

CHAPTER 5 - THE BOOLOOROO OF THE BLUES

Cap'n Bill suspected that these remarks were addressed to him, but he couldn't move just then because the seat was across him, and a boy and girl were sprawling on the seat. As the Magic Umbrella was now as motionless as any ordinary umbrella might be, Button-Bright first released the catch and closed it up, after which he unhooked the crooked handle from the rope and rose to his feet. Trot had managed by this time to stand up, and she pulled the board off from Cap'n Bill. All this time the shrill, excited voice was loudly complaining because the sailor was on his feet, and Trot looked to see who was making the protest, while Cap'n Bill rolled over and got on his hands and knees so he could pull his meat leg and his wooden leg into an upright position, which wasn't a very easy thing to do.

Button-Bright and Trot were staring with all their might at the queerest person they had ever seen. They decided it must be a man because he had two long legs, a body as round as a ball, a neck like an ostrich, and a comical little head set on the top of it. But the most curious thing about him was his skin, which was of a lovely sky-blue tint. His eyes were also sky-blue, and his hair, which was trained straight up and ended in a curl at the top of his head, was likewise blue in color and matched his skin and his eyes. He wore tight-fitting clothes made of sky-blue silk, with a broad blue ruffle around his long neck, and on his breast glittered a magnificent jewel in the form of a star, set with splendid blue stones.

If the blue man astonished the travelers, they were no less surprised by his surroundings, for look where they might, everything they beheld was of the same blue color as the sky above. They seemed to have landed in a large garden, surrounded by a high wall of blue stone. The trees were all blue, the grass was blue, the flowers were blue, and even the pebbles in the paths were blue. There were many handsomely carved benches and seats of blue wood scattered about the garden, and near them stood a fountain made of blue marble, which shot lovely sprays of blue water into the blue air.

But the angry inhabitants of this blue place would not permit them to look around them in peace, for as soon as Cap'n Bill rolled off his toes, he began dancing around in an excited way and saying very disrespectful things of his visitors. "You brutes! You apes! You miserable, white-skinned creatures! How dare you come into my garden and knock me on the head with that awful basket and then fall on my toes and cause me pain and suffering? How dare

you, I say? Don't you know you will be punished for your impudence? Don't you know the Boolooroo of the Blues will have revenge? I can have you patched for this insult, and I will--just as sure as I'm the Royal Boolooroo of Sky Island!"

"Oh, is this Sky Island, then?" asked Trot.

"Of course it's Sky Island. What else could it be? And I'm its Ruler, its King, its sole Royal Potentate and Dictator. Behold in the Personage you have injured the Mighty Quitey Righty Boolooroo of the Blues!" Here he strutted around in a very pompous manner and wagged his little head contemptuously at them.

"Glad to meet you, sir," said Cap'n Bill. "I allus had a likin' for kings, bein' as they're summat unusual. Please 'scuse me for a-sittin' on your royal toes, not knowin' as your toes were there."

"I won't excuse you!" roared the Boolooroo. "But I'll punish you. You may depend upon that."

"Seems to me," said Trot, "you're actin' rather imperlite to strangers. If anyone comes to our country to visit us, we always treat 'em decent."

"YOUR country!" exclaimed the Boolooroo, looking at them more carefully and seeming interested in their appearance. "Where in the Sky did you come from, then, and where is your country located?"

"We live on the Earth when we're at home," replied the girl.

"The Earth? Nonsense! I've heard of the Earth, my child, but it isn't inhabited. No one can live there because it's just a round, cold, barren ball of mud and water," declared the Blueskin.

"Oh, you're wrong about that," said Button-Bright.

"You surely are," added Cap'n Bill.

"Why, we live there ourselves," cried Trot.

"I don't believe it. I believe you are living in Sky Island, where you have no right to be, with your horrid white skins. And you've intruded into the private garden of the palace of the Greatly Stately Irately Boolooroo, which is a criminal offense. And you've bumped my head with your basket and smashed my toes with your boards and bodies, which is a crime unparalleled in all the history of Sky Island! Aren't you sorry for yourselves?"

"I'm sorry for you," replied Trot, "'cause you don't seem to know the proper way to treat visitors. But we won't stay long. We'll go home pretty soon."

"Not until you have been punished!" exclaimed the Boolooroo sternly. "You are my prisoners."

"Beg parding, your Majesty," said Cap'n Bill, "but you're takin' a good deal for granted. We've tried to be friendly and peaceable, an' we've 'poligized for hurtin' you, but if that don't satisfy you, you'll have to make the most of it. You may be the Boolooroo of the Blues, but you ain't even a tin whistle to us, an' you can't skeer us for half a minute. I'm an ol' man, myself, but if you don't behave, I'll spank you like I would a baby, an' it won't be any trouble at all to do it, thank'e. As a matter o' fact, we've captured your whole bloomin' blue island, but we don't like the place very much, and I guess we'll give it back. It gives us the blues, don't it, Trot? So as soon as we eat a bite of lunch from our basket, we'll sail away again."

"Sail away? How?" asked the Boolooroo.

"With the Magic Umbrel," said Cap'n Bill, pointing to the umbrella that Button-Bright was holding underneath his arm.

"Oh, ho! I see, I see," said the Boolooroo, nodding his funny head. "Go ahead, then, and eat your lunch."

He retreated a little way to a marble seat beside the fountain, but watched the strangers carefully. Cap'n Bill, feeling sure he had won the argument, whispered to the boy and girl that they must eat and get away as soon as possible, as this might prove a dangerous country for them to remain in. Trot longed to see more of the strange blue island, and especially wanted to explore the magnificent blue palace that adjoined the garden and which had six hundred tall towers and turrets; but she felt that her old friend was wise in advising them to get away quickly. So she opened the basket, and they all three sat in a row on a stone bench and began to eat sandwiches and cake and pickles and cheese and all the good things that were packed in the lunch basket.

