

**Three stories by Léopold Chauveau**

**Translated from the French by Nat Paterson**

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**This English text is based on the abridged version of two stories from *Histoires du Petit Père Renaud* (1929) and one from *Histoire du poisson-scie et du poisson-marteau* (1932) used for the Orsay/Roubaix exhibition video. Any enquiries about publishing a full-length translation of either work, and any requests to reproduce this document in whole or in part, should be directed to Nat Paterson at [2505036p@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:2505036p@student.gla.ac.uk).**

### **Story of the Little Serpent**

One day, a little serpent was disobedient and insolent.

His mother told him, 'Don't put your toes in your nose!'

He replied, 'For a start, there's only one!'

It was true. There was only one, the big toe of his right foot. The little serpent never put more than one toe in his nose at a time, almost always the same one, almost always that big toe.

And he left it there.

His mother rushed to give him the slap that he deserved. He didn't want to get it and sped away on three legs, the toe in his nose to taunt his mother.

How insolent!

But he didn't leave it there for long. He soon needed all his legs – none of them got in the way, the four of them were only just enough – to keep him at a distance from his mother.

'Mustn't she be angry to run so fast!' he thought. 'What a slap I'm going to get if she catches me!'

And he sped on, using all his legs.

He sped on for so long, she followed him so single-mindedly, that she forgot why she was so determined to give him a slap. She remembered that he deserved one, she wanted to give him one, but she just could not remember why she wanted to give him one.

He sped on. He too had forgotten, a very long time ago, why he deserved a slap. That 'why', though, wasn't very important – he knew that he was sure to get it, and that it was sure to be a good slap, if he let himself be caught, and so he sped on.

He sped on for so long, that little by little his legs wore away. When they were all worn away, all four down to the root, he had no legs left.

He didn't stop – he could hear his mother running behind him – he didn't even take the time to look back – he sped on by crawling on his belly.

All of that didn't happen in a trice. His legs wore away slowly and, as they wore away, he learned to crawl on his belly.

They didn't wear away very quickly, and he had time to learn to crawl perfectly well before they had disappeared entirely, worn away down to the roots, and he no longer had a trace of a toe, trace of a foot, trace of a front leg or back leg, so thoroughly worn away that nothing ever, ever grew back.

The mother learned to crawl on her belly, in exactly the same way, before her legs were completely worn away, worn away down to the roots, so thoroughly worn away that, since that day, all serpents are born without legs – never again has a serpent been seen with legs or with anything that looks like legs – except some failed serpents called lizards. And all serpents crawl on their belly because they find that is the easiest way to crawl – easier, for example, than crawling on their back, or than walking upright on the tip of their tail.

If the mother serpent had remembered, at that moment, that she wanted to give her son a slap to teach him not to put his toes in his nose, she would have stopped immediately. It would have been enough for her to think that the poor child couldn't put his toes anywhere anymore, not in his nose or anywhere else because he no longer had any toes, nor anything that looked like a toe or a piece or a root of a toe, nothing at all, absolutely nothing at all when it came to toes.

She was going to give him a useless slap.

And give it to him with what? Because, she too, she no longer had anything that could be used to give him a slap. With her tail, perhaps? But would she have thought of it straightaway?

The little serpent sped on. He threaded his way between stones, slid in the grass, and this lasted so long that he started to suffer from an ache in his belly. He wasn't yet used to bumping it like this against everything that came along.

His mother was gaining ground.

He was going to be caught and to get his slap. His belly hurt, he wanted to cry, but he didn't cry because that would have been no use. His mother didn't let herself be moved by tears – he knew. It wasn't the first time he was going to get a slap!

He arrived on the bank of a river. He dived into the water and felt very good, rested and refreshed.

But his mother was getting closer. It was out of the question to stay there, smoothing the way for her. He floated joyfully in the direction of the current – joyfully because he no longer had an ache in his belly, which was gently caressed by the lovely warm water; joyfully because he thought that his mother, for all her cunning, would not be cunning enough to follow his trail in the river.

Abruptly he stopped and sped backwards. He could see, just in front of him, a huge gaping mouth full of very sharp teeth – a crocodile's mouth that a crocodile had opened, in the hope that the little serpent would fall into it. The little serpent was swimming straight towards the open mouth, and he only needed to swim straight ahead, to fall in.

'Just let him come in', thought the crocodile. 'I'll take care of the rest.'

But the little serpent didn't come in, he made an about turn and rushed in the opposite direction, swimming upstream.

