maybe he should have tried to tidy up the contents of the dresser? It was too late now. But at least he could help Mrs Hay by plugging her washing machine back in. He could just reach the plug with his front paw.

After he had done that, he left the batteries thoughtfully on the table, since the water on the kitchen floor still seemed to be rising. As he hurried out into the garden there was a flash behind him and a sudden sharp **BANG**.

Horace spun round. A cloud of smoke was rising from the washing machine. Mrs Hay ran back into the kitchen, screaming something about Floods and Fuses and Electrocutation.

Horace shook his head. He had had a lucky escape.

“Dangerous things, those electric ants and wasps,” he decided. “I don’t want my car to go flash and **BANG**! Maybe I’d better think of something else to make my buggy go.”

He climbed into the buggy to ponder. It smelt comfortingly of Joshua, although it was a little too small for him, so that his front legs flopped out over the hood. All the same, it was a good pondering place.

But he was running out of ideas. A nuclear-powered car was too hard, and so was an electric car.

How else could he make his buggy go? How could he win that Golden Arrow?

Horace tried hard to concentrate, doing his best to shut out the noise of Mrs Hay as she yelled into the phone. He ignored her as she ran outside with a basket full of soggy washing. He barely noticed when she tripped on the cable and threw wet clothes all over Mr Hay's potato plants.

Paying no attention to her screams, Horace lay back in the buggy and closed his eyes, the better to ponder hard.

Yet he had still not thought of an answer by the time he fell asleep.

## Chapter Six

Horace had a dream.

He was driving a huge, green, torpedo-shaped car. He sat at its wheel with a yellow woolly hat pulled down over his ears.

When he put his foot down, the car took off and leapt up into the air. Looking out, he saw that the car was sprouting wide green wings. As it soared through the sky like a giant flying cucumber, he felt ecstatic with excitement.

Then the wind caught the car and tossed it swiftly head over heels. Horace tumbled out. He was heading for the earth with the wind whistling in his ears...

He woke up just before he landed. His nose was two centimetres from the ground. He had almost slid right out of the buggy. When he tried to heave himself back in, he fell out onto his nose.

“Ow,” said Horace, sitting up on the grass and rubbing himself absent-mindedly. His head was still full of his dream. If only he could make a car that would fly!

“Well, why not?” he said to himself. “No one else will have a flying car. Why don’t I try to make some wings?”

There were usually a few feathers scattered around the garden; so he set out to hunt for them. But this morning he could find only three feathers, and a sock in the potato bed. That was probably not enough to make even a bean-sized car fly.

Just as he was about to give up the idea, Horace noticed some long, fronded leaves waving at him from a shady corner of the garden.

Ferns! Not only were they the right shape for feathers, but they were exactly the same colour as the car in his dream.

Horace galloped over to tear up the ferns with his teeth. He stuck them into the buggy’s wheels. Now his car had four green, ferny wings.

However, it showed no sign of flying.

“Hmm,” said Horace, frowning at it.

It needed something to get it started – just as, in his dream, the wind had plucked the car up and blown it across the sky.

“Wind!” he barked. “That’s what I need.”

Now that he came to think of it, Kimi had mentioned wind, when she had listed all those ideas for his car design. Not just wind...

Horace bounded up happily. “Windmills! I know what windmills are,” he declared. “They’re those things on a stick that children play with. Why, I saw some of those in Jellybean’s shop!”

Windmills would make his car go like a tornado. All he needed were enough of them. Then the car would lift off and soar through the air on its ferny wings. That really would be something to make the cats sit up and gasp!

Horace was fired with enthusiasm. There was no time to waste. So, pausing only to gobble his breakfast, because thinking was hungry work, he ran straight down the road to Jellybean’s sweet-shop.

“Hallo there, Horace. What brings you back so soon?” asked Jellybean.  
“Have you eaten all those chocolates already?”

“No. I need windmills!” panted Horace.

“You can’t eat windmills!” said Jellybean, shaking his head. “Why do you want them? What’s this all about?”

“It’s a secret.”

“You can tell *me*,” wheedled Jellybean. “In fact, you’ll have to, before I give you any windmills.”

“Do you promise to keep it to yourself?”

“Cross my heart and hope to never lick another lollipop as long as I live,” vowed Jellybean. “Now, tell!”

“Well, if you really must know – I’m designing a wind-powered car.”

“Whatever for?”

Reluctantly, Horace explained about the competition and the Golden Arrow which he was going to win.

Jellybean was agog. Wagging his tail eagerly, he yapped, “Wow! That Golden Arrow sounds stupendous! I should have a go at that competition myself.”

“I suppose you could,” Horace said unwillingly, “but not with windmills. And don’t tell anybody else about it, will you?” He didn’t want all the dogs in town to enter. He wanted to be sure of winning that Golden Arrow himself.

“No, no, of course not,” Jellybean assured him. “I won’t tell a soul. Good luck with your car!”

He gave Horace a dozen plastic windmills on sticks. “No charge. You really showed that horrible cat!” he chuckled. “Here, have a balloon as well. It’s my treat.”

“Thank you very much,” said Horace. He did not really need a pink heart-shaped balloon that bobbed around on the end of a string; but it seemed rude to refuse.

Jellybean tied the balloon's string to his collar, and Horace picked up the windmills by their sticks to carry in his mouth. Then he hurried home, hoping that no other dogs would spot him and ask what the windmills were for.

Half way back to the house, he heard a soft thud behind him.

What was that? Horace stopped dead and whirled round. There was nobody in sight – yet he had the strongest sense that he was being watched.

He set off once more, ears pricking. There it was again! The softest of rustles, and a thump. Horace spun round twice, while the balloon trailed and swooped on its string above his head.

Still he saw nobody. Although Jellybean might have followed him, he didn't think the little dog could move that fast.

Horace sniffed the air. A hundred smells were riding on the breeze: dogs, cats, squirrels, birds and humans in a whiffy jumble. He could not pick out any particular scent.

By now the hackles were rising on his neck. A shiver trickled down his back. He had to get away, and fast!

Horace began to run. He cantered down the road as fast as he could go with his mouthful of windmills. Yet he could not escape that tingling, haunting sense that somebody was watching him.

*A spy...*

## Chapter Seven

By the time he got home, Horace was quite unnerved. He decided to start work on his car inside the shed, where nobody could see him.

So he dumped the windmills on the grass and nosed the shed door open. There was an indignant squawk.

“Get out! Stop spying on me!” squealed Tickety.

“*I’m* not the spy,” said Horace. “I didn’t know you were still here. I want to use the shed to work in.”

“You can’t! I’m using it!”

“All right.” Horace paused, peering through the gloom. “Tickety? Is that your hamster wheel? And why have you stuck cotton reels to that old margarine tub?”

“You *are* spying on me!”

“No, no! I’m only collecting a few things I need,” explained Horace. He strained his eyes in an attempt to see exactly what Tickety was building. She was trying to squeeze the hamster wheel into the margarine tub. It wouldn’t fit.

Whirling round, she glowered at him.

“Out!” she yelled. “And take that balloon with you! I bet you’ve got a secret camera tied to it, haven’t you?”

“Of course I haven’t! I just want some tools,” cried Horace. “I need a hammer and nails.”

A bag of nails hit him on the nose. A hammer landed on his foot.

“Now *go away!*” said Tickety.

Horace retreated. He took his buggy and other things round to the back of the garage. It wasn’t as secret as the shed, but at least it was well-hidden from the house.

“I don’t want to add too much weight to my new wind-powered car,” he decided. “No bricks this time. It needs to be as light as a feather. Well, as light as a chicken, anyway. Or a turkey.”

First he tried to hammer the windmills into the buggy. This wasn't easy, not least because he had to hold the hammer in his mouth, and the balloon tied to his collar kept getting in the way.

"Ouch!" said Horace, rubbing his paw after hitting it for the fifth time. At a faint rustle in the bushes, he looked up suspiciously.

"Who's there?" he growled. No-one answered.

Horace squinted hard at the bushes. Seeing nothing unusual, he went back to his hammering.

"This hammer doesn't work," he muttered. "And the nails are too soft. They keep bending. This is hopeless! What I need is string, to tie these windmills on with. I'm sure there's string somewhere in the house."

So, dropping the hammer, he trotted inside and headed for the living room.

"Boo? Do you know where they keep string?" he called. "Where are you, Boo?"

Boo wasn't in his cage. He wasn't on the table. He wasn't on the floor.

Snuffling around the room for his scent, Horace tracked him down at last, stuck behind the back of the sofa cushion. Horace pulled him out.

"I didn't need your help," said Boo when he emerged, rather flushed. "I was just about to get out by myself."

