

CHAPTER 17 - THE MEETING

While the Frogman and his party were advancing from the west, Dorothy and her party were advancing from the east, and so it happened that on the following night they all camped at a little hill that was only a few miles from the wicker castle of Ugu the Shoemaker. But the two parties did not see one another that night, for one camped on one side of the hill while the other camped on the opposite side. But the next morning, the Frogman thought he would climb the hill and see what was on top of it, and at the same time Scraps, the Patchwork Girl, also decided to climb the hill to find if the wicker castle was visible from its top. So she stuck her head over an edge just as the Frogman's head appeared over another edge, and both, being surprised, kept still while they took a good look at one another.

Scraps recovered from her astonishment first, and bounding upward, she turned a somersault and landed sitting down and facing the big Frogman, who slowly advanced and sat opposite her. "Well met, Stranger!" cried the Patchwork Girl with a whoop of laughter. "You are quite the funniest individual I have seen in all my travels."

"Do you suppose I can be any funnier than you?" asked the Frogman, gazing at her in wonder.

"I'm not funny to myself, you know," returned Scraps. "I wish I were. And perhaps you are so used to your own absurd shape that you do not laugh whenever you see your reflection in a pool or in a mirror."

"No," said the Frogman gravely, "I do not. I used to be proud of my great size and vain of my culture and education, but since I bathed in the Truth Pond, I sometimes think it is not right that I should be different from all other frogs."

"Right or wrong," said the Patchwork Girl, "to be different is to be distinguished. Now in my case, I'm just like all other Patchwork Girls because I'm the only one there is. But tell me, where did you come from?"

"The Yip Country," said he.

"Is that in the Land of Oz?"

"Of course," replied the Frogman.

"And do you know that your Ruler, Ozma of Oz, has been stolen?"

"I was not aware that I had a Ruler, so of course I couldn't know that she was stolen."

"Well, you have. All the people of Oz," explained Scraps, "are ruled by Ozma, whether they know it or not. And she has been stolen. Aren't you angry? Aren't you indignant? Your Ruler, whom you didn't know you had, has positively been stolen!"

"That is queer," remarked the Frogman thoughtfully. "Stealing is a thing practically unknown in Oz, yet this Ozma has been taken, and a friend of mine has also had her dishpan stolen. With her I have traveled all the way from the Yip Country in order to recover it."

"I don't see any connection between a Royal Ruler of Oz and a dishpan!" declared Scraps.

"They've both been stolen, haven't they?"

"True. But why can't your friend wash her dishes in another dishpan?" asked Scraps.

"Why can't you use another Royal Ruler? I suppose you prefer the one who is lost, and my friend wants her own dishpan, which is made of gold and studded with diamonds and has magic powers."

"Magic, eh?" exclaimed Scraps. "THERE is a link that connects the two steals, anyhow, for it seems that all the magic in the Land of Oz was stolen at the same time, whether it was in the Emerald City of in Glinda's castle or in the Yip Country. Seems mighty strange and mysterious, doesn't it?"

"It used to seem that way to me," admitted the Frogman, "but we have now discovered who took our dishpan. It was Ugu the Shoemaker."

"Ugu? Good gracious! That's the same magician we think has stolen Ozma. We are now on our way to the castle of this Shoemaker."

"So are we," said the Frogman.

"Then follow me, quick! And let me introduce you to Dorothy and the other girls and to the Wizard of Oz and all the rest of us."

She sprang up and seized his coatsleeve, dragging him off the hilltop and down the other side from that whence he had come. And at the foot of the hill, the Frogman was astonished to find the three girls and the Wizard and

Button-Bright, who were surrounded by a wooden Sawhorse, a lean Mule, a square Woozy, and a Cowardly Lion. A little black dog ran up and smelled at the Frogman, but couldn't growl at him.

"I've discovered another party that has been robbed," shouted Scraps as she joined them. "This is their leader, and they're all going to Ugu's castle to fight the wicked Shoemaker!"

They regarded the Frogman with much curiosity and interest, and finding all eyes fixed upon him, the newcomer arranged his necktie and smoothed his beautiful vest and swung his gold-headed cane like a regular dandy. The big spectacles over his eyes quite altered his froglike countenance and gave him a learned and impressive look. Used as she was to seeing strange creatures in the Land of Oz, Dorothy was amazed at discovering the Frogman. So were all her companions. Toto wanted to growl at him, but couldn't, and he didn't dare bark. The Sawhorse snorted rather contemptuously, but the Lion whispered to the wooden steed, "Bear with this strange creature, my friend, and remember he is no more extraordinary than you are. Indeed, it is more natural for a frog to be big than for a Sawhorse to be alive."

