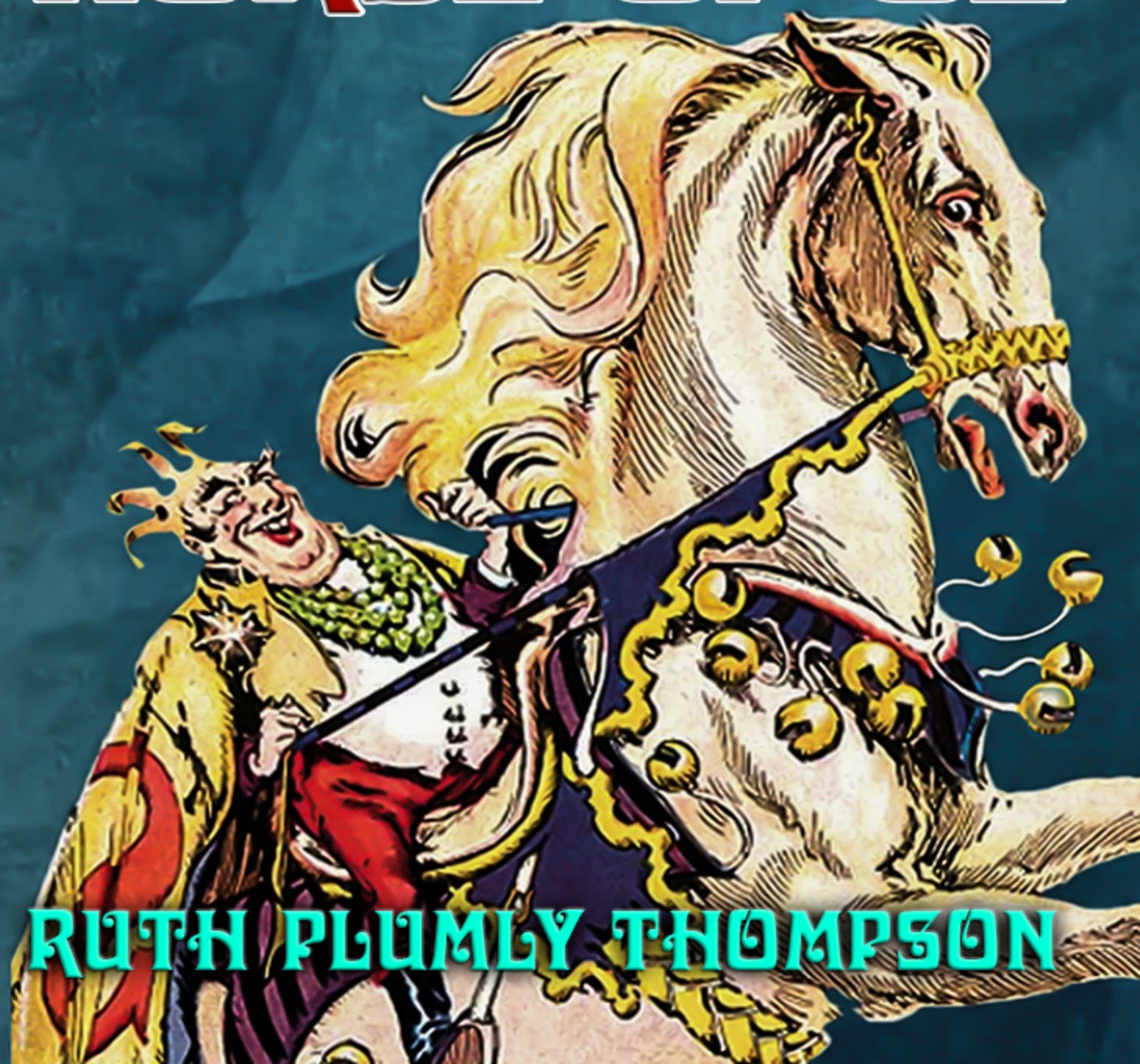


CLASSICS TO GO

# THE WISHING HORSE OF OZ



RUTH PLUMLY THOMPSON

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**Ruth Plumly Thompson**

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# CHAPTER 1

## The King of Skampavia

"Is this all?" The King of Skampavia frowned at the great stack of bags, bales, crates and carriers heaped around his throne. Leaning forward, he gingerly extracted a fig from one of the baskets and popped it into his enormous mouth.

