



Chapter 9

A Lester and a Bear

Yes, we were in the garden once more: and, to escape that horrid discordant voice, we hurried indoors, and found ourselves in the library—Uggug blubbering, the Professor standing by with a bewildered air, and my Lady, with her arms clasped round her son's neck, repeating, over and over again, "and did they give him nasty lessons to learn? My own pretty pet!"

"What's all this noise about?" the Vice-warden angrily enquired, as he strode into the room. "And who put the hat-stand here?"

And he hung his hat up on Bruno, who was standing in the middle of the room, too much astonished by the sudden change of scene to make any attempt at removing it, though it came down to his shoulders, making him look something like a small candle with a large extinguisher over it.

The Professor mildly explained that His Highness had been graciously pleased to say he wouldn't do his lessons.

"Do your lessons this instant, you young cub!" thundered the Vice-Warden. "And take this!" and a resounding box on the ear made the unfortunate Professor reel across the room.

"Save me!" faltered the poor old man, as he sank, half-fainting, at my Lady's feet.

"Shave you? Of course I will!" my Lady replied, as she lifted him into a chair, and pinned an anti-macassar round his neck. "Where's the razor?"

The Vice-Warden meanwhile had got hold of Uggug, and was belabouring him with his umbrella. "Who left this loose nail in the floor?" he shouted, "Hammer it in, I say!

Hammer it in!" Blow after blow fell on the writhing Uggug, till he dropped howling to the floor.

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Then his father turned to the 'shaving' scene which was being enacted, and roared with laughter. "Excuse me, dear, I ca'n't help it!" he said as soon as he could speak. "You are such an utter donkey! Kiss me, Tabby!"

And he flung his arms round the neck of the terrified Professor, who raised a wild shriek., but whether he received the threatened kiss or not I was unable to see, as Bruno, who had by this time released himself from his extinguisher, rushed headlong out of the room, followed by Sylvie; and I was so fearful of being left alone among all these crazy creatures that I hurried after them.

"We must go to Father!" Sylvie panted, as they ran down the garden. "I'm sure things are at their worst! I'll ask the Gardener to let us out again."

"But we ca'n't walk all the way!" Bruno whimpered. "How I wiss we had a coach-and-four, like Uncle!"

And, shrill and wild, rang through the air the familiar voice:—

"He thought he saw a Coach-and-Four
That stood beside his bed:
He looked again, and found it was
A Bear without a Head.
'Poor thing,' he said, 'poor silly thing!
It's waiting to be fed!"

"No, I ca'n't let you out again!" he said, before the children could speak. "The Vice-warden gave it me, he did, for letting you out last time! So be off with you!" And, turning away from them, he began digging frantically in the middle of a gravel-walk, singing, over and over again, "'Poor thing,' he said, 'poor silly thing! It's waiting to be fed!" but in a more musical tone than the shrill screech in which he had begun.



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The music grew fuller and richer at every moment: other manly voices joined in the refrain: and soon I heard the heavy thud that told me the boat had touched the beach, and the harsh grating of dragged it up. I roused them a hand in hauling up awhile to watch them disment of the hard-won

When at last I reached our sleepy, and glad enough the easy-chair, while Arhis cupboard, to get me without which, he doctor, permit my going

And how that cupboard-could not be Arthur, who ting it so often, moving muttering like the solilo-

No, it was a female voice. den by the cupboard-door—was a female figure, massive, and in flowing robes,

Could it be the landlady? The door opened, and a strange man entered the room.

“What is that donkey doing?” he said to himself, pausing, aghast, on the threshold.

The lady, thus rudely referred to, was his wife. She had got one of the cupboards open, and stood with her back to him, smoothing down a sheet of brown paper on one of the shelves, and whispering to herself “So, so! Deftly done! Craftily contrived!”

Her loving husband stole behind her on tiptoe, and tapped her on the head. “Boh!” he playfully shouted at her ear. “Never tell me again I ca’n’t say ‘boh’ to a goose!”

