

The Ninth Surprise - THE WIZARD AND THE PRINCESS

Within the depths of the mountains which bordered the Valley of Mo to the east lived a Wicked Wizard in a cavern of rubies. It was many, many feet below the surface of the earth and cut off entirely from the rest of the world, save for one passage which led through dangerous caves and tunnels to the top of the highest mountain. So that, in order to get out of his cavern, the Wizard was obliged to come to this mountain top, and from there descend to the outside world.

The Wizard lived all alone; but he did not mind that, for his thoughts were always on his books and studies, and he seldom showed himself on the surface of the earth. But when he did go out every one laughed at him; for this powerful magician was no taller than my knee, and was very old and wrinkled, so that he looked comical indeed beside an ordinary man.

The Wizard was nearly as sensitive as he was wicked, and was sorry he had not grown as big as other people; so the laughter that always greeted him made him angry.

At last he determined to find some magical compound that would make him grow bigger. He shut himself up in his cave and searched diligently amongst his books until, finally, he found a formula recommended by some dead and gone magician as sure to make any one grow a foot each day so long as the dose was taken. Most of the ingredients were quite easy to procure, being such as spiders' livers, kerosene oil and the teeth of canary birds, mixed together in a boiling caldron. But the last item of the recipe was so unusual that it made the Wizard scratch his head in perplexity.

It was the big toe of a young and beautiful princess.

The Wizard thought on the matter for three days, but nowhere could he think of a young and beautiful princess who would willingly part with her big toe--even that he might grow to be as big as he wished.

Then, as such a thing was not to be come by honestly, the Wicked Wizard resolved to steal it. So he went through all the caves and passages until he came to the mountain-top. Standing on the point of a

rock he placed one hand on his chin and the other on the back of his neck, and then recited the following magical incantation:

"I wish to go To steal the big toe Of a princess I know, In
order to grow Quite big. And so I'll change, to a crow!"

No sooner had he spoken the words than he changed into a Black Crow, and flew away into the Valley of Mo, where he hid himself in a tall tree that grew near the King's palace.

That morning, as the Princess Truella was lying late in bed, with one of her dainty pink feet sticking out from under the covers, in through the window fluttered a Black Crow, which picked off her big toe and immediately flew away with it.

The Princess awoke with a scream and was horrified to find her beautiful foot ruined by the loss of her biggest toe. When the King and Queen and the Princes and Princesses, having heard her outcry, came running in to see what was the matter, they were each and all very indignant at the theft.

But, search as they might, nowhere could they find the audacious Black Crow, nor the Princess' big toe, and the whole court was in despair.

Finally Timtom, who was now a Prince, suggested that Truella seek assistance from the kind sorceress Maetta, who had helped him out of his own difficulties. The Princess thought well of this idea, and determined to undertake a journey to the castle.

She whistled for her favorite Stork, and soon the great bird came to her side. It was pure white, and of an extraordinary size. When the Stork had been saddled the Princess kissed her father and mother good by and seated herself on the bird's back, when it instantly rose into the air and flew away toward the castle of Maetta.

Traveling in this pleasant way, high in the air, the Princess crossed the River of Needles and the deep gulf and the dangerous wood, and at last was set down safe at the castle gates.

Maetta welcomed the pretty Princess very cordially and, on being told of her misfortune, at once agreed to assist her. So the sorceress consulted her Oracle, which told her truly anything she wanted to know, and then said to the Princess:

"Your toe is in the possession of the Wicked Wizard who lives in the ruby cave under the mountains. In order to recover it you must go yourself to seek it; but I warn you that the Wizard will put every obstacle in your path to prevent your finding the toe and taking it from him."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Truella, "I am afraid I shall never be able to get my toe from such a horrid man."

"Have courage, and trust in me," returned Maetta, "for I believe my powers are stronger than his. I shall now furnish you the weapons you must use to overcome him. Here is a magic umbrella, and in this basket which you must carry on your arm, you will find a lump of putty, an iron ball, a mirror, a package of chewing-gum and a magic veil, all of which will be very useful. Here, also, is a winged dagger, with which you must protect yourself if the Wizard attempts to harm you. With these enchanted weapons and a brave heart I believe you will succeed. So kiss me, my child, and start on your journey."

