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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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## Ozoplaning with the Wizard of Oz: In the Red Castle (15/20)

And now let us peek into 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 lead 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 travellers. 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 behind 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. "Mmm—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 rights—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.—WIZ.'"

"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—HARK! What was that?" Dropping the pajamas, she clutched Dorothy as the unmistakable tread of a heavy boot came stamping up the stair.

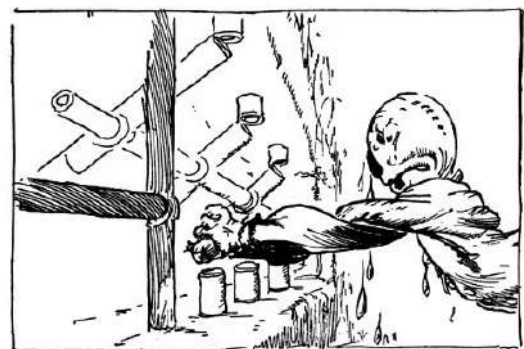
"Bustabo!" shivered Dorothy. "Oh—he's not going to wait till morning! He's coming for us now! Oh, Jellia, JELLIA—"

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—as the steps on the stair thumped louder and nearer—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 eyes so she would not see the rocks below, and 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 ever 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. Brrrrah! 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 come 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!"