

# The Cloud King OF Oz

by Richard E. Blaine  
& March Laumer

Founded on and Continuing  
The Famous Oz Stories  
by L. Frank Baum

The  Press  
Sweden U.S.A.

1994



The Cloud King of Oz

Copyright © 1994 by Richard E. Blaine & March Laumer

All rights reserved.

First provisional edition: 1994

Second provisional edition: 2006

Published with the long-standing encouragement of  
Contemporary Books Inc., Chicago

The Vanitas Press

Opium Books Series number 38

"Glinda," said Dorothy, not bothering with honorifics.

"Yes, dear?"

"What are you getting Ozma?"

"Getting'?"

"You know: like for her birthday."

The Queen of the Quadlings considered. "Not getting, exactly. More 'abetting'."

Since her degree Dorothy was of course fully conversant with that word, so she didn't ask What? but "Whom?"

"Oh, that would be telling, wouldn't it?" said Glinda. But she told. "However, it *is* a secret. You won't tell anyone, will you?"

"I'd sooner sicken and die," quoted the young American princess.

"Oh, but, Glinda!" she went on abruptly. "I've had a terrific idea!"

"May I know?" asked the Sorceress-in-Extraordinary to the Court of Oz.

"I want to hold the party for Ozma! I couldn't think what I could give her that would be the least bit different. She's the 'Princess that has everything'—and what she hasn't got she can get with the Magic Belt in the wink of an eye. But *this* would be different!"

"I'm all agog," confessed the witch of the South.

Then Princess Dorothy reminisced. "I only ever went to one. It was—oh, ages ago: when I went to the Butterfield District School back in 1899. I didn't seem to have any real girl friends there but just one time I did get invited to a party: an all-night party.

"One of the girls lived on a farm where there was a walnut grove and we were all supposed to bring a blanket and a pillow and then we'd sleep out under the walnut trees, have supper there and tell stories. It was just about this time of year too—maybe a little later. It was such fun—even a bit romantic: with

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

the laughing girls, playing along the road—when the sun was low and the air was cool—stopping to club the walnut trees standing leafless against the flaming west...”

Dorothy’s eyes grew a little misty remembering a lost golden day. “Anyway, it was called a ‘slumber party.’ I’d like to give one for Ozma. I bet she’s never been to one. It would be—different.”

The sorceress smiled. “It’s a charming idea, Dorothy. There’s just one catch. Ozma would have to know in advance, so the element of surprise would be lost.”

“Oh, would she have to know? Yes, I suppose she would. At least, we could hardly plan the logistics of it without her noticing and catching on. In that case it would make it a lot easier just to include her from the start. Oh, well...”

Thus it was that before long Princess Ozma, as she had on so many previous occasions, found herself being talked to by her great chum and favorite Princess Dorothy about Kansas. How Dorothy had enjoyed that one time sleeping outdoors beneath the starlit sky!

Ozma, without at all wanting to practise one-upwomanship, revealed that she had in fact done this a number of times. That was during her early boyhood when the witch Mombi, dissatisfied with the boy Tippetarius’ failure to clean thoroughly the cottage in which they lived, had thrown him out to make the best of snuggling down in the nettle bed conveniently located near the back door.

But Dorothy’s tale of a slumber party underneath the stars was something else again. Ozma was intrigued and readily went along with the plan. “How many did you think of inviting, dear?” she asked.

“Oh, everybody who’d be wanting to celebrate your birthday,” assured the Kansas girl.

Ozma giggled modestly. “I’m afraid that will be everybody—period.”

“Then everybody must come,” declared Dorothy.

“You mean the entire population of the Emerald City?! plus

all the invitees from outside the District of Oz?" cried the little fairy. "Goodness, it will be like a mass exodus or migration of peoples."

"Exactly," concurred the Kansas girl. "That's why I thought it would be best if we held it on those big meadows out south-east of the city: bordering on that forest, you know, that belongs to the Lion King's domains."

So the queen sent for her herald and instructed him to have the Emerald Citizens gather in the square before the royal palace. Thither she made her way in due course and stepped out upon the balcony that overlooked the scene.

The men threw their hats in the air, the women applauded, and the children cheered. When their queen began to speak and told them what the gathering was all about, they all screamed even louder, especially one little girl whose pigtail had been pulled by a naughty boy, making the sounds of acclamation not exclusively those of pleasure.

There was another round of applause when Ozma's brief proclamation was done. The Courageous Lion was one of those most delighted for he had just learned that he was to play inadvertent partial host to the celebration. He tried to execute a little dance of satisfaction, but failed. Despite Narnia it is always difficult for lions to stand on their hind legs—while waltzing on all fours somehow just doesn't look like a dance.

Every man, woman, child, and animal in the city went home to make preparations for the great event which was scheduled for the evening of the following day. Those who were made of flesh and blood packed food in large hampers and folded linens to sleep on; those who weren't merely prepared themselves in mind to sit or stand all night in a different locale than usual. The Wizard of Oz put up some powders which would be necessary for converting pocket handkerchiefs into tents, just in the unlikely event that it might rain.

When all was ready people and animals took their places in the long procession that was to follow their queen to the forest-edged meadows. To the southeastern city gate they marched

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

and there Ozma gave the signal for the Guardian of the Gate to grant them egress. Out of the emerald metropolis they trooped. Two men in front carried banners. Four others blew on trumpets made of silver.

Actually no one had expected the dainty girl Queen to tramp the entire distance. No, she was borne proudly on the back of her friend and steed, the renowned Sawhorse.

As the trumpeters' clarion calls rang out the mob moved forward with glad smiles on their faces.

Despite the Wizard's expectation that the prospects for precipitation were poor some clouds did after all dot the sky and cast their shadows on the green land below.

One of these clouds, unlike the usual run of such vapor collections which drift or scud along without looking at where they're going, seemed to be following the parade of people, almost as if with intent. Several of the marchers looked up at it from time to time wonderingly and even pointed it out to their fellows. The cloud went on slowly trailing the procession for more than the hour it took for the vanguard to reach the beginnings of the meadows designated for the night's festivities. Then it did something very odd.

When the first of the arrivals had already begun to spread out picnic cloths and blankets the attendant cloud turned around and sped back to the Emerald City, arriving over the capital just as the Guardian was locking up for the night. His devotion to this duty was so great that he had even declined to join the general slumber-bound exodus. Faramont placed the key in his uniform pocket and departed for his cottage home outside the city walls.

The cloud waited until it saw that the last Emerald Citizen had quitted the city (though how a cloud could 'see' is not recorded; perhaps with the eye of the storm). Then it sailed serenely over the walls to a position over the center of the town, where it began to condense.

A sprinkle of sparkling spangles fell to the green streets of the Emerald City. There the drops slowly flowed toward the central gutter and from there trickled down to collect in a low place at the intersection of Strawberry Street and Lullaby Lane, where, *mirabile dictu*, the puddle began to take on a different, definite, and no longer flat-lying shape.

The shape was that of a large man of powerful appearance though a rather wishywashy expression. Perhaps this latter was produced by his insignificance of a nose, though all his other

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

features were striking: large steely eyes like those of a cat, a wide beard and moustache and two very bushy eyebrows. The mouth was heart-shaped and the face was framed by hair that appeared to consist of long strands of porcelain: perhaps adapted plumbing fixtures. From his muscular back rose silver wings and there was another pair of these on his heels. Despite his sappy expression he was a rather impressive-looking fellow.

For lo: this was the Great Cloud King of Oz. He had descended from his kingdom in the sky to pay a visit to the surface of his wonderful magical homeland.

The Cloud King had existed from time immemorial and so, though rarely in contact with any of the inhabitants of the magic land, he knew from centuries of drifting or racing across it a good deal about the country. He even knew of the great Sorceress Glinda and of her wonderful Book of Records and of the fact that it was promptly going to record anything he did here now.

The Cloud King had said to himself (once when in vocal mode and not merely thundering): "I don't care if they find out about the deeds I'm going to perform with my own brands of magic. Maybe that will even make them sit up and take notice of the importance and power of my people" (though whom he meant by 'people' is not recorded) "and of our world."

The king was immensely old, for he began life when the first clouds were formed. He was immensely wise and skilled too. He could control the clouds, make them rain or hail or snow just as he directed. He held himself directly responsible for all the weather in and around Oz. He had always taken great pride in the beautiful valley landscapes he had created through slow ages by the gradual wearing down of mountains, as well as in the beauty of flowers and trees that he made flourish with mundane rain.

As for his magic, that was so simply done that it hardly was interesting. He just had to wave a hand (or, when in cloud mode, shake a mare's-tail) to make any wish come true. And it was on this very day that he had chosen to take on his greatest magical task.



He planned to take away with him to his kingdom in the sky the most magnificent city (well, the only one, really) in all Oz.

The Cloud King got to work without fuss or feathers. For an hour or so he stayed near his puddle place in Lullaby Lane and cast a large number of magic spells. Afterwards he flew about the city as quickly as his silver wings would bear him and sprayed a fine blue vapor over all the buildings. It was important that every structure in town receive at least a drop of the mysterious effluvium. Then when he had done so the Emerald City became as light as air. King Welkin stood to one side and watched the whole thing drift up into the sky where it presently disappeared under the vault of heaven. The king was not long in following it, returning to his own city among the clouds. His magic, by no means to his surprise, had proven effective down to the last detail.

All this had happened during the last hours of evening while the Emerald Citizens were preoccupied with the enjoyment of their basket supper and afterwards taking part in sing-songs and extemporaneous performances on piccolo and zither. No one thought of looking to the northwestern horizon beyond the screen of low hills and woods, where in any case no lights burned in the deserted city.

The greater then was the shock when the Emerald Citizens rose early from what all had to admit had been a rather chilly night. Among the first was young Dorothy who, for reasons best known to herself (perhaps the better to view the rising sun), climbed a tall sycamore where she spied out, after the merest glance to the east, into the northwesterly distance.

Beyond the hills and trees were—more hills and trees, with one rather bare broad patch where nothing much seemed to be growing, as far as she could tell from her airy perch. Looking down and around to be sure she was observed Dorothy pinched herself.

“Ouch,” she replied, then: “I guess this isn’t just a bad dream. I wonder where our beautiful city could have got to.”

Queen Ozma still lay asleep in the rosy bower the Wizard

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

had rigged up for her out of a few flower petals under a tall maple. Dorothy touched her shoulder. Her friend sat up and stretched. "What game are we playing today?" she asked with a happy yawn.

"It's called One of Our Cities Is Missing," adlibbed the Kansan. She took her queen's hand. "Ozma darling," she went on. "I'm afraid I have what may be bad news. Something has happened to our Emerald City." Little pools of tears actually welled in her eyes.

"Something nice, I hope," returned Ozma in matching jocosose tone. Then she observed her chum's tears. "I see: this is no game. Please don't cry, my dear. I'll need you to help as we go round waking the others."

The first to receive the alarm was O.Z. Diggs, the Wizard. He lost valuable time determining by the use of magic spells that the city was actually gone. Dorothy had found that out from the branches of the sycamore. However, he also ascertained that the Emerald City had not merely been made invisible.

The Courageous Lion and the Hungry Tiger had spent the night peacefully purring on a large emerald green pillow, their favorite form of couch whether at home or abroad. While Ozma woke them Dorothy moved to where Trot and Betsy Bobbin were sharing a blanket. Cap'n Bill, always protective of Trot, was not far away. The three had fallen asleep while playing at dozminoes.

Under a jacaranda tree lay the Shaggy Man and Button Bright. They were being shaken awake by Princess Ozma's personal attendant Jellia Jamb who was having hysterics ever since she heard the Wizard's final analysis. Without waiting to see if her friends were fully awake Jellia ran off crying, "What am I going to do?! My work's run away... Where's my broom? Where's my feather duster?!" Dorothy made a moue of dismay; Jellia was usually cool in a crisis.

As the various denizens of the royal palace came to, learned of the disaster, and gathered around their sovereign, their cries of consternation roused the farther-flung Emerald Citizens who flocked about demanding what was what and

what to do about it.

Ozma commanded silence and a brief space of time to collect her wits. Everyone fell silent as commanded and nobody moved. Only Jellia returned in chastened mood and crept to a rock convenient for sitting and dusted it off for Ozma with her night cap.

The Scarecrow and the Patchwork Girl, for fear of dangerous dews, had spent the night in a little tent apart, talking to each other. They now appeared, belated and bewildered to hear of the dreadful news. They were so dismayed that their vaunted intelligence failed them and they just sat down and stared straight before them for hours.

Queen Ozma's cogitations had borne fruit. "The first thing we must do is round up all the roadworthy animals. For a little time they must, alas, serve as beasts of burden. We must get the population under cover before another nightfall. The slumber party has been ever such fun but an indefinite period out of doors cannot be thought of.

"I wondered, you know," mused the little queen, "why Glinda was not with us here at the birthday doings. She was in town only yesterday. Could she have foreseen something of this contretemps? In any case, we have sore need of her help now. Of course the Ruby City cannot house all of us as well as its own inhabitants. Half must travel with us to her. Shaggy, I would ask of you that you lead the rest of our friends to the castle of the Emperor of the Winkies. Incidentally there will be plenty of work for them there as this is the harvest season."

