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Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang The Magical Car Adventure Number Two

Also in this series

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You Only Live Twice

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Dedication

These stories are affectionately dedicated to the memory of the original CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG, built in 1920 by Count Zborowski on his estate near Canterbury.

She had a pre-1914 War, chain-drive, 75 horse-power Mercedes chassis, in which was installed a six-cylinder Zeppelin-Maybach aeroplane engine—the military type used by the Germans in their Gotha bombers.

Four vertical overhead valves per cylinder were operated by exposed push-rods and rockers from a cam-shaft on each side of the crank-case, and two Zenith carburettors were attached, one at each end of a long induction-pipe.

She had a grey, torpedo-shaped four-seater body built by Blythe Brothers of Canterbury.

In 1921 she won the Hundred M.P.H. Short Handicap at Brooklands at 101 miles per hour, and in 1922, again at Brooklands, the Lightning Short Handicap. But in that year she was involved in an accident^[1] and never raced again.

I.F.

^[1] This is a polite way of putting it. In fact CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG suddenly went mad with rage about something, and with the Count at the wheel, got out of control and charged through the timing-hut, very fast, backwards!

Adventure Number Two

Before we begin on the further adventures of our magical car, I must remind you of where we got to in Adventure Number One.

There was this rather nice and adventurous family called Pott—Commander Caractacus Pott, father, Mimsie Pott, mother, and the twins, Jeremy and Jemima Pott. They didn't have much money, but Commander Pott, who was an inventor and explorer, invented the Crackpot Whistling Sweet, which, because it had two holes cleverly drilled through it, made a wonderful whistling noise when, after sucking it, you blew down the holes. He sold the invention to the famous Skrumshus sweet firm and with the money bought the wreck of a famous old racing-car, the twelve-cylinder, eight-litre Paragon Panther, long and low and painted in England's racing colours, which are bright green. And, by the time Jeremy and Jemima had come back from their summer term, Commander Pott had worked and worked on the wreck until it was as good as new and perhaps the most beautiful car in the world. But, besides some inventions of his own, there were a lot of knobs and levers and winking lights on the dashboard which remained a mystery even to Commander Pott.

The whole family set off for the seaside near Dover in the gleaming new car, but they soon ran into long queues of cars going the same way, and it was then that CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG, which was what they had christened the car because of the extraordinary noises she made when she started up, suddenly developed wings and a propeller and took to the air. Yes, that's right, she flew just like an aeroplane, using her mudguards as wings and her radiator fan as a propeller.

They got to the coast, but all the beaches were covered with other holiday-makers, so CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG flew the family out to the famous Goodwin Sands in the middle of the English Channel and landed them gently there so that they could all have a wonderful paddle and swim and a hunt among the old wrecks of ships that have been shipwrecked on these dangerous sands. After their bathe and a delicious picnic, the whole family dozed off for a little after-lunch rest, and they didn't notice that the tide was slowly creeping up on its way to covering the Goodwin Sands completely. And now the Pott family and CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG are IN MORTAL DANGER! That's how we left them at the end of the Adventure Number One, and the situation, with them and CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG marooned on the Goodwin Sands in the middle of the English Channel, is enough to frighten you—and them, except that they are all fast asleep, dozing in the sun—*out of your and their wits!*

To make matters worse, one of those summer mists came creeping across the sea, hiding the family and their magical car from the Goodwin Lightship, which lies anchored some way to the south of the Goodwins. To warn them and all shipping of the terrible danger of the sands, the lightship began sounding its great fog-horn, which is one of the loudest in the world, and blinking its dazzling white danger light.

It was CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG who first woke up to the danger. You see, she had got very hot flying out to the sands and sitting in the sunshine, and as the sea came creeping up, glug-glugging in the hulls of the wrecks and whispering softly over the flat sand, the water gradually submerged the wheels of CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG. When it reached the bottom of her radiator she let out a loud warning hiss from the hot metal.

The family opened dozy eyes and then at once they were all on their feet and Commander Pott was running to the car. He jumped in and pressed the self-starter, and with a quick "CHITTY! CHITTY! BANG! BANG!" of relief the big car, spinning her wheels in the wet sand so that the spray flew, crept up out of the incoming tide and was steered by Commander Pott up on to the dry centre of the rapidly diminishing sandbank where the rest of the family was waiting.

"Quick! Jump in!" he shouted. "We've just got room to take off." But as Jeremy and Jemima piled into the back seats and Mimsie got in front, already the first little waves had run up the flat sands after them and the bottoms of the tyres were awash again.

"My goodness!" said Commander Pott anxiously. "Now we've had it! CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG can never get up enough speed to take off through the water. The only hope is that the lightship will realize the trouble we're in and send their rescue boat for us. But that'll mean leaving poor CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG marooned out here alone, and she'll gradually be covered by the sea. During the night, she may easily be washed off the sands into deep water and we'll lose her for ever!"

They all sat there gloomily as the water glugged around them and the fog thickened and there was no sign of a rescue boat. They suddenly realized that they might all be drowned out there in the middle of the English Channel.

All this while, CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S engine had been running steadily on, but very soon, any minute now, the level of the sea would be up to her electric generator; there would be the blinding blue flash of a short circuit and the engine would go dead.

