

Chapter Seventeen - Under the Great Dome

When Glinda the Good and her followers of the Rescue Expedition came in sight of the Enchanted Mountain of the Flatheads, it was away to the left of them, for the route they had taken through the Great Forest was some distance from that followed by Ozma and Dorothy.

They halted awhile to decide whether they should call upon the Supreme Dictator first, or go on to the Lake of the Skeezers.

"If we go to the mountain," said the Wizard, "we may get into trouble with that wicked Su-dic, and then we would be delayed in rescuing Ozma and Dorothy. So I think our best plan will be to go to the Skeezer Country, raise the sunken island and save our friends and the imprisoned Skeezers. Afterward we can visit the mountain and punish the cruel magician of the Flatheads."

"That is sensible," approved the Shaggy Man. "I quite agree with you."

The others, too, seemed to think the Wizard's plan the best, and Glinda herself commended it, so on they marched toward the line of palm trees that hid the Skeezers' lake from view.

Pretty soon they came to the palms. These were set closely together, the branches, which came quite to the ground, being so tightly interlaced that even the Glass Cat could scarcely find a place to squeeze through. The path which the Flatheads used was some distance away.

"Here's a job for the Tin Woodman," said the Scarecrow.

So the Tin Woodman, who was always glad to be of use, set to work with his sharp, gleaming axe, which he always carried, and in a surprisingly short time had chopped away enough branches to permit them all to pass easily through the trees.

Now the clear waters of the beautiful lake were before them and by looking closely they could see the outlines of the Great Dome of the sunken island, far from shore and directly in the center of the lake.

Of course every eye was at first fixed upon this dome, where Ozma and Dorothy and the Skeezers were still fast prisoners. But soon their attention was caught by a more brilliant sight, for here was the Diamond Swan swimming just before them, its long neck arched proudly, the amethyst eyes gleaming and all the diamond-sprinkled feathers glistening splendidly under the rays of the sun.

"That," said Glinda, "is the transformation of Queen Coo-ce-oh, the haughty and wicked witch who betrayed the three Adepts at Magic and treated her people likeslaves."

"She's wonderfully beautiful now," remarked the Frogman.

"It doesn't seem like much of a punishment," said Trot. "The Flathead Su-dic ought to have made her a toad."

"I am sure Coo-ee-oh is punished," said Glinda, "for she has lost all her magic power and her grand palace and can no longer misrule the poor Skeezers."

"Let us call to her, and hear what she has to say," proposed the Wizard.

So Glinda beckoned the Diamond Swan, which swam gracefully to a position near them. Before anyone could speak Coo-ee-oh called to them in a rasping voice--for the voice of a swan is always harsh and unpleasant--and said with much pride:

"Admire me, Strangers! Admire the lovely Coo-ee-oh, the handsomest creature in all Oz. Admire me!"

"Handsome is as handsome does," replied the Scarecrow. "Are your deeds lovely, Coo-ce-oh?"

"Deeds? What deeds can a swan do but swim around and give pleasure to all beholders?" said the sparkling bird.

"Have you forgotten your former life? Have you forgotten your magic and witchcraft?" inquired the Wizard.

"Magic--witchcraft? Pshaw, who cares for such silly things?" retorted Coo-ee-oh. "As for my past life, it seems like an unpleasant dream. I wouldn't go back to it if I could. Don't you admire my beauty, Strangers?"

"Tell us, Coo-ee-oh," said Glinda earnestly, "if you can recall enough of your witchcraft to enable us to raise the sunken island to the surface of the lake. Tell us that and I'll give you a string of pearls to wear around your neck and add to your beauty."

"Nothing can add to my beauty, for I'm the most beautiful creature anywhere in the whole world."

"But how can we raise the island?"

"I don't know and I don't care. If ever I knew I've forgotten, and I'm glad of it," was the response. "Just watch me circle around and see me glitter!"

"It's no use," said Button Bright; "the old Swan is too much in love with herself to think of anything else."

"That's a fact," agreed Betsy with a sigh; "but we've got to get Ozma and Dorothy out of that lake, somehow or other."

"And we must do it in our own way," added the Scarecrow.

"But how?" asked Uncle Henry in a grave voice, for he could not bear to think of his dear niece Dorothy being out there under water; "how shall we do it?"

"Leave that to Glinda," advised the Wizard, realizing he was helpless to do it himself.

"If it were just an ordinary sunken island," said the powerful sorceress, "there would be several ways by which I might bring it to the surface again. But this is a Magic Isle, and by some curious art of witchcraft, unknown to any but Queen Coo-ce-oh, it obeys certain commands of magic and will not respond to any other. I do not despair in the least, but it will require some deep study to solve this difficult problem. If the Swan could only remember the witchcraft that she invented and knew as a woman, I could force her to tell me the secret, but all her former knowledge is now forgotten."

