



Tik-Tok of Oz



Chapter Seven: POLYCHROME'S PITIFUL PLIGHT

The Rain King got too much water in his basin and spilled some over the brim. That made it rain in a certain part of the country—a real hard shower, for a time—and sent the Rainbow scampering to the place to show the gorgeous colors of his glorious bow as soon as the mist of rain had passed and the sky was clear.

The coming of the Rainbow is always a joyous event to earth folk, yet few have ever seen it close by. Usually the Rainbow is so far distant that you can observe its splendid hues but dimly, and that is why we seldom catch sight of the dancing Daughters of the Rainbow.

In the barren country where the rain had just fallen there appeared to be no human beings at all; but the Rainbow appeared, just the same, and dancing happily upon its arch were the Rainbow's Daughters, led by the fairylike Polychrome, who is so dainty and beautiful that no girl has ever quite equaled her in loveliness.

Polychrome was in a merry mood and danced down the arch of the bow to the ground, daring her sisters to follow her. Laughing and gleeful, they also touched the ground with their twinkling feet; but all the Daughters of the Rainbow knew that this was a dangerous pastime, so they quickly climbed upon their bow again.

All but Polychrome. Though the sweetest and merriest of them all, she was likewise the most reckless. Moreover, it was an unusual sensation to pat the cold, damp earth with her rosy toes. Before she realized it the bow had lifted and disappeared in the billowy blue sky, and here was Polychrome standing helpless upon a rock, her gauzy draperies floating about her like brilliant cobwebs and not a soul—fairy or mortal—to help her regain her lost bow!

“Dear me!” she exclaimed, a frown passing across her pretty face, “I’m caught again. This is the second time my carelessness has left me on earth while my sisters returned to our Sky Palaces. The first time I enjoyed some pleasant adventures, but this is a lonely, forsaken country and I shall be very unhappy until my Rainbow comes again and I can climb aboard. Let me think what is best to be done.”

She crouched low upon the flat rock, drew her draperies about her and bowed her head.

It was in this position that Betsy Bobbin spied Polychrome as she came along the stony path, followed by Hank, the Princess and Shaggy. At once the girl ran up to the radiant

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Daughter of the Rainbow and exclaimed:

“Oh, what a lovely, lovely creature!”

Polychrome raised her golden head. There were tears in her blue eyes.

“I’m the most miserable girl in the whole world!” she sobbed.

The others gathered around her.

“Tell us your troubles, pretty one,” urged the Princess.

“I—I’ve lost my bow!” wailed Polychrome.

“Take me, my dear,” said Shaggy Man in a sympathetic tone, thinking she meant “beau” instead of “bow.”

“I don’t want you!” cried Polychrome, stamping her foot imperiously; “I want my Rainbow.”

“Oh; that’s different,” said Shaggy. “But try to forget it. When I was young I used to cry for the Rainbow myself, but I couldn’t have it. Looks as if you couldn’t have it, either; so please don’t cry.”

Polychrome looked at him reproachfully.

“I don’t like you,” she said.

“No?” replied Shaggy, drawing the Love Magnet from his pocket; “not a little bit?—just a wee speck of a like?”

“Yes, yes!” said Polychrome, clasping her hands in ecstasy as she gazed at the enchanted talisman; “I love you, Shaggy Man!”

“Of course you do,” said he calmly; “but I don’t take any credit for it. It’s the Love Magnet’s powerful charm. But you seem quite alone and friendless, little Rainbow. Don’t you want to join our party until you find your father and sisters again?”

“Where are you going?” she asked.

“We don’t just know that,” said Betsy, taking her hand; “but we’re trying to find Shaggy’s long-lost brother, who has been captured by the terrible Metal Monarch. Won’t you come with us, and help us?”

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Polychrome looked from one to another of the strange party of travelers and a bewitching smile suddenly lighted her face.

"A donkey, a mortal maid, a Rose Princess and a Shaggy Man!" she exclaimed. "Surely you need help, if you intend to face Ruggedo."

"Do you know him, then?" inquired Betsy.

"No, indeed. Ruggedo's caverns are beneath the earth's surface, where no Rainbow can ever penetrate. But I've heard of the Metal Monarch. He is also called the Nome King, you know, and he has made trouble for a good many people—mortals and fairies—in his time," said Polychrome.

"Do you fear him, then?" asked the Princess, anxiously.

"No one can harm a Daughter of the Rainbow," said Polychrome proudly. "I'm a sky fairy."

"Then," said Betsy, quickly, "you will be able to tell us the way to Ruggedo's cavern."

