

4. King Dox

It was amusing to note the expression on the face of King Dox as he looked the boy over, from his sailor hat to his stubby shoes, and it was equally diverting to watch Button-Bright stare at the King in return. No fox ever beheld a fresher, fairer child's face, and no child had ever before heard a fox talk, or met with one who dressed so handsomely and ruled so big a city. I am sorry to say that no one had ever told the little boy much about fairies of any kind; this being the case, it is easy to understand how much this strange experience startled and astonished him.

"How do you like us?" asked the King.

"Don't know," said Button-Bright.

"Of course you don't. It's too short an acquaintance," returned his Majesty.

"What do you suppose my name is?"

"Don't know," said Button-Bright.

"How should you? Well, I'll tell you. My private name is Dox, but a King can't be called by his private name; he has to take one that is official. Therefore my official name is King Renard the Fourth. Ren-ard with the accent on the 'Ren'."

"What's 'ren'?" asked Button-Bright.

"How clever!" exclaimed the King, turning a pleased face toward his counselors. "This boy is indeed remarkably bright. 'What's 'ren'?' he asks; and of course 'ren' is nothing at all, all by itself. Yes, he's very bright indeed."

"That question is what your Majesty might call foxy," said one of the counselors, an old grey fox.

"So it is," declared the King. Turning again to Button-Bright, he asked:

"Having told you my name, what would you call me?"

"King Dox," said the boy.

"Why?"

"'Cause 'ren''s nothing at all," was the reply.

"Good! Very good indeed! You certainly have a brilliant mind. Do you know why two and two make four?"

"No," said Button-Bright.

"Clever! clever indeed! Of course you don't know. Nobody knows why; we only know it's so, and can't tell why it's so. Button-Bright, those curls and blue eyes do not go well with so much wisdom. They make you look too youthful, and hide your real cleverness. Therefore, I will do you a great favor. I will confer upon you the head of a fox, so that you may hereafter look as bright as you really are."

As he spoke the King waved his paw toward the boy, and at once the pretty curls and fresh round face and big blue eyes were gone, while in their place a fox's head appeared upon Button-Bright's shoulders--a hairy head with a sharp nose, pointed ears, and keen little eyes.

"Oh, don't do that!" cried Dorothy, shrinking back from her transformed companion with a shocked and dismayed face.

"Too late, my dear; it's done. But you also shall have a fox's head if you can prove you're as clever as Button-Bright."

"I don't want it; it's dreadful!" she exclaimed; and, hearing this verdict, Button-Bright began to boo-hoo just as if he were still a little boy.

"How can you call that lovely head dreadful?" asked the King. "It's a much prettier face than he had before, to my notion, and my wife says I'm a good judge of beauty. Don't cry, little fox-boy. Laugh and be proud, because you are so highly favored. How do you like the new head, Button-Bright?"

"D-d-don't n-n-n-know!" sobbed the child.

"Please, PLEASE change him back again, your Majesty!" begged Dorothy.

King Renard IV shook his head.

"I can't do that," he said; "I haven't the power, even if I wanted to. No, Button-Bright must wear his fox head, and he'll be sure to love it dearly as soon as he gets used to it."

Both the shaggy man and Dorothy looked grave and anxious, for they were sorrowful that such a misfortune had overtaken their little companion. Toto barked at the fox-boy once or twice, not realizing it was his former friend who

now wore the animal head; but Dorothy cuffed the dog and made him stop. As for the foxes, they all seemed to think Button-Bright's new head very becoming and that their King had conferred a great honor on this little stranger. It was funny to see the boy reach up to feel of his sharp nose and wide mouth, and wail afresh with grief. He wagged his ears in a comical manner and tears were in his little black eyes. But Dorothy couldn't laugh at her friend just yet, because she felt so sorry.

Just then three little fox-princesses, daughters of the King, entered the room, and when they saw Button-Bright one exclaimed: "How lovely he is!" and the next one cried in delight: "How sweet he is!" and the third princess clapped her hands with pleasure and said, "How beautiful he is!"

Button-Bright stopped crying and asked timidly:

"Am I?"

"In all the world there is not another face so pretty," declared the biggest fox-princess.

"You must live with us always, and be our brother," said the next.

"We shall all love you dearly," the third said.

This praise did much to comfort the boy, and he looked around and tried to smile. It was a pitiful attempt, because the fox face was new and stiff, and Dorothy thought his expression more stupid than before the transformation.

"I think we ought to be going now," said the shaggy man, uneasily, for he didn't know what the King might take into his head to do next.

"Don't leave us yet, I beg of you," pleaded King Renard. "I intend to have several days of feasting and merry-making in honor of your visit."

"Have it after we're gone, for we can't wait," said Dorothy, decidedly. But seeing this displeased the King, she added: "If I'm going to get Ozma to invite you to her party I'll have to find her as soon as possible, you know."

In spite of all the beauty of Foxville and the gorgeous dresses of its inhabitants, both the girl and the shaggy man felt they were not quite safe there, and would be glad to see the last of it.

"But it is now evening," the King reminded them, "and you must stay with us until morning, anyhow. Therefore, I invite you to be my guests at dinner, and

to attend the theater afterward and sit in the royal box. To-morrow morning, if you really insist upon it, you may resume your journey."

They consented to this, and some of the fox-servants led them to a suite of lovely rooms in the big palace.

