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Title: The Unwilling Professor

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Release date: February 19, 2013 [EBook #42135]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Dianna Adair, Greg Weeks and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE UNWILLING PROFESSOR ***

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The "Professor" had braved great perils to reach Earth, and believed he knew what he was up against. But he hadn't counted on the menace of Fatty Schultz and Irv Lece.

[49]



THE UNWILLING PROFESSOR

by Arthur Porges

illustrated by Milton Luros

On that fateful afternoon Fatty Schultz and Irv Lece had cut their last classes, and were taking a gloomy walk together, scrambling through the scrubby brush well behind the athletic field.

There were good reasons for their unhappiness. Fatty was failing in Calculus II with a velocity that varied directly as the square of the number of lectures attended. Irv's math instructor had informed *him*, with a kind of loathing respect, that his only salvation lay in recommencing the study of arithmetic—taking five or ten years in the process—and then retiring to a cave for perhaps another fifteen in the vain hope of digesting, through meditation and prayer, the multiplication table. After that, Irv might be ready for elementary algebra, but not, the professor hoped to a merciful God, in this unfortunate institution of higher learning.

As a matter of fact, the whole of their fraternity, Omega Pi Upsilon (usually referred to on campus as "Oh, P-Yu") was in the same boat regarding almost every subject offered at Bateman College. Bateman had courses that ranged from Aardvark Breeding to Zythum Brewing, but no field of knowledge troubled them more than mathematics.

[50]

Hence the long face on Irv Lece. Fatty's visage also strove to elongate, but simply wasn't built for such an accomplishment. Instead, his piggy little eyes, ordinarily glowing with a kind of coarse good-humor, were now smouldering with resentment.

They had just seated themselves in a small clearing, where Fatty, after setting his calculus text on a grassy mound, began to heave rocks at it, when there was a whistling scream, a jarring *whump*, and before their bulging eyes a small disc lay crumpled, barely ten yards away.

A shrill creaking came from this odd craft, which looked like a manhole-cover some eight feet in diameter and twenty inches thick. Then, as they stared in wonder, a badly-sprung port opened crazily, and a small rabbit flopped out. It may be stated here that the creature was not actually a rabbit, but that any difference between the disc's pilot and an ordinary cottontail was imperceptible to the naked eye.

For a moment the rabbit swayed drunkenly, its big eyes cloudy, then it hopped towards Fatty, preferring, perhaps, his larger gravitational field over Irv's. Extending one snowy paw, it squeaked: "Good afternoon, gentlemen. Permit me to introduce myself. I am a good-will ambassador from Venus, and by your conventions should be addressed as 'Professor.' My name," he added a trifle pompously, "is Iglowt P. Slakmak, and I hold degrees comparable to your PhD, LLD, and M. D." All this in a very British accent.

Fatty gave a hoarse croak; Irv's knees knocked together.

"Come," the rabbit chirped, "chin up, fellows! There's nothing to be afraid of. I speak English because we've been monitoring your radio broadcasts for years. Television is a bit trickier, but we've seen a few. And by listening to educational programs, I've learned a great deal about terrestrial culture, which I notice is based upon cigarettes, used cars—but never mind that, now. I must get to Washington and present myself. A rival of mine is about to contact Mars for the first time, and I hope to send in my report on Earth first." He peered at them anxiously. "You do understand me, chaps, don't you? I learned the best English from B. B. C., you know."

Seeing that the two boys were still dumb, the rabbit, with a mighty effort, picked up the three-pound calculus text, which was bound in a revolting green. As he did so, a paper fluttered out, and the professor deftly scooped it up. He studied Fatty's messy scrawlings for a moment, then said warmly: "Ah, I observe that you chaps are beginning the study of elementary mathematics." He shook a paw waggishly. "The limits are wrong on this integration: they should go from pi-over-two to pi-over-three first, instead of to zero. There's a discontinuity at pi-over-three, and your result, that the center of gravity of this six-inch cube is nine feet to the right, looks somewhat implausible."

At this, Fatty finally found his voice. "A discontinuity?" he gulped. "Whassat?"

"Aw, you know," Irv rebuked him. "Old Cusp's been gassing about 'em for days, now."

"Has he? Well, what is it, if you're so smart?"

"I don't remember," Irv said brazenly, "but at least I heard the name before."

"At pi-over-three," the rabbit broke in with authority, "the denominator of the integrand vanishes. To put it loosely, the function becomes infinite."

Fatty looked at Irv; Irv gaped at Fatty. The piggy eyes lit up. "A rabbit that knows math!" Fatty breathed. [51]

"Knows it! He wrote the damn book—a real brain!" Irv exulted.

Once again their eyes met meaningfully. "You always said," Irv remarked in an abstracted manner, "that you could lick the guy who invented calc."

"I sure can," Fatty asserted, "but—" He paused; then with a speed surprising in one of his bulk, his thick hands shot out, and Professor Slakmak, the eminent Venusian savant, found himself dangling by the ears from stubby, freckled fingers. He kicked with a vigor shockingly undignified.