The Emerald Citizens surging about were growing angry as the full realization came to them that they had lost their homes and all their belongings. Ozma spoke to quieten them. "Please calm yourselves. I shall do all in my power to insure that you regain your dwellings and all of our beautiful city. For now we must divide up, some journeying southward into Quadlingland, the rest to the land of the Winkies. Please gather your belongings and be ready to march out as you shall be commanded. Families will not be separated."

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

The queen's tone had been grave but others of the party were not taking the catastrophe so heavily. What most amused many people was the sight of the others in their night-clothes, for of course few had taken time to get dressed before running to hear the consternating news. Now Betsy, Trot, and Cap'n Bill were heard to burst out laughing. They had just caught sight of the Soldier with the Green Whiskers peering out from behind a great rock. The long skinny man was ashamed to be seen in his long skinny nightshirt.

"Oh, isn't he the cutest!" cried Betsy with a rather out-of-place merry gleam in her eyes.

"I do declare," howled the cap'n, quite falling to the ground and rolling about with amusement, "I don't know when I've ever seen anything funnier than green handle-bar moustaches tied up with pink ribbons."

The merriment showed no signs of abating, with the captain holding his sides and the soldier wincing and gritting his teeth with anger and embarrassment, until Dorothy came up and said, "Cap'n dear, you're hurting Omby Amby's feelings. Would you mind putting a sock in it?"

Ever impressed by commands from royalty, Cap'n Bill at once sat on a rock and pulled the sock off his one good foot. He stuffed it in his mouth but alas, it didn't prevent his har-har, ho-ho's from still being audible.

Princess Ozma at last put a stop to the unseemly hilarity by declaring, "We must not waste any more time. I would like for us to be able to reach Glinda's before dark. We must find out what she knows about the disappearance of our royal city." Various thoughtful individuals agreed, including the Wizard, the Courageous Lion, and Hank the mule.

Then it was bustle, bustle! "Caparison my horse!" cried Ozma, and they all flew into a tizzy as they sought to sort themselves out and decide who was going to ride on who. When the dust cleared Button Bright, Betsy Bobbin, and Trot were found seated on the back of the Hungry Tiger. This celebrity yawned and said, "Maybe we'll find some tender juicy fat babies on our

way there. One or two such would preserve me from starving."

"Would these do?" asked Betsy and passed him a handful of jelly babies from her capacious apron pocket.

Princess Ozma took her place on her caparisoned horse (wooden, type Saw-, Mark IX), then found that there would be room behind her for the Patchwork Girl and the Scarecrow, who were still in their post-shock trance, the one staring cottonly, the other strawishly. The Sawhorse, usually so pleased to carry his sovereign and life-giver wherever she listed, now pawed the ground nervously, as loath to bear her to the slaughter-house.

Cap'n Bill and Jellia Jamb, an oddly matched pair, took seats on the back of the mule Hank, and the procession was just about to set off when there was a commotion from behind. This proved to emanate from two cats and a dog: the Glass Cat, Eureka the Pink Kitten, and Dorothy's Toto. It appeared that they were quarreling over a dirty old bone belonging to the latter, but as the story is scarcely edifying we will omit it here.

The caravan proceeded apace, Ozma in the lead, the cluster of palace celebrities close behind her, and a vast concourse of the humbler Emerald Citizenry trailing after at the best speed they could muster though all afoot. To tell truth, the common people were rather soon left behind and we hear no more of them until such happy day as their capital might be restored and they could go home again.

The main contingent of refugees pressed ever southward. They had no trouble in keeping track of where they were going as they had but to keep the sun in front of them and look out for the red landscapes of the Quadling country. There most everything is of a roseate hue. Flowers, trees, and animals of all species wear the most brilliant shades of crimson, scarlet, carmine, cerise, ruby, lake, terra cotta, claret, russet, and brick. There are also some pink things. The company of seventeen (give or take a few) rode as quickly as they could straight toward the palace of Glinda the Good.

Cloud King Welkin knew that what he had done was wrong. One just doesn't steal capital cities, then mingle with decent people. In for a penny, in for a pound, he thought. Depriving the Emerald Citizens of houses and homes wasn't enough. "I'll fix them," he declared to himself spitefully. "I'll make their journey as miserable for them as I can."

He waved his right little finger in the air three times, then lifting his left hand on high he rotated the little finger there in the opposite direction. This done, he chanted:

"Rain, rain, come in a sluice,  
So Ozma's party go to the deuce!"

At that very moment, far away, the sky grew dark above the travelers. Clouds clashed together bringing forth the rain within them; lightning filled the sky with brilliant pyrotechnics, followed by loud crashes of thunder. Dorothy was reminded of a Fourth of July celebration home in Kansas in wet weather. The road the company trod became a slippery, sloppery, slimy mess. Walking even a few paces upon what had been a dry and dusty trail became a difficult task.

"We must find a dry place for the Scarecrow and Scraps," quoth Ozma, "or they will become of no use to anyone, even themselves." Even as she spoke, the Patchwork Girl grew limp and listless. She fluttered her cotton-gloved hands once, then fell off the Sawhorse and flopped to the ground. She was helpless to get to her feet again.

The Scarecrow was made of (slightly) sterner stuff. An Emerald City upholsterer had mingled stiff steel wire spirals with his straw filling at his latest overhaul. "Scarecrow to the rescue," he cried and leapt to Scraps' side. He extended his stuffed hand to help her rise. "Oh, dear, I believe you've gained weight," he said to the sponge-like maiden.

Scraps was not so far gone but what she could still poetize:

"Your words are all too true.

This rain has made me blue.  
If only Munchkins knew:  
They'd make me theirs too."

But this only revealed to the others that her mind was indeed wandering, for the Patchwork Girl had been a Munchkin from the word Go.

Even as he struggled to lift his pied pal the Scarecrow himself became stuck in the mud. His desperate cries moved his traveling companions strangely. They had all had presence of mind to dash under roadside trees, from where they watched the fun.

At last Dorothy cried excitedly: "Oh, won't someone please help them! King Rex, your four strong feet won't get stuck. I beg you, bring them over here under the trees." Then, warm and dry as toast, she continued to observe the drama.

Thus inspired the Courageous Lion headed out into the elements where he soon seized first the cotton girl, then the straw man, in his dandelion-colored teeth—but gently!—and bore them to safety and relative dryness.

Too late the Wizard tore a hem from his shirt and said a few magic words, among which could be distinguished:

"Iscarabella!

Become an umbrella!"

A wave of his right hand in the steaming air produced a cloud of green smoke, whereupon the standers-by could watch the tatter of cloth swell into a beautiful big bumbershoot of tartan pattern.

"Quick, everyone!" he cried. "Get under this umbrella!"

"Why?" said Button Bright. "I'm perfectly dry standing under this spreading chestnut tree, which is a lot bigger than that parasol."

But O.Z. Diggs was determined to prove a hero, now that there was no need for it. He seized the blanket off Hank the mule's back and threw it over Betsy, Trot, Button Bright, Dorothy, and the little Queen, who all began to sneeze mightily from stable dust and mule juice.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

The Cloud King with infinitely remote vision was watching all this with great amusement. "Now I'll make it snow," he announced to his audience of one. He did this suddenly, never stopping to reflect that by freezing water surfaces he made them firm enough to walk on. However, no one was going to be doing that just yet for the damp and sneezy mule cover froze iron-hard in the abrupt cold snap and Ozma and the others were trapped underneath. There they made much moan.

"Oh-h, Oz-z-ma, I'm s-so c-c-cold," gasped Dorothy through chattering teeth.

"Wizard, oh, Wizard, can you hear us?" called the dainty Queen of Oz. "If you could do anything I'm sure all of us underneath here would appreciate it."

"Right you are," said O.Z. Diggs breezily. He tore off another piece of his plaid hunting shirt, rolled it into a ball, and cast a spell. In no time it had stretched into an enormous length of material of irregular shape. The Wizard whipped out his whizzer-scissors, snipped out great hunks of the cloth, and shoved them one after another under the crusty edge of the mule blanket. There the girls with faltering fingers drew out their pocket sewing kits (which they never left home without) and in a short space of time had stitched together for themselves capacious comfy mother-hubbards which, when donned, soon brought agreeable warmth to frigid bodies. This together with the activity of sewing raised the general temperature enough that the mule blanket thawed and they were able to creep out from under.

"Let's make a fire," proposed Dorothy and went to collect branches and twigs fallen from the nearest tree. Soon a cheery blaze gladdened the eyes and outer surfaces of the frozen travelers. 'Frozen' was quite literal in the case of the stuffed members of the party. The Patchwork Girl was as stiff as if made of wood and the Scarecrow, speaking for the first time in hours, said in a muffled tone, "I could use some thawing out." The pair were both attracted and repelled by the blaze, wanting to lose their unaccustomed stiffness and dampness but fearing fire.



"It's getting late for any further travel today," spoke Ozma in a sad tone. "Do you have enough magic left, Mr. Diggs, to make us a tent for overnighting?"

"There *isn't* much," confessed the Wizard. "Besides, my magic may be a little damp. But we'll see."

He took off the rest of his shirt, made a few passes, and lo! there appeared on a patch of bare ground the tattiest tatteredest Bedouin tent anyone had ever seen, all frayed and threadbare, in a most incongruous tartan pattern. The Wizard blushed.

"At least it's big enough to contain all of us," said the dainty ruler kindly. Even she by now had forgotten about the left-behind Emerald Citizens who were nominally supposed to be of the party.

"It looks like it's been through more than one desert storm," commented Dorothy acidly. "Oh, well, come on, chums," she commanded and led the way to enter and explore their lodging.

More disappointments awaited them there. There were no beds or cots. On the still-frozen ground lay Persian carpets - apparently made by just-beginning apprentices - and on the one low but broad table was spread a jumbled array of second-quality dates and a large haunch of dried camel. The girl travelers from blue turned a little green.

"I told you I had only a little magic left," the Wizard excused himself, "and what there was wasn't top-quality."

The party passed a miserable night, all lying crowded close together in a heap for mere animal warmth. The only ones who enjoyed themselves were Scraps and the Scarecrow, who spent the night outside dancing furiously in the moonlight, just to try to dry themselves out and limber themselves up.

On awaking too early next morning the Hungry Tiger called for a hundred tender juicy fat babies and was shushed fiercely.

Princess Ozma was more provident. "Collect those dates, someone, won't you?" she requested. "And let us fold up the tent carefully, just in case. There may not be any more where this one, such as it is, came from." Hardly speaking her loyal subjects obeyed.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

Things were a bit better after they got under way. Though it was still bitterly cold the sun was shining brightly. The steeds remounted, the party soon passed into territory that was distinctly Quadling. The color red dominated everything. They saw redwood trees towering high, raspberry brambles, and, crimson against the lingering snow, the brightest roses any of them had seen. On every hand grew tulip 'bushes', peculiar to Oz alone and additionally distinguished by blooming in late August. From time to time the caravan passed mileposts, peppermint-striped in red and white.

Native fauna made its appearance as well. The travelers glimpsed tawny foxes, ruby-red fieldmice, and little pink bunnies which caused Jellia Jamb to exclaim, "Oh, aren't they *cute!*" The loud though affectionate word startled the rabbits, however, so they scurried out of view.

"This is my favorite time of year to visit our good Sorceress Glinda," said Wizard Diggs.

"Yes, it reminds me of a favorite song of mine," agreed Betsy and began to hum: "Icy finger-waves... Ski trails on a mountainside... Snow-light in Vermont..."

Happily, well before dark they caught sight of the tallest spires of the Ruby Palace of the good witch of the South. The animals quickened their pace. The little queen had trouble controlling the eager Sawhorse. He was all for making a mad dash toward the city of rubies.

Soon they could make out the red banners that flew from the distant turrets. When nearer they could see that each flag bore the device of a letter G within a letter Q. Even the slowest-thinking understood what these letters stood for. Next they could see that the palace walls were encrusted with rubies and, nearer yet, the party noted that the palace gates were artfully covered with an iron-hard paste of crushed rubies. The very path they trod consisted of a gravel of second-quality precious stones.

Now this path was replaced by carpeting of red velvet and Witch Glinda's maids of honor greeted Princess Ozma and welcomed the throng of visitors. "Our lady waits to receive you

in her parlor," announced Tourmaline, the principal maid.

Glinda was seated upon what needs must be described as a throne, though protocol would have had that she descend and greet her sovereign standing, if not kneeling. She wore a gown of fire-red moon-beam silk. It descended to her ankles, beneath which could just be glimpsed ruby slippers. At breast (not too low-cut) and cuffs and hem were fringes of silver lace. Glinda's auburn hair was caught up in a chignon and she wore a comb and short mantilla of fire-engine red. Altogether she made a stunning impression, standing just where rays of the sun struck through redstained windows.