"What were you doing down the back of the sofa?"

"It was my car's ejector seat," said Boo. "It ejected me rather hard."

"How does your car go?" Horace asked.

Boo pulled a face. "It doesn't quite, yet. Apart from the ejector seat. But it will."

Horace looked around for Boo's car. It was made out of Joshua's Meccano kit and appeared to consist mostly of a catapult and rubber bands. It was also rather prickly.

Horace put his nose down to inspect it.

"Ouch," he said. "What are those cocktail sticks doing on the wheels?"

"Those are the rotating knives," said Boo.

“Why has your car got rotating knives?”

“Because it’s a battle chariot, of course!” said Boo. “And don’t you dare copy my idea!”

“I wouldn’t dream of it,” said Horace. “All I want is string.”

“Bottom shelf of the cupboard. Then leave me alone. I’ve still got a lot of designing to do.”

“Why don’t you help me with my car, instead of building your own?” said Horace hopefully.

“I bet yours won’t have rotating knives,” Boo grunted.

“Well, no,” admitted Horace. “They’d get in the way of the wings.”

Boo sat up. “Of the *what?*”

“Of the – of the things! Of the things that aren’t there! I mean, of nothing at all!” said Horace in a hurry. To hide his confusion, he ran over and put his head in the cupboard to find the ball of string.

Boo snorted. “You don’t have to be so cagey! I don’t need *your* ideas. They’re as lightweight as that pink balloon you’re dragging round. Are there any more rubber bands in there? I need to make my ejector seat work better.”

“I think it already works too well,” said Horace. “Why don’t you use them to make your car work instead?”

“Don’t tell me what to do!”

“Is it a bungee battle chariot?” asked Horace.

“*Stop asking questions!*” yelled Boo. “Don’t be so nosy! Go away!”

Horace grabbed the ball of string, and went.

He felt very lonely. None of his friends seem to like him any more. First Kimi had rejected him, then Tickety, and now Boo...

“I need a pat,” he thought. “I need a tickle on the tummy. I need Joshua.”

So he lolloped up the stairs with a trail of string following him, and pawed at Joshua’s door until it swung open.

Josh was sitting at his little desk. Horace pattered over to put his chin on Josh’s lap. The balloon bobbed across the table.



Josh pushed it away.

“Nice balloon, but not now, Horace,” he muttered. “I’m finishing off my drawing for the Golden Arrow competition.”

Horace clambered up onto Josh’s knee to have a look.

“Wow! That’s *good!*” he woofed.

For Josh’s drawing was most impressive. The solar panels spread out on either side of his car like kites. He had drawn little diagrams to show how they could fold away. Everything was neatly labelled.

Horace ran round the chair and tried to climb on to the table to get a closer look.

“Get off, Horace!” Josh pushed him firmly aside. “I’m not having you trampling all over this drawing like you did the first one. Go away and leave me alone!”

Horace shrank down again with a miserable whine. He wasn’t wanted anywhere.

He went out again, moping, with string still trailing from his mouth. When he got out into the corridor there was string there too. There seemed to be string everywhere, like a spaghetti accident. He wondered where it had all come from.

His own piece of string was caught on something. He gave it a yank.

There was a yell and a crash from Josh’s bedroom. Horace rushed back in to see if he needed rescuing.

Josh was on the floor. So was his chair, which had string wrapped round its legs. So was his sheet of paper, which he had grabbed at as he fell. It had a big rip right across the middle.

“Now look what you’ve done!” Josh cried. “It took me ages – and it’s ruined!”

Horace whimpered. He didn’t see how it was *his* fault. It was possibly the string’s fault.

But when he tried to give Josh comforting licks, Josh shoved him out of the bedroom and tossed an armful of tangled string after him. Then he went back in and slammed the door.

Horace whined, pawing at the door. It did not open. So he trudged slowly and guiltily down the stairs. What could he do to make it up to Joshua?

“He wants that Golden Arrow almost as much as I do!” Horace thought. “And now I’ve spoilt his entry. I’ve got to win the competition for him!”

Josh would be so grateful when he won first prize! Horace could just imagine Josh’s joy at the prize-giving, as his family climbed into their wonderful new golden car. Horace would ride in the back, his ears and balloon all flying in the breeze. It would be blissful!

Cheered by this thought, he galloped outside with the string and began to use it to tie the windmills on to the buggy.

By the time all the windmills were attached, the buggy looked like a ragged, seaweed-covered fishing net that had caught the contents of a toy shop. It had knots and bits of fern all over the place.

“Beautiful! It just needs a finishing touch,” decided Horace. So he carefully took the pink balloon off his collar and fastened it to the buggy’s handlebars.

Now his wind-powered car looked perfect. He wheeled it into the middle of the garden where it would catch the breeze.

The ferns hung limply. But the windmills were more of a success. They whizzed round, whirring and sparkling in the sun.

“Very pretty,” said Horace admiringly. Then he frowned.

There was a problem. Despite the breeze, his car wasn’t moving. Not so much as a centimetre.

“Not enough wind,” declared Horace. He climbed on to the buggy. Drawing a deep breath, he blew at the windmills.

They whizzed round a little faster. Nothing else moved.

Horace drew in more deep breaths. He puffed and panted as hard as he could. Still the buggy did not stir.

“Bother!” he said.

There was a sudden crackle of dead leaves behind him. Horace spun round, jumped off the buggy and stared hard at the bushes.

“Who’s there? Kimi? Is that you?”

No-one answered.

“Tickety? Boo? Who is it?”

Horace sniffed the air. He could detect the usual garden smells of soil and compost; but over them wafted an alien scent that made his lip curl.

*Cat!* Those pesky cats had been following him! Furious, Horace charged into the bushes.

There was a squawk and a flash of orange fur, as Horace grabbed his prey and dragged him out by the scruff of his neck.

“*Marmaduke!* Why are you spying on me?”

“I’m not!” squealed Marmaduke.

Horace growled deep in his throat. “I don’t believe you. What were you doing in there?”

“Nothing. I want to help you!” the cat whimpered.

“*Help me?*”

“I heard you talking to Roly-Poly about your wonderful plan to win the Golden Arrow. I want to help you build your winning car!”

## Chapter Eight

“A likely story,” sniffed Horace. “You’re a cat. Why would you help me?”

“Because you didn’t twist my tail off,” said Marmaduke. “And because the other cats were mean to me. But I’m going to show those foolish felines. I’m going – I mean, we’re going to win the Golden Arrow together!”

“I don’t need your help,” said Horace huffily.

“Yes, you do. You haven’t even started building your car yet.”

“I have!” protested Horace. “Look! It’s finished! That’s it, there!”

Marmaduke stared at the buggy.

“What? That thing?” he said. “With all those toys tied to it, and that stupid balloon?”

“What’s wrong with the balloon?” said Horace.

Marmaduke shook his head. “Oh, dearie, dearie me.”

“I’m sure it’ll go if I can just blow hard enough,” said Horace. He puffed at the windmills again, to no effect. “Or when it’s a windy day,” he panted.

“You look like the big bad wolf,” snickered Marmaduke. “Except that the big bad wolf didn’t huff and puff at a buggy with a stupid pink balloon tied to it! Oh, Horace. Whatever happened to your sense of style?”

“Style?”

“You need a cool car.”

“A cool car?” Horace was puzzled. “Am I supposed to put it in the fridge?”

Marmaduke marched over to the buggy and started pulling off ferns and windmills. He untied the balloon and anchored it to the lawn with a stone on its string.

Then he began to mangle the buggy.

“Hey! Wait!” said Horace, as Marmaduke stuck his claws through the back of the chair and slashed it to ribbons.

“Just a mo,” he protested as the cat ripped up the seat.

“I don’t really think—” he began, as the arms were wrenched off and thrown to the ground.

“Watch it!” he yelled as Marmaduke bent back the handlebars.

The ginger cat stood back and brushed off his paws. “That’s better,” he said.

“There’s nothing left!” howled Horace.

There was indeed very little left apart from four wheels and the metal frame, with a few last rags of fabric hanging off them.

“It’s ruined!” he moaned.

“Nonsense. It’s streamlined!” announced Marmaduke. “No windmills. No heart-shaped balloons. We’re going to build a cool car. Remember that lawnmower thing you made with the dog-house on top?”

“Oh, yes!” Horace recalled it with pride. “The Sensational Staggering Houndmobile. That was wonderful!”

“That was not cool,” said Marmaduke. “Trust me. I’m a cat. I know these things.” He preened his orange fur.

“*Horace! Horry-horry Horace!*” A strangled shriek came from the house.

“What’s that?” squawked Marmaduke, leaping backwards in alarm.

