

Ozoplaning With The Wizard Of Oz – Oz 33

L. Frank Baum

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CHAPTER 1

AT HOME WITH THE WIZARD OF OZ

In his big, brightly lighted laboratory back of the throne room, the Wizard of Oz paced impatiently forth and back, his hands clasped tightly behind

him. Every minute or two he would glance at the clock or dart over to peer out to the already-darkening garden.

"Are you sure you told them all, Jellia? Are you sure you told them tonight?" he asked, turning to the pretty little serving maid who was setting a table near the fire, for the fall evening was quite cool and frosty.

"Four, five, six, seven" Jellia, counting places, nodded her head firmly to answer the Wizard's question, then stepped back to regard her handiwork with complete satisfaction. "Oh, doesn't that tiny house in the center look too cute and cunningish? Real smoke coming out of the chimney, too. How ever did you manage it, Wiz? And having those silver slippers at each place for nuts and candies is just plain beautiful."

"Do you really think so?" The little Wizard positively blushed with pleasure. "Well, ye see, Jellia, this party is to celebrate Dorothy's first trip to the Emerald City. That is an exact model of the house in which she blew from Kansas to Oz in a cyclone, the house that fell on the Wicked Witch of the West and destroyed her, all but her silver slippers.

Remember?"

"Ho, everybody remembers that," said Jellia with a toss of her head that set all her green cap ribbons fluttering. "If I live to be a million, I'll never forget the day she came to this castle with the Cowardly Lion, the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman. Not if I live to be a million! Will I light the candles now, Wiz dear, or wait until they arrive?"

"Oh, wait till they arrive, by all means. But see here," the Wizard, taking a last look at the party table, was plainly distressed. "You've only seven places, Jellia, and there are eight of us. My idea was to have everyone

immediately associated with Dorothy's first visit, and that would be: one, Dorothy herself; two, myself; three, yourself; four, the Cowardly Lion; five, the Scarecrow; six, the Tin Woodman; seven, the Soldier with the Green Whiskers; and eight, the Guardian of the Gate. Quick, my dear! Another plate for the Guardian of the Gate."

"He's not coming," announced Jellia primly. "He says he has not deserted his post for forty years and does not intend to desert it now. But if you'll send his refreshments to the Guard House, he'll take it very kindly. I've already fixed him a basket," said Jellia, smoothing her apron.

"Good old Guardy!" The Wizard absently brushed back the hair he no longer had, then, hearing voices and steps in the corridor, bounced over to open the door while Jellia tripped joyously about, lighting the candles set everywhere in the big workshop. Candle and fire light are so much cozier for parties, and it all looked so cheery and gay that Dorothy, who was first, stopped short in the doorway with an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, Wizard! How beautiful! Oh, how I do wish Ozma could see it all!"

"Tut tut!" chuckled the Wizard, leading her into the room. "Ozma is having a fine time in Glinda's palace by now. To tell the truth, Dorothy, this party is just for YOU and to remind us all of the old Oz days whenFF20C4"

"You were nothing but a humbug," snorted the Scarecrow, laughing so hard he had to lean against the door jamb.

"Don't forget he gave you your famous brains, friend." The Tin Woodman spoke reprovingly, for Nick Chopper did not like anyone's feelings to be hurt, even in fun. "And don't forget he gave me my splendid heart!"

"And me my grade A, double-distilled, instant-acting courage," purred the

Cowardly Lion. Moving over to the fire, the big beast stretched himself luxuriously on the hearth rug.

"And don't forget our little Wiz was once Supreme Ruler of Oz!" boomed the Soldier with the Green Whiskers. Marching three times round the party table, the thin, immensely tall soldier brought up with a smart salute before their embarrassed little host.

"Three cheers for the Wizard of Oz!" cried Jellia Jam. Seizing a silver bell with an emerald clapper, she rang it so hard the Cowardly Lion's mane blew straight back, and even the candles flickered.

"Thank you! Thank you very much!" The Wizard bowed and rubbed his ear, which still tingled from the cheers and bell-ringing. "But where is Toto, Dorothy? I thought of course you'd bring your little dog."

"Oh, Toto's with Ozma," explained Dorothy, drawn in spite of herself to the brightly decorated party table. "You know how he dotes on traveling, so Ozma took him along for company."

"Then of course he cannot be here," sighed the Wizard regretfully. "Now Jellia, off with that cap and apron. Tonight you are my guest and not a maid-in-waiting to Ozma or anyone else. Dorothy, suppose you sit at the head. I'll sit at the foot, and the others may find their own places."

"My place will always be next to little Dorothy," rumbled the Cowardly Lion, hoisting himself sleepily to the chair beside the little girl.

"Mine will be next to the pickles. MM-mmmm! I LOVE pickles," said the Soldier, slipping into the seat next to the lion, while Jellia, with a purposeful bounce, settled near a plate of green cookies. There was no doubt where the Tin Woodman and Scarecrow would sit, for at one plate the Wizard had put a silver box of metal polish and an emerald bottle

containing purest oil. Then, instead of a chair, he had provided a bale of freshly packed straw for the Scarecrow.

"Well, well, here we all are!" Rubbing his hands briskly, the Wizard beamed on his guests as Fredjon, wearing his best suit of green and silver, bustled in with the first course.

"And isn't it fun to be here?" Dorothy took a long, satisfying sip of her Ozade. "I'm awfully glad I came back to live in the Land of Oz. Aren't you, Wizard?"

"A country where a body grows no older, where animals talk as easily as men and where the practice of magic is not only possible but practical, a country like that has many advantages," admitted the Wizard, winking at the Cowardly Lion, who was drinking his fruit juice in a refined way from a huge, green aquarium. "I myself never have regretted the years spent in this marvelous fairyland. Sometimes I hardly can believe I ever did live in Omaha, or travel through the West with a circus."

"I know," agreed Dorothy, nodding her head slowly. "Kansas, when I think of it, seems very far away, as much like a dream, I suppose, as Oz seems like a dream to boys and girls in Kansas who read Oz history."

"Oh, why think of Kansas?" Jellia spoke scornfully. "In Kansas you were only an ordinary little girl, while here you are a Princess and second in importance to our Ruler, Ozma, herself."

"And in Kansas," observed the Scarecrow as Dorothy rather self-consciously straightened her crown, "I'll bet you never had as much fun or as many adventures as we have here." The Scarecrow, being well stuffed with straw, never indulged in any refreshments. In fact, he just came to parties for

the conversation, and to be sure of a good time, he tried to do all the talking himself.

"That's right," said Dorothy thoughtfully, "that cyclone was about the only thing that ever happened in Kansas."

"A great blow to you, my dear, but a fortunate thing for Nick and me." The Scarecrow patted the Tin Woodman affectionately on the funnel he wore for a hat. "If you had not blown to Oz, I'd probably still be hanging on a pole in that cornfield, and Nick would be rusting away his life in the greenwood."

"And in some ways," mused Dorothy, looking dreamily at the model of her small Kansas house, "in some ways that first adventure always will seem best. Just imagine how surprised I was to blow all those miles and find myself in a strange, wonderful country like Oz. The Munchkins thought I was a sorceress because my house had killed the Wicked Witch of the East. Then the Good Witch of the North told me to put on her silver shoes and go to the Emerald City to ask the great OZ to send me home. And on the way I discovered you, and do you remember how astonished I was when I lifted you down from your pole and found you really were alive and could talk?"

The Scarecrow nodded cheerfully.

"And remember how we traveled on together till we found the Tin Woodman?" went on Dorothy. "And Nick told us about the witch who had enchanted his axe so that it chopped off a leg here and an arm there, and finally his head and body, too. And after each accident he'd go to a tinsmith who made him new tin arms and legs and finally even a body and a head. You didn't mind being Tin at all, did you, Nick? Except that day you went out to chop wood and left your oil can at home. Then that storm came up, your joints

rusted, and you couldn't move, and there you had been, rusting and helpless for months!"

"But we hustled back to your hut, fetched the oil can and fixed you up in fine shape, didn't we, old fellow?" The Scarecrow flung his flimsy arm around Nick Chopper's shoulder, and the Tin Woodman, at the mere mention of rust, uncorked the emerald bottle and let three drops of oil slide down his neck.

"I never shall forget your kindness," he told them earnestly, turning his head first to look at Dorothy and then at the Scarecrow.

"And after that you came along so the Wizard could give you a new heart," Dorothy reminded him gaily. "And right afterwards, we met the Cowardly Lion."

"And he was more afraid of us than we were of him," teased the Scarecrow, leaning across the table to give the lion a poke.

"Yes, I was just a big coward in those days," admitted the lion, blinking approvingly at the rare roast Fredjon had brought him instead of the chicken he was serving the others. "Just a great big coward! Ho, hum!"

"But not too cowardly to fight for us," said Dorothy, taking quick little bites of her biscuit, "and to come with us to the Emerald City."

"Oh, that was because I wanted the Wizard to give me some courage," roared the lion. "And weren't we surprised when we did reach the Emerald City to find it all built of green marble, studded with real emeralds! And remember how the Guardian of the Gate gave us all green specs, even me, and then led us up to the palace?"

"You looked awfully funny in those specs!" laughed Dorothy. "I'll never

forget how funny!"

"But remember, it was I who carried your messages to Oz," put in the Soldier with Green Whiskers.

"Of course it was," said Dorothy, nodding her head quickly. "You gave us some splendid advice, Soldier, and Jellia showed us to the grandest rooms in the castle and loaned me the loveliest dresses to wear."

"I liked you from the very first!" declared Jellia, choking a bit on her seventh cooky.

"But Old Man Wizzy wouldn't give us a thing!" said the Scarecrow, waving his napkin toward the head of the table. "He told us we'd have to kill the Witch of the West before he'd send Dorothy home or grant any of our requests."

"But you see, I didn't know any real magic then." The Wizard looked quite unhappy, for he did not like to remember the time before he was a \$real&& Wizard. "And besides, I needed more time."

"Ho ho! You were doing very well for yourself!" chuckled the Scarecrow.

"Living in a splendid castle and having the whole country eating out of your hand. As it happened, we did kill the witch of the West, or at least Dorothy melted her with a bucket of water, and the Winkies were so tickled they gave us all presents and made Nick their Emperor. So when we got back at last, you did give me some brand-new brains, and Nick a red plush heartFF20C4"

"And me some real red, true-blue courage," grinned the Cowardly Lion, wiping his mouth delicately with the tip of his tail.

"And you made me Ruler of OZ! Ah! My Majesty the Scarecrow, Hah, those were the days!" The Scarecrow thumped his pudgy chest and fairly glowed at the

memory.

"You would have taken me back to Kansas, too, only your balloon flew away too fast, didn't it?" Dorothy leaned all the way across the table to pat the Wizard's arm.

"But don't forget it was I who told you to go to the palace of Glinda, the Good Sorceress of the South," interrupted the Soldier with Green Whiskers again.

"So we all went to Glinda's," rumbled the Cowardly Lion, half closing his eyes. "And Glinda told Dorothy the Witch's silver shoes would carry her home. And they did!" There was a little silence following the lion's last sentence, as if all of Dorothy's friends were recalling their sorrow at that first parting from their cheerful little comrade.

"But you came back," declared the Scarecrow, balancing a fork on the edge of his tumbler. "And so did our little Wizard."

"Well, to tell the truth, Omaha seemed rather dull after the Emerald City," admitted the Wizard, motioning for Fredjon to bring on the dessert. This caused many admiring "Oh's" and "Ah's" when it arrived, for it was ice cream moulded into small Tin Woodmen, Scarecrows, Lions, and all the other guests. Then, out of a huge, frosted cake the footman set down before Dorothy, flew four little witches riding green broomsticks, straight into the fire.

"I tell you, it takes a real Wizard to perform a trick like that." Nick Chopper wagged his head solemnly. "You certainly have made progress since Ozma made you Chief Magician of the Realm."

"WellFF20C4" drawled the Wizard, pushing the pickle dish away from the

Soldier with Green Whiskers, who already had eaten twenty-seven and was looking rather dill. "Magic is like any other science: it takes practice.

Of course, if you are a born fairy like Ozma and the former rulers of Oz, working spells and charms just comes natural, like playing the piano by ear. But if you are not a Fairy, you must study witchcraft and sorcery as I have done with Glinda the Good. It only has been by continuous study and research that I have managed to perfect myself in the arts of wizardry."

"Well, how is wizness lately?" inquired the Scarecrow, wrinkling his cotton forehead at all the big words.

"Fine, just fine!" The Wizard assured him brightly. Marching over to his desk, he returned with a long, tube-like object resembling a seaman's spyglass. "This is one of my latest inventions," he confessed modestly.

"Here, take a look." Beaming with anticipation, he pressed the spyglass into Dorothy's hands.

CHAPTER 2

THE WIZARD'S SPY GLASS

With the Wizard's latest invention clapped to one eye and pointed straight at the Wizard himself, Dorothy peered through the green glass hardly knowing what to expect. Certainly not what happened, for from the other end of the instrument a composed voice began making announcements proudly and impressively as a radio speaker.

"You are now looking at Oscar Zoroaster Phadrig Isaac Norman Henkle Emmanuel Ambroise Diggs," it informed them crisply. "Calls himself Oz after the first letters of his first two names, as his other initials spell Pinhead.

Born in Omaha, Diggs ran away as a young man to join a circus, where he

made balloon ascensions to amuse the crowds, his balloon bearing his initials, O.Z.

"One day in a storm, Oscar's balloon was carried to our wonderful Land of Oz. At that time, the rightful King of the Country and his son had been destroyed by Mombi the Witch, who also had enchanted and hidden away Ozma, the little Granddaughter of this unfortunate monarch. And four witches had divided the country between them. When the balloon bearing the name OZ on its side sailed out of the clouds, the inhabitants instantly hailed the traveler from America as their ruler, supposing him to be another member of the famous fairy family of Oz. Unable to return to America, Oz accepted the people's decision with good grace and ruled the realm for many years. Under his wise direction the people built this castle and the famous City of Emeralds; and the four witches, thinking Oz more powerful than they, did not question his rule or authority.

"Later, when little Dorothy from Kansas arrived in Oz, the Wizard decided to return with her to the United States, leaving the Scarecrow to rule in his place. The Scarecrow was deposed by Jinjur and her Army of Girls. Jinjur in turn was conquered by Glinda, the Good Witch of the South, who also forced Mombi to disenchant Ozma, the young and rightful girl ruler of the realm. Ozma has ruled over Oz ever since. Not long after Ozma was restored to her throne, the Wizard returned to Oz and our clever girl ruler made him Chief Magician of the realm. In this ancient and honorable capacity he has served ever since, PERIOD C4 STOP C4 DROP OR POINT ELSEWHERE!" These last words were uttered so rudely, Dorothy almost did drop the spyglass.

"My! MY GOODNESS!" gasped the little girl.

"It always says that when it has told all it knows. You see, it is a
'tell-all-escape.'FF20" explained the Wizard, reaching out for his
spyglass with an embarrassed cough.

"And it certainly tells ALL, all right!" roared the Scarecrow, pushing back
his chair. "Congratulations, my dear Mr. Diggs!"

"Look out! Be careful! Don't you point that thing at me! \$\$Please&& don't!"

The big lion simply cowered in his chair, and no wonder he felt nervous.
There had been some pretty savage incidents in that old lion's life before
he met Dorothy and came to live in the Emerald City as a civilized citizen
of Oz. And the thought of the tell-all-escape telling all it knew about him
made the Cowardly Lion positively shudder. But the others were so busy
examining the Wizard's spyglass, they did not even notice the lion's
terrific agitation.

"You know, a thing like that would be of great value to a traveler,"
remarked Nick Chopper, tapping the tell-all-escape thoughtfully with his
tin fingers.

"That's just what I figured," grinned the Wizard, thrusting the instrument
into his pocket. "And speaking of traveling, I have something else to show
you!" Clapping on his high hat, Ozma's Chief Magician hastened over to the
door that opened on the garden, signaling for the others to come along.
Having had experience with inventors before, Dorothy and Jellia snatched up
coats, Dorothy her own, and Jellia one of the Wizard's. Then, followed by
the rest of the party, they stepped out into the sparkling, starlit
evening. The Soldier with Green Whiskers, who had stopped to eat the last
pickle in the dish and stuff an extra piece of cake in his pocket, came
last of all. At each step he gave a little groan, for all by himself the

soldier had eaten enough for a whole army. But then, he was a whole army; he was every single man, private, corporal, captain, major, colonel and general in the entire fighting force of Oz.

Anxious to exhibit his latest treasure, the Wizard walked rapidly along leading the little party across the park, through the Emerald City, out of the Gates and into the thick woodland beyond.

"Where do you suppose he is taking us?" shivered Jellia, thinking longingly of the cozy fire back in the laboratory.

"No knowing," giggled the Scarecrow. "But a-hunting we shall go! A-hunting we shall go! Ta-Ta-Ta-Ta-Ta-Ta-Ta-TAH!" Blowing an imaginary horn, the Scarecrow pretended to gallop and fell flat on his face, his legs never being what you really could call reliable.

"Sh-hh!" whispered the Wizard, looking back warningly as the Tin Woodman jerked the straw man to his feet. "What I am about to show you has been seen by no one in Oz except my faithful assistants! So please be more quiet!"

"You mean it's a secret?" whispered Dorothy, skipping forward to catch up with the Wizard and linking her arm through his.

"Two secrets!" confided Ozma's Chief Magician mysteriously. Pushing impatiently through the last fringe of trees, the group stepped into a moonlit clearing.

CHAPTER 3

LATEST INVENTION OF THE WIZARD OF OZ

"Ooooh! A conservatory!" murmured Jellia, blinking at the shining glass

structure that occupied the entire treeless space.

"A barn, if you ask me!" guessed the Scarecrow. "But why build it of glass, Mr. Wiz?"

"Because glass is the latest and lightest building material known. But this is no barn, as you'll soon discover." Handing his flashlight to Dorothy, the Wizard slid back the vast doors, switched on the lights and stood back, his hands in his pockets, as the little group in silence and astonishment viewed the two shining planes housed as snugly as giant butterflies in a glass cocoon.

"Airplanes!" exclaimed Dorothy when she found her voice at last.

"No, Ozoplanes," corrected the Wizard, trying to keep the excitement out of his voice. "Somewhat like the planes in America, but more powerful, for remember, my dear, I had not only the scientific knowledge of aeronautics available to mortals, but the scientific knowledge of magic to help me as well!"

"Well," echoed the Tin Woodman, gazing approvingly at the Wizard's planes, which, except for their silver wings, might have been huge silver-and-glass torpedoes.

"Not for the army, I hope," exclaimed the Soldier, clutching his whiskers nervously. Being the entire army himself and quite old-fashioned and set in his ways, the Soldier felt sure he never could pilot these gleaming airplanes.

"On, No! No! NO!" The Wizard frowned at the mere thought of war. "These are pleasure planes for traveling and exploring the unknown regions of the upper air. As soon as Ozma returns from the South, I plan to present them both to our illustrious young Ruler and arrange for her to make the first

triumphant flight."

"But there are two," said Dorothy a little wistfully. She had hoped to make the first flight with the Wizard herself.

"Of course, of course!" he answered in a matter-of-fact way. "Most experimental flights fail because they depend on one ship. We shall have two!"

"We?" Dorothy brightened up considerably at the Wizard's plural.

"Yes, we," repeated the Wizard, turning round to smile at the little girl.

"Counting Ozma and those of us here, there will be eight passengers C4 four for each plane."

"Now please don't bother about me!" begged the Cowardly Lion, his tail dragging on the ground at the very thought of flying. "I'd not think of troubling you. Besides, I'm much too heavy for flying."

"Not at all, not at all," the Wizard reassured him with a wink. "I have made exact calculations about weight, old fellow, and you and the Scarecrow balance each other nicely. So don't worry about that."

"Oh, I'm not worrying about that!" rumbled the lion, rearing up on his hind legs to read the names outlined in emeralds on the luminous sides of the Wizard's ships.

"Ozpril and Oztober!" The lion spoke in a slightly trembling roar. "Mmmn! Mmmnnmn! Kerumph!"

"Why, those are beautiful names," exclaimed Dorothy, tilting back her head to spell them out for herself.

"I thought they were rather neat," said the Wizard complacently. "Suitable, too, one to rise and one to fall!" Expressively, he lifted an arm and let

it fall limply to his side.

"To C4 to fall?" quavered the lion, dropping to all fours.

"Oh, just in a figurative way, of course." The Wizard shrugged his shoulders. "You will observe," he went on enthusiastically, "that these planes need no runway or special track to take off. They really are balloonplanes. Note those round packets on the top of the fuselage." The lion blinked rapidly, for he had no idea that fuselage meant the body of the plane, but the others nodded quite knowingly. "Well, those," declared the inventor proudly, "are my own patented balloon attachments. At the touch of a button, the wings are depressed and the balloon inflated with a magic gas, lighter than helium, that carries the ship as high and as far as desired. Then the balloon can be deflated, and the Ozoplane can continue under its own power. But you will readily see how ~~my~~ ship, with its balloon attachment, has twice the altitude possibilities of an ordinary airplane. Hah! We shall fly ~~higher~~ than higher!" boasted the little Wizard happily.

"Oh, quite!" agreed the Tin Woodman, mounting the ladder of the Oztober, the Soldier with Green Whiskers pressing nervously at his heels.

"But how will you move them out of here?" inquired the Scarecrow, taking off his hat and scratching his cotton head.

"Oh, as to thatFF20C4" The Wizard pulled a switch just behind him, whereupon the top of the glass airdrome lifted like the lid of an enormous jewel box.

"Hmmm! I see!" The Scarecrow slapped his knee and grinned with appreciation. "Off with the roof! Up with the planes!"

"Exactly!" Seizing the Straw Man's arm, the Wizard urged him toward the

ladder of the Ozpril, Dorothy skipping cheerfully behind them. After Dorothy plodded the Cowardly Lion, talking to himself in anxious whispers and growls.

"Be sure not to touch anything over there," called the Wizard as Nick and the Soldier with Green Whiskers disappeared into the cabin of the other plane.

"I'll keep an eye on them," promised Jellia, tripping up the ladder as lightly as a feather. "Don't give us a thought, Wiz dear."

"Jellia's so funny!" laughed Dorothy.

"Sensible, too," added the Wizard, helping the little girl over the high door sill and into the plane. While he and the Scarecrow went forward to examine the steering gear, Dorothy looked delightedly 'round the snug little cabin. There were four seats upholstered in pale green leather along one side. The whole top was of thick glass, through which she could distinctly see the moon and stars winking down at her. The side walls of the Ozpril were of a silvery grey, with all trimmings in green. At the back was a small dinette with chairs and table locked to the floors as they are on seagoing vessels. A cabinet full of china, a wall full of charts, a bookcase full of books, and a tiny kitchen and dressing room completed the equipment.

"It's just as cozy as a little house," sighed Dorothy contentedly as the Cowardly Lion, having glanced round in a discouraged way, seated himself in one of the green chairs and pressed his nose against the round window pane.

"Won't we have fun, Liony, when we really get off?"

"\$\$Getting off&& will be the best fun of all," sniffed the lion, glancing

briefly at the door. The Lion, as you probably have guessed, felt no enthusiasm for the trip. Once, much against his will, he had been carried to an island in the sky, and that experience had been more than enough. In his own mind he already had decided not to accompany the Wizard on his proposed flight. Yessir, when the party assembled for the trip he would just turn up missing and manage to stay behind. Immensely relieved by this secret decision, he ambled forward.

