



Tik-tok of OZ



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After the King had made good his escape Files said to the dragon, in a sad voice:

“Alas! Why did you not come before? Because you were sleeping instead of conquering, the lovely Rose Princess has become a fiddle without a bow, while poor Shaggy sits there a cooing dove!”

“Don’t worry,” replied Quox. “Tititi-Hoochoo knows his business, and I have my orders from the Great Jinjin himself. Bring the fiddle here and touch it lightly to my pink ribbon.”

Files obeyed and at the moment of contact with the ribbon the Nome King’s charm was broken and the Rose Princess herself stood before them as sweet and smiling as ever.

The dove, perched on the back of the throne, had seen and heard all this, so without being told what to do it flew straight to the dragon and alighted on the ribbon. Next instant Shaggy was himself again and Quox said to him grumblingly:

“Please get off my left toe, Shaggy Man, and be more particular where you step.”

“I beg your pardon!” replied Shaggy, very glad to resume his natural form. Then he ran to lift the heavy diamond off Tik-Tok’s chest and to assist the Clockwork Man to his feet.

“Ma-ny thanks!” said Tik-Tok. “Where is the wicked King who want-ed to melt me in a cru-ci-ble?”

“He has gone, and gone for good,” answered Polychrome, who had managed to squeeze into the room beside the dragon and had witnessed the occurrences with much interest. “But I wonder where Betsy Bobbin and Hank can be, and if any harm has befallen them.”

“We must search the cavern until we find them,” declared Shaggy; but when he went to the door leading to the other caverns he found it shut and barred.

“I’ve a pretty strong push in my forehead,” said Quox, “and I believe I can break down that door, even though it’s made of solid gold.”

“But you are a prisoner, and the chains that hold you are fastened in some other room, so that we cannot release you,” Files said anxiously.

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“Oh, never mind that,” returned the dragon. “I have remained a prisoner only because I wished to be one,” and with this he stepped forward and burst the stout chains as easily as if they had been threads.

But when he tried to push in the heavy metal door, even his mighty strength failed, and after several attempts he gave it up and squatted himself in a corner to think of a better way.

“I’ll o-pen the door,” asserted Tik-Tok, and going to the King’s big gong he pounded upon it until the noise was almost deafening.

Kaliko, in the next cavern, was wondering what had happened to Ruggedo and if he had escaped the eggs and outwitted the dragon. But when he heard the sound of the gong, which had so often called him into the King’s presence, he decided that Ruggedo had been victorious; so he took away the bar, threw open the door and entered the royal cavern.

Great was his astonishment to find the King gone and the enchantments removed from the Princess and Shaggy. But the eggs were also gone and so Kaliko advanced to the dragon, whom he knew to be Tititi-Hoochoo’s messenger, and bowed humbly before the beast.

“What is your will?” he inquired.

“Where is Betsy?” demanded the dragon.

“Safe in my own private room,” said Kaliko.

“Go and get her!” commanded Quox.

So Kaliko went to Betsy’s room and gave three raps upon the door. The little girl had been asleep, but she heard the raps and opened the door.

“You may come out now,” said Kaliko. “The King has fled in disgrace and your friends are asking for you.”

So Betsy and Hank returned with the Royal Chamberlain to the throne cavern, where she was received with great joy by her friends. They told her what had happened to Ruggedo and she told them how kind Kaliko had been to her. Quox did not have much to say until the conversation was ended, but then he turned to Kaliko and asked:

“Do you suppose you could rule your nomes better than Ruggedo has done?”

“Me?” stammered the Chamberlain, greatly surprised by the question. “Well, I couldn’t be

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a worse King, I'm sure."

"Would the nomes obey you?" inquired the dragon.

"Of course," said Kaliko. "They like me better than ever they did Ruggedo."

"Then hereafter you shall be the Metal Monarch, King of the Nomes, and Tititi-Hoochoo expects you to rule your Kingdom wisely and well," said Quox.

"Hooray!" cried Betsy; "I'm glad of that. King Kaliko, I salute Your Majesty and wish you joy in your gloomy old Kingdom!"

"We all wish him joy," said Polychrome; and then the others made haste to congratulate the new King.

"Will you release my dear brother?" asked Shaggy.

