

Πανδύρα
Επισκεψαμεν ολίαν Πλανήτην Οξυμύρα

A VISIT TO PLANET ALLISPOSSIBLE

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THE PROFESSOR WHO CAME OUT OF THE TV SET

The last show on the TV had just ended: "A very goodnight to all," said the Professor. Then, he winked meaningfully, and whispered in a conspiratorial way.

"Time for the visit to Planet Allispossible."

Johnny elbowed Liz, "Liz, he's talking to us."

"Oh, come on, are you serious? How could he be talking to us ..."

"Hurry up, the spaceship can't wait forever", insisted the Professor.

"Liz, I'm telling you, he's talking to us, shouted Johnny".

"It's a television trick", said Liz knowingly. "They are showing him looking at us, while in fact he is only looking into the camera lens. Do you remember that hypnotist, who hypnotized people from the TV screen? He looked at them right in the eyes, see, like that, and ... Johnny, don't look at him, he'll hypnotize you."

"I can't wait not even for a second", said the Professor impatiently, "are you coming or should I come?"

In a single bound he was out of the TV screen, sitting comfortably next to them on the couch.

Liz was frightened.

"How on earth did you do that?" wondered Johnny, at a loss.

"That,' what 'that'?"

“I mean that leap, just a hop and out of the TV set”

“No big deal”, said the Professor modestly. “It’s a matter of practice. I walk three miles a day, I bike two miles, I swim one mile and so on and so forth. I have a strong build, you see; take a look at my arms.” The Professor rolled up his sleeves to show them his arms. They were bony and white, just like Grandpa Aloysius’s arms when he takes off his shirt before he takes a bath.

“Do you have any Seltzer Water?”, he asked? “I had garlic dip, you know, and it gave me indigestion.”

The Professor was rubbing his stomach. Liz ran to the kitchen to look for Seltzer. As she was pouring it into the glass she hesitated.

“What am I doing now? I am taking soda to a certain Professor who just came out of the TV set! What are Mom and Dad going to say? They’ve told us not to open the door to strangers.”

Liz put the Seltzer back in the fridge; but she took it back out right away.

“Oh, bother! It’s just a soda, no big deal. The poor man didn’t even ask for orange juice. Besides, he didn’t come from the door, did he? He came from the television. The television is inside the house. Anyway, we didn’t open our door.”

Liz ran back, taking the Professor the Seltzer Water. He gulped it at once, and put the empty glass on top of the television.

“Excellent! Now let’s move on quickly, no delays”, he said, “We have to be back at the latest by midnight. Otherwise the spell is broken.”

“This is from Cinderella”, intervened Liz. “She had to be back by midnight, and then as she was running she lost her slipper and the prince ...”

But nobody was paying attention to the story of Cinderella. The Professor had already reentered the television screen. Johnny followed him

“What are you doing, Johnny? Where are you going?”

“Come, Liz, quick, climb on the table, take my hand.”

He extended his hand to Liz from inside the TV. She grabbed his hand and Johnny pulled her in.

“Run, run, the spaceship is leaving in three minutes!” the Professor was shouting.

His hair, all white, was waving in the air as he ran towards a huge metallic ball all glittering and shining. Thousands of tiny light bulbs and little candles flickered all around it. The Professor climbed onto a small iron staircase and as he was entering the contraption he was counting in a loud voice.

“Ten, nine, eight, seven ... Come, Liz, hurry up”, screamed Johnny.

“Please don’t leave me, wait for me”, wept Liz.

“Six, five, four”, shouted the Professor.

“I’m coming”, Liz gasped as she put her foot onto the first step.

“Three, two, one”, screamed the Professor, “and the last one ... the lucky one is ... Come, Lizzie ... Hurray! You made it!”

“Ah!” Liz collapsed on the seat.

“Zero!” The Professor slammed the spaceship door.

“Fasten your seatbelts”, ordered the Professor, “Off we go”, and he started singing:

“Old King Cole
Was a merry old soul
And a merry old soul was he ...”

Liz and Johnny plugged their ears. The noise of the engine was deafening. When they unplugged them they heard the Professor saying: “So, you should never forget. On Planet Allispossible everything is possible and everything is allowed, except for one little sentence: The ‘I cannot’ sentence.

“I don’t quite understand that, Professor”, said Johnny.

Liz noticed that on the seat next to her there was a red velvet box. She opened it. It was filled with seashells.

“They are so pretty!” she exclaimed. “Look, Johnny, they are exactly like the shells that we collected last summer at the beach, and we put them on display in Mama’s glass cabinet.”

“Noooo!” Screamed the Professor, and Liz jumped two feet off her seat in fear. “No, don’t touch them”, went on the Professor, “this is my valuable collection of seashells. They will save us in case we are in danger.”

“What kind of danger?” said Liz, terrified. “I want to go to my Mommy.”

“There will be no danger if you remember never to pronounce the sentence, ‘I cannot’. Do you understand?”

“I want to go to my Mommy”, said Liz again.

“It’s too late now; we are already there”, said the Professor. “Au revoir and goodbye. And remember: never, under any circumstances say, ‘I cannot’, ‘You cannot’, ‘He/she cannot’, ‘We cannot’, ‘They cannot’. From the moment you set foot on Planet Allispossible you’ll **never** pronounce this verb. All right then, we will meet again right here, in exactly one month.”

“Wait a second, Professor. What did you just say? In one month?”

protested Johnny. “You have said to us, have you not, that we have to be back before midnight? Because if we don’t the spell will be broken?”

“One month on Planet Allispossible equals one minute on Planet Earth.

Understand? Because we have said ALL IS POSSIBLE. Didn’t we?

Therefore, bye-bye and I’ll see you here, in a month.”

“Please don’t go. Don’t leave us alone, please, please”, pleaded Liz, almost in tears.

The Professor had already opened the door and jumped out.

“If we split up”, explained the Professor, “each one of us will have different stories to tell. Simple mathematics. Go on, make the calculations, Liz, $1 \times 1 = 1$, $1 \times 2 = 2$, $1 \times 3 = 3$. If all three of us stay together we’ll see the same things and we will all be telling the same story. Whereas if we split up each one will see different things, and when we all get together we’ll have different stories to tell. Each one will tell his story to the other two. This way we’ll have three stories times three, nine stories in total.”

Liz did not understand anything, but she wasn't good in mathematics anyway.

"Lizzie, it is so simple", said the Professor cheerfully, and at that moment he looked exactly like Grandpa Aloysius. "If we go back to Earth with nine stories from Planet Allispossible we will be famous. Imagine the headlines in the newspapers: 'Nine incredible stories from space', or even better, 'Space Odyssey.'

"This is the name of a movie", intervened Liz, "and I don't want ... no, I don't want to be all by myself."

The Professor walked to her, he gave her the box with the shells and said solemnly:

"The gang of the Secret Three is entrusting you with the Secret Box. From now on, our safety is in your hands. The moment you sense danger, use one of the seashells. Your message will be received right away."

However, instead of calming Liz's fears the Professor's words frightened her even more so.

"Johnny", she said, with tears in her eyes, "at least you stay with me, please."

"Shame on you, Liz", Johnny scolded her sternly, "When you made your decision to come, you took an oath. Remember your oath?"

'A little yellow onion
I toss it. I catch it.
A little yellow onion
Will take me very far.'

“Oh, this is something else”, said Liz, in tears. “Why are you mixing things up? That was the game I was playing with Mary-Anne in the afternoon and you teased us and brought us an onion on a plate.”

But Johnny insisted.

“Just think, Lizzie, think how many boys and girls would like to be in our place right now. The Professor picked the two of us because ...”

“Because you two speak the language of Planet Allispossible beautifully”, said the Professor cheerfully. He was now wearing a funny lady’s hat with colorful feathers.

“You two”, he went on, “speak the *Allispossiblish* with no Earthlish accent. And because money is time I am going. We’ll meet again in this exact place in a year, or two, or ten at the most.”

“In a month, Mr. Professor, Sir, in a month. You keep confusing things”, corrected Johnny.

“What difference does it make, a month, a year, a day, a minute, thirty years, forty years, fifty years ... Au revoir, and till I see you again, ciao, cheerio, bye-bye, aufwiedersehen.”

The Professor made a cute curtsy, waving the lady’s hat with the feathers. Then he walked away, singing an old-fashioned song to himself.

“She shook the blooming almond tree
with both her lovely hands
And little blossoms showered on
her back, her lap and hair.”

Johnny gave last-minute instructions to Liz.

“Remember, Liz, you will never utter that forbidden sentence. All right? You know which one I mean. I will not repeat it now. You shouldn’t even think of it. Do you understand? Just don’t, don’t think of that sentence.” Poor Liz bit her tongue to stop the sentence from escaping from her mouth.

“The next thing”, Johnny went on, “is to make sure that you have a notebook and a pen to write your story.”

“Here is the notebook, and here is the pen”, said Liz.

“Make sure to remember the water bottle, and some bread and cheese to snack on, so you don’t starve to death.”

“Bread and cheese”, repeated Liz, mesmerized.

“And last, but most important, take with you the box with the shell collection. Keep it safe at the bottom of your bag. You should guard it like a treasure. All right? You will use one of these shells only if you are in real difficulty. Okay?”

“Everything is so confusing. I’m not sure I understand”, complained Liz. Johnny, however, was too busy to listen to complaints. He put on his scout cap, strapped on his backpack and assumed the look that Father always had when he wanted to pacify his children. Giving his sister a friendly pat on the shoulder, he said in a reassuring way:

“Let us go then, my brave Lizzie.”

He opened the spacecraft door and jumped out first. Then he extended his hand to Liz just like a real gentleman. Next he saluted in a military fashion, by raising his hand to his scout cap and said:

“Cheerio!”

