

## 21. The Wonderful Book of Magic

Whatever their fears might be, none of Prince Marvel's party hesitated to follow him along the path through the forest in search of the sorcerer, and by and by they came upon a large clearing. In the middle of this open space was a big building in such bad repair that its walls were tumbling down in several places, and all around it the ground was uncared for and littered with rubbish. A man was walking up and down in front of this building, with his head bowed low; but when he heard the sound of approaching horses' hoofs he looked up and stared for a moment in amazement. Then, with a shout of rage, he rushed toward them and caught Prince Marvel's horse by the bridle.

"How dare you!" he cried; "how dare you enter my forest?"

Marvel jerked his bridle from the man's grasp and said in return:

"Who are you?"

"Me! Who am I? Why, I am the great and powerful Kwytoffle! So beware! Beware my sorcery!"

They all looked at the man curiously. He was short and very fat, and had a face like a puff-ball, with little red eyes and scarcely any nose at all. He wore a black gown with scarlet grasshoppers and june-bugs embroidered upon the cloth; and his hat was high and peaked, with an imitation grasshopper of extraordinary size perched upon its point. In his right hand he carried a small black wand, and around his neck hung a silver whistle on a silver cord.

Seeing that the strangers were gazing on him so earnestly, Kwytoffle thought they were frightened; so he said again, in a big voice:

"Beware my vengeance!"

"Beware yourself!" retorted the prince. "For if you do not treat us more respectfully, I shall have you flogged."

"What! Flog me!" shouted Kwytoffle, furiously. "For this I will turn every one of you into grasshoppers--unless you at once give me all the wealth you possess!"

"Poor man!" exclaimed Nerle; "I can see you are longing for that flogging. Will you have it now?" and he raised his riding-whip above his head.

Kwytoffle stumbled backward a few paces and blew shrilly upon his silver whistle. Instantly a number of soldiers came running from the building, others following quickly after them until fully a hundred rough-looking warriors, armed with swords and axes, had formed in battle array, facing the little party of Prince Marvel.

"Arrest these strangers!" commanded Kwytoffle, in a voice like a roar. "Capture them and bind them securely, and then I will change them all into grasshoppers!"

"All right," answered the captain of the soldiers; and then he turned to his men and shouted: "Forward--double-quick--march!"

They came on with drawn swords; at first running, and then gradually dropping into a walk, as they beheld Nerle, Wul-Takim, King Terribus and Marvel standing quietly waiting to receive them, weapons in hand and ready for battle. A few paces off the soldiers hesitated and stopped altogether, and Kwytoffle yelled at the captain:

"Why don't you go on? Why don't you capture them? Why don't you fight them?"

"Why, they have drawn their swords!" responded the captain, reproachfully.

"Who cares?" roared the sorcerer.

"We care," said the captain, giving a shudder, as he looked upon the strangers. "Their swords are sharp, and some of us would get hurt."

"You're cowards!" shrieked the enraged Kwytoffle. "I'll turn you all into June-bugs!"

At this threat the soldiers dropped their swords and axes, and all fell upon their knees, trembling visibly and imploring their cruel master not to change them into june-bugs.

"Bah!" cried Nerle, scornfully; "why don't you fight? If we kill you, then you will escape being June-bugs."

"The fact is," said the captain, woefully, "we simply can't fight. For our swords are only tin, and our axes are made of wood, with silver-paper pasted over them."

"But why is that?" asked Wul-Takim, while all the party showed their surprise.

"Why, until now we have never had any need to fight," said the captain, "for every one has quickly surrendered to us or run away the moment we came near. But you people do not appear to be properly frightened, and now, alas! since you have drawn upon us the great sorcerer's anger, we shall all be transformed into June-bugs."

"Yes!" roared Kwytoffle, hopping up and down with anger, "you shall all be June-bugs, and these strangers I will transform into grasshoppers!"

"Very well," said Prince Marvel, quietly; "you can do it now."

"I will! I will!" cried the sorcerer.

"Then why don't you begin?" inquired the prince.

"Why don't I begin? Why, I haven't got the enchantments with me, that's why. Do you suppose we great magicians carry around enchantments in our pockets?" returned the other, in a milder tone.

"Where do you keep your enchantments?" asked the prince.

"They're in my dwelling," snapped Kwytoffle, taking off his hat and fanning his fat face with the brim.

"Then go and get them," said Marvel.

"Nonsense! If I went to get the enchantments you would all run away!" retorted the sorcerer.

"Not so!" protested Nerle, who was beginning to be amused. "My greatest longing in life is to become a grasshopper."

"Oh, yes! PLEASE let us be grasshoppers!" exclaimed the High Ki maids in the same breath.

"We want to hop! We want to hop! Please--PLEASE let us hop!" implored the bald-headed Ki, winking their left eyes at Wul-Takim.

"By all means let us become grasshoppers," said King Terribus, smiling; and Wul-Takim added:

"I'm sure your soldiers would enjoy being June-bugs, for then they wouldn't have to work. Isn't that so, boys?"

The bewildered soldiers looked at one another in perplexity, and the still more bewildered sorcerer gazed on the speakers with staring eyes and wide-open mouth.

"I insist," said Prince Marvel, "upon your turning us into grasshoppers and your soldiers into June-bugs, as you promised. If you do not, then I will flog you--as I promised."

"Very well," returned the sorcerer, with a desperate look upon his face; "I'll go and find the enchantment."

"And we'll go with you," remarked the prince, pleasantly.

So the entire party accompanied Kwytoffle into the house, where they entered a large room that was in a state of much disorder.

"Let me see," said the sorcerer, rubbing his ears, as if trying to think; "I wonder if I put them in this cupboard. You see," he explained, "no one has ever before dared me to transform him into a June-bug or grasshopper, so I have almost forgotten where I keep my book of enchantments. No, it's not in the cupboard," he continued, looking there; "but it surely must be in this chest."

It was not in the chest, either, and so the sorcerer continued to look in all sorts of queer places for his book of enchantments, without finding it. Whenever he paused in his search Prince Marvel would say, sternly:

"Go on! Find the book! Hunt it up. We are all anxious to become grasshoppers." And then Kwytoffle would set to work again, although big drops of perspiration were now streaming down his face.

Finally he pulled an old book from underneath the pillow of his bed, and crying, "Here it is!" carried it to the window.

He turned a few leaves of the book and then said:

"How unfortunate! The compound I require to change you into grasshoppers must be mixed on the first day of September; and as this is now the eighth day of September I must wait nearly a year before I can work the enchantment."

"How about the June-bugs?" asked Nerle.

"Oh! Ah! The June-bug mixture can only be made at the dark o' the moon," said the sorcerer, pretending to read, "and that is three weeks from now."

"Let me read it," said Prince Marvel, suddenly snatching the book from Kwytoffle's hands. Then he turned to the title-page and read:

"Lives of Famous Thieves and Impostors.' Why, this is not a book of enchantments."

"That is what I suspected," said Terribus.

"No one but a sorcerer can read the enchantments in this book," declared Kwytoffle; but he hung his head with a sheepish look, for he knew his deception had been well understood.

"Is your own history written in this volume?" inquired Marvel.

"No," answered the sorcerer.

"Then it ought to be," said the prince, "for you are no sorcerer at all, but merely a thief and an impostor!"