"Pah, dry as a blotter," spluttered the red-faced ruler, gritting his teeth with disgust, "and look at those cocoanuts, no bigger round than a baby's rattle!" Leaping off his throne, he began kicking at the baskets of vegetables and bales of cotton and other merchandise. "What dusty junk is this?" he raged, glaring furiously at Pinny Penny, his patient Prime Minister. "How dare they send me such stuff?" Claspings and unclaspings his hands nervously, Pinny Penny nevertheless spoke up boldly.

"Because they have nothing better, your Majesty. What can our poor subjects do with land so unprofitable and barren? Then, not only must they produce enough for their own needs, but are required by the law to give one-third of all they raise to the crown."

"And why not?" blustered Skamperoo, settling back argumentatively on his throne. "I am the KING! You can't get around that, you know."

"No," sighed Pinny Penny, and drawing aside one of the shabby curtains he looked sorrowfully out into the courtyard.

"What's all that racket?" demanded his Master, as a medley of shouts, roars, and dull thuds came rolling up to them. Forgetting his anger for a moment, he bounded to his feet

and came across the room to look over Pinny Penny's shoulder.

"A slight argument seems to have arisen among the Supervisors," murmured Pinny Penny resignedly.

Now Skampavia, I must tell you, is roughly divided into seven counties, and over each county Skamperoo had set a Supervisor whose duty it was to govern the province and to turn over to him one-third of all produce and merchandise in that county. To save time, and easily identify them, the supervisors were known by the size of the counties they governed. For instance, the Supervisor of the First County, which was one mile wide and ten miles long, was called Onebyten; the Supervisor of the Second County Twobyfour; and the others were variously known as Threebysix, Ninebyfive, Eightbyeight, Fivebynine and Fourbyseven. Twice a year the Supervisors rode into the capital with their tribute, and now, down in the courtyard, the seven tremendous Skampavians were in a perfect pitched battle, helped out by all the guards and palace servants.

"Argument!" roared the King, slapping Pinny Penny rudely on the shoulder. "It's a fight, and you know it! Ho, ho! Just look at the good-for-nothing rascals. I tell you, old Two Pins, however poorly they serve us as farmers and merchants, our Skampavians can certainly fight. And who says I'm too hard on them? Have I not given every man Jack a dress uniform and gun and made them learn military drilling and marching at the Royal College?"

"And what use is all this drilling and marching?" inquired Pinny Penny wearily. Letting the curtain fall, he hurried away, for well he knew, if he did not put a stop to the conflict in the courtyard every window in the palace would be broken.



"Now what did he mean by that?" muttered Skamperoo peevishly as his little Prime Minister whisked out of sight. Pursing his lips, he seated himself heavily on his throne. After all, Pinny Penny had only spoken the truth. Why had his father or his father's father ever picked out this pesky little country in the first place? Located in the southern part of the desert of Noland, between the Kingdoms of Ix and Merryland, Skampavia, he was forced to admit, had neither riches, beauty, nor interest. His castle, though poor and shabby, was comfortable enough, and having lived in it all his life, he was used to it. He had put up with the hot dry climate and the poor quality of the food, but after all, why should he continue to do so? In those long ago days in the school room he had studied of energetic rulers who had taken their armies and gone forth to conquer richer and more desirable lands from their neighbors. Well, then, why should not he take his men, push over the border into a more fertile and kindly land? The idea pleased but at the same time annoyed him. Skamperoo was fat and lazy. He loved quiet and ease and the thought of a hard military campaign made him shudder with distaste. Still, he

reflected, remembering Pinny Penny's reproachful face, a King should do something for his subjects and the more he did for them—Ho, ho! the more he could make them do for him. A rich and prosperous country meant a rich and prosperous ruler. Discontentedly fingering the rough cloth from which his royal robes were fashioned, he began to picture himself decked out in splendid satins and velvets heavily encrusted with jewels. Jewels. Pah! All the jewels he had were his plain gold scepter, badly dented and bent from hurling at Pinny Penny. Taking off the crown, he scowled at it critically and began considering the realms on either side of his own dominions.



