

## CHAPTER 12 - THE CZAROVER OF HERKU

Trot wakened just as the sun rose, and slipping out of the blankets, went to the edge of the Great Orchard and looked across the plain. Something glittered in the far distance. "That looks like another city," she said half aloud.

"And another city it is," declared Scraps, who had crept to Trot's side unheard, for her stuffed feet made no sound. "The Sawhorse and I made a journey in the dark while you were all asleep, and we found over there a bigger city than Thi. There's a wall around it, too, but it has gates and plenty of pathways."

"Did you get in?" asked Trot.

"No, for the gates were locked and the wall was a real wall. So we came back here again. It isn't far to the city. We can reach it in two hours after you've had your breakfasts."

Trot went back, and finding the other girls now awake, told them what Scraps had said. So they hurriedly ate some fruit--there were plenty of plums and fijoas in this part of the orchard--and then they mounted the animals and set out upon the journey to the strange city. Hank the Mule had breakfasted on grass, and the Lion had stolen away and found a breakfast to his liking; he never told what it was, but Dorothy hoped the little rabbits and the field mice had kept out of his way. She warned Toto not to chase birds and gave the dog some apple, with which he was quite content. The Woozy was as fond of fruit as of any other food except honey, and the Sawhorse never ate at all.

Except for their worry over Ozma, they were all in good spirits as they proceeded swiftly over the plain. Toto still worried over his lost growl, but like a wise little dog kept his worry to himself. Before long, the city grew nearer and they could examine it with interest.

In outward appearance the place was more imposing than Thi, and it was a square city, with a square, four-sided wall around it, and on each side was a square gate of burnished copper. Everything about the city looked solid and substantial; there were no banners flying, and the towers that rose above the city wall seemed bare of any ornament whatever.

A path led from the fruit orchard directly to one of the city gates, showing that the inhabitants preferred fruit to thistles. Our friends followed this path to

the gate, which they found fast shut. But the Wizard advanced and pounded upon it with his fist, saying in a loud voice, "Open!"

At once there rose above the great wall a row of immense heads, all of which looked down at them as if to see who was intruding. The size of these heads was astonishing, and our friends at once realized that they belonged to giants who were standing within the city. All had thick, bushy hair and whiskers, on some the hair being white and on others black or red or yellow, while the hair of a few was just turning gray, showing that the giants were of all ages. However fierce the heads might seem, the eyes were mild in expression, as if the creatures had been long subdued, and their faces expressed patience rather than ferocity.

"What's wanted?" asked one old giant in a low, grumbling voice.

"We are strangers, and we wish to enter the city," replied the Wizard.

"Do you come in war or peace?" asked another.

"In peace, of course," retorted the Wizard, and he added impatiently, "Do we look like an army of conquest?"

"No," said the first giant who had spoken, "you look like innocent tramps; but you never can tell by appearances. Wait here until we report to our masters. No one can enter here without the permission of Vig, the Czarover."

"Who's that?" inquired Dorothy.

But the heads had all bobbed down and disappeared behind the walls, so there was no answer. They waited a long time before the gate rolled back with a rumbling sound, and a loud voice cried, "Enter!" But they lost no time in taking advantage of the invitation.

On either side of the broad street that led into the city from the gate stood a row of huge giants, twenty of them on a side and all standing so close together that their elbows touched. They wore uniforms of blue and yellow and were armed with clubs as big around as tree trunks. Each giant had around his neck a broad band of gold, riveted on, to show he was a slave.

As our friends entered riding upon the Lion, the Woozy, the Sawhorse and the Mule, the giants half turned and walked in two files on either side of them, as if escorting them on their way. It looked to Dorothy as if all her party had been made prisoners, for even mounted on their animals their heads scarcely

reached to the knees of the marching giants. The girls and Button-Bright were anxious to know what sort of a city they had entered, and what the people were like who had made these powerful creatures their slaves. Through the legs of the giants as they walked, Dorothy could see rows of houses on each side of the street and throngs of people standing on the sidewalks, but the people were of ordinary size and the only remarkable thing about them was the fact that they were dreadfully lean and thin. Between their skin and their bones there seemed to be little or no flesh, and they were mostly stoop-shouldered and weary looking, even to the little children.