Perhaps the magnificence was lost on the young queen of Oz. Perhaps she was just the least bit wounded because Glinda had left the Emerald City so unaccountably just as Ozma's birthday slumber party was about to begin. At any rate she began rather shortly, saying, "My party is hungry and tired as we have traveled a long and unpleasant way to visit you, Glinda. You and I must consult directly."

A light flush rose into the good sorceress' cheeks but she made no sign, only turning to address Tourmaline: "You have prepared rooms. Please conduct our guests thither. And if you will, let cook know that dinner will be in three quarters of an hour."

The usual splendor prevailed at the dining table. The board was covered with a raspberry taffeta cloth. All the glassware was cranberry, all the porcelain carnelian, all the nappery damask. Long-stemmed roses rose from rosy red-gold vases. The diners sat on red plush cushions. Round the walls of the refectory were ranged paintings in rosewood frames of many of the Sorceress' favorite persons and creatures. All those seated at the table could, with a bit of looking, identify themselves in limned likeness.

The queen, however, was still upset that her hostess was taking so lightly her predicament. Their preprandial conference had produced nothing but Glinda's casual though kindly shushing. "We shall have ample time for discussion later. For now, dear Ozma, will you not allow yourself to enjoy the being together of all of us? After all, supper tonight is *my* birthday celebration for you."

Procrastination continued after the sumptuous meal. All the party gravitated to the palace ballroom where the all-girl orchestra struck up a toe-tapping tune. This of course was the signal for the Scarecrow and his girl friend to give way once more to the terpsichorean craze that had so unwontedly struck them. That moon-night on the ice must have worked its spell. The two couldn't stop tripping the light fantastic.

To them perhaps it was romance and blitheful charm. To the onlookers it was comedy. Where Scraps and Scarekickers possibly anticipated sighs of admiration and applause they were greeted by gales of laughter. The other dancers presently left the floor and formed a great circle to watch the comic duo hop 'til they dropped. This, however, was impossible and one by one everyone went off to longed-for bed, while the straw-and-cotton pair waltzed on.

The rising sun pierced further red-stained glass and shone on Ozma's face, where the ruby hue made a pleasing contrast with the emerald-green eyes which soon opened. She sat up in

bed and rubbed her eyes. Then she dropped back again and said to herself, "Oh, what the heck. This is too nice—after two nights of roughing it," and she slept again for another half hour.

After that it was no nonsense. "Come in," called a sleepy voice when there was a sharp rap on Witch Glinda's bedroom door. She expected to see the enquiring face of Tourmaline and was just a bit taken aback to see that of Queen Ozma of Oz, who was dressed in riding togs, the nearest thing to a travel outfit she had been able to find in the closets of the chamber assigned to her.

Spruce though she looked, Ozma was in no robust mood. Her throat was dry and parched as she tried to utter, nor could she hold back tears any longer.

"What ever is the matter, my dear?" cried Glinda.

"I've lost my palace and my beautiful Emerald City, that's what!" croaked Ozma. "I've been trying to impress that fact on you since yesterday but you don't seem to care. It's awfully unlike you, Glinda."

The sorceress looked concerned and the young queen went on: "How am I going to manage? What will become of my people? Half of them have become day laborers in the Winkie country and the other half—if they're lucky—are going to be landing on your doorstep today or tomorrow. I should think you'd want to get cracking lining up lodgings for them— if only in stables and mangers," she added, remembering the witch's don't-care attitude.

"Let us go look in the Great Book of Records," suggested Glinda, thinking that would take Ozma's mind off. "Perhaps that will give clues to the great disappearance."

"I was hoping you would allow that," cried the princess with almost a smile of gladness.

"Only, after breakfast," said Glinda, ever offputting.

Ozma swallowed the delay with as much grace as she could muster. It proved to be her only meal of the morning.

The breakfast of the other visitors proved not to be of much greater extent. An annoying diversion took place in the form of

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

the attempts of an under-maid, Garnet, to brush and comb the Hungry Tiger's pelt. People forgot to eat while they watched the two chase each other, in highly unseemly fashion, round the breakfast tables. "Oh, goodness, it reminds me of an Oz book," sighed Ozma at this further delay: "all this senseless horse-play holding up the business at hand." However, she put on a fixed smile and tried to seem condescending and indulgent. When the breakfasters looked again the servants had carried all the leftovers back to the kitchen.

At last Ozma, Glinda, and the Wizard were closeted over the vast Book of Records. Dorothy wanted to be too but the girl ruler told her to go and play. After all, Trot and Betsy were not always demanding to participate in the highest councils, and in her present sombre mood Ozma did not choose to be suspected of favoritism.

Glinda's Book of Records had for eons past been a useful tool to the all-wise sorceress. It told of all important events taking place in the world or out of it. Every time a cabinet minister in Slovenia initialed a decree it was recorded there. You can imagine how exciting great areas of the Book were. Glinda, by great and intense working of magic, had long ago managed to effect an amelioration in the volume's printed entries: all events happening in Oz were thenceforth recorded in dark gold print, rather than in the customary black. That made skimming easier.

Glinda skimmed—and it was not long before she exclaimed, "I have found something."

"Oh, tell, tell!" cried the excited sovereign of Oz.

"A certain Cloud King has taken your city and palace—"

"'Cloud King'? Do you mean King Welkin?" broke in Ozma. "Why, I know him. At least, I've heard a lot about him. Why in the world—"

"I've never even heard of him," volunteered O.Z. Diggs. He looked solemn. "A serious gap in my knowledge, it would appear. Where does he come from?"

Glinda leaned back in her studio chair and touched her witch's thorn to her lips. "I have known the Cloud King for many

years as a kind and gentle being. He has been in—well, *over*—Oz for as long as there have been clouds in the sky. His magic is most powerful. He has watched for long ages the doings of good witches and bad ones alike. With his brilliant intelligence he picked up most of his magic that way. But then he is intimate with queen Lurline as well and she taught him much. King Welkin was around in that infinitely remote age when the great Goorikop first cast *his* spells over Oz and made animals capable of speech in human tongues. Why, he knows spells that I scarcely wot of! He is going to be a mighty foe to have to reckon with.”

“But, great Sorceress,” cried young Ozma, consternated, “what are we to do?! Is there any way we can hope to overpower him and take back what is ours by right?”

“Yes,” answered Glinda simply. “But you must carry out my plan to the smallest detail.”

“So willingly!” assured the girl ruler.

“First, Ozma, you must choose two companions to accompany you on your journey. If your quest is successful, at its end you will confront the mighty Cloud King—alone. Then only will your capital city be returned to you... *if* it is.

“Now, Ozma, you must choose wisely and with dispatch. Every day that the Emerald City remains outside your ken your power over it will diminish, the power of the Cloud King increase.”

Now indeed did the young princess let favoritism rule. Without hesitation she declared that Dorothy of Kansas should go with her. Then she looked ruefully at the Wizard. “Forgive me, my old friend. As my second companion I choose the Scarecrow. When he is not dancing—or freezing—he is the wisest of the wise.” Perhaps too O.Z. Diggs’ recent embarrassing performance during the rain and snow storms played its part in determining the young queen’s choice.

“Your first destination will be the village lying nearest the spot where Dorothy’s house fell long ago in the land of the Munchkins and destroyed the witch of the East. You are to find a certain spiraling staircase, a very magical one, which appears

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

only once in a hundred years. And this is the year!"

Witch Glinda handed her sovereign a list indicted in red lacquer ink on finest parchment: proof that Glinda had not been twiddling her thumbs the night before. "Here is what should be your program. You must follow each step to the best of your ability. Only so will you win through to success at last."

"'Tis very hard when princes 'must'," paraphrased the Oz queen. But then she smiled. "It shall be done—"to the best of my ability'."

"You have been most fortunate in a way," consoled the red sorceress. "If your capital had to be stolen, now is the ideal time. The spiral staircase I spoke of...? The stairway appears and remains visible for only three days. I have ascertained that the day of its appearance falls just four days from now."

"Oh, Glinda! then you *have* cared! You *did* foresee and understand!" The dainty Oz ruler was just short of throwing her arms about her older mentor—but a degree of formality had always been preserved between the two noble ladies.

"Now listen to this," went on Glinda. "The Cloud King and I had dealings long ago. Among other magical rites we created together three pairs of special shoes. On my own I have never been able to make any further pairs but the chance exists that you may find those original magic shoes. They are vital for your continued progress toward the Cloud Kingdom. But heed this warning: on your way to find them, do not, I conjure you!, walk upon the violet brick road for more than three days lest you and your companions be transformed into violet monkeys—under a spell that can never be broken!"

"'Violet brick road'?" Ozma almost stammered.

"Yes. You'll find a description of it in your program notes. It was built by the Gillikins on the model of the Munchkins' famous yellow road, though the northerners preferred to use their own national color in their choice of bricks. There are many strange and wonderful sights along the violet road, but do not tarry to view them! If you arrive late, you and your Emerald Citizens will have to wait for another hundred years..."



Ozma's head was awlirl with all she had to compass—and so quickly. When the red sorceress spoke of putting cares aside now and preparing to enjoy a farewell feast that evening, Ozma said, "'Feast'? Oh, I couldn't eat a thing. I'm too excited, wrought-up even, to think about food! Let me see: I—that is, we—will ride my sawhorse to reach the Munchkin village speedily. It in itself is more than a long day's walk from here."

"That's true." The witch returned to business. "And of course Sawks won't be able to climb the Vanishing Staircase and there are no magic horseshoes at the top."

There was so much to be thought of and provided for that Ozma after all attended that evening's banquet where the others were given the awful news of the Emerald City's fate and of all that must be done. But the girl ruler only toyed with a lobster in tomato aspic. "Dorothy, my friend," she said, "I wish you to be of the party that goes to try to win our city's release."

"Oh, Ozma," said the girl, who had been feeling blue all afternoon, "this makes everything all right again—and more than ever."

Everyone was up with the birds on the morning of the great departure, to assist the trio in making last preparations for the expedition. A change of garments and hair ribbons for the two girls was packed. They planned to depend on kindly wayside farmers for any change of straw the Scarecrow might need. Food was stowed in baskets: sandwiches, a thermos of water, and some large red apples.

The genial Wizard had saved his last bit of brought-along magic for this occasion. It consisted of shrinking the provision baskets to make them easier to carry. He also provided a word. It was *worg*. "That's 'grow' spelt backwards. When you say 'worg' the baskets will swell again to their normal sizes," he explained.

"And when we want to shrink them again?" asked Dorothy pertly.

The Wizard blushed. But Glinda came to the rescue. "I'll supply you with a further wishing word. When you want to

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

reshrink them just say 'grow'."

They all laughed at that and trailed along outdoors where the travelers were to be given the red-carpet-treatment. The Sawhorse with Ozma and Dorothy aboard and the soft Scarecrow crammed in between pranced the length of the scarlet runner that ran from Glinda's reception hall out the front portals and down the pink marble steps to the great red world without. "Don't worry about your friends who are remaining here with me," reassured the Good Witch of the South, as she gave a light fairy kiss on the forehead of each departing guest.

Trot and Betsy waved their hankies and cried.

The Patchwork Girl did back-flips and spouted verse.

Cap'n Bill shook hands all 'round.

The Courageous Lion growled and the Hungry Tiger too.

Button Bright went back inside and got lost.

Jellia Jamb took Ozma's hand in both of hers.

The Glass Cat and the Pink Kitten yawned.

Hank the Mule chewed at a bit of sweet red grass.

Toto did nothing.

The Sawhorse ran swiftly, bounding over bushes, clumps of flowers, and cracks in the earth, in the general direction of Fuddlecumjig. Ozma and Dorothy held on as tightly as they could and the Scarecrow, crushed between them, found himself bound to their steed whether he would or no. Nominally Ozma was holding the reins and guiding her fiery mount but in fact Sawks' only attention to the will of his owner was to listen to where she intended to go and then to race there at top speed looking neither to left or right. The reins remained twined about the girl ruler's wrists and she clung for dear life to the stick that long ago, as Tip, she had inserted upright into the animal's back.

It was August and there were stubble fields often to be glimpsed under the flying hoofs of the Sawhorse. At first the racing girls attributed to them the amount of straw wisps that flew into their faces and whirled about their heads. Meanwhile the riding grew marginally more comfortable as the girls found themselves not so tightly squeezed together. But it was not until Dorothy realized that she could feel Ozma's shoulderblades pressing against her chest that she understood where all the straw was coming from.

With all the jouncing one of the Scarecrow's glove hands had shaken loose and all his stuffing had gradually been pounded out of him. His body was nothing but an empty suit of clothes between the two equestrian dames!

"Ozma!" shrieked Dorothy. "The Scarecrow has passed away!"

"Gracious, dear, I believe you're right," returned the fairy princess, feeling rather than actually seeing the thinness behind her. "He's flat as a pancake." Then, "Stop! stop!" she yelled when the Sawhorse paid utterly no attention to the pulling on the reins.

The Scarecrow said nothing. His voice-box had gone with the wind. His brains too were so jostled that he was incapable of a consecutive thought.

