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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Road to Oz: Tik-Tok and Billina (14/24)

They had not walked far across the flower-strewn meadows when they came upon a fine road leading toward the northwest and winding gracefully among the pretty yellow hills.

"That way," said Dorothy, "must be the direction of the Emerald City. We'd better follow the road until we meet some one or come to a house."

The sun soon dried Button-Bright's sailor suit and the shaggy man's shaggy clothes, and so pleased were they at regaining their own heads that they did not mind at all the brief discomfort of getting wet.

"It's good to be able to whistle again," remarked the shaggy man, "for those donkey lips were so thick I could not whistle a note with them." He warbled a tune as merrily as any bird.

"You'll look more natural at the birthday celebration, too," said Dorothy, happy in seeing her friends so happy. Polychrome was dancing ahead in her usual sprightly manner, whirling gaily along the smooth, level road, until she passed from sight around the curve of one of the mounds. Suddenly they heard her exclaim "Oh!" and she appeared again, running toward them at full speed.

"What's the matter, Polly?" asked Dorothy, perplexed.

There was no need for the Rainbow's Daughter to answer, for turning the bend in the road there came advancing slowly toward them a funny round man made of burnished copper, gleaming brightly in the sun. Perched on the copper man's shoulder sat a yellow hen, with fluffy feathers and a pearl necklace around her throat.

"Oh, Tik-tok!" cried Dorothy, running forward. When she came to him the copper man lifted the little girl in his copper arms and kissed her cheek with his copper lips. "Oh, Billina!" cried Dorothy, in a glad voice, and the yellow hen flew to her arms, to be hugged and petted by turns.

The others were curiously crowding around the group, and the girl said to them:

"It's Tik-tok and Billina; and oh! I'm so glad to see them again."

"Wel-come to Oz," said the copper man, in a monotonous voice.

Dorothy sat right down in the road, the yellow hen in her arms, and began to stroke Billina's back. Said the hen:

"Dorothy, dear, I've some wonderful news to tell you."

"Tell it quick, Billina!" said the girl.

Just then Toto, who had been growling to himself in a cross way gave a sharp bark and flew at the yellow



hen, who ruffled her feathers and let out such an angry screech that Dorothy was startled.

"Stop, Toto! Stop that this minute!" she commanded.

"Can't you see that Billina is my friend?" In spite of this warning had she not grabbed Toto quickly by the neck the little dog would have done the yellow hen a mischief, and even now he struggled madly to escape Dorothy's grasp. She slapped his ears once or twice and told him to behave, and the yellow hen flew to Tik-tok's shoulder again, where she was safe.

"What a brute!" croaked Billina, glaring down at the little dog.

"Toto isn't a brute," replied Dorothy; "but at home Uncle Henry has to whip him sometimes for chasing the chickens. Now, look here, Toto," she added, holding up her finger and speaking sternly to him, "you've got to understand that Billina is one of my dearest friends, and mustn't be hurt—now or ever."

Toto wagged his tail as if he understood.

"The miserable thing can't talk," said Billina, with a sneer.

"Yes, he can," replied Dorothy; "he talks with his tail, and I know everything he says. If you could wag your tail, Billina, you wouldn't need words to talk with."

"Nonsense!" said Billina.

"It isn't nonsense at all. Just now Toto says he's sorry, and that he'll try to love you for my sake. Don't you, Toto?"

"Bow-wow!" said Toto, wagging his tail again.

"But I've such wonderful news for you; Dorothy," cried the yellow hen; "I've——"

"Wait a minute, dear," interrupted the little girl; "I've got to introduce you all, first. That's manners, Billina. This," turning to her traveling companions, "is Mr. Tik-tok, who works by machinery, 'cause his thoughts wind up, and his talk winds up, and his action winds up—like a clock."

"Do they all wind up together?" asked the shaggy man.

"No; each one separate. But he works just lovely, and Tik-tok was a good friend to me once, and saved my life—and Billina's life, too."

"Is he alive?" asked Button-Bright, looking hard at the copper man.

"Oh, no, but his machinery makes him just as good as alive." She turned to the copper man and said politely:

"Mr. Tik-tok, these are my new friends: the shaggy man, and Polly the Rainbow's Daughter, and Button-Bright, and Toto. Only Toto isn't a new friend, 'cause he's been to Oz before."

The copper man bowed low, removing his copper hat as he did so.

"I'm ve-ry pleased to meet Dor-o-thy's fr-r-r-r-r——"
Here he stopped short.

