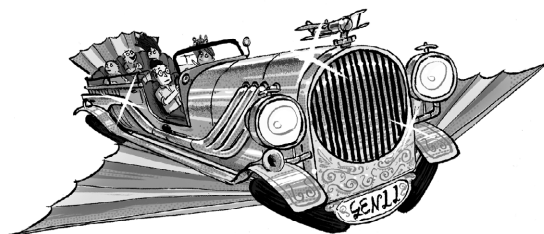


1



Most cars are just cars. Four wheels. An engine. Some seats. They take you to work or to school. Then they bring you home again. The Tooting family car was not one of these. The Tooting family car was different. The Tooting family car was a beautiful, green, perfectly restored 1921 Paragon Panther, the only one ever built. Her wheels flashed in the sunshine. Her long, majestic bonnet gleamed. Her seats were as soft as silk, and the instruments on her walnut dashboard sparkled like summer. The glossy ebony handle of her Chronojuster glowed invitingly. Most cars don't have a Chronojuster. It's a special handle that allows you to drive backward and forward in time. That's how special Chitty Chitty Bang Bang is—time travel is fitted as standard.

If an ordinary car breaks down, it might end up in a lay-by with steam coming out of the engine. When the Tooting family car broke down, it ended up in an ancient steaming jungle being eyed by a hungry dinosaur.

“Dinosaur!” yelled Little Harry. He seemed to think that the rest of his family might not have noticed the gigantic head swaying over the treetops, drooling spit, and bellowing its hunger.

“Dinosaur!” yelled Little Harry again.

None of them had ever seen such a creature before. No living being has ever seen such a creature. But all of them—even Little Harry—knew what it was.

Tyrannosaurus rex.

“Hang on, everyone,” yelled Dad. “Jem, watch the back. We’re going to reverse.”

Dad pushed hard on the accelerator and yanked the gears around. Black smoke billowed from the exhaust. Sludge splattered into the air. Chitty Chitty Bang Bang moved. Six inches. Down into the mud.

Then her engine stopped.

“Why has the engine stopped?” asked Mum.

“It’s just stalled,” said Dad.

No one said a word. They were all thinking the same thing. To start the engine, someone would

have to get out of the car and turn the crank handle.

"If we just sit tight, maybe it won't see us and we'll be safe."


"Or maybe it will see the car and think, *Oh, tinned Tootings!*" muttered Mum.

"Or maybe it will crush us underfoot," said Lucy, "burying us in mud so that over the years we turn into fossils, and in millions of years, we will be one of the great mysteries of science—a family of humans that somehow managed to get themselves fossilized in the age of dinosaurs. We'll be the Great Tooting Conundrum. Except they won't know our name was Tooting."

The head loomed closer. It was so vast that Jem felt like he was staring at something through a microscope. He could see the bits of mud and twigs caught in the folds of its pebbly skin; the stains of blood on its white dagger teeth. Its tongue was as rough as a gravel path. Its nostrils were a pair of wet, grungy bin lids; its eye, a tiny, twitchy rivet.

Maybe it won't see us, thought Jem.

But just as he thought that, those bin-lid nostrils twitched. They closed up. They opened again. The tyrannosaur had sniffed, and its sniff was so powerful that every leaf and branch rattled and Lucy's hair went flying round her head. It was sniffing for food. It had definitely sniffed out the Tootings.



"Fascinating," said Lucy. "For years now, there has been a debate about whether *Tyrannosaurus rex* was a true predator—able to move fast and catch and kill its prey—or whether it was just a very big scavenger, eating only animals that were already dead."

"Why is that interesting?" said Jem.

"Because if it is a scavenger, it will leave us alone; but if it is a predator, it will kill us."

"Actually, that *is* quite interesting."

There was a sound like the sound that a house might make if someone picked it up and dropped it from a great height. It was the creature's foot, landing a few yards



in front of them. Its curved, cruel claws dug into the earth as it steadied itself. Its toes stretched like leathery bridges. Its leg was a tower of meat. Under the skin, chains of muscle shifted like the gears of a terrible machine.

