

## CHAPTER 16 - THE LITTLE PINK BEAR

"One Person and one Freak," said the big Lavender Bear when he had carefully examined the strangers.

"I am sorry to hear you call poor Cayke the Cookie Cook a Freak," remonstrated the Frogman.

"She is the Person," asserted the King. "Unless I am mistaken, it is you who are the Freak."

The Frogman was silent, for he could not truthfully deny it.

"Why have you dared intrude in my forest?" demanded the Bear King.

"We didn't know it was your forest," said Cayke, "and we are on our way to the far east, where the Emerald City is."

"Ah, it's a long way from here to the Emerald City," remarked the King. "It is so far away, indeed, that no bear among us has even been there. But what errand requires you to travel such a distance?"

"Someone has stolen my diamond-studded gold dishpan," explained Cayke, "and as I cannot be happy without it, I have decided to search the world over until I find it again. The Frogman, who is very learned and wonderfully wise, has come with me to give me his assistance. Isn't it kind of him?"

The King looked at the Frogman.

"What makes you so wonderfully wise?" he asked.

"I'm not," was the candid reply. "The Cookie Cook and some others in the Yip Country think because I am a big frog and talk and act like a man that I must be very wise. I have learned more than a frog usually knows, it is true, but I am not yet so wise as I hope to become at some future time."

The King nodded, and when he did so, something squeaked in his chest.

"Did Your Majesty speak?" asked Cayke.

"Not just then," answered the Lavender Bear, seeming to be somewhat embarrassed. "I am so built, you must know, that when anything pushes against my chest, as my chin accidentally did just then, I make that silly noise. In this city it isn't considered good manners to notice. But I like your

Frogman. He is honest and truthful, which is more than can be said of many others. As for your late lamented dishpan, I'll show it to you."

With this he waved three times the metal wand which he held in his paw, and instantly there appeared upon the ground midway between the King and Cayke a big, round pan made of beaten gold. Around the top edge was a row of small diamonds; around the center of the pan was another row of larger diamonds; and at the bottom was a row of exceedingly large and brilliant diamonds. In fact, they all sparkled magnificently, and the pan was so big and broad that it took a lot of diamonds to go around it three times.

Cayke stared so hard that her eyes seemed about to pop out of her head. "O-o-o-h!" she exclaimed, drawing a deep breath of delight.

"Is this your dishpan?" inquired the King.

"It is, it is!" cried the Cookie Cook, and rushing forward, she fell on her knees and threw her arms around the precious pan. But her arms came together without meeting any resistance at all. Cayke tried to seize the edge, but found nothing to grasp. The pan was surely there, she thought, for she could see it plainly; but it was not solid; she could not feel it at all. With a moan of astonishment and despair, she raised her head to look at the Bear King, who was watching her actions curiously. Then she turned to the pan again, only to find it had completely disappeared.

"Poor creature!" murmured the King pityingly. "You must have thought, for the moment, that you had actually recovered your dishpan. But what you saw was merely the image of it, conjured up by means of my magic. It is a pretty dishpan, indeed, though rather big and awkward to handle. I hope you will some day find it."

Cayke was grievously disappointed. She began to cry, wiping her eyes on her apron. The King turned to the throng of toy bears surrounding him and asked, "Has any of you ever seen this golden dishpan before?"

"No," they answered in a chorus.

The King seemed to reflect. Presently he inquired, "Where is the Little Pink Bear?"

"At home, Your Majesty," was the reply.

"Fetch him here," commanded the King.

Several of the bears waddled over to one of the trees and pulled from its hollow a tiny pink bear, smaller than any of the others. A big, white bear carried the pink one in his arms and set it down beside the King, arranging the joints of its legs so that it would stand upright.

This Pink Bear seemed lifeless until the King turned a crank which protruded from its side, when the little creature turned its head stiffly from side to side and said in a small, shrill voice, "Hurrah for the King of Bear Center!"

"Very good," said the big Lavender Bear. "He seems to be working very well today. Tell me, my Pink Pinkerton, what has become of this lady's jeweled dishpan?"

"U-u-u," said the Pink Bear, and then stopped short.

The King turned the crank again.

"U-g-u the Shoemaker has it," said the Pink Bear.

"Who is Ugu the Shoemaker?" demanded the King, again turning the crank.

"A magician who lives on a mountain in a wickerwork castle," was the reply.

"Where is the mountain?" was the next question.

"Nineteen miles and three furlongs from Bear Center to the northeast."

"And is the dishpan still at the castle of Ugu the Shoemaker?" asked the King.

"It is."

The King turned to Cayke.

"You may rely on this information," said he. "The Pink Bear can tell us anything we wish to know, and his words are always words of truth."

"Is he alive?" asked the Frogman, much interested in the Pink Bear.

