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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Ozoplaning with the Wizard of Oz: Escape from Red Top (16/20)

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! Splendid!" 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—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?"

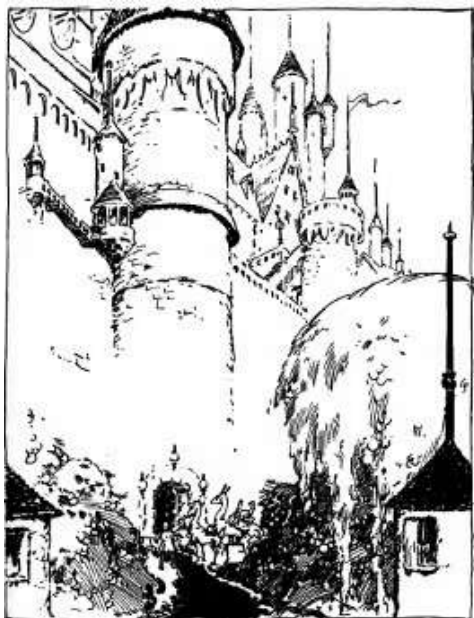
"But I do hope we'll find some way to stop Strut! How long will it take him to reach the capitol?" Dorothy called across to the Wizard.

"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 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.