To the north there was nothing but a sandy strip of desert and the tossing waters of the Nonestic Ocean. East lay the Kingdom of Ix, and Zixie the little Queen he considered too pleasant and friendly to conquer. Besides, the climate of Ix was not much better than that of his own country. To the west of Skampavia was Merryland and at one time a band of his roistering Skampavians had crossed over into that country bent on theft and mischief. Recalling the way they



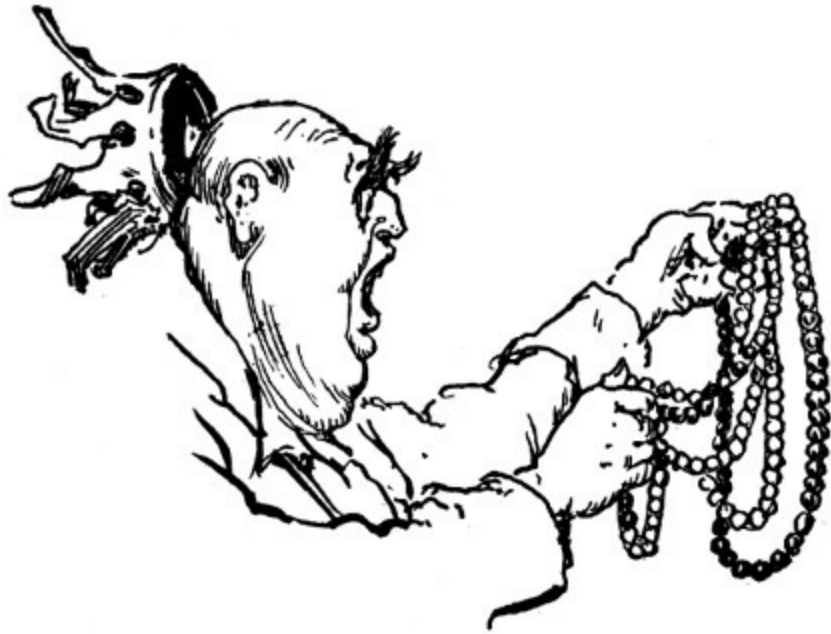
had been welcomed and entertained by the cheerful King of Merryland and sent home simply laden with presents, he hastily dismissed that country too. How could he fight a monarch like that? To the south lay the burning sands of the Deadly Desert, which no man in his own Kingdom had ever succeeded in crossing.

So, having exhausted all the possibilities in the immediate neighborhood, Skamperoo tapped his foot in vexation and began casting about in his mind for some fair and faraway country to conquer. He closed his eyes in order to think better and was just on the point of falling into a pleasant doze of riches and conquest, when Pinny Penny came noisily into the room.

He was preceded by two of the King's Supervisors, who, urged forward by the fearless little Prime Minister, stood sulkily and defiantly before the throne.

"Well, what now?" demanded Skamperoo, blinking his eyes sleepily. "Can you not handle these arguments yourself, Pinny Penny? Is a King to have no rest or privacy at all?"

Instead of answering, Pinny Penny took a small cotton bag from the tallest of the Supervisors and handed it silently to the King. Still half asleep, Skamperoo untied the draw string of the small bag and emptied the contents into his fat hand. What he saw there made his eyes fly open—wide open! Jewels! The very thing for which he had been wishing.



"Emeralds!" gasped the King, rubbing the glittering necklace between his fingers. "Where did you get this, Twobyfour?"

