

MIKE NAYLOR

The Last Crumb

We'd invited them all, but who thought they'd all come!
To Zeno's First Conference on Infinite Sums.
We'd gathered together in Aleph-Null square,
And an infinite number of people were there!

The people were hungry, they'd been there all day,
And Mrs. McMurtle had lost the buffet.
It rolled off the mountain and all that we found
Was one chocolate chip cookie that fell on the ground.

George, the main speaker, asked me for the news,
And I said "I'm afraid that it's simply no use.
"One cookie is all that survived the buffet,
"And one cookie will not feed these people, no way."

George looked at the cookie and George looked at me,
And George shook his head and said "I disagree.
"Let me look in my suitcase and find something quick,
"I think I have just the right tool for this trick."

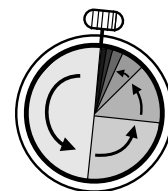
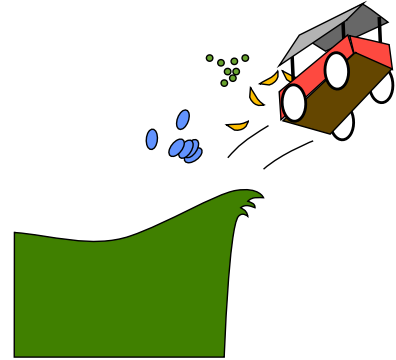
Then he pulled from his suitcase a very strange thing,
A tool with a handle and one tiny string.
"Have you ever seen something like this in your life?
"It's a Pennington Ultra-Fine Portable Knife."

He told me, "This tool was especially made
"With a single-dimensional string for a blade.
"This knife will cut anything, smaller than small,
"So we'll just keep on slicing 'til we feed them all!"

He looked very pleased but I sadly said "No...
"There's an infinite number of people, you know.
"If you cut up that cookie, I don't care how small,
"There's not enough pieces, you can't feed them all."

"Well, I guess we'll just see," he replied with a laugh,
As he carefully sliced our last cookie in half.
He yelled, "Form one line, and prepare to move fast!
"There's only one cookie, one cookie - our last!"

Then he gave me a stopwatch and said, "Would you mind?
"I'd be ever so grateful if you'd watch the time



“For I’ll double my speed as I slice up each one
“And in just sixty seconds the job will be done.”

He gave the first half to a man with green hair
Who danced away quickly and flipped through the air.
George looked at the half that was left and said “Yes,
“I will halve this again, into quarters no less!”

A googly-eyed man bellied up with his plate
But George said “Be patient, you’ll just have to wait
“For just thirty seconds – not one second more
“Then I’ll give you one fourth of that cookie for sure.”

Now I was puzzled, and worried, and how!
“George now you’ve done it, you won’t make it now.
“You’ve given up half – half our cookie is gone!
“And with all of these folks it will take far too long.”

But George said “Don’t worry, you’ll soon understand.”
As he handed a fourth to the googly-eyed man.
With a flick of his Pennington ultra-fine blade,
The fourth became eighths with the cut that he made.

The next one in line was a girl with one shoe.
“Fifteen seconds,” he said, “then I’ll have some for you.”
He looked at his watch and he looked up at me.
“Timing is everything, as you will soon see.

“If I took, say, one second to hand out each bite,
“Then we’d be here forever plus half of the night.
“But I’ll slice down my time as I slice up each one,
“And in just sixty seconds the job will be done.”

He gave her one eighth, which she dropped in her shoe,
And he sliced the remaining piece neatly in two.
A monkey bounced up with his hat and a cup.
“One sixteenth is yours when eight seconds are up.”

As he gave the next piece he looked over at me,
“I needn’t start slow but it helps, you agree?
“I’m about to get busy, I hope you don’t mind,
“There are so many people and such little time!”

A juggler came forward and just as he’d reckoned,
Four seconds later got one thirty-second.
Up stepped a boy from the far-frozen North,
Who two seconds later got one sixty-fourth.

In only one second the next guest was fed,
A man with a large tambourine for a head.
Quickly and neatly George split up the rest,
And in just half a second he fed the next guest.

A lollipop girl and a mandolin man,
A witch made of match sticks and empty tin cans,
A teacher, a doctor, a man with an owl,
A woman dressed up in a large paper towel.

A monk and a mermaid, a pink centipede,
The faces were coming with dizzying speed.
A fireman, a waitress, a pig with a drum,
Faster and faster and faster they'd come.

George kept on cutting, and to my surprise,
The pieces were down to molecular size!
His hands were a blur, as the faces sped by,
Here and then gone in the blink of an eye.

The air crackled with static and sizzled with heat!
The people whizzed by with incredible speed!
The ground shook and trembled - a deafening roar!
Then a Flash! And a Boom! And then ---

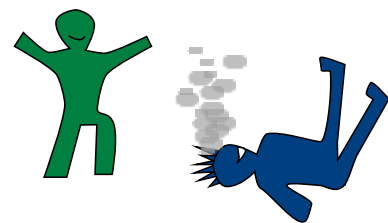
nothing more.

George lay on the ground with his feet in the air
And a smile on his face as smoke rose from his hair
"You did it!" I said, "Yes, you did it, no doubt!
"By splitting in half, why, you'll never run out!

"You could do it again, for as long as you please,
"Forever and ever and ever - with ease!
"Now I know you are tired, but do one more thing
"Please cut me a slice with that ultra-fine string."

"Oh goodness," said George, "It's too late, you can't dine.
"There would have plenty had you slipped in line.
"I'm sorry," he said, "but you see it's all gone.
"I don't have infinity pieces, plus one."

I chuckled, "That's funny! But you and I know,
"Surely something's remaining, it couldn't all go.
"Even though that last crumb might be so very small,
"Just by cutting in half you cannot cut them all."



He looked at me strangely, "It's gone, there's no more,
"But please have a look if you'd like to be sure."
So I peered in his hand, and he gave me a wink,
And you know what I saw?

Well . . . what do YOU think?

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