



Chapter 10

The Other Professor

“We were looking for you!” cried Sylvie, in a tone of great relief. “We do want you so much, you ca’n’t think!”

“What is it, dear children?” the Professor asked, beaming on them with a very different look from what Uggug ever got from him.

“We want you to speak to the Gardener for us,” Sylvie said, as she and Bruno took the old man’s hands and led him into the hall.

“He’s ever so unkind!” Bruno mournfully added. “They’s all unkind to us, now that Father’s gone. The Lion were much nicer!”

“But you must explain to me, please,” the Professor said with an anxious look, “which is the Lion, and which is the Gardener. It’s most important not to get two such animals confused together. And one’s very liable to do it in their case—both having mouths, you know—”

“Doos oo always confuses two animals together?” Bruno asked.

“Pretty often, I’m afraid,” the Professor candidly confessed. “Now, for instance, there’s the rabbit-hutch and the hall-clock.” The Professor pointed them out. “One gets a little confused with them—both having doors, you know. Now, only yesterday—would you believe it?—I put some lettuces into the clock, and tried to wind up the rabbit!”

“Did the rabbit go, after oo wounded it up?” said Bruno.

The Professor clasped his hands on the top of his head, and groaned. “Go? I should think it did go! Why, it’s gone? And where ever it’s gone to—that’s what I ca’n’t find out! I’ve done my best—I’ve read all the article ‘Rabbit’ in the great dictionary—Come in!”

“Only the tailor, Sir, with your little bill,” said a meek voice outside the door.

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“Ah, well, I can soon settle his business,” the Professor said to the children, “if you’ll just wait a minute. How much is it, this year, my man?” The tailor had come in while he was speaking.

“Well, it’s been a doubling so many years, you see,” the tailor replied, a little gruffly, “and I think I’d like the money now. It’s two thousand pound, it is!”

“Oh, that’s nothing!” the Professor carelessly remarked, feeling in his pocket, as if he always carried at least that amount about with him. “But wouldn’t you like to wait just another year, and make it four thousand? Just think how rich you’d be! Why, you might be a King, if you liked!”

“I don’t know as I’d care about being a King,” the man said thoughtfully. “But it; dew sound a powerful sight o’ money! Well, I think I’ll wait—”

“Of course you will!” said the Professor. “There’s good sense in you, I see. Good-day to you, my man!”

“Will you ever have to pay him that four thousand pounds?” Sylvie asked as the door closed on the departing creditor.

“Never, my child!” the Professor replied emphatically. “He’ll go on doubling it, till he dies. You see it’s always worth while waiting another year, to get twice as much money! And now what would you like to do, my little friends? Shall I take you to see the Other Professor? This would be an excellent opportunity for a visit,” he said to himself, glancing at his watch: “he generally takes a short rest —of fourteen minutes and a half—about this time.”

Bruno hastily went round to Sylvie, who was standing at the other side of the Professor, and put his hand into hers. “I thinks we’d like to go,” he said doubtfully: “only please let’s go all together. It’s best to be on the safe side, oo know!”

“Why, you talk as if you were Sylvie!” exclaimed the Professor.

“I know I did,” Bruno replied very humbly. “I quite forgotted I wasn’t Sylvie. Only I fought he might be rarver fierce!”

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The Professor laughed a jolly laugh. "Oh, he's quite tame!" he said. "He never bites. He's only a little—a little dreamy, you know." He took hold of Bruno's other hand; and led the children down a long passage I had never noticed before—not that there was anything remarkable in that: I was constantly coming on new rooms and passages in that mysterious Palace, and very seldom succeeded in finding the old ones again.

Near the end of the passage the Professor stopped. "This is his room," he said, pointing to the solid wall.

"We ca'n't get in through there!" Bruno exclaimed.

Sylvie said nothing, till she had carefully examined whether the wall opened anywhere. Then she laughed merrily. "You're playing us a trick, you dear old thing!" she said. "There's no door here!"

"There isn't any door to the room," said the Professor. "We shall have to climb in at the window."



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So we went into the garden, and soon found the window of the Other Professor's room. It was a ground-floor window, and stood invitingly open: the Professor first lifted the two children in, and then he and I climbed in after them.

The Other Professor was seated at a table, with a large book open before him, on which his forehead was resting: he had clasped his arms round the book, and was snoring heavily. "He usually reads like that," the Professor remarked, "when the book's very interesting: and then sometimes it's very difficult to get him to attend!"

This seemed to be one of the difficult times: the Professor lifted him up, once or twice, and shook him violently: but he always returned to his book the moment he was let go of, and showed by his heavy breathing that the book was as interesting as ever.

"How dreamy he is!" the Professor exclaimed. "He must have got to a very interesting part of the book!" And he rained quite a shower of thumps on the Other Professor's back, shouting "Hoy! Hoy!" all the time. "Isn't it wonderful that he should be so dreamy?" he said to Bruno.

"If he's always as sleepy as that," Bruno remarked, "a course he's dreamy!"

"But what are we to do?" said the Professor. "You see he's quite wrapped up in the book!"

"Suppose oo shuts the book?" Bruno suggested.

"That's it!" cried the delighted Professor. "Of course that'll do it!" And he shut up the book so quickly that he caught the Other Professor's nose between the leaves, and gave it a severe pinch.

