

THE STORY OF OLD FATHER GRAVITY

By C. H. Claudy
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“**SQUIDGE**,” (which is short for Squidgicum-Squee, which is a funny little thing that swallows itself, as told in a very beautiful and very interesting story in verse, called the “Raggedy Man,” which was written by a certain J. W. R., whom *your* Old Pops will tell *you* about) —”Squidge,” otherwise Carlie-boy, climbed up on his Old Pops’ knee and said, “Now then!”

Now when Squidge climbs up on Old Pops’ knee and says, “Now then!” in that very solemn little voice, Old Pops knows there is a very, very big question coming indeed, and starts to think of all he knows, so as to be ready to answer it.

“To-day,” went on Squidge, “I was sitting in my ’spress wagon in front of our house. I was talking to Joe. And my ’spress wagon started up all by itself and ran away. It didn’t run fast, but it did go, oh, way down the sidewalk—further than the lot, and further than Joe’s house, and almost down to the corner, and I never did anything to it at all. But I turned it ’round and asked it, ever so nicely, to please go back, and it wouldn’t at all. And I want to know why it ran away and why it wouldn’t run back.”

“Gracious me!” answered Old Pops. “We will have to go back to the very, very, very first of all beginnings of things to find that out.”

“*What?*” asked Squidge, quite amazed.

“Yes, indeed!” said Old Pops. “To the very, very, very, first of all beginnings, before there was a world, or a country, or trees, or animals, or a sidewalk, or a ’spress wagon, or a Squidge, or an Old Pops, or anything. That is, if you really want to know why the ’spress wagon ran away. Of course, if you just want to be told it was because the action of gravitation affecting the molecules of matter in the wagon drew them always nearer the center of *terra firma*, we can let it go at that!”

“Now Pops!” said Squidge.

Squidge always says “Now Pops,” in that hopeless voice, when Old Pops uses big words that don’t really mean much of anything, because no one can understand them, and of course, words of which no one understands the meaning are hardly worth saying. Anyone knows that.

“Oh, all right!” said Old Pops. “We will go back to the very, very, very first of all first beginnings, and I will tell you the story of Old Father Gravity.”

“Once upon a time, in the very, very, very first of all first beginnings, there wasn’t any earth or country or cities at all. There was just a Mess. It was a most tremendous big Mess, and had rocks and earth and fire and water and air all mixed up together in it, but there were no animals nor plants. You can see there couldn’t be any plants if there wasn’t any earth for them to grow in, and of course there couldn’t be animals

because there was nothing for them to walk on. And while there might have been birds, the air, what there was of it, was so full of dirt and rocks and water there wasn't any room to fly. So there were no birds either. There wasn't anything at all but a huge big Mess and Mother Nature, who makes birds grow and fly and sing, and plants come up and have flowers, and animals live, and bugs buzz, and fishes swim, and all, was all mixed up in the Mess, and extremely distressed indeed, because there was nowhere to make a beginning to do anything. Now you know that Old Mother Nature is a very orderly person. She always has a Spring and a Summer and a Fall and a Winter, and she never gets mixed up and puts the Spring in before the Winter or the Summer after the Fall. She likes things to grow and bear fruit, and she likes to see lots of animals. She likes rain and sunshine and snow and hail and wind, but as there wasn't any earth, she couldn't have any of these things.

"Now, I don't for truly sure know just what she said about all this, but I suspect it was something like this:

" 'Here is a nice Mess. No earth to grow things on, Air too full of things for birds. Water too mixed up with rocks for fishes. No place to *do* anything. I must certainly get hold of Old Father Gravity and ask him to help.'

"Now then, I don't know where Old Father Gravity came from; neither does anyone else. Maybe Mother Nature didn't know herself. Maybe he came from the sun, and perhaps from the stars, but I rather like to think he was there all the time, but so mixed up with everything that Old Mother Nature just didn't notice him.

"But anyway, he came when Mother Nature called. I don't know' for really, truly, sure and honest, just what she said, but I suspect it was something like this:

" 'Oh, Father Gravity, please come and help me. I have a lovely Mess, with water and rocks and air and earth, but it's all mixed up and I can't do anything with it.'

"And I suppose Old Father Gravity said,

" 'If I fix the Mess in a nice, round earth for you, can I live in it?'

"And of course Old Mother Nature said yes, because Old Father Gravity *does* live in the earth, right now, this minute.

" 'And can I *always* live there, and take care of it, and see that it doesn't mess itself up again, and can I always have hold of every single thing on the earth, hard and fast and very tight so it can't get away?'