"Oh, I guess his speech needs winding!" said the little girl, running behind the copper man to get the key off a hook at his back. She wound him up at a place under his right arm and he went on to say:

"Par-don me for run-ning down. I was a-bout to say I am pleased to meet Dor-o-thy's friends, who must be

my friends." The words were somewhat jerky, but plain to understand.

"And this is Billina," continued Dorothy, introducing the yellow hen, and they all bowed to her in turn.

"I've such wonderful news," said the hen, turning her head so that one bright eye looked full at Dorothy.

"What is it, dear?" asked the girl.

"I've hatched out ten of the loveliest chicks you ever saw."

"Oh, how nice! And where are they, Billina?"

"I left them at home. But they're beauties, I assure you, and all wonderfully clever. I've named them Dorothy."

"Which one?" asked the girl.

"All of them," replied Billina.

"That's funny. Why did you name them all with the same name?"

"It was so hard to tell them apart," explained the hen.

"Now, when I call 'Dorothy,' they all come running to me in a bunch; it's much easier, after all, than having a separate name for each."

"I'm just dying to see 'em, Billina," said Dorothy, eagerly.

"But tell me, my friends, how did you happen to be here, in the Country of the Winkies, the first of all to meet us?"

"I'll tell you," answered Tik-tok, in his monotonous voice, all the sounds of his words being on one level—"Princess Oz-ma saw you in her mag-ic pic-ture, and knew you were com-ing here; so she sent Bil-lin-a and me to wel-come you, as she could not come her-self; so that—"

fiz-i-dig-le cum-so-lut-ing hy-ber-gobble in-tu-zib-ick
—"

"Good gracious! Whatever's the matter now?" cried Dorothy, as the copper man continued to babble these unmeaning words, which no one could understand at all because they had no sense.

"Don't know," said Button-Bright, who was half scared.



Polly whirled away to a distance and turned to look at the copper man in a fright.

"His thoughts have run down, this time," remarked Billina composedly, as she

sat on Tik-tok's shoulder and pruned her sleek feathers.

"When he can't think he can't talk properly, any more than you can. You'll have to wind up his thoughts, Dorothy, or else I'll have to finish his story myself."

Dorothy ran around and got the key again and wound up Tik-tok under his left arm, after which he could speak plainly again.

"Par-don me," he said, "but when my thoughts run down my speech has no mean-ing, for words are formed on-ly by thought. I was a-bout to say that Oz-ma sent us to wel-come you and in-vite you to come straight to the Em-er-ald Ci-ty. She was too bus-y to come her-self, for she is pre-par-ing for her birth-day cel-e-bra-tion, which is to be a grand af-fair."

"I've heard of it," said Dorothy, "and I'm glad we've come in time to attend. Is it far from here to the Emerald City?"

"Not ve-ry far," answered Tik-tok, "and we have plen-ty of time. To-night we will stop at the pal-ace of the Tin Wood-man, and to-mor-row night we will ar-rive at the Em-er-ald Ci-ty."

"Goody!" cried Dorothy. "I'd like to see dear Nick Chopper again. How's his heart?"

"It's fine," said Billina; "the Tin Woodman says it gets softer and kindlier every day. He's waiting at his castle to welcome you, Dorothy; but he couldn't come with us because he 'is getting polished as bright as possible for Ozma's party."

"Well, then," said Dorothy, "let's start on, and we can talk more as we go."

They proceeded on their journey in a friendly group, for Polychrome had discovered that the copper man was harmless and was no longer afraid of him. Button-Bright was also reassured, and took quite a fancy to Tik-tok. He wanted the clockwork man to open himself, so that he might see the wheels go round; but that was a thing Tik-tok could not do. Button-Bright then wanted to wind up the copper man, and Dorothy promised he should do so as soon as any part of the machinery ran down. This pleased Button-Bright, who held fast to one of Tik-tok's copper hands as he trudged along the road, while Dorothy walked on the other side of her old friend and Billina perched by turns upon his shoulder or his copper hat. Polly once more joyously danced ahead

and Toto ran after her, barking with glee. The shaggy man was left to walk behind; but he didn't seem to mind that a bit, and whistled merrily or looked curiously upon the pretty scenes they passed.

At last they came to a hilltop from which the tin castle of Nick Chopper could plainly be seen, its towers glistening magnificently under the rays of the declining sun.

"How pretty!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I've never seen the Emp'ror's new house before."

"He built it because the old castle was damp, and likely to rust his tin body," said Billina. "All those towers and steeples and domes and gables took a lot of tin, as you can see."

"Is it a toy?" asked Button-Bright, softly.

"No, dear," answered Dorothy; "it's better than that. It's the fairy dwelling of a fairy prince."

