

Party Problems

*I thought this scene was really funny but it does slow down the start of the main story. You may notice it is quite similar to the **My Birthday** deleted scene from *Professor P and the Jurassic Coast*. So perhaps I should explain why I came to write these scenes. You see, when I was in my second year at University my best friend, Mike had an expensive hi-fi system. It was his pride and joy – he had spent all his money on it. Anyway, one day I called by his room and he was terribly upset – his hi-fi had broken and he didn't have enough money to get it fixed. So what did I do? I offered to fix it. Big mistake...*

I woke with a start. A wet tongue was licking my face!

“Sparky!” I cried, sitting up abruptly and pushing him away.

“Woof,” he barked and looked up at me with his soft innocent eyes.

“Sorry, Sparky,” I apologised.

He could not understand why I was so grumpy – but I had been up most of last night worrying. I felt terrible about breaking Tara's computer. I should have been more careful. Exhausted, I had finally fallen asleep in the early hours of the morning.

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Now, sun was streaming through the gap in the curtains. I glanced at my bedside clock. It was late! Almost ten thirty! Tara's party started soon! I crawled out of bed, dressed, washed and went downstairs. I forced down a few spoons of cereal and then Sparky and I went round to Tara's house.

I walked slowly up to the front door, dreading what I might find. If Tara's parents had found out about the computer...

I pressed the bell and waited anxiously.

"Oh, hi, Peter, hi, Sparky," Tara's mother greeted us cheerfully at the door.

I felt a surge of relief. She had not found out, yet. Sparky and I went into the house and up to Tara's bedroom. Tara was sitting on the bed looking tired and worried.

"Hi, Tara," I said, trying to raise a smile.

"Hi," she said. "I called Professor P this morning, but he wasn't there."

"Oh," I said disappointedly.

"I left a message on his answer machine," she added, "asking him to come early."

"I hope he can," I said anxiously.

I sat down on the bed beside Tara. I felt so guilty about breaking her new computer – her special Christmas gift. Neither of us spoke. I stared at the floor unable to meet her eyes.

Sparky sat on the floor and looked up at us. He tilted his head and looked puzzled. He knew something was wrong. He reached up to me with his paw and then jumped up onto the bed. He lay down and nestled between Tara and me. I stroked him gently.

"I'm really sorry about your computer, Tara," I said quietly.

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“It’s not your fault, Peter,” she replied. “It was just an accident.”

She smiled. At least we were still friends.

I glanced anxiously at the bedside clock. It was nearly eleven thirty – time for the party to start. What had happened to Professor P?

We waited anxiously for Professor P to arrive. Finally, the doorbell rang. Tara jumped up and we ran downstairs.

Professor P stood at the door. He was dressed immaculately in a white suit with a red and white spotted bow tie. Sleepy was at his side, well groomed and wearing a new shiny collar. I had never been so pleased to see them!

“Thank goodness you’re here, Professor P,” Tara said, grabbing his arm and pulling him into the hallway.

“Is everything all right?” he asked, concerned. “I got your message. I came as quickly as I could...”

“Ah, Professor P,” Tara’s father said, as he came into the hall. “Welcome, it’s a pleasure to meet you. Tara has told me so much about you! Can I get you a glass of sherry?”

“Thank you,” Professor P replied.

As Tara’s father went over to the drink’s table, Sleepy bounded into the house, wagging her tail in a friendly greeting.

“Is that your dog?” Tara’s father asked abruptly.

“Yes,” Professor P replied. “She’s called Sleepy. She’s very well behaved.”

Sleepy sat down obediently beside Professor P. She shook the hair out of her eyes, panted and looked up at Tara’s father. He looked at her disapprovingly.

“She’ll be fine in the garden, if you’d rather not have her in the house,” Professor P said.

“Well, yes, that would be better,” Tara’s father replied. “She is very big, and with so many guests around...”

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“She can play outside with Sparky,” I suggested. I did not like the idea of both dogs running around in Tara’s bedroom while Professor P was trying to fix the computer.

I called to Sparky and he ran downstairs. Tara and I led the dogs through the kitchen to the back door. I threw Sparky’s rubber bone into the garden and the dogs dashed out to play. When we returned to the hall, Tara’s father was showing Professor P one of his paintings, which was hanging by the stairway.

As we went over to them, I heard a whisper, “Hello, Peter, hello Tara, it’s me, Floppy.”

“Where are you?” I asked, looking around in surprise.

“I’m sitting on Professor P shoulder,” Floppy replied. “I’m invisible. I’m an invisible rabbit.”

The bell rang again and Tara’s father went to answer the door.

“Professor P, we need your help,” Tara whispered urgently.