“That’s Mrs Hay,” said Horace. “It’s my teatime.”

Mrs Hay appeared at the back door with Horace’s food bowl. At once Marmaduke ran over to her. He began to twine himself in and out of her legs, gazing up at her adoringly and purring like an electric toothbrush.

“Well, hallo, you gorgeous thing!” said Mrs Hay; and she was not talking to Horace. When she put the bowl down, the cat sniffed at it hungrily before breaking into despairing mews.

“Are you hungry then, you lovely fluffy kitty? Is pussums a hungry little sweetie-pie?” crooned Mrs Hay. “Shall we see if we can find a little treat in the kitchen for you?”

Marmaduke turned wide, soulful eyes up at her and mewed again. She bent down to stroke him.

“You darling fluffikins! Come with me!”

A wide, soulful eye winked at Horace as the cat followed her into the house.

Three minutes later, a small, furry bullet came shooting out.

Horace looked up from his food. Boo raced across the garden, screaming at the top of his tiny voice.

“Tickety! Tickety! There’s a cat after me! *Help!*”

Behind Boo came a large, ginger, furry cannonball. Marmaduke pounced and pounced again. Each time, Boo only just managed to dodge him.

“Shtop that!” said Horace with his mouth full.

Tickety came flying out of the shed.

“You leave my brother alone!” she squealed, and gave the cat’s tail a smart karate chop.

Marmaduke whisked his tail away and set off after Boo again. He chased the hamster round the buggy, across the rose bed, and through the vegetable patch. Abandoning his food bowl, Horace galloped after them; but while he could out-run Marmaduke on the straight, he could not twist and turn as fast as the cat.

“Do something, Horace!” screamed Tickety. Horace leapt at Marmaduke and ran smack into the apple tree. He staggered backwards and sat down.

Boo dived across the pile of windmills. Marmaduke clattered through them. Boo darted behind the pink balloon. Marmaduke pounced on the stone that held the balloon’s string.

At once the balloon bobbed up into the air. Marmaduke tried to claw it back, and missed.

But it wasn’t just the balloon that was heading upwards. Boo was hanging on to the string, being carried up out of reach of the cat’s claws and teeth.

“Let go!” cried Marmaduke, snarling and spitting as he tried to leap up at the airborne hamster.

“Boo, don’t let go! He’ll eat you!” screamed Tickety.

Boo did not say anything. He clung to the string with both front paws, a shocked look on his face, as the balloon shot upwards.

Within seconds, he was sailing for the sky.

## Chapter Nine

“Whee! I’m flying!” squealed Boo, as the balloon bounced and swayed in the wind.

“Boo! Boo! Don’t fly away!” screamed Tickety.

Horace was aghast. The balloon was heading straight for the clouds. Boo would sail away on the end of the string and never be seen again!

“Oh, Boo!” he howled in terror. “Come back!”

The balloon shot sideways, buffeted by a strong gust of wind. Still soaring upwards, Boo swung to and fro in a terrifying way. Then, just as Horace was sure that the hamster was about to disappear for ever over the treetops, the balloon caught in the tallest tree at the end of the garden.

It lodged against the topmost branches and halted, quivering, while Boo dangled from the string beneath.

“Hang on, Boo!” cried Tickety.

“I’m hanging,” came Boo’s voice. “But I don’t think I can hang much longer.”

“Yes, you can! Remember you’re a stunt hamster!” urged Tickety. “Try and climb up the string to safety!”

“I can’t! My arms are aching. Help!” squeaked Boo faintly.

Marmaduke laughed with a callous cackle. Then, leaping at the tree, he began to scramble up its trunk. “*I’ll* rescue him,” he said.

“Don’t you touch my brother!” yelled Tickety.

Horace sprang at Marmaduke; but the cat had already climbed too high for him to reach. When he tried to scramble up the tree himself, he couldn’t hold on. He fell back to the ground, barking frantically.

The cat was swiftly ascending, his claws digging into the bark. Soon he had reached the top of the tree and started to creep along the branch nearest to Boo.

“Get lost, you manky moggie!” squealed Boo, struggling on the end of his string. “Help, Tickety! My arms are falling off.”

“Jump, Boo!” begged Tickety. “We’ll catch you!”

“Will we?” yelped Horace, startled. He had no idea how he could catch Boo. So he did the only thing he could think of, which was to run round and round the tree trunk, barking.

Meanwhile Marmaduke was edging along the branch towards the balloon, until he was only a tail’s length from Boo. He swiped out at the string with an unsheathed claw. Boo screamed at him defiantly.

Then the cat recoiled. Shrinking back against the branch, he began to hiss and spit.

“Get away from me!”

Horace stopped and stared up, puzzled. What was Marmaduke spitting at? It wasn’t Boo. But he couldn’t see anything else— until he spotted what looked like a long, black and white striped rope wrapped around the branch.

It was Kimi. She gazed at Marmaduke with unblinking golden eyes. “You’d better get away from *me*,” she rasped.

“Hah! I’m not scared of you!” The cat arched his back.

“You *sssshould* be,” hissed the snake. Unwrapping herself from the branch, she swayed closer to Marmaduke, her thin tongue darting.

The ginger cat began to back away. A twig snapped: leaves shook.

Kimi lunged at Marmaduke, who leapt backwards in alarm. He missed his footing, slithered off the branch, and with a dreadful yowl, tumbled headlong from the tree.

Horace watched in shock, expecting to see a splatted cat – but Marmaduke managed to twist round in mid-air. Crashing through branches and tearing through leaves, he landed on all four feet. He stood there shakily for a second before toppling over on the grass.

Kimi turned her attention to the hapless hamster. Twining her tail around the branch, she lowered her head to Boo’s level.

“Jump on,” she urged.

“You’ll eat me!”



“No, I won’t. It’s not Tuessday. Anyway, I’m full of chocolate.”

Boo swung on his string and then let go, leaping on to Kimi’s head. He clung to her neck with all four paws as she began to slide from branch to branch in a slick descent

At the bottom of the tree, Tickety started to clap. When Marmaduke staggered to his feet, she yelled at him.

“Get out of our garden, you malicious moggie! You’re trespassing!”

“I am not. I’m a guest,” the cat retorted. “I’m a friend of Horace.”

“Horace?” cried Tickety in disbelief.

“Horace?” echoed Boo as he reached the ground and slid off Kimi’s neck.

“Oh, Horace,” said Kimi sorrowfully. “How disappointed I am.” She shook her head.

“Well, that cowardly cat is no friend of *ours!*” cried Tickety. “Scram!” Picking up a windmill, she charged at Marmaduke and stabbed him with the pointy end.

The cat’s paw shot out. Kimi got between them just in time.

“No need to tilt with windmills, Tickety,” she said. “I’ll get rid of him.”

“You and whose army?” sneered Marmaduke; but he did not look confident.

Kimi drew back her head. Her forked tongue flickered. “Don’t you know how poissssonouss I am?” she hissed.

As she lunged at him a second time, the cat ran, howling. “Horace! Save me!”

Horace did not know which way to turn. While he was still wondering what to do, Marmaduke had scrambled over the fence and disappeared down the road.

But two angry hamsters were glaring at him.

“You’ve been making friends with a *cat?*” yelled Boo.

“It wasn’t my fault.” Horace began to explain, but Boo stuck his nose in the air.

“I’m not talking to you!”

“Neither am I!” said Tickety. “You were no help at all when Boo was in such danger. You just ran round the tree.” She turned and curtsied to the snake. “Thank you for rescuing Boo.”

“Not at all,” said Kimi.

“How poisonous are you, by the way?”

“Ditto,” said the snake.

“Well, I’ll share the Golden Arrow with you when I win,” promised Tickety.

“Me too!” cried Boo. “I certainly won’t be sharing it with that – that turncoat traitor of a treacherous two-faced dog! Hah! Come along, *friends!*”

And he flounced away with Tickety and Kimi.

Horace howled. He barged after them and nearly bowled over Mrs Hay as she was coming out into the garden.

“What’s all the noise out here? Horace, stop that!” She looked round with a frown. “Whatever happened to that lovely cat? Oh, Horace! Did you chase away the cute little kitty-cat? What a bad dog! No, you can’t come in!”

Horace howled again as she closed the door on him. Then he retreated to the remains of his wind-powered car and huddled underneath it.

His car was a failure. But what was worse, he had nobody to help him try again. His friends had deserted him; his family had spurned him. Everyone thought he was a coward and a traitor.

Nobody loved him. He was alone and desolate.

## Chapter Ten

“Pssst!”

Horace looked up hopefully. No-one had spoken to him since yesterday.

