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Chapter 11 - A Nickel-Plated Emperor

Tip awoke soon after dawn, but the Scarecrow had already risen and plucked, with his clumsy fingers, a double-handful of ripe berries from some bushes near by. These the boy ate greedily, finding them an ample breakfast, and afterward the little party resumed its Journey.

After an hour's ride they reached the summit of a hill from whence they espied the City of the Winkies and noted the tall domes of the Emperor's palace rising from the clusters of more modest dwellings.

The Scarecrow became greatly animated at this sight, and exclaimed:

"How delighted I shall be to see my old friend the Tin Woodman again! I hope that he rules his people more successfully than I have ruled mine!"

Is the Tin Woodman the Emperor of the Winkies?" asked the horse.

"Yes, indeed. They invited him to rule over them soon after the Wicked Witch was destroyed; and as Nick Chopper has the best heart in all the world I am sure he has proved an excellent and able emperor."

"I thought that 'Emperor' was the title of a person who rules an empire," said Tip, "and the Country of the Winkies is only a Kingdom."

"Don't mention that to the Tin Woodman!" exclaimed the Scarecrow, earnestly. "You would hurt his feelings terribly. He is a proud man, as he has every reason to be, and it pleases him to be termed Emperor rather than King."

"I'm sure it makes no difference to me," replied the boy.

The Saw-Horse now ambled forward at a pace so fast that its riders had hard work to stick upon its back; so there was little further conversation until they drew up beside the palace steps.

An aged Winkie, dressed in a uniform of silver cloth, came forward to assist them to alight. Said the Scarecrow to his personage:

"Show us at once to your master, the Emperor."

The man looked from one to another of the party in an embarrassed way, and finally answered:

"I fear I must ask you to wait for a time. The Emperor is not receiving this morning."

"How is that?" enquired the Scarecrow, anxiously. "I hope nothing has happened to him."

"Oh, no; nothing serious," returned the man. "But this is his Majesty's day for being polished; and just now his august presence is thickly smeared with putz-pomade."

"Oh, I see!" cried the Scarecrow, greatly reassured. "My friend was ever inclined to be a dandy, and I suppose he is now more proud than ever of his personal appearance."

"He is, indeed," said the man, with a polite bow. "Our mighty Emperor has lately caused himself to be nickel-plated."

"Good Gracious!" the Scarecrow exclaimed at hearing this. "If his wit bears the same polish, how sparkling it must be! But show us in -- I'm sure the Emperor will receive us, even in his present state"

"The Emperor's state is always magnificent," said the man. "But I will venture to tell him of your arrival, and will receive his commands concerning you."

So the party followed the servant into a splendid ante-room, and the Saw- Horse ambled awkwardly after them, having no knowledge that a horse might be expected to remain outside.

The travelers were at first somewhat awed by their surroundings, and even the Scarecrow seemed impressed as he examined the rich hangings of silver cloth caught up into knots and fastened with tiny silver axes. Upon a handsome center-table stood a large silver oil-can, richly engraved with scenes from the past adventures of the Tin Woodman, Dorothy, the Cowardly Lion and the Scarecrow: the lines of the engraving being traced upon the silver in yellow gold. On the walls hung several portraits, that of the Scarecrow seeming to be the most prominent and carefully executed, while a the large painting of the famous Wizard of Oz, in act of presenting the Tin Woodman with a heart, covered almost one entire end of the room.

While the visitors gazed at these things in silent admiration they suddenly heard a loud voice in the next room exclaim:

"Well! well! well! What a great surprise!"

And then the door burst open and Nick Chopper rushed into their midst and caught the Scarecrow in a close and loving embrace that creased him into many folds and wrinkles.

"My dear old friend! My noble comrade!" cried the Tin Woodman, joyfully. "how delighted!, I am to meet you once again.

And then he released the Scarecrow and held him at arms' length while he surveyed the beloved, painted features.

But, alas! the face of the Scarecrow and many portions of his body bore great blotches of putz-pomade; for the Tin Woodman, in his eagerness to welcome his friend, had quite forgotten the condition of his toilet and had rubbed the thick coating of paste from his own body to that of his comrade.

"Dear me!" said the Scarecrow dolefully. "What a mess I'm in!"

"Never mind, my friend," returned the Tin Woodman, "I'll send you to my Imperial Laundry, and you'll come out as good as new."

"Won't I be mangled?" asked the Scarecrow.

"No, indeed!" was the reply. "But tell me, how came your Majesty here? and who are your companions?"

The Scarecrow, with great politeness, introduced Tip and Jack Pumpkinhead, and the latter personage seemed to interest the Tin Woodman greatly.

"You are not very substantial, I must admit," said the Emperor. "but you are certainly unusual, and therefore worthy to become a member of our select society."

"I thank your Majesty, said Jack, humbly.

"I hope you are enjoying good health?" continued the Woodman.

