

Chapter Twelve - The Diamond Swan

When the Flatheads had gone away the Diamond Swan swam back to the boat and one of the young Skeezers named Ervic said to her eagerly:

"How can we get back to the island, your Majesty?"

"Am I not beautiful?" asked Coe-ee-oh, arching her neck gracefully and spreading her diamond-sprinkled wings. "I can see my reflection in the water, and I'm sure there is no bird nor beast, nor human as magnificent as I am!"

"How shall we get back to the island, your Majesty?" pleaded Ervic.

"When my fame spreads throughout the land, people will travel from all parts of this lake to look upon my loveliness," said Coe-ee-oh, shaking her feathers to make the diamonds glitter more brilliantly.

"But, your Majesty, we must go home and we do not know how to get there," Ervic persisted.

"My eyes," remarked the Diamond Swan, "are wonderfully blue and bright and will charm all beholders."

"Tell us how to make the boat go--how to get back into the island," begged Ervic and the others cried just as earnestly: "Tell us, Coe-ee-oh; tell us!"

"I don't know," replied the Queen in a careless tone.

"You are a magic-worker, a sorceress, a witch!"

"I was, of course, when I was a girl," she said, bending her head over the clear water to catch her reflection in it; "but now I've forgotten all such foolish things as magic. Swans are lovelier than girls, especially when they're sprinkled with diamonds. Don't you think so?" And she gracefully swam away, without seeming to care whether they answered or not.

Ervic and his companions were in despair. They saw plainly that Coe-ee-oh could not or would not help them. The former Queen had no further thought for her island, her people, or her wonderful magic; she was only intent on admiring her own beauty.

"Truly," said Ervic, in a gloomy voice, "the Flatheads have conquered us!"

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Some of these events had been witnessed by Ozma and Dorothy and Lady Aurex, who had left the house and gone close to the glass of the dome, in order to see what was going on. Many of the Skeezers had also crowded against the dome, wondering what would happen next. Although their vision was to an extent blurred by the water and the necessity of looking upward at an angle, they had observed the main points of the drama enacted above. They saw Queen Coo-ee-oh's submarine come to the surface and open; they saw the Queen standing erect to throw her magic rope; they saw her sudden transformation into a Diamond Swan, and a cry of amazement went up from the Skeezers inside the dome.

"Good!" exclaimed Dorothy. "I hate that old Su-dic, but I'm glad Coo-ee-oh is punished."

"This is a dreadful misfortune!" cried Lady Aurex, pressing her hands upon her heart.

"Yes," agreed Ozma, nodding her head thoughtfully; "Coo-ee-oh's misfortune will prove a terrible blow to her people."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Dorothy in surprise. "Seems to me the Skeezers are in luck to lose their cruel Queen."

"If that were all you would be right," responded Lady Aurex; "and if the island were above water it would not be so serious. But here we all are, at the bottom of the lake, and fast prisoners in this dome."

"Can't you raise the island?" inquired Dorothy.

"No. Only Coo-ee-oh knew how to do that," was the answer.

"We can try," insisted Dorothy. "If it can be made to go down, it can be made to come up. The machinery is still here, I suppose."

"Yes; but the machinery works by magic, and Coo-ee-oh would never share her secret power with any one of us."

Dorothy's face grew grave; but she was thinking.

"Ozma knows a lot of magic," she said.

"But not that kind of magic," Ozma replied.

"Can't you learn how, by looking at the machinery?"

"I'm afraid not, my dear. It isn't fairy magic at all; it is witchcraft."

"Well," said Dorothy, turning to Lady Aurex, "you say there are other sub-sub-sinking boats. We can get in one of those, and shoot out to the top of the water, like Coo-ee-oh did, and so escape. And then we can help to rescue all the Skeezers down here."

"No one knows how to work the under-water boats but the Queen," declared Lady Aurex.

"Isn't there any door or window in this dome that we could open?"

"No; and, if there were, the water would rush in to flood the dome, and we could not get out."

"The Skeezers," said Ozma, "could not drown; they only get wet and soggy and in that condition they would be very uncomfortable and unhappy. But you are a mortal girl, Dorothy, and if your Magic Belt protected you from death you would have to lie forever at the bottom of the lake."

"No, I'd rather die quickly," asserted the little girl. "But there are doors in the basement that open--to let out the bridges and the boats--and that would not flood the dome, you know."

"Those doors open by a magic word, and only Coo-ee-oh knows the word that must be uttered," said Lady Aurex.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Dorothy, "that dreadful Queen's witchcraft upsets all my plans to escape. I guess I'll give it up, Ozma, and let you save us."

Ozma smiled, but her smile was not so cheerful as usual. The Princess of Oz found herself confronted with a serious problem, and although she had no thought of despairing she realized that the Skeezers and their island, as well as Dorothy and herself, were in grave trouble and that unless she could find a means to save them they would be lost to the Land of Oz for all future time.

"In such a dilemma," said she, musingly, "nothing is gained by haste. Careful thought may aid us, and so may the course of events. The unexpected is always likely to happen, and cheerful patience is better than reckless action."

"All right," returned Dorothy; "take your time, Ozma; there's no hurry. How about some breakfast, Lady Aurex?"

Their hostess led them back to the house, where she ordered her trembling servants to prepare and serve breakfast. All the Skeezers were frightened and anxious over the transformation of their Queen into a swan. Coo-ee-oh was feared and hated, but they had depended on her magic to conquer the

Flatheads and she was the only one who could raise their island to the surface of the lake again.

