



Chapter 23

 The Pig-Tale

By this time the appetites of the guests seemed to be nearly satisfied, and even Bruno had the resolution to say, when the Professor offered him a fourth slice of plum-pudding, "I think three helpings is enough!"

Suddenly the Professor started as if he had been electrified. "Why, I had nearly forgotten the most important part of the entertainment! The Other Professor is to recite a Tale of a Pig--I mean a Pig-Tale," he corrected himself. "It has Introductory Verses at the beginning, and at the end."

"It ca'n't have Introductory Verses at the end, can it?" said Sylvie.

"Wait till you hear it," said the Professor: "then you'll see. I m not sure it hasn't some in the middle, as well." Here he rose to his feet, and there was an instant silence through the Banqueting-Hall: they evidently expected a speech.

"Ladies, and gentlemen," the Professor began, "the Other Professor is so kind as to recite a Poem. The title of it is 'The Pig-Tale'. He never recited it before!" (General cheering among the guests.) "He will never recite it again!" (Frantic excitement, and wild cheering all down the hall, the Professor himself mounting the table in hot haste, to lead the cheering, and waving his spectacles in one hand and a spoon in the other.)

Then the Other Professor got up, and began:

Little Birds are dining
Warily and well,
Hid in mossy cell:
Hid, I say, by waiters
Gorgeous in their gaiters--
I've a Tale to tell.

Little Birds are feeding
Justices with jam,
Rich in frizzled ham:

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Rich, I say, in oysters
Haunting shady cloisters--
That is what I am.

Little Birds are teaching
Tigresses to smile,
Innocent of guile:
Smile, I say, not smirkle--
Mouth a semicircle,
That's the proper style.

Little Birds are sleeping
All among the pins,
Where the loser wins:
Where, I say, he sneezes
When and how he pleases--
So the Tale begins.

There was a Pig that sat alone
Beside a ruined Pump:
By day and night he made his moan--
It would have stirred a heart of stone
To see him wring his hoofs and groan,
Because he could not jump.

A certain Camel heard him shout--
A Camel with a hump.
"Oh, is it Grief, or is it Gout?
What is this bellowing about?"
That Pig replied, with quivering snout,
"Because I cannot jump!"

That Camel scanned him, dreamy-eyed.
"Methinks you are too plump.
I never knew a Pig so wide--
That wobbled so from side to side--
Who could, however much he tried,
Do such a thing as jump!

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“ Yet mark those trees, two miles away,
All clustered in a clump:
If you could trot there twice a day,
Nor ever pause for rest or play,
In the far future--Who can say--
You may be fit to jump.”

That Camel passed, and left him there,
Beside the ruined Pump.
Oh, horrid was that Pig's despair!
His shrieks of anguish filled the air.
He wrung his hoofs, he rent his hair,
Because he could not jump.

There was a Frog that wandered by--
A sleek and shining lump:
Inspected him with fishy eye,
And said “O Pig, what makes you cry?”
And bitter was that Pig's reply,
“Because I cannot jump!”

That Frog he grinned a grin of glee,
And hit his chest a thump.
”O Pig,” he said, “be ruled by me,
And you shall see what you shall see.
This minute, for a trifling fee,
I'll teach you how to jump!

“ You may be faint from many a fall,
And bruised by many a bump:
But, if you persevere through all,
And practice first on something small,
Concluding with a ten-foot wall,
You'll find that you can jump!”

That Pig looked up with joyful start:
“Oh Frog, you are a trump!

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Your words have healed my inward smart--
Come, name your fee and do your part:
Bring comfort to a broken heart
By teaching me to jump!"

"My fee shall be a mutton-chop,
My goal this ruined Pump.
Observe with what an airy flop
I plant myself upon the top!
Now bend your knees and take a hop,
For that's the way to jump!"

Uprose that Pig, and rushed, full whack,
Against the ruined Pump:
Rolled over like an empty sack
And settled down upon his back
While all his bones at once went "Crack!"
It was a fatal jump.

When the Other Professor had recited this Verse, he went across to the fire-place, and put his head up the chimney. In doing this, he lost his balance, and fell head first into the empty grate, and got so firmly fixed there that it was some time before he could be dragged out again.

Bruno had had time to say "I thought he wanted to see how many peoples was up the chimbley."

And Sylvie had said "Chimney--not chimbley."

And Bruno had said "Don't talk 'ubbish!"

All this, while the Other Professor was being extracted.

"You must have blacked your face!" the Empress said anxiously. "Let me send for some soap?"

"Thanks, no," said the Other Professor, keeping his face turned away. "Black's quite a respectable colour. Besides, soap would be no use without water--"

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Keeping his back well turned away from the audience, he went on with the Introductory Verses:

Little Birds are writing
Interesting books,
To be read by cooks:
Read, I say, not roasted--
Letterpress, when toasted,
Loses its good looks.

Little Birds are playing
Bagpipes on the shore,
Where the tourists snore:
"Thanks!" they cry. "'Tis thrilling!
Take, oh take this shilling!
Let us have no more!"

Little Birds are bathing
Crocodiles in cream,
Like a happy dream:
Like, but not so lasting--
Crocodiles, when fasting,
Are not all they seem!

That Camel passed, as Day grew dim
Around the ruined Pump.
"O broken heart! O broken limb!
It needs", that Camel said to him
"Something more fairy-like and slim,
To execute a jump!"

That Pig lay still as any stone
And could not stir a stump:
Nor ever, if the truth were known
Was he again observed to moan
Nor ever wring his hoofs and groan,
Because he could not jump.

