



Einstein's Parrot

A GREAT BRAIN AND A BIRD BRAIN SPEND TIME TOGETHER BY STEVE MIRSKY

In late April the Associated Press reported the discovery of a diary written by a woman, Johanna Fantova, who was a close friend of Albert Einstein. "The 62-page diary, written in German, was discovered in February in Fantova's files at Princeton University's Firestone Library, where she had worked as a curator," the AP story noted. One fascinating revelation of the diary is that Einstein received a parrot as a 75th-birthday gift. According to the AP, "After deciding the bird was depressed, Einstein tried to alter its mood by telling bad jokes."

Parrots can live for a century. In early May I may (or may not) have encountered a parrot that may (or may not) have been the bird entertained by Einstein. Speaking in German-accented English, the parrot recited a monologue. What follows is a transcript of that monologue:

"How do I order beer in a bar? I say '*Ein stein* for Einstein.' Hey, Parrot, what's the difference between a wild boar and Niels Bohr? When I say that God doesn't play dice, a wild boar doesn't tell me to stop telling God what to do. I hate that. So what do you say to the man who developed the exclusion principle? You say, 'Pauli want a cracker?' Wolfgang Pauli, get it? Hello, is this thing on? Testing, one, two. Hey, Parrot, I had a dream where I made love to Rita Hayworth for an hour. Well, for her it was an hour. For me, 35 seconds. That's relativity. Okay, Newton is standing on the shoulders of a giant, and he says, 'Giant, how do I get

down off you?' and the giant says, 'You don't get down off me, you get down off a duck.' I love that one. Parrot, tell me, what is a Lorentz contraction? That's when Mrs. Lorentz knows the baby is coming. It's a timed dilation, not a time dilation, get it? Let's see, two guys walk into an h-bar. An H-BAR. If you knew any physics you'd be on the floor, I swear. Uh, if Ruby Keeler married, uh, John Wheel-



er, became a doctor and got a job in Vegas, she'd be Ruby Keeler Wheeler the healer dealer. So what would people say if Paul Dirac fell on Jane Russell? They'd say, 'Look at Dirac on Jane Russell.' Oh, they'd say it, trust me. Okay, there are these twins, see. They're 20 years old. And one of them goes zipping around the uni-

verse really fast while the other one stays on Earth. The twin who was zipping around comes back, and he's maybe a year older, and he goes to find his brother. And the brother is now 95 years old. And the young twin comes up to him. The old twin looks at the young twin, and tears come to his eyes. And the young twin says, 'Why are you crying?' And the old twin says, 'I'm so happy.' And the young twin says, 'To see me?' And the old twin, he says, 'Yes. The \$100 you owed me when you left. It's now \$100,000.' From the compounding interest. Oy, these are the jokes, Parrot. What, you don't like living in a cage? Yeah, try being the most famous man in the world. I can't even go out for a haircut. You know, you're a good listener for a parrot. Oh boy, it looks like you just did a Brownian movement. Good thing I lined the cage with my cosmological constant proposal. That proposal was my second biggest mistake. My biggest mistake was my proposal to my first wife. Ba-dum-bum. Parrot, if you had a plastic deer on your lawn covered in Christmas lights, turning them on would give you the faux doe electric effect. Whaddya call it when Leo Szilard and Enrico Fermi pull up an anchor? A chain retraction! Not so good? You should hear me play the violin. So Schrödinger and Heisenberg are driving down the road, and Heisenberg says, 'Hey, I think you just ran over a cat.' And Schrödinger, he says, 'Is it dead?' And Heisenberg says, heh heh, get this: 'I can't be certain.' Okay, so the smartest man in the world is talking to a parrot. Hey, Parrot, that's not a joke, that's my life." ■

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