More and more, Dorothy wondered how and why the great giants had ever submitted to become slaves of such skinny, languid masters, but there was no chance to question anyone until they arrived at a big palace located in the heart of the city. Here the giants formed lines to the entrance and stood still while our friends rode into the courtyard of the palace. Then the gates closed behind them, and before them was a skinny little man who bowed low and said in a sad voice, "If you will be so obliging as to dismount, it will give me pleasure to lead you into the presence of the World's Most Mighty Ruler, Vig the Czarover."

"I don't believe it!" said Dorothy indignantly.

"What don't you believe?" asked the man.

"I don't believe your Czarover can hold a candle to our Ozma."

"He wouldn't hold a candle under any circumstances, or to any living person," replied the man very seriously, "for he has slaves to do such things and the Mighty Vig is too dignified to do anything that others can do for him. He even obliges a slave to sneeze for him, if ever he catches cold. However, if you dare to face our powerful ruler, follow me."

"We dare anything," said the Wizard, "so go ahead."

Through several marble corridors having lofty ceilings they passed, finding each corridor and doorway guarded by servants. But these servants of the palace were of the people and not giants, and they were so thin that they almost resembled skeletons. Finally, they entered a great circular room with a high, domed ceiling, where the Czarover sat on a throne cut from a solid block of white marble and decorated with purple silk hangings and gold tassels.

The ruler of these people was combing his eyebrows when our friends entered the throne room and stood before him, but he put the comb in his pocket and

examined the strangers with evident curiosity. Then he said, "Dear me, what a surprise! You have really shocked me. For no outsider has ever before come to our City of Herku, and I cannot imagine why you have ventured to do so."

"We are looking for Ozma, the Supreme Ruler of the Land of Oz," replied the Wizard.

"Do you see her anywhere around here?" asked the Czarover.

"Not yet, Your Majesty, but perhaps you may tell us where she is."

"No, I have my hands full keeping track of my own people. I find them hard to manage because they are so tremendously strong."

"They don't look very strong," said Dorothy. "It seems as if a good wind would blow 'em way out of the city if it wasn't for the wall."

"Just so, just so," admitted the Czarover. "They really look that way, don't they? But you must never trust to appearances, which have a way of fooling one. Perhaps you noticed that I prevented you from meeting any of my people. I protected you with my giants while you were on the way from the gates to my palace so that not a Herku got near you."

"Are your people so dangerous, then?" asked the Wizard.

"To strangers, yes. But only because they are so friendly. For if they shake hands with you, they are likely to break your arms or crush your fingers to a jelly."

"Why?" asked Button-Bright.

"Because we are the strongest people in all the world."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the boy. "That's bragging. You prob'ly don't know how strong other people are. Why, once I knew a man in Philadelphi' who could bend iron bars with just his hands!"

"But mercy me, it's no trick to bend iron bars," said His Majesty. "Tell me, could this man crush a block of stone with his bare hands?"

"No one could do that," declared the boy.

"If I had a block of stone, I'd show you," said the Czarover, looking around the room. "Ah, here is my throne. The back is too high, anyhow, so I'll just break off a piece of that." He rose to his feet and tottered in an uncertain way

around the throne. Then he took hold of the back and broke off a piece of marble over a foot thick. "This," said he, coming back to his seat, "is very solid marble and much harder than ordinary stone. Yet I can crumble it easily with my fingers, a proof that I am very strong."

Even as he spoke, he began breaking off chunks of marble and crumbling them as one would a bit of earth. The Wizard was so astonished that he took a piece in his own hands and tested it, finding it very hard indeed.

Just then one of the giant servants entered and exclaimed, "Oh, Your Majesty, the cook has burned the soup! What shall we do?"

"How dare you interrupt me?" asked the Czarover, and grasping the immense giant by one of his legs, he raised him in the air and threw him headfirst out of an open window. "Now, tell me," he said, turning to Button-Bright, "could your man in Philadelphia crumble marble in his fingers?"

"I guess not," said Button-Bright, much impressed by the skinny monarch's strength.

"What makes you so strong?" inquired Dorothy.

"It's the zosozo," he explained, "which is an invention of my own. I and all my people eat zosozo, and it gives us tremendous strength. Would you like to eat some?"

