

## CHAPTER 6 - SINGING THEIR WAY OUT OF POKES

Taking a deep breath, Sir Hokus, the Cowardly Lion and Dorothy burst out of the hall singing at the top of their voices.

"Three blind mice--!" sang Dorothy.

"Across the plain!" shouted Sir Hokus.

"I am the Cowardly Lion of Oz!" roared the lion.

The Pokes were so taken aback at the horrid sounds that they ran scurrying right and left. In another minute the three were out of the castle and singing their way through the gloomy garden. Dorothy stuck to the Three Blind Mice. Sir Hokus sang verse after verse of an old English ballad, and the Cowardly Lion roared and gurgled a song of his own making, which, considering it was a first attempt, was not so bad:

I am the Cowardly Lion of Oz!      Be good! Begone! Beware! Becoz  
When I am scared full fierce I be;      Br--rah--grr--ruff, look out for me!

The Pokes stumbled this way and that, and all went well until they rushed into a company of Pokes who were playing croquet. The slowness with which they raised their mallets fascinated Dorothy, and she stopped to watch them in spite of herself.

"Don't stop! Sing!" growled the Cowardly Lion in the middle of a line. To make up for lost time, Dorothy closed her eyes and sang harder than ever, but alas! next instant she fell over a wicket, which so deprived her of breath that she could barely scramble up, let alone sing. As soon as she stopped singing, the Pokes paused in their flight, and as soon as they paused Dorothy began to gape. Singing for dear life, Sir Hokus jerked Dorothy by the arm, and the Cowardly Lion roared so loud that the Pokes covered their ears and began backing away.

"There was a Knight! Come on, come on!" sang Sir Hokus, and Dorothy came, and in a few minutes was able to take up the "Three Blind Mice" again. But running and singing at the same time is not an easy task. And running through Pokes is like trying to run through water. (You know how hard that is?)

"Three Blind Mice--uh--hah--Three Blind--Mice--uh--hah--I can't sing another note! Thu--ree--!" gasped poor Dorothy, stumbling along, while the Cowardly Lion was puffing like an engine. The Pokes in the garden had

recovered from their first alarm and were following at a safe distance. The gates of the city were only a short distance off, but it seemed to Dorothy that she could not go another step.

A large group of Pokes had gathered at the gates, and unless they could sing their way through, they would fall asleep and be carried ignominiously back to the castle.

"Now!" wheezed Sir Hokus, "Remember, it is for the Scarecrow!" All of them swallowed, took a deep breath, and put their last remaining strength into their voices. But a wily Poke who had stuffed some cotton in his ears now approached pushing a little cart.

"Take--!" he drawled, and before Dorothy realized what she was doing, she had accepted a cone from the Poke.

"Hah, hoh, hum! Why, it's hokey pokey!" spluttered Dorothy, and with a deep sigh of delight she took a large bite of the pink ice cream. How cool it felt on her dry throat! She opened her mouth for a second taste, yawned terrifically, and fell with a thud to the stone pavement.

"Dorothy!" wailed Sir Hokus, stopping short in his song and bending over the little girl. The poor Cowardly Lion gave a gulp of despair and began running around the two, roaring and singing in a choked voice. The Pokes nodded to each other in a pleased fashion, and the Chief Poker started cautiously toward them with a long, thick rope. The Cowardly Lion redoubled his efforts. Then, seeing Sir Hokus about to fall, he jumped on the Knight with all his strength. Down crashed Sir Hokus, his armor clanging against the stones that paved the gateway.

"Sing!" roared the Cowardly Lion, glaring at him fiercely. The fall wakened the poor Knight, but he had not the strength to rise. Sitting on the hard stones and looking reproachfully at the Cowardly Lion, he began his ballad in a half-hearted fashion. The Cowardly Lion's heart was like to burst between lack of breath and fear, but making one last tremendous effort and still roaring his song, he bounded at the Chief Poker, seized the rope, and was back before the stupid creature had time to yawn.