But it was not Kimi who had hissed, or either of the hamsters. Instead, Marmaduke was crouching on the wall.

“Is that sneaky snake anywhere around?” the cat whispered, his eyes darting warily from side to side.

“Nobody’s around. Nobody’s talking to me,” said Horace mournfully. “I don’t think you should be talking to me, either.”

“Why not?”

“Kimi and the hamsters wouldn’t like it.”

“Is that so? Well, we don’t need *them*,” said Marmaduke, as he jumped down lithely from the wall. “Even if they’ve given up on you, I haven’t! So let’s get down to business and design your car.”

“I don’t really feel like it any more,” said Horace dolefully. “Those windmills didn’t work in any case.”

“Don’t be such a droopy dog! You can’t give up yet,” snapped Marmaduke. “We’ve got a Golden Arrow to win. We’re going to show those sniggering stuck-up cats at Mordle’s Motors. Aren’t we? *Aren’t we?*”

“If only we could,” sighed Horace. “If only I could find a way to make my car go.”

“I know how!” Marmaduke glanced around, and then spoke under his breath. “I’ve got a sure-fire way to make it work.”

“You have?” Horace was interested in spite of himself. “What is it?”

“A motorbike engine. We can attach it to your wheels.”

“A motorbike engine?” Horace sat up. “Oh, no, we can’t do that, I’m afraid. We’re not allowed petrol engines! That would be cheating.”

“Would it? Well, in that case,” said Marmaduke, “we’re fine. Because this engine doesn’t run on petrol. It runs on – um – something else.”

“What?”

“Oh, er...” Marmaduke shifted, glancing around the garden. His eyes rested on the compost heap. “Compost,” he said. “It runs on compost.”

“Really?” Horace’s tail began to wag. “Well, that’s wonderful! Because we just happen to have a whole heap of compost right there in the corner!”

“Why, so you have! What good luck,” smiled Marmaduke. “I’ll go and fetch my compost-driven engine and bring it round here.”

“Oh, yes, please! What can I do in the meantime?” asked Horace eagerly.

“You’d better look for something we can use to hide the engine,” said Marmaduke.

“Why? We don’t want to hide it! We want to show it off!”

“No, we don’t. It’s not very pretty,” explained Marmaduke. “Go and find some tinfoil or something like that.”

“Where do I...”

But Marmaduke had already jumped up onto the fence. Before Horace could finish, the cat had gone.

“A compost engine!” said Horace to himself. “What a brilliant idea! That’s alternative energy all right! It’s the perfect answer.” To satisfy himself that there was plenty of well-rotted compost in the heap, he trotted over to investigate it.

When he burrowed into it, he discovered to his pleasure that it was very well-rotted indeed. Decaying grass and leaves were laced with mouldy potato peelings and slimy, black banana skins. It smelt delightful. Horace breathed in deeply of its heavenly odours.

Then he trotted happily off in search of tinfoil.

The back door was locked, so he could not search the house; but that didn’t matter. There were always plenty of tinfoil dishes to be found piled up behind the takeaway.

So Horace ran down the road with new hope in his heart. Maybe the hamsters would forgive him for making friends with Marmaduke, when they saw the compost car.

He lolloped around to the deserted yard at the back of the takeaway and snuffled at the empty boxes and tinfoil trays. A box would be useful as a compost tank for his car, he decided.

He had just selected a nice big box labelled BEANSPROUTS, and dropped a few sticky tinfoil trays inside it, when he heard the noise of running water close by. On turning, he saw Ragbag, the bouncy little mongrel.

But today, she wasn't bouncing. She was sitting on a wooden tray on wheels. The tray was loaded with plastic bottles. Ragbag was panting; she looked exhausted.

"Hallo, Ragbag!"

"Hallo, Horace," she gasped. "You smell nice."

"What on earth is that thing you're sitting on?" asked Horace, bemused.

"This is my prize-winning car," panted Ragbag.

"Your *what?*" Horace froze.

"Haven't you heard? I thought Jellybean had told everyone. Build a car and win a prize, he said! It can run on anything except petrol! But this one's hard work."

Horace stared at her tray-on-wheels with his mouth open. Just as he was about to protest, he realised that there was something strange about the car.

"It's got an extra wheel!" he barked. "A wheel covered in little plastic cups!"

"Yep. That's the water wheel. That's what drives it. Just watch this!"

Ragbag picked up a plastic bottle of water in her teeth and tilted it carefully, pouring water over the extra wheel. As the water flowed over the cups, the wheel turned. The car began, very slowly, to creep along the tarmac.

"I have to keep watering it or it stops," she panted. "And these bottles are heavy. What do you think of it?"

“Lovely. Can’t stop. I’ve got to talk to Jellybean!” cried Horace. He seized his cardboard box between his jaws, and ran.

Half way to the sweetshop he was brought up short by the sight of the butcher’s dog lolling on a tricycle.

Horace put his head on one side uncertainly. “Silverside? Is that you?” he asked; for his friend was wearing sunglasses.

“It’s me all right,” said Silverside. “Is the sun out yet?”

Horace looked up at the clouds. “No. Why?”

“Dang it! I thought that wearing shades would make the sun come out. That’s what happens when my owner wears them.”

“I’m not sure if that’s how they work,” said Horace doubtfully. “Why do you want the sun to shine?”

“To make my car go, of course! I want to win that prize that Jellybean was talking about. I’ve made my owner’s tricycle into a solar-powered car.”

“How did you do that?” yelped Horace.

“I covered it in sun-cream.”

Horace looked more closely. The tricycle was slick with grease. “Will that work?”

“It works on my owners,” said Silverside confidently. “As soon as they’ve got sun-cream on and the sun shines on them, they’re full of energy. They start jumping into paddling pools and squirting each other with water pistols and running in and out with ice lollies. They never stop!”

Horace was impressed. And also aghast. What if Silverside’s brilliant design were to win? He spun round twice in panic.

“See you later!” he barked. “Gotta find Jellybean!” He grabbed his box and raced away.

As he passed *Mordle’s Modern Motors*, he stopped. There was a kerfuffle going on at the back of the showroom. The cats were squabbling.

He crept round to listen.

“I should be the one who gets to ride on top!” hissed Fang’s voice.

“But that’s not fair,” whined Demon.

“And I’m a better driver than either of you,” objected Pibbles.

“This car was my idea!” spat Fang. “If you want to win, you do as I say!”

*Car? Win??* Horace was aghast. Surely the cats weren’t in on this as well?

He poked his head around the corner, hoping to catch a glimpse of the cats’ car. He could see the Green Car parked there. It was the right way up this time, but still covered in dents and scrapes. It looked dreadful.

Could the cats possibly be planning to fix it, to enter in the competition? He was just trying to sneak a closer look when the three cats caught a glimpse of *him*.

With angry mews, they leapt on Horace. He was trapped in a furious whirlwind of claws and fur. Managing to escape with his box intact, he hurtled up the road. He had to find Jellybean!

Just round the corner from the sweet shop, he ran smack into a dog.

It wasn’t Jellybean. It was a German Shepherd, with grizzled fur and a stern glare.

“Justine!” gasped Horace, dropping his box.

“What do you want?” snapped the police dog. She had one foot on a skateboard and was trying to attach a sail to it.

“What’s that?”

“This is my wind-powered car, of course.”

“Wind power? But that was my idea!” yelped Horace.

“I don’t know anything about that. And you’re trespassing,” Justine growled. “This is a private driveway.”

Horace backed off to the main road, and then bolted down it to the shops.

“Jellybean! Jellybean!” he called urgently.

He stuck his head into the sweet shop. No Jellybean. He scoured the street nearby until, up an alleyway, he saw a child’s trolley. It was the sort of wooden trolley that a toddler might push along with toys inside it.

There were no toys inside this one. Instead there was a small, fat, roly-poly dog.

As Horace watched, the trolley began to trundle down the alleyway towards him. It rolled faster and faster until it hit him on the knee.

“Ow!” yelped Horace.

“Well, you shouldn’t be standing there,” scolded Jellybean, squatting in the trolley. “How can I design a prize-winning car if gormless dogs keep getting in my way?”

“You’ve designed a car?” wailed Horace.

“It’s good, isn’t it?” said Jellybean proudly. “It goes really fast.”

“What does it run on?”

“Hills,” said Jellybean. He tumbled out of the trolley and began to push it back up the sloping alley.

“You told everyone about the Golden Arrow!” howled Horace.

“Not everyone,” said Jellybean. “Only two or three dogs. Or five. Or maybe seven.”

Horace hid his face in his paws in mute despair. All these dogs had much better designs than him.

But then he remembered Marmaduke’s plan. His new car would go faster than any of these others. At the thought of the compost engine, he took heart.

