

LIONEL AND THE RABBIT

It was the slippers that I noticed first. When I take them off I put them side-by-side, together, beside the bed. A bit anal retentive, you might say, but why, that evening, were they higgeldy-piggeldy? I placed the slippers back together neatly and moved on. After all, there had been no-one in my bedroom during the day well, except for Lionel and The Rabbit.

Perhaps, before progressing, I should introduce them to you. Lionel is a smallish yellow toy bear with fluffy curled hair and an innocent face. He was delivered by a florist some years ago, firmly attached to a bunch of celebratory roses. Australians will understand the choice of name Rose, Lionel Rose, Lionel. It's obvious. His best friend is called The Rabbit as he's, well, a toy Rabbit. He's taller and wider than Lionel, with longish white fur and an aqua coloured bow-tie which matched the colour of a brightly wrapped Easter egg which he was clutching on his belly. But I should also mention that he has the biggest back feet that you would ever see on a rabbit. They are very long and wide and plump and I have wondered whether in fact they are at all practical. In summary, he's confident and very smart looking. They are toys, yes, but very life-like. After their separate arrivals at our home I could not part with them and they were put out to pasture, so to speak, in my bedroom. I felt that having two little pillow-sitters would mean that they could keep each other company ... two's company.

Lionel and The Rabbit appear to be good friends ... relaxed and enjoying each others company. During the day they have pride of place on the bed pillows. At night they are moved to the floor, perhaps with some reluctance on their behalf. They are affectionately known within my family as The Lads.

Back to my slipper mystery. The following evening my slippers were again lying upside down some distance from where I had left them. On the trail, and now much more observant, I looked for other evidence of activity. And yes, if I knelt down to bed level and looked carefully across the doona I could see dents in the doona, a definite trail that

led from the pillows to the edge of the bed. And if I moved a little to my left and leaned right out over the edge of the bed there was another clear trail of small dents and bigger dents which appeared to be similar to the first and yet perhaps reversed. Footprints?

So what's happening here, I asked myself?

1. Did we have intruders during the day? Not possible.

Or, I know it sounds unlikely, but ...

2. Had I underestimated the aspirations and capabilities of a fluffy pillow-sitting toy rabbit with extra large feet and a smaller toy bear?

I felt confident that Option 1 didn't have legs (so to speak) so, if Option 2 had any potential I now had to consider what it would take to motivate The Lads to move from their lazy daytime life of pillow-sitting to 'something else'?

How should I get evidence of what was happening here? The whole episode might have been quite innocent, mightn't it? Yes, yes, but it was too intriguing to ignore.

Next morning, after making the bed, I casually wandered off as if it was just another day. I waited quietly outside the bedroom door for some time, in total silence, and then was that a noise? Yes, I could hear huffing-shuffling and then a small bump followed by a louder bump, as if someone (or several someones) was jumping on the carpeted floor. And then ... I know it's hard for you to believe, but I heard voices. A smaller voice which was soft and gentle and then a louder, deeper voice which seemed to have some authority to it. Who could this be?

Well, you could have knocked me down with a feather if I had not already been sitting on the floor leaning with my back against the bedroom door. And just when I was feeling surprised and perhaps even downright astounded, the voices became a little louder and I heard the following conversation coming from the bedroom

"We worked this out yesterday" said the deeper voice. "If you stand on my shoulders you will be able to reach the button to turn it on". And then the softer voice added "And we'd better hurry up or we will miss the start, and you know we need to practice".

Button? Start? Practice?

And sure enough, I could hear some more huffling-shuffling and some puffing and then there was music playing. And then I heard counting.

I concentrated hard now, on the trail of some answers. I was confident I could solve this.

I was sure that my much loved little toys were the only occupants of the bedroom during the day. I had to accept that, for whatever reason, The Lads were moving (can you believe that?) from the bed to the other side of the bedroom as far as the television, to reach up and turn it on at a particular time of the day so that they “didn’t miss the start”.

I knew what I had to do next. I needed evidence and I needed to know what was on television at that time of the day that was so important that The Lads would be tempted to undertake such an adventure.

Browsing quickly through the television program I was mystified – there appeared to be nothing relevant to a small bear and a larger rabbit. And then I saw it this had to be it! A replay of old episodes of “So you think you can Dance” was starting right now. Well!

