

## CHAPTER 24 - HOMEWARD BOUND TO THE EMERALD CITY

Dorothy and the Scarecrow, clinging fast to the magic parasol, had followed the Knight almost to the clouds. At first, it looked as if they would never catch up with him, so swiftly was the branch growing, but it was not long before the little umbrella began to gain, and in several minutes more they were beside Sir Hokus himself.

"Beshrew me, now!" gasped the Knight, stretching out his hand toward Dorothy. "Can'st stop this reckless plant?"

"Give me your sword," commanded the Scarecrow, "and I'll cut you off."

Dorothy, with great difficulty, kept the parasol close to the Knight while the Scarecrow reached for the sword. But Sir Hokus backed away in alarm.

"'Tis part of me, an' you cut it off, I will be cut off, too. 'Tis rooted in my back," he puffed.

"What shall we do?" cried Dorothy in distress. "Maybe if we take hold of his hands we can keep him from going any higher."

The Scarecrow, jamming down his hat so it wouldn't blow off, nodded approvingly, and each holding the parasol with one hand gave the other to the Knight. And when Dorothy pointed the parasol down, to her great delight Sir Hokus came also, the thin green branch growing just about as fast as they moved.

Just then the little fan, which had been rolling around merrily in Dorothy's pocket, slipped out and fell straight down toward the three unsuspecting beasts below. Draft! No wonder!

But Dorothy never missed it, and quite unconscious of such a calamity anxiously talked over the Knight's predicament with the Scarecrow. They both decided that the best plan was to fly straight to the Emerald City and have Ozma release the Knight from the enchanted beanstalk.

"I'm sorry you got tangled up in my family tree, old fellow," said the Scarecrow after they had flown some time in silence, "but this makes us relations, doesn't it?" He winked broadly at the Knight.

"So it does," said Sir Hokus jovially. "I'm a branch of your family now. Yet methinks I should not have swallowed that bean."

"Bean?" questioned Dorothy. "What bean?" The Knight carefully explained how he had plucked a handful of red beans from the beanstalk just before reaching the top of the tube and how he had eaten one.

"So that's what started you growing!" exclaimed Dorothy in surprise.

"Alas, yes!" admitted the Knight. "I've never felt more grown-up in my life," he finished solemnly. "An adventurous country, this Oz!"

"I should say it was," chuckled the Scarecrow. "But isn't it almost time we were reaching the Emerald City, Dorothy?"

"I think I'm going in the right direction," answered the little girl, "but I'll fly a little lower to be sure."

"Not too fast! Not too fast!" warned Sir Hokus, looking nervously over his shoulder at his long, wriggling stem.

"There's Ozma's palace!" cried the Scarecrow all at once.

"And there's Ozma!" screamed Dorothy, peering down delightedly. "And Scraps and Tik-Tok and everybody!"

She pointed the parasol straight down, when a sharp tug from Sir Hokus jerked them all back. They were going faster than the poor Knight was growing, so Dorothy lowered the parasol half way, and slowly they floated toward the earth, landing gently in one of the flower beds of Ozma's lovely garden.

"Come along and meet the folks," said the Scarecrow as Dorothy closed the parasol. But Sir Hokus clutched him in alarm.

"Hold! Hold!" gasped the Knight. "I've stopped growing, but if you leave me I'll shoot up into the air again."

The Scarecrow and Dorothy looked at each other in dismay. Sure enough, the Knight had stopped growing, and it was all they could do to hold him down to earth, for the stubborn branch of beanstalk was trying to straighten up. They had fallen quite a distance from the palace itself, and all the people of Oz had their backs turned, so had not seen their singular arrival.

"Hello!" called the Scarecrow loudly. Then "Help! Help!" as the Knight jerked him twice into the air. But Ozma, Trot, Jack Pumpkinhead and all the rest were staring upward and talking so busily among themselves that they did not hear either Dorothy's or the Scarecrow's cries. First one, then the other was snatched off his feet, and although Sir Hokus, with tears in his eyes,

begged them to leave him to his fate, they held on with all their might. Just as it looked as if they all three would fly into the air again, the little Wizard of Oz happened to turn around.

"Look! Look!" he cried, tugging Ozma's sleeve.

