

CHAPTER 14 - TOURMALINE THE POVERTY QUEEN

The open space which they entered was paved with pink marble, and around it were two rows of large, pink statues, at least life-size and beautifully sculptured. All were set upon nicely carved pink pedestals. They were, of course, statues of Pinky men and women, and all had bands of pink metal around their foreheads, in the center of each band being a glistening pink jewel.

About the middle of the open space inside the statues, which appeared to be the public meeting place of the Pinkies, was a small, low house, domed like all the other houses but built of a coarse pink stone instead of the fine marble to be seen everywhere else. It had no ornamentation, being exceedingly plain in appearance. No banners floated from it; no flowers grew near it.

"Here," said one of their guides as the procession halted before the little stone building, "is the palace of Tourmaline, who is our Queen."

"What, that little cabin?" exclaimed Trot.

"Of course. Did you suppose a palace would be like one of our handsome residences?" asked the woman, evidently surprised.

"I thought it would be better," said the girl. "All the palaces I've seen were splendid."

"A splendid palace!" exclaimed one of the Pinkies, and then they looked at one another in amazement and seemed to doubt that their ears had heard aright.

"These intruders are very peculiar people," remarked a man in the crowd.

"They seem very ignorant, poor things!" said another in reply.

"Come!" commanded the woman who led the party. "You three must follow me to the presence of Tourmaline. The people must wait outside, for there is no room for them in the palace."

So they followed her through the low archway, and in a room beyond, very simply furnished, sat a young girl engaged in darning a pair of pink stockings. She was a beautiful girl of about seventeen years of age, not fat like all the rest of the Pinkies but slender and well formed according to our own ideas of beauty. Her complexion was not a decided pink, but a soft, rosy tint not much deeper than that of Trot's skin. Instead of a silken gown furbelowed like all the

others they had seen women wear in this land, Tourmaline was dressed in a severely plain robe of coarse pink cloth much resembling bedticking. Across her brow, however, was a band of rose gold, in the center of which was set a luminous pink jewel which gleamed more brilliantly than a diamond. It was her badge of office and seemed very incongruous when compared with her poor raiment and simple surroundings.

As they entered, the girl sighed and laid down her work. Her expression was patient and resigned as she faced her audience. "What is it, Coralie?" she asked the woman.

"Here are three strange people, Tourmaline," was the reply, "who say they have entered our country through the Fog Bank. They tell a queer story of an escape from the Blueskins, so I decided to bring them to you, that you may determine their fate."

The Queen gazed upon our friends with evident interest. She smiled--a little sadly--at Trot, seemed to approve Button-Bright's open, frank face, and was quite surprised because Cap'n Bill was so much bigger than her own people. "Are you a giant?" she asked the sailor in a soft, sweet voice.

"No, your Majesty," he replied, "I'm only--"

"Majesty!" she exclaimed, flushing a deeper pink. "Are you addressing that word to me?"

"O' course, ma'am," answered Cap'n Bill. "I'm told that's the proper way to speak to a Queen."

"Perhaps you are trying to ridicule me," she continued, regarding the sailor's face closely. "There is nothing majestic about me, as you know very well. Coralie, do you consider 'majesty' a proper word to use when addressing a Queen?" she added, appealing to the Pinky woman.

"By no means," was the prompt reply.

"What shall I call her, then?" inquired Cap'n Bill.

"Just Tourmaline. That is her name, and it is sufficient," said the woman.

"The Ruler of a country ought to be treated with great respect," declared Trot a little indignantly, for she thought the pretty little queen was not being properly deferred to.

"Why?" asked Tourmaline curiously.

"Because the Ruler is the mos' 'risticratic person in any land," explained the little girl. "Even in America ever'body bows low to our President, an' the Blueskins are so 'fraid o' their Boolooroo that they tremble whenever they go near him."

"But surely that is all wrong," said Tourmaline gravely. "The Ruler is appointed to protect and serve the people, and here in the Pink Country I have the full power to carry out the laws. I even decree death when such a punishment is merited. Therefore I am a mere agent to direct the laws, which are the Will of the People, and am only a public servant obliged constantly to guard the welfare of my subjects."

"In that case," said Button-Bright, "you're entitled to the best there is to pay for your trouble. A powerful ruler ought to be rich and to live in a splendid palace. Your folks ought to treat you with great respect, as Trot says."