“Of course, what can I...?” he began.

“Come upstairs,” Tara said, “quickly!”

As Tara’s father was letting in the guests, Tara, Professor P and I dashed upstairs to Tara’s bedroom. Tara closed the door firmly behind us. Floppy appeared above the bed as a pink rabbit dressed exactly like Professor P, in a white suit with a spotted bow tie!

“How may we be of service?” Floppy asked politely.

“My new computer,” Tara said, pointing to it. “It’s broken! If my parents find out, they’ll...”

She looked down. I could see tears welling up in her eyes.

“Now, don’t you worry, Tara” Professor P said, kindly. “Tell me exactly what happened.”

“It was all my fault!” I blurted out. “I split juice on it. Sparky knocked the glass out of my hand and it went all over the keyboard.”

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“Do you... do you think you can fix it, Professor P,” Tara stammered.

“I’m sure I can,” he replied confidently. “I remember, when I was about your age, I knocked over our radio and it blew up with quite a bang! So I tried to fix it and I’ve been fixing things ever since.”

“If anyone can do it, Professor P can,” Floppy said proudly.

I breathed a sigh a relief. All that worry for nothing!

“First, I’ll have to clean the juice out from the inside of the computer,” Professor P explained. “Tara, could you get me plenty of tissues and a small bowl of water please?”

“Be right back,” she said, hurriedly leaving the room.

Professor P went over to the computer. He took off his jacket and rolled up his sleeves.

“First, we must disconnect the computer from the mains,” Professor P said, as he pulled out the plug. “We don’t want to get electrocuted!”

He took a small tool set out of his pocket and laid it down beside the computer. Floppy rushed over to help. I laughed – he was dressed in a white overall like a doctor about to perform an operation. He was even wearing a mask!

“All scrubbed up and ready to go!” he cried.

“Thank you, Floppy,” Professor P chuckled. “I’ll let you know when I need you.”

Professor P took a screwdriver out of the tool set and started to remove the screws from the back of the computer. He laid the screws neatly on the desk.

“It’s very important to be tidy and methodical,” Professor P explained, “when taking things apart. Then you can put everything back together in the right order.”

Tara returned. She giggled when she saw Floppy waving a scalpel in the air, playing at ‘operations’.

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“Thank you,” Professor P said as Tara gave him the tissues and water.

We watched in fascination as Professor P carefully took out the circuit boards. He moistened a tissue and wiped the boards clean. Then he dabbed them dry with more tissues.

“That’s got rid of all the orange juice,” he said, satisfied.

“Will it work, now?” I asked hopefully.

“I’m afraid it’s not that simple, Peter,” Professor P explained. “The orange juice caused a power surge, damaging some of the components. I’ll have to replace them.”

“Do you have spares?” Tara said, looking worried.

“Let me see,” Professor P said, reaching into his pockets.

“He never goes anywhere without a pocket full of electronics,” Floppy whispered to us.

“Well, you never know when you’ll need a spare capacitor,” Professor P said.

He pulled out a handful of electronic components – small black rectangles with dozens of tiny silver leads, like fat centipedes, tiny black tubes circled with coloured bands, and little silver rectangles with long trailing wires.

“I think these should do the job,” Professor P nodded, picking up a sample of the components.

He took a miniature soldering iron out of his tool kit. He was just about to start soldering when I heard a loud scream from downstairs. Then another scream and the front door slammed shut loudly.

“Help! Somebody help!” Tara’s mother called out.

Tara and I raced downstairs, leaving Professor P and Floppy to work on the computer. A group of guests were standing in the hallway, looking shocked. Tara’s mother was by the front door, holding her hands over her mouth in horror.

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“Mum, what’s the matter?” Tara asked, looking very concerned. “Are you all right?”

“There’s a...a thing...a monster...” she stammered. “Outside...”

Thump! Thump! The door shook violently. Tara’s mother backed away, a look of terror on her face.

“Ron, call the police!” she cried, turning to her husband. “It’s trying to break in!”

“What’s trying to break in?” Tara asked, looking scared.

“A giant,” she replied, “with glowing red eyes – that were evil, pure evil. And it was wearing a suit, a suit of armour...”

“A suit of armour!” Tara and I exclaimed, suddenly realising who was at the door.

We went to the front door.

“Don’t let it in!” Tara’s mother shouted.

“It’s OK, mum,” Tara said, trying not to giggle, “it’s only Brains!”

“Brains!” Tara’s mother cried. “Who... what...” she stammered.

Tara opened the door. Brains was standing in the porch, his huge shining suit of armour towering above us.

“Hello, Tara,” he said quietly. “Can I come to your party, please?”