"You will notice," the Wizard was pointing out briskly, "that I have done away with all controls and levers. On this board are all the buttons necessary to operate the ship."

"Looks like an organ," observed Dorothy, squinting at the bright array of buttons set in the top of the table within easy reach of the first seat.

"Must you play all those stops and starters to guide the plane?"

"Not quite all," smiled the Wizard, "but if we wished to start, first I'd press this green button to depress the wings and inflate our balloon. Next I'd push the button marked 'up' and, if I decided to go North, this 'North' button as well. Then I'd use the wheel to hold her steady, and if I preferred to go up in a gradual way, I'd push this button marked 'zig.'FF20"

"And I suppose if you saw something interesting or wished to dodge a mountain, you'd 'zag,'FF20" suggested the Scarecrow, indicating the "zag" button with his pudgy finger. "Or you could 'spin,' 'spiral' or 'level off'C4"

"Stop! Stop!" panted the Cowardly Lion, clapping his paw to one eye. "All this up-zig and down-zig makes me positively giddy!"

"It does seem a little complicated," said Dorothy, looking dubiously at the

Wizard's button-board.

"Why, it's perfectly simple!" the Wizard assured her brightly. "All you have to do is touch the right buttons at the right time!"

"But

The Scarecrow, who had been about to ask another question, whirled round on one heel and flopped on his back in the aisle. The Cowardly Lion skidded rapidly past to wedge under the little dining table, while Dorothy and the Wizard clung to the steering board to keep from falling. For a terrific roar like the tearing of a gigantic sheet had made the Ozpril tremble like a leaf. There came a sudden flash of silver smoke, and the gradual dying away of all sound. Then a complete and ominous silence.

"WHAT? WHAT! Why, it's gone!" shouted the Wizard, racing over to the door and staring amazedly at the empty space occupied a moment before by the Oztober. Then he glanced up into the starlit expanse of sky.

"Gone?" Creeping on hands and knees, the Scarecrow peered out to see for himself. "Why, what right have they to go off like that?" he demanded, pulling himself up by the door jam. "April comes before October and goes before October, too. Fall before spring C4 Why, that's ridiculous! The Ozpril should have led off!"

"Oh, what will become of them?" cried Dorothy in distress, clasping her hands anxiously. "I'm sure it was a dreadful mistake."

"Mistake!" moaned the Wizard, pushing back his high hat. "Worse than that, Dorothy! Why, everything is ruined! Here they've gone off before I even had a chance to show the plane to Ozma. They have no directions, no supplies; they'll crash, smash or wreck themselves. I intended to teach

Nick Chopper to navigate the plane before we started!"

"But can't we stop them? Can't we go after them?" exclaimed Dorothy, clutching the Wizard's coattails.

"Go after them? Yes! That's the idea, go after them! Of course!" panted the Wizard, falling over the Cowardly Lion, who was making a stream-lion for the door.

"I was just going back for my overshoes," wheezed the lion, slinking rather guiltily into his seat at the Wizard's reproachful glance.

"Stay where you are!" the Wizard directed sharply. "Now then, steady, everybody steady! Shut that door, Scarecrow, we are about to ascend." The Wizard bent over the steering board to touch the green button that would inflate the Ozpril's balloon. "But I never expected to go without my black bag of magic, an extra vest, or even my bottle of hair tonic."

"Haven't you any magic at all?" called Dorothy as the Ozpril began to vibrate and tremble from the rush of gas into its balloon.

"A little, a little," confessed the Wizard, pressing the buttons marked "Up" and "South." "Here, Dorothy, take the tell-all-escape and see if you can catch a glimpse of the Oztober when we are aloft." Grasping the wheel, the Wizard settled grimly into the pilot's seat. Dorothy had just time to clutch the tell-all-escape before the Ozpril rose straight into the air.

Lifted and borne by its buoyant gasbag, the graceful ship pointed toward the stars.

CHAPTER 4

FIRST FLIGHT OF THE OZTOBER

Now the start of the Oztober had been nothing like the orderly takeoff of

the Ozpril. The first hint Jellia had of their departure was when a china coffee pot from the open china closet into which she was looking with great interest hit her a sharp clip on the chin. Next moment she was rolling round on the floor of the cabin, dodging all the rest of the green dishes.

"Oh! Oh! Dishes awful!" choked poor Jellia Jam, not even realizing she was making a pun.

"Stop!" yelled the Tin Woodman, turning a complete somersault and coming down on his funnel with one leg hooked through the luggage rack. "Stop! Who did that?"

"Pickles!" moaned a faint voice from the forward end of the cabin. "Oh, those pickles!" And that was probably as correct an answer as any to Nick's indignant question. Even upside down as he was and subject to the fierce rocketing of the plane, the Tin Woodman could see a tall, green figure sprawled across the navigator's table. As he had bent over to examine the Oztober's steering apparatus, the Soldier with Green Whiskers had been taken with a violent cramp from the twenty-nine pickles he had eaten at the party. Falling heavily on the board, he had pushed down ten of the Wizard's bright-colored buttons. Following the directions of all ten, one after the other, the Oztober had exploded into the air and now, whistling and whirling like a comet bound for Mars, was charging into the Heavens. Jellia Jam was too bruised and shaken to do anything but cling to the side of one of the seats. The Soldier, after his head had been whacked down three times on the board, had lapsed into complete and utter silence. Only Nick managed to preserve a semblance of his usual calm and composure. Though severely dented by the plane's takeoff, the Tin Woodman, being of

metal, felt no pain. Nor was he subject to the giddiness that assailed ordinary flesh and bone bodies under such trying conditions. Even standing on his head did not greatly inconvenience him, and after the first dreadful shock he began to perceive a certain order and rhythm in their flight. This was not strange.

The Soldier's fall had pressed down the button to inflate the Oztober's balloon, the "Up" and the "South" buttons, the "fast," "spin," "spiral," "zig," "zag," "slow" and "circle" buttons as well. So first the Oztober would shoot straight up, then it would go into a fast spin, and spiral. The zigs and zags were a little less terrible, and on one of the slow circles the Tin Woodman managed to extricate his foot from the luggage rack. Clattering full length in the aisle, he lay still till the next slow circle. Then, leaping to his feet, he rushed forward and pulled the Soldier off the steering board. He had just time to prop the unconscious army into the third chair and fall into the pilot's seat himself when the Oztober went into another fast spin and spiral. This rather upset Nick.

He had taken a hasty look at the navigator's table when he entered the ship and then, more interested in the metal of which the plane was constructed, had gone tapping about, testing it with his tin knuckles, intending to return to the steering gear later. He naturally had supposed that when he pulled the soldier off the board the plane would slow down or change its course. But nothing of the kind happened. All the buttons the soldier had fallen on stayed down.

Grasping the wheel, Nick was relieved to find he could steady the Oztober a bit in this way. Holding to it with one hand, he tried to pull out the "spin" and "spiral" buttons with the other. But even his strong tin fingers

could not budge them. Next he glanced frantically over the board for a "stop" or "down" button, but the "down" button when he found it filled him with apprehension. If they shot downward at the speed they were hurling upward, the plane most certainly would be wrecked. No, decided Nick, drawing his fingers hastily back from the "down" button, they were much safer in the air until he learned a little more about flying, and he'd just have to hang on till he discovered how the Ozoplane worked.

Grasping the wheel resignedly in both hands, he glanced back to see how Jellia was faring. Jellia was sitting dizzily in the middle of the aisle.

But she was so encouraged to see Nick actually at the wheel that she made her way to him and hung firmly to the arm of his chair. Just then the Oztober whirled into its twentieth spin and spiral, and Jellia C4 dislodged from the chair C4 caught at the steering table to save herself from falling.

"Oh, now you've done it!" gasped Nick as the Oztober gave a wicked lurch.

"Oh, nowFF20C4" His voice trailed off into a hoarse squeak, for as abruptly as it had started the plane stopped, and held aloft by its still-buoyant balloon, swung easily to and fro in the faint wind that stirred above the clouds. "Say! How did you \$\$do&& it?" Letting go the wheel, the Tin Woodman seized Jellia by the shoulders.

"What?" panted Jellia. "What did I do?"

"Why, you saved the ship. You stopped her. See, all the buttons are up again!" Removing Jellia's clutching fingers gently from the table top, Nick discovered a flat bar on the underside of the board. As soon as Jellia pressed the bar, all the buttons had popped back to their normal position.

"So THAT'S it!" exclaimed Nick, rubbing his tin forehead anxiously. "Each time you want to change the course, you press this bar and then begin all over again."

"But now we're sinking," groaned Jellia. And sinking herself into the seat back of Nick, she stared at him with round, desperate eyes.

"Sinking, are we? Well, I'll soon put a stop to \$that!&&" Pouncing on the green button to inflate the Oztober's gas bag, Nick pressed it quickly, for of course as soon as Jellia had touched the bar, the buttons had all sprung up and the magic gas had begun to seep out of the plane's balloon attachment. As it again filled and became taut, the slow downward drift of the ship ceased, and again it hung motionless between a cloud and a star.

"Now!" breathed the Tin Woodman, eyeing the button board with grim purpose and determination, "Now we can take our time and start off right."

"Oh, Nick, must we go through all that again?" Jellia began to cry softly, drying her eyes on the sash of her party dress. "Oh, Nick, I never thought flying would be like this. Please, can't we just stay as we are?"

"Certainly not," said the Tin Woodman briskly. "Hanging 'round the sky is dangerous. We might be hit by a shooting star or even by a meteor. Now just trust yourself to me, my dear Jellia. Remember, I am the Emperor of the East!" Nick smote his tin chest a resounding blow. "And after ruling the Winkies all these years, I surely can handle one small plane!"

Reassuring himself if not Jellia, the Tin Woodman searched the array of buttons for one marked "slow." After he had found it, he slowly began to map his course. He would continue to fly up for a time. Next he would take a horizontal direction until he grew more accustomed to piloting the Ozoplane. Then, as night passed and the sun rose, he would zig and zag

slowly downward and make a safe landing near the Emerald City.

The Soldier with Green Whiskers had regained consciousness only to fall at once into a heavy slumber. His snores blended nicely with Jellia's sobs as Nick Chopper pushed the "up," the "South" and the "slow" buttons. Braced for a new shock, Jellia grasped the arms of her seat. But this time the Oztober soared gently and gracefully aloft, the motion of the plane so smooth and pleasant Ozma's little Maid in Waiting soon forgot all her fears. Relaxing against the soft green cushions, she too fell asleep. This left only Nick awake and alert.

But if the Wizard had searched all over Oz, he could not have found a better pilot than the Tin Woodman. Being practically tireless and requiring neither food nor rest, he could keep his place at the wheel for days if necessary. Delighted at the way the Oztober responded to his clever manipulation of the wheel and buttons, he flew up and up and on and on, scarcely realizing the distance he was putting between himself and Oz.

Glancing out the round window beside him, Nick viewed the starry expanse of the upper air with growing interest and enthusiasm. Sometimes he was almost tempted to waken Jellia to point out the splendid cloud mountains and cities they were passing. As he swept along, the sky turned from deep blue grey and was now suffused with the rainbow tints of early morning.

Switching off the lights, the Tin Woodman slightly changed his course.

"I really need a lot more practice before I go back or try to make a safe landing," he observed softly to himself. "It never would do to crack up a valuable ship like this." But the truth of the matter was, the Tin Woodman did not wish to turn back. And after all, who was to insist? The Soldier

and Jellia still slept on, and far ahead, between a bank of fog and an arch of platinum sun rays, loomed a long, lavender crescent. Nick even fancied he could see people moving about its glittering surface.

"A new world!" gloated the Tin Woodman, setting his funnel at a more daring angle. If this were so, he would be its discoverer. Not only that, but he could claim it for Ozma and win for himself as much honor and renown as Samuel Salt, the Royal Explorer of Oz. "Even if it's not inhabited, it would be a good place to practice landing," reflected Nick happily. So again he pressed the black bar, touched the button to deflate the Oztober's balloon and raise the wings. For now he wished to fly horizontally, and the wings would be faster than the gas bag. Next, touching the "straight-on" and "faster" buttons and twirling the wheel expertly, he headed the ship straight for the tip of the lavender island.

CHAPTER 5

THE SPIKERS

Nick waited until he was well over the crescent before he attempted to land.

As he flew along, he planned exactly how he would go about it, and everything worked out as planned except for one thing. The "slow," the "zig" and the "down" buttons brought the Oztober within a foot of the glittering air Isle, but the "stop" button functioned a bit late. Instead of stopping on the surface, the plane dropped clear through with a crash like the smashing of a thousand thin tumblers. Peering up through a spray of splinters, the Tin Woodman found he had knocked a jagged hole in the Crescent.

"Attention! Shoulder arms! Company, fall in!" yelled the Soldier with Green

Whiskers. Jolted completely awake, he sprang up in the aisle, aiming his gun at the ceiling.

"Yes? Yes! Coming, your Majesty!" Jellia, mistaking the musical crash for the ringing of Ozma's morning bell, rolled sleepily out of her seat and started down the aisle after the Soldier.

"Now, now, don't be alarmed," remarked Nick Chopper. "I was just trying to land."

"Land? Where is it? Quick! Let me out of here!" panted Jellia Jam, remembering all in a rush where she was and the dreadful experiences of the night before.

"I see no land," said the Soldier, pressing his nose against one of the windows.

"Well, it certainly looked like land!" The Tin Woodman spoke in a slightly exasperated voice. The Oztober, still quivering from its impact with the island, was hanging motionless about ten feet below the Crescent. "Can't tell about these Sky Countries till you try them."

"I'll bet it's nothing but a cake of ice," shivered Jellia, hugging herself to keep warm. "Being of tin, I don't suppose you'd notice that it was freezing! I wonder if that stove lights."

"Ice?" meditated Nick as Jellia hurried toward the back of the cabin. "Why, I do believe you are right, my dear. In the upper stratas the air does become colder. We probably cracked through a frozen cloud!"

Jellia, turning all the switches on the stove, paid little attention to Nick's scientific discourse. She was too busy warming herself over the glowing burners. "If we just had something to cook," sighed the little Oz

maid, staring wistfully into the cupboard beside the stove. But the shelves were perfectly empty. Reflecting that the Wizard had not yet had time to stock up for the flight, Jellia, who was an orderly little soul, began picking up the china that had broken when it fell from the cabinet the night before. Rather pompously, the Soldier with Green Whiskers began to help her.

"Will someone kindly explain what we are doing flying around in this dangerous and haphazard manner?" he inquired loftily. "I understood we were to wait for Ozma's return before we made a trial flight! And really, you know, I'm needed at home to guard the castle."

"Oh, indeed!" sniffed Jellia. "And who do you suppose started us off, Mr. Whiskers? Nobody but yourself. A fine pickle you put us in when you fell on that steering board."

"I?" The Soldier straightened up, aghast.

"Yes, YOU!" declared Jellia. "You and your pickles." Sweeping the rest of the broken plates into her skirt, she marched to the end of the cabin and dumped them into the big basket beside the water cooler. "Goodness knows whether we shall ever get back," she sighed, sinking despondently into the last seat and staring out the window.

"But we're backing now," muttered the Soldier. This was quite true, for Nick, to avoid hitting the crescent of ice again, was maneuvering the plane from beneath; then, feeling it might be dangerous to go any higher, he began slowly and cautiously to descend. Neither he nor Jellia paid any more attention to the Soldier with Green Whiskers, who glanced uncomfortably from one to the other. After a little silence, he remarked in a hollow voice, "I shall consider myself under arrest. I shall walk guard for two

hours without a pause for rest or rations!"

"Oh, don't be a goose!" giggled Jellia. "You'll probably go without rations because there aren't any. But what good will walking guard do?"

"As Commander-in-Chief, I have sentenced myself to walk guard. As a first-class Private in the Army of Oz, I shall carry out this sentence," insisted the Soldier. "Discipline must be maintained!" Hoisting his old-fashioned blunderbuss to his shoulder, he began tramping stiffly up and down the short aisle of the cabin.

Born in a small Munchkin village to a family named Battles who had promptly christened him Wantowin, he had applied as soon as he was grown for a position in the army of Oz. The Wizard, then Supreme Ruler of the Kingdom, impressed by the Soldier's height and long green whiskers, had immediately hired him. Later he had been promoted by Ozma to fill the position of the entire staff and army of Oz. Wantowin had never been much of a fighter, but as war in Oz is practically outlawed and victories usually won by magic, he had got on very well. At his tenth about-face, Wantowin suddenly recalled the piece of cake he had stuffed into his pocket the night before, and generously offered it to Jellia.

"Oh, Wanny, how wonderful!" To the famished girl, the cake tasted even better than it had at the Wizard's party. Breaking it in half, she tried to force the soldier to eat a piece, but raising his hand sternly, Wantowin continued his self-imposed sentence. Seeing argument was useless, Jellia ate her own share and put the other half in the cupboard for the soldier's supper.

The plane was still slanting smoothly downward. After oiling all of Nick's

joints and thinking how fortunate it was they had brought along the oil can, Jellia began marching up and down behind the Soldier, examining the pictures and charts on the wall as she went along. The cake and a long drink of water from the cooler had done much to restore her courage and cheerfulness, and an occasional glance out the window was both pleasant and reassuring. The Oztober was dropping through fluffs and puffs of creamy cloud. "Just like whipped cream on strawberries C4 if we had any strawberries!" mused Jellia, withdrawing her gaze reluctantly from the window and resuming her march. "Oh, Nick, here are some directions!" she cried suddenly, stepping before a finely printed notice beside the water cooler.

"Directions?" The Tin Woodman looked round rather annoyed. He felt he had almost mastered the mechanism of the Ozoplane and did not care to start a new system. But the directions that Jellia read off had nothing to do with the navigation of the plane. They were rules for the behavior of passengers in the strat. "The air in this cabin has been magically treated," stated the notice. "So long as the windows and doors are closed, riders may safely pass through the highest strata. On debarking, however, it would be well to don my patent protective air helmets, see chest beneath second seat, or to take one, for each mile up, of my elutherated altitude pills from the recess in the table leg."

Jellia, whose bump of curiosity was larger than most, lost no time hunting for the helmets. Dragging the chest from beneath the second seat and paying no attention to the marching soldier, who stepped over her each time he passed, she impatiently lifted the lid. The four helmets in the chest were of some pliant, glassy material resembling cellophane. They belted in at

the waist, and after holding one up for Nick's inspection, Jellia put them back and returned the chest to its place.

"Now which leg of which table?" pondered the little Maid in Waiting, her mind turning to the altitude pills.

"Oh, what does it matter?" grinned the Tin Woodman as Jellia crawled under the navigator's table and began tapping its legs one after the other.

"You'll soon be on solid earth and won't need altitude pills." Nick had made up his mind to bring the Oztober down to a landing wherever they happened to be. But Jellia scarcely heard him, for at that moment she had discovered a small hook on one of the front legs of the table. Pulling it down, she disclosed a tall, triangular bottle in the hollow center. The pills were triangular too, and of every color in the rainbow.

"Take one after each mile," read Jellia, uncorking the bottle and taking a good sniff. The pills smelled as good as they looked, and she was about to sample one when the Soldier with Green Whiskers gave a hoarse scream and such a leap that his head hit the ceiling.

"Now what's the matter?" demanded Nick Chopper, turning around stiffly, while Jellia hastily corked the bottle, shoved it back into the table leg and crawled into the aisle.

"NICK!" shrieked poor Jellia. "What is it? What are they? Oh, Ozma! Oh, Wizard! Oh, help! HELP!"

And well might Jellia scream, for swarming round the tail of the Oztober came a perfect horde of iridescent monsters. In shape each resembled an octopus, but instead of arms they had long, horny spikes and spines.

Pressing close to the plane, they ogled at the shivering passengers as if

they were fish in some strange aquarium. Then, evidently angered at what they saw, they began hurling and banging themselves against the sides of the Oztober till it sounded like the rattle of machine guns. At this juncture, I am sorry to report, Wantowin Battles, after sounding a shrill retreat on the bugle attached to his belt, rushed into the dressing room and wrapped himself in the shower curtain.

Nick Chopper, who already loved the Wizard's ship as if it were his own, shuddered as each spike struck the shining metal. Then, deciding that flight was the better part of valor, he hastily changed course, zooming up and up, faster and faster and FASTER! For perhaps a thousand feet the goggle-eyed monsters pursued them, but at last the air grew too thin and rare for the spikers, and one by one they fell away. Their horrid squeals and screeches still came faintly to the three voyagers, and Jellia ran quickly to the back window to stare down after them.

"Why, I never knew there were wild animals in the air," stuttered Jellia, blinking her eyes rapidly.

"Now, I wouldn't exactly call them wild animals," said Nick argumentatively, twisting his neck from side to side to be sure he was not rusting.

"Well, they certainly weren't birds!" declared Jellia indignantly. "And how did they fly without wings? Come on out, Soldier, they're gone."

"Ah, so we have won?" Jauntily, the Soldier stepped out of the dressing room and resumed his marching. "Give me credit for sounding the retreat, comrades," he observed cheerfully. Jellia sniffed, and Nick Chopper said nothing.

"What are we going to do now?" inquired the little Oz Maid, going over to stand by the wheel. "How can we ever fly down with those awful creatures

below?"

"We'll just travel horizontally till we are out of their area," Nick told her complacently. "But for a while, anyway, we'll go up. After all, one has to go up to come down, you know. And when we do come down" Nick gave a satisfied little nod "it will be in a safe spot and far from those spiky airimals."

"So that's what they are! But how did you know?" Jellia looked admiringly at the Tin Woodman.

"Oh, it just came to me," admitted Nick with a modest cough. "Beasts of the air must have names, I suppose. Make a note of those monsters, will you, Wantwin?"

"I'm writing them up in my little green book now," mumbled the Soldier, who was in fact scribbling away hastily as he tramped up and down. "I've made a sketch of one, too."

"Good! Although I didn't suppose you'd looked at them long enough for that!" said Nick, a bit sarcastically. He glanced hastily at the page the soldier had before his nose. Then, deciding they had flown high enough, he pointed the Oztober toward the east, and after an hour's leisurely flying again began a slow and cautious descent.

"I do wonder where we'll land," mused Jellia, trying to pierce with her bright eyes the bank of fog that lay beneath.

"Somewhere in the Quadling Country, I should judge," answered Nick, twirling the wheel deftly to the right. "And when we do" At that moment, the Soldier with Green Whiskers let out another panicky squawk.

"Climb! Climb!" he panted, running up and down the aisle so fast he almost

ran himself down on the about-faces. "We're ambushed, comrades! Fire in the fog! Land on the stern!"

"Oh, tin cups and canyons!" rasped Nick Chopper, losing his temper at last.

"If this keeps up, how are we ever to get down? Hammer and tong it!

Something's always getting in the way. WILL you stop that silly marching?"

he yelled, snatching at the Soldier's sleeve as he raced by.

"HALT!" quavered Wantowin. Instantly obeying his own command, he stood trembling beside the navigator's table as Nick peered desperately down through the fog.

