

## **Chapter Eight - Queen Coo-ee-oh**

Princess Ozma considered the situation gravely. Then she tied her handkerchief to her wand and, standing at the water's edge, waved the handkerchief like a flag, as a signal. For a time they could observe no response.

"I don't see what good that will do," said Dorothy. "Even if the Skeezers are on that island and see us, and know we're friends, they haven't any boats to come and get us."

But the Skeezers didn't need boats, as the girls soon discovered. For on a sudden an opening appeared at the base of the palace and from the opening came a slender shaft of steel, reaching out slowly but steadily across the water in the direction of the place where they stood. To the girls this steel arrangement looked like a triangle, with the base nearest the water. It came toward them in the form of an arch, stretching out from the palace wall until its end reached the bank and rested there, while the other end still remained on the island.

Then they saw that it was a bridge, consisting of a steel footway just broad enough to walk on, and two slender guide rails, one on either side, which were connected with the footway by steel bars. The bridge looked rather frail and Dorothy feared it would not bear their weight, but Ozma at once called, "Come on!" and started to walk across, holding fast to the rail on either side. So Dorothy summoned her courage and followed after. Before Ozma had taken three steps she halted and so forced Dorothy to halt, for the bridge was again moving and returning to the island.

"We need not walk after all," said Ozma. So they stood still in their places and let the steel bridge draw them onward. Indeed, the bridge drew them well into the glass-domed building which covered the island, and soon they found themselves standing in a marble room where two handsomely dressed young men stood on a platform to receive them.

Ozma at once stepped from the end of the bridge to the marble platform, followed by Dorothy, and then the bridge disappeared with a slight clang of steel and a marble slab covered the opening from which it had emerged.

The two young men bowed profoundly to Ozma, and one of them said:

"Queen Coo-ee-oh bids you welcome, O Strangers. Her Majesty is waiting to receive you in her palace."

"Lead on," replied Ozma with dignity.

But instead of "leading on," the platform of marble began to rise, carrying them upward through a square hole above which just fitted it. A moment later they found themselves within the great glass dome that covered almost all of the island.

Within this dome was a little village, with houses, streets, gardens and parks. The houses were of colored marbles, prettily designed, with many stained-glass windows, and the streets and gardens seemed well cared for. Exactly under the center of the lofty dome was a small park filled with brilliant flowers, with an elaborate fountain, and facing this park stood a building larger and more imposing than the others. Toward this building the young men escorted Ozma and Dorothy.

On the streets and in the doorways or open windows of the houses were men, women and children, all richly dressed. These were much like other people in different parts of the Land of Oz, except that instead of seeming merry and contented they all wore expressions of much solemnity or of nervous irritation. They had beautiful homes, splendid clothes, and ample food, but Dorothy at once decided something was wrong with their lives and that they were not happy. She said nothing, however, but looked curiously at the Skeezers.

At the entrance of the palace Ozma and Dorothy were met by two other young men, in uniform and armed with queer weapons that seemed about halfway between pistols and guns, but were like neither. Their conductors bowed and left them, and the two in uniforms led the girls into the palace.

In a beautiful throne room, surrounded by a dozen or more young men and women, sat the Queen of the Skeezers, Coo-ee-oh. She was a girl who looked older than Ozma or Dorothy--fifteen or sixteen, at least--and although she was elaborately dressed as if she were going to a ball she was too thin and plain of feature to be pretty. But evidently Queen Coo-ee-oh did not realize this fact, for her air and manner betrayed her as proud and haughty and with a high regard for her own importance. Dorothy at once decided she was "snippy" and that she would not like Queen Coo-ee-oh as a companion.

The Queen's hair was as black as her skin was white and her eyes were black, too. The eyes, as she calmly examined Ozma and Dorothy, had a suspicious and unfriendly look in them, but she said quietly:

"I know who you are, for I have consulted my Magic Oracle, which told me that one calls herself Princess Ozma, the Ruler of all the Land of Oz, and the other is Princess Dorothy of Oz, who came from a country called Kansas. I know nothing of the Land of Oz, and I know nothing of Kansas."

"Why, this is the Land of Oz!" cried Dorothy. "It's a part of the Land of Oz, anyhow, whether you know it or not."

"Oh, in-deed!" answered Queen Coo-ee-oh, scornfully. "I suppose you will claim next that this Princess Ozma, ruling the Land of Oz, rules me!"

