

### Chapter Three - The Mist Maidens

From the top of the hill Ozma and Dorothy looked down into the valley beyond and were surprised to find it filled with a floating mist that was as dense as smoke. Nothing in the valley was visible except these rolling waves of mist, but beyond, on the other side, rose a grassy hill that appeared quite beautiful.

"Well," said Dorothy, "what are we to do, Ozma? Walk down into that thick fog, an' prob'bly get lost in it, or wait till it clears away?"

"I'm not sure it will clear away, however long we wait," replied Ozma, doubtfully. "If we wish to get on, I think we must venture into the mist."

"But we can't see where we're going, or what we're stepping on," protested Dorothy. "There may be dreadful things mixed up in that fog, an' I'm scared just to think of wading into it."

Even Ozma seemed to hesitate. She was silent and thoughtful for a little while, looking at the rolling drifts that were so gray and forbidding. Finally she said:

"I believe this is a Mist Valley, where these moist clouds always remain, for even the sunshine above does not drive them away. Therefore the Mist Maids must live here, and they are fairies and should answer my call."

She placed her two hands before her mouth, forming a hollow with them, and uttered a clear, thrilling, bird-like cry. It floated far out over the mist waves and presently was answered by a similar sound, as of a far-off echo.

Dorothy was much impressed. She had seen many strange things since coming to this fairy country, but here was a new experience. At ordinary times Ozma was just like any little girl one might chance to meet--simple, merry, lovable as could be--yet with a certain reserve that lent her dignity in her most joyous moods. There were times, however, when seated on her throne and commanding her subjects, or when her fairy powers were called into use, when Dorothy and all others about her stood in awe of their lovely girl Ruler and realized her superiority.

Ozma waited. Presently out from the billows rose beautiful forms, clothed in fleecy, trailing garments of gray that could scarcely be distinguished from the mist. Their hair was mist-color, too; only their gleaming arms and sweet, pallid faces proved they were living, intelligent creatures answering the call of a sister fairy.

Like sea nymphs they rested on the bosom of the clouds, their eyes turned questioningly upon the two girls who stood upon the bank. One came quite near and to her Ozma said:

"Will you please take us to the opposite hillside? We are afraid to venture into the mist. I am Princess Ozma of Oz, and this is my friend Dorothy, a Princess of Oz."

The Mist Maids came nearer, holding out their arms. Without hesitation Ozma advanced and allowed them to embrace her and Dorothy plucked up courage to follow. Very gently the Mist Maids held them. Dorothy thought the arms were cold and misty--they didn't seem real at all--yet they supported the two girls above the surface of the billows and floated with them so swiftly to the green hillside opposite that the girls were astonished to find themselves set upon the grass before they realized they had fairly started.

"Thank you!" said Ozma gratefully, and Dorothy also added her thanks for the service.

The Mist Maids made no answer, but they smiled and waved their hands in good-bye as again they floated out into the mist and disappeared from view.