

## 11. The Beasts of the Forest of Gugu

That was a wonderful gathering of wild animals in the Forest of Gugu next sunrise. Rango, the Gray Ape, had even called his monkey sentinels away from the forest edge, and every beast, little and big, was in the great clearing where meetings were held on occasions of great importance.

In the center of the clearing stood a great shelving rock, having a flat, inclined surface, and on this sat the stately Leopard Gugu, who was King of the Forest. On the ground beneath him squatted Bru the Bear, Loo the Unicorn, and Rango the Gray Ape, the King's three Counselors, and in front of them stood the two strange beasts who had called themselves Li-Mon-Eags, but were really the transformations of Ruggedo the Nome, and Kiki Aru the Hyup.

Then came the beasts--rows and rows and rows of them! The smallest beasts were nearest the King's rock throne; then there were wolves and foxes, lynxes and hyenas, and the like; behind them were gathered the monkey tribes, who were hard to keep in order because they teased the other animals and were full of mischievous tricks. Back of the monkeys were the pumas, jaguars, tigers and lions, and their kind; next the bears, all sizes and colors; after them bisons, wild asses, zebras and unicorns; farther on the rhinoceri and hippopotami, and at the far edge of the forest, close to the trees that shut in the clearing, was a row of thick-skinned elephants, still as statues but with eyes bright and intelligent.

Many other kinds of beasts, too numerous to mention, were there, and some were unlike any beasts we see in the menageries and zoos in our country. Some were from the mountains west of the forest, and some from the plains at the east, and some from the river; but all present acknowledged the leadership of Gugu, who for many years had ruled them wisely and forced all to obey the laws.

When the beasts had taken their places in the clearing and the rising sun was shooting its first bright rays over the treetops, King Gugu rose on his throne. The Leopard's giant form, towering above all the others, caused a sudden hush to fall on the assemblage.

"Brothers," he said in his deep voice, "a stranger has come among us, a beast of curious form who is a great magician and is able to change the shapes of men or beasts at his will. This stranger has come to us, with another of his kind, from out of the sky, to warn us of a danger which threatens us all, and

to offer us a way to escape from that danger. He says he is our friend, and he has proved to me and to my Counselors his magic powers. Will you listen to what he has to say to you--to the message he has brought from the sky?"

"Let him speak!" came in a great roar from the great company of assembled beasts.

So Ruggedo the Nome sprang upon the flat rock beside Gugu the King, and another roar, gentle this time, showed how astonished the beasts were at the sight of his curious form. His lion's face was surrounded by a mane of pure white hair; his eagle's wings were attached to the shoulders of his monkey body and were so long that they nearly touched the ground; he had powerful arms and legs in addition to the wings, and at the end of his long, strong tail was a golden ball. Never had any beast beheld such a curious creature before, and so the very sight of the stranger, who was said to be a great magician, filled all present with awe and wonder.

Kiki stayed down below and, half hidden by the shelf of rock, was scarcely noticed. The boy realized that the old Nome was helpless without his magic power, but he also realized that Ruggedo was the best talker. So he was willing the Nome should take the lead.

"Beasts of the Forest of Gugu," began Ruggedo the Nome, "my comrade and I are your friends. We are magicians, and from our home in the sky we can look down into the Land of Oz and see everything that is going on. Also we can hear what the people below us are saying. That is how we heard Ozma, who rules the Land of Oz, say to her people: 'The beasts in the Forest of Gugu are lazy and are of no use to us. Let us go to their forest and make them all our prisoners. Let us tie them with ropes, and beat them with sticks, until they work for us and become our willing slaves.' And when the people heard Ozma of Oz say this, they were glad and raised a great shout and said: 'We will do it! We will make the beasts of the Forest of Gugu our slaves!'"

The wicked old Nome could say no more, just then, for such a fierce roar of anger rose from the multitude of beasts that his voice was drowned by the clamor. Finally the roar died away, like distant thunder, and Ruggedo the Nome went on with his speech.

"Having heard the Oz people plot against your liberty, we watched to see what they would do, and saw them all begin making ropes--ropes long and short--with which to snare our friends the beasts. You are angry, but we also were angry, for when the Oz people became the enemies of the beasts they also

became our enemies; for we, too, are beasts, although we live in the sky. And my comrade and I said: 'We will save our friends and have revenge on the Oz people,' and so we came here to tell you of your danger and of our plan to save you."

"We can save ourselves," cried an old Elephant. "We can fight."

"The Oz people are fairies, and you can't fight against magic unless you also have magic," answered the Nome.

"Tell us your plan!" shouted the huge Tiger, and the other beasts echoed his words, crying: "Tell us your plan."

"My plan is simple," replied Ruggedo. "By our magic we will transform all you animals into men and women--like the Oz people--and we will transform all the Oz people into beasts. You can then live in the fine houses of the Land of Oz, and eat the fine food of the Oz people, and wear their fine clothes, and sing and dance and be happy. And the Oz people, having become beasts, will have to live here in the forest and hunt and fight for food, and often go hungry, as you now do, and have no place to sleep but a bed of leaves or a hole in the ground. Having become men and women, you beasts will have all the comforts you desire, and having become beasts, the Oz people will be very miserable. That is our plan, and if you agree to it, we will all march at once into the Land of Oz and quickly conquer our enemies."

When the stranger ceased speaking, a great silence fell on the assemblage, for the beasts were thinking of what he had said. Finally one of the walruses asked:

"Can you really transform beasts into men, and men into beasts?"

"He can--he can!" cried Loo the Unicorn, prancing up and down in an excited manner. "He transformed ME, only last evening, and he can transform us all."

Gugu the King now stepped forward.

"You have heard the stranger speak," said he, "and now you must answer him. It is for you to decide. Shall we agree to this plan, or not?"

"Yes!" shouted some of the animals.

"No!" shouted others.

And some were yet silent.

Gugu looked around the great circle.

"Take more time to think," he suggested. "Your answer is very important. Up to this time we have had no trouble with the Oz people, but we are proud and free, and never will become slaves. Think carefully, and when you are ready to answer, I will hear you."