"It seems to me," said the Wizard after a brief silence had followed Glinda's speech, "that there are three fishes in this lake that used to be Adepts at Magic and from whom Coo-ee-oh stole much of her knowledge. If we could find those fishes and return them to their former shapes, they could doubtless tell us what to do to bring the sunken island to the surface."

"I have thought of those fishes," replied Glinda, "but among so many fishes as this lake contains how are we to single them out?"

You will understand, of course, that had Glinda been at home in her castle, where the Great Book of Records was, she would have known that Ervic the Skeezer already had taken the gold and silver and bronze fishes from the lake. But that act had been recorded in the Book after Glinda had set out on this journey, so it was all unknown to her.

"I think I see a boat yonder on the shore," said Ojo the Munchkin boy, pointing to a place around the edge of the lake. "If we could get that boat and row all over the lake, calling to the magic fishes, we might be able to find them."

"Let us go to the boat," said the Wizard.

They walked around the lake to where the boat was stranded upon the beach, but found it empty. It was a mere shell of blackened steel, with a collapsible roof that, when in position, made the submarine watertight, but at present the roof rested in slots on either side of the magic craft. There were no oars or sails, no machinery to make the boat go, and although Glinda promptly realized it was meant to be operated by witchcraft, she was not acquainted with that sort of magic.

"However," said she, "the boat is merely a boat, and I believe I can make it obey a command of sorcery, as well as it did the command of witchcraft. After I have given a little thought to the matter, the boat will take us wherever we desire to go."

"Not all of us," returned the Wizard, "for it won't hold so many. But, most noble Sorceress, provided you can make the boat go, of what use will it be to us?"

"Can't we use it to catch the three fishes?" asked Button Bright.

"It will not be necessary to use the boat for that purpose," replied Glinda. "Wherever in the lake the enchanted fishes may be, they will answer to my call. What I am trying to discover is how the boat came to be on this shore, while the island on which it belongs is under water yonder. Did Coo-ee-oh come here in the boat to meet the Flatheads before the island was sunk, or afterward?"

No one could answer that question, of course; but while they pondered the matter three young men advanced from the line of trees, and rather timidly bowed to the strangers.

"Who are you, and where did you come from?" inquired the Wizard.

"We are Skeezers," answered one of them, "and our home is on the Magic Isle of the Lake. We ran away when we saw you coming, and hid behind the trees, but as you are Strangers and seem to be friendly we decided to meet you, for we are in great trouble and need assistance."

"If you belong on the island, why are you here?" demanded Glinda.

So they told her all the story: How the Queen had defied the Flatheads and submerged the whole island so that her enemies could not get to it or destroy it; how, when the Flatheads came to the shore, Coo-ee-oh had commanded them, together with their friend Ervic, to go with her in the submarine to conquer the Su-dic, and how the boat had shot out from the basement of the sunken isle, obeying a magic word, and risen to the surface, where it opened and floated upon the water.

Then followed the account of how the Su-dic had transformed Coo-ee-oh into a swan, after which she had forgotten all the witchcraft she ever knew. The young men told how, in the night when they were asleep, their comrade Ervic had mysteriously disappeared, while the boat in some strange manner had floated to the shore and stranded upon the beach.

That was all they knew. They had searched in vain for three days for Ervic. As their island was under water and they could not get back to it, the three Skeezers had no place to go, and so had waited patiently beside their boat for something to happen.

Being questioned by Glinda and the Wizard, they told all they knew about Ozma and Dorothy and declared the two girls were still in the village under the Great Dome. They were quite safe and would be well cared for by Lady Aurex, now that the Queen who opposed them was out of the way.

When they had gleaned all the information they could from these Skeezers, the Wizard said to Glinda:

"If you find you can make this boat obey your sorcery, you could have it return to the island, submerge itself, and enter the door in the basement from which it came. But I cannot see that our going to the sunken island would enable our friends to escape. We would only Join them as prisoners."

"Not so, friend Wizard," replied Glinda. "If the boat would obey my commands to enter the basement door, it would also obey my commands to come out again, and I could bring Ozma and Dorothy back with me."

"And leave all of our people still imprisoned?" asked one of the Skeezers reproachfully.

"By making several trips in the boat, Glinda could fetch all your people to the shore," replied the Wizard.

"But what could they do then?" inquired another Skeezer. "They would have no homes and no place to go, and would be at the mercy of their enemies, the Flatheads."

"That is true," said Glinda the Good. "And as these people are Ozma's subjects, I think she would refuse to escape with Dorothy and leave the others behind, or to abandon the island which is the lawful home of the Skeezers. I believe the best plan will be to summon the three fishes and learn from them how to raise the island."

The little Wizard seemed to think that this was rather a forlorn hope.

"How will you summon them," he asked the lovely Sorceress, "and how can they hear you?"

"That is something we must consider carefully," responded stately Glinda, with a serene smile. "I think I can find a way."

All of Ozma's counsellors applauded this sentiment, for they knew well the powers of the Sorceress.

"Very well," agreed the Wizard. "Summon them, most noble Glinda."