

## CHAPTER 13 - DANCING BEDS AND THE ROADS THAT UNROLLED

"It must be a shipwreck," thought Dorothy, sitting up in alarm. She seemed to be tossing about wildly.

"Time for little girls to get up," grumbled a harsh voice that seemed to come from the pillows.

Dorothy rubbed her eyes. One of the bedposts was addressing her, and the big four-poster itself was dancing a regular jig.

"Oh, stop!" cried Dorothy, holding on to the post to keep from bouncing out.

"Can't you see I'm awake?"

"Well, I go off duty now, and you'll have to hurry," said the bed sulkily. "I'm due at the lecture at nine."

"Lecture?" gasped Dorothy.

"What's so queer about that?" demanded the bed coldly. "I've got to keep well posted, haven't I? I belong to a polished set, I do. Hurry up, little girl, or I'll throw you out."

"I'm glad my bed doesn't talk to me in this impertinent fashion," thought Dorothy, slipping into her dress and combing her hair with her side comb.

"Imagine being ordered about by a bed! I wonder if Sir Hokus is up." Parting the curtains, she jumped down, and the bed, without even saying goodbye, took itself off.

Sir Hokus was sitting on a stile, polishing his armor with a pillowslip he had taken from his bed, and the Cowardly Lion was lying beside him lazily thumping his tail and making fun of the passing furniture.

"Have you had breakfast?" asked Dorothy, joining her friends.

"We were waiting for your Ladyship," chuckled the Cowardly Lion. "Would you mind ordering two for me, Hokus? I find one quite insufficient."

Sir Hokus threw away the pillowslip, and talking cheerfully they walked toward King Fix Sit's circle. The beds had been replaced by breakfast tables, and the whole street was eating busily.

"Good morning, King," said Sir Hokus. "Four breakfasts, please."

The king rang a bell four times without looking up from his oatmeal. Seeing that he did not wish to be disturbed, the three waited quietly for their tables.

"In some ways," said Dorothy, contentedly munching a hot roll, "in some ways this is a very comfortable place."

"In sooth 'tis that," mumbled Sir Hokus, his mouth full of baked apple. As for the Cowardly Lion, he finished his two breakfasts in no time. "And now," said Sir Hokus as the tables walked off, "let us continue our quest. Could'st tell us the way to the Emerald City, my good King Fix?"

"If you go, go away. And if you stay, stay away. That's my motto," answered King Fix shortly. "I can't have people running around here like common furniture," he added in a grieved voice. All the Fix Its nodded vigorously.

"Let them take their stand or their departure," said Sticken Plaster firmly.

The King felt in his pocket and brought out three pieces of chalk. "Go to the end of the street. Choose a place and draw your circle. In five minutes you will find it impossible to move out of the circle, and you will be saved all this unnecessary motion."

"But we don't want to come to a standstill," objected Dorothy.

"No, by my good sword!" spluttered the Knight, glaring around nervously. Then, seeing the King looked displeased, he made a low bow. "If your Highness could graciously direct us out of the city--"

"Buy a piece of road and go where it takes you," snapped the King.

Seeing no more was to be got out of him, they started down the long street.

"I wonder what they do when it rains?" said Dorothy, looking curiously at the solemn rows of people.

"Call for roofs, silly!" snapped a Fix, staring at her rudely. "If you would spend your time thinking instead of walking, you'd know more."

"Go to, and swallow a gooseberry!" roared the Knight, waving his sword at the Fix, and Dorothy, fearing an encounter, begged him to come on, which he did--though with many backward glances.

Fix City seemed to consist of one long street, and they had soon come to the very end.

"Uds daggers!" gasped Sir Hokus.

"Great palm trees," roared the Cowardly Lion.

As for Dorothy, she could do nothing but stare. The street ended surely enough, and beyond there was nothing at all. That is, nothing but air.

"Well," said the Cowardly Lion, backing a few paces, "this is a pretty fix."

"Glad you like it," said a wheezy voice. The three travelers turned in surprise. A huge Fix was regarding them with interest. His circle, which was the last in the row, was about twenty times as large as the other circles, and on the edge stood a big sign:

"Don't you remember, the King said something about buying a road," said Dorothy in an excited undertone to the Knight.

"Can't direct us to a road, my good man?" asked Sir Hokus with a bow. The Fix jerked his thumb back at the sign. "What kind of a road to you want?" he asked hoarsely.

"A road that will take us back to the Emerald City, please," said Dorothy.

"I can't guarantee anything like that," declared the Fix, shaking his head.

"Our roads go where they please, and you'll have to go where they take you. Do you want to go on or off?"

"On," shivered the Cowardly Lion, looking with a shudder over the precipice at the end of the street.

"What kind of a road will you have? Make up your minds, please. I am busy."

"What kind of roads have you?" asked Dorothy timidly. It was her first experience at buying roads, and she felt a bit perplexed.

"Sunny, shady, straight, crooked, and cross-roads," snapped the Fix.

"We wouldn't want a cross one," said Dorothy positively. "Have you any with trees at both sides and water at the end?"

"How many yards?" asked the Fix, taking a pair of shears as large as himself off a long counter beside him.

"Five miles," said Sir Hokus as Dorothy looked confused. "That ought to take us somewhere!"

The Fix rang one of the bells in the counter. The next minute, a big trap door in the ground opened, and a perfectly huge roll bounced out at his feet.