"Of course," returned Dorothy. "There's no doubt of it."

The Queen turned to Ozma.

"Do you dare make such a claim?" she asked.

By this time Ozma had made up her mind as to the character of this haughty and disdainful creature, whose self-pride evidently led her to believe herself superior to all others.

"I did not come here to quarrel with your Majesty," said the girl Ruler of Oz, quietly. "What and who I am is well established, and my authority comes from the Fairy Queen Lurline, of whose band I was a member when Lurline made all Oz a Fairyland. There are several countries and several different peoples in this broad land, each of which has its separate rulers, Kings, Emperors and Queens. But all these render obedience to my laws and acknowledge me as the supreme Ruler."

"If other Kings and Queens are fools that does not interest me in the least," replied Coo-ee-oh, disdainfully. "In the Land of the Skeezers I alone am supreme. You are impudent to think I would defer to you--or to anyone else."

"Let us not speak of this now, please," answered Ozma. "Your island is in danger, for a powerful foe is preparing to destroy it."

"Pah! The Flatheads. I do not fear them."

"Their Supreme Dictator is a Sorcerer."

"My magic is greater than his. Let the Flatheads come! They will never return to their barren mountain-top. I will see to that."

Ozma did not like this attitude, for it meant that the Skeezers were eager to fight the Flatheads, and Ozma's object in coming here was to prevent fighting and induce the two quarrelsome neighbors to make peace. She was also greatly disappointed in Coo-ee-oh, for the reports of Su-dic had led her to imagine the Queen more just and honorable than were the Flatheads. Indeed Ozma reflected that the girl might be better at heart than her self-pride and overbearing manner indicated, and in any event it would be wise not to antagonize her but to try to win her friendship.

"I do not like wars, your Majesty," said Ozma. "In the Emerald City, where I rule thousands of people, and in the countries near to the Emerald City, where thousands more acknowledge my rule, there is no army at all, because there is no quarreling and no need to fight. If differences arise between my people, they come to me and I judge the cases and award justice to all. So, when I learned there might be war between two faraway people of Oz, I came here to settle the dispute and adjust the quarrel."

"No one asked you to come," declared Queen Coo-ee-oh. "It is my business to settle this dispute, not yours. You say my island is a part of the Land of Oz, which you rule, but that is all nonsense, for I've never heard of the Land of Oz, nor of you. You say you are a fairy, and that fairies gave you command over me. I don't believe it! What I do believe is that you are an impostor and have come here to stir up trouble among my people, who are already becoming difficult to manage. You two girls may even be spies of the vile Flatheads, for all I know, and may be trying to trick me. But understand this," she added, proudly rising from her jeweled throne to confront them, "I have magic powers greater than any fairy possesses, and greater than any Flathead possesses. I am a Krumbic Witch--the only Krumbic Witch in the world--and I fear the magic of no other creature that exists! You say you rule thousands. I rule one hundred and one Skeezers. But every one of them trembles at my word. Now that Ozma of Oz and Princess Dorothy are here, I shall rule one hundred and three subjects, for you also shall bow before my power. More than that, in ruling you I also rule the thousands you say you rule."

Dorothy was very indignant at this speech.

"I've got a pink kitten that sometimes talks like that," she said, "but after I give her a good whipping she doesn't think she's so high and mighty after all. If you only knew who Ozma is you'd be scared to death to talk to her like that!"

Queen Coo-ee-oh gave the girl a supercilious look. Then she turned again to Ozma.

"I happen to know," said she, "that the Flatheads intend to attack us tomorrow, but we are ready for them. Until the battle is over, I shall keep you two strangers prisoners on my island, from which there is no chance for you to escape."

She turned and looked around the band of courtiers who stood silently around her throne.

"Lady Aurex," she continued, singling out one of the young women, "take these children to your house and care for them, giving them food and lodging. You may allow them to wander anywhere under the Great Dome, for they are harmless. After I have attended to the Flatheads I will consider what next to do with these foolish girls."

She resumed her seat and the Lady Aurex bowed low and said in a humble manner:

"I obey your Majesty's commands." Then to Ozma and Dorothy she added, "Follow me," and turned to leave the throne room.

Dorothy looked to see what Ozma would do. To her surprise and a little to her disappointment Ozma turned and followed Lady Aurex. So Dorothy trailed after them, but not without giving a parting, haughty look toward Queen Coo-ee-oh, who had her face turned the other way and did not see the disapproving look.