Suddenly, amongst the many dials and buttons and levers on the dashboard, a violet light began to blink urgently showing the words "TURN THE KNOB". And quickly, although Commander Pott didn't know the secret of every one of the row upon row of gadgets on the dashboard, he turned the knob under the violet light, and from underneath the car there came a soft grinding of cog-wheels and a curious lifting and shifting of the chassis, so that the whole family peered out over the sides to see what was happening.

And do you know what? I bet you can't guess! All four wheels, pointing fore and aft as all car wheels do, had turned and had now flattened out like a hovercraft! Being an inventor, Commander Pott realized what this meant and what the result would be, so he pressed slowly on the accelerator and, just as the waves came up level with the floor-boards, all four wheels began to turn like propellers. There was a jerk and CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG began to move through the water, just like a motor-boat, with the four wheels whizzing round and round propelling her forward.

Well, that was all very fine, but she was a heavy car with four people in her and the only way to keep from sinking was to go so fast that they were almost skimming over the surface. So Commander Pott trod the accelerator into the floor-boards, there was a great whirl of spray from the four wheels and CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG fairly sped across the surface of the sea, kicking up a big bow wave like a speed-boat.

Commander Pott had quite a tricky time dodging the masts of the sunken wrecks on the Goodwin Sands, weaving in and out of the tall, rusty, iron spikes as if they were involved in some kind of watery maze—but a dangerous one, because if Commander Pott hadn't whirled the wheel this way and that they would have ended up as just another Goodwin wreck. The fog swirled around them, the fog horn from the lightship gave its huge double hoot every two minutes and it really was pretty dangerous and spooky.

To tell the truth, Mimsie and Jeremy and Jemima held their breath and clutched tight to the arm-rests, expecting any moment to hear a grinding crash and find themselves swimming for dear life. But somehow Commander Pott and CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG between them managed to dodge all the obstacles and soon they were in clear water and swooshing along through the fog.

They had all let out a great "*Pouff!*" of relief when Jeremy, who'd got a good bump of locality, said, "But Daddy, aren't we pointing the wrong way? There's the hoot of the Goodwin Lightship fog-horn coming from down on the right. Oughtn't we to sail towards her and then on past her towards Dover?"

Commander Pott said sternly, "You mustn't say 'down on the right'. We're all sailors now. You must say 'to starboard'—that's naval language for 'right'. And at sea 'left' is 'port'." He twirled the wheel to the left so that CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG swirled to the left. "Now we're going to port." He turned the wheel to the right. "Now we're going to starboard. Quite easy to remember. 'Port' and 'left' both have fewer letters in them than 'right' and 'starboard'. Got it?"

"Well, yes," said Jeremy, "that sounds easy. But still, Daddy, whichever way you're going, to port or starboard, I bet you're going the wrong way—away from England, I mean."

At this, Commander Caractacus Pott put on his secret face—the face he wore around Christmas time when Jeremy and Jemima asked if they were going to get what they had asked Father Christmas for, and the face he put on when, for instance, he was preparing the Easter-egg hunt. All of them, Mimsie and Jeremy and Jemima, recognized their father's "secret" face and waited excitedly for what was to come, as CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG sped on through the fog, throwing up fountains of spray from her whirling wheels while the sound of the Goodwin Lightship's fog-horn got farther and farther away.

"Well," said Commander Pott in his "surprise" voice (he also had a particular voice for springing surprises with), "it's the holidays, isn't it?"

"Yes," they chorused.

"So we'd all like to have a holiday adventure. Right?"

"Yes," they said breathlessly.

"Well," said Commander Pott, "CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG is going like smoke. The Channel's as flat as a mill-pond. We've got plenty of petrol and the oil pressure's fine, the engine temperature's all right, and the fog will lift the farther we get away from land, and it can't be more than about twenty-five miles now to the other side of the Channel, and we're doing about thirty knots and a naval knot is 1.15 miles per hour, which gives a speed of about thirty-five miles per hour, so the whole trip would take less than an hour. And as it's only just five o'clock now—" he paused for breath—"and as we've never been abroad, I thought it would be rather fun to *go to France!*"

"Good heavens!" said Mimsie.

"Gosh!" said Jemima.

"My hat!" said Jeremy.

And for a moment they all sat thinking about this colossal adventure. Then Mimsie said, "But we haven't got any passports!"

And Jeremy said, "But don't they have different money in France—francs, they're called. What about francs?"

And Jemima said, "What about the language? I've only learned 'oui', which means 'yes', and 'non', which means 'no'. That's not going to get me very far."

Commander Pott said firmly, "That's no way to treat adventures. Never say 'no' to adventures. Always say 'yes', otherwise you'll lead a very dull life. Now then, passports—we'll make for Calais, which is dead ahead, and go to the British Consul who represents all English people, from the Queen down, in Calais, and get provisional passports. Money? We've got pounds and we'll change them into francs. Language—Mimsie and I both talk French a bit and if we can't make ourselves understood we'll find someone who talks English. More people in the world talk English than any other language and we'll soon find someone. Right? Then that's settled. CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S going to take

us right across the English Channel to France. Now then, we'll turn on the radio and get the weather report for ships and we'll steer a bit more towards the north, as there's quite a current running down the Channel and we don't want to be swept along with it and suddenly find ourselves in Portugal or even in Africa." He chuckled. "Do we?"

And all together, and very loud and definitely, they said, "No, we don't!"

