

Chapter Twenty-Five

The Land of Love

"Well, is 'hee-haw' all you are able to say?" inquired the Sawhorse, as he examined Hank with his knot eyes and slowly wagged the branch that served him for a tail.

They were in a beautiful stable in the rear of Ozma's palace, where the wooden Sawhorse--very much alive--lived in a gold-paneled stall, and where there were rooms for the Cowardly Lion and the Hungry Tiger, which were filled with soft cushions for them to lie upon and golden troughs for them to eat from.

Beside the stall of the Sawhorse had been placed another for Hank, the mule. This was not quite so beautiful as the other, for the Sawhorse was Ozma's favorite steed; but Hank had a supply of cushions for a bed (which the Sawhorse did not need because he never slept) and all this luxury was so strange to the little mule that he could only stand still and regard his surroundings and his queer companions with wonder and amazement.

The Cowardly Lion, looking very dignified, was stretched out upon the marble floor of the stable, eyeing Hank with a calm and critical gaze, while near by crouched the huge Hungry Tiger, who seemed equally

interested in the new animal that had just arrived. The Sawhorse, standing stiffly before Hank, repeated his question:

"Is 'hee-haw' all you are able to say?"

Hank moved his ears in an embarrassed manner.

"I have never said anything else, until now," he replied; and then he began to tremble with fright to hear himself talk.

"I can well understand that," remarked the Lion, wagging his great head with a swaying motion. "Strange things happen in this Land of Oz, as they do everywhere else. I believe you came here from the cold, civilized, outside world, did you not?"

"I did," replied Hank. "One minute I was outside of Oz--and the next minute I was inside! That was enough to give me a nervous shock, as you may guess; but to find myself able to talk, as Betsy does, is a marvel that staggers me."

"That is because you are in the Land of Oz," said the Sawhorse. "All animals talk, in this favored country, and you must admit it is more sociable than to bray your dreadful 'hee-haw,' which nobody can understand."

"Mules understand it very well," declared Hank.

"Oh, indeed! Then there must be other mules in your outside world," said the Tiger, yawning sleepily.

"There are a great many in America," said Hank. "Are you the only Tiger in Oz?"

"No," acknowledged the Tiger, "I have many relatives living in the Jungle Country; but I am the only Tiger living in the Emerald City."

"There are other Lions, too," said the Sawhorse; "but I am the only horse, of any description, in this favored Land."

"That is why this Land is favored," said the Tiger. "You must understand, friend Hank, that the Sawhorse puts on airs because he is shod with plates of gold, and because our beloved Ruler, Ozma of Oz, likes to ride upon his back."

"Betsy rides upon my back," declared Hank proudly.

"Who is Betsy?"

"The dearest, sweetest girl in all the world!"

The Sawhorse gave an angry snort and stamped his golden feet. The Tiger crouched and growled. Slowly the great Lion rose to his feet, his mane

bristling.

"Friend Hank," said he, "either you are mistaken in judgment or you are willfully trying to deceive us. The dearest, sweetest girl in the world is our Dorothy, and I will fight anyone--animal or human--who dares to deny it!"

"So will I!" snarled the Tiger, showing two rows of enormous white teeth.

"You are all wrong!" asserted the Sawhorse in a voice of scorn. "No girl living can compare with my mistress, Ozma of Oz!"

Hank slowly turned around until his heels were toward the others. Then he said stubbornly:

"I am not mistaken in my statement, nor will I admit there can be a sweeter girl alive than Betsy Bobbin. If you want to fight, come on--I'm ready for you!"

While they hesitated, eyeing Hank's heels doubtfully, a merry peal of laughter startled the animals and turning their heads they beheld three lovely girls standing just within the richly carved entrance to the stable. In the center was Ozma, her arms encircling the waists of Dorothy and Betsy, who stood on either side of her. Ozma was nearly half a head taller than the two other girls, who were almost of one

size. Unobserved, they had listened to the talk of the animals, which was a very strange experience indeed to little Betsy Bobbin.

"You foolish beasts!" exclaimed the Ruler of Oz, in a gentle but chiding voice. "Why should you fight to defend us, who are all three loving friends and in no sense rivals? Answer me!" she continued, as they bowed their heads sheepishly.

"I have the right to express my opinion, your Highness," pleaded the Lion.

"And so have the others," replied Ozma. "I am glad you and the Hungry Tiger love Dorothy best, for she was your first friend and companion. Also I am pleased that my Sawhorse loves me best, for together we have endured both joy and sorrow. Hank has proved his faith and loyalty by defending his own little mistress; and so you are all right in one way, but wrong in another. Our Land of Oz is a Land of Love, and here friendship outranks every other quality. Unless you can all be friends, you cannot retain our love."