CHAPTER 6

STRUT OF THE STRAT

"What is it, Hippenscop?" Strutoovious the Seventh looked up impatiently as his first and fastest messenger came to a panting halt under the Imperial Canopy. Instead of answering, Hippenscop, his chest heaving and his eyes bulging, made a wordless gesture over his shoulder. Then, catching his foot in the royal bootscraper, he fell violently up the steps of the dais. This was not unusual, for anyone who falls in Stratovania falls up instead of down. Rather relieved to find himself before the throne at last, Hippenscop scrambled to his feet. Sucking in his breath, he announced hoarsely:

"I beg to report a strange and sonorbious monster falling through the fog over Half Moon Lake."

"Are you sure it is not a Zoomer?" Throwing down the morning star which he had been reading, Strutoovious stared coldly at the messenger.

"Ho, no! Ho, NO!" Hippenscop shook his head positively. "It has wings and a tail, your Stratjesty. Wings, a tail, and seven eyes! But HARK!" The

menacing whirr and sputter following the messenger's speech made even the Ruler of all the Stratovarians leap off his throne. Striding rapidly after the terrified servitor, Strut, followed by half the inhabitants of his irradiant Tip-toposphere, reached the shores of Half Moon Lake.

"Skydragon!" he announced after a brief glance at the gleaming shape drifting down through the fog. "Quick, Hippen! Summon the Royal Blowmen! Back, stand back, you witless woffs! Do you wish to be crushed and eaten? Yon monster will alight on the North shore any moonite now!" At Strut's loud warning, half of his subjects took to their heels, while the rest scurried round to the South side of the lake, every head turned up toward the mysterious dragon.

Only of course it was not a dragon. It was the silver-bodied Oztober, inside of which the agitation was almost as great as the alarm of the Airlanders below.

"How long have we? How long'll it be before we land?" gulped Jellia.

Remembering the Wizard's instructions, she jerked out the box of air helmets and next made a dive under the navigator's table. "Here, take one C4 twoC4 threeC4 Oh, how many shall we take?" groaned the little Oz Maid, holding up the bottle of altitude pills. "FF20`One, after each mile up,' but how many miles have we come?"

"One hundred and one thousand, eight hundred and sixty-seven feet!" mumbled the Soldier with Green Whiskers, reading the figures from a shining metal hypsometer clamped to the navigator's table. "All we have to do is figure how many feet in a mile."

"Fifty-two hundred and some," puffed Nick, working away desperately at his

wheel and buttons to bring the Oztober down without crashing. "Oh, take twenty!" he directed sharply as Jellia and the Soldier stood regarding him with open mouths. It was no time, as Jellia later told Ozma, to be doing long division. With trembling fingers she counted out twenty pills for the Soldier with Green Whiskers. Then, popping twenty into her own mouth and crunching them desperately between her teeth, she handed the bottle to Nick Chopper.

"No, No! None for me!" The Tin Woodman waved the bottle impatiently aside.

"High altitude won't injure my metal, but keep this oil can handy, Jellia, and whatever happens, don't let me rust!" Choking on the pills, which were dry and rather bitter, Jellia nodded earnestly. Tucking the oil can into the little bag that hung from her wrist, she began nervously dragging on her air helmet. Wantowin Battles already had adjusted his and swallowed his pills. Now, peering out one of the round windows, he trembled so violently all his weapons rattled and clanked to the dismal tune of his fright.

"Th-thousands of them!" quavered the Soldier. "What kind of place is this, anyway? It's so bright it hurts my eyes. Oh, I just know there'll be fighting! Look, I'd far better stay in the cabin, as someone must guard the plane!"

"But not YOU!" Nick Chopper spoke with great firmness. Then, spinning the wheel rapidly and gauging to a nicety the distance between the ship and the sparkling airoisphere, he touched the "down" and "stop" buttons simultaneously. Coasting down the last little hill of wind, the Oztober came to a gentle and complete stop on the shore of a rainbow-hued body of water.

"Now, now! Take your time," cautioned the Tin Woodman as Jellia started impulsively toward the door. Pulling off one of the cushion covers, Nick

began polishing himself vigorously. As the discoverer of this new and astonishing airland, he wished to make a good impression. From what he had seen, it was a country well worth claiming for Ozma of Oz. "Here, let me go first," he said, tossing aside the cushion cover. "Keep close to me, Jellia and Soldier. Under no circumstances are you to retreat unless I give the signal. Great Tinhoppers, what was that?" A long wail rather like the squall of a cat suddenly had rent the quiet air of the cabin.

"Stowaway!" cried Jellia as another unmistakable meow followed the first.

"Sounds like Dorothy's cat." But it was not Eureka that Jellia pulled from behind the second seat cushion. It was a small black kit-bag. The green eyes turned off and on like electric lights, and the tail curved over the back to form a handle. Round its neck hung a green placard:

"This Kit-Bag of Magic to be used

Only in cases of extreme emergency.

To open, pull the tail. C4 WIZ."

"Well, Gee Whiz, is this an emergency?" Jellia held the bag out nervously.

"ErC4 YES!" declared Nick Chopper after a second glance out of the window.

"Bring it along! And remember, you have nothing to fear! I, the Emperor of all the Winkies, am with you. With kind words and courteous gestures we will win the friendship and allegiance of these strange airlanders for Ozma of Oz."

Jellia knew Nick's red plush heart, given him by the Wizard, was the kindest in all Oz. Nevertheless, she took a firmer hold on the kit bag, and only after assuring herself that Wantowin had his saber and blunderbuss did she follow the Tin Woodman down the Oztober's ladder.

There was a complete and astonished silence as the three Ozians stepped from the plane. And it must be confessed, Jellia and the Soldier in their transparent helmets and the Tin Woodman without a helmet were strange enough to startle any airbody. So it's no wonder the Stratovanians were as amazed at the appearance of the travelers as the travelers were amazed at the Stratovanians. Separated only by the waters of Half Moon Lake, they confronted each other with growing alarm. Strut, who had expected this dragon to roar, spurt flames and then rush forward to attack them, hardly knew what to do when these three curious beings stepped from the monster's interior. Noting with alarm that his Blowmen had not yet arrived, he determined to hold the invaders in conversation, if possible.

So with his head and chest high and walking with the queer, strutting gait that characterized all of the dwellers in Stratovania, he advanced slowly around the edge of Half Moon Lake. A few paces behind strutted the rest of his retainers. Just as slowly, Nick Chopper and his two companions advanced to meet them.

The Airlanders were a head taller than even the Tin Woodman. Their hair grew straight up on end, sparkling and crackling with electricity in a really terrifying manner. Their eyes were star-shaped and shaded by long, silver lashes; the noses and mouths were straight and firm, the foreheads transparent. Some shone as from a hidden sun, while across the brows of others tiny black clouds chased one another in rapid succession. Watching their foreheads would be a good way, decided Jellia Jam, to find out whether they were pleased or angry. Strut and his subjects wore belted tunics of some iridescent, rainbow-hued material, and silver sandals laced to the knee.

>From the ears of the men hung huge, crescent pendants, while from those of the women star earrings danced and dangled. Each Stratovanian carried a tall staff tipped with wings. Beyond, Jellia saw a country of such dazzling beauty, she was almost afraid to breathe lest it vanish before her eyes. The trees were tall and numerous, with gleaming, prism-shaped trunks and a mass of cloudlike foliage. Some bore fruit that actually seemed to be illuminated C4 oranges, pears, and peaches glowing like decorated electric light bulbs! Moon and star flowers grew in great profusion, and in the distance caves and grottoes of purest crystal scintillated in the high noon sun. So far as Jellia could see, there were no houses or castles, but there were hundreds of gay canopies held up by crystal poles. Jellia was just standing on tiptoe to glimpse the furnishings of the nearest Canopy when Nick Chopper, feeling that time had come to speak, raised his tin arm and called out imperiously:

"I, Emperor of the East and the Winkies, hereby claim this new and beautiful airosphere for Ozma of Oz, and bid you, its illustrious inhabitants, pledge to her your allegiance! At the same time, I bestow upon all of you Upper Airians free citizenship in the glorious Land of Oz!"

At this bold speech Strut stopped and stood as if rooted to the spot. Not only was he dumbfounded to discover he could understand the language of these curious beings, but if what he heard were correct, they actually were claiming his Kingdom for their own.

"Well, how was that?" whispered Nick, looking down sideways at Jellia.

"Terrible! Terrible!" moaned the little Oz Maid. "Oh, my! We'd better look out!" Catching hold of Wantowin's hand, for he already showed signs of

retreating, she looked anxiously at the approaching Airman. Black clouds were simply racing across his imperial brow; his eyes flashed red and blue lights, and his hair positively crackled with indignation and fury.

"Oh, my, I do hope you are feeling well," ventured Jellia as Strut took an enormous stride toward them. "If you have a headache or anything, we could easily come back tomorrow."

"Stand where you are!" sneered Strut. Looking over his shoulder, he made sure his twenty tall Bowmen had arrived and were pushing their way through the crowd. "Stand where you are, or I'll have you blown to atoms!"

"Now, now, let us not come to blows!" begged Nick Chopper. "We have much to learn from you, and you from us, and I assure you we have come in the spirit of highest friendship!"

"Humph! So that's what it is, a friend ship! Looks like a dragon to me!"

Folding his arms, Strut scowled past the three travelers to where the Oztober rested like some giant butterfly on the shore of Half Moon Lake.

Then, making a secret signal to the Blowmen who had lined up before him, he shouted fiercely, "I am Strut of the Strat and Supreme Ruler of all the Upper Areas. In daring to claim Stratovania for your foolish countrywoman, you indeed aim high and will go, I promise you, still higher! Three blasts and a toot, men!" As Strut issued this cruel command, his twenty stern-looking warriors lifted their curved horns and puffed out their cheeks for a tremendous blow.

Jellia Jam, feeling that if they ever needed help it was right here and now, frantically sought with her one free hand to open the Wizard's Kit-Bag. As she fumbled with the curved handle, Strut raised his long arm. "Wait!" he cried tensely. "Not yet!" Lowering their horns and exhaling their breaths

in loud whistles, the Blowmen stared at him in surprise. Strut had been examining the strangers from Oz more attentively. Now he strode over to Jellia, jerked off her helmet and ran his hand slowly over her smooth brown hair. Jellia, expecting to faint or expire without the helmet, let out a piteous groan. But the altitude pills were evidently powerful enough to protect her, and feeling no ill effects she glanced up timidly at the towering Stratovanian. Dark clouds no longer flitted across his brow. Indeed, he looked almost pleasant. "Ve-ry pret-ty!" he mused, stroking Jellia's hair softly. "Not wiry or stand-uppish like ours. Hippenscop! Summon her Majesty the Queen. She'll be delighted with this beautiful little creature! But it is my intention to blow away these other insolent invaders from Oz, keeping only this smooth-haired lassie for our Starina." "Oh, No! Oh, NO!" begged Jellia, pulling back with all her strength. "Stop! You can't have Jellia," yelled Nick Chopper, flinging out his arms. "Ready C4 aim C4 fire!" quavered the Soldier with Green Whiskers. And pointing his ancient gun at Strut, he valiantly pulled the trigger. But Wantowin's aim was very bad. The twenty marbles with which the gun was loaded sipped harmlessly past the Airman's ears, stinging quite a few of his subjects and frightening at least fifty into full flight. Strut himself was not impressed. Giving Nick a push that sent him sprawling and the Soldier a shove, he drew Jellia firmly away from her friends. Terrified as she was, the little Oz Maid could not help a small thrill of satisfaction to have been chosen by a monarch as High and Mighty as Strut of the Strat to be Starina to him and his Queen. "As for you two," said Strut to Nick and the Soldier, "blowing up is quite

painless, I assure you, and if you ever do come down, you'll doubtless have many interesting things to tell."

The Blowmen placed a guard around Nick and the Soldier, and stepped back to their posts. Nick Chopper and Wantowin, stunned by the swiftness of events, stared sadly at their little Jellia as the Blowmen for a second time raised their horns. But Strut, intent on his Warriors, had dropped Jellia's hand. Quick as a flash, she pulled the kit-bag's tail and pulled out the first object her fingers closed on. It was a small, green trumpet. Without stopping to think or reason, Jellia placed it to her lips and blew three frantic toots. Instantly a light-green vapor flowed from the mouth of the horn, spreading like a fast-moving cloud over the entire assemblage C4 a light-green vapor accompanied by three musical notes.

CHAPTER 7

A MOST RELUCTANT STARINA

As the last note died away in a sweet, reluctant echo, Strut's Bowmen threw down their horns. With wild shouts and cheers, they began to embrace as if each were the other's long-lost brother. The behavior of the rest of the Stratovanians was equally puzzling. They sang, they whistled, they laughed and stamped their feet from sheer gaiety. Strut, hurrying over to Nick Chopper, shook him heartily by the hand.

"Say, Hay-Hurray! How ARE you?" he demanded exuberantly. "How are you and all of your aunts, uncles and infant nieces?"

"Wha C4 what's that?" sputtered Nick Chopper, completely taken aback by this sudden show of friendliness. Kabebe the Queen, tears of joy streaming down her moon-shaped face, seized the hands of the Soldier with Green

Whiskers and was dancing him 'round and 'round. Unnoticed in the general hubbub and hilarity, Jellia managed to steal another glance at the green trumpet. Printed in white letters on the handle was this surprising sentence: "\$\$This trumpet contains cheer gas."&& Cheer Gas! With a tremulous sigh, for the last few moments had been a great strain, Jellia slipped the Wizard's instruments back into the kit bag and zipped it shut. Strangely enough, the gas had not affected any of the people from Oz. In fact, Jellia had never felt less like cheering in her whole life.

"This way! Ray, Ray, hur\$\$ray!&&" shouted Strut, who now had Nick by one arm and the Soldier by the other. "Quickly! Go and prepare the Guest Canopies, Queen Kabebe! These travelers are doubtless weary and need rest and refreshment. Have you any preference as to canopies?" he inquired, leaning down to look in Nick Chopper's face.

"Do you have any \$\$tin&& canopies?" asked Nick hoarsely. He was still dazed by Strut's unaccountable change of manner. "I always feel safer under a tin roof. It is such a beautiful and dependable metal."

"Tin? Oh, Ha-Ha-HA!" Strut blinked his star eyes rapidly. "I'm afraid we have no tin, but any other kind, my dearFF20C4"

"Nick Chopper, Tin Woodman of Oz," put in Jellia, who felt it was high time they were properly introduced. "And thereFF20C4" she hastily indicated the Soldier with Green Whiskers "C4FF20there is Wantowin Battles, the Grand Army of Oz!" At Jellia's introduction, Wantowin dropped Strut's arm to shake hands.

"And who are you, my lively little Skylark?" he questioned.

"Oh, I'm just Jellia Jam, Ozma's Chief Maid-in-Waiting," Jellia said as she

trotted uneasily along at his side. The rest of the Stratovanians, still cheering and singing, but in a more subdued way, came streaming after them. Rather anxiously, Jellia wondered how long the effects of the cheer gas would last and how soon Strut would remember about blowing Nick and the Soldier away again. It seemed unlikely that she would have another chance to open the kit bag without detection.

The Queen, who had not been as cheered by the gas as the others, seemed somewhat unfriendly as she walked along behind her Royal Husband. Every few minutes, in fact, she would lean forward and give Jellia a spiteful pinch.

Jellia bore this rude treatment with extreme patience, making no complaint or outcry and merely walking a little faster to keep out of the creature's way. Jellia wanted to see all she could of this wonderful, sparkling airland so she could tell Ozma and Dorothy all about it when she returned to Oz.

The Soldier with Green Whiskers had fallen back to a place beside Queen Kababe and was gazing about him with contemptuous snorts. Any country that was not green like the land surrounding the Emerald City held no interest for him. Noticing that Jellia was faring quite well without her helmet and finding his rather stuffy, he took it off and slung it over one shoulder.

As he did so, he caught the Queen in the very act of pinching Jellia.

Disgusted by such conduct, he sternly took her arm, and each time Kababe pinched Jellia, the Soldier would slap her fingers. After the fifth slap, the Queen peered at him with astonished admiration, for on this whole Tip-toposphere there was no man bold enough to strike a member of the reigning family. Soon Kababe was so fascinated by Wantowin's flowing green whiskers, she forgot all about pinching Jellia. By this time the strange

and still faintly cheering procession had reached Strut's Royal Canopy.

Waving away his giggling Bowmen, Strut lifted Jellia to one of the splendid Star Thrones.

To Kabebe King Strut spoke impatiently. "Don't you remember you were to see about the Guest Canopies?" Kababe dared not object, but looked quite displeased. "Just tell Bittsywittle to bring us a tray of air-ades and a wind pudding," ordered Strut, giving the Queen a jovial shove to help her on her way. "You'd like an air-ade, wouldn't you, little lady?" Poor Jellia shook her head no and then quickly changed it to yes. The furnishings of the Royal Pavilion were so rich and dazzling and the Star Throne so high and grand that she felt completely bewildered. As Kabebe shuffled away, Jellia smiled nervously at Nick and the Soldier. At Strut's invitation they had seated themselves cross-legged on bright-blue air cushions and looked as uncomfortable as they felt.

"Well, what do you think of Stratovania by now?" inquired Strut, settling back complacently. "I believe you will all enjoy high life as much as we do once you are used to it."

Nick Chopper was on the point of saying they had no intention of getting used to it or of staying one single moment longer than was positively necessary when he caught Jellia's worried expression and muttered instead, "Beautiful, very beautiful."

"But where are the houses?" asked the Soldier with Green Whiskers bluntly.

"These tent tops are all right for a war or for field sports, but I should think you'd find them rather chilly for all year 'round living."

"Stratovania," explained Strut as he crossed his long legs, "is never

chilly. It is surrounded by a rim of warm air that keeps the temperature just as you find it today. No wind, no rain, no storms of any kind," he concluded proudly.

"And it's all so bright and shiny," sighed Jellia Jam, blinking down at the floor of the pavilion, which was an inlay of sparkling glass, and then off to the countless bright canopies that dotted the airscape beyond. The surface of Strut's curious Skyland was of gleaming crystal, sometimes smooth as ice, sometimes rough and rocky, but always flashing with the brilliance of diamonds. "Everything sparkles so," finished Jellia, rather wishing she had brought her dark glasses.

"That's because Stratovania is formed of solid air," smiled Strut, tapping one of the iridescent posts that supported the silken canopy over their heads. "And I am its High and Mighty Sovereign, ruler of the Spikers who inhabit the strata below and of the Zoomers who inhabit the strata above, and of all the other spheres and half-spheres in this particular area.

Strut of the Strat! Consider THAT, Little One, and be proud that you have been chosen to be our Starina!"

"But Jellia can't stay here!" cried the Soldier with Green Whiskers, springing indignantly to his feet. "Jellia'sFF20C4"

"Tut! Tut! Now do not excite yourself! Here comes Bittsywittle, and we'll all have a glass of liquid air." As Strut leaned forward to speak to his small, electric-haired page, Jellia shook her head sharply at Nick and the Soldier, for both seemed on the point of dragging her off the throne.

"Wait!" Jellia formed the word soundlessly, and with puzzled frowns her two friends sank back on their air cushions, accepting rather glumly the sparkling goblets of air-ade from the light-footed servitor. With the

air-ade Bittsywittle passed heaping saucers of wind pudding, a fluffy, cloud-like confection that made Jellia's mouth positively water.

"You will find the diet here light but nourishing," Strut informed them blandly. "Our atmosphere is so rare and exhilarating, we need little but sun and starlight to keep us going. But now, friends, I propose a toast to Jellia, our new Starina!" As Nick and Wantowin rose unwillingly to their feet, for the whole affair struck them as perfectly preposterous, Strut lifted his glass and downed his air-ade. Then the Soldier rather sulkily drank his. Nick, who never partook of food or drink of any kind, set his goblet on a small tabouret and stared sadly at Jellia Jam. The Tin Woodman feared she was seriously considering Strut's proposal. Jellia surmised what Nick was thinking, but as there was no way of explaining that she was just trying to gain time till they could find some way to escape, she smiled wanly back at him and swallowed her own air-ade.

Suddenly Jellia felt herself rising into the air. Before she could utter a sound, her head was pressed tightly against the top of the canopy. Then, dizzily, she began to float 'round and 'round like a pretty balloon just let off its string.

"Ho, Ho!" roared Strut. "Our air-ade has made you light-headed, m'lass! But wait, I'll fetch you down!" He tapped the winged staff he held in his right hand sharply on the floor. Instantly, it spread its wings, carrying him up beside Jellia. Grasping her hand, he drew her down to the throne.

"There," he chuckled, handing her a heavy glass globe to hold, "that will weigh you down!" Reflecting that one of these winged sticks might be a handy thing to have, Jellia clutched the glass globe. Still weak and giddy

from her flight, she could not bring herself to touch the wind pudding Bittsywittle had placed on the arm of the throne. The Soldier with Green Whiskers, on account of his heavy weapons and boots, had not gone so high as Jellia, but even he, instead of sitting on his air cushion, was now seated on nothing C4 three feet above Nick Chopper's head. He looked extremely unhappy, as indeed he was.

"Don't worry," grinned Strut, who seemed highly amused by the whole affair, "you'll come down presently." He tapped his winged staff on the head as he spoke, and the staff immediately folded its wings. "Tell me," he urged, turning to Nick Chopper, who was looking anxiously from the Soldier to Jellia. "Do you come from below or be-high?"

"Be-oth," answered the Tin Woodman, too confused by this time to know what he was saying. "Taking off from the Emerald City of Oz, we first flew up, then over, then up and next down!"

"Hmmm-mmmn, OZ?" Two very black clouds floated across Strut's transparent brow. "I seem to remember your mentioning Oz before! I seem to rememberFF20C4" Strut's voice was no longer pleasant, and watching his brow growing blacker and blacker, Jellia frantically sought to open the Wizard's kit bag. Unless she could release some more of the cheer gas, almost anything might happen.

Out of the third point of his left star eye, Strut saw what she was doing.

"Don't fidget, my dear," he snapped crossly. "It is unbecoming for our new Starina of Stratovania to fidget or to unpack her own bag. HereFF20C4"

Taking the kit bag from her, he tossed it carelessly beneath his throne.

Jellia's heart sank. She hoped Nick would say no more about claiming

Stratovania for Ozma. But the Tin Woodman, already launched upon a glowing

description of their famous Fairy Land, was working up to that very point.

"One hundred and one thousand, eight hundred and sixty-seven feet below this airoisphere," began Nick, taking a long breath, "lies the grand, grand and incomparable Fairyland of Oz. Oblong in shape, it is divided into four triangular Kingdoms. The Northern and Purple Land of the Gillikens is ruled by Jo King; the Blue, Western Land of the Munchkins by his Majesty King Cheeriohed; the Eastern, Yellow Land of the Winkies is governed by myself; the Southern Red Land of the Quadlings by Glinda, the Good Sorceress.

"But all of us are subject to the benign rule of Ozma, the young Fairy Ruler of the whole Kingdom. Her capitol, the Emerald City, in the exact center of Oz, is one of the most beautiful cities out of the world! Surrounding Oz and protecting it from invasions is a deadly desert, and in Ozma's possession are more jewels and treasure than you doubtless have seen in the whole of your air existence."

