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Opening extract from

The Matchbox Mysteries

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WINGS & CO

THE FAIRY DETECTIVE AGENCY

THE MATCHBOX MYSTERIES

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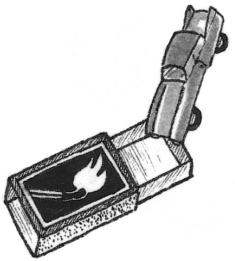
Chapter One



NO FIBS FROM PHIBBS
The Best Deals On Four Wheels

So read the sign over Podgy Bottom's car showroom. The owner, Preston Phibbs, was proudly polishing a red 1957 Ford Thunderbird convertible when a giant silhouette of a man with broad shoulders and a hat struck the showroom floor.

Preston Phibbs felt a strange chill run down his spine.

'Hello,' he called out. 'Hello there, can I help you?'

The silhouette fell across the car's cream soft-top.

From nowhere came a voice with a bad American accent. 'Gee, getta load of those wheels – black and white with silver hubcaps.'

'Yes, quite,' replied Preston Phibbs, nervously twiddling his moustache. He still couldn't make out where the voice was coming from.

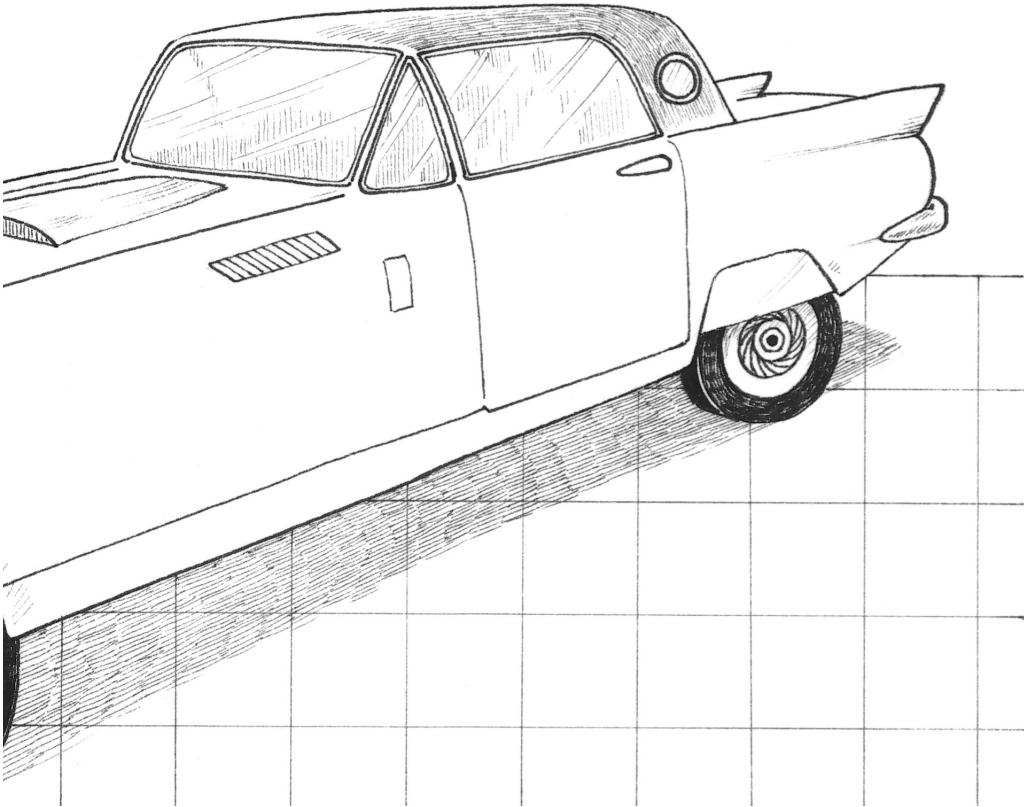
'Those hooded headlights are hot,' it said. 'This baby's got the best chrome smile I've ever seen.'

Preston Phibbs still couldn't see who was talking. He nearly jumped out of his skin when he felt a presence behind him.

He looked round to find a man who was dressed like a gangster from an old black-and-white movie. His fedora hat was pulled over dark glasses to meet a large bow tie, so that apart from a rather red nose, his face was hidden from view. His double-breasted suit was so padded at the shoulders that the man appeared almost square in shape. On his feet he wore very pointed black-and-white two-tone shoes.

'We are about to close,' said Preston Phibbs.

