

THE LITTLE GRAMMAR PEOPLE

By
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Illustrated by
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Peeping out here and there.

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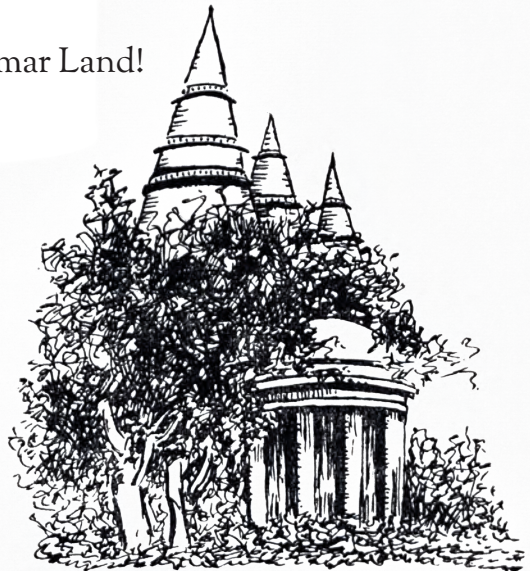
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There is a land of shining flowers,
Of dream-like palaces and towers.
Where little laughing people dwell
By fairy hours.
And oh, the grass is velvet green,
But only very seldom seen,

For mortals do not see or hear
Except with mortal eye and ear,
So witching joys they cannot know,
However near.
No fairy smiles for them or sings:
Theirs is a world of lifeless things.

And so, that pretty land where dwell
The Grammar folk by fairy spell,
And where these little people e'er
Their stories tell,
Can only live for children who
Are sure that magic things are true.
So, with a fairy hand in hand,
Come, let us away to the Grammar Land!





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CHAPTER III

MISS NOUN

THEN suddenly he dipped right into the cave, and disappeared so completely in the darkness that Barry and Linda feared they might have lost him, but they quickly sprang in after him and, although they could see nothing of him, they were immediately reassured by the sound of his cheery voice.

“It’s rather dark just here,” he called out, “but we’ll soon be getting out into some light. Be careful of these steps, now, because they’re a little uneven, and it would never do for you to fall into the garden of the Parts of Speech head first. You’d only frighten them all away like that. If you approach them quietly and carefully, you’ll get on ever so much better with them.”

“All right,” Linda replied with a slight tremor in her voice. “I’ll be careful.”

And Barry added a little grunt that sounded very wise and approving.

After a moment’s silence Sir Desire’s voice again rang out through the cavern. “Many people,” he said, “lose track of me altogether in this dark piece of the journey. After trying a few steps they complain that it’s far too hard and gloomy, and an awful lot of trouble for nothing. So they simply turn back and go home, and then blame the poor little Parts of Speech for all their difficulties—just imagine that!—before they’ve even given themselves the pleasure of meeting them.”

“I think he means us, Lin, don’t you?” Barry whispered.

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“I believe he does,” was the hushed reply.

Now, for the first time, there was a corner to turn. Sir Desire turned it quickly and the twins, still following closely, were surprised to find themselves suddenly in broad sunlight, the same as that of the ordinary everyday world, and in a most glorious garden. The short grass, all over which were thousands of tiny flowers, was shaded by huge spreading trees, but the golden sunshine was peeping through in countless different shapes and places, and it really looked as if the patterns of light and shade in that garden had been woven by fairy hands.

“Oh, lovely, lovely!” cried Linda. “Dear Sir Desire, please tell us, who lives here in this simply wonderful place?”

Her eyes were sparkling with admiration, and so were Barry’s, but the sparkles in the eyes of Sir Desire were even brighter while he answered, in triumph, “Why, can’t you guess? The Parts of Speech, of course—Miss Noun, Madam Adjective, Sir Pronoun, Master Verb—”

“Oh, oh,” interrupted the small girl, “please show them to us, Sir Desire. Oh, please, please! All of them, one by one. Could we—oh, do you think we could start with Miss Noun, Sir Desire?”