"Humph!" growled Strut, looking fiercer than ever. But paying no heed to the ominous storm clouds forming on his brow, Nick loftily proceeded. "Not only is Ozma possessed of more jewels than any other sovereign known, but in her castle are magic appliances that make her the most powerful of rulers. For instance, Ozma has a magic belt with which she can transport anyone anywhere. On her wall hangs a magic picture in which she can see what is happening to her friends or foes, right while it is happening. In her safe is a magic fan to blow away her enemies, and so many other strange instruments of magic I have not time to describe them. Among her advisors is the famous Wizard of Oz, who spends all his time studying magic and perfecting new inventions. The Ozoplane in which we made this perilous

flight is his latest masterpiece. And now that you know a bit more of Ozma and her famous country, I am sure you will be delighted to become a part of our happy realm and acknowledge Ozma as the Supreme Sovereign of Stratovania."

"What?" screamed Strut, bounding off his throne and furiously confronting the Tin Woodman. "How DARE you suggest such a thing? This is the second time you have done so! Why should I, Strut of the Strat, acknowledge this miserable earthlander as my supreme anything? I am a thousand times richer and more important than any Belowlander below. Oz! OZ! Indeed!"

As Nick backed off in alarm, Strut shook his long staff over the Tin Woodman's head. "Why, you can't even pronounce the name of your own country!" he sneered. "It is not Oz, as you say it, but OHS C4 the Zone of Ohs, to be more correct. And if Ohs is in the zone of Ohs, it is Ozone, which means AIR C4 and that makes it belong to ME! So I, Strut of the Strat, hereby do claim OZONIA for myself and my people, and you, my fine Mr. Funnel Top, shall take me there!"

CHAPTER 8

STRUT OF THE STRAT SETS OFF FOR OZ

"Don't you do it! Don't you do it!" Plumping down on his air cushion, for the effects of the air-ade had worn off at last, the Soldier with Green Whiskers wildly sounded retreat on his green bugle. Jellia, knowing he would run as fast as he could and perhaps wreck the Ozoplane before she and Nick could reach it, jumped off her throne and seized him by the coattails. As she did so, Strut gave the glass gong beside him a resounding whack. Before any of the three travelers could take another step, the twenty

Blowmen tramped back into the Royal Pavilion. The cheer engendered by the cheer gas had entirely evaporated by now, and they looked very grim indeed.

At a signal from Strut, one seized Nick, a second the Soldier. A third was taking hold of Jellia when Strut sternly waved his aside.

"No, No! Not that one! She is our new Starina!" he told the Blowmen roughly.

"Now, you are to stay right here, Jellia, my dear, and help rule over Stratovania while I descend to Ohs and take possession of that rich and prosperous country. And sooner than soon I will return, bringing you the magic treasure and jewels and the crown and scepter of this Ohsma!"

"Oh, but you musn't!" wailed Jellia, clasping her hands desperately. "Ozma is a \$\$real&& Princess and much more beautiful than I!"

"In that case, I shall bring Ohsma back and make her a Starina also!" promised Strut.

"Now Hippenscop," he directed, shaking his finger at the odd-looking page, "you and Junnenrump are to obey Jellia in everything. I'll leave three Blowmen here to protect our Starina. The others, and all of my able-bodied fighters, shall fly with me to Ohs."

"The Ozoplane holds only four!" cried Jellia, looking desperately over at Nick, who was struggling angrily to free himself from the Blowmen. But they had his arms pinioned behind his back, and the poor Tin Woodman was unable to help himself.

"Oh, that's all right!" answered Strut. "I and this Tin Emperor will ride in the Friend-ship, and the others will follow on their flying sticks, and soon I will return with all the treasures of Ohs!" As the Blowmen started away, shoving Nick and the Soldier with Green Whiskers ahead of them,

Jellia felt so frightened and alone that she burst into tears.

"Oh, please, please, couldn't you leave the Soldier to keep me company?" she sobbed, wiping her streaming eyes on her sash.

"Of course, if you wish!" Motioning to the Blowmen, they picked up Wantowin as if he had been a sack of potatoes and tossed him roughly back into the Royal Pavilion. He landed with a clatter at Jellia's feet.

"But see here! I am not sure I can find the way back to Oz!" protested Nick Chopper as Strut fell into step at his side. "I happened upon this airoisphere by the merest chance and have no idea in which direction Oz now lies."

"Just the same, I think you will take me there!" Strut grinned wickedly, tapping Nick on the shoulder with his staff. He already had sent Junnenrump to summon the army, and, glancing over his shoulder, Nick saw a thousand young airmen strutting along behind them. As they came to the shores of Half Moon Lake, Hippenscop came panting and gasping into view.

"Her Skyness the new Starina bade me give you this," he puffed, handing the Tin Woodman the small oil can the Wizard had given him at the party. Nick had forgotten all about his oil can, and without it he was likely to rust and become perfectly helpless. Taking it thankfully from the messenger, he hung it on a hook beneath his arm and headed reluctantly for the Oztober. Nick had no intention of flying Strut to the Emerald City. Even if he had to wreck the plane, he would find some way to keep the greedy airman and his legions from conquering Oz. Then he would return and rescue Jellia and the soldier.

But without a word to Strut, for argument at this point would have been useless, he mounted the ladder, walked through the cozy cabin, and seated

himself in the pilot's chair. Strut paused on the top rung of the ladder before he entered. "Follow us closely, men," he commanded gruffly, "no matter how far or fast we fly." Strut's young warriors raised their flying staffs to show that they understood, and with a few final directions, the Stratovanian stepped over the sill, slammed the door of the Oztober and walked rapidly forward, examining everything with lively interest.

"So this dragon-body really flies?" he said, bending curiously over the navigator's table. "Ho, what's this? I thought you told me you had no way of finding the route back." Nick Chopper, much more surprised than Strut, picked up the tidy map that lay on top of the buttons. It certainly had not been there when he left the plane, but here it was now, showing the complete course they had taken since leaving the Emerald City. Concluding this was some of the Wizard's magic, Nick examined the map attentively. Each turn up or down, each mile east or west, was charted accurately.

"All you have to do is follow this in reverse," exclaimed Strut.

Unaccustomed as he was to flying except by staff, he was nevertheless sharp enough to realize the value of a good map when he saw one. "And remember now, no tricks!" he warned sternly. "Land me safely in Ohs and you will be suitably rewarded. But land me anywhere else and you will be completely obliterated!"

Nick said nothing. Weary of Strut's threats and boasts, the Woodman touched the button to inflate the Oztober's balloon, and the "up," "south" and "fast" buttons. In the whirr and splutter of their takeoff, the Airlander's further remarks and directions were completely drowned out.

CHAPTER 9

JELLIA IN A FRIGHTFUL JAM

For a long time after the departure of the Tin Woodman and of Strut and his legions, Jellia sat forlornly on the Star Throne trying to stem the tears that coursed slowly down her cheeks. To be stranded on this high and dangerous airosphere was bad enough, but the thought of Strut flying off to destroy Ozma and steal all her treasures was more frightening still.

"What on airth shall we do?" questioned Jellia with a rueful smile of the Soldier with Green Whiskers, who was tramping morosely up and down the pavilion. Halting in his march, Wantowin shook his head dubiously.

"That I cannot say!" he murmured, taking off his cap and staring gloomily inside. "I have no standing in this country at all! But you, Jellia, are a Starina. Therefore you must decide what is to be done. And whatever your Majesty's orders may be, I will carry them out to the letter. \$\$To the letter!&&" declared Wantowin, standing up very straight and tall.

"Oh, bother `my Majesty'!" scolded Jellia. "You know perfectly well I didn't \$\$ask&& to be a Starina of this terrible place!"

"It is not what you want, but what you are that counts!" insisted the Soldier, stubbornly. "And there's no getting around it, Jellia, you \$\$are&& a Starina! So while you are deciding what is to be done, I'll just do a bit of reconnoitering. It might be well to know the lay of the air!"

"Wait!" cried Jellia as Wantowin started smartly down the steps. "Whatever you do, Wanny, don't run!" she implored earnestly. "You might easily run off the edge, and then where'd you be? So do please be careful, and if anything frightens you, run straight back here! Do you promise?"

"Nothing ever frightens me!" said the Soldier in an offended voice. Marching

sternly down the steps, he was off at a double-quick, without even a glance over his shoulder. Feeling more alone than ever, Jellia sighed and folded her hands in her lap. But Wantowin's words, foolish as they were, had done her good. After all, she was a Starina, for the time being anyway. So, straightening her crown and drying her tears, Jellia tried to think how she should act under such bewildering circumstances.

How would Ozma act, for instance, if she were sitting on the throne of this singular airtry? Even thinking of the gentle and dignified little Girl Ruler of Oz steadied Jellia. Holding her head very high, she stepped down from the dais and began pacing slowly up and down the pavilion, switching her green skirts in such a regal manner that the two messengers who had returned quietly to their posts stared at her with new interest and admiration.

"Is there anything we might bring your Stratjesty?" asked Junnenrump, bowing from the waist and clicking his heels smartly together. At his question Jellia paused and eyed the two speculatively.

"Why, yes," she decided after a moment's thought. "You, Junnenrump, may send someone to amuse me, and you, Hippenscop, may bring me two of those winged staffs. It is neither safe nor proper for a Starina and her Army to be without them!"

"But your Skyness!" Hippenscop leaped into the air and spun round and round in an agony of embarrassment. "There are no extra staffs!" he blurted, finally coming to a stop before her. The little fellow looked so distressed, Jellia was on the point of letting him off. Then, remembering just in time that she was bound to be obeyed, she raised her arm.

"Go!" she commanded haughtily. "And do not return without two winged staffs!" Junnenrump already had started, and at Jellia's stern command Hippenscop backed dejectedly down the steps, his eyes bulging with dismay and consternation.

"If Wanny and I had flying sticks, we'd at least be as well off as the rest of these Airlanders," reasoned Jellia, resuming her walk. "But what funny names," she mused as the messengers disappeared in two different directions and at two different speeds. "They make me think of FF20C4" Here Jellia took a little run and jump, following it with a skip and a hop. "I suppose," she continued, talking conversationally to herself, "that is what their names really mean, everything is so mixed up here." Regaining her throne in one long slide, Jellia brought up with a slight start. This, she decided, was no way for a Starina to act. Smoothing down her dress, she walked sedately to Strut's throne and reached underneath.

The real reason she had got rid of the messengers, of course, was so she could recover the kit-bag and have a chance to examine its contents without being observed. The cheer gas had saved them on one occasion, and perhaps there was magic powerful enough to enable her and the Soldier to escape from the aiosphere before Strut returned. The bag was still there, and snatching it up in her arms, Jellia climbed back on the throne. But just as she was about to zip it open, Junnenrump bounded up the steps of the pavilion, dragging a lean old Skylander by the hand.

"His Majesty's Piper!" announced Junnenrump, giving the Piper a shove forward and seating himself expectantly on the messenger's bench. Jellia was annoyed to have Junnenrump return so soon. But since she had sent for someone to amuse her, she could not very well object. So, resting her chin

in her hand, she looked curiously at the Royal Piper. The old Skylander was tremendously tall and thin. His tunic was short and plaited, and under his arms he carried a pair of enormous bagpipes. Jellia had never cared for bagpipes, but on an airosphere she supposed wind instruments such as this naturally would be popular. The Piper, however, did not immediately play on his pipes. Instead, he struck a few light and pleasant chords on the top buttons of his tunic.

"Shall I do a buck and wing, or a little Skyland fling?

Shall I sing a little sing, for you, Dear?"

bawled the Piper cheerfully. He looked so funny that Jellia burst out laughing. Thus encouraged, the Piper proceeded to sing, punctuating his song with extraordinary leaps and toe tappings.

"When we Skylanders feel low, we just Dance the stratispho;

"Step it high, kick and fly, toss the Partner up ski-high. High HO!

"Would you care to try it?" he asked politely, holding out his hand to Jellia.

"No, No! Not today!" gasped the Oz maid, backing as far as the star throne would allow. "But I've really enjoyed watching you very much, and your singing is lovely," she added generously.

"Ah, but wait until you hear me play," puffed the Piper. Raising his pipes, he blew forth such a hurricane of whistles, squeals and fierce thunderings that poor Jellia clapped both hands to her ears. "Tell him to go away," she screamed above the awful din, wildly motioning to Junnenrump, who was tapping his foot in time to the pipes and looking highly diverted. "Tell him to come back tomorrow."

The fierce music of the bagpipes had brought airlanders running from every direction. Crowding round the pavilion, they waved and bowed to the new Starina. Realizing she never would have any privacy under the Imperial Canopy, Jellia slipped off her throne. The messenger had the Piper by the tunic tails and was easing him gently down the steps. Jellia waited till they reached the bottom, then, as all the airlanders began to run after the still furiously pumping piper, Jellia started in the opposite direction. Surely somewhere, she thought, clutching the kit-bag close to her, somewhere she could find a quiet corner or cave or clump of bushes where she could examine the contents of the Wizard's bag without interruption. So anxious was Jellia to be by herself, she broke into a run. Failing to notice a crystal bar stretched across the path, she tripped and fell violently up a tune tree. Falling down is bad enough, but falling up is worse still. Jellia not only had barked her shins on the crystal bar, but had bounced into the air so high she lost her breath and plunged down so abruptly among the top branches of the tune tree that she was somewhat scratched and shaken. She knew it must be a tune tree because plump black notes grew in clusters like cherries between the leaves. Several, dislodged by her fall, broke into gay little arias and chords. At any other time Jellia would have been quite interested, but now she was too agitated and upset to care.

"Such a country C4 or airtry!" groaned the Oz maid, rubbing her left ankle and her right knee. "One can't even fall down in their own way!" Parting the branches, the ruffled little girl looked crossly out. It was quite a long way to the ground, but nevertheless Jellia decided to climb down. But suddenly it occurred to her that the top of the tune tree was as good a

place as any to open the kit-bag. Easing herself to a larger limb, she balanced the bag carefully in her lap and stretched out her hand to pull the tail. Then a piercing scream and the thump of a hundred footsteps made her draw it back in a hurry. Parting the branches of the tree for a second time, she saw Wantowin Battles running toward her like the wind.

"Help! Help! Save me!" yelled the Soldier with Green Whiskers. And he had reason to yell, for just two leaps behind him panted Kabebe, waving an enormous crystal rolling pin. After the Queen pounded the three big Blowmen, and after the Blowmen came nearly a hundred men, women and children. Before Jellia had time even to guess why they were chasing the Army, Wantowin tripped over the same crystal bar that had caused her upfall and landed with a terrific grunt in the branches beside her, scattering half- and quarter-notes in every direction. The Airlanders stopped short and watched with breathless interest as the Soldier disappeared into the thick foliage of the tune tree.

"What's the matter? What happened?" whispered Jellia, reaching out to steady the soldier, who was bouncing wildly up and down on a nearby limb.

"YOU?" gasped Wantowin, almost losing his balance at the shock of seeing her. "Oh, Jellia! We must leave at once! AT ONCE! As I was passing the cooking caves, Kabebe rushed out and grabbed me. She has decided to blow us away most any minute now. She has persuaded the Airlanders that Strut is lost and never will return. Oh why, WHY, did we ever fly to this terrible place?"

"Be quiet!" hissed Jellia, frightened almost out of her wits at this new turn of affairs. "How can I think with you making all that noise?"

"Come down! Come down!" bawled Kabebe. "Come down before I shake you down!"

Grasping the trunk of the tune tree, she gave it a playful shake.

"You might as well go down," she whispered resignedly as the Queen gave the tree a tremendous shake that nearly dislodged them both.

"Not without you," shivered Wantowin, hugging his branch for dear life.

"Oh, well, let's get it over with," said Jellia despairingly. "Blowing away may not be so bad, and I'd rather do anything than stay up here." Tucking the kit-bag under one arm, Jellia swung herself down by the other and dropped lightly to the ground.

"What is the meaning of this outrageous behavior?" she demanded as Wantowin dropped fearfully beside her. "His Majesty shall hear of this, I promise you."

Kabebe, astonished to see Jellia as well as the Soldier with Green Whiskers drop out of the tree, took a hasty step backward. Jellia quickly followed up her advantage. "I'm amazed!" she said sternly. "I thought you knew that I was to help you rule while King Strut is away!" At this bold speech, Wantowin looked at Jellia in round-eyed admiration. Though her cheeks were scratched and her crown slightly askew, the little Waiting Maid looked every inch a ruler's helper, if not a ruler. Even the Blowmen began to shift uneasily from one foot to the other, their mouths falling open at Jellia's indignation. But Kabebe raised both arms and fairly screeched at the little Oz Maid.

"How dare you speak to me like that?" she shrieked. "King Strut is lost and never will return! I am Queen here, and I don't need your help! Blowmen! Seize this impudent pair, march them to the edge of the cliffs, and blow them away." The crowd of Stratovanians looked uncertainly from Kabebe to

Jellia.

"His Highness left you here to protect me!" Jellia reminded them sternly. But even as she spoke, she knew they had decided to obey Kabebe. She was flashing her star eyes so threateningly and waving her winged stick to close to their heads that the Blowmen were afraid to defy her.

"Come along now," grumbled the first Blowman, taking Jellia roughly by the arm. "You've caused enough trouble here!"

The other two Blowmen seized the trembling Soldier and began marching sternly toward the edge of Strut's Skyland. Jellia pulled back with all her strength, as also did Wantowin, but hustled along by the huge Skylanders they could do little to help themselves. Relentlessly, with the jeering citizens of Stratovania running along after them, the unfortunate Oz pair was dragged on.

"Just wait till your Master hears about this," sobbed Jellia as the Blowmen shoved them as near to the edge of the cliffs as they dared go themselves. Then they stepped back to lift their horns. Jellia had managed to retain her hold on the Wizard's kit-bag, but even so she felt that their last moment had come.

Jellia gave a final sad little wave to the Soldier, who really was quite brave now that his doom had arrived. The Blowmen pointed their horns straight at them, but before they even could inflate their cheeks, a fierce roar and splutter from the clouds caused every head to turn upwards.

"The ship, the ship! The flying ship!" cried the First Blowman, letting his horn fall disregarded to the ground.

"It's Strut!" screamed the Stratovanians, treading on one another's toes in

their sudden frenzy to be out of sight of their Master when he landed.

"FF20'Tis the Master himself!" cried the first Blowman, yanking Jellia and the Soldier back from the edge of the Skyland. Pulling Kabebe along with them, the Blowmen ran as never before, closely followed by Strut's scurrying subjects. One moment later there was not a single airbody in sight. Convinced that their cruel and brilliant ruler had returned, they ran like rabbits. Some even flew, helping themselves along with their winged staffs, while Jellia, sinking on a large crystal boulder, stared dazedly at the silver-bodied plane dropping rapidly toward them.

"It can't be the Oztober!" cried Jellia delightedly. "It couldn't have come back so soon!"

"It's \$\$not&&!" cried Wantowin Battles, tossing up his cap and waving his arms exuberantly. "It's the other one, the Ozpril, and that meansFF20C4" In his extreme excitement, the Soldier tripped over a balloon bush and fell seven feet into the air. "It means the Wizard himself has come to help us," sputtered Wantowin, blinking rapidly as he landed hard on the rock beside the young Oz maid. "Three cheers, Jellia! The Wizard of Oz has saved us!"

CHAPTER 10

THE WIZARD IN STRATOVANIA!

It was indeed the Ozpril, just as the Soldier with Green Whiskers had said.

Even at a distance, Jellia could spell out the name on the gleaming body, and as the silvery plane came swooping toward them she could not repress a shout of joy.

Too exhausted by the dreadful ordeal she had just been through to run to meet the ship, she jerked off her scarf and waved it wildly over her head.

About ten feet from the crystal boulder on which she had been sitting, the Ozpril came to a gentle and perfect landing. Scarcely had the whirr and sputter of its engine died away before the door of the cabin burst open, and down climbed the little Wizard of Oz, followed by Dorothy and the Scarecrow. The Cowardly Lion, last of all, had difficulty fitting his paws on the rungs and after a trembling descent rolled over on his back, his four feet straight up in the air. The trip had not agreed with the Cowardly Lion at all. Weak and dizzy, he made no attempt to rise.

"Here you are at last!" cried the Wizard happily, rushing over to Jellia and seizing both of her hands. "So THIS is where you've been! Well, I must say it's a fine place. Why, it's beautiful, beautiful!" Swinging round so he could look in all directions, the Wizard positively glowed with interest and enthusiasm.

"What's so beautiful about it?" growled the lion without turning over. "Is there any grass? Are there any trees? Is there anything to eat?" Dorothy, on the point of embracing Jellia, gave a little scream, for the Tell-all-escape, which she had picked up just before leaving the plane, was making terse announcements. At this point it happened to be pointed at Jellia. Clearing its throat, it remarked in a superior way:

"You are now looking at Miss Jellia Jam, formerly of Oz, at present new Starina of the Strat, by edict of Strutoovious the Seventh. Miss Jellia Jam, Starina of Stratovania! Period! Stop, drop or point elsewhere!"

"Why, \$\$Jellia!&&" gasped Dorothy, letting the Tell-all-escape fall with a crash. "Are you really? Oh my! I don't suppose you'll \$\$ever&& want to return to Oz now. Why, you must be having a wonderful time!"

"Humph!" sniffed Jellia with a slightly wan smile. "If being pinched, chased and nearly blown to atoms is having a wonderful time, then I guess I've been having it, all right!"

"Tell me," requested the Scarecrow, who had been walking in a slow circle around Jellia. "Does one prostrate oneself before a Starina, or does one merely kiss her hand?"

"Neither," laughed Jellia. Jumping up, she gave the Scarecrow such a hug he was out of shape for hours. "But quick! Let's all hop in the Ozpril and fly away before something terrible happens."

"Fly away?" cried the Wizard, shoving back his high hat. "But, my \$\$dear&&, we've only just come! I've been flying all night and need a little rest and refreshment before we start off again. Besides, I would like to see more of this interesting airland and its people and add to my data on the Strata."

"That's what Nick thought," observed Jellia, putting both her hands on her hips. "And look what happened to him!"

"What \$\$did&& happen to him?" demanded the Wizard, realizing for the first time that Nick was not among those present.

"You tell him," sighed Jellia to the Soldier. Sinking back on the boulder, she held her aching head in both hands. All eyes turned toward the Soldier with Green Whiskers, who opened and closed his mouth several times without saying a word. The Wizard, now thoroughly alarmed, began shaking him on one side and the Scarecrow on the other, until finally Wantowin took a tremendous swallow and gave them the whole story.

When the narrator reached the part where Strut had ordered Nick and him blown away, the Scarecrow hurried over to the balloon bush and began picking the almost-ripe balloons as fast as his clumsy cotton fingers would

permit. Not till he had about twenty did he even pause. So light and flimsy was the straw man that the bunch of balloons on their long stems kept jerking him into the air. After each jerk he would give a little grunt of satisfaction.

"These are just to keep me aloft in case of accidents," he explained hastily to Dorothy, who was watching him intently.

"But what of us?" asked the little girl, looking anxiously toward the Canopied City, which at present seemed absolutely deserted.

"You say that this wretched Strut, after naming Jellia Starina, forced Nick to fly him to Oz?" exclaimed the Wizard, grasping Wantowin Battles by both arms and gazing into his face.

"Not only that," Wantowin told him hoarsely, "but he's taken his Blowmen and a thousand fighting men to conquer the country! He intends to bring back Ozma's crown, scepter, jewels and all the treasures in our castle!" finished the Soldier dolefully.

"Oh, can't we do something, Wizard?" cried Jellia determinedly. "I simply won't be Starina! I won't! I WON'T!"