And in less than a minute he had vanished. Now, poor Liz did not have the time to utter a single word. She was left all alone. She looked around. She was in a place full of trees, flowers, birds and all sorts of creatures “a true jungle. She didn’t know where to go and what to do. Hot tears started running down her cheeks. Right at this moment, a tiny pink bird sat on her hair and spoke in human voice:

“Salutations, pretty little girl.”

Then a little yellow bird sat on her shoulder, and a green one on her palm.

“Salutations, pretty little girl”, they all said.

“But ... but you speak in a human voice.”

Liz was at a loss.

Instead of any other answer, the birds started to sing, all together like a chorus:

“Come all the swallows of the world
The nightingales, the cuckoo birds
Bring all your children from the trees
and all your cousins and your friends
We’ll sing together, all at once

“Come all to meet our little Liz,
the lonely, lovely little girl
Salute her all and welcome her
and cheer her up and comfort her

Sing for her a happy song.”

Their little song was so sweet, that Liz at once forgot all about her fears and her loneliness. She also loved it when the birds called her pretty.

Between you and me, what woman doesn't like it when she's called pretty, whether she's nine or ninety years old.

“Planet Allispossible is not so bad after all”, she thought. “We may have a good time; one never knows.”

“You will have a good time
Just do not get bewildered
Everything is just fine
Good day to you, dear friend”

The little birds were singing, waving their colorful wings to greet her.

Liz took a deep breath and started out.

IFYUFINDME AND THE CAVE WITH THE TREASURES

Liz had walked in the jungle for a few minutes when suddenly a squeaky little voice beside her shouted, "Hey, you, what's your name?"

Liz pushed aside some vines. Two big eyes were looking at her with great curiosity.

"My name is Liz. What's yours?"

"Ifyufindme"

"Oh, come now! How am I supposed to find you if you don't tell me your name?"

"They call me Ifyufindme. My name is Ifyufindme. Do you understand now?"

"Ifyufindme? Is it really a name?"

"Of course it is. It's my name. Why is Looz a better name?"

"Liz"

"All right. Liz! Is Liz a better name?"

The truth is that Liz did not like this name, not at all. Can you imagine 'Liz?' just for the sake of Grandma Elisabeth? Besides, did anyone ask her if she wanted to be called Liz? Parents should ask their children what name they'd like for themselves. Why, was there a shortage of pretty names, such as Nellie, or Nadia or Lydia, that her classmates had? And they had long hair too, on top of that. The parents should also ask their children what kind of hair they would like to have. Liz was thinking that

when she grew up and had a daughter she would call her Nellie and she would let her hair grow long and blond, not be short and curly like hers.

“Liz, Liz, you’ll catch a sneeze. See, it rhymes. I like the names that one can make poems with”, said Ifyufindme. “Don’t be sad, Liz. Your name is pretty.” He was looking at her with big sad eyes.

“Let me take a good look at you. Get out of there, please”, suggested Liz.

“Noooo, no, no, no, no. I am not getting out.”

“And why aren’t you getting out?”

“Witch Higgledy-Piggledy has ordered me to remain squeezed in here, unless I take her the green shell.”

“How can you take it to her, when you are all squeezed in there?”

“Tell me about it.”

Ifyufindme was looking straight into her eyes. He had a funny little face, like a baby monkey, and huge ears.

“Come, let me help you come out”, said Liz and pulled him really strongly. She felt his little body, warm and soft and light as a feather.

“You were not really squeezed in there. You only thought you were. Look, the hole is big. You could ...”

Liz swallowed her words as soon as she realized what she was getting ready to say. She started saying something else.

“Here, take a look. The hole is really big. It can fit four, maybe even five Ifyufindmes.”

Ifyufindme burst into laughter.

“Why are you laughing?”

“Because you said Ifyufindmes. There is only one Ifyufindme. Me.”

“Are you telling me that on your entire Planet there is no one else with the same name? We have thousands of Johnnys and thousands of Georges and thousands “maybe millions “of Marys.”

“Oh, this is funny, very funny, indeed. How is this possible? Here, Liz is just you. No one else can be Liz. Your name is you and only you; it can't be anyone else.”

“Strange, very strange”, muttered Liz, as she put her head into the hole.

“Can you tell me what is in there?”

Ifyufindme whispered:

“It is the cave with the enchanted herbs. Witch Higgledy-Piggledy asked me to guard them from the spies. They can steal them, you know. Liz, you are not a spy, are you?”

“Do I look like a spy to you? Spies wear dark glasses and long trench coats. Isn't that so?”

Liz got confused when it came to caves and witches and enchanted herbs.

“We'll write an incredible story, Ifyufindme”, she said.

She opened her bag and took her notebook and pencil.

Ifyufindme was looking with great curiosity.

“What are these things? What are you doing there?”

Liz wrote in capital letters.

CHAPTER ONE. WITCH HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY. LIZ SETS IFYUFINDME FREE. THE MYSTERY OF THE ENCHANTED CAVE.

“Let me see. What are you doing there?”

Ifyufindme took the pencil and he started to scribble on the paper. Liz grabbed the pencil from him.

“No, you’ll spoil my notebook. Please behave yourself. Come, let’s go inside the cave.”

She took him by the hand.

“I don’t want to. You don’t like me. I’m not your friend.”

Ifyufindme had screwed up his little mouth.

“Oh, I can swear it, if you want me to. You are my best friend on Planet Allispossible. Look, I swear.” She crossed her fingers, brought them to her lips and then she passed them over her head. Ifyufindme did exactly the same.

“Now, are we friends forever?” he asked.

“Forever. Let’s go now. You see, I have to fill this notebook for the class.”

“What is ‘the class?’”

Liz was already in the cave. Ifyufindme was following behind her. It was pitch dark.

“One can’t even see one’s own nose in here”, mumbled Liz and Ifyufindme burst into laughter.

“How can you ever see your own nose, Lizzie? Even so, if you wish to have light, you’ll have light right away.”

He clapped his hands three times while he was murmuring: "Darkness begone, lights illuminate."

At once, the cave was illuminated by thousands of hidden lights.

"Holy Cow! How did you do that? Are you a little sorcerer too?"

Liz was rubbing her eyes in disbelief. The cave was filled with rocks of pure gold. She broke a small piece. It was soft like a tea biscuit.

"Mom-my!", she stuttered. "Golden mountains, all gold, pure gold. A chunk like this is worth an entire apartment building."

"What is an 'apartment building'?"

The voice of Ifyufindme brought her back.

"Come, Ifyufindme, you have to help me. We will collect chunks of gold and take them back to the spaceship. Nobody will believe this. Johnny will not, the Professor will not and none of my friends will. Here, take this chunk and that one over there, and this one, too."

"What are you going to do with the rocks, Lizzie?" wondered Ifyufindme.

"These are not rocks, silly, this is gold. I will take it with me and sell it to buy dresses and shoes."

"But you have a dress, and shoes too."

"I'll buy more dresses and more shoes. And I'll buy a car too."

"What's a 'car'", Ifyufindme was asking, as he was trying not to drop the chunks of gold that Liz had dumped on him.

But Liz was not even listening to him. She had gone deeper into the cave.

Now there were diamonds everywhere, thousands of diamonds, millions

of diamonds, big like fava beans, like chickpeas, even like hazelnuts. They were carelessly thrown on top of the golden rocks. Liz was dazzled, she put down the chunks of gold and she started filling her hands with diamonds.

“Come, Ifyufindme, take some too”, she urged him. “Wait; let me put some on top of your beard”.

Liz was running here and there like crazy. Further down, the cave looked all red from the rubies, and then it looked green from the emeralds, and after that it looked sky blue and violet from the amethysts and the other precious stones. And even further down it looked yellow from the amber and blue-green from the malachite. In other words, this was a cave filled with every possible gemstone.

“I have to go look for Johnny and the Professor. We have to bring the spacecraft here and load it with these treasures.”

“What is ‘treasures?’”

“Come, hurry up, Ifyufindme. You have to help me. You have to ...”

“You have to ... We have to ... What are you going to do with all these stones, Lizzie? Do you want them to play with?”

“To play with?! Are you in your right mind, Ifyufindme? One handful of these will make me rich for the rest of my life.”

“What is ‘rich?’”

“Rich is someone who owns many things, like houses, clothes, jewelry. He can buy whatever his heart desires. Don’t you have rich people on your Planet?”

“What is ‘jewelry’? What does ‘buy’ mean?”

“Oh, cut it out, Ifyufindme. I’ve had enough of your questions. What is this and what is that and what is the other. You guys over here don’t know what the best things are and you don’t value them either.”

“But I want you to teach me, please.”

“All right. Look, aren’t all these things beautiful? Don’t you like gold and precious stones, and pearls? See how they glitter, what beautiful colors they have.”

“Yeah, they are fine, but wait until you see the Granite Hill and the Big Mountain. There are ten times as many over there. And at the Silver Lake and the Orange Volcano there are twenty times as many as these.”

“You mean to tell me that you have more treasures like these on your Planet?”

“All right, now I see. You call the rocks treasures. Of course, our Planet is full of them. Do you want to take them all, Lizzie? I think it would be very tiring for you.”

Ifyufindme was right. When the entire Planet is full of gold, then the gold is not precious anymore. On Earth it is precious precisely because it is rare.

“It may not be of value to you guys, but if I take them and sell them I will get plenty of money.”

“What is ‘money’?”

“Well, money, you know, those pieces of paper that have some pictures on them, and you give them and you get things in exchange.”

“What things?”

Liz was not finding the right words to explain to Ifyufindme, and she was getting frustrated.

“Oh, please stop it, Ifyufindme. You’re driving me nuts. Things, just things, such as bread and cheese and cakes and ice-cream and chocolate. Things that you can eat when you are hungry. And other things too.”

