

## CHAPTER 10 - THE KING'S TREASURE CHAMBER

All the Blueskins assembled in the servants' hall were amazed to see the pets of the Princesses trailing after the strange little girl, but Trot took her place next to Button-Bright at the table, and the parrot perched upon her shoulder, while the peacock stood upon one side of her chair, and the lamb upon the other, and the cat and dog lay at her feet and the blue rabbit climbed into her lap and cuddled down there. Some of the Blueskins insisted that the animals and birds must be put out of the room, but Ghip-Ghisizzle said they could remain, as they were the favored pets of the lovely Snubnosed Princesses.

Cap'n Bill was delighted to see his dear little friend again, and so was Button-Bright, and now that they were reunited--for a time, at least--they paid little heed to the sour looks and taunting remarks of the ugly Blueskins and ate heartily of the dinner, which was really very good.

The meal was no sooner over than Ghip-Ghisizzle was summoned to the chamber of his Majesty the Boolooroo, but before he went away, he took Trot and Cap'n Bill and Button-Bright into a small room and advised them to stay there until he returned so that the servants and soldiers would not molest them. "My people seem to dislike strangers," said the Majordomo thoughtfully, "and that surprises me because you are the first strangers they have ever seen. I think they imagine you will become favorites of the Boolooroo and of the Princesses, and that is why they are jealous and hate you."

"They needn't worry 'bout that," replied Trot. "The Snubnoses hate me worse than the people do."

"I can't imagine a bootblue becoming a royal favorite," grumbled Button-Bright.

"Or a necktie mixer," added Cap'n Bill.

"You don't mix neckties; you're a nectar mixer," said Ghip-Ghisizzle correcting the sailor. "I'll not be gone long, for I'm no favorite of the Boolooroo, either, so please stay quietly in this room until my return."

The Majordomo found the Boolooroo in a bad temper. He had finished his dinner, where his six daughters had bitterly denounced Trot all through the meal and implored their father to invent some new and terrible punishment for her. Also, his wife, the Queen, had made him angry by begging for gold to buy ribbons with. Then, when he had retired to his own private room, he

decided to send for the umbrella he had stolen from Button-Bright and test its magic powers. But the umbrella, in his hands, proved just as common as any other umbrella might be. He opened it and closed it, and turned it this way and that, commanding it to do all sorts of things, but of course the Magic Umbrella would obey no one but a member of the family that rightfully owned it. At last the Boolooroo threw it down and stamped upon it and then kicked it into a corner, where it rolled underneath a cabinet. Then he sent for Ghip-Ghisizzle.

"Do you know how to work that Magic Umbrella?" he asked the Majordomo.

"No, your Majesty, I do not," was the reply.

"Well, find out. Make the Whiteskins tell you so that I can use it for my own amusement."

"I'll do my best, your Majesty," said Ghip-Ghisizzle.

"You'll do more than that, or I'll have you patched!" roared the angry Boolooroo. "And don't waste any time, either, for as soon as we find out the secret of the umbrella I'm going to have the three strangers marched through the Arch of Phinis, and that will be the end of them."

"You can't do that, your Majesty," said the Majordomo.

"Why can't I?"

"They haven't lived six hundred years yet, and only those who have lived that length of time are allowed to march through the Arch of Phinis into the Great Blue Grotto."

The King looked at him with a sneer. "Has anyone ever come out of that Arch alive?" he asked.

"No," said Ghip-ghisizzle, "but no one has ever gone into the Blue Grotto until his allotted time was up."

"Well, I'm going to try the experiment," declared the Boolooroo. "I shall march these three strangers through the Arch, and if by chance they come out alive, I'll do a new sort of patching--I'll chop off their heads and mix 'em up, putting the wrong head on each of 'em. Ha, ha! Won't it be funny to see the old Moonface's head on the little girl? Ho, ho! I really hope they'll come out of the Great Blue Grotto alive!"

"I also hope they will," replied Ghip-Ghisizzle.

"Then I'll bet you four buttonholes they don't. I've a suspicion that once they enter the Great Blue Grotto that's the last of them."