"Tie it around your waist; take Dorothy in your arms!" gasped the Cowardly Lion out of the corner of his mouth. Sir Hokus, though completely dazed, had just enough presence of mind to obey, and the next minute the Cowardly Lion, growling between his teeth like a good fellow, was dashing through the group of Pokes, the other end of the rope in his mouth.

Bumpety bump--bump--bump! Bangety-bang-bang! went Sir Hokus over the cobbles, holding his helmet with one hand and Dorothy fast in the other arm. The Pokes fell this way and that, and such was the determination of the Cowardly Lion that he never stopped till he was out of the gate and halfway up the rough road they had so recently traveled. Then with a mighty sigh, he dropped the rope, rolled over and over down the hill, and lay panting with exhaustion at the bottom.

The bumping over the cobbles had wakened Sir Hokus thoroughly. Indeed, the poor Knight was black and blue, and his armor dented and scraped frightfully in important places.

Dorothy, considerably shaken, opened her eyes and began feebly singing "Three Blind Mice."

"No need," puffed Sir Hokus, lifting her off his lap and rising stiffly.

"Yon noble beast has rescued us."

"Won't the Pokes come up here?" asked Dorothy, staring around a bit dizzily.

"They cannot live out of the kingdom," said the Knight, and Dorothy drew a big sigh of relief. Sir Hokus, however, was looking very grave.

"I have failed on my first adventure. Had it not been for the Cowardly Lion, we would now be prisoners in Pokes," he murmured sadly. Then he unfastened the plume from his helmet. "It beseemeth me not to wear it," sighed the Knight mournfully, and though Dorothy tried her best to comfort him, he refused to put it back. Finally, she fastened the plume to her dress, and they went down to the Cowardly Lion.

There was a little spring nearby, and after they had poured six helmets of water over his head, the lion opened his eyes. "Been in a good many fights," gasped the lion, "but I never fought one like this. Singing, bah!"

"Noble Sir, how can I ever repay you?" faltered the Knight. "Alas, that I have failed in the hour of trial!"

"Why, it wasn't a question of courage at all," rumbled the Cowardly Lion, greatly embarrassed. "I had the loudest voice and the most breath, that's all! You got the rough end of it." Sir Hokus looked ruefully at his armor. The back was entirely squashed.

"Never mind!" said the Knight bravely. "It is the front one presents to the foe."

"Now you're talking like a real Knight," said Dorothy. "A while ago you said, 'Yon' and 'beseemeth,' and first thing you know the talk will all come back to you." Sir Hokus' honest face shone with pleasure.

"Odds bludgeons and truncheons! The little maid is right!" he exclaimed, striking an attitude. "And once it does, the rest will be easy."

"Don't say rest to me," begged the Cowardly Lion, getting slowly to his feet. "Hah, hoh, hum! Just to think of it makes me yawn. Now don't you think we had better start off?"

"If you're rested," began Dorothy. The Cowardly Lion put his paw over his ear and looked so comical that both Dorothy and Sir Hokus laughed heartily.

"If you're ready," amended Dorothy, and the three adventurers started up the steep road. "The first thing to do," said the little girl, "is to get back to the Emerald City as quickly as we can."

At this very minute Glinda, the Good Sorceress of Oz, in her palace in the Quadling Country, was puzzling over an entry in the Magic Record Book. This book tells everything that is happening in the world and out, and while it does not give details, it is a very useful possession.

"The Emperor of the Silver Islands," read Glinda, "has returned to his people."

"Now who is the Emperor of the Silver Islands?" she asked herself. She puzzled about it for a long while, and then, deciding that it had nothing to do with the Fairy Kingdom of Oz, she closed the book and went for a walk in the palace garden.

Dorothy and Sir Hokus and the Cowardly Lion had meanwhile reached the first sign in the dim forest, the sign directing travelers to Pokes. Two roads branched out through the forest, and after much debating they took the wider.

"Do you 'spose this leads to the Emerald City?" asked Cowardly Lion dubiously.

"Time will tell, time will tell," said Sir Hokus cheerfully.

"Yes," murmured the Cowardly Lion, "time will tell. But what?"