

Percy Poll's Peculiar Plants

It had been quite the morning at Poll Manor. Percy had taken his usual seat at the breakfast table, doodled roses idly in his notepad and watched as the chaos had begun to unfold.

As he observed his family, he saw Father burn through his third saucepan, trying to scramble eggs. Basil Poll rattled around the kitchen, too tall for his own good. He knocked utensils over with his too-long arms, bashed into open cupboard doors with his too-knobby knees and tripped over the dog with his too-big feet.

It appeared that, sometime earlier that morning, Mother had tidied away the butter, which had drastically affected how quickly he had burnt the eggs. When Mother was unable to find the butter again, Father gave up and served bread with prune jam instead.

“Breakfast is the most important meal of the day! It prepares you for whatever is to come. Fail to prepare, prepare to fail; that’s what I always say!” he declared as he sprinkled dried parsley over his serving.

Mother eventually found the butter in her knitting bag. Bratwurst reminded her that it was there by sticking his long snout into the collection of coloured twine for a lick.

“The wool protects it from the flies,” Mother said, “but not from dachshunds, apparently.”

Mother had a gentle way of being. She had a heart-shaped face with large, dark eyes and her thick hair, streaked with grey, was always held off her face by a silk scarf. She seemed to breeze around the house as if her feet hung a few centimetres above the floor. She always wore one of her many huipils – today’s was the one with the stitched flowers around the neck and the red trim. Percy thought she looked like a patch of valerians. When Mother looked at Percy, he felt like he was the only person in the world.

Grandmother believed, and often said,



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that she thought that Mother was odd. This was, no doubt, down to Mother's habit of tidying things away in surprising places and her unusual beliefs about how the house should be kept. Many years ago, for example, Mother had installed a thermometer in every room of the house and still spent much of her time checking each one to make sure that the inside of Poll Manor stayed the perfect temperature for brain function – which, according to her, was twenty-and-a-quarter degrees Celsius. Mother had her ways, but Percy never complained when he found various sugary snacks in his bed.

“So that you will have sweet dreams,” she would say happily.

This is an extract from 'Percy Poll's Peculiar Plants'. Read the rest of the story [here](#).

Questions

1. What did the family finally have for breakfast? Tick **one**.

- scrambled eggs
- toast and butter
- bread with prune jam
- sausages

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order in which they happened.
The first one has been done for you.

Father served breakfast.

Percy came down for breakfast.

1

Mother tidied away the butter.

Mother found the butter in her knitting bag.

3. Find and copy a word from the text which means 'kitchen tools'.

4. What is the name of the family dog?

5. **Basil Poll rattled around the kitchen, too tall for his own good.**

What impression does 'rattled' give you about how Basil is moving?

6. According to Mother, what is the perfect temperature for brain function?

7. What do you think 'valerians' are? Explain your answer.

8. What is Percy's opinion of Mother? Explain how you know.

Answers

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4. What is the name of the family dog?

Bratwurst

5. **Basil Poll rattled around the kitchen, too tall for his own good.**

What impression does 'rattled' give you about how Basil is moving?

Children's own responses which refer to the fact that Basil is making a lot of noise because he bashes into things. Children might infer that Basil is clumsy.

6. According to Mother, what is the perfect temperature for brain function?

twenty-and-a-quarter degrees Celsius

7. What do you think 'valerians' are? Explain your answer.

Children's own responses with a reasonable justification using the text as context. For example: 'I think that valerians must be flowers because they are something that comes in a 'patch' and Percy's mother is wearing clothes with stitched flowers around the neck.'

8. What is Percy's opinion of Mother? Explain how you know.

Children's own responses, justified using the text. For example, 'I think that Percy loves his mother no matter what anyone else says, because it says that when she looked at him, he felt like the only person in the world.'

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“So that you will have sweet dreams,” she would say happily.

Percy cleared his plate and escaped into his favourite room in the house: the orangery. The orangery was the only part of the house where Percy was rarely disturbed, as it contained nothing but plantlife and was of no interest to the rest of the Poll family. Tall, narrow windows stretched from floor to ceiling along the walls of the large room, which stuck out from the rest of Poll Manor to get sunlight on three sides. This light was now limited, however, due to the amount of grime that had collected on the flat, glass roof and the sheer volume of exotic plants that filled every corner of the space. A date palm towered over everything and the luscious lemon and orange trees gave the shady room a wonderful citrus aroma. Percy leaned close to the creeping jasmine anyway to block out the smell of Father's cooking.

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3. Find and copy a synonym for 'scent' from the final paragraph.

4. What type of dog is Bratwurst?

5. **Basil Poll rattled around the kitchen, too tall for his own good.**

What impression does 'rattled' give you about how Basil is moving?

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8. Give **two** reasons why Percy likes it in the orangery.

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aroma (Also accept 'smell' but point out and define the word 'aroma'.)

4. What type of dog is Bratwurst?

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Children's own responses which refer to the fact that Basil is making a lot of noise because he bashes into things. Children might infer that Basil is clumsy.

