

A Very Cambridge Christmas.

G.P.G. Norman

Little Bertie Russell couldn't sleep.
He was 10 years old, it was Christmas eve,
And a draught had begun to creep
Under his covers, tickling his feet
He thought to himself, "It's been cold all week,
all month 'round here
I want to wake up to the next day's cheer."
And he shivered beneath the sheets.

WHHOOOSH

The draft blew blankets off, like an eagle's wings beginning to beat
Bertie leapt up and started to race
Down the stairs, 'cross the hall till he came to the fireplace,
From the fire long dead, not an ember did glow
There was a mournful sobbing of "ho ho ho!"
Bertie became acquainted before his hearth
With an old rotund man, crying in the dark
"Santa? But where are all your toys?"
Saint Nick cried aloud "Bertie my boy!
My workshop is bare, nothing lines the shelves!
Christmas is cancelled – I've lost my Cambridge Elves!"
Santa's eyes continued to moisten and glisten
Bertie was perturbed as he took this in.

"But Santa who masterminded the plot?
What do they want? Can they be stopped?"
Santa wiped away his tears, "My son, you star,
Keep asking those questions, they'll take you far!
We'll save Christmas using the brains you've got!"

And he produced from his satchel a white teapot
With floral designs and Chinese script
“This will do, I’m sure we’ll both fit!”
And before Bertie knew it he was pulled down down down into in a cold porcelain place
“Don’t move too much or we’ll be sucked into outer space!”
Bertie screamed “Santa what have you done?”
“This is the teapot on the other side of the sun!”
“What?!”
“Save your questions, you’ll need them for the rest of the night!”
And they were both ejected at the landing site.

“Where are we?”
“This is Boston Common”
Brrrrrr
Bertie looked up to see a demure old man
“Oh lil boy, please don’t freeze.”
Bertie found himself surrounded by syntax trees!
“Oh Santa, I see you’ve come to my home”
Santa gestured out “*This* is Chomsky the Gnome!”
“Does he work for you too? Why hasn’t he been kidnapped?”
“Kidnapped?”
“The elves have been taken” Santa grimly remarked. “Rudolf tracked them down to this very park.”
Chomsky produced a rainbow-coloured pearl.
“This lil Bertie, is a possible world.
Eat it, and think of a proposition.
You’ll divide space-times and find the right position.”
Bertie took the pearl with a grasp unnerving,
Forehead sweating, and stomach churning
He knocked his head back and swallowed the world
And immediately his throat was burning.

A sweet fieriness sank into his tummy
Bertie whimpered “I really feel funny”

His body shook and swayed like he was going to fall
Then Bertie screamed
“AHHH I’M TRIPPING BALLS!!
Hundreds of scenes are playing all in my mind’s eye
Except it’s all compound like the vision of a fly
And no two images are exactly alike.
Half of them are day and half are night.”
Santa whispered “Good boy, you’re looking at modal space!
Bertie, the proposition! The elves’ hiding place!”

The boy gritted his teeth and said “the location of the elves is...”
His hallucination hurried on, homing in til the horror held him no more
His head made whole he’d harmlessly heeded the hostage’s habitation.
“Well?”
“Well every world became one where we find them in a white field surrounded by Syntax Trees.”
“So they’re here in Boston common”
“But then who took them Santa?”
Santa stared straight ahead and solemnly shook his snow-sprinkled chin
“The Gottlob...”
“What’s the Gottlob?”
“What’s the Gottlob? What’s the Gottlob?
Why he lives in the Fog!
He eats terrible food and has a terrible stare
And a terrible suit, but great facial hair
He’s a terrible writer, but you can’t avoid him
He bores you to death with Sinn und Bedeutung”

Bertie exclaimed, “You mean like him?”
And there he stood, in black tails and boots
A white wing collar, hair greying at the roots.
He smiled, as if in a jovial mood,
“Your claims” he said, “Zey denote ze true!
I am Herr Frege, unt you have vun task:

Refute my system, unt I'll do anything you ask!

Fail to do so, un your elves vill pay

Now pay achtung to all I say.”

And just like that he made them all feel like twits

About Functions and Concepts and Begriffsschriften

As the long laborious lecture would last,

Sanity slowly slips a prosem students' clasp!

Bertie buried his head and bellowed “It's all going too damn fast!”

“Vun last thing to mention: if all ze objects falling under F fall under G unt vice versa,
zey have ze same extension! Now you reply, Ja?”

Bertie pondered on Basic Law Five

He rubbed his temple, and opened his eyes,

“Suppose that all around and in the lands much farther, the Law states:

Everyone who does not shave themselves is shaved by the barber.

Now listen here to this puzzle I tell.

Answer me Gottlob: Does the barber shave themselves?

For if he uses his own razor and lather,

Then he's not a man shaved by the town's only Barber

But as this stands, this is absurd,

For the pronoun and “The Barber” both co-refer!

Therefore, he doesn't shave himself... But the argument doesn't stop!

Because the Law now mandates he visits the barber's shop.

But in doing so he commits a sin,

because he's *a priori* the first one in.

Now make your attempt at a rejoinder or retort

Will you speak any Sense or share any Thought?”

The Gottlob's Grimace spread and he snarled

“Nein! I'll not be defeated by a naughty child!

If you're not nice, a beating is on-deck,

For ze concept FIST is not a concept!”

Bertie's solarplexus crumpled,
Santa was next as he toppled and stumbled
"Bertie, there's still a that way we can win!
Reach into my sack and pull out the violin!"
Bertie reached into the bag and groped, retrieving a Stradivarius
Finding the solution hoped to a position precarious.

But Russell was not released from the hook,
As Frege was raging and Chomsky's ass was getting whooped.
He would surely kill the elderly gnome,
So Bertie boiled with fury of his own.

Graaaagggbbbbb!

The Stradivarius separated into each proper part
A hissing sound sizzled and swept through the park.
Gottlob fell silent sinking into the snow
They all beheld a woman
fully-formed and in repose.
Enormous square spectacles, and short grey hair.
They bore into the monster with a withering stare.
"Your prose Mr Frege is a shameful disgrace!"
And she drew a red line across his face!

The Gottlob wept as he limped away,
And 16 tiny voices suddenly chorused "Hooray!"
And tiny little elves in every colour and flavour,
All came out to embrace Bertie Russell, their Saviour!
But before the little ones could celebrate by playing in the snow
St Nicholas bellowed "We must all bow low!
Philosophy's first lady, truly missed by us
Please give us your blessing, to finish Christmas!"

And this is what she said:
"Byrne, Berstler! work through the night!

Gather the toys with Kevin Dorst, and Roger White!

Kieran! Tamar! Brad! Sally! Stephen!

There's arguments to be had!

Come Caspar! Come Jack!

Come Justin! Come Bob!

Agustin Rayo, come back to your job!

Write on sweetening problems, or counterpossibles or Grice.

But mark my words... you better be concise!"

Then with a satisfied smile she gave her hips a twist,

And Judy Thomson disappeared into a cloud of mist.

After letting them know that she had wished them

Success in fulfilling philosophy's mission.

Well that's it from Bertie and from Me. Thank y'all for listening. Happy Holidays MIT!

END