“Certainly,” said the little man proudly. “You give me enough power to do anything you wish. I’ll bring her straight away.”



And with this, he put one hand up to his mouth and called a long, clear note which sounded exactly like a horn in a forest. And that very second there came running up towards Linda and Barry the daintiest little girl imaginable, in a bright yellow frock, who seemed far too tiny a thing to be such an important personage.

She curtsied prettily for the two children, and Barry, feeling that

He called a long, clear note.

Miss Noun

this was a good opportunity to prove himself a gentleman, swept off his cap, bowed low, and said, “We’re very pleased to meet you, Miss Noun.”

“Well, well,” she replied, “I’m glad to hear you say that at last. You’ve taken a frightfully long time about it. I couldn’t say how often I’ve tried to introduce myself to you both, only to have you turn away quite rudely without glancing at me and remark, ‘Horrid thing!’”

“Oh,” cried Linda solemnly, “we had no idea we were doing anything like that, Miss Noun. I’m sure we wouldn’t have offended you for all the world, if only—”

“Dear me,” broke in Miss Noun, smiling, “nobody in the Kingdom of Grammar ever gets offended, Linda. We only get sorry, sometimes.”

And now a broad smile started playing tricks with Barry’s seriousness as he watched this bright, graceful little person whom he had spent so many of his schooldays hating diligently, and, with a chuckle of delight, he exclaimed, “So you’re one of those awful nouns!”

“Well, yes and no,” she answered doubtfully. “I mean to say that, speaking more correctly, I’m not *a* noun, but Noun itself.” And, as that seemed to puzzle both the children quite a lot, she continued, “You see, I, as Noun, am really everything you ever give a name to—everything at once—book, school, table, herd, sideboard, sky, rocks, king, queen, country—”

“But,” Linda interrupted, “I don’t see you as any of these things. You just look like a tiny little girl to me.”

“Ah yes, but that is only the form I’ve



“Not a noun, but
Noun itself.”

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chosen to meet you in. Whenever human visitors come to see me—which is very seldom—I appear to them like this, because that makes it so much easier for us to understand each other. However, I could have come to you in quite a different form if I'd liked—as a pair of fire-tongs, for instance, a window, a carpet, or a cloud—because all of these things are nouns. And they are nouns *because* they are things.”

“And is that all there is to know about nouns?” asked Barry, looking most surprised.

“Well no, not quite all, Barry,” she answered, “but that’s the main part. You see, I am a person of a number of different capabilities and moods. I’m not always the same.”

“You are always a noun, though,” said Linda.

“Yes, just the same as you are always a girl. But that doesn’t mean that you and I can’t change our moods sometimes. You may be in a happy mood one minute and in an angry one the next, and so on.”

“I don’t think you are ever angry,” Barry objected.

“Perhaps not, but I’m often in a collecting mood.”

Linda seemed to think this very funny. “And whatever does that feel like?” she asked, laughing.