My Lady wrung her hands. “Discovered!” she groaned. “Yet no—he is one of us! Reveal it not, oh Man! Let it bide its time!”



the shingle as the men myself, and, after lending their boat, I lingered yet embark a goodly assort- ‘treasures of the deep.’ lodgings I was tired and to settle down again into thur hospitably went to out some cake and wine, clared, he could not, as a to bed.

door did creak! It surely was opening and shut- so restlessly about, and quy of a tragedy-queen!

Also the figure half-hid- den by the cupboard-door—was a female figure, massive, and in flowing robes,

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“Reveal what not?” her husband testily replied, dragging out the sheet of brown paper. “What are you hiding here, my Lady? I insist upon knowing!”

My Lady cast down her eyes, and spoke in the littlest of little voices. “Don’t make fun of it, Benjamin!” she pleaded. “It’s—it’s—don’t you understand? It’s a DAGGER!”

“And what’s that for?” sneered His Excellency. “We’ve only got to make people think he’s dead! We haven’t got to kill him! And made of tin, too!” he snarled, contemptuously bending the blade round his thumb. Now, Madam, you’ll be good enough to explain. First, what do you call me Benjamin for?”

“It’s part of the Conspiracy, Love! One must have an alias, you know—”

“Oh, an alias, is it? Well! And next, what did you get this dagger for? Come, no evasions! You ca’n’t deceive me!”

“I got it for—for—for—” the detected Conspirator stammered, trying her best to put on the assassin-expression that she had been practising at the looking-glass. “For—”

“For what, Madam!”

“Well, for eighteenpence, if you must know, dearest! That’s what I got it for, on my—”

“Now don’t say your Word and Honour!” groaned the other Conspirator. “Why, they aren’t worth half the money, put together!”

“On my birthday,” my Lady concluded in a meek whisper. “One must have a dagger, you know. It’s part of the—”

“Oh, don’t talk of Conspiracies!” her husband savagely interrupted, as he tossed the dagger into the cupboard. “You know about as much how to manage a Conspiracy as if you were a chicken. Why, the first thing is to get a disguise. Now, just look at this!”

And with pardonable pride he fitted on the cap and bells, and the rest of the Fool’s dress, and winked at her, and put his tongue in his cheek. “Is that the sort of thing, now.” he demanded.

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My Lady's eyes flashed with all a Conspirator's enthusiasm. "The very thing!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands. "You do look, oh, such a perfect Fool!"

The Fool smiled a doubtful smile. He was not quite clear whether it was a compliment or not, to express it so plainly. "You mean a Jester? Yes, that's what I intended. And what do you think your disguise is to be?" And he proceeded to unfold the parcel, the lady watching him in rapture.

"Oh, how lovely!" she cried, when at last the dress was unfolded. "What a splendid disguise! An Esquimaux peasant-woman!"

"An Esquimaux peasant, indeed!" growled the other. "Here, put it on, and look at yourself in the glass. Why, it's a Bear, ca'n't you use your eyes?" He checked himself suddenly, as a harsh voice yelled through the room

"He looked again, and found it was
A Bear without a Head!"

But it was only the Gardener, singing under the open window. The Vice-Warden stole on tip-toe to the window, and closed it noiselessly, before he ventured to go on. "Yes, Lovey, a Bear: but not without a head, I hope! You're the Bear, and me the Keeper. And if any one knows us, they'll have sharp eyes, that's all!"

"I shall have to practise the steps a bit," my Lady said, looking out through the Bear's mouth: "one ca'n't help being rather human just at first, you know. And of course you'll say 'Come up, Bruin!', won't you?"

"Yes, of course," replied the Keeper, laying hold of the chain, that hung from the Bear's collar, with one hand, while with the other he cracked a little whip. "Now go round the room in a sort of a dancing attitude. Very good, my dear, very good. Come up, Bruin! Come up, I say!"

He roared out the last words for the benefit of Uggug, who had just come into the room, and was now standing, with his hands spread out, and eyes and mouth wide open, the very picture of stupid amazement. "Oh, my!" was all he could gasp out.

The Keeper pretended to be adjusting the bear's collar, which gave him an opportunity of whispering, unheard by Uggug, "my fault, I'm afraid! Quite forgot to fasten the door.