"Just the same, you make a very pretty one," murmured the Scarecrow, patting the little Oz Maid consolingly on the shoulder. "But of course, we cannot allow this bounding airlander to take Oz!"

"If Nick had not 'taken possession' of Stratovania for Ozma, he'd never have thought of it," groaned Jellia. Rising stiffly, she picked up the kit-bag from the crystal rock beside her.

"Ah, so you still have my magic kitty!" In spite of his anxiety, the Wizard smiled.

"Indeed I have," said Jellia firmly. "It saved us from being blown away. I used some of your cheer gas, Wiz, but I didn't have time to try out any of the other magic. Here, you'd better take it now, and do let's be starting.

No telling when Kabebe and those three Blowmen will be coming back."

"Forward march! Forward march!" Wantowin Battles started off all by himself for the Ozpril. "Hurry, hurry!" he called over his shoulder. "If those fearful people return, they'll surely make trouble!" yelled the Soldier, his voice growing more emphatic.

"Well, it's certainly a mix-up," said Dorothy, moving closer to the Wizard.

"What do these people look like, Jellia?" she asked curiously. "Really, I'd enjoy seeing a few."

"They look like nothing you have ever imagined!" Jellia told her with a slight shudder. "Goochers! Here come some now! And oh, it's those Blowmen, and all the others! Look, Wizard! Could we reach the Ozpril before they reach us?"

"Let's not try," decided the Wizard as the Blowmen broke into a run. "Even if we made the plane, they might blow us to bits before I could get her started. Let's stay here and reason with them till I find something in this bag to help us."

"Oh, woe is we! Oh, woe is we!" gulped the Scarecrow, taking little runs and leaps into the air, hopeful that his balloons would lift him out of the danger zone as the threatening company drew closer. The Queen was marching grimly ahead of her subjects. In some way, decided Jellia, she had discovered Strut had not been in the silver plane. As the Wizard opened his kit bag, the little Oz Maid rushed over to the Cowardly Lion.

"Get up!" directed Jellia, giving him a desperate prod with her toe. "Get

up! We need your growl C4 and LISTEN!" she begged as the big beast rolled over and blinked sleepily at the approaching airlanders. "Do everything I tell you, or we are lost, LOST!"

Dorothy concluded Jellia had been quite right about the inhabitants of Stratovania. They certainly were like no one she ever had seen, and she could not help admiring the bold way Jellia stepped out to meet her dangerous adversary.

"Just what are you doing here?" demanded Jellia, folding her arms and tilting up her chin. "Did I not order you to leave us strictly alone?

Blowmen, take this Kabebe woman away!"

"Kabebe's our Queen," muttered one of the Blowmen, scowling at Jellia. "At least," he corrected, glancing at his comrades, "she is our Queen until Strut returns."

"What makes you think Strut has NOT returned?" questioned Jellia grandly.

"Do you not recognize your Master?" With a regal wave, Jellia pointed to the Cowardly Lion. "Do you not believe that this is Strut C4 changed to this great beast by Ozma of Oz? But he is as powerful and able as ever to rule this Kingdom! Strut!" Imperiously, Jellia appealed to the Cowardly Lion. "Am I the Starina of Stratovania?"

The poor lion was as startled at Jellia's question as the Stratovanians.

From sheer shock, he rose on his hind legs and let out a perfectly awful roar C4 which was perhaps as convincing an answer as he could have given.

"There! You see?" Jellia shrugged her shoulders as Queen Kabebe and the Blowmen turned white as ghosts and began to move away.

"It does sound like the Master," stuttered the Blowman as the Cowardly Lion

followed up his roar with a reverberating growl.

"What are your Majesty's wishes?" inquired Jellia, inclining her head graciously toward the trembling lion.

"Take that woman away and have our supper prepared and served at once in the Royal Pavilion!" directed the lion in his most commanding roar.

CHAPTER 11

KING, KING C4 DOUBLE KING!

The effect of the Cowardly Lion's speech was astonishing indeed. The Stratovanians behind the Queen turned and ran for their lives. They started backing away so fast they fell up at every step, so that their progress was curious enough to watch. There were few animals on the airosphere, and certainly none that talked. Thoroughly convinced that the Cowardly Lion was Strut and Strut was the lion, his terrified subjects fled in all directions.

"Whew!" exclaimed the Wizard, snatching out his green handkerchief and mopping his moist forehead. "That was quick thinking, my dear. Good acting, too," he puffed, leaning down to give the lion an approving pat.

"Oh, wasn't he WONDERFUL?" Jellia hugged the lion so energetically he fairly gasped for breath.

"Not so hard for ME to play King," he wheezed when he managed to escape from Jellia's embrace. "After all, I AM the King of the Forest!"

"Well, however that may be, Jellia is certainly Starina of the Strat!" declared the Scarecrow. "I'm beginning to think Strut was right in choosing her! You've been wasting your talents in Oz, my dear, and you surely have earned a crown today!"

"But I don't want a crown!" asserted Jellia with spirit. Nevertheless, she was quite pleased at such high praise. "Now, look! Since the Cowardly Lion ordered supper in the Royal Pavilion, perhaps we'd better go. It will be as good a place as any to rest while we plan our next move."

"Hi there, is everything all right?" Wantowin Battles, who had hidden himself behind a crystal rock at the Blowmen's approach, now peered out nervously.

"For the present," called the Wizard, waving his kerchief, "for the present. Come along, Soldier, we're going to have supper in the Royal Pavilion!"

"Not I," said the Soldier, falling in step with the Scarecrow. "Count me out of that!"

"I'm sure I'll not be able to eat a bite," sighed Dorothy, picking up the Tell-all-escape. "How can you even think of supper with those awful airmen flying to the Emerald City? Oh, why don't we go after them now?"

"Because I do not believe Nick will take them to the Emerald City," said Jellia, straightening her crown. "He'll lose them somehow and then come back here for Wanny and me."

"My own deduction exactly," agreed the Wizard, walking briskly along beside Jellia. "But wherever Nick is, we'll find him same as we have found you."

"How did you find us?" asked Jellia, stopping short and staring up into the Wizard's face. "I've been wondering about that."

"Well, you see," explained the little magician impressively, "on the Ozpril there is a magnetic compass that shows the exact course taken by the Oztober, provided that both planes are in flight. By following the compass, I followed your exact route. The delay in our arrival was caused by the

difference in speed!"

"Why, then, you saw the very same things we did," cried Jellia, nodding distantly to several airlanders who were bowing to the ground as the little procession passed.

"The very same," said the Wizard. Then, as a little afterthought, "By the way, what did you see?"

"Oh, nothing much but clouds, fog, an icecloud, and some flying airimals with spikes," Jellia told him briefly as she started up the long steps to the Royal Pavilion.

"The same with us," said the Wizard, taking out a little book and squinting hastily at the precisely written entries. "FF20`Clouds, fogs, spiked monsters.' AH!" He closed the book with a little exclamation of admiration.

"So this is the seat of Government?"

"I must say I prefer a castle," observed the Scarecrow, jumping up the steps three at a time. "Still, all these columns are very pretty. Very pretty indeed!"

"Is my throne comfortable?" inquired the Cowardly Lion with a lordly sniff.

"That's right," giggled Jellia, "you \$\$will&& have to sit on the throne C4 that is, if Wanny doesn't mind." The little maid turned mischievously to the Soldier with Green Whiskers. "After all, you are a kind of King, too!"

"Not on your life!" declared Wantowin violently. "I wouldn't trade one button on my uniform for all the jewels in Strut's crown, nor one blade of Oz grass for all the rocks in Stratovania!"

"Bravo! Bravo!" applauded the Scarecrow. Having tied his balloons to one of the pillars, he was bouncing up and down on a blue air cushion. "Try one," he invited, shoving a couple toward the Wizard. Instead of one, the Wizard

put three of the air cushions together and stretched out at full length.

"You can't imagine how tired a fellow grows after sixteen hours of flying,"

he murmured drowsily. "Hah, hoh, HUM! I hope you girls will excuse me if I take a little nap."

"I wouldn't mind a nap myself," yawned Dorothy. Though she had dozed part of the night before, she felt extremely sleepy. Without much urging from Jellia, she curled up on a couch at the back of the pavilion and was asleep almost before her head touched the pillows.

"The best thing in the world for them," grinned the Scarecrow as Jellia looked rather nervously from one sleeper to the other. "We'll probably have to fly all night C4 if we get away from here at all! The Wiz needs a good rest before he does any more piloting."

"Yes," agreed Jellia with a sigh, "I suppose he does. But I hope the lion's not going to sleep, too." Climbing to her throne, Jellia gave him a good poke in the ribs. The lion, who was leaning back against the cushions with both eyes closed, shook his head.

"I never sleep on an empty stomach," he declared firmly. "Besides, a lion can go for days C4 if necessary C4 without rest or refreshment."

"Didn't you bring anything to eat at all?" inquired Jellia. Being terribly hungry herself, she could sympathize with the hungry beast.

"Oh," answered the lion without opening his eyes, "we did have a few square meal tablets the Wizard happened to have in his pocket. But while they fill you up, they don't seem to satisfy."

"Same with the food here," said Jellia.

"Food!" The Cowardly Lion's nose began to twitch with eagerness. "Where is

any?"

"If I am not mistaken, supper is approaching now!" announced the Scarecrow, peering out through the side draperies of the Canopy. "Is this one of your many servants, my dear?"

"Oh, I suppose so," said Jellia as Bittsywittle trudged up the crystal steps balancing a huge tray on his head. He had been warned of the change in Strut, but the sight of the huge monster on the throne unnerved the little fellow, and he began to tremble so violently, the dishes on the tray danced a regular jig.

"Just put the tray on the table," directed Jellia patiently. "And don't jump, Bittsywittle! Strut won't bite you."

"How do you know I won't?" roared the Cowardly Lion, opening his eyes so wide Bittsywittle set down the tray and scuttled off like a hare. Without much enthusiasm, Jellia noted Kabebe had sent them six saucers of wind pudding and six glasses of air-ade."

"Don't touch it!" warned the Soldier with Green Whiskers as the lion slithered off the throne and ambled to the table. "It will make you feel very funny."

"Well, I'd rather feel funny than sad," said the lion, sniffing the pudding delicately, "and I'd rather feel funny than starve. Aren't you having any, Jellia?"

"No, thank you!" Jellia shook her head sharply and exchanged a quiet wink with Wantowin. But the Cowardly Lion did not notice the wink. Or at least he pretended not to and hurriedly lapped up all six saucers.

"Why, it's delicious!" he murmured rapturously. "DeliC4"

"Hey, where are you going?" The Scarecrow had been watching him enviously,

for the pink pudding looked so good he almost wished he found it necessary to eat. But now he spun round in alarm, for without any warning at all the lion had swelled and puffed up like a carnival balloon and gone wafting upward to soar in dizzy circles over their heads.

"Oh, he's just putting on airs because he's King," teased Jellia, wishing Dorothy were awake to enjoy the fun.

"But he might easily float off," worried the Scarecrow, pursuing the luckless lion with outstretched arms. "Wait, I'll save you!" he puffed, and snatching the cord from a long bell pull, he leaped on Strut's throne.

After several unsuccessful attempts, he managed to lasso the lion and tie him fast to the arm of the throne. "How do you feel?" he called solicitously, for the lion, with closed eyes and a desperate expression, was paddling his legs like a drowning dog.

"Oh, take it easy!" advised Jellia, relenting a little. "You'll float around all by yourself and come down presently as light as a feather. I know, 'cause I've tried it. Hello, here's Hippenscop! Now I wonder what he wants. Oh! My goodness! He's actually brought me two of those flying sticks!"

"Flying sticks?" exclaimed the Scarecrow, sliding off Strut's throne. "You don't tell me!" The messenger by this time had reached the top step of the Pavilion. After a fearful look at the people from Oz, he advanced timidly toward Jellia.

"I have brought the flying sticks, your Majesty!" explained Hippenscop, holding them out with great pride and satisfaction. "I stole them from two sleeping watchmen and managed to bring them here without Kabebe seeing me."

"KABEBE?" said Jellia with an uncomfortable start. "Why, where is Kabebe?"

"In Star Park," whispered the Messenger hoarsely. "She's got all the people worked up and excited! They're coming here presently to blow you away!"

"What?" gasped Jellia in an exasperated voice. "Again? Why, she knows Strut will never allow that."

"But Kabebe says HE isn't Strut!" said the messenger with an apologetic bow toward the Cowardly Lion, who, paying no attention to the conversation, was floating in distracted circles above the throne. "Now Junnenrump and I believe your Majesty, and consider you the best and prettiest Starina Stratovania ever had! But no one else does, so first they are going to blow away the Friend Ship, and then they are coming here to blow \$\$you&& all away! So while I do not presume to give orders, if I were in your Majesty's place, I'd fly this very instant and while there still is time!"

"The boy is right," declared the Soldier, grabbing up his blunderbuss.

"Company! Fall in! Forward, march!"

"Wake up! Wake up!" cried the Scarecrow, pummeling the Wizard with both hands. "The Airlanders are destroying our Ozoplane!" While Jellia, really touched by the messenger's loyalty, gave him one of her emerald rings, Wantowin Battles lifted Dorothy off the soft sofa and set her hastily on her feet.

"Forward! Forward!" he urged, pushing her ahead of him. "Kabebe's coming to blow us away!" Dorothy, blinking her eyes after a look at the Cowardly Lion floating over the throne, concluded she still was dreaming. But the Soldier kept shaking her till she finally realized she was awake and in danger.

"This way!" cried Jellia as the Wizard bounced off his cushions. "This way! The thing for us to do is to run to the other side of the airosphere. Then, while those villains are blowing the Ozpril away, we can be reaching the

edge andFF20C4"

"And WHAT?" queried Dorothy, looking at Jellia with round, scared eyes.

Jellia, for reasons of her own, did not answer. The Scarecrow already had retrieved his balloons. Now he pressed the cord, still attached to the Cowardly Lion, into Wantowin's hand.

"You must pull him along with you," directed the Scarecrow earnestly. "I am too light. And DO let's be starting!" The angry buzz of the crowd on its way to Half Moon Lake already could be heard. So without stopping to plan or reason the travelers from Oz slipped through the back curtains of the Royal Pavilion and began running as fast as they could toward the other side of Strut's curious air realm.

The Wizard, grasping his kit-bag in one hand and Dorothy by the other, went first. Next came Jellia, carrying the two flying sticks; the Scarecrow clutched his bunch of balloons. Last of all ran Wantowin, dragging the growling and disgusted lion after him through the air. Fortunately, Stratovania is long and narrow. In less time than they had dared hope, the little cavalcade came to the edge. Forbidding cliffs stretched along the whole coast, and the moist, blue air seemed actually to be breaking in great waves against the rocks. As they all gazed unhappily outward, a terrific "BOOM" made them all shudder.

"Well, there goes the Ozpril," mourned Jellia, patting the Wizard compassionately on the shoulder. The Wizard, looking very angry and grim, nodded his head. "Come on," puffed Jellia, stepping closer to the cliffs, "unless we want to go up with the ship, we've got to jump! And really, it's not so bad as it sounds! I've seen the airlanders fly with these winged

staves, and these two will have to do for us all."

"How do they work?" asked Dorothy in a faint voice.

"Why, you tap them once on the ground to start, and once on the handle to stop," explained Jellia breathlessly. "Now, suppose Dot and I and the Scarecrow ride one and Wiz and the Soldier the other. And for cake's sake, don't let go our lion!" added Jellia.

"But suppose he deflates and pulls us all down with his weight," groaned the Soldier. "Why can't he float along by himself?"

"Because I'm not going to have it!" said Jellia determinedly. "You must hold on to him and risk whatever happens! And if anything does happen, the Wizard will think of something!"

"I ~~\$\$have&&~~ thought of something!" said the Wizard composedly. "But first we must do as Jellia says. HARK! Isn't that Kabebe calling you?" As a matter of fact, it was. The Stratovanians, after witnessing the blow-off of the Ozpril, had rushed back to the Royal Pavilion. Furious at the disappearance of their victims, they now were rushing toward the crystal cliffs, the screams of Kabebe rising above all the rest.

"What do we do, ride 'em like broomsticks?" jabbered the Scarecrow as Jellia with shaking hands held out one of the sticks to the Wizard.

"A good idea!" approved the little magician, watching with deep interest as the wings on the tip of his staff opened and spread. "Come along, Soldier, or the mob will get you yet!" With wildly beating hearts, Dorothy and Jellia watched the Wizard and the Soldier mount the flying stick and boldly leap from the cliff's edge. The Cowardly Lion let out a terrified howl as he was dragged after them, but Jellia, Dorothy and the Scarecrow without further hesitation mounted their own staff and hurled themselves into space

just as the Queen and her cohorts came panting into view.

CHAPTER 12

THE FLIGHT TO OZ

Keeping the flying sticks in a more-or-less level position so they would not slip off and at the same time pointing them downward required no little skill. The Wizard, being used to magic appliances, mastered his in double-quick time. But Jellia, who sat in front on the other staff, soared up for seventy feet and across for fifty before she learned the trick of flying it. During the first twenty minutes of their flight not a word was spoken. Each had enough to do to hold on, and the Cowardly Lion, hurtling through the air beside the Soldier with Green Whiskers, looked the picture of despair and discouragement. A dozen times Dorothy, after a glance downward, gave herself up for lost. But gradually the strangeness of their situation wore off. Passing out of the moist, clammy strata just below Strut's Kingdom into a drier and less-clouded area, the spirits of the little band of adventurers rose. The wings of each flying staff, though not large, were powerful as airplane propellers, and they flapped as rhythmically as the wings of a bird.

"Not exactly like riding in an Ozoplane!" called the Wizard, waving cheerfully to Jellia. "Still, it's better than falling, eh?" Jellia, who had maneuvered her staff to a position close to his, nodded emphatically. "What worries me is the altitude!" she called back presently. "Somewhere or other we lost our air helmets. Will the effects of those altitude pills wear off before we're out of the strat?"

"No, we'll be all right," promised the Wizard. "My altitude pills condition one for the upper areas for several days at a time!"

"Oh! Then everything's splendid!" sighed Jellia, pushing back her curly locks and smiling at Dorothy.

"Unless we meet a meteor, and then our flight will soon be o'er," quavered the Scarecrow, waving his arm in a doleful circle.

"Now, now, don't anticipate!" advised the Wizard, guiding the staff with one hand and opening his kit bag with the other. For several moments he had been anxiously regarding the Cowardly Lion. The buoyancy resulting from the wind pudding was at last subsiding, and the swelled and bloated appearance of the unfortunate beast was fast disappearing. At almost any time now, the lion would become a dead weight. His poundage, added to the Wizard's and the Soldier's, would be too much for the flying staff, and they all would plunge like plummets to the earth. Feeling hurriedly around in the kit-bag, the Wizard pulled out a small black bottle. Uncorking it with his teeth, he turned it upside down and held it out at arm's length until not a drop of its oily contents remained.

"Now, don't be alarmed at a sudden bump!" he warned as his companions watched him with surprise and curiosity. "Whatever happens, hold on to your staff!" Scarcely had the Wizard issued his warning when the air directly beneath them froze into a solid block of blue ice on which they landed with a series of bumps and began sliding around in great confusion. "Nothing to worry about! Nothing to worry about!" panted the Wizard, keeping a firm hold on his flying stick and at the same time managing to extract a large envelope from the kit-bag. "Hold on to that stick, Jellia, and keep it down!"

The Cowardly Lion, completely deflated by his smack against the ice, was sprawled flat as an animal skin in the center of the berg. Dismounting from his own staff, the Wizard scurried perilously round the edges of the rapidly falling block of ice, scattering seeds from his envelope with a lavish hand. Instantly, or so it seemed to Dorothy, a thick, green hedge sprang up, enclosing them snugly inside.

"To keep us from tumbling off," explained the Wizard, sliding anxiously after Wantowin Battles, who was galloping round and round on his flying stick like a child on a merry-go-round. "Whoa, whoa!" cried Ozma's chief magician, grabbing the Soldier's coattails. "We need these sticks to act as brakes to stop our fall!" Unseating the Soldier, the Wizard lifted the flying stick and stuck it through the top branches of the hedge. Bidding the others dismount from their staff, he thrust it through the hedge on the opposite side. The wings of both staffs kept up their steady beating and, as the Wizard had predicted, acted as strong brakes on the plunging cake of ice.

"I was afraid we'd lose our lion," explained the Wizard as the little company of adventurers gathered breathlessly round him.

"I'd just as lief be lost as frozen!" Sneezing plaintively, the lion pulled himself to his feet and slid over to the hedge, bracing his back against its stouter branches.

"It won't be long before we strike solid earth now, old fellow," the Wizard observed brightly.

"Strike the earth!" roared the lion. "Well, goodbye, friends! I'll say it now, before I'm squashed and scattered to the four points of the compass!"

"Never mind, you'll make a lovely splatter!" teased the Scarecrow. "Better stamp your feet, girls, to keep from freezing!"

"Here, stand on my coat," offered the Wizard gallantly. "Not YOU!"

Indignantly he pushed the Soldier with Green Whiskers aside. "You can stand on your own coat!"

"But it's against regulations for a soldier to appear without his jacket," shivered Wantowin piteously. "The manual of arms saysFF20C4"

"How about the manual of feet?" snorted the Scarecrow, thankful he was stuffed with cotton and incapable of feeling the cold. "Say, Wiz, I guess this is about the oddest flying trip a band of explorers ever had."

"Did those magic drops freeze the air into ice?" called Dorothy. "And how'd you grow the hedge so fast?"

"Yes, the drops froze the air," the Wizard bawled back, for the rush of air as they shot downward made it difficult to hold polite conversation. "And I just happened to have some of my instant sprouting saplings in that kit-bag."

To keep up their spirits, they continued to shout back and forth as they fell. "I don't suppose we'll \$\$ever&& catch up with Strut and Nick Chopper now," screamed Jellia, hooking her arms securely through the hedge.

"Why not?" cried the Wizard. "As soon as we land, we can fly these flying sticks straight to the Emerald City and be there before the Oztober arrives. Remember now, the first one up after we hit the earth is to snatch a winged staff."

"And how do you suppose we will be able to rise after striking the earth at one hundred and forty miles an hour?" roared the lion a trifle sarcastically.

"Well, it won't hurt \$\$me!&&" boasted the Scarecrow, holding to his hat with both hands. He had lost the balloons long ago. "And I promise to pick up the rest of you as soon as possible. Is there anything in that kit-bag for breaks, sprains and bruises, Wiz?"

"Oh, hold your tongue!" snapped Jellia, trying to peer over the hedge.

"We're not going to crash at all! We'll probably get stuck on a steeple or tower!"

"How'd Nick manage with his flying?" shrieked the Wizard, who was anxious to change the subject. The less said about their landing the better. Of course, they could take to the flying sticks and abandon the Cowardly Lion, but that did not seem exactly sporting. So he resolutely put the thought of it out of his mind. "Grand, just grand!" answered Jellia, making a megaphone of her hands. "Nick had the Oztober going smoothly as a swallow!"

"That's good!" boomed the Wizard, beating his arms against his breast to keep warm. "Maybe we'll get the best of Strut yet and bring the Oztober safely down. I'd certainly like to have one ship left to present to Ozma!"

