

L. FRANK BAUM



THE ENCHANTED
ISLAND OF YEW

The Enchanted Island of Yew

Whereon Prince Marvel Encountered the High Ki of Twi and Other Surprising People

L. Frank Baum

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The Enchanted Island of Yew

1. "Once on a Time"

I am going to tell a story, one of those tales of astonishing adventures that happened years and years and years ago. Perhaps you wonder why it is that so many stories are told

of "once on a time", and so few of these days in which we live; but that is easily explained.

In the old days, when the world was young, there were no automobiles nor flying-machines to make one wonder; nor were there railway trains, nor telephones, nor mechanical inventions of any sort to keep people keyed up to a high pitch of excitement. Men and women lived simply and quietly. They were Nature's children, and breathed fresh air into their lungs instead of smoke and coal gas; and tramped through green meadows and deep forests instead of riding in street cars; and went to bed when it grew dark and rose with the sun--which is vastly different from the present custom. Having no books to read they told their adventures to one another and to their little ones; and the stories were handed down from generation to generation and reverently believed.

Those who peopled the world in the old days, having nothing but their hands to depend on, were to a certain extent helpless, and so the fairies were sorry for them and ministered to their wants patiently and frankly, often showing themselves to those they befriended.

So people knew fairies in those days, my dear, and loved them, together with all the ryls and knooks and pixies and nymphs and other beings that belong to the hordes of immortals. And a fairy tale was a thing to be wondered at and spoken of in awed whispers; for no one thought of doubting its truth.

To-day the fairies are shy; for so many curious inventions of men have come into use that the wonders of Fairyland are somewhat tame beside them, and even the boys and girls can not be so easily interested or surprised as in the old days. So the sweet and gentle little immortals perform their

tasks unseen and unknown, and live mostly in their own beautiful realms, where they are almost unthought of by our busy, bustling world.

Yet when we come to story-telling the marvels of our own age shrink into insignificance beside the brave deeds and absorbing experiences of the days when fairies were better known; and so we go back to "once on a time" for the tales that we most love--and that children have ever loved since mankind knew that fairies exist.

2. The Enchanted Isle

Once there was an enchanted island in the middle of the sea. It was called the Isle of Yew. And in it were five important kingdoms ruled by men, and many woodland dells and forest glades and pleasant meadows and grim mountains inhabited by fairies.

From the fairies some of the men had learned wonderful secrets, and had become magicians and sorcerers, with powers so great that the entire island was reputed to be one of enchantments. Who these men were the common people did not always know; for while some were kings and rulers, others lived quietly hidden away in forests or mountains, and seldom or never showed themselves. Indeed, there were not so many of these magicians as people thought, only it was so hard to tell them from common folk that every stranger was regarded with a certain amount of curiosity and fear.

The island was round--like a mince pie. And it was divided into four quarters--also like a pie--except that there was a big place in the center where the fifth kingdom, called Spor, lay in the midst of the mountains. Spor was ruled by King Terribus, whom no one but his own subjects had ever seen--and not many of them. For no one was allowed to enter the Kingdom of Spor, and its king never left his palace. But the people of Spor had a bad habit of rushing down from their mountains and stealing the goods of the inhabitants of the other four kingdoms, and carrying them home with them, without offering any apologies whatever for such horrid conduct. Sometimes those they robbed tried to fight them; but they were a terrible people, consisting of giants with huge clubs, and dwarfs who threw flaming darts, and the stern Gray Men of Spor, who were most frightful of all. So, as a rule, every one fled before them, and the people were thankful that the fierce warriors of Spor seldom came to rob them oftener than once a year.

It was on this account that all who could afford the expense built castles to live in, with stone walls so thick that even the giants of Spor could not batter them down. And the children were not allowed to stray far from home for fear some roving band of robbers might steal them and make their parents pay large sums for their safe return.

Yet for all this the people of the Enchanted Isle of Yew were happy and prosperous. No grass was greener, no forests more cool and delightful, no skies more sunny, no sea more blue and rippling than theirs.

And the nations of the world envied them, but dared not attempt to conquer an island abounding in enchantments.

3. The Fairy Bower

That part of the Enchanted Isle which was kissed by the rising sun was called Dawna; the kingdom that was tinted rose and purple by the setting sun was known as Auriel, and the southland, where fruits and flowers abounded, was the kingdom of Plenta. Up at the north lay Heg, the home of the great barons who feared not even the men of Spor; and in the Kingdom of Heg our story opens.

Upon a beautiful plain stood the castle of the great Baron Merd--renowned alike in war and peace, and second in importance only to the King of Heg. It was a castle of vast extent, built with thick walls and protected by strong gates. In front of it sloped a pretty stretch of land with the sea glistening far beyond; and back of it, but a short distance away, was the edge of the Forest of Lurla.

