

## CHAPTER 12 - THROUGH THE FOG BANK

It was rather moist in the Fog Bank. "Seems like a reg'lar drizzle," said Trot. "I'll be soaked through in a minute." She had been given a costume of blue silk in exchange for her own dress, and the silk was so thin that the moisture easily wetted it.

"Never mind," said Cap'n Bill. "When it's a case of life 'n' death, clo's don't count for much. I'm sort o' drippy myself."

Cried the parrot, fluttering his feathers to try to keep them from sticking together,

"Floods and gushes fill our path-- This is not my day for a bath! Shut if off, or fear my wrath."

"We can't," laughed Trot. "We'll jus' have to stick it out till we get to the other side."

"Had we better go to the other side?" asked Button-Bright anxiously.

"Why not?" returned Cap'n Bill. "The other side's the only safe side for us."

"We don't know that, sir," said the boy. "Ghip-Ghisizzle said it was a terrible country."

"I don't believe it," retorted the sailor stoutly. "Sizzle's never been there, an' he knows nothing about it. 'The Sunset Country' sounds sort o' good to me."

"But how'll we ever manage to get there?" inquired Trot. "Aren't we already lost in this fog?"

"Not yet," said Cap'n Bill. "I've kep' my face turned straight ahead ever since we climbed inter this bank o' wetness. If we don't get twisted any, we'll go straight through to the other side."

It was no darker in the Fog Bank than it had been in the Blue Country. They could see dimly the mass of fog, which seemed to cling to them, and when they looked down, they discovered that they were walking upon white pebbles that were slightly tinged with the blue color of the sky. Gradually this blue became fainter until, as they progressed, everything became a dull gray.

"I wonder how far it is to the other side," remarked Trot wearily.

"We can't say till we get there, mate," answered the sailor in a cheerful voice. Cap'n Bill had a way of growing more and more cheerful when danger threatened.

"Never mind," said the girl. "I'm as wet as a dishrag now, and I'll never get any wetter."

"Wet, wet, wet! It's awful wet, you bet!"

moaned the parrot on her shoulder.

"I'm a fish-pond, I'm a well; I'm a clam without a shell!"

"Can't you dry up?" asked Cap'n Bill.

"Not this evening, thank you, sir; To talk and grumble I prefer," replied the parrot dolefully.

They walked along more slowly now, still keeping hold of hands, for although they were anxious to get through the Fog Bank, they were tired with the long run across the country and with their day's adventures. They had no sleep and it was a long time past midnight.

"Look out!" cried the parrot sharply; and they all halted to find a monstrous frog obstructing their path. Cap'n Bill thought it was as big as a whale, and as it squatted on the gray pebbles, its eyes were on a level with those of the old sailor.

"Ker-chug, herk-choo!" grunted the frog. "What in the Sky is THIS crowd?"

"W-we're strangers," stammered Trot, "an' we're tryin' to 'scape from the Blueskins an' get into the Pink Country."

"I don't blame you," said the frog in a friendly tone. "I hate those Blueskins. The Pinkies, however, are very decent neighbors."

"Oh, I'm glad to hear that!" cried Button-Bright. "Can you tell us, Mister-- Mistress--good Mr. Frog--eh, eh, your Royal Highness, if we're on the right road to the Pink Country?"

The frog seemed to laugh, for he gurgled in his throat in a very funny way. "I'm no Royal Highness," he said. "I'm just a common frog, and a little wee tiny frog, too. But I hope to grow in time. This Fog Bank is the Paradise of Frogs, and our King is about ten times as big as I am."

"Then he's a big 'un, an' no mistake," admitted Cap'n Bill. "I'm glad you like your country, but it's a mite too damp for us, an' we'd be glad to get out of it."

"Follow me," said the frog. "I'll lead you to the border. It's only about six jumps." He turned around, made a mighty leap and disappeared in the gray mist. Our friends looked at one another in bewilderment.

"Don't see how we can foller that lead," remarked Cap'n Bill, "but we may as well start in the same direction."

"Brooks and creeks, How it leaks!"

muttered the parrot.

"How can we jog To a frog in the fog?"

