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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Ozoplaning with the Wizard of Oz: The Flight to Oz (12/20)

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 dryer 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 coat-tails. "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 the 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, good-bye, 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 says—"

"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 he'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 big—"
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.

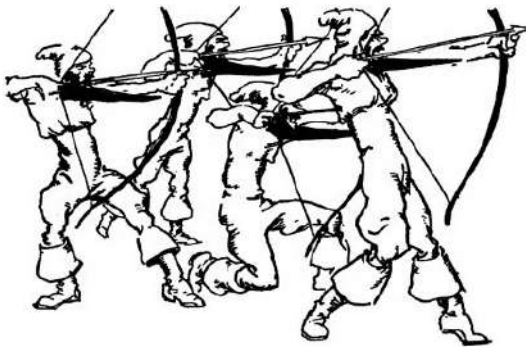
"An army!" shivered Wantowin, clutching his dripping beard—"Thou—sands of them!"

"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—my goodness—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 friendly," 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 terrible 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.