Truella thanked the kind sorceress, and mounting the saddle of her Stork flew away toward the high mountain in which dwelt the Wicked Wizard.

But the naughty man, by means of his black magic, saw her coming, and sent such a fierce wind to blow against her that it prevented the Stork from making any headway through the air. Therefore, in spite of his huge wings and remarkable strength, the brave bird was unable to get an inch nearer the mountain.

When Truella saw this she put up the umbrella and held it in front of the Stork; whereupon, being shielded from the wind, he flew easily to the mountain.

The Princess now dismounted and, looking into the hole at the top of the mountain, discovered a flight of stairs leading downward.

Taking her basket on her arm, as she had been directed, Truella walked boldly down the steps until she came to a door. But then she shrank back in affright, for before the door was coiled a great serpent, not quite a mile long and fully as large around as a stick of wood. The girl knew she must manage in some way to overcome this terrible creature, so when the serpent opened its mouth and raised its head to bite her, she reached within the basket, and finding the lump of putty, threw it

quickly into the serpent's mouth. The creature snapped its jaws together so suddenly that its teeth stuck fast in the putty, and this made it so furious that it wriggled around until it had tied itself into a hard knot, and could wriggle no longer.

Seeing there was no further danger, the Princess passed the door and entered a large cave, which was but dimly lighted. While she paused to allow her eyes to become accustomed to the darkness, so she might see her way, a faint rustling sound reached her ears, and a moment later there came toward her a hideous old woman, lean and bent, with wrinkled face and piercing black eyes. She had only one tooth, but that was of enormous size, being nearly as large as the tusk of an elephant; and it curved out of her mouth and down under her chin, where it ended in a very sharp point. Her finger-nails were a foot long, and they, also, were very sharp and strong.

"What are you doing here?" asked the old woman, in a harsh voice, while she moved her horrible fingers, as if about to scratch out Truella's eyes.

"I came to see the Wizard," said the Princess, calmly, "and if you will allow me to pass I shall give you, in return for the favor, some delicious chewing-gum."

"Chewing-gum!" croaked the old woman, "what is that?"

"It is a dainty of which all ladies are very fond," replied Truella, taking the packet from her basket. "This is it."

The old woman hesitated a moment, and then said:

"Well, I'll try the chewing-gum and see what it is like; there will be plenty of time to scratch out your eyes afterwards."

She placed the gum in her mouth and tried to chew it, but when she shut her jaws together the great tusk went straight through her neck and came out at the back. The old hag gave a scream and put up her hands to pull out the tusk again, but so great was her excitement that in her haste she scratched out both her own eyes, and could no longer see where the Princess was standing.

So Truella ran through the cave and came to, a door, on which she knocked. Instantly it flew open, and before her she saw another cave, this time brightly lighted, but filled with knives and daggers, which were

flying about in every direction. To enter this cave was impossible, for the Princess saw she would immediately be pierced by dozens of the sharp daggers. So she hesitated for a time, not knowing how to proceed; but, chancing to remember her basket, she took from it the iron ball, which she tossed into the center of the Cave of Daggers. At once the dangerous weapons began to strike against the ball, and as soon as they touched it they were broken and fell to the floor. In a short time every one of the knives and daggers had been spoiled by contact with the iron ball, and Truella passed safely through the cave and came to another long stairway leading downward. At the bottom of this she reached the third cave, and came upon a horrible monster.

It had the body of a zebra, the legs of a rhinoceros, the neck of a giraffe, the head of a bull dog, and three corrugated tails. This monster at once began to growl and run toward her, showing its terrible teeth and lashing its three tails. The Princess snatched the mirror from her basket and, as the creature came near her, she held the glittering surface before its eyes. It gave one look into the mirror and fell lifeless at her feet, being frightened to death by its own reflection in the mirror.

Truella now walked through several more caves and descended a long flight of stairs, which brought her to another door, on which was a sign that read:

"A. WIZARD, Esq., Office hours: From 10:45 until a quarter to 11."

The Princess, knowing that she had now reached the den of the Wizard who had stolen her big toe, knocked boldly on the door.

"Come in!" called a voice.

