

CHAPTER 11 - BUTTON-BRIGHT ENCOUNTERS THE BLUE WOLF

A low, fierce growl greeted him. The Treasure Chamber was pretty dark, although the moonlight came in through some of the windows, but the boy had brought with him the low brass lamp that lighted the corridor, and this he set upon a table beside the door before he took time to look around him.

The Treasure Chamber was heaped and crowded with all the riches the Boolooroo had accumulated during his reign of two or three hundred years. Piles of gold and jewels were on all sides, and precious ornaments and splendid cloths, rare pieces of carved furniture, vases, bric-a-brac and the like, were strewn about the room in astonishing profusion.

Just at the boy's feet crouched a monstrous animal of most fearful aspect. He knew at a glance it was the terrible Blue Wolf, and the sight of the beast sent a shiver through him. The Blue Wolf's head was fully as big as that of a lion, and its wide jaws were armed with rows of long, pointed teeth. His shoulders and front legs were huge and powerful, but the rest of the wolf's body dwindled away until at the tail it was no bigger than a dog. The jaws were therefore the dangerous part of the creature, and its small blue eyes flashed wickedly at the intruder.

Just as the boy made his first step forward, the Blue Wolf sprang upon him with its enormous jaws stretched wide open. Button-Bright jammed the sofa-pillow into the brute's mouth and crowded it in as hard as he could. The terrible teeth came together and buried themselves in the pillow, and then Mr. Wolf found he could not pull them out again--because his mouth was stuffed full. He could not even growl or yelp, but rolled upon the floor trying in vain to release himself from the conquering pillow.

Button-Bright paid no further attention to the helpless animal, but caught up the blue-brass lamp and began a search for his umbrella. Of course he could not find it, as it was not there. He came across a small book bound in light-blue leather which lay upon an exquisitely carved center-table. It was named, in dark-blue letters stamped on the leather, "The Royal Record Book," and remembering Ghip-Ghisizzle longed to possess this book, Button-Bright hastily concealed it inside his blouse. Then he renewed his search for the umbrella, but it was quite in vain. He hunted in every crack and corner, bumping the treasures here and there in the quest, but at last he became positive that the Magic Umbrella was not there.

The boy was bitterly disappointed and did not know what to do next. But he noticed that the Blue Wolf had finally seized an edge of the sofa-pillow in its sharp claws and was struggling to pull the thing out of his mouth; so, there being no object in his remaining longer in the room where he might have to fight the wolf again, Button-Bright went out and locked the door behind him.

While he stood in the corridor wondering what to do next, a sudden shouting reached his ears. It was the voice of the Boolooroo, saying "My Key, my Key! Who has stolen my golden Key?" And then there followed shouts of soldiers and guards and servants, and the rapid pattering of feet was heard throughout the palace.

Button-Bright took to his heels and ran along the passages until he came to Cap'n Bill's room, where the sailorman and Trot were anxiously awaiting him.

"Quick!" cried the boy. "We must escape from here at once, or we will be caught and patched."

"Where's the umbrel?" asked Cap'n Bill.

"I don't know. I can't find it. But all the palace is aroused, and the Boolooroo is furious. Come, let's get away at once!"

"Where'll we go?" inquired Trot.

"We must make for the open country and hide in the Fog Bank or in the Arch of Phinis," replied the boy.

They did not stop to argue any longer, but all three stepped out of the little door into the street, where they first clasped hands so they would not get separated in the dark, and then ran as swiftly as they could down the street, which was deserted at this hour by the citizens. They could not go very fast because the sailorman's wooden leg was awkward to run with and held them back, but Cap'n Bill hobbled quicker than he had ever hobbled before in all his life, and they really made pretty good progress.

They met no one on the streets and continued their flight until at last they came to the City Wall, which had a blue-iron gate in it. Here was a Blueskin guard, who had been peacefully slumbering when aroused by the footsteps of the fugitives. "Halt!" cried the guard fiercely.

Cap'n Bill halted long enough to grab the man around his long neck with one hand and around his long leg with the other hand. Then he raised the

Blueskin in the air and threw him far over the wall. A moment later they had unfastened the gate and fled into the open country, where they headed toward the low mountain whose outlines were plainly visible in the moonlight.

The guard was now howling and crying for help. In the city were answering shouts. A hue and cry came from every direction, reaching as far as the palace. Lights began to twinkle everywhere in the streets, and the Blue city hummed like a beehive filled with angry bees. "It won't do for us to get caught now," panted Cap'n Bill as they ran along. "I'm more afeared o' them Blue citizens ner I am 'o the Blue Boolooroo. They'd tear us to pieces if they could."

Sky Island was not a very big place, especially the blue part of it, and our friends were now very close to the low mountain. Presently they paused before a grim archway of blue marble, above which was carved the one word, "Phinis." The interior seemed dark and terrible as they stopped to regard it as a possible place of refuge.

"Don't like that place, Cap'n," whispered Trot.

"No more do I, mate," he answered.

"I think I'd rather take a chance on the Fog Bank," said Button-Bright.

Just then they were all startled by a swift flapping of wings, and a voice cried in shrill tones,

"Where are you, Trot? As like as not I've been forgot!"

Cap'n Bill jumped this way and Button-Bright that, and then there alighted on Trot's shoulder the blue parrot that had been the pet of the Princess Cerulia. Said the bird,

"Gee! I've flown Here all alone. It's pretty far, But here we are!"

and then he barked like a dog and chuckled with glee at having found his little friend.

In escaping the palace, Trot had been obliged to leave all the pets behind her, but it seemed that the parrot had found some way to get free and follow her. They were all astonished to hear the bird talk--and in poetry, too--but Cap'n Bill told Trot that some parrots he had known had possessed a pretty fair gift of language, and he added that this blue one seemed an unusually bright bird. "As fer po'try," said he, "that's as how you look at po'try. Rhymes come from

your head, but real po'try from your heart, an' whether the blue parrot has a heart or not, he's sure got a head."

Having decided not to venture into the Arch of Phinis, they again started on, this time across the country straight toward the Fog Bank, which hung like a blue-grey cloud directly across the center of the island. They knew they were being followed by bands of the Blueskins, for they could hear the shouts of their pursuers growing louder and louder every minute, since their long legs covered the ground more quickly than our friends could possibly go. Had the journey been much farther, the fugitives would have been overtaken, but when the leaders of the pursuing Blueskins were only a few yards behind them, they reached the edge of the Fog Bank and without hesitation plunged into its thick mist, which instantly hid them from view.

The Blueskins fell back, horrified at the mad act of the strangers. To them the Fog Bank was the most dreadful thing in existence, and no Blueskin had ever ventured within it even for a moment.

"That's the end of those short-necked Yellowskins," said one, shaking his head. "We may as well go back and report the matter to the Boolooroo."