

CHAPTER 23 - THE GIRL AND THE BOOLOOROO

Trot watched from the window the escape of Ghip-Ghisizzle but did not know, of course, who it was. Then, after the City had quieted down again, she lay upon the bed without undressing and was sound asleep in a minute.

The blue dawn was just breaking when she opened her eyes with a start of fear that she might have overslept, but soon she found that no one else in the palace was yet astir. Even the guards had gone to sleep by this time and were adding their snores to the snores of the other inhabitants of the Royal Palace. So the little girl got up and, finding a ewer of water and a basin upon the dresser, washed herself carefully and then looked in a big mirror to see how her hair was. To her astonishment, there was no reflection at all; the mirror was blank so far as Trot was concerned. She laughed a little at that, remembering she wore the ring of Rosalie the Witch, which rendered her invisible. Then she slipped quietly out of the room and found it was already light enough in the corridors for her to see all objects distinctly.

After hesitating a moment which way to turn, she decided to visit the Snubnosed Princesses and passed through the big reception room to the sleeping room of Indigo. There this Princess, the crossdest and most disagreeable of all the disagreeable six, was curled up in bed and slumbering cozily. The little blue dog came trotting out of Indigo's boudoir and crowed like a rooster, for although he could not see Trot, his keen little nose scented her presence. Thinking it time the Princess awoke, Trot leaned over and gave her snub nose a good tweak, and at once Indigo sprang out of her bed and rushed into the chamber of Cobalt, which adjoined her own. Thinking it was this sister who had slyly attacked her, Indigo rushed at the sleeping Cobalt and slapped her face.

At once there was war. The other four Princesses, hearing the screams and cries of rage, came running into Cobalt's room, and as fast as they appeared, Trot threw pillows at them, so that presently all six were indulging in a free-for-all battle and snarling like tigers. The blue lamb came trotting into the room, and Trot leaned over and patted the pretty little animal, but as she did so, she became visible for an instant, each pat destroying the charm of the ring while the girl was in contact with a living creature. These flashes permitted some of the Princesses to see her, and at once they rushed toward her with furious cries. But the girl realized what had happened, and leaving the lamb, she stepped back into a corner and her frenzied enemies failed to

find her. It was a little dangerous, though, remaining in a room where six girls were feeling all around for her, so she went away and left them to their vain search while she renewed her hunt for Cap'n Bill.

The sailorman did not seem to be in any of the rooms she entered, so she decided to visit the Boolooroo's own apartments. In the room where Rosalie's vision had shown them the Magic Umbrella lying under a cabinet, Trot attempted to find it, for she considered that next to rescuing Cap'n Bill this was the most important task to accomplish; but the umbrella had been taken away and was no longer beneath the cabinet. This was a severe disappointment to the child, but she reflected that the umbrella was surely someplace in the Blue city, so there was no need to despair.

Finally, she entered the King's own sleeping chamber and found the Boolooroo in bed and asleep, with a funny nightcap tied over his egg-shaped head. As Trot looked at him, she was surprised to see that he had one foot out of bed and that to his big toe was tied a cord that led out of the bedchamber into a small dressing room beyond. Trot slowly followed this cord and in the dressing room came upon Cap'n Bill, who was lying asleep upon a lounge and snoring with great vigor. His arms were tied to his body, and his body was tied fast to the lounge. The wooden leg stuck out into the room at an angle, and the shoe on his one foot had been removed so that the end of the cord could be fastened to the sailor's big toe.

This arrangement had been a clever thought of the Boolooroo. Fearing his important prisoner might escape before he was patched as Ghip-Ghisizzle had done, the cruel King of the Blues had kept Cap'n Bill in his private apartments and had tied his own big toe to the prisoner's big toe, so that if the sailor made any attempt to get away, he would pull on the cord, and that would arouse the Boolooroo.

Trot saw through this cunning scheme at once, so the first thing she did was to untie the cord from Cap'n Bill's big toe and retie it to the leg of the lounge. Then she unfastened her friend's hands and leaned over to give his leathery face a smacking kiss. Cap'n Bill sat up and rubbed his eyes. He looked around the room and rubbed his eyes again, seeing no one who could have kissed him. Then he discovered that his bonds had been removed, and he rubbed his eyes once more to make sure he was not dreaming. The little girl laughed softly.

"Trot!" exclaimed the sailor, recognizing her voice.

Then Trot came up and took his hand, the touch at once rendering her visible to him. "Dear me!" said the bewildered sailor. "However did you get here, mate, in the Boolooroo's own den? Is the Blue City captured?"

"Not yet," she replied, "but YOU are, Cap'n, and I've come to save you."

"All alone, Trot?"

"All alone, Cap'n Bill. But it's got to be done, jus' the same." And then she explained about the magic ring Rosalie had lent her, which rendered her invisible while she wore it--unless she touched some living creature. Cap'n Bill was much interested.

"I'm willing to be saved, mate," he said, "for the Boolooroo is set on patchin' me right after breakfas', which I hope the cook'll be late with."

"Who are you to be patched to?" she asked.

"A feller named Tiggie, who's in disgrace 'cause he mixed the royal necktie for me."

"That was nectar, not necktie," corrected Trot. "But you needn't be 'fraid of bein' patched with Tiggie, 'cause I've set him loose. By this time he's in hiding, where he can't be found."

"That's good," said Cap'n Bill, nodding approval, "but the blamed ol' Boolooroo's sure to find someone else. What's to be done, mate?"

