

Chapter Nineteen - Red Reera, the Yookoohoo

After the meal was over and Reera had fed her pets, including the four monster spiders which had come down from their webs to secure their share, she made the table disappear from the floor of the cottage.

"I wish you'd consent to my transforming your fishes," she said, as she took up her knitting again.

The Skeezer made no reply. He thought it unwise to hurry matters. All during the afternoon they sat silent. Once Reera went to her cupboard and after thrusting her hand into the same drawer as before, touched the wolf and transformed it into a bird with gorgeous colored feathers. This bird was larger than a parrot and of a somewhat different form, but Ervic had never seen one like it before.

"Sing!" said Reera to the bird, which had perched itself on a big wooden peg--as if it had been in the cottage before and knew just what to do.

And the bird sang jolly, rollicking songs with words to them--just as a person who had been carefully trained might do. The songs were entertaining and Ervic enjoyed listening to them. In an hour or so the bird stopped singing, tucked its head under its wing and went to sleep. Reera continued knitting but seemed thoughtful.

Now Ervic had marked this cupboard drawer well and had concluded that Reera took something from it which enabled her to perform her transformations. He thought that if he managed to remain in the cottage, and Reera fell asleep, he could slyly open the cupboard, take a portion of whatever was in the drawer, and by dropping it into the copper kettle transform the three fishes into their natural shapes. Indeed, he had firmly resolved to carry out this plan when the Yookoohoo put down her knitting and walked toward the door.

"I'm going out for a few minutes," said she; "do you wish to go with me, or will you remain here?"

Ervic did not answer but sat quietly on his bench. So Reera went out and closed the cottage door.

As soon as she was gone, Ervic rose and tiptoed to the cupboard.

"Take care! Take care!" cried several voices, coming from the kittens and chipmunks. "If you touch anything we'll tell the Yookoohoo!"

Ervic hesitated a moment but, remembering that he need not consider Reera's anger if he succeeded in transforming the fishes, he was about to open the cupboard when he was arrested by the voices of the fishes, which stuck their heads above the water in the kettle and called out:

"Come here, Ervic!"

So he went back to the kettle and bent over it

"Let the cupboard alone," said the goldfish to him earnestly. "You could not succeed by getting that magic powder, for only the Yookoohoo knows how to use it. The best way is to allow her to transform us into three girls, for then we will have our natural shapes and be able to perform all the Arts of Magic we have learned and well understand. You are acting wisely and in the most effective manner. We did not know you were so intelligent, or that Reera could be so easily deceived by you. Continue as you have begun and try to persuade her to transform us. But insist that we be given the forms of girls."

The goldfish ducked its head down just as Reera re-entered the cottage. She saw Ervic bent over the kettle, so she came and joined him.

"Can your fishes talk?" she asked.

"Sometimes," he replied, "for all fishes in the Land of Oz know how to speak. Just now they were asking me for some bread. They are hungry."

"Well, they can have some bread," said Reera. "But it is nearly supper-time, and if you would allow me to transform your fishes into girls they could join us at the table and have plenty of food much nicer than crumbs. Why not let me transform them?"

"Well," said Ervic, as if hesitating, "ask the fishes. If they consent, why--why, then, I'll think it over."

Reera bent over the kettle and asked:

"Can you hear me, little fishes?"

All three popped their heads above water.

"We can hear you," said the bronzefish.

"I want to give you other forms, such as rabbits, or turtles or girls, or something; but your master, the surly Skeezer, does not wish me to. However, he has agreed to the plan if you will consent."

"We'd like to be girls," said the silverfish.

"No, no!" exclaimed Ervic.

"If you promise to make us three beautiful girls, we will consent," said the goldfish.

"No, no!" exclaimed Ervic again.

"Also make us Adepts at Magic," added the bronzefish.

"I don't know exactly what that means," replied Reera musingly, "but as no Adept at Magic is as powerful as Yookoohoo, I'll add that to the transformation."

"We won't try to harm you, or to interfere with your magic in any way," promised the goldfish. "On the contrary, we will be your friends."

