

DUNNO'S ADVENTURES

Nikolai Nosov

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A VISIT TO A LIVE AUTHOR



KANOL PUBLISHING HOUSE (PVT) LTD.

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Slick was standing at the open window of his study with his arms crossed, gazing out into the distance. His long hair was slicked back and his thick black eyebrows met over his nose, lending his face an expression of deep concentration. He did not so much as stir when our three friends came into the room. Pretzel greeted him in a loud voice and introduced Bendum and Twistum, explaining that they had come for the soldering-iron, but still Slick kept staring out of the window with the look of one who had a very quick and clever thought scampering about inside his head and he was doing his best to catch it by the tail. Pretzel shrugged his shoulders and

looked at Bendum and Twistum as if to say: "What did I tell you?" In the end Slick shook himself as if he had just awakened, and turned round.

"How do you do," he said in a soft drawl. "I beg your pardon, my friends. I was ... er ... withdrawn, so to say carried away by my imagination into higher realms... Slick," he said by way of introduction, holding out his hand to Bendum.

Bendum took his hand, which felt very much like a fish-cake, and told his own name.

"Slick," said the writer again as he held out his hand to Twistum.

"Twistum" said the latter, shaking the fish-cake.

"Slick," said writer a third time as he held out his hand to Pretzel.

"But you and I know each other," said Pretzel.



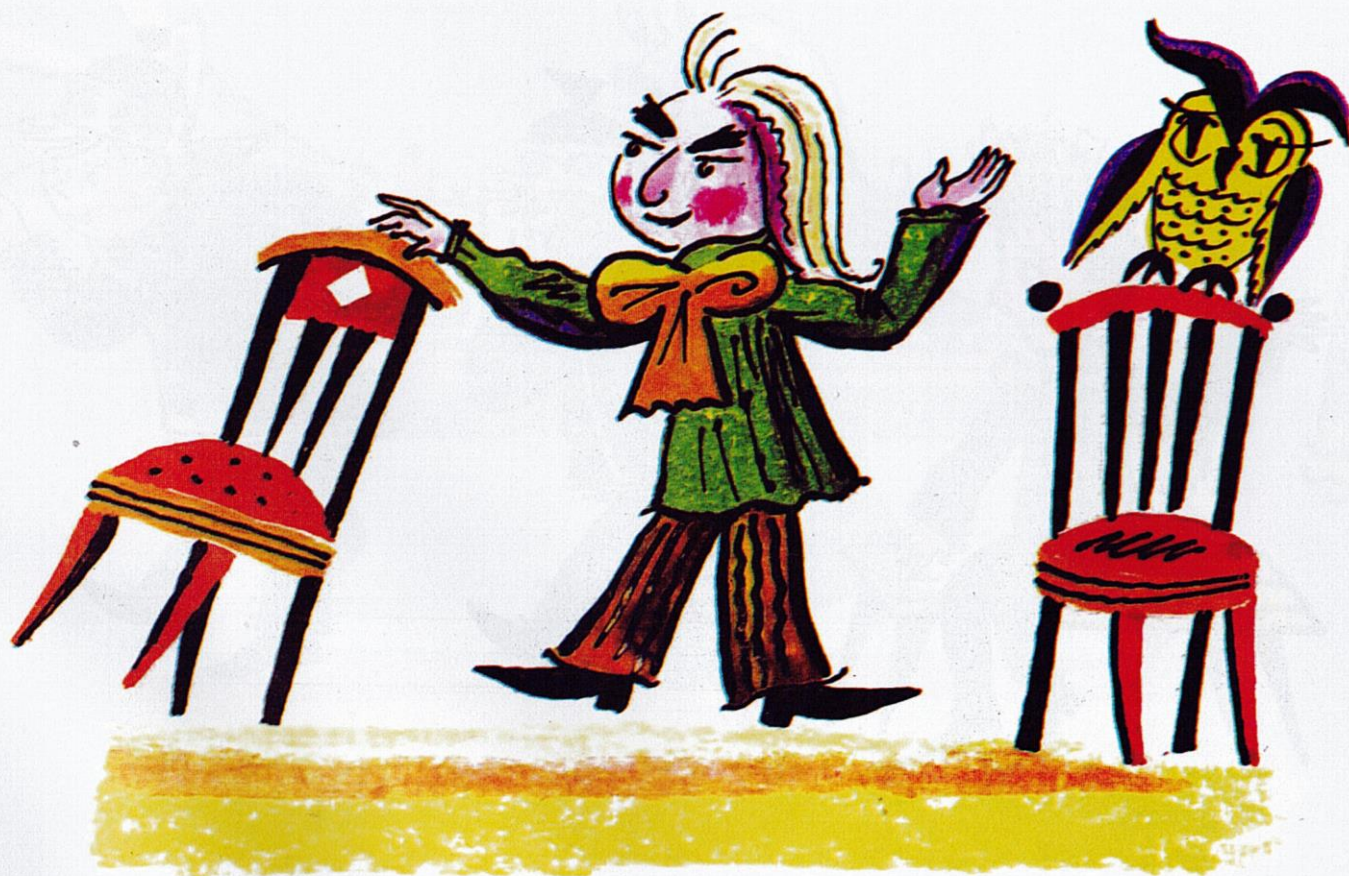
"Ah, so it's Pretzel," said Slick. "Glad to see you. Very glad indeed. Do sit down, friends."

