



Tik-tok of OZ



Chapter Seventeen: A TRAGIC TRANSFORMATION

“Don’t let us worry,” said Shaggy to his companions, “for it may take the Queen some time to conquer the Metal Monarch, as Tik-Tok has to do everything in his slow, mechanical way.”

“Do you suppose they are likely to fail?” asked the Rose Princess.

“I do, indeed,” replied Shaggy. “This Nome King is really a powerful fellow and has a legion of nomes to assist him, whereas our bold Queen commands a Clockwork Man and a band of faint-hearted officers.”

“She ought to have let Quox do the conquering,” said Polychrome, dancing lightly upon a point of rock and fluttering her beautiful draperies. “But perhaps the dragon was wise to let her go first, for when she fails to conquer Ruggedo she may become more modest in her ambitions.”

“Where is the dragon now?” inquired Ozga.

“Up there on the rocks,” replied Files. “Look, my dear; you may see him from here. He said he would take a little nap while we were mixing up with Ruggedo, and he added that after we had gotten into trouble he would wake up and conquer the Nome King in a jiffy, as his master the Jinjin has ordered him to do.”

“Quox means well,” said Shaggy, “but I do not think we shall need his services; for just as soon as I am satisfied that Queen Ann and her army have failed to conquer Ruggedo, I shall enter the caverns and show the King my Love Magnet. That he cannot resist; therefore the conquest will be made with ease.”

This speech of Shaggy Man’s was overheard by the Long-Eared Hearer, who was at that moment standing by Ruggedo’s side. For when the King and Guph had recovered from Hank’s kick and had picked themselves up, their first act was to turn Tik-Tok on his back and put a heavy diamond on top of him, so that he could not get up again. Then they carefully put his gun in a corner of the cavern and the King sent Guph to fetch the Long-Eared Hearer.

The Hearer was still angry at Ruggedo for breaking his ear, but he acknowledged the Nome King to be his master and was ready to obey his commands. Therefore he repeated Shaggy’s speech to the King, who at once realized that his Kingdom was in grave danger.

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For Ruggedo knew of the Love Magnet and its powers and was horrified at the thought that Shaggy might show him the magic talisman and turn all the hatred in his heart into love. Ruggedo was proud of his hatred and abhorred love of any sort.

“Really,” said he, “I’d rather he conquered and lose my wealth and my Kingdom than gaze at that awful Love Magnet. What can I do to prevent the Shaggy Man from taking it out of his pocket?”

Kaliko returned to the cavern in time to overhear this question, and being a loyal nome and eager to serve his King, he answered by saying:

“If we can manage to bind the Shaggy Man’s arms, tight to his body, he could not get the Love Magnet out of his pocket.”

“True!” cried the King in delight at this easy solution of the problem. “Get at once a dozen nomes, with ropes, and place them in the passage where they can seize and bind Shaggy as soon as he enters.”

This Kaliko did, and meanwhile the watchers outside the entrance were growing more and more uneasy about their friends.

“I don’t worry so much about the Oogaboo people,” said Polychrome, who had grown sober with waiting, and perhaps a little nervous, “for they could not be killed, even though Ruggedo might cause them much suffering and perhaps destroy them utterly. But we should not have allowed Betsy and Hank to go alone into the caverns. The little girl is mortal and possesses no magic powers whatever, so if Ruggedo captures her she will be wholly at his mercy.”

“That is indeed true,” replied Shaggy. “I wouldn’t like to have anything happen to dear little Betsy, so I believe I’ll go in right away and put an end to all this worry.”

“We may as well go with you,” asserted Files, “for by means of the Love Magnet, you can soon bring the Nome King to reason.”

So it was decided to wait no longer. Shaggy walked through the entrance first, and after him came the others. They had no thought of danger to themselves, and Shaggy, who was going along with his hands thrust into his pockets, was much surprised when a rope shot out from the darkness and twined around his body, pinning down his arms so securely that he could not even withdraw his hands from the pockets. Then appeared several grinning nomes, who speedily tied knots in the ropes and then led the prisoner along the passage to the cavern. No attention was paid to the others, but Files and the Princess fol-

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lowed on after Shaggy, determined not to desert their friend and hoping that an opportunity might arise to rescue him.

As for Polychrome, as soon as she saw that trouble had overtaken Shaggy she turned and ran lightly back through the passage and out of the entrance. Then she easily leaped from rock to rock until she paused beside the great dragon, who lay fast asleep.

“Wake up, Quox!” she cried. “It is time for you to act.”

