

## Chapter Five - The Little Old Man of the Island

A few steps brought them to the shed, which was merely a roof of boughs built over a square space, with some branches of trees fastened to the sides to keep off the wind. The front was quite open and faced the sea, and as our friends came nearer they observed a little man, with a long pointed beard, sitting motionless on a stool and staring thoughtfully out over the water.

"Get out of the way, please," he called in a fretful voice. "Can't you see you are obstructing my view?"

"Good morning," said Cap'n Bill, politely.

"It isn't a good morning!" snapped the little man. "I've seen plenty of mornings better than this. Do you call it a good morning when I'm pestered with such a crowd as you?"

Trot was astonished to hear such words from a stranger whom they had greeted quite properly, and Cap'n Bill grew red at the little man's rudeness. But the sailor said, in a quiet tone of voice:

"Are you the only one as lives on this 'ere island?"

"Your grammar's bad," was the reply. "But this is my own exclusive island, and I'll thank you to get off it as soon as possible."

"We'd like to do that," said Trot, and then she and Cap'n Bill turned away and walked down to the shore, to see if any other land was in sight.

The little man rose and followed them, although both were now too provoked to pay any attention to him.

"Nothin' in sight, partner," reported Cap'n Bill, shading his eyes with his hand; "so we'll have to stay here for a time, anyhow. It isn't a bad place, Trot, by any means."

"That's all you know about it!" broke in the little man. "The trees are altogether too green and the rocks are harder than they ought to be. I find the sand very grainy and the water dreadfully wet. Every breeze makes a draught and the sun shines in the daytime, when there's no need of it, and disappears just as soon as it begins to get dark. If you remain here you'll find the island very unsatisfactory."

Trot turned to look at him, and her sweet face was grave and curious.

"I wonder who you are," she said.

"My name is Pessim," said he, with an air of pride. "I'm called the Observer."

"Oh. What do you observe?" asked the little girl.

"Everything I see," was the reply, in a more surly tone. Then Pessim drew back with a startled exclamation and looked at some footprints in the sand. "Why, good gracious me!" he cried in distress.

"What's the matter now?" asked Cap'n Bill.

"Someone has pushed the earth in! Don't you see it?"

"It isn't pushed in far enough to hurt anything," said Trot, examining the footprints.

"Everything hurts that isn't right," insisted the man. "If the earth were pushed in a mile, it would be a great calamity, wouldn't it?"

"I s'pose so," admitted the little girl.

"Well, here it is pushed in a full inch! That's a twelfth of a foot, or a little more than a millionth part of a mile. Therefore it is one-millionth part of a calamity--Oh, dear! How dreadful!" said Pessim in a wailing voice.

"Try to forget it, sir," advised Cap'n Bill, soothingly. "It's beginning to rain. Let's get under your shed and keep dry."

"Raining! Is it really raining?" asked Pessim, beginning to weep.

"It is," answered Cap'n Bill, as the drops began to descend, "and I don't see any way to stop it--although I'm some observer myself."

"No; we can't stop it, I fear," said the man. "Are you very busy just now?"

"I won't be after I get to the shed," replied the sailor-man.

"Then do me a favor, please," begged Pessim, walking briskly along behind them, for they were hastening to the shed.

"Depends on what it is," said Cap'n Bill.

"I wish you would take my umbrella down to the shore and hold it over the poor fishes till it stops raining. I'm afraid they'll get wet," said Pessim.

Trot laughed, but Cap'n Bill thought the little man was poking fun at him and so he scowled upon Pessim in a way that showed he was angry.

They reached the shed before getting very wet, although the rain was now coming down in big drops. The roof of the shed protected them and while they stood watching the rainstorm something buzzed in and circled around Pessim's head. At once the Observer began beating it away with his hands, crying out:

"A bumblebee! A bumblebee! The queerest bumblebee I ever saw!"

Cap'n Bill and Trot both looked at it and the little girl said in surprise:

"Dear me! It's a wee little Ork!"

"That's what it is, sure enough," exclaimed Cap'n Bill.

Really, it wasn't much bigger than a big bumblebee, and when it came toward Trot she allowed it to alight on her shoulder.

"It's me, all right," said a very small voice in her ear; "but I'm in an awful pickle, just the same!"