So Commander Pott fiddled with the dials on the radio and out came the familiar voice they had never bothered to listen to before. But now it was very important indeed. It said: "And this is the shipping forecast—North Sea and English Channel: dead calm. Patches of fog near the English coast. Further outlook, unchanged."

Commander Pott switched off the radio. "Well, that's all right. But now we've got to keep our eyes and ears open. The English Channel's always crowded with shipping sailing up and down from London, which is the biggest port in the world, and from Belgium and Holland and Denmark and Sweden and Norway—even from Russia—on its way to and from Africa, India, America and even as far away as China and Japan. Ships of every nationality use the English Channel and we'd better watch out or we'll be run down."

And even as he spoke, they heard the giant beat of the engine of a big ship approaching, and Commander Pott quickly sounded the klaxon as a fog-horn, and it said "GA-GOOO-GA", "GA-GOOO-GA" to warn the big ship. Back out of the fog came a series of huge "MOOS", just like the noise a vast iron cow might make, and through the fog, coming straight at them, were the bows of a gigantic white liner.

Well, all I can say is that she missed them by a cat's whisker, and they just had a glimpse of lines of passengers a hundred feet above them, staring down with astonishment at the sight of a green motor-car, using its wheels sideways like propellers, in the middle of the English Channel. Then the huge stern disappeared into the fog, leaving them pitching and tossing in the choppy wake.

"Whew!" they all said, more or less together. "That was a narrow squeak!" And Commander Pott added, rather unfairly, the others thought, "CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG for heaven's sake keep your eyes open and watch where you're going!" This gave him an idea, and he switched the fog lights on and kept on making frequent "GA-GOOO-GA'S" on the klaxon.

Well, they heard many more ships passing in both directions, up and down channel, and once the periscope of a submarine came shooting up out of the depths to have a look at them and then quickly slid down under water again. They imagined word being passed round among the eighty or ninety men of the crew (yes, big submarines carry as many crew as that!), "Stone the crows! There's a perishing motor-car overhead!"

Then suddenly the fog cleared and they were out in the sunshine with the big white cliffs of France showing up on the horizon, and they all let out a cheer that quite surprised the crew of a Dutch schuyt (a kind of small barge you see a lot of in the Channel, though when it's at home it pronounces itself skoot) that happened to be passing. The Dutch crew let out a big "Hurrah" too as they gazed in amazement at CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG whizzing across the surface of the calm sea.

They sped happily on, getting nearer to France, and Commander Pott said it was now time to steer north so that they would arrive in the harbour of Calais. But this was easier said than done. The strong current kept drifting them southwards, and every time Commander Pott turned the wheel to steer north CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG had to slow down because her wheels couldn't go round and round like propellers and change direction at the same time. Commander Pott, and in fact all of them, began to get quite worried because there was no doubt that they were going to land on the shingle at the base of the gigantic French chalk cliffs that are just as high and steep as the ones on the English shores near Dover. Sure enough, the water got shallower and shallower until they touched the shingle and the violet light on the dashboard blinked urgently and said "TURN THE KNOB". When Commander Pott turned the knob, there came the same purr of machinery under the chassis, and the wheels straightened out and clicked back into the straightforward position and they bumped and churned their way up on to the shingle.

Of course everyone was very glad to be on dry land again, but nothing could alter the fact that they were stuck at the bottom of giant cliffs that soared up above them towards the sky, and the tide was still coming in and it was half past six

and there would only be about three more hours of daylight. It really looked as if the whole family, and CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG, were in the most dreadful and dangerous situation.

Commander Pott said decisively, "Well, it's no good just standing here making long faces. We must split up into two parties and hurry along under the cliffs to right and left, and hope that we'll find a little bay somewhere where we can shelter for the night above high-water mark. Right? Well now, Jemima, you come with me along to the left, and Mimsie and Jeremy run off to the right, and let's hope we find a safe place, because otherwise we'll just have to put to sea again, and none of us wants to spend the night out in the Channel. All right then, off we go!"

It was Jeremy, running on ahead of Mimsie, who found it. Round a big headland, tucked right in under the cliff so that you couldn't see it from seawards, was the mouth of a cave! The sideways opening was quite big, about as big as garage doors, which was the first and most important comparison that came to Jeremy's mind. He called Mimsie and together they went in, over the tide-line of seaweed and washed-up cans and bottles and bits of plastic bags and all the other junk that gets carried in on the tide. They could see that, farther in, the cave widened out and got bigger. But then it got a bit spooky and they both decided that the thing to do would be to bring CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG in with her tremendous lights before they went any farther. So they ran back, scrambling and rattling over the shingle, and shouted and called for Commander Pott and Jemima, who presently came back to where Jeremy and Mimsie waited beside CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG, whose back wheels were already being dangerously approached by the rising tide.

When Commander Pott had heard what they had to say, they all climbed into the car, and with her usual two sneezes and two bangs, she turned and moved slowly, humping and bumping over the shingle, towards the cave. At the noise of her great rumbling exhaust, the sea-gulls flew screeching out from the top of the cliff, and the vibration of her rumble even dislodged small pebbles and scraps of chalk that came tumbling down the gigantic high cliff and once or twice made them cover their heads with their hands and duck.

But they got to the hidden opening to the cave all right, and Commander Pott turned the bonnet of the car into the opening. They nosed their way in, with a big bump, over the piled-up tide-line.

