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[Authors](#)
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[The Road to Oz](#)

[L Frank Baum](#)

This Book:
[Contents](#)
[Previous Chapter](#)
[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 17

The neat yellow houses of the Winkies were now to be seen standing here and there along the roadway, giving the country a more cheerful and civilized look. They were farm-houses, though, and set far apart; for in the Land of Oz there were no towns or villages except the magnificent Emerald City in its center.

Hedges of evergreen or of yellow roses bordered the broad highway and the farms showed the care of their industrious inhabitants. The nearer the travelers came to the great city the more prosperous the country became, and they crossed many bridges over the sparkling streams and rivulets that watered the lands.

As they walked leisurely along the shaggy man said to the Tin Woodman:

"What sort of a Magic Powder was it that made your friend the Pumpkinhead live?"

"It was called the Powder of Life," was the answer; "and it was invented by a crooked Sorcerer who lived in the mountains of the North Country. A Witch named Mombi got some of this powder from the crooked Sorcerer and took it home with her. Ozma lived with the Witch then, for it was before she became our Princess, while Mombi had transformed her into the shape of a boy. Well, while Mombi was gone to the crooked Sorcerer's, the boy made this pumpkin-headed man to amuse himself, and also with the hope of frightening the Witch with it when she returned. But Mombi was not scared, and she sprinkled the Pumpkinhead with her Magic Powder of Life, to see if the Powder would work. Ozma was watching, and saw the Pumpkinhead come to life; so that night she took the pepper-box containing the Powder and ran away with it and with Jack, in search of adventures.

"Next day they found a wooden Saw-Horse standing by the roadside, and sprinkled it with the Powder. It came to life at once, and Jack Pumpkinhead rode the Saw-Horse to the Emerald City."

"What became of the Saw-Horse, afterward?" asked the shaggy man, much interested in this story.

"Oh, it's alive yet, and you will probably meet it presently in the Emerald City. Afterward, Ozma used the last of the Powder to bring the Flying Gump to life; but as soon as it had carried her away from her enemies the Gump was taken apart, so it doesn't exist any more."

"It's too bad the Powder of Life was all used up," remarked the shaggy man; "it would be a handy thing to have around."

"I am not so sure of that, sir," answered the Tin Woodman. "A while ago the crooked Sorcerer who invented the Magic Powder fell down a precipice and was killed. All his possessions went to a relative--an old woman named Dyna, who lives in the Emerald City. She went to the mountains where the Sorcerer had lived and brought away everything she thought of value. Among them was a small bottle of the Powder of Life; but of course Dyna didn't know it was a Magic Powder, at all. It happened she had once had a big blue bear for a pet; but the bear choked to death on a fishbone one day, and she loved it so dearly that Dyna made a rug of its skin, leaving the head and four paws on the hide. She kept the rug on the floor of her front parlor."

"I've seen rugs like that," said the shaggy man, nodding, "but never one made from a blue bear."

"Well," continued the Tin Woodman, "the old woman had an idea that the Powder in the bottle must be moth-powder, because it smelled something like moth-powder; so one day she sprinkled it on her bear rug to keep the moths out of it. She said, looking lovingly at the skin: 'I wish my dear bear were alive again!' To her horror, the bear rug at once came to life, having been sprinkled with the Magic Powder; and now this live bear rug is a great trial to her, and makes her a lot of trouble."

"Why?" asked the shaggy man.

"Well, it stands up on its four feet and walks all around, and gets in the way; and that spoils it for a rug. It can't speak, although it is alive; for, while its head might say words, it has no breath in a solid body to push the words out of its mouth. It's a very slimpy affair altogether, that bear rug, and the old woman is sorry it came to life. Every day she has to scold it, and make it lie down flat on the parlor floor to be walked upon; but sometimes when she goes to market the rug will hump up its back skin, and stand on its four feet, and trot along after her."

"I should think Dyna would like that," said Dorothy.