"They were sent to your Majesty by a merchant in the Second County, who got them from a traveling peddler. The peddler had got them from a Gilliken, who had got them from a Quadling, who had got them from a Munchkin, who had once lived in the Emerald City of Oz."

"OZ!" snapped the King, sitting up very straight. "Where is Oz?"

"Oz is a great and powerful Kingdom on the other side of the Deadly Desert," answered Twobyfour, looking uneasily over his shoulder at Pinny Penny.

"Then how did this peddler cross the desert?" demanded Skamperoo, holding the necklace up to the light and feasting his eyes greedily on its gleaming emeralds.

"That, I cannot say." Twobyfour cast a longing glance at the door, heartily wishing himself on the other side.

"Then perhaps you will tell us why you did not turn this necklace over to the King?" suggested Pinny Penny mournfully.

"Yes, how dared you keep it?" panted Skamperoo indignantly. "And what are you gaping at, Threebysix? I'll wager you were in this, too."

"He was," shouted Twobyfour hoarsely. "He tried to steal the jewels from me. That's how he got the black eye."

"But you tried to steal them from me, and what about *that* my fine fellow?" Twobyfour turned a painful and uncomfortable scarlet under the King's accusing eye.

"In Skampavia we have so little, your Majesty," he stuttered miserably. "With these emeralds I thought I might buy a bit of land in some cooler and more comfortable country where my wife and two boys could be happy—a country where flowers would grow in a garden, and where a man would not have to spend his whole life wrestling with rocks and weeds and drilling for hours in the hot sun for no reason whatsoever."

"Hah!" exclaimed Pinny Penny, looking meaningfully at the King.

"Hah, yourself!" grunted Skamperoo wrathfully, then as the emeralds continued to sparkle and glitter in his hand his anger subsided.

"You did very wrong to keep the necklace, Twobyfour," he stated mildly. "But I have decided to forgive you. Return now to the Second County and explain to the merchant who gave you this necklace that I must have all three."

"All three!" exclaimed Twobyfour. "But he's entitled by law to two of them."

"My word is the law here, and you can choose between a broken law or a broken head," Skamperoo told him calmly.

"He is the KING," murmured Pinny Penny in a quiet voice. There was nothing sarcastic in the manner of his speech, but something in the Prime Minister's expression made the King prickle all over with discomfort.



"Yes, I am the King," he shouted explosively, "and moreover I have spoken. Begone, both of you, and YOU, Twobyfour, have two days to return with those two necklaces. The necklaces or your HEAD, do you understand? And—er—er—you may tell that merchant in your county that he need send no more of his wares to the capital, the three necklaces will suffice," he bellowed as the two Supervisors went bolting through the door.

"How nice—they will suffice. You are the King," sniffed Pinny Penny with a sour smile.

"Are you a parrot or a Prime Minister? Stop repeating that silly stuff and tell me about Oz," commanded Skamperoo, claspng the emerald necklace around his fat throat. "Have you ever heard of this place, Pinny Penny? It must be a rich

and marvelous country if peddlers can trade emerald necklaces as carelessly as we trade wooden beads."

"It is a marvelous country," answered Pinny Penny thoughtfully. "I remember my father telling me about the capital of Oz, an Emerald City, where even the streets were inlaid with jewels and every tower and wall was studded with emeralds."

"Well, why have I never been told about this?" wheezed the King peevishly. "A country like that just a precious stone's throw away, so to speak."

"Your Majesty has never cared for reading or study," Pinny Penny reminded him a bit maliciously. "In our library there is a whole history of Oz."

"Fetch it! Fetch it, bring it to me at once!" panted the King, bouncing up and down on his throne like a big bad baby (which in truth he was). "I must discover why Oz is so rich and prosperous while we are so poor and unfortunate."



"Not so unfortunate and poor as we are unwise and greedy," stated Pinny Penny, stalking calmly across the room. "If your Majesty would study ways to improve Skampavia and allow your own subjects to keep a fair share of their crops and merchandise, we might be a powerful country, too."

