

CHAPTER 2 - THE SCARECROW'S FAMILY TREE

The moon shone brightly, but everyone in the Emerald City was fast asleep! Through the deserted streets hurried the Scarecrow. For the first time since his discovery by little Dorothy, he was really unhappy. Living as he did in a Fairyland, he had taken many things for granted and had rather prided himself on his unusual appearance. Indeed, not until Professor Wogglebug's rude remarks concerning his family had he given his past a thought.

"I am the only person in Oz without a family!" he reflected sorrowfully. "Even the Cowardly Lion has kingly parents and a palm tree! But I must keep thinking. My brains have never failed me yet. Who was I? Who were I? Who were I?"

Often he thought so hard that he forgot to look where he was going and ran headlong into fences, stumbled down gutters, and over stiles. But fortunately, the dear fellow could not hurt himself, and he would struggle up, pat his straw into shape, and walk straightway into something else. He made good time in between falls, however, and was soon well on his way down the yellow brick road that ran through the Munchkin Country. For he had determined to return to the Munchkin farm where Dorothy had first discovered him and try to find some traces of his family.

Now being stuffed with straw had many advantages, for requiring neither food nor sleep the Scarecrow could travel night and day without interruption. The stars winked out one by one, and by the time the cocks of the Munchkin farmers began to crow, he had come to the banks of a broad blue river!

The Scarecrow took off his hat and scratched his head thoughtfully. Crossing rivers is no easy matter in Oz, for there isn't a ferry in the Kingdom, and unless one is a good swimmer or equipped with some of the Wizard's magic it is mighty troublesome. Water does not agree with the Scarecrow at all, and as for swimming, he can no more swim than a bag of meal.

But he was too wise a person to give up merely because a thing appeared to be impossible. It was for just such emergencies that his excellent brains had been given to him.

"If Nick Chopper were here, he would build a raft in no time," murmured the Scarecrow, "but as he is not, I must think of another way!"

Turning his back on the river, which distracted his mind, he began to think with all his might. Before he could collect his thoughts, there was a tremendous crash, and next minute he was lying face down in the mud. Several little crashes followed, and a shower of water. Then a wet voice called out with a cheerful chuckle:

"Come on out, my dear Rattles. Not a bad place at all, and here's breakfast already waiting!"

"Breakfast!" The Scarecrow turned over cautiously. A huge and curious creature was slashing through the grass toward him. A smaller and still more curious one followed. Both were extremely damp and had evidently just come out of the river.

"Good morning!" quavered the Scarecrow, sitting up with a jerk and at the same time reaching for a stick that lay just behind him.

"I won't eat it if it talks--so there!" The smaller creature stopped and stared fixedly at the Scarecrow.

The Scarecrow, hearing this, tried to think of something else to say, but the appearance of the two was so amazing that, as he told Dorothy afterwards, he was struck dumb. The larger was at least two hundred feet long and made entirely of blocks of wood. On each block was a letter of the alphabet. The head was a huge square block with a serpent's face and long, curling, tape-measure tongue. The little one was very much smaller and seemed to consist of hundreds of rattles, wood, celluloid, and rubber, fastened together with wires. Every time it moved, the rattles tinkled. Its face, however, was not unpleasant, so the Scarecrow took heart and made a deep bow.

"And I'm not going to eat anything that squirms." This time it was the big serpent who spoke.

"Thank you!" said the Scarecrow, bowing several times more. "You relieve my mind. I've never been a breakfast yet, and I'd rather not begin. But if I cannot be your breakfast, let me be your friend!" He extended his arms impulsively.

There was something so jolly about the Scarecrow's smile that the two creatures became friendly at once, and moreover told him the story of their lives.

"As you have doubtless noted," began the larger creature, "I am an A-B-Sea Serpent. I am employed in the nursery of the Mer children to teach them their letters. My friend, here, is a Rattlesnake, and it is his business to amuse the Mer babies while the Mermaids are mer-marketing. Once a year, we take a vacation, and proceeding from the sea depths up a strange river, we came out upon this shore. Perhaps you, Sir, will be able to tell us where we are?"

"You are in the Munchkin Country of the Land of Oz," explained the Scarecrow politely. "It is a charming place for a vacation. I would show you about myself if I were not bound on an important mission." Here the Scarecrow sighed deeply.

"Have you a family?" he asked the A-B-Sea Serpent curiously.

"Yes, indeed," replied the monster, snapping its tape-measure tongue in and out, "I have five great-grandmothers, twenty-one grandnieces, seven brothers, and six sisters-in-law!"

"Ah!" murmured the Scarecrow, clasping his hands tragically, "How I envy you. I have no one--no aunts--no ancestors--no family--no family tree but a bean pole. I am, alas, a man without a past!" The Scarecrow looked so dejected that the Rattlesnake thought he was going to cry.

"Oh, cheer up!" it begged in a distressed voice. "Think of your presence--here--I give you permission to shake me!" The Scarecrow was so affected by this kind offer that he cheered up immediately.

"No past but a presence--I'll remember that!" He swelled out his straw chest complacently, and leaning over, stroked the Rattlesnake on the head.

"Are you good at riddles?" asked the Rattlesnake timidly.

"Well," answered the Scarecrow judiciously, "I have very good brains, given me by the famous Wizard of Oz."