"Why, it's Dorothy!" gasped Ozma, rubbing her eyes. "It's Dorothy and--"

"Help! Help!" screamed the Scarecrow, waving one arm wildly. Without waiting another second, all the celebrities of Oz came running toward the three adventurers.

"Somebody heavy come take hold!" puffed Dorothy, out of breath with her efforts to keep Sir Hokus on the ground.

The Ozites, seeing that help was needed at once, suppressed their curiosity.

"I'm heavy," said Tik-Tok solemnly, clasping the Knight's arm. The Tin Woodman seized his other hand, and Dorothy sank down exhausted on the grass.

Princess Ozma pressed forward.

"What does it all mean? Where did you come from?" asked the little Queen of Oz, staring in amazement at the strange spectacle before her.

"And who is this medieval person?" asked Professor Wogglebug, pushing forward importantly. (He had returned to the palace to collect more data for the Royal Book of Oz.)

"He doesn't look evil to me," giggled Scraps, dancing up to Sir Hokus, her suspender button eyes snapping with fun.

"He isn't," said Dorothy indignantly, for Sir Hokus was too shaken about to answer. "He's my Knight Errant."

"Ah, I see," replied Professor Wogglebug. "A case of 'When Knighthood was in flower.'" And would you believe it--the beanstalk at that minute burst into a perfect shower of red blossoms that came tumbling down over everyone. Before they had recovered from their surprise, the branch snapped off close to the Knight's armor, and Tik-Tok, the Tin Woodman and Sir Hokus rolled over in a heap. The branch itself whistled through the air and disappeared.

"Oh," cried Dorothy, hugging the Knight impulsively, "I'm so glad."

"Are you all right?" asked the Scarecrow anxiously.

"Good as ever!" announced Sir Hokus, and indeed all traces of the magic stalk had disappeared from his shoulders.

"Dorothy!" cried Ozma again. "What does it all mean?"

"Merely that I slid down my family tree and that Dorothy and this Knight rescued me," said the Scarecrow calmly.

"And he's a real Royalty--so there!" cried Dorothy with a wave at the Scarecrow and making a little face at Professor Wogglebug. "Meet his Supreme Highness, Chang Wang Woe of Silver Island, who had abdicated his throne and returned to be a plain Scarecrow in Oz!"

Then, as the eminent Educator of Oz stood gaping at the Scarecrow, "Oh, Ozma, I've so much to tell you!"

"Begin! Begin!" cried the little Wizard. "For everything's mighty mysterious. First, the Cowardly Lion and two unknown beasts shoot through the air and stop just outside the third-story windows, and there they hang although I've tried all my magic to get them down. Then you and the Scarecrow drop in with a strange Knight!"

"Oh, the poor Cowardly Lion!" gasped Dorothy as the Wizard finished speaking. "The magic fan!" She felt hurriedly in her pocket. "It's gone!"

"It must have slipped out of your pocket and blown them here, and they'll never come down till that fan is closed," cried the Scarecrow in an agitated voice.

All of this was Greek to Ozma and the others, but when Dorothy begged the little Queen to send for her Magic Belt, she did it without question. This belt Dorothy had captured from the Gnome King, and it enabled the wearer to wish people and objects wherever one wanted them.

"I wish the magic fan to close and to come safely back to me," said Dorothy as soon as she had clasped the belt around her waist. No sooner were the words out before there was a loud crash and a series of roars and groans. Everybody started on a run for the palace, Sir Hokus ahead of all the rest. The fan had mysteriously returned to Dorothy's pocket.

The three animals had fallen into a huge cluster of rose bushes and, though badly scratched and frightened, were really unhurt.

"I doubt that I'll like Oz," quavered the Doubtful Dromedary, lurching toward Sir Hokus.

"You might have been more careful of that fan," growled the Cowardly Lion reproachfully, plucking thorns from his hide. The Comfortable Camel was so overjoyed to see the Knight that he rested his head on Sir Hokus's shoulder and began weeping down his armor.

And now that their adventures seemed really over, what explanations were to be made! Sitting on the top step of the palace with all of them around her, Dorothy told the whole wonderful story of the Scarecrow's family tree. When her breath gave out, the Scarecrow took up the tale himself, and as they all realized how nearly they had lost their jolly comrade, many of the party shed real tears. Indeed, Nick Chopper hugged the Scarecrow till there was not a whole straw in his body.

"Never leave us again," begged Ozma, and the Scarecrow, crossing Nick Chopper's heart (he had none of his own), promised that he never would.