The Sawhorse had at last screeched to a halt and the girls

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

could survey the damage. Then Dorothy had a bright idea. A hasty glance had assured her that the dusty crumbled remains of wheat stubble that remained in the nearest field would not do to restuff worthily their noble friend. "We could fold him up and put him in one of the food baskets until we reach somewhere with straw."

The Scarecrow's head heard this and smiled in agreement. It was the only physical activity he could still engage in. Well, he might frown if he wanted.

The girls dismounted and folded their friend neatly. There was just room in one basket for the suit of clothes next to the apples. The head and shoes they crammed in with their own clothes in the other basket.

Then on they flew. They passed Fuddlecumjig in a near blur. "I wish we had time to visit the Fuddles," said Dorothy. "They're such fun to try to put together," she reminisced. "Once I put a nose I picked up on the wrong person and I didn't know until I stuck his mouth back in and he gave me what-for. He was most disagreeable. He didn't like the nose; he wanted his own back. You know, they're just like putting jigsaw puzzles together. With each one being different it's awfully hard finding the pieces that match." By the time the Kansas princess finished this instructive speech Fuddlecumjig was only a memory in the distant dust.

Next stop was Oz State University, the current name of Professor Highly Magnified Wogglebug, T.E.'s institution of higher athletics, whose campus spread over some acres in the Emerald country near the Munchkin border. The Professor himself happened to be standing on the front steps of the administration building when the Sawhorse flew to a gravel-filled stop before him.

Professor Highly, nothing daunted, pronounced in stately tones, "Humble welcome, Your Highness, to our campus! And Princess Dorothy – and, yes, our friend the Sawhorse."

"What about the Scarecrow?" asked Dorothy pertly, bending to the right saddlebag, muttering "Worg", and drawing forth the head of the former ruler of Oz.

A started prexy exclaimed, "Has the Scarecrow become a basket case?"

The girls explained what had happened, then asked, "Is there any fresh straw on campus?"

"Oh, dear," regretted the professor. "For that you'd want the Ag school. It's about a mile back along the way you've just come."

"Never mind," dismissed Ozma. "Time is of the essence. We mustn't retrace a step." But she did take a minute to explain to the savant what their quest was.

"I'm so sorry your grace cannot stay over and address the student body. They would so much profit from it. However..." And he took pensive leave of the travelers.

It was no time, at the Sawhorse's breakneck pace, before the party had reached the Munchkin River. Even on the west side of the border stream things were already turning green-blue. The travelers spied peacock-colored flowers, teal turtles, and even aqua cabbages. At the river's bank the girls dismounted for a well-deserved breather.

They were sitting at ease, dangling their feet in the water and sharing a (non-habit-forming) coriander dope-stick, when the fairy princess happened to glance around and saw a strange double pair of eyes watching them.

This was a signal for a curious creature to jump forward and accost them. It was of lavender hue and had four hind legs, four long ears, and two puce balls of fur for tails. "Drnah-drnah-drnah-drnah!" the being chimed out, in imitation of a fanfare. "Behold: Tibberfoot the Double Rabbitt!"

Ozma looked at Dorothy. "Does that tell you anything, dear?"

"Not much. But I guess it comes from the Gillikin country. Check that violet tint."

"It!" cried the rabbit. "I like *that!*"

"Well, what sex are you?" demanded Dorothy. She was not much of a naturalist. Her interest in animals in general was limited to china representations of them, of which, at home in the Emerald City, she had, or had had, a large collection.<sup>§</sup>

---

§ See *The China Dog of Oz*. Editor's note.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

"I am *Mister Tibberfoot*," stated the rabbit.

"How do you do, Mr. Tibberfoot," said Queen Ozma, trying to spread oil on ruffled waters. Then she made introductions, even withdrawing the Scarecrow's head from its withy confinement so that he would not feel left out.

"What brings you here?" she enquired kindly. "Your charming hue informs me that you are not a local native."

"No, I'm from up north," said Tibberfoot, confirming Dorothy's shrewd guess. "I'm on my way to the University. I've been invited to lecture on Duplicity, being as I am an expert on doubleness. I've made double quick time from Gillikinland but now I'm tuckered out and was thinking to have a drink from the river and rest a bit when I stumbled on you lot. What are you doing here?" the creature demanded rather rudely.

Ozma, ever the diplomat, explained that her party was in the same boat. And speaking of boats, had Tibberfoot seen any along the northern reach of the stream the way he must have come?

"None," assured the rabbit. "No bridges either."

"That's curious," said Ozma thoughtfully. "I'm sure I had some put in—over all the major waterways after I came to the throne. Well, thank you: that helps to determine our course from here. We must proceed south."

"And I west!" declared the lecturer, taking out his pocket watch to consult. "Oh, my thoughts and thimbles!" he cried. "I'm behind time! It will never do to be late. I'm hoping to be asked to work my talk up into a regular seminar."

And with that the strange animal scuttled off.

The riverbank descended to become a pebble-strewn verge as they moved on and the Sawhorse stumbled a good bit over the loose stones. They struggled on for nearly a mile, then on the opposite shore of the broad river they could begin to make out in the far distance the scarlet gleam of the Deadly Poppy Field of unholy memory.

"Oh, Ozma!" cried Dorothy. "I know this country very well and the yellow road can't be far off!"

"Yes," concurred the girl ruler,"and I *know* I had the river bridged to connect the parts of the famous Yellow Brick Road. We must see it soon."

But they never did. Shadows were lengthening and at last the girls saw nothing for it but to attempt to ford the river. "We can both swim, can't we?" Ozma enquired rhetorically. "If we each hang onto the stick pommel the Sawhorse can float us across."

"Good idea!" enthusiasticized Dorothy, more eager-seeming than she really felt. "And if we put the saddlebags up on Sawks' back they may not get *too* wet."

Cringing somewhat at entering the cool water fully clothed the travelers waded out. For a bit it was shallow but before long they were treading water and in the middle of the river the current was strong.

The Sawhorse's legs were powerful—but so thin—and his twig tail was not much of a rudder. Willynilly the swimming group was borne away downstream. They tried not to panic but it was not until the river described a curve toward the west that the current released them sufficiently to allow them to paddle to the eastern shore.

Here the soft strand consisted of sand and mud. The party and their belongings were all saved, but only just. The Sawhorse had somehow been turned turtle; his head was half buried in the mud and his ears were full of it. Ozma was scraping mud off her jodhpurs and Princess Dorothy was almost standing on her head trying to shake the sand out of her hair.

The girls each seized two wooden legs and pulled and tugged. The Sawhorse suddenly came unstuck with a loud skwulping sound. While Ozma helped him clean out his ears Dorothy looked about for the baskets. Since their last enlargement the travelers hadn't bothered to shrink them again. That came in handy now as making them easier to spot. One basket had lodged in a particularly spiny blue bramble. Luckily this proved to be the basket containing Scarekers' head, which was full of pins and needles anyway (to make him sharp intellectu-

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

ally), so a few extra thorns didn't matter.

With steed and saddlebags in safety the dainty maidens turned their attention to their personal couture. The girls found their packed 'extras' to be only marginally damp and Dorothy soon had donned the blue and white gingham frock that Aunt Em had made for her for her latest birthday. Ozma got out of her wet riding habit and, with only a faint moue of distaste, put on the highly unsuitable emerald green jump-suit with a star design in pearls on its breast that Tourmaline had packed in a moment of madness.

It was full evening by now. "Let us make haste!" entreated the young queen. "Sawks, will you carry us like the wind?! To the Munchkin village near the tomb of the Witch of the East. And don't spare the horse!"

Rather refreshed than the reverse by his plunge in the river, followed by a healing mud bath, the Sawhorse raced flat-out and in only five minutes they reached that elusive yellow brick road. From there they could gain the Munchkin village in a trice.

The village was modeled, of course, on the one in the 1939 movie (where, in fact, it was designated a 'city'). It was pure kitsch and only sanctioned by ruler Ozma because she knew that even in Oz you didn't dare cross the M.G.M./Disney empire. Replicas of all the film props were in place. The party of visitors knew they had arrived when the road of 'normal' dingy grey-yellow bricks turned suddenly to ones of pure gold (more readily available in Oz than butter-colored plastic—but in just this one instance Ozma did not protest at cutting corners).

Right on cue, probably notified in advance by allseeing Glinda, the Mayor and all the other villagers popped out of their houses, cheering, laughing, applauding, and singing "They're Off Without the Wizard." With a bouquet of blue plastic roses in each hand the mayor scuttled up to the smartly braking Sawhorse. "Queen Ozma! Princess Dorothy! Please accept these flowers and the hospitality of our town," thus cleverly he skirted the status of the place as a village or a city. "We have been expecting you most eagerly. A feast is prepared in your honor—"



This was good news to the girls who in their flying haste had neglected to eat the sandwiches, which by tomorrow would be stale. Perhaps the mayor sensed something of their state for without further ceremony, he led the way to a vast banquet table that had been laid out in the middle of the town square. With scant attention paid to locals dressed in their finery the two Emerald City celebrities strode to the table where Dorothy, in a quick first inventory, noted the presence of:

- chocolate nut drops
- cakes
- bread
- buns
- freshly churned butter
- jars of home-made jellies
- salads
- veal cutlets
- pork roasts
- prime ribs of beef
- potatoes
- rice dishes
- noodles of every kind.

All the foods were cooked to perfection and their rich aromas filled the air. It was hard to decide whether the chocolate nut drops were sweeter to gaze upon or to eat. Hot steam poured from the pastries when they were opened. The bread and jellies were set out on large platters. Dorothy's favorite of the latter was blueberry; you could tell by the way she smacked her lips after each bite.

But what was this? Was the mayor going to interrupt the feeding frenzy with speeches? Sure enough, the Munchkin villagers instead of falling to at the groaning board queued up to go through a reception line. The mayor spoke: "Queen Ozma and Princess Dorothy, we, the Munchkins, owe you so much—"

Ozma, realizing that *noblesse oblige* and doing *comme il faut*, attended nicely but had to wonder what the mayor meant. What had she ever done for these people but rubber-stamp the direc-

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

tive that came from the M.G.M. front office? But the mayor was going on: "Whatever you may wish for we will surely try to grant."

This too was a poser but the girl ruler had to say something. "Friends and loyal subjects: I thank you most humbly for this beautiful reception. I have indeed a wish but, alas, it is one that you can scarcely grant. I wish for the safe return of the vanished Emerald City of Oz." The Munchkins all cried when they heard this mentioned. "But I thank you all for making us feel so at home. If, most woefully to anticipate, our capital should *not* be returned, I would choose to live here among my Munchkin people, for I love you all." Now even the members of the Lollipop Gym wept openly.

"Psst! Ozma," hissed Dorothy. "Aren't you forgetting something?"

"What would that be, sweetie?" the queen whispered back.

"The Scarecrow. Get this bunch to fetch in a load of fresh hay—if I may counsel you," added the Kansas girl, remembering her manners.

"Right-o." The queen delivered the p.s. and at once four stalwart youths hastened away to the south forty.

The feasting could proceed unbridled now. While everyone stuffed, the villagers evidently having saved their appetites all day too, the municipal band played. They were still at it when a commotion was caused by the return of the four stalwarts leading in a fifth member of their party.

"Oh, Scarecrow! how wonderful you look," shrieked Dorothy rushing into his arms, and Ozma too complimented him on his very handsome appearance.

The wise one explained. "These boys caught on at once and had me out of the saddlebags in a jiffy. The fresh hay is marvelous. And not content with stuffing me they also got one of their girl friends to press my suit and another to polish my boots." Verily, the ex-king gleamed.

But the music was what chiefly charmed the Scarecrow in the present scene. As soon as Dorothy had finished her second

portion of dessert he whirled her off in a mazurka. He did not go so far as to presume to extend to his queen an invitation to the waltz but he did dance with everyone else, including the mayor. The gaiety went on long into the night.

The mayor took a quarter of an hour to say goodnight with all sorts of cordial wishes, but at last the fatigued young queen could sink down before the mirror at her dressing table. She was feeling a little blue. No wonder. Her face looked back at her from a blue glass. Blue muslin draped the mirror which was also framed with sapphires. On blue doilies reposed her own personal blue hair brush, comb, and hair-pins. There were blue velvet drapes at the window and the bed was blue: blue spread, blue blankets, blue sheets, blue pillow-cases. A blue lamp stood on a blue bedside table.

By this time Ozma had got the idea. In a fit of pique she got out the emerald nightgown she had brought with her and put it on, ignoring the dainty cerulean negligee someone had laid out so nicely for her.

Dorothy in her own room was going through the same sort of thing. The Kansas girl, however, tried on the blue nightgown prepared for her and exclaimed that it fit perfectly. Then her eye fell on a statuette on her night-stand. It represented her dog Toto as a chihuahua and brought back memories of the days when Toto was a bull terrier and the two had had such fun laughing at the statue of him as a cairn that had been erected in the gardens of the Palace of Magic at the Emerald City. Alas, would she ever see that comic masterpiece again?<sup>s</sup>

There was a quiet knock at Dorothy's door. "Come in," called the visitor.