“Aha! Now, I get it”, nodded Ifyufindme, and he started to pick up diamonds. Then he hesitated again.

“But when you are hungry, you just get something to eat. By the way, are you hungry, Lizzie?”

The truth of the matter was that Liz’s stomach was making noises. The treasures whet the appetite, you see.

“Boy, am I hungry! If I could only have some pasta the way my Mom prepares it, with spaghetti sauce and cheese on top, and a glass of icy cold orange juice. But how could someone hope for such things in this cave?” Before she even completed her sentence, Ifyufindme was clapping his hands three times and was saying:

“Cold juice and spaghetti on table appear
For Liz who is hungry and thirsty, right here.”

Right at that moment, a table appeared. It was all set. On it, there was a big platter of pasta topped with tomato sauce and generous amounts of grated cheese, and a quart of orange juice.

“Hurray, for Planet Allispossible”, shouted Liz cheerfully and she tied the napkin around her neck. But before she even had time to swallow the first gulp, a terrible voice was heard. It was coming from the depths of the cave.

“Where did you go, you germ? Why have you deserted your place?”

Liz stopped, still holding her fork up in the air. Ifyufindme froze stiff.

“The Witch, we are doomed”, he managed to say.

He pulled Liz and they both hid under the table.

“What have we here? We are feasting, I see. And who are you sheltering in my own house, may I ask?”

The Ifyufindme’s little heart of was beating like crazy, and so was Liz’s little heart. They squeezed tight next to each other, and they waited.

WITCH HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY AND THE FLYING CHAIR

“Don’t try to hide from me, you rotten onion! You know that I can see you no matter where you go. Abracadabra, yellow alambra! At once, table disappear. No more food is wanted here.” The Witch clapped her hands four times and the table disappeared. Everything was gone, the pasta, the orange juice, even the fork was gone from Lizzie’s hand. What a shame. She didn’t have time to eat a single morsel of her food.

“Well, well, who is this ‘lady’ hanging around with you? I don’t believe I’ve ever seen her ugly face before. Get up, both of you, right away.”

Liz and Ifyufindme got up. Liz looked around but she could not see anyone. Yet, when she looked up towards the ceiling of the cave she was faced with the strangest spectacle she had seen in her entire life. There was a hag up there. She probably was over a hundred years old with long white hair that reached her feet, sitting on a rocking chair, just like the one Grandpa Aloysius had. The difference was that this rocking chair was not even touching the ground. It was up, up in the air; it was not resting on anything. In other words, it was a flying rocking chair. The chair with the hag on it hovered for a moment over Liz and Ifyufindme’s heads like a helicopter. Liz squinted as she was trying not to lose sight of it.

“Come here, you two, here near me”, ordered the hag.

With a very simple movement, just by raising his knee very slightly, Ifyufindme was thrown up into the air and he stood before the old Witch and her chair. Liz was at a total loss.

“You come here too, ugly-faced young lady.”

“How do you expect me to come up there? I do not ...”

“What do not ...?”

Thank God Liz had remembered on time. She had almost said the forbidden sentence.

“I don’t ... I don’t have wings to fly.”

“And so what if you don’t have wings? Does one need wings to fly? Jump up and come.”

Liz tried to jump the way Ifyufindme had done a few minutes ago. She bent one knee and jumped as high as she could. Nothing. All she managed to do was a tiny hop and she was back again in the same place.

“You mean to tell me that you people don’t even know the alphabet yet? What do they teach you on Planet Earth? Come on then, take this and climb up.”

The old woman dropped a rope. The rope stood upright in the air with no one holding it or anything supporting it.

“Go on then, I will not stand here and wait for ten years.”

Poor Liz took the end of the rope, closed her eyes and started to climb, just like a little monkey climbs on trees. When she opened her eyes again she was standing in mid air before the old woman and her chair. Next to

her was standing Ifyufindme. When she looked down she started to feel shaken.

“Oh, Mama! Now I’ll tumble down and break my bones on all these rocks of gold”, she screamed.

“Rubbish”, said the old woman. “Here, take this and sit on it. It is for beginners. It’s a lifesaver.” She gave her a small velvet cushion. Liz was bewildered but she took it.

“Go on then. Sit”, ordered the hag.

Liz closed her eyes again and sat on the swaying small cushion. It was soft and comfy. She opened her eyes. The Witch was watching her from behind her spectacles. She didn’t look all that terrible now. In fact, she even reminded Liz of her Grandma Elisabeth with her little glasses sitting on her nose, and her white hair when she let it down to wash it, and when Liz would ask her if she could comb her hair. “Oh, dear Grandma, what are you doing right now”, Liz was thinking.

“Leave your Grandma alone and tell me why you are here”, asked the Witch.

“How did you know that I was thinking of my Grandma?” wondered Liz.

“Ha, ha, ha! What kind of Witch would I be if I didn’t know that much?” mocked the old woman. “Do you really think that I am one of those fake witches that you have in your stories? Pfff ... I would refuse to even have my shoelaces tied by one of them. Those good-for-nothing witches of

yours are making fools of everybody by doing some silly stuff and calling it witchcraft.”

“Well, it’s not quite that way”, protested Liz. We have some first class witches and fairies in our stories. In the story of Cinderella, let’s say, the fairy brings her a golden carriage to take her to the dance. And how about the sorceress in Snow White who looks in the mirror and asks it: ‘Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?’”

Ifyufindme elbowed Liz to stop her, but it was no use; she was on a roll ...

“And then the other one, the bad one in Sleeping Beauty, who made Sleeping Beauty prick her finger and go to sleep for one hundred years, and the entire kingdom went to sleep with her, and ...”

“Big deal”, the Witch said scornfully. “A junky old mirror on the wall and a few cheap sorcery tricks. This is ... kindergarten stuff. Any self-respecting witch would despise such silly witchcraft. Can you imagine, golden carriages, green horses and feathers! We were doing such things in prehistoric times.”

The Witch had turned red. She was she was agitated and gestured excitedly as she spoke, moving her hands in every direction. Liz was worried. In her excitement the Witch could give her a shove and send her flying down on the golden rocks. Fortunately for her, Liz was saved at the last minute as the voice of Ifyufindme was heard saying:

“Witch Higgledy-Piggledy... Helloooo ... Witch Higgledy-Piggledy, Asterix is here and he wishes to tell you something.”

Then, with great amazement Liz noticed a little star, the size of a watermelon, coming towards them, skipping and dancing.

“Come Asterix, come. What’s up? What do you want?”

The Witch’s voice was now soft and very sweet.

The little star made a graceful summersault, and then it went and sat nice and snug on the Witch’s lap, like a playful kitten.

“What a lovely little star”, said Liz.

Now the Witch had forgotten all about being angry and was petting the little star exactly like people do with kittens. And the little star was purring ...

“Asterix informed me that you and two other fools zoomed right by him while he was sleeping, making a frantic noise, and you disturbed his sleep. Is that true?”

“I am so sorry, Asterix”, apologized Liz. “We didn’t know that you were sleeping. I will tell the Professor to go slower next time.”

“And may I ask, what is your Professor doing here on our Planet?”

“Well, Mr. Professor wanted to study your Planet because, as he always says, it is a very happy Planet. Yeah, this is exactly what he said when he was showing your Planet to us on the astronomical map. ‘Children,’ he said, ‘this is the happiest Planet I have ever seen. We have to visit this Planet’.”

“Hmm ... very suspicious, these things sound very suspicious to me. I sense ... treason here. Don't you agree, Asterix?”

The little star started to dance and jump up and down on the Witch's lap. Then hop ... he leapt down, did three summersaults right on the spot, then he did two more upwards and another four to the side, and immediately rushed to the exit of the cave with a loud whistle.

“Of course you got bored. I can't blame you ... go out and play now”, said the Witch softly.

Then, obviously irritated, she turned to Ifyufindme,

“Now it's your turn, Mr. Ifyufindme. What punishment do you think you deserve for neglecting your duty?”

“I'll ... I'll ... do whatever you suggest”, mumbled Ifyufindme, looking down at his feet.

“You know pretty well that I'd rather have you propose your own punishment, since you are the accused. Say then, how many pounds?”

“Twenty pounds?”

“Hmm ... let's see ... I think twenty pounds is a lot. It hasn't been proven yet that your friend is a spy. Therefore I will propose only six pounds for now. And we'll see again later.”

Liz was straining her ears. What on earth could this thing be, that would be only six pounds and not twenty, and that they would burden poor Ifyufindme with?

“According to the laws about obedience, I will also allow you, the accused one, to have the choice of flavor. Speak then, do you want it chocolate-covered or with whipped cream?”

“Let it be whipped cream with strawberries then”, said Ifyufindme, totally devastated.

Liz almost fell off her velvet pillow. The Witch clapped her hands three times and said:

“Six pounds punishment appear, whipped cream and strawberries right here.”

A very tempting, freshly baked cake, made of plump sponge, covered with white frosting and decorated with whipped cream and strawberries, passed right under Liz’s nose and stood in midair in front of Ifyufindme.

The heavenly aroma of vanilla and flower water made Liz almost pass out. Ifyufindme started to eat unwillingly, Liz was licking her lips.

“I ... I am to be blamed for Ifyufindme deserting his post”, she said timidly. “I’d like very much to ... help him with his punishment.”

“Oh, no!” said Ifyufindme. You are my best friend. How can I burden you with my punishment?”

“But I want to do it, I want it very much”, said Liz. “Besides, what are best friends for? They should help their friends in time of need. Please, Ifyufindme, give me a large piece.”

“Oh, thank you, Liz. Here, take it. I will never forget this”, said

Ifyufindme, as he gave Liz a large piece from his cake. She started to devour it. The Witch was watching the scene with great curiosity.

