

Professor Lully: Introducing Bobby's Dad

From the chapter, "Professor Lully"

Bobby's father, the great, titanic, admired, terrifically famous Professor Lully, knew he had enemies but this felt different. As he darted through the lushness of his estate, from Japanesecedar to Japanese cedar, English ash to English ash, award-winning rosebush to award-winning rosebush, manicured hedge to sculpted espalier—and all black shapes at this late hour—he mulled the possibilities of who, this time, might be trying to thwart him. And, specifically, chase him.

Though the man was still spry physically and legendary mentally, he was tiring at both.

This, he thought, is childish! Amateurish. Clumsy! Usually, his adversaries plotted and calculated, tried to outwit him, or outmaneuver him politically through complex risky intrigues, through propaganda or public opinion. Some even chose to battle through war or technology, though those required the backing of whole nations—such was the vastness of the great

Professor Lully's visionary reach as he stood upon a large pile of scientific accomplishments that most of the world relied on.

But this guy was chasing the professor around his own grounds, under thick clouds just singed with what was earlier a bright moon, late at night, shouting nastiness in a foreign language, and not too careful about it all. Flying through the air behind the pursuer's path came bushes, branches, and leaves, and sometimes stones.

In this way, and until Manor Security was alerted, Lully could track and avoid his attacker. And think.

Who could be this stupid? Who is this desperate? Why the mess? And where the hell is everyone? Where are the path lights?

Just as that thought arose, lights lit, though they were away at the four-story main house where rooms came to life, large windows glowed brightly, their luminous progression cascading through the Lully mansion as ...

Finally ...

... others awoke. The domestic staff, mostly. The professor did not have friends and did not like relatives; he preferred intellectual equals, who were rare—you didn't bump into those just anywhere. And genetics did not necessarily create them.

Of family, only his son Bobby was in the house—not yet the sleepy, newbie orb pilot but still an Earth-tethered sleepy teen in his bedroom, which was still dark. The rest were the mansion's staff and security, visiting scientists, and an important figurehead or two in the farther wing.

The ruckus of the pursuer did not change but went in a wide arc around the perimeter of the grounds.

It moved fast. It moved loudly.

How odd ... Who could this be? Could be anybody! People are crazy and crazed ... and dull like this fellow.

He watched as the pursuer made a special untidiness of the large rubbery garbage bins outside the main kitchen.

The great scientist was right, mostly. It could be anybody, especially now, with the world

going kaput. Systems and countries were failing, humanity was flailing, wars were raging, economies were sagging, nerves were fraying, religions were imploding. And the horses were missing.

Kay: Upon Realizing That Her Ship Was Invaded by “Things”

From the chapter, “Kay Awakes, As Needed”

Not long after that...

Refreshed, Kay awoke. She yawned and stretched but started when her eye detected motion above—her own reflection in the ceiling. It was a corrupted and distorted version of herself, as if every bone in her body were broken, and her face and hands disfigured. However, she felt fine and soon realized it was the mirror that was battered and misshapen. Relieved, Kay fainted.

Refreshed, Kay awoke. She yawned and stretched but started when her eye detected motion above—her own reflection in the ceiling. This time, she recalled that the mirror was not to be trusted, and she was physically OK other than the bumps and bruises that resulted from her capture and lack of “duck” training.

She remembered her spaceship’s invasion by...things. She realized she must have fainted in her transparent transport egg, considered her reflection again, and viewed the metallic landscape around her, including the table she lay on. She considered her options and fainted.

When Kay’s eyes slowly opened upon a third time, her phone was in her hand, and there was no reflection above. Many large, precious-metal colored objects, in a mockery of shapes and a comedy of sizes, were leaving the room and moving under their own power. They did so

using various means: legs, large wheels, springs, small wheels, slithering skin, sliding feet, motile tails, shoves from others.

These creatures also made sounds, and in English. In fact a small, wheeled thing—perhaps named “This One” based on the chatter Kay heard, and who somehow reminded her of an untied sneaker—seemed even to say goodbye as it left the room.

This strange new world, even for someone who didn’t prefer the real one she was born into, was overwhelming. Kay resisted her usual solutions, for example her favorite: escape by way of concentration on other modes of perception. Instead, she forced herself to think in terms of a more physical leave-taking.

The moving things exited. Kay looked about the room as it shone in gold, silver, and white from every corner, though she could not understand how or why nor clearly distinguish walls from ceiling. She might be in a cloud, for all she knew, other than the support on her back and the pressure—perhaps gravity—that kept her on it.