Nobody else had anything as extraordinary as that. His compost car would be unique!



## Chapter Eleven

When Horace arrived home, Marmaduke was back in the garden with the compost engine. It was tied to a roller-skate, which the cat was trundling over the patio. The engine dwarfed the roller-skate. It was black with soot and oil.

“I got the tinfoil! And I brought this box to make a tank,” woofed Horace eagerly. “Shall I go and fill it with compost now?”

Marmaduke wrinkled his nose. “It smells like you already have. You pong!”

“Oh, thank you,” Horace said. “It’s excellent compost. It’ll make your engine run like a dream.” And he ran to the compost heap to fill his box.

Once the box was overflowing with lovely, crumbly, wormy compost, Horace pushed it over to the buggy.

“Help me lift this engine up,” said the cat. Together they heaved the engine off its roller-skate and onto the buggy, which dipped under its weight.

“What next?” said Horace, standing back to gaze proudly at it. “How exactly do we make the engine work?”

Marmaduke looked non-plussed. “I thought *you’d* know that,” he said. “You’re the car expert.”

“Of course,” said Horace. “Right. Well. First we have to connect up the fuel supply. I mean the compost supply.”

“Oh, that can wait,” said Marmaduke. “Before we do that, we’d better use your tinfoil trays to hide the engine.”

Horace didn’t hear. He was already running to the shed and banging on the door.

“What do you want?” said Tickety’s voice.

“The garden hose, please. For my fuel supply.”

“Take it quickly, then.” As Horace dragged out the hose, which was wriggling like a peevish python, Tickety darted out of the shed and stared at him suspiciously.

“What sort of fuel?”

“Compost.”

“Compost? What exactly is going on?” She marched over to the buggy, and squealed in indignation. “That’s a *petrol* engine!”

“No, no,” said Horace. “It runs on compost. Doesn’t it, Marmaduke?”

“And you’re talking to that cat again!” shrieked Tickety.

“Go away, little rat,” said Marmaduke, waving a dismissive paw at her.

“The big boys are busy.”

“Don’t you call me a rat!” snapped Tickety.

“It really is a compost-driven car,” insisted Horace.

“Prove it!” Tickety thrust the end of the hose at him. “Go on, then. Link up your fuel supply and let’s see your engine working!”

“Well, the compost goes down here and gets sucked into the engine...”

Horace fished in his box of compost, selected a nicely rotten apple core and began to try and stuff it down the hose.

“No, it doesn’t!” yelled Tickety. “It *doesn’t work!* You fraud! You fake! You *cheat!*”

Marmaduke put his whiskery face down to hers. “I don’t call it cheating,” he said silkily. “I call it winning.”

“What?” cried Horace. “Hang on! You mean this engine doesn’t really run on compost?”

“Well, of course not,” sneered Marmaduke. “Only an idiot would think it did.”

“Swindler!” shouted Tickety. The cat swiped at her in irritation.

She sprang sideways. “Forger!”

Marmaduke pounced on the hamster. This time he got her, and held her down with one fat paw.

“Just say that again!” he threatened.

“Trickster!” came a muffled cry.

Marmaduke stretched out his other paw and unsheathed his long, sharp claws. He hissed at Tickety, raised his paw to strike—

—and disappeared under an avalanche of compost. Horace had just emptied the box over his head.

The cat went wild. “*Uurfh! Blerg! Rargh!*” he snarled, trying to fight the box off in a shower of carrot tops and mouldy cabbage. At last he emerged from underneath the compost, sneezing and spattered with old tea leaves.

“You disgusting dog! I’m not helping you any more,” he hissed. “You’ve had your chance to win this competition, and you’ve blown it. I’m leaving – and I’m taking my car with me!” The cat began to shove the buggy and its engine towards the gate.

“Wait! You can’t take that. Those are my wheels!” protested Horace.

“Tough,” sneered Marmaduke. “I’m going back to join the cats, you ungrateful hound!”

“Take the lot, and good riddance!” yelled Tickety after the cat. He pushed the buggy through the gate and disappeared.

“But, but—” began Horace.

“But nothing!” said Tickety, giving him a withering stare. Then she marched off to the shed, pausing only to throw a single, cutting word over her shoulder.

“*Cheat!*”

## Chapter Twelve

Now Horace had no car, no friends and no plan.

Instead of his buggy, he was left with only Marmaduke's roller-skate.

The hamsters were refusing to talk to him. His wind-powered car had failed. His compost-driven car was a fraud. He felt the marvellous Golden Arrow slipping further and further from his grasp.

In a panic, Horace ran next door to try and cajole Kimi.

"Help, Kimi! Help!" he barked. "I gave you a huge box of chocolates and you pro-oomised to help me!" He howled at her window relentlessly until she slid out of her tank. With a sigh, she wriggled through the hole in her wall to meet him.

"I thought that ginger cat was helping you?" she said.

"Not any more! And no-one's talking to me, and they say I'm a cheat, and I'll never win that Golden Arrow now!" moaned Horace. "One of the other dogs will win it – or worse, Marmaduke will! Oh, no. That would be terrible!"

"Marmaduke will never build a car," said Kimi reassuringly. "Cats are lazy. They'd rather someone else did the hard work."

"But all the cats might get together!" Horace wrung his paws. "They might build an enormous nuclear-powered car. And what about the dogs? Jellybean told everyone, and now they've all made a car except me! Oh, Kimi, please help me!"

Kimi's eyes gleamed. "Got any more chocolates?"

"I gave you an enormous box not long ago!" yelled Horace. "You must have loads left! All I want is an idea. And I don't want everyone to think that I'm a cheat!"

Kimi yawned. "I've told you plenty of ideas, Horace. Use your brain. You *have* got one."

“I’ve tried to use it, but it’s empty,” Horace moaned. “I can’t think of any more ideas. You promised to help me, Kimi, and you haven’t yet!”

“That’s because it’s a hopeless case, Horace. It’s a non-starter.”

“I know my car wouldn’t start. But that’s because you didn’t help me!”

“Hmmm.” The snake stretched herself out, considering. “I’ll tell you what. We’ll have a race-off on Saturday.”

“A race-off?”

“Yes. You can spread the word. I’m inviting everyone, dogs, cats and rodents, to bring their cars to the playground at daybreak. There won’t be any humans around at that hour.”

“But how will that help me?” asked Horace.

“Because I will judge the entries, and I will give advice. You’ll get to see everybody’s car designs. Then you’ll know what you’re up against. What’s more, I will spot any cheats. And if I do, the fur will fly.”

“I’m not a cheat! I’m not!”

“I know that,” said Kimi patiently. “And on Saturday everyone else will know it too.”

“How will they know?”

“Because I’ll tell them.”

“Will they listen to you?” said Horace doubtfully.

“I’m a *ssssnake*,” hissed Kimi. She reared up and opened her mouth wider than he would have thought possible, showing her lethally sharp fangs. “Oh, yes. They’ll lisssten all right.”

After he left her, Horace felt much happier. The happiness lasted for at least three minutes, until he realised that he still had no car for Kimi to judge.

He lay down under the apple tree and tried to use his brain. Kimi seemed to think he had one, although he wasn’t convinced.

No matter how he puzzled and pondered, it seemed that all the good ideas had already been taken. Why, even his wonderful wind idea had been used by Justine...

Rolling over on the grass, his legs waving in the air, Horace gazed up into the high branches where Boo had sailed. The heart-shaped balloon was still up there, tangled in the tree. If only he could fly up like a balloon...

As Horace stared at it, bobbing amongst the rustling leaves, a picture formed slowly in his head. At first it was as hazy as a cloud; but then the cloud took on a shape. And all was suddenly clear.

“My brain’s not empty after all! It had a thought! Kimi was right. *Fur will fly!*” With a triumphant bark, Horace leapt to his feet and ran to the back door.

Mrs Hay was busy in the kitchen. Horace crept in past her and tiptoed to the living room.

“Go away!” squealed Boo as he entered. “You cat-loving cheat!”

“I just wanted to ask you...”

“I’m not listening!” Boo began to sing. “Hum humdy hum hum!” He clapped his paws over his ears and refused to even look at Horace.

So Horace left and raced upstairs to find Joshua, who had just come home from school and was putting on his trainers.

“Hi there, Horace,” he said, giving him a quick pat. “Sorry I can’t take you for a walk right now. I’m going out to play football.”

However, Horace didn’t want a walk. He wanted something quite different; but he didn’t know where to find it. He bounced over to Josh’s toy cupboard, nosed it open and sniffed.

It was in there somewhere! He could smell it – a dry, clean, rubbery scent. Horace began to pull out boxes and games in his search for his target.