“You should help one another”, said Liz, with her stuffed mouth.

“I do like this”, said the Witch in a loud voice. “How about that? These people did bring something good to us from Earth after all. Tell me though, would you help your friend anyway, regardless of what the punishment is? Say, if the cake was with chestnuts and walnuts?”

“But of course”, said Liz quickly, as she was stuffing her face with another mouthful.

“And if it was chocolate cake with almonds?”

“Yes, of course”, repeated Liz as she gulped the last piece.

“Very strange, this girl”, said the Witch and fixed her glasses on her nose to see better. “I should make a note of this in my magic book. We had different information about the people of Earth until now. It was said of them that they wouldn’t help anyone, not even their own friends.” The Witch started to write in the air with her finger as she whispered to herself:

“GIRL FROM EARTH EATS IFYOUFINDME’S PUNISHMENT OF TWO POUNDS OF CAKE WILLINGLY. STOP. THIS IS VERY STRANGE. I SUSPECT WICKED PLOT OF EARTH-ANS AGAINST ALLISPOSSIBLE-ANS. ALL SORCERERS ARE CALLED TO HAVE THEIR ANTENNAS OPEN AND THEIR EYES HALF-CLOSED IN READINESS. STOP.

The fingers of the Witch were forming letters written in laser beams.

When she finished she took out a small vacuum cleaner and sucked all the words into a box. She pulled out an antenna that looked like the antenna of a radio from one side of this box. Then, from the other side of it she took out a microphone and held it near her mouth.

“Hello, hello there”, she said. “Sorcerers of Allispossible, you are called to keep watch. The enemy is very close. I can smell his presence with my own nose.”

Then the Witch took another good look at Liz, she put the box on her head, as if it were a hat, and flew with her chair up to the ceiling of the cave. Ifyufindme was still struggling with his cake.

“Should I help you some more, Ifyufindme?” asked Liz.

“Do you really mean it, Lizzie? Come then, take another piece.”

The Witch returned with her chair right at the moment when Liz was stuffing her mouth with a large piece of cake.

“Well, well, you are helping him again, I see, even when I am not here to see you. I am starting to like you. You are not behaving like a girl from Earth. I am thinking that we should make you a citizen of Allispossible. You have eaten half Ifyufindme’s punishment. Almost three pounds.”

“Oh, I like cake very much”, said Liz, without thinking twice. “And I like ice-cream too. I would happily eat six pounds of ice-cream, maybe even ten. But if I had to help Ifyufindme by eating beans - like six pounds of beans or so - most likely I couldn’t do it. I don’t like beans at all.”

Liz didn't even have the time to complete her sentence.

"What did you say?!" shrieked the old woman, and her white hair stood up like a frightening cloud. The antenna from the box that was on her head started to whirl around like mad.

Disaster, poor Liz was totally carried away. She had pronounced the forbidden sentence. The Witch had changed three colors within five seconds. She first turned all red, then she turned yellow and finally all green.

"I was right, I knew it. The whole thing smelled like treason to me. You rotten spy, you carried the germ to our Planet, and now the disease will spread everywhere. Guards of the enchanted herbs, arrest her!" ordered the Witch.

Unfortunate Liz was left with the fork in her hand and her mouth half open. The Witch's eyes were shooting sparks like the fireworks in the national celebrations.

"Oh, Mama", groaned Liz, and she felt cold sweat all over her body.

"Mrs. Higgledy-Piggledy", started Ifyufindme timidly, "Please don't be so harsh with Liz. She didn't exactly say the forbidden sentence"

"What?!" shouted the Witch. "Do you still dare to defend her, you sly little worm? It looks like you have contracted her germs too. You'll be admitted to the hospital for disinfection, right away."

"No, not the hospital, please not. I don't like it at all in there. It smells like medicine."

“Disinfection, both of you, right away!” shouted the Witch.

She grabbed Liz and Ifyufindme and put them on her lap. Then she flew to the far end of the cave with her chair, making a loud noise.

“Where is she taking us now, Ifyufindme, I am scared”, whispered Liz.

“She’ll take us to the room with the enchanted herbs”, said Ifyufindme.

In a little while the Witch stopped. They were in a room filled with bottles, big and small, and with jars of all sizes.

“No one enters this room except for the Witch”, whispered Ifyufindme.

“The most valuable things of our Planet are stored here.”

The Witch got up from her chair, reached for a cabinet and opened it.

“Do you know what this is?” she asked Liz, putting one of the little bottles under her nose.

“Hey, this is chamomile. My Grandma gives it to me when I have a sore throat.”

“And this? Do you know this one?”

“This is mint. My Mom drinks it when she gets a tummy ache.”

“And this one here, do you know what this is?”

“This is sage. Grandpa likes it a lot. It reminds him of the village he grew up in, he says ...”

“You mean to tell me that you have all these treasures on Earth?”

questioned the Witch.

“Treasures? What treasures? These are simple soothing teas ...”

“These are priceless magic herbs!”, shrieked the Witch. “And now that you have seen our treasures, you are very dangerous. You will tell the other spies, I’m sure, and they will come to steal them from us.”

“Oh, no, no, I will not tell anyone. I swear ...”

“I do not believe you, no matter how much you swear. I’d better give you some herb of oblivion.” Liz broke into tears.

“What am I going to do, Ifyufindme? I don’t want her to give me the herb of oblivion.”

Ifyufindme was looking at her in a very sad way. Suddenly Liz remembered.

“The shells. The Professor told me to use the shells if I find myself in real danger.”

She opened the bag that was hanging on her shoulder and took out one shell.

“My Goodness, Lizzie. You’ve had the green shell the whole time and you haven’t said anything?”

Ifyufindme snatched it and turned to the Witch.

“Witch Higgledy-Piggledy, what will you give me if I give you the green shell?” he shouted, waving the shell in the air.

!Whaaat?!” screamed the Witch, and in one leap she was right there next to them. “The green shell? Unbelievable. I have been waiting for this shell for thirty-three years, three months, three weeks, three hours and three minutes. See? It is never too late. Now my father will consent to give my

hand to my beloved one, the sorcerer Zodiac. How marvelous! What happiness! What joy, fa la la la la la la la la la.”

The Witch was holding on tightly to the green shell; she was kissing it and she was sweet-talking it.

“My dear shell, my little shell, my sweet shell and happy shell. My father will not refuse to let me marry my beloved one. Hip, hip, hurrah!”

With the word “hurrah,” the Witch jumped all the way up, to the ceiling of the cave, and she even forgot about her rocking chair. Ifyufindme dashed to the chair.

“Come, Lizzie, quick, sit and let’s go. With the flying chair we’ll go wherever your heart desires.”

Liz followed him, although she didn’t quite understand what was going on. Ifyufindme pushed a small button on the right arm of the armchair and frrr ... they quickly went up in the air.

“But what ... what exactly happened to the Witch?”, questioned Liz, in wonder. “Why is she so excited just for one shell? In Greece the sea is full of these.”

“What is ‘sea?’” asked Ifyufindme.

“You really don’t know what the sea is? Where do you go swimming when the weather gets hot?”

Ifyufindme was not listening. He was having tremendous fun driving the Witch’s chair.

“Hold tight, Lizzie. We are flying ... Frrr ...”

With a mighty jerk they were out of the cave, flying high up in the sky.

JOHNNY, GWEN'ASK AND CHEERFUL WHO COULD NEVER CRY

As you probably remember, Johnny went in a different direction than Liz, and a different direction than the Professor. After walking for some time in the jungle, Johnny started to feel lonely. He remembered the song that he had learned some time back from Georgy the fisherman, who was Grandpa's friend, and he started singing it:

"A crazy man walked in the street
and two madmen were watching.
Where are you going crazy man,
all by yourself? they asked him.
I am not walking by myself,
he said and he kept walking.
I've a devoted guard with me
who follows in my footsteps.

"Where are you hiding him, madman
so well that we can't see him?
said both the crazy men together.
Show him, and we'll believe you.
You want to see my guard? he asked.
Well, then, I will present him,
said the madman and then and there
he showed them his shadow.

"One crazy man and two madmen
make three of them, all crazy.
Now they're walking all the three
having great fun together.
Another crazy man they see.
We're six of us, they tell him.
And the poor man starts counting,
he counts again, and he's still counting ..."

"Ha, ha, ha! funny song", said a delicate voice behind Johnny. "What does 'crazy man' mean?"

Johnny was startled. In fact, he was frightened so much that he jumped up ten feet. He turned around, ready to take to his heels, but he

hesitated. A funny looking girl with carrot-color braids and freckles on her nose was looking at him quite cheerfully.

“Where did you come from? Who are you?” he asked.

“My name is Gwen’ask”.

“Good grief! Where should I go and ask? I am a total stranger here. I don’t know anyone. If you want to tell me your name, go ahead. If you don’t want to, just leave me alone to do my job. I don’t have time to waste”, he said, and he turned around to go.

“Come on, don’t get cross. I’m serious, my name is Gwen’ask.”

“You mean to tell me that ‘Go and Ask’ is a real name?”

“Yes, of course, it is my name. Who are you?”

“I am Johnny.”

“What does ‘Johnny’ mean?”

“Johnny means a little John.”

“Funny, very funny. Why, isn’t your name funny?”

Gwen’ask looked at him with her pretty green eyes.

“You said you were a stranger. Where are you from?”

Johnny pointed to the sky. “From up there”, he said, “from Planet Earth.”

“I don’t believe you. Oh, all right, all right, I believe you, don’t get cross.

Will you take me with you? I want to see your Planet.”

“If you first show me your Planet.”

“You are seeing my Planet right now.”

“I want to see your homes, the places where you live.”

“No problem. Hold fast on to my braids.”

“Whaaat???”

Gwen’ask turned her back to Johnny.