"Get on," commanded the Fix in such a sharp tone that the three jumped to obey. Holding fast to Sir Hokus, Dorothy stepped on the piece of road that had already unrolled. The Cowardly Lion, looking very anxious, followed. No sooner had they done so than the road gave a terrific leap forward that stretched the three flat upon their backs and started unwinding from its spool at a terrifying speed. As it unrolled, tall trees snapped erect on each side and began laughing derisively at the three travelers huddled together in the middle.

"G-g-glad we only took five miles," stuttered Dorothy to the Knight, whose armor was rattling like a Ford.

The Cowardly Lion had wound his tail around a tree and dug his claws into the road, for he had no intention of falling off into nothingness. As for the road, it snapped along at about a mile a minute, and before they had time to grow accustomed to this singular mode of travel, it gave a final jump that sent them circling into the air, and began rapidly winding itself up.

Down, down, down whirled Dorothy, falling with a resounding splash into a broad stream of water. Then down, down, down again, almost to the bottom.

"Help!" screamed Dorothy as her head rose above water, and she began striking out feebly. But the fall through the air had taken all her breath.

"What do you want?" A thin, neat little man was watching her anxiously from the bank, making careful notes in a book that he held in one hand.

"Help! Save me!" choked Dorothy, feeling herself going down in the muddy stream again.

"Wait! I'll look it up under the 'H's," called the little man, making a trumpet of his hands. "Are you an island? An island is a body of land entirely surrounded by water, but this seems to be a some-body," Dorothy heard him mutter as he whipped over several pages of his book. "Sorry," he called back, shaking his head slowly, "but this is the wrong day. I only save lives on Monday."

"Stand aside, Mem, you villain!" A second little man exactly like the first except that he was exceedingly untidy plunged into the stream.

"It's no use," thought Dorothy, closing her eyes, for he had jumped in far below the spot where she had fallen and was making no progress whatever.

The waters rushed over her head the second time. Then she felt herself being dragged upward.

When she opened her eyes, the Cowardly Lion was standing over her. "Are you all right?" he rumbled anxiously. "I came as soon as I could. Fell in way upstream. Seen Hokus?"

"Oh, he'll drown," cried Dorothy, forgetting her own narrow escape. "He can't swim in that heavy armor!"

"Never fear, I'll get him," puffed the Cowardly Lion, and without waiting to catch his breath he plunged back into the stream. The little man who only saved lives on Monday now approached timidly. "I'd like to get a statement from you, if you don't mind. It might help me in the future."

"You might have helped me in the present," said Dorothy, wringing out her dress. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I'll make a note of that," said the little man earnestly. "But how did you feel when you went down?" He waited, his pencil poised over the little book.

"Go away," cried Dorothy in disgust.

"But my dear young lady--"

"I'm not your dear young lady. Oh, dear, why doesn't the Cowardly Lion come back?"

"Go away, Mem." The second little man, dripping wet, came up hurriedly.

"I was only trying to get a little information," grumbled Mem sulkily.

"I'm sorry I couldn't swim faster," said the wet little man, approaching Dorothy apologetically.

"Well, thank you for trying," said Dorothy. "Is he your brother? And could you tell me where you are? You're dressed in yellow, so I 'spose it must be somewhere in the Winkie Country."

"Right in both cases," chuckled the little fellow. "My name is Ran and his name is Memo." He jerked his thumb at the retiring twin. "Randum and Memo--see?"

"I think I do," said Dorothy, half closing her eyes. "Is that why he's always taking notes?"

"Exactly," said Ran. "I do everything at Random, and he does everything at memorandum."

"It must be rather confusing," said Dorothy. Then as she caught sight of the Cowardly Lion dragging Sir Hokus, she jumped up excitedly. Ran, however, took one look at the huge beast and then fled, calling for Mem at the top of his voice. And that is the last Dorothy saw of these singular twins.

The Lion dropped Sir Hokus in a limp heap. When Dorothy unfastened his armor, gallons of water rushed out.

"Sho good of--of--you," choked the poor Knight, trying to straighten up.

"Save your breath, old fellow," said the Cowardly Lion, regarding him affectionately.

"Oh, why did I ask for water on the end of the road?" sighed Dorothy. "But, anyway, we're in some part of the Winkie Country."

Sir Hokus, though still spluttering, was beginning to revive. "Yon noble bheast shall be knighted. Uds daggers! That's the shecond time he's shaved my life!" Rising unsteadily, he tottered over to the Lion and struck him a sharp blow on the shoulder. "Rishe, Shir Cowardly Lion," he cried hoarsely, and fell headlong, and before Dorothy or the lion had recovered from their surprise he was fast asleep, mumbling happily of dragons and bludgeons.

"We'll have to wait till he gets rested," said Dorothy. "And until I get dry." She began running up and down, then stopped suddenly before the Lion.

"And there's something else for Professor Wogglebug to put in his book, Sir Cowardly Lion."

"Oh, that!" mumbled the Cowardly Lion, looking terribly embarrassed.

"Whoever heard of a Cowardly Knight? Nonsense!"

"No, it isn't nonsense," said Dorothy stoutly. "You're a knight from now on. Won't the Scarecrow be pleased?"

"If we ever find him," sighed the Lion, settling himself beside Sir Hokus.

"We will," said Dorothy gaily. "I just feel it."