I thought that I had answers to “what” (but as it turned out later, I only had part of the answer) but I still did not have the answer to “why”. This really was mystifying. If The Lads were just listening to the dancing program, why was I now hearing huffling-shuffling and why was Lionel’s quiet voice heard to be counting “1-2-3” and why, oh why, did I now hear The Rabbit’s deeper and bolder voice suddenly say “Lionel, it isn’t working, our feet are just too different in size”.

Feet? Different size? What wasn’t working? And what caused the huffling-shuffling noise?

There was now no way that I could have left my hiding position in the passage outside the bedroom door I was witnessing a seriously interesting mystery (well, sort of, if you call listening to some strange sounds ‘witnessing’) and I would not be content until I had an explanation. There was nothing else for it but to continue to eavesdrop, which is not something that I would normally recommend unless the situation was as serious as this. And this was serious, wasn’t it?

Were these loveable little toys undertaking an adventure that in fact showed them to be capable of much greater aspirations and outcomes than any of us would ever imagine for a very small bear and a larger rabbit?

I listened. I waited. The Rabbit’s louder and bolder voice said “I do wish she wouldn’t put the slippers back where they started every morning”. Slippers? What could The Lads possibly want with my slippers?

Lionel’s quiet voice joined the conversation. “Never mind complaining, just help me to put them on. Yesterday’s practice was much better once I was wearing her slippers. Because your feet are sooooo big and my feet are sooooo small, we couldn’t meet in the middle and we kept losing our balance. That’s better, now let’s stand face-to-face. You see? Now our feet are the same size.”

And then the music got louder. And the huffling-shuffling got louder and faster, in time with the music. “Careful” said Lionel’s quiet voice, although it was a little louder than before and sounded just a little bit agitated. “Don’t push me backwards too quickly or I will step out of the slippers”. “That’s it!” said The Rabbit’s louder and bolder voice. “That’s where we are going wrong. Because you are in constant danger of stepping out of the slippers when you move backwards, we need to change. I need to be the one moving backwards, so let’s reverse what we were doing”.

And then I heard laughter loud, carefree, happy, joyful laughter.

And Lionel's quiet voice wasn't quiet anymore. He was laughing and called out "That's it, my friend, we can do it. I told you that we could do it if only we practiced. Aren't you pleased?" "Yes" said The Rabbit's louder and bolder voice. "But tell me again, why are we doing this?" The Rabbit sometimes had to ask Lionel to explain things and re-explain things as, even though he was bigger and bolder, that did not necessarily make him smarter.

"Just to prove a point" said Lionel's now not-so-quiet small bear voice. "You believed that little ones like you and I aren't capable of doing anything except pillow-sitting, that we are inanimate objects. I wanted to show you that with a little imagination we are in fact capable of much more. But of course I needed a little help, so that was why I suggested that we watch this program for a few mornings and practice our skills so that I could demonstrate to you just how clever we are". The Rabbit sounded satisfied with that answer and of course he knew better than to argue with Lionel, as he knew in his heart that Lionel, although smaller and less-bold than The Rabbit, was indeed a very smart little bear.

And then I worked it out.

They were dancing!

Lionel knew that it simply doesn't work to tell someone that they are clever. Would his friend have believed him? Lionel needed to show him that he was indeed a clever Rabbit. Lionel also knew that you don't just hop into something without doing your homework. He had put together a plan. For a while, the bigger feet and smaller feet had obviously proved to be a problem but, again, they thought it through and borrowed my slippers to even out the size differences. And who could have predicted that poor Lionel's very small feet would slide out of the slippers when he was pushed backwards? Their solution was to swap roles, or was that to swap directions, so that The Rabbit moved backwards and Lionel's feet were pushed snugly and firmly into the slippers as he

moved forwards. And they practiced. Lionel was determined that this demonstration would not fail.

They were dancing!

A small bear had found a way to demonstrate to his very best friend that, together, they were indeed very clever, and that they should never again underestimate their abilities even if they have very small or very large feet.

They were dancing!

And then, as I walked quietly back towards the kitchen I noticed that the musical sounds coming from the bedroom had changed from a Waltz to Rock and Roll. Oh dear, how would the slippers behave with the speed and movement of Rock and Roll? I then realised something very important. Even though I couldn't see them dancing, what I had learnt today had nothing to do with dancing! It was about companionship, about loyalty. And it was about imagination!

Or had I imagined that?