

When the Professor Got Stuck in the Snow

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Two men were sitting opposite one another in an otherwise empty railway carriage. The first was hidden behind a large newspaper while the second, a man of indeterminate age who went by the name of Smee, looked out at the landscape as the train made its way through the countryside. The carriage was warm, but the trees were bare, and ponds were freezing over. Ducks could be seen walking on water. *I wonder if it will begin to snow*, thought Smee. *It certainly seems cold enough.*

This moment of idle conjecture was brought to an end by a series of snorts from behind the newspaper, followed by a ‘Ptchwwffff’. The paper was folded, to reveal an exasperated face. ‘Take a letter for me, Smee.’

‘Certainly, Professor.’

Smee opened his computer. His fingers hovered over the keyboard, waiting for the words to flow.

After a little academic chin-stroking, the Professor began. ‘To the editor of the *Daily Telegraph* of London: Sir, I find it quite extraordinary that you have allowed your newspaper to be used as a forum for the propagation of poppycock. Today you published an article by Justin Welby, the – quotes – Archbishop of

Canterbury – close quotes – in which he discusses his – quotes – faith – close quotes. This is a man whose entire life revolves around his belief in fairy stories. If this piece had appeared on your world-renowned Funnies Page it would have been in some way understandable, but to treat it as serious comment defies common sense. You might as well have told your readers that there is a goblin with a purple face. With all best wishes, Richard Dawkins – brackets – Professor – exclamation mark – exclamation mark – exclamation mark – exclamation mark ...’ The Professor thought for a while longer. ‘Exclamation mark. How many exclamation marks are we up to, Smee?’

Smee counted. ‘That would be five, Professor.’

‘Hmmm ... Four would not be quite enough, and six excessive. I am resolute that five is the correct amount for the circumstances. Close brackets. The end. Put it in one of those email things of yours and send it off, would you?’

‘Certainly, Professor,’ said Smee. *What a mind*, he thought, as he went back over his typing to smooth out the punctuation and make sure his fingers had not, in their excitement, made any mistakes. *What a brilliant mind*.

The Professor closed his eyes and began to make having-a-nap sounds, and with each man occupied in his own way neither noticed the first snow begin to fall. It was powdery, hardly snow at all, but before long the

flakes were coming down large and thick, and there was no getting away from it.

Winter had arrived.