"What, are you our Ork, then?" demanded the girl, much amazed.

"No, I'm my own Ork. But I'm the only Ork you know," replied the tiny creature.

"What's happened to you?" asked the sailor, putting his head close to Trot's shoulder in order to hear the reply better. Pessim also put his head close, and the Ork said:

"You will remember that when I left you I started to fly over the trees, and just as I got to this side of the forest I saw a bush that was loaded down with the most luscious fruit you can imagine. The fruit was about the size of a gooseberry and of a lovely lavender color. So I swooped down and picked off one in my bill and ate it. At once I began to grow small. I could feel myself shrinking, shrinking away, and it frightened me terribly, so that I lighted on the ground to think over what was happening. In a few seconds I had shrunk to the size you now see me; but there I remained, getting no smaller, indeed, but no larger. It is certainly a dreadful affliction! After I had recovered somewhat from the shock I began to search for you. It is not so easy to find one's way when a creature is so small, but fortunately I spied you here in this shed and came to you at once."

Cap'n Bill and Trot were much astonished at this story and felt grieved for the poor Ork, but the little man Pessim seemed to think it a good joke. He began laughing when he heard the story and laughed until he choked, after which he lay down on the ground and rolled and laughed again, while the tears of merriment coursed down his wrinkled cheeks.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" he finally gasped, sitting up and wiping his eyes. "This is too rich! It's almost too joyful to be true."

"I don't see anything funny about it," remarked Trot indignantly.

"You would if you'd had my experience," said Pessim, getting upon his feet and gradually resuming his solemn and dissatisfied expression of countenance.

"The same thing happened to me."

"Oh, did it? And how did you happen to come to this island?" asked the girl.

"I didn't come; the neighbors brought me," replied the little man, with a frown at the recollection. "They said I was quarrelsome and fault-finding and blamed me because I told them all the things that went wrong, or never were right, and because I told them how things ought to be. So they brought me here and left me all alone, saying that if I quarreled with myself, no one else would be made unhappy. Absurd, wasn't it?"

"Seems to me," said Cap'n Bill, "those neighbors did the proper thing."

"Well," resumed Pessim, "when I found myself King of this island I was obliged to live upon fruits, and I found many fruits growing here that I had never seen before. I tasted several and found them good and wholesome. But one day I ate a lavender berry--as the Ork did--and immediately I grew so small that I was scarcely two inches high. It was a very unpleasant condition and like the Ork I became frightened. I could not walk very well nor very far, for every lump of earth in my way seemed a mountain, every blade of grass a tree and every grain of sand a rocky boulder. For several days I stumbled around in an agony of fear. Once a tree toad nearly gobbled me up, and if I ran out from the shelter of the bushes the gulls and cormorants swooped down upon me. Finally I decided to eat another berry and become nothing at all, since life, to one as small as I was, had become a dreary nightmare.

"At last I found a small tree that I thought bore the same fruit as that I had eaten. The berry was dark purple instead of light lavender, but otherwise it was quite similar. Being unable to climb the tree, I was obliged to wait underneath it until a sharp breeze arose and shook the limbs so that a berry

fell. Instantly I seized it and taking a last view of the world--as I then thought--I ate the berry in a twinkling. Then, to my surprise, I began to grow big again, until I became of my former stature, and so I have since remained. Needless to say, I have never eaten again of the lavender fruit, nor do any of the beasts or birds that live upon this island eat it."

They had all three listened eagerly to this amazing tale, and when it was finished the Ork exclaimed:

"Do you think, then, that the deep purple berry is the antidote for the lavender one?"

"I'm sure of it," answered Pessim.

"Then lead me to the tree at once!" begged the Ork, "for this tiny form I now have terrifies me greatly."

Pessim examined the Ork closely

"You are ugly enough as you are," said he. "Were you any larger you might be dangerous."

"Oh, no," Trot assured him; "the Ork has been our good friend. Please take us to the tree."

Then Pessim consented, although rather reluctantly. He led them to the right, which was the east side of the island, and in a few minutes brought them near to the edge of the grove which faced the shore of the ocean. Here stood a small tree bearing berries of a deep purple color. The fruit looked very enticing and Cap'n Bill reached up and selected one that seemed especially plump and ripe.