He was still shaking from the sight of the inside of that crocodile's mouth, when there, gaping in front of him, he saw another even wider mouth, immense and immeasurable, red, with teeth – oh! what teeth! – a hippopotamus' mouth that a hippopotamus had opened, simply to yawn, without thinking of doing any harm, without thinking of the little serpent, without thinking of anything at all,

because a hippopotamus rarely thinks of anything at all when he doesn't think of eating. And this one didn't think of that for the time being: he'd just had lunch.

The little serpent, who didn't know all that, was even more afraid of this mouth than of the crocodile's and, not daring to swim downstream because of the crocodile, nor upstream because of the hippopotamus, he crossed the river and landed on the other bank.

These comings and goings had made him lose time, his mother was getting closer, so he plunged into the undergrowth. His mother plunged behind him.

On his poor, sore belly, the little serpent slithered so fast that all the beasts, when he passed, were frightened.

Nobody had ever seen anyone walk in this way.

He passed between the legs of a lion, who roared with terror and rushed to lift his feet one after the other, so that this strange beast wouldn't touch them.

The lion was still ruffled when the mother serpent arrived at the same speed. He rushed even faster to remove his feet, roared even louder, then decided to saunter off slowly and majestically, stiffening his tail so that nobody could guess how much he wanted to put it between his legs and escape at full gallop, turning round every two steps to make sure that none of those strange beasts was following him.

A bit further on, the little serpent passed over the neck of a giraffe who was sleeping, stretched out at full length across the path. She woke, arose, and became as tall as a tree. But she wasn't completely awake, she didn't understand what was happening – she never understood very well what was happening, even when she was completely awake.

She saw the mother serpent slithering towards her, and stretched out her legs to let her pass. There was, between her legs, much more space than was needed to let the mother serpent pass, and she passed.

And the giraffe never understood what had happened. It was, what's more, not easy to understand for a giraffe.

The little serpent rushed on and on, straight ahead. Tired out, out of breath, with an aching belly, he no longer had legs, and he had cramps in the legs that he no longer had.

He couldn't do it anymore, his mother was surely going to catch him.

And what a slap he'd get!

Then he noticed a hole, the opening of a narrow passage that seemed to plunge into the earth.

He thought quickly, 'This is the thing for me. My mother's too big to come inside.'

He slithered swiftly in.

When he was sure that he'd brought all his tail in behind him, that he'd left nothing outside, he stopped.

He didn't know where he was.

Safe from his furious mother – that, for the time being, was enough.

Now this hole was one of two holes on the end of the trunk of a sleeping elephant, and the little serpent had just entered the nose of that elephant.

The mother serpent arrived, just in time to see him disappear. She realised immediately, without needing to try, that she was much too big to enter that hole.

She waited for the elephant to open his eyes, and then she asked him, 'Big father elephant, don't you feel anything in your nose?'

'I have no nose', said the elephant.

'No nose! What, then, is this great contraption that hangs from you, in the place where you should have a nose?'

'It's a trunk.'

'A trunk! Well! Tell me, don't you feel anything in your trunk?'

'No!' replied the elephant. 'I don't feel anything at all. Or rather, yes! Look! Look! What's getting in the way of my breathing through my right nostril?'

'It's my son', said the mother serpent.

'What an idea', said the elephant, 'to have gone and crammed himself in there.'

And, from that time on, the elephant, who up until then had contested with the rhinoceros for the first prize among all beasts for stupidity – from that time on, every day, the elephant has given the most convincing proofs of guile and intelligence.

It's simply that the little serpent, lodged at the very end of his nose, very close to his very little brain, finds himself very well placed to give him advice.

When the elephant is about to do something stupid, the little serpent, who is very intelligent, notices and tells him, 'Don't'.

And the elephant won't.

When the elephant is about to talk like an idiot, the wary little serpent's sure to spot what he was going to say and whisper, 'Don't'.

And the elephant won't.

So well that he passes for the wisest of beasts. But it's not him, it's the serpent.

### **Story of the Big Tree who ate Little Children**

Once upon a time, in a forest, there was a big tree who ate little children.

When a little child passed all alone along the path, the tree ate the little child.

If two little children passed, if three little children passed, that was two, that was three, little children who were eaten.

But if four little children came along the path together, the tree let them pass without disturbing them, because he did not dare eat more than three children at a time. There would have been no space for the fourth in his trunk. That fourth one would have escaped and would have told the story of why the others did not come back.

But this way, when the tree set about eating, everyone was always eaten and nobody stayed to tell the story of how the little children who didn't come back, didn't come back because the big tree had eaten them.

