

TOPAZ
and the
Evil Wizard

The Tales of Topaz the Conjure Cat



Pat Frayne

Topaz and the Evil Wizard: Revised Edition

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This is a work of fiction. This book is a product of the authors imagination. Except for the names of my grandchildren, the names of characters, places or situations have no bearing on any actual persons, living or dead.

Tales of Topaz the Conjure Cat Books

Topaz and the Evil Wizard

Topaz and the Plum-Gista Stone

Topaz and the Green Fairies

*For all my children and grandchildren
who love fantasy and mystical adventures*



Chapter One



The young Fairy called Orange Blossom stood in her open doorway and stared out into the forest. The sun had already set and the sky had begun to darken. She released a heavy sigh and whispered aloud, “Where’s Thistle? He should have come home by now.” Thistle was always home before dusk. He would never leave her alone at night to worry about him. He’d certainly never do this with their mum and dad out of town. Besides, Thistle loved to eat. It wasn’t like him to miss a meal, most of all his supper.

From somewhere in a more distant part of the forest, she heard an owl hoot. Orange Blossom sighed again and felt the gloom of night begin to wrap itself around her.

All at once a cold blustering wind swept through the forest. It rattled the branches of the trees near her family’s small stone cottage. An icy chill ran through her. Orange Blossom hugged her arms and watched the evening shadows change shape in front of her. They spread across the ground bringing eerie images that made her feel lonely and afraid.

She turned and stepped inside, closing the door behind her much harder than she'd intended. A rush of tears blurred her vision. "Where are you, Thistle?" She moaned. "It's almost dark. Please, Brother, come home."

Orange Blossom went to the fireplace and stuck a long reed into the fire. She caught a flame to light another candle. This one she placed in the front window, a beacon of light for Thistle to find his way home in the darkness.

There was only one explanation to account for her brother's curious behavior. Something terrible must have happened to him. He could be hurt and lying somewhere in the forest half-dead and unable to get help. Or maybe he'd drowned while swimming alone in the lake that sat in the middle of the meadow.

All sorts of dreadful thoughts came to mind. It was as if her imagination had taken off on a wild goose chase of horrors. With so much time alone to think, she began to recall every scary tale she'd ever heard about missing children. Everyone who lived in the Kingdom of Knownotten was familiar with these old legends. They had been told and retold many times over to entertain and frighten each new generation of Fairy and Elf children.

Even so, Orange Blossom reminded herself, these legends really were true. Although these awful things had taken place hundreds of years ago. It didn't make the tales any less frightening. It was a time, their father told them, when many dark forces hovered over the land.

Orange Blossom tidied the kitchen and swept the floor. Afterward, she sat by the fire and tried to concentrate on her knitting. But some of these stories continued to play in her head. She'd heard them so many times she remembered most of them exactly as her father always told them.

She laid her knitting in her lap and rubbed her eyes. It was hours past her bedtime, and she was extremely tired. Yet she hated

to go off to bed before Thistle came home. But, try as she may, she couldn't keep her eyes open.

Finally, she decided to turn in for the night. She left the door to her room half open. That way she might hear Thistle if he came home later that night. Thistle's supper had been left on the table, a moist towel over it to keep it from drying out. Not bothering to change into her nightdress, she lay on top of the quilts. She pulled a light blanket she always kept at the foot of her bed up over herself.

After a long restless night of too little sleep, the dawn finally came. As soon as Orange Blossom awoke she threw off the blanket and ran to Thistle's room. She didn't really expect to find him there. But, when she looked into the room and saw his bed was still empty, feelings of fear and disappointment swept over her, nevertheless. Her brother had never done anything like this before, nor would he. Something was wrong, something terrible. Orange Blossom knew she had to go out and look for him. Once again, the meadow came to mind. Thistle was friends with lots of the animals who lived there. When his chores were done, the meadow was where he spent most of his time.

With no thought for a morning meal, Orange Blossom left the cottage wearing the same dress she'd slept in. Two separate woodland trails branched out from her front yard. Either one of them would have taken her to the meadow. The lower trail was the one most traveled, the one Thistle usually took, because it happened to be the shortest.

The trail farther up the hillside meandered through the mountains. This trail fed into several others. Most of these trails were now overgrown; they had been for many years. Some of them wound their way into the deeper, darker, and more ancient parts of the Knownotten Forest. Long, long ago that ancient forest had been the ancestral home of the Yellow Conjure Cats.

Hundreds of years earlier, those large cats had roamed the mountains and the forest to protect it. They'd kept it safe from wicked beings who would have invaded the kingdom and taken it over.

Orange Blossom pushed the thought away. This early in the morning, parts of the forest were still in deep shadow. This was especially true in places where the trees had grown close together. Dark thoughts about unhappy times wasn't something she wanted to recall whilst walking alone in the forest. Better to recite the names of the trees and the wildflowers aloud to keep from thinking anything bad.

