

Boy

Page 80 to 82

When we are driving up the road from Flikanflak, we begin to notice a funny smell in the limousine. A burning smell. We all sniff loudly. Burning rubber. In a little downhill section in the mainly uphill road, Captain switches off the ignition and goes on sniffing as we free-wheel a few yards. He puts his head out of the window and sniffs again. The smell is just as bad when the engine's off.

So it's not the engine. I'm scared to say anything in case he calls me a 'diagnostician' again. He switches the engine on again, in case there's trouble restarting it, then he brakes, and brings the car to a halt. He leaves the engine ticking over on high revs.

Kid and I get out. We look at the wheels one by one, and find that there is a bit of car chassis scraping the left back wheel, causing the rubber to melt and smell burnt like that.

'Damn! No spare tyre left either,' I swear. 'Tempting gods, we were. You were right. Captain.'

'No problem,' Captain says, 'I'll go slowly. It's only rubbing slightly, isn't it? She'll take us home yet, that left rear tyre.' I realize that I don't even know where home is for them.

So we drive on, slow. Real slow.

Captain sings 'It's a long way to Tipperary'. He's got songs for everything.

I say I'm not going to get off at Montan Bol. I will stay with them until Banbu just in case the car needs pushing.

'Thanks,' they say, 'most kind of you.'

As we are going into Banbu, just opposite the entrance to the Medinn sugar estate, where the white-barked trees on each side of the road are so huge that they meet in the middle, making a tunnel, we hear another explosion. Third in one day.

This time we all get out and tear around to the left rear tyre, which must have exploded.

But no, it hasn't.

Wrong again. There it is, still in fine shape. All plump and happy. Only slightly burnt in a line around its circumference.

'I don't believe it,' Captain says. 'Don't tell me.'

We walk around the car, all three of us together, to do an inspection.

Another tyre, the front right one, has exploded.