“Hold on to my braids, and hold fast, all right? Ready? Let’s go.” She stood on the tips of her toes and raised her hands up; she took a deep breath and repeated three times:

‘Cross-Patch
Draw the latch
Take a cup
and drink it up.’

She immediately started to fly. And with her was Johnny, who was holding on to her braids.

“Pull my left braid, please”, said Gwen’ask. Johnny pulled the left braid slightly and Gwen’ask turned left.

“Don’t pull hard. Easy does it. Now pull the right braid. That’s it, good. See, you are learning.”

Johnny was enjoying the ride. He was pulling the left braid, then the right one.

“My Goodness, Gwen’ask, what are you? A helicopter or an airplane?”

“What are ‘helicopter’ and ‘airplane?’”

“Naturally, you don’t know. You guys don’t need these things. All you have to do is hold on to a braid, and off you go flying to the sky. No tickets, no airports, no fuss. Just ‘cross-patch, draw the latch’ and you’re ready to take off.”

It was really tremendous fun to fly over the jungle. Little monkeys were screaming and waving their hands to them. Birds were trying to catch up with them, flapping their wings. But the flight did not last long. In a few minutes Gwen'ask said:

"Here we are. Now tie both my braids together." Johnny tied the braids and Gwen'ask landed on top of a hill.

"We are in my town", she said, as she jumped up and down to stretch.

"I don't see any town, I only see a gray mountain with rocks on it."

"Are you kidding me? How could you see the town? It is built inside the mountain. All these mountains that you see around, they all are towns.

But I brought you to visit my own town. And all those lower hills that you see, they are our villages."

"I don't believe it. Why on earth would you build your cities inside the mountains?"

"Where else should we build them?"

"Well, out here. All around this place."

"But don't you see? Out here are all the trees."

"Up there on our Planet, on Earth, we cut the trees to clear the space and we build our homes. It's very simple, really. We use those machines, they go bzzz and cut the tree. Don't you have such machines here?"

Gwen'ask looked at him quite surprised. Her nose was covered with little golden freckles, like little stars. "How can you kill the trees? Don't you get punished for that?"

“Get punished? Ha, ha, ha! By whom? Why, do you think the trees can feel?”

“I have changed my mind”, said Gwen’ask. “I don’t want to go to your Planet. I don’t like to see trees being killed. Bye now, I am leaving.”

“Hey, hey wait a minute”, said Johnny and tried to stop her. “Are you going to leave me here all alone? Come now, don’t get upset. I promise, I will not kill one single tree.”

“All right. Let’s go then.”

The mountain was hollow inside, like a volcano. There were escalators and elevators all over the place. Right in there, in the very heart of the mountain stood an entire city, with bridges and highways, with high-rises and public places, with sidewalks and plazas.

Once in a while someone would land where Gwen’ask had landed a little earlier and would take one of the elevators. There were no cars, no trains, no motorbikes or any other sort of engine. It was perfectly quiet. Gwen’ask stopped in front of a television screen with all sorts of buttons.

“So what would you like to visit in Grayville, my town?”

The first thing that came to Johnny’s mind was Uncle George’s confectionery.

“Would you like to go to a confectionery then?” asked Gwen’ask and Johnny marveled at her because she had guessed his thought.

“So, do you have confectioners here, too?”

“Of course we do ... so ... let’s see, candy, cane sugar, confectionery.”

Gwen'ask pushed the button next to the word confectionery and the number 237 appeared on the screen.

"Here it is, down on level 237, not too far from here."

"Wow! Does Grayville have 200 levels? Where are they? I can't see them."

"Sure, it does. There are cities that have up to 3000 levels. You can't see them, they are under ground."

They entered the elevator, Gwen'ask pushed a button and they started going down. Before they knew it the elevator stopped.

"This is the level of confectioneries and pastry shops, it is 237 down. On 237 up, there are bakeries. So what would you like to get from the shop?"

"Hmm ... let's get a good ice-cream. We are feeling hot, aren't we?"

"Here now ... ice, iceberg, ice-cream, there they are", said Gwen'ask and she pushed another button. "Now we are going to travel in the horizontal elevator on level 237 to find the ice-cream section."

In his entire life Johnny had never seen a horizontal elevator, but he pretended he knew about it. It only took half a second and the elevator stopped again. They were standing in front of section 432, ICE-CREAM.

"And now tell me, what's your favorite flavor?", asked Gwen'ask,

"Strawberry, pistachio, apricot, vanilla, banana, chocolate?"

"I don't care, I love them all", said Johnny, licking his lips.

"In that case we'll go to section 67, VARIOUS FLAVORS OF ICE-CREAM."

"My Goodness", thought Johnny, "they have 67 kinds of ice-cream."

“As a matter of fact, we have 987 kinds of ice-cream, if we take into account the various combinations made in each cone. For example, vanilla, banana, chocolate is no. 83, maple walnut, apricot, strawberry is no. 45, and so on and so forth. Do you see now?” Johnny could not see anything now. The moment the elevator door was opened, he felt dizzy from the aroma of all these flavors of ice-creams that overwhelmed his sense of smell. They walked down the hallway and they entered a room. When we say room we mean it in a figurative way, of course; this place was really gigantic. It was like a stadium for gymnastics, and there were huge kettles - many kettles had taps at their lower ends - all around the place.

“Here, help yourself”, said Gwen’ask, and offered him a cone.

Johnny hesitated, “But ... how are we going to pay for it? I don’t have the money you use on your Planet. Will you please lend me some money?”

“What is ‘money’ What do you mean by ‘pay’? If you want ice-cream you go and get it.

“What about the owner of the place? he will be mad at us.”

“What is ‘owner’?”

“The owner is the person to whom the ice-cream belongs, the ice-cream man.”

“I don’t get it, the owners are us.”

“Us, what do you mean by ‘us’?”

“I mean, whoever would like to have ice-cream. Come on then, we are wasting time.”

She handed him a cone that was as big as a flower pot and took one herself, then she started turning on the taps. Gwen’ask had pistachio ice-cream and chocolate and almond. Johnny, on the other hand, tasted the rose flavor ice-cream, the cream and coconut, and shortly after he helped himself to a second serving because he wanted to try the peach and strawberry. He would gladly have had a third serving too, but his stomach was already very full.

“If I could only take some ice-cream with me it would be super” he thought. “It would drive Liz wild. But it is so hot that it will melt.”

“What does it mean, ‘drive Liz wild?’” asked Gwen’ask and Johnny blushed from embarrassment.

“If my friend Manuel was here he would gobble a whole kettle of ice-cream”, he said, just to change the subject.

“What does ‘Manuel’ mean?”

“He’s my best friend. He’s round like a barrel, but I don’t make fun of him.”

“My best friend is Cheerful”, said Gwen’ask. “Wait, I’ll ask him to come and play with us. She pushed a button on her belt, first three times, then two times and then once.

“Hello, Cheerful, come to the ice-cream room to meet Johnny”, she said.

First they heard laughter and then, “Coming, right away!” In just a matter of seconds a boy, laughing his head off, came rolling down one of the ice-cream kettles using it like a slide. He had bright red cheeks and his hair was the color of carrots, just like Gwen’ask’s.

“Hey, Gwen’ask, I was looking for you”, he said and kept laughing nonstop. “So this is Johnny, ha, ha, ha!”

“Yeah, this is me. What’s so funny?”

“And what’s this that you’re holding? Ha, ha, ha!”

“This is my backpack.”

“What do you keep in it? Ha, ha, ha!”

“What’s in my backpack is none of your business ha, ha, ha!”

“No, it’s none of my business, ha, ha, ha!”

Johnny was really cross. Here comes this silly guy mocking him now.

“What does ‘silly-guy’ mean? ha, ha, ha!”

“A silly-guy is someone who laughs for no reason. Just like you. I’m amazed at you, Gwen’ask, how can you have a friend like him? Enjoy him, he’s all yours!”

While Johnny was talking, Cheerful was holding his stomach from laughing so hard. Gwen’ask tried to signal Johnny to stop. But Johnny was really angry and kept on.

“Don’t they teach you good manners here on your Planet?” he insisted.

Cheerful was laughing and laughing and laughing even more, tears were rolling down his cheeks. Gwen’ask ran to him.

“Oh, please, our Cheerful, please stop. Johnny did not mean all that, he was only joking ... He really likes you ...”

“I was not joking at all”, said Johnny stubbornly. “Why should I like him? He’s not my friend.”

“Ha, ha, ha! He’s not my friend, he doesn’t like me” Cheerful burst out laughing again. His face looked like a red pepper, he fell on the ground laughing. Gwen’ask knelt down beside him and tried to calm him down.

“You are nothing but a spoilt kid”, Johnny went on angrily. An even stronger wave of laughter burst out and made Cheerful literally unable to breathe. Gwen’ask turned to Johnny, she was very angry.

“You are nasty. Look what you’ve done! I don’t like you at all. Leave this place right away. I don’t want to see you ever again.”

Johnny was frightened. He could not understand what was wrong with these two kids. The one was laughing like a fool for no reason, and the other was getting angry for no reason. And now what? She was ordering him out of her town. Why, did he have braids to pull them and fly? Or did he know how to get out of this mountain, this town, that is, with the five hundred and something levels? How would he ever find Liz? What if she went back with the Professor and left him here on this strange planet with all the kettles of ice-cream, and with no friends at all? Johnny tried hard to control himself but it was no use. Two big tears rolled down his cheeks and fell on the ground. Gwen’ask, who was on her knees holding Cheerful and trying to comfort him, noticed the tears.

“Are you crying, Johnny?” she whispered.

“I never cry”, said Johnny, “men don’t cry”, and two big, fresh tears came down his cheeks.

