Professor P arrives

This was my original first chapter. I was aware that I had left the end of the first book hanging slightly and I wanted to make it clear that Professor P had decided to move to the Jurassic Coast and away from Cambridge. I wanted to introduce all the characters as quickly as possible so I could get on with the story. In the end, I decided to delete this chapter as it's too confusing for those who haven't read the first book.

"Oh, where is he, Tara?" I asked, glancing at my watch.

Tara and I were sitting on the rocks overlooking the beach and watching my dog Sparky playing in the waves. It was a cold December morning; strong winds whipped up the spray and waves crashed onto the beach.

"He should have arrived hours ago!" Tara said worriedly.

Suddenly my phone rang. I took it out of my pocket. "Professor P?" I asked excitedly.

"Hello, Peter," came Professor P familiar, warm voice.

"Where are you?" I asked.

"I'm just turning into the village," he replied, "Got held up on the motorway. I'll be at the cottage in a few minutes."

"Come on Sparky!" I cried "Professor P's arrived!"

“Woof! Woof!” Sparky barked excitedly and ran towards the steps leading up the cliff. He bounded up the steps and we raced to keep up with him.

“Wait for us, Sparky!” Tara panted as we reached the top. We ran down the path, through the woods and into the road leading to Professor P house. We arrived just as a huge removal van pulled into the driveway.

Professor P climbed out of the van, followed by Sleepy, his very large hairy dog, barking madly. We rushed over and gave Professor P a hug.

“Peter! Tara!” he cried, “how wonderful to see you again. And Sparky – how you’ve grown!”

“It’s great to see you again, Professor P!” I said, “and you too Sleepy!”

Sleepy ran around in circles wagging her huge tail, overjoyed to see us.

“It’s great to be here at last!” Professor P said grinning broadly. “Let’s start unloading the van shall we?”

Professor P went round to the back of the van and opened the door. The van was full with huge boxes, stacked unevenly, heavy furniture thrown in – there was even a piano leaning awkwardly against the side. I looked questioningly at Tara, wondering how we were going to move all this stuff.

“We’ll have the van unloaded in a jiffy!” Professor P said confidently. “I’ll put Floppy in charge of operations.”

“Floppy!” I said in surprise.

“Yes,” Professor P said, taking a small silver sphere out of his pocket. He tapped the sphere and a fluffy rabbit popped out of the air and looked around excitedly.

“We’re here at last!” the rabbit cried, dancing with joy. “Peter! Tara! It’s wonderful to see you again – I’m so excited – isn’t it wonderful – we’ve moved to the sea at last – we’re going to have such fantastic adventures!”

“It great to see you again, Floppy,” I said smiling.

"We've really missed you," Tara added. "I wish I could give you a hug!"

Floppy shyly covered his eyes with his large floppy eyes and pretended to be embarrassed.

"I have an important job for you to do, Floppy," Professor P said, "I'd like to put you in charge of removals – how would you like to be operations manager?"

"Operations manager!" Floppy said proudly, puffing himself up and appearing in overalls, holding a clipboard. "Of course, Professor P, I won't let you down."

"All the boxes are clearly labelled," Professor P added. "Oh, and do be careful with the piano – it's very heavy!"

I looked at Professor P in astonishment. Floppy was a supercomputer – he could appear as a hologram in any form – but he would not be able to lift anything, and certainly not a piano.

"But how can Floppy…" Tara began.

Professor P laughed at the look of surprises on our faces. "Jump up into the van," he said. "There's something I'd like to show you."

We all climbed into the back of the van and Professor P went over to a long packing case. He bent down, undid the catches and pulled off the top of the case. Tara and I peered inside as Professor P removed the loose packaging material.

"It's a suit of armour!" Tara exclaimed.

"Peter, Tara," Professor P said, his eyes twinkling. I'd like you to meet Brains!"

He reached into the case and pressed a switch on the back of the armour. There was a loud clanking sound and the suit of armour sat bolt upright. Tara and I jumped back in surprise.

"Brains is my latest invention," Professor P explained. "He's a robot, immensely strong…"

“Hello,” the suit of armour said. “My name is…What’s my name Professor P, I forgot?”

“Brains,” Professor P replied. “And I’d like you to meet my friends Peter and Tara.”

“Hello,” Brains said.

“He’s not too bright,” Professor P whispered to us, “I haven’t had time to finish his computer program.”

“Brains,” Professor P continued. “I’d like you to move all these boxes into the house. Floppy will be in charge and tell you where to put everything.”

“Yes, Professor P,” Brains said, standing up and effortlessly picking up a large crate marked Kitchen Things (BREAKABLE).

“Leave everything to me,” Floppy said confidently, as Professor P clipped Floppy’s sphere to Brains’ shoulder.

We climbed out of the van and went over to the front door of the house. Brains followed with Floppy perched on his head.

“Welcome to my new home,” Professor P said as he took out a key and opened the door.

We went inside and looked round.

“It feels so empty,” Tara said.

I nodded, remembering when the house was full of things – mess everywhere, Professor P’s talking inventions, always full of surprises.

“Soon get this place into shape!” Professor P said, smiling as we went into the kitchen. “Put the crate over there please, Brains – but do be careful – it’s breakable.”

Professor P looked highly relieved as Brains slowly and carefully put down the crate.

Tara and I started to unpack the boxes as Professor P cleaned the kitchen cupboards and started to put the things away. When we had almost finished, there was a loud crashing sound from the hallway. Floppy flew into the kitchen, as a brightly coloured parrot.