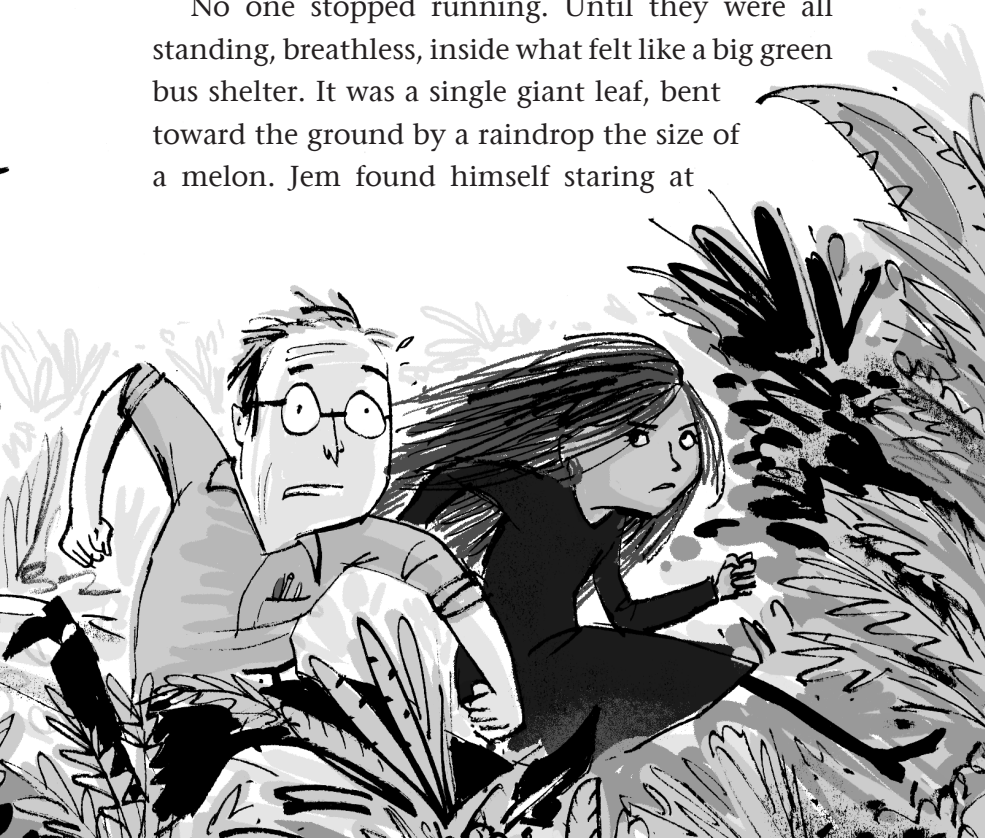
"On balance," said Lucy, "I'm going to say predator."

Everyone leaped out of the car and into the undergrowth.

No one looked up.

No one looked back.

No one stopped running. Until they were all standing, breathless, inside what felt like a big green bus shelter. It was a single giant leaf, bent toward the ground by a raindrop the size of a melon. Jem found himself staring at



the changing patterns on its surface. He could hear his father and mother discussing what to do, but for some reason he couldn't tear his attention away from those patterns.

"We need to get far away from that tyrannosaur as quickly as possible," said Dad. Not a sentence he'd ever expected to have to say.

"But what if there's another tyrannosaur round the corner?" said Mum. "What if there's a HERD of them?"

"Opinion is divided," said Lucy, "but it's definitely possible that they moved in herds."

Suddenly Jem realized what the fascinating pattern on the surface of the raindrop was. "Little Harry!" he gasped. For the pattern was the reflection of Little Harry's bottom as he crawled back into danger.

"Dinosaur!" giggled Little Harry—correctly—as he toddled through the undergrowth.