"This is perfect," called Commander Pott. (He had to shout because of the great BOOM-BOOM-BOOM of the exhaust inside the cave.) "It's dry as a bone!" And he switched on the big headlights.

Excitedly they all peered forward into the cave that seemed to widen out as it burrowed into the cliff until it came to what looked like a corner. "Come on," called Commander Pott. He put CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG into low gear and they trundled forward over the pebbles, while the boom of the exhaust echoed back at them from the walls and the roof just over their heads.

They came to the corner, and round it, and now the cave opened out and became still bigger. There were the marks of pickaxes or chisels of some kind on the walls, which meant that humans had been at work making the cave broader, and there was a straight piece and then another corner and another, and CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG rumbled and boomed on and Jeremy and Jemima (and their parents too for the matter of that) were breathless with excitement.

Suddenly Commander Pott called, "Look out!" and there was a great squeaking woosh, and hundreds and hundreds of bats, disturbed by the noise of the car, swept out over their heads towards the entrance! But the children weren't particularly frightened by them, because they knew they were only little harmless mice with wings. They had often seen them flitting about in the evening at home. And they knew, too, that it was all nonsense about bats getting tangled up in your hair (which is an old wives' tale), because, as Commander Pott had explained to them, bats have the most wonderful built-in radar that works in their heads with the help of the tips of their big soft ears, making it almost impossible for them to collide with anything—as you can see for yourself by watching them dart about among the trees in your garden, diving now and then to catch flies so tiny that the human eye can hardly see them.

So the children just watched with curiosity as the bats poured out over their heads, and soon their squeaking disappeared and CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG came to the next corner. Now they all realized that they were far from the entrance and deep, deep inside the cliff, and they wondered, all of them rather anxiously, what they would find as CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG nosed carefully round the bend between the smooth chalk walls.

I must admit that what they found was such a shock that even CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S exhaust gave a kind of trembly gulp. And Commander Pott himself, who was a very brave man, gave quite a jump in the driving-seat and at once put on the brakes and switched off the engine, so that there was dead silence in the depths of the cave. As for Mimsie and Jeremy and Jemima, to be quite honest, they went all goose-pimplly with fright and just stared and stared at the dreadful thing in front of them—a *skeleton*, a human skeleton that hung down from the ceiling and swayed softly in the small breeze that blew down the cave!

It was probably only seconds, but it seemed like minutes, that they just sat and stared. And the empty eyeholes in the skull stared back at them, and CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S big lights showed up each separate bone and the rope that hung down from the roof of the cave and was tied tightly round the skeleton's neck.

Commander Pott spoke first, and it was good to hear his strong, human voice. "This is ridiculous," he said scornfully. "It's nothing but a scarecrow. There are secrets in this cave and someone wants to keep them secret and frighten people away. I vote for going on. What do you all say?"

Mimsie said doubtfully, "If you think it's all right, darling."

And Jemima said, in a rather trembly voice, "After all, it's only a lot of old bones."

And Jeremy said, pretending to forget all about the skeleton, "It would be an awful bore to have to reverse the whole way back again. Besides, it'll be jolly exciting to find out the secret of the cave."

And Commander Pott said, "That's the spirit!" (which wasn't a very good choice of words with the ghostly skeleton swaying there in front of them!). "Now we'll just have to push against his knees, so don't be worried by his feet dragging across the car," and he started the engine and moved slowly forward.

Well, as you can imagine, it wasn't very pleasant pushing against the dangling skeleton, feeling its feet scraping over the bonnet of the car and up over the windscreen and flopping down almost into Mimsie's lap and then over the front seat and scraping between Jeremy and Jemima. But they squashed up against the sides of the seats to avoid being touched by the bony toes, and with a last rattle on the boot they had left the skeleton behind. Only the silly Jeremy and Jemima would look back, and I must admit that they both gave quite a gasp to see the back of the skeleton swaying to and fro and all lit up by the red tail-lights of CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG! Then it really did look at its very spookiest, and they quickly swivelled round and gazed firmly ahead.

Now there was no more shingle on the floor but just beaten-down earth, and there was quite a slope upwards as the cave wound on and on, but you can imagine that the whole family was absolutely agog to discover where the cave led to and what they were going to see round each bend.

Suddenly Commander Pott seemed to listen carefully and again he stopped the car and switched off the engine. And now they could all hear what he had heard—a frightening, eerie moaning that rose and fell and rose and fell and sent shivers down the spine.

"What's that?" they all asked, trying to keep their voices calm.

Commander Pott leant forward and unclipped the spotlight beside the wind-screen. It was one of the useful spotlights you can use at night as inspection lights and to read high-up road-signs. He shone the light carefully up and along the roof of the cave until the beam came to a sort of contraption strung with shiny copper wires that was fixed into the chalk.

Commander Pott laughed. "That's an old trick," he said cheerfully. "Someone really does want to scare people away from the cave. That's a musical instrument called an Aeolian harp. It's much the same as an ordinary harp only the strings or wires are much thinner, so that even this small breeze blowing along them can make the strings sound this sort of moaning noise. It can get really spooky when the breeze varies and blows hard and soft in turns. I've seen them used before this—in ruined castles in Germany, to give the tourists a fright. Well, it hasn't given these tourists a fright, has it?"