"How long'll it be before we do get down?" called Dorothy as the Wizard paused for breath. "Seems to me we're falling faster. FASTER AND FASTER!"

"Any minute now," predicted the Wizard, popping his head over the top of the hedge. "Oh! It's going to be all right! he shouted joyfully. "We're coming down right in the middle of a great bigFF20C4"

SPLASH!

Before the Wizard could finish his sentence, the block of ice struck the smooth surface of a large mountain lake and went completely under. As it came bobbing to the top, its drenched and shivering passengers looked at

one another with mingled dismay and relief. Dorothy, picking up the Wizard's coat, handed it back and then went slipping and sliding over to help the Scarecrow, who was too water-soaked and sodden even to move.

"Wring me out! Hang me up to dry, somebody!" gurgled the straw man dismally.

"Grrr-rah!" The Cowardly Lion, outraged at the cold plunge after all the other shocks and indignities of the day, jumped over the hedge and began to swim grimly for the shore. The Soldier with Green Whiskers, better at carrying out orders than the others, already was pulling one of the flying sticks from the hedge. As it came loose, he took a brief glance over the top, gave an agonized shriek, and fell backward, stepping all over the Wizard, who was just behind him.

"An army!" shivered Wantowin, clutching his dripping beard. "Thousands of them!"

"It ~~is~~ an army, too!" echoed Jellia, who had parted the hedge to have a look for herself.

"What do they look like?" demanded the Wizard, shoving past the soldier and grabbing the winged staff, which was on the point of flying off by itself.

"Like trouble!" said Jellia, reaching for Dorothy's hand. "They have long bows and pointed red beards and C4 my goodyness C4 their beards are pointed straight at us!"

"Bearded Bowmen, eh?" grunted the Wizard. "Well, that doesn't prove they're unfriendly." The Wizard stuck his head over the hedge, barely avoiding the arrow that sped past his ear.

"I suppose you'd call THAT unfriendly," sniffed Jellia, flopping on her stomach and pulling Dorothy down with her. The Wizard had no time to answer, for Wantowin Battles had one of the winged staffs and was preparing

to ride by himself.

"Drop it! Drop it at once!" commanded the Wizard sharply. "How dare you fly off without us? Why, it's plain desertion, that's what!"

"I was just going to do a bit of reconnoitering," mumbled the Soldier, looking terribly abashed and then diving to a place beside Jellia as three more arrows came hissing over the hedge. Quickly recovering the staff, the wet little Wizard crouched down.

"Now girls!" he directed, panting from the exertion of holding down both sticks. "When I give the signal, you and the Scarecrow mount one staff, and Wantowin and I will mount the other, and fly high over the enemy lines!"

"The higher the better," said Jellia as a perfect shower of arrows whizzed over their heads.

CHAPTER 13

THE KING OF THE KUDGERS

The Wizard's plan worked very well at first. He and the Soldier astride one stick, Dorothy and Jellia holding the poor, sodden Scarecrow between them on the other, shot high into the air, across the lake and over the amazed ranks of Bowmen drawn up on the bank. Before the Red Beards had recovered from their surprise, the travelers were winging strongly toward the turreted red castle that crowned the mountaintop. The Cowardly Lion, to escape the flying arrows, had swum under water. Now, scrambling up the bank, he neatly skirted the enemy and ran swiftly beneath the two flying staffs.

"As soon as we're safely past this castle, we'll descend, rest, dry our

clothes and then proceed to the Emerald City," called the Wizard, turning to wave encouragingly at the two girls.

But at that moment a dreadful thing happened. Sprawled on a huge camp chair on the sloping terrace before the castle, its huge, red-bearded owner suddenly sighted the flying sticks and their riders. Seizing the long bow that lay beside him, he sent two arrows speeding upward, one right after the other. Each arrow found its mark and splintered a flying stick. With spine-shattering suddenness, the travelers crashed to earth. Dorothy, describing it to Ozma later, explained that although she never had been in a battle, she knew exactly how a warrior felt when his horse was shot from under him. Except, of course, that a horseman would not have had so far to fall. The Scarecrow, tumbling off first, softened the bump for both girls.

The Wizard and Soldier plunged headlong into a red-pepper bush. While not seriously injured, they were grievously scratched and shaken. But the worst was not the blow to their pride and persons; the worst was to see the upper and winged halves of their precious sticks flying away without them.

"Oh! Oh!" groaned the Wizard, leaping out of the pepper bush and running for an anguished yard or two after the vanishing staffs. "This is awful, AWFUL! Come back! Come down!" he implored, realizing even as he shouted that the sticks could neither hear nor obey.

"Noo then, whew are yew?" The startled Red Beard hoisted himself out of his camp chair. "W-itches riding on br-hoom sticks? Noo then, call off yewer dog!" The Cowardly Lion, noting the mischief already done by the Red King's bow, had seized it in his teeth and backed rapidly into the bushes. The Wizard, reluctantly withdrawing his gaze from the sky, now stamped over to the astonished owner of the castle.

"Just see what you've done," he cried angrily. "Destroyed the only winged staffs in Oz. We flew them all the way from the Strat, and now how are we to reach the Emerald City in time to stop the airlanders? Don't you realize C4 but how could you?" In sudden discouragement, the Wizard broke off and stared despondently around the rugged mountaintop. "I must tell you," he began in a hoarse and desperate voice, "that Ozma and the Emerald City are in great danger. Strut of the Strat and a host of his flying Stratovanians are descending to conquer Oz and carry off Ozma's treasure. If we fail to warn her, the city is lost, doomed, I tell you! Since you have shattered our flying sticks, you must quickly supply us with some other means of travel. We must reach the capital before morning!"

"MUST!" roared the Bearded Bowman. "Are yew shouting `must' at ME?"

"Be careful!" cried Dorothy. For the Wizard in his earnestness had stepped closer and closer to the red King. But her cry was too late. Without any warning, the King's pointed beard, rising with his wrath, pointed straight out and struck the valiant Wizard to the earth. For a whole minute he lay perfectly still, staring up at this curious phenomenon. Though he had seen many a beard in his day, he had never been knocked down by one before.

"Whew are yew?" demanded the burly mountain monarch again. "How dare yew fly over my castle and swim in my lake without permission?" Stroking his beard, which gradually resumed a vertical position on his chest, he stared from one to the other of the adventurers. "No use to run," he sneered as Wantowin Battles began to back toward the bushes. "My bowmen will be here any moment now! But WHEW are YEW?"

"Wheww!" groaned Jellia, propping the bedraggled Scarecrow against a rock.

"A body'd hardly know after such a welcome.20Whew are hew yewerself, yew old Redbeard?"

"I?" roared the Bowman, taken completely by surprise. "Why, don't yew know?

I am Bustabo, King of the Kudgers and Red Top Mountain."

"I don't believe it," said the Wizard, leaping agilely to his feet and shaking his fist under Bustabo's long nose. "A \$\$real&& King would not treat travelers as you have done, shoot away valuable flying sticks and keep two lovely girls standing out here in the wind."

"How dew yew know what a King would dew?" demanded Bustabo, puckering his forehead in an uneasy frown.

"Because," stated the Wizard, folding his arms disdainfully, "I personally know all the most important rulers in Oz, and none of them would behave as you have done. If you are a King, act like a King!"

"Whew are yew?" repeated the Ruler of Red Top, walking around the little group with hands clasped behind his back.

"Oh, for Oz sake, tell him!" snarled the Cowardly Lion, poking his head out of the bushes. "If he asks that question again, I might eat him up, pointed beard and all!"

"Well, this is the Wizard of Oz," explained Dorothy as the Lion stalked grimly out of the bushes. "Chief Magician for Ozma of Oz. ThisFF20C4" Dorothy, with a wave of her hand, indicated the trembling soldier "C4FF20 this is Wantowin Battles, the Grand Army of Oz. Beside him is our famous live Scarecrow. I am Princess Dorothy of Oz, and this is Jellia Jam, First Lady in Waiting to Ozma. Coming toward you is the Cowardly Lion of Oz."

"He doesn't look very cowardly to me," muttered Bustabo, putting the camp chair between himself and the approaching beast.

"Oh, but I am cowardly," growled the lion growlishly, "and when I'm frightened I never know what I'll do. I might even chew up the King of this Mountain! Whoever heard of a King pointing his beard at harmless travelers? Whoever heard of a King with a beard as hard and red as yours, anyway? It's hard as iron from the looks of it."

"Harder!" agreed the King, evidently considering the lion's remark a compliment. "All we Kudgers have red beards, not of soft hair like hisFF20 C4" The Red King gazed contemplatively at the Soldier with Green Whiskers "C4FF20but of hard hair like mine. I don't suppose yew've ever seen a beard like this before. The point's sharp as a dagger, too," he warned as the lion sprang a pace closer.

"Oh, I'm sure it is," said Dorothy nervously. "And it's dreadfully handsome, too. But could your Majesty please let us dry out in your castles, and then could you show us the quickest route to the Emerald City? If you don't," finished Dorothy, clasping her hands anxiously, "the ruler of this whole country of Oz may be captured and carried to the Strat."

"What do I care about the Ruler of Oz?" sniffed Bustabo, scratching his head in a most unkingly manner. "Ozma never does anything for me! Even if she were conquered, I'd still have my Mountain. Why should I help yew or her or them?" His scornful wave included the whole little group. "What can yew dew for me?" he asked sullenly. "Can yew sing?" His dull eye brightened momentarily as it rested inquiringly on Dorothy.

"Well, a little," confessed Dorothy, smoothing down her damp dress. Clearing her throat and fixing her eye on the top of a red pine, she started in rather a choked voice:

"Oh, Bright and gay is the Land of Oz. We love its lakes and hills

becozFF20C4"

"There, there! That will dew!" Bustabo snapped his fingers impatiently, and taking out a little book scribbled hastily, "Can't sing."

"Can yew dance?" he demanded, addressing himself to Jellia. "We are short of good dancers on this mountain." Jellia by this time was in such a state of cold and temper, she stamped her foot and turned her back on the unmannerly monarch. "Can't dance," wrote Bustabo under the first entry.

"Well, then, what \$\$dew&& yew dew?" he asked, turning in exasperation to the Wizard.

"I?" said the Wizard, twirling his water-soaked topper, "I am a Wizard.

Naturally, I supposed a King like yourself would have everything he desired. But if that is not the case, tell me what you wish and perhaps I can help you. Only be quick!" he added earnestly. "For we have no time to lose."

"Sooo, yew really are a Wizard!" Bustabo's expression became almost agreeable. "Well, then," he drew himself up pompously. "The Princess whom I wish to wed has unaccountably disappeared. Find and return her to this castle, and I will speed yew and yewer friends to the Emerald City by the safest and swiftest route!"

"But that would take too much time," objected the Wizard, rubbing his chin anxiously. "Who is this Princess? Why has she gone? What is her name and what does she look like?"

"If yew were a real Wizard, yew would know all these things without my telling yew," answered Bustabo, looking suspiciously at Ozma's Chief Magician. "I'll tell you this much, though. The Princess whom I would marry

is called Azarine, the Red. Not three days ago she was in this castle, but on the morning of our wedding day she ran off into the forest, and though all my Bowmen have been searching ever since, not a trace of her have they found!"

"Humph, the girl showed very good sense, if you ask me," sniffed the Cowardly Lion, shaking his mane. "What did you do? Point your beard at her? Come on, Wiz! Let's go. We're just wasting time here."

"Aha, but yew cannot leave! Look behind yew!" Bustabo, with an enormous laugh, pointed over his shoulder. Silently as Indians, the Bearded Bowmen had crept up and entirely surrounded the little company on the green. Standing in a circle with bows raised and beards pointed, they fairly dared anyone to take a step. "Soo, then, it's all settled!" The Red King clapped the Wizard heartily on the back. "Don't think I have not heard of yewer skill, Mister Weezard. Even here on Red Top we've heard rumors of the wonderful Weezard of Oz. Now all yew have to dew is walk into that forest, find the Princess and bring her back to me. Meanwhile, I shall treat these others as my guests. They shall rest and warm themselves and have all they wish to eat. If by morning yew have failed to return, I shall regretfully be forced to throw them off the mountain. If yew dew return, yew will find that Bustabo will keep his word and bargain."

The Wizard hardly knew what to say.

"If he knows so much, why does he not help himself?" demanded one of the Red Beards, stepping insolently out of the circle. "People who can fly through the air on icebergs and sticks do not need help from ordinary folk like us. Why doesn't he fly to the Emerald City if he's so smart? I'll tell you why:

because he's not the Wizard of Oz! He's a fraud, that's what!"

"If he's a fraud, then you're a rascal!" cried Jellia Jam, remembering suddenly that she recently had been a Starina. "Your Princess is as good as found, Mister King! Isn't that so, Wizard?"

Meeting Jellia's firm gaze, the Wizard nodded quickly. "This young Oz girl is right, your Majesty! Before the sun rises, Azarine will return to this castle!"

"Yes, and now bid your vassals lead us into the castle!" ordered Jellia sharply. "Bring us soup, meat, bread, vegetables and plenty of fruit and cake!"

Bustabo, after a long look both at Jellia and the Wizard, motioned for the Bowmen to lead the visitors into the castle. The Cowardly Lion trailed suspiciously along in the rear, keeping a sharp watch to see that no beards were pointed at his friends. The Wizard accompanied them part way, conversing in earnest whispers with Jellia and Dorothy. Wantowin Battles supported the dripping and still-helpless Scarecrow, and each tried not to show the anxiety he felt when the Wizard finally turned to leave them.

"Goodbye, all!" he said, lifting his dripping hat. "Goodbye, Jellia, \$here is your bag!&&" Tapping the kit-bag significantly, he pressed it into Jellia's cold hands. Then, without a word to Bustabo or his Henchmen, he strode resolutely toward the dark forest that covered the sides and more than half of the top of the mountain. Relenting a little, the Red King sent a Bowman running after him with a basket of provisions. Taking the basket with a brief nod of thanks, the Wizard waved again to his friends and marched straight into the gloomy and forbidding woods.

CHAPTER 14

AZARINE THE RED

The late afternoon shadows made the forest seem even gloomier. The little Wizard, trudging along under the rustling red trees, hands thrust deep into his pockets, never had felt more depressed or unhappy. He had hated to leave his friends with a Monarch as cruel and untrustworthy as Bustabo. Still, he had the utmost confidence in Jellia Jam. The Young Oz Miss doubtless had some plan in her clever little head and had chosen this way for him to escape, meaning to follow with the others at the first opportunity. Anyway, he reflected, dropping down on a heap of fallen leaves and resting his back against a tree, they had the kit-bag to help them if worst came to worst. Perhaps if he had concentrated and thought very hard, he could recall the powerful incantation for locating missing persons and articles.

But a wizard without his books and equipment is almost as helpless as a doctor without his pills and medicine bag. Try as he could, the Wizard could not remember the proper combination of words to bring back the missing Princess. His short nap in Stratovania had rested him a little, but he still was dreadfully weary from his grueling flight and the recent shocks and mischances. The loss of the Ozpril had been the worst blow of all, and now his tired brain simply refused to work. So, sitting sadly under the tree, he munched the sandwiches from the basket, drank from the bottle of cold tea, and wished fervently for a fire to warm himself, for his clothes were still damp and clammy from the dive in Bustabo's lake. It comforted him a little to know that the others were drying out and enjoying

a good supper in the castle. But it was no comfort at all to realize that Strut and his legions were winging their way toward the Emerald City, the city She&& had built and lived in so long it seemed more like home than any place he had known in America.

The Wizard crammed the rest of the sandwiches into the basket and started recklessly through the forest, tripping over tough vines and rocks, bumping into trees and peering desperately about for traces of a Princess or for any sign that might tell him in which direction the Emerald City lay. From the slant of the ground he knew he was traveling down the mountain, and the deep red foliage told him he was somewhere in the Quadling country of Oz. But with night coming on and the shadows growing deeper and darker, he probably would lose his way entirely and never get out of the forest at all. He felt uneasy at leaving his comrades behind in the Red King's Castle. Was it better to try to save Ozma and the Emerald City or to stay in this forest and help Dorothy and Jellia and the devoted friends who had embarked on this unexpected adventure with him?

Stopping short, the Wizard pressed both hands to his forehead in an effort to make up his mind. Night already had overtaken him, and it was now so dark, it was impossible to see more than a foot or so in any direction. Occasional roars, the snapping of twigs and the gleam of yellow eyes from the thicket caused him no little anxiety. At an especially savage roar he suddenly stopped worrying about Ozma and the others and began to do considerable worrying about himself.

How humbling for a Wizard to be devoured by a hungry beast! Backing softly away from the approaching monster, he began looking sharply about for a hollow tree, a cave, or even a clump of bushes where he might conceal

himself. On the tip of his tongue and ready for instant use was the magic word that would render him invisible. Fortunately, he did remember that. But the Wizard never wasted words, magic or otherwise. Resolving to wait till the last possible moment, he continued to back rapidly and cautiously. Then, unexpectedly from behind him came another distraction: the clear ringing of a silver bell. At the same time the gloom was pierced by a dancing ray of light. Swinging round, the Wizard flung up both arms, and not knowing whether to dash into the teeth of the monster in front of him or risk the lowered horns of the huge beast behind him, the startled magician uttered the word that rendered him invisible.

"Brr-rah!" raged the burly, bear-like creature, rearing up on his hind legs.

"Where is that pesky man-creature? I saw him a moment ago, but now, though I still catch his scent, he has hidden from me. And why must you, Shagomar, come horning in to spoil my supper? Why cannot you mind your own business, Br-rrah!"

"I am minding my own business," roared the creature addressed as Shagomar.

"AWAY, you Entomophagus monster! Haven't I told you time and again to keep away from the cave of the Princess? The very next bug-bear that comes prowling 'round shall have a taste of my antlers! Get on with you now, and after this leave harmless travelers alone!"

The great red stag made a short rush at the ugly beast blocking his path.

Large as a Grizzly, half insect and half bear, it held its ground uncertainly for a moment, then shuffled off into the darkness, grunting angrily. The Wizard, who had jumped hastily from between the two beasts, had listened to the stag's words with lively interest and astonishment.

Huge and sandy, with antlers of tremendous breadth, the huge creature now stood quiet as a statue. From one antler prong hung a flashing silver lantern. From another dangled the bell which had so startled the Wizard.

"Well, friend! Are you still there?" whispered the Stag softly. Instead of answering, the Wizard uttered the word that would make him visible. "Come with me!" directed the Stag, showing neither surprise nor curiosity at the Wizard's sudden reappearance. "You will be safer with us in the cave. Surely you are a stranger, or you would know it is dangerous to wander in this forest at night."

"Oh, I don't mind danger," said the Wizard, striding sturdily beside the Stag. "I am used to danger, and I must reach the Emerald City before morning! Ozma and her whole capitol are threatened by a band of ruthless Airlanders, and unless I can give them some warning, the Emerald City certainly will be captured by Strut of the Strat. I am Ozma's Chief Magician, fallen by great misfortune into this forest."

"I thought you might be a Wizard," murmured Shagomar, pausing to nibble at a few tender leaves. "And you say the Ruler of the whole Land of Oz is in danger? Hah, well, we all have our troubles." Exhaling his breath noisily, Shagomar looked off between the trees with a troubled frown. "I cannot direct you to the Emerald City, but I'm sure the Princess can help you."

"What Princess do you mean?" asked the Wizard, curious to hear what Shagomar would say.

"Azarine!" whispered the Stag, looking around carefully to see that no one was listening. "Azarine the Red, Ruler of Red Top Mountain!"

"But I thought Bustabo was ruler of the mountain! I just came from his castle!" sputtered the Wizard. "He certainly told me he was King of the

Kudgers."

"King of the Kudgers, pfui!" The stag shook his head as if a bee were in his ear, while his bell played a regular roundelay. "Bustabo was, till a week ago, Chief Bowman in Her Majesty's Guard. Using his position and his men to help him, he has wickedly seized Azarine's throne, insisting that Azarine permit him to be the King of all the Kudgers. When our little Princess refused, she was locked up in the tower. But with the assistance of a faithful servant, she managed to escape and has been hiding in this forest ever since. I, being an old and trusted friend, have been looking out for her and will protect her with horn and hoof until her own loyal subjects unseat this miserable imposter!"

"Whew, so that's the way it is!" The Wizard thrust his hands more deeply into his pockets. "Well, that settles \$that&&! I won't do it, no matter what happens!"

"Won't do what?" questioned the Stag, looking down sideways at the little man.

"Oh C4 nothing!" Kicking at a stone, the Wizard walked along in a depressed silence. Surely no one ever had been in a worse dilemma. If he managed by a trick or by force to carry Azarine back to the Red Castle, Dorothy and his friends would be released instantly and all of them speeded on their way to the Capitol. If he did not return the Princess to the castle, his brave and faithful companions would be flung off the mountain, Strut would conquer the Emerald City, and everything would be lost. LOST!

But when, a few minutes later, the Stag pushed through a cluster of bushes that concealed the entrance to the cave and the Wizard stepped into the

presence of Azarine herself, he knew he never would force her to surrender to the infamous Bustabo.

Seated pensively on a rough boulder beside a small fire was the prettiest little Princess the Wizard had almost ever seen. Her hair, long and red as Glinda's, fell in satiny waves to her feet. She wore a little mesh cap of pearls and a white satin Princess dress. A long, red velvet cloak hung loosely from her shoulders. Not exactly the costume for a cave, but vastly becoming. Azarine's pale and flower-like face was sweet and gentle, and when she saw the wet and weary traveler with Shagomar, she jumped up to welcome him as graciously as though she still were mistress of her castle.

"Why, it's the Wizard of Oz!" she cried joyfully after a second look at the guest. "Oh, we \$all&& know the Wizard of Oz! I have a picture of you right over the grand piano in my castle. Wherever did you find him, Shaggy, dear? Has he come all this way to help us?"

"It will be a great pleasure and privilege, if I may," said the Wizard, sitting on a rock opposite the Princess and placing his high hat between his knees. "Just now, I happen to be in as much trouble as your Highness. But perhapsFF20C4" The Wizard looked thoughtfully at the Stag standing motionless at the entrance of the cave. "Can Shagomar run?"

"Oh, yes! Terribly fast!" Azarine assured him eagerly. "Faster than eagles can fly, than water can fall down the mountain, faster than any creature on Red Top. Shaggy can do anything!" Jumping up, the Princess ran over to lean her head against the Red Stag's shoulder. "He goes to the village each day and returns with food. He has brought me blankets for my bed, pillows for my head, and has kept away the fierce Bug-bears and all other wild beasts that roam the Red Wood. I don't know what I should have done without him!"

The Princess added softly, "Shaggy's such a dear!"

"You're both dears!" agreed the Wizard.

"Are we?" Azarine twinkled her eyes at the Wizard. "But Shaggy's the biggest, and we've always been friends, haven't we?" The Stag, looking down at Azarine with his bright, steadfast eyes, nodded so vigorously that the bell on his antlers rang a veritable medley, and the rays from the silver lantern danced into every corner of the dreary cavern.

"Well, then," the Wizard rubbed his hands briskly together, "Shaggy shall carry us straight to the Palace of Glinda the Good Sorceress of the South. As Red Top Mountain is in the Quadling Country, her palace must be somewhere quite near."