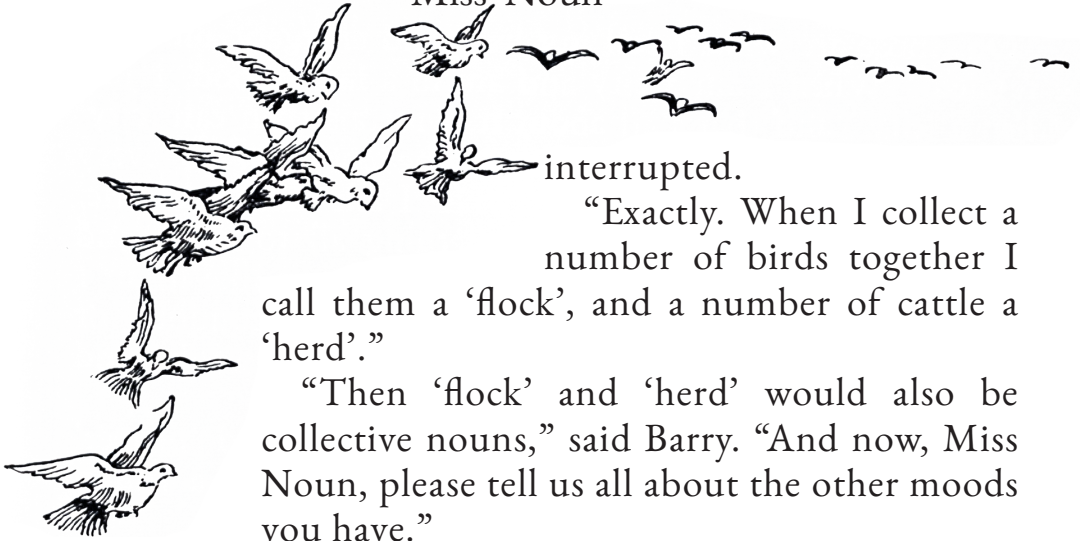
“Just as if you want to collect together a whole lot of things that are alike in some way, and give all of them only one name between them. This may seem a queer sort of mood to you, but it’s quite natural to me, and when I’m feeling like that mortals call me a ‘collective noun’.”

“Well!” said Barry. “I never thought collective nouns were so easy.”

The tiny girl smiled happily and continued, “Sometimes I feel as if I want to collect a whole lot of people together and call them a ‘crowd’—”

“Then ‘crowd’ would be a collective noun,” Linda

Miss Noun



interrupted.

“Exactly. When I collect a number of birds together I call them a ‘flock’, and a number of cattle a ‘herd’.”

“Then ‘flock’ and ‘herd’ would also be collective nouns,” said Barry. “And now, Miss Noun, please tell us all about the other moods you have.”

“I call them a ‘flock’.”

“Well,” she quickly replied, “sometimes I feel very abstract.”

“Absent-minded?” Linda suggested.

“No, no, nothing like that. Let us say, very untouchable.”

“That’s funny,” said Barry.

“Yes, I know. But all the same, I feel that way quite often—you know, just as if nobody could see or hear or touch me, and yet as if I’m there just the same. Sometimes, you see, I feel like freedom or happiness or regret. I do not feel happy or regretful. but simply like happiness itself.”

“Yes, I think I understand,” said Linda.

“And when this is the way I feel, mortals call me an ‘abstract noun’.”

“So that ‘happiness’ is an abstract noun,” said Barry, “and ‘regret’ is another, and ‘joy’ another, and—Oh, there are any and any amount of them, Miss Noun. You must feel abstract very often.”

“I do,” she agreed.

“And what about common and proper nouns? How do they come about?” asked Linda.

“Oh, those are what I call my lazy and energetic moods,” she replied. “When I am a city and am in a lazy mood, I just

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say I'm a 'city', and that's all about it. Mortals then call 'city' a 'common noun', because it is the name *common* to every example of that kind of thing. But when I am more energetic, I realize that each separate city is something all to itself, and that there isn't another in the whole world exactly like it, so I get busy and give it a name all its own. I call it 'London', or 'Sydney', or 'Madrid'—whichever one it happens to be—and people then say that 'London' is a 'proper noun'."

"I see," said Linda. "But why should it be called 'proper' just because it belongs to one city only? That seems a funny name to give it."

"Well, Linda," the tiny girl answered, putting her head on one side and smiling as brightly as a sunbeam, "little ladies as young as you can't expect to know everything. But when you're a few years older you might learn something about Latin, and then you'll know that your word 'proper' has been borrowed from a Latin word which means 'belonging to'."

"Latin must be a kind language to lend us one of its words." Barry remarked. "And so, Miss Noun, 'Barry Robin' would be two proper nouns, and 'Linda Robin' would be two more—wouldn't they?—because those names *belong* to us as our very own."

"Right!" said Miss Noun.