But Quox did not wake up. He lay as one in a trance, absolutely motionless, with his enormous eyes tight closed. The eyelids had big silver scales on them, like all the rest of his body.

Polychrome might have thought Quox was dead had she not known that dragons do not die easily or had she not observed his huge body swelling as he breathed. She picked up a piece of rock and pounded against his eyelids with it, saying:

“Wake up, Quox—wake up!” But he would not waken.

“Dear me, how unfortunate!” sighed the lovely Rainbow’s Daughter. “I wonder what is the best and surest way to waken a dragon. All our friends may be captured and destroyed while this great beast lies asleep.”

She walked around Quox two or three times, trying to discover some tender place on his body where a thump or a punch might be felt; but he lay extended along the rocks with his chin flat upon the ground and his legs drawn underneath his body, and all that one could see was his thick sky-blue skin—thicker than that of a rhinoceros—and his silver scales.

Then, despairing at last of wakening the beast, and worried over the fate of her friends, Polychrome again ran down to the entrance and hurried along the passage into the Nome King’s cavern.

Here she found Ruggedo lolling in his throne and smoking a long pipe. Beside him stood General Guph and Kaliko, and ranged before the King were the Rose Princess, Files and the Shaggy Man. Tik-Tok still lay upon the floor, weighted down by the big diamond.

Ruggedo was now in a more contented frame of mind. One by one he had met the invaders and easily captured them. The dreaded Love Magnet was indeed in Shaggy’s pocket, only a few feet away from the King, but Shaggy was powerless to show it and unless Ruggedo’s eyes beheld the talisman it could not affect him. As for Betsy Bobbin and her

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mule, he believed Kaliko had placed them in the Slimy Cave, while Ann and her officers he thought safely imprisoned in the pit. Ruggedo had no fear of Files or Ozga, but to be on the safe side he had ordered golden handcuffs placed upon their wrists. These did not cause them any great annoyance but prevented them from making an attack, had they been inclined to do so.

The Nome King, thinking himself wholly master of the situation, was laughing and jeering at his prisoners when Polychrome, exquisitely beautiful and dancing like a ray of light, entered the cavern.

“Oho!” cried the King; “a Rainbow under ground, eh?” and then he stared hard at Polychrome, and still harder, and then he sat up and pulled the wrinkles out of his robe and arranged his whiskers. “On my word,” said he, “you are a very captivating creature; moreover, I perceive you are a fairy.”

“I am Polychrome, the Rainbow’s Daughter,” she said proudly.

“Well,” replied Ruggedo, “I like you. The others I hate. I hate everybody—but you! Wouldn’t you like to live always in this beautiful cavern, Polychrome? See! The jewels that stud the walls have every tint and color of your Rainbow—and they are not so elusive. I’ll have fresh dewdrops gathered for your feasting every day and you shall be Queen of all my nomes and pull Kaliko’s nose whenever you like.”

“No, thank you,” laughed Polychrome. “My home is in the sky, and I’m only on a visit to this solid, sordid earth. But tell me, Ruggedo, why my friends have been wound with cords and bound with chains?”

“They threatened me,” answered Ruggedo. “The fools did not know how powerful I am.”

“Then, since they are now helpless, why not release them and send them back to the earth’s surface?”

“Because I hate ‘em and mean to make ‘em suffer for their invasion. But I’ll make a bargain with you, sweet Polly. Remain here and live with me and I’ll set all these people free. You shall be my daughter or my wife or my aunt or grandmother—whichever you like—only stay here to brighten my gloomy kingdom and make me happy!” Polychrome looked at him wonderingly. Then she turned to Shaggy and asked:

“Are you sure he hasn’t seen the Love Magnet?”

“I’m positive,” answered Shaggy. “But you seem to be something of a Love Magnet your-

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self, Polychrome.”

She laughed again and said to Ruggedo: “Not even to rescue my friends would I live in your kingdom. Nor could I endure for long the society of such a wicked monster as you.”

“You forget,” retorted the King, scowling darkly, “that you also are in my power.”

“Not so, Ruggedo. The Rainbow’s Daughter is beyond the reach of your spite or malice.”

“Seize her!” suddenly shouted the King, and General Guph sprang forward to obey. Polychrome stood quite still, yet when Guph attempted to clutch her his hands met in air, and now the Rainbow’s Daughter was in another part of the room, as smiling and composed as before.

Several times Guph endeavored to capture her and Ruggedo even came down from his throne to assist his General; but never could they lay hands upon the lovely sky fairy, who flitted here and there with the swiftness of light and constantly defied them with her merry laughter as she evaded their efforts.