The Ork had remained perched upon Trot's shoulder but now it flew down to the ground. It was so difficult for Cap'n Bill to kneel down, with his wooden leg, that the little girl took the berry from him and held it close to the Ork's head.

"It's too big to go into my mouth," said the little creature, looking at the fruit sidewise.

"You'll have to make sev'ral mouthfuls of it, I guess," said Trot; and that is what the Ork did. He pecked at the soft, ripe fruit with his bill and ate it up very quickly, because it was good.

Even before he had finished the berry they could see the Ork begin to grow. In a few minutes he had regained his natural size and was strutting before them, quite delighted with his transformation.

"Well, well! What do you think of me now?" he asked proudly.

"You are very skinny and remarkably ugly," declared Pessim.

"You are a poor judge of Orks," was the reply. "Anyone can see that I'm much handsomer than those dreadful things called birds, which are all fluff and feathers."

"Their feathers make soft beds," asserted Pessim. "And my skin would make excellent drumheads," retorted the Ork. "Nevertheless, a plucked bird or a skinned Ork would be of no value to himself, so we needn't brag of our usefulness after we are dead. But for the sake of argument, friend Pessim, I'd like to know what good you would be, were you not alive?"

"Never mind that," said Cap'n Bill. "He isn't much good as he is."

"I am King of this Island, allow me to say, and you're intruding on my property," declared the little man, scowling upon them. "If you don't like me--and I'm sure you don't, for no one else does--why don't you go away and leave me to myself?"

"Well, the Ork can fly, but we can't," explained Trot, in answer. "We don't want to stay here a bit, but I don't see how we can get away."

"You can go back into the hole you came from."

Cap'n Bill shook his head; Trot shuddered at the thought; the Ork laughed aloud.

"You may be King here," the creature said to Pessim, "but we intend to run this island to suit ourselves, for we are three and you are one, and the balance of power lies with us."

The little man made no reply to this, although as they walked back to the shed his face wore its fiercest scowl. Cap'n Bill gathered a lot of leaves and, assisted by Trot, prepared two nice beds in opposite corners of the shed. Pessim slept in a hammock which he swung between two trees.

They required no dishes, as all their food consisted of fruits and nuts picked from the trees; they made no fire, for the weather was warm and there was

nothing to cook; the shed had no furniture other than the rude stool which the little man was accustomed to sit upon. He called it his "throne" and they let him keep it.

So they lived upon the island for three days, and rested and ate to their hearts' content. Still, they were not at all happy in this life because of Pessim. He continually found fault with them, and all that they did, and all their surroundings. He could see nothing good or admirable in all the world and Trot soon came to understand why the little man's former neighbors had brought him to this island and left him there, all alone, so he could not annoy anyone. It was their misfortune that they had been led to this place by their adventures, for often they would have preferred the company of a wild beast to that of Pessim.

On the fourth day a happy thought came to the Ork. They had all been racking their brains for a possible way to leave the island, and discussing this or that method, without finding a plan that was practical. Cap'n Bill had said he could make a raft of the trees, big enough to float them all, but he had no tools except those two pocketknives and it was not possible to chop down tree with such small blades.

"And s'pose we got afloat on the ocean," said Trot, "where would we drift to, and how long would it take us to get there?"

Cap'n Bill was forced to admit he didn't know. The Ork could fly away from the island any time it wished to, but the queer creature was loyal to his new friends and refused to leave them in such a lonely, forsaken place.

It was when Trot urged him to go, on this fourth morning, that the Ork had his happy thought.

"I will go," said he, "if you two will agree to ride upon my back."

"We are too heavy; you might drop us," objected Cap'n Bill.

"Yes, you are rather heavy for a long journey," acknowledged the Ork, "but you might eat of those lavender berries and become so small that I could carry you with ease."

This quaint suggestion startled Trot and she looked gravely at the speaker while she considered it, but Cap'n Bill gave a scornful snort and asked:

"What would become of us afterward? We wouldn't be much good if we were some two or three inches high. No, Mr. Ork, I'd rather stay here, as I am, than be a hop-o'-my-thumb somewhere else."

"Why couldn't you take some of the dark purple berries along with you, to eat after we had reached our destination?" inquired the Ork. "Then you could grow big again whenever you pleased."

