

CHAPTER 15 - THE SUNRISE TRIBE AND THE SUNSET TRIBE

Although Trot and her comrades were still prisoners, they were far more comfortable than they had been in the Blue Country. Coralie took them to her own home, where she lived in great luxury, being one of the prominent women of the Pinkies. In this country the women seemed fully as important as the men, and instead of being coddled and petted, they performed their share of the work, both in public and private affairs, and were expected to fight in the wars exactly as the men did.

Our friends learned considerable about the Pinkies during that afternoon and evening, for their hostess proved kind and agreeable and frankly answered all their questions. Although this half of Sky Island was no larger than the Blue Country, being no more than two miles square, it had several hundred inhabitants. These were divided into two tribes, which were called the Sunrise Tribe and the Sunset Tribe. The Sunrise Tribe lived in the eastern half of the Pink Country and the Sunset Tribe in the west half, and there was great rivalry between them, and sometimes war.

It was all a question of social importance. The Sunrise Tribe claimed that every day the sun greeted them first of all, which proved they were the most important; but on the other hand, the Sunset Tribe claimed that the sun always deserted the other tribe and came to them, which was evidence that they were the most attractive people. On Sky Island--at least on the Pink side--the sun arose in wonderful splendor, but also it set in a blaze of glory, and so there were arguments on both sides, and for want of something better to argue about, the Pinkies took this queer subject as a cause of dispute.

Both Tribes acknowledged Tourmaline their Queen and obeyed the laws of the country, and just at this time there was peace in the land, and all the inhabitants of the east and west were friendly. But they had been known, Coralie said, to fight one another fiercely with their sharp sticks, at which times a good many were sure to get hurt.

"Why do they call this an Island?" asked Button-Bright. "There isn't any water around it, is there?"

"No, but there is sky all around it," answered Coralie. "And if one should step off the edge, he would go tumbling into the great sky and never be heard of again."

"Is there a fence around the edge?" asked Trot.

"Only a few places are fenced," was the reply. "Usually there are rows of thick bushes set close to the edge to prevent people from falling off. Once there was a King of the Pinkies who was cruel and overbearing and imagined he was superior to the people he ruled, so one day his subjects carried him to the edge of the island and threw him over the bushes."

"Goodness me!" said Trot. "He might have hit someone on the Earth."

"Guess he skipped it, though," added Cap'n Bill, "for I never heard of a Pinky till I came here."

"And I have never heard of the Earth," retorted Coralie. "Of course, there must be such a place, because you came from there, but the Earth is never visible in our sky."

"No," said Button-Bright, "'cause it's UNDER your island. But it's there, all right, and it's a pretty good place to live. I wish I could get back to it."

"So do I, Button-Bright!" exclaimed Trot.

"Let's fly!" cried the parrot, turning his head so that one bright little eye looked directly into the girl's eye. "Say goodbye and let's fly through the sky, far and high!"

"If we only had my umbrella, we'd fly in a minute," sighed Button-Bright. "But the Boolooroo stole it."

"Naughty, naughty Boolooroo, What a wicked thing to do!"

wailed the parrot, and they all agreed with him.

Coralie belonged to the Sunset Tribe, as she lived west of the queen's palace, which was the center of the Pink Country. A servant came to the room where they were conversing to state that the sun was about to set, and at once Coralie arose and took the strangers to an upper balcony, where all the household had assembled.

The neighboring houses also had their balconies and roofs filled with people, for it seemed all the Sunset Tribe came out every night to witness the setting of the sun. It was really a magnificent sight, and Trot scarcely breathed as the great, golden ball sank low in the sky and colored all the clouds with gorgeous tints of orange, red and yellow. Never on the Earth was there visible such

splendor, and as the little girl watched the ever-changing scene, she decided the Sunset Tribe was amply justified in claiming that the West was the favored country of the sun.

"You see," said Cap'n Bill, "the sky is all around us, an' we're high up, so the sun really loses itself in the clouds an' leaves a trail of beauty behind him."

"He does that!" agreed Trot. "This is almost worth comin' for, Cap'n."

"But not quite," said Button-bright sadly. "I'd get along without the sunset if only we could go home."

They went in to dinner after this, and sat at Coralie's own table with her husband and children and found the meal very good. After a pleasant evening, during which no reference was made to their being prisoners, they were shown to prettily furnished rooms--all in pink--and slept soundly in the soft beds provided for them. Trot wakened early the next morning and went out on the balcony to see the sunrise. The little girl was well repaid, for the splendor of the rising sun was almost equal to that of the setting sun. Surely this was a wonderful country and much more delightful than the Blue side of the island, where the sun was hidden by the great Fog and only the moon was visible.

When she went in, she found that both Button-Bright and Cap'n Bill were up and dressed, so they decided to take a walk before breakfast. No one restrained them or interfered with them in any way. "They know we can't get away," observed the sailor, "so they don't need to watch us."

"We could go into the Fog Bank again," suggested Trot.

"We could, mate, but we won't," answered Cap'n Bill. "If there's no way for us to get clean off'n Sky Island, I'd rather stay with the Pinkies than with the Blues."

"I wonder what they'll do with us," said Button-Bright. "The Queen seems like a nice girl, and I don't think she'll hurt us, whatever happens."

They walked freely along the circular street, seeing such sights as the Pink City afforded, and then returned to Coralie's house for breakfast. Coralie herself was not there, as she had been summoned to the Queen's palace, but her husband looked after the guests, and when breakfast was finished he said to them, "I am to take you to Tourmaline, who has promised to decide your fate this morning. I am curious to know what she will do with you, for in all our history we have never before had strangers intrude upon us."

