



Chapter 12

 A Musical Gardener 

The Other Professor regarded him with some anxiety. “The smaller animal ought to go to bed at once,” he said with an air of authority.

“Why at once?” said the Professor.

“Because he can’t go at twice,” said the Other Professor.

The Professor gently clapped his hands. ‘Isn’t he wonderful!’ he said to Sylvie. “Nobody else could have thought of the reason, so quick. Why, of course he ca’n’t go at twice! It would hurt him to be divided.”

This remark woke up Bruno, suddenly and completely. “I don’t want to be divided,” he said decisively.

“It does very well on a diagram,” said the Other Professor. “I could show it you in a minute, only the chalk’s a little blunt.”

“Take care!” Sylvie anxiously exclaimed, as he began, rather clumsily, to point it. “You’ll cut your finger off, if you hold the knife so!”

“If oo cuts it off, will oo give it to me, please? Bruno thoughtfully added.

“It’s like this,” said the Other Professor, hastily drawing a long line upon the black board, and marking the letters ‘A,’ ‘B,’ at the two ends, and ‘C’ in the middle: “let me explain it to you. If AB were to be divided into two parts at C—”

“It would be drowned,” Bruno pronounced confidently.

The Other Professor gasped. “What would be drowned?”

“Why the bumble-bee, of course!” said Bruno. “And the two bits would sink down in the sea!”

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Here the Professor interfered, as the Other Professor was evidently too much puzzled to go on with his diagram.

“When I said it would hurt him, I was merely referring to the action of the nerves—”

The Other Professor brightened up in a moment. “The action of the nerves,” he began eagerly, “is curiously slow in some people. I had a friend, once, that, if you burnt him with a red-hot poker, it would take years and years before he felt it!”

“And if you only pinched him?” queried Sylvie.

“Then it would take ever so much longer, of course. In fact, I doubt if the man himself would ever feel it, at all. His grandchildren might.”

“I wouldn’t like to be the grandchild of a pinched grandfather, would you, Mister Sir?” Bruno whispered. “It might come just when you wanted to be happy!”

That would be awkward, I admitted, taking it quite as a matter of course that he had so suddenly caught sight of me. “But don’t you always want to be happy, Bruno?”

“Not always,” Bruno said thoughtfully. “Sometimes, when I’s too happy, I wants to be a little miserable. Then I just tell Sylvie about it, oo know, and Sylvie sets me some lessons. Then it’s all right.”

“I’m sorry you don’t like lessons,” I said.

“You should copy Sylvie. She’s always as busy as the day is long!”

“Well, so am I!” said Bruno.

“No, no!” Sylvie corrected him. “You’re as busy as the day is short!”

“Well, what’s the difference?” Bruno asked. “Mister Sir, isn’t the day as short as it’s long? I mean, isn’t it the same length?”

Never having considered the question in this light, I suggested that they had better ask the Professor; and they ran off in a moment to appeal to their old friend. The Professor left off polishing his spectacles to consider. “My dears,” he said after a minute, “the day

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is the same length as anything that is the same length as it." And he resumed his never-ending task of polishing.

The children returned, slowly and thoughtfully, to report his answer. "Isn't he wise?"

Sylvie asked in an awestruck whisper. "If I was as wise as that, I should have a head-ache all day long. I know I should!"

"You appear to be talking to somebody—that isn't here," the Professor said, turning round to the children. "Who is it?"

Bruno looked puzzled. "I never talks to nobody when he isn't here!" he replied. "It isn't good manners. Oo should always wait till he comes, before oo talks to him!"

The Professor looked anxiously in my direction, and seemed to look through and through me without seeing me. "Then who are you talking to?" he said. "There isn't anybody here, you know, except the Other Professor and he isn't here!" he added wildly, turning round and round like a teetotum. "Children! Help to look for him! Quick! He's got lost again!"

The children were on their feet in a moment.

"Where shall we look?" said Sylvie.

"Anywhere!" shouted the excited Professor. "Only be quick about it!" And he began trotting round and round the room, lifting up the chairs, and shaking them.

Bruno took a very small book out of the bookcase, opened it, and shook it in imitation of the Professor. "He isn't here," he said.

"He ca'n't be there, Bruno!" Sylvie said indignantly.

"Course he ca'n't!" said Bruno. "I should have shooked him out, if he'd been in there!"

"Has he ever been lost before?" Sylvie enquired, turning up a corner of the hearth-rug, and peeping under it.

"Once before," said the Professor: "he once lost himself in a wood—"

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“And couldn’t he find his-self again?” said Bruno. “Why didn’t he shout? He’d be sure to hear his-self, ‘cause he couldn’t be far off, oo know.”

“Lets try shouting,” said the Professor.

“What shall we shout?” said Sylvie.

“On second thoughts, don’t shout,” the Professor replied. “The Vice-Warden might hear you. He’s getting awfully strict!”

This reminded the poor children of all the troubles, about which they had come to their old friend. Bruno sat down on the floor and began crying. “He is so cruel!” he sobbed. “And he lets Uggug take away all my toys! And such horrid meals!”

“What did you have for dinner to-day?” said the Professor.

“A little piece of a dead crow,” was Bruno’s mournful reply.

“He means rook-pie,” Sylvie explained.

“It were a dead crow,” Bruno persisted. “And there were a apple-pudding —and Uggug ate it all—and I got nuffin but a crust! And I asked for a orange—and—didn’t get it!” And the poor little fellow buried his face in Sylvie’s lap, who kept gently stroking his hair, as she went on. “It’s all true, Professor dear! They do treat my darling Bruno very badly! And they’re not kind to me either,” she added in a lower tone, as if that were a thing of much less importance.

The Professor got out a large red silk handkerchief, and wiped his eyes. “I wish I could help you, dear children!” he said. “But what can I do?”