Without pausing to think, Jem ran after him. Surely he would catch him in no time. But it was amazing how quickly his little brother could move on his hands and knees. Unlike Jem, Little Harry did not have to push leaves and branches out of the way or clamber over roots and stones. He just kept shuffling forward, singing, "Dino-saur. Dino-saur . . ." until he crawled out into the sunlight where the

huge, savage, drooling creature was now examining the bonnet of the car with its nose.

"Dinosaur!" yelled Little Harry, and waved at it merrily.

The dinosaur turned its mighty head toward him as Jem burst through the undergrowth and swept his little brother into his arms. He was about to turn and run back to safety when something stopped him. The eye. That tiny, dark eye was staring straight at Jem. The tyrannosaur was looking at Jem, and Jem could not look away. Not even when that wide mouth opened, not even when that fence of cutlass teeth flashed in the sun, not even when that giant foot unhooked itself from the ground and swung into the air.

Then there came a terrible noise, an earsplitting, tree-shaking noise, a noise that made Jem jump, a noise that went . . . *Ga gooo ga!*

Ga gooo ga? thought Jem. *That's not a very dinosaury noise.*

"Ga gooo ga!"

"That sounds like . . ."

"Ga gooo ga!"

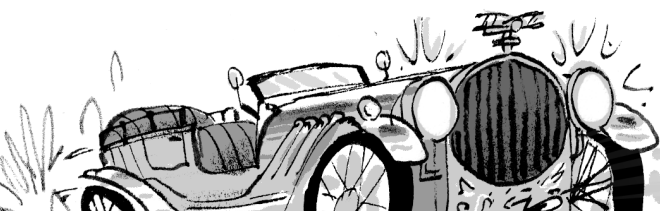
It was Chitty Chitty Bang Bang sounding her unbelievably loud original 1921 motor Klaxon.

"Ga gooo ga!"

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There was only one thing that the tyrannosaur wanted to know about Chitty Chitty Bang Bang: namely, could you eat her? She put her mighty foot down and turned to look at the Thing That Went Ga Gooo Ga.