And what a welcome they gave Sir Hokus, the Doubtful Dromedary and the Comfortable Camel! Only Professor Wogglebug seemed disturbed. During the strange recital, he had grown quieter and quieter and finally, with an embarrassed cough, had excused himself and hurried into the palace.

He went directly to the study, and seating himself at a desk opened a large book, none other than The Royal Book of Oz. Dipping an emerald pen in the ink, he began a new chapter headed thus:

#### HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY, THE SCARECROW

Late Emperor and Imperial Sovereign of

Silver Island

Then, flipping over several pages to a chapter headed "Princess Dorothy!", he wrote carefully at the end, "Dorothy, Princess and Royal Discoverer of Oz."

Meanwhile, below stairs, the Scarecrow was distributing his gifts. There were silver chains for everyone in the palace and shining silver slippers for Ozma, Betsy Bobbin, Trot and Dorothy, and a bottle of silver polish for Nick Chopper.

Dorothy presented Ozma with the magic fan and parasol, and they were safely put away by Jellia Jamb with the other magic treasures of Oz.

Next, because they were all curious to see the Scarecrow's wonderful Kingdom, they hurried upstairs to look in the Magic Picture.

"Show us the Emperor of Silver Island," commanded Ozma. Immediately the beautiful silver throne room appeared. Happy Toko had removed his

imperial hat and was standing on his head to the great delight of the whole court, and a host of little Silver Islander boys were peeking in at the windows.

"Now doesn't that look cheerful?" asked the Scarecrow delightedly. "I knew he'd make a good Emperor."

"I wish we would hear what he's saying," said Dorothy. "Oh, do look at Chew Chew!" The Grand Chew Chew was standing beside the throne scowling horribly.

"I think I can arrange for you to hear," muttered the Wizard of Oz, and taking a queer magic instrument from his pocket, he whispered "Aohbeeobbuy."

Instantly they heard the jolly voice of Happy Toko singing:

Oh shine his shoes of silver,      And brush his silver queue,      For I  
am but an Emperor      And he's the Grand Chew Chew!

Ozma laughed heartily as the picture faded away, and so did the others. Indeed, there was so much to ask and wonder about that it seemed as if they never would finish talking.

"Let's have a party--an old-fashioned Oz party," proposed Ozma when the excitement had calmed down a bit. And an old-fashioned party it was, with places for everybody and a special table for the Cowardly Lion, the Hungry Tiger, Toto, the Glass Cat, the Comfortable Camel, the Doubtful Dromedary and all the other dear creatures of that amazing Kingdom.

Sir Hokus insisted upon stirring up a huge party for the occasion, and there were songs, speeches and cheers for everyone, not forgetting the Doubtful Dromedary.

At the cheering he rose with an embarrassed jerk of his long neck. "In my left-hand saddle-sack," he said gruffly, "there is a quantity of silken shawls and jewels. I doubt whether they are good enough, but I would like Dorothy and Queen Ozma to have them."

"Hear! Hear!" cried the Scarecrow, pounding on the table with his knife. Then everything grew quiet as Ozma told how she, with the help of Glinda, the Good Sorceress, had stopped the war between the Horners and Hoppers.

When she had finished, Sir Hokus sprang up impulsively. "I prithee, lovely Lady, never trouble your royal head about wars again. From now on, I will

do battle for you and little Dorothy and Oz, and I will be your good Knight every day." At this, the applause was tremendous.

Ye good Knight of Oz, full of courage and vim, Will do battle for us,  
and we'll take care of him!

shouted Scraps, who was becoming more excited every minute.

"I'll lend you some of my polish for your armor, old fellow," said Nick Chopper as the Knight sat down, beaming with pleasure.

"Well," said Ozma with a smile when everyone had feasted and talked to heart's content, "is everybody happy?"

"I am!" cried the Comfortable Camel. "For here I am perfectly comfortable."

"I am!" cried Dorothy, putting her arm around the Scarecrow, who sat next to her. "For I have found my old friend and made some new ones."

"I'm happy!" cried the Scarecrow, waving his glass, "because there is no age in Oz, and I am still my old Ozish self."

"As for me," said the Knight, "I am happy, for I have served a Lady, gone on a Quest, and Slain a Dragon! Ozma, and Oz forever!"