

CHAPTER 22 - THE FLIGHT OF THE PARASOL

Holding the handle of the parasol, Dorothy steered it with all the skill of an aviator, and in several minutes after their start the party had entered the deep, black passage down which the Scarecrow had fallen. Each one of the adventurers was fastened to the parasol with ropes of different length so that none of them bumped together, but even with all the care in the world it was not possible to keep them from bumping the sides of the tube. The Comfortable Camel grunted plaintively from time to time, and Dorothy could hear the Doubtful Dromedary complaining bitterly in the darkness. It was pitch dark, but by keeping one hand in touch with the bean pole, Dorothy managed to hold the parasol in the center.

"How long will it take?" she called breathlessly to the Scarecrow, who was dangling just below.

"Hours!" wheezed the Scarecrow, holding fast to his hat. "I hope none of the parties on this line hear us," he added nervously, thinking of the Middlings.

"What recks it?" blustered Sir Hokus. "Hast forgotten my trusty sword?" But his words were completely drowned in the rattle of his armor.

"Hush!" warned the Scarecrow, "Or we'll be pulled in." So for almost an hour, they flew up the dark, chimney-like tube with only an occasional groan as one or another scraped against the rough sides of the passage. Then, before they knew what was happening, the parasol crashed into something, half closed, and the whole party started to fall head over heels over helmets.

"O!" gasped Dorothy, turning a complete somersault, "catch hold of the bean pole, somebody!"

"Put up the parasol!" shrieked the Scarecrow. Just then Dorothy, finding herself right side up, grasped the pole herself and snapped the parasol wide open. Up, up, up they soared again, faster than ever!

"We're flying up much faster than I fell down. We must be at the top!" called the Scarecrow hoarsely, "and somebody has closed the opening!"