" 'Well,' said Old Mother Nature, 'I think you should remember that while it is fine to be as strong as you are, it is still finer not to use your strength on everything, as hard as you can. Suppose we fix it this way. You make a nice round earth out of this Mess, and I'll make things grow and flowers bloom and fishes swim and birds fly and animals walk and run. Then you hold on tight to everything and keep it from jumping off the earth, but you must hold on to each and everything according to its size and bigness, and hold tighter to the big things than the little. If you hold a mouse as tight

as an elephant, of course the mouse can't walk, And if you hold the birds the same way you hold a mountain, how could they fly?"

"Now Old Father Gravity, who is as old as Mother Nature herself, if not older, saw that this was so, at once. So he agreed to do exactly as she said. And one of the very fine things about Mother Nature and any of her friends is that they *always* do exactly as they have agreed to do, and they never disappoint people by doing one way one day and another way another day. You can always depend on Mother Nature and her friends.

"So Old Father Gravity agreed to hold on tight to each and every thing, according to its size and bigness and another thing called 'density,' which is pretty hard for a little head to understand. But a little ball of rubber is not so 'dense' as a little ball of iron, and so Old Father Gravity holds on tighter to the iron than the rubber.

"And the first thing Old Father Gravity had to do was to make a nice, round earth. So he wriggled and wroggled and climbed and traveled and ran and walked and squirmed until he was in the Middlemost Middle of All, right in the center of the Mess. Then he reached out his arms and began to pull. And he pulled and pulled and pulled and pulled! He pulled a little on everything in the Mess, on the rocks and the earth and the water and the air and the ice, and on each he pulled according to his promise, so that he pulled the biggest and heaviest things the hardest and the littler and lighter things easier. And it took him a long, long, long time, but Father Gravity doesn't care for time. And when he was through, there was all the earth in a nice, round ball, and next came the water, and next came the air, because earth is heavier than water, and water, of course, is much heavier than air.

"And then Old Mother Nature went to work and made the trees grow and the animals walk and run and the birds fly and the fish swim, and everything, and there was a real nice world all ready for the first man to live in.

"Meanwhile, Old Father Gravity was very happy indeed in the very Middlemost Middle of the center of the nice round earth he had made. He was happy because that was his business and he loved it—to sit in the Middlemost Middle of the earth and hold everything down and keep it from flying away. And it is very interesting indeed, how he keeps birds and balloons and flying-fish and squirrels and all the insects that buzz, from flying right straight away from the earth. He does it by holding the air above the earth so tightly that *it* can't get away. And nothing that flies could fly if there wasn't any air, any more than any fish could swim if there wasn't any water. So the birds and the flying machines have to stay near the earth, where the air is. Rather clever of Old Father Gravity, don't you think?

"He works all the time, night and day, never stopping, never resting, never wanting to stop. One of his wonderful arms (which we can't see, but can feel) is always holding on to every single thing in and on the earth and always pulling it, each

according to its size and density, towards the middle of the earth. So if you pick up an apple and let go of it, Old Father Gravity pulls it right down again, as far as he can, towards the center of the earth. And it was because a very clever man watched an apple fall and wondered about it, that we learned a great deal of what little we do know about Old Father Gravity.

“And so to-day, when you were in your ’spress wagon, some of Old Father Gravity’s arms were around you and pulling, pulling, pulling towards the center of the earth. And he saw a chance to get you just a little nearer, because the end of the street down by Joe’s house is nearer the center than our end of the street—it is a little hill, only it is such a very little hill indeed that you hardly notice it. But it was enough of a hill for Old Father Gravity and so he kept on pulling and pulling, and the ’spress wagon, being on wheels, started to go, and of course you went too, being in it. And the ’spress wagon wouldn’t go the other way, because that is *up* hill, and *away* from the center of the earth, and Old Father Gravity only pulls down. But he wasn’t pulling on you and the ’spress wagon so very hard, because you are not so very big, and so you had no trouble in pushing the ’spress wagon back again!”

“Am *I* stronger than Old Father Gravity?” asked Squidge, astonished.

“Are you stronger than I am?” asked Old Pops.

“Only when you pretend I am!” said Squidge, softly.

“And you are only stronger than Old Father Gravity when he lets you be,” said Old Pops, “and you have only to try to lift a house or a street car or a great big rock, to know it. But Old Father Gravity lets you lift little things and push your ’spress wagon round, and he lets us use engines which are stronger than he is for a while, but always, always, always, what we lift up away from the earth comes back to it; always, in the end, Old Father Gravity is the stronger, and it is well that is so, for if he were not, we might jump right off the earth and not be able to come back, and that wouldn’t be nice at all, ’specially after Mother Nature has taken so much trouble to make it such a pretty place to live in.

“But you needn’t worry, Squidge—Old Father Gravity and dear Old Mother Nature are just as sure, as sure, as sure, to do their work and hold you here and make the world a pleasant place for you, as I am sure you are going to bed, and that I love you!”

And that was the end of *that* story.