Gwen’ask gently removed her hands from under Cheerful’s head, who in the meanwhile had fallen asleep. She got up and went to Johnny.

“You are crying. Here are your tears”, she said, and she bent down to gather them. “One, two, three, four.”

Johnny saw four tiny stars in Gwen’ask’s palm glittering like diamonds.

“The ... these are my tears?”

“Sure, look now.”

Gwen’ask blew gently in her palm. The four little stars flew high up and disappeared.

“Now four new stars are born in the sky. Don’t you know that every tear that a child sheds becomes a star in the sky? But they have to be blown away really quickly. Look, your little stars have already flown into the sky. Quickly make four wishes.”

“I wish all to be well for my mother, for my father, for my sister and ... and for all the world”, said Johnny, as quickly as he could.

“Good. You made good wishes”, said Gwen’ask, obviously pleased.

“Aren’t you mad at me anymore?”

“Mad? Are you kidding? Four little stars all at once. Hey! This is a record for us here.” Gwen’ask turned to Cheerful. He was sound asleep with a smile on his face.

“Poor Cheerful is the most unfortunate child in the entire Planet”, she said.

“How come, he didn’t look all that unfortunate to me. He kept laughing all the time.”

“This precisely is his problem. It is impossible for him to cry. He can only laugh.”

“He can only laugh? How odd”, said Johnny in wonder.

“Witch Higgledy-Piggledy is responsible for all this. She is Cheerful’s godmother. As soon as he was born the Witch said, ‘May you be blessed, my child, and may you always laugh’ ”

“She sounds like a good witch, doesn’t she?”

“Good witch, you said? Look what she did to the kid. Put yourself in his place. Imagine that you want to cry, or that you wish to be serious, or that you want to quarrel, to grumble, to yell, to curse, and instead all you can do is burst out in laughter like a fool.”

“Poor kid, so that’s why he was laughing, and I got mad at him, and yelled at him.”

“Exactly. This was not really his laughter. He was crying. The sadder he gets, the more he laughs, and the more he laughs, the sadder he gets.

When this fit of laughter comes over him it’s impossible for him to stop. The laughter stops only when he falls asleep.”

“And what happens now? How is he going to be cured from this laughter?”

“He will be cured if some other kid would want to take the laughter away from him ... then he will be cured. But then the other kid will become Cheerful, and he or she will be laughing nonstop. That’s why no kid is willing to take his laughter.”

Johnny remained silent, he was sinking into deep thoughts. There should be a way to help poor Cheerful out of his misfortune. Suddenly he had an idea.

“What if we both take some of Cheerful’s laughter from him? Say you take a little and I also take a little, then Cheerful will be left with only a little laughter, and this way he will have the chance to cry a little too.”

At first Gwen’ask didn’t quite understand what Johnny meant. But after she thought the idea over, she started jumping up and down shouting, “Hurray! Why didn’t we think of it all this time? Wow! Johnny, you are really smart! Wake up, Cheerful, wake up ... We will take some of your laughter away!”

“What is it? What’s going on?” asked Cheerful, rubbing his eyes, and bursting into laughter.

“Our friend Johnny here has a marvelous idea. It goes like this: instead of you laughing, let’s say twenty hours a day, you will only laugh for ten hours and the other ten we’ll split between him and me.”

“Maybe Liz, also, will be willing to take a few hours of laughter, and maybe there are some children who never laugh, and are always sad or angry, who would like us to give them some laughter too.”

“Who is Liz?”

“She’s my sister, she has gone to gather stories, but I bet you she hasn’t found one like mine.”

“Ha, ha, ha! Stories, I love stories, I’d give anything for funny stories. Funny stories make everybody laugh; I won’t laugh all by myself like a fool.” Cheerful groaned, and broke into laughter again.

“Don’t worry a bit, Cheerful, we will save you, said Johnny reassuringly. I know at least ten kids in my class who would gladly take one hour of laughter each.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Cheerful. “Now, I am laughing for real. In fact, I feel very happy. Imagine, if they took away all my laughter and I was left only with weeping ... How beautiful ... With my tears I would fill the sky with little stars.”

“We have to hurry”, said Gwen’ask. “We’ll go to Witch Higgledy-Piggledy who has the herb of laughter. We’ll ask her to give us some for Johnny and his friends. Come on then, hold on to my braids, we’re leaving.”

“We cannot find my sister, Liz, first, can we? We could take her with us”, said Johnny.

Suddenly Gwen’ask’s face turned pale. Cheerful started his nervous laughter; he fell on the ground again, and was falling about from laughing so hard. What was going on? Was something wrong? In less than a minute the whole mountain started shuddering as if there was an earthquake, and a terrifying voice was heard saying:

“Where is the spy who dared to utter the forbidden sentence?”

“Oh, mother dear, what did I do, stupid me”, stammered Johnny. “How could I ever forget and say we cannot? I just meant would it be possible?”

Johnny was going on.

“Hush, quiet, you silly kid”, Gwen’ask interrupted him. “You keep repeating the sentence.”

“We are doomed now. Oh dear! We are doomed, ha, ha, ha!” Cheerful was laughing his head off. “How can I now ask my godmother to take my laughter away and give it to you? Now I will stay the miserable Cheerful forever, ha, ha, ha!”

Gwen’ask shut Cheerful’s mouth with her hand. She pulled him quickly and they both hid behind the kettle with the cherry ice-cream. Johnny was in total confusion. He didn’t even manage to hide. The terrifying voice of the Witch was now coming from over his head, and to his astonishment he saw an old woman with long white hair sitting on a ... velvet cushion, in the air, right above the kettle with the vanilla ice-cream.

“I caught you, wretched spy. Now you’ll have to pay. You wanted to introduce the germ of laziness to our Planet, didn’t you? Both you and that thieving girl who stole my armchair. I’ll show you! I’ll give you a drink from the herb of oblivion and you will not remember who you are and where you came from, or where you’re going to. You’ll become a perfect Allispossible kid in no time.”

“Oh, no, not that, please. I beg you, don’t do this to me”, stuttered Johnny, in fear. “I have to go home. Tomorrow is Manuel’s birthday and my mother will make ice-cream for us.”

“Drink the potion right away”, ordered the old woman, and she approached Johnny with a soup spoon.

“No, I don’t want to, no, no!” Johnny was crying in desperation, all covered in sweat and tears.

The potion was pink like a rose, but it smelled like the medicine that Johnny’s Mom gave him when he had a temperature. The Witch shoved a spoonful into his mouth.

“Where am I? Who am I? Where am I going? What am I doing?”, asked Johnny right away.

“You are a good and obedient boy from Planet Allispossible . Let’s go then, we have a lot to do. You have to go find the spies from Earth and bring them here to drink their syrup.”

“From Earth, you said, from Earth? This name rings a bell ...” said Johnny, trying to think.

“The name Earth doesn’t tell you anything. You’ve never seen the place before. Here, take some more of this nice syrup. There, that’s a boy”, and she shoved another spoonful of the syrup of oblivion into his mouth.

“I don’t know who I am, what I am doing and where I am going”, said Johnny immediately.

“You are a sensible boy from Planet Allispossible, and your name is Silly-Billy”, screeched the Witch.

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“You will go and find the spies from Earth, you’ll bring them here and they will be punished.”

“Yes, Ma’am. Planet Earth ... I never heard this name before.”

“Planet Earth is full of bad people who want to spread their germs to our Planet. But they are deluded.”

“Now this sounds familiar”, said Johnny. “Grandpa Aloysius loves to use this sentence.”

“Take a third spoonful of the syrup”, ordered the Witch, “and all you’ll remember, will be your name, Silly-Billy, and Witch Higgledy-Piggledy.

Get going and bring the spies from Earth right here before me.”

“I am off, Mrs. Higgledy-Piggledy”

He hopped three times on his left foot, twice on his right foot, and four times on his left foot again and said:

“Fly high, fly low, fly high ’n low
Fly left, fly right, fly left ’n right
Fly high ’n low, fly left ’n right, all right!”

And then he started flying like Gwen’ask did a little earlier, and he considered this perfectly normal. He was feeling exactly like a kid from Planet Allispossible.

THE TALKING TREE AND OTHER STRANGE THINGS

Even learned men can feel somewhat frightened when they are all alone in a jungle. At first our Professor whistled as he walked in the jungle, then he started singing old-fashioned songs and after that he recited two poems that he had learned when he was in grammar school. The one was called "Little Bo-peep lost her sheep" and the other "The North wind made the lambkins freeze." For as long as he heard his own voice he didn't feel lonely. So, after he exhausted all the songs and the poems he knew he went on with prayers and psalms. He recited "Our Father" and "The Lord is my shepherd," but he had some difficulty in finishing this one. Then he chanted "Behold the bridegroom is coming," but he had to stop and clear his throat for that one. At last, after looking carefully around to make sure that no one was listening, he started singing some nursery rhymes which he remembered from his nursery school days. He sang "Hickory, dickory dock," then "Peter Piper," then "A dog and a cat went out together," then "Three blind mice," then "The Man in the Moon," and "There was an old man," and "Little Miss Muffet," and so on and so forth. When all his songs, his poems, his psalms and prayers, and his nursery rhymes were exhausted the Professor decided to write his observations in his diary. He opened his bag to take out his notebook and pencil but to his surprise he found that instead of a pencil he had brought a screwdriver, and instead of a notebook he had a cake of soap. Because our Professor, you see, like most of the professors in the world,

is a little absentminded. He also noticed that he was missing some very important items such as a bottle of water. Instead of his water bottle he had brought a bottle of aftershave lotion. Fortunately, he had remembered to bring his pipe, but to his tough luck he had not brought the tobacco. Instead of the tobacco pouch, he had packed a bag of roasted chick peas.

