

CHAPTER 12 - DOROTHY AND SIR HOKUS COME TO FIX CITY

The afternoon went pleasantly for the three travelers. The road was wide and shady and really seemed a bit familiar. Dorothy rode comfortably on the Cowardly Lion's back and to pass the time told Sir Hokus all about Oz. He was particularly interested in the Scarecrow.

"Grammercy! He should be knighted!" he exclaimed, slapping his knee, as Dorothy told how the clever straw man had helped outwit the Gnome King when that wicked little rascal had tried to keep them prisoners in his underground kingdom.

"But, go to! Where is the gallant man now?" The Knight sobered quickly. "Mayhap in need of a strong arm! Mayhap at the mercy of some terrible monster!"

"Oh, I hope not!" cried Dorothy, dismayed at so dark a picture. "Why, oh why, did he bother about his family tree?"

"Trust the Scarecrow to take care of himself," said the Cowardly Lion in a gruff voice. Nevertheless, he quickened his steps. "The sooner we reach the Emerald City, the sooner we'll know where he is!"

The country through which they were passing was beautiful, but quite deserted. About five o'clock, they came to a clear little stream, and after Dorothy and Sir Hokus had washed their faces and the Cowardly Lion had taken a little plunge, they all felt refreshed. Later they came to a fine pear orchard, and as no one was about they helped themselves generously.

The more Dorothy and the Cowardly Lion saw of Sir Hokus, the fonder of him they grew. He was so kind-hearted and so polite.

"He'll be great company for us back in the Emerald City," whispered the Cowardly Lion as the Knight went off to get Dorothy a drink from a little spring. "That is, if he forgets this grammercy, bludgeon stuff."

"I think it sounds lovely," said Dorothy, "and he's remembering more of it all the time. But I wonder why there are no people here. I do hope we meet some before night." But no person did they meet. As it grew darker, Sir Hokus' armor began to creak in a quite frightful manner. Armor is not meant for walking, and the poor Knight was stiff and tired, but he made no complaint.

"Need oiling, don't you?" asked the Cowardly Lion, peering anxiously at him through the gloom.

"Joints in my armor a bit rusty," puffed Sir Hokus, easing one foot and then the other. "Ah, had I my good horse!" He expressively waved a piece of the giant's button at which he had been nibbling.

"Better climb up behind Dorothy," advised the Cowardly Lion, but Sir Hokus shook his head, for he knew the lion was tired, too.

"I'll manage famously. This very night I may find me a steed!"

"How?" asked the lion with a yawn.

"If I sleep beneath these trees, I may have a Knight mare," chuckled Sir Hokus triumphantly.

"Br-rrr!" roared the Cowardly Lion while Dorothy clapped her hands. But they were not to sleep beneath the trees after all, for a sudden turn in the road brought them right to the gates of another city. They knew it must be a city because a huge, lighted sign hung over the gate.

"Fix City," read Dorothy. "What a funny name!"

"Maybe they can fix us up," rumbled the lion, winking at Sir Hokus.

"Perchance we shall hear news of the valiant Scarecrow!" cried the Knight, and limping forward he thumped on the gate with his mailed fist. Dorothy and the Cowardly Lion pressed close behind him and waited impatiently for someone to open the gate.

A bell rang loud back in the town. The next instant, the gates flew open so suddenly that the three adventurers were flung violently on their faces.

"Out upon them!" blustered Sir Hokus, getting up stiffly and running to help Dorothy. "What way is this to welcome strangers?" He pulled the little girl hastily to her feet, then they all ran forward, for the gates were swinging shut again.

It was almost as light as day, for lanterns were everywhere, but strangely enough they seemed to dart about like huge fireflies, and Dorothy ducked involuntarily as a red one bobbed down almost in her face. Then she gasped in real earnest and caught hold of Sir Hokus.

"Uds daggers!" wheezed the Knight. Two large bushes were running down the path, and right in front of Dorothy the larger caught the smaller and began pulling out its leaves.

"Leave off! Leave off!" screamed the little bush.

"That's what I'm doing," said the big bush savagely. "There won't be a leaf on when I get through with you."

"Unhand him, villain!" cried Sir Hokus, waving his sword at the large bush. The two bushes looked up in surprise, and when they saw Dorothy, the Cowardly Lion and Sir Hokus, they fell into each other's branches and burst into the most uproarious laughter.

"My dear Magnolia, this is rich! Oh, dear fellow, wait till Sit sees this; he will be convulsed!" Quite forgetting their furious quarrel, the two went rollicking down the path together, stopping every few minutes to look back and laugh at the three strangers.

"Is this usual?" asked Sir Hokus, looking quite dazed.

"I never heard of bushes talking or running around, but I confess I'm a few centuries behind times!"

"Neither did I!" exclaimed Dorothy. "But then--almost anything's likely to happen in Oz."

"If these lanterns don't look out something will happen. I'll break 'em to bits," growled the Cowardly Lion, who had been dodging half a dozen at once.

