

## CHAPTER 9 - THE HIGH COCO-LORUM OF THI

And now the Patchwork Girl came dancing out of the wall again.

"Come on!" she called. "It isn't there. There isn't any wall at all."

"What? No wall?" exclaimed the Wizard.

"Nothing like it," said Scraps. "It's a make-believe. You see it, but it isn't. Come on into the city; we've been wasting our time."

With this, she danced into the wall again and once more disappeared. Button-Bright, who was rather venture-some, dashed away after her and also became invisible to them. The others followed more cautiously, stretching out their hands to feel the wall and finding, to their astonishment, that they could feel nothing because nothing opposed them. They walked on a few steps and found themselves in the streets of a very beautiful city. Behind them they again saw the wall, grim and forbidding as ever, but now they knew it was merely an illusion prepared to keep strangers from entering the city.

But the wall was soon forgotten, for in front of them were a number of quaint people who stared at them in amazement as if wondering where they had come from. Our friends forgot their good manners for a time and returned the stares with interest, for so remarkable a people had never before been discovered in all the remarkable Land of Oz.

Their heads were shaped like diamonds, and their bodies like hearts. All the hair they had was a little bunch at the tip top of their diamond-shaped heads, and their eyes were very large and round, and their noses and mouths very small. Their clothing was tight fitting and of brilliant colors, being handsomely embroidered in quaint designs with gold or silver threads; but on their feet they wore sandals with no stockings whatever. The expression of their faces was pleasant enough, although they now showed surprise at the appearance of strangers so unlike themselves, and our friends thought they seemed quite harmless.

"I beg your pardon," said the Wizard, speaking for his party, "for intruding upon you uninvited, but we are traveling on important business and find it necessary to visit your city. Will you kindly tell us by what name your city is called?"

They looked at one another uncertainly, each expecting some other to answer. Finally, a short one whose heart-shaped body was very broad replied, "We have no occasion to call our city anything. It is where we live, that is all."

"But by what name do others call your city?" asked the Wizard.

"We know of no others except yourselves," said the man. And then he inquired, "Were you born with those queer forms you have, or has some cruel magician transformed you to them from your natural shapes?"

"These are our natural shapes," declared the Wizard, "and we consider them very good shapes, too."

The group of inhabitants was constantly being enlarged by others who joined it. All were evidently startled and uneasy at the arrival of strangers.

"Have you a King?" asked Dorothy, who knew it was better to speak with someone in authority.

But the man shook his diamond-like head. "What is a King?" he asked.

"Isn't there anyone who rules over you?" inquired the Wizard.

"No," was the reply, "each of us rules himself, or at least tries to do so. It is not an easy thing to do, as you probably know."

The Wizard reflected.

"If you have disputes among you," said he after a little thought, "who settles them?"

"The High Coco-Lorum," they answered in a chorus.

"And who is he?"

"The judge who enforces the laws," said the man who had first spoken.

"Then he is the principal person here?" continued the Wizard.

"Well, I would not say that," returned the man in a puzzled way. "The High Coco-Lorum is a public servant. However, he represents the laws, which we must all obey."

"I think," said the Wizard, "we ought to see your High Coco-Lorum and talk with him. Our mission here requires us to consult one high in authority, and the High Coco-Lorum ought to be high, whatever else he is."

The inhabitants seemed to consider this proposition reasonable, for they nodded their diamond-shaped heads in approval. So the broad one who had been their spokesman said, "Follow me," and turning led the way along one of the streets. The entire party followed him, the natives falling in behind. The dwellings they passed were quite nicely planned and seemed comfortable and convenient. After leading them a few blocks, their conductor stopped before a house which was neither better nor worse than the others. The doorway was shaped to admit the strangely formed bodies of these people, being narrow at the top, broad in the middle and tapering at the bottom. The windows were made in much the same way, giving the house a most peculiar appearance. When their guide opened the gate, a music box concealed in the gatepost began to play, and the sound attracted the attention of the High Coco-Lorum, who appeared at an open window and inquired, "What has happened now?"

But in the same moment his eyes fell upon the strangers and he hastened to open the door and admit them--all but the animals, which were left outside with the throng of natives that had now gathered. For a small city there seemed to be a large number of inhabitants, but they did not try to enter the house and contented themselves with staring curiously at the strange animals. Toto followed Dorothy.

Our friends entered a large room at the front of the house, where the High Coco-Lorum asked them to be seated. "I hope your mission here is a peaceful one," he said, looking a little worried, "for the Thists are not very good fighters and object to being conquered."