Ghip-Ghisizzle went away quite sad and unhappy. He did not approve the way the strangers were being treated and thought it was wicked and cruel to try to destroy them.

During his absence, the prisoners had been talking together very earnestly. "We must get away from here somehow 'r other," said Cap'n Bill, "but o' course we can't stir a step without the Magic Umbrel."

"No, I must surely manage to get my umbrella first," said Button-Bright.

"Do it quick, then," urged Trot, "for I can't stand those snubnoses much longer."

"I'll do it tonight," said the boy.

"The sooner, the better, my lad," remarked the sailor, "but seein' as the Blue Boolooroo has locked it up in his Treasure Chamber, it mayn't be easy to get hold of."

"No, it won't be easy," Button-Bright admitted. "But it has to be done, Cap'n Bill, and there's no use waiting any longer. No one here likes us, and in a few days they may make an end of us."

"Oh, Button-Bright! There's a Blue Wolf in the Treasure Chamber!" exclaimed Trot.

"Yes, I know."

"An' a patched man on guard outside," Cap'n Bill reminded him.

"I know," repeated Button-Bright.

"And the key's in the King's own pocket," added Trot despairingly.

The boy nodded. He didn't say how he would overcome all these difficulties, so the little girl feared they would never see the Magic Umbrella again. But their present position was a very serious one, and even Cap'n Bill dared not advise Button-Bright to give up the desperate attempt.

When Ghip-Ghisizzle returned, he said, "You must be very careful not to anger the Boolooroo, or he may do you a mischief. I think the little girl had better keep away from the Princesses for tonight unless they demand her presence. The boy must go for the King's shoes and blue them and polish them and then take them back to the Royal Bedchamber. Cap'n Bill won't have anything to do, for I've ordered Tiggie to mix the nectar."

"Thank 'e, friend Sizzle," said Cap'n Bill.

"Now follow me, and I will take you to your rooms."

He led them to the rear of the palace, where he gave them three small rooms on the ground floor, each having a bed in it. Cap'n Bill's room had a small door leading out into the street of the City, but Ghip Ghisizzle advised him to keep this door locked, as the city people would be sure to hurt the strangers if they had the chance to attack them.

"You're safer in the palace than anywhere else," said the Majordomo, "for there is no way you can escape from the island, and here the servants and soldiers dare not injure you for fear of the Boolooroo."

He placed Trot and her six pets--which followed her wherever she went--in one room, and Cap'n Bill in another, and took Button-Bright away with him to show the boy the way to the King's bedchamber. As they proceeded, they passed many rooms with closed doors, and before one of these a patched Blueskin was pacing up and down in a tired and sleepy way. It was Jimfred Jinksjones, the double of the Fredjim Jonesjinks they had talked with in the servants' hall, and he bowed low before the Majordomo.

"This is the King's new bootblue, a stranger who has lately arrived here," said Ghip-Ghisizzle, introducing the boy to the patched man.

"I'm sorry for him," muttered Jimfred. "He's a queer-looking chap, with his pale yellow skin, and I imagine our cruel Boolooroo is likely to patch him before long, as he did me--I mean us."

"No he won't," said Button-Bright positively. "The Boolooroo's afraid of me."

"Oh, that's different," said Jimfred. "You're the first person I ever knew that could scare our Boolooroo."

They passed on, and Ghip-Ghisizzle whispered, "That is the Royal Treasure Chamber." Button-Bright nodded. He had marked the place well so he

couldn't miss it when he wanted to find it again. When they came to the King's apartments there was another guard before the door, this time a long-necked soldier with a terrible scowl.

"This slave is the Royal Bootblue," said Ghip-Ghisizzle to the guard. "You will allow him to pass into his Majesty's chamber to get the royal shoes and to return them when they are blued."

"All right," answered the guard. "Our Boolooroo is in an ugly mood tonight. It will go hard with this little short-necked creature if he doesn't polish the shoes properly."