But to escape, she would have to move. Escape as a notion, an idea, a good idea, was one thing. Moving from her current position as a real and definite first step was something altogether different and probably unwise. Although she was known to meditate on the nothingness and unreality of all existence for hours at a time, when she was done, she always had pizza.

For now, she only had her senses, guts, and will—and she used them. First, she learned how not to faint.

Then she learned, by waiting a few minutes, that she was probably not going to die in the next few minutes.

So that she calmed enough to listen. There were voices and, yes, they were inexplicably speaking English, a hint she stored away for consideration later. The sound came from the shine as it were, and from opposite ends of the room, which she could see without moving too

much by squeezing her eyeballs to the edges of their sockets. The brightness moved and faded, changed from gold to silver, and to white and back, and did so in time to the sounds and syllables, and to words and conversation.

Kay listened. What she heard shrunk her hopes of escape to a small particle of unarmed hope floating within a galaxy of despair populated with bellicose enemies. She was, her captors had determined, “special.”

Bobby: Where Bobby Meets a Space Dog

From the chapter, “Bobby Follows as Best He May”

“Hey. Ummm ... dog?” Bobby stammered, then realized that instead he should ask “What is your name?” in order to be polite. Bobby was, after all, only a guest in this dog’s vortex of black doom.

The pup did not answer but asked in turn, “Are yooooo Praaafesscherrrr Lully’shh son?”

The dog wiggled with every muscle in his short, log-like trunk and was able to move his tongue closer and directly to Bobby’s face, a long red canine tongue ready to slather. But Bobby, with a huge effort, held out his arms, caught the pup, and held him a foot away.

“You heard the orb computer say that?” asked Bobby.

“Yeschhh. And othersssshhhh.”

“Yes, I’m his son. Others? What others?”

“You are a human, yessschhh? An Earthling? Named Lohssssh?” the space-canine asked, ignoring Bobby’s questions. Slobber floated near to them until the dog shook his head and the liquids spiraled away, a new, unnamed, small, disgusting galaxy.

“Yeah, of course, from Earth. But who is—” Bobby tried ask about that ‘Lohssssh’ part but was interrupted by wet glee.

“Yooooouu are! That prooovessch it for good!” The dog projected his voice out toward the other creatures. To Bobby he said, evenly and politely, “Nice to meet you, Los!”

“Why are you calling me Los?”

“Oh, sorry, Master. I will call you Master.” Dolefully, the dog’s ears drooped, a whiplash change in mood.

Bobby considered this. They knew he was Professor Lully’s son. And from Earth. And they hadn’t killed him or squished him, which seemed promising. How they knew anything was a mystery as deep as space, but they didn’t know that Professor Lully’s son was named Bobby and not Los. Maybe there was another Lully somewhere, a parallel universe? Maybe these guys were just uninformed? Bobby knew no one named Los, or what it might mean, but why risk it, he reasoned, and screw up this rescue? If they wanted to rescue Los Lully instead of Robert Lully, that was fine for now.

Also: he thought back to when his father told him not to give his name to strangers.

When Bobby was four years old, this was basic advice, but as the great man grew in importance in a competitive and dangerous international industry, it was a security measure to protect Bobby. Not that the boy went anywhere or knew anyone, but just in case. So Bobby figured he would be smart here and accept the name given. A new personality would be fun in any case, a space-traveling one.

And he could also make the dog feel better at the same time.

“No, no, no, Los is fine. Please call me Los if you want. You are a good dog.” A big wet kiss came in answer as they floated.

“Where are we going?” Bobby asked, his breath echoing back to him through the see-through mask that allowed him, somehow, to live.

“Toooo the Beginning, tooooo the Middle!” the dog said after yanking Bobby’s—his new master’s—pant leg to keep them moving along while also allowing the dog to speak properly, mostly, through his thick brown snout. Bobby’s body caught up until he and the dog were face to

face, and his own was licked.

“Stop,” he said. Bobby liked dogs but wanted answers. “Can you be more specific?”

“Yessschhsssm, Maschsscchsster!” The words came excitedly and, for these words, with a lot of dog drool, too. The droplets went in all directions, spinning and yellow, like small disgusting asteroids, and Bobby watched them, thinking it might be a million years before some of them hit something, like a planet or a jerk’s eye. But this thought quickly made him space-sick, since the view beyond the spit globules was a vastness of dark nothingness that reminded Bobby of where he was and also where he unfortunately definitely wasn’t.

The dog obeyed and answered, spraying and howling with delight, “Tooo the schtart! Toooo the schenter, and toooo the end! Aroooo!”