One fair summer day the custodian of the castle gates opened a wicket and let down a draw-bridge, when out trooped three pretty girls with baskets dangling on their arms. One of the maids walked in front of her companions, as became the only daughter of the mighty Baron Merd. She was named Seseley, and had yellow hair and red cheeks and big, blue eyes. Behind her, merry and laughing, yet with a distinct deference to the high station of their young lady, walked Berna and Helda--dark brunettes with mischievous eyes and slender, lithe limbs. Berna was the daughter of the chief archer, and Helda the niece of the captain of the guard, and they were appointed play-fellows and comrades of the fair Seseley.

Up the hill to the forest's edge ran the three, and then without hesitation plunged into the shade of the ancient

trees. There was no sunlight now, but the air was cool and fragrant of nuts and mosses, and the children skipped along the paths joyously and without fear.

To be sure, the Forest of Lurla was well known as the home of fairies, but Seseley and her comrades feared nothing from such gentle creatures and only longed for an interview with the powerful immortals whom they had been taught to love as the tender guardians of mankind. Nymphs there were in Lurla, as well, and crooked knooks, it was said; yet for many years past no person could boast the favor of meeting any one of the fairy creatures face to face.

So, gathering a few nuts here and a sweet forest flower there, the three maidens walked farther and farther into the forest until they came upon a clearing--formed like a circle--with mosses and ferns for its carpet and great overhanging branches for its roof.

"How pretty!" cried Seseley, gaily. "Let us eat our luncheon in this lovely banquet-hall!"

So Berna and Helda spread a cloth and brought from their baskets some golden platters and a store of food. Yet there was little ceremony over the meal, you may be sure, and within a short space all the children had satisfied their appetites and were laughing and chatting as merrily as if they were at home in the great castle. Indeed, it is certain they were happier in their forest glade than when facing grim walls of stone, and the three were in such gay spirits that whatever one chanced to say the others promptly joined in laughing over.

Soon, however, they were startled to hear a silvery peal of laughter answering their own, and turning to see whence the sound proceeded, they found seated near them a

creature so beautiful that at once the three pairs of eyes opened to their widest extent, and three hearts beat much faster than before.

"Well, I must say you DO stare!" exclaimed the newcomer, who was clothed in soft floating robes of rose and pearl color, and whose eyes shone upon them like two stars.

"Forgive our impertinence," answered the little Lady Seseley, trying to appear dignified and unmoved; "but you must acknowledge that you came among us uninvited, and--and you are certainly rather odd in appearance."

Again the silvery laughter rang through the glade.

"Uninvited!" echoed the creature, clapping her hands together delightedly; "uninvited to my own forest home! Why, my dear girls, you are the uninvited ones--indeed you are--to thus come romping into our fairy bower."

The children did not open their eyes any wider on hearing this speech, for they could not; but their faces expressed their amazement fully, while Helda gasped the words:

"A fairy bower! We are in a fairy bower!"

"Most certainly," was the reply. "And as for being odd in appearance, let me ask how you could reasonably expect a fairy to appear as mortal maidens do?"

"A fairy!" exclaimed Seseley. "Are you, then, a real fairy?"

"I regret to say I am," returned the other, more soberly, as she patted a moss-bank with a silver-tipped wand.

Then for a moment there was silence, while the three girls sat very still and stared at their immortal companion with evident curiosity. Finally Seseley asked:

"Why do you regret being a fairy? I have always thought them the happiest creatures in the world."

"Perhaps we ought to be happy," answered the fairy, gravely, "for we have wonderful powers and do much to assist you helpless mortals. And I suppose some of us really are happy. But, for my part, I am so utterly tired of a fairy life that I would do anything to change it."

"That is strange," declared Berna. "You seem very young to be already discontented with your lot."

Now at this the fairy burst into laughter again, and presently asked:

"How old do you think me?"

"About our own age," said Berna, after a glance at her and a moment's reflection.

"Nonsense!" retorted the fairy, sharply. "These trees are hundreds of years old, yet I remember when they were mere twigs. And I remember when mortals first came to live upon this island, yes--and when this island was first created and rose from the sea after a great earthquake. I remember for many, many centuries, my dears. I have grown tired of remembering--and of being a fairy continually, without any change to brighten my life."

"To be sure!" said Seseley, with sympathy. "I never thought of fairy life in that way before. It must get to be quite tiresome."

"And think of the centuries I must yet live!" exclaimed the fairy in a dismal voice. "Isn't it an awful thing to look forward to?"

"It is, indeed," agreed Seseley.

"I'd be glad to exchange lives with you," said Helda, looking at the fairy with intense admiration.

"But you can't do that," answered the little creature quickly. "Mortals can't become fairies, you know--although I believe there was once a mortal who was made immortal."

"But fairies can become anything they desire!" cried Berna.

