

## CHAPTER 20 - DOROTHY UPSETS THE CEREMONY OF THE ISLAND

"A caravan!" whistled the Comfortable Camel, lurching to his feet. "How nice!"

"I doubt that!" The dromedary's eyes flew open, and he stared sleepily at the magnificent procession of Silver Islanders.

First came the musicians, playing their shining silver trumpets and flutes. The Grand Chew Chew and General Mugwump followed, attired in brilliant silk robes of state. Then came the three Princes, glittering with jeweled chains and medals, and the fifteen little Princes, like so many silver butterflies in their satin kimonas. Next appeared a palanquin bearing the veiled Princess Orange Blossom, followed by a whole company of splendid courtiers and after them as many of the everyday Silver Islanders as the hall would hold. There was a moment of silence. Then the whole assemblage, contrary to the Scarecrow's edict, fell upon their faces.

"My!" exclaimed Dorothy, impressed in spite of herself. "Are you sure you want to give up all this?"

"Great Emperor, beautiful as the sun, wise as the stars, and radiant as the clouds, the Ceremony of Restoration is about to begin!" quavered the Grand Chew Chew, rising slowly. Then he paused, for he was suddenly confused by the strange company around the Scarecrow's throne.

"Treachery!" hissed the eldest Prince to the others. "We left him tied to the bean pole. Ancient Papa Scarecrow needs watching! Who are these curious objects he has gathered about him, pray?"

Now by some magic which even I cannot explain, the people from Oz found they could understand all that was being said. When Dorothy heard herself called an object and saw the wicked faces of the three Princes and the stupid little grandsons, she no longer wondered at the Scarecrow's decision.

The Scarecrow himself bowed calmly. "First," said he cheerfully, "let me introduce my friends and visitors from Oz."

The Silver Islanders, who really loved the Scarecrow, bowed politely as he called out the names of Dorothy and the others. But the three Silver Princes scowled and whispered indignantly among themselves.

"I am growing very wroth!" choked Sir Hokus to the Cowardly Lion.

"Let the ceremony proceed!" called the eldest Prince harshly, before the Scarecrow had finished his introductions. "Let the proper body of his Serene Highness be immediately restored. Way for the Grand Gheewizard! Way for the Grand Gheewizard!"

"One moment," put in the Scarecrow in a dignified voice. "I have something to say." The Silver Islanders clapped loudly at this, and Dorothy felt a bit reassured. Perhaps they would listen to reason after all and let the Scarecrow depart peacefully. How they were ever to escape if they didn't, the little girl could not see.

"My dear children," began the Scarecrow in his jolly voice, "nothing could have been more wonderful than my return to this lovely island, but in the years I have been away from you I have changed very much, and I find I no longer care for being Emperor. So with your kind permission, I will keep the excellent body I now have and will abdicate in favor of my eldest son and return with my friends to Oz. For in Oz I really belong."

A dead silence followed the Scarecrow's speech--then perfect pandemonium.

"No! No! You are a good Emperor! We will not let you go!" shrieked the people. "You are our honorable little Father. The Prince shall be Emperor after you have peacefully returned to your ancestors, but not now. No! No! We will not have it!"

"I feared this!" quavered Happy Toko.

"It is not the Emperor, but the Scarecrow who speaks!" shrilled the Grand Chew Chew craftily. "He knows not what he says. But after the transformation--Ah, you shall see!"

The company calmed down at this. "Let the ceremony proceed! Way for the Grand Gheewizard!" they cried exultantly.

"Chew Chew," wailed the Scarecrow, "you're off the track!" But it was too late. No one would listen.

"I'll have to think of something else," muttered the Scarecrow, sinking dejectedly back on his throne.

"Oh!" shuddered Dorothy, clutching the Scarecrow, "Here he comes!"

"Way for the Grand Gheewizard! Way for the Grand Gheewizard!"

The crowd parted. Hobbling toward the throne came the ugly little Gheewizard of the Silver Island holding a large silver vase high above his head, and after him--!

When Sir Hokus caught a glimpse of what came after, he leaped clean over the Comfortable Camel.

"Uds daggers!" roared the Knight. "At last!" He rushed forward violently. There was a sharp thrust of his good sword, then an explosion like twenty giant firecrackers in one, and the room became quite black with smoke. Before anyone realized what had happened, Sir Hokus was back, dragging something after him and shouting exuberantly, "A dragon! I have slain a dragon! What happiness!"

Everyone was coughing and spluttering from the smoke, but as it cleared Dorothy saw that it was indeed a dragon Sir Hokus had slain, the rheumatic dragon of the old Gheewizard himself.

"Why didn't you get the wizard?" rumbled the Cowardly Lion angrily.

"Must have exploded," said the Comfortable Camel, sniffing the skin daintily.

"Treason!" yelled the three Princes, while the Grand Gheewizard flung himself on the stone floor and began tearing strand after strand from his silver pigtail.

"He has killed the little joy of my hearth!" screeched the old man. "I will turn him to a cat, a miserable yellow cat, and roast him for dinner!"