"Are your people called Thists?" asked Dorothy.

"Yes. I thought you knew that. And we call our city Thi."

"Oh!"

"We are Thists because we eat thistles, you know," continued the High Coco-Lorum.

"Do you really eat those prickly things?" inquired Button-Bright wonderingly.

"Why not?" replied the other. "The sharp points of the thistles cannot hurt us, because all our insides are gold-lined."

"Gold-lined!"

"To be sure. Our throats and stomachs are lined with solid gold, and we find the thistles nourishing and good to eat. As a matter of fact, there is nothing else in our country that is fit for food. All around the City of Thi grow countless thistles, and all we need do is to go and gather them. If we wanted anything else to eat, we would have to plant it, and grow it, and harvest it, and that would be a lot of trouble and make us work, which is an occupation we detest."

"But tell me, please," said the Wizard, "how does it happen that your city jumps around so, from one part of the country to another?"

"The city doesn't jump. It doesn't move at all," declared the High Coco-Lorum. "However, I will admit that the land that surrounds it has a trick of turning this way or that, and so if one is standing upon the plain and facing north, he is likely to find himself suddenly facing west or east or south. But once you reach the thistle fields, you are on solid ground."

"Ah, I begin to understand," said the Wizard, nodding his head. "But I have another question to ask: How does it happen that the Thists have no King to rule over them?"

"Hush!" whispered the High Coco-Lorum, looking uneasily around to make sure they were not overheard. "In reality, I am the King, but the people don't know it. They think they rule themselves, but the fact is I have everything my own way. No one else knows anything about our laws, and so I make the laws to suit myself. If any oppose me or question my acts, I tell them it's the law and that settles it. If I called myself King, however, and wore a crown and lived in royal style, the people would not like me and might do me harm. As the High Coco-Lorum of Thi, I am considered a very agreeable person."

"It seems a very clever arrangement," said the Wizard. "And now, as you are the principal person in Thi, I beg you to tell us if the Royal Ozma is a captive in your city."

"No," answered the diamond-headed man. "We have no captives. No strangers but yourselves are here, and we have never before heard of the Royal Ozma."

"She rules over all of Oz," said Dorothy, "and so she rules your city and you, because you are in the Winkie Country, which is a part of the Land of Oz."

"It may be," returned the High Coco-Lorum, "for we do not study geography and have never inquired whether we live in the Land of Oz or not. And any

Ruler who rules us from a distance and unknown to us is welcome to the job. But what has happened to your Royal Ozma?"

"Someone has stolen her," said the Wizard. "Do you happen to have any talented magician among your people, one who is especially clever, you know?"

"No, none especially clever. We do some magic, of course, but it is all of the ordinary kind. I do not think any of us has yet aspired to stealing Rulers, either by magic or otherwise."

"Then we've come a long way for nothing!" exclaimed Trot regretfully.

"But we are going farther than this," asserted the Patchwork Girl, bending her stuffed body backward until her yarn hair touched the floor and then walking around on her hands with her feet in the air.

The High Coco-Lorum watched Scraps admiringly.

"You may go farther on, of course," said he, "but I advise you not to. The Herkus live back of us, beyond the thistles and the twisting lands, and they are not very nice people to meet, I assure you."

"Are they giants?" asked Betsy.

"They are worse than that," was the reply. "They have giants for their slaves and they are so much stronger than giants that the poor slaves dare not rebel for fear of being torn to pieces."

"How do you know?" asked Scraps.

"Everyone says so," answered the High Coco-Lorum.

"Have you seen the Herkus yourself?" inquired Dorothy.

"No, but what everyone says must be true, otherwise what would be the use of their saying it?"

"We were told before we got here that you people hitch dragons to your chariots," said the little girl.

"So we do," declared the High Coco-Lorum. "And that reminds me that I ought to entertain you as strangers and my guests by taking you for a ride around our splendid City of Thi." He touched a button, and a band began to play. At least, they heard the music of a band, but couldn't tell where it came from.

"That tune is the order to my charioteer to bring around my dragon-chariot," said the High Coco-Lorum. "Every time I give an order, it is in music, which is a much more pleasant way to address servants than in cold, stern words."

"Does this dragon of yours bite?" asked Button-Bright.

"Mercy no! Do you think I'd risk the safety of my innocent people by using a biting dragon to draw my chariot? I'm proud to say that my dragon is harmless, unless his steering gear breaks, and he was manufactured at the famous dragon factory in this City of Thi. Here he comes, and you may examine him for yourselves."

