

Chapter Fifteen - Trot Meets the Scarecrow

Trot and Pon covered many leagues of ground, searching through forests, in fields and in many of the little villages of Jinxland, but could find no trace of either Cap'n Bill or Button-Bright. Finally they paused beside a cornfield and sat upon a stile to rest. Pon took some apples from his pocket and gave one to Trot. Then he began eating another himself, for this was their time for luncheon. When his apple was finished Pon tossed the core into the field.

"Tchuk-tchuk!" said a strange voice. "What do you mean by hitting me in the eye with an apple-core?"

Then rose up the form of the Scarecrow, who had hidden himself in the cornfield while he examined Pon and Trot and decided whether they were worthy to be helped.

"Excuse me," said Pon. "I didn't know you were there."

"How did you happen to be there, anyhow?" asked Trot.

The Scarecrow came forward with awkward steps and stood beside them.

"Ah, you are the gardener's boy," he said to Pon. Then he turned to Trot. "And you are the little girl who came to Jinxland riding on a big bird, and who has had the misfortune to lose her friend, Cap'n Bill, and her chum, Button-Bright."

"Why, how did you know all that?" she inquired.

"I know a lot of things," replied the Scarecrow, winking at her comically. "My brains are the Carefully-Assorted, Double-Distilled, High-Efficiency sort that the Wizard of Oz makes. He admits, himself, that my brains are the best he ever manufactured."

"I think I've heard of you," said Trot slowly, as she looked the Scarecrow over with much interest; "but you used to live in the Land of Oz."

"Oh, I do now," he replied cheerfully. "I've just come over the mountains from the Quadling Country to see if I can be of any help to you."

"Who, me?" asked Pon.

"No, the strangers from the big world. It seems they need looking after."

"I'm doing that myself," said Pon, a little ungraciously. "If you will pardon me for saying so, I don't see how a Scarecrow with painted eyes can look after anyone."

"If you don't see that, you are more blind than the Scarecrow," asserted Trot. "He's a fairy man, Pon, and comes from the fairyland of Oz, so he can do 'most anything. I hope," she added, turning to the Scarecrow, "you can find Cap'n Bill for me."

"I will try, anyhow," he promised. "But who is that old woman who is running toward us and shaking her stick at us?"

Trot and Pon turned around and both uttered an exclamation of fear. The next instant they took to their heels and ran fast up the path. For it was old Blinkie, the Wicked Witch, who had at last traced them to this place. Her anger was so great that she was determined not to abandon the chase of Pon and Trot until she had caught and punished them. The Scarecrow understood at once that the old woman meant harm to his new friends, so as she drew near he stepped before her. His appearance was so sudden and unexpected that Blinkie ran into him and toppled him over, but she tripped on his straw body and went rolling in the path beside him.

The Scarecrow sat up and said: "I beg your pardon!" but she whacked him with her stick and knocked him flat again. Then, furious with rage, the old witch sprang upon her victim and began pulling the straw out of his body. The poor Scarecrow was helpless to resist and in a few moments all that was left of him was an empty suit of clothes and a heap of straw beside it. Fortunately, Blinkie did not harm his head, for it rolled into a little hollow and escaped her notice. Fearing that Pon and Trot would escape her, she quickly resumed the chase and disappeared over the brow of a hill, following the direction in which she had seen them go.

Only a short time elapsed before a gray grasshopper with a wooden leg came hopping along and lit directly on the upturned face of the Scarecrow's head.

"Pardon me, but you are resting yourself upon my nose," remarked the Scarecrow.

"Oh! are you alive?" asked the grasshopper.

"That is a question I have never been able to decide," said the Scarecrow's head. "When my body is properly stuffed I have animation and can move around as well as any live person. The brains in the head you are now

occupying as a throne, are of very superior quality and do a lot of very clever thinking. But whether that is being alive, or not, I cannot prove to you; for one who lives is liable to death, while I am only liable to destruction."

"Seems to me," said the grasshopper, rubbing his nose with his front legs, "that in your case it doesn't matter--unless you're destroyed already."

"I am not; all I need is re-stuffing," declared the Scarecrow; "and if Pon and Trot escape the witch, and come back here, I am sure they will do me that favor."

"Tell me! Are Trot and Pon around here?" inquired the grasshopper, its small voice trembling with excitement.

The Scarecrow did not answer at once, for both his eyes were staring straight upward at a beautiful face that was slightly bent over his head. It was, indeed, Princess Gloria, who had wandered to this spot, very much surprised when she heard the Scarecrow's head talk and the tiny gray grasshopper answer it.

"This," said the Scarecrow, still staring at her, "must be the Princess who loves Pon, the gardener's boy."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the grasshopper--who of course was Cap'n Bill--as he examined the young lady curiously.

"No," said Gloria frigidly, "I do not love Pon, or anyone else, for the Wicked Witch has frozen my heart."

"What a shame!" cried the Scarecrow. "One so lovely should be able to love. But would you mind, my dear, stuffing that straw into my body again?"

The dainty Princess glanced at the straw and at the well-worn blue Munchkin clothes and shrank back in disdain. But she was spared from refusing the Scarecrow's request by the appearance of Trot and Pon, who had hidden in some bushes just over the brow of the hill and waited until old Blinkie had passed them by. Their hiding place was on the same side as the witch's blind eye, and she rushed on in the chase of the girl and the youth without being aware that they had tricked her.

Trot was shocked at the Scarecrow's sad condition and at once began putting the straw back into his body. Pon, at sight of Gloria, again appealed to her to take pity on him, but the frozen-hearted Princess turned coldly away and with a sigh the gardener's boy began to assist Trot.

Neither of them at first noticed the small grasshopper, which at their appearance had skipped off the Scarecrow's nose and was now clinging to a wisp of grass beside the path, where he was not likely to be stepped upon. Not until the Scarecrow had been neatly restuffed and set upon his feet again--when he bowed to his restorers and expressed his thanks--did the grasshopper move from his perch. Then he leaped lightly into the path and called out:

"Trot--Trot! Look at me. I'm Cap'n Bill! See what the Wicked Witch has done to me."

The voice was small, to be sure, but it reached Trot's ears and startled her greatly. She looked intently at the grasshopper, her eyes wide with fear at first; then she knelt down and, noticing the wooden leg, she began to weep sorrowfully.

"Oh, Cap'n Bill--dear Cap'n Bill! What a cruel thing to do!" she sobbed.

"Don't cry, Trot," begged the grasshopper. "It didn't hurt any, and it doesn't hurt now. But it's mighty inconvenient an' humiliatin', to say the least."

"I wish," said the girl indignantly, while trying hard to restrain her tears, "that I was big 'nough an' strong 'nough to give that horrid witch a good beating. She ought to be turned into a toad for doing this to you, Cap'n Bill!"

"Never mind," urged the Scarecrow, in a comforting voice, "such a transformation doesn't last always, and as a general thing there's some way to break the enchantment. I'm sure Glinda could do it, in a jiffy."

"Who is Glinda?" inquired Cap'n Bill.

Then the Scarecrow told them all about Glinda, not forgetting to mention her beauty and goodness and her wonderful powers of magic. He also explained how the Royal Sorceress had sent him to Jinxland especially to help the strangers, whom she knew to be in danger because of the wiles of the cruel King and the Wicked Witch.