"No thank you," replied the girl. "I--I don't want to get so thin."

"Well, of course one can't have strength and flesh at the same time," said the Czarover. "Zosozo is pure energy, and it's the only compound of its sort in existence. I never allow our giants to have it, you know, or they would soon become our masters, since they are bigger than we; so I keep all the stuff locked up in my private laboratory. Once a year I feed a teaspoonful of it to each of my people--men, women and children--so every one of them is nearly as strong as I am. Wouldn't YOU like a dose, sir?" he asked, turning to the Wizard.

"Well," said the Wizard, "if you would give me a little zosozo in a bottle, I'd like to take it with me on my travels. It might come in handy on occasion."

"To be sure. I'll give you enough for six doses," promised the Czarover.

"But don't take more than a teaspoonful at a time. Once Ugu the Shoemaker took two teaspoonsful, and it made him so strong that when he leaned against the city wall, he pushed it over, and we had to build it up again."

"Who is Ugu the Shoemaker?"

Button-Bright curiously, for he now remembered that the bird and the rabbit had claimed Ugu the Shoemaker had enchanted the peach he had eaten.

"Why, Ugu is a great magician who used to live here. But he's gone away now," replied the Czarover.

"Where has he gone?" asked the Wizard quickly.

"I am told he lives in a wickerwork castle in the mountains to the west of here. You see, Ugu became such a powerful magician that he didn't care to live in our city any longer for fear we would discover some of his secrets. So he went to the mountains and built him a splendid wicker castle which is so strong that even I and my people could not batter it down, and there he lives all by himself."

"This is good news," declared the Wizard, "for I think this is just the magician we are searching for. But why is he called Ugu the Shoemaker?"

"Once he was a very common citizen here and made shoes for a living," replied the monarch of Herku. "But he was descended from the greatest wizard and sorcerer who ever lived in this or in any other country, and one day Ugu the Shoemaker discovered all the magical books and recipes of his famous great-grandfather, which had been hidden away in the attic of his house. So he began to study the papers and books and to practice magic, and in time he became so skillful that, as I said, he scorned our city and built a solitary castle for himself."

"Do you think," asked Dorothy anxiously, "that Ugu the Shoemaker would be wicked enough to steal our Ozma of Oz?"

"And the Magic Picture?" asked Trot.

"And the Great Book of Records of Glinda the Good?" asked Betsy.

"And my own magic tools?" asked the Wizard.

"Well," replied the Czarover, "I won't say that Ugu is wicked, exactly, but he is very ambitious to become the most powerful magician in the world, and so I

suppose he would not be too proud to steal any magic things that belonged to anybody else--if he could manage to do so."

"But how about Ozma? Why would he wish to steal HER?" questioned Dorothy.

"Don't ask me, my dear. Ugu doesn't tell me why he does things, I assure you."

"Then we must go and ask him ourselves," declared the little girl.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," advised the Czarover, looking first at the three girls and then at the boy and the little Wizard and finally at the stuffed Patchwork Girl. "If Ugu has really stolen your Ozma, he will probably keep her a prisoner, in spite of all your threats or entreaties. And with all his magical knowledge he would be a dangerous person to attack. Therefore, if you are wise, you will go home again and find a new Ruler for the Emerald City and the Land of Oz. But perhaps it isn't Ugu the Shoemaker who has stolen your Ozma."

"The only way to settle that question," replied the Wizard, "is to go to Ugu's castle and see if Ozma is there. If she is, we will report the matter to the great Sorceress Glinda the Good, and I'm pretty sure she will find a way to rescue our darling ruler from the Shoemaker."

"Well, do as you please," said the Czarover, "but if you are all transformed into hummingbirds or caterpillars, don't blame me for not warning you."

They stayed the rest of that day in the City of Herku and were fed at the royal table of the Czarover and given sleeping rooms in his palace. The strong monarch treated them very nicely and gave the Wizard a little golden vial of zosofo to use if ever he or any of his party wished to acquire great strength.

Even at the last, the Czarover tried to persuade them not to go near Ugu the Shoemaker, but they were resolved on the venture, and the next morning bade the friendly monarch a cordial goodbye and, mounting upon their animals, left the Herkus and the City of Herku and headed for the mountains that lay to the west.