"Will you agree to go away and leave me alone in my cottage, whenever I command you to do so?" asked Reera.

"We promise that," cried the three fishes.

"Don't do it! Don't consent to the transformation," urged Ervic.

"They have already consented," said the Yookoohoo, laughing in his face, "and you have promised me to abide by their decision. So, friend Skeezer, I shall perform the transformation whether you like it or not."

Ervic seated himself on the bench again, a deep scowl on his face but joy in his heart. Reera moved over to the cupboard, took something from the drawer and returned to the copper kettle. She was clutching something tightly in her right hand, but with her left she reached within the kettle, took out the three fishes and laid them carefully on the floor, where they gasped in distress at being out of water.

Reera did not keep them in misery more than a few seconds, for she touched each one with her right hand and instantly the fishes were transformed into three tall and slender young women, with fine, intelligent faces and clothed in handsome, clinging gowns. The one who had been a goldfish had beautiful golden hair and blue eyes and was exceedingly fair of skin; the one who had been a bronzefish had dark brown hair and clear gray eyes and her complexion matched these lovely features. The one who had been a silverfish had snow-white hair of the finest texture and deep brown eyes. The hair contrasted exquisitely with her pink cheeks and ruby-red lips, nor did it make her look a day older than her two companions.

As soon as they secured these girlish shapes, all three bowed low to the Yookoohoo and said:

"We thank you, Reera."

Then they bowed to the Skeezer and said:

"We thank you, Ervic."

"Very good!" cried the Yookoohoo, examining her work with critical approval. "You are much better and more interesting than fishes, and this ungracious Skeezer would scarcely allow me to do the transformations. You surely have nothing to thank him for. But now let us dine in honor of the occasion."

She clapped her hands together and again a table loaded with food appeared in the cottage. It was a longer table, this time, and places were set for the three Adepts as well as for Reera and Ervic.

"Sit down, friends, and eat your fill," said the Yookoohoo, but instead of seating herself at the head of the table she went to the cupboard, saying to the Adepts: "Your beauty and grace, my fair friends, quite outshine my own. So that I may appear properly at the banquet table I intend, in honor of this occasion, to take upon myself my natural shape."

Scarcely had she finished this speech when Reera transformed herself into a young woman fully as lovely as the three Adepts. She was not quite so tall as they, but her form was more rounded and more handsomely clothed, with a wonderful jeweled girdle and a necklace of shining pearls. Her hair was a bright auburn red, and her eyes large and dark.

"Do you claim this is your natural form?" asked Ervic of the Yookoohoo.

"Yes," she replied. "This is the only form I am really entitled to wear. But I seldom assume it because there is no one here to admire or appreciate it and I get tired admiring it myself."

"I see now why you are named Reera the Red," remarked Ervic.

"It is on account of my red hair," she explained smiling. "I do not care for red hair myself, which is one reason I usually wear other forms."

"It is beautiful," asserted the young man; and then remembering the other women present he added: "But, of course, all women should not have red hair, because that would make it too common. Gold and silver and brown hair are equally handsome."

The smiles that he saw interchanged between the four filled the poor Skeezer with embarrassment, so he fell silent and attended to eating his supper, leaving the others to do the talking. The three Adepts frankly told Reera who they were, how they became fishes and how they had planned

secretly to induce the Yookoohoo to transform them. They admitted that they had feared, had they asked her to help, that she would have refused them.

"You were quite right," returned the Yookoohoo. "I make it my rule never to perform magic to assist others, for if I did there would always be crowd at my cottage demanding help and I hate crowds and want to be left alone."

"However, now that you are restored to your proper shapes, I do not regret my action and I hope you will be of use in saving the Skeezer people by raising their island to the surface of the lake, where it really belongs. But you must promise me that after you go away you will never come here again, nor tell anyone what I have done for you."

The three Adepts and Ervic thanked the Yookoohoo warmly. They promised to remember her wish that they should not come to her cottage again and so, with a good-bye, took their departure.