Then she, Sir Desire, Linda and Barry all laughed joyously at the same moment, for everything seemed so beautifully simple, and they found one another such very good company.

"I had no idea," said Linda, "that nouns were so easy—and neither had Barry. And it's just ever so nice to have you for a friend, dear Miss Noun."

At that, the little lady looked very happy, and said how glad she was that Linda and Barry did at last think of her as a friend. "And now," she finished, "as I have nothing more to tell you, I shall call Sir Pronoun to come and see you. I really

Miss Noun

don't know what I'd do without Sir Pronoun. But there! I mustn't say any more. I must leave him to tell you all about that himself. Oh, but just before I go I must recite my own little rhyme to you. It may help you to remember how easy it is to recognize a noun whenever you see one:

“Chimney, Europe, sadness, flock,
Mountain, ocean, Venus, town,
Mary, sympathy and frock—
Every one of them a noun!”

“Oh, thank you!” said the two children.

“Just repeat it over to yourselves, now,” added the tiny girl, “and try to pick out which are the common, proper, abstract and collective nouns in it.”

And neither of the twins had a chance to promise her that they would do this, or even to say one more thank you, for little Miss Noun had suddenly disappeared.

CHAPTER IV

SIR PRONOUN

SHE had only been gone a very short while, however, when there came walking towards the twins a rather long, thin boy. His face was so pale and his steps were so slow that Linda could not help asking him if he were sad or worried about anything.

“Oh no,” he replied, smiling. “I’m thinking, that’s all. You see, I have so much to think about, being Pronoun.”

“Yes, I suppose you have,” Barry agreed. “Whenever I’ve been asked a question about you I’ve had to think a great deal too.”

This seemed to amuse Sir Pronoun, for he laughed merrily, crossing and uncrossing his very long legs several times as if he did not know quite what to do with them. “Yes,” he continued, “my whole life is one of deep thought, because, as you can tell by my name, I have to stand in the place of Miss Noun.”

“Whatever do you mean?” asked Linda, puzzled. “Doesn’t Miss Noun stand in her own place?”

“Oh yes, certainly. Sometimes she does, but not always. You must remember that she leads a very busy life and has to be in an awful number of parts at once, and it’s my business to help her whenever I can.”

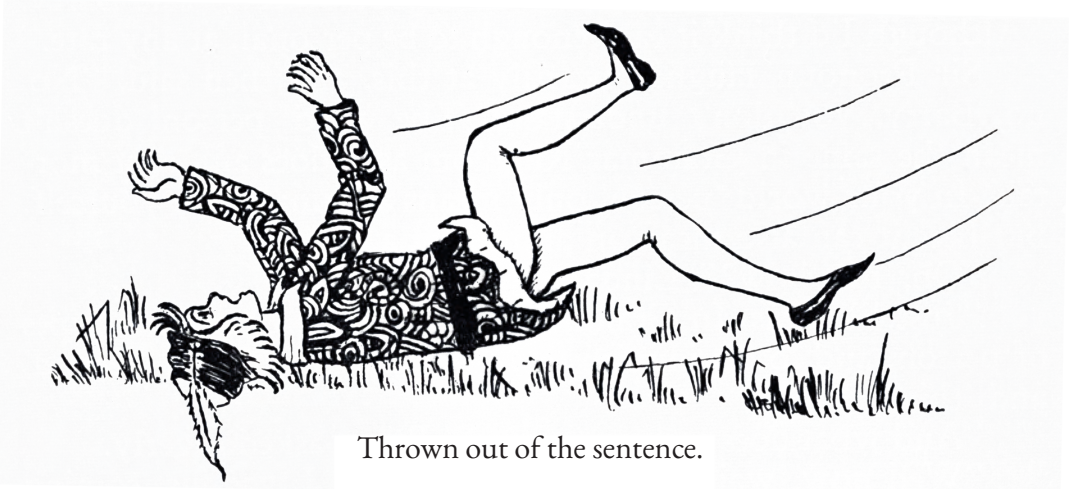


A rather long, thin boy.