They all sat down.

"So you've met that Taps of ours, have you?" asked Slick, showing by this question that whatever the realms to which he had been carried away, he had heard Pretzel's words. "I suppose he's shown you his folding chairs and tables?" he added with a chuckle.

Bendum nodded his head. A mocking smile lingered in the corners of Slick's mouth and he rubbed his knees as if it gave him pleasure.

"A queer lot, those inventor fellows," he said. "Now what do you suppose anybody could want with all those folding tables and chairs, those secret cupboards and falling hammocks? I prefer sitting on an ordinary chair that doesn't leap up the minute you get off it, and



sleeping in a bed that doesn't go up and down the minute you get into it. Who could make me sleep in such a bed? Who could make me if I did not want to? Who could make me if I had no desire to?"

"Nobody could," said Pretzel. "It's just that Taps is an inventor, and so he's always trying to think of improvements. He isn't always successful, but some of his inventions are very useful. He's a clever workman."

"I don't say he isn't," put in Slick. "On the contrary, I say he is. He has made me an excellent chatterbox, for instance."

"A chatterbox?"

"A talking machine. Here, look."

And Slick led his visitors over to a table on which stood a small apparatus.





"That little box, or bag, or whatever you wish to call it, has an opening in one side. If you say a few words into the opening and then push this button, the chatterbox will repeat everything you have said. Try it," said Slick to Bendum.

Bendum leaned down and said into the little box:

"Bendum, Bendum, Twistum, Twistum."

"And Pretzel," added Pretzel.

Slick pressed a button and the machine repeated in a husky voice:

"Bendum, Bendum, Twistum, Twistum. And Pretzel."

"What do you want a talking machine for?" asked Twistum.

"Why, a writer is practically helpless without a machine of this sort," said Slick. "I put it in people's houses, and it records



everything they say. All I have to do is copy down the words and there you are — a short story or even a novel, all ready for print."

"How very simple it is!" said Twistum. "And some people say a writer has to have a plot first!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Slick contemptuously. "That's what they say in the books, but just you try to think of a plot when they've all been thought of. There's not a plot that comes into your head that hasn't been in somebody else's first. No, this is the modern method — taking your material straight from nature — in the raw, so to speak. And who knows but that in so doing, you may hit on something no writer has ever thought of before."

"But not everybody may be willing to have you put your chatterbox in his house," said Bendum.