And the others all said, "Oh, no. Rather not," a bit doubtfully, and Commander Pott started up the engine and on they

went again, hoping that that was the end of the nasty surprises and wondering all the more who it was who was trying to guard the secret of the cave and what, for the matter of that, the secret could be!

Round the next two bends they crawled carefully along, with the thunder of CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S exhaust echoing on ahead of them. And then, all of a sudden, on a perfectly straight stretch of cave, CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG stopped dead!

"Well, that's funny," said Commander Pott, examining the dials in front of him. "We're a bit low on petrol, but there's still five gallons. Oil pressure all right, engine temperature a bit high, but not more than it should be going up this sloping tunnel in third gear," and he got out to open the bonnet and have a look at the engine. He walked round to the front of the car and suddenly stopped. "So that's it!" he said softly. "She saw the trap!"

"What trap?" they all called, leaning out to see.

Commander Pott pointed to a very thin trip-wire stretched knee-high from wall to wall across the cave.

He scratched his head and walked up and down the wire, looking at the ground in front in case there was a trapdoor to catch people in, and looking at the walls and the roof to see if there was some big rock or a concealed weapon waiting to drop on their heads as soon as they touched the wire. They saw him kneel down and examine where the wire joined the wall, and he finally stood up and said, "Aha! The devils! I've got it!" Then he walked back to the car and got out a pair of pliers and some rubber gloves he always carried for dealing with faults in CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S electrical system.

"What is it?" they asked rather anxiously, because by now the whole adventure was getting almost too exciting. Commander Pott said cheerfully, "Oh, nothing much. They're only trying to electrocute trespassers and explorers who get this far into their cave. Probably not actually kill them. Just give them a powerful shock to frighten them away. But it wouldn't have been funny if our front bumpers had touched the wire. Might easily have short-circuited the whole of CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S electrical system as well as giving us all a nasty shock." He looked puzzled. "Funny the way CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG saw the wire and stopped just in time. There really is something almost magical about this car."

(Well, of course, Jeremy and Jemima weren't in the least surprised. They *knew* CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG was a magical car. Just look at the way she could fly like an aeroplane and skim across the sea like a speed-boat. And anyway, hadn't they had their suspicions on the very first day, when they had noticed that the registration number GEN II could be read two ways? Do you see what they saw in the letters and numbers?)

Commander Pott put on his rubber gloves (electricity can't go through rubber) and gave one short snip at the wire, and sure enough, as the pliers cut through, there was a bright blue flash and a shower of sparks and the two halves of the wire fell dead.

And now, when Commander Pott got back into the driving-seat and pressed the starter, CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S engine at once roared into life again. On they went, climbing still up the wide tunnel of the cave with the big headlights searching ahead for more dangers, and I must say that Jeremy and Jemima in the back seat were quite trembly with excitement at where in heaven's name this underground adventure was going to end.

Round the bends they went, on and on into the depths of the chalk cliff, and the speedometer showed that they had now come a whole mile inland from the sea. The air was cold and damp, and the breeze, that got stronger and stronger, blew the cobwebs to and fro high up in the roof and made Jeremy and Jemima huddle up together to keep warm.

And then, round a particularly sharp bend, they were suddenly faced with a blank wall of chalk that completely closed the cave. They had come to the end—or at any rate, they seemed to have come to the end—of the long cave!

But Commander Pott got out of the car and walked carefully forward, looking at the ground and the walls and then examining, inch by inch, the chalk wall that blocked the cave. He seemed to find something that excited him very much and he came back to the car and announced, "It's not a wall. It's some kind of a door, a sort of secret trapdoor. We must find the catch that opens it. Come on, everyone. We must just search every inch of the ground and the walls for it. It'll be

something very clever, I expect, and well hidden, so tell me if you find even the tiniest clue."

So, inch by inch, the family, working in the bright glare from CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S headlights, began examining what seemed to be a solid wall of chalk blocking the cave—just as if the original cave-diggers had decided they couldn't be bothered to burrow any farther. The only clue, which Commander Pott found very early on, was that there was the tiniest crack that wandered, zig-zagging, down the middle of the wall. It might have been natural, just a fault in the chalk surface, but again it might not, because through the crack a sharp draught was blowing from the other side.

Jemima had chosen to grub about in the right-hand corner, where the wall met the side wall of the cave. There were a lot of bits of flint embedded in the chalk. (There had been the whole way along the walls and roof of the cave, just like you find in the chalk of any chalk cliff. Some of them are fossils. It's often worth digging them out to see.) Jemima found a jagged piece of flint almost as big as a football. Some instinct made her tug at it and go on tugging until it suddenly came away in her hand, so that she almost fell over backwards. She bent down and peered into the hole the flint had left in the chalk and at once she gave a squawk of excitement and called, "Daddy, come quickly!" And when Commander Pott knelt down beside her he saw what she had seen—an *electric-light switch!*

"By golly, you're a clever girl, Jemima! I do believe you've found the secret." He called to the other two. "Stand back, everyone. I'm going to press down this switch. Heaven only knows what'll happen. Ready?" And he pressed down the switch.

