

23. The Fountain of Oblivion

The morning after the birthday fete, as the Wizard and Dorothy were walking in the grounds of the palace, Ozma came out and joined them, saying:

"I want to hear more of your adventures in the Forest of Gugu, and how you were able to get those dear little monkeys to use in Dorothy's Surprise Cake."

So they sat down on a marble bench near to the Fountain of the Water of Oblivion, and between them Dorothy and the Wizard related their adventures.

"I was dreadfully fussy while I was a woolly lamb," said Dorothy, "for it didn't feel good, a bit. And I wasn't quite sure, you know, that I'd ever get to be a girl again."

"You might have been a woolly lamb yet, if I hadn't happened to have discovered that Magic Transformation Word," declared the Wizard.

"But what became of the walnut and the hickory-nut into which you transformed those dreadful beast magicians?" inquired Ozma.

"Why, I'd almost forgotten them," was the reply; "but I believe they are still here in my pocket."

Then he searched in his pockets and brought out the two nuts and showed them to her.

Ozma regarded them thoughtfully.

"It isn't right to leave any living creatures in such helpless forms," said she. "I think, Wizard, you ought to transform them into their natural shapes again."

"But I don't know what their natural shapes are," he objected, "for of course the forms of mixed animals which they had assumed were not natural to them. And you must not forget, Ozma, that their natures were cruel and mischievous, so if I bring them back to life they might cause us a great deal of trouble."

"Nevertheless," said the Ruler of Oz, "we must free them from their present enchantments. When you restore them to their natural forms we will discover who they really are, and surely we need not fear any two people, even though they prove to be magicians and our enemies."

"I am not so sure of that," protested the Wizard, with a shake of his bald head. "The one bit of magic I robbed them of--which was the Word of Transformation--is so simple, yet so powerful, that neither Glinda nor I can equal it. It isn't all in the word, you know, it's the way the word is pronounced. So if the two strange magicians have other magic of the same sort, they might prove very dangerous to us, if we liberated them."

"I've an idea!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I'm no wizard, and no fairy, but if you do as I say, we needn't fear these people at all."

"What is your thought, my dear?" asked Ozma.

"Well," replied the girl, "here is this Fountain of the Water of Oblivion, and that's what put the notion into my head. When the Wizard speaks that terrible word that will change 'em back to their real forms, he can make 'em dreadful thirsty, too, and we'll put a cup right here by the fountain, so it'll be handy. Then they'll drink the water and forget all the magic they ever knew--and everything else, too."

"That's not a bad idea," said the Wizard, looking at Dorothy approvingly.

"It's a very GOOD idea," declared Ozma. "Run for a cup, Dorothy."

So Dorothy ran to get a cup, and while she was gone the Wizard said:

"I don't know whether the real forms of these magicians are those of men or beasts. If they're beasts, they would not drink from a cup but might attack us at once and drink afterward. So it might be safer for us to have the Cowardly Lion and the Hungry Tiger here to protect us if necessary."

Ozma drew out a silver whistle which was attached to a slender gold chain and blew upon the whistle two shrill blasts. The sound, though not harsh, was very penetrating, and as soon as it reached the ears of the Cowardly Lion and the Hungry Tiger, the two huge beasts quickly came bounding toward them. Ozma explained to them what the Wizard was about to do, and told them to keep quiet unless danger threatened. So the two powerful guardians of the Ruler of Oz crouched beside the fountain and waited.

Dorothy returned and set the cup on the edge of the fountain. Then the Wizard placed the hickory-nut beside the fountain and said in a solemn voice:

"I want you to resume your natural form, and to be very thirsty--Pyrzqxgl!"

In an instant there appeared, in the place of the hickory-nut, the form of Kiki Aru, the Hyup boy. He seemed bewildered, at first, as if trying to remember what had happened to him and why he was in this strange place. But he was facing the fountain, and the bubbling water reminded him that he was thirsty. Without noticing Ozma, the Wizard and Dorothy, who were behind him, he picked up the cup, filled it with the Water of Oblivion, and drank it to the last drop.

