

Chapter Fifteen - The Great Sorceress

Betsy and Trot, when they heard of the rescue expedition, begged the Wizard to permit them to join it and he consented. The Glass Cat, overhearing the conversation, wanted to go also and to this the Wizard made no objection.

This Glass Cat was one of the real curiosities of Oz. It had been made and brought to life by a clever magician named Dr. Pipt, who was not now permitted to work magic and was an ordinary citizen of the Emerald City. The cat was of transparent glass, through which one could plainly see its ruby heart beating and its pink brains whirling around in the top of the head.

The Glass Cat's eyes were emeralds; its fluffy tail was of spun glass and very beautiful. The ruby heart, while pretty to look at, was hard and cold and the Glass Cat's disposition was not pleasant at all times. It scorned to catch mice, did not eat, and was extremely lazy. If you complimented the remarkable cat on her beauty, she would be very friendly, for she loved admiration above everything. The pink brains were always working and their owner was indeed more intelligent than most common cats.

Three other additions to the rescue party were made the next morning, just as they were setting out upon their journey. The first was a little boy called Button Bright, because he had no other name that anyone could remember. He was a fine, manly little fellow, well mannered and good humored, who had only one bad fault. He was continually getting lost. To be sure, Button Bright got found as often as he got lost, but when he was missing his friends could not help being anxious about him.

"Some day," predicted the Patchwork Girl, "he won't be found, and that will be the last of him." But that didn't worry Button Bright, who was so careless that he did not seem to be able to break the habit of getting lost.

The second addition to the party was a Munchkin boy of about Button Bright's age, named Ojo. He was often called "Ojo the Lucky," because good fortune followed him wherever he went. He and Button Bright were close friends, although of such different natures, and Trot and Betsy were fond of both.

The third and last to join the expedition was an enormous lion, one of Ozma's regular guardians and the most important and intelligent beast in all Oz. He called himself the Cowardly Lion, saying that every little danger scared him so badly that his heart thumped against his ribs, but all who knew him knew that the Cowardly Lion's fears were coupled with bravery

and that however much he might be frightened he summoned courage to meet every danger he encountered. Often he had saved Dorothy and Ozma in times of peril, but afterward he moaned and trembled and wept because he had been so scared.

"If Ozma needs help, I'm going to help her," said the great beast. "Also, I suspect the rest of you may need me on the journey--especially Trot and Betsy--for you may pass through a dangerous part of the country. I know that wild Gillikin country pretty well. Its forests harbor many ferocious beasts."

They were glad the Cowardly Lion was to join them, and in good spirits the entire party formed a procession and marched out of the Emerald City amid the shouts of the people, who wished them success and a safe return with their beloved Ruler.

They followed a different route from that taken by Ozma and Dorothy, for they went through the Winkie Country and up north toward Oogaboo. But before they got there they swerved to the left and entered the Great Gillikin Forest, the nearest thing to a wilderness in all Oz. Even the Cowardly Lion had to admit that certain parts of this forest were unknown to him, although he had often wandered among the trees, and the Scarecrow and Tin Woodman, who were great travelers, never had been there at all.

The forest was only reached after a tedious tramp, for some of the Rescue Expedition were quite awkward on their feet. The Patchwork Girl was as light as a feather and very spry; the Tin Woodman covered the ground as easily as Uncle Henry and the Wizard; but Tik-Tok moved slowly and the slightest obstruction in the road would halt him until the others cleared it away. Then, too, Tik-Tok's machinery kept running down, so Betsy and Trot took turns in winding it up.

The Scarecrow was more clumsy but less bother, for although he often stumbled and fell he could scramble up again and a little patting of his straw-stuffed body would put him in good shape again.

Another awkward one was Jack Pumpkinhead, for walking would jar his head around on his neck and then he would be likely to go in the wrong direction. But the Frogman took Jack's arm and then he followed the path more easily.

Cap'n Bill's wooden leg didn't prevent him from keeping up with the others and the old sailor could walk as far as any of them.

When they entered the forest the Cowardly Lion took the lead. There was no path here for men, but many beasts had made paths of their own which only

the eyes of the Lion, practiced in woodcraft, could discern. So he stalked ahead and wound his way in and out, the others following in single file, Glinda being next to the Lion.

There are dangers in the forest, of course, but as the huge Lion headed the party he kept the wild denizens of the wilderness from bothering the travelers. Once, to be sure, an enormous leopard sprang upon the Glass Cat and caught her in his powerful jaws, but he broke several of his teeth and with howls of pain and dismay dropped his prey and vanished among the trees.

"Are you hurt?" Trot anxiously inquired of the Glass Cat.