In the door frame appeared an engaging young maiden who introduced herself as Jollia Jumb.

"How delightful," quoth Dorothy. "Your name reminds of someone in the Emerald City whom I like very much."

"That's the idea," said the girl with a curtsy. "Everything here is meant to recall to you and your celebrity friends your

---

§ See *The Road to Oz*. Editor's note.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

visit here long ago.”

“You must be dreaming,” said the guest. “I’ve never been here before in my life.”

Jollia blushed. “No, of course it was Judy Garland—”

Dorothy frowned. Judy had not been a favorite of hers since way back in 1943 when the star turned her down for a crack at the role of herself in *The Wizard of Oz, Part II*.<sup>§</sup> “But Miss Garland was never here either,” she protested. “Only on a Hollywood sound stage.” She paused. “Maybe you mean Fairuza Balk...? I understand she refuged to Oz after she crashed in *Return to Oz* and was never able to get another film role<sup>§§</sup>.”

“Miss Balk did visit,” admitted Jollia, chastened. “She’s commemorated in Klab Azuriaf, the maid who is attending on queen Ozma.”

“Oh, well, that settles that then,” said Dorothy, relieved.

“Pardon me,” pursued Jollia. “May I ask?: do you like the statue of Toto?”

“Very much,” confessed the princess.

“Then you may have it,” offered the maid.

“Why, thank you: I think I’ll extend my porcelain collection with figurines of Toto as all different breeds of dogs. This will go beautifully there.”

When Jollia had gone Princess Dorothy, aware that Disney was watching her on closed-circuit t.v., took care to say her prayers audibly.

---

§ See *The Vegetable Man of Oz*.

§§ At least, up until the time of the events chronicled herein. See *The Water Boy*, *The Craft*, *American History X*, or *The Sopranos*, among others. Editor’s notes.

"Did you find out where the violet brick road starts?" asked Dorothy.

"Oh, how stupid of me," cried Ozma. "I did not think to enquire last night... I'll ask the mayor at the first opportunity."

"Yeah," agreed her chum. "We'll get him to gather everybody in the village square. Somebody must know."

"Pardon me, dear," said the queen, slipping on her stockings, "but if the mayor doesn't know is it likely any of his citizens do? After all, the violet road is not a security risk. According to Glinda's program of procedure—and indeed my own recollections—that road is the main thoroughfare from the Munchkin into the Gillikin country. And it branches off the yellow road somewhere right around here."

Not long afterwards the girls were seated at the breakfast table, where, nothing daunted by having gorged themselves the night before, they tucked into blueberry waffles with blueberry syrup and blueberry juice and bluejohn on the side. The Scarecrow joined them, just to kibbitz, and the village mayor sat ceremonially at the foot of the table.

Talk was of the Vanishing Spiral Staircase. "You should have no trouble in reaching it," opined His Honor. "It is three days' journey from here. With the speed and surety that your wonderful Sawhorse is capable of, you should be there in no time at all."

"Oh, I'm sending him back to Glinda," remarked Ozma off-hand. "I promised I'd only have two companions on my quest."

"What a dumb thing to do," burst out Dorothy before she could stop herself. Then, "Oh, Your Highness!" she gasped, getting out of her seat and dropping to the floor out of sheer *lése majesté*. "Can you ever forgive me?!"

The Scarecrow gave her moral support. "If you will pardon me, my Sovereign," he put in sagely, "it's not the brightest. Just when speed is of the essence and our time strictly delimited, to send away the fleet Sawhorse who would be in his element

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

galloping over the well-paved Violet Road..? Besides, he's already been with us—and invaluable—for twenty-four hours: Who determines that now is the appropriate cut-off time for you to become two-companioned?"

Ozma blushed. She wasn't usually so dense. She wondered what had come over her.

Fond farewells were made all round. The villagers gathered en masse to wave handkerchiefs and render a reprise of "Ding-Dong, the Witch Is Dead." Then the travelers were off like the wind—or even wildfire, as Sawks' furious gait had been compared to. They ran through the wilderness that surrounded the picturesque artificial hamlet and came without ado to the branching of the violet brick road four miles out along the yellow one.

From there on the air fair whistled around them, hurting the ears of those able to feel pain. All held on for dear life. The passengers seated behind begged Ozma to command the horse to slow down, at least a trifle, but she heard nothing, the pleading words ripped away in the hurricane wind.

Finally, however, the girl ruler began to sense that their speed was excessive. She leaned down and screamed in her steed's ear, "Please abate your speed, my worthy champion. We cannot go on at this pace. I can feel at my back that the Scarecrow's stuffing is all sifting down into his pants-legs."

With providence the Scarecrow had foreseen something of the sort and after breakfast had requested Jollia Jumb to sew his trouser cuffs to the tops of his boots. The obliging maid had been glad to carry out the simple task.

Now the party came to a halt and time was taken to collect their thoughts and to lay the straw (read, 'hay') man out upon the violet bricks and vigorously pummel him back into well distributed shape again.

By the end of a few more hours' ride the violet road began to narrow in. The condition did not improve. Quite the contrary: after twenty minutes of jittery avoidance of potholes the road, like the Humboldt River, just 'dried up' in an indeterminate

scatter of loose bricks.

The adventurers were sufficiently entertained, however, by the peculiar flora and fauna that flourished all about in this remote place. Multifruit trees bore ripening apples, oranges, and papayas all at the same time. They spotted two-headed beavers and a giraffe with short legs. "Mr. Tibberfoot would feel right at home here, wouldn't he?" said Dorothy, pointing out a rabbit with four tails, not a measly mere two.

They pushed on over violet brick-dust but by the time they came to the end of the forest there was no pretense that they were following a road or even path any longer. Violet though the last vestiges of the road might be the party was still in the Munchkin country. The trees, hills, underbrush, and sky were blue.

One curious feature, as the travelers proceeded, was that the bluery appeared to have been flattened, perhaps, thought Ozma worriedly, by some cosmic catastrophe that she had not been apprised of, something like the meteor crash in Siberia in 1908.<sup>§</sup> All the trees lay on their sides, whence already stout limbs grew skyward, and the bushes lay with roots exposed almost like legs struggling impotently to get up and walk.

The Scarecrow tripped over something and when his friends looked closely they saw a blue signpost lying on its side, whose finger-board pointed vainly at the sky and said: *THIS WAY TO SIDEWAYS*.

Here at least was proof that somebody had been here before. It didn't take the travelers long to right the post, after which they duly set off in the direction it seemed to indicate. Forty feet on they found another signpost, this one usefully not lying on its side. Three boards pointed respectively to: "*SIDEWAYS, 5 HOURS' WALK*"; "*SIDEWAYS, 1 DAY'S WALK SIDEWAYS*"; and "*SIDEWAYS: STRAIGHT AHEAD 100 YARDS*".

Dorothy sniffed contemptuously. "Do they actually expect us to walk sideways for a whole day?"

---

§ See *A Fairy Queen in Oz*. Editor's note.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

Ignoring the signs, the four companions ascended a small hill well outside the verges of the forest. Thence they looked toward a small town. They sauntered down the far side of the hill, pretty well knowing what to expect. They had all been around Oz a long time. Nor were they deceived. When they got into the village streets they found all the buildings lying on their sides.

Granted, the town's inhabitants were not all lying down on their sides, but they all walked sideways. Even the domestic animals appeared to have been trained to do the like. A farmer's cart lay on its side, its 'upper' wheels circling idly in the faint breeze.

The Scarecrow wondered mildly, though aloud, "How can they carry any loads that way?"

Unluckily, the farmer, who was vainly trying to make his ox drag the cart forward with its underwheels scraping through the dust, heard the hay man's speech. He sidled over angrily and offered a nonsensical explanation about having taken the precaution to load his produce into the cart sideways.

The dainty girl ruler of Oz intervened. Ignoring all the idiotic sidewayfulness, she requested of the farmer directions to the Vanishing Spiral Staircase.

The farmer sensed he was in the presence of someone of importance. Perhaps Ozma's coronet, strapped on above her waterproof ear poppies, helped him reach that conclusion.

"Oh, it's quite straightforward, Your Grace—I mean, sideways!" the rustic corrected himself. "This street turns into Door-knob Mountain Road. Follow it out of town and sideways on for about a day's walk. There you'll be in shooting distance of the stair."

The land of Sideways appeared not to be limited to just the one town the tourists had seen. Buildings lying on their sides dotted the peaceful rural landscape. Well ahead of schedule the travelers could afford to 'walk' as directed, so they gave the Saw-horse surcease of labors and he ambled along at their side. They had time to admire the curious scenery where everything that



could be sideways was sideways. At evening they came to a small sideways inn.

"How do we get in?" wondered Dorothy. But a side window gaped a mere four feet above the ground so they stepped in easily.

Once inside the sideways tap-room they side-stepped the bustling landlord, then asked if they could get dinner. With genial gestures of welcome he showed them to a side table where they ordered from a bill of fare written along the side of the card. The selection of sidewise dishes was not great.

"Can you eat a whole side of beef?" Dorothy asked her sovereign playfully.

"Hardly. I think I'll settle for toast buttered just on one side... And the pineapple sidewise cake sounds good."

The dishes were served on plates standing on their sides so there was not much gladness there. However, the waiter set down carry-tray and all; the diners placed the tray between them and managed to make a meal of sorts of the food that had run off onto it.

The Scarecrow, not taking part in the repast and distressed and bored by the horrid sight, sidled over and engaged the landlord in talk. "How did your country get into this situation?" he asked. "Do you lie under an enchantment or something?"

"Well, yes," admitted the fellow, quickly giving up the pretense that going at everything sideways was fun. "Some of our countrymen long ago had the misfortune to cross the wicked witch of the East. She vowed vengeance and cast a spell over town and country, turning everything on its side, and worse: so twisting men's mind that they would seem to *like* sidewayfulness. It was only through singular mercy that we were allowed not to spend our whole lives lying on our sides.

"We had, however, to sidle and sidestep wherever we went. How often have I tried in secret to walk as you people do but always I trip and stumble and fall down on my side. And sometimes it is hours before I can get up again."

The man's talk was interesting and when the ladies had

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

retired to the modest room they would share, each lying on her side of the bed, the Scarecrow sought out his genial host again and the two went for a sideways stroll through the late-evening lanes. They even took in a sideshow that some enterprising Barnum had set up in a nearby field.

Next day the leisurely journey continued until about mid-day the quartet entered another forest, this one even gloomier than the last. The way was now getting steeper and it was hard to make out what lay ahead. The forest was closely grown with elm, birch, and ash and despite the denseness and even darkness at noon seemed to be alive with activity of all sorts. Small woods animals skipped from place to place. Lizards rummaged under dead leaves. Bluebirds and jays fluttered among the branches, sometimes darting to the ground to stir and seek for worms.

Suddenly the dim and upward-going path came to an abrupt end at a great thick oaken door. Above it in the living rock was etched:

DOORKNOB MOUNTAIN. ENTER AT OWN RISK.

"Look, ladies," said the Scarecrow. "There's a key in the lock."

"Yes, and awfully rusty-looking," commented young Dorothy.

"Yet after all it may work," opined the Queen of Oz, "and let us through to what lies beyond."

The Sawhorse said nothing, but his very silence attracted to him the attention of the others. Sawks stood looking expectantly. Then Ozma looked pensive.

"My faithful friend," she said. "You have been most patient. These last few miles along the narrow trail through dense undergrowth cannot have been easier for you than for us. I believe that now is the time for you to turn back. Please return to the court of Glinda the Good and render her an account of all we have seen and done. We will meet again under happier auspices."

All the companions took formal leave of their stout steed. Then the wooden animal turned about in the little space before the forbidding door, rustled briefly through the brush, and was seen no more.

Turning again to the door in sombre mood the Scarecrow pondered. "Could it be a trap? Do unwary travelers pass through, never to be heard from more?"

"Come," said Ozma more sanguinely. "This door might, too, lead on to the spiral stairway we seek. Nothing ventured, nothing gained." Here the doughty little queen put her hand to the great key and sought to turn it. Nothing budged.

The Scarecrow now directed his mighty brain at the problem confronting them. "If only we had the Tin Woodman's oil can," he wished, "we might get that key to move. I wonder: could nut oil serve?"

"Of course!" cried Ozma. "What a wonderful thought. I saw hazel thickets and walnut trees amongst the forest growth. Let us make haste to gather nuts."

Hazel nuts were hard to crack without a pounding utensil, which no one had thought to pack, but pecans and walnuts,

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

easily found, yielded as easily to insistent fingers. The Scarecrow's hay-filled fingers (fine kid, since the Munchkin villagers' ministrations) were useless either for nut-picking-up or nutcracking, so while the girls worked he wandered away to see if perchance some path led over the mountain that might obviate penetration of the door at all.