"No," returned Polychrome, shaking her head, "that is one thing I cannot do. But I will gladly go with you and help you search for the place."

This promise delighted all the wanderers and after the Shaggy Man had found the path again they began moving along it in a more happy mood. The Rainbow's Daughter danced lightly over the rocky trail, no longer sad, but with her beautiful features wreathed in smiles. Shaggy came next, walking steadily and now and then supporting the Rose Princess, who followed him. Betsy and Hank brought up the rear, and if she tired with walking the girl got upon Hank's back and let the stout little donkey carry her for a while.

At nightfall they came to some trees that grew beside a tiny brook and here they made camp and rested until morning. Then away they tramped, finding berries and fruits here and there which satisfied the hunger of Betsy, Shaggy and Hank, so that they were well content with their lot.

It surprised Betsy to see the Rose Princess partake of their food, for she considered her a fairy; but when she mentioned this to Polychrome, the Rainbow's Daughter explained that when Ozga was driven out of her Rose Kingdom she ceased to be a fairy and would never again be more than a mere mortal. Polychrome, however, was a fairy wherever she hap-

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pened to be, and if she sipped a few dewdrops by moonlight for refreshment no one ever saw her do it.

As they continued their wandering journey, direction meant very little to them, for they were hopelessly lost in this strange country. Shaggy said it would be best to go toward the mountains, as the natural entrance to Ruggedo's underground cavern was likely to be hidden in some rocky, deserted place; but mountains seemed all around them except in the one direction that they had come from, which led to the Rose Kingdom and the sea. Therefore it mattered little which way they traveled.

By and by they espied a faint trail that looked like a path and after following this for some time they reached a crossroads. Here were many paths, leading in various directions, and there was a signpost so old that there were now no words upon the sign. At one side was an old well, with a chain windlass for drawing water, yet there was no house or other building anywhere in sight.

While the party halted, puzzled which way to proceed, the mule approached the well and tried to look into it.

"He's thirsty," said Betsy.

"It's a dry well," remarked Shaggy. "Probably there has been no water in it for many years. But, come; let us decide which way to travel."

No one seemed able to decide that. They sat down in a group and tried to consider which road might be the best to take. Hank, however, could not keep away from the well and finally he reared up on his hind legs, got his head over the edge and uttered a loud "Heehaw!" Betsy watched her animal friend curiously.

"I wonder if he sees anything down there?" she said.

At this, Shaggy rose and went over to the well to investigate, and Betsy went with him. The Princess and Polychrome, who had become fast friends, linked arms and sauntered down one of the roads, to find an easy path.

"Really," said Shaggy, "there does seem to be something at the bottom of this old well." "Can't we pull it up, and see what it is?" asked the girl.

There was no bucket at the end of the windlass chain, but there was a big hook that at one time was used to hold a bucket. Shaggy let down this hook, dragged it around on the bottom and then pulled it up. An old hoopskirt came with it, and Betsy laughed and threw

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it away. The thing frightened Hank, who had never seen a hoopskirt before, and he kept a good distance away from it.

Several other objects the Shaggy Man captured with the hook and drew up, but none of these was important.

"This well seems to have been the dump for all the old rubbish in the country," he said, letting down the hook once more. "I guess I've captured everything now. No—the hook has caught again. Help me, Betsy! Whatever this thing is, it's heavy."

She ran up and helped him turn the windlass and after much effort a confused mass of copper came in sight.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Shaggy. "Here is a surprise, indeed!"

"What is it?" inquired Betsy, clinging to the windlass and panting for breath.

For answer the Shaggy Man grasped the bundle of copper and dumped it upon the ground, free of the well. Then he turned it over with his foot, spread it out, and to Betsy's astonishment the thing proved to be a copper man.

"Just as I thought," said Shaggy, looking hard at the object. "But unless there are two copper men in the world this is the most astonishing thing I ever came across."

At this moment the Rainbow's Daughter and the Rose Princess approached them, and Polychrome said:

"What have you found, Shaggy One?"

"Either an old friend, or a stranger," he replied.

"Oh, here's a sign on his back!" cried Betsy, who had knelt down to examine the man. "Dear me; how funny! Listen to this."

Then she read the following words, engraved upon the copper plates of the man's body:

SMITH & TINKER'S
Patent Double-Action, Extra-Responsive,
Thought-Creating, Perfect-Talking
MECHANICAL MAN

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Fitted with our Special Clockwork Attachment. Thinks, Speaks, Acts, and Does Everything but Live.

"Isn't he wonderful!" exclaimed the Princess.