On being questioned, the Frogman told them the whole story of the loss of Cayke's highly prized dishpan and their adventures in search of it. When he came to tell of the Lavender Bear King and of the Little Pink Bear who could tell anything you wanted to know, his hearers became eager to see such interesting animals.

"It will be best," said the Wizard, "to unite our two parties and share our fortunes together, for we are all bound on the same errand, and as one band we may more easily defy this shoemaker magician than if separate. Let us be allies."

"I will ask my friends about that," replied the Frogman, and he climbed over the hill to find Cayke and the toy bears. The Patchwork Girl accompanied him, and when they came upon the Cookie Cook and the Lavender Bear and the Pink Bear, it was hard to tell which of the lot was the most surprised.

"Mercy me!" cried Cayke, addressing the Patchwork Girl. "However did you come alive?"

Scraps stared at the bears.

"Mercy me!" she echoed, "You are stuffed, as I am, with cotton, and you appear to be living. That makes me feel ashamed, for I have prided myself on being the only live cotton-stuffed person in Oz."

"Perhaps you are," returned the Lavender Bear, "for I am stuffed with extra-quality curled hair, and so is the Little Pink Bear."

"You have relieved my mind of a great anxiety," declared the Patchwork Girl, now speaking more cheerfully. "The Scarecrow is stuffed with straw and you with hair, so I am still the Original and Only Cotton-Stuffed!"

"I hope I am too polite to criticize cotton as compared with curled hair," said the King, "especially as you seem satisfied with it."

Then the Frogman told of his interview with the party from the Emerald City and added that the Wizard of Oz had invited the bears and Cayke and himself to travel in company with them to the castle of Ugu the Shoemaker. Cayke was much pleased, but the Bear King looked solemn. He set the Little Pink Bear on his lap and turned the crank in its side and asked, "Is it safe for us to associate with those people from the Emerald City?"

And the Pink Bear at once replied,

"Safe for you and safe for me; Perhaps no others safe will be."

"That 'perhaps' need not worry us," said the King, "so let us join the others and offer them our protection."

Even the Lavender Bear was astonished, however, when on climbing over the hill he found on the other side the group of queer animals and the people from the Emerald City. The bears and Cayke were received very cordially, although Button-Bright was cross when they wouldn't let him play with the Little Pink Bear. The three girls greatly admired the toy bears, and especially the pink one, which they longed to hold.

"You see," explained the Lavender King in denying them this privilege, "he's a very valuable bear, because his magic is a correct guide on all occasions, and especially if one is in difficulties. It was the Pink Bear who told us that Ugu the Shoemaker had stolen the Cookie Cook's dishpan."

"And the King's magic is just as wonderful," added Cayke, "because it showed us the Magician himself."

"What did he look like?" inquired Dorothy.

"He was dreadful!"

"He was sitting at a table and examining an immense Book which had three golden clasps," remarked the King.

"Why, that must have been Glinda's Great Book of Records!" exclaimed Dorothy. "If it is, it proves that Ugu the Shoemaker stole Ozma, and with her all the magic in the Emerald City."

"And my dishpan," said Cayke.

And the Wizard added, "It also proves that he is following our adventures in the Book of Records, and therefore knows that we are seeking him and that we are determined to find him and reach Ozma at all hazards."

"If we can," added the Woozy, but everybody frowned at him.

The Wizard's statement was so true that the faces around him were very serious until the Patchwork Girl broke into a peal of laughter.

"Wouldn't it be a rich joke if he made prisoners of us, too?" she said.

"No one but a crazy Patchwork Girl would consider that a joke," grumbled Button-Bright.

And then the Lavender Bear King asked, "Would you like to see this magical shoemaker?"

"Wouldn't he know it?" Dorothy inquired.

"No, I think not."

Then the King waved his metal wand and before them appeared a room in the wicker castle of Ugu. On the wall of the room hung Ozma's Magic Picture, and seated before it was the Magician. They could see the Picture as well as he could, because it faced them, and in the Picture was the hillside where they were not sitting, all their forms being reproduced in miniature. And curiously enough, within the scene of the Picture was the scene they were now beholding, so they knew that the Magician was at this moment watching them in the Picture, and also that he saw himself and the room he was in become visible to the people on the hillside. Therefore he knew very well that they were watching him while he was watching them.

In proof of this, Ugu sprang from his seat and turned a scowling face in their direction; but now he could not see the travelers who were seeking him,

although they could still see him. His actions were so distinct, indeed, that it seemed he was actually before them. "It is only a ghost," said the Bear King. "It isn't real at all except that it shows us Ugu just as he looks and tells us truly just what he is doing."

"I don't see anything of my lost growl, though," said Toto as if to himself.

Then the vision faded away, and they could see nothing but the grass and trees and bushes around them.