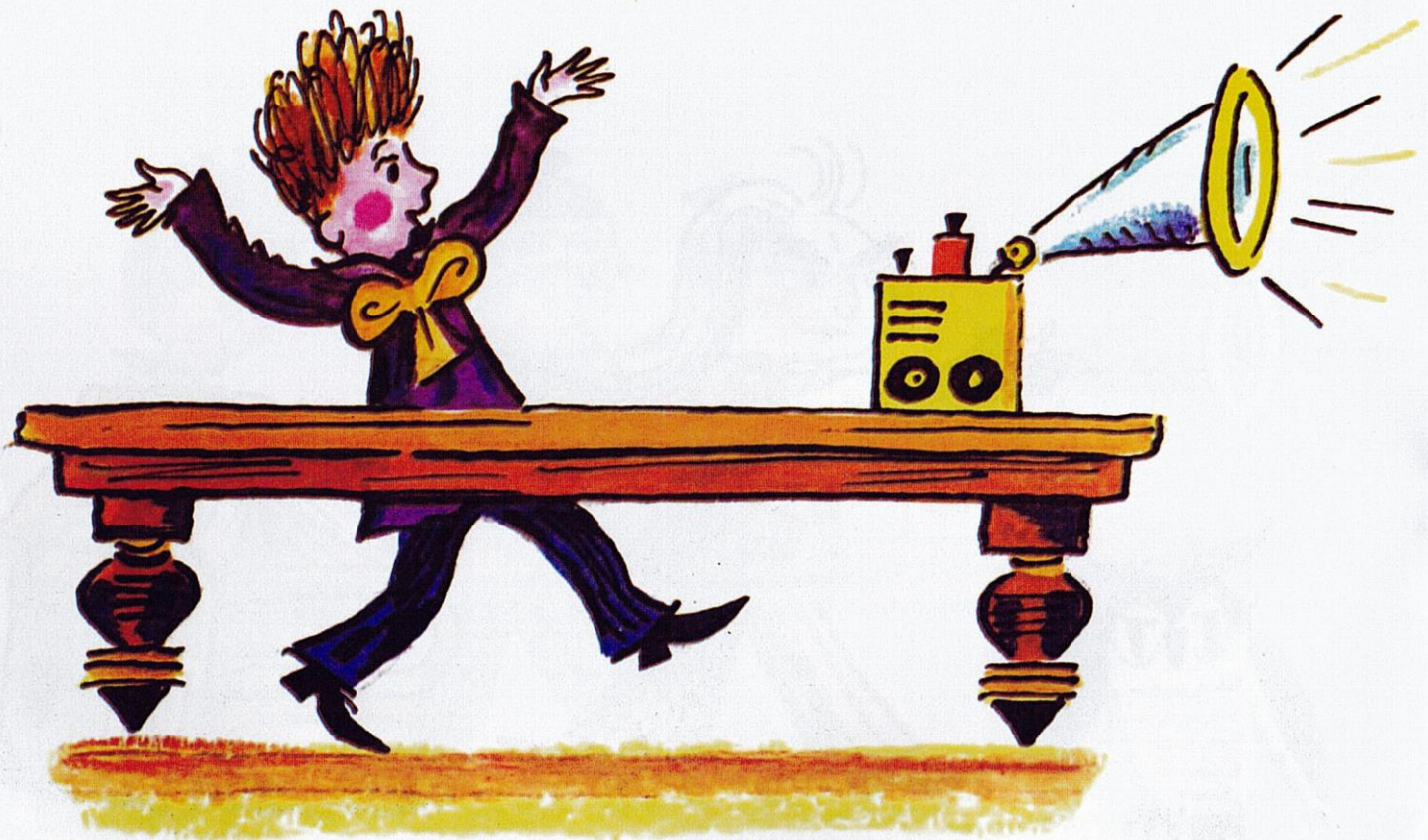
"I fool them," said Slick. "As you see, it looks like an ordinary little bag. I take it with me when I go to visit my friends, and when I go home I 'accidentally' leave it under a table or chair. Later I have pleasure of hearing everything my friends have said."