“Luckily, I have the roasted chick peas”, he said to himself, in a rather philosophical mood. The Professor loved roasted chick peas and he also loved peanuts and potato chips.

“The situation calls for scientific analysis”, he said, as he was putting everything back in his bag. “Firstly, I don’t have paper and pencil. But, fortunately, I still have my good memory. Therefore, I will record in my head, now, all the sensational things that I will see, and later I will write them down. So, that’s taken care of. Secondly, I don’t have tobacco for my pipe, but this is not so bad. Smoking is not good for my health anyway. Thirdly, I don’t have water. Luckily though, in the Boy Scouts they taught us how to suck the juice of the forest flowers in case we were stranded without water. So that wouldn’t be a problem either. So far so good. But now, I have to go back to the spacecraft to take the ... the ... the ..?”

The poor man had already forgotten what he needed from the spacecraft. “So what? I am allowed to forget a few things here and there. This doesn’t mean at all that my memory is not excellent. As soon as I step into the

spacecraft I will remember what it is that I have forgotten.” He turned around and started to walk; but he soon realized that he did not remember how to return to the spacecraft. “Most definitely I should not panic”, he was thinking, as he wiped the sweat off his forehead. “Panic makes you feel confused and when you are confused you panic. All jungles are the same, they all have a beginning and an end. All you need to do is start at the beginning and walk straight to the end or ... start at the end and go to the beginning. So, I will keep walking and this way I will get either to the beginning or to the end of it.”

The poor Professor walked for many, many hours, but he got neither to the beginning nor to the end of the jungle. In the meantime, as he didn't have his notebook and pencil, he tried to store in his memory the discovery that he had just made: IN PLANET ALLISPOSSIBLE THE JUNGLES HAVE NEITHER A BEGINNING NOR AN END. He had finished all his roasted chickpeas while he was walking so now he was feeling thirsty and his mouth was very dry. He picked all the flowers along the way and tried to suck their juice, but it was useless. His thirst was not quenched at all. “I will never return to the Scouts!”, he yelled angrily, “Everything they taught us was rubbish.” The miserable Professor was forgetting that a good fifty years had gone by since he was last at the Boy Scout camp. He was desperate.

All covered in perspiration, he sat under a tree to rest. He took his hat off, put it on the ground next to him and wiped the sweat off the bald

spot on his head. "If I only had some tobacco to puff on in my pipe", he sighed. By now he had forgotten that smoking was harmful to his health. But right there and then a pouch of select tobacco appeared before him. The Professor's mouth hung wide open. "Someone was kind enough to forget his tobacco here", he mused to himself. "It wouldn't be the end of the world if I borrowed just a tiny bit."

He quickly filled his pipe and leaned comfortably against the big tree trunk to light it. Then he remembered that he didn't have matches.

"Tobacco without a light is like pastry without sugar", he sighed. ... If I only had a light ...just a small flame, please." At once there was a flame beside him; it was from a fire burning some dried grass and herbs.

"Thanks", said the Professor absentmindedly, and he lit his pipe, he inhaled once or twice, closing his eyes with pleasure. When he opened them again, he noticed that the flames had spread around a wide area.

"Dear Lord! Fire in the jungle!", he screamed. "Some fool set fire to the jungle. Help! Water, some water, please ... We need water to extinguish the fire!" That very moment a fountain with fresh running water popped up in front of him.

"I can't believe it", he said, "It was in front of me all the time and I didn't notice it. It seems that I will have to change my glasses again", he mumbled.

He bent down and drank from the fresh water, then he extinguished the fire, and he went back to smoking his pipe.

“Now it would be nice to have a scotch, he said. A scotch on the rocks, please, waiter”, he joked.

He had hardly finished his sentence and there it was, a glass with scotch and ice. The Professor was rubbing his eyes in perplexity, and then it dawned on him.

“It looks as if on this Planet when someone asks for something it just happens immediately. Let’s test this hypothesis and see.”

So the Professor started ordering all sorts of things. First he asked for some biscuits to have with his scotch and for some cheese and olives and cucumber on the side. Everything came immediately. He loved this game. When he had finished the scotch he asked for three cheese puffs, two yogurts and five pieces of baklava.

“Now that Wilhelmina is not here to scold me”, he said, smiling meaningfully, “it is my chance to have a few more sweets.”

The moment he mentioned his wife, he remembered what she had asked him to bring for her.

“Since you’re going to Allispossible”, she had said, “why don’t you bring me a cream for wrinkles, they will probably be cheaper there.”

The Professor asked for four creams instead of one, after all they were free! After the creams arrived, he asked for cologne for himself, for a perfume for Madam Wilhelmina, then a necktie for his friend Papageno, and a walking stick for the old doorman in his apartment building. He was also thinking about asking for various other things he needed such

as a can opener, a garlic press to use when they prepared garlic dip, and a grill that he could use on his terrace to prepare kebab. But, then he thought that it would be too much to carry all these things with him as he was walking in the jungle.

“Besides”, he said, “I didn’t come here just for shopping. I have a serious scientific mission, and that reminds me, I have to order the most important item yet. A notebook and a pencil, please” he said in a commanding voice.

Right at that moment a notebook and a pencil appeared under his nose. The Professor reached for them. But, the notebook and the pencil moved away from him. Quite surprised, he tried to catch them again. The more he reached for them though, the more they moved away from him, moving now to the left and then to the right.

“What’s going on here?” he exclaimed. “Somebody is obviously playing games with me. Listen, whoever you are, I’d like to inform you that I am in no mood for games.”

“You are mistaken, Sir. No one is playing games with you. In fact, you are playing with our lives”, answered a voice very near the Professor.

There was no one to be seen. There were only trees, birds and animals.

“Who’s talking? Who are you?” wondered the Professor looking for his hat. The hat was no longer where he had left it and it could not be seen anywhere.

“I say, where is my hat? Who took my hat? I demand that you give it back to me immediately. I am not a small child to play with. Here I am, an accomplished Professor of Philosophy, a Doctor of Astronomy and of Astrology and Starlight, with degrees in Chemistry, in Ornithology, in ...”

“In chattering nonsense”, said the voice in a mocking tone. “All these things that you are boasting about do not have the slightest value for me, dear sir”

“For you? Who are you? Why are you hiding? You don’t dare face me, do you?” said the Professor in an angry voice, as he continued looking all around him to find out where the voice was coming from.

“It’s not important who I am, sir. If you hadn’t bothered me, I wouldn’t have bothered you either. And if you hadn’t stolen from me I wouldn’t have stolen from you.”

“Oh, really, now you are also accusing me of stealing too. I will report you to the police, sir, whoever you are. As soon as I get back to Earth I will write to the newspapers telling them how inhospitable this Planet is. And if the tourists from Earth stop coming here, it will not be my concern.”

“So much the better. We don’t want the tourists from Earth. They will destroy our Planet the same way they destroyed theirs.”

The Professor got a stiff neck from turning his head in every direction, looking for the owner of the voice. He was sure now, that there were invisible creatures on this Planet. A chill ran down his spine. No matter

how brave one may be, it is easier to confront someone that one can see rather than someone invisible.

“No matter who you are you have to have the courage to present yourself”, said the Professor. “Only cowards hide.”

“I haven’t left my spot, not even for a moment, and I certainly did not hide. I am right here, beside you. All this time you have been keeping yourself cool in my shadow and now your are pretending not to see me?”

The Professor was now shaking from fear. It was probably a Giant.

Maybe this Planet was inhabited by Giants.

“In your shadow?” he muttered, looking fearfully upwards. By doing that, he saw his hat hanging from the highest branch of a gigantic tree. There it was! Clearly this Giant was in the mood for games.

“My hat, I demand my hat right now”, he yelled.

The branch of the tree that the hat was hanging from shook forcefully.

“And I demand that you tell me right now what are you going to do with that piece of my body that you are asking for?”

“Your body? But who are you, after all? I have only asked for a piece of paper and a pencil to write with.

“Yes, Mr. Professor of Philosophy, true, but, do you know, by any chance, what the paper is made out of?”

“I most certainly do. Even small children know that. It is made out of wood.”

“And where do you get the wood from?”

“From ... from the trees ... trees. Could it be that ... no, it is not possible. Could it be that the trees have a voice?”

Now the entire tree was quivering. The birds flew away and thousands of leaves fell like raindrops on top of the bewildered Professor.

“Of course, they have a voice. If you could use those silly ears of yours carefully, just for a short while, you would be able to hear the voices of the trees and of the flowers and the plants and even of the humble grass.

“Ha, ha, ha! Listen to this”

The tree shook for a third time, with more might than before. It felt like an earthquake.

“All right, all right, don’t get angry”, stammered the Professor. “Calm down, Mr ... Tree. I do apologize.”

“Even a million of your apologies will not wash out your crimes. Only the Green Trial would restore justice.”

“I do not understand what you are trying to say. Would you be kind enough to give me my hat so I can go?”

The Professor’s hat fell directly on his head.

“Thank you”, he said, and he took a first step to go away.

“Not from there”, said the voice of the Tree. “There is only one way.”

The Professor did not understand and he continued. But then, the branches of the trees all around touched one another, as if holding hands, and they formed an impenetrable wall. No matter how much the Professor tried he wasn’t able to penetrate that wall.

“What is the matter with you? I beg you, please let me go home. Now is the time that my wife is waiting for me for the garlic dip.”

“Wrong! It is not the garlic dip day. It is the day for the spinach and rice.”

“Oh, yeah, true. I hate spinach. I’d better go to the restaurant. Could you, please, give me the address of a good restaurant?”

The Professor tried to leave again, and again the branches of the trees stopped him.

“There is only one way. The way to the Green Trial”, said the voice of the Tree. “This way, please.” The trunk of the Tree split in the middle. The Professor put his head in with great curiosity.

