

## CHAPTER 22 - IN THE WICKER CASTLE

No sooner were the Wizard of Oz and his followers well within the castle entrance when the big gates swung to with a clang and heavy bars dropped across them. They looked at one another uneasily, but no one cared to speak of the incident. If they were indeed prisoners in the wicker castle, it was evident they must find a way to escape, but their first duty was to attend to the errand on which they had come and seek the Royal Ozma, whom they believed to be a prisoner of the magician, and rescue her.

They found they had entered a square courtyard, from which an entrance led into the main building of the castle. No person had appeared to greet them so far, although a gaudy peacock perched upon the wall cackled with laughter and said in its sharp, shrill voice, "Poor fools! Poor fools!"

"I hope the peacock is mistaken," remarked the Frogman, but no one else paid any attention to the bird. They were a little awed by the stillness and loneliness of the place. As they entered the doors of the castle, which stood invitingly open, these also closed behind them and huge bolts shot into place. The animals had all accompanied the party into the castle because they felt it would be dangerous for them to separate. They were forced to follow a zigzag passage, turning this way and that, until finally they entered a great central hall, circular in form and with a high dome from which was suspended an enormous chandelier.

The Wizard went first, and Dorothy, Betsy and Trot followed him, Toto keeping at the heels of his little mistress. Then came the Lion, the Woozy and the Sawhorse, then Cayke the Cookie Cook and Button-Bright, then the Lavender Bear carrying the Pink Bear, and finally the Frogman and the Patchwork Girl, with Hank the Mule tagging behind. So it was the Wizard who caught the first glimpse of the big, domed hall, but the others quickly followed and gathered in a wondering group just within the entrance.

Upon a raised platform at one side was a heavy table on which lay Glinda's Great Book of Records, but the platform was firmly fastened to the floor and the table was fastened to the platform and the Book was chained fast to the table, just as it had been when it was kept in Glinda's palace. On the wall over the table hung Ozma's Magic Picture. On a row of shelves at the opposite side of the hall stood all the chemicals and essences of magic and all the magical instruments that had been stolen from Glinda and Ozma and the

Wizard, with glass doors covering the shelves so that no one could get at them.

And in a far corner sat Ugu the Shoemaker, his feet lazily extended, his skinny hands clasped behind his head. He was leaning back at his ease and calmly smoking a long pipe. Around the magician was a sort of cage, seemingly made of golden bars set wide apart, and at his feet, also within the cage, reposed the long-sought diamond-studded dishpan of Cayke the Cookie Cook. Princess Ozma of Oz was nowhere to be seen.

"Well, well," said Ugu when the invaders had stood in silence for a moment, staring about them. "This visit is an unexpected pleasure, I assure you. I knew you were coming, and I know why you are here. You are not welcome, for I cannot use any of you to my advantage, but as you have insisted on coming, I hope you will make the afternoon call as brief as possible. It won't take long to transact your business with me. You will ask me for Ozma, and my reply will be that you may find her--if you can."

"Sir," answered the Wizard in a tone of rebuke, "you are a very wicked and cruel person. I suppose you imagine, because you have stolen this poor woman's dishpan and all the best magic in Oz, that you are more powerful than we are and will be able to triumph over us."

"Yes," said Ugu the Shoemaker, slowly filling his pipe with fresh tobacco from a silver bowl that stood beside him, "that is exactly what I imagine. It will do you no good to demand from me the girl who was formerly the Ruler of Oz, because I will not tell you where I have hidden her, and you can't guess in a thousand years. Neither will I restore to you any of the magic I have captured. I am not so foolish. But bear this in mind: I mean to be the Ruler of Oz myself, hereafter, so I advise you to be careful how you address your future Monarch."

"Ozma is still Ruler of Oz, wherever you may have hidden her," declared the Wizard. "And bear this in mind, miserable Shoemaker: we intend to find her and to rescue her in time, but our first duty and pleasure will be to conquer you and then punish you for your misdeeds."

"Very well, go ahead and conquer," said Ugu. "I'd really like to see how you can do it."

Now although the little Wizard had spoken so boldly, he had at the moment no idea how they might conquer the magician. He had that morning given the Frogman, at his request, a dose of zosofo from his bottle, and the Frogman

had promised to fight a good fight if it was necessary, but the Wizard knew that strength alone could not avail against magical arts. The toy Bear King seemed to have some pretty good magic, however, and the Wizard depended to an extent on that. But something ought to be done right away, and the Wizard didn't know what it was.

While he considered this perplexing question and the others stood looking at him as their leader, a queer thing happened. The floor of the great circular hall on which they were standing suddenly began to tip. Instead of being flat and level, it became a slant, and the slant grew steeper and steeper until none of the party could manage to stand upon it. Presently they all slid down to the wall, which was now under them, and then it became evident that the whole vast room was slowly turning upside down! Only Ugu the Shoemaker, kept in place by the bars of his golden cage, remained in his former position, and the wicked magician seemed to enjoy the surprise of his victims immensely.

First they all slid down to the wall back of them, but as the room continued to turn over, they next slid down the wall and found themselves at the bottom of the great dome, bumping against the big chandelier which, like everything else, was now upside down. The turning movement now stopped, and the room became stationary. Looking far up, they saw Ugu suspended in his cage at the very top, which had once been the floor.

"Ah," said he, grinning down at them, "the way to conquer is to act, and he who acts promptly is sure to win. This makes a very good prison, from which I am sure you cannot escape. Please amuse yourselves in any way you like, but I must beg you to excuse me, as I have business in another part of my castle."