"And what do they say?" asked Twistum. "It must be awfully interesting."

"It is. I myself had no idea it would be so interesting. It turns out they don't say anything at all. They roar with laughter for no apparent reason, they crow like cocks, they bark like dogs, they grunt and moo and mew, but they don't say anything at all."

"How strange!" said Bendum.

"Isn't it?" said Slick. "As long as I am with them they talk like normal Mites, but the minute I leave they begin to make these remarkable noises. Here, listen to last night's recording."





Slick twisted a disk inside the apparatus and pushed a button. First the visitors heard a scraping noise and a bang as of a door shutting. This was followed by a moment's silence ending in a roar of laughter. Somebody said: "'Under the table.'" There was a scraping of feet. Another burst of laughter. Barking, crowing, mooing. The bleating of a sheep. Somebody said: "Here, I'll bray like an ass: hee-haw! hee-haw! hee-haw!" The neighing of a horse. More laughter.

"See?... or rather, hear?" said Slick with a lift of his shoulders.

"Rather hard to make a novel out of that," said Bendum.

"There's no mystery here," said Pretzel to Slick. "Everybody in town knows about your machine by this time, and so as soon as you go home they shout all sorts of nonsense into it."

"But why should they?"



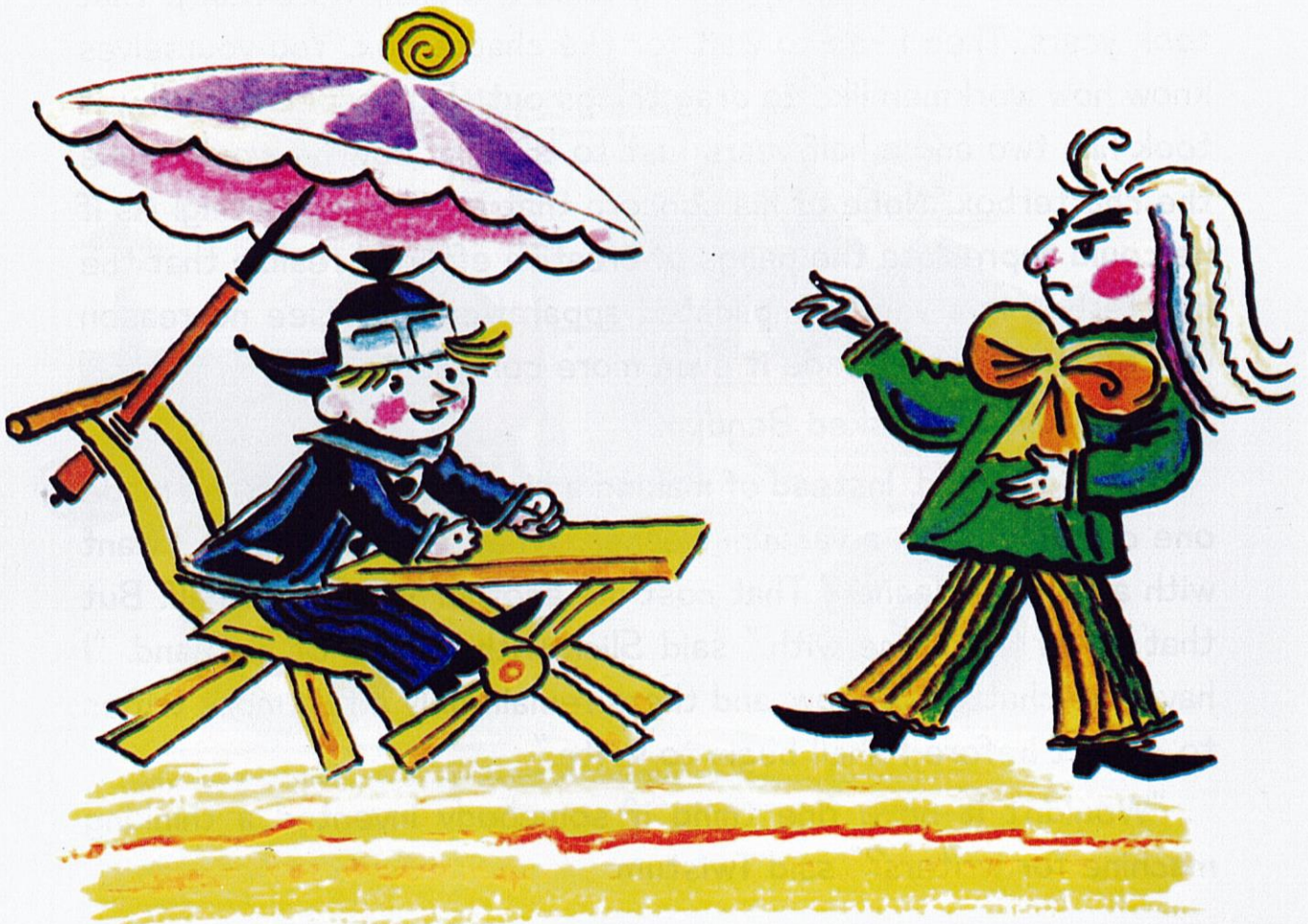
"You wanted to pull one over on them, and they pulled one over on you instead. Their little joke."