"At present, yes;" replied the Pumpkinhead, with a sigh; "but I am in constant terror of the day when I shall spoil."

"Nonsense!" said the Emperor -- but in a kindly, sympathetic tone. "Do not, I beg of you, dampen today's sun with the showers of tomorrow. For before your head has time to spoil you can have it canned, and in that way it may be preserved indefinitely."

Tip, during this conversation, was looking at the Woodman with undisguised amazement, and noticed that the celebrated Emperor of the Winkies was composed entirely of pieces of tin, neatly soldered and riveted together into the form of a man. He rattled and clanked a little, as he moved, but in the main he seemed to be most cleverly constructed, and his appearance was only marred by the thick coating of polishing-paste that covered him from head to foot.

The boy's intent gaze caused the Tin Woodman to remember that he was not in the most presentable condition, so he begged his friends to excuse him while he retired to his private apartment and allowed his servants to polish him. This was accomplished in a short time, and when the emperor returned his nickel-plated body shone so magnificently that the Scarecrow heartily congratulated him on his improved appearance.

"That nickel-plate was, I confess, a happy thought," said Nick; "and it was the more necessary because I had become somewhat scratched during my adventurous experiences. You will observe this engraved star upon my left breast. It not only indicates where my excellent heart lies, but covers very neatly the patch made by the Wonderful Wizard when he placed that valued organ in my breast with his own skillful hands."

"Is your heart, then, a hand-organ?" asked the Pumpkinhead, curiously.

"By no means," responded the emperor, with dignity. "It is, I am convinced, a strictly orthodox heart, although somewhat larger and warmer than most people possess."

Then he turned to the Scarecrow and asked:

"Are your subjects happy and contented, my dear friend?"

"I cannot, say" was the reply. "for the girls of Oz have risen in revolt and driven me out of the emerald City."

"Great Goodness!" cried the Tin Woodman, "What a calamity! They surely do not complain of your wise and gracious rule?"

"No; but they say it is a poor rule that don't work both ways," answered the Scarecrow; "and these females are also of the opinion that men have ruled the land long enough. So they have captured my city, robbed the treasury of all its jewels, and are running things to suit themselves."

"Dear me! What an extraordinary idea!" cried the Emperor, who was both shocked and surprised.

"And I heard some of them say," said Tip, "that they intend to march here and capture the castle and city of the Tin Woodman."

"Ah! we must not give them time to do that," said the Emperor, quickly; "we will go at once and recapture the Emerald City and place the Scarecrow again upon his throne."

"I was sure you would help me," remarked the Scarecrow in a pleased voice. "How large an army can you assemble?"

"We do not need an army," replied the Woodman. "We four, with the aid of my gleaming axe, are enough to strike terror into the hearts of the rebels."

"We five," corrected the Pumpkinhead.

"Five?" repeated the Tin Woodman.

"Yes; the Saw-Horse is brave and fearless," answered Jack, forgetting his recent quarrel with the quadruped.

The Tin Woodman looked around him in a puzzled way, for the Saw-Horse had until now remained quietly standing in a corner, where the Emperor had not noticed him. Tip immediately called the odd-looking creature to them, and it approached so awkwardly that it nearly upset the beautiful center-table and the engraved oil-can.

"I begin to think," remarked the Tin Woodman as he looked earnestly at the Saw-Horse, "that wonders will never cease! How came this creature alive?"

"I did it with a magic powder," modestly asserted the boy. "and the Saw- Horse has been very useful to us."

"He enabled us to escape the rebels," added the Scarecrow.

"Then we must surely accept him as a comrade," declared the emperor. "A live Saw-Horse is a distinct novelty, and should prove an interesting study. Does he know anything?"

"Well, I cannot claim any great experience in life," the Saw-Horse answered for himself. "but I seem to learn very quickly, and often it occurs to me that I know more than any of those around me."

"Perhaps you do," said the emperor; "for experience does not always mean wisdom. But time is precious Just now, so let us quickly make preparations to start upon our Journey."

The emperor called his Lord High Chancellor and instructed him how to run the kingdom during his absence. Meanwhile the Scarecrow was taken apart and the painted sack that served him for a head was carefully laundered and restuffed with the brains originally given him by the great Wizard. His clothes were also cleaned and pressed by the Imperial tailors, and his crown polished and again sewed upon his head, for the Tin Woodman insisted he should not renounce this badge of royalty. The Scarecrow now presented a very respectable appearance, and although in no way addicted to vanity he was quite pleased with himself and strutted a trifle as he walked. While this was being done Tip mended the wooden limbs of Jack Pumpkinhead and made them stronger than before, and the Saw-Horse was also inspected to see if he was in good working order.

Then bright and early the next morning they set out upon the return Journey to the emerald City, the Tin Woodman bearing upon his shoulder a gleaming axe and leading the way, while the Pumpkinhead rode upon the Saw-Horse and Tip and the Scarecrow walked upon either side to make sure that he didn't fall off or become damaged.