

CHAPTER 13 - THE PINK COUNTRY

When the travelers could collect their senses and sit up, they stared about them in bewilderment, for the transition from the sticky, damp fog to this brilliant scene was so abrupt as to daze them at first.

It was a Pink Country indeed. The grass was a soft pink, the trees were pink, all the fences and buildings which they saw in the near distance were pink-- even the gravel in the pretty paths was pink. Many shades of color were there, of course, grading from a faint blush rose to deep pink verging on red, but no other color was visible. In the sky hung a pink glow, with rosy clouds floating here and there, and the sun was not silvery white, as we see it from the Earth, but a distinct pink.

The sun was high in the sky just now, which proved the adventurers had been a long time in passing through the Fog Bank. But all of them were wonderfully relieved to reach this beautiful country in safety, for aside from the danger that threatened them in the Blue Country, the other side of the island was very depressing. Here the scene that confronted them was pretty and homelike, except for the prevailing color and the fact that all the buildings were round, without a single corner or angle.

Half a mile distant was a large City, its pink tintings glistening bravely in the pink sunshine, while hundreds of pink banners floated from its numerous domes. The country between the Fog Bank and the city was like a vast garden, very carefully kept and as neat as wax.

The parrot was fluttering its wings and pruning its feathers to remove the wet of the fog. Trot and Button-Bright and Cap'n Bill were all soaked to the skin and chilled through, but as they sat upon the pink grass they felt the rays of the sun sending them warmth and rapidly drying their clothes; so, being tired out, they laid themselves comfortably down and first one and then another fell cozily asleep.

It was the parrot that aroused them.

"Look out--look out-- There's folks about!"

it screamed.

"The apple-dumplings, fat and pink, Will be here quicker than a wink!"

Trot stared up in alarm and rubbed her eyes; Cap'n Bill rolled over and blinked, hardly remembering where he was; Button-Bright was on his feet in an instant. Advancing toward them were four of the natives of the Pink Country.

Two were men and two were women, and their appearance was in sharp contrast to that of the Blueskins. For the Pinkies were round and chubby--almost like "apple-dumplings," as the parrot called them--and they were not very tall, the highest of the men being no taller than Trot or Button-Bright. They all had short necks and legs, pink hair and eyes, rosy cheeks and pink complexions, and their faces were good-natured and jolly in expression.

The men wore picturesque pink clothing and round hats with pink feathers in them, but the apparel of the women was still more gorgeous and striking. Their dresses consisted of layer after layer of gauzy tuck and ruffles and laces, caught here and there with bows of dainty ribbon. The skirts--which of course were of many shades of pink--were so fluffy and light that they stuck out from the fat bodies of the Pinkie women like the skirts of ballet-dancers, displaying their chubby pink ankles and pink kid shoes. They wore rings and necklaces and bracelets and brooches of rose-gold set with pink gems, and all four of the new arrivals, both men and women, carried sharp-pointed sticks made of rosewood for weapons.

They halted a little way from our adventurers, and one of the women muttered in a horrified voice, "Blueskins!"

"Guess again! The more you guess I rather think you'll know the less," retorted the parrot, and then he added grumblingly in Trot's ear, "Blue feathers don't make bluebirds."

"Really," said the girl, standing up and bowing respectfully to the Pinkies, "we are not Blueskins, although we are wearing the blue uniforms of the Boolooroo and have just escaped from the Blue Country. If you will look closely, you will see that our skins are white."

"There is some truth in what she says," remarked one of the men thoughtfully. "Their skins are not blue, but neither are they white. To be exact, I should call the skin of the girl and that of the boy a muddy pink, rather faded, while the skin of the gigantic monster with them is an unpleasant brown."

Cap'n Bill looked cross for a minute, for he did not like to be called a "gigantic monster," although he realized he was much larger than the pink people.

"What country did you come from" asked the woman who had first spoken.

"From the Earth," replied Button-Bright.