His search produced nothing but a small avalanche. Even a light scarecrow's leather feet could dislodge a few pebbles and send him tumbling and even his slight weight could make a boulder roll and a boulder could collect earth, snowball-fashion, as it tumbled further, and the soil and rocks could start to slide and carry scarecrow and hillside down to overwhelm the mysterious door and bury the two females who sat working before it.

"Well," said Dorothy, sticking her head above avalanche level and shaking it once more free of sand (dryish this time, not wet as at the Munchkin River), "here's another nice mess you've gotten us into," remembering all the times they'd had to stop and deal with the Scarecrow's stuffing. But she was being unfair.

Princess Ozma shushed her properly too, as soon as she had dug herself out of the dirt and taken stock. "Don't scold. Our poor old friend may have solved our dilemma for us. Look:" The torrent of falling soil and rocks seemed to have knocked the door frame askew. When the girls, after ten minutes of feverish scabbling with their bare hands, had freed the doorway, the weathered and rotten old door fell forward virtually into their laps.

The now well sewn-together hay man had survived his unexpected descent in one piece but finding that piece was the next job on the ladies' agenda. Muffled cries assisted them to locate him under no more than a few bushels of soil, but alack! his like-newness as of the sojourn in the Munchkin village was sadly spoiled. Ozma brushed him down as best she might with her hair-brush but the effect was not the same.

Miraculously one of the provisions baskets turned up: the

one with the food (and the all-important lacquer-lettered agenda) in it, but the other, as well as the girls' hard-garnered haul of nuts, was never seen again.

The landslide-chastened trio now addressed themselves to the daunting project of penetrating the uninviting doorway. In a sickly effort to be jocose Dorothy quavered, "It doesn't look like anybody's at home," and she yoo-hooed as if treating the portal as an ordinary house entrance.

"I only hope you're right, Dot," spoke the Scarecrow. He was frankly frightened but trying not to show it.

"Let us join hands and plunge in," proposed the Oz queen bravely.

The hand-holding did generate a modicum of comfort and the travelers advanced. The entrance to Doorknob Mountain's interior was dimly lighted! At first the adventurers thought it was merely the early afternoon sunlight filtering in through the encircling trees that pierced the dark shadows, but gazing inward they began to make out distant crystal chandeliers that gave off a faint refracted glow. They dared to step inside.

The floor of the cavern or tunnel was reasonably smooth and as the party advanced their eyes gradually adapted to the near-darkness. After a little, when they looked back, the warm daylight at the entrance could no longer be seen.

They walked and walked. The corridor seemed endless but otherwise had not so far proved threatening. Now their eyes could make out the first of a series of doorways cut in the living rock. The metal doors were quite large and arched. They had wrought-iron hinge plates of antique type and tiny knobs.

Dorothy essayed a witticism, whistling-in-the-dark-fashion. "You don't suppose this mountain is called after *those* knobs, do you? They're so puny."

"They're silly too," opined Ozma. "Did you ever try to open a knob-type door with your elbow?" This view of things had caused her to have all doorknobs throughout the Palace of Magic replaced with bold firm jutting door *handles* soon after her accession to the throne of Oz.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

The trio stopped to squint and read the inscription carved in a wooden plaque above the first door:

*"WHO ENTERS THIS HALL OF DOORS MUST CHOOSE THE RIGHT ONE".*

"I suppose that makes sense," said Dorothy. "Only: how to tell?"

They stood around discussing this point until something odd occurred. 'Til now the air in the passage had been still, damp, rather musty-smelling. Now a wind from the entrance-way began to blow hard: hard enough to rattle even the metal doors in their frames. Shivers—from cold or alarm?—ran up and down the expeditionists' backs.

That was all. We hear no more of the wind, which must have been but a momentary vagary of nature. But under cover of the noise and alarm it brought something or someone had made an exit through one of the series of doors. No one saw it happen but they could all feel the presence. "Who's there?!" cried Dorothy with sudden prescience.

Out of the gloom down the passage a being appeared. Her companions gaped but Princess Ozma, ever alert to the forms of courtesy and protocol, whispered, "Try not to stare, darlings, at—well, whatever it is." Then, louder, she addressed the—er, whatever it was: "May we request to know who or what you are?"

There was silence. Dorothy thought this a rudeness to her noble, and polite, companion and she blurted, "Do you talk, whatever you are?"

"Yes, I do / no, I don't," answered the two voices of the unusual being. Then paying no further attention to its questioners it engaged itself in a long argument with itself. Back and forth the questions, opinions, and recriminations flew for what seemed a very long time.

Finally a resolution seemed to be reached. One half of the split (or double?) personality delivered a parting shot: "Well, if you're going to talk to these strangers I'm certainly not," and therewith quitted the field.

The other ‘half’ now introduced itself. “My name is Veys Vursah. I was once an explorer of this grim retreat as I suppose you yourselves are. I picked the wrong door to open. I’ve been locked up in a stone cell for a very long time. I had no calendar, of course, or any way to tell night from day, but I feel that I have not seen the outside world for many years.”

Dorothy was about to blurt a question about why the prisoner hadn’t starved to death but caught herself in time, remembering that starved Ozites never die, they just fade away.

Mr. (Miss? Mrs.? Ms.?) Vursah had the appearance of parts of two more or less normal Munchkins joined together, yet he/she/it was not Siamese twins. It was joined at the back and had a normal ration of arms and legs and just one head but this had faces on both sides. Perhaps Vursah’s best—or at any rate most—feature was the eyes. There were two of these in the usual location on each face plus an extra one in the middle of the chin.

The person (the new arrivals were willing to grant it that much) was too great a curiosity to pass by in a hurry. The three friends sat down with their backs to the cavern wall and prepared to listen as Veys Vursah told its tale. After years in solitary confinement it was clearly eager to talk.

V.V. strode back and forth as it spoke. Room to stretch its legs seemed welcome after so long a time in cramped quarters. “I come from a land of blue flowers and blue mountains. I was the product of a most unusual birth, ‘set before my time into this breathing world, scarce half made up’: Mr. Shakespeare has described my case precisely. Far from appearing as Siamese twins, with a multiplicity of parts, my brother and I arrived—separately—with just enough limbs to go round for a single individual.

“My parents called in a most accomplished surgeon, who sewed the ‘halves’ together. Even now, after all the bitterness, I realize that without my other half I would be helpless. However, I think I got the worst of the deal. My other half is so disagreeable most of the time!”

This remark piqued the second half into speaking, despite

its declared intention. "Don't listen to that half!" it yelled. "He's" (that cleared up that point anyway) "the one that is a nuisance. If it wasn't for him we wouldn't have ended up in that closet. Left to me, we'd have chosen a completely different door to open. That way we wouldn't be standing here now explaining our business to a bunch of nosey strangers."

"That's enough of your surliness!" barked the first half. "I have more to tell these kind interested folks. Are you going to shut up and let me talk?"

"Why should I?" demanded the 'mean' side.

"It's that or another hair-pulling," threatened the 'nice' side.

"Oh, help! No, no! not that!"

"Then hold your tongue. I have more to relate to my listeners," decreed side one.

"Nobody ever cares about my wishes," was the second side's parting shot as it/he retired into a sulk.

"Where was I?" said Veys, taking no further notice of Vursah.

"You had told us about your birth and early experiences," Ozma described it diplomatically.

"Ah, yes. Well, having two fronts and no back proved to be a frightful bother." Veys' audience at once reflected upon internal arrangements but everyone was too genteel to say anything. Dorothy thought with a fiercely repressed giggle about a weird film she'd seen called *Edward Scissorhands* (whose problem in that department must have been even more drastic).

"The trouble is," Veys went on, "that we each have a voice, and eyes to deliver us impressions of the world around us, and we share a pair of ears. But we don't seem to receive the same impulses and we argue all the time about what we should do next. Most of the time I have to threaten Other with bodily harm to get him to let me have my way.

"On the other hand, there's nothing like having eyes at your back, especially when an enemy (and we have plenty) may be meaning to sneak up on you. If one half has a bad toothache the other half can still eat, to keep the communal body going. And



there are little comforts like each foot having ten toes—five to an end—allowing us to count to twenty without having to start over. I only wish we didn't quarrel all the time."

"We couldn't help noticing how—er, contrary Other seemed to be," admitted Ozma with hesitation, wanting to seem sympathetic but nervous at appearing to take sides.

"Oh, you did, did you?" interrupted Vursah. "Who asked you for put-downs?!"

Veyss instantly seized the hair on Vursah's end of the head. But the latter seemed to control the action of the second arm and with it tore the offending hand from 'their' head.

"Hmpff," snorted Veyss. "This is getting impossible—and very embarrassing. I had better say goodbye to you young people—"

"Oh, wait!" pleaded the little girl ruler. "There is so much you could tell us if you would." Ozma talked fast. "We're trying to reach a certain Vanishing Spiral Stairway—"

Veyss Vursah stopped in their tracks and said, "Vanishing Spiral...? what is that, my dear lady?"

"We have directions saying that is the only way we can get to—a place we have to get to." Ozma did not want to lose precious time trying to explain about a Vanishing Emerald City. "Can you possibly direct us?"

Veyss smiled, saying, "I would indeed try to help you if I could but I have never heard of any such stairway and would be at a total loss trying to advise you how to proceed. I will only say this: as you go along this passageway you must make very sure to select the right door. One door you *must* choose if ever you are to get out."

"But," inserted the Scarecrow, "how can we possibly guess which is the right one? What clue could we have?"

"I'm sorry, I haven't the faintest idea. You see how we failed the very same test. Still... I wonder if Other has any ideas."

Other chimed in with a disgruntled "You told me to keep my mouth shut, so why should I tell them anything?"

"You just *might* want to prove you have a heart after all,"

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

suggested Veyss.

Vursah relented with scant grace. "I'll tell you a riddle," he said to the strangers. "But don't expect me to tell you what the riddle means."

"Oh, goodie," cired Dorothy. "I love riddles." And the Scarecrow too enjoyed their challenge to his intellectual powers.

"So here goes," announced Vursah:

"Search your best.

You may be blessed.

Attend the floor

And choose one door.

You might try feeling

On the ceiling.

A source of light

May aid your flight.

But if you're wrong

You may belong

Behind a door

Forevermore.

So Search! I say,

Without delay,

Both front and back.

The color's black!"

The tragic double man without a further word or glance made off along the passage toward the distant known exit from the mountain. One wrong guess, after this amount of time, was enough for 'them'!

Our friends looked after the figure growing dim in the gloom. "You know," said Dorothy thoughtfully, "I wonder what made Veyss Vursah's cell door open after all this time..."

"Part of the spell, don't you suppose?" posited the Scarecrow. "Maybe when new potential flies stray into the web the 'spider' in charge lets earlier ones go."

"That would seem a pointless exercise," commented Princess Ozma. But then, she'd known instances of arbitrary pointlessness in Oz before.

"It doesn't make much sense, does it?" muttered Princess Dorothy: "that riddle."

"That's the nature of riddles, Dot my friend," pontificated the Scarecrow. "They're supposed to reveal by deviousness."

"But it's self-contradictory," replied the girl. "We know we're to try one of the doors but it says to 'attend' the floor. There aren't any doors in the floor!"

"Just suppose there were," proposed the Scarecrow. In fact, Dorothy's querulousness had given him the clue he needed. He gestured to the others and set off forward without bush-beating to peer closely at the rocky passage floor as he moved forward.

The girls followed for a bit but where the famous straw/hay man was tireless they were not. Besides it was long past lunch-time. They fell behind—and then quite out. Ozma and Dorothy sat down against the cave wall and opened the provisions basket.

The Munchkins had packed the food basket with a tempting supply of blue—and 'keepable'—dainties. The girls toasted each other in little flagons of "Blue Nun" and sank their teeth with gusto into baguettes liberally smeared with bleu cheese. A wonderful impromptu meal. But just when they were speculating as to the extent to which they should each eat a second baguette, they-heard a distant cry.

A little guiltily, but enjoyably so, they hastily stuffed the broken bits back in the basket, rose, and ran down the rocky corridor.

"Eureka!" yelled the Scarecrow when he saw them coming. Dot was pleased; she had used the expression too long before on a celebrated occasion. But no time for reminiscing now. "There it is! I've found the door," chortled Scarekera.

The ladies looked along the cavern wall. There were doors to be sure, but which one? "Not there," protested the Scarecrow. "In the floor. Just like Vursah predicted in his riddle." There was another riddle: if Vursah had known how to find the proper

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

door why had he not made use of his own percipience to open it, rather than another and wrong one? But maybe this wisdom had come to him belatedly, after many years of bleak confinement, with time for contemplation.

The Scarecrow was on Cloud Nine. "Maybe I can go on and solve the whole riddle now," he wished.

"Oh, sure you can," encouraged the ladies. They had never entertained doubts on that score.

The hay man now led his friends to where dim lines in the dust outlined a trapdoor.

"Oh, goodness," cried Dorothy, assailed by more memories. "It's just like the cyclone cellar door I last saw Aunt and Uncle disappear down before I came to Oz."