Even though the lower path was by far the quickest way to reach the meadow, it was still a long walk from her cottage. Orange Blossom was only half way there when she ran out of trees and plants to name, so she kept up her spirits by singing. *If Thistle is someplace close by, he'll hear me, sooner or later.* Orange Blossom wanted to believe it was possible to meet up with her brother somewhere along the way.

Nevertheless, she saw no sign of him anywhere on the trail through the forest, and by the time she reached the meadow, she was about to cry. The only footprints she'd seen were those of the animals.

As she walked through the meadow, a plump white opossum called down to her from the limb of a cherry tree. "Good morning, Orange Blossom. What brings you to the meadow so early?"

Orange Blossom took a few steps back and looked up. "I'm looking for my brother. Have you seen him, Nilla?"

Grabbing onto the next lowest branch, Nilla eased herself down to it. She was careful to balance the weight of her six youngsters that rested on her back. "Thistle? Gosh, no. He never comes here before noon."

"Did you happen to see him yesterday?"

“He was here yesterday. I saw him playing hide and seek with a badger and two young bucks. He didn’t stay long, though. I remember, because he wanted to go swimming. I overheard him complain to his friends that the water was too cold.”

Nilla inched forward on the branch. The branch was thin; it began to bend and creak under the opossum’s weight. Orange Blossom held her breath as she watched the branch dip even lower when Nilla moved closer to the end of it.

The opossum didn’t appear to show any concern that she and her youngsters might be headed for disaster. The branch swayed up and down while Nilla steadied herself and eyed the cluster of ripe cherries that grew just beyond her reach. “I didn’t see him after that. I thought he might have gone home early.”

“Well he didn’t, Nilla. He didn’t come home all night.”

Before stepping onto the next lowest limb, Nilla nosed one of her young opossum back into place. “Maybe he decided to sleep in the forest with some of his woodland friends. The two young bucks left early too.”

Orange Blossom wiped at a tear and shook her head. “I wish that were so, but Thistle never stays out all night. Even if he had, I’m sure I would have seen him on my way here this morning.”

Nilla’s whiskers twitched. She made an odd clicking sound. “I see why you’re worried. What will you do now, Orange Blossom?”

Orange Blossom pushed a wisp of her fair hair away from her face. “I’m not sure, really. Maybe I should walk up to the lake. Someone there might have seen where he went.”

“If I see him again, I’ll let him know you’re looking for him. I do hope you find him soon. He’s bound to be somewhere here in the meadow.”

There was no sign of Thistle at the lake, not even a footprint. At a loss for what to do next, Orange Blossom sat on a large boulder to think while she fought back the tears and the panic she felt.

She'd already talked to several other animals who lived near the lake. No one had seen Thistle in days.



Otis, a Great-Horned Owl, made a low sweeping glide over the meadow. He was looking for a tasty tidbit to top off his morning meal before heading home. He lived in the tall yellow pines at the top of the forest. When he spotted Orange Blossom, he hooted a greeting. Orange Blossom waved to Otis in return, but there was no cheery smile as usual.

Otis wondered about this. *How come she's in the meadow at such and early hour? And all alone.* He'd never seen her here without her brother. Besides that, she looked upset, dazed, like someone lost or afraid. Believing something must be amiss, Otis dropped to the ground beside her and folded his great wings.

"Where's Thistle?" he hooted.

"Thistle —" The words stopped in Orange Blossom's throat. A series of loud sobs burst out instead.

Otis' golden eyes blinked. "Has something happened to Thistle?" He waited for her to gain control of her crying.

"I don't know." She sobbed again.

Otis cocked his head to one side. *Well, that's a strange answer.* "When did you see him last?"

"He didn't come home all night." Orange Blossom sniffled. "And now, I can't find him."

When the great owl heard this, his feathered ear tufts began to twitch. "No wonder you're upset. That's not at all like Thistle. What do your folks think about this; are they out looking for him too?"

Orange Blossom began to cry again. This time Otis thought she'd never stop. Between sobs, he learned that both their mum and their dad had gone off to Boarsbreek to help her grandfather

make some repairs on his cottage and begin his new garden. It seemed likely they'd be gone for a few days more, at least. Not knowing what else he could do to console her, Otis stayed by her side until she was all cried out.

“I’ve no place else to look, Otis. What am I to do?”

Otis blinked several times before he answered. “I believe you’ve done all you can for the time being. Why don’t you leave this matter to me for now. I think this is something your elders ought to look in to.

In the meantime, it might be best if you stay here in the meadow where you’ll be amongst friends. It’s never good to be alone when you’re worried and upset. I’ll come and find you the moment I have any news.”

Orange Blossom dried her face on the hem of her dress. “How long will you be gone, Otis?”

“Only as long as it takes to have a good long look around. So, you may not see me again until this afternoon.”