“Hey, Horace! What are you doing? Leave those alone.”

But Horace had found what he wanted: the pack of balloons left over from Josh’s birthday party. He dropped the packet in front of Josh, put his paw on Josh’s foot and whined appealingly.

“Do you want a balloon, Horace? Is that it? Shall I blow one up?”

Horace yelped and panted agreement. No sooner had Josh blown up the balloon and tied a knot in it, than Horace tipped more out of the packet at his feet.

“Another one? You like playing with balloons?”

Horace woofed eagerly. To prove it, he began jumping up and down, patting the balloon around with his paws.

“All right then,” said Josh, and he blew up some more. Every time he stopped, Horace whined. Every time he started again, Horace bounced up and down and chased the balloons around the room.

Soon Josh was laughing so hard at Horace that he could hardly blow.

“I’m puffed out now,” he told Horace. “And I’ve gotta go. Have fun with your balloons, Horace! See you later!”

He ran out, and Horace lay down, exhausted. It was hard work having fun.

But it had paid off. Now he had plenty of balloons. After a moment’s rest, he got up and looked for something to tie the balloons with. Marmaduke had taken all his string along with the buggy.

There was a piece of wool dangling from Joshua’s school jumper on the bed. Horace pulled at it. More wool came away from the jumper.

Excellent! thought Horace. Plenty of wool to tie my balloons with.

It took him a long time, using nose, teeth and paws, to tie a good length of wool to each balloon. By the time he’d finished and bitten off the last piece of wool, the pile of balloons was covered in a woolly web. And Joshua’s jumper looked quite a different shape.

Horace paused, worried that Joshua might notice. Should he hide the jumper? Maybe he should just get rid of it.

So he picked it up in his teeth, trotted to the bathroom, and dropped it in the toilet. He pushed the flush with his nose and waited for it to disappear.

It didn’t. Horace flushed twice more, but the jumper still lay there soggly.

He plucked the toilet roll from its holder and dropped it into the toilet to disguise the jumper. Then he got the toothpaste and squeezed an interesting pattern all over the sink to distract people's attention from the toilet.

Satisfied with his good work, he returned to the bedroom, carefully gathered all the balloons by their lengths of wool and padded downstairs with them bouncing along in a huge bunch behind him.

Managing to avoid Mrs Hay, he sneaked outside. The balloons squeezed squeakily through the doorway after him. Horace loped out into the garden and ran behind the shed.

What a brilliant idea his brain had come up with! Why, just one balloon had nearly carried Boo away into the sky.

Now Horace had sixteen balloons. He would have the only flying car in the competition. The merest breeze should be enough to give him lift-off!

"Justine, eat your heart out!" he growled.

Of course, he no longer had his buggy, since Marmaduke had stolen it. He still needed to find some actual wheels. And, at the moment, the balloons were lying rather limply on the grass instead of trying to take off in the way he had expected.

But that was because it was such a windless day. It was bound to be breezier on Saturday: and then away he would fly, over the playground, astounding dogs and cats alike. The hamsters would beg to be his friends again when they saw his fantastic flying car...

His tail thumped joyfully. He rolled over on the grass in glee. Vaguely he was aware that Mrs Hay was shrieking something about floods and toilets; but Horace didn't care.

In his imagination he was floating up to meet the clouds. He was flying high!



## Chapter Thirteen

“First entry, come forward!” announced Kimi.

The big day had arrived. Dawn was breaking over the playground, which was full of animals and their assorted vehicles.

Most of them were dogs; but then Horace saw a bunch of cats from the car showroom. They were pushing along a large car-shaped object covered in a cloth. Fang and Demon grinned evilly at him. Of Marmaduke, there was no sign.

Kimi, as judge, was coiled regally on top of the climbing frame. “Right! Let’s see these cars in action! I will award a prize to the one I consider the best.”

“What sort of prize?” asked Ragbag.

“A cup.”

“A silver cup? Wow! Can I go first?”

“Wait! I claim priority,” said Justine haughtily. “I have to go on duty later.”

“Then bring your car forward,” Kimi said.

The police dog pushed forward her skateboard with its sail attached. She stood on it and balanced there carefully, ramrod stiff, nose pointed.

“Good streamlining,” whispered Boo to Tickety.

“But it’s not moving,” said Horace hopefully. “Oh, drat! It is now.”

It was a gusty day. As a strong gust caught the sail, the skateboard slowly began to glide over the playground. It rolled a full three metres before the sail keeled over sideways and Justine tumbled off.

The dogs applauded, barking their appreciation.

“A very good start,” said Kimi graciously. “Seven out of ten.”

Justine looked pleased. It was the first time Horace had ever seen her smile.

He didn't begrudge Justine her success. She'd only gone three metres, after all – just enough to prove that a wind-powered car could work. But she didn't have any balloons. This wonderful wind would blow his own car sky-high!

Horace looked lovingly at his car, which he had parked behind the bushes. He hadn't been able to get the buggy back from Marmaduke; but that didn't matter. The roller-skate had wheels too, didn't it?

It wasn't a very big car, it was true, but it had the great advantage of being light. All the better to float away on the breeze...

"Next!" called Kimi.

"Me," said Tickety promptly. She wheeled out a margarine tub on cotton-reel wheels. It had pedals made out of lollipop sticks and a juice carton for a seat.

"And your source of energy is...?" Kimi enquired.

"It's banana-powered," explained Tickety, as she sat down in the margarine tub and began to pedal laboriously.

"Are you sure?" asked Kimi, when the car had gone about a metre. "It looks rather like it's hamster powered to me."

"I eat the banana," panted Tickety. She wiped the sweat from her forehead.

"I think you'd be better off just walking," Kimi said. "But five for effort. Which that car seems to need rather a lot of. Next!"

Several dogs rushed forward to demonstrate their cars, jostling to be the first in line. Horace watched with his heart in his mouth, worried that one of these rivals would shoot away at ninety miles an hour...

But Silverside's well-greased tricycle refused to move at all, even though the sun was shining and he wore his smartest shades.

"Wrong sort of sun," he muttered, shaking his head.

"Two out of ten for style," said Kimi. "Next!"

Ragbag's waterwheel car went quite well until she ran out of bottles of water.

"Ingenious," admitted Kimi, as several dogs ran to lap up the resulting puddles. "I give you six. Next!"

Jellybean plopped himself complacently into his trolley and set off. His car rolled beautifully down the slope towards the swings.

“*Oooh!*” went all the watching dogs in admiration. Horace’s ears drooped.

“Excellent,” said Kimi. “A gravity powered car. Now drive it back up here, please.”

“I can’t!” huffed Jellybean. “It won’t go uphill!”

“No? What a shame. One out of ten. Next!”

“Our turn!” snarled the cats, elbowing the eager dogs aside. “Stand back and watch the professionals!”

Fang and Demon pushed forward the long, lean object covered with a cloth. It was definitely car-shaped. With a flourish, Demon twitched the cloth aside.

“Eat your hearts out, dogs!” jeered Fang.

“The Green Car!” gasped Horace. “They must have fixed all the dents and scratches. And that’s funny – they’ve *shrunk* it...”

The other dogs’ tongues were hanging out with desire. They stared avidly at the cats’ shiny green car.

“Wow,” breathed Silverside. “Just look at that! That is so *smart!*”

“It is,” sighed Horace. “It’s just like the real thing. Only slightly smaller. And somehow flatter.”

Tickety scampered over to inspect it.

“It’s a cardboard cut-out!” she cried indignantly. “It’s an advertising board from the showroom! You’ve just painted out the lettering!”

“So?” snapped Fang. “It goes. Watch this!” He leapt onto the cardboard car and clung to the painted seat.

To the dogs’ amazement, the car began to move. There was no noise of any engine: yet the car glided swiftly across the playground.

“We can go faster! Full speed ahead!” cried Fang.

Sure enough, faster and faster went the flat green car, with the white cat perched, grinning, on the top. Its cardboard wheels seemed to hardly touch the ground as it slid silently across the tarmac.

The other cats applauded wildly; and even a few dogs joined in. Although Boo ran after it, he was soon left behind.

“It’s faster than any of your feeble efforts!” boasted Demon, preening her whiskers.

“Two metres a second,” said Fang. “Top that, mutts!”

“Well?” demanded Demon. “Is it or is it not the winner?”

Kimi stared hard at the car as it began to slow down. “Interesting. What makes it go?”

“That’s our secret,” said Demon smugly.

But Boo, catching up with the car, screamed like a train whistle.

“*Marmaduke!* That’s your secret!”

“What?” Justine bounded over to the cats’ car and barged into it. Fang fell off as the car spun round. There, tied on to the other side of the cardboard cut-out and running along at full pelt, was Marmaduke.

