

CHAPTER 4 - AMONG THE WINKIES

The settled parts of the Winkie Country are full of happy and contented people who are ruled by a tin Emperor named Nick Chopper, who in turn is a subject of the beautiful girl Ruler, Ozma of Oz. But not all of the Winkie Country is fully settled. At the east, which part lies nearest the Emerald City, there are beautiful farmhouses and roads, but as you travel west, you first come to a branch of the Winkie River, beyond which there is a rough country where few people live, and some of these are quite unknown to the rest of the world. After passing through this rude section of territory, which no one ever visits, you would come to still another branch of the Winkie River, after crossing which you would find another well-settled part of the Winkie Country extending westward quite to the Deadly Desert that surrounds all the Land of Oz and separates that favored fairyland from the more common outside world. The Winkies who live in this west section have many tin mines, from which metal they make a great deal of rich jewelry and other articles, all of which are highly esteemed in the Land of Oz because tin is so bright and pretty and there is not so much of it as there is of gold and silver.

Not all the Winkies are miners, however, for some till the fields and grow grains for food, and it was at one of these far-west Winkie farms that the Frogman and Cayke the Cookie Cook first arrived after they had descended from the mountain of the Yips. "Goodness me!" cried Nellary the Winkie wife when she saw the strange couple approaching her house. "I have seen many queer creatures in the Land of Oz, but none more queer than this giant frog who dresses like a man and walks on his hind legs. Come here, Wiljon," she called to her husband, who was eating his breakfast, "and take a look at this astonishing freak."

Wiljon the Winkie came to the door and looked out. He was still standing in the doorway when the Frogman approached and said with a haughty croak, "Tell me, my good man, have you seen a diamond-studded gold dishpan?"

"No, nor have I seen a copper-plated lobster," replied Wiljon in an equally haughty tone.

The Frogman stared at him and said, "Do not be insolent, fellow!"

"No," added Cayke the Cookie Cook hastily, "you must be very polite to the great Frogman, for he is the wisest creature in all the world."

"Who says that?" inquired Wiljon.

"He says so himself," replied Cayke, and the Frogman nodded and strutted up and down, twirling his gold-headed cane very gracefully.

"Does the Scarecrow admit that this overgrown frog is the wisest creature in the world?" asked Wiljon.

"I do not know who the Scarecrow is," answered Cayke the Cookie Cook.

"Well, he lives at the Emerald City, and he is supposed to have the finest brains in all Oz. The Wizard gave them to him, you know."

"Mine grew in my head," said the Frogman pompously, "so I think they must be better than any wizard brains. I am so wise that sometimes my wisdom makes my head ache. I know so much that often I have to forget part of it, since no one creature, however great, is able to contain so much knowledge."

"It must be dreadful to be stuffed full of wisdom," remarked Wiljon reflectively and eyeing the Frogman with a doubtful look. "It is my good fortune to know very little."

"I hope, however, you know where my jeweled dishpan is," said the Cookie Cook anxiously.

"I do not know even that," returned the Winkie. "We have trouble enough in keeping track of our own dishpans without meddling with the dishpans of strangers."

Finding him so ignorant, the Frogman proposed that they walk on and seek Cayke's dishpan elsewhere. Wiljon the Winkie did not seem greatly impressed by the great Frogman, which seemed to that personage as strange as it was disappointing. But others in this unknown land might prove more respectful.

"I'd like to meet that Wizard of Oz," remarked Cayke as they walked along a path. "If he could give a Scarecrow brains, he might be able to find my dishpan."

"Poof!" grunted the Frogman scornfully. "I am greater than any wizard. Depend on ME. If your dishpan is anywhere in the world, I am sure to find it."

"If you do not, my heart will be broken," declared the Cookie Cook in a sorrowful voice.

For a while the Frogman walked on in silence. Then he asked, "Why do you attach so much importance to a dishpan?"

"It is the greatest treasure I possess," replied the woman. "It belonged to my mother and to all my grandmothers since the beginning of time. It is, I believe, the very oldest thing in all the Yip Country--or was while it was there-- and," she added, dropping her voice to an awed whisper, "it has magic powers!"

"In what way?" inquired the Frogman, seeming to be surprised at this statement.

"Whoever has owned that dishpan has been a good cook, for one thing. No one else is able to make such good cookies as I have cooked, as you and all the Yips know. Yet the very morning after my dishpan was stolen, I tried to make a batch of cookies and they burned up in the oven! I made another batch that proved too tough to eat, and I was so ashamed of them that I buried them in the ground. Even the third batch of cookies, which I brought with me in my basket, were pretty poor stuff and no better than any woman could make who does not own my diamond-studded gold dishpan. In fact, my good Frogman, Cayke the Cookie Cook will never be able to cook good cookies again until her magic dishpan is restored to her."

"In that case," said the Frogman with a sigh, "I suppose we must manage to find it."