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Children's own responses with a reasonable justification using the text as context. For example: 'I think that valerians must be flowers because they are something that comes in a 'patch' and Percy's mother is wearing clothes with stitched flowers around the neck.'

7. What is Percy's opinion of Mother? Explain how you know.

Children's own responses, justified using the text. For example, 'I think that Percy loves his mother no matter what anyone else says, because it says that when she looked at him, he felt like the only person in the world.'

8. Give **two** reasons why Percy likes it in the orangery.

Children's own responses which should refer to two of the following:

- **it was quiet/it was quieter than the kitchen**
- **no other members of the family spent time there**
- **it was full of plants**
- **there was a lovely (citrus) smell**
- **the aroma blocked out the smell of Father's cooking**

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For a moment, Percy took in his own faded reflection in a dusty, gold-framed mirror that was propped against the wall. His large, goggle-like glasses rested on the tip of his nose. Just like his father, Percy needed them for reading, writing, looking and just about everything else. Also, just like his father, he had never managed to find a pair that fit. His dark, tightly curled hair sat atop his head as usual; it always seemed to grow faster than he could trim it. Today, he wore his summer suit with the bow tie and waistcoat. Mother said that it made him look handsome but Percy was not so sure.

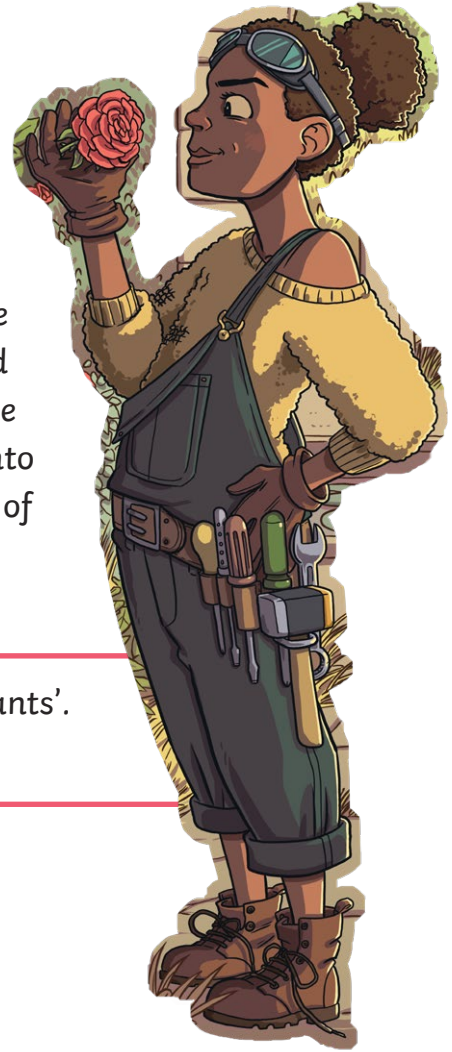
As he looked at himself, he wondered where Daisy was.



His sister had not come down for breakfast. He had not heard her usual banging and clattering so far that morning, and –

“Hey! Percy Petal!”

Daisy landed with a thump through the open glass-panelled doors that led to the grounds, almost as if she had swung in on one of the hanging vines. She shook her head and a cloud of dust and dirt bloomed out in all directions. She wore her usual pair of tatty, denim work dungarees and brought in a smell of grease and engine oil. When she took a second to look at Percy, her brow creased into a frown in the way that it did with all the women of the Poll family.



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Percy left the kitchen and went to the orangery.

Percy's sister, Daisy, came into the room.

Mother tidied away the butter.

Mother found the butter in her knitting bag.

3. What type of dog is Bratwurst?

4. What do you think 'valerians' are? Explain your answer.

5. What is Percy's opinion of Mother? Explain how you know.

6. Give **two** reasons why Percy likes it in the orangery.

7. What is the tallest plant in the orangery? Explain how you know.

8. **He had not heard her usual banging and clattering so far that morning, and –**
Why do you think the author has ended this paragraph with a dash?

9. How are the characters of Percy and Daisy different? Use what you know from the text to support your answer.

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7. What is the tallest plant in the orangery? Explain how you know.

A date palm. The text refers to the way it 'towered over everything'.

8. **He had not heard her usual banging and clattering so far that morning, and –**
Why do you think the author has ended this paragraph with a dash?

Because Percy is about to be surprised by Daisy's entering unannounced/to make the reader feel surprised by Daisy's sudden entrance.

9. How are the characters of Percy and Daisy different? Use what you know from the text to support your answer.

Children's own responses which may refer to any of the following:

- **Percy likes it quiet (his favourite room is the orangery and he hasn't spoken yet in the story) whereas Daisy arrives with a 'thump', makes 'usual banging and clattering' and speaks with exclamation marks ("Hey! Percy Petal!");**
- **Percy wears a formal outfit (a suit with a bow tie) while Daisy wears tatty dungarees;**
- **Percy enjoys the scent of citrus and jasmine whereas Daisy brings a smell of 'grease and engine oil';**
- **Percy has 'tightly curled hair' and looks 'handsome' while Daisy's hair is full of dust and dirt;**
- **Percy was with his family for breakfast while Daisy was absent.**