

Old Mombi indulges in Witchcraft

They soon discovered that the Saw-Horse limped, for his new leg was a trifle too long. So they were obliged to halt while the Tin Woodman chopped it down with his axe, after which the wooden steed paced along more comfortably. But the Saw-Horse was not entirely satisfied, even yet.

"It was a shame that I broke my other leg!" it growled.

"On the contrary," airily remarked the Woggle-Bug, who was walking alongside, "you should consider the accident most fortunate. For a horse is never of much use until he has been broken."

"I beg your pardon," said Tip, rather provoked, for he felt a warm interest in both the Saw-Horse and his man Jack; "but permit me to say that your joke is a poor one, and as old as it is poor."

"Still, it is a Joke," declared the Woggle-Bug; firmly, "and a Joke derived from a play upon words is considered among educated people to be eminently proper."

"What does that mean?" enquired the Pumpkinhead, stupidly.

"It means, my dear friend," explained the Woggle-Bug, "that our language contains many words having a double meaning; and that to pronounce a joke

that allows both meanings of a certain word, proves the joker a person of culture and refinement, who has, moreover, a thorough command of the language."

"I don't believe that," said Tip, plainly; "anybody can make a pun."

"Not so," rejoined the Woggle-Bug, stiffly. "It requires education of a high order. Are you educated, young sir?"

"Not especially," admitted Tip.

"Then you cannot judge the matter. I myself am Thoroughly Educated, and I say that puns display genius. For instance, were I to ride upon this Saw-Horse, he would not only be an animal he would become an equipage. For he would then be a horse-and-buggy."

At this the Scarecrow gave a gasp and the Tin Woodman stopped short and looked reproachfully at the Woggle-Bug. At the same time the Saw-Horse loudly snorted his derision; and even the Pumpkinhead put up his hand to hide the smile which, because it was carved upon his face, he could not change to a frown.

But the Woggle-Bug strutted along as if he had made some brilliant remark, and the Scarecrow was obliged to say:

"I have heard, my dear friend, that a person can become over-educated; and

although I have a high respect for brains, no matter how they may be arranged or classified, I begin to suspect that yours are slightly tangled. In any event, I must beg you to restrain your superior education while in our society."

"We are not very particular," added the Tin Woodman; "and we are exceedingly kind hearted. But if your superior culture gets leaky again--" He did not complete the sentence, but he twirled his gleaming axe so carelessly that the Woggle-Bug looked frightened, and shrank away to a safe distance.

The others marched on in silence, and the Highly Magnified one, after a period of deep thought, said in an humble voice:

"I will endeavor to restrain myself."

"That is all we can expect," returned the Scarecrow pleasantly; and good nature being thus happily restored to the party, they proceeded upon their way.

When they again stopped to allow Tip to rest--the boy being the only one that seemed to tire--the Tin Woodman noticed many small, round holes in the grassy meadow.

"This must be a village of the Field Mice," he said to the Scarecrow. "I wonder if my old friend, the Queen of the Mice, is in this neighborhood."

"If she is, she may be of great service to us," answered the Scarecrow, who was impressed by a sudden thought. "See if you can call her, my dear Nick."

So the Tin Woodman blew a shrill note upon a silver whistle that hung around his neck, and presently a tiny grey mouse popped from a near-by hole and advanced fearlessly toward them. For the Tin Woodman had once saved her life, and the Queen of the Field Mice knew he was to be trusted.

"Good day, your Majesty," said Nick, politely addressing the mouse; "I trust you are enjoying good health?"

"Thank you, I am quite well," answered the Queen, demurely, as she sat up and displayed the tiny golden crown upon her head. "Can I do anything to assist my old friends?"

"You can, indeed," replied the Scarecrow, eagerly. "Let me, I intreat you, take a dozen of your subjects with me to the Emerald City."

"Will they be injured in any way?" asked the Queen, doubtfully.

