

### **23. The Red Rogue of Dawna**

One morning, while they were all standing in the courtyard waiting for their horses, as they were about to go for a ride, a courier came galloping swiftly up to the palace and cried:

"Does any one know where Prince Marvel can be found?"

"I am Prince Marvel," replied the young knight, stepping out from among the others.

"Then have I reached my journey's end!" said the courier, whose horse was nearly exhausted from long and hard riding. "The Lady Seseley is in great danger, and sends for you to come and rescue her. The great Baron Merd, her father, has been killed and his castle destroyed, and all his people are either captives or have been slain outright."

"And who has done this evil thing?" asked Prince Marvel, looking very stern and grave.

"The Red Rogue of Dawna," answered the messenger. "He quarreled with the Baron Merd and sent his savage hordes to tear down his castle and slay him. I myself barely escaped with my life, and the Lady Seseley had but time to say, before she was carried off, that if I could find Prince Marvel he would surely rescue her."

"And so I will!" declared the prince, "if she be still alive."

"Who is this Lady Seseley?" asked Nerle, who had come to his master's side.

"She is my first friend, to whom I owe my very existence. It is her image, together with those of her two friends, which is graven on my shield," answered Prince Marvel, thoughtfully.

"And what will you do?" inquired the esquire.

"I must go to her at once."

When they heard of his mission all the party insisted on accompanying him. Even the dainty High Ki could not be deterred by any thoughts of dangers they might encounter; and after some discussion Prince Marvel allowed them to join him.

So Wul-Takim sharpened his big broadsword, and Nerle carefully prepared his master's horse, so that before an hour had passed they were galloping toward the province of the Red Rogue of Dawna.

Prince Marvel knew little concerning this personage, but Nerle had much to tell of him. The Red Rogue had once been page to a wise scholar and magician, who lived in a fine old castle in Dawna and ruled over a large territory. The boy was very small and weak--smaller even than the average dwarf--and his master did not think it worth while to watch him. But one evening, while the magician was standing upon the top of the highest tower of his castle, the boy gave him a push from behind, and he met death on the sharp rocks below. Then the boy took his master's book of magic and found a recipe to make one grow. He made the mixture and swallowed it, and straightway began to grow big and tall. This greatly delighted him, until he found he was getting much bigger than the average man and rapidly becoming a giant. So he sought for a way to arrest the action of the magical draft; but before he could find it he had grown to enormous proportions, and was bigger than the biggest giant. There was nothing in the book of magic to make one grow smaller, so he was obliged to remain as he was--the largest man in the Enchanted Island.

All this had happened in a single night. The morning after his master's murder the page announced himself lord of the castle; and, seeing his enormous size, none dared deny his right to rule. On account of his bushy hair, which was fiery red in color, and the bushy red beard that covered his face when he became older, people came to call him the Red One. And after his evil deeds and quarrelsome temper had made him infamous throughout the island, people began to call him the Red Rogue of Dawna.

He had gathered around him a number of savage barbarians, as wicked and quarrelsome as himself, and so none dared to interfere with him, or even to meet him, if it were possible to avoid it.

This same Red Rogue it was who had drawn the good Baron Merd into a quarrel and afterward slain the old knight and his followers, destroyed his castle, and carried his little daughter Seseley and her girl friends, Berna and Helda, into captivity, shutting them up in his own gloomy castle.

The Red Rogue thought he had done a very clever thing, and had no fear of the consequences until one of his men came running up to the castle to announce that Prince Marvel and his companions were approaching to rescue the Lady Seseley.

"How many of them are there?" demanded the Red Rogue.

"There are eight, altogether," answered the man, "but two of them are girls."

"And they expect to force me to give up my captives?" asked the Red One, laughing with a noise like the roar of a waterfall. "Why, I shall make prisoners of every one of them!"

The man looked at his master fearfully, and replied:

"This Prince Marvel is very famous, and all people speak of his bravery and power. It was he who conquered King Terribus of Spor, and that mighty ruler is now his friend, and is one of the eight who approach."

The Red Rogue stopped laughing, for the fame of Spor's terrible king had long ago reached him. And he reflected that any one who could conquer the army of giants and dwarfs and Gray Men that served Terribus must surely be one to be regarded seriously. Moreover--and this was a secret--the Red Rogue had never been able to gain the strength to correspond with his gigantic size, but had ever remained as weak as when he was a puny boy. So he was accustomed to rely on his cunning and on the terror his very presence usually excited to triumph over his enemies. And he began to be afraid of this prince.

"You say two of the party are girls?" he asked.

"Yes," said the man, "but also among them are King Terribus himself, and the renowned Wul-Takim, formerly king of thieves, who was conquered by the prince, although accounted a hard fighter, and is now his devoted servant. And there are two old men who are just alike and have a very fierce look about them. They are said to come from the hidden Kingdom of Twi."

By this time the Red Rogue was thoroughly frightened, but he did not yet despair of defeating his enemies. He knew better than to attempt to oppose Prince Marvel by force, but he still hoped to conquer him by trickery and deceit.

Among the wonderful things that the Red Rogue's former master, the wise scholar and magician, had made were two large enchanted mirrors, which were set on each side of the great hallway of the castle. Heavy curtains were drawn over the surfaces of these mirrors, because they both possessed a dreadful magical power. For whenever any one looked into one of them his reflection was instantly caught and imprisoned in the mirror, and his body at

the same time became invisible to all earthly eyes, only the mirror retaining his form.

While considering a way to prevent the prince from freeing the Lady Seseley, the Red Rogue happened to think of these mirrors, which had never yet been used. So he went stealthily into the great hall and drew aside the covering from one of the mirrors. He did not dare look into the mirror himself, but hurried away to another room, and then sent a page up a back stairway to summon the Lady Seseley and her two maids into his presence.

The girls at once obeyed, for they greatly feared the Red Rogue; and of course they descended the front stairway and walked through the great hall. At once the large mirror that had been exposed to view caught the eye of Seseley, and she paused to regard her reflection in the glass. Her two companions did likewise, and instantly all three girls became invisible, while the mirror held their reflections fast in its magic surface.

The Red Rogue was watching them through a crack in the door, and seeing the girls disappear he gave a joyful laugh and exclaimed:

"Now let Prince Marvel find them if he can!"

The three girls began to wander aimlessly through the castle; for not only were they invisible to others, but also to themselves and to one another, and they knew not what to do nor which way to turn.