"Let me down!" he squeaked furiously. "This is outrageous. A friendly ambassador's person is sacred among all civilized peoples; your national President shall hear of this insult!"

Fatty looked at him, showing uneven teeth in a loose grin. "Bugs Bunny," he gloated, "you are now the official mascot of Omega Pi Upsilen!"

"I second the motion," Irv said, shuffling in excitement.

"We'd better hide his ship, though," Fatty cried, full of ingenious intelligence now that nobody was grading him for it.

"It's too big, ain't it?" Irv replied doubtfully. "Simmer down you!" he ordered the writhing professor. "We don't wanna choke you, but—" The captive subsided, contenting himself with little quivers of indignation.

"It's awful light," Fatty muttered, shoving the damaged saucer with one size eleven shoe. "We'll move it over here, pile a lot of brush on top, and—"

"—Start a fire!" Irv interrupted joyously.

The professor gave a piercing squeal of protest.

"No, stupid," Fatty told him, winking. "If the prof here helps us out this semester, we'll give him back his old disc, right?"

"Right," Irv agreed, crossing two fingers.

In fifteen minutes, even with Fatty working one-handed, the ship vanished under a pile of stiff brush. "That's that," Irv said, taking a deep breath. "Now—"

"We can't take him like this," Fatty remarked, swinging the professor by his ears and giving him a shake by way of emphasis.

"Why not? We just been rabbit-hunting, that's all."

"Too risky. Even if the professor keeps quiet, some joker from another frat might get nosy."

"He'll be quiet," Irv said grimly. "I know how to hit a rabbit on the neck with the edge of my hand—" Here the professor began to kick frantically, and Fatty snatched his hind legs, holding him rigid from ears to toes.

"There's an old cardboard box back there," Fatty said. "That'll do the trick."

A few seconds later the sullen captive was stuffed unceremoniously into a damp, mouldy container, and the two students returned to the campus, their hearts free from mathematical worries.

"The frat will owe us plenty for this," Fatty said darkly. "We've never had anybody to coach us in math."

"They'll be licking our boots," Irv agreed. "But they always have, the poor dopes!"

That night the professor, poorly refreshed by some wilted carrot tops and water, found himself in a circle of eager Omega Pi Upsilon's, delivering a detailed lecture—mostly problem-solving—on Section 45 of Broota's "Introduction to the Elementary Rudiments of the Differential and Integral Calculus."

He was a good teacher, and when either his enthusiasm or expository art faltered, Fatty revived it quickly with a sharp pinch or stinging slap. So, although the average I. Q. of the fraternity was seventy-six, a certain amount of mathematics get through; and it was almost midnight before the unhappy ambassador found himself lying in a dirty, fetid cage, formerly the residence of the fraternity parrot, who had expired for lack of intelligent dialogue to copy. Rabbits, even Venusian ones, cannot weep, but the professor's soul was heavy within him.

[52]

And so it went, day after day, week after week.

"I am quite amazed," Professor Cusp told a skeptical colleague towards the end of the term, "at the remarkable way Schultz and his Oh P-Yu bunch have improved. Their homework these last six weeks has been excellent."

"Somebody's coaching them—or doing it outright," was the cynical reply. "I find no improvement in their zoology."

"No, that's what I suspected at first, but it can't be true. For example, on last week's extra credit problem—a real stinker—they turned in over a dozen correct solutions, all different. Nobody would go to that much trouble for the P-Yu crowd; they're about as popular on campus as Malenkov is with the D. A. R."

Another colleague, who had been listening, demanded: "But you won't let Fatty Schultz by, will you?"

"I'll have to," Cusp admitted. "Even though his exams are still horrible, I give quite a bit of weight to good homework, so—"

"You swine!" the other said sourly. "Now I'll get him."

Cusp laughed. "Ah, but you're supposed to be tough; they're afraid of you."

"They'd better be. It's a pity the biology lab has to experiment on poor chimps while we give degrees to anthropoids like Fatty!"

That night Fatty told his unwilling mascot the bad news. "I'm sorry, Prof," he said genially. "It's only one more term, then I'll be done with math, and you can go back to your disc. By my last course is with old Totient, and he's rough."

"You promised!" the professor squealed angrily.

"This time I mean it, honest."

"Hey, Fatty," a fraternity brother objected, "ain't you gonna leave the prof to our gang? Just cause *you're* through—" He broke off in confusion as Irv kicked his ankle, hard.

"Ignore the jerk," Lece reassured the crestfallen rabbit. "When Fatty and I finish our math requirement, you're on your own again. Course, you'll have to promise not to tell the President!" Over the professor's head he winked broadly at his friends.

"I won't do it! It's a cad's trick!" The rabbit's brown eyes were bright with rage.

Fatty pawed his soft fur with one lardy hand. "C'mon, Prof, be a sport," he urged, greasily affectionate. "We like you a lot. You wouldn't let us down now."