From somewhere inside the walls of the cave there came a deep rumbling and grinding of machinery, as, very slowly, the jagged zigzag crack in the solid wall widened and widened and widened until the two halves of what was really a secret door slid sideways into deep slots in the side walls of the cave. And what do you think CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S lights showed through the opening? A huge vaulted room, quite as big as the inside of your village church, and all round the sides were cases and boxes and barrels and sacks neatly stacked up against the walls. It was an underground warehouse—a very secret warehouse for secret things. What could these things be? And who owned them? And why did the owners want to keep them secret? And why did they want a very private cave leading down through the cliff to the sea? And where were the owners? And, since it all smelt so strongly of secrecy, and therefore probably of unlawfulness, how nasty could these owners be?

These questions and many others ran through all their minds, and Commander Pott put their thoughts in a nutshell when he put his hands on his hips and declared, "Ho hum! I smell dirty work! Now then, everyone, switch on the brains! Full power! What do we do next?"

Mimsie, who was, like all mothers, worried about the children, said at once, "Darling, let's close the secret door again and reverse quietly back down the way we came. I don't like the look of this at all."

But Jeremy and Jemima just wouldn't agree to this. They were both the tiniest bit trembly about the way the adventure was going, but they had inherited some of their father's exploring bug and they were terribly eager to discover the secrets of the big underground vault. "Oh, please, Mimsie," they both pleaded together, "do let's find out what it's all about."

Commander Pott reflected and said, "Well, Mimsie, after all, no one's going to eat us. And the children don't seem worried. I vote we see the adventure through. It would be ghastly reversing CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG the whole way back now over a mile of cave to the sea. Besides, we've been climbing all the way and we can't be far from the top of the cliff. The cave obviously goes on out of this vault on the other side and leads on to the top. Come on, we'll drive the car up on to the level floor of the vault and give her a rest and then have a good explore. After all, this is pretty thrilling and we really *must* get to the bottom of the secret."

"All right, darling," said Mimsie rather reluctantly. "You know I'm just as keen as you are to find out what this is all about. But if you ask me, there's something pretty fishy about all this—something, well, something criminal. I wouldn't be at all surprised if we hadn't come upon a nest of crooks and gangsters. I only hope none of them appear while we're looking into their secret hoard!"

"Oh, well," said Commander Pott cheerfully, "have to take the rough with the smooth. You never get real adventures without a bit of risk somewhere. Come on!" And they all piled back into CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG and crept up the last bit of slope until they were parked slap in the middle of the huge secret vault.

While the others piled out and began carefully sniffing about round the edge of the bales and barrels and packages, Commander Pott went back and found the switch on their side of the secret door, and with a grind and a hum of machinery, the two halves came together again. Then he came back and they all systematically began to pry and peer into the secret stocks that were piled up round the walls of the big, echoing vault.

Jeremy was the first. "Machine-guns," he cried excitedly, "packed in grease-paper. They're in sections ready to assemble!"

Mimsie said, "Oh, heavens! Boxes and boxes of bombs and hand-grenades!"

"Daggers," called Jemima, "all kinds of them. And bayonets with rifles to go with them!"

"Well I'm dashed," said Commander Pott. "Dynamite in these cases, and yards and yards of fuse. And gelignite—the stuff burglars use to blast open safes and strong-rooms."

"Revolvers," called out Jeremy, "automatic pistols. Big ones and small ones—every kind. With boxes and boxes of cartridges."

Mimsie called out anxiously, "Now don't touch anything, children. You can look, but not touch. Something might go off." (Mothers are always thinking something is going to go off—on Guy Fawkes' Day, for instance, with the fireworks. And very often mothers are right about this. I must admit that Jeremy and Jemima knew this through one bitter experience with a box of jumping-crackers, and they were very careful about the way they peered into the boxes and bales.)

So the search went on. And there was no doubt about it, the family had come upon a great secret arsenal of weapons that certainly hadn't been hidden down in the vault except for some secret and probably criminal purpose.

Finally they all came together again in the middle of the vault, and they looked at their father to see what he was going to say about this extraordinary and rather frightening discovery.

Commander Pott had a scruffy bit of paper in his hand and he said, "You know what I think all this stuff is for? In one of the boxes, full of coshes and clubs and knuckle-dusters, there was this scrap of paper that says "SPECIAL ORDER FOR JOE THE MONSTER, 453 BASHER STREET, SOHO, LONDON". Now he's the man I've read about from time to time as being responsible for most of the bank robberies and hold-ups in England that the papers are always full of. But the police have never been able to catch him and they've never even been able to find out where he gets his weapons from. Well, there's no doubt about it. This is his secret arms dump, and I bet my bottom dollar he smuggles what he wants from time to time over the Channel on foggy nights by speed-boat. Now"—Commander Pott scratched his head—"what do we do next?"

"I know, I know, I know!" cried Jeremy excitedly. "*Blow it all up!*"

"Don't be silly, darling," said Mimsie. "What about us and CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG? Do you want to blow us up too?"

"Well," said Commander Pott thoughtfully, "it would be rather fun, wouldn't it? But first of all we must find the way out of here. The cave must go on to the top of the cliff, or Joe the Monster and his gang couldn't have got all this stuff down here. Now, I've noticed that the draught we've been feeling all the way up the cave is coming from over there." He pointed to the back of the vault. "From behind those huge packing-cases. Let's just have a look."

He went over to the packing-cases and hauled on the front one, and instead of weighing a ton as they had all expected, it moved easily aside, and so did the next one and the next one. And when he moved the fourth, with the help of the family all tugging and panting, there was the continuation of their cave sloping upwards, and in the distance there was a pale glimmer of light.

