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Chapter 22 - The Transformation of Old Mombi

The Witch was at first frightened at finding herself captured by the enemy; but soon she decided that she was exactly as safe in the Tin Woodman's button-hole as growing upon the bush. For no one knew the rose and Mombi to be one, and now that she was without the gates of the City her chances of escaping altogether from Glinda were much improved.

"But there is no hurry," thought Mombi. "I will wait awhile and enjoy the humiliation of this Sorceress when she finds I have outwitted her." So throughout the night the rose lay quietly on the Woodman's bosom, and in the morning, when Glinda summoned our friends to a consultation, Nick Chopper carried his pretty flower with him to the white silk tent.

"For some reason," said Glinda, "we have failed to find this cunning old Mombi; so I fear our expedition will prove a failure. And for that I am sorry, because without our assistance little Ozma will never be rescued and restored to her rightful position as Queen of the Emerald City"

"Do not let us give up so easily," said the Pumpkinhead. "Let us do something else."

"Something else must really be done," replied Glinda, with a smile. "yet I cannot understand how I have been defeated so easily by an old Witch who knows far less of magic than I do myself."

"While we are on the ground I believe it would be wise for us to conquer the Emerald City for Princess Ozma, and find the girl afterward," said the Scarecrow. "And while the girl remains hidden I will gladly rule in her place, for I understand the business of ruling much better than Jinjur does."

"But I have promised not to molest Jinjur," objected Glinda.

"Suppose you all return with me to my kingdom -- or Empire, rather," said the Tin Woodman, politely including the entire party in a royal wave of his arm. "It will give me great pleasure to entertain you in my castle, where there is room enough and to spare. And if any of you wish to be nickel-plated, my valet will do it free of all expense."

While the Woodman was speaking Glinda's eyes had been noting the rose in his button-hole, and now she imagined she saw the big red leaves of the flower tremble slightly. This quickly aroused her suspicions, and in a moment more the Sorceress had decided that the seeming rose was nothing else than a transformation of old Mombi. At the same instant Mombi knew she was discovered and must quickly plan an escape, and as transformations were easy to her she immediately took the form of a Shadow and glided along the wall of the tent toward the entrance, thinking thus to disappear.

But Glinda had not only equal cunning, but far more experience than the Witch. So the Sorceress reached the opening of the tent before the Shadow, and with a wave of her hand closed the entrance so securely that Mombi could not find a crack big enough to creep through. The Scarecrow and his friends were greatly surprised at Glinda's actions; for none of them had noted the Shadow. But the Sorceress said to them:

"Remain perfectly quiet, all of you! For the old Witch is even now with us in this tent, and I hope to capture her."

These words so alarmed Mombi that she quickly transformed herself from a shadow to a Black Ant, in which shape she crawled along the ground, seeking a crack or crevice in which to hide her tiny body.

Fortunately, the ground where the tent had been pitched, being just before the city gates, was hard and smooth; and while the Ant still crawled about, Glinda discovered it and ran quickly forward to effect its capture. But, just as her hand was descending, the Witch, now fairly frantic with fear, made her last transformation, and in the form of a huge Griffin sprang through the wall of the tent -- tearing the silk asunder in her rush -- and in a moment had darted away with the speed of a whirlwind.

Glinda did not hesitate to follow. She sprang upon the back of the Saw-Horse and cried:

"Now you shall prove that you have a right to be alive! Run -- run -- run!"

The Saw-Horse ran. Like a flash he followed the Griffin, his wooden legs moving so fast that they twinkled like the rays of a star. Before our friends could recover from their surprise both the Griffin and the Saw-Horse had dashed out of sight.

"Come! Let us follow!" cried the Scarecrow.

They ran to the place where the Gump was lying and quickly tumbled aboard.

"Fly!" commanded Tip, eagerly.

"Where to?" asked the Gump, in its calm voice.

"I don't know," returned Tip, who was very nervous at the delay; "but if you will mount into the air I think we can discover which way Glinda has gone."

"Very well," returned the Gump, quietly; and it spread its great wings and mounted high into the air.

Far away, across the meadows, they could now see two tiny specks, speeding one after the other; and they knew these specks must be the Griffin and the Saw-Horse. So Tip called the Gump's attention to them and bade the creature try to overtake the Witch and the Sorceress. But, swift as was the Gump's flight, the pursued and pursuer moved more swiftly yet, and within a few moments were blotted out against the dim horizon.

"Let us continue to follow them, nevertheless," said the Scarecrow. "for the Land of Oz is of small extent, and sooner or later they must both come to a halt."

Old Mombi had thought herself very wise to choose the form of a Griffin, for its legs were exceedingly fleet and its strength more enduring than that of other animals. But she had not reckoned on the untiring energy of the Saw-Horse, whose wooden limbs could run for days without slacking their speed. Therefore, after an hour's hard running, the Griffin's breath began to fail, and it panted and gasped painfully, and moved more slowly than before. Then it reached the edge of the desert and began racing across the deep sands. But its tired feet sank far into the sand, and in a few minutes the Griffin fell forward, completely exhausted, and lay still upon the desert waste.

Glinda came up a moment later, riding the still vigorous Saw-Horse; and having unwound a slender golden thread from her girdle the Sorceress threw it over the head of the panting and helpless Griffin, and so destroyed the magical power of Mombi's transformation.

For the animal, with one fierce shudder, disappeared from view, while in its place was discovered the form of the old Witch, glaring savagely at the serene and beautiful face of the Sorceress.