There was just one thing missing: any means to open the horizontal door. They could see a keyhole but no key and no handle or knob ("Doorknob Mountain slipped up there," joked Dorothy) by which an even unlocked door could be pulled up. What to do now?

The girls broke their fingernails trying to get a purchase on the edge of the trap. It was both too heavy and too locked to budge.

"We'll have to have recourse to the riddle," advised the Scarecrow. All three of the travelers had committed the rhyme to memory; after all, success or failure seemed to depend on it. "Feeling on the ceiling" had been one mysterious bit of counseling, and something about a "source of light".

"The chandeliers!" they cried.

Now in fact not all the cobwebby chandeliers that ranged, every twenty yards, down the center of the passageway ceiling, were lit. What if what they sought: a key — no doubt — was to be found near an unlit chandelier? "It's so black up there," commented Ozma. "Indeed, we never could find anything there except by feeling about."

"Black'!" shouted the Scarecrow. "Exactly! The riddle warned us to be alert about something black."

Somebody had been providential: Ozma, Dorothy, Tourma-

line, or the Munckins? Nobody paused to claim credit. They scabbled in the food basket and came up with a candle stump and matches.

The Scarecrow had already keen-sightedly peered about in the vicinity of a couple of the nearer lighted chandeliers. Now he urged that they go consequently down the line and investigate every light-crown, lit or unlit. For this human pyramids were in order. Ozma who had once been a boy preserved a trace of boyish robustness, so she stood bottom-most. Lithe Dot clambered up on her shoulders and thence hauled up by one arm the flimsy Scarecrow, who yet was sturdy enough to hold aloft the burning candle-end. He was not at *all* keen on that shenanigan, but he did it.

At the eighth chandelier they struck oil—but they did not bother to light it. Instead the Scarecrow just held up the guttering candle and with nervous fingers detached the black (!) key that hung from a leather thong from an arm of the candelabra.

They could all fall to the ground now and breathe great sighs of relief. *This* was the key—or if it wasn't they weren't going to lose more time in this cul-de-sac but make for the cave entrance and freedom. They'd think of some other way of getting over Doorknob Mountain.

"I'm almost afraid to try the key," said the Oz queen in a hoarse whisper.

"Needs must," whispered Dorothy back archaically.

Ozma drew a deep beath, inserted the clumsy iron key, and twisted. She sighed out, and something like a sigh echoed down the cavern. The key worked perfectly.

They were glad of the key's sturdiness. This was the only handle they had to pull up the creaking but not stuck trapdoor. A wave of mustiness welled upward.

Not surprisingly a staircase was revealed to view. It was not spiral, however, and showed no signs of vanishing. There must be another staircase in their future.

No sentimental last looks were in order. Peering straight down, Ozma led the way into the bowels of the earth, holding

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

up a fresh candle-end from the provisions basket. Dorothy followed with that basket itself. The Scarecrow took an instant to toss the long-sought but only momentarily needed key upon the cavern floor. Spare the next seeker a lot of needless bother!

The Cloud King reposed on his silver throne in his silver-towered palace up above the world so high. The cushions that aided his comfort were of cloth-of-silver with a simple design picked out in tiny diamonds and of course the fringes were silver threads. Indeed, the entire article of furniture was a variation on the theme of silver: the arm-rests were silver bars, the head-rest was a silver mirror ringed about with stylized heads of cloud fairies and above this again was an argent arch with small portraits of his niece Polychrome and some of her sisters etched in silver nitrate.

King Welkin appeared lost in thought but suddenly he called out to his chamberlain who stood respectfully at a distance: "Come hither, sirrah!" He gave instructions and the chamberlain pulled upon a silver cord that hung near the wall.

A stout little silverling came running into the hall. "What does your majesty require?"

Welkin stared hard at the little fellow. "Silvertip," he spoke, "I have called you here to expedite three commands. You will take excessive care in putting them into execution."

"But of course, your greatness. Yours is but to speak your will."

The Cloud King rose and stepped from the dais. He laid a fatherly hand on Silvertip's shoulder and looked closely into the youth's silver eyes. He spoke almost in a whisper. "It is of utmost importance that the work on the Emerald City be carried out in the most exquisite detail. You understand that each and every mounted emerald must be taken from its setting. Gem and mounting must be code-numbered and the master list of matchings preserved under triple lock and key."

"That will take days, even weeks!" cried Silvertip, alarmed.

"Days!" commanded the king, "and but few of those... Secondly, see to the delivery of the crated emeralds to the Black Cloud Forest—"

"Why is your highness doing all this?" the equerry inter-

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

rupted again.

“Darest thou to question me, varlet?!” roared the incensed king.

Silvertip trembled agonizingly and fell to his knees. “I was merely curious,” he excused himself in a seizure of contrition.

“Don’t let it happen again. Now get up and pay attention to my final orders. After every single emerald has been scoured and purified and delivered to the Forest you are to see that instructions are given for their ultimate transport to my Silver Cloud mines. When all this has been set in train send Silverplate to me. Now be off with you!”

Silvertip sped out of the Hall of the Throne, down some steps, along a corridor, toward a pair of enormous silver doors. The doors stood fifty feet high and were covered with great gawdy diamond knobs.

Opening them was not a task that could be accomplished by one small cloud elf with the bare hands. He had to throw his whole inconsiderable weight into pressing on a great silver-spangled lever that jutted from the floor. A burst of raw sunlight flooded the hall and prismatic colors shot from the knob diamonds, blinding the elf.

Squinting against the glare Silvertip ran between the doors calling, “Silvertop! Silvertop! Where are you, Silvertop?”

A little silverling voice spoke matter-of-factly: “I’m over here. What’s up?”

“Quick, quick! Speed is of the essence. I’ll explain as we run to the Emerald City. We—and everybody—have got to work like furies round the clock! It’s that or be melted down for filigree, so old Welkin says.”

The job facing Tip and Top was immense. Everybody in the palace and complex was going to have to pitch in. Not only that but they sent the royal herald Silvertap to broadcast throughout the cloud kingdom that every able-bodied elf who could be spared was to report to the royal jewelworks.

Soon the workshops were bursting with eager little Silverlings wanting to do their bit. These cloud creatures are



charming little figures, none taller than traditional-type Munchkins. Bit weird-looking though: they have diamond-shaped heads which are completely hairless and their faces have the peculiar quality of reflecting brilliantly whatever sunlight falls on them, making it hard for mere mortals to gaze on them for more than a moment. Even their hands are unusual, bearing only as many fingers as those of Mickey Mouse. (Ever consider that it is odd a mouse should have fingers? How anthropomorphic can ya get?) As for the Silverlings' clothing, they dressed uniformly in silver gowns painted with star-dust.

The volunteer workers had come each carrying own tools: hammers, axes, saws, scrub brushes, scouring powder, jeweler's pincettes and magnifying glasses. They did not neglect to pack lunches for a lengthy tour of duty. They rather favored sandwiches of silverside beef.

Foremen were quickly appointed. Silvertop suggested working the 'men' in shifts. (Actually, all Silverlings are of the same [unspecified] sex.) Silvertip agreed fully that that would hasten the work.

For greater handleability the Cloud King's first act on getting the stolen city home to the clouds was to miniaturize it slightly. It was already featherlight but a reduction in dimensions meant a valuable saving in time as the army of workers swarmed over its surface: it was not so far from work-point A to work-point B.

Soon the air was fairly green with plucked-out emeralds from the city walls and buildings flying down to land in lifted bolt-catchers. Fast scraping and polishing followed. "Gosh, some of these stones are the grimmest," remarked one Silverblup to his mate Silverflit.

"Yeah. Did you hear the ruler of Oz is considering enclosing the city under a protective dome?" said Flit, passing on the rumor he'd picked up. "Air pollution is getting pretty fierce these days."

"Especially," said Blup with a shrug, "out in the great world." The clean-up crew worked 'from the outside in', first scour-

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

ing the Emerald City's outer protective walls, then moving on to citizens' private houses, and saving the Palace of Magic for last. It had a coating of emeralds equal in extent to almost the rest of the city combined.

The cleaned (and number-tagged) green stones were shoveled into cloud carts by the bushel. There was no grumbling among the overtime-working elves but there was plenty of talk and speculation. "Why do you suppose the king is doing all this?" Silverflit asked another mate, Silverdump.

"Never question the ways of royalty," advised Dump.

"Oh, come on," pleaded Flit. "I know you worked for a while as scullion in the palace kitchens. You must have heard something."

"I'll tell you what happened when I was a scullion:" declared the elf-with-a-grievance. "One day when there was nobody else around ol' Welkin gave me a message to be carried to the royal treasury. There I got fascinated by the sight of silver bars stacked up to the ceiling, and I was a mite late getting back to report to His Skyness. He never waited for a word of excuse before he shot a bolt of lightning through my body. I've never been quite the same since."

"But wasn't that an exception?" wondered Flit. "Ordinarily he's supposed to be a very fair monarch. At least, I remember once, a long time ago, my cloud-house was struck by a thunderbolt and completely destroyed. King Welkin heard about it and sent for me and my whole family to live in a palace side building until his cloudsmiths could build us a new house. I call that pretty royal."

"And was the new place okay?" asked Dump sceptically.

"Sure! It even has more rooms than the old house, besides a beautiful view down on Oz."

By the end of the day all available carts and wagons were filled to brimming with refurbished emeralds. The loads caught the last rays of the setting sun and gleamed out verdantly in a million rays and sparkles.

The despoiled City itself, however—was a different matter.

Never since the earliest days of its foundation by Oz the Great and Terrible had the capital looked so dull, dark, and depleted. The Emerald City had lost its personality and looked now about as inviting as East St. Louis. Would the once lovely metropolis ever again be the jewel in the crown of Oz?

At the hour when the very last decorative emerald had been pried from its scone at the pinnacle of the Wizard's tower at the Oz palace a crowd of Silverlings was observed to be laughing. Was it in relief at an arduous job accomplished? Or were they enjoying the completion of the spoliation of one of the fairest cities (if not *the* fairest) mankind had ever imagined?

Silvertip ran to report to King Welkin the completion of a bad job well done. The elfin equerry, even after so many years, never failed to draw an extra breath of wonderment and admiration on entering the Throne Room of the cloud palace. Everything was of silver, needless to say: tables, chairs, what-nots, picture frames, and all was kept burnished daily within an inch of its life.

Those picture frames were of particular interest, not as much for their beauty as for what they contained. Surprisingly, they surrounded portraits of personalities we have heard of before, all etched on silver. You could admire a scene of Dorothy of Kansas, with Toto in her arms, knocking on the gates of the Emerald City. Another picture showed the Tin Woodman, Scarecrow, and (then) Cowardly Lion looking awed in the middle of a dark wood. There was Glinda the Good surrounded by some of her court ladies. The Hungry Tiger was depicted standing under the limbs of a tree which, just too high up, supported a row of tender juicy babies.

But Silvertip today had no time to pause and admire. "Your Skyness, I bring most satisfactory news."

"Out with it!" snarled King Welkin. "Can't you see I'm at my supper?!" (People seem to be eating all the time in this story. How fat *is* the author?)

Chastened, Tip told the tale. "The Oz emeralds have all been removed," he stated sulkily.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

"Where are they now?" demanded the chewing king.

"On their way to the Black Cloud Forest, as you commanded."

"Hmpff. Very well," said his majesty ungraciously. "What took you so long?"

"'Long'!? A day and a half to dismantle an entire (if scaled-down) city? I like that!" Silvertip was shaken.

"Entirely too long. If that's the best you can do, tomorrow you'll repose on a shelf in the treasury: melted down to a *thin* brick of silver," said Welkin testily. "Now go before I decide to smelt you right now."

"Whew," said Tip when back in his apartment (which was as far away from the king's quarters as might be for the equerry still to be on call). His teeth chattered and his knees knocked. "What's come over the old boy?" the elf soliloquized. "He's usually a bit more easy-going than that. I'll bet he's got a bad conscience at stealing that city that was minding its own business—and he's taking it out on us. Silly old feese! Serves him right."

Back in the throne hall Welkin was laughing to recall how scared his servant had been. "That ought to make him get on with the job. I daren't tell them *why* the whole project has to be completed inside a week. Anyway, it was kinda fun seeing him jump," gloated the Cloud King naughtily. "Maybe I'll go zap a few other underlings with a touch of lightning."

With the emerald train well and safely dispatched to the cloud forest Silvertip himself set off next morning for the Silver Cloud mines. There he sought out Silverplate, chief engineer. "I'm to escort you back to court," he told the official. With that his current load of managerial duties was completed.

Maid Silverbell announced mine boss Silverplate and king and commoner were left alone. "This will only take a few minutes," Welkin told the engineer. "We have a few details to work out."

Not long afterwards Plate left the presence with the king's words echoing in his ears: "Good luck. You will need it."

The three underground travelers found the stone stairs to be twisty, turny, and topsy-turvy. Someone or two stumbled at every step. The risers were of unequal height, making it impossible to sense where to place one's step in the gloom, which, however, was not total. Fantastically enough, ancient kerosene lamps cast flickering shadows on the walls. One is hard put to imagine attendants coming to put fresh fuel in those lamps at least every day or so.