“Cheat!” yelled Boo, and the dogs joined in.

“*Cheat! Cheat!*”

Marmaduke came to a halt. He was panting so hard that he could not say a word.

“*Cheat! Cheat!*”

“*Husshhhh,*” said Kimi fiercely. Everyone fell silent. “This vehicle is clearly cat-powered. That is a kind of alternative energy. It’s not against the rules.”

“So we win, then!” crowed Fang. “We’re the fastest!”

“Your vehicle is the fastest so far.”

“Yes!”

“However, it doesn’t actually have wheels that go round,” the snake went on. “It only has a picture of wheels. Therefore it is not a car. I disqualify it from the competition.”

“What! You can’t do that!” yowled Demon.

“I told you it was a stupid idea,” panted Marmaduke.

“Shut up!” snapped Fang. “You’re the stupid one. Why did you let them see you?”

“It was that horrid hamster’s fault,” whined Marmaduke.

“Enough!” said Kimi. “No points, because your entry doesn’t count.”

The sulky cats began to hiss at her until she bared her fangs and hissed back; at which they edged away, falling strangely silent.

“Get lost, you cheating cats!” yelled Tickety.

“*I’m* not a cheating cat. And you haven’t seen *my* car yet.”

Everybody turned. The black cat, Pibbles, sat in a car behind them. It had driven up so silently that nobody had heard it arrive. And this one was definitely a real car, not a cardboard cut-out.

“That’s the electric car from the showroom!” cried Horace. “That’s the Green Car!”

“No, it’s not,” said Pibbles. “You can see quite well that it’s purple.”

“With orange spots,” said Kimi, staring. “Well, that is certainly a vivid vehicle.”

“I call it the Fleeter Cheetah,” said Pibbles.

“That’s the Green Car! It’s still covered in dents!” exclaimed Horace indignantly. “All you’ve done is paint it!”

“Paint it? Certainly not.”

“No? Then why have you got purple splashes on your fur?” demanded Tickety.

“Look,” said Pibbles, “do you want to see this car go or not?” And without waiting for an answer, he released the handbrake. The purple-and-orange spotted Cheetah shot off as if fired from a cannon – a completely noiseless cannon.

With no Marmaduke bungling its pedals, it went very fast indeed. Pibbles was a skilful driver. The car sped twice around the playground in almost complete silence other than the whooping and yelping of admiring dogs.

“Wahey! Just look at it go!” cried Silverside.

“That car is so gorgeous,” sighed Jellybean.

“It really is as fast as a cheetah,” said Ragbag longingly.

“It’s not a cheetah. It’s a cheater!” said Horace furiously.

“I know. That’s what I just said.”

“It’s a fake!”

“You’re a fine one to talk about fakes,” snorted Boo. “What about your compost engine?”

Horace was silenced.

Meanwhile the Fleeter Cheetah was getting very fleet indeed. Pibbles was showing off his skills. After completing his second circuit of the playground, he did a handbrake turn which brought the car’s back end squealing round a full 180 degrees.

The car stopped – but only for an instant. Next it zoomed off towards the swings.

“Ooh!” went all the dogs as the purple car dived between the uprights, just skimming them on either side. The swing seat was thrown up in the air like a pizza carton. By the time it came down, the car had shot through the posts and gone.

“Watch this!” yelled Pibbles, as he launched the Cheetah at the roundabout.

The car hit the roundabout side on. It lodged there on the two nearside wheels, while the offside ones stayed on the ground. Creaking in complaint, the roundabout spun round, carrying the car with it.

“Ooooh!” gasped the dogs, as Pibbles let the roundabout haul the car through three full circles.

Then he wrenched at the wheel. The car shot off the roundabout and back across the playground.

This time it launched itself straight at the slide. Two wheels hit the chute. It was going so fast that it charged all the way up to the top of the slide before coming to a halt, wedged against the handrail.

And there it stopped. The dogs all waited expectantly for the next trick.

There was a moment's silence.

"Bother," said Pibbles.

He climbed out of the car and ran down the ladder. The car tilted slowly and then began to slide back down the chute.

This time, it did make a noise. It started with a GRIND, continued with a **WHOOSH** and ended with a **CRUNCH**.

Three dozen disappointed dogs looked at the mangled remains of the Fleeter Cheetah lying at the bottom of the slide. The purple paint had been scraped off in several places.

"Look! It's green underneath!" cried Horace. "I told you. That's the Green Car from the showroom!"

"A stolen car?" barked Justine, leaping to attention. "You'd better come down the station with me, Mr Pibbles – hoy! Come back here, you feline felon!"

But Pibbles had fled. As soon as the police dog opened her mouth, he turned tail and ran. He raced out of the playground, leaving his crumpled car behind.

"That was really rather good," said Boo wistfully. "How many marks for the Fleeter Cheetah?"

"None," said Kimi firmly. "Pibbles didn't design it himself, apart from the paint job. So it doesn't count. However, I think we had better get a move on now, before Mr Mordle comes looking for his car. Who have we got left?"

Horace took a deep breath.

"Me," he said.

## Chapter Fourteen

Rather shyly, Horace pushed his roller-skate into the arena.

He was worried that his car might seem a little tame at first, after the thrills of the Cheetah; but that would change as soon as it got going.

“And this is?” enquired Kimi.

“A flying car,” said Horace. He clutched the bundle of balloons in his front paws. Although they were securely tied to his roller-skate, he didn’t want them to take off too soon. “The wind will whisk it up into the sky!”

“Doesn’t that make it an aeroplane?” asked Tickety.

“No, because it doesn’t have wings,” Horace pointed out. “But it does have wheels.”

“Very small ones,” observed Kimi. “However, that’s enough for it to qualify as a car. If it does fly, I will be most impressed. How will you get down again?”

Horace had thought of that. “I’ll bite through the strings, one at a time, until I start to float down.”

“Good logic,” approved Kimi. “All right. Let’s see your flying car in action!”

Horace climbed onto the roller-skate and teetered there on one hind foot. He held out the balloons to catch the breeze. The roller-skate moved to and fro a little, making him wobble: but he did not take off.

“I don’t know why the balloons aren’t going up,” he said apologetically.

For instead, they all went down. They sank to the ground and bobbed there, dangling from their wool and showing no sign of wanting to zoom up into the sky.

“What are they filled with?” Kimi asked.

“Joshua’s breath,” said Horace.

“I see. I take it Joshua doesn’t breathe out helium.”



“What?”

Kimi sighed. “Helium is a gas that’s lighter than air,” she said. “Joshua’s breath isn’t. That’s why your balloons aren’t going anywhere. Still, two out of ten for the idea. And another one for the entertainment value,” she added as the roller-skate skidded suddenly forwards and Horace sat down with a thump.

He retreated with his balloons, rubbing himself. “Oh, well... I suppose three isn’t too bad. And maybe I can find some of this helium stuff.”

“Huh!” said Boo contemptuously. “That was hopeless. It didn’t go anywhere. And I’m still not talking to you.”

“Yes, you are,” Horace pointed out.

“No, I’m not. I’m just talking to you to tell you that I’m not talking to you.”

“Next!” called Kimi.

“That’s me!” said Boo. “Here I go!” And he wheeled out the car made of Joshua’s Meccano. It still seemed to be full of rubber bands.

“Why are there spikes on the wheels?” asked Kimi.

“To fend off interfering cats,” said Boo. The dogs cheered at this, while the cats hissed.

Boo bowed deeply to the audience. “Allow me to present the amazing elastic powered Boo Bomb.” Then, bending over the car, he cranked a handle that twisted the rubber bands tighter and tighter around the front axle.

Boo jumped into the car and let go of the crank handle. The car shot off like a tiny rocket.

“Wow!” cried the dogs as the car bounced along the tarmac, as sprightly as a playful squirrel. It got halfway to the slide before it stopped.

“Clever,” observed Kimi. “I wouldn’t have thought he had the brains for that.”

“His car almost took off!” said Horace wistfully.

“Unlike your useless effort,” snarled Fang.

“It went the fastest of the lot,” said Tickety, “if you don’t count those snide and sarky cheating cats.”

“I bet I can go even faster than them!” called Boo. He jumped out of the car, turned it round and wound it up again. As it sped back across the playground, all the dogs woofed applause.

“One more go!” said Boo excitedly. “I want to break my own record! Stunt hamsters forever!”

“Allow *me*,” said Marmaduke silkily. “You just sit there and I’ll wind it up.” As Boo sat in the car, the ginger cat began to turn the handle like a whirling dervish.

“Don’t wind it up too much!” warned Tickety.

