The Cowardly Lion and the Hungry Tiger

In the splendid palace of the Emerald City, which is in the

center of the fairy Land of Oz, is a great Throne Room. This

is where Princess Ozma, the Ruler, sits in a throne of

glistening emeralds for an hour each day and listens to all the

troubles of her people, which they are sure to tell her about.

Around Ozma's throne, on such occasions, are grouped all

the important personages of Oz, such as the Scarecrow,

Tiktok the Clockwork Man, the Tin Woodman, the Wizard

of Oz, and other famous fairy people. Little Dorothy usually

has a seat at Ozma's feet, and crouched on either side the

throne are two enormous beasts known as the Hungry Tiger

and the Cowardly Lion.

These two beasts are Ozma's chief guardians, but as

everyone loves the beautiful girl Princess there has never

been any disturbance in the great Throne Room, or anything

for the guardians to do but look fierce and solemn and keep

quiet until the Royal Audience is over and the people go

away to their homes.

Of course no one would dare be naughty while the huge Lion

and Tiger crouched beside the throne; but the fact is, the

people of Oz are very seldom naughty. So Ozma's big guards

are more ornamental than useful. No one realizes that

better than the beasts themselves.

One day, after everyone had left the Throne Room except the

Cowardly Lion and the Hungry Tiger, the Lion yawned and

said to his friend:

"I'm getting tired of this job. No one is afraid of us and no

one pays any attention to us."

"That is true," replied the big Tiger, purring softly. "We

might as well be in the thick jungles where we were born, as

trying to protect Ozma when she needs no protection. And

I'm dreadfully hungry all the time."

"You have enough to eat, I'm sure," said the Lion, swaying

his tail slowly back and forth.

"Enough, perhaps; but not the kind of food I long for,"

answered the Tiger. "What I'm hungry for is fat babies. I

have a great desire to eat a few fat babies. Then, perhaps, the

people of Oz would fear me and I'd become more

important."

"True," agreed the Lion. "It would stir up quite a scene if you

ate but one fat baby. As for myself, my claws are sharp as

needles and strong as crowbars. My teeth are powerful

enough to tear a person to pieces in a few seconds. I could

spring upon a man and make chop suey of him. There would

be wild excitement in the Emerald City. People would fall

upon their knees and beg me for mercy. That, in my opinion,

would render me very important."

"After you had torn the person to pieces, what would you do

next?" asked the Tiger sleepily.

"Then I would roar so loudly it would shake the earth and

stalk away to the jungle to hide myself, before anyone could

attack me or kill me for what I had done."

"I see," nodded the Tiger. "You are really cowardly."

"To be sure. That is why I am named the Cowardly Lion.

That is why I have always been so tame and peaceable. But

I'm awfully tired of being tame," added the Lion, with a sigh,

"and it would be fun to raise a row and show people what a

terrible beast I really am."

The Tiger remained silent for several minutes, thinking

deeply as he slowly washed his face with his left paw. Then

he said:

"I'm getting old, and it would please me to eat at least one fat

baby before I die. Suppose we surprise these people of Oz

and prove our power. What do you say? We will walk out of

here just as usual and the first baby we meet I'll eat in a

jiffy. And the first man or woman you meet, you will tear to

pieces. Then we will both run out of the city gates and gallop

across the country and hide in the jungle before anyone can

stop us."

"All right. I'm game," said the Lion, yawning again so that

he showed two rows of large sharp teeth.

The Tiger got up and stretched his great, sleek body.

"Seen any of them old Hydrophobies the last day or two?"

"Come on," he said. The Lion stood up and proved he was

the larger of the two, for he was almost as big as a small

horse.

Out of the palace they walked, and met no one. They passed

through the beautiful grounds, past fountains and beds of

lovely flowers, and met no one. Then they unlatched a gate

and entered a street of the city, and met no one.

"I wonder how a fat baby will taste," said the Tiger, as they

stalked majestically along, side by side.

"I imagine it will taste like nutmegs," said the Lion.

"No," said the Tiger, "I've an idea it will taste like

gumdrops."

They turned a corner, but met no one, for the people of the

Emerald City usually take their naps at this hour of the

afternoon.

"I wonder how many pieces I ought to tear a person into,"

said the Lion, in a thoughtful voice.

"Sixty would be about right," suggested the Tiger.

"Would that hurt any more than to tear one into about a

dozen pieces?" asked the Lion, with a little shudder.

"Who cares whether it hurts or not?" growled the Tiger.

The Lion did not reply.

They entered a side street, but met no

one. Suddenly they heard a child crying.

"Aha!" exclaimed the Tiger. "There is my meat."

He rushed around a corner, the Lion following, and came

upon a nice fat baby sitting in the middle of the street and

crying as if in great distress.

"What's the matter?" asked the Tiger, crouching before the

baby.

"I--I--I-lost my m-m-mamma!" wailed the baby.

"Why, you poor little thing," said the great beast, softly

stroking the child's head with its paw. "Don't cry, my dear,

for mamma can't be far away. I'll help you find her."