"Oh, no, they can't. You are mistaken if you believe that," was the reply. "I could change YOU into a fly, or a crocodile, or a bobolink, if I wanted to; but fairies can't change themselves into anything else."

"How strange!" murmured Seseley, much impressed.

"But YOU can," cried the fairy, jumping up and coming toward them. "You are mortals, and, by the laws that govern us, a mortal can change a fairy into anything she pleases."

"Oh!" said Seseley, filled with amazement at the idea.

The fairy fell on her knees before the baron's daughter. "Please--please, dear Seseley," she pleaded, "change me into a mortal!"

4. Prince Marvel

It is easy to imagine the astonishment of the three girls at hearing this strange request. They gazed in a bewildered fashion upon the kneeling fairy, and were at first unable to answer one word. Then Seseley said--sadly, for she grieved to disappoint the pretty creature:

"We are but mortal children, and have no powers of enchantment at all."

"Ah, that is true, so far as concerns yourselves," replied the fairy, eagerly; "yet mortals may easily transform fairies into anything they wish."

"If that is so, why have we never heard of this power before?" asked Seseley.

"Because fairies, as a rule, are content with their lot, and do not wish to appear in any form but their own. And, knowing that evil or mischievous mortals can transform them at will, the fairies take great care to remain invisible, so they can not be interfered with. Have you ever," she asked, suddenly, "seen a fairy before?"

"Never," replied Seseley.

"Nor would you have seen me to-day, had I not known you were kind and pure-hearted, or had I not resolved to ask you to exercise your powers upon me."

"I must say," remarked Helda, boldly, "that you are foolish to wish to become anything different from what you are."

"For you are very beautiful NOW," added Berna, admiringly.

"Beautiful!" retorted the fairy, with a little frown; "what does beauty amount to, if one is to remain invisible?"

"Not much, that is true," agreed Berna, smoothing her own dark locks.

"And as for being foolish," continued the fairy, "I ought to be allowed to act foolishly if I want to. For centuries past I have not had a chance to do a single foolish thing."

"Poor dear!" said Helda, softly.

Seseley had listened silently to this conversation. Now she inquired:

"What do you wish to become?"

"A mortal!" answered the fairy, promptly.

"A girl, like ourselves?" questioned the baron's daughter.

"Perhaps," said the fairy, as if undecided.

"Then you would be likely to endure many privations," said Seseley, gently. "For you would have neither father nor mother to befriend you, nor any house to live in."

"And if you hired your services to some baron, you would be obliged to wash dishes all day, or mend clothing, or herd cattle," said Berna.

"But I should travel all over the island," said the fairy, brightly, "and that is what I long to do. I do not care to work."

"I fear a girl would not be allowed to travel alone," Seseley remarked, after some further thought. "At least," she added, "I have never heard of such a thing."

"No," said the fairy, rather bitterly, "your men are the ones that roam abroad and have adventures of all kinds. Your women are poor, weak creatures, I remember."

There was no denying this, so the three girls sat silent until Seseley asked:

"Why do you wish to become a mortal?"

"To gain exciting experiences," answered the fairy. "I'm tired of being a humdrum fairy year in and year out. Of course, I do not wish to become a mortal for all time, for that would get monotonous, too; but to live a short while as the earth people do would amuse me very much."

"If you want variety, you should become a boy," said Helda, with a laugh, "The life of a boy is one round of excitement."

"Then make me a boy!" exclaimed the fairy eagerly.

"A boy!" they all cried in consternation. And Seseley added:

"Why--you're a GIRL fairy, aren't you?"

"Well--yes; I suppose I am," answered the beautiful creature, smiling; "but as you are going to change me anyway, I may as well become a boy as a girl."

"Better!" declared Helda, clapping her hands; "for then you can do as you please."

"But would it be right?" asked Seseley, with hesitation.

"Why not?" retorted the fairy. "I can see nothing wrong in being a boy. Make me a tall, slender youth, with waving brown hair and dark eyes. Then I shall be as unlike my own self as possible, and the adventure will be all the more interesting. Yes; I like the idea of being a boy very much indeed."

"But I don't know how to transform you; some one will have to show me the way to do it," protested Seseley, who was getting worried over the task set her.

"Oh, that will be easy enough," returned the little immortal. "Have you a wand?"

"No."

"Then I'll loan you mine, for I shall not need it. And you must wave it over my head three times and say: 'By my mortal powers I transform you into a boy for the space of one year'."

"One year! Isn't that too long?"

"It's a very short time to one who has lived thousands of years as a fairy."

"That is true," answered the baron's daughter.

"Now, I'll begin by doing a little transforming myself," said the fairy, getting upon her feet again, "and you can watch and see how I do it." She brushed a bit of moss from her gauzy skirts and continued: "If I'm to become a boy I shall need a horse, you know. A handsome, prancing steed, very fleet of foot."