

CHAPTER 24 - THE LITTLE PINK BEAR SPEAKS TRULY

For several minutes they all stood staring at the black spot on the canvas of the Magic Picture, wondering what it could mean. "P'r'aps we'd better ask the little Pink Bear about Ozma," suggested Trot.

"Pshaw!" said Button-Bright. "HE don't know anything."

"He never makes a mistake," declared the King.

"He did once, surely," said Betsy. "But perhaps he wouldn't make a mistake again."

"He won't have the chance," grumbled the Bear King.

"We might hear what he has to say," said Dorothy. "It won't do any harm to ask the Pink Bear where Ozma is."

"I will not have him questioned," declared the King in a surly voice. "I do not intend to allow my little Pink Bear to be again insulted by your foolish doubts. He never makes a mistake."

"Didn't he say Ozma was in that hole in the ground?" asked Betsy.

"He did, and I am certain she was there," replied the Lavender Bear.

Scraps laughed jeeringly, and the others saw there was no use arguing with the stubborn Bear King, who seemed to have absolute faith in his Pink Bear. The Wizard, who knew that magical things can usually be depended upon and that the little Pink Bear was able to answer questions by some remarkable power of magic, thought it wise to apologize to the Lavender Bear for the unbelief of his friends, at the same time urging the King to consent to question the Pink Bear once more. Cayke and the Frogman also pleaded with the big Bear, who finally agreed, although rather ungraciously, to put the little Bear's wisdom to the test once more. So he sat the little one on his knee and turned the crank, and the Wizard himself asked the questions in a very respectful tone of voice. "Where is Ozma?" was his first query.

"Here in this room," answered the little Pink Bear.

They all looked around the room, but of course did not see her. "In what part of the room is she?" was the Wizard's next question.

"In Button-Bright's pocket," said the little Pink Bear.

This reply amazed them all, you may be sure, and although the three girls smiled and Scraps yelled "Hoo-ray!" in derision, the Wizard turned to consider the matter with grave thoughtfulness. "In which one of Button-Bright's pockets is Ozma?" he presently inquired.

"In the left-hand jacket pocket," said the little Pink Bear.

"The pink one has gone crazy!" exclaimed Button-Bright, staring hard at the little bear on the big bear's knee.

"I am not so sure of that," declared the Wizard. "If Ozma proves to be really in your pocket, then the little Pink Bear spoke truly when he said Ozma was in that hole in the ground. For at that time you were also in the hole, and after we had pulled you out of it, the little Pink Bear said Ozma was not in the hole."

"He never makes a mistake," asserted the Bear King stoutly.

"Empty that pocket, Button-Bright, and let's see what's in it," requested Dorothy.

So Button-Bright laid the contents of his left jacket pocket on the table. These proved to be a peg top, a bunch of string, a small rubber ball and a golden peach pit. "What's this?" asked the Wizard, picking up the peach pit and examining it closely.

"Oh," said the boy, "I saved that to show to the girls, and then forgot all about it. It came out of a lonesome peach that I found in the orchard back yonder, and which I ate while I was lost. It looks like gold, and I never saw a peach pit like it before."

"Nor I," said the Wizard, "and that makes it seem suspicious."

All heads were bent over the golden peach pit. The Wizard turned it over several times and then took out his pocket knife and pried the pit open. As the two halves fell apart, a pink, cloud-like haze came pouring from the golden peach pit, almost filling the big room, and from the haze a form took shape and settled beside them. Then, as the haze faded away, a sweet voice said, "Thank you, my friends!" and there before them stood their lovely girl Ruler, Ozma of Oz.