

## CHAPTER 7 - THE MERRY-GO-ROUND MOUNTAINS

The Rolling Prairie was not difficult to travel over, although it was all uphill and downhill, so for a while they made good progress. Not even a shepherd was to be met with now, and the farther they advanced the more dreary the landscape became. At noon they stopped for a "picnic luncheon," as Betsy called it, and then they again resumed their journey. All the animals were swift and tireless, and even the Cowardly Lion and the Mule found they could keep up with the pace of the Woozy and the Sawhorse.

It was the middle of the afternoon when first they came in sight of a cluster of low mountains. These were cone-shaped, rising from broad bases to sharp peaks at the tops. From a distance the mountains appeared indistinct and seemed rather small--more like hills than mountains--but as the travelers drew nearer, they noted a most unusual circumstance: the hills were all whirling around, some in one direction and some the opposite way.

"I guess these are the Merry-Go-Round Mountains, all right," said Dorothy.

"They must be," said the Wizard.

"They go 'round, sure enough," agreed Trot, "but they don't seem very merry."

There were several rows of these mountains, extending both to the right and to the left for miles and miles. How many rows there might be none could tell, but between the first row of peaks could be seen other peaks, all steadily whirling around one way or another. Continuing to ride nearer, our friends watched these hills attentively, until at last, coming close up, they discovered there was a deep but narrow gulf around the edge of each mountain, and that the mountains were set so close together that the outer gulf was continuous and barred farther advance. At the edge of the gulf they all dismounted and peered over into its depths. There was no telling where the bottom was, if indeed there was any bottom at all. From where they stood it seemed as if the mountains had been set in one great hole in the ground, just close enough together so they would not touch, and that each mountain was supported by a rocky column beneath its base which extended far down in the black pit below. From the land side it seemed impossible to get across the gulf or, succeeding in that, to gain a foothold on any of the whirling mountains.

"This ditch is too wide to jump across," remarked Button-Bright.

"P'raps the Lion could do it," suggested Dorothy.

"What, jump from here to that whirling hill?" cried the Lion indignantly. "I should say not! Even if I landed there and could hold on, what good would it do? There's another spinning mountain beyond it, and perhaps still another beyond that. I don't believe any living creature could jump from one mountain to another when both are whirling like tops and in different directions."

"I propose we turn back," said the Wooden Sawhorse with a yawn of his chopped-out mouth as he stared with his knot eyes at the Merry-Go-Round Mountains.

"I agree with you," said the Woozy, wagging his square head.

"We should have taken the shepherd's advice," added Hank the Mule.

The others of the party, however they might be puzzled by the serious problem that confronted them, would not allow themselves to despair. "If we once get over these mountains," said Button-Bright, "we could probably get along all right."

"True enough," agreed Dorothy. "So we must find some way, of course, to get past these whirling hills. But how?"

"I wish the Ork was with us," sighed Trot.

"But the Ork isn't here," said the Wizard, "and we must depend upon ourselves to conquer this difficulty. Unfortunately, all my magic has been stolen, otherwise I am sure I could easily get over the mountains."

"Unfortunately," observed the Woozy, "none of us has wings. And we're in a magic country without any magic."

"What is that around your waist, Dorothy?" asked the Wizard.

"That? Oh, that's just the Magic Belt I once captured from the Nome King," she replied.

"A Magic Belt! Why, that's fine. I'm sure a Magic Belt would take you over these hills."

"It might if I knew how to work it," said the little girl. "Ozma knows a lot of its magic, but I've never found out about it. All I know is that while I am wearing it, nothing can hurt me."

"Try wishing yourself across and see if it will obey you," suggested the Wizard.

"But what good would that do?" asked Dorothy. "If I got across, it wouldn't help the rest of you, and I couldn't go alone among all those giants and dragons while you stayed here."

"True enough," agreed the Wizard sadly. And then, after looking around the group, he inquired, "What is that on your finger, Trot?"