"Then why is the A-B-Sea Serpent like a city?" asked the Rattlesnake promptly.

The Scarecrow thought hard for several seconds.

"Because it is made up of blocks!" he roared triumphantly. "That's easy; now it's my turn. Why is the A-B-Sea Serpent such a slow talker?"

"Give it up!" said the Rattlesnake after shaking himself several times.

"Because his tongue is a tape measure, and he has to measure his words!" cried the Scarecrow, snapping his clumsy fingers. "And that's a good one, if I did make it myself. I must remember to tell it to Dorothy!"

Then he sobered quite suddenly, for the thought of Dorothy brought back the purpose of his journey. Interrupting the Rattlesnake in the midst of a new riddle, he explained how anxious he was to return to the little farm where he had been discovered and try to find some traces of his family.

"And the real riddle," he sighed with a wave of his hand, "is how to cross this river."

"That's easy and no riddle at all," rumbled the A-B-Sea Serpent, who had been listening attentively to the Scarecrow's remarks. "I'll stretch across, and you can walk over." Suiting the action to the word, he began backing very cautiously toward the river so as not to shake the Scarecrow off his feet.

"Mind your P's and Q's!" called the Rattlesnake warningly. It was well that he spoke, for the A-B-Sea Serpent had doubled the P and Q blocks under, and they were ready to snap off. Finally, however, he managed to make a bridge of himself, and the Scarecrow stepped easily over the blocks, the huge serpent holding himself rigid. Just as he reached Y, the unfortunate creature sneezed, and all the blocks rattled together. Up flew the Scarecrow and escaped falling into the stream only by the narrowest margin.

"Blockhead!" shrilled the Rattlesnake, who had taken a great fancy to the Scarecrow.

"I'm all right," cried the Scarecrow rather breathlessly. "Thank you very much!" He sprang nimbly up the bank. "Hope you have a pleasant vacation!"

"Can't, with a rattlepate like that." The A-B-Sea Serpent nodded glumly in the Rattlesnake's direction.

"Now don't quarrel," begged the Scarecrow. "You are both charming and unusual, and if you follow that Yellow Road, you will come to the Emerald City, and Ozma will be delighted to welcome you."

"The Emerald City! We must see that, my dear Rattles." Forgetting his momentary displeasure, the A-B-Sea Serpent pulled himself out of the river, and waving his X Y Z blocks in farewell to the Scarecrow, went clattering down the road, the little Rattlesnake rattling along behind him.

As for the Scarecrow, he continued his journey, and the day was so delightful and the country so pleasant that he almost forgot he had no family. He was treated everywhere with the greatest courtesy and had innumerable invitations from the hospitable Munchkins. He was anxious to reach his destination, however, so he refused them all, and traveling night and day came without further mishap or adventure late on the second evening to the little Munchkin farm where Dorothy had first discovered him. He was curious to know whether the pole on which he had been hoisted to scare away the crows still stood in the cornfield and whether the farmer who had made him could tell him anything further about his history.

"It is a shame to waken him," thought the kind Scarecrow. "I'll just take a look in the cornfield." The moon shone so brightly that he had no trouble finding his way about. With a little cry of pleasure, he pushed his way through the dry cornstalks. There in the center of the field stood a tall pole--the very identical bean pole from which he had descended.

"All the family or family tree I've got!" cried the Scarecrow, running toward it with emotion.

"What's that?" A window in the farmhouse was thrown up, and a sleepy Munchkin thrust out his head. "What are you doing?" he called crossly.

"Thinking!" said the Scarecrow, leaning heavily against the bean pole.

"Well, don't do it out loud," snapped the farmer. Then, catching a better view of the Scarecrow, he cried in surprise: "Why, it's you!-- Come right in, my dear fellow, and give us the latest news from the Emerald City. I'll fetch a candle!"

The farmer was very proud of the Scarecrow. He had made him long ago by stuffing one of his old suits with straw, painting a jolly face on a sack, stuffing that, and fastening the two together. Red boots, a hat, and yellow gloves had finished his man--and nothing could have been jollier than the result. Later on, when the Scarecrow had run off with Dorothy and got his brains from the Wizard of Oz and become ruler of the Emerald City, the little farmer had felt highly gratified.

The Scarecrow, however, was not in a humor for conversation. He wanted to think in peace. "Don't bother!" he called up. "I'm going to spend the night here. I'll see you in the morning."

"All right! Take care of yourself," yawned the farmer, and drew in his head.

For a long time the Scarecrow stood perfectly still beside the bean pole-- thinking. Then he got a spade from the shed and began clearing away the cornstalks and dried leaves from around the base of the pole. It was slow work, for his fingers were clumsy, but he persevered. Then a wonderful idea came to him.

"Perhaps if I dig down a bit, I may discover--" He got no further, for at the word "discover," he pushed the spade down with all his might. There was a loud crash. The bottom dropped out of things, and the Scarecrow fell through.

"Gr-eat cornstalks!" cried the Scarecrow, throwing up his arms. To his surprise, they came in contact with a stout pole, which he embraced. It was a lifesaver, for he was shooting down into the darkness at a great rate.

"Why!" he gasped as soon as he regained his breath, for he was falling at a terrific rate of speed, "Why, I believe I'm sliding down the bean pole!"