

Chapter Sixteen - Pon Summons the King to Surrender

Gloria had drawn near to the group to listen to their talk, and it seemed to interest her in spite of her frigid manner. They knew, of course, that the poor Princess could not help being cold and reserved, so they tried not to blame her.

"I ought to have come here a little sooner," said the Scarecrow, regretfully; "but Glinda sent me as soon as she discovered you were here and were likely to get into trouble. And now that we are all together--except Button-Bright, over whom it is useless to worry--I propose we hold a council of war, to decide what is best to be done."

That seemed a wise thing to do, so they all sat down upon the grass, including Gloria, and the grasshopper perched upon Trot's shoulder and allowed her to stroke him gently with her hand.

"In the first place," began the Scarecrow, "this King Krewl is a usurper and has no right to rule this Kingdom of Jinxland."

"That is true," said Pon, eagerly. "My father was King before him, and I--"

"You are a gardener's boy," interrupted the Scarecrow. "Your father had no right to rule, either, for the rightful King of this land was the father of Princess Gloria, and only she is entitled to sit upon the throne of Jinxland."

"Good!" exclaimed Trot. "But what'll we do with King Krewl? I s'pose he won't give up the throne unless he has to."

"No, of course not," said the Scarecrow. "Therefore it will be our duty to make him give up the throne."

"How?" asked Trot.

"Give me time to think," was the reply. "That's what my brains are for. I don't know whether you people ever think, or not, but my brains are the best that the Wizard of Oz ever turned out, and if I give them plenty of time to work, the result usually surprises me."

"Take your time, then," suggested Trot. "There's no hurry."

"Thank you," said the straw man, and sat perfectly still for half an hour. During this interval the grasshopper whispered in Trot's ear, to which he was

very close, and Trot whispered back to the grasshopper sitting upon her shoulder. Pon cast loving glances at Gloria, who paid not the slightest heed to them.

Finally the Scarecrow laughed aloud.

"Brains working?" inquired Trot.

"Yes. They seem in fine order to-day. We will conquer King Krewl and put Gloria upon his throne as Queen of Jinxland."

"Fine!" cried the little girl, clapping her hands together gleefully. "But how?"

"Leave the how to me," said the Scarecrow proudly. "As a conqueror I'm a wonder. We will, first of all, write a message to send to King Krewl, asking him to surrender. If he refuses, then we will make him surrender."

"Why ask him, when we know he'll refuse?" inquired Pon.

"Why, we must be polite, whatever we do," explained the Scarecrow. "It would be very rude to conquer a King without proper notice."

They found it difficult to write a message without paper, pen and ink, none of which was at hand; so it was decided to send Pon as a messenger, with instructions to ask the King, politely but firmly, to surrender.

Pon was not anxious to be the messenger. Indeed, he hinted that it might prove a dangerous mission. But the Scarecrow was now the acknowledged head of the Army of Conquest, and he would listen to no refusal. So off Pon started for the King's castle, and the others accompanied him as far as his hut, where they had decided to await the gardener's boy's return.

I think it was because Pon had known the Scarecrow such a short time that he lacked confidence in the straw man's wisdom. It was easy to say: "We will conquer King Krewl," but when Pon drew near to the great castle he began to doubt the ability of a straw-stuffed man, a girl, a grasshopper and a frozen-hearted Princess to do it. As for himself, he had never thought of defying the King before.

That was why the gardener's boy was not very bold when he entered the castle and passed through to the enclosed court where the King was just then seated, with his favorite courtiers around him. None prevented Pon's entrance, because he was known to be the gardener's boy, but when the King saw him he began to frown fiercely. He considered Pon to be to blame for all his trouble

with Princess Gloria, who since her heart had been frozen had escaped to some unknown place, instead of returning to the castle to wed Googly-Goo, as she had been expected to do. So the King bared his teeth angrily as he demanded:

"What have you done with Princess Gloria?"

"Nothing, your Majesty! I have done nothing at all," answered Pon in a faltering voice. "She does not love me any more and even refuses to speak to me."

"Then why are you here, you rascal?" roared the King.

Pon looked first one way and then another, but saw no means of escape; so he plucked up courage.

"I am here to summon your Majesty to surrender."

"What!" shouted the King. "Surrender? Surrender to whom?"

Pon's heart sank to his boots.

"To the Scarecrow," he replied.

Some of the courtiers began to titter, but King Krewl was greatly annoyed. He sprang up and began to beat poor Pon with the golden staff he carried. Pon howled lustily and would have run away had not two of the soldiers held him until his Majesty was exhausted with punishing the boy. Then they let him go and he left the castle and returned along the road, sobbing at every step because his body was so sore and aching.

"Well," said the Scarecrow, "did the King surrender?"

"No; but he gave me a good drubbing!" sobbed poor Pon.

Trot was very sorry for Pon, but Gloria did not seem affected in any way by her lover's anguish. The grasshopper leaped to the Scarecrow's shoulder and asked him what he was going to do next.

"Conquer," was the reply. "But I will go alone, this time, for beatings cannot hurt me at all; nor can lance thrusts--or sword cuts--or arrow pricks."

"Why is that?" inquired Trot.

"Because I have no nerves, such as you meat people possess. Even grasshoppers have nerves, but straw doesn't; so whatever they do--except just one thing--they cannot injure me. Therefore I expect to conquer King Krewl with ease."

"What is that one thing you excepted?" asked Trot.

"They will never think of it, so never mind. And now, if you will kindly excuse me for a time, I'll go over to the castle and do my conquering."

"You have no weapons," Pon reminded him.

"True," said the Scarecrow. "But if I carried weapons I might injure someone--perhaps seriously--and that would make me unhappy. I will just borrow that riding-whip, which I see in the corner of your hut, if you don't mind. It isn't exactly proper to walk with a riding-whip, but I trust you will excuse the inconsistency."

Pon handed him the whip and the Scarecrow bowed to all the party and left the hut, proceeding leisurely along the way to the King's castle.