



Tik-Tok of Oz



Chapter Five: THE ROSES REPULSE THE REFUGEES

Gently the raft grated on the sandy beach. Then Betsy easily waded ashore, the mule following closely behind her. The sun was now shining and the air was warm and laden with the fragrance of roses.

“I’d like some breakfast, Hank,” remarked the girl, feeling more cheerful now that she was on dry land; “but we can’t eat the flowers, although they do smell mighty good.”

“Hee-haw!” replied Hank and trotted up a little pathway to the top of the bank.

Betsy followed and from the eminence looked around her. A little way off stood a splendid big greenhouse, its thousands of crystal panes glittering in the sunlight.

“There ought to be people somewhere ‘round,” observed Betsy thoughtfully; “gardeners, or somebody. Let’s go and see, Hank. I’m getting hungrier ev’ry minute.”

So they walked toward the great greenhouse and came to its entrance without meeting with anyone at all. A door stood ajar, so Hank went in first, thinking if there was any danger he could back out and warn his companion. But Betsy was close at his heels and the moment she entered was lost in amazement at the wonderful sight she saw.

The greenhouse was filled with magnificent rosebushes, all growing in big pots. On the central stem of each bush bloomed a splendid Rose, gorgeously colored and deliciously fragrant, and in the center of each Rose was the face of a lovely girl.

As Betsy and Hank entered, the heads of the Roses were drooping and their eyelids were closed in slumber; but the mule was so amazed that he uttered a loud “Hee-haw!” and at the sound of his harsh voice the rose leaves fluttered, the Roses raised their heads and a hundred startled eyes were instantly fixed upon the intruders.

“I—I beg your pardon!” stammered Betsy, blushing and confused.

“O-o-o-h!” cried the Roses, in a sort of sighing chorus; and one of them added: “What a horrid noise!”

“Why, that was only Hank,” said Betsy, and as if to prove the truth of her words the mule uttered another loud “Hee-haw!”

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At this all the Roses turned on their stems as far as they were able and trembled as if some one were shaking their bushes. A dainty Moss Rose gasped: "Dear me! How dreadfully dreadful!"

"It isn't dreadful at all," said Betsy, somewhat indignant. "When you get used to Hank's voice it will put you to sleep."

The Roses now looked at the mule less fearfully and one of them asked:

"Is that savage beast named Hank?"

"Yes; Hank's my comrade, faithful and true," answered the girl, twining her arms around the little mule's neck and hugging him tight. "Aren't you, Hank?"

Hank could only say in reply: "Hee-haw!" and at his bray the Roses shivered again.

"Please go away!" begged one. "Can't you see you're frightening us out of a week's growth?"

"Go away!" echoed Betsy. "Why, we've no place to go. We've just been wrecked."

"Wrecked?" asked the Roses in a surprised chorus.

"Yes; we were on a big ship and the storm came and wrecked it," explained the girl. "But Hank and I caught hold of a raft and floated ashore to this place, and—we're tired and hungry. What country is this, please?"

"This is the Rose Kingdom," replied the Moss Rose, haughtily, "and it is devoted to the culture of the rarest and fairest Roses grown."

"I believe it," said Betsy, admiring the pretty blossoms.

"But only Roses are allowed here," continued a delicate Tea Rose, bending her brows in a frown; "therefore you must go away before the Royal Gardener finds you and casts you back into the sea."

"Oh! Is there a Royal Gardener, then?" inquired Betsy.

"To be sure."

"And is he a Rose, also?"

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“Of course not; he’s a man—a wonderful man,” was the reply.

“Well, I’m not afraid of a man,” declared the girl, much relieved, and even as she spoke the Royal Gardener popped into the greenhouse—a spading fork in one hand and a watering pot in the other.

He was a funny little man, dressed in a rose-colored costume, with ribbons at his knees and elbows, and a bunch of ribbons in his hair. His eyes were small and twinkling, his nose sharp and his face puckered and deeply lined.

“O-ho!” he exclaimed, astonished to find strangers in his greenhouse, and when Hank gave a loud bray the Gardener threw the watering pot over the mule’s head and danced around with his fork, in such agitation that presently he fell over the handle of the implement and sprawled at full length upon the ground.

Betsy laughed and pulled the watering pot off from Hank’s head. The little mule was angry at the treatment he had received and backed toward the Gardener threateningly.

“Look out for his heels!” called Betsy warningly and the Gardener scrambled to his feet and hastily hid behind the Roses.

“You are breaking the Law!” he shouted, sticking out his head to glare at the girl and the mule.

“What Law?” asked Betsy.

“The Law of the Rose Kingdom. No strangers are allowed in these domains.”

“Not when they’re shipwrecked?” she inquired.

“The Law doesn’t except shipwrecks,” replied the Royal Gardener, and he was about to say more when suddenly there was a crash of glass and a man came tumbling through the roof of the greenhouse and fell plump to the ground.