

## **CHAPTER 23 - SAFE AT LAST IN THE LAND OF OZ**

"Must we keep bumping until we bump through?" panted Dorothy anxiously.

"No, by my hilts!" roared Sir Hokus, and setting his foot in a notch of the beanstalk, he cut with his sword the rope that bound him to the parasol. "Put the parasol down half way, and I'll climb ahead and cut an opening."

With great difficulty Dorothy partially lowered the parasol, and instantly their speed diminished. Indeed, they barely moved at all, and the Knight had soon passed them on his climb to the top.

"Are you there?" rumbled the Cowardly Lion anxiously. A great clod of earth landed on his head, filling his eyes and mouth with mud.

"Ugh!" roared the lion.

"It's getting light! It's getting light!" screamed Dorothy, and in her excitement snapped the parasol up.

Sir Hokus, having cut with his sword a large circular hole in the thin crust of earth covering the tube, was about to step out when the parasol, hurling up from below, caught him neatly on its top, and out burst the whole party and sailed up almost to the clouds!

"Welcome to Oz!" cried Dorothy, looking down happily on the dear familiar Munchkin landscape.

"Home at last!" exulted the Scarecrow, wafting a kiss downward.

"Let's get down to earth before we knock the sun into a cocked hat," gasped the Cowardly Lion, for Dorothy, in her excitement, had forgotten to lower the parasol.

Now the little girl lowered the parasol carefully at first, then faster and faster and finally shut it altogether.

Sir Hokus took a high dive from the top. Down tumbled the others, over and over. But fortunately for all, there was a great haystack below, and upon this they landed in a jumbled heap close to the magic bean pole. As it happened, there was no one in sight. Up they jumped in a trice, and while the Comfortable Camel and Doubtful Dromedary munched contentedly at

the hay, Sir Hokus and the Scarecrow placed some loose boards over the opening around the bean pole and covered them with dirt and cornstalks.

"I will get Ozma to close it properly with the Magic Belt," said the Scarecrow gravely. "It wouldn't do to have people sliding down my family tree and scaring poor Tappy. As for me, I shall never leave Oz again!"

"I hope not," growled the Cowardly Lion, tenderly examining his scratched hide.

"But if you hadn't, I'd never have had such lovely adventures or found Sir Hokus and the Comfortable Camel and Doubtful Dromedary," said Dorothy. "And what a lot I have to tell Ozma! Let's go straight to the Emerald City."

"It's quite a journey," explained the Scarecrow to Sir Hokus, who was cleaning off his armor with a handful of straw.

"I go where Lady Dot goes," replied the Knight, smiling affectionately at the little girl and straightening the ragged hair ribbon which he still wore on his arm.

"Don't forget me, dear Karwan Bashi," wheezed the Comfortable Camel, putting his head on the Knight's shoulder.

"You're a sentimental dunce, Camy. I doubt whether they'll take us at all!" The Doubtful Dromedary looked wistfully at Dorothy.

"Go to, now!" cried Sir Hokus, putting an arm around each neck. "You're just like two of the family!"

"It will be very comfortable to go to now," sighed the camel.

"We're all a big, jolly family here," said the Scarecrow, smiling brightly, "and Oz is the friendliest country in the world."

"Right," said the Cowardly Lion, "but let's get started!" He stretched his tired muscles and began limping stiffly toward the yellow brick road.

"Wait," cried Dorothy, "have you forgotten the parasol?"

"I wish I could," groaned the Cowardly Lion, rolling his eyes.

Sir Hokus, with folded arms, was gazing regretfully at the bean pole. "It has been a brave quest," he sighed, "but now, I take it, our adventures are over!" Absently, the Knight felt in his boot-top and drawing out a small red bean popped it into his mouth. Just before reaching the top of the tube, he had

pulled a handful of them from the beanstalk, but the others had fallen out when he dove into the hay.

"Shall we use the parasol again, Lady Dot?" he asked, still staring pensively at the bean pole. "Shall--?"

He got no farther, nor did Dorothy answer his question. Instead, she gave a loud scream and clutched the Scarecrow's arm. The Scarecrow, taken by surprise, fell over backward, and the Comfortable Camel, raising his head inquiringly, gave a bellow of terror. From the Knight's shoulders a green branch had sprung, and while the company gazed in round-eyed amazement it stretched toward the bean pole, attached itself firmly, and then shot straight up into the air, the Knight kicking and struggling on the end. In another second, he was out of sight.

"Come back! Come back!" screamed the Comfortable Camel, running around distractedly.

"I doubt we'll ever see him again!" groaned the Doubtful Dromedary, craning his neck upward.

"Do something! Do something!" begged Dorothy. At which the Scarecrow jumped up and dashed toward the little farmhouse.

"I'll get an ax," he called over his shoulder, "and chop down the bean pole."

"No, don't do that!" roared the Cowardly Lion, starting after him. "Do you want to break him to pieces?"

"Oh! Oh! Can't you think of something else?" cried Dorothy. "And hurry, or he'll be up to the moon!"

The Scarecrow put both hands to his head and stared around wildly. Then, with a triumphant wave of his hat, declared himself ready to act.

"The parasol!" cried the late Emperor of Silver Island. "Quick, Dorothy, put up the parasol!"

Snatching the parasol, which lay at the foot of the bean pole, Dorothy snapped it open, and the Scarecrow just had time to make a flying leap and seize the handle before it soared upward, and in a trice they, too, had disappeared.

"Doubty! Doubty!" wailed the Comfortable Camel, crowding up to his humpbacked friend, "we're having a pack of trouble. My knees are all a-tremble!"

"Now don't you worry," advised the Cowardly Lion, sitting down resignedly. "I'm frightened myself, but that's because I'm so cowardly. Queer things happen in Oz, but they usually turn out all right. Why, Hokus is just growing up with the country, that's all, just growing up with the country."

"Doubt that," sniffed the Doubtful Dromedary faintly. "He was grown up in the beginning."

"But think of the Scarecrow's brains. You leave things to the Scarecrow." But it was no use. Both beasts began to roar dismally.

"I don't want a plant. I want my Karwan Bashi," sobbed the Comfortable Camel broken-heartedly.

"Well, don't drown me," begged the Cowardly Lion, moving out of the way of the camel's tears. "Say, what's that draft?"

What indeed? In the trees overhead, a very cyclone whistled, and before the three had even time to catch their breath, they were blown high into the air and the next instant were hurtling toward the Emerald City like three furry cannonballs, faster and faster.