

## CHAPTER 17 - THE ARRIVAL OF POLYCHROME

Cap'n Bill had determined to fight desperately for their lives, but he was a shrewd old sailorman, and he found much that was reasonable in the Witch's assertion that fairies would protect them. He had often wondered how the Magic Umbrella could fly and obey spoken commands, but now he plainly saw that the thing must be directed by some invisible power, and that power was quite likely to save them from the cruel death that had been decreed. To be sure, the Magic Umbrella was now in the Blue Country, and the fairies that directed its flight might be with the umbrella instead of with them, yet the old sailor had already experienced some strange adventures in Trot's company and knew she had managed to escape every danger that had threatened. So he decided not to fight until the last moment and meekly hobbled along the street as he was commanded to do. Trot was also encouraged by the Witch's suggestion, for she believed in fairies and trusted them; but Button-Bright could find no comfort in their situation, and his face was very sad as he marched along by Trot's side.

If they had followed the corkscrew windings of the street, it would have been a long journey to the outer edge of the Pink Country, but Tourmaline took a shortcut, leading them through private gardens and even through houses, so that they followed almost a bee line to their destination. It rained all the way and the walking was very disagreeable, but our friends were confronting an important crisis in their strange adventures, and with possible death at their journey's end, they were in no hurry to arrive there.

Once free of the City they traversed the open country, and here they often stepped into sticky, pink mud up to their ankles. Cap'n Bill's wooden leg would often go down deep and stick fast in this mud, and at such times he would be helpless until two of the Pinkies--who were a strong people--pulled him out again. The parrot was getting its feathers sadly draggled in the rain, and the poor bird soon presented a wet and woebegone appearance.

"Soak us again, Drown us with rain!"

it muttered in a resigned tone; and then it would turn to Trot and moan, "The rose is red, the violet's blue, The Pinkies are a beastly crew!"

The country was not so trim and neatly kept near the edge, for it was evident the people did not care to go too near to the dangerous place. There was a row of thick bushes which concealed the gulf below, and as they approached these

bushes the rain abruptly ceased, and the clouds began to break and drift away in the sky. "Two of you seize the girl and throw her over," said Tourmaline in a calm, matter-of-fact way, "and two others must throw the boy over. It may take four, perhaps, to lift the huge and ancient man."

"More'n that," said Cap'n Bill grimly. "I'm pretty sure it'll take all o' you, young lady, an' the chances are you won't do it then."

They had halted a short distance from the bushes, and now there suddenly appeared through a rift in the clouds an immense Rainbow. It was perfectly formed and glistened with a dozen or more superb tintings that were so vivid and brilliant and blended into one another so exquisitely that everyone paused to gaze enraptured upon the sight. Steadily, yet with wonderful swiftness, the end of the great bow descended until it rested upon the pink field--almost at the feet of the little party of observers. Then they saw, dancing gaily upon the arch, a score of beautiful maidens, dressed in fleecy robes of rainbow tints which fluttered around them like clouds.

"The Daughters of the Rainbow!" whispered Tourmaline in an awed voice, and the Witch beside her nodded and said, "Fairies of the sky. What did I tell you, Tourmaline?"

Just then one of the maidens tripped lightly down the span of the arch until near the very end, leaning over to observe the group below. She was exquisitely fair, dainty as a lily and graceful as a bough swaying in the breeze. "Why, it's Polychrome!" exclaimed Button-Bright in a voice of mingled wonder and delight. "Hello, Polly! Don't you remember me?"

"Of course I remember Button-Bright," replied the maiden in a sweet, tinkling voice. "The last time I saw you was in the Land of Oz."

"Oh!" cried Trot, turning to stare at the boy with big, wide-open eyes. "Were you ever in the Land of Oz?"

"Yes," he answered, still looking at the Rainbow's Daughter, and then he said appealingly, "These people want to kill us, Polly. Can't you help us?"

"Polly wants a cracker! Polly wants a cracker!"

screached the parrot.

Polychrome straightened up and glanced at her sisters. "Tell Father to call for me in an hour or two," said she. "There is work for me to do here, for one of my old friends is in trouble."

With this she sprang lightly from the rainbow and stood beside Button-Bright and Trot, and scarcely had she left the splendid arch when it lifted and rose into the sky. The other end had been hidden in the clouds, and now the Rainbow began to fade gradually, like mist, and the sun broke through the clouds and shot its cheering rays over the Pink Country until presently the Rainbow had vanished altogether and the only reminder of it was the lovely Polychrome standing among the wondering band of Pinkies. "Tell me," she said gently to the boy, "why are you here, and why do these people of the sky wish to destroy you?"

