

19. The Shaggy Man's Welcome

The shaggy man stood in the great hall, his shaggy hat in his hands, wondering what would become of him. He had never been a guest in a fine palace before; perhaps he had never been a guest anywhere. In the big, cold, outside world people did not invite shaggy men to their homes, and this shaggy man of ours had slept more in hay-lofts and stables than in comfortable rooms. When the others left the great hall he eyed the splendidly dressed servants of the Princess Ozma as if he expected to be ordered out; but one of them bowed before him as respectfully as if he had been a prince, and said:

"Permit me, sir, to conduct you to your apartments."

The shaggy man drew a long breath and took courage.

"Very well," he answered. "I'm ready."

Through the big hall they went, up the grand staircase carpeted thick with velvet, and so along a wide corridor to a carved doorway. Here the servant paused, and opening the door said with polite deference:

"Be good enough to enter, sir, and make yourself at home in the rooms our Royal Ozma has ordered prepared for you. Whatever you see is for you to use and enjoy, as if your own. The Princess dines at seven, and I shall be here in time to lead you to the drawing-room, where you will be privileged to meet the lovely Ruler of Oz. Is there any command, in the meantime, with which you desire to honor me?"

"No," said the shaggy man; "but I'm much obliged."

He entered the room and shut the door, and for a time stood in bewilderment, admiring the grandeur before him.

He had been given one of the handsomest apartments in the most magnificent palace in the world, and you can not wonder that his good fortune astonished and awed him until he grew used to his surroundings.

The furniture was upholstered in cloth of gold, with the royal crown embroidered upon it in scarlet. The rug upon the marble floor was so thick and soft that he could not hear the sound of his own footsteps, and upon the walls were splendid tapestries woven with scenes from the Land of Oz. Books

and ornaments were scattered about in profusion, and the shaggy man thought he had never seen so many pretty things in one place before. In one corner played a tinkling fountain of perfumed water, and in another was a table bearing a golden tray loaded with freshly gathered fruit, including several of the red-cheeked apples that the shaggy man loved.

At the farther end of this charming room was an open doorway, and he crossed over to find himself in a bedroom containing more comforts than the shaggy man had ever before imagined. The bedstead was of gold and set with many brilliant diamonds, and the coverlet had designs of pearls and rubies sewed upon it. At one side of the bedroom was a dainty dressing-room with closets containing a large assortment of fresh clothing; and beyond this was the bath--a large room having a marble pool big enough to swim in, with white marble steps leading down to the water. Around the edge of the pool were set rows of fine emeralds as large as door-knobs, while the water of the bath was clear as crystal.

For a time the shaggy man gazed upon all this luxury with silent amazement. Then he decided, being wise in his way, to take advantage of his good fortune. He removed his shaggy boots and his shaggy clothing, and bathed in the pool with rare enjoyment. After he had dried himself with the soft towels he went into the dressing-room and took fresh linen from the drawers and put it on, finding that everything fitted him exactly. He examined the contents of the closets and selected an elegant suit of clothing. Strangely enough, everything about it was shaggy, although so new and beautiful, and he sighed with contentment to realize that he could now be finely dressed and still be the shaggy man. His coat was of rose-colored velvet, trimmed with shags and bobtails, with buttons of blood-red rubies and golden shags around the edges. His vest was a shaggy satin of a delicate cream color, and his knee-breeches of rose velvet trimmed like the coat. Shaggy creamy stockings of silk, and shaggy slippers of rose leather with ruby buckles, completed his costume, and when he was thus attired the shaggy man looked at himself in a long mirror with great admiration. On a table he found a mother-of-pearl chest decorated with delicate silver vines and flowers of clustered rubies, and on the cover was a silver plate engraved with these words:

THE SHAGGY MAN: HIS BOX OF ORNAMENTS

The chest was not locked, so he opened it and was almost dazzled by the brilliance of the rich jewels it contained. After admiring the pretty things, he took out a fine golden watch with a big chain, several handsome finger-rings,

and an ornament of rubies to pin upon the breast of his shaggy shirt-bosom. Having carefully brushed his hair and whiskers all the wrong way to make them look as shaggy as possible, the shaggy man breathed a deep sigh of joy and decided he was ready to meet the Royal Princess as soon as she sent for him. While he waited he returned to the beautiful sitting room and ate several of the red-cheeked apples to pass away the time.

Meanwhile, Dorothy had dressed herself in a pretty gown of soft grey embroidered with silver, and put a blue-and-gold suit of satin upon little Button-Bright, who looked as sweet as a cherub in it. Followed by the boy and Toto--the dog with a new green ribbon around his neck--she hastened down to the splendid drawing-room of the palace, where, seated upon an exquisite throne of carved malachite and nestled amongst its green satin cushions was the lovely Princess Ozma, waiting eagerly to welcome her friend.