

## CHAPTER 24 - THE AMAZING CONQUEST OF THE BLUES

The shouting and excitement in the City following upon the recapture of Cap'n Bill aroused the sleeping Boolooroo. He found the cord still tied to his big toe and at first imagined his prisoner safe in the dressing room. While he put on his clothes, the king occasionally gave the cord a sudden pull, hoping to hurt Cap'n Bill's big toe and make him yell; but as no response came to this mean action, the Boolooroo finally looked into the room only to find he had been pulling on a leg of the couch and that his prisoner had escaped.

Then he flew into a mighty rage, and running out into the hall he aimed a blow at the unfaithful guard, knocking the fellow off his feet. Then he rushed downstairs into the courtyard, shouting loudly for his soldiers and threatening to patch everybody in his dominions if the sailorman was not recaptured.

While the Boolooroo stormed and raged, a band of soldiers and citizens came marching in, surrounding Cap'n Bill, who was again firmly bound.

"So-ho!" roared the monarch. "You thought you could defy me, Earth Clod, did you? But you were mistaken. No one can resist the Mighty Boolooroo of the Blues, so it is folly for you to rebel against my commands. Hold him fast, my men, and as soon as I've had my coffee and oatmeal I'll take him to the Room of the Great Knife and patch him."

"I wouldn't mind a cup o' coffee myself," said Cap'n Bill. "I've had consid'ble exercise this mornin', and I'm all ready for breakfas'."

"Very well," replied the Boolooroo, "you shall eat with me, for then I can keep an eye on you. My guards are not to be trusted, and I don't mean to let you out of my sight again until you are patched."

So Cap'n Bill and the Boolooroo had breakfast together, six Blueskins standing in a row back of the sailorman to grab him if he attempted to escape. But Cap'n Bill made no such attempt, knowing it would be useless.

Trot was in the room, too, standing in a corner and listening to all that was said while she racked her little brain for an idea that would enable her to save Cap'n Bill from being patched. No one could see her, so no one--not even Cap'n Bill--knew she was there.

After breakfast was over, a procession was formed, headed by the Boolooroo, and they marched the prisoner through the palace until they came to the

Room of the Great Knife. Invisible Trot followed soberly after them, still wondering what she could do to save her friend.

As soon as they entered the Room of the great Knife, the Boolooroo gave a yell of disappointment.

"What's become of Tiggie?" he shouted. "Where's Tiggie? Who has released Tiggie? Go at once, you dummies, and find him, or it will go hard with you!"

The frightened soldiers hurried away to find Tiggie, and Trot was well pleased because she knew Tiggie was by this time safely hidden.

The Boolooroo stamped up and down the room, muttering threats and declaring Cap'n Bill should be punished whether Tiggie was found or not, and while they waited, Trot took time to make an inspection of the place, which she now saw for the first time in broad daylight.

The Room of the Great Knife was high and big, and around it ran rows of benches for the spectators to sit upon. In one place at the head of the room was a raised platform for the royal family, with elegant throne-chairs for the King and Queen and six smaller but richly upholstered chairs for the Snubnosed Princesses. The poor Queen, by the way, was seldom seen, as she passed all her time playing solitaire with a deck that was one card short, hoping that before she had lived her entire six hundred years she would win the game. Therefore, her Majesty paid no attention to anyone and no one paid any attention to her.

In the center of the room stood the terrible knife that gave the place its name, a name dreaded by every inhabitant of the Blue City. The knife was built into a huge framework like a derrick, that reached to the ceiling, and it was so arranged that when the Boolooroo pulled a cord the great blade would drop down in its frame and neatly cut in two the person who stood under it. And in order that the slicing would be accurate, there was another frame to which the prisoner was tied so that he couldn't wiggle either way. This frame was on rollers so that it could be placed directly underneath the knife.

While Trot was observing this dreadful machine, the door opened and in walked the Six Snubnosed Princesses, all in a row and with their chins up as if they disdained everyone but themselves. They were magnificently dressed, and their blue hair was carefully arranged in huge towers upon their heads, with blue plumes stuck into the tops. These plumes waved gracefully in the air with every mincing step the Princesses took. Rich jewels of blue stones

glittered upon their persons, and the royal ladies were fully as gorgeous as they were haughty and overbearing. They marched to their chairs and seated themselves to enjoy the cruel scene their father was about to enact, and Cap'n Bill bowed to them politely and said:

"Mornin', girls. Hope ye feel as well as ye look."