"Yes; but here's more," said Betsy, reading from another engraved plate:

DIRECTIONS FOR USING:

For THINKING:—Wind the Clockwork Man under his left arm, (marked No. 1). For

SPEAKING:—Wind the Clockwork Man under his right arm, (marked No. 2). For WALKING and

ACTION:—Wind Clockwork Man in the middle of his back, (marked No. 3).

N. B.—This Mechanism is guaranteed to work perfectly for a thousand years.

"If he's guaranteed for a thousand years," said Polychrome, "he ought to work yet."

"Of course," replied Shaggy. "Let's wind him up."

In order to do this they were obliged to set the copper man upon his feet, in an upright position, and this was no easy task. He was inclined to topple over, and had to be propped again and again. The girls assisted Shaggy, and at last Tik-Tok seemed to be balanced and stood alone upon his broad feet.

"Yes," said Shaggy, looking at the copper man carefully, "this must be, indeed, my old friend Tik-Tok, whom I left ticking merrily in the Land of Oz. But how he came to this lonely place, and got into that old well, is surely a mystery."

"If we wind him, perhaps he will tell us," suggested Betsy. "Here's the key, hanging to a hook on his back. What part of him shall I wind up first?"

"His thoughts, of course," said Polychrome, "for it requires thought to speak or move intelligently."

So Betsy wound him under his left arm, and at once little flashes of light began to show in the top of his head, which was proof that he had begun to think.

"Now, then," said Shaggy, "wind up his phonograph."

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"What's that?" she asked.

"Why, his talking-machine. His thoughts may be interesting, but they don't tell us anything."

So Betsy wound the copper man under his right arm, and then from the interior of his copper body came in jerky tones the words: "Ma-ny thanks!"

"Hurrah!" cried Shaggy, joyfully, and he slapped Tik-Tok upon the back in such a hearty manner that the copper man lost his balance and tumbled to the ground in a heap. But the clockwork that enabled him to speak had been wound up and he kept saying: "Pick-me-up! Pick-me-up! Pick-me-up!" until they had again raised him and balanced him upon his feet, when he added politely: "Ma-ny thanks!"

"He won't be self-supporting until we wind up his action," remarked Shaggy; so Betsy wound it, as tight as she could—for the key turned rather hard—and then Tik-Tok lifted his feet, marched around in a circle and ended by stopping before the group and making them all a low bow.

"How in the world did you happen to be in that well, when I left you safe in Oz?" inquired Shaggy.

"It is a long sto-ry," replied Tik-Tok, "but I'll tell it in a few words. Af-ter you had gone in search of your broth-er, Oz-ma saw you wan-der-ing in strange lands when-ev-er she looked in her mag-ic pic-ture, and she also saw your broth-er in the Nome King's cavern; so she sent me to tell you where to find your broth-er and told me to help you if I could. The Sor-cer-ess, Glin-da the Good, trans-port-ed me to this place in the wink of an eye; but here I met the Nome King him-self—old Rug-ge-do, who is called in these parts the Met-al Mon-arch. Rug-ge-do knew what I had come for, and he was so an-gry that he threw me down the well. Af-ter my works ran down I was help-less un-til you came a-long and pulled me out a-gain. Ma-ny thanks."

"This is, indeed, good news," said Shaggy. "I suspected that my brother was the prisoner of Ruggedo; but now I know it. Tell us, Tik-Tok, how shall we get to the Nome King's underground cavern?"

"The best way is to walk," said Tik-Tok. "We might crawl, or jump, or roll o-ver and o-ver until we get there; but the best way is to walk."

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"I know; but which road shall we take?"

"My ma-chin-er-y is-n't made to tell that," replied Tik-Tok.

"There is more than one entrance to the underground cavern," said Polychrome; "but old Ruggedo has cleverly concealed every opening, so that earth dwellers can not intrude in his domain. If we find our way underground at all, it will be by chance."

"Then," said Betsy, "let us select any road, haphazard, and see where it leads us."

"That seems sensible," declared the Princess. "It may require a lot of time for us to find Ruggedo, but we have more time than anything else."

"If you keep me wound up," said Tik-Tok, "I will last a thousand years."

"Then the only question to decide is which way to go," added Shaggy, looking first at one road and then at another.

But while they stood hesitating, a peculiar sound reached their ears—a sound like the tramping of many feet.

"What's coming?" cried Betsy; and then she ran to the left-hand road and glanced along the path. "Why, it's an army!" she exclaimed. "What shall we do, hide or run?"

"Stand still," commanded Shaggy. "I'm not afraid of an army. If they prove to be friendly, they can help us; if they are enemies, I'll show them the Love Magnet."