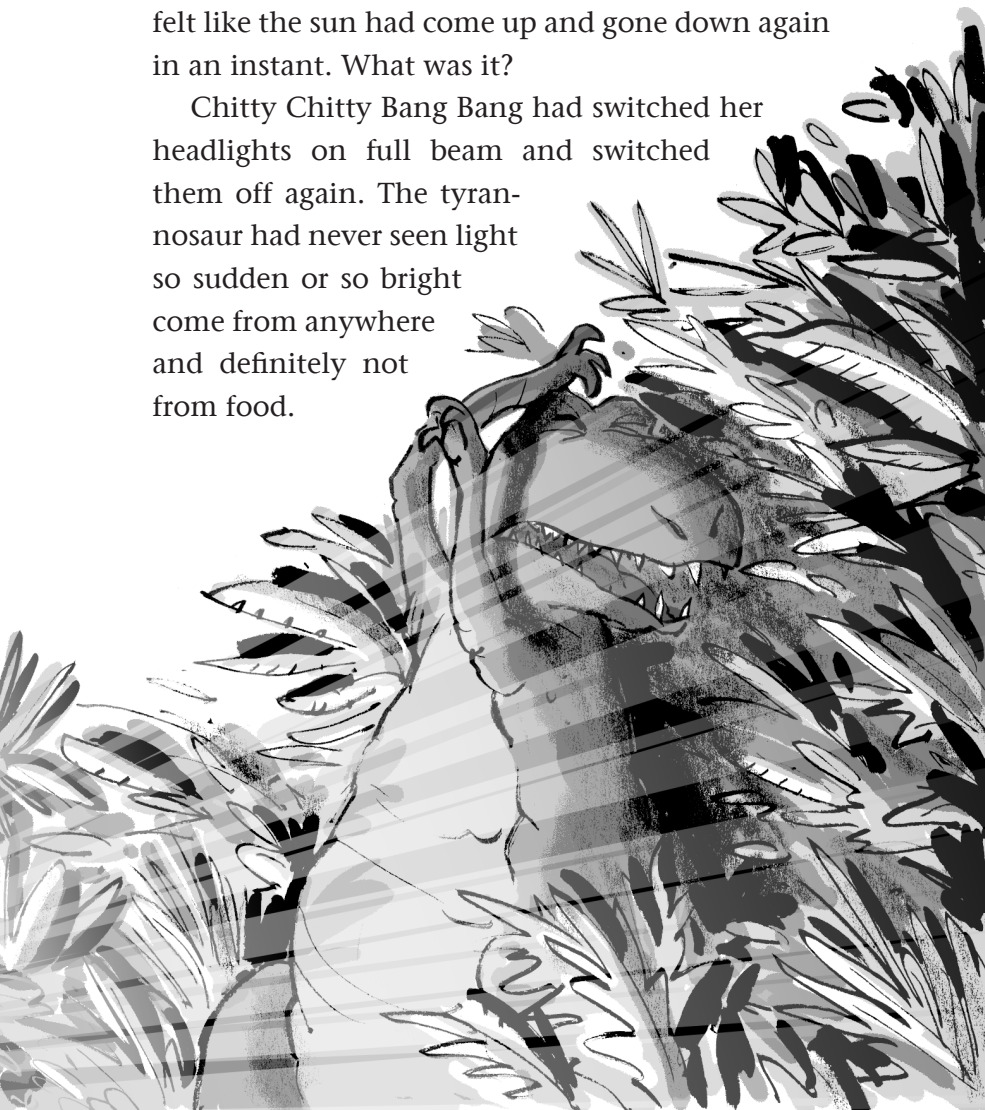
The standard Tyrannosaurus Test for Whether You Can Eat a Thing or Not is: Does it try to run away? If it doesn't try to run away, it's probably not fresh. The Thing That Went Ga Gooo Ga didn't try to run away. On the other hand, it didn't smell off. It smelled sort of interesting. This tyrannosaur was not a fussy eater. "Interesting" was nearly as good as "fresh" in her book. Another standard Tyrannosaurus Test for Whether You Can Eat a Thing or Not is: Does it beg for mercy? Does it scream, "Please, don't eat me!" or "Run, children, run!"? The Thing That Went Ga Gooo Ga hadn't said a word until now, but here it was saying, "Ga gooo ga!" This did not sound like a plea for mercy. It sounded more like a warning or even—but this was impossible—a *threat*?! No one had ever threatened the tyrannosaur before. She wasn't sure how she felt about it. It gave her an unusual feeling in her tummy. It might well have been the beginning of a laugh, but because she'd never laughed before, she didn't recognize it.



So she was already slightly uneasy when the next thing happened.

The Thing That Went Ga Gooo Ga threw a bolt of lightning at her. Every shadow in the glade shifted as though the whole forest were whirling. It felt like the sun had come up and gone down again in an instant. What was it?

Chitty Chitty Bang Bang had switched her headlights on full beam and switched them off again. The tyrannosaur had never seen light so sudden or so bright come from anywhere and definitely not from food.



That was it. She decided to give up on the whole idea of eating Chitty Chitty Bang Bang and concentrate instead on eating those little creatures that were running around. Namely, the Tooting family.

By now Mum was happily hugging Little Harry in the safety of the bus-shelter leaf.

“How could you do such a thing?” she said, covering him with kisses. “Don’t ever run away again.”

“We have to stick together,” said Dad. “Oh!”

Dad said “Oh” because the melon-size raindrop had finally fallen off the end of the bus-shelter leaf and exploded around his feet like a water bomb. Without the water to hold it down, the leaf sprang back into place on its branch.

“Amazing.” Lucy sighed. With the leaf gone, they could see the whole forest rising around them. Wisps of mist drifted between the tree trunks. A dragonfly the size of a bicycle flitted among the ferns, its million-colour wings whirring in and out of visibility. Beyond all that, the huge, oily back of the tyrannosaur moved away.