"I think not," replied the Scarecrow. "I will carry them hidden in the straw which stuffs my body, and when I give them the signal by unbuttoning my jacket, they have only to rush out and scamper home again as fast as they can. By doing this they will assist me to regain my throne, which the Army of Revolt has taken from me."

"In that case," said the Queen, "I will not refuse your request. Whenever you are ready, I will call twelve of my most intelligent subjects."

"I am ready now" returned the Scarecrow. Then he lay flat upon the ground and unbuttoned his jacket, displaying the mass of straw with which he was stuffed.

The Queen uttered a little piping call, and in an instant a dozen pretty field mice had emerged from their holes and stood before their ruler, awaiting her orders.

What the Queen said to them none of our travelers could understand, for it was in the mouse language; but the field mice obeyed without hesitation, running one after the other to the Scarecrow and hiding themselves in the straw of his breast.

When all of the twelve mice had thus concealed themselves, the Scarecrow buttoned his Jacket securely and then arose and thanked the Queen for her kindness.

"One thing more you might do to serve us," suggested the Tin Woodman; "and that is to run ahead and show us the way to the Emerald City. For some enemy is evidently trying to prevent us from reaching it."

"I will do that gladly," returned the Queen. "Are you ready?"

The Tin Woodman looked at Tip.

"I'm rested," said the boy. "Let us start."

Then they resumed their journey, the little grey Queen of the Field Mice running swiftly ahead and then pausing until the travelers drew near, when away she would dart again.

Without this unerring guide the Scarecrow and his comrades might never have gained the Emerald City; for many were the obstacles thrown in their way by the arts of old Mombi. Yet not one of the obstacles really existed--all were cleverly contrived deceptions. For when they came to the banks of a rushing river that threatened to bar their way the little Queen kept steadily on, passing through the seeming flood in safety; and our travelers followed her without encountering a single drop of water.

Again, a high wall of granite towered high above their heads and opposed their advance. But the grey Field Mouse walked straight through it, and the others did the same, the wall melting into mist as they passed it.

Afterward, when they had stopped for a moment to allow Tip to rest, they saw forty roads branching off from their feet in forty different directions; and soon these forty roads began whirling around like a mighty wheel, first in one direction and then in the other, completely bewildering their vision.

But the Queen called for them to follow her and darted off in a straight

line; and when they had gone a few paces the whirling pathways vanished and were seen no more.

Mombi's last trick was the most fearful of all. She sent a sheet of crackling flame rushing over the meadow to consume them; and for the first time the Scarecrow became afraid and turned to fly.

"If that fire reaches me I will be gone in no time!" said he, trembling until his straw rattled. "It's the most dangerous thing I ever encountered."

"I'm off, too!" cried the Saw-Horse, turning and prancing with agitation; "for my wood is so dry it would burn like kindlings."

"Is fire dangerous to pumpkins?" asked Jack, fearfully.

"You'll be baked like a tart--and so will I!" answered the Woggle-Bug, getting down on all fours so he could run the faster.

But the Tin Woodman, having no fear of fire, averted the stampede by a few sensible words.

"Look at the Field Mouse!" he shouted. "The fire does not burn her in the least. In fact, it is no fire at all, but only a deception."

Indeed, to watch the little Queen march calmly through the advancing flames restored courage to every member of the party, and they followed her without

being even scorched.

"This is surely a most extraordinary adventure," said the Woggle-Bug, who was greatly amazed; "for it upsets all the Natural Laws that I heard Professor Nowitall teach in the school-house."

"Of course it does," said the Scarecrow, wisely. "All magic is unnatural, and for that reason is to be feared and avoided. But I see before us the gates of the Emerald City, so I imagine we have now overcome all the magical obstacles that seemed to oppose us."

Indeed, the walls of the City were plainly visible, and the Queen of the Field Mice, who had guided them so faithfully, came near to bid them good-bye.

"We are very grateful to your Majesty for your kind assistance," said the Tin Woodman, bowing before the pretty creature.

"I am always pleased to be of service to my friends," answered the Queen, and in a flash she had darted away upon her journey home.

The Prisoners of the Queen