"By golly!" cried Commander Pott. "That must be the top. Now then. We'll get CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG through the opening and go on up until we get out of here and then I'll run back and lay a fuse down the cave to the dynamite and we'll get as far away as possible before the firework display." He looked at his watch. "It's after eight, so it'll be dark enough to get the most out of our fireworks. But I'm famished and I know all of you must be, so after the big bang we'll go off to the nearest town and find somewhere for dinner and bed. We'll certainly all have earned it after this evening's work—if all goes well. And I don't see why it shouldn't."

So they piled back into CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG, and she started up with her two sneezes and two small explosions and they motored between the packing-cases and up the slope and out of the secret vault with its huge hoard of explosives and guns that belonged to the biggest crook in England—*Joe the Monster!*

Outside the vault, Commander Pott stopped the car and went back, while the twins watched through the entrance to see what he did. He took a long roll of fuse out of one of the boxes (it looks like stiff, thin rope and it's stuffed with magnesium powder or some other quick-burning explosive, rather like the blue touch-paper you light when you want to set off a firework), and he attached one end to the stacks of dynamite (that comes in oblong sticks) and piled all the gelignite (that's a stiff putty stuff) on top of the dynamite, and then he unrolled the length of fuse and came back to the car, after blocking up the entrance again with the big crates so that the explosion, when it came, wouldn't chase them up the cave. Then he gave Jeremy the big roll of fuse to unwind as they went along, and off went CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG up the sloping cave towards the distant glimmer of light that was the entrance.

The entrance was hidden behind a big clump of bushes in an old disused quarry, but CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG nosed her way through and they bumped and banged across the rough floor of the quarry until they came to a cart track that led away across the fields to one of the French main roads about ten miles away.

It was getting dusky by now, and far away across the fields they could see the sidelights of a car that seemed to be coming towards them along the same cart track as they were on. "I expect it's some farmer," said Commander Pott. "Come on, we'd better set light to the fuse and get away quick, or we—and perhaps the farmer too—may get a lump of chalk on our heads. There's a terrific load of explosive down there inside the cave, and heaven knows how much of the cliff we're going to blow up when the fuse gets to the dynamite."

Commander Pott got out of the car, took the rest of the roll of fuse from Jeremy, cut off the end and threw the rest of the coil into the back of the car. Then he knelt down and put a match to the end of the fuse.

Well, I don't know if you've ever seen a real fuse on fire, but the flame runs almost as fast as you can run, and with a tiny bang and a splutter the little yellow flame darted off across the floor of the quarry back towards the bush which hid the mouth of the cave, and Commander Pott dived for the driver's seat and got CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG quickly through the gears and racing off along the cart track away from the danger area. When he had gone a good two hundred yards away from the edge of the quarry, he stopped the car and they all looked back and waited, and I must confess that Mimsie and Jeremy and Jemima all had their hands firmly clamped over their ears.

"It must be close now," cried Commander Pott excitedly, and even as he said "now" there came a deep rumbling roar from right down inside the cliff, the ground shook, a great yellow jet of flame shot out of the quarry they had just left, and from the edge of the cliff there came a distant flash and a deep boom, and a pillar of smoke rose slowly into the air as the force of the explosion rushed down the long cave and burst out down by the edge of the sea. Then there came a series of smaller underground explosions and crackles as the ammunition-boxes blew up one by one and the bombs and cartridges, caught fire, and then there came one last terrific roar and whoosh of flame out of the quarry and to seawards, and there was a crackling and rumbling noise in the ground and the cliff-top above the cave split open and smoke and flame came out, like a mixture between a volcano and an earthquake. And then the smoking crack in the ground closed again, leaving a big dent in the grass where the inside of the cliff had collapsed, filling in the underground vault and the remains of the cave.

And then there was silence!

They all let their breath out with a whoosh.

"By golly!" (Jemima).

"Gee whiz!" (Jeremy).

"Well I never!" (Mimsie).

Commander Pott said, "That's the biggest bang I've ever heard. Now come on! We'd better get away quick from here before we have to do any explaining. There's that farmer's car still coming and people will have heard that bang as far away as Calais. They'll even have heard it right across the Channel in England. We'd better steal quietly away and when we get back to England I'll go and explain things to Scotland Yard. I bet they won't make a fuss. Probably even give us all medals! It's getting dark, and I bet you're all starving. I know I am." And he put CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG into gear and she roared along the cart track just as if she was as hungry and thirsty as all of them.

BUT! BUT! BUT!

And again BUT!

As they approached what they thought had been a farmer's car, they saw it was a big black open tourer, a very powerful-looking car indeed. It had drawn itself right across the track so as not to let them pass, and four men had got out and were standing, or rather crouching down, and they all had revolvers in their hands. One of them, a huge unshaven giant of a man with shoulders as big as a gorilla's, came slowly towards where Commander Pott had been forced to pull up. He looked as if he would burst with rage, and his eyes were red with fury and his lips were drawn back from his big yellow teeth in a snarl.

Commander Pott whispered, "I regret to have to announce that that's Joe the Monster. I've seen pictures of him outside police stations. And the other three are his gang—Man-Mountain Fink, who's escaped from heaven knows how many prisons, he must be on the run now; Soapy Sam, he's their explosives expert for opening safes ('soap' is the crooks' name for gelignite), and Blood-Money Banks, the blackmailer. Watch out! This is going to be tricky!"