“Yay! As much as you can!” cried Boo.

“Ready? On the count of three,” said Marmaduke. “Three.”

He let go and sprang out of the way.

The car sped off like a small torpedo – until it hit Fang’s foot, which the white cat just happened to stretch out in its path.

“Oops,” said Fang.

The car took off. So did Boo. The car somersaulted through the air. Boo somersaulted even higher.

“Boo!” screamed Tickety. “I’ll catch you!” She ran after him, holding out her arms, while the cats sniggered and the dogs began to bark in horror and alarm.

All except Horace. Horace did not bark. When Boo had been in danger of falling from the tree, Horace had not known what to do. He had been helpless.

But now, as Boo reached the apex of his flight and seemed to hover for an instant before beginning his long fall, Horace sprang into action.

He hopped on to his roller-skate and gave himself a mighty shove with his hind foot. The roller-skate rattled across the playground, trailing its bundle of balloons.

Pushing off again, Horace steered himself directly under Boo’s flight-path. By now the hamster was plummeting downwards faster and ever faster.

Horace got there just in time. Boo landed on the bunch of balloons. He bounced and boinged from one balloon to another and finally slid gently to the ground.

“Cool,” he said faintly, before collapsing in a small furry heap.

Tickety turned on Fang. “Murderer! Murderer!” she yelled, and rushed over to attend to Boo.

He was already trying to sit up. “Wow. That was even better than my ejector seat,” he said dazedly.

But the dogs took up the chant. “Murderers! Murderers!” they barked.

“Not my fault!” screeched Fang. “It was that Marmaduke!”

“Traitor!” hissed Marmaduke, lashing out a paw at Fang.

“You’re all in it together!” thundered Justine. “It’s no good trying to blame each other. You’re all guilty.”

And at that, the fur *did* fly.

First the squalling cats leapt on each other. Then half a dozen dogs began to pursue them round and round the playground, barking and baying.

After a hectic chase around the swings and a dash across the roundabout, the cats headed for the gate. They could be heard caterwauling insults at each other as they sprinted down the street.

“Well, that was a lot more exciting than I expected,” Kimi commented once the hubbub had died down. “Boo gets nine out of ten. A first-class effort. I declare him the winner.”

“Hooray! I am the champion!” yelled Boo, jumping up and down. “What’s my prize?”

“The cherry cup from my box of chocolates.”

“Is that all?”

“It’s all there is left,” said Kimi.

“Have you eaten that whole enormous box already, then?” asked Tickety, incredulous.

“No! No! Of course not,” Kimi said. “I haven’t eaten the cherry cup. And I’m also going to make a special award for gallantry.”

“To me?” squealed Boo.

Kimi shook her head. “To Horace, for quick thinking and for saving your little furry bonce from being broken like an egg. And I would like to remind you that he is not a cheat. Marmaduke tricked him, just as he tried to trick us all.”

“Oh! Well, all right. Thank you, Horace.”

“Are you talking to me now?” asked Horace.

Boo considered. “Yes,” he said graciously. “Because you also gave me some good ideas for my winning car. So I think I am.”

“Me too,” said Tickety. “I take it all back about you being a cheat. That was a brave and clever rescue. I’m glad to be your friend.”

Horace glowed with pride and happiness. He might have earned only three out of ten for his non-flying car, and the special award turned out to be an empty chocolate box; but he had his friends back, and that was what counted more than anything.

Anyway, Boo’s car was so good that it would certainly win the Golden Arrow. And now that they were all friends again, Boo would be bound to let Horace have a go in it.

In fact, an even better thought occurred to Horace. Since hamsters couldn’t drive a proper car, they would need a chauffeur for the Golden Arrow. They would need Horace to drive it for them! What a perfect outcome!

He spun round three times, tail wildly wagging, and then toppled over to roll in the empty chocolate box. He was in total bliss.

## Chapter Fifteen

Horace lay happily in the living room with a doggy chew and the cherry cup.

Boo had generously given the cherry cup to him, only slightly nibbled. Horace hadn't eaten it, because it smelt like worming tablets, but it was the thought that counted.

And he had some very happy thoughts. Boo had packed his rubber-band powered car into an empty teabag box and was currently covering it with brown paper and sticky tape.

Tickety was laboriously writing out a label that said

**GOLDN AROW COMPETETETIshn**

When it was ready, Horace had agreed to take it down to the post office and leave it there.

There was a sharp rap at the front door. Horace jumped up and began to woof.

“Stranger! Stranger!”

“Be quiet, Horace,” said Mrs Hay on her way to open the door. Horace stood behind her, ready to defend his family from the small, round man in a green suit who stood outside.

“Mrs Hay? I've come about the Golden Arrow competition,” he began.

Horace's ears pricked up. What was he doing here already? Could he have heard about Boo's wonderful car before it had even been sent off? News travelled fast, he thought.

“Oh, yes?” said Mrs Hay.

“As you may know, the competition closed last week for judging.”

“What?” barked Horace. “*What?* Oh no, no, no!”

“Stop it, Horace!” said Mrs Hay. “I'm so sorry. I don't know what's got into him! Lie down, Horace.”

Horace lay down and whimpered. He was too late! Too late! Too late! Poor Boo. His elastic driven car could never win. How would he break the bad news to the hamster? He felt he had let Boo down.

“Well, I am very pleased to tell you,” said the man, “that Joshua’s magnificent design has won first prize!”

Mrs Hay looked stunned. She put a hand to her mouth. “First prize? He’s won the Golden Arrow?” she gasped. “Well, I never! Oh, I wish Joshua was here right now! He’s at school – but he’ll be thrilled!”

“So am I!” barked Horace, scrambling to his feet again. He felt amazed and giddy with delight.

“I’ll tell you what. Why don’t I come back at four o’clock to present him with his prize?” the man suggested. “We could arrange for the Golden Arrow to drive round the corner just outside your house, to meet Joshua when he walks home from school.”

“Ooh, yes! That would be a wonderful surprise for him!” said Mrs Hay.

Horace barked agreement.

“Be quiet, Horace, you daft dog.”

But he had already galloped back to the living room to tell the hamsters the extraordinary news.

“Golden Arrow! Golden Arrow! Joshua’s won!” he yelped ecstatically.

“Yippee!” squealed Boo.

“Whoopee!” cried Tickety. The pair of them began to trampoline on the sofa.

“Stunt hamsters!” yelled Boo, doing a double back somersault.

Horace left the happy hamsters bouncing, and ran off down the road to spread the word to Kimi and the other dogs. His friends were just as thrilled as he was.

So, by four o'clock, there was a row of expectant dogs, hamsters and a well-concealed snake lined up along the street, all looking out for Joshua as he walked home from school. Even Pibbles sauntered up casually, and sneaked on to the end of the waiting row.

They seemed to wait for ever. Then at last they saw Josh trudging up the street towards them.

"Hallo, Horace," he said, surprised. "What's going on?"

The small, round man skipped through the gate with a wide grin.

"Joshua! Champion car-designer!" he announced. "We are very proud to present you with your fantastic, fantabulous first prize."

"What?" Josh looked dazed.

"I give you – the *gorgeous Golden Arrow!*"

He stretched out his arm. Josh stared down the road, his mouth open. All the dogs craned their necks to see the Golden Arrow arriving.

"There it is! There it is, coming round the corner!" squealed Tickety. "Oh, wow! It's just like in the picture! It's truly gorgeous!"

It was.

It was beautiful, smooth and sleek. It shone like the evening sun. It purred like a hungry lioness. It really did look like a gleaming golden arrowhead on wheels.

And it was exactly the same size as Joshua's shoe.

It purred up to Joshua and stopped. A man who had been walking behind it handed over a small black box.

"Here are the controls, Joshua," he said. "That's a great little radio-controlled car. Enjoy!"

"Thanks! Awesome!" grinned Joshua.

"Why are those dogs all howling?" wondered Mrs Hay. "What's wrong with them? And what's wrong with *you*, Horace? You look like you've just swallowed a snail."

Horace was staring at the car in disbelief. What had happened? Somebody had shrunk the wonderful Golden Arrow! He could never drive it now.

But then, from his side, came tiny cheers.

“Oh, excellent!” cried Tickety.

“It’s perfect!” exclaimed Boo. “It’s exactly hamster size!”

“We’re the winners!”

“*Stunt hamsters forever!*”

And the pair of them began to dance round Horace, laughing in triumphant glee.

## THE END

Have you read the first two books about Horace and his friends? Book 1 of the *Wheeler*s series, *Petrol Paws*, and Book 2, *Race Night*, are free to download from Emma Laybourn’s website at

[www.megamousebooks.com](http://www.megamousebooks.com).

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