"How would we look--out?" sniffed one, flying at Dorothy.

"You could light out--or go out," giggled the little girl.

"We never go out unless we're put out," cried another, but as the Cowardly Lion made a few springs, they flew high into the air and began talking indignantly among themselves. By this time, the three had become accustomed to the changing lights.

"I wonder where the people are," said Dorothy, peering down a wide avenue. "There don't seem to be any houses. Oh, look!"

Three tables set for dinner with the most appetizing viands were walking jauntily down the street, talking fluent china.

"There must be people!" cried Dorothy.

"One dinner for each of us," rumbled the Cowardly Lion, licking his chops.
"Come on!"

"Perchance they will invite us. If we follow the dinners, we'll come to the diners," said Sir Hokus mildly.

"Right--as usual." The Cowardly Lion looked embarrassed, for he had intended pouncing on the tables without further ceremony.

"Hush! Let's go quietly. If they hear us, they may run and upset the dishes," warned Dorothy. So the three walked softly after the dinner tables, their curiosity about the people of Fix growing keener at every step. Several chairs, a sofa and a clothes tree rushed past them, but as Dorothy said later to Ozma, after talking bushes, nothing surprised them. The tables turned the corner at the end of the avenue three abreast, and the sight that greeted Dorothy and her comrades was strange indeed. Down each side of a long street as far as they could see stood rows and rows of people. Each one was in the exact center of a chalked circle, and they were so still that Dorothy thought they must be statues.

But no sooner had the three tables made their appearance than bells began ringing furiously all up and down the street, and dinner tables and chairs came running from every direction. All the inhabitants of Fix City looked alike. They had large, round heads, broad placid faces, double chins, and no waists whatever. Their feet were flat and about three times as long as the longest you have ever seen. The women wore plain Mother Hubbard dresses and straw sailor hats, and the men gingham suits.

While the three friends were observing all this, the tables had been taking their places. One stopped before each Fix, and the chairs, after much bumping and quarreling, placed themselves properly. At a signal from the Fix in the center, the whole company sat down without so much as moving their feet. Dorothy, Sir Hokus and the Cowardly Lion had been too interested to speak, but at this minute a whole flock of the mischievous lanterns clustered over their heads, and at the sudden blare of light the whole street stopped eating and stared.

"Oh!" cried the Fix nearest them, pointing with his fork, "Look at the runabouts!"

"This way, please! This way, please! Don't bark your shins. Don't take any more steps than you can help!" boomed an important voice from the middle

of the street. So down the center marched the three, feeling--as the Cowardly Lion put it--exactly like a circus.

"Stop! Names, please!" The Fix next to the center put up his knife commandingly. Sir Hokus stepped forward with a bow:

"Princess Dorothy of Oz, the Cowardly Lion of Oz."

"And Sir Hokus of Pokes," roared the Lion as the Knight modestly stepped back without announcing himself.

"Sir Pokus of Hoax, Howardly Kion of Boz, and Little Girl Beginning with D," bellowed the Fix, "meet His Royal Highness, King Fix It, and the noble Fixitives."

"Little Girl Beginning with D! That's too long," complained the King, who, with the exception of his crown, looked like all the rest of them, "I'll leave out the middle. What do you want, Little With D?"

"My name is Dorothy, and if your Highness could give us some dinner and tell us something about the Scarecrow and--"

"One thing at a time, please," said the King reprovingly. "What does Pokes want, and Boz? Have they anything to spend?"

"Only the night, an' it please your Gracious Highness," said Sir Hokus with his best bow.

"It doesn't please me especially," said the King, taking a sip of water. "And there! You've brought up another question. How do you want to spend it?"

He folded his hands helplessly on the table and looked appealingly at the Fix next to him. "How am I to settle all these questions, Sticken? First they come running around like crazy chairs, and--"

"You might ring for a settle," suggested Sticken, looking curiously at Sir Hokus. The King leaned back with a sigh of relief, then touched a bell. There were at least twenty bells set on a high post at his right hand, and all of the Fixes seemed to have similar bell posts.

"He's talking perfect nonsense," said Dorothy angrily. The Cowardly Lion began to roll his eyes ominously.

"Let me handle this, my dear. I'm used to Kings," whispered Sir Hokus. "Most of 'em talk nonsense. But if he grows wroth, we'll have all the furniture in the place around our ears. Now just--"

Bump! Sir Hokus and Dorothy sat down quite suddenly. The settle had arrived and hit them smartly behind the knees. The Cowardly Lion dodged just in time and lay down with a growl beside it.

"Now that you're settled," began the King in a resigned voice, "we might try again. What is your motto?"

This took even Sir Hokus by surprise, but before he could answer, the King snapped out:

"Come late and stay early! How's that?"

"Very good," said Sir Hokus with a wink at Dorothy.

"Next time, don't come at all," mumbled Sticken Plaster, his mouth full of biscuit.

"And you wanted?" the King asked uneasily.

"Dinner for three," said the Knight promptly and with another bow.

