

Chapter Eleven - The Wicked King and Googly-Goo

When our friends approached the great doorway of the castle they found it guarded by several soldiers dressed in splendid uniforms. They were armed with swords and lances. Cap'n Bill walked straight up to them and asked:

"Does the King happen to be at home?"

"His Magnificent and Glorious Majesty, King Krewl, is at present inhabiting his Royal Castle," was the stiff reply.

"Then I guess we'll go in an' say how-d'ye-do," continued Cap'n Bill, attempting to enter the doorway. But a soldier barred his way with a lance.

"Who are you, what are your names, and where do you come from?" demanded the soldier.

"You wouldn't know if we told you," returned the sailor, "seein' as we're strangers in a strange land."

"Oh, if you are strangers you will be permitted to enter," said the soldier, lowering his lance. "His Majesty is very fond of strangers."

"Do many strangers come here?" asked Trot.

"You are the first that ever came to our country," said the man. "But his Majesty has often said that if strangers ever arrived in Jinxland he would see that they had a very exciting time."

Cap'n Bill scratched his chin thoughtfully. He wasn't very favorably impressed by this last remark. But he decided that as there was no way of escape from Jinxland it would be wise to confront the King boldly and try to win his favor. So they entered the castle, escorted by one of the soldiers.

It was certainly a fine castle, with many large rooms, all beautifully furnished. The passages were winding and handsomely decorated, and after following several of these the soldier led them into an open court that occupied the very center of the huge building. It was surrounded on every side by high turreted walls, and contained beds of flowers, fountains and walks of many colored marbles which were matched together in quaint designs. In an open space near the middle of the court they saw a group of courtiers and their ladies, who surrounded a lean man who wore upon his head a jeweled crown. His face was hard and sullen and through the slits of his half-closed eyelids the

eyes glowed like coals of fire. He was dressed in brilliant satins and velvets and was seated in a golden throne-chair.

This personage was King Krewl, and as soon as Cap'n Bill saw him the old sailor knew at once that he was not going to like the King of Jinxland.

"Hello! who's here?" said his Majesty, with a deep scowl.

"Strangers, Sire," answered the soldier, bowing so low that his forehead touched the marble tiles.

"Strangers, eh? Well, well; what an unexpected visit! Advance, strangers, and give an account of yourselves."

The King's voice was as harsh as his features. Trot shuddered a little but Cap'n Bill calmly replied:

"There ain't much for us to say, 'cept as we've arrived to look over your country an' see how we like it. Judgin' from the way you speak, you don't know who we are, or you'd be jumpin' up to shake hands an' offer us seats. Kings usually treat us pretty well, in the great big Outside World where we come from, but in this little kingdom--which don't amount to much, anyhow--folks don't seem to 'a' got much culchure."

The King listened with amazement to this bold speech, first with a frown and then gazing at the two children and the old sailor with evident curiosity. The courtiers were dumb with fear, for no one had ever dared speak in such a manner to their self-willed, cruel King before. His Majesty, however, was somewhat frightened, for cruel people are always cowards, and he feared these mysterious strangers might possess magic powers that would destroy him unless he treated them well. So he commanded his people to give the new arrivals seats, and they obeyed with trembling haste.

After being seated, Cap'n Bill lighted his pipe and began puffing smoke from it, a sight so strange to them that it filled them all with wonder. Presently the King asked:

"How did you penetrate to this hidden country? Did you cross the desert or the mountains?"

"Desert," answered Cap'n Bill, as if the task were too easy to be worth talking about.

"Indeed! No one has ever been able to do that before," said the King.

"Well, it's easy enough, if you know how," asserted Cap'n Bill, so carelessly that it greatly impressed his hearers. The King shifted in his throne uneasily. He was more afraid of these strangers than before.

"Do you intend to stay long in Jinxland?" was his next anxious question.

"Depends on how we like it," said Cap'n Bill. "Just now I might suggest to your Majesty to order some rooms got ready for us in your dinky little castle here. And a royal banquet, with some fried onions an' pickled tripe, would set easy on our stomicks an' make us a bit happier than we are now."

"Your wishes shall be attended to," said King Krewl, but his eyes flashed from between their slits in a wicked way that made Trot hope the food wouldn't be poisoned. At the King's command several of his attendants hastened away to give the proper orders to the castle servants and no sooner were they gone than a skinny old man entered the courtyard and bowed before the King.

This disagreeable person was dressed in rich velvets, with many furbelows and laces. He was covered with golden chains, finely wrought rings and jeweled ornaments. He walked with mincing steps and glared at all the courtiers as if he considered himself far superior to any or all of them.

"Well, well, your Majesty; what news--what news?" he demanded, in a shrill, cracked voice.

The King gave him a surly look.

"No news, Lord Googly-Goo, except that strangers have arrived," he said.