Sir Pronoun

“That’s interesting,” said Barry.

“Let me explain myself more clearly,” Sir Pronoun went on. “When Miss Noun is needed in a sentence she makes quite sure she is there to begin with, but hops away again like quicksilver, partly because she has so much to do and partly because she’s afraid people may grow tired of her. I then step along and say, ‘Ladies and gentlemen, with your kind permission, I shall represent Miss Noun for a short time, as she was afraid of tiring you and has gone.’ Sometimes I am greeted quite amiably, but other times everybody gets very annoyed, says I



don’t make myself at all clear and throws me out of the sentence. Miss Noun then, realizing the situation, appears again in person, and all is well—although, I must admit—” he added dolefully, then paused.

“—that isn’t as well as it might be with you,” Linda suggested.

“Exactly,” he replied. And he looked so downcast that neither Barry nor Linda had the heart to laugh out loudly, so,

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for the moment at least, they tucked their laughs away cosily inside themselves.

“But Sir Pronoun, just why is it that you have to think so much?” Barry asked.

“Because,” the long boy explained, “Miss Noun is so terribly changeable, and as I have to take her place I must be changeable too. I’m positively the whole time trying to decide whether I should now be a ‘personal’, ‘demonstrative’, ‘relative’ or ‘interrogative’ pronoun.”

“I’m sure that would puzzle me a good bit too,” said Barry.

“Although I’d think it easy enough to be personal, at any rate.”

Sir Pronoun laughed heartily at this, and then said, “No, no, Barry, you don’t understand. The word ‘person’ doesn’t mean the same in Grammar Kingdom as it does amongst mortals. In your world ‘person’ only means a human, like yourself, but here it can also mean an animal, or a thing.”

“Oh, but how?” Linda asked, frowning.

“Just like this. In Grammar Kingdom there are three types of person, and to distinguish them we call them ‘first’, ‘second’ and ‘third’.”

“And what does each one mean?” Barry asked eagerly.

“Well now, wait a minute. young man. I was just coming to that. The one who is actually speaking at the time—we think him the most important, so we call him ‘first person’.”

“But,” Linda objected, “only people can talk, so the word ‘person’ must be the same in Grammar Kingdom as it is in our world after all.”

Sir Pronoun looked slightly peeved. “Not a bit of it!” he said curtly. “You should listen to everything I have to say before you argue the point, young lady. I was just going to add that the one or *thing* being spoken to we think the second

Sir Pronoun

most important, or ‘second person’. And the one or *thing* being spoken about we think the least important, so we call him, her or it ‘third person’.”

“Oh, I see,” said Barry. “So that I, because I am speaking now, am most important. Therefore I am first person.”

“That’s what I am,” corrected Sir Pronoun.

Barry was shocked. Fancy contradicting just like that, for the sake of it! “What *I* am,” he repeated firmly.

Sir Pronoun laughed. “Dear me,” he said, “what a lot of explaining you children seem to need! What I meant was that the actual word ‘I’ is what I am myself, namely a pronoun.”

“But you would call it ‘first person’, wouldn’t you?” Barry insisted.

“Yes, certainly.”

“So that ‘I’ is a first personal pronoun. That seems easy enough. And, being a pronoun, it must stand for a noun. Now, what is that noun?”

“Why, ‘Barry’, of course. That’s your own name, isn’t it?”

“Yes, yes,” said Barry eagerly. “And that’s a proper noun, because it belongs to me only.”

“And the word ‘you’ would be a second personal pronoun, wouldn’t it? Because it stands for the one or thing being spoken to,” said Linda.

“Quite right,” replied Sir Pronoun. “You’ll find, as you go on thinking, that there are any amount of occasions on which I am ‘personal’.”

