

# Crossing the road

*This extract is from the beginning of 'The Hodgeheg', a story by the author Dick King-Smith.*

“Your Auntie Betty has copped it,” said Pa Hedgehog to Ma.

“Oh no!” cried Ma. “Where?”

“Just down the road. Opposite the newsagent’s. Bad place to cross, that.”

“Everywhere’s a bad place to cross nowadays,” said Ma. “The traffic’s dreadful. Do you realise, Pa, that’s the third this year, and all on my side of the family too? First there was Grandfather, then my second cousin once removed, and now poor old Auntie Betty....”

They were sitting in a flower-bed at their home, the garden of Number 5A of a row of semi-detached houses in a suburban street. On the other side of the road was a Park, very popular with local hedgehogs on account of the good hunting it offered. As well as worms and slugs and snails, which they could find in their own gardens, there were special attractions in the Park. Mice lived under the Bandstand, feasting on the crumbs dropped from the listeners’ sandwiches; frogs dwelt in the Lily-Pond, and in the Ornamental Gardens grass-snakes slithered through the shrubbery. All these creatures were regarded as great delicacies by the hedgehogs, and they could never resist the occasional night’s sport in the Park. But to reach it they had to cross the busy road.

“Poor old Auntie Betty,” said Ma again. “It’s a hard life and that’s fact.”

“It’s a hard death,” said Pa sourly “and that’s flat too – talk about squashed, the poor old girl was ....”

“Sssshhhhh!” said Ma at the sound of approaching footsteps. “Not in front of the children,” as up trotted four small figures, exact miniatures of their parents except that their spines were still greyish rather than brown.