“Now, that,” Lucy sighed, “is a predator.” She took out her phone—which was shaped like a big jelly baby—and began to film.

She was right about this. *Tyrannosaurus rex* was

a predator, and like all predators it noticed every single little thing. This tyrannosaur, for instance, even noticed the tiny flash of light that sparked from the tiny lens of the camera of Lucy's phone. It turned its head around to get a better look.

The moment it saw the Tooting family, the tyrannosaur felt more relaxed. They were definitely food. They were doing all the things that food was supposed to do—running around in a confused way and screaming their heads off. The screams in particular really got the tyrannosaur's juices going. She swung around. She would be over them in a single stride.

"Run!" yelled Dad.

"But keep together!" yelled Mum.

"Hold hands!" yelled Dad.

They held hands and ran into the undergrowth, hoping that the ferns would hide them. The ferns didn't hide them. In fact, their every move made the fern tops shake in a way that said "Dinner's here." The tyrannosaur carefully lined herself up with the Tooting family's escape route. Her colossal tail swept through the glade as she steadied herself.

The Tootings followed Dad between the thick stalks of the primeval fern. With Little Harry perched on his shoulders, Dad dodged left and then right. He thought that maybe if the tyrannosaur

was watching them, this would make her dizzy or confuse her tiny brain.

Sadly he was wrong. All the dodging just made the food look fresher and more tasty.

It also made Jem anxious. He was thinking, *What if we get lost? It was Chitty that brought us here. Only Chitty can take us back. If we lose track of where she is, we'll be stuck here, dodging hungry tyrannosaurs for the rest of our lives.*

Then Jem stopped running.

And so did Mum.

And so did Dad.

And so did Lucy.

They stopped dead in their tracks.

They stared in horror into the undergrowth.

Something was coming toward them. Scything through the leaves and stalks and branches at amazing speed.

It wasn't the tyrannosaur.

It was too fast, too low, and much, much too unstoppable.

"Duck!" yelled Dad.

They threw themselves onto the ground just in time as the something crashed out of the undergrowth and hurtled through the air above their heads.

It smacked into the ground behind them.

"Ga gooo ga!"

It was Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. When the tyrannosaur swung around, she had swiped the car with her tail and sent her spinning through the air, right into the path of the Tootings.

"Well, at least that got her out of the mud," said Dad. "Thanks, tyrannosaur."

The tyrannosaur probably heard him say this, because by now she was towering directly over the Tootings, with her mouth wide open, ready to swallow them.

Then she saw that thing. That Thing That Went Ga Gooo Ga went *"Ga gooo ga"* again. Then it did its lightning again. Then the food that she was about to eat climbed inside it. This really worried the tyrannosaur. To a tyrannosaur, if food—for instance, a family—climbs inside something, that means that the something has eaten the food. The something was eating her food, right in front of her. How unbelievably cheeky! The tyrannosaur decided to think this over and possibly discuss it with some other tyrannosaurs.

The Tooting family settled down happily into the lovely soft leather of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang's seats and breathed deep, contented sighs.

"In all my long life," said Mum, "I have never seen anything so relaxing and reassuring as the

sight of a tyrannosaur walking in the opposite direction from me and my family.”

“Let’s see if we can get this Chronojuster to take us home,” said Dad.

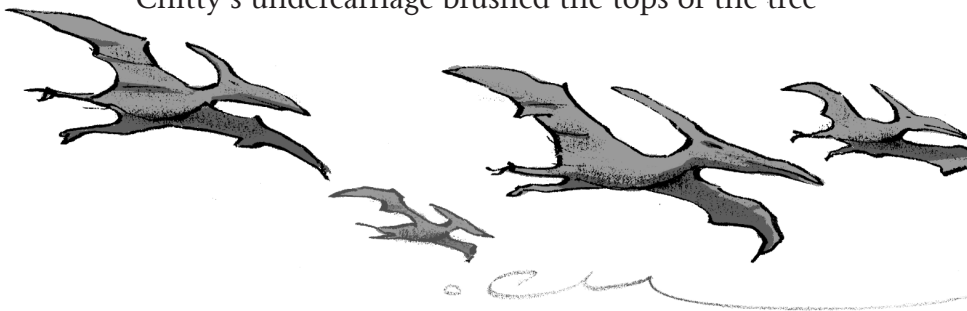
“What?” said Mum. “We’ve come all the way to the Cretaceous period, we’ve just escaped an attack by a *Tyrannosaurus rex*, and you want to go HOME? Surely we’re going to take a look around first?”