"Oh!" cried Dorothy, looking at Sir Hokus sorrowfully. "How could you?"

The slaying of the dragon had thrown the whole hall into utmost confusion. Sir Hokus turned a little pale under his armor, but faced the angry mob without flinching.

"Oh, my dear Karwan Bashi, this is so uncomfortable!" wheezed the camel, glancing back of him with frightened eyes.

"There's a shiny dagger in my left-hand saddlesack. I doubt very much whether they would like it," coughed the Doubtful Dromedary, pressing close to the Knight.

"On with the ceremony!" cried the eldest Prince, seeing that the excitement was giving the Scarecrow's friends too much time to think. "The son of an iron pot shall be punished later!"

"That's right!" cried a voice from the crowd. "Let the Emperor be restored!"

"I guess it's all over," gulped the Scarecrow. "Give my love to Ozma and tell her I tried to come back."

In helpless terror, the little company watched the Gheewizard approach. One could fight real enemies, but magic! Even Sir Hokus, brave as he was, felt that nothing could be done.

"One move and you shall be so many prunes," shrilled the angry old man, fixing the people from Oz with his wicked little eyes. The great room was so still you could have heard a pin drop. Even the Doubtful Dromedary had not the heart to doubt the wizard's power, but stood rigid as a statue.

The wizard advanced slowly, holding the sealed vase carefully over his head. The poor Scarecrow regarded it with gloomy fascination. One more moment and he would be an old, old Silverman. Better to be lost forever! He held convulsively to Dorothy.

As for Dorothy herself, she was trembling with fright and grief. When the Grand Gheewizard raised the vase higher and higher and made ready to hurl it at the Scarecrow, disregarding his dire threat she gave a shrill scream and threw up both hands.

"Great grandmothers!" gasped the Scarecrow, jumping to his feet. As Dorothy had thrown up her arms, the little parasol swinging at her wrist had jerked open. Up, up, up, and out through the broken skylight in the roof sailed the little Princess of Oz!

The Grand Gheewizard, startled as anyone, failed to throw the vase. Every neck was craned upward, and everyone was gasping with astonishment.

The oldest Prince, as usual, was the first to recover. "Don't stand staring like an idiot! Now's your chance!" he hissed angrily in the Gheewizard's ear.

"I didn't come here to be harried and hurried by foreigners," sobbed the little man. "How is one to work magic when interrupted every other minute? I want my little dragon."

"Oh, come on now, just throw it. I'll get you another dragon," begged the Prince, his hands trembling with excitement.

In the face of this new disaster, the Scarecrow had forgotten all about the Gheewizard. He and the Cowardly Lion and Sir Hokus were running distractedly around the great throne trying to think up a way to rescue

Dorothy. As for the Doubtful Dromedary, he was doubting everything in a loud, bitter voice, while the Comfortable Camel fairly snorted with sorrow.

"There! Now's your chance," whispered the Prince. The Scarecrow, with his back to the crowd, was gesturing frantically.

Taking a firm hold on the neck of the vase and with a long incantation which there is no use at all in repeating, the Gheewizard flung the bottle straight at the Scarecrow's head. But scarcely had it left his hand before there was a flash and a flutter and down came Dorothy and the magic parasol right on top of the vase.

Zip! The vase flew in quite another direction, and next minute had burst over the luckless heads of the three plotting Princes, while Dorothy floated gently to earth.

Sir Hokus embraced the Scarecrow, and the Scarecrow hugged the Cowardly Lion, and I don't wonder at all. For no sooner had the magic elixir touched the Princes, than two of them became silver pigs and the eldest a weasel. They had been turned to their true shapes instead of the Scarecrow. And while the company hopped about in alarm, they ran squealing from the hall and disappeared in the gardens.

"Seize the Gheewizard and take him to his cave," ordered the Scarecrow, asserting his authority for the first time since the proceedings has started. He had noticed the old man making queer signs and passes toward Sir Hokus. A dozen took hold of the struggling Gheewizard and hurried him out of the hall.

Sir Hokus, at the request of the Scarecrow, clapped his iron gauntlets for silence.

"You will agree with me, I'm sure," said the Scarecrow in a slightly unsteady voice, "that magic is a serious matter to meddle with. If you will all return quietly to your homes, I will try to find a way out of our difficulties."

The Silver Islanders listened respectfully and after a little arguing among themselves backed out of the throne room. To tell the truth, they were anxious to spread abroad the tale of the morning's happenings.

Princess Orange Blossom, however, refused to depart. Magic or no magic, she had come to marry the Emperor, and she would not leave till the ceremony had been performed.

"But my dear old Lady, would you wish to marry a Scarecrow?" coaxed the Emperor.

"All men are Scarecrows," snapped the Princess sourly.

"Then why marry at all?" rumbled the Cowardly Lion, making a playful leap at her palanquin. This was too much. The Princess swooned on the spot, and the Scarecrow, taking advantage of her unconscious condition, ordered her chair bearers to carry her away as far and as fast as they could run.

"Now," said the Scarecrow when the last of the company had disappeared, "let us talk this over."