“We had a slight accident with the piano, Professor P,” he squawked, “nothing to worry about. We couldn’t get the piano though the doorway into the living room, so I told Brains to take off both of the legs – that was OK, but then he dropped it and the whole thing sort of fell apart – I’m sure you can fix it, Professor P.”

Professor P said nothing. He rushed out of the kitchen, a very worried look on his face. There was another loud bang from the hallway followed by Brains crying out, “Sorry!”

Professor P poked his head round the kitchen door. “You two carry on unpacking, I’ll be a few minutes sorting this out,” he said, shutting the door firmly behind him.

“Leaving Floppy in charge!” Tara giggled. “I don’t think that’s a very good idea!”

“Nor do I,” I laughed.

I opened a large cardboard box and pulled out an orange toaster.

“Do you remember Professor P’s toaster?” I asked. “It used to tell jokes.”

“Let’s see if it still does,” Tara said, putting it on a shelf and plugging it in.

“Morning,” it said quietly as she switched it on. “Toast?”

“No, thanks,” she replied, “but do you tell jokes?”

“Jokes,” it said, puzzled. “I’m a toaster, I make toast. Why should I tell jokes?”

“Oh, sorry,” she said, “I just thought…”

“But the kettle does,” it added, “not very good ones though.”

I searched through the cardboard box, pulled out the kettle and switched it on. It burst into life with a song.

“Oh, what a beautiful morning!” it cried. “Why not start the day with a delicious cup of hot tea? And perhaps a joke to brighten your day?”

“Go on then,” I laughed. “Let’s have a joke.”

"You'll love this one!" it cried. "How do you get four large dinosaurs into a car?"

"Er…" I began

Before I could reply it burst out, "Two in the front and two in the back. What about another joke. You'll really like this one, I made it up myself. How do you get six large dinosaurs into a car?"

"Er…" I began.

"Two in the front, two in the back and two in the boot!" it burst out. "It's brilliant isn't it. I've made up lots more dinosaurs joke, do you want to hear them, how do you get eight large dinosaurs into a car?"

"How about three in the front, three in the back and two in the boot?" Tara suggested.

"Oh, you've heard it before," the kettle said disappointedly and promptly switched itself off.

Tara burst out laughing, "I wish our kettle at home did that!"

We continued unpacking the kitchen things and putting everything neatly away in the cupboards. When we had finished I glanced at my watch.

"It's really late!" I said in surprise, "I'd better be going home for tea."

"Me too," Tara nodded. "I wonder what's happened to Professor P – it's all been very quiet."

We went into the hallway and called out for Professor P. The living room door opened.

"Come in Peter, Tara," he said. "I've nearly finished in here."

We walked into the living room and I looked around. The room was cosy and inviting. A warm fire was crackling in the fireplace and there was a lovely smell of burning wood. The furniture was neatly arranged, two armchairs either side of the fireplace, a TV by the wall opposite the fireplace, the piano (with one leg slightly

shorter than the other) leaning against the wall opposite the bay window. And there were Christmas decorations everywhere! Streamers were draped across the ceiling and balloons hung from the corners. There were hundreds of Christmas cards – on the mantelpiece, on the piano and hanging from the walls.

Brains burst through the doorway, carrying a square box, wrapped in green paper with silver stars, which looked like a large Jack–in–the–Box.

"Where shall I put this, Professor P?" he asked.

"Over there in the corner in the corner please, Brains," Professor P said pointing. "Oh, and put it on plenty of newspaper – we don't want the carpet to get damaged!"

I glanced at Tara questioning. What could it be?

"You love this!" Professor P said, a twinkle in his eye. "Now, everyone stand well back!"

Professor P opened the door to let Sleepy and Sparky out. Then he went over to the box, pressed a button on the side and quickly retreated.

There was a crackling sound, like a firework and a small puff of smoke. Floppy hid behind the sofa, "Tell me when it's over!" he called out.

Then there was sudden loud bang and the room was filled with thick white smoke. Floppy coughed loudly.

"Yes!" Professor P cried. "It worked!"

As the smoke began to clear I could see what had happened.

"It's, it's a Christmas tree!" I cried in astonishment.

"A self–inflating, ready–decorated Christmas tree," Professor P said proudly, "complete with angel on the top!"

"It's brilliant!" Tara exclaimed.

We all went over to the tree to admire it. Professor P plugged in the lights and they twinkled red and yellow.

"I'll put some presents under the tree," Professor P said, "then everything will be perfect."

"I'm afraid we've got to go now," Tara said, "but can you come to a party at my house after Christmas? Mum and Dad always have a few friends and neighbours over for drinks on Boxing Day."

"Thanks," he replied smiling, "I'd love to."

"Great," Tara said. "Come in the morning, about eleven o'clock. It should be fun!"

We all left the living room. As we made our way through the hallway Professor P picked up a small box, wrapped in Christmas paper and gave it to us.

"Thanks for helping me unpack," he said. "Here's a little Christmas present for you both. I hope you like it – it's… well, you'll find out!"

"Thanks," we said.

"Bye, then," he called as we set off, "see you on Boxing Day."

We raced down the lanes, Sparky leading the way, his little tail wagging and his ears flapping in the wind. I felt so excited – Professor P was here at last! What adventures we would have! And what was that mysterious present he had given us?