"Papa," exclaimed Turquoise angrily, "can you not prevent this vile Earth Being from addressing us? It is an insult to be spoken to by one about to be patched."

"Control yourselves, my dears," replied the Boolooroo. "The worst punishment I know how to inflict on anyone this prisoner is about to suffer. You'll see a very pretty patching, my royal daughters."

"When?" inquired Cobalt.

"When? As soon as the soldiers return with Tigger," said he.

But just then in came the soldiers to say that Tigger could not be found anywhere in the City; he had disappeared as mysteriously as had Ghip-Ghisizzle. Immediately, the Boolooroo flew into another towering rage.

"Villains!" he shouted. "Go out and arrest the first living thing you meet, and whoever it proves to be will be instantly patched to Cap'n Bill."

The Captain of the Guards hesitated to obey this order. "Suppose it's a friend?" he suggested.

"Friend!" roared the Boolooroo. "I haven't a friend in the country. Tell me, sir, do you know of anyone who is my friend?"

The Captain shook his head. "I can't think of anyone just now, your Spry and Flighty High and Mighty Majesty," he answered.

"Of course not," said the Boolooroo. "Everyone hates me, and I don't object to that because I hate everybody. But I'm the Ruler here, and I'll do as I please. Go and capture the first living creature you see and bring him here to be patched to Cap'n Bill."

So the Captain took a file of soldiers and went away very sorrowful, for he did not know who would be the victim, and if the Boolooroo had no friends, the Captain had plenty and did not wish to see them patched.

Meanwhile, Trot, being invisible to all, was roaming around the room, and behind a bench she found a small end of rope, which she picked up. Then she seated herself in an out-of-the-way place and quietly waited.

Suddenly there was a noise in the corridor and evidence of scuffling and struggling. Then the door flew open and in came the soldiers dragging a great blue billygoat, which was desperately striving to get free.

"Villains!" howled the Boolooroo. "What does this mean?"

"Why, you said to fetch the first living creature we met, and that was this billygoat," replied the Captain, panting hard as he held fast to one of the goat's horns.

The Boolooroo stared a moment, and then he fell back to his throne, laughing boisterously. The idea of patching Cap'n Bill to a goat was vastly amusing to him, and the more he thought of it the more he roared with laughter. Some of the soldiers laughed, too, being tickled with the absurd notion, and the Six Snubnosed Princesses all sat up straight and permitted themselves to smile contemptuously. This would indeed be a severe punishment, therefore the Princesses were pleased at the thought of Cap'n Bill's becoming half a billygoat, and the billygoat's being half Cap'n Bill.

"They look something alike, you know," suggested the Captain of the Guards, looking from one to the other doubtfully, "and they're nearly the same size if you stand the goat on his hind legs. They've both got the same style of whiskers, and they're both of 'em obstinate and dangerous, so they ought to make a good patch."

"Splendid! Fine! Glorious!" cried the Boolooroo, wiping the tears of merriment from his eyes. "We will proceed with the Ceremony of Patching at once."

Cap'n Bill regarded the billygoat with distinct disfavor, and the billygoat glared evilly upon Cap'n Bill. Trot was horrified, and wrung her little hands in sore perplexity, for this was a most horrible fate that awaited her dear friend.

"First, bind the Earth Man in the frame," commanded the Boolooroo. "We'll slice him in two before we do the same to the billygoat."

So they seized Cap'n Bill and tied him into the frame so that he couldn't move a jot in any direction. Then they rolled the frame underneath the Great Knife and handed the Boolooroo the cord that released the blade. But while this was going on, Trot had crept up and fastened one end of her rope to the frame in

which Cap'n Bill was confined. Then she stood back and watched the Boolooroo, and just as he pulled the cord, she pulled on her rope and dragged the frame on its rollers away, so that the Great Knife fell with a crash and sliced nothing but the air.

"Huh!" exclaimed the Boolooroo. "That's queer. Roll him up again, soldiers."