Then Ghip-Ghisizzle left Button-Bright and went away, and the boy passed through several rooms to the Royal Bedchamber, where his Majesty sat undressing.

"Hi, there! What are you doing here?" he roared as he saw Button-Bright.

"I've come for the shoes," said the boy.

The king threw them at his head, aiming carefully, but Button-Bright dodged the missiles, and one smashed a mirror while the other shattered a vase on a small table. His Majesty looked around for something else to throw, but the boy seized the shoes and ran away, returning to his own room.

While he polished the shoes he told his plans to Cap'n Bill and Trot and asked them to be ready to fly with him as soon as he returned with the Magic Umbrella. All they need to do was to step out into the street, through the door of Cap'n Bill's room, and open the umbrella. Fortunately, the seats and the lunch-basket were still attached to the handle--or so they thought--and there would be nothing to prevent their quickly starting on the journey home.

They waited a long time, however, to give the Boolooroo time to get to sleep, so it was after midnight when Button-Bright finally took the shoes in his hand and started for the Royal Bedchamber. He passed the guard of the Royal Treasury and Fredjim nodded good-naturedly to the boy. But the sleepy guard before the King's apartments was cross and surly.

"What are you doing here at this hour?" he demanded.

"I'm returning his Majesty's shoes," said Button-Bright.

"Go back and wait till morning," commanded the guard.

"If you prevent me from obeying the Boolooroo's orders," returned the boy quietly, "he will probably have you patched."

This threat frightened the long-necked guard, who did not know what orders the Boolooroo had given his Royal Bootblue. "Go in, then," said he, "but if you make a noise and waken his Majesty, the chances are you'll get yourself patched."

"I'll be quiet," promised the boy.

Indeed, Button-Bright had no desire to waken the Boolooroo, whom he found snoring lustily with the curtains of his high-posted bed drawn tightly around him. The boy had taken off his own shoes after he passed the guard and now he tiptoed carefully into the room, set down the royal shoes very gently and then crept to the chair where his Majesty's clothes were piled. Scarcely daring to breathe for fear of awakening the terrible monarch, the boy searched in the royal pockets until he found a blue-gold key attached to a blue-gold chain. At once he decided this must be the key to the Treasure Chamber, but in order to make sure he searched in every other pocket--without finding another key.

Then Button-Bright crept softly out of the room again, and in one of the outer rooms he sat down near a big cabinet and put on his shoes. Poor Button-Bright did not know that lying disregarded beneath that very cabinet at his side was the precious umbrella he was seeking, or that he was undertaking a desperate adventure all for nothing. He passed the long-necked guard again, finding the man half asleep, and then made his way to the Treasure Chamber. Facing Jimfred, he said to the patched man in a serious tone, "His Majesty commands you to go at once to the corridor leading to the apartments of the Six Snubnosed Princesses and to guard the entrance until morning. You are to permit no one to enter or leave the apartments."

"But--good gracious!" exclaimed the surprised Jimfred. "Who will guard the Treasure Chamber?"

"I am to take your place," said Button-Bright.

"Oh, very well," replied Jimfred. "This is a queer freak for our Boolooroo to indulge in, but he is always doing something absurd. You're not much of a guard, seems to me, but if anyone tries to rob the Treasure Chamber you must ring this big gong, which will alarm the whole palace and bring the soldiers to your assistance. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Button-Bright.

Then Fredjim stalked away to the other side of the palace to guard the Princesses, and Button-Bright was left alone with the key to the Treasure Chamber in his hand. But he had not forgotten that the ferocious Blue Wolf was guarding the interior of the Chamber, so he searched in some of the rooms until he found a sofa-pillow, which he put under his arm and then returned to the corridor.

He placed the key in the lock, and the bolt turned with a sharp click. Button-Bright did not hesitate. He was afraid, to be sure, and his heart was beating fast with the excitement of the moment, but he knew he must regain the Magic Umbrella if he would save his comrades and himself from destruction, for without it they could never return to the Earth. So he summoned up his best courage, opened the door, stepped quickly inside, and closed the door after him.