They were hungry from the long ride, and while they ate they kept their eyes busily employed in examining all the queer things around them. The Boolooroo seemed quite the queerest of anything, and Trot noticed that when he pulled the long curl that stuck up from the top of his head, a bell tinkled somewhere in the palace. He next pulled at the bottom of his right ear, and

another faraway bell tinkled; then he touched the end of his nose, and still another bell was faintly heard. The Boolooroo said not a word while he was ringing the bells, and Trot wondered if that was the way he amused himself. But now the frown died away from his face and was replaced with a look of satisfaction.

"Have you nearly finished?" he inquired.

"No," said Trot, "we've got to eat our apples yet."

"Apples? Apples? What are apples?" he asked.

Trot took some from the basket. "Have one?" she said. "They're awful good."

The Boolooroo advanced a step and took the apple, which he regarded with much curiosity.

"Guess they don't grow anywhere but on the Earth," remarked Cap'n Bill.

"Are they good to eat?" asked the Boolooroo.

"Try it and see," answered Trot, biting into an apple herself.

The Blueskin sat down on the end of their bench, next to Button-Bright, and began to eat his apple. He seemed to like it, for he finished it in a hurry, and when it was gone he picked up the Magic Umbrella.

"Let that alone!" said Button-Bright, making a grab for it. But the Boolooroo jerked it away in an instant, and standing up he held the umbrella behind him and laughed aloud.

"Now then," said he, "you can't get away until I'm willing to let you go. You are my prisoners."

"I guess not," returned Cap'n Bill, and reaching out one of his long arms, the sailorman suddenly grasped the Boolooroo around his long, thin neck and shook him until his whole body fluttered like a flag. "Drop that umbrel. Drop it!" yelled Cap'n Bill, and the Boolooroo quickly obeyed. The Magic Umbrella fell to the ground, and Button-Bright promptly seized it. Then the sailor let go his hold and the King staggered to a seat, choking and coughing to get his breath back.

"I told you to let things alone," growled Cap'n Bill. "If you don't behave, your Majesty, this Blue Island'll have to get another Boolooroo."

"Why?" asked the Blueskin.

"Because I'll prob'ly spoil you for a king, an' mebbe for anything else. Anyhow, you'll get badly damaged if you try to interfere with us, an' that's a fact."

"Don't kill him, Cap'n Bill," said Trot cheerfully.

"Kill me? Why, he couldn't do that," observed the King, who was trying to rearrange the ruffle around his neck. "Nothing can kill me."

"Why not?" asked Cap'n Bill.

"Because I haven't lived my six hundred years yet. Perhaps you don't know that every Blueskin in Sky Island lives exactly six hundred years from the time he is born."

"No, I didn't know that," admitted the sailor.

"It's a fact," said the King. "Nothing can kill us until we've lived to the last day of our appointed lives. When the final minute is up, we die; but we're obliged to live all of the six hundred years whether we want to or not. So you needn't think of trying to kill anybody on Sky Island. It can't be done."

"Never mind," said Cap'n Bill. "I'm no murderer, thank goodness, and I wouldn't kill you if I could, much as you deserve it."

"But isn't six hundred years an awful long time to live?" questioned Trot.

"It seems like it at first," replied the King, "but I notice that whenever any of my subjects get near the end of their six hundred, they grow nervous and say the life is altogether too short."

"How long have you lived?" asked Button-Bright.

The King coughed again and turned a bit bluer. "That is considered an impertinent question in Sky Island," he answered, "but I will say that every Boolooroo is elected to reign three hundred years, and I've reigned not quite--ahem!--two hundred."

"Are your kings elected, then?" asked Cap'n Bill.

"Yes, of course. This is a Republic, you know. The people elect all their officers from the King down. Every man and every woman is a voter. The Boolooroo tells them whom to vote for, and if they don't obey, they are severely punished. It's a fine system of government, and the only thing I object to is electing the

Booloroo for only three hundred years. It ought to be for life. My successor has already been elected, but he can't reign for a hundred years to come."

"I think three hundred years is plenty long enough," said Trot. "It gives someone else a chance to rule, an' I wouldn't be s'prised if the next king is a better one. Seems to me you're not much of a Booloroo."

"That," replied the King indignantly, "is a matter of opinion. I like myself very much, but I can't expect you to like me, because you're deformed and ignorant."

"I'm not!" cried Trot.

"Yes, you are. Your legs are too short and your neck is nothing at all. Your color is most peculiar, but there isn't a shade of blue about any of you, except the deep-blue color of the clothes the old ape that choked me wears. Also, you are ignorant because you know nothing of Sky Island, which is the Center of the Universe and the only place anyone would care to live."

"Don't listen to him, Trot," said Button-Bright. "He's an ignorant himself."

Cap'n Bill packed up the lunch basket. One end of the rope was still tied to the handle of the basket, and the other end to his swing seat, which lay on the ground before them.

"Well," said he, "let's go home. We've seen enough of this Blue Country and its Blue Booloroo, I guess, an' it's a long journey back again."

"All right," agreed Trot, jumping up.

Button-Bright stood on the bench and held up the Magic Umbrella, so he could open it, and the sailor had just attached the ropes when a thin blue line shot out from behind them and in a twinkling wound itself around the umbrella. At the same instant another blue cord wound itself around the boy's body, and others caught Trot and Cap'n Bill in their coils, so that all had their arms pinned fast to their sides and found themselves absolutely helpless.