"The Ugly One? Very willingly," replied Kaliko. "I begged Ruggedo long ago to send him away, but he would not do so. I also offered to help your brother to escape, but he would not go."

"He's so conscientious!" said Shaggy, highly pleased. "All of our family have noble natures. But is my dear brother well?" he added anxiously.

"He eats and sleeps very steadily," replied the new King.

"I hope he doesn't work too hard," said Shaggy.

"He doesn't work at all. In fact, there is nothing he can do in these dominions as well as our nomes, whose numbers are so great that it worries us to keep them all busy. So your brother has only to amuse himself."

"Why, it's more like visiting, than being a prisoner," asserted Betsy.

"Not exactly," returned Kaliko. "A prisoner cannot go where or when he pleases, and is not his own master."

"Where is my brother now?" inquired Shaggy.

"In the Metal Forest."

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“Where is that?”

“The Metal Forest is in the Great Domed Cavern, the largest in all our dominions,” replied Kaliko. “It is almost like being out of doors, it is so big, and Ruggedo made the wonderful forest to amuse himself, as well as to tire out his hard-working nomes. All the trees are gold and silver and the ground is strewn with precious stones, so it is a sort of treasury.”

“Let us go there at once and rescue my dear brother,” pleaded Shaggy earnestly.

Kaliko hesitated.

“I don’t believe I can find the way,” said he. “Ruggedo made three secret passages to the Metal Forest, but he changes the location of these passages every week, so that no one can get to the Metal Forest without his permission. However, if we look sharp, we may be able to discover one of these secret ways.”

“That reminds me to ask what has become of Queen Ann and the Officers of Oogaboo,” said Files.

“I’m sure I can’t say,” replied Kaliko.

“Do you suppose Ruggedo destroyed them?”

“Oh, no; I’m quite sure he didn’t. They fell into the big pit in the passage, and we put the cover on to keep them there; but when the executioners went to look for them they had all disappeared from the pit and we could find no trace of them.”

“That’s funny,” remarked Betsy thoughtfully. “I don’t believe Ann knew any magic, or she’d have worked it before. But to disappear like that seems like magic; now, doesn’t it?”

They agreed that it did, but no one could explain the mystery.

“However,” said Shaggy, “they are gone, that is certain, so we cannot help them or be helped by them. And the important thing just now is to rescue my dear brother from captivity.”

“Why do they call him the Ugly One?” asked Betsy.

“I do not know,” confessed Shaggy. “I can not remember his looks very well, it is so long since I have seen him; but all of our family are noted for their handsome faces.”

Betsy laughed and Shaggy seemed rather hurt; but Polychrome relieved his embarrassment

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by saying softly: "One can be ugly in looks, but lovely in disposition."

"Our first task," said Shaggy, a little comforted by this remark, "is to find one of those secret passages to the Metal Forest."

"True," agreed Kaliko. "So I think I will assemble the chief nomes of my kingdom in this throne room and tell them that I am their new King. Then I can ask them to assist us in searching for the secret passages."

"That's a good idea," said the dragon, who seemed to be getting sleepy again.

Kaliko went to the big gong and pounded on it just as Ruggedo used to do; but no one answered the summons.

"Of course not," said he, jumping up from the throne, where he had seated himself. "That is my call, and I am still the Royal Chamberlain, and will be until I appoint another in my place."

So he ran out of the room and found Guph and told him to answer the summons of the King's gong. Having returned to the royal cavern, Kaliko first pounded the gong and then sat in the throne, wearing Ruggedo's discarded ruby crown and holding in his hand the sceptre which Ruggedo had so often thrown at his head.

When Guph entered he was amazed.

"Better get out of that throne before old Ruggedo comes back," he said warningly.

"He isn't coming back, and I am now the King of the Nomes, in his stead," announced Kaliko.

"All of which is quite true," asserted the dragon, and all of those who stood around the throne bowed respectfully to the new King.

Seeing this, Guph also bowed, for he was glad to be rid of such a hard master as Ruggedo. Then Kaliko, in quite a kingly way, informed Guph that he was appointed the Royal Chamberlain, and promised not to throw the sceptre at his head unless he deserved it.

All this being pleasantly arranged, the new Chamberlain went away to tell the news to all the nomes of the underground Kingdom, every one of whom would be delighted with the change in Kings.