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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Ozoplaning with the Wizard of Oz: King, King-Double King! (11/20)

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 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 Blowmens' 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 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 airmals 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, "'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—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.

"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—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—if necessary—without rest or refreshment."

"Didn't you have 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."

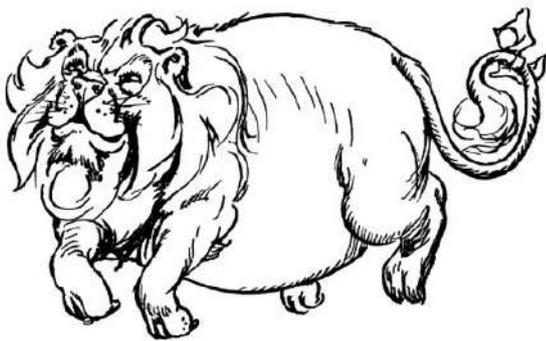
"Well, I'd rather feel funny than sad," said the lion, sniffing the pudding delicately, "and I'd rather feel funny than starve. Aren't you having any, Jellia?"

"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, "Deli—" "Hey, where 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 blunder-buss. "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 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—and—"



"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 travellers 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 staffs, 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 the 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.