People told each other, 'It's surely the charcoal burners who take all those little children.'

They killed all the charcoal burners and nothing changed.

They told each other, 'It's surely the wolves.'

They killed all the wolves, and still nothing changed.

They killed all the beasts of the forest, the foxes, the badgers, the beech martens, the red and roe deer, the rabbits – it's not rabbits who can eat so many little children – and the big tree continued to gorge on little girls, to gorge on little boys, every time he found the opportunity.

But it was no use the tree being cunning, it was no use him not touching the little children who passed when he was afraid of letting one escape, when he wasn't sure that he could eat them all, all down to the last mouthful. He still ended up getting nabbed.

One day, a woodcutter spent the evening in the shade of the big tree, leaning his back against the trunk. The big tree's big belly blocked him from knowing what was happening around his foot, and he was very worried because he knew that woodcutters sometimes cut down trees.

The good man only thought of resting. He fell asleep and the tree soon forgot about him. When the woodcutter woke up, he saw, on the path, a little boy walking forward and, without warning, a small branch of the big tree lowered, stretched, grabbed the little boy and shoved him, and pushed him, pushed him, pushed him – oh, push him in, that big mouthful - into the tree's mouth at the top of his trunk. The tree's two biggest branches stretched apart to open his mouth, then moved back again to close it, and he started to chomp.

He chomped the boy into a round, soft ball, and the ball slid down, stopping every now and again, under the bark, to the bottom of the trunk, where it abruptly disappeared. The little boy had been devoured.

The woodcutter fled in terror. As he ran, he sweated, trembled, shivered, shook with chattering teeth, and still found the means to think. So this was why that devil of a beech was so well, grew so thick, was so shiny, so lush, the dirty beast!

He arrived, out of breath, in the village square, and told the story of what he had just seen.

'Well, well, well', said the countryfolk, 'drunk as a skunk. How out of character!' They made fun of him. Nobody believed him.

So he took his best axe, the heaviest, polished it, threw it over his shoulder, and went back into the forest.

A terrible battle began between the man and the tree. Branches whipped the air around the woodcutter, twisted and whirred whilst striving to seize him. The woodcutter whirled his axe above his head, threw it to the right, threw it to the left, leapt forward, leapt back, always dodging the attack. And the axe, quivering with impatience, broke loose and then, one after another, cut off the branches of the tree who ate little children.

When all the branches had been cut off, the woodcutter attacked the trunk. The tree could no longer defend himself. He fell.

At once, from the hollow trunk, from that trunk that he used as his stomach, out came all the little children the tree had eaten. But they had become very little, very little the poor little ones, no bigger than half a little finger. There was nothing left of them but what the tree hadn't been able to digest.

They began to cry, 'Take us back home, Mister Woodcutter! Take us back home!'

And they climbed all the way up his legs, because they were afraid he would leave them there.

The woodcutter put them in his pockets, in the pockets of his breeches, in the pockets of his jacket, in the pockets of his vest. Soon, all his pockets were full, and still heaps of little fellows cried, 'Take us back home, Mister Woodcutter! Take us back home!'

The woodcutter took off his hat and filled it with little fellows. There were still many who couldn't get into the hat and who cried even louder, 'Take us back home, Mister Woodcutter! Take us back home!'

And so a whole gang, a whole gang of little fellows as big as half a little finger, began toddling behind him on the path, shouting at him now not to go too fast because they were struggling to follow him on their little legs.

Walking very slowly, very gently, the woodcutter eventually reached the village. When he arrived there at last, with all those little heads peeping out of his pockets, the pockets of his breeches, the pockets of his jacket, the pockets of his vest, out of all his pockets, with all those little heads peeping out of his hat like little birds' heads peeping out of the nest, with all those little fellows who toddled behind him on the path, the people were astonished, even more astonished still when they recognised the little children they had lost so long ago.

When each of them had recognised all the little children they had lost, there were still many little children nobody recognised, those the tree had eaten in very early times and whose daddies and mummies were now dead, and those poor little children started to cry, the poor abandoned creatures.

So the woodcutter said, 'The parents who find a child will all take one of these who are orphans, those who find two will all take two, and those who are lucky enough to find three will all take three.'

They did what the woodcutter asked. And so all the little children were housed, fed, cared for and, in a few days, they became exactly as big as they had been when the tree had eaten them. And then they continued to grow, right up to the size that each needed to grow to.

The woodcutter lived to a ripe old age, and all the little children he had given back to their parents were like his grandchildren.