"A ring. The Mermaids gave it to me," she explained, "and if ever I'm in trouble when I'm on the water, I can call the Mermaids and they'll come and help me. But the Mermaids can't help me on the land, you know, 'cause they swim, and--and--they haven't any legs."

"True enough," repeated the Wizard, more sadly.

There was a big, broad, spreading tree near the edge of the gulf, and as the sun was hot above them, they all gathered under the shade of the tree to study the problem of what to do next. "If we had a long rope," said Betsy, "we could fasten it to this tree and let the other end of it down into the gulf and all slide down it."

"Well, what then?" asked the Wizard.

"Then, if we could manage to throw the rope up the other side," explained the girl, "we could all climb it and be on the other side of the gulf."

"There are too many 'if's' in that suggestion," remarked the little Wizard. "And you must remember that the other side is nothing but spinning mountains, so we couldn't possibly fasten a rope to them, even if we had one."

"That rope idea isn't half bad, though," said the Patchwork Girl, who had been dancing dangerously near to the edge of the gulf.

"What do you mean?" asked Dorothy.

The Patchwork Girl suddenly stood still and cast her button eyes around the group. "Ha, I have it!" she exclaimed. "Unharness the Sawhorse, somebody. My fingers are too clumsy."

"Shall we?" asked Button-Bright doubtfully, turning to the others.

"Well, Scraps has a lot of brains, even if she IS stuffed with cotton," asserted the Wizard. "If her brains can help us out of this trouble, we ought to use them."

So he began unharnessing the Sawhorse, and Button-Bright and Dorothy helped him. When they had removed the harness, the Patchwork Girl told them to take it all apart and buckle the straps together, end to end. And after they had done this, they found they had one very long strap that was stronger than any rope. "It would reach across the gulf easily," said the Lion, who with the other animals had sat on his haunches and watched this proceeding. "But I don't see how it could be fastened to one of those dizzy mountains."

Scraps had no such notion as that in her baggy head. She told them to fasten one end of the strap to a stout limb of the tree, pointing to one which extended quite to the edge of the gulf. Button-Bright did that, climbing the tree and then crawling out upon the limb until he was nearly over the gulf. There he managed to fasten the strap, which reached to the ground below, and then he slid down it and was caught by the Wizard, who feared he might fall into the chasm. Scraps was delighted. She seized the lower end of the strap, and telling them all to get out of her way, she went back as far as the strap would reach and then made a sudden run toward the gulf. Over the edge she swung, clinging to the strap until it had gone as far as its length permitted, when she let go and sailed gracefully through the air until she alighted upon the mountain just in front of them.

Almost instantly, as the great cone continued to whirl, she was sent flying against the next mountain in the rear, and that one had only turned halfway around when Scraps was sent flying to the next mountain behind it. Then her patchwork form disappeared from view entirely, and the amazed watchers under the tree wondered what had become of her. "She's gone, and she can't get back," said the Woozy.

"My, how she bounded from one mountain to another!" exclaimed the Lion.

"That was because they whirl so fast," the Wizard explained. "Scraps had nothing to hold on to, and so of course she was tossed from one hill to another. I'm afraid we shall never see the poor Patchwork Girl again."

"I shall see her," declared the Woozy. "Scraps is an old friend of mine, and if there are really Thistle-Eaters and Giants on the other side of those tops, she will need someone to protect her. So here I go!" He seized the dangling strap firmly in his square mouth, and in the same way that Scraps had done swung himself over the gulf. He let go the strap at the right moment and fell upon the first whirling mountain. Then he bounded to the next one back of it--not on his feet, but "all mixed up," as Trot said--and then he shot across to

another mountain, disappearing from view just as the Patchwork Girl had done.

"It seems to work, all right," remarked Button-Bright. "I guess I'll try it."

"Wait a minute," urged the Wizard. "Before any more of us make this desperate leap into the beyond, we must decide whether all will go or if some of us will remain behind."

"Do you s'pose it hurt them much to bump against those mountains?" asked Trot.