They accepted this rebuke very meekly.

"All right," said the Sawhorse, quite cheerfully; "shake hoofs, friend Mule."

Hank touched his hoof to that of the wooden horse.

"Let us be friends and rub noses," said the Tiger. So Hank modestly rubbed noses with the big beast.

The Lion merely nodded and said, as he crouched before the mule:

"Any friend of a friend of our beloved Ruler is a friend of the Cowardly Lion. That seems to cover your case. If ever you need help or advice, friend Hank, call on me."

"Why, this is as it should be," said Ozma, highly pleased to see them so fully reconciled. Then she turned to her companions: "Come, my dears, let us resume our walk."

As they turned away Betsy said wonderingly:

"Do all the animals in Oz talk as we do?"

"Almost all," answered Dorothy. "There's a Yellow Hen here, and she can talk, and so can her chickens; and there's a Pink Kitten upstairs in my room who talks very nicely; but I've a little fuzzy black dog, named Toto, who has been with me in Oz a long time, and he's never said a single word but 'Bow-wow!'"

"Do you know why?" asked Ozma.

"Why, he's a Kansas dog; so I s'pose he's different from these fairy animals," replied Dorothy.

"Hank isn't a fairy animal, any more than Toto," said Ozma, "yet as soon as he came under the spell of our fairyland he found he could talk. It was the same way with Billina, the Yellow Hen whom you brought here at one time. The same spell has affected Toto, I assure you; but he's a wise little dog and while he knows everything that is said to him he prefers not to talk."

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I never s'pected Toto was fooling me all this time." Then she drew a small silver whistle from her pocket and blew a shrill note upon it. A moment later there was a sound of scurrying footsteps, and a shaggy black dog came running up the path.

Dorothy knelt down before him and shaking her finger just above his nose she said:

"Toto, haven't I always been good to you?"

Toto looked up at her with his bright black eyes and wagged his tail.

"Bow-wow!" he said, and Betsy knew at once that meant yes, as well as Dorothy and Ozma knew it, for there was no mistaking the tone of Toto's voice.

"That's a dog answer," said Dorothy. "How would you like it, Toto, if I said nothing to you but 'bow-wow'?"

Toto's tail was wagging furiously now, but otherwise he was silent.

"Really, Dorothy," said Betsy, "he can talk with his bark and his tail just as well as we can. Don't you understand such dog language?"

"Of course I do," replied Dorothy. "But Toto's got to be more sociable. See here, sir!" she continued, addressing the dog, "I've just learned, for the first time, that you can say words--if you want to. Don't you want to, Toto?"

"Woof!" said Toto, and that meant "no."

"Not just one word, Toto, to prove you're as any other animal in Oz?"

"Woof!"

"Just one word, Toto--and then you may run away."

He looked at her steadily a moment.

"All right. Here I go!" he said, and darted away as swift as an arrow.

Dorothy clapped her hands in delight, while Betsy and Ozma both laughed

heartily at her pleasure and the success of her experiment. Arm in arm they sauntered away through the beautiful gardens of the palace, where magnificent flowers bloomed in abundance and fountains shot their silvery sprays far into the air. And by and by, as they turned a corner, they came upon Shaggy Man and his brother, who were seated together upon a golden bench.

The two arose to bow respectfully as the Ruler of Oz approached them.

"How are you enjoying our Land of Oz?" Ozma asked the stranger.

"I am very happy here, Your Highness," replied Shaggy's brother. "Also I am very grateful to you for permitting me to live in this delightful place."

"You must thank Shaggy for that," said Ozma. "Being his brother, I have made you welcome here."

"When you know Brother better," said Shaggy earnestly, "you will be glad he has become one of your loyal subjects. I am just getting acquainted with him myself and I find much in his character to admire."

Leaving the brothers, Ozma and the girls continued their walk.

Presently Betsy exclaimed:

"Shaggy's brother can't ever be as happy in Oz as I am. Do you know,

Dorothy, I didn't believe any girl could ever have such a good time--anywhere--as I'm having now?"

"I know," answered Dorothy. "I've felt that way myself, lots of times."

"I wish," continued Betsy, dreamily, "that every little girl in the world could live in the Land of Oz; and every little boy, too!"

Ozma laughed at this.

"It is quite fortunate for us, Betsy, that your wish cannot be granted," said she, "for all that army of girls and boys would crowd us so that we would have to move away."

"Yes," agreed Betsy, after a little thought, "I guess that's true."

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