

CHAPTER 16 - ROSALIE THE WITCH

Trot and Button-Bright had now become worried and anxious, for they knew if they were tossed over the edge of the island they would be killed. Cap'n Bill frowned and set his jaws tight together. The old sailor had made up his mind to make a good fight for his boy and girl, as well as for his own life, if he was obliged to do so.

The twelve Counselors then voted, and when the vote was counted, Tourmaline announced that six had voted to allow the strangers to remain and six to toss them over the bushes. "We seem evenly divided on this matter," remarked the Queen with a puzzled look at her Council.

Trot thought the pretty Queen was their friend, so she said, "Of course you'll have the deciding vote, then, you being the Ruler."

"Oh no," replied Tourmaline. "Since I have asked these good people to advise me, it would be impolite to side against some of them and with the others. That would imply that the judgment of some of my Counselors is wrong, and the judgment of others right. I must ask someone else to cast the deciding vote."

"Who will it be, then?" inquired Trot. "Can't I do it? Or Cap'n Bill or Button-Bright?"

Tourmaline smiled and shook her head, while all the Counselors murmured their protests.

"Let Trot do it Or you'll rue it!"

advised the parrot, and then he barked like a dog and made them all jump.

"Let me think a moment," said the Queen, resting her chin on her hand.

"A Pink can think As quick's a wink!"

the parrot declared. But Tourmaline's thoughts required time, and all her Counselors remained silent and watched her anxiously.

At last she raised her head and said, "I shall call upon Rosalie the Witch. She is wise and honest and will decide the matter justly."

The Pinkies seemed to approve this choice, so Tourmaline rose and took a small, pink paper parcel from a drawer. In it was a pink powder, which she scattered upon the seat of a big armchair. Then she lighted this powder, which at first flashed vivid pink and then filled all the space around the chair with a thick, pink cloud of smoke. Presently the smoke cleared away, when they all saw seated within the chair Rosalie the Witch.

This famous woman was much like the other Pinkies in appearance except that she was somewhat taller and not quite so fat as most of the people. Her skin and hair and eyes were all of a rosy, pink color, and her gown was of spiderweb gauze that nicely matched her complexion. She did not seem very old, for her features were smiling and attractive and pleasant to view. She held in her hand a slender staff tipped with a lustrous pink jewel.

All the Pinkies present bowed very respectfully to Rosalie, who returned the salutation with a dignified nod. Then Tourmaline began to explain the presence of the three strangers and the difficulty of deciding what to do with them.

"I have summoned you here that you may cast the deciding vote," added the Queen. "What shall we do, Rosalie, allow them to remain here as honored guests, or toss them over the bushes into the sky?"

Rosalie, during Tourmaline's speech, had been attentively examining the faces of the three Earth people. Now she said,

"Before I decide, I must see who these strangers are. I will follow their adventures in a vision to discover if they have told you the truth. And in order that you may all share my knowledge, you shall see the vision as I see it." She then bowed her head and closed her eyes.

"Rock-a-bye, baby, on a treetop; Don't wake her up, or the vision will stop," muttered the parrot, but no one paid any attention to the noisy bird.

Gradually, a pink mist formed in the air about the Witch, and in this mist the vision began to appear.

First, there was Button-bright in the attic of his house, finding the Magic Umbrella. Then his first flight was shown, and afterward his trip across the United States until he landed on the bluff where Trot sat. In rapid succession the scenes shifted and disclosed the trial flights, with Trot and Cap'n Bill as passengers, then the trip to Sky Island and the meeting with the Boolooroo.

No sound was heard, but it was easy from the gestures of the actors for the Pinkies to follow all the adventures of the strangers in the Blue Country. Button-Bright was greatly astonished to see in this vision how the Boolooroo had tested the Magic Umbrella and in a fit of rage cast it into a corner underneath the cabinet, with the seats and lunch basket still attached to the handle by means of the rope. The boy now knew why he could not find the umbrella in the Treasure Chamber, and he was provoked to think he had several times been quite close to it without knowing it was there. The last scene ended with the trip through the Fog Bank and the assistance rendered them by the friendly frog. After the three tumbled upon the grass of the Pink Country, the vision faded away, and Rosalie lifted her head with a smile of triumph at the success of her witchcraft.

"Did you see clearly?" she asked.

"We did, O Wonderful Witch!" they declared.

"Then," said Rosalie, "there can be no doubt in your minds that these strangers have told you the truth."

"None at all," they admitted.

"What arguments are advanced by the six Counselors who voted to allow them to remain here as guests?" inquired the Witch.

"They have done us no harm," answered Coralie, speaking for her side, "therefore we should, in honor and justice, do them no harm."

Rosalie nodded. "What arguments have the others advanced?" she asked.

"They interfere with our color scheme and do not harmonize with our people," a man of the Sunrise Tribe answered.

Again Rosalie nodded, and Trot thought her eyes twinkled a little.

"I think I now fully comprehend the matter," said she, "and so I will cast my vote. I favor taking the Earth people to the edge of the island and casting them into the sky."

For a moment there was perfect silence in the room. All present realized that this was a decree of death to the strangers. Trot was greatly surprised at the decision, and for a moment she thought her heart had stopped beating, for a wave of fear swept over her. Button-Bright flushed red as a Pinky and then grew very pale. He crept closer to Trot and took her hand in his own, pressing

it to give the little girl courage. As for Cap'n Bill, he was watching the smiling face of the Witch in a puzzled but not hopeless way, for he thought she did not seem wholly in earnest in what she had said.

"The case is decided," announced Tourmaline in a clear, cold voice. "The three strangers shall be taken at once to the edge of the island and thrown over the bushes into the sky."

"It's raining hard outside," announced Coralie, who sat near the door. "Why not wait until this shower is over?"

"I have said 'at once,'" replied the little Queen with dignity, "and so it must be at once. We are accustomed to rain, so it need not delay us, and when a disagreeable duty is to be performed, the sooner it is accomplished the better."

"May I ask, ma'am," said Cap'n Bill, addressing the Witch, "why you have decided to murder of us in this cold-blooded way?"

"I did not decide to murder you," answered Rosalie.

"To throw us off the island will be murder," declared the sailor.

"Then they cannot throw you off," the Witch replied.

"The Queen says they will."

"I know," said Rosalie, "but I'm quite positive her people can't do it."

This statement astonished all the Pinkies, who looked at the Witch inquiringly. "Why not?" asked Tourmaline.

"It is evident to me," said the Witch, speaking slowly and distinctly, "that these Earth people are protected in some way by fairies. They may not be aware of this themselves, nor did I see any fairies in my vision. But if you will think upon it carefully, you will realize that the Magic Umbrella has no power in itself, but is enchanted by fairy power so that it is made to fly and carry passengers through the air BY FAIRIES. This being the case, I do not think you will be allowed to injure these favored people in any way; but I am curious to see in what manner the fairies will defend them, and therefore I have voted to have them thrown off the island. I bear these strangers no ill will, nor do I believe they are in any danger. But since you, Tourmaline, have determined to attempt this terrible thing at once, I shall go with you and see what will happen."

Some of the Pinkies looked pleased and some troubled at this speech, but they all prepared to escort the prisoners to the nearest edge of the island. The rain was pouring down in torrents, and umbrellas were unknown; but all of them, both men and women, slipped gossamer raincoats over their clothing, which kept the rain from wetting them. Then they caught up their sharp sticks and surrounding the doomed captives commanded them to march to meet their fate.