Before she could answer, her father rushed over, brandishing an umbrella in his right hand.

“Get back!” he cried. “Go away, monster!”

“Monster!” Brains cried, looking very worried. “Where? I’m really scared of monsters.”

Tara’s father raised the umbrella menacingly. “I’m warning you!”

Brains glanced behind nervously. “Can I come in and hide from the monster, please, Tara?” he asked timidly, taking a step closer.

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“It’s OK, dad,” Tara said, pulling her father back. “This is Professor P’s robot. He’s quite safe.”

“And very friendly,” I added. “He wouldn’t hurt a fly.”

“Well...” Tara’s father hesitated. “All right then. It can come in.”

“Thank you,” Brains said, bending as he came through the doorway. “I’ll be safe from that monster, now.”

Tara looked at me and we burst out laughing. If only he knew, he was the monster!

“Where’s Professor P?” Brains asked, looking around.

“Yes, where is Professor P?” Tara’s father asked, turning to Tara.

“He’s...” Tara looked flustered. “He went upstairs to...”

Tara’s voice trailed off.

“To help with Tara’s new computer,” I said, coming to her aid. “He offered to help set it up properly.”

“Oh, good,” Tara’s father said. “I’ll come up and see how he’s getting on.”

Tara looked at me, horrified. Professor P would not have fixed it yet! The computer would still be in pieces!

“Dad, there’s no need to...” Tara began.

But before she had the chance to finish, the bell rang again and her father went to answer it.

“We’d better find out how Professor P’s getting on,” Tara whispered.

I nodded. “Come on, Brains,” I said as we rushed upstairs to Tara’s bedroom. When she opened the door, we gasped in horror!

I could not believe my eyes! The mess! Bits of Tara’s computer were scattered all over the floor – circuit boards, plastic keys and small springs littered the carpet. Professor P was at the desk holding the soldering iron and bending over a circuit board. Floppy hovered over the board, looking frantic. He was no longer smart and professional –

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it looked like he had been dragged through a hedge backwards! His coat was crumpled and his mask hung over one ear. He wiped a bead of sweat from his forehead.

Tara and I stood at the door, speechless.

“Ah, there you are,” Professor P said, glancing round. “And Brains, too – I thought it was probably you,” he chuckled.

“Professor P,” Tara stammered, “What...”

She stopped, lost for words and just stared at the mess in horror.

“What are you doing, Professor P?” I asked anxiously. “What have you done to the computer?”

“Just making a few improvements,” he said, casually.

We went into the room. I closed the door firmly behind us.

“Wait there by the door, Brains,” Floppy called out, “and whatever you do, don’t tread on anything – this is a delicate operation!”

“Oh,” Brains said disappointedly, “can’t I help with the computer too?”

“No,” Floppy replied, looking very flustered, “it’s best left to the experts.”

Tara and I went over to the desk, carefully avoiding the bits of electronics scattered all over the carpet.

“What...what happened?” Tara stammered. “The floor is covered in... I mean...”

“Don’t ask!” Floppy said covering his eyes with his long pink ears. “It was a disaster! First the keyboard flew apart...”

“Why do they make them with so many springs?” Professor P exclaimed. “It’s so unnecessary!”

“And then Professor P decided to fiddle with the circuit...”

“Improve the circuit,” Professor P corrected, looking sternly at Floppy. “It will work twice as fast, now.”

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“If you ever get it to work!” Floppy said, shaking his head pessimistically.

Tara flopped down on the bed and looked very pale.

“But Professor P,” I said, “Tara’s dad will be coming up to look at the computer soon. We told him you were helping to set it up. If he finds out...”

I could not finish. I felt sick at the thought of Tara’s father seeing her brand new computer in bits all over the floor. This was so much worse than before! It was bad enough that I had spilt juice on the computer but now... How could we ever explain this to Tara’s father?

“Will it take long, Professor P,” Tara asked anxiously.

“Five more minutes,” Professor P replied, quickly picking up the soldering iron.

“Five hours more like,” Floppy said mournfully. “Oh, we’re all doomed! Doomed!” he wailed.

“Don’t be so melodramatic, Floppy!” Professor P protested.

He returned to mending the computer. I watched as he quickly and expertly soldered wires and tiny chips into the circuit. Tara sat on the bed, nervously biting her nails. Floppy hovered in the air beside her, unusually silent. He did not want to disturb Professor P’s concentration.

I glanced at my watch. Ten minutes had passed. Surely, Tara’s father would arrive soon.

“Nearly there,” Professor P said confidently. “The circuit is finished. I just need to fit everything back into the case.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. Tara stopped biting her nails and looked up at me hopefully. Floppy wiped the beads of sweat from his forehead with his ear.

