

CHAPTER 6 - THE SIX SNUBNOSED PRINCESSES

The Boolooroo was laughing and dancing around in front of them as if well pleased. For a moment the prisoners could not imagine what had happened to them, but presently half a dozen Blueskins, resembling in shape and costume their ruler but less magnificently dressed, stepped in front of them and bowed low to the Boolooroo.

"Your orders, most Mighty, Flighty, Tight and Righty Monarch, have been obeyed," said the leader.

"Very well, Captain. Take that umbrella and carry it to my Royal Treasury. See that it is safely locked up. Here's the key, and if you don't return it to me within five minutes, I'll have you patched."

The Captain took the key and the Magic Umbrella and hastened away to the palace. Button-Bright had already hooked the ropes to the elephant-trunk handle, so that when the Captain carried away the umbrella, he dragged after him first the double seat, then Cap'n Bill's seat, which was fastened to it, and finally the lunch-basket, which was attached to the lower seat. At every few steps some of these would trip up the Captain and cause him to take a tumble, but as he had only five minutes' time in which to perform his errand, he would scramble to his feet again and dash along the path until a board or the basket tripped him up again.

They all watched him with interest until he had disappeared within the palace, when the King turned to his men and said:

"Release the prisoners. They are now quite safe, and cannot escape me."

So the men unwound the long cords that were twined around the bodies of our three friends, and set them free. These men seemed to be soldiers, although they bore no arms except the cords. Each cord had a weight at the end, and when the weight was skillfully thrown by a soldier, it wound the cord around anything in the twinkling of an eye and held fast until it was unwound again.

Trot decided these Blueskins must have stolen into the garden when summoned by the bells the Boolooroo had rung, but they had kept out of sight

and crept up behind the bench on which our friends were seated until a signal from the king aroused them to action.

The little girl was greatly surprised by the suddenness of her capture, and so was Button-Bright. Cap'n Bill shook his head and said he was afeared they'd get into trouble. "Our mistake," he added, "was in stoppin' to eat our lunch. But it's too late now to cry over spilt milk."

"I don't mind, not much anyhow," asserted Trot bravely. "We're in no hurry to get back, are we, Button-Bright?"

"I'm not," said the boy. "If they hadn't taken the umbrella, I wouldn't care how long we stopped in this funny island. Do you think it's a fairy country, Trot?"

"Can't say, I'm sure," she answered. "I haven't seen anything here yet that reminds me of fairies, but Cap'n Bill said a floating island in the sky was sure to be a fairyland."

"I think so yet, mate," returned the sailor. "But there's all sorts o' fairies, I've heard. Some is good, an' some is bad, an' if all the Blueskins are like their Boolooroo, they can't be called fust-class."

"Don't let me hear any more impudence, prisoners!" called the Boolooroo sternly. "You are already condemned to severe punishment, and if I have any further trouble with you, you are liable to be patched."

"What's being patched?" inquired the girl.

The soldiers all laughed at this question, but the King did not reply. Just then a door in the palace opened and out trooped a group of girls. There were six of them, all gorgeously dressed in silken gowns with many puffs and tucks and ruffles and flounces and laces and ribbons, everything being in some shade of blue, grading from light blue to deep blue. Their blue hair was elaborately dressed and came to a point at the top of their heads. The girls approached in a line along the garden path, all walking with mincing steps and holding their chins high. Their skirts prevented their long legs from appearing as grotesque as did those of the men, but their necks were so thin and long that the ruffles around them only made them seem the more absurd.

"Ah," said the King with a frown, "here come the Six Snubnosed Princesses, the most beautiful and aristocratic ladies in Sky Island."

"They're snubnosed, all right," observed Trot, looking at the girls with much interest, "but I should think it would make 'em mad to call 'em that."

"Why?" asked the Boolooroo in surprise. "Is not a snub nose the highest mark of female beauty?"

"Is it?" asked the girl.

"Most certainly. In this favored island, which is the Center of the Universe, a snub nose is an evidence of high breeding which any lady would be proud to possess."

The Six Snubnosed Princesses now approached the fountain and stood in a row, staring with haughty looks at the strangers.

"Goodness me, your Majesty!" exclaimed the first. "What queer, dreadful-looking creatures are these? Where in all the Sky did they come from?"

"They say they came from the Earth, Cerulia," answered the Boolooroo.

"But that is impossible," said another Princess. "Our scientists have proved that the Earth is not inhabited."