Button-Bright was afraid to be left alone, so Dorothy took him into her own room. While a maid-fox dressed the little girl's hair--which was a bit tangled--and put some bright, fresh ribbons in it, another maid-fox combed the hair on poor Button-Bright's face and head and brushed it carefully, tying a pink bow to each of his pointed ears. The maids wanted to dress the children in fine costumes of woven feathers, such as all the foxes wore; but neither of them consented to that.

"A sailor suit and a fox head do not go well together," said one of the maids, "for no fox was ever a sailor that I can remember."

"I'm not a fox!" cried Button-Bright.

"Alas, no," agreed the maid. "But you've got a lovely fox head on your skinny shoulders, and that's ALMOST as good as being a fox."

The boy, reminded of his misfortune, began to cry again. Dorothy petted and comforted him and promised to find some way to restore him his own head.

"If we can manage to get to Ozma," she said, "the Princess will change you back to yourself in half a second; so you just wear that fox head as comf't'bly as you can, dear, and don't worry about it at all. It isn't nearly as pretty as your own head, no matter what the foxes say; but you can get along with it for a little while longer, can't you?"

"Don't know," said Button-Bright, doubtfully; but he didn't cry any more after that.

Dorothy let the maids pin ribbons to her shoulders, after which they were ready for the King's dinner. When they met the shaggy man in the splendid drawing room of the palace they found him just the same as before. He had refused to give up his shaggy clothes for new ones, because if he did that he would no longer be the shaggy man, he said, and he might have to get acquainted with himself all over again.

He told Dorothy he had brushed his shaggy hair and whiskers; but she thought he must have brushed them the wrong way, for they were quite as shaggy as before.

As for the company of foxes assembled to dine with the strangers, they were most beautifully costumed, and their rich dresses made Dorothy's simple gown and Button-Bright's sailor suit and the shaggy man's shaggy clothes look commonplace. But they treated their guests with great respect and the King's dinner was a very good dinner indeed. Foxes, as you know, are fond of chicken and other fowl; so they served chicken soup and roasted turkey and stewed duck and fried grouse and broiled quail and goose pie, and as the cooking was excellent the King's guests enjoyed the meal and ate heartily of the various dishes.

The party went to the theater, where they saw a play acted by foxes dressed in costumes of brilliantly colored feathers. The play was about a fox-girl who was stolen by some wicked wolves and carried to their cave; and just as they were about to kill her and eat her a company of fox-soldiers marched up, saved the girl, and put all the wicked wolves to death.

"How do you like it?" the King asked Dorothy.

"Pretty well," she answered. "It reminds me of one of Mr. Aesop's fables."

"Don't mention Aesop to me, I beg of you!" exclaimed King Dox. "I hate that man's name. He wrote a good deal about foxes, but always made them out cruel and wicked, whereas we are gentle and kind, as you may see."

"But his fables showed you to be wise and clever, and more shrewd than other animals," said the shaggy man, thoughtfully.

"So we are. There is no question about our knowing more than men do," replied the King, proudly. "But we employ our wisdom to do good, instead of harm; so that horrid Aesop did not know what he was talking about."

They did not like to contradict him, because they felt he ought to know the nature of foxes better than men did; so they sat still and watched the play, and Button-Bright became so interested that for the time he forgot he wore a fox head.

Afterward they went back to the palace and slept in soft beds stuffed with feathers; for the foxes raised many fowl for food, and used their feathers for clothing and to sleep upon.

Dorothy wondered why the animals living in Foxville did not wear just their own hairy skins as wild foxes do; when she mentioned it to King Dox he said they clothed themselves because they were civilized.

"But you were born without clothes," she observed, "and you don't seem to me to need them."

"So were human beings born without clothes," he replied; "and until they became civilized they wore only their natural skins. But to become civilized means to dress as elaborately and prettily as possible, and to make a show of your clothes so your neighbors will envy you, and for that reason both civilized foxes and civilized humans spend most of their time dressing themselves."

"I don't," declared the shaggy man.

"That is true," said the King, looking at him carefully; "but perhaps you are not civilized."

After a sound sleep and a good night's rest they had their breakfast with the King and then bade his Majesty good-bye.

"You've been kind to us--'cept poor Button-Bright," said Dorothy, "and we've had a nice time in Foxville."

"Then," said King Dox, "perhaps you'll be good enough to get me an invitation to Princess Ozma's birthday celebration."

"I'll try," she promised; "if I see her in time."

"It's on the twenty-first, remember," he continued; "and if you'll just see that I'm invited I'll find a way to cross the Dreadful Desert into the marvelous Land of Oz. I've always wanted to visit the Emerald City, so I'm sure it was fortunate you arrived here just when you did, you being Princess Ozma's friend and able to assist me in getting the invitation."

"If I see Ozma I'll ask her to invite you," she replied.

The Fox-King had a delightful luncheon put up for them, which the shaggy man shoved in his pocket, and the fox-captain escorted them to an arch at the side of the village opposite the one by which they had entered. Here they found more soldiers guarding the road.

"Are you afraid of enemies?" asked Dorothy.

"No; because we are watchful and able to protect ourselves," answered the captain. "But this road leads to another village peopled by big, stupid beasts who might cause us trouble if they thought we were afraid of them."

"What beasts are they?" asked the shaggy man.

The captain hesitated to answer. Finally, he said:

"You will learn all about them when you arrive at their city. But do not be afraid of them. Button-Bright is so wonderfully clever and has now such an intelligent face that I'm sure he will manage to find a way to protect you."

This made Dorothy and the shaggy man rather uneasy, for they had not so much confidence in the fox-boy's wisdom as the captain seemed to have. But as their escort would say no more about the beasts, they bade him good-bye and proceeded on their journey.