### **Story of Slug Basset**

Slug Basset was a dog, his long body supported by short legs, the front ones all crooked; a dog with droopy ears and a pointed snout.

He went out for his morning walk, stopped in front of the grocer's shop, lifted his leg and trotted off again, nose to the ground, his tail in the air. He rolled in a mess, ran barking after a bicycle, met

friends, checked their scents, then stopped at once when he noticed what was, to him, an inviting fragrance. He followed it and arrived at the foot of a huge pile of garbage.

At the top of the pile, a chocolate-coloured poodle scratched, sniffed, huffed, and started scratching again.

Between his splayed hams flew cabbage stumps, peelings, crusts, and greaseproof paper. He disappeared. Slug Basset could only see the end of his tail wagging.

The poodle's head popped out of a hole at the bottom of the pile, his mouth holding a bone. He jumped out, stretched out on his belly and, curling his lips, creasing the top of his nose, using his legs to help, cleaned what little was left off the bone. Then, opening his mouth wide, he broke it between his big back teeth, and licked the marrow with little strokes of the tip of his tongue. At last he got up, sniffed to the right and to the left, looked at Slug Basset, and sniggered, 'You can eat the rest.'

Slug Basset sucked every morsel, found nothing left, and pulled a face. The poodle said, 'You're not proud! What's your name?'

'Slug.'

'Slug what?'

'Slug Basset. And yours?'

'Chocolate.'

'A pretty name that brings back memories. Chocolate what?'

'Chocolate Poodle.'

'What's your job?'

'A blind man's guide-dog. And you?'

'A performing dog.'

'Come for a walk with me.'

'With pleasure. But don't go too fast! I've got shorter legs than you.'

They trotted along and chatted on the way. Slug Basset asked, 'Where does your blind man beg?'

'Beg! He doesn't beg.'

'So what does he do?'

'He's an astronomer.'

'And doesn't being blind get in the way with that?'

'Not at all. I watch for him through the telescope – a beautiful cardboard refracting telescope that we have on our balcony. Do you know what does get in the way for him? Arithmetic! He's very good at mathematics of course – an astronomer! He knows off his fingertips every kind of geometry, algebra, mechanics, but he's never been able to remember any times tables except the two and the five. And not only that! Give him a longish addition, it's no use him counting on his fingers, he'll get muddled before the end of the column of tens. That makes him miss all his discoveries. And you, where do you work?'

'At Médrano.'

'At the circus?'

'Yes.'

'They say the circus is fun.'

'Have you ever been there?'

'No.'

'Come with me this evening.'

'At what time?'

'Twenty-one hundred hours, at the artist's entrance: *porte de Médrano entrée des artistes.*'

Twenty-one hundred hours, that's nine o'clock.'

'You know where it is, of course?'

'No. I'll take a taxi.'

Slug Basset got Chocolate Poodle one of the best seats, settled him into it, and went up to his dressing room.

Chocolate Poodle, dazed by the lights, numbed by the noise – the music, the shouts of the clowns, the horses galloping past – was falling asleep, when he was roused by a bark.

Slug Basset was trotting onto the stage. He sat on a high-stool. A gentleman in evening dress and a white tie wrote figures on a blackboard. Slug Basset read them by barking, once for the number one, twice for the number two, and so on. He never got one wrong.

He then, without mistakes, did an addition, a subtraction, a multiplication, and a division, writing the results himself with a piece of chalk fixed to his leg.

The audience laughed. Chocolate Poodle thought, 'This is the dog for my master.' At the exit, he told Slug Basset, 'Come to see us. My master's not a fool – his conversation will interest you.'

'Where do you live?'

'Rue de la Comète, 8. On the sixth floor. The name is on the door. The moon, astronomer.'

'Understood. One of these days, I'll come.'

The next day, after lunch, Slug Basset, lying in front of the fire, digested and daydreamed.

His master yelled, 'Slug Basset! Matinée today!'

Slug Basset thought, 'You're getting on my nerves with your matinée. I'm closing my eyes, I'm sleeping, I can't hear you!'

To make it seem more like he was sleeping, he let out a little snore through his nose.

'Slug Basset!'

'Slug Basset!'

He leapt to his feet and yelped. He'd just been kicked in a sensitive area. Pressing his tail between his legs, he rushed for the door, pushed it open, and skipped from step to step, his front and back feet joined together, right down to the bottom of the stairs.