'Then I'm just in time. I'm gonna take that car home with me,' said the man, pointing at the Ford Thunderbird convertible.



Preston Phibbs had worked long enough as a car salesman to know that it was a mistake to judge a man by an ill-fitting gangster suit.

'This car, sir, is one of the finest examples of its kind and costs eighty-five thousand pounds.'

'I don't do zeros,' said the man.

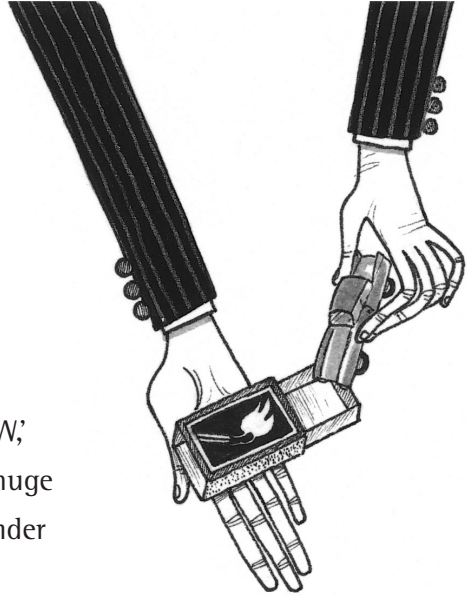
'Oh, very witty, sir,' said Preston Phibbs. He smiled. Of course. Hallowe'en was just over a week away and there was to be a Hallowe'en Ball at the Red Lion Hotel. That's why the chap was dressed as a gangster. He must belong to one of the acts. 'Are you anything to do with the bash at the Red Lion Hotel this Hallowe'en?'

'Bash? Yep, I'm always ready for one of those,' said the man, as he walked round the car, stopping to cup his hands and stare through the window at the red steering wheel. As he bent forward, Preston Phibbs saw, to his alarm, something bulky under his jacket. 'It's swell. I wannit,' said the man.

'I'm afraid I'm about to close,' repeated Preston Phibbs. He fiddled with his mobile phone. This customer was beginning to worry him.

'Let's just settle this right now,' said the man, and took out of his pocket not a cheque book or a credit card, but a matchbox.

'We are closing,' said Preston Phibbs, feeling somewhat



hot under the collar.
'Why don't you come back tomorrow morning, sir?'

'I don't do tomorrows. I do the HERE and the NOW,' said the man. He pulled a huge plastic water pistol from under his double-breasted jacket.

Preston Phibbs laughed heartily in relief.

'That'll go down well at the Hallowe'en Ball. You must be one of the star acts that I've read about. A magician maybe?' he said.

'You could say that,' said the man, and fired the water pistol at the Thunderbird.

'Oh, no. Spare me the waterworks,' said Preston Phibbs. 'I've just polished . . .'

But before he could say another word, the red 1957 Ford Thunderbird convertible began to shrink. Speechless, Preston Phibbs watched as the solution to his cash-flow problems became smaller and smaller, until it was so small that the man picked it up and put it in the matchbox.

By the time Preston Phibbs had recovered from the shock of what had just happened, all he could see of

the man was his huge shadow disappearing out of the showroom door.

With shaky fingers, he called Podgy Bottom Police Station. Sergeant Litton answered the phone.

'One of my cars has been shrunk – no, I mean one of my cars has been stolen,' cried Preston Phibbs. 'Shrunk. Stolen.'

This wasn't the first odd call that Sergeant Litton had received that day. In the morning, a man had been taken to Podgy Bottom Hospital's A&E swearing that he had seen his Rolls Royce shrunk to matchbox size. That afternoon, a woman had phoned from the local branch of Slugbury's supermarket to say she had witnessed the same thing happen to her four-wheel drive.

Sergeant Litton arrived at Preston Phibbs's showroom at about half past five. The car salesman's face was whiter than an ice rink.

'What do I do now?' he said. 'That car was going to solve my money problems.'

'Tell me in your own words what happened,' said the sergeant.

'My red 1957 Ford Thunderbird convertible shrank before my eyes,' wailed the car salesman.

He was interrupted by the showroom jingle, which was timed to sing out on the hour, every hour.

No fibs

From Phibbs.

The Best Deals

On Four Wheels.

'Eighty-five thousand pounds of prime car gone. Shrunk to the size of a matchbox.'

'Are you sure, sir?' said Sergeant Litton.

'Yes!' shouted Preston Phibbs. 'Yes – and for once I am telling the truth.'