"The Earth! The Earth!" they repeated. "That is a country we have never heard of. Where is it located?"

"Why, down below somewhere," said the boy, who did now know in which direction the Earth lay. "It isn't just one country, but a good many countries."

"We have three countries in Sky Island," returned the woman. "They are the Blue Country, the Fog Country and the Pink Country. But of course this end of the Island is the most important."

"How came you in the Blue Country, from whence you say you escaped?" asked the man.

"We flew there by means of a Magic Umbrella," explained Button-Bright, "but the wicked Boolooroo stole it from us."

"Stole it! How dreadful," they all cried in a chorus.

"And they made us slaves," said Trot.

"An' wanted fer to patch us," added Cap'n Bill indignantly.

"So we ran away and passed through the Fog Bank and came here," said Button-Bright.

The Pinkies turned away and conversed together in low tones. Then one of the women came forward and addressed the strangers. "Your story is the strangest we have ever heard," said she, "and your presence here is still more strange and astonishing. So we have decided to take you to Tourmaline and let her decide what shall be your fate."

"Who is Tourmaline?" inquired Trot doubtfully, for she didn't like the idea of being "taken" to anyone.

"The Queen of the Pinkies. She is the sole Ruler of our country, so the word of Tourmaline is the Law of the Land."

"Seems to me we've had 'bout enough of kings an' queens," remarked Cap'n Bill. "Can't we shy your Tut-Tor-mar-line--or whatever you call her--in some way an' deal with you direct?"

"No. Until we prove your truth and honor we must regard you as enemies of our race. If you had a Magic Umbrella, you may be magicians and sorcerers come here to deceive us and perhaps betray us to our natural enemies, the Blueskins."

"Mud and bricks, fiddlesticks! We don't play such nasty tricks,"

yelled the parrot angrily, and this caused the Pinkies to shrink back in alarm, for they had never seen a parrot before.

"Surely this is magic!" declared one of the men. "No bird can talk unless inspired by witchcraft."

"Oh yes, parrots can," said Trot. But this incident had determined the Pinkies to consider our friends prisoners and to take them immediately before their Queen.

"Must we fight you?" asked the woman. "Or will you come with us peaceably?"

"We'll go peaceable," answered Cap'n Bill. "You're a-makin' a sad mistake, for we're as harmless as doves; but seein' as you're suspicious, we'd better have it out with your Queen first as last."

Their clothing was quite dry by this time, although much wrinkled and discolored by the penetrating fog, so at once they prepared to follow the Pinkies. The two men walked on either side of them, holding the pointed sticks ready to jab them if they attempted to escape, and the two women followed in the rear, also armed with sharp sticks.

So the procession moved along the pretty roadways to the City, which they soon reached. There was a strong, high wall of pink marble around it, and they passed through a gate made of pink metal bars and found themselves in a most delightful and picturesque town. The houses were big and substantial, all round in shape, with domed roofs and circular windows and doorways. In all the place there was but one street--a circular one that started at the gate and wound like a corkscrew toward the center of the City. It was paved with pink marble, and between the street and the houses that lined both sides of it were gardens filled with pink flowers and pink grass lawns, which were shaded by pink trees and shrubbery.

As the Queen lived in the very center of the city, the captives were obliged to parade the entire length of this street, and that gave all the Pink Citizens a chance to have a good look at the strangers. The Pinkies were every one short

and fat and gorgeously dressed in pink attire, and their faces indicated that they were contented and happy. They were much surprised at Cap'n Bill's great size and wooden leg--two very unusual things in their experience--and the old sailor frightened more than one Pink boy and girl and sent them scampering into the houses, where they viewed the passing procession from behind the window shutters in comparative safety. As for the grown people, many of them got out their sharp-pointed sticks to use as weapons in case the strangers attacked them or broke away from their guards. A few, more bold than the others, followed on at the tail of the procession, and so presently they all reached an open, circular place in the exact center of the Pink City.