"Nonsense! What can we do with a rocky little desert like this?" blustered Skamperoo contemptuously. "Skampavia is a dull little Kingdom, a dumb little Kingdom—a KingDUMB, that's a good name for it."

"And you?" murmured Pinny Penny under his breath as he hastened away to fetch the book on Oz. Returning, he plumped the fat volume down on the King's knees and stood back with folded arms.

"Well—well? Do you expect me to read all this?" wailed Skamperoo in dismay. "Why, it would take a year or more. Explain it to me, Pinny Penny. Just give me the gist of the matter. Just give me the gist—there, I've made a joke. Ha! ha! ha! I've made a joke."

"But Oz is no joke," said the Prime Minister shortly, "your Majesty had better get that through your head at once. Now attend closely and I will endeavor to give you the most important facts about this rich and enchanting country across the desert. In the first place," Pinny Penny looked severely over his specs, "Oz is about fifty times as large as Skampavia, a great oblong, undulating country divided into four triangular Kingdoms. Each of these Kingdoms has its own ruler, but all four are subject to the rule of Ozma of Oz, whose capital, the Emerald City, is in the exact center of Oz."

"A girl?" exclaimed Skamperoo, leaning forward excitedly. "How can a mere girl rule over an important country like that?"

"By using her heart as well as her head, by encouraging thrift and rewarding industry," announced Pinny Penny in a tone that made the King wince. "Your Majesty would do well to read of her wise laws and plans for the betterment of her country."

"You may just skip all that," sniffed Skamperoo, closing his mouth stubbornly. "Tell me who are the rulers of these four Kingdoms and the general customs and characteristics of the people."

Closing his eyes and putting his finger tips together, Pinny Penny began solemnly: "The Northern-most country of Oz is the Land of the Gillikens, famed for its luscious grapes, plums, wisteria, and heather. It is a purple country and is ruled over by Joe King and Queen Hyacinth, who live in an amethyst trimmed castle high in the Gilliken Mountains. The Eastern Empire of Oz is a yellow country, known for its wheat, corn, butter, pumpkins, daffodils, and gold mines. Nick Chopper is Emperor of the Winkies and this singular ruler is entirely made of tin plate and celebrated in song and story as 'The Tin Woodman of Oz.'" Pinny Penny paused a moment to catch his breath and then continued quietly:



"The Southland is red and noted for its strawberries, tomatoes, beets, red birds, red wood, and red-heads. Glinda, the Good Sorceress, governs the Quadlings, who make up its inhabitants, and she knows as much magic as Ozma herself—"

"Oh, it's one of those magic places where one just snaps the fingers to get what he wants," sighed the King discontentedly. "Well—well—go on—"

"The Western Country of Oz is blue," continued Pinny Penny obligingly, "and everyone has heard of its famous blue ridge mountains, its blue birds, its violets, its blue skies and its capital, the Sapphire City. Cheerioled is King, and Orin is Queen of the Munchkins, and they live in the Sapphire City, in almost as much magnificence as Ozma in the Emerald City. Is that all you wish to know?"

"About the army?" muttered Skamperoo, wrinkling up his forehead. "Has this girl ruler a great army stationed at her capital?"



Pinny Penny grinned in spite of himself. "The young fairy ruler of Oz is opposed to all wars and fighting and has at her court an army consisting of one tall soldier with green whiskers," he explained hurriedly.

"One soldier with green whiskers!" shouted the King, nearly tumbling off his throne. "I never heard anything more ridiculous in my life. I thought you said Oz wasn't a joke and yet you stand there and tell me about an army of one soldier. Why, that's the funniest thing I ever heard. Ha, haw, haw!"

"Laugh if you wish," said Pinny Penny resignedly, "but don't forget that Ozma has more magic appliances at her finger tips than we have pebbles on our desert. In her palace lives the famous Wizard of Oz, who can work every sort of transformation and enchantment, but does so only for the good of the country."