So after a time they abandoned the chase and Ruggedo returned to his throne and wiped the perspiration from his face with a finely-woven handkerchief of cloth-of-gold.

“Well,” said Polychrome, “what do you intend to do now?”

“I’m going to have some fun, to repay me for all my bother,” replied the Nome King. Then he said to Kaliko: “Summon the executioners.”

Kaliko at once withdrew and presently returned with a score of nomes, all of whom were nearly as evil looking as their hated master. They bore great golden pincers, and prods of silver, and clamps and chains and various wicked-looking instruments, all made of precious metals and set with diamonds and rubies.

“Now, Pang,” said Ruggedo, addressing the leader of the executioners, “fetch the Army of Oogaboo and their Queen from the pit and torture them here in my presence—as well as in the presence of their friends. It will be great sport.”

“I hear Your Majesty, and I obey Your Majesty,” answered Pang, and went with his nomes into the passage. In a few minutes he returned and bowed to Ruggedo.

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“They’re all gone,” said he.

“Gone!” exclaimed the Nome King. “Gone where?”

“They left no address, Your Majesty; but they are not in the pit.”

“Picks and puddles!” roared the King; “who took the cover off?”

“No one,” said Pang. “The cover was there, but the prisoners were not under it.”

“In that case,” snarled the King, trying to control his disappointment, “go to the Slimy Cave and fetch hither the girl and the donkey. And while we are torturing them Kaliko must take a hundred nomes and search for the escaped prisoners—the Queen of Oogaboo and her officers. If he does not find them, I will torture Kaliko.”

Kaliko went away looking sad and disturbed, for he knew the King was cruel and unjust enough to carry out this threat. Pang and the executioners also went away, in another direction, but when they came back Betsy Bobbin was not with them, nor was Hank.

“There is no one in the Slimy Cave, Your Majesty,” reported Pang.

“Jumping jellycakes!” screamed the King.

“Another escape? Are you sure you found the right cave?”

“There is but one Slimy Cave, and there is no one in it,” returned Pang positively.

Ruggedo was beginning to be alarmed as well as angry. However, these disappointments but made him the more vindictive and he cast an evil look at the other prisoners and said:

“Never mind the girl and the donkey. Here are four, at least, who cannot escape my vengeance. Let me see; I believe I’ll change my mind about Tik-Tok. Have the gold crucible heated to a white, seething heat, and then we’ll dump the copper man into it and melt him up.”

“But, Your Majesty,” protested Kaliko, who had returned to the room after sending a hundred nomes to search for the Oogaboo people, “you must remember that Tik-Tok is a very curious and interesting machine. It would be a shame to deprive the world of such a clever contrivance.”

“Say another word, and you’ll go into the furnace with him!” roared the King. “I’m getting tired of you, Kaliko, and the first thing you know I’ll turn you into a potato and make Saratoga-chips of you! The next to consider,” he added more mildly, “is the Shaggy Man. As he owns the Love

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Magnet, I think I'll transform him into a dove, and then we can practice shooting at him with Tik-Tok's gun. Now, this is a very interesting ceremony and I beg you all to watch me closely and see that I've nothing up my sleeve."

He came out of his throne to stand before the Shaggy Man, and then he waved his hands, palms downward, in seven semicircles over his victim's head, saying in a low but clear tone of voice the magic wugwa:

"Adi, edi, idi, odi, udi, oo-i-oo!
Idu, ido, idi, ide, ida, woo!"

The effect of this well-known sorcery was instantaneous. Instead of the Shaggy Man, a pretty dove lay fluttering upon the floor, its wings confined by tiny cords wound around them. Ruggedo gave an order to Pang, who cut the cords with a pair of scissors. Being freed, the dove quickly flew upward and alighted on the shoulder of the Rose Princess, who stroked it tenderly.

"Very good! Very good!" cried Ruggedo, rubbing his hands gleefully together. "One enemy is out of my way, and now for the others."

(Perhaps my readers should be warned not to attempt the above transformation; for, although the exact magical formula has been described, it is unlawful in all civilized countries for anyone to transform a person into a dove by muttering the words Ruggedo used. There were no laws to prevent the Nome King from performing this transformation, but if it should be attempted in any other country, and the magic worked, the magician would be severely punished.)

When Polychrome saw Shaggy Man transformed into a dove and realized that Ruggedo was about do something as dreadful to the Princess and Files, and that Tik-Tok would soon be melted in a crucible, she turned and ran from the cavern, through the passage and back to the place where Quox lay asleep.