“Take a look around?” said Dad. “I honestly think from a health-and-safety point of view that the idea of taking a look around a fetid swamp full of flesh-eating monsters—”

“Not in a swamp full of monsters,” said Mum. “In a luxurious flying car.”

“Oh,” said Dad.

Jem cranked the handle. Chitty’s engine purred. Her wheels sliced through the soft ground, and when she was going just fast enough, Dad pulled the ebony flight button, and Chitty flicked out her wide, elegant wings. The wings caught the breeze, and soon the car was soaring up through the shreds of mist, slaloming through the giant conifers. When Chitty’s undercarriage brushed the tops of the tree



ferns, dozens of giant dragonflies came skittering out, their wings a hurry of rainbows. A butterfly floated by—so big they could see the feathers on its antennae. From the top branches of a gigantic magnolia, a family of what looked like stripy mice watched them intently.

“Strange to think,” said Lucy, “that we’re related. They must be like our second cousins nine million times removed.”

She took a photo for the family album.

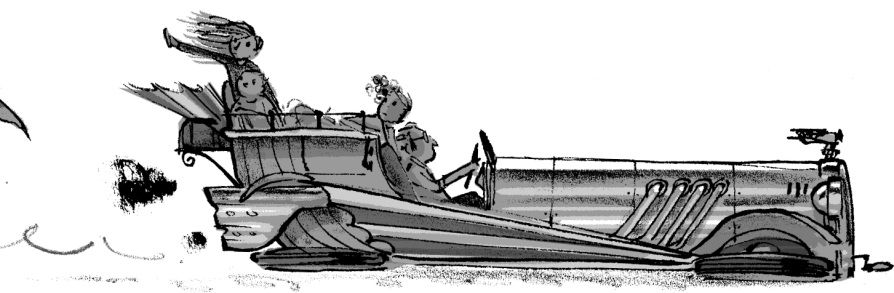
Then all of a sudden, they were above the treetops.

“Look at those weird branches sticking out of the treetops,” said Jem. “They look like gargoyles.”

The moment he said this, the gargoyle branches leaned forward and flopped into the air, opening up their leathery wings and stretching out their leathery necks.

“Pterodactyls,” said Lucy, taking out her jelly-baby camera again. “They seem to be interested in us, and the feeling is mutual.”

Jem dug out Chitty’s manual and started to flick through the pages frantically to see if she had any form of onboard anti-pterodactyl defences. But



when he looked up, he saw that the creatures were surprisingly small and unthreatening. They were following the beautiful car through the clear blue sky, the way children at home might follow it along the pavement. Even pterodactyls could appreciate the loveliness of Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.

“Do you think they like chocolate?” asked Mum, pulling out a bag of chocolates that she’d bought in a shop in Basildon. She threw one to the nearest pterodactyl. It folded its wings, caught it, and threw back its neck to swallow it.

“The word today,” said Dad, “is surely *unbelievable photo opportunity*.”

“Oh. Yes,” said Lucy. “Do it again. I didn’t catch it.”

They flew over the forest, tossing chocolate to pterodactyls, without a care in the world. Until Lucy asked if she could have one.

“Do you think they’ll be all right?” said Dad. “You don’t think time travel might have affected them?”

“Of course they’re all right,” said Mum. “Their sell-by date is sixty-six million years in the future. Youngest first . . .”

She held the packet out to Little Harry.

That was the first time anyone noticed.

Little Harry wasn’t there.