The soldiers again rolled the frame in position, having first pulled the Great Knife once more to the top of the derrick. The immense blade was so heavy that it took the strength of seven Blueskins to raise it. When all was in readiness, the King pulled the cord a second time, and Trot at the same instant pulled upon her rope. The same thing happened as before. Cap'n Bill rolled away in his frame, and the knife fell harmlessly.

Now, indeed, the Boolooroo was as angry as he was amazed. He jumped down from the platform and commanded the soldiers to raise the Great Knife into position. When this was accomplished, the Boolooroo leaned over to try to discover why the frame rolled away--seemingly of its own accord--and he was the more puzzled because it had never done such a thing before.

As he stood, bent nearly double, his back was toward the billygoat, which in their interest and excitement the soldiers were holding in a careless manner. Before any could stop him, he butted his Majesty so furiously that the King soared far into the air and tumbled in a heap among the benches, where he lay moaning and groaning.

The goat's warlike spirit was roused by this successful attack. Finding himself free, he turned and assaulted the soldiers, butting them so fiercely that they tumbled down in bunches, and as soon as they could rise again ran frantically from the room and along the corridors as if a fiend was after them. By this time the goat was so animated by the spirit of conquest that he rushed at the Six Snubnosed Princesses, who had all climbed upon their chairs and were screaming in a panic of fear. Six times the goat butted, and each time he tipped over a chair and sent a haughty Princess groveling upon the floor, where the ladies got mixed up in their long, blue trains and flounces and laces and struggled wildly until they recovered their footing. Then they sped in great haste for the door, and the goat gave a final butt that sent the row of royal ladies all diving into the corridor in another tangle, whereupon they shrieked in a manner that terrified everyone within sound of their voices.

As the Room of the Great Knife was now cleared of all but Cap'n Bill, who was tied in his frame, and of Trot and the moaning Boolooroo, who lay hidden

behind the benches, the goat gave a victorious bleat and stood in the doorway to face any enemy that might appear. Trot had been as surprised as anyone at this sudden change of conditions, but she was quick to take advantage of the opportunities it afforded. First she ran with her rope to the goat, and as the animal could not see her, she easily succeeded in tying the rope around its horns and fastening the loose end to a pillar of the doorway. Next she hurried to Cap'n Bill and began to unbind him, and as she touched the sailor she became visible. He nodded cheerfully, then, and said, "I had a notion it was you, mate, as saved me from the knife. But it were a pretty close call, an' I hope it won't happen again. I couldn't shiver much, bein' bound so tight, but when I'm loose I mean to have jus' one good shiver to relieve my feelin's."

"Shiver all you want to, Cap'n," she said as she removed the last bonds. "But first you've got to help me save us both."

"As how?" he asked, stepping from the frame.

"Come and get the Boolooroo," she said, going toward the benches. The sailor followed and pulled out the Boolooroo, who, when he saw the terrible goat was captured and tied fast, quickly recovered his courage. "Hi, there!" he cried. "Where are my soldiers? What do you mean, prisoner, by daring to lay hands upon me? Let me go this minute or I'll--I'll have you patched TWICE!"

"Don't mind him, Cap'n," said Trot, "but fetch him along to the frame." The Boolooroo looked around to see where the voice came from, and Cap'n Bill grinned joyfully and caught up the king in both his strong arms, dragging the struggling Monarch of the Blues to the frame.

"Stop it! How dare you?" roared the frightened Boolooroo. "I'll have revenge! I'll--I'll--"

"You'll take it easy, 'cause you can't help yourself," said Cap'n Bill. "What next, Queen Trot?"

"Hold him steady in the frame, and I'll tie him up," she replied. So Cap'n Bill held the Boolooroo, and the girl tied him fast in position as Cap'n Bill had been tied, so that his Majesty couldn't wiggle at all. Then they rolled the frame in position underneath the Great Knife and Trot held in her hand the cord which would release it.

"All right, Cap'n," she said in a satisfied tone. "I guess we can run this Blue Country ourselves after this." The Boolooroo was terrified to find himself in danger of being sliced by the same knife he had so often wickedly employed to

slice others. Like Cap'n Bill, he had no room to shiver, but he groaned very  
dismally and was so full of fear that his blue hair nearly stood on end.