"Oh no," responded Tourmaline quickly. "That would indeed be very wrong. Too much should never be given to anyone. If, with my great power, conferred upon me by the people, I also possessed great wealth, I might be tempted to be cruel and overbearing. In that case my subjects would justly grow envious of my superior station. If I lived as luxuriously as my people do and had servants and costly gowns, the good Pinkies would say that their Queen had more than they themselves, and it would be true. No, our way is best. The Ruler, be it king or queen, has absolute power to rule, but no riches, no high station, no false adulation. The people have the wealth and honor, for it is their due. The Queen has nothing but the power to execute the laws, to adjust grievances and to compel order."

"What pays you, then, for all your bother?" asked Trot.

"I have one great privilege. After my death a pink marble statue of me will be set up in the Grand Court, with the statues of the other Kings and Queens who have ruled this land, and all the Pinkies in ages to come will then honor me as having been a just and upright queen. That is my reward."

"I'm sorry for you, ma'am," said Cap'n Bill. "Your pay for bein' a queen is sort o' like a life-insurance. If don't come due till after you're dead, an' then you can't get much fun out o' it."

"I did not choose to be the Queen," answered Tourmaline simply. "A misfortune of birth placed me here, and I cannot escape my fate. It is much

more desirable to be a private citizen, happy and carefree. But we have talked long enough of myself. Tell me who you are, and why you have come here."

Between them they told the story of how the Magic Umbrella had taken them to Sky Island, which they did not know when they started was anywhere in existence. Button-Bright told this, and then Trot related their adventures among the Blueskins and how the Boolooroo had stolen the umbrella and prevented them from going home again. The parrot on her shoulder kept interrupting her continually, for the mention of the Boolooroo seemed to make the bird frantic with rage.

"Naughty, naughty Boolooroo! He's the worst I ever knew!"

the parrot repeated over and over again.

Cap'n Bill finished the story by telling of their escape through the Fog Bank. "We didn't know what your Pink Country was like, o' course," he said, "but we knew it couldn't be worse than the Blue Country, an' we didn't take any stock in their stories that the Fog Bank would be the death o' us."

"Pretty wet! Pretty wet Was the journey, you can bet!"

declared the parrot in conclusion.

"Yes, it was wet an' sticky, all right," agreed the sailor, "but the big frog helped us an' we got through all right."

"But what can you do here?" asked Tourmaline. "You are not like my people, the Pinkies, and there is no place for you in our country."

"That's true enough," said Cap'n Bill, "but we had to go somewhere, an' this was the likeliest place we could think of. Your Sky Island ain't very big, so when we couldn't stay in the Blue Country, where ever'body hated us, or in the Fog Bank, which ain't healthy an' is too wet for humans to live in for long, we nat'rally were forced to enter the Pink Country, where we expected to find nice people."

"We ARE nice," said Tourmaline, "but it is our country, not yours, and we have no place here for strangers. In all our history you are the first people from outside our borders who have ever stepped a foot in our land. We do not hate you, as you say the Blueskins do, nor are we savage or cruel, but we do not want you here, and I am really puzzled what to do with you."

"Isn't there a law to cover this case?" asked Coralie.

"I do not remember any such law," replied the queen, "but I will search in the Great Book and see if I can find anything that refers to strange people entering our land."

"If not," said the woman, "you must make a law. It is your duty."

"I know," answered Tourmaline, "but I hope such a responsibility will not fall upon my shoulders. These poor strangers are in a very uncomfortable position, and I wish I could help them to get back to their own country."

"Thank you," said Trot. "We wish so, too. Haven't you any fairies here?"

"Oh, there are fairies, of course, as there are everywhere," answered Tourmaline, "but none that we can call to our assistance or command to do our bidding."

"How about witches?" asked Button-Bright.

"I know of one witch," said Tourmaline thoughtfully, "but she is not very obliging. She says it makes her head ache to perform witchcraft, and so she seldom indulges in it. But if there is no other way, I may be obliged to call upon Rosalie for help. I'll look in the Great Book first. Meantime, you will go home with Coralie, who will feed you and give you entertainment. Tomorrow morning come to me again and then I will decree your fate." The little queen then picked up her stocking and began to darn the holes in it, and Coralie, without any formal parting, led the strangers from the miserable palace.