"Oh, it is! It is!" beamed Azarine. "I've often seen her lights from the towers on Red Top. It's just a mile or two from the base of this mountain. I never have seen Glinda, but I have heard she is very good and a Powerful Sorceress. Do you think she can force Bustabo to give me back my castle and my Kingdom?"

"I know it!" declared the Wizard, picking up his hat and clapping it on the back of his head. "But before we start for Glinda's, I must go back and rescue my friends from that thieving Red Beard."

Marching forth and back before the fire, the Wizard related all that had happened since he and his party had started off in the two Ozoplanes.

Hearing the strange tale, Azarine almost forgot her own troubles. When the Wizard told how Bustabo had broken the winged staffs on which they hoped to ride to the Emerald City and of the wicked bargain he had driven, the little Princess generously offered to return to the Red Castle so that Ozma

and Oz might be saved. But the Wizard would not hear of such a thing. "No!" he decided. "Shaggy and I will go back and manage, somehow, to release my comrades from the castle. Then we all can start for Glinda's together."

"Wait," whistled the Stag, who had been listening to the Wizard's story with distended eyes and nostrils. "Wait, first I will fetch Dear Deer."

"Who in Oz is Dear Deer?" inquired the Wizard as Shagomar melted like a shadow through the dark opening of the cavern.

"His wife," explained Azarine with an excited skip. "And that will be just splendid, for Dear Deer shall carry all of your friends, and we can ride Shaggy!"

CHAPTER 15

IN THE RED CASTLE

And now let us peek in to the doings of Jellia, Dorothy and the others after they mournfully watched the Wizard stalk off into the forest.

With Bowmen ahead of them and Bowmen closely following, the prisoners marched slowly into the castle. Afraid not to hurry on account of the sharp-pointed beards of the Guards, the little party progressed almost at a run.

Hurrying them through the beautiful throne room and other cheerful apartments on the first floor, the Bowmen led them to a covered stone stairway curving up from the back courtyard. Up, up, and up tramped the Bowmen, and up, up and up trudged the weary travelers. It seemed to Dorothy they had climbed a thousand steps before they reached the top. Both girls were frightened, but holding their backs straight and their chins high, they stepped haughtily along without even a glance at their red-bearded

captors. Unlocking an iron door at the head of the stair, the Guards gruffly ushered them into a round, stone-walled room at the very top of the tower. Relocking the door just as gruffly, they took their departure.

"Thank gooseness there's a fire!" shivered Jellia, running across the room to hold out her hands to the crackling blaze. "As soon as we're warm and dry, we can decide what to do. Pull up a couple of those benches, Wantowin, and for cake's sake don't look so glum! Nobody's been hurt yet!"

"Ah, but what of the morning?" The Soldier with Green Whiskers wagged his head dismally. "That rogue of a Red Beard will pitch us off this mountain quick as \$\$that!&&" Wantowin snapped his cold fingers. "One toss from this tower and we're done!" groaned the Army, turning away from one of the barred windows with a positive shudder. Glancing out the window nearest her, Dorothy saw that the tower had been built at the very edge of the mountain. Jagged rocks far below and long-dead trees jutting out from the sides of the sheer precipice made it even more formidable.

"I'm going to sleep," mumbled the lion, settling himself near the fire.

"What I don't see won't make me feel more cowardly."

"How true," thought Dorothy. Backing away from the window and resolutely keeping her mind off the precipice, she began to help Jellia drape the Scarecrow over a bench close to the fire.

"Not too close, girls," begged the Straw Man nervously. "Fire's almost as bad for me as water. One little spark and pouff! Nothing but a bonfire of your old friend and comrade!"

At this point a sharp tap on the door made them all jump, but it was only a servant carrying a large tray. At least, Bustabo was keeping his promise

about supper. The servant was round and jolly. He looked sympathetically at the little company, but evidently was afraid to speak to them. Placing his tray on a table in the center of the room, he bowed stiffly and withdrew, locking the door carefully after him.

"Not bad," said Jellia, lifting cover after cover from the silver serving dishes. "Not bad at all! Give us a hand, Wanny, and we'll pull the table over to the fire. My gooseness, this is almost as good as a party!"

Seating herself next to Dorothy, who already was busy, Jellia bit rapturously into a crisp roll. "Mmmm, mmm! This is the first food I've tasted since we left the Emerald City. Draw up, Liony! This roast lamb will make you forget that wind pudding. You may have \$all&& the roast, and we'll manage with the vegetables, the soup, salad and dessert!"

Dusk was falling, and the tower room was hardly cheerful, but sitting on their hard benches close to the fire, the prisoners dined almost as well as though they had been in the Emerald City. Now that his hunger was satisfied, even the Soldier with Green Whiskers began to look less desperate. The Scarecrow, now completely dry though a little wrinkled, was his old, witty self again.

As it grew darker, Jellia lit the rusty lantern on the stone mantel, and Wantowin placed another log on the fire. There was a heap of blankets on one of the benches. No other beds being visible, the girls spread several on the hearth. Resting their backs comfortably against the sleeping lion, they conversed in low and guarded whispers. Wantowin, considering it his duty to stand guard, dragged a bench across the doorway. Wrapping himself up in a blanket, he was soon snoring louder than the Cowardly Lion. The servant had removed the tray, and sounds from below had long since ceased.

They knew it must be way past midnight, but Dorothy and Jellia were unable to relax.

"I wonder how the Wizard's getting along!" mused Dorothy, pulling the blanket a little closer. "It must be awfully dark in that forest."

"Oh, Wiz'll be all right, depend on that!" Jellia spoke with a heartiness she was far from feeling. "He'll have that Princess here before sun-up. If he doesn't, we'll just light out and find him!"

"Light out?" inquired the Scarecrow, drawing back still further from the fire. "How do you mean?"

"Yes," echoed Dorothy, moving closer to Jellia as a board creaked somewhere below. "How do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't just know," admitted Jellia frankly. "But there might be something in this kit-bag to help! Let's have a look, anyway." Dragging it from under a bench where she had stowed it on their arrival, Jellia zipped it open and began feeling inside, curiously. "I never have had a chance to examine it properly," Jellia said. "But that cheer gas certainly came in handy, and the freezing fluid and sapling seeds were pretty neat, too! My, whatever are these, now?" Folded neatly on the very top were four suits of blue pajamas with hoods and feet attached like those in an infant's sleeping garment.

Holding one near to the blaze so she could read the pink placard on the pocket, Jellia gave a little gasp. "Oh, listen!" she whispered, catching Dorothy's sleeve. "It says: \$\$`These falling-out suits have not been tested, but I believe they will work and prove safe and practical in case of accident. C4 WIZ.'&&FF20"

"I suppose the Wizard meant them for his Ozoplane passengers to use instead of parachutes," decided Dorothy, fingering one rather doubtfully. "Well, I should hate to be the first to try one!"

"Oh, I don't know," Jellia, her head on one side, pensively considered the blue pajamas. "I think they're real cute. I think C4 HARK! What was that?" Dropping the pajamas, she clutched Dorothy as the unmistakable tread of a heavy boot came stamping up the stair.

"Bustabo!" shivered Dorothy. "Oh, he's not going to wait till morning! He's coming for us now! Oh, Jellia, JELLIA, what shall we DO?" Dorothy's voice, rising almost to a shriek, roused the Cowardly Lion. Cocking one ear and arriving at exactly the same conclusion as the little girl, the lion sprang over to waken the Soldier with Green Whiskers. The Scarecrow already was hurrying from window to window, trying the bars with his flimsy cotton fingers. At the window nearest the fireplace he gave a joyful little grunt, for some former prisoner had managed to saw through three of the iron bars. As the Scarecrow pushed, they moved creakily outward.

"Quick! Come help me!" urged the Scarecrow, dragging the terrified and only half-awake Soldier to the window. "On with those parachute suits, girls! We'll jump before we're tossed out!" Dorothy and Jellia exchanged desperate glances and then C4 as the steps on the stair thumped louder and nearer C4 each grabbed a falling-out suit and zipped herself tidily inside.

"Here!" panted Jellia, down on her hands and knees beside the Cowardly Lion. "You can put your front feet in anyway, and anything will be better than nothing when you fall!" To her relief and surprise, she discovered that the pajamas would stretch! Even the lion could wear them without too much discomfort. Except for a cramp in his tail, which was coiled tightly

on his back, the lion fitted into his pajamas nicely.

As the Soldier with Green Whiskers was trembling too violently to help himself or anyone else, Jellia jerked and pushed him into one of the falling-out suits. Then, picking up the Wizard's kit-bag and looking solemnly back at her anxious comrades, Jellia climbed to the window sill. "I'll go first," she announced, closing her mouth to keep her teeth from chattering.

"No! Let me! I insist on going first," cried the Scarecrow, springing nimbly up beside Jellia. "Falling does not hurt me at all."

"Oh, hurry! Hurry!" begged Dorothy, glancing fearfully over her shoulder. The footsteps were now so loud and near, she expected the door to burst right open and Bustabo's red face to appear.

"Goodbye! I'm off!" Before the Scarecrow could stop her, Jellia was off indeed! Clutching the kit-bag to her bosom, she squeezed through the opening between the bars and dove headlong into space! Next, the Scarecrow, with a sad little wave to Dorothy, dropped out of sight. "Help me push this so-called Soldier out!" puffed Dorothy as the Cowardly Lion signalled for her to go next. "If we leave him till last, he'll never jump at all!"

"Halt! About face! Help! Mama! Papa! Help! Help! HELP!" wailed Wantowin Battles. But Dorothy relentlessly forced him to the sill and through the opening. As his wildly thrashing legs disappeared over the edge, whoever was coming up the stairs broke into a run. Thump, thump, THUMPETY-THUMP! Trembling in every muscle, Dorothy climbed to the sill. Spreading both arms, she launched herself into the air.

She heard the grunt of the Cowardly Lion as he forced his way through the

opening. Then the fierce rush of wind past her ears as she pitched downward drowned out all other sounds. At first she was sure the Wizard's falling-out suits were failures, for the lion plunged past her, falling like a plummet. She, too, was whirling downward so fast she felt sure she would be crushed on the rocks below. Closing her eyes, she tried to resign herself to whatever was coming. Then, suddenly, the pajamas filled with air, ballooning out till she floated lightly as a feather. The question now was, would she ~~sever~~ come down?

There was no moon, and in the faint starlight she could make out three other bulky shapes spinning through the air just beneath her. By kicking her legs and flapping her arms, Dorothy managed to miss several jutting rocks and tree limbs. As she floated lower, the suit began gradually to deflate, finally letting her down as softly as could be, on a strip of sand at the base of the mountain. A little distance away she could see Jellia, already stepping out of her falling-out suit, and the Cowardly Lion, waiting impatiently for someone to help him out of his. Wantowin Battles, very brave now that the danger was past, already had stripped off his flying suit and was shaking and patting the Scarecrow into shape, for the poor straw man had been completely flattened out by his fall.

"Well, how did you like it?" called Jellia, hurrying over to help the lion untangle himself. "After the first swoop, it wasn't bad at all. Really, I quite enjoyed it!"

"~~Enjoyed it!~~" choked the Lion, looking indignantly from Dorothy to Jellia. "I'll never set foot in a plane again as long as I live. Brrrah!

Ever since we left the Emerald City we've been falling, flying and blowing about like yesterday's papers. Now that I'm on solid ground at last, I

intend to stay there! The rest of you may do as you please, but I shall walk home if it takes a year!"

"I don't blame you," said Jellia, patting the lion soothingly on the nose.

"But we can't start without the Wizard. We'll have to hide here till morning and then try to find him."

"Let him find us," growled the Lion, lashing his tail experimentally to see whether there was any wag left in it after the shameful way it had been cramped in the suit. "The whole trip was his idea, not mine!"

"Oh, hush," warned Dorothy. "Someone will hear you! Ooooh! Someone has!" And sure enough, the faint tinkle of a bell came mysteriously through the gloom.

"Mercy, do you suppose those Red Beards have started after us already?" cried Jellia, looking around for the kit-bag. "But how could they have come down the mountain as fast as we fell?"

"They couldn't," whispered the Scarecrow, picking up the bag and handing it to Jellia. "But don't worry, my dears! It's probably a herd of goats or cattle. These mountaineers often put bells on their animals. Just keep still and don't move, and they won't notice us at all." Flattening themselves against the rocks at the foot of the mountain, the five adventurers waited tensely. But when a huge, shaggy shape loomed out of the darkness and came charging straight toward them, all five screamed and started to slither sideways.

"Wait! Don't run! Don't be frightened!" begged an agitated voice. "Don't you know me? It's I! It's \$me!&& THE WIZARD!"

CHAPTER 16

ESCAPE FROM RED TOP

As the great stag came to a sliding halt, the rays from his silver lantern cast a wavering light over the little group crouched against the rocks.

"Hello! How ever did you escape from the castle?" demanded Ozma's little Magician, sliding recklessly off the high back of his steed and embracing them jubilantly. "We were just coming to help you. Girls, Scarecrow, Soldier, Lion, may I present Azarine, the real Princess of this Mountain, and Shagomar and Dear Deer, her friends!"

Dorothy and Jellia were so stunned by the unexpected appearance of the Wizard, they were able only to manage a couple of breathless bows. And indeed, the lovely picture Azarine made seated demurely on the huge red stag was enough to render anyone speechless. Shaggy himself was breathtaking, too. Not only the lantern and bell hung from his antlers now, but perched unconcernedly on the tallest prong was a lovely white pigeon with a key in his bill.

"This pigeon was going to fly up to the tower with the key to the door," explained the Wizard as his five comrades continued to gaze at him in stupefied silence. "Fortunately, Azarine, who was imprisoned there before you, had an extra key. She said Bustabo would lock you up in the tower!" exclaimed the Wizard with a nod at the Princess. "But since you already are out and down, we'll not need the key. Tell me, how did you manage to escape? What did you do? Break down the door?"

"No, we just stepped out the window," the Scarecrow told him with a nonchalant wave upward.

"You mean you jumped all this distance?" gasped Azarine, leaning forward to

peer between Shaggy's branching antlers while Dear Deer trotted closer to nudge Dorothy with her soft, moist nose.

"Well, sort of," explained Jellia, putting an arm around the Cowardly Lion, who still was looking extremely sulky. "But first we put on those falling-out suits, Wiz, and you'll be glad to know they really worked."

"Splendid! \$\$\$plendid!&&" beamed the Wizard with a satisfied shake of his head. "You know, I'd completely forgotten them, but I felt sure you'd find some useful magic in the kit. Did Bustabo keep his promises?"

"Well, he locked us up in the tower, and he gave us a pretty good supper," answered Dorothy. "But we didn't like being prisoners, and we didn't feel safe in that castle. Then a little while ago when we heard him thumping up the stair, we just decided to leave! And so C4 we left!"

"So we see! So we see!" The Wizard grinned appreciatively, delighted by the spirit of the two girls. "But perhaps we'd better be off! No knowing when Bustabo and his Bowmen will be coming to look for you. Shagomar and Dear Deer have kindly agreed to carry us to the castle of Glinda the Good. Once there, with Glinda's magic to help me I'll find some way to deal with Strut and to force Bustabo to give up Azarine's throne. Now suppose you two girls and the Scarecrow mount Dear Deer, and the Soldier and I will ride with the Princess."

Dear Deer, at the Wizard's words, moved over to a flat rock. Without any trouble at all, Jellia and Dorothy climbed to places on her back. Then the Scarecrow vaulted up behind, clasping his arms 'round Jellia to keep from slipping off. When Wantowin and the Wizard had mounted behind Azarine, the two Deer swung away from the mountain. With the Cowardly Lion loping easily

between, they ran swiftly toward the Southlands.

Their gait was so smooth it seemed to Jellia they were flying like figures in a dream through the shadowy forest, with only the twinkle of the silver lantern to light their way. As they raced along, Azarine again told the story of Bustabo's treachery and how Shagomar had brought the Wizard to her hidden cave. Then the two girls amused the little Princess with the story of their experiences in the Strat. They told her all about their life at home in the Emerald City, and of the curious celebrities who lived in the palace with Ozma. Azarine already was charmed with the Scarecrow and the Cowardly Lion, and kept leaning down to have a better look at the tawny beast trotting so unconcernedly between the two deer.

"I tell you," she proposed generously. "I tell you, if Strut destroys the Emerald City you all can come back and live with me. That is, if Glinda and the Wizard can make Bustabo give my castle and Kingdom back."

"But I do hope we'll find some way to stop Strut! How long will it take him to reach the capitol?" Dorothy called across to the Wizard.

"Well, it took us a night and half a day to fly to Stratovania," calculated the little Magician, wrinkling his forehead. "So I'm afraid if Strut and the Tin Woodman left yesterday, they'll be in the Emerald City tomorrow. That is, today."

"And it's almost morning now," shivered Jellia, glancing off toward the East, where the sky already showed the first streaks of lavender and rose.

"Now don't you worry," begged the Wizard, holding fast to his high hat. "As soon as we reach Glinda's castle and I have some proper magic to work with, I'll find a way to make both Strut and Bustabo behave. The few trifles in this kit-bag are a help, but not nearly so powerful enough for rascals like

those. Look, girls, isn't that Glinda's castle now?"

"Oh, it is! It is!" cried Dorothy, clasping Dear Deer around the neck, she was so relieved and happy. And the silver-trimmed towers and spires of Glinda's lovely red castle shimmering through the early-morning mists were enough to make anyone happy. Flashing through the beautiful gardens and parks, leaping hedges and flower beds as lightly as swallows, the stag and his mate brought the little band of adventurers to the very door of the castle.

"Goodbye now," breathed the stag as the Wizard and Soldier slipped off his back and the Wizard lifted Azarine down. "Take care of my little Princess!"

"Oh, don't go!" cried Dorothy, for Dear Deer seemed on the point of vanishing, too. "Do stay and see how it all turns out. Later on, wouldn't you like to go to the Emerald City and meet the famous animals who live in the capitol?" Shagomar looked questioningly at Dear Deer, and as his pretty little wife seemed interested, he allowed himself to be persuaded.

"We'll wait in the garden," he whistled softly. "Houses and castles are too stuffy and shut in for Deer people. If you need me, Princess, just ring the silver bell." Lowering his head so the Princess could slip the bell from his antlers, the stag stood looking at her solemnly.

"I will," promised Azarine, waving her little red handkerchief as the two deer sprang away. They actually seemed to float off above the flowers, so lightly and easily did they run.

CHAPTER 17

THE WIZARD GETS TO WORK

"Please announce us to your Mistress at once!" directed the Wizard to the sleepy little castle-maid who presently came in answer to his loud knock.

"But Her Highness and Princess Ozma are not here!" stuttered the maid, her eyes popping at sight of visitors so early in the morning. "They left yesterday to visit Prince Tatters and Grampa in Ragbad!"

"Ha, well," the Wizard turned to the others with a little shrug. "Looks as if I shall have to manage alone. A fortunate thing Ozma did not start back to the Emerald City. At least \$she&& will not fall into Strut's hands.

Here, HERE! Don't shut the door!" The Wizard quickly pushed past the little serving maid. "Glinda will wish us to make ourselves comfortable in her absence. Now then, Miss, MissC4?"

"Greta," mumbled the girl, looking bashfully at her feet.

"Oho, a Greta to greet, eh?" chuckled the Scarecrow, taking off his hat and bowing to the ground. "Well, now, my dear Miss Greta, will you kindly show these young ladies to suitable apartments, and tell the cook to prepare breakfast for six."

"Make it twelve!" growled the Cowardly Lion with a little bounce toward the maid. "I could eat six all by myself!"

"Yes Sirs! Yes \$\$\$irs!&&" quavered Greta, running off so fast she lost one of her red slippers.

"Never mind," laughed Dorothy. "Jellia and I know this castle as well as our own. We'll show Azarine about and have time for a short nap before breakfast." The hundred pretty girls who acted as Glinda's Maids-in-Waiting were still asleep. In fact, no one was stirring in the castle except a few servants. Waving briskly to the girls as they started up the marble stairway, the Wizard went striding toward the red study where the Sorceress

kept all her books on witchcraft, her magic potions, her phials and appliances.

The exquisite palace of Glinda, over which Azarine was exclaiming at every step, was an old story to the Cowardly Lion. Throwing himself down on a huge bearskin, he soon was in a doze and making up the sleep he had lost on the two previous nights. Wantowin Battles had at once gone off to waken an old Soldier Crony of his who drilled Glinda's Girl Guard, and the Scarecrow, about to follow the Wizard into the study, paused to look at the great record book.

This book, fastened with golden chains to a marble table in the reception room of the castle, records each event as it happens in the Land of Oz.

When Glinda goes on a journey, she usually locks the Record book and takes the key with her. But this time she had neglected to do so, and sentences were popping up, row after row on the open pages. As he bent over to peruse the latest entry, the Scarecrow's painted blue eyes almost popped from his cotton head.

"Fierce Airlanders from the Upper Strat are descending on the Emerald City of Oz," read the Straw Man, nearly losing his balance. "If measures of defense are not taken at once, the capitol will fall under the fierce attack of the invaders!"

"Wiz! YO, WIZ!" yelled the Scarecrow, taking a furious slide into the study.

"Hurry! HURRY! For the love of Oz, hurry, or Strut will blow Ozma's castle into the Strat! The Record Book says so!" he panted, grabbing the Wizard's arm to steady himself. The Wizard, working over the delicate apparatus on a long table, looked up with an anxious frown.

"Now, now, you must be a little patient," he told the Scarecrow earnestly.

"I'm hurrying just as fast as ever I can."

"But what do you propose to do?" demanded the Scarecrow, puckering his forehead into almost forty deep wrinkles. "Can't you whiz these Stratovanians away or send them back where they came from?"

"Not without Ozma's magic belt," sighed the Wizard. "And you know perfectly well that the belt is back in the Emerald City safe in the castle!"

"Then can't you transport the safe here?" asked the Scarecrow, playing a frantic little tune on the edge of the table.

"Just what I'm trying to do!" admitted the Wizard, turning a lever here and a wheel there. "But this triple-edged, zentomatic transporter of Glinda's does not seem to be working as it should. I'll probably be able to fix it in a little while, but meantime I tell you what you can do. Post yourself beside the record book, and the minute it announces Strut's arrival in the Emerald City, rush straight back here to me!"

Before he had finished his sentence, the Scarecrow was gone, and for the next two hours the faithful Straw Man, without once lifting his eyes, bent over the great book of records, reading with tense interest and lively appreciation of the progress of the Oztober and the Airlanders toward the Capitol of Oz.

CHAPTER 18

STRUT OF THE STRAT ARRIVES IN OZ!

For several hours after leaving Stratovania, Nick followed the Wizard's map implicitly. With Strut leaning over the back of his seat, eyes glued to both map and board, there was nothing else he could do. If he deviated from

the course so much as a hair's breadth, the Airlander would tap him on his tin head with his staff. The Tin Woodman had not expected Strut to be so clever about navigating, and as time passed he grew less and less hopeful of outwitting the wily Airman.

If he increased the speed of the Oztober in an effort to outdistance Strut's flying warriors, they also increased their speed. Try as he would, it seemed quite impossible to lose them. But Nick Chopper did not despair. He was counting on the night to help him. Never tiring or needing sleep, he would have the advantage of Strut then. As soon as the Airlander relaxed in his seat, the Tin Woodman meant to fall upon him, hurl him from a window, put all the plane's lights out, and speed off in the dark so swiftly the Stratovanians would be unable to follow. That failing, he depended on the difference in altitude to subdue the enemy. Perhaps when they reached the lower areas, Strut and his Airmen would faint, wilt, and become harmless. So, bolstering his spirits with these heartening hopes, Nick bore as patiently as he could the long afternoon and the unpleasant taunts and company of his captor. Repassing the ice crescent without meeting any Spikers, the Tin Woodman zoomed along, not even bothering to answer Strut's many questions about Oz and its inhabitants.

