

CHAPTER 21 - THE ESCAPE FROM THE SILVER ISLAND

"Well!" gasped Dorothy, fanning herself with her hat, "I never was so s'prised in my life!"

"Nor I," exclaimed the Scarecrow. "The Grand Gheewizard will be suing you for parassault and battery. But how did it happen?"

"Well," began Dorothy, "as soon as the parasol opened, I flew up so fast that I could hardly breathe. Then, after I'd gone ever so far, it came to me that if the parasol went up when it was up, it would come down when it was down. I couldn't leave you all in such a fix-- so I closed it, and--"

"Came down!" finished the Scarecrow with a wave of his hand. "You always do the right thing in the right place, my dear."

"It was lucky I hit the vase, wasn't it?" sighed Dorothy. "But I'm rather sorry about the Princes."

"Served 'em right," growled the Cowardly Lion. "They'll make very good pigs!"

"But who's to rule the island?" demanded Sir Hokus, turning his gaze reluctantly from the smoking dragonskin.

"This will require thought," said the Scarecrow pensively. "Let us all think."

"I doubt that I can ever think again." The Doubtful Dromedary wagged his head from side to side in a dazed fashion.

"Just leave it to our dear Karwan Bashi." The Comfortable Camel nodded complacently at the Knight and began plucking sly wisps from the Scarecrow's boot top. For a short time there was absolute silence.

Then Sir Hokus, who had been thinking tremendously with his elbows on his knees, burst out, "Why not Sir Pudding, here? Why not this honest Punster? Who but Happy Toko deserves the throne?"

"The very person!" cried the Scarecrow, clasping his yellow gloves, and taking off his silver hat, he set it impulsively upon the head of the fat little Silver Islander.

"He'll make a lovely Emperor," said Dorothy. "He's so kind-hearted and jolly. And now the Scarecrow can abdicate and come home to Oz."

They all looked triumphantly at the Imperial Punster, but Happy Toko, snatching off the royal hat, burst into tears.

"Don't leave me behind, amiable Master!" he sobbed disconsolately. "Oh, how I shall miss you!"

"But don't you see," coaxed Dorothy, "the Scarecrow needs you here more than anyplace, and think of all the fine clothes you will have and how rich you will be!"

"And Tappy, my dear boy," said the Scarecrow, putting his arm around Happy Toko, "you might not like Oz any more than I like Silver Island. Then think--if everything goes well, you can visit me--just as one Emperor visits another!"

"And you won't forget me?" sniffed Happy, beginning to like the idea of being Emperor.

"Never!" cried the Scarecrow with an impressive wave.

"And if anything goes wrong, will you help me out?" questioned Happy uncertainly.

"We'll look in the Magic Picture of Oz every month," declared Dorothy, "and if you need us we'll surely find some way to help you."

"An' you ever require a trusty sword, Odds Bodikins!" exclaimed Sir Hokus, pressing Tappy's hand, "I'm your man!"

"All right, dear Master!" Happy slowly picked up the Imperial hat and set it sideways on his head. "I'll do my best."

"I don't doubt it at all," said the Doubtful Dromedary to everyone's surprise.

"Three cheers for the Emperor! Long live the Emperor of the Silver Island," rumbled the Cowardly Lion, and everybody from Oz, even the camel and dromedary, fell upon their knees before Happy Toko.

"You may have my bride, too, Tappy," chuckled the Scarecrow with a wink at Dorothy. "And Tappy," he asked, sobering suddenly, "will you have my grandsons brought up like real children? Just as soon as I return, I shall send them all the Books of Oz."

Happy bowed, too confused and excited for speech.

"Now," said the Scarecrow, seizing Dorothy's hand, "I can return to Oz with an easy mind."

"Doubt that," said the Doubtful Dromedary.

"You needn't!" announced Dorothy. "I've thought it all out." In a few short sentences she outlined her plan.

"Bravo!" roared the Cowardly Lion, and now the little party began in real earnest the preparation for the journey back to Oz.

First, Happy brought them a delicious luncheon, with plenty of twigs and hay for the camel and dromedary and meat for the Cowardly Lion. The Scarecrow packed into the camel's sacks a few little souvenirs for the people of Oz. Then they dressed Happy Toko in the Scarecrow's most splendid robe and ordered him to sit upon the throne. Next, the Scarecrow rang for one of the palace servants and ordered the people of the Silver Islands to assemble in the hall.

Presently the Silvermen began to come trooping in, packing the great throne room until it could hold no more. Everyone was chattering excitedly.

It was quite a different company that greeted them. The Scarecrow, cheerful and witty in his old Munchkin suit, Dorothy and Sir Hokus smiling happily, and the three animal members of the party fairly blinking with contentment.

"This," said the Scarecrow pleasantly when everyone was quiet, "is your new Emperor, to whom I ask you to pledge allegiance." He waved proudly in the direction of Happy Toko, who, to tell the truth, presented a truly royal appearance. "It is not possible for me to remain with you, but I shall always watch over this delightful island and with the magic fan vanquish all its enemies and punish all offenders."

Happy Toko bowed to his subjects.

The Silver Islanders exchanged startled glances, then, as the Scarecrow carelessly lifted the fan, they fell prostrate to the earth.

"Ah!" said the Scarecrow with a broad wink at Happy. "This is delightful. You agree with me, I see. Now then, three cheers for Tappy Oko, Imperial Emperor of the Silver Island."

The cheers were given with a will, and Happy in acknowledgement made a speech that has since been written into the Royal Book of state as a masterpiece of eloquence.

Having arranged affairs so satisfactorily, the Scarecrow embraced Happy Toko with deep emotion. Dorothy and Sir Hokus shook hands with him and wished him every success and happiness. Then the little party from Oz walked deliberately to the bean pole in the center of the hall.

The Silver Islanders were still a bit dazed by the turn affairs had taken and stared in astonishment as the Scarecrow and Sir Hokus fastened thick ropes around the Cowardly Lion, the Doubtful Dromedary and the Comfortable Camel. Similar ropes they tied around their own waists and Dorothy's, and the ends of all were fastened securely to the handle of the magic parasol, which Dorothy held carefully.

"Goodbye, everybody!" called the little girl, suddenly opening the parasol.

"Goodbye!" cried the genial Scarecrow, waving his hand.

Too stupefied for speech, the assemblage gaped with amazement as the party floated gently upward. Up--up--and out of sight whirled the entire party.