In a few hurried words Button-Bright related their adventures with the Magic Umbrella and how the Boolooroo had stolen it and they had been obliged to escape into the Pink Country. Polychrome listened and then turned to the Queen. "Why have you decreed death to these innocent strangers?" she asked.

"They do not harmonize with our color scheme," replied Tourmaline.

"That is utter nonsense," declared Polychrome impatiently. "You're so dreadfully pink here that your color, which in itself is beautiful, had become tame and insipid. What you really need is some sharp contrast to enhance the charm of your country, and to keep these three people here would be a benefit rather than an injury to you."

At this, the Pinkies looked downcast and ashamed, while only Rosalie the Witch laughed and seemed to enjoy the rebuke. "But," protested Tourmaline, "the Great Book of Laws says our country shall harbor none but the Pinkies."

"Does it indeed?" asked the Rainbow's Daughter. "Come, let us return at once to your City and examine your Book of Laws. I am quite sure I can find in them absolute protection for these poor wanderers."

They dared not disobey Polychrome's request, so at once they all turned and walked back to the City. As it was still muddy underfoot, the Rainbow's Daughter took a cloak from one of the women, partly rolled it, and threw it upon the ground. Then she stepped upon it and began walking forward. The cloak unrolled as she advanced, affording a constant carpet for her feet and for those of the others who followed her. So, being protected from the mud and wet, they speedily gained the City and in a short time were all gathered in the

low room of Tourmaline's palace, where the Great Book of Laws lay upon a table.

Polychrome began turning over the leaves, while the others all watched her anxiously and in silence. "Here," she said presently, "is a Law which reads as follows: 'Everyone in the Pink Country is entitled to the protection of the Ruler and to a house and a good living, except only the Blueskins. If any of the natives of the Blue Country should ever break through the Fog Bank, they must be driven back with sharp sticks.' Have you read this Law, Tourmaline?"

"Yes," said the Queen, "but how does that apply to these strangers?"

"Why, being in the Pink Country, as they surely are, and not being Blueskins, they are by this Law entitled to protection, to a home and good living. The Law does not say 'Pinkies,' it says any who are in the Pink Country."

"True," agreed Coralie, greatly pleased, and all the other Pinkies nodded their heads and repeated, "True, true!"

"The rose is red, the violet's blue, The law's the thing, because it's true!"

cried the parrot.

"I am indeed relieved to have you interpret the Law in this way," declared Tourmaline. "I knew it was cruel to throw these poor people over the edge, but that seemed to us the only thing to be done."

"It was cruel and unjust," answered Polychrome as sternly as her sweet voice could speak. "But here," she added, for she had still continued to turn the leaves of the Great Book, "is another Law which you have also overlooked. It says, 'The person, whether man or woman, boy or girl, living in the Pink Country who has the lightest skin shall be the Ruler--King or Queen--as long as he or she lives, unless someone of a lighter skin is found, and this Ruler's commands all the people must obey.' Do you know this Law?"

"Oh yes," replied Tourmaline. "That is why I am the Queen. You will notice my complexion is of a lighter pink than that of any other of my people."

"Yes," remarked Polychrome, looking at her critically, "when you were made Queen without doubt you had the lightest-colored skin in all the Pink Country. But now you are no longer Queen of the Pinkies, Tourmaline."

Those assembled were so startled by this statement that they gazed at the Rainbow's Daughter in astonishment for a time. Then Tourmaline asked, "Why not, your Highness?"

"Because here is one lighter in color than yourself," pointed to Trot. "This girl is, by the Law of the Great Book, the rightful Queen of the Pinkies, and as loyal citizens you are all obliged to obey her commands. Give me that circlet from your brow, Tourmaline." Without hesitation Tourmaline removed the rose-gold circlet with its glittering jewel and handed it to Polychrome, who turned and placed it upon Trot's brow. Then she called in a loud, imperative voice, "Greet your new Queen, Pinkies!"

One by one they all advanced, knelt before Trot and pressed her hand to their lips. "Long live Queen Mayre!" called out Cap'n Bill, dancing around on his wooden leg in great delight. "Vive la--Vive la--ah, ah, Trot!"

"Thank you, Polly," said Button-Bright gratefully. "This will fix us all right, I'm sure."

"Why, I have done nothing," returned Polychrome, smiling upon him. "It is the Law of the Country. Isn't it surprising how little people know of their Laws? Are you all contented, Pinkies?" she asked, turning to the people.

"We are!" they cried. Then several of the men ran out to spread the news throughout the City and Country, so that a vast crowd soon began to gather in the Court of the Statues.