“Interesting, very interesting”, he said. “This was not mentioned in the tourist guide.” He fixed his spectacles, and he entered the enormous trunk, mumbling:

“I am holding you responsible for anything that might happen to me. My lawyer will ask you for compensation.”

The opening at the tree trunk shut at once. The Professor was in complete darkness. He was very frightened. “This is the end”, he said in desperation. “I will die in here from hunger and thirst and nobody will ever know. Not even my friend Papageno will have a chance to prepare my obituary. Do you see now, Papageno? If you had come with me when I asked you to, you would be here now to keep me company.”

“Come on then, you silly man, push the button”, said the voice of the Tree.

Right in front of his nose there was a small red flashing light next to a button. The Professor pressed it mechanically. Suddenly, he was shaken really hard, like being in a broken elevator dropping into a void. When the descent came to an end, he was laying full length on the floor. Thousands of multicolored little stars were swirling in his head. When he recovered a bit he checked himself to make sure he wasn't missing any part of his body. Fortunately, he wasn't missing a leg, nor an arm; however, he was missing his hat, his spectacles and his suspenders. The last item was the most important one because his trousers could not be held in place without suspenders. The Professor started looking around blindly because he could not see without his glasses.

"Here, are you looking for this?" asked a woman's voice next to him.

The Professor got up and right away his pants dropped down.

"Who ... who is there?" he stammered, trying to hold his pants in place.

"Here, take your suspenders, and your glasses too. I'm afraid you can't have your hat right now. It got caught on the ceiling of the elevator.

Follow me, please."

The Professor fastened his suspenders and he put his glasses on. Only then did he notice the lady who was standing in front of him. She was wearing a long dress and she had her hair up in a bun.

"My name is Prudence", she said. "I came here to escort you to the Council of the Wise Men. The Green Trial will follow." The Professor

noticed that he was in a room that was all white like the operating room of a hospital. There was no door anywhere.

“Ah, I am very sorry, he said, but I have to get going. Could you please show me the way to the exit? My wife, you know, has prepared bean soup and she is waiting for me.”

“Wrong, you are wrong again”, said the lady. “First of all, today is Tuesday, not Thursday. Therefore, you don’t eat bean soup at home, you eat rice pilaf with yogurt sauce. And, secondly, how can the trial begin without the accused? But since you seem to be hungry, why don’t you sit down to eat? She clapped her hands and said:

“Please, table, get set right here, in no time
have green garden salad and a bottle of wine.
have fresh bread and butter
and bean soup on a platter.”

The Professor had to admit that Lady Prudence’s bean soup was as good as the bean soup Madam Wilhelmina prepared. And as far as the wine was concerned he drank it, just as if it were orange juice.

“This wine is just like nectar”, he thought.

“This wine is called nectar”, said Prudence. “The gods of Greece used to drink it. We have imported it from Olympus. Let’s go then, Professor, sir.”

Prudence made a sign on the white wall and right away a door was opened. The Professor rubbed his eyes. He got up. His feet felt light as a

feather. He followed Lady Prudence down a long hallway, hopping and dancing like a school kid.

“I should remember to take a few bottles of this wine with me, Mrs. Prudie”, he told her cheerfully.

Prudence opened a second door and led the Professor through it. Now they were in a room, perfectly round and light blue, like the color of the sky. All around a big round table were sitting seven elderly men. They were wearing strange garments, like nightshirts, and they had white beards.

“They are the Seven Sages”, whispered Prudence in the Professor’s ear.

“Bow, please.”

The Professor tried to bow but all he managed was a summersault.

“Allow me to present you Professor Mightysharp. The gentlemen here are: Mr. Solon, Mr. Pitacus, Mr. Bias, Mr. Cleobulus, Mr. Periander, Mr. Chilon and Mr. Thales.”

“These names sound somehow familiar”, mumbled the Professor.

“Of course they are familiar to you. These are the Seven Wise Men who had visited Ancient Greece several centuries ago.”

“Glad to meet you”, said Solon, the first sage. “What is new in Athens these days? Do Athenians remember my laws?”

“Oh, yes, Solon the Athenian. How are your, sir? As far as I am aware, there are strikes in Athens these days. The mailmen are on strike, the

federal employees are on strike, the street sweepers, the telephone operators, the taxi drivers and even the children are on strike.

“The children, you said? Hmm ... This is a very serious matter.”

“Yes, indeed. Unfortunately, the children went on strike because they claim they want parks, playgrounds, and lots of space to play in. Have you ever heard of such nonsense before?”

“Hmm ... So there aren't parks for the children to play in? And where do they play?”

“In their rooms, of course. They are clean and safe there.”

Mr. Solon looked angry now. The other sages were discussing what they had heard among themselves, they seemed rather worried.

“Thales, please remind me to pack my suitcase later. I'm planning to take a trip to Athens to set new laws, all over again. The first law will be: there should be a park for the children on every block. There should be swings and seesaws and games and skating in the park.”

“And slides too?” asked Thales.

“Yes, of course, slides, and fields for soccer, and basketball courts.”

“And swimming pools?”

“Most certainly.”

“I object to that”, said the Professor. “With all these games and playing the children will have no time left for their homework, or for their private lessons and foreign languages, not even for the preparation of their final exams. They will become numbskulls and blockheads.”

The Seven Wise Men surrounded the Professor in a menacing way, regarding him as if he was a freakish phenomenon.

“So Witch Higgledy-Piggledy was right after all.”

“He has to be tried for high treason.”

“To the Golden Tripod.”

“The trial starts right away!”

As he was lightheaded from the wine, the Professor did not quite understand what was going on. The Seven Sages sat around the crystal table and Solon said, “Let the Golden Tripod appear.”

A three-legged chair made out of pure gold appeared at the center of the crystal table.

“Please, Mr. Mightysharp, be seated.”

Prudence pointed out the Golden Tripod to him to sit on.

“Look, I’m alright here, thank you, said the Professor.”

“You have to sit on the Golden Tripod”, said Thales. I’m sure you are familiar with the story of its origin. Several thousand years ago some fishermen found this Golden Tripod in the sea. They went to the Oracle at Delphi and asked who should take it. The answer was ‘The wisest’. Since that day we have been discussing amongst ourselves who is truly the wisest, and whom the Golden Tripod should go to.”

“I see, said the Professor. Each one of you would like to have the Tripod because he thinks he is wiser than the others. Things like that happen in

our place too. The professors in the school where I work, always fight about who will be promoted next.”

“You are mistaken”, said one of the sages. “None of us thinks he is wise enough to take this precious gift for himself. Therefore, we decided to offer it to the Goddess of Justice.”

“In other words”, said another sage, “every time a Trial takes place, the accused sits on the Golden Tripod. Thus, the truth shines.”

“The accused?”

“Yes, he who is accused of high treason. At this very moment you are the one. Come, please, and be seated.”

“But I haven’t done anything wrong”, complained the Professor. “I am a law-abiding citizen. I pay my taxes, I go to church on Sundays, and ...”

“Let’s not waste time, Mr. ... Antisharp.”

“Mightysharp.”

“All right, Mr. Mightysharp, please do take your seat so we can proceed”, said Solon sternly.

Four sages helped the Professor to climb on the table, a fifth one held the Tripod to prevent it from sliding on the table, and a sixth one fastened the seatbelt.

“Why are you tying me up? I will not go anywhere”, mumbled the Professor. The sages, however, were not paying attention to him. They were all bent over the table having a discussion. The Professor took a look at the table and his hair stood up in shock. The table had been

transformed into a gigantic screen where his own life was being projected, like in a movie. He was shown in the classroom, and he was shown in his house, too, in his slippers and his dressing-gown, or playing backgammon with his friend Papageno.

“Ah, yes, here is the scene of the murder ... pause the picture.” The Professor was seen in his yard cutting a bitter orange tree with an electric saw. All the Wise Men at once turned and looked at him in horror.

“For Goodness’ sake, aren’t you ashamed of killing a defenseless victim? In cold blood, just like that. You MURDERER!”

“Murderer? Me?”

“Look at what you are doing here. What do you think this is? Why, what did the tree do to you? Did it steal from you, did it offend you in some way, or did it hit you?”

“What are you talking about? Trees don’t steal, they don’t talk, neither do they move from their places.”

“Why did you kill it then?”

“It was obstructing my view. Besides, what does a bitter orange tree offer? Nothing. Bitter oranges can not be eaten. They are sour.”

“What about the greenness of the tree, and its shadow, and the oxygen? And what about its blossoms in the spring, with their elegant fragrance?”

“My grandmother was making bitter orange juice for us”, said one of the Wise Men in a nostalgic mood. “She juiced them, put the juice in an

amphora (pitcher) and mix it with honey. Then she would pour a little of the mixture into our cups and add some water to it. It was just like nectar.”

“My grandmother made flower water from the blossom of the bitter orange tree”, said another Wise Man. “She would boil the little flowers and she would take the distilled essence. Then she would wash our faces with that fragrant water.”

“We have heard enough, gentlemen. It is obvious that the murder of that tree was unfair. It’s now the official beginning of the trial”, said Solon.

“The preliminary work is completed. Defendant, please take your seat.”

The Professor got up and, because he was tied to the seat, the Tripod was also lifted up with him.

“How can you bring me to trial without a lawyer? Even the worst criminals have the right to a defense lawyer.”

“I am your lawyer”, said Prudence.

“My lawyer is a woman? No, never!”

“I will pretend I didn’t hear that”, said Prudence. “Sit down now, please.”

Solon beat on the drum and said:

“THE TRIAL BEGINS.”

At that moment a strong wind blew the door open. Witch Higgledy-Piggledy hurried in, flying on her cushion.

"I am sorry for the delay", she said, and took her place at the ceiling of the room, so she could have a panoramic view of everything that was happening there.