Night, when it did come, was especially dark and murky. No moon and only a few stars dotted the arching Skyway. The darker the better, rejoiced the Tin Woodman, taking quick little glances over his shoulder to see whether Strut was falling asleep or showing any signs of drowsiness. If it were just dark enough, he'd rid himself of these flying pests in a hurry. But all his plans proved futile. As the Oztober rushed on and on and the hours

dragged slowly by, Strut grew even more alert and watchful. His star-shaped eyes twinkled and glowed with sulphurous lights, and he showed no more signs of weariness than the Tin Woodman himself.

The endurance of the Airlander and his warriors was positively uncanny, and Nick, maneuvering the buttons and wheel of the plane, grew increasingly discouraged and gloomy. Flying at this rate, they would arrive in the Emerald City early in the morning, and to think that he was leading this band of savages upon the defenseless City almost broke Nick Chopper's heart. As it was a red plush heart, it could not really break, but it fluttered up and down in his tin bosom like a bird beating against the bars of a cage. To Nick's suggestion that he rest, Strut gave a contemptuous glance.

"I'll rest in Ohsma's palace," he sneered maliciously. "D'ye think I trust you enough to sleep? Ho no! Just attend to your flying, Mr. Funnel Top, and I'll take care of the rest of this little adventure." After this, Nick made no further remarks, and morning found the Oztober sailing high above the Hammerhead Mountains in the Quadling Country of Oz. All too soon the Tin Woodman made out the glittering green turrets and spires of the Emerald City itself.

"Quite a pretty little town," observed Strut condescendingly as Nick, his thoughts in a perfect tumult, tried to think of some excuse for not landing.

"Why are you not flying over the castle?" demanded Strut sharply. "It's the castle I am most anxious to reach. There, you can come down right inside the walls. My, My! So this is the wonderful Land of OHS. Well, it owes me its crown jewels and treasure to pay for your insolent invasion of the

Strat. Collecting them should prove pleasant! Very pleasant indeed!"

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," snapped Nick, turning his head stiffly. "I suppose you realize you are in great danger. If Ozma sees you before you have time to storm the castle, you and your silly flock of flyers are likely to be turned to crows and sparrows! The chances are, she HAS seen you," concluded Nick, slanting the Oztober sharply downward. At Nick's warning, the few clouds flitting across the Airman's forehead became positively thunderous.

"Pouf!" he sniffed, snapping his fingers scornfully. "Do you suppose a mere girl like this Ohsma of Ohs can frighten me? My Blowmen will soon attend to her and anyone else who stands in our way!"

"That," shouted Nick, raising his voice above the roar of the engine, "remains to be seen!" As a matter of fact, the Oztober and the swarm of flying warriors had been sighted almost as soon as they appeared above the green lands edging the capitol. Long before they reached the Emerald City itself, terrified messengers had brought word of the approaching airmen. Ozma being absent, Bettsy and Trot, the two little mortal girls who lived with Dorothy and the Supreme Ruler in the Emerald Palace, were in charge. After one glance at the flying army, they had called all the celebrities, servants and courtiers together and bade them flee for their lives. Then Bettsy, Trot, and the Patchwork Girl climbed into the Red Wagon. With the Saw Horse to pull them, they set off at a gallop to hide in the Blue Forests of the Munchkin Country till the invasion was over. Tik Tok, the Machine Man, carrying all of Ozma's loose jewels and valuables, marched rapidly after them. The Medicine Man rode the Hungry Tiger, and the rest of

the palace inmates ran helter-skelter down the yellow brick highway from the Capitol.

The inhabitants of the Emerald City itself, never having seen the Wizard's Ozoplanes and having no way of knowing that Nick Chopper was inside this one, were almost as afraid of the Oztober as of the Stratovanians. Pelting into their houses and shops, they bolted windows and doors and waited in terror-stricken silence for whatever was to come. Only the Guardian of the Gate stayed bravely at his post, waving his bunch of keys defiantly as the Ozoplane and the Airlanders swooped over the castle wall.

"Ho! No you don't!" cried Strut as Nick, having brought the plane to a landing, started to run for the door. "You'll stay with me as a hostage!" he rasped, gripping the Tin Woodman's arm. Furious but helpless in the iron grasp of the Stratovanian, Nick was forced to lead him into Ozma's beautiful castle.

Strut's warriors, after fluttering like curious birds from tree to tree and alighting in chattering groups on the wall, finally furred the wings of their staffs, formed ranks and marched, singing and shouting, up the steps after their jubilant leader.

In vain Nick sought for any signs of weakening among them. The Airmen seemed as comfortable and carefree in this lower altitude as they had been on their own airosphere. The Tin Woodman's only consolation was that he had brought back the Wizard's Ozoplane in as good condition as when it had started away so unexpectedly. It was also a great relief to him to find the castle deserted. Not a courtier, servant or celebrity was in sight C4 not even the Glass Cat or Dorothy's little kitten, Eureka. Strut and his rude army stamped through the first floor from end to end without encountering a

single soul.

"Very good," sniffed the Ruler of all the Stratovanians, shooting his eyes sharply to left and right, "so this powerful fairy Ohsma of Ohs has run off and left us her castle, and we win the war without blowing a blow! Ho, Ho! I shall spend my summers in this enchanting palace," he added with a malicious wink at the Tin Woodman. "But now," his grasp on Nick's arm tightened, "where are these famous magic treasures and jewels you were boasting of, this belt and fan and all the other foolishments and fripperies?"

"In a safe in Ozma's own apartment," Nick told him reluctantly. Now that Strut was in complete possession of the castle, little was to be gained by concealing the location of the treasures.

"Take me there at once," commanded Strut, and because the thousand Airlanders were a bit too numerous for comfort, Strut ordered them out to the garden, bidding them man the walls, guard the gates and all entrances, and give the alarm should any of the Ozlanders approach. Then, with lowered head and dragging feet, the Tin Woodman led the way to Ozma's private sitting room. The safe, sparkling with emeralds embedded in metal more valuable than platinum, stood in an alcove behind a pair of silk curtains.

Giving little heed to the elegant appointments of the apartment itself, Strut knelt before the safe, fairly panting with impatience and curiosity.

"How does it open?" he asked, spinning the little knob on the door round and round without any results whatsoever.

"I am sure I cannot say." Resting one elbow on the golden mantel, the Tin Woodman looked indifferently at the kneeling Airman. "Only Ozma and our

Wizard ever open that safe."

"Oh, is that so!" Strut straightened up angrily. "We shall see about that.

All I have to do is call one of my Blowmen and BLOW it open."

"Suit yourself," said Nick with a shrug of his shoulders. "Only if you do, the safe probably will blow away, and all the treasures with it!"

"Then how in the Dix shall I open it?" screamed Strut, giving it a spiteful kick with his silver-shod toe. Worn out by his long vigil of the night and the excitement of taking possession of the castle, he lost his temper completely and stamped and raged up and down before Ozma's jeweled strongbox. But thump and bang at the door as he would, it still remained shut. "Ha!" he puffed at last. "I'll call my swordsmith! He can hammer it open!" Racing over to the window, he yelled for the Swordsmith to come up.

But Strut's Swordsmith had no more success than his Master. Kindling a fire in the grate, he heated a poker red hot and tried to burn a hole in the door, but the poker did not leave even a scratch on the glittering surface.

"Stop! Stop! You witless Woff. I'll do it myself," raged Strut. "I'll blow it open with star powder!"

"Surely you wouldn't do that," protested Nick, who up to this time had been watching the effort of the two airmen with quiet amusement. "If you blow up the safe, you might set fire to the castle and destroy all the treasures you have won."

"Oh, hold your tongue!" advised Strut. Dragging two smouldering logs from the grate, he shoved them under the safe. Then, unscrewing the end of his flying stick, he sprinkled a fine, black powder that smelled and looked like gunpowder, over the logs. Lighting a twisted paper, he stuck it beneath the logs and jumped back, waiting impatiently for the safe to fly

apart.

Nick Chopper waited not a moment longer. Darting into the dressing room, he hastily filled a pitcher with water. But before he could return, an ear-splitting explosion rocked the castle and flung him and the pitcher through the doorway of the sitting room.

Without stopping to recover his breath, the Tin Woodman jumped up and hurried across the room. The two airmen, with blackened clothes and faces, stared dazedly at the spot where the safe had been. \$Where it had been&& C4 because the safe was no longer there! Not a sign, emerald or single splinter of it! There was no hole in the ceiling, so it could not have blown up; there was no hole in the floor, so it could not have blown down. The windows were unbroken, the walls intact. Only the two logs, smoking sullenly on Ozma's priceless rug, remained of the Airlander's bonfire C4 unless we count the expression on Strut's face, which simply blazed with wrath, bafflement and unadulterated fury.

CHAPTER 19

THE TRAVELERS RETURN!

"I told you not to do that," said Nick, running over to Strut and the Swordsmith. "I warned you! Now see what you've done!"

"But where is it? Where did it go? Where did it BLOW?" screamed the Airlander, his electric hair standing more on end than ever and crackling like summer lightning.

"Ask Ozma! Ask the Wizard!" suggested Nick, folding his arms and surveying the two quite calmly. "But if you take my advice, you'll hustle right out

of this castle before the same thing happens to YOU!"

"Who asked for your advice?" cried Strut, streaking over to the window to see whether the safe had blown into the garden, though how it could have done so without knocking a hole in the wall or ceiling he could neither imagine nor understand. Drawing aside the curtain, he gave a great gasp. Nick, who had hurried after him, uttered a loud shout of joy.

"See! I told you!" cried Nick, and unhooking his oil can, the Tin Woodman let four drops of oil slide down his neck. "I told you!" Strut made no reply. He just hung on to the curtain as if he were drowning and the flimsy portiere a life preserver. "See!" shouted Nick again.

But it was Strut who didn't see that upset the Airman! What he didn't see was his entire army of nine hundred and ninety-nine splendid fighters!

The garden below was as empty and quiet as a park on a rainy Sunday. "Calm yourself, Man! Calm yourself!" advised Nick as Strut, turning from the window and noting the disappearance of his Swordsmith, began running in frenzied circles, overturning chairs and tables and tripping over rugs and footstools.

"Quick," he hissed, making a dive for the Tin Woodman. "Fly me back to the Strat. At once! At ONCE! Do you hear?"

"Oh, yes! I hear you quite well!" said Nick, eluding Strut easily. "But I'll never fly you anywhere again! Besides, don't you realize you cannot fly from magic? You'll have to stay, my good man, and face the music!"

Nick's words seemed to bring the Airlander to his senses. Remembering, even in defeat, that he was a powerful King and Ruler, he straightened up proudly and, with one hand resting on an emerald-topped table, stood looking tensely from Nick Chopper to the door. He did not have long to

wait, for in less time than it takes to count ten, nine excited Ozians burst into the Royal Sitting room.

"Oh, Nick! Are you really safe? Is everything all right?" Jellia Jam rushed over to the Tin Woodman and took both of his hands in her own.

"So that's the fellow I was supposed to impersonate!" roared the Cowardly Lion, thrusting his head between Dorothy and the Soldier. "Well, Goosengravy, girls, I'm insulted!"

"And this really Strut, the high and mighty Stratovanian who has come to conquer us?" Ozma, who was just behind the Soldier, gazed so steadily and sorrowfully at the Airman that he uncomfortably averted his gaze. He was, to tell the truth, astonished at the youth, beauty and regal manner of the young Fairy. He cast a questioning look at the others crowding through the doorway. He already knew the Soldier with Green Whiskers, but the Scarecrow, the Cowardly Lion, the small, High-Hatted gentleman talking earnestly to a cheerful little girl, the little, red-cloaked Princess and the tall, imposing red-haired Glinda were all new and bewildering strangers. For the first time since they had met, Nick felt sorry for his discomfited foe, and as each of the celebrities approached, he called out the names.

"Our famous live Scarecrow, His Majesty the Cowardly Lion, Glinda the Good Sorceress, the Wonderful Wizard of Oz, Princess Dorothy of Kansas and the Emerald City"

"Azarine the Red," finished Dorothy, helping him out. For Nick, completely at sea, looked inquiringly at the pretty little Princess in the red cloak.

At each introduction Strut bowed stiffly. If he could have reached his

flying stick, which he had left standing beside the mantel, he would have flown out of the window, regardless of the fact that he might never find his way back to the Strat. But as he could not reach the staff, he stood stonily waiting for whatever was to befall.

"How'd you find Jellia and the Soldier? What became of the Ozpril? Where's the Emerald safe?" questioned Nick, leaving Strut's side and hurrying to seize the little Wizard by both lapels, for he could restrain his curiosity no longer.

"Quite a story, quite a story," puffed the Wizard, closing one eye. "Ask me again some long winter evening." Jerking away from Nick, he ran off to fetch his black bag of magic, from which he had been separated far too long.

"I suppose you are quite anxious to return to your own country," said Ozma, addressing herself to the Ruler of the Strat as she seated herself on a small satin sofa.

"Not without my army," blustered Strat defiantly. "It is neither fair nor honest for one ruler to destroy by magic the fighting forces of another!"

"Your army is not destroyed," Ozma told him evenly. "It already is in Stratovania, transported there by this magic belt." Lightly, the dark-haired fairy touched the gem-studded girdle she was wearing. "And speaking of honesty and fairness," she went on seriously, "did you think it honest or fair to come here, take possession of my castle and try to steal all my treasure and jewels?" Strut had the grace to blush, and as there was no good answer to Ozma's question, he looked haughtily over the heads of the company regarding him so accusingly.

"Well, have you anything to say?" inquired Ozma sternly. "Whether or not you

return to your Kingdom depends entirely upon yourself and how you treat Kabebe." At mention of his Queen, Strut started involuntarily.

"By the way, here's that silly crown you made me wear!" said Jellia, handing over the star-tipped circlet she had been wearing since her visit to the Strat. "Remember me to the Piper when you see him, and to Junnenrump and Hippenscop."

"Are you sure you'd rather not live in the Strat as a Starina than stay here with us?" asked Ozma, smiling mischievously as Jellia backed away from the frowning airman.

"Never! Never! NEVER!" cried Jellia, taking a long step backward at each word. "I've had enough of Kings to last me the rest of my life!"

A little ripple of laughter followed Jellia's blunt refusal, and taking pity on the mortified Airlander, Ozma touched her belt and whispered the magic word that would transport him to his own country.

"But can you trust him?" worried Nick Chopper as the Stratovanian vanished before their eyes. "How do you know he won't blow things up as soon as he returns?"

"Because I've removed all power from his Blowmen's horns," Ozma told him quietly. "He'll be all right, and for the kind of people he rules Strut probably is the best sort of ruler they could have."

"If you ask me," observed the Cowardly Lion, shaking his mane vigorously, "the worst punishment anyone could have would be to live on wind pudding and air-ade. Wooof!"

"Oh, what a shame!" Dorothy ran over to the mantel where the flying stick had been standing. "The winged staff's gone! I rather had hoped we could

keep it for Hallowe'en or New Year's or something!"

"Haven't you had enough flying?" grinned the Scarecrow, settling on the green sofa beside Ozma. "By the way, where's the tell-all-escape?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry," Dorothy felt ruefully in the pocket of her coat. "I must have left it in Strut's Royal Pavilion!"

"Never mind! I'll bring it back with the magic belt," smiled Ozma, "and I presume it's all right to bring the safe back, too." As Glinda nodded in agreement, the Ruler of Oz touched her belt twice, and with two thumps C4 one louder than the other C4 the safe and tell-all-escape thumped down on the floor beside the sofa. The tell-all-escape was pointing directly at Ozma, and it immediately began broadcasting her whole history. So the little Fairy, with a chuckle of amusement, locked it up in her desk drawer.

While Ozma had been meting out her gentle justice, Jellia had been telling Nick all that had happened since he was forced to fly Strut to Oz. She told him of the arrival of the Ozpril, the escape of the whole party from the angry Kabebe, their fall to Red Top Mountain, their rude treatment by Bustabo, their meeting with Azarine and the red Deer, and their final journey to Glinda's castle.

Spellbound, Nick learned how the Wizard finally had mastered the intricacies of Glinda's zentomatic transporter and brought the safe to her red castle just as Strut was on the point of taking violent measures. With the safe in his possession, it had been an easy matter for the Wizard to transport both Glinda and Ozma from Ragbad. After listening to the whole exciting story, Glinda, Ozma and the Wizard had sent the Stratovanian army back to the Strat and returned to the Emerald City to deal with Strut personally.

"It's certainly handy to have a Fairy around," sighed Dorothy, slipping an

arm around Ozma's slim waist. "One little wave of Ozma's wand and we soared right into this castle! Isn't it grand to be home again? Not that I didn't enjoy the trip," she added hastily as the Wizard came briskly into the room with his black bag. "Oh, Ozma! Just wait till you see the beautiful Ozoplanes our Wizard has built for you!"

"She'll need pretty strong glasses to see the Ozpril," observed the Wizard, looking rather sadly at the ceiling. "I expect it's hanging to the tip of a star by this time! And I suppose Strut made hash of the Oztober!"

"Hash!" sputtered Nick Chopper indignantly. "I should say NOT. I've taken splendid care of your ship, Wiz, and you'll find the Oztober below in the garden as bright and beautiful as the night she was launched!"

"Hurray for Nick," shouted Jellia, waving the duster she already was flipping briskly over pictures and books. "He should have a medal, your Majesty! No one could have flown that Plane better than the Tin Woodman!"

"He \$\$\$hall&& have a medal!" promised Ozma with a special smile for Nick Chopper, who was one of her special favorites. "And when he needs a vacation from the Winkies, he can come here and be our official Pilot answerable only to me and to the Wizard!"

"And I hereby present your Majesty with my two splendid Ozoplanes C4 for exploring, for pleasure, or for warfare!" announced the little Wizard, extending both arms dramatically. "But now you will have to excuse me, as the Tin Woodman and I are leaving at once!"

"Leaving!" wailed Jellia, plumping down on a footstool. "But you've only just returned!"

"Can't help it," panted the Wizard, who seemed in a perfect phiz to be off.

"I'll show you the Ozoplanes later, Ozma, but now Goodbye! Goodbye, Dorothy! Goodbye, Jellia! Take good care of Azarine till I return!"

"But look, where are we going?" demanded Nick Chopper as the Wizard seized his arm and marched him rapidly toward the door.

"To find the Ozpril, of course!" explained the Wizard impatiently, as if that should have been clear to everybody! "To find the Ozpril and bring her back to the Emerald City!"

"But think how high those Blowmen may have blown it," worried Dorothy. "They may even have blown it to Bitz!"

"Then we'll bring back the pieces," declared the Wizard firmly. "How about coming along?" With a wink at Jellia Jam, he paused beside the Lion, who was busy licking his front paws.

"WHAT?" roared the Lion, springing up as if someone had shot him. With a thoroughly indignant glance at Ozma's little magician, he bolted through the curtains and was gone.

"Just \$not&& a flyer!" mused the Wizard, shaking his head in amusement.

"Well, goodbye, Friends! Farewell, all!" With an energetic nod, he stepped through the door, pulling Nick along with him.

"Couldn't you bring the Ozpril back with your magic belt?" questioned Dorothy, hurrying over to the window to watch the plane's takeoff.

"I suppose so," answered Ozma thoughtfully. "But they both are so fond of flying, they'd much rather \$bring&& it back themselves! I'm sure of it!"

CHAPTER 20

AZARINE IS RESTORED TO RED TOP

>From the castle window, the whole party cheered wildly as the Ozoplane,

roaring with power, soared over the wall, over the treetops and up, up, and up, till it vanished into the cloudless blue sky.

"My pie! I do hope Nick doesn't start claiming any more countries," sighed Jellia, drawing in her head reluctantly. "And for cake's sake, why couldn't they have waited a few days? Of course, the Tin Woodman is never tired, but Wiz certainly needed a rest after all we've been through!"

"Never you mind about that!" Glinda patted the kind-hearted little Jellia on the shoulder. "The Wizard has his black bag along this time, and in that bag there is a cure for almost everything C4 even lack of sleep!"

"Look!" called Dorothy, pulling Jellia back to the window. "Shaggy and Dear Deer are running races round the pond, and here come all our servants and celebrities! Hiah, Tik Tok! Hello, Scraps! See, Azarine! That's the Patch Work Girl! You'll simply love her! We all do! Someone must have sent word that Strut had been defeated!"

"I did. I dispatched one of my doves," explained Glinda. "And now, my dear," the tall and lovely Sorceress motioned significantly to Ozma, "is it not time to deal with Bustabo and restore this Little Lady to her Castle?"

"Oh, not yet! Please, not yet!" begged Dorothy as Azarine looked expectantly from Glinda to Ozma. "We want Azarine to stay here a long time, don't we, Jellia? Come on, Azzy dear, I'll lend you an old dress, and we'll all go for a ride before lunch! You on Shaggy, Jellia and I on Dear Deer, Bettsy and Trot on the Cowardly Lion, and the Scarecrow on the Hungry Tiger!"

"It's all right, go ahead," Ozma nodded indulgently as the little Princess hung back. She did want so much to stay and meet all the interesting people in the garden, but she felt it her real duty to return to her subjects, now

suffering under the cruel rule and temper of Bustabo.

Then: "I've already turned Bustabo into a red Squirrel!" Ozma told the Princess gravely. "In that form he still can enjoy himself, but do no harm to others. I've also sent a message saying you will be home in a few days and placed Archibald the Archer in charge till you return!"

"Oh, how did you know Archy is the one I trust most?" marveled Azarine, her eyes shining with happiness and astonishment. "Bustabo threw Archy into a dungeon a week ago because he tried to help me!"

"Ozma knows everything," confided Dorothy with an adoring glance toward the little Ruler of all Oz. "And everything's going to be lovely! Come on, Azzy! I'll beat you to the fountain in the garden!"

So now, with her last worry removed, the little Princess of Red Top skipped off with Dorothy to meet all the exciting celebrities in the garden. The two deer, alarmed by the strange appearance of some of the Ozlanders, had hidden themselves in a snowball bush. But Azarine soon coaxed them out, and in no time at all they were chatting like old friends with the Hungry Tiger and the Saw Horse.

Jellia stayed in the garden only a short while, for Jellia had other things to do. The little Oz Maid was determined to have a party to celebrate their homecoming, and soon, in deep conference with the castle chef, she was planning the most gorgeous feast the Green Castle ever had known.

It began at noon and lasted till nightfall. Even long after the tall candles had burned low, the cheery company sat around the royal table while Dorothy, Jellia and the Scarecrow told and retold their amazing adventures in the Strat and on Red Top Mountain.

So delightful did Azarine and the two Deer find life in the capitol, they

stayed on and on. Each evening, the girls and Ozma and her most important counselor would gather in her private sitting room. There, looking at the magic screen, they followed the progress of Nick and the Wizard as they flew on and on through the strange Highways and Byways of the Stratosphere. What a story they will have to tell us when they return. WHAT a story!

THE END