Slick frowned.

"So that's what's happening! Well, I'll get the better of them yet. I'll put my chatterbox under their windows. That little bag will prove its worth yet. But look at this — what do you think this is?" — and he pointed to a bulky package that looked like a folded tent, or a large-sized umbrella.

"Is it an umbrella?" asked Twistum.

"Not at all. It's a portable chair and table for authors," said Slick. "Let's say an author wants to write a description of a wood. He goes to the wood, opens up his table, sits down in a comfortable chair, and writes a description of everything he sees. Here, try the chair," he said to Twistum.



Slick pushed a button in what seemed to be the handle of the umbrella, and instantly it turned into a small table and chair. Twistum had to tie himself into knots to get into the chair.

"Now that you are comfortable you are sure to get an inspiration," said Slick. "You'll agree that it is a thousand times more comfortable to write while sitting in a chair than while sitting on the grass or the bare earth."

Twistum felt neither comfortable nor inspired. He did feel a cramp in his leg and so decided to change the subject as quickly as possible.

"What books have you written?" he asked as he wrenched himself out of the chair.

"I haven't written any yet," said Slick. "Being an author is not as simple as you might think. Before I could become an author I had to supply myself with a number of things which were hard to get. First of all I had to wait until my folding table and chair were ready. That took years. Then I had to wait for the chatterbox. You yourselves know how workmen like to drag things out. Taps especially. Why, it took him two and a half years just to think of how he would make the chatterbox. None of his concern that I was kept waiting! As if he could appreciate the pangs of creative effort! I realize that the chatterbox is a very complicated apparatus, but I see no reason why he should have made it even more complicated."

"Why, did he?" asked Bendum.

"He did indeed. Instead of making a simple chatterbox, he made one combined with a vacuum cleaner. What in the world do I want with a vacuum cleaner? That cost me another year and a half. But that's over and done with," said Slick with a wave of his hand. "I have the chatterbox now, and there remain only a few more trifles to collect before I shall begin to write."

"Wouldn't it be a fine thing if somebody invented a thinking machine for writers?" said Twistum.

"A very fine thing," agreed Slick.

By this time the sun had begun to set and the visitors thought it was time for them to leave. They said good-bye, took the soldering-iron, and went out.

"We must hurry if we want to get to Greenville before dark," said Bendum.

"Have no fear, I'll get you there in a jiffy," said Pretzel. "But I think we had better have something to eat first."

And he took them home with him for dinner.







You can read about more adventures of
Dunno and his friends from Flower Town in
BLOBS AT WORK
and **THE RETURN OF BENDUM AND TWISTUM**



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