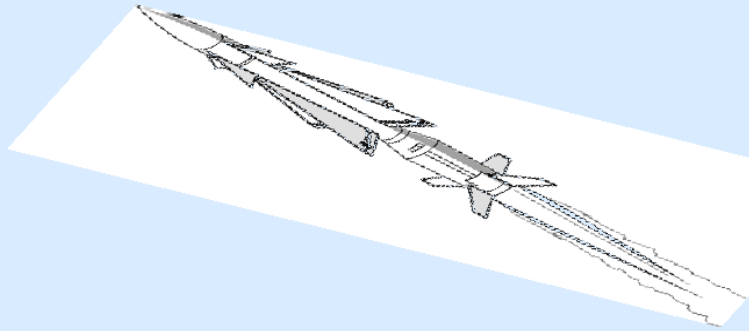


**Extract from:**



# Space Gum

by Tania Roxborough

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## Chapter 12 Car Trouble (Pages 67-71)

The next day, Carl is up before anyone else, which is a bit strange because usually he is the last one up on a school day. He makes himself some toast and a large mug of hot chocolate, and waits in the kitchen for Dad to come through. He waits and waits ... but Dad is a no-show.

Carl wanders down the hall to Mum and Dad's bedroom and, just as he pushes open their door, Dad lets rip with a gigantic sneeze. Carl stares into the gloom.

"You sick?" Carl asks, staring at the scrunched-up tissues littering the floor.

"Yeah, looks like a day off school for me," Dad says, his voice croaking.

Mum comes out of the ensuite, heralded by light and steam. "Morning Carl," she says, towelling her hair. "Good to see you up already." She pulls open the curtains. "Dad's staying home today so I'll take you and Jenny to school."

"Can du ged bme some more tissues fromd da pandry?"

Carl frowns, translating his father's snot-blocked accent. "Tissues. Pantry. Right." He goes back to the kitchen and grabs a box. When he returns, he finds Dad sitting up, blowing his nose – huge trumpet blasts. Carl picks up the small rubbish bin and puts it beside the bed.

"Ta," his father says, chucking the used tissues into the bin. "I need du to do some stuff for me ad school please."

"Okay."

"Iss all on da list," Dad says, handing Carl a sheet of paper.

"Okay, no sweat." Carl scans the list. Easy – and it would mean he could be late for English. Sometimes being the son of the Head of the Science Department has its advantages.

Outside, Coca barks. Her "hey you guys I'm still out here and I'm hungry and lonely and need the loo" kind of bark.

"Can you get Coca please Carl?" Mum calls from the bathroom. "Just let her off for a quick run and then she can come in."

*What am I – errand boy?* Carl thinks. But, it doesn't really matter when it comes to Coca. She might be the family dog but she's best friends with Carl.

Coca attacks him with her tongue as he bends down to unchain her. As soon the chain hits the ground, she is off – tearing around the garden, chasing birds, sniffing everything. Knowing she'll come back when she's stretched her legs, Carl goes back inside to pack his school bag.

About five minutes later, Carl hears the clatter of claws on the lino as Coca comes through the back door, and the thudding of her tail hitting the walls of the hallway as she stands outside Dad's bedroom waiting to be admitted.

"In you ged, you stewpad dog," Dad says, and Coca disappears into the bedroom.

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Carl doesn't know how he could have forgotten. He spent enough time on it! But, when he and Jenny get into the car, they are arguing about whose turn it is to sit in the front.

"You were in the front yesterday," says Carl.

"But, now it's Mum driving, so that doesn't count. You were in the front the last time Mum drove us."

"Good grief, you two, get a life," Mum says, reversing out of the drive. It is when Mum pulls out into the street and changes gear that Carl remembers. There goes the sound: *purrrpppttta!*

The bicycle tube around the exhaust pipe of the car. *Purrrpppttta ... prttt ... prttttt.* Carl sees people turn to look at them.

"Can you guys hear something?" Mum asks, frowning into the rear vision mirror. "Is that us?"

"Don't think so," Carl says, his hands beginning to sweat. *Please come off*, he prays to the rubber tube. He just knows Mum would *not* find this prank *at all* funny.

*Purrrppptttppbbppptttt-ppurt-ppurt,* the exhaust says.

They are nearing the school and, as they slow down, the car farts its way past the students. People are beginning to point at them and laugh.

Mum changes down a gear.

*Prrraafttt!*

"What *is* that?" Mum asks. She pulls alongside the curb and stops the car. "Okay. Jenny, can you get out and tell me if that noise comes back when I press down on the accelerator?"

"kay, Mum."

Carl opens the door too. "I might as well get to school." He waves Dad's list at his mother. "Get onto the things on Dad's list."

"Okay, love. Have a good day," Mum says and then presses her foot down on the accelerator.

*PHATTTATTTPPPBBBTTT!*

"Mum," Jenny calls. Carl freezes. "There's something stuck on the end of the exhaust pipe."

For a moment, Carl thinks of bolting into the school grounds and losing himself in the crowd. But, he quickly forgets that because that crowd is now gathering around the car, laughing, pointing and laughing harder.

Mum walks around to the back of the car. Carl sees it through her eyes: exhaust fumes inflating a piece of inner tube, so that the car continues to make soft farting sounds.

Jenny glares at him. "How embarrassing." She picks up her school bag and storms through the crowd into school.

Mum speaks. "Go to school. I'll deal with you later." She reaches down and pulls at the rubber tube. It doesn't budge so she pulls harder. Carl is about to suggest that she let him take it off when Mum gives a final tug, which pulls the inner tube off the exhaust but sends Mum tumbling onto her backside.

She looks up at Carl, face red, and glowers. "Go, now," she says quietly.

Carl doesn't argue. He walks through the school gates surrounded by people laughing and talking about them. If Dad had been driving, Carl would be laughing at the joke like all these guys and enjoying their admiration. Instead, his stomach is in knots. He wishes he was back home, sick in bed like Dad.