Googly-Goo cast a contemptuous glance at Cap'n Bill and a disdainful one at Trot and Button-Bright. Then he said:

"Strangers do not interest me, your Majesty. But the Princess Gloria is very interesting--very interesting, indeed! What does she say, Sire? Will she marry me?"

"Ask her," retorted the King.

"I have, many times; and every time she has refused."

"Well?" said the King harshly.

"Well," said Googly-Goo in a jaunty tone, "a bird that can sing, and won't sing, must be made to sing."

"Huh!" sneered the King. "That's easy, with a bird; but a girl is harder to manage."

"Still," persisted Googly-Goo, "we must overcome difficulties. The chief trouble is that Gloria fancies she loves that miserable gardener's boy, Pon. Suppose we throw Pon into the Great Gulf, your Majesty?"

"It would do you no good," returned the King. "She would still love him."

"Too bad, too bad!" sighed Googly-Goo. "I have laid aside more than a bushel of precious gems--each worth a king's ransom--to present to your Majesty on the day I wed Gloria."

The King's eyes sparkled, for he loved wealth above everything; but the next moment he frowned deeply again.

"It won't help us to kill Pon," he muttered. "What we must do is kill Gloria's love for Pon."

"That is better, if you can find a way to do it," agreed Googly-Goo. "Everything would come right if you could kill Gloria's love for that gardener's boy. Really, Sire, now that I come to think of it, there must be fully a bushel and a half of those jewels!"

Just then a messenger entered the court to say that the banquet was prepared for the strangers. So Cap'n Bill, Trot and Button-Bright entered the castle and were taken to a room where a fine feast was spread upon the table.

"I don't like that Lord Googly-Goo," remarked Trot as she was busily eating.

"Nor I," said Cap'n Bill. "But from the talk we heard I guess the gardener's boy won't get the Princess."

"Perhaps not," returned the girl; "but I hope old Googly doesn't get her, either."

"The King means to sell her for all those jewels," observed Button-Bright, his mouth half full of cake and jam.

"Poor Princess!" sighed Trot. "I'm sorry for her, although I've never seen her. But if she says no to Googly-Goo, and means it, what can they do?"

"Don't let us worry about a strange Princess," advised Cap'n Bill. "I've a notion we're not too safe, ourselves, with this cruel King."

The two children felt the same way and all three were rather solemn during the remainder of the meal.

When they had eaten, the servants escorted them to their rooms. Cap'n Bill's room was way to one end of the castle, very high up, and Trot's room was at the opposite end, rather low down. As for Button-Bright, they placed him in the middle, so that all were as far apart as they could possibly be. They didn't like this arrangement very well, but all the rooms were handsomely furnished and being guests of the King they dared not complain.

After the strangers had left the courtyard the King and Googly-Goo had a long talk together, and the King said:

"I cannot force Gloria to marry you just now, because those strangers may interfere. I suspect that the wooden-legged man possesses great magical powers, or he would never have been able to carry himself and those children across the deadly desert."

"I don't like him; he looks dangerous," answered Googly-Goo. "But perhaps you are mistaken about his being a wizard. Why don't you test his powers?"

"How?" asked the King.

"Send for the Wicked Witch. She will tell you in a moment whether that wooden-legged person is a common man or a magician."

"Ha! that's a good idea," cried the King. "Why didn't I think of the Wicked Witch before? But the woman demands rich rewards for her services."

"Never mind; I will pay her," promised the wealthy Googly-Goo.

So a servant was dispatched to summon the Wicked Witch, who lived but a few leagues from King Krewl's castle. While they awaited her, the withered old courtier proposed that they pay a visit to Princess Gloria and see if she was not now in a more complaisant mood. So the two started away together and searched the castle over without finding Gloria.

At last Googly-Goo suggested she might be in the rear garden, which was a large park filled with bushes and trees and surrounded by a high wall. And what was their anger, when they turned a corner of the path, to find in a quiet nook the beautiful Princess, and kneeling before her, Pon, the gardener's boy! With a roar of rage the King dashed forward; but Pon had scaled the wall by means of a ladder, which still stood in its place, and when he saw the King

coming he ran up the ladder and made good his escape. But this left Gloria confronted by her angry guardian, the King, and by old Googly-Goo, who was trembling with a fury he could not express in words.

Seizing the Princess by her arm the King dragged her back to the castle. Pushing her into a room on the lower floor he locked the door upon the unhappy girl. And at that moment the arrival of the Wicked Witch was announced.

Hearing this, the King smiled, as a tiger smiles, showing his teeth. And Googly-Goo smiled, as a serpent smiles, for he had no teeth except a couple of fangs. And having frightened each other with these smiles the two dreadful men went away to the Royal Council Chamber to meet the Wicked Witch.