"Your scientists'll have to guess again, then," said Trot.

"But how did they get to Sky Island?" inquired the third snubnosed one.

"By means of a Magic Umbrella, which I have captured and put away in my Treasure Chamber," replied the Boolooroo.

"What will you do with the monsters, papa?" asked the fourth Princess.

"I haven't decided yet," said the Boolooroo. "They're curiosities, you see, and may serve to amuse us. But as they're only half civilized, I shall make them my slaves."

"What are they good for? Can they do anything useful?" asked the fifth.

"We'll see," returned the King impatiently. "I can't decide in a hurry. Give me time, Azure, give me time. If there's anything I hate, it's a hurry."

"I've an idea, your Majesty," announced the sixth Snubnosed Princess, whose complexion was rather darker than that of her sisters, "and it has come to me quite deliberately, without any hurry at all. Let us take the little girl to be our maid--to wait upon us and amuse us when we're dull. All the other ladies of

the court will be wild with envy, and if the child doesn't prove of use to us, we can keep her for a living pincushion."

"Oh! Ah! That will be fine!" cried all the other five, and the Boolooroo said:

"Very well, Indigo, it shall be as you desire." Then he turned to Trot and added, "I present you to the Six Lovely Snubnosed Princesses, to be their slave. If you are good and obedient, you won't get your ears boxed oftener than once an hour."

"I won't be anybody's slave," protested Trot. "I don't like these snubnosed, fussy females, an' I won't have anything to do with 'em."

"How impudent!" cried Cerulia.

"How vulgar!" cried Turquoise.

"How unladylike!" cried Sapphire.

"How silly!" cried Azure.

"How absurd!" cried Cobalt.

"How wicked!" cried Indigo. And then all six held up their hands as if horrified.

The Boolooroo laughed. "You'll know how to bring her to time, I imagine," he remarked, "and if the girl isn't reasonable and obedient, send her to me and I'll have her patched. Now, then, take her away."

But Trot was obstinate and wouldn't budge a step. "Keep us together, your Majesty," begged Cap'n Bill. "If we're to be slaves, don't separate us, but make us all the same kind o' slaves."

"I shall do what pleases me," declared the Boolooroo angrily. "Don't try to dictate, old Moonface, for there's only one Royal Will in Sky Island, and that's my own."

He then gave a command to a soldier, who hastened away to the palace and soon returned with a number of long, blue ribbons. One he tied around Trot's waist and then attached to it six other ribbons. Each of the Six Snubnosed Princesses held the end of a ribbon, and then they turned and marched haughtily away to the palace, dragging the little girl after them.

"Don't worry, Trot," cried Button-Bright. "We'll get you out of this trouble pretty soon."

"Trust to us, mate," added Cap'n Bill. "We'll manage to take care o' you."

"Oh, I'm all right," answered Trot with fine courage. "I'm not afraid of these gawkies."

But the princesses pulled her after them, and soon they had all disappeared into one of the entrances to the Blue Palace.

"Now, then," said the Boolooroo. "I will instruct you two in your future duties. I shall make old Moonface--"

"My name's Cap'n Bill Weedles," interrupted the sailor.

"I don't care what your name is. I shall call you old Moonface," replied the king, "for that suits you quite well. I shall appoint you the Royal Nectar Mixer to the court of Sky Island, and if you don't mix our nectar properly, I'll have you patched."

"How do you mix it?" asked Cap'n Bill.

"I don't mix it. It's not the Boolooroo's place to mix nectar," was the stern reply. "But you may inquire of the palace servants, and perhaps the Royal Chef or the Major-domo will condescend to tell you. Take him to the servants' quarters, Captain Ultramarine, and give him a suit of the royal livery."

So Cap'n Bill was lad away by the chief of the soldiers, and when he had gone, the king said to Button-Bright, "You, slave, shall be the Royal Bootblue. Your duty will be to keep the boots and shoes of the royal family nicely polished with blue."

"I don't know how," answered Button-Bright surlily.

"You'll soon learn. The Royal Steward will supply you with blue paste, and when you've brushed this on our shoes, you must shine them with Q-rays of Moonshine. Do you understand?"

"No," said Button-Bright.

Then the Boolooroo told one of the soldiers to take the boy to the shoeblue den and have him instructed in his duties, and the soldiers promptly obeyed and dragged Button-Bright away to the end of the palace where the servants lived.