The Other Professor instantly rose to his feet, and carried the book away to the end of the room, where he put it back in its place in the book-case. "I've been reading for eighteen hours and three-quarters," he said, "and now I shall rest for fourteen minutes and a half. Is the Lecture all ready?"

"Very nearly," the Professor humbly replied. "I shall ask you to give me a hint or two—there will be a few little difficulties—"

"And Banquet, I think you said?"

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“Oh, yes! The Banquet comes first, of course. People never enjoy Abstract Science, you know, when they’re ravenous with hunger. And then there’s the Fancy-Dress-Ball. Oh, there’ll be lots of entertainment!”

“Where will the Ball come in?” said the Other Professor.

“I think it had better come at the beginning of the Banquet—it brings people together so nicely, you know.”

“Yes, that’s the right order. First the Meeting: then the Eating: then the Treating—for I’m sure any Lecture you give us will be a treat!” said the Other Professor, who had been standing with his back to us all this time, occupying himself in taking the books out, one by one, and turning them upside-down. An easel, with a black board on it, stood near him: and, every time that he turned a book upside-down, he made a mark on the board with a piece of chalk.

“And as to the ‘Pig-Tale’—which you have so kindly promised to give us—” the Professor went on, thoughtfully rubbing his chin. “I think that had better come at the end of the Banquet: then people can listen to it quietly.”

“Shall I sing it?” the Other Professor asked, with a smile of delight.

“If you can,” the Professor replied, cautiously.

“Let me try,” said the Other Professor, seating himself at the pianoforte. “For the sake of argument, let us assume that it begins on A flat.” And he struck the note in question. “La, la, la! I think that’s within an octave of it.” He struck the note again, and appealed to Bruno, who was standing at his side. “Did I sing it like that, my child?”

“No, oo didn’t,” Bruno replied with great decision. “It were more like a duck.”

“Single notes are apt to have that effect,” the Other Professor said with a sigh. “Let me try a whole verse.

There was a Pig, that sat alone,
Beside a ruined Pump.
By day and night he made his moan:

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It would have stirred a heart of stone
To see him wring his hoofs and groan,
Because he could not jump.

“Would you call that a tune, Professor?” he asked, when he had finished.

The Professor considered a little. “Well,” he said at last, “some of the notes are the same as others and some are different but I should hardly call it a tune.”

“Let me try it a bit by myself,” said the Other Professor. And he began touching the notes here and there, and humming to himself like an angry bluebottle.

“How do you like his singing?” the Professor asked the children in a low voice.

“It isn’t very beautiful,” Sylvie said, hesitatingly.

“It’s very extremely ugly!” Bruno said, without any hesitation at all.

“All extremes are bad,” the Professor said, very gravely. “For instance, Sobriety is a very good thing, when practised in moderation: but even Sobriety, when carried to an extreme, has its disadvantages.”

“What are its disadvantages?” was the question that rose in my mind— and, as usual, Bruno asked it for me. “What are its lizard bandages?”

“Well, this is one of them,” said the Professor. “When a man’s tipsy (that’s one extreme, you know), he sees one thing as two. But, when he’s extremely sober (that’s the other extreme), he sees two things as one. It’s equally inconvenient, whichever happens.

“What does ‘inconvenient’ mean?” Bruno whispered to Sylvie.

“The difference between ‘convenient’ and ‘inconvenient’ is best explained by an example,” said the Other Professor, who had overheard the question. “If you’ll just think over any Poem that contains the two words—such as—”

The Professor put his hands over his ears, with a look of dismay. “If you once let him begin a Poem,” he said to Sylvie, “he’ll never leave off again! He never does!”

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“Did he ever begin a Poem and not leave off again?” Sylvie enquired.

“Three times,” said the Professor.

Bruno raised himself on tiptoe, till his lips were on a level with Sylvie’s ear. “What became of them three Poems?” he whispered. “Is he saying them all, now?”

“Hush!” said Sylvie. “The Other Professor is speaking!”

“I’ll say it very quick,” murmured the Other Professor, with downcast eyes, and melancholy voice, which contrasted oddly with his face, as he had forgotten to leave off smiling. (“At least it wasn’t exactly a smile,” as Sylvie said afterwards: “it looked as if his mouth was made that shape.”)

“Go on then,” said the Professor. “What must be must be.”

“Remember that!” Sylvie whispered to Bruno, “It’s a very good rule for whenever you hurt yourself.”

“And it’s a very good rule for whenever I make a noise,” said the saucy little fellow. “So you remember it too, Miss!”

“Whatever do you mean?” said Sylvie, trying to frown, a thing she never managed particularly well.

“Oftens and oftens,” said Bruno, “haven’t oo told me ‘ There mustn’t be so much noise, Bruno!’ when I’ve tolded oo ‘There must!’ Why, there isn’t no rules at all about ‘There mustn’t’! But oo never believes me!”

“As if any one could believe you, you wicked wicked boy!” said Sylvie. The words were severe enough, but I am of opinion that, when you are really anxious to impress a criminal with a sense of his guilt, you ought not to pronounce the sentence with your lips quite close to his cheek—since a kiss at the end of it, however accidental, weakens the effect terribly.