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Plot's ruined if he finds it out! Keep it up a minute or two longer. Be savage!" Then, while seeming to pull it back with all his strength, he let it advance upon the scared boy: my Lady, with admirable presence of mind, kept up what she no doubt intended for a savage growl, though it was more like the purring of a cat: and Uggug backed out of the room with such haste that he tripped over the mat, and was heard to fall heavily outside— an acci-

dent to which even his doting mother paid no heed, in the excitement of the moment.

The Vice-Warden shut and bolted the door. "Off with the disguises!" he panted. "There's not a moment to lose. He's sure to fetch the Professor, and we couldn't take him in, you know!" And in another minute the disguises were stowed away in the cupboard, the door unbolted, and the two Conspirators seated lovingly side-by-side on the sofa, earnestly discussing a book the Vice-Warden had hastily snatched off the table, which proved to be the City-Directory of the capital of Outland.

The door opened, very slowly and cautiously, and the Professor peeped in, Uggug's stupid face being just visible behind him.

"It is a beautiful arrangement!" the Vice-warden was saying with enthusiasm. "You see, my precious one, that there are fifteen houses in Green Street, before you turn into West Street."

"Fifteen houses! Is it possible?" my Lady replied. "I thought it was fourteen!" And, so intent were they on this interesting question, that neither of them even looked up till the Professor, leading Uggug by the hand, stood close before them.

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My Lady was the first to notice their approach. "Why, here's the Professor!" she exclaimed in her blandest tones. "And my precious child too! Are lessons over?"

"A strange thing has happened!" the Professor began in a trembling tone. "His Exalted Fatness" (this was one of Uggug's many titles) "tells me he has just seen, in this very room, a Dancing-Bear and a Court-Jester!"

The Vice-Warden and his wife shook with well-acted merriment.

Not in this room, darling!" said the fond mother. "We've been sitting here this hour or more, reading—," here she referred to the book lying on her lap, "—reading the—the City-Directory."

"Let me feel your pulse, my boy!" said the anxious father. "Now put out your tongue. Ah, I thought so! He's a little feverish, Professor, and has had a bad dream. Put him to bed at once, and give him a cooling draught."

"I ain't been dreaming!" his Exalted Fatness remonstrated, as the Professor led him away.

"Bad grammar, Sir!" his father remarked with some sternness. "Kindly attend to that little matter, Professor, as soon as you have corrected the feverishness. And, by the way, Professor!" (The Professor left his distinguished pupil standing at the door, and meekly returned.) "There is a rumour afloat, that the people wish to elect an—in point of fact, an—you understand that I mean an—"

"Not another Professor!" the poor old man exclaimed in horror.

"No! Certainly not!" the Vice-Warden eagerly explained. "Merely an Emperor, you understand."

"An Emperor!" cried the astonished Professor, holding his head between his hands, as if he expected it to come to pieces with the shock. "What will the Warden—"

"Why, the Warden will most likely be the new Emperor!" my Lady explained. "Where could we find a better? Unless, perhaps—" she glanced at her husband.

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“Where indeed!” the Professor fervently responded, quite failing to take the hint.

The Vice-Warden resumed the thread of his discourse. “The reason I mentioned it, Professor, was to ask you to be so kind as to preside at the Election. You see it would make the thing respectable—no suspicion of anything, underhand—”

“I fear I ca’n’t, your Excellency!” the old man faltered. “What will the Warden—”

“True, true!” the Vice-Warden interrupted. “Your position, as Court-Professor, makes it awkward, I admit. Well, well! Then the Election shall be held without you.”

“Better so, than if it were held within me!” the Professor murmured with a bewildered air, as if he hardly knew what he was saying. “Bed, I think your Highness said, and a cooling-draught?” And he wandered dreamily back to where Uggug sulkily awaited him.

I followed them out of the room, and down the passage, the Professor murmuring to himself, all the time, as a kind of aid to his feeble memory, “C, C, C; Couch, Cooling-Draught, Correct-Grammar,” till, in turning a corner, he met Sylvie and Bruno, so suddenly that the startled Professor let go of his fat pupil, who instantly took to his heels.