"Humph!" exclaimed the King. "Well, how many fighting men have we?"

"Seven hundred Skampavian soldiers in each of the seven counties," answered Pinny Penny reluctantly, "but let me warn your Majesty that the idea you have in your head is sheer madness and will lead to nothing but ruin. Take off your crown, put on your night cap and dream away this foolishness."

"And a fine looking crown it is," snapped the King, snatching off his crown and looking at it angrily. "But these emeralds will brighten it up a bit, eh, Pinny Penny?"

"It is not the sparkle of gems in a King's crown that count, it is the jewels of wisdom in the head under the crown that make him happy and well beloved—"

"Stop! Enough!" yelled the King, hurling the crown with all his might at Pinny Penny. "When will you stop this infernal lecturing and scolding?"



"When your Majesty stops talking nonsense," sighed Pinny, catching the crown with one hand and pulling a long bell cord with the other. "Come now, let us have our tea and forget about Oz," he proposed calmly. "Lemon or cream, your Highness?"

"Lemon!" growled the King sourly, and slapping open the book of history on his knees, he stared long and enviously at a picture of the Emerald City of Oz.



## CHAPTER 2

### The King and the Merchant

Two days had passed since Skamperoo had come into possession of the emerald necklace. He had never taken it off for a moment. He even wore it to bed, and spent most of the daytime admiring himself and it in the palace mirrors. Now, as the afternoon of the second day drew to a close, he kept bouncing over to the windows that commanded a view of the Highway.

"If that rascal does not turn up soon, I'll—I'll—"

"Explode, probably," predicted Pinny Penny, who was playing solitaire with the only pack of cards the castle afforded. "Calm yourself, Skamper, what good are these emeralds when you come right down to it?"

"Good? Good? They are worth more than this whole miserable castle," answered the King indignantly. "I can sell them and buy—no, no, I'll never part with them," he corrected himself hastily. "They give me a feeling of importance and power. Our star has risen, Pinny Penny. Great days are ahead. Hark! Listen! Is that a footstep in the courtyard?" Darting back to the window, the portly monarch flattened his nose against the pane. "It's Twoby! It's Twobyfour!" he shouted hopping up and down like a school boy. "And there's a tall bearded stranger with him."

"If your Majesty will quietly seat yourself, I'll endeavor to announce them," reproved Pinny Penny, gathering up his cards. "Remember you are a King and not a jumping jack."

"Oh—all right." Skamperoo flung himself heavily down among his cushions and presently the tramp of feet along

the corridor proclaimed the arrival of the long awaited Supervisor. Pinny Penny advanced stiffly to meet him and after a whispered conversation he called out in a bored voice:

"Twobyfour, Governor of our Second Province, and Matiah, the Merchant, your Majesty!"

"Yes! Yes? But where are the emeralds?" panted Skamperoo, leaning forward eagerly as the two travelers advanced respectfully to the throne.

Drawing a small bag from his leather jerkin, Twobyfour held it sullenly out to the King.

"Here, your Majesty, and here also is the merchant who goes with the necklace." Twobyfour haughtily indicated the turbaned Skampavian beside him.

"Yes! Yes, the merchant." The King, intent upon the jewels, did not even look up. "He goes with the necklaces, you say? Well, ha! ha! now he may go without them. That is all I require of you, my good fellow, your presence here is not necessary or desirable. You may go. GO, do you understand?"

"Go?" Matiah drew himself up to his fullest height, which was pretty high, I can tell you. "Perhaps your Majesty will suggest where? For these three necklaces I traded my house, my shops, and all my other possessions. You say that is all, and it is indeed. Since you have taken all I own and possess, your Majesty must take me also. You owe me a living and I am here to say so."

"Say no more," put in Pinny Penny soothingly.

"Matiah is right, Skamperoo, and well within his rights as well. We must make a place for him in the palace. What can you do?" he inquired practically.