

Chapter Twenty-Three

Ruggedo Reforms

It did not take them long to regain the royal cavern of the Nome King, where Kaliko ordered served to them the nicest refreshments the place afforded.

Ruggedo had come trailing along after the rest of the party and while no one paid any attention to the old King they did not offer any objection to his presence or command him to leave them. He looked fearfully to see if the eggs were still guarding the entrance, but they had now disappeared; so he crept into the cavern after the others and humbly squatted down in a corner of the room.

There Betsy discovered him. All of the little girl's companions were now so happy at the success of Shaggy's quest for his brother, and the laughter and merriment seemed so general, that Betsy's heart softened toward the friendless old man who had once been their bitter enemy, and she carried to him some of the food and drink. Ruggedo's eyes filled with tears at this unexpected kindness. He took the child's hand in his own and pressed it gratefully.

"Look here, Kaliko," said Betsy, addressing the new King, "what's the use of being hard on Ruggedo? All his magic power is gone, so he can't

do any more harm, and I'm sure he's sorry he acted so badly to everybody."

"Are you?" asked Kaliko, looking down at his former master.

"I am," said Ruggedo. "The girl speaks truly. I'm sorry and I'm harmless. I don't want to wander through the wide world, on top of the ground, for I'm a nome. No nome can ever be happy any place but underground."

"That being the case," said Kaliko, "I will let you stay here as long as you behave yourself; but, if you try to act badly again, I shall drive you out, as Tititi-Hoochoo has commanded, and you'll have to wander."

"Never fear. I'll behave," promised Ruggedo. "It is hard work being a King, and harder still to be a good King. But now that I am a common nome I am sure I can lead a blameless life."

They were all pleased to hear this and to know that Ruggedo had really reformed.

"I hope he'll keep his word," whispered Betsy to Shaggy; "but if he gets bad again we will be far away from the Nome Kingdom and Kaliko will have to 'tend to the old nome himself."

Polychrome had been a little restless during the last hour or two. The lovely Daughter of the Rainbow knew that she had now done all in her power to assist her earth friends, and so she began to long for her sky home.

"I think," she said, after listening intently, "that it is beginning to rain. The Rain King is my uncle, you know, and perhaps he has read my thoughts and is going to help me. Anyway I must take a look at the sky and make sure."

So she jumped up and ran through the passage to the outer entrance, and they all followed after her and grouped themselves on a ledge of the mountain-side. Sure enough, dark clouds had filled the sky and a slow, drizzling rain had set in.

"It can't last for long," said Shaggy, looking upward, "and when it stops we shall lose the sweet little fairy we have learned to love. Alas," he continued, after a moment, "the clouds are already breaking in the west, and--see!--isn't that the Rainbow coming?"

Betsy didn't look at the sky; she looked at Polychrome, whose happy, smiling face surely foretold the coming of her father to take her to the Cloud Palaces. A moment later a gleam of sunshine flooded the mountain and a gorgeous Rainbow appeared.

With a cry of gladness Polychrome sprang upon a point of rock and held

out her arms. Straightway the Rainbow descended until its end was at her very feet, when with a graceful leap she sprang upon it and was at once clasped in the arms of her radiant sisters, the Daughters of the Rainbow. But Polychrome released herself to lean over the edge of the glowing arch and nod, and smile and throw a dozen kisses to her late comrades.

"Good-bye!" she called, and they all shouted "Good-bye!" in return and waved their hands to their pretty friend.

Slowly the magnificent bow lifted and melted into the sky, until the eyes of the earnest watchers saw only fleecy clouds flitting across the blue.

"I'm dreadful sorry to see Polychrome go," said Betsy, who felt like crying; "but I s'pose she'll be a good deal happier with her sisters in the skypalaces."

"To be sure," returned Shaggy, nodding gravely. "It's her home, you know, and those poor wanderers who, like ourselves, have no home, can realize what that means to her."

"Once," said Betsy, "I, too, had a home. Now, I've only--only--dear old Hank!"

She twined her arms around her shaggy friend who was not human, and he

said: "Hee-haw!" in a tone that showed he understood her mood. And the shaggy friend who was human stroked the child's head tenderly and said: "You're wrong about that, Betsy, dear. I will never desert you."

"Nor I!" exclaimed Shaggy's brother, in earnest tones.

The little girl looked up at them gratefully, and her eyes smiled through their tears.

"All right," she said. "It's raining again, so let's go back into the cavern."

Rather soberly, for all loved Polychrome and would miss her, they reentered the dominions of the Nome King.