“And then, what about third personal pronouns?” asked Barry. “They would be ‘they’, ‘them’, ‘their’, ‘him’, ‘it’, ‘she’, ‘he’—oh, lots and lots of them—as those stand for the things or people being spoken about. How easy it is after all, isn’t it, Lin?”

“Yes, very easy. But there are still lots of things I want to

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ask. For instance, Sir Pronoun, you said a while ago that you were sometimes a relative. Whose relative would that be?”

At this, Sir Pronoun burst into a real fit of laughter, and it was quite a long time before he could stop. “Oh dear!” he cried at last. “You do say some funny things, you two. I’m not *a* relative by any means. I’m just relative.”

“Oh,” said Barry, doubtfully.

“Yes, I know it sounds like a riddle just now. Small humans mostly take an awful time to understand the doings of



Running between the beginning and end of the sentence.

Grammar folk. Well, I’ve already told you how Miss Noun has the habit of disappearing as quickly as she appears. But sometimes, when there’s quite a lot being said about her, she grows even shyer than usual. This means that I have a frightful amount of work to do, running backwards and forwards between the beginning and end of the sentence, connecting or *relating* things to one another which would otherwise be all higgledy-piggledy.”

“Oh, so it’s when you are relating things that humans call you a ‘relative pronoun’. Is that it?” cried Linda.

“Exactly. Now I shall give you an example of the hard work

Sir Pronoun

I have to do when Miss Noun is extra-specially shy. Just look at this sentence: ‘She is the girl who was late for school yesterday.’ I appear twice there.”

Linda could not help clapping her hands for joy. “Yes, yes,” she exclaimed. “‘She’ is you—a personal pronoun.”

“A third personal pronoun,” Barry added.

“Right. And then I appear again a little farther on as ‘who’. But when I am ‘who’ I am a different kind of pronoun altogether. I am a relative pronoun, because—Do you know why?”

“I’m not quite sure,” said Barry.

“Well, because I am connecting or *relating* ‘she’ with what is being said about her, namely that she was late for school yesterday. And look at Miss Noun there, as ‘girl’! She knew something else was going to be said about her soon, so she ran off in double quick time. That meant that, if the sentence was to be made in any way clear. I would have to appear in it twice—a very trying business, I can assure you.”

“Yes, indeed,” Linda agreed. “No wonder you have so much to think about.”

“You said, though,” continued Barry, eager to know all there was to be known about Sir Pronoun, “that you are sometimes ‘demonstrative’. Would that be when you are demonstrating things?”

“We-ell,” he replied hesitantly, “when I am *pointing* at things.”

“Humans are not allowed to point,” said Linda.

“Ah, but they do all the same,” said Sir Pronoun. “If they don’t point with their fingers, they do with their voices.”

“How?” Barry inquired.

“Simply like this. When someone asks you, ‘Do you want this?’ you may answer. ‘No, I want that.’ And what are you

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doing then but pointing with your voice? And what am I doing then but coming to help you do so, as ‘that?’”

“Yes, of course. I see now,” both children cried out together.

“You must think we’re dreadfully inquisitive,” Linda remarked, “asking you all these questions, but—”

“Not at all,” he replied. “I am often inquisitive too. Sometimes I ask ever so many questions. And it’s then that humans call me ‘interrogative’.”

“That’s very interesting indeed,” said Barry. “And do you know what? I do believe I can tell you what words you are when you are interrogative.”

“Let me see, then!” And Sir Pronoun smiled all over, for he loved to be thought about and taken notice of.

“You are ‘which?’, ‘what?’—”

“And ‘who?’” Linda interrupted, “and ‘whom?’—”

“Quite right.” said Sir Pronoun. And then, suddenly, he added, “Somehow or other, I don’t think you and I will ever be bad friends again, because, you see, we understand each other so much better now, and that makes all the difference. Goodbye!”

And with this, Sir Pronoun swung round on his long, thin legs until he was facing in the opposite direction, and, with great, thoughtful steps, he walked slowly away.