"Something animates him when you turn his crank," replied the King. "I do not know if it is life or what it is or how it happens that the Little Pink Bear can answer correctly every question put to him. We discovered his talent a long time ago, and whenever we wish to know anything--which is not very often--we ask the Pink Bear. There is no doubt whatever, madam, that Ugu the Magician has your dishpan, and if you dare to go to him, you may be able to recover it. But of that I am not certain."

"Can't the Pink Bear tell?" asked Cayke anxiously.

"No, for that is in the future. He can tell anything that HAS happened, but nothing that is going to happen. Don't ask me why, for I don't know."

"Well," said the Cookie Cook after a little thought, "I mean to go to this magician, anyhow, and tell him I want my dishpan. I wish I knew what Ugu the Shoemaker is like."

"Then I'll show him to you," promised the King. "But do not be frightened. It won't be Ugu, remember, but only his image." With this, he waved his metal wand, and in the circle suddenly appeared a thin little man, very old and skinny, who was seated on a wicker stool before a wicker table. On the table lay a Great Book with gold clasps. The Book was open, and the man was reading in it. He wore great spectacles which were fastened before his eyes by means of a ribbon that passed around his head and was tied in a bow at the neck. His hair was very thin and white; his skin, which clung fast to his bones, was brown and seared with furrows; he had a big, fat nose and little eyes set close together.

On no account was Ugu the Shoemaker a pleasant person to gaze at. As his image appeared before them, all were silent and intent until Corporal Waddle, the Brown Bear, became nervous and pulled the trigger of his gun. Instantly, the cork flew out of the tin barrel with a loud "pop!" that made them all jump. And at this sound, the image of the magician vanished.

"So THAT'S the thief, is it?" said Cayke in an angry voice. "I should think he'd be ashamed of himself for stealing a poor woman's diamond dishpan! But I mean to face him in his wicker castle and force him to return my property."

"To me," said the Bear King reflectively, "he looked like a dangerous person. I hope he won't be so unkind as to argue the matter with you."

The Frogman was much disturbed by the vision of Ugu the Shoemaker, and Cayke's determination to go to the magician filled her companion with misgivings. But he would not break his pledged word to assist the Cookie Cook, and after breathing a deep sigh of resignation, he asked the King, "Will Your Majesty lend us this Pink Bear who answers questions that we may take him with us on our journey? He would be very useful to us, and we will promise to bring him safely back to you."

The King did not reply at once. He seemed to be thinking.

"PLEASE let us take the Pink Bear," begged Cayke. "I'm sure he would be a great help to us."

"The Pink Bear," said the King, "is the best bit of magic I possess, and there is not another like him in the world. I do not care to let him out of my sight, nor do I wish to disappoint you; so I believe I will make the journey in your company and carry my Pink Bear with me. He can walk when you wind the other side of him, but so slowly and awkwardly that he would delay you. But if I go along, I can carry him in my arms, so I will join your party. Whenever you are ready to start, let me know."

"But Your Majesty!" exclaimed Corporal Waddle in protest, "I hope you do not intend to let these prisoners escape without punishment."

"Of what crime do you accuse them?" inquired the King.

"Why, they trespassed on your domain, for one thing," said the Brown Bear.

"We didn't know it was private property, Your Majesty," said the Cookie Cook. "And they asked if any of us had stolen the dishpan!" continued Corporal Waddle indignantly. "That is the same thing as calling us thieves and robbers and bandits and brigands, is it not?"

"Every person has the right to ask questions," said the Frogman.

"But the Corporal is quite correct," declared the Lavender Bear. "I condemn you both to death, the execution to take place ten years from this hour."

"But we belong in the Land of Oz, where no one ever dies," Cayke reminded him.

"Very true," said the King. "I condemn you to death merely as a matter of form. It sounds quite terrible, and in ten years we shall have forgotten all about it. Are you ready to start for the wicker castle of Ugu the Shoemaker?"

"Quite ready, Your Majesty."

"But who will rule in your place while you are gone?" asked a big Yellow Bear.

"I myself will rule while I am gone," was the reply.

"A King isn't required to stay at home forever, and if he takes a notion to travel, whose business is it but his own? All I ask is that you bears behave yourselves while I am away. If any of you is naughty, I'll send him to some girl or boy in America to play with."

This dreadful threat made all the toy bears look solemn. They assured the King in a chorus of growls that they would be good. Then the big Lavender Bear picked up the little Pink Bear, and after tucking it carefully under one arm, he said, "Goodbye till I come back!" and waddled along the path that led through the forest. The Frogman and Cayke the Cookie Cook also said goodbye to the bears and then followed after the King, much to the regret of the little Brown Bear, who pulled the trigger of his gun and popped the cork as a parting salute.