"Now that's talking." The King looked admiringly at Sir Hokus. "This Little With D had matters all tangled up. One time at a thing! That's my motto!"

Leaning over, the King pressed another button. By this time, the Fixes had lost interest in the visitors and went calmly on with their dinners. Three tables came pattering up, and the settle drew itself up of its own accord. Dorothy placed the Cowardly Lion's dinner on the ground, and then she and Sir Hokus enjoyed the first good meal they had had since they left Pokes. They were gradually becoming used to their strange surroundings.

"You ask him about the Scarecrow," begged Dorothy. Everybody had finished, and the tables were withdrawing in orderly groups. The King was leaning sleepily back in his chair.

"Ahem," began the Knight, rising stiffly, "has your Majesty seen aught of a noble Scarecrow? And could your Supreme Fixity tell us aught--"

The King's eyes opened. "You're out of turn," he interrupted crossly. "We're only to the second question. How will you spend the night?"

"In sleep," answered Sir Hokus promptly, "if your Majesty permits."

"I do," said the King solemnly. "That gets me out of entertaining. Early to bed and late to rise, that's my motto. Next! It's your turn," he added irritably as Sir Hokus did not immediately answer.

"Have you seen aught of the noble Scarecrow?" asked Sir Hokus, and all of them waited anxiously for the King's reply.

"I don't know about the Scarecrow. I've seen a Scarecrow, and a sensible chap he was, hanging still like a reasonable person and letting chairs and tables chase themselves 'round."

"Where was he?" asked Sir Hokus in great agitation.

"In a picture," said the King. "Wait, I'll ring for it."

"No use," said the Knight in a disappointed voice. "We're looking for a man."

"Would you mind telling me why you are all so still, and why all your furniture runs around?" asked Dorothy, who was growing a little restless.

"You forget where you are, and you're out of turn. But I'll overlook it this once," said the King. "Have you ever noticed, Little With D, that furniture lasts longer than people?"

"Why, yes," admitted Dorothy.

"Well, there you are!" King Fix Sit folded his hands and regarded her complacently. "Here we manage things better. We stand still and let the furniture run around and wear itself out. How does it strike you?"

"It seem sensible," acknowledged Dorothy. "But don't you ever grow tired of standing still?"

"I've heard of growing hair and flowers and corn, but never of growing tired. What is it?" asked Sticken Plaster, leaning toward Dorothy.

"I think she's talked enough," said the King, closing his eyes.

Sir Hokus had been staring anxiously at the King for some time. Now he came close to the monarch's side, and standing on tiptoe whispered hoarsely: "Hast any dragons here?"

"Did you say wagons?" asked the King, opening his eyes with a terrible yawn.

"Dragons!" hissed the Knight.

"Never heard of 'em," said the King. The Cowardly Lion chuckled behind his whiskers, and Sir Hokus in great confusion stepped back.

"What time is it?" demanded the King suddenly. He touched a bell, and next minute a whole company of clocks came running down the street. The big ones pushed the little ones, and a grandfather clock ran so fast that it tripped over a cobblestone and fell on its face, which cracked all the way across.

"You've plenty of time; why don't you take it?" called the King angrily, while two clothes trees helped the clock to its feet.

"They're all different," giggled Dorothy, nudging the Cowardly Lion. Some pointed to eight o'clock, some to nine, and others to half past ten.

"Why shouldn't they be different?" asked Sticken haughtily. "Some run faster than others!"

"Pass the time, please," said the King, looking hard at Dorothy.

"The lazy lump!" growled the Cowardly Lion. But Dorothy picked up the nearest little clock and handed it to King Fix Sit.

"I thought so," yawned the King, pointing at the clock. At this, everybody began ringing bells till Dorothy was obliged to cover her ears. In an instant, the whole street was filled with beds, "rolling up just as if they were taxis," laughed Dorothy to Sir Hokus. The Knight smiled faintly, but as he had never seen a taxi, he could not appreciate Dorothy's remark.

"Here come your beds," said the King shortly. "Tell them to take you around the corner. I can't abide snoring."

"I don't snore, thank you," said Dorothy angrily, but the King had stepped into his bed and drawn the curtains tight.

"We might as well go to bed, I 'spose," said the little girl. "I'm so tired!"

The three beds were swaying restlessly in the middle of the street. They were tall, four-post affairs with heavy chintz hangings. Dorothy chose the blue one, and Sir Hokus lifted her up carefully and then went off to catch his bed, which had gotten into an argument with a lamppost. When he spoke to it sharply, it left off and came trotting over to him. The Cowardly Lion, contrary to his usual custom, leaped into his bed, and soon the three four-posters were walking quietly down the street, evidently following the King's instructions.

Dorothy slipped off her shoes and dress and nestled comfortably down among the soft covers. "Just like sleeping in a train," she thought drowsily. "What a lot I shall have to tell the Scarecrow and Ozma when I get home."

"Good night!" said the bed politely.

"Good night!" said Dorothy, too nearly asleep to even think it strange for a bed to talk. "Good night!"