In the street, he groaned, 'What a brute! A kick for me! What a brute! He will never see me again! I'm going to Chocolate Poodle's, on rue de la Comète! Let's gallop! Rue de la Comète! Let's not forget the name! Rue de la Comète! Rue de la Comète! Rue de la Comète! There it is! Number eight! Fourteen, twelve – we're on the right track – ten, ten a, eight – let's go in! One – two – three – four – five – six floors! – Here we are! – Themoon, astronomer – It's written down! Let's ring the bell!'

Chocolate Poodle opened the door.

'Hush! Not a sound! Let's not disturb the boss!'

'Is he sleeping?'

'No! Hush! He's going wrong with an operation! Hush! Come in! Hush!'

Themoon sat at his table, sighing, with his head in his hands. He wrote a figure, crossed it out, counted on his fingers, took his head in both hands again, and moaned, 'Impossible to finish this devilish division!'

Slug Basset leapt onto the table, looked at the figures, dipped his leg in the inkpot, and immediately wrote down the quotient.

Chocolate Poodle read it out loud. Themoon cried, 'This is exactly what I needed!' He put his hand on Slug Basset's back.

'Are you the high-performing dog Chocolate Poodle has spoken to me about?'

'I believe so.'

'You're good! Very good! Stay with us! We'll share the work.'

Chocolate Poodle is looking through the cardboard telescope – he's used to doing that.

Themoon continued, 'I'm thinking it over. You'll do the calculations. What's your name?'

'Slug Basset.'

'Well! Slug Basset! Time to work!'

Until dinner time, Themoon could be heard rubbing his hands and repeating, 'You calculate like an angel.'

In the end he cried, 'I've never seen anything like it! Astonishing! Truly extraordinary!'

'Oh!' sighed Slug Basset, 'if you had known Pythagoras...'

'But how could I have known him? He's been dead for two thousand years!'

'I'm not talking about that one. Pythagoras, a high-performing toad I've worked with before at Neuilly Fair. He might be dead too, after all!'

'Did he calculate better than you?'

'Much better.'

‘You’re enough for me.’

The collaboration of Slug Basset, Themoon, and Chocolate Poodle quickly gave remarkable results. Every day they discovered new stars too far away to appear in the most powerful reflecting telescopes. But Slug Basset’s calculations proved their existence, irrefutably.

One day, Themoon told his dog friends, ‘One of the most shocking errors of the old astronomy has been to give the constellations names that do not correspond to their appearance. Does the Great Bear look like a bear? No. And the Little one? No more so. We need to fix all that. Slug Basset’s calculations allow me to shift the position of the stars as I please – within the limits of their constellation, of course. I can draw with them a bear when a bear is required, a dragon when I need a dragon, etc, etc. Let’s go on the balcony, you’re going to see.’

Raising an arm, gesticulating, he cried, ‘Let’s start with the Little Bear! Let’s not touch the Polestar so as not to move our North. Second star a bit lower – like so! This other one there – this other one here! The tail! The legs! The eye! Don’t you see, here in the Sky, a very close resemblance to a little bear?’

‘Well! Well!’ said Chocolate Poodle.

‘There’s no change!’ groaned Slug Basset.

But Themoon didn’t hear him.

‘On to the Great Bear! A star here! And there! And there! And there! That’s it! How do you find it?’

‘Well! Well!’ mouthed Chocolate Poodle.

‘He’s completely dotty!’ said Slug Basset.

But Themoon didn’t hear him.

One morning, Themoon listened to Slug Basset reading out the calculations he’d performed during the day. He asked abruptly, ‘Are you quite sure of your figures?’

‘I’ve proved them with nine of my operations.’

‘Then it is very serious.’

‘What is very serious?’

‘This very day, at one o’clock in the afternoon, the Earth will be pulverized by a comet that is heading directly towards us so quickly that we’ll struggle to see her with the naked eye! What squabbling! She’s tearing a leg off my Great Bear, bursting my Little one’s eye, jostling planets and stars that mingle, crash, collapse, break, and explode!’

‘Stop her!’ cried Chocolate Poodle.

‘I’m going to make the necessary arrangements. Slug Basset! Quick with that division!’

Slug Basset looked at the figures, lowered his head, and put his tail between his legs.

‘Quick! What are you waiting for?’

‘Too difficult! I can’t do it.’

‘The comet’s getting closer!’

'I can't do it!'

'Try again', said Chocolate Poodle.

'Impossible!'

'Go and look for Pythagoras!' cried Themoon.

'I'll race there!'

'Hurry up!' begged Chocolate Poodle.