Joe the Monster came up to the car. In his most threatening manner he growled, "And who might you all be? And what might you all know about that there explosion what's just taken place?"

Commander Pott said innocently, "Explosion? Explosion?" He turned to the children. "Anyone hear an explosion round here?"

Jeremy said brightly, "There was a bit of a pop just now, Daddy. Over by the cliff. You must have missed it."

"Bit of a pop!" Joe the Monster almost exploded himself. He turned round. "Hear that, mates?" He said in a mincing voice, "They think they may have heard a bit of a pop." He turned back threateningly. "Bit of a pop! Call that whopping volcano a bit of a pop? Why, it sounded like the end of the world!" Now his voice was an angry growl. "I saw you folks drive up out of the quarry and I happen, I just happen like, to see a roll of fuse beside those little rascals in the back seat." (Oh dear, thought Jeremy and Jemima together, we ought to have sat on it!) "So do you know what I'm going to do with you and this saucy-looking bus of yours?" He gave a great cackle of cruel laughter. "Why, in exchange for you having blown up my belongings, I'm going to blow up yours and you all with it. See? I'm going to light the end of that fuse and put the lighted end in the petrol tank of your fancy motor-car and up you'll all go! How do you like the thought of that, eh, my fine little family of meddlers in other people's business?" He turned to the other gangsters. "Get your guns ready, men, and if any of these rascals try to escape, shoot them down like rabbits. Get it?" The dreadful gangsters cackled with joy at the thought of the sport they were going to have, and the Pott family heard the click of the safety-catches going back.

"Now then, you golliwog in the back there, hand over that length of fuse or it'll be the worse for you." And he pointed his revolver straight at Jeremy.

"I won't," said Jeremy stoutly, "and if I'm a golliwog, you're the ugliest ape outside the London Zoo." And he took the roll of fuse and sat on it.

"Ho-ho!" Joe the Monster grimaced with fury at the insult. "You young whipper-snapper. I'll teach you to do what you're told," and he took a big black cosh out of his pocket and walked purposefully towards the car.

Jeremy had butterflies in his tummy at the sight, but out of the corner of his eye he saw Commander Pott's hand steal across to the little lever that worked the wing mechanism, and as Joe the Monster drew level with the car, Commander Pott pulled the lever sharply down and CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S big green mudguards swung sharply out into their wing-shape. The right-hand wing caught Joe the Monster slap in his tummy and sent him flying head over heels.

"Hang on," shouted Commander Pott. "And keep your heads down." And he rammed the accelerator down into the floor-boards.

CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG leaped forward with an angry roar from her twin exhausts and swooped low at the other three gangsters, who just had time to throw themselves down on their faces or they would have been mown down, like Joe the Monster, by the charging wings. And then the great green aerocar, for that is what she had become, just cleared the top of the gangsters' car and roared off towards the main road.

Of course the gangsters were soon on their feet and all their guns spat bullets at the swooping green dragon, but Commander Pott zigzagged the wheel, and although there was one bang as a bullet hit the coachwork, the other bullets whistled harmlessly past and the spurting flames of the revolvers got smaller and smaller in the dusk.

"Whew!" said Commander Pott. "That was a narrow shave."

The others made whewing noises and thanked heaven for the way their magical CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG had saved them from the gangsters' terrible revenge.

They got to the main road to Calais and Commander Pott eased CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG down on to the smooth surface. She gave a bump or two and then was going like the wind down the empty road, with the big headlamps lighting up the way to the distant glow of Calais and the huge feast of omelettes and roast chicken and ice-cream they were all looking forward to.

They drew up in front of a nice-looking hotel called the Splendide (which, as you've guessed, is French for "splendid") and Commander Pott ordered their rooms, and while they tidied up and had a good scrub (much needed by now, as you can guess!) he ordered the delicious dinner in the bright and cheerful dining-room and went out to look after CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG, because, as you know, you must always see that your car is cosy and happy for the night before you look after yourself.

Commander Pott filled up the car with petrol and oil and water, checked the batteries and the tyres and drove the car into a comfortable garage beside the hotel. Once he had seen that she seemed contented and in good order, he decided to leave her washing and polishing for the morning, when all the family could help. Then he patted her on her rather hot nose and locked her up for the night and went back into the hotel, where the whole family sat down to their delicious dinner before going up to bed for a wonderful and, I'm sure you'll agree, well-earned rest.

BUT!

BUT!

BUT!

And again BUT!

Later that night, when they were all fast asleep, a long black car, with Joe the Monster at the wheel and Man-Mountain Fink and Soapy Sam and Blood-Money Banks crouching down in the body of the car, came creeping up to the Hotel Splendide in the darkness and hid itself amongst the shadows down a side turning.

Joe the Monster and his gang, still bent on revenge, crept round the ground-floor windows of the sleeping hotel, looking for a way to break in and get at Commander Pott and his family.

And once again Commander Caractacus Pott and Mimsie and Jeremy and Jemima were in *mortal danger!*

But for what happened next I'm afraid you must wait for

CHITTY-CHITTY-BANG-BANG'S
Adventure Number Three

[End of *Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang, Adventure Number Two*, by Ian Fleming]