"I—will—not—do—it! You promised—"

"You will, too!" Irv grunted. "Don't give us any backtalk. If I have to twist your ears—"

"Use the cigarette lighter," somebody suggested, half ashamed. "He's only bluffing again."

"I'm not," the professor said sturdily. "You can burn me, kill me, but I won't tutor this bunch of cretins any more!"

"Where does he get those words?" a student wondered aloud. "What's a cretin?"

"Irv," Fatty said in a sly, buttery voice, "where's that nasty pooch who adopted the Delts last week? The one that chased the chaplain into Tom Paine Hall. I'll bet he's a first class abbitray oundhay."

"Mac," Irv addressed a slender, dark boy, "they keep him in that shed by the athletic field. Go and —ah borrow him, will you?" Mac left. [53]



"What's an abbitray oundhay?" the professor quavered.

"You'll find out!" Fatty told him grimly. "Don't they teach pig-latin on Venus?"

There was a strained silence, while some members of the group whispered protests. But there was no open resistance. Fatty and Irv ran Omega Phi Upsilon with an iron hand.

Then the door opened, and Mac, tugging hard at the collar of a large dog, lurched into the room. "Here's Hotspur," he grinned, as the brute strove to mangle the cowering professor.

Hotspur was a canine melting pot. The Spitz in his ancestry seemed to predominate, but there were plain traces of airdale, setter—and crowning evidence of some mis-alliance—dachshund. White teeth bared in a slavering snarl, the dog glared at the rabbit, lunging against his collar as Mac held hard.

But the professor had collapsed, all his courage gone. "A dog!" he gasped in horror, and Hotspur seemed startled at the human voice emerging from a rabbit. A thin whimper came from the professor. "Take that monster away," he begged. "I'll do anything—anything!"

"That's better," Fatty chortled. "But we need this good ol' hound more than the Delts do. Put him down in the basement—just in case." He eyed the professor, who shrank into a furry, abject heap.

"My new prof, Dr. Totient, is tough," Fatty said. "Bugs Bunny here is gonna have plenty to do. We'll clear out now and let him prepare his assignments! See that you watch those signs," he jibed, handing out what he had so long received. He fastened the rabbit's chain to its stout staple in the wall. "Here." He fished an apple core from his jeans, and tossed it at the professor, giving him an oily smirk. "Just to show there's no hard feeling. Eat hearty!" He stumped out, followed by his companions.

Gradually it grew dark, and the deserted fraternity-house was quiet. Ravenous, the professor finally nerved himself to nibble the apple core, which to his sensitive nostrils reeked of Fatty. He had just downed the last noisome fragment, when there was a loud, inquisitive sniff at the door. He grew rigid. Another sniff and the shoulder thrust of a heavy body.

Insecurely shut, the door swung open, and a huge, white form stalked in. The professor cringed, moaning a little, the hot alien scent of dog in his nose, prepared to meet a terrible death.

"Ssst!" the big mongrel admonished him. "I'm a friend," he rumbled in slow, thick English. Trotting over, he took the slender chain in his great teeth, and threw his thirty pound body into the wrench. The staple pulled free.

"Let's get t'hell out of here," he grunted, "while your bunch is gone." [54]

"B-but my ship," the professor stammered, staring in bewilderment. "It's broken down, and those two awful boys will find me before I can fix it."

"Never mind; I'll give you a lift in mine. I'm heading for Washington, then I'll have to report back on Mars. I can drop you either place. I just got word myself, only a few days ago, that our two planets had finally made contact. They asked me to find out where you'd disappeared to, but I never dreamed you were here. When I heard you talking English—! But we'd better scoot. I've spied out this place long enough— I don't think it's quite representative."

They had just reached the brush behind the library, where the professor's passionate story was completed, when Hotspur, looking back, saw lights flash in the fraternity house windows.

"Wait here," he said cryptically. "Be right back." He sprang into the brush, and vanished. A few moments later, the anxious professor heard some yells of agony coming from the campus, and

before long Hotspur returned, panting.

"I know you'll get a sympathetic hearing in Washington," he gasped; "and we Martians abhor violence, but there are times—" He rubbed one paw against his mouth. "I didn't like the taste of Irv, but Fatty's even worse! I hope," he added viciously, "they have to take Pasteur treatments!"

"Me too!" Professor Slakmak agreed cheerfully. "And best of all, they'll flunk math—but good! Where's your ship—Pal?"

Transcriber's Note

Missing punctuation has been silently supplied.

No Changes have been made to the following:

who had expired for lack of intellegent --
intellegent is an old correct spelling

mascot of Omega Pi Upsilen!" --
not changed, in other places the spelling is Pi Upsilon!"

Changes have been made to the following:

Fatty and Irv ran Omega Ph Upsilon -->
Fatty and Irv ran Omega Phi Upsilon
missing character supplied

"and we Martians abhor voilence -->
"and we Martians abhor violence
spelling error corrected

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