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That Frog made no remark, for he
Was dismal as a dump:
He knew the consequence must be
That he would never get his fee--
And still he sits, in miserie
Upon that ruined Pump!

“It’s a miserable story!” said Bruno. “It begins miserably, and it ends miserabler. I think I shall cry. Sylvie, please lend me your handkerchief.”

“I haven’t got it with me,” Sylvie whispered

“Then I wo’n’t cry,” said Bruno manfully.

There are more Introductory Verses to come,” said the Other Professor, “but I’m hungry.” He sat down, cut a large slice of cake, put it on Bruno’s plate, and gazed at his own empty plate in astonishment

“Where did you get that cake?” Sylvie whispered to Bruno.

“He gived it me,” said Bruno.

“But you shouldn’t ask for things! You know you shouldn’t!”

“I didn’t ask,” said Bruno, taking a fresh mouthful: “he gived it me.”

Sylvie considered this for a moment: then she saw her way out of it. “Well, then, ask him to give me some!”

“You seem to enjoy that cake?” the Professor remarked.

“Doos that mean ‘munch’?” Bruno whispered to Sylvie.

Sylvie nodded. “It means ‘to munch’ and ‘to like to munch’.”

Bruno smiled at the Professor. “I doos enjoy it,” he said.

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The Other Professor caught the word. "And I hope you're enjoying yourself, little Man?" he enquired.

Bruno's look of horror quite startled him. "No, indeed I aren't!" he said.

The Other Professor looked thoroughly puzzled. "Well, well!" he said. "Try some cowslip wine!" And he filled a glass and handed it to Bruno. "Drink this, my dear, and you'll be quite another man!"

"Who shall I be?" said Bruno, pausing in the act of putting it to his lips.

"Don't ask so many questions!" Sylvie interposed, anxious to save the poor old man from further bewilderment. "Suppose we get the Professor to tell us a story."

Bruno adopted the idea with enthusiasm. Please do, he cried eagerly. "Sumfin about tigers--and bumble-bees --and robin-redbreasts, oo knows!"

"Why should you always have live things in stories? said the Professor. "Why don't you have events, or circumstances?"

"Oh, please invent a story like that!" cried Bruno.

The Professor began fluently enough. "Once a coincidence was taking a walk with a little accident, and they met an explanation--a very old explanation--so old that it was quite doubled up, and looked more like a conundrum--" he broke off suddenly.

"Please go on!" both children exclaimed.

The Professor made a candid confession. "It's a very difficult sort to invent, I find. Suppose Bruno tells one first."

Bruno was only too happy to adopt the suggestion.

"Once there were a Pig, and a Accordion, and two jars of Orange-marmalade--"

"The dramatis personae," murmured the Professor. "Well, what then?"

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“So, when the Pig played on the Accordion,” Bruno went on, “one of the Jars of Orange-marmalade didn’t like the tune, and the other Jar of Orange-marmalade did like the tune-- I know I shall get confused among those Jars of Orange-marmalade, Sylvie!” he whispered anxiously.

“I will now recite the other Introductory Verses,” said the Other Professor.

Little Birds are choking
Baronets with bun,
Taught to fire a gun:
Taught, I say, to splinter
Salmon in the winter--
Merely for the fun.

Little Birds are hiding
Crimes in carpet-bags,
Blessed by happy stags:
Blessed, I say, though beaten--
Since our friends are eaten
When the memory flags.

Little Birds are tasting
Gratitude and gold,
Pale with sudden cold:
Pale, I say, and wrinkled--
When the bells have tinkled,
And the Tale is told.

“The next thing to be done”, the Professor cheerfully remarked to the Lord Chancellor, as soon as the applause, caused by the recital of the Pig-Tale, had come to an end, “is to drink the Emperor’s health, is it not?”

“Undoubtedly!” the Lord Chancellor replied with much solemnity, as he rose to his feet to give the necessary directions for the ceremony. “Fill your glasses!” he thundered. All did so, instantly. “Drink the Emperor’s health!” A general gurgling resounded all through the Hall. “Three cheers for the Emperor!” The faintest possible sound followed this announcement: and the Chancellor, with admirable presence of mind, instantly proclaimed “A speech from the Emperor!”

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The Emperor had begun his speech almost before the words were uttered. "However unwilling to be Emperor --since you all wish me to be Emperor--you know how badly the late Warden managed things--with such enthusiasm as you have shown--he persecuted you--he taxed you too heavily--you know who is fittest man to be Emperor--my brother had no sense--"

How long this curious speech might have lasted it is impossible to say, for just at this moment a hurricane shook the palace to its foundations, bursting open the windows, extinguishing some of the lamps, and filling the air with clouds of dust, which took strange shapes in the air, and seemed to form words.

But the storm subsided as suddenly as it had risen-- the casements swung into their places again: the dust vanished: all was as it had been a minute ago--with the exception of the Emperor and Empress, over whom had come a wondrous change. The vacant stare, the meaning less smile, had passed away: all could see that these two strange beings had returned to their senses.

The Emperor continued his speech as if there had been no interruption. "And we have behaved--my wife and I--like two arrant Knaves. We deserve no better name. When my brother went away, you lost the best Warden you ever had. And I've been doing my best, wretched hypocrite that I am, to cheat you into making me an Emperor. Me! One that has hardly got the wits to be shoe-black!"

The Lord Chancellor wrung his hands in despair. "He is mad, good people!" he was beginning. But both speeches stopped suddenly--and, in the dead silence that followed, a knocking was heard at the outer door.

"What is it?" was the general cry. People began running in and out. The excitement increased every moment The Lord Chancellor, forgetting all the rules of Court ceremony, ran full speed down the hall, and in a minute returned, pale and gasping for breath.