Truella obeyed, and found herself in a large cave, the walls of which were lined with rubies. In each of the four corners were big electric lights, and these, shining upon the rubies, filled the cave with a deep red glow. The Wizard himself sat at his desk in one of the corners, and when the Princess entered he looked up and exclaimed:

"What! Is it you? Really, I did not expect to see you. How did you manage to pass the guards I placed within the caves and passageways to prevent your coming here?"

"Oh, that was not difficult," answered Truella, "for you must know I am protected by a power stronger than your own."

The Wizard was much annoyed at this reply, for he knew it was true, and that only by cunning could he hope to oppose the pretty Princess. Still, he was resolved not to give up the big toe unless obliged to, for it was necessary to complete the magic compound.

"What do you want?" he asked, after a moment's thought.

"I want the toe you stole from me while I was asleep."

The Wizard knew it was useless to deny the theft, so he replied:

"Very well; take a chair, and I will see if I can find it."

But Truella feared the little man was deceiving her; so when he turned his back she took the magic veil from her basket and threw it over her head. Immediately it began unfolding until it covered her completely, from head to foot.

The Wizard walked over to a cupboard, which he opened; and, while pretending to search for the toe, he suddenly turned on a big faucet that was concealed under a shelf. At once the thunder rolled, the lightning flashed, and from the arched ceiling of the cavern drops of fire began to fall, coming thicker and thicker until a perfect shower of burning drops filled the room.

These fell hissing upon Truella's veil, but could not penetrate it, for they all bounded off and were scattered upon the rocky floor, where they soon burned themselves out. Seeing this the Wizard gave a sigh of disappointment and turned off the faucet, when the fire-drops ceased to fall.

"Please excuse this little interruption," he said, as if he had not been the cause of it himself. "I'll find the toe in a few minutes. I must have mislaid it somewhere."

But Truella suspected he was up to more mischief, and was on her guard. She saw him stealthily press a button, and in the same instant a deep gulf opened in the floor of the cave, half way between the Princess and the Wizard.

Truella did not know what this meant, at first, unless it was to prevent her getting across the room to where her toe was; but soon she noticed that the gulf was moving toward her, slowly, but steadily; and, as it

extended across the cave from wall to wall, it would in time be sure to reach the spot where she stood, when she would, of course, fall into it.

When she saw her danger the Princess became frightened, and tried to escape through the door by which she had entered; but to her dismay she found it locked. Then she turned to look at the Wizard. The little man had perched himself upon a high stool, and was carelessly swinging his feet and laughing with glee at Truella's awful peril. He thought that at last he had certainly found a way to destroy her. The poor Princess again looked into the gulf, which was gradually getting nearer and nearer; and she shuddered at its vast depths.

A cold wind began to sweep up from the abyss, and she heard mocking laughter and savage growls from below, as if evil spirits were eagerly waiting to seize her.

Just as she was giving way to despair, and the gulf had crept very close to her feet, Truella thought of her winged dagger. She drew it from her bosom and, pointing it toward her enemy, said:

"Save me from the Wizard's art-- Fly until you reach his heart. Foil his power and set me free, This is my command to thee!"

In a flash the dagger flew from her hand and struck the Wizard full on his breast. With a loud cry he fell forward into the gulf, which in the same instant closed up with a crash. Then, when the rocks about her had ceased trembling from the shock, the door swung open, leaving the Princess at liberty to go where she pleased.

She now searched the Wizard's cupboard until she found her toe, which had been safely hidden in a little ivory box. Truella stopped only long enough to put on her toe, and then she ran through the caves and up the stairways until she reached the top of the mountain again.

There she found her Stork patiently awaiting her and, having seated herself on its back, she rode safely and triumphantly back to her father's palace.

The King and Queen were delighted when she recounted to them the success of her adventure, but they shuddered when they learned of the fearful dangers their sweet little daughter had encountered.

"It seems to me," said the good Queen, "that a big toe is scarcely worth all the trouble you have had in recovering it."

"Perhaps not," replied the Princess, thoughtfully; "but a big toe is very handy to have when you wish to dance; and, after all, I succeeded in destroying the Wicked Wizard, which surely repays me for the trials I have been forced to undergo."