“Well done, Professor P,” he said, straightening his coat. “We did it!”

“We?” Professor P said raising his eyebrows questioningly.

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“Professor P! I never doubted you,” Floppy said, “honestly.”

I felt so relieved. Everything would be all right now. But then I heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

“My father!” Tara cried. “He’s coming!”

Oh no! It was too late!

“Brains, don’t let him in!” Floppy cried. “Head him off!”

“Chop his head off?” Brains said, looking very worried. “I don’t...”

“No, Brains!” Floppy cried. “Just make sure he doesn’t come into the bedroom!”

“OK,” Brains said confidently, “I can do that.”

Brains opened the door and went outside.

“You’re in my way!” I heard Tara’s father say. “I can’t get past...”

Then he shouted, “Help! Somebody help! It’s got me!”

Tara jumped off the bed and rushed outside, slamming the door behind her.

“No, Brains, no!” she cried out. “Put him down!”

“Unhand me, do you hear!” Tara’s father cried. “Put me down immediately!”

But Brains was obviously not listening. I felt the floorboards shake as he strode along the landing towards the stairs. Their voices trailed off as Brains carried Tara’s father downstairs.

“Brains to the rescue!” Floppy chuckled.

“I hope Tara’s father is all right,” Professor P said, looking concerned. “Brains means well but doesn’t know his own strength. I’ll go and check as soon as I’ve finished here. Peter, could you help with the keyboard, please?”

“Sure,” I said, glad to help.

I got down on my hands and knees and picked up all the keys that were scattered over the carpet. Professor P showed me how to slot them back into the keyboard.

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“What order do the letters go in?” I asked, after I had finished the numbers.

“I know!” Floppy said eagerly. “I can help you, Peter!”

With Floppy’s telling me where they went, I slotted all the keys into the keyboard in the correct order. A few minutes later, Professor P fitted the keyboard into the computer case and screwed on the back.

“All done,” Professor P said, looking very satisfied and wiping the desk clean. “Now, let’s just check that it works.”

He plugged the computer into the mains and switched it on. I stared at the screen anxiously. Moments later the welcome logo flashed onto the screen.

“Yahoo!” Floppy cried, turning cartwheels in the air. “It works! It works!”

“You did it, Professor P!” I cried in relief. All that worry for nothing! I should never have doubted Professor P.

Professor P smiled. “Everything seems to be working correctly,” he said, satisfied. “Peter, perhaps you could just check the internet connection while I go downstairs. I need to rescue Brains, or should I say, Tara’s father.”

Professor P left the room and I plugged the satellite lead into the computer.

“Brilliant!” I said as the Intergalactic Web screen appeared. “It’s working, just like before, only faster.”

A few moments later, Professor P, Tara and her father came into the bedroom. Tara’s father was looking quite shaken.

“I am so sorry,” Professor P said apologetically. “Brains doesn’t normally behave like that. There must be something wrong with his program...”

“That thing picked me up by my shirt collar!” Tara’s father protested. “I could have been strangled!”

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“I’m really terribly sorry,” Professor P continued. “I’ll check his circuits when I get home...”

“I think it should be dismantled! A thing like that is a danger!” Tara’s father continued crossly.

“Look, dad,” Tara said, taking his arm and steering him towards the computer. “Have a look at my new computer. Professor P has kindly set it up for me.”

As Tara’s father went over to the computer, he noticed Floppy hovering above the keyboard. Floppy looked very odd indeed, now. He was half owl, half rabbit, wearing bits of spacesuit and half a pair of spectacles. Tara’s father rubbed his eyes, not quite able to believe what he was seeing.

“Wh...what is...what’s that?” he stammered, pointing to Floppy.

“Oh, that’s Floppy,” Professor replied. “Let me introduce you. Floppy! Floppy, I’d like you to meet Mr Royce.”

Floppy’s head swivelled around disconcertingly, without his body moving. He looked at Professor P and then at Tara’s father who was staring at him in total disbelief. Floppy quickly shook himself and appeared more solid, as an owl dressed in a dark suit. He blinked his large eyes and said politely, “How do you do, Mr Royce?”

Tara’s father opened his mouth and then closed it.

“Floppy is a quantum holographic computer,” Professor P explained.

“It’s...it’s a computer,” Tara’s father repeated looking completely confused.

“I’m a super-computer actually,” Floppy corrected.

Tara’s father looked pale. He reached out and took hold of the bedpost to steady himself.

“If you’ll excuse me,” he said quietly. “I think I should attend to my other guest, now.”

He turned and quickly left the room.