"I don't s'pose anything could hurt Scraps or the Woozy," said Dorothy, "and nothing can hurt ME, because I wear the Magic Belt. So as I'm anxious to find Ozma, I mean to swing myself across too."

"I'll take my chances," decided Button-Bright.

"I'm sure it will hurt dreadfully, and I'm afraid to do it," said the Lion, who was already trembling, "but I shall do it if Dorothy does."

"Well, that will leave Betsy and the Mule and Trot," said the Wizard, "for of course I shall go that I may look after Dorothy. Do you two girls think you can find your way back home again?" he asked, addressing Trot and Betsy.

"I'm not afraid. Not much, that is," said Trot. "It looks risky, I know, but I'm sure I can stand it if the others can."

"If it wasn't for leaving Hank," began Betsy in a hesitating voice.

But the Mule interrupted her by saying, "Go ahead if you want to, and I'll come after you. A mule is as brave as a lion any day."

"Braver," said the Lion, "for I'm a coward, friend Hank, and you are not. But of course the Sawhorse--"

"Oh, nothing ever hurts ME," asserted the Sawhorse calmly. "There's never been any question about my going. I can't take the Red Wagon, though."

"No, we must leave the wagon," said the wizard, "and also we must leave our food and blankets, I fear. But if we can defy these Merry-Go-Round Mountains to stop us, we won't mind the sacrifice of some of our comforts."

"No one knows where we're going to land!" remarked the Lion in a voice that sounded as if he were going to cry.

"We may not land at all," replied Hank, "but the best way to find out what will happen to us is to swing across as Scraps and the Woozy have done."

"I think I shall go last," said the Wizard, "so who wants to go first?"

"I'll go," decided Dorothy.

"No, it's my turn first," said Button-Bright. "Watch me!"

Even as he spoke, the boy seized the strap, and after making a run swung himself across the gulf. Away he went, bumping from hill to hill until he disappeared. They listened intently, but the boy uttered no cry until he had been gone some moments, when they heard a faint "Hullo-a!" as if called from a great distance. The sound gave them courage, however, and Dorothy picked up Toto and held him fast under one arm while with the other hand she seized the strap and bravely followed after Button-Bright.

When she struck the first whirling mountain, she fell upon it quite softly, but before she had time to think, she flew through the air and lit with a jar on the side of the next mountain. Again she flew and alighted, and again and still again, until after five successive bumps she fell sprawling upon a green meadow and was so dazed and bewildered by her bumpy journey across the Merry-Go-Round Mountains that she lay quite still for a time to collect her thoughts. Toto had escaped from her arms just as she fell, and he now sat beside her panting with excitement. Then Dorothy realized that someone was helping her to her feet, and here was Button-Bright on one side of her and Scraps on the other, both seeming to be unhurt. The next object her eyes fell upon was the Woozy, squatting upon his square back end and looking at her reflectively, while Toto barked joyously to find his mistress unhurt after her whirlwind trip.

"Good!" said the Woozy. "Here's another and a dog, both safe and sound. But my word, Dorothy, you flew some! If you could have seen yourself, you'd have been absolutely astonished."

"They say 'Time flies,'" laughed Button-Bright, "but Time never made a quicker journey than that."

Just then, as Dorothy turned around to look at the whirling mountains, she was in time to see tiny Trot come flying from the nearest hill to fall upon the soft grass not a yard away from where she stood. Trot was so dizzy she couldn't stand at first, but she wasn't at all hurt, and presently Betsy came flying to them and would have bumped into the others had they not retreated

in time to avoid her. Then, in quick succession, came the Lion, Hank and the Sawhorse, bounding from mountain to mountain to fall safely upon the greensward. Only the Wizard was now left behind, and they waited so long for him that Dorothy began to be worried.

But suddenly he came flying from the nearest mountain and tumbled heels over head beside them. Then they saw that he had wound two of their blankets around his body to keep the bumps from hurting him and had fastened the blankets with some of the spare straps from the harness of the Sawhorse.