

Mushrooms

It was my week to take the twins to school, so there I was setting the table for breakfast buttering the toast, pouring the orange juice and at the same time checking my watch just to make sure I had enough time to get the children to school and still make the train to work.

Then I realised that Elsie and Arthur, the twins, were missing. I called upstairs, nothing, so they must be in the garden I thought.

I looked outside and there they both were, at the end of the garden. "Are you two coming in for breakfast" I called. "Yes Dad, coming" they replied.

"What were you doing at the end of the garden?" I asked. "There's nothing down there but overgrown bushes, garden waste and all those old garden ornaments".

Elsie was the first to speak. "No Dad you're wrong. There's a little man there sitting on the old stone mushrooms".

"Don't be silly Elsie" I said. "They are only garden gnomes, they're made of plastic. They're not real people".

"They are Dad and they can talk as well" chirped in Arthur. "They spoke to us".

"Now come on you two" I said. "Let's just forget all that and get ready for school. Hurry up, we can talk tonight when I get home".

That night I got home late so I didn't have an opportunity to speak to them. I did however speak to my wife, but she merely tried to convince me I shouldn't worry, it was all part of growing up.

The next morning I was back in the kitchen preparing breakfast and the twins, they were at the end of the garden of course.

This time, however, I didn't call out but walked quietly towards the dump that was at the back of the garden. As I got closer I crouched down thinking that I could get up really close before being discovered and I could discover what they were playing at.

As I approached I could hear voices whispering. I strained to listen and I could clearly pick Elsie and Arthur's voices but there was a third voice, one I couldn't place. I lifted my head a little, just enough to see where the voices were coming from, the children had their backs to me.

And there it was, Elsie and Arthur talking to a little garden gnome sitting on a stone mushroom. Then he spoke. The gnome was talking! His was the voice I hadn't recognised.

The shock immediately made me straighten up and stare in disbelief at the talking plastic gnome, who for his part quickly jumped down and tried to hide behind the mushroom.

The twins, aware that something had happened behind them, spun around and stared at me with open mouths. Arthur spoke first, "Dad, what are you doing here. Why didn't you call us!". But I was unable to speak and filled with disbelief my mind raced. What was I looking at?

Then Elsie spoke, but to the little gnome. "Don't be afraid" she said "this is only Dad, he won't hurt you". Turning to me she said, "Will you Dad?".

By this time, I gathered a few thoughts and replied almost mechanically "No, of course not. I won't hurt you, but who are you?".

The little man seemed to relax a little and came out from behind the mushroom. "I'm Norman, I'm a gnome".

"Yes," I said "I can see, but gnomes are not real, are they?".

"They are if you believe they are" he said. "I've lived here for years but nobody ever talked me. Then Elsie and Arthur started talking and each morning as their belief in me grew, so did I, until one day I felt safe enough to talk to them".

"But what are you saying" I asked. "you are alive because they believe you are, what about me, I don't believe it?".

"Yes you do" he said, "aren't you talking to me, or do you often talk to people who are not real?".

"Well no" I replied. "I don't talk to imaginary people, certainly not gnomes anyway".

By this time he was sitting comfortably on top of the mushroom again, smiling away and chuckling to himself. The twins were also smiling and laughing I soon found myself joining.

"But wait a minute" I said, "What happens when we leave you and I take the children to school and I go off to work?".

"It's simple" he said. "I just sit here until you come back and talk to me again. When you aren't here there is nobody else that believes in me, so I don't come to life".

"Are you happy with that?" I asked.

"Yes of course" he said. "It's been years since I last spoke to anybody else, so I'm quite used to it".

"Oh, ok then. Well, we'll have to leave you now anyway" I said. "Come on kids, you've got to get to school and I've got to get to work" and we left Norman at the end of the garden sitting on his mushroom until the next morning.

Al Shadbolt. March 2018