"Well, she doesn't; because every one knows it isn't a real bear, but just a hollow skin, and so of no actual use in the world except for a rug," answered the Tin Woodman. "Therefore I believe it is a good thing that all the Magic Powder of Life is now used up, as it can not cause any more trouble."

"Perhaps you're right," said the shaggy man, thoughtfully.

At noon they stopped at a farmhouse, where it delighted the farmer and his wife to be able to give them a good luncheon. The farm people knew Dorothy, having seen her when she was in the country before, and they treated the little girl with as much respect as they did the Emperor, because she was a friend of the powerful Princess Ozma.

They had not proceeded far after leaving this farm-house before coming to a high bridge over a broad river. This river, the Tin Woodman informed them, was the boundary between the Country of the Winkies and the territory of the Emerald City. The city itself was still a long way off, but all around it was a green meadow as pretty as a well-kept lawn, and in this were neither houses nor farms to spoil the beauty of the scene.

From the top of the high bridge they could see far away the magnificent spires and splendid domes of the superb city, sparkling like brilliant jewels as they towered above the emerald walls. The shaggy man drew a deep breath of awe and amazement, for never had he dreamed that such a grand and beautiful place could exist--even in the fairyland of Oz.

Polly was so pleased that her violet eyes sparkled like amethysts, and she danced away from her companions across the bridge and into a group of feathery trees lining both the roadsides. These trees she stopped to look at with pleasure and surprise, for their leaves were shaped like ostrich plumes, their feather edges beautifully curled; and all the plumes were tinted in the same dainty rainbow hues that appeared in Polychrome's own pretty gauze gown.

"Father ought to see these trees," she murmured; "they are almost as lovely as his own rainbows."

Then she gave a start of terror, for beneath the trees came stalking two great beasts, either one big enough to crush the little Daughter of the Rainbow with one blow of his paws, or to eat her up with one snap of his enormous jaws. One was a tawny lion, as tall as a horse, nearly; the other a striped tiger almost the same size.

Polly was too frightened to scream or to stir; she stood still with a wildly beating heart until Dorothy rushed past her and with a glad cry threw her arms around the huge lion's neck, hugging and kissing the beast with evident joy.

"Oh, I'm SO glad to see you again!" cried the little Kansas girl. "And the Hungry Tiger, too! How fine you're both looking. Are you well and happy?"

"We certainly are, Dorothy," answered the Lion, in a deep voice that sounded pleasant and kind; "and we are greatly pleased that you have come to Ozma's party. It's going to be a grand affair, I promise you."

"There will be lots of fat babies at the celebration, I hear," remarked the Hungry Tiger, yawning so that his mouth opened dreadfully wide and showed all his big, sharp teeth; "but of course I can't eat any of 'em."

"Is your Conscience still in good order?" asked Dorothy, anxiously.

"Yes; it rules me like a tyrant," answered the Tiger, sorrowfully. "I can imagine nothing more unpleasant than to own a Conscience," and he winked slyly at his friend the Lion.

"You're fooling me!" said Dorothy, with a laugh. "I don't b'lieve you'd eat a baby if you lost your Conscience. Come here, Polly," she called, "and be introduced to my friends."

Polly advanced rather shyly.

"You have some queer friends, Dorothy," she said.

"The queerness doesn't matter so long as they're friends," was the answer. "This is the Cowardly Lion, who isn't a coward at all, but just thinks he is. The Wizard gave him some courage once, and he has part of it left."

The Lion bowed with great dignity to Polly.

"You are very lovely, my dear," said he. "I hope we shall be friends when we are better acquainted."

"And this is the Hungry Tiger," continued Dorothy. "He says he longs to eat fat babies; but the truth is he is never hungry at all, 'cause he gets plenty to eat; and I don't s'pose he'd hurt anybody even if he WAS hungry."

"Hush, Dorothy," whispered the Tiger; "you'll ruin my reputation if you are not more discreet. It isn't what we are, but what folks think we are, that counts in this world. And come to think of it Miss Polly would make a fine variegated breakfast, I'm sure."