They heard a low rumble and a shrill squeaking sound, and going out to the front of the house, they saw coming around the corner a car drawn by a gorgeous jeweled dragon, which moved its head to right and left and flashed its eyes like headlights of an automobile and uttered a growling noise as it slowly moved toward them. When it stopped before the High Coco-Lorum's house, Toto barked sharply at the sprawling beast, but even tiny Trot could see that the dragon was not alive. Its scales were of gold, and each one was set with sparkling jewels, while it walked in such a stiff, regular manner that it could be nothing else than a machine. The chariot that trailed behind it was likewise of gold and jewels, and when they entered it, they found there were no seats. Everyone was supposed to stand up while riding. The charioteer was a little, diamond-headed fellow who straddled the neck of the dragon and moved the levers that made it go.

"This," said the High Coco-Lorum pompously, "is a wonderful invention. We are all very proud of our auto-dragons, many of which are in use by our wealthy inhabitants. Start the thing going, charioteer!"

The charioteer did not move.

"You forgot to order him in music," suggested Dorothy.

"Ah, so I did."

He touched a button and a music box in the dragon's head began to play a tune. At once the little charioteer pulled over a lever, and the dragon began to move, very slowly and groaning dismally as it drew the clumsy chariot after it. Toto trotted between the wheels. The Sawhorse, the Mule, the Lion and the Woozy followed after and had no trouble in keeping up with the machine. Indeed, they had to go slow to keep from running into it. When the wheels turned, another music box concealed somewhere under the chariot played a

lively march tune which was in striking contrast with the dragging movement of the strange vehicle, and Button-Bright decided that the music he had heard when they first sighted this city was nothing else than a chariot plodding its weary way through the streets.

All the travelers from the Emerald City thought this ride the most uninteresting and dreary they had ever experienced, but the High Coco-Lorum seemed to think it was grand. He pointed out the different buildings and parks and fountains in much the same way that the conductor does on an American "sightseeing wagon" does, and being guests they were obliged to submit to the ordeal. But they became a little worried when their host told them he had ordered a banquet prepared for them in the City Hall.

"What are we going to eat?" asked Button-Bright suspiciously.

"Thistles," was the reply. "Fine, fresh thistles, gathered this very day."

Scraps laughed, for she never ate anything, but Dorothy said in a protesting voice, "OUR insides are not lined with gold, you know."

"How sad!" exclaimed the High Coco-Lorum, and then he added as an afterthought, "but we can have the thistles boiled, if you prefer."

"I'm 'fraid they wouldn't taste good even then," said little Trot. "Haven't you anything else to eat?"

The High Coco-Lorum shook his diamond-shaped head.

"Nothing that I know of," said he. "But why should we have anything else when we have so many thistles? However, if you can't eat what we eat, don't eat anything. We shall not be offended, and the banquet will be just as merry and delightful."

Knowing his companions were all hungry, the Wizard said, "I trust you will excuse us from the banquet, sir, which will be merry enough without us, although it is given in our honor. For, as Ozma is not in your city, we must leave here at once and seek her elsewhere."

"Sure we must!" Dorothy, and she whispered to Betsy and Trot, "I'd rather starve somewhere else than in this city, and who knows, we may run across somebody who eats reg'lar food and will give us some."

So when the ride was finished, in spite of the protests of the High Coco-Lorum, they insisted on continuing their journey. "It will soon be dark," he objected.

"We don't mind the darkness," replied the Wizard.

"Some wandering Herku may get you."

"Do you think the Herkus would hurt us?" asked Dorothy.

"I cannot say, not having had the honor of their acquaintance. But they are said to be so strong that if they had any other place to stand upon they could lift the world."

"All of them together?" asked Button-Bright wonderingly.

"Any one of them could do it," said the High Coco-Lorum.

"Have you heard of any magicians being among them?" asked the Wizard, knowing that only a magician could have stolen Ozma in the way she had been stolen.

"I am told it is quite a magical country," declared the High Coco-Lorum, "and magic is usually performed by magicians. But I have never heard that they have any invention or sorcery to equal our wonderful auto-dragons."

They thanked him for his courtesy, and mounting their own animals rode to the farther side of the city and right through the Wall of Illusion out into the open country. "I'm glad we got away so easily," said Betsy. "I didn't like those queer-shaped people."

"Nor did I," agreed Dorothy. "It seems dreadful to be lined with sheets of pure gold and have nothing to eat but thistles."

"They seemed happy and contented, though," remarked the Wizard, "and those who are contented have nothing to regret and nothing more to wish for."