Trot clapped her hands with delight.

"That's it!" she exclaimed. "Let's do it, Cap'n Bill."

The old sailor did not like the idea at first, but he thought it over carefully and the more he thought the better it seemed.

"How could you manage to carry us, if we were so small?" he asked.

"I could put you in a paper bag, and tie the bag around my neck."

"But we haven't a paper bag," objected Trot.

The Ork looked at her.

"There's your sunbonnet," it said presently, "which is hollow in the middle and has two strings that you could tie around my neck."

Trot took off her sunbonnet and regarded it critically. Yes, it might easily hold both her and Cap'n Bill, after they had eaten the lavender berries and been reduced in size. She tied the strings around the Ork's neck and the sunbonnet made a bag in which two tiny people might ride without danger of falling out. So she said:

"I b'lieve we'll do it that way, Cap'n."

Cap'n Bill groaned but could make no logical objection except that the plan seemed to him quite dangerous--and dangerous in more ways than one.

"I think so, myself," said Trot soberly. "But nobody can stay alive without getting into danger sometimes, and danger doesn't mean getting hurt, Cap'n; it only means we might get hurt. So I guess we'll have to take the risk."

"Let's go and find the berries," said the Ork.

They said nothing to Pessim, who was sitting on his stool and scowling dismally as he stared at the ocean, but started at once to seek the trees that



bore the magic fruits. The Ork remembered very well where the lavender berries grew and led his companions quickly to the spot.

Cap'n Bill gathered two berries and placed them carefully in his pocket. Then they went around to the east side of the island and found the tree that bore the dark purple berries.

"I guess I'll take four of these," said the sailor-man, "so in case one doesn't make us grow big we can eat another."

"Better take six," advised the Ork. "It's well to be on the safe side, and I'm sure these trees grow nowhere else in all the world."

So Cap'n Bill gathered six of the purple berries and with their precious fruit they returned to the shed to bid good-bye to Pessim. Perhaps they would not have granted the surly little man this courtesy had they not wished to use him to tie the sunbonnet around the Ork's neck.

When Pessim learned they were about to leave him he at first looked greatly pleased, but he suddenly recollected that nothing ought to please him and so began to grumble about being left alone.

"We knew it wouldn't suit you," remarked Cap'n Bill. "It didn't suit you to have us here, and it won't suit you to have us go away."

"That is quite true," admitted Pessim. "I haven't been suited since I can remember; so it doesn't matter to me in the least whether you go or stay."

He was interested in their experiment, however, and willingly agreed to assist, although he prophesied they would fall out of the sunbonnet on their way and be either drowned in the ocean or crushed upon some rocky shore. This uncheerful prospect did not daunt Trot, but it made Cap'n Bill quite nervous.

"I will eat my berry first," said Trot, as she placed her sunbonnet on the ground, in such manner that they could get into it.

Then she ate the lavender berry and in a few seconds became so small that Cap'n Bill picked her up gently with his thumb and one finger and placed her in the middle of the sunbonnet. Then he placed beside her the six purple berries--each one being about as big as the tiny Trot's head--and all preparations being now made the old sailor ate his lavender berry and became very small--wooden leg and all!

Cap'n Bill stumbled sadly in trying to climb over the edge of the sunbonnet and pitched in beside Trot headfirst, which caused the unhappy Pessim to laugh with glee. Then the King of the Island picked up the sunbonnet--so rudely that he shook its occupants like peas in a pod--and tied it, by means of its strings, securely around the Ork's neck.

"I hope, Trot, you sewed those strings on tight," said Cap'n Bill anxiously.

"Why, we are not very heavy, you know," she replied, "so I think the stitches will hold. But be careful and not crush the berries, Cap'n."

"One is jammed already," he said, looking at them.

"All ready?" asked the Ork.

"Yes!" they cried together, and Pessim came close to the sunbonnet and called out to them: "You'll be smashed or drowned, I'm sure you will! But farewell, and good riddance to you."

The Ork was provoked by this unkind speech, so he turned his tail toward the little man and made it revolve so fast that the rush of air tumbled Pessim over backward and he rolled several times upon the ground before he could stop himself and sit up. By that time the Ork was high in the air and speeding swiftly over the ocean.