

19. The Reunion of the High Ki

The twins of Twi were too startled and amazed to offer to fight with the odd people surrounding them. Even the executioners allowed their axes to fall harmlessly to the ground, and the double people, soldiers and citizens alike, turned to stare at the strangers in wonder.

"We're here, Prince!" yelled Wul-Takim, his bristly beard showing over the heads of those who stood between.

"Thank you," answered Prince Marvel.

"And the men of Spor are here!" added King Terribus, who was mounted on a fine milk-white charger, richly caparisoned.

"I thank the men of Spor," returned Prince Marvel, graciously.

"Shall we cut your foes into small pieces, or would you prefer to hang them?" questioned the King of the Reformed Thieves, loudly enough to set most of his hearers shivering.

But now the little maid in yellow stepped up to Prince Marvel and, regarding the youthful knight with considerable awe, said sweetly:

"I beg you will pardon my people and spare them. They are usually good and loyal subjects, and if they fought against me--their lawful High Ki--it was only because they were misled by my separation from my other half."

"That is true," replied the prince; "and as you are still the lawful High Ki of Twi, I will leave you to deal with your own people as you see fit. For those who have conquered your people are but your own allies, and are still under your orders, as I am myself."

Hearing this, the green High Ki walked up to her twin High Ki and said, boldly:

"I am your prisoner. It is now your turn. Do with me as you will."

"I forgive you," replied her sister, in kindly tones.

Then the little maid who had met with defeat gave a sob and turned away weeping, for she had expected anything but forgiveness.

And now the Ki-Ki came forward and, bowing their handsome blond heads before the High Ki, demanded: "Are we forgiven also?"

"Yes," said the girl, "but you are no longer fit to be rulers of my people. Therefore, you are henceforth deprived of your honorable offices of Ki-Ki, which I shall now bestow upon these good captains here," and she indicated the good-natured officers who had first captured the prince and Nerle.

The people of Twi eagerly applauded this act, for the captains were more popular with them than the former Ki-Ki; but the blond ones both flushed with humiliation and anger, and said:

"The captains fought against you, even as we did."

"Yet the captains only obeyed your orders," returned the High Ki. "So I hold them blameless."

"And what is to become of us now?" asked the former Ki-Ki.

"You will belong to the common people, and earn your living playing tunes for them to dance by," answered the High Ki. And at this retort every one laughed, so that the handsome youths turned away with twin scowls upon their faces and departed amidst the jeers of the crowd.

"Better hang 'em to a tree, little one," shouted Wul-Takim, in his big voice; "they won't enjoy life much, anyhow."

But the maid shook her pretty head and turned to the prince.

"Will you stay here and help me to rule my kingdom?" she asked.

"I can not do that," replied Prince Marvel, "for I am but a wandering adventurer and must soon continue my travels. But I believe you will be able to rule your people without my help."

"It is not so easy a task," she answered, sighing. "For I am singular and my people are all double."

"Well, let us hold a meeting in your palace," said the prince, "and then we can decide what is best to be done."

So they dismissed the people, who cheered their High Ki enthusiastically, returning quietly to their daily tasks and the gossip that was sure to follow such important events as they had witnessed.

The army of King Terribus and the fifty-nine reformed thieves went to the twin palaces of the Ki and the Ki-Ki and made merry with feasting and songs to celebrate their conquest. And the High Ki, followed by the prince, Nerle, King Terribus and Wul-Takim, as well as by the Ki and the newly-appointed Ki-Ki, mounted the silver steps and passed over the wall to the royal palaces. The green High Ki followed them, still weeping disconsolately.

When they had all reached the throne-room, the High Ki seated herself on one of the beautiful thrones and said:

"By some strange chance, which I am unable to explain, my twin and I have become separated; so that instead of thinking and acting alike, we are now individuals--as are all the strange men who have passed through the hole in the hedge. And, being individuals, we can no longer agree, nor can one of us lawfully rule over the Kingdom of Twi, where all the subjects are twins, thinking and acting in unison."

Said Prince Marvel:

"Your Highness, I alone can explain why you became separated from your twin. By means of a fairy enchantment, which I learned years ago, I worked upon you a spell, which compelled your brain to work independent of your sister's brain. It seems to me that it is better each person should think her own thoughts and live her own life, rather than be yoked to another person and obliged to think and act as a twin, or one-half of a complete whole. And since you are now the one High Ki, and the acknowledged ruler of this country, I will agree to work the same fairy spell on all your people, so that no longer will there be twin minds in all this Land of Twi."

"But all the cows and dogs and horses and other animals are double, as well as the people," suggested the old Ki, blinking their little eyes in amazement at the thought of being forever separated from each other.

"I can also work the spell upon all the twin animals," said the prince, after a moment's hesitation.

"And all our houses are built double, with twin doors and windows and chimneys, to accommodate our twin people," continued the High Ki. "And the trees and flowers--and even the blades of grass--are all double. And our roads are double, and--and everything else is double. I alone, the ruler of this land, am singular!"

Prince Marvel became thoughtful now, for he did not know how to separate trees and flowers, and it would be a tedious task to separate the twin houses.

"Why not leave the country as it is?" asked King Terribus of Spor. "The High Ki is welcome to come to my castle to live, and then she need no longer bother about the Land of Twi, which seems to me a poor place, after all."

"And your sister may come with me to my cave, and be the queen of the reformed thieves, which is a much more important office than being High Ki of Twi," added big Wul-Takim, who had placed the maiden in green upon a cushion at his feet, and was striving to comfort her by gently stroking her silken hair with his rough hand.

"But I love my country, and do not wish to leave it," answered the yellow High Ki. "And I love my twin sister, and regret that our minds have become separated," she continued, sadly.

"I have it!" exclaimed Nerle. "Let the prince reunite you, making you regular twins of Twi again, and then you can continue to rule the country as the double High Ki, and everything will be as it was before."

The yellow High Ki clapped her pink hands with delight and looked eagerly at the prince.

"Will you?" she asked. "Will you please reunite us? And then all our troubles will be ended!"

This really seemed to Marvel the best thing to be done. So he led the maid in green to the other throne, where she had once sat, and after replacing the golden crown upon her brow he whispered a fairy spell of much mystical power.

Then the prince stepped back and regarded the maidens earnestly, and after a moment both the High Ki smiled upon him in unison and said--speaking the same words in the same voices and with the same accents:

"Thank you very much!"