Before breakfast was over several of the leading Skeezers came to Aurex to ask her advice and to question Princess Ozma, of whom they knew nothing except that she claimed to be a fairy and the Ruler of all the land, including the Lake of the Skeezers.

"If what you told Queen Coo-ee-oh was the truth," they said to her, "you are our lawful mistress, and we may depend on you to get us out of our difficulties."

"I will try to do that," Ozma graciously assured them, "but you must remember that the powers of fairies are granted them to bring comfort and happiness to all who appeal to them. On the contrary, such magic as Coo-ee-oh knew and practiced is unlawful witchcraft and her arts are such as no fairy would condescend to use. However, it is sometimes necessary to consider evil in order to accomplish good, and perhaps by studying Coo-ee-oh's tools and charms of witchcraft I may be able to save us. Do you promise to accept me as your Ruler and to obey my commands?"

They promised willingly.

"Then," continued Ozma, "I will go to Coo-ee-oh's palace and take possession of it. Perhaps what I find there will be of use to me. In the meantime tell all the Skeezers to fear nothing, but have patience. Let them return to their homes and perform their daily tasks as usual. Coo-ee-oh's loss may not prove a misfortune, but rather a blessing."

This speech cheered the Skeezers amazingly. Really, they had no one now to depend upon but Ozma, and in spite of their dangerous position their hearts were lightened by the transformation and absence of their cruel Queen.

They got out their brass band and a grand procession escorted Ozma and Dorothy to the palace, where all of Coo-ee-oh's former servants were eager to wait upon them. Ozma invited Lady Aurex to stay at the palace also, for she knew all about the Skeezers and their island and had also been a favorite of the former Queen, so her advice and information were sure to prove valuable.

Ozma was somewhat disappointed in what she found in the palace. One room of Coo-ee-oh's private suite was entirely devoted to the practice of witchcraft, and here were countless queer instruments and jars of ointments and bottles of potions labeled with queer names, and strange machines that Ozma could not guess the use of, and pickled toads and snails and lizards,

and a shelf of books that were written in blood, but in a language which the Ruler of Oz did not know.

"I do not see," said Ozma to Dorothy, who accompanied her in her search, "how Coo-ee-oh knew the use of the magic tools she stole from the three Adept Witches. Moreover, from all reports these Adepts practiced only good witchcraft, such as would be helpful to their people, while Coo-ee-oh performed only evil."

"Perhaps she turned the good things to evil uses?" suggested Dorothy.

"Yes, and with the knowledge she gained Coo-ee-oh doubtless invented many evil things quite unknown to the good Adepts, who are now fishes," added Ozma. "It is unfortunate for us that the Queen kept her secrets so closely guarded, for no one but herself could use any of these strange things gathered in this room."

"Couldn't we capture the Diamond Swan and make her tell the secrets?" asked Dorothy.

"No; even were we able to capture her, Coo-ee-oh now has forgotten all the magic she ever knew. But until we ourselves escape from this dome we could not capture the Swan, and were we to escape we would have no use for Coo-ee-oh's magic."

"That's a fact," admitted Dorothy. "But--say, Ozma, here's a good idea! Couldn't we capture the three fishes--the gold and silver and bronze ones, and couldn't you transform 'em back to their own shapes, and then couldn't the three Adepts get us out of here?"

"You are not very practical, Dorothy dear. It would be as hard for us to capture the three fishes, from among all the other fishes in the lake, as to capture the Swan."

"But if we could, it would be more help to us," persisted the little girl.

"That is true," answered Ozma, smiling at her friend's eagerness. "You find a way to catch the fish, and I'll promise when they are caught to restore them to their proper forms."

"I know you think I can't do it," replied Dorothy, "but I'm going to try."

She left the palace and went to a place where she could look through a clear pane of the glass dome into the surrounding water. Immediately she became interested in the queer sights that met her view.

The Lake of the Skeezers was inhabited by fishes of many kinds and many sizes. The water was so transparent that the girl could see for a long distance and the fishes came so close to the glass of the dome that sometimes they actually touched it. On the white sands at the bottom of the lake were star-fish, lobsters, crabs and many shell fish of strange shapes and with shells of gorgeous hues. The water foliage was of brilliant colors and to Dorothy it resembled a splendid garden.

But the fishes were the most interesting of all. Some were big and lazy, floating slowly along or lying at rest with just their fins waving. Many with big round eyes looked full at the girl as she watched them and Dorothy wondered if they could hear her through the glass if she spoke to them. In Oz, where all the animals and birds can talk, many fishes are able to talk also, but usually they are more stupid than birds and animals because they think slowly and haven't much to talk about.

In the Lake of the Skeezers the fish of smaller size were more active than the big ones and darted quickly in and out among the swaying weeds, as if they had important business and were in a hurry. It was among the smaller varieties that Dorothy hoped to spy the gold and silver and bronze fishes. She had an idea the three would keep together, being companions now as they were in their natural forms, but such a multitude of fishes constantly passed, the scene shifting every moment, that she was not sure she would notice them even if they appeared in view. Her eyes couldn't look in all directions and the fishes she sought might be on the other side of the dome, or far away in the lake.

"P'raps, because they were afraid of Coo-ee-oh, they've hid themselves somewhere, and don't know their enemy has been transformed," she reflected.

She watched the fishes for a long time, until she became hungry and went back to the palace for lunch. But she was not discouraged.

"Anything new, Ozma?" she asked.

"No, dear. Did you discover the three fishes?"

"Not yet. But there isn't anything better for me to do, Ozma, so I guess I'll go back and watch again."