The big frog seemed to understand their difficulty, for he kept making noises in his throat to guide them to where he had leaped. When at last they came up to him, he made a second jump--out of sight, as before--and when they attempted to follow, they found a huge lizard lying across the path. Cap'n Bill thought it must be a giant alligator at first, it was so big, but he looked at them sleepily and did not seem at all dangerous.

"O, Liz--you puffy Liz--Get out of our way and mind your biz," cried the parrot.

"Creep-a-mousie, crawl-a-mousie, please move on! We can't move a step till you are gone."

"Don't disturb me," said the lizard. "I'm dreaming about parsnips. Did you ever taste a parsnip?"

"We're in a hurry, if it's the same to you, sir," said Cap'n Bill politely.

"Then climb over me or go around, I don't care which," murmured the lizard. "When they're little, they're juicy; when they're big, there's more of 'em; but either way there's nothing so delicious as a parsnip. There are none here in the Fog Bank, so the best I can do is dream of them. Oh, parsnips, par-snips, p-a-r-snips!" He closed his eyes sleepily and resumed his dreams.

Walking around the lizard, they resumed their journey and soon came to the frog, being guided by its grunts and croaks. Then off it went again, its tremendous leap carrying it far into the fog. Suddenly, Cap'n Bill tripped and would have fallen flat had not Trot and Button-Bright held him up. Then he

saw that he had stumbled over the claw of a gigantic land-crab, which lay sprawled out upon the pebbly bottom.

"Oh, beg parding, I'm sure!" exclaimed Cap'n Bill, backing away.

"Don't mention it," replied the crab in a tired tone. "You did not disturb me, so there is no harm done."

"We didn't know you were here," explained Trot.

"Probably not," said the crab. "It's no place for me, anyhow, for I belong in the Constellations, you know, with Taurus and Gemini and the other fellows. But I had the misfortune to tumble out of the Zodiac some time ago. My name is Cancer, but I'm not a disease. Those who examine the heavens in these days, alas! can find no Cancer there."

"Yes we can, sir, Mister Cancer!" said the parrot with a chuckle.

"Once," remarked Cap'n Bill, "I sawr a picter of you in an almanac."

"Ah, the almanacs always did us full justice," the crab replied, "but I'm told they're not fashionable now."

"If you don't mind, we'd like to pass on," said Button-Bright.

"No, I don't mind, but be careful not to step on my legs. They're rheumatic, it's so moist here."

They climbed over some of the huge legs and walked around others. Soon they had left the creature far behind. "Aren't you rather slow?" asked the frog when once more they came up to him.

"It isn't that," said Trot. "You are rather swift, I guess." The frog chuckled and leaped again. They noticed that the fog had caught a soft rose tint and was lighter and less dense than before, for which reason the sailor remarked that they must be getting near to the Pink Country.

On this jump they saw nothing but a monstrous turtle, which lay asleep with its head and legs drawn into its shell. It was not in their way, so they hurried on and rejoined the frog, which said to them, "I'm sorry, but I'm due at the King's Court in a few minutes, and I can't wait for your short, weak legs to make the journey to the Pink Country. But if you will climb upon my back, I think I can carry you to the border in one more leap."

"I'm tired," said Trot, "an' this awful fog's beginnin' to choke me. Let's ride on the frog, Cap'n."

"Right you are, mate," he replied, and although he shook a bit with fear, the old man at once began to climb to the frog's back. Trot seated herself on one side of him and Button-bright on the other, and the sailor put his arms around them both to hold them tight together.

"Are you ready?" asked the frog.

"Ding-dong!" cried the parrot.

"All aboard, let 'er go! Jump the best jump that you know."

"Don't--don't! Jump sort o' easy, please," begged Cap'n Bill.

But the frog was unable to obey his request. Its powerful hind legs straightened like steel springs and shot the big body, with its passengers, through the fog like an arrow launched from a bow. They gasped for breath and tried to hang on, and then suddenly the frog landed just at the edge of the Fog Bank, stopping so abruptly that his three riders left his back and shot far ahead of him. They felt the fog melt away and found themselves bathed in glorious rays of sunshine, but they had no time to consider this change because they were still shooting through the air, and presently--before they could think of anything at all--all three were rolling heels over head on the soft grass of a meadow.