Saying this, he opened a trap door in the floor of his cage (which was now over his head) and climbed through it and disappeared from their view. The diamond dishpan still remained in the cage, but the bars kept it from falling down on their heads.

"Well, I declare," said the Patchwork Girl, seizing one of the bars of the chandelier and swinging from it, "we must peg one for the Shoemaker, for he has trapped us very cleverly."

"Get off my foot, please," said the Lion to the Sawhorse.

"And oblige me, Mr. Mule," remarked the Woozy, "by taking your tail out of my left eye."

"It's rather crowded down here," explained Dorothy, "because the dome is rounding and we have all slid into the middle of it. But let us keep as quiet as possible until we can think what's best to be done."

"Dear, dear!" wailed Cayke, "I wish I had my darling dishpan," and she held her arms longingly toward it.

"I wish I had the magic on those shelves up there," sighed the Wizard.

"Don't you s'pose we could get to it?" asked Trot anxiously.

"We'd have to fly," laughed the Patchwork Girl.

But the Wizard took the suggestion seriously, and so did the Frogman. They talked it over and soon planned an attempt to reach the shelves where the magical instruments were. First the Frogman lay against the rounding dome and braced his foot on the stem of the chandelier; then the Wizard climbed over him and lay on the dome with his feet on the Frogman's shoulders; the Cookie Cook came next; then Button-Bright climbed to the woman's shoulders; then Dorothy climbed up and Betsy and Trot, and finally the Patchwork Girl, and all their lengths made a long line that reached far up the dome, but not far enough for Scraps to touch the shelves.

"Wait a minute. Perhaps I can reach the magic," called the Bear King, and began scrambling up the bodies of the others. But when he came to the Cookie Cook, his soft paws tickled her side so that she squirmed and upset the whole line. Down they came, tumbling in a heap against the animals, and although no one was much hurt, it was a bad mix-up, and the Frogman, who was at the bottom, almost lost his temper before he could get on his feet again.

Cayke positively refused to try what she called "the pyramid act" again, and as the Wizard was now convinced they could not reach the magic tools in that manner, the attempt was abandoned. "But SOMETHING must be done," said the Wizard, and then he turned to the Lavender Bear and asked, "Cannot Your Majesty's magic help us to escape from here?"

"My magic powers are limited," was the reply. "When I was stuffed, the fairies stood by and slyly dropped some magic into my stuffing. Therefore I can do any of the magic that's inside me, but nothing else. You, however, are a wizard, and a wizard should be able to do anything."

"Your Majesty forgets that my tools of magic have been stolen," said the Wizard sadly, "and a wizard without tools is as helpless as a carpenter without a hammer or saw."

"Don't give up," pleaded Button-Bright, "'cause if we can't get out of this queer prison, we'll all starve to death."

"Not I!" laughed the Patchwork Girl, now standing on top of the chandelier at the place that was meant to be the bottom of it.

"Don't talk of such dreadful things," said Trot, shuddering. "We came here to capture the Shoemaker, didn't we?"

"Yes, and to save Ozma," said Betsy.

"And here we are, captured ourselves, and my darling dishpan up there in plain sight!" wailed the Cookie Cook, wiping her eyes on the tail of the Frogman's coat.

"Hush!" called the Lion with a low, deep growl. "Give the Wizard time to think."

"He has plenty of time," said Scraps. "What he needs is the Scarecrow's brains."

After all, it was little Dorothy who came to their rescue, and her ability to save them was almost as much a surprise to the girl as it was to her friends. Dorothy had been secretly testing the powers of her Magic Belt, which she had once captured from the Nome King, and experimenting with it in various ways ever since she had started on this eventful journey. At different times she had stolen away from the others of her party and in solitude had tried to find out what the Magic Belt could do and what it could not do. There were a lot of things it could not do, she discovered, but she learned some things about the Belt which even her girl friends did not suspect she knew.

For one thing, she had remembered that when the Nome King owned it, the Magic Belt used to perform transformations, and by thinking hard she had finally recalled the way in which such transformations had been accomplished. Better than this, however, was the discovery that the Magic Belt would grant its wearer one wish a day. All she need do was close her right eye and wiggle her left toe and then draw a long breath and make her wish. Yesterday she had wished in secret for a box of caramels, and instantly found the box beside her. Today she had saved her daily wish in case she

might need it in an emergency, and the time had now come when she must use the wish to enable her to escape with her friends from the prison in which Ugu had caught them.

So without telling anyone what she intended to do--for she had only used the wish once and could not be certain how powerful the Magic Belt might be--Dorothy closed her right eye and wiggled her left big toe and drew a long breath and wished with all her might. The next moment the room began to revolve again, as slowly as before, and by degrees they all slid to the side wall and down the wall to the floor--all but Scraps, who was so astonished that she still clung to the chandelier. When the big hall was in its proper position again and the others stood firmly upon the floor of it, they looked far up the dome and saw the Patchwork girl swinging from the chandelier.

"Good gracious!" cried Dorothy. "How ever will you get down?"

"Won't the room keep turning?" asked Scraps.

"I hope not. I believe it has stopped for good," said Princess Dorothy.

"Then stand from under, so you won't get hurt!" shouted the Patchwork Girl, and as soon as they had obeyed this request, she let go the chandelier and came tumbling down heels over head and twisting and turning in a very exciting manner. Plump! She fell on the tiled floor, and they ran to her and rolled her and patted her into shape again.