"How silly!" exclaimed the creature in an irritated tone of voice; "nothing can hurt glass, and I'm too solid to break easily. But I'm annoyed at that leopard's impudence. He has no respect for beauty or intelligence. If he had noticed my pink brains work, I'm sure he would have realized I'm too important to be grabbed in a wild beast's jaws."

"Never mind," said Trot consolingly; "I'm sure he won't do it again."

They were almost in the center of the forest when Ojo, the Munchkin boy, suddenly said: "Why, where's Button Bright?"

They halted and looked around them. Button Bright was not with the party.

"Dear me," remarked Betsy, "I expect he's lost again!"

"When did you see him last, Ojo?" inquired Glinda.

"It was some time ago," replied Ojo. "He was trailing along at the end and throwing twigs at the squirrels in the trees. Then I went to talk to Betsy and Trot, and just now I noticed he was gone."

"This is too bad," declared the Wizard, "for it is sure to delay our journey. We must find Button Bright before we go any farther, for this forest is full of ferocious beasts that would not hesitate to tear the boy to pieces."

"But what shall we do?" asked the Scarecrow. "If any of us leaves the party to search for Button Bright he or she might fall a victim to the beasts, and if the Lion leaves us we will have no protector."

"The Glass Cat could go," suggested the Frogman. "The beasts can do her no harm, as we have discovered."

The Wizard turned to Glinda.

"Cannot your sorcery discover where Button Bright is?" he asked.

"I think so," replied the Sorceress.

She called to Uncle Henry, who had been carrying her wicker box, to bring it to her, and when he obeyed she opened it and drew out a small round mirror. On the surface of the glass she dusted a white powder and then wiped it away with her handkerchief and looked in the mirror. It reflected a part of the forest, and there, beneath a wide-spreading tree, Button Bright was lying asleep. On one side of him crouched a tiger, ready to spring; on the other side was a big gray wolf, its bared fangs glistening in a wicked way.

"Goodness me!" cried Trot, looking over Glinda's shoulder. "They'll catch and kill him sure."

Everyone crowded around for a glimpse at the magic mirror.

"Pretty bad--pretty bad!" said the Scarecrow sorrowfully.

"Comes of getting lost!" said Cap'n Bill, sighing.

"Guess he's a goner!" said the Frogman, wiping his eyes on his purple silk handkerchief.

"But where is he? Can't we save him?" asked Ojo the Lucky.

"If we knew where he is we could probably save him," replied the little Wizard, "but that tree looks so much like all the other trees, that we can't tell whether it's far away or near by."

"Look at Glinda!" exclaimed Betsy

Glinda, having handed the mirror to the Wizard, had stepped aside and was making strange passes with her outstretched arms and reciting in low, sweet tones a mystical incantation. Most of them watched the Sorceress with anxious eyes, despair giving way to the hope that she might be able to save their friend. The Wizard, however, watched the scene in the mirror, while over his shoulders peered Trot, the Scarecrow and the Shaggy Man.

What they saw was more strange than Glinda's actions. The tiger started to spring on the sleeping boy, but suddenly lost its power to move and lay flat upon the ground. The gray wolf seemed unable to lift its feet from the ground. It pulled first at one leg and then at another, and finding itself strangely confined to the spot began to back and snarl angrily. They couldn't hear the barkings and snarls, but they could see the creature's mouth open and its thick lips move. Button Bright, however, being but a few feet away from the wolf, heard its cries of rage, which wakened him from his untroubled sleep. The boy sat up and looked first at the tiger and then at

the wolf. His face showed that for a moment he was quite frightened, but he soon saw that the beasts were unable to approach him and so he got upon his feet and examined them curiously, with a mischievous smile upon his face. Then he deliberately kicked the tiger's head with his foot and catching up a fallen branch of a tree he went to the wolf and gave it a good whacking. Both the beasts were furious at such treatment but could not resent it.

Button Bright now threw down the stick and with his hands in his pockets wandered carelessly away.

"Now," said Glinda, "let the Glass Cat run and find him. He is in that direction," pointing the way, "but how far off I do not know. Make haste and lead him back to us as quickly as you can."

The Glass Cat did not obey everyone's orders, but she really feared the great Sorceress, so as soon as the words were spoken the crystal animal darted away and was quickly lost to sight.

The Wizard handed the mirror back to Glinda, for the woodland scene had now faded from the glass. Then those who cared to rest sat down to await Button Bright's coming. It was not long before he appeared through the trees and as he rejoined his friends he said in a peevish tone:

"Don't ever send that Glass Cat to find me again. She was very impolite and, if we didn't all know that she had no manners, I'd say she insulted me."

Glinda turned upon the boy sternly.

"You have caused all of us much anxiety and annoyance," said she. "Only my magic saved you from destruction. I forbid you to get lost again."

"Of course," he answered. "It won't be my fault if I get lost again; but it wasn't my fault this time."