Slug Basset rushed onto the metro, got off at Porte Maillot, passed the gate, and threaded his way between the modest booths and monumental attractions of Neuilly Fair, up to the headless woman's caravan.

He went in. The headless woman cried, 'Slug Basset! To what do we owe the pleasure? We haven't seen you for a century!'

They hugged. Slug Basset said, 'And Pythagoras?'

'He's there.'

The headless woman opened a box. Pythagoras leapt onto the table and held his hand out to Slug Basset.

'Hello, old pal!'

'I'm pleased to see you.'

'Me too. But I'm really annoyed.'

'What's happened?'

'A long story. My new boss – a very fine man – an astronomer – has made me do calculations! Calculations! And now they foretell the end of the world today – at one o'clock! A comet going to crush us! He's found a trick to stop that, but we still need another calculation, and I'm stuck. You could settle the operation for him.'

'More work!' groaned Pythagoras. 'No! I'm too tired!'

'He's too tired!' sighed the headless woman.

'Come for lunch! We eat well. With excellent wines!'

'I'll put my hat on!' said the headless woman.

'Let's go!' cried Pythagoras.

He leapt into the box. The headless woman took him under her arm.

They arrived at Themoon's. Slug Basset introduced: 'Monsieur Themoon, the great astronomer.'

'Pleased to meet you, Monsieur.'

'Madame Headless Woman, the great curiosity.'

'Very honoured! Madame!'

'My friend Pythagoras, the great mathematician – there! In the little box. Come out, Pythagoras!'

'Delighted, Monsieur!'

'So am I!'

'Lunch is served!' cried Themoon. 'We'll work after we've eaten.'

They sat down, ate, drank, and talked politely with each other.

They didn't hear the bells strike half past. They were shouting, laughing, quarrelling, and singing.

All of a sudden, the headless woman struck the side of her plate, shouting 'Silence! Silence!'

There was silence. Then she said, 'Look at the clock! Three! We should have exploded at one!'

Themoon leapt to his feet, knocking over his chair.

'Three o'clock! Slug Basset! Your calculations are false!'

Slug Basset bowed his head.

'That's really likely.'

'Slug Basset! You've been trying it on with me!'

'No! Only I don't know how to do operations. I only know how to count up to three.'

'Yet, at the *cirque Médrano*...'

'Tricks of my master about which I've never understood a thing.'

'And all those calculations you did for me!'

'I wrote anything, at random. It could have come out right.'

'Then, my discoveries! My stars!'

'Done for!' croaked Pythagoras.

'My catastrophe!'

'Failed!'

'We're saved!' yelled Chocolate Poodle.

'No luck!' sighed Themoon.

And he added, 'Monsieur Pythagoras, it is sad that your great talents are uselessly wasted in a fair booth. Do you want to replace Slug Basset and take charge of my calculations?'

'My great talents! I'm no smarter than Slug Basset. Even less. I only know how to count up to two.'

'Come on, Pythagoras', said the headless woman, 'let's get back. You talk too much. You shouldn't tell the world that. When they know you don't know, they won't come to see us anymore.'

'You're right. Let's get back. Come with us, Slug Basset: you'll take back your old job at Médrano. You, Monsieur Themoon, try to find a calculator, a real one.'

'What's the use?'

'Don't lose heart! Perhaps, one day, you'll make an authentic discovery!'

'Alas! I am quite incapable!'

'Incapable! A great astronomer like you!'

'Great astronomer! I'm no better at astronomy than you two at arithmetic!'

'Eh?'

'I know, like everyone, the Great Bear and the Little Bear by name. The Sun and the Moon, I can't even remember what they're like anymore. The rest, I've never understood a thing.'

'Come with us', said the headless woman. 'There's space in the caravan.'

'I'll follow you. Chocolate Poodle, don't forget the cardboard telescope.'

Chocolate Poodle put his tail between his legs. 'I've never seen anything inside!'

'Let's go!' cried Themoon.

On the way, the headless woman sighed, 'Monsieur Themoon! I've always dreamed of marrying a great modest scholar – like you!'

'And I a woman with a good head on her shoulders – like you!'

Chocolate Poodle cried, 'Get married! Slug Basset, Pythagoras and I, that already gives you three children.'

'When the others come, I'll teach them to count', said Pythagoras.

'I'll teach them arithmetic', said Slug Basset.

'I astronomy', said Themoon.

And leaning towards the headless woman, he cried joyfully, 'Let's get married!'

Lowering her eyes, she whispered, 'You know! When I say I haven't got a head...!'