He was now no longer thirsty, but he felt more bewildered than ever, for now he could remember nothing at all--not even his name or where he came from. He looked around the beautiful garden with a pleased expression, and then, turning, he beheld Ozma and the Wizard and Dorothy regarding him curiously and the two great beasts crouching behind them.

Kiki Aru did not know who they were, but he thought Ozma very lovely and Dorothy very pleasant. So he smiled at them--the same innocent, happy smile that a baby might have indulged in, and that pleased Dorothy, who seized his hand and led him to a seat beside her on the bench.

"Why, I thought you were a dreadful magician," she exclaimed, "and you're only a boy!"

"What is a magician?" he asked, "and what is a boy?"

"Don't you know?" inquired the girl.

Kiki shook his head. Then he laughed.

"I do not seem to know anything," he replied.

"It's very curious," remarked the Wizard. "He wears the dress of the Munchkins, so he must have lived at one time in the Munchkin Country. Of course the boy can tell us nothing of his history or his family, for he has forgotten all that he ever knew."

"He seems a nice boy, now that all the wickedness has gone from him," said Ozma. "So we will keep him here with us and teach him our ways--to be true and considerate of others."

"Why, in that case, it's lucky for him he drank the Water of Oblivion," said Dorothy.

"It is indeed," agreed the Wizard. "But the remarkable thing, to me, is how such a young boy ever learned the secret of the Magic Word of

Transformation. Perhaps his companion, who is at present this walnut, was the real magician, although I seem to remember that it was this boy in the beast's form who whispered the Magic Word into the hollow tree, where I overheard it."

"Well, we will soon know who the other is," suggested Ozma. "He may prove to be another Munchkin boy."

The Wizard placed the walnut near the fountain and said, as slowly and solemnly as before:

"I want you to resume your natural form, and to be very thirsty--Pyrzqxgl!"

Then the walnut disappeared and Ruggedo the Nome stood in its place. He also was facing the fountain, and he reached for the cup, filled it, and was about to drink when Dorothy exclaimed:

"Why, it's the old Nome King!"

Ruggedo swung around and faced them, the cup still in his hand.

"Yes," he said in an angry voice, "it's the old Nome King, and I'm going to conquer all Oz and be revenged on you for kicking me out of my throne." He looked around a moment, and then continued: "There isn't an egg in sight, and I'm stronger than all of you people put together! I don't know how I came here, but I'm going to fight the fight of my life--and I'll win!"

His long white hair and beard waved in the breeze; his eyes flashed hate and vengeance, and so astonished and shocked were they by the sudden appearance of this old enemy of the Oz people that they could only stare at him in silence and shrink away from his wild glare.

Ruggedo laughed. He drank the water, threw the cup on the ground and said fiercely:

"And now--and now--and--"

His voice grew gentle. He rubbed his forehead with a puzzled air and stroked his long beard.

"What was I going to say?" he asked, pleadingly.

"Don't you remember?" said the Wizard.

"No; I've forgotten."

"Who ARE you?" asked Dorothy.

He tried to think. "I--I'm sure I don't know," he stammered.

"Don't you know who WE are, either?" questioned the girl.

"I haven't the slightest idea," said the Nome.

"Tell us who this Munchkin boy is," suggested Ozma.

Ruggedo looked at the boy and shook his head.

"He's a stranger to me. You are all strangers. I--I'm a stranger to myself," he said.

Then he patted the Lion's head and murmured, "Good doggie!" and the Lion growled indignantly.

"What shall we do with him?" asked the Wizard, perplexed.

"Once before the wicked old Nome came here to conquer us, and then, as now, he drank of the Water of Oblivion and became harmless. But we sent him back to the Nome Kingdom, where he soon learned the old evil ways again.

"For that reason," said Ozma, "we must find a place for him in the Land of Oz, and keep him here. For here he can learn no evil and will always be as innocent of guile as our own people."

And so the wandering ex-King of the Nomes found a new home, a peaceful and happy home, where he was quite content and passed his days in innocent enjoyment.