“We know the way to Fairyland—where Father’s gone—quite well,” said Sylvie: “if only the Gardener would let us out.”

“Won’t he open the door for you?” said the Professor.

“Not for us,” said Sylvie: “but I’m sure he would for you. Do come and ask him, Professor dear!”

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"I'll come this minute!" said the Professor.

Bruno sat up and dried his eyes. "Isn't he kind, Mister Sir?"

"He is indeed," said I. But the Professor took no notice of my remark. He had put on a beautiful cap with a long tassel, and was selecting one of the Other Professor's walking-sticks, from a stand in the corner of the room. "A thick stick in one's hand makes people respectful," he was saying to himself. "Come along, dear children!" And we all went out into the garden together.

"I shall address him, first of all," the Professor explained as we went along, "with a few playful remarks on the weather. I shall then question him about the Other Professor. This will have a double advantage. First, it will open the conversation (you can't even drink a bottle of wine without opening it first): and secondly, if he's seen the Other Professor, we shall find him that way: and, if he hasn't, we sha'n't."

On our way, we passed the target, at which Uggug had been made to shoot during the Ambassador's visit.

"See!" said the Professor, pointing out a hole in the middle of the bull's-eye. "His Imperial Fatness had only one shot at it; and he went in just here!

Bruno carefully examined the hole. "Couldn't go in there," he whispered to me. "He are too fat!"

We had no sort of difficulty in finding the Gardener. Though he was hidden from us by some trees, that harsh voice of his served to direct us; and, as we drew nearer, the words of his song became more and more plainly audible:-

"He thought he saw an Albatross
That fluttered round the lamp:
He looked again, and found it was
A Penny-Postage-Stamp.
'You'd best be getting home,' he said:
'The nights are very damp!'"

"Would it be afraid of catching cold?" said Bruno.

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If it got very damp," Sylvie suggested, "it might stick to something, you know."

"And that somefin would have to go by the post, what ever it was!" Bruno eagerly exclaimed. "Suppose it was a cow! Wouldn't it be dreadful for the other things!"

"And all these things happened to him," said the Professor. "That's what makes the song so interesting."

"He must have had a very curious life," said Sylvie.

"You may say that!" the Professor heartily rejoined.

"Of course she may!" cried Bruno.

By this time we had come up to the Gardener, who was standing on one leg, as usual, and busily employed in watering a bed of flowers with an empty watering-can.

"It hasn't got no water in it!" Bruno explained to him, pulling his sleeve to attract his attention.

"It's lighter to hold," said the Gardener. "A lot of water in it makes one's arms ache." And he went on with his work, singing softly to himself

"The nights are very damp!"

"In digging things out of the ground which you probably do now and then," the Professor began in a loud voice; "in making things into heaps—which no doubt you often do; and in kicking things about with one heel—which you seem never to leave off doing; have you ever happened to notice another Professor something like me, but different?"

"Never!" shouted the Gardener, so loudly and violently that we all drew back in alarm. "There ain't such a thing!"

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“We will try a less exciting topic,” the Professor mildly remarked to the children. “You were asking—”

“We asked him to let us through the garden-door,” said Sylvie: “but he wouldn’t: but perhaps he would for you!”

The Professor put the request, very humbly and courteously.

“I wouldn’t mind letting you out,” said the Gardener. “But I mustn’t open the door for children. D’you think I’d disobey the Rules? Not for one-and-sixpence!”

The Professor cautiously produced a couple of shillings.

“That’ll do it!” the Gardener shouted, as he hurled the watering-can across the flower-bed, and produced a handful of keys—one large one, and a number of small ones.

“But look here, Professor dear!” whispered Sylvie. “He needn’t open the door for us, at all. We can go out with you.”

“True, dear child!” the Professor thankfully replied, as he replaced the coins in his pocket. “That saves two shillings!” And he took the children’s hands, that they might all go out together when the door was opened. This, however, did not seem a very likely event, though the Gardener patiently tried all the small keys, over and over again.

At last the Professor ventured on a gentle suggestion. “Why not try the large one? I have often observed that a door unlocks much more nicely with its own key.”

The very first trial of the large key proved a success: the Gardener opened the door, and held out his hand for the money.

The Professor shook his head. “You are acting by Rule,” he explained, “in opening the door for me. And now it’s open, we are going out by Rule—the Rule of Three.”

The Gardener looked puzzled, and let us go out; but, as he locked the door behind us, we heard him singing thoughtfully to himself

”He thought he saw a Garden-Door

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That opened with a key:
He looked again, and found it was
A Double Rule of Three:
'And all its mystery,' he said,
'Is clear as day to me!'"

"I shall now return," said the Professor, when we had walked a few yards: "you see, it's impossible to read here, for all my books are in the house."

But the children still kept fast hold of his hands. "Do come with us!" Sylvie entreated with tears in her eyes.

"Well, well!" said the good-natured old man. "Perhaps I'll come after you, some day soon. But I must go back now. You see I left off at a comma, and it's so awkward not knowing how the sentence finishes! Besides, you've got to go through Dogland first, and I'm always a little nervous about dogs. But it'll be quite easy to come, as soon as I've completed my new invention—for carrying one's-self, you know. It wants just a little more working out."

"Won't that be very tiring, to carry yourself?" Sylvie enquired.

"Well, no, my child. You see, whatever fatigue one incurs by carrying, one saves by being carried! Good-bye, dears! Good-bye, Sir!" he added to my intense surprise, giving my hand an affectionate squeeze.

"Good-bye, Professor!" I replied: but my voice sounded strange and far away, and the children took not the slightest notice of our farewell. Evidently they neither saw me nor heard me, as, with their arms lovingly twined round each other, they marched boldly on.