Trot thought about it for a moment. Then she remembered how some unknown man had escaped from the palace the night before by means of the wall, which he had reached from the window of the very chamber in which she had slept. Cap'n Bill might easily do the same. And the rope ladder she had used would help the sailor down from the top of the wall. "Could you climb down a rope ladder, Cap'n?" she asked.

"Like enough," said he. "I've done it many a time on shipboard."

"But you hadn't a wooden leg then," she reminded him.

"The wooden leg won't bother much," he assured her.

So Trot tied a small sofa cushion around the end of his wooden leg so it wouldn't make any noise pounding upon the floor, and then she quietly led the sailor through the room of the sleeping Boolooroo and through several other rooms until they came to the passage. Here a soldier was on guard, but

he had fallen asleep for a moment in order to rest himself. They passed the Blueskin without disturbing him and soon reached the chamber opposite the suite of the Six Snubnosed Princesses, whom they could hear still quarreling loudly among themselves.

Trot locked the door from the inside so no one could disturb them, and then led the sailor to the window. The garden was just below.

"But good gracious me! It's a drop o' ten feet, Trot," he exclaimed.

"And you've only one foot to drop, Cap'n," she said, laughing. "Couldn't you let yourself down with one of the sheets from the bed?"

"I'll try," he rejoined. "But can YOU do that circus act, Trot?"

"Oh, I'm goin' to stay here an' find the Magic Umbrella," she replied. "Bein' invis'ble, Cap'n, I'm safe enough. What I want to do is to see you safe back with the Pinkies, an' then I'll manage to hold my own all right, never fear."

So they brought a blue sheet and tied one end to a post of the blue bed and let the other end dangle out the blue window. "Goodbye, mate," said Cap'n Bill, preparing to descend. "Don't get reckless."

"I won't, Cap'n. Don't worry."

Then he grasped the sheet with both hands and easily let himself down to the wall. Trot had told him where to find the rope ladder she had left and how to fasten it to the broken flagstaff so he could climb down into the field outside the City. As soon as he was safe on the wall, Cap'n Bill began to hobble along the broad top toward the connecting wall that surrounded the entire City--just as Ghip-Ghisizzle had done--and Trot anxiously watched him from the window.

But the Blue City was now beginning to waken to life. One of the soldiers came from a house, sleepily yawning and stretching himself, and presently his eyes lit upon the huge form of Cap'n Bill hastening along the top of the wall. The soldier gave a yell that aroused a score of his comrades and brought them tumbling into the street. When they saw how the Boolooroo's precious prisoner was escaping, they instantly became alert and wide-awake, and every one started in pursuit along the foot of the wall.

Of course, the long-legged Blueskins could run faster than poor Cap'n Bill. Some of them soon got ahead of the old sailorman and came to the rope ladder

which Trot had left dangling from the stone bench, where it hung down inside the City. The Blue soldiers promptly mounted this ladder and so gained the wall, heading off the fugitive. When Cap'n Bill came up, panting and all out of breath, the Blueskins seized him and held him fast.

Cap'n Bill was terribly disappointed at being recaptured, and so was Trot, who had eagerly followed his every movement from her window in the palace. The little girl would have cried with vexation, and I think she did weep a few tears before she recovered her courage; but Cap'n Bill was a philosopher, in his way, and had learned to accept ill fortune cheerfully. Knowing he was helpless, he made no protest when they again bound him and carried him down the ladder like a bale of goods.

Others were also disappointed by his capture. Button-Bright had heard the parrot squawking, "Oh, there's Cap'n Bill! There's Cap'n Bill! I see him still, up on that hill! It's Cap'n Bill!" So the boy ran out of his tent to find the sailor scurrying along the top of the wall as fast as he could go. At once Button-Bright aroused Coralie, who got her Pinkies together and quickly marched them toward the wall to assist in the escape of her Commander in Chief. But they were too late. Before they could reach the wall, the Blueskins had captured Trot's old friend and lugged him down in to the City, so Coralie and Button-Bright were forced to return to their camp discomfited. There Ghip-Ghisizzle and Rosalie were awaiting them, and they all went into the Witch's tent and held a council of war.

"Tell me," said Ghip-Ghisizzle, "did you not take the Royal Record Book from the Treasure Chamber of the Boolooroo?"

"I did," replied the boy. "I remember that you wanted it, and so I have kept it with me ever since that night. Here it is." And he presented the little blue book to the Majordomo, the only friend the adventurers had found among all the Blueskins.

Ghip-Ghisizzle took the book eagerly and at once began turning over its leaves. "Ah!" he exclaimed presently. "It is just as I suspected. The wicked Boolooroo had already reigned over the Blue Country three hundred years last Thursday, so that now he has no right to rule at all. I myself have been the rightful Ruler of the Blues since Thursday, and yet this cruel and deceitful man has not only deprived me of my right to succeed him, but he has tried to have me patched so that I could never become the Boolooroo."

"Does the book tell how old he is?" asked Button-Bright.

"Yes. He is not five hundred years old, and has yet another hundred years to live. He planned to rule the Blue Country until the last, but I now know the deception he has practiced and have the Royal Record Book to prove it. With this I shall be able to force him to resign that I may take his place, for all the people will support me and abide by the Law. The tyrant will perhaps fight me and my cause desperately, but I am sure to win in the end."

"If we can help you," said Button-Bright, "the whole Pink Army will fight for you. Only, if you win, you must promise to give me back my Magic Umbrella and let us fly away to our own homes again."

"I will do that most willingly," agreed Ghip-Ghisizzle. "And now let us consult together how best to take the Blue City and capture the Boolooroo. As I know my own country much better than you or the Pinkies do, I think I can find a way to accomplish our purpose."