"We're curious, too," said Trot, "but we'll soon find out." As they walked down the street, they observed that the sky was now covered with dark clouds which entirely hid the sun.

"Does it ever rain here?" inquired Button-Bright.

"Certainly," answered Coralie's husband, "that is the one drawback of our country: it rains quite often. And although it makes the flowers and the grass grow, I think rain is very disagreeable. I am always glad to see the rainbow, which is a sign that the sun will shine again."

"Looks like rain now," remarked Cap'n Bill.

"It does," said the man, glancing at the sky. "We must hurry, or we may get wet."

"Haven't you any umbrellas?" asked Button-Bright.

"No, we don't know what umbrellas are," replied the Pinky man.

It did not rain at once, and they reached Tourmaline's wretched hut in safety. There they found quite a number of Pinkies assembled, and a spirited discussion was taking place when they arrived.

"Come in, please," said Tourmaline, opening the door for them, and when they had entered, she placed a pinkwood bench for them to sit upon and went back to her throne, which was a common rocking chair. At her right were seated six men and women of the Sunrise Tribe, and on her left six men and women of the Sunset Tribe, among the latter being Coralie. The contrast between the plain, simple dress of the Queen and the gorgeous apparel of her Counselors was quite remarkable, yet her beauty far surpassed that of any of her people, and her demeanor was so modest and unassuming that it was difficult for the prisoners to believe that her word would decree life or death and that all the others were subservient to her. Tourmaline's eyes were so deep a shade of pink that they were almost hazel, and her hair was darker than that of the others, being a golden-red in color. These points, taken with her light-pink skin and slender form, rendered her distinctive among the Pinkies, whatever gown she might wear.

When the strangers were seated, she turned to them and said, "I have searched through the Great Book of Laws and found nothing about foreign people entering our land. There is a law that if any of the Blueskins break through the Fog Bank, they shall be driven back with sharp sticks; but you

are not Blueskins, so this Law does not apply to you. Therefore, in order to decide your fate, I have summoned a Council of twelve of my people, who will vote as to whether you shall be permitted to remain here or not. They wanted to see you before they cast their final vote, that they may examine you carefully and discover if you are worthy to become inhabitants of the Pink Country."

"The rose is red, the violet's blue, But Trot is sweeter than the two!"

declared the parrot in a loud voice. It was a little verse Cap'n Bill had taught the bird that very morning while Trot was seeing the sun rise.

The Pinkies were startled and seemed a little frightened at hearing a bird speak so clearly. Trot laughed and patted the bird's head in return for the compliment. "Is the Monster Man whose legs are part wood a dangerous creature?" asked one of the Sunrise Tribe.

"Not to my friends," replied Cap'n Bill, much amused. "I s'pose I could fight your whole crowd of Pinkies if I had to, an' make you run for your lives, but bein' as you're friendly to us, you ain't in any danger." The sailor thought this speech was diplomatic and might "head off any trouble," but the Pinkies seemed uneasy, and several of them picked up their slender, pointed sticks and held them in their hands. They were not cowardly, but it was evident they mistrusted the big man, who on Earth was not considered big at all, but rather undersized.

"What we'd like," said Trot, "is to stay here, cozy an' peaceable, till we can find a way to get home to the Earth again. Your country is much nicer than the Blue Country, and we like you pretty well from what we've seen of you, so if you'll let us stay, we won't be any more trouble to you than we can help."

They all gazed upon the little girl curiously, and one of them said, "How strangely light her color is! And it is pink, too, which is in her favor. But her eyes are of that dreadful blue tint which prevails in the other half of Sky Island, while her hair is a queer color unknown to us. She is not like our people and would not harmonize with the universal color here."

"That's true," said another. "The three strangers are all inharmonious. If allowed to remain here, they would ruin the color scheme of the country, where all is now pink."

"In spite of that," said Coralie, "they are harmless creatures and have done us no wrong."

"Yes they have," replied a nervous little Sunrise man, "they wronged us by coming here."

"They could not help doing that," argued Coralie, "and it is their misfortune that they are here on Sky Island at all. Perhaps if we keep them with us for a while, they may find a way to return safely to their own country."

"We'll fly through the sky by-and-by--ki-yi!" yelled the parrot with startling suddenness.

"Is that true?" asked a Pinky seriously.

"Why, we would if we could," answered Trot. "We flew to this island, anyhow."

"Perhaps," said another, "if we pushed them off the edge, they could fly down again. Who knows?"

"We know," answered Cap'n Bill hastily. "We'd tumble, but we wouldn't fly."

"They'd take a fall-- And that is all!"

observed the parrot, fluttering its wings. There was silence for a moment while all the Pinkies seemed to think deeply. Then the Queen asked the strangers to step outside while they counseled together. Our friends obeyed, and leaving the room they all entered the courtyard and examined the rows of pink marble statues for nearly an hour before they were summoned to return to the little room in Tourmaline's palace.

"We are now ready to vote as to your fate," said the pretty Queen to them. "We have decided there are but two things for us to do: either permit you to remain here as honored guests or take you to an edge of the island and throw you over the bushes into the sky."

They were silent at hearing this dreadful alternative, but the parrot screamed shrilly,

"Oh, what a dump! Oh, what a jump! Won't we all thump when we land with a bump?"

"If we do," said Cap'n Bill thoughtfully, "we'll none of us know it."