The party made conversation but whether it kept their spirits up is difficult to say. Ozma started by saying, "At least we are traveling in the right direction."

"How do you know that, dearest?" wondered Dorothy just behind her.

"Oh," said Ozma and thought for a moment. "I suppose because there seemed no other way to go. The cavern seemed to dead-end, choosing any one of those wall doors seemed an impossible task, and out the way we came in our Scarecrow proved there was not much hope of crossing the mountain any other way. Voila: right direction."

"Okay, I'll buy that," said Dot and gave up.

The Oz queen, being in the lead, was not surprisingly the first to reach the bottom of the stairway and to exclaim, "Oh, lookeel!: a light ahead!"

The source of the light was never revealed but it seemed to be of quite an astonishing brightness. It pierced all eyes, which were turned away to squint and blink to try to adapt. When they were adjusted to the illumination they saw a doorway much resembling those they had left behind less than half an hour before on the upper level. This door was shorter: about three feet in height, and was cut in the rock in the shape of an hour-glass. It looked to be merely latched, not locked, and seemed to be very old. One felt that but to touch it would make it fall in frapoents to the ground, as had happened, if less spectacularly, with the original door into Doorknob Mountain. Actually, the

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

door went that premonition one better: when Ozma touched the latch, the door crumbled almost like rotten sawdust.

Behold: the party stepped out into the Land of Oz (though technically they had not been out of it while inside the mountain). There was a distinct sense of anticlimax. "Boy, that was a pretty short mountain," protested Dorothy. "We can't possibly have walked or down-climbed more than a third of a mile since we came in."

Never mind. What they saw made up for their disappointment at not having suffered more while negotiating Doorknob Mountain. Princess Ozma's face grew wreathed in the loveliest smile and the dear Scarecrow began to bounce in sheer imitation of the scene disclosed.

Everything was astir in the town that lay before them. The buildings swayed in the breeze, producing corny sounds like 'boing', 'spwing', and 'pling', and all the people who could be glimpsed were bouncing energetically—and even enjoying it, to judge by the smiles. Babies especially came in for an inordinate amount of bouncing. Dogs even bounced as they got walked (and this despite the assurance of early authors that there are no native dogs in Oz). Men bounced while sitting on park benches reading newspapers.

"Don't tell me; let me guess!" said Dorothy. "This is Bounceburg." (In point of fact it turned out to be called 'Springer Town'.)

We must give the place its due. It appeared clean and tidy and the inhabitants were obviously happy or, if not, they were kidding themselves that they were.

On closer inspection it transpired that everything, creatures and objects alike, had springs attached. Street lights, window frames, fences, grass, shrubs, trees, all came spring-equipped. The newcomers admitted that plants might well spring up, and window frames might not unnaturally be fitted with springs. But what was the function of a spring on a fence? Now if it had been a garden gate...?

A bouncing boy lurched toward them. "Who are you?" he queried, "Where ya come from? And where are your springs?"

Ozma undertook to reply. "Now isn't that a shame?: we clean neglected to pack any springs when we came away. Really, we might have suspected we'd need them, for we are on our way to a spiral staircase, and springs and spirals are much alike in shape."

"Don't know nothin' 'bout no spiral staircase," confessed the youth. "But howdy anyway. My name's Coily. That's 'cause o' my coily hair... But bounce along: I'll take you to meet Mayor Carom. He'll be the one to know about spiral stairs, if anybody."

Coily bounced on ahead, but too fast. In a couple of energetic leaps he was out of sight. The visitors shrugged and followed along after at a leisurely pace.

The little town was fascinating to look upon. The houses were all built of springboards. People moved fast and furiously, springing up where you least expected them. And when the visitors noticed fresh primroses, snowdrops, and daffodils they had only to surmise that it was always spring in Springer Town.

Young Coily had bounced back after being out of circulation for a bit. "Come on!" he cried. "The Mayor is bouncing up and down with eagerness to meet you."

The new arrivals ran like mad but after all Coily always kept one jump ahead of them. After fifteen minutes the girls flopped exhausted on a bench. Coily circled back. "Come on," he wheedled. "The mayor's house is only a hop, skip, and a jump from here."

Before long the party did actually arrive there. The house proved to be star-shaped and was clearly the town's star tourist attraction. It sported a rainbow-colored roof and high arched doorways. Inside the doors sprang open at a touch. Glancing through doorways the visitors spied spring-leg tables and bed with well-sprung mattresses.

The mayor, when at last he was discovered in his den, was wearing a gold hat. Graduate Dorothy stopped in her tracks, overcome with the aptness of it all. She remembered her summer course in the novels of Scott Fitzgerald. How did it go?: that forepiece to *Gatsby*:

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

“Then wear the gold hat—if that will win her.  
And, if you bounce high, bounce for her too.  
’Til she cry, ‘Loved  
Gold-hatted, high-bouncing lover!  
I must have *you*’.”

Dorothy extended her hand very cordially to the literary mayor. She was sorry when he jumped as if affrighted.

But, “Hello! and welcome,” he cried civilly enough. “You must forgive me, my dear,” he went on when he noted the Kansas girl’s puzzled and wounded look. “Everybody in this town is jumpy—but I more than most. Don’t know why. And you, my lady,” he went on, sensing queen Ozma’s pre-eminence. “I as most curious: why did your ladyship choose to pay Springer Town a visit?”

“Don’t be offended, good sir,” admitted Ozma, “but our presence here is quite fortuitous.” She proceeded to tell about the quest and the need of finding a certain Vanishing Spiral Staircase. “Can you possibly help us at all? No one we’ve met seems to know anything about the stairway.”

“Is that the fabled stair that makes an appearance just once in every hundred years?”

“Yes! yes!” cried all the newcomers eagerly.

“I *have* heard of it, but only just, nor have I ever seen it myself. But I’m only ninety nine years old almost. There’s time; there’s time.” Actually the mayor didn’t look a day over ninety eight—and in Oz oldsters of that age can appear as spry as George Burns.

The mayor invited them to an impromptu luncheon reception. Young Coily was let come too. The fivesome bounced along to the town hall where the repast would be spread. The menu consisted of chops of spring lamb, spring beans, and spring rolls, piping hot, all washed down with spring water.

When queen Ozma rose to give a speech of thanks she realized for the first time the miraculous prescience of whoever had chosen her travel wardrobe and so appropriately included the once despised jump suit.



Mayor Carom had prevailed on the travelers to stay over night. After the glooms of the Doorknob Mountain experience they were nothing loath to linger in the cheerful town. Only, their slumbers were rudely broken into next morning by a tiresome disturbance in the kitchen of the mayor's home.

It seemed that Coily, fascinated by the great-world aura of the visitors, had crept back into the mansion uninvited, just to be near them. He had spent the night on the pantry floor, sleeping under a comfortable blanquette de veau with his head cushioned on a six-pint saucepan. When the cook discovered him there his screams and reproaches so startled the boy that his head slipped *into* the pot. Now he couldn't get it off.

Fleeing from the attack of the oddly flat-faced cook Coily blundered about blindly, knocking pots, pans, and dishes galley-west. "Get out!" shrieked the cook.

"Help, help! and rescue!" yelled Coily.

Everyone came running and looked on in consternation as the cook belabored the fleeing youngster with a broom and Coily rebounded from wall to wall. By sheer accident he stumbled through the doorway where the rudely wakened sleepers gaped. Quickly one or two got between him and the irate cuisinier.

The mayor seized the saucepan handle and tried to free his young compatriot. The girls wrung their hands and the Scarecrow looked grave. Suddenly the cook stuck his puggy face out of the kitchen doorway and held out a handful of bacon grease. "Here! Try to get this in between the pot and the head. It just might work."

It did. Soon the unfortunate scene was but a dumb memory.

Springers had begun to gather on the mayor's doorstep. It turned out that this was his birthday. "What fun," said Princess Ozma quietly. "Almost the same day as my own." The

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

townsmen had come to serenade him at breakfast. They had brought with them fifes, hautboys, and theorbos.

Carolers sang songs of joy and musicians blew and strummed forth delightful twangs and chortlings while the inmates of the mayor's mansion looked on, edified, from a star-shaped window. A very large soprano favored with "Spring Is Here", "The Jersey Bounce", and "Alabammy Bound". The Springers cheered themselves hoarse. In the end there was nothing for it but that Mayor Carom must step out upon the balcony and say a few words of pleased recognition.

The breakfast that had begun so disastrously gathered momentum and ended as quite a celebration. The locals carried in mountains of food to add to the mayor's own offerings. You'll want to know the menu. It was melon balls, hot cakes, and bacon as pièces de resistance, but other dishes, both suitable and unsuitable, made their appearance and were tasted by some: chilled pizza, ice cream soup, divinity, matzo balls, chocolate-covered oysters, maple malted milk, breast of guinea hen under glass, and day-old hamburgers.

"Now then," said the mayor with satisfaction when the last of the revelers had departed and charwomen were clearing the grounds of folding chairs, streamers, and a drift of fallen confetti, "what would you like to do today?"

"Hit the road," blurted young Dorothy with conviction.

"Oh, but—I thought you might care to go shopping or for a buggy ride or skating on the pond (we keep it magically frozen the year round)—"

"*Would* that it were possible," put in the Queen of Oz with regret, "but please do not forget, your honor, that we are engaged in a quest. We're already running over time. We simply must find this all too verily vanished stairway."

"Well, then, the least I can do for my distinguished visitors is to bring them safely on their way." Here the mayor turned to greasy-headed Coily who still lurked under foot. "My boy, be so good as to run to the stable and alert the coachmen. This must be a leave-taking in state."

The expeditionists gathered up their few possessions and waited on the front steps of the mayoral residence. Very soon a coach, black with gold trim, glittered to a halt on the drive. The coachman tipped his hat and a footman jumped down to place a stepping stool and give his hand to assist the passengers to encoach.

Then it was an electrical snapping of the whip and cries of "Tallyho! Away!" The drivers seemed to know where to go without commands. The horses sprang away and raced to the town square scarcely ceremonially.

From there the pace was more sedate. The visitors had time to take note of offerings in shop windows. Ozma was intrigued by an evening gown with green sequins but instantly came to the conclusion that now was not at all an appropriate time to concern herself with such fripperies. Dorothy and the Scarecrow in their turn gazed with interest at the window of a luggage shop and pondered the advisability of acquiring some kind of carryall to replace the missing travel basket—but decided against it. After all, what did they really have to put in it?

Yet all the party gave way at the sight of an antique shop. After all, they were all antiques themselves, having lived well over a hundred years apiece. "Oh, Ozma," pleaded Dorothy, "couldn't we pop in just for a minute? Those things in the window look so fascinating!" The Scarecrow, who was interested in genealogy, having traced his own lineage way back (under ground<sup>s</sup>), had spotted some ancient family trees that he would have liked to have a closer look at. And the girl ruler of Oz herself had caught a glimpse of a daguerrotype of her own father, King Pastoria of sainted memory, and was determined to acquire it if at all possible. The three pleaded prettily with Mayor Carom who was only too delighted to fall in with his guests' wishes.

The old Springer behind the counter cast a frightened look at the strange springless creatures who had entered his shop

---

§ See *The Royal Book of Oz*. Editor's note.

but the familiar presence of the Mayor reassured him. "Yes, indeed," he confirmed when asked: "nothing in the shop less than a hundred years old." This obviously went for himself as well—and as we know Mayor C. was an exact ninety nine.

Ozma soon had possession of her dad's picture and the Scarecrow had picked up for a song ("It Might as Well Be Spring") several hoary old trees, roots and all. Dorothy couldn't decide what to take. But now of course the party did have something to put in a valise, so her gaze strayed to venerable portmanteaux and frayed and stained carpetbags. In the end her choice rested between a cracked—but so quaint—hatbox and a small weatherbeaten steamer trunk.

"The hatbox, I think, dearest," opined her royal chum. "Considerations of space, you know."

"That's just it, Ozma," returned the other girl. "The hatbox is just a wee bit too small to contain the one basket we have left. I want something that will go in, so we still just have one piece to carry."

"I see what you mean," admitted the other. "But I don't really know how we can manage with a whole trunk."

Nevertheless Dorothy wanted to consider further. Something about the trunk appealed to her strangely. At least she could have it out and opened and see what it was like inside. But among the high-piled aisles of the narrow shop there was scarcely room to open the receptacle—and still have room around for people to stand and peer in.

Shopkeeper and mayor lifted the trunk out to the back court. Daylight was better there too. They all gathered round. A key dangled from one of the trunk's lock-catches. The antiquarian slipped it in the hole indicated. There was a strenuous effort at twisting. No luck.

It was the scene from the door to Doorknob Mountain all over again. But here there were no handy pecans or walnuts for squeezing. As it happened, little Coily, not to be done out of intercourse with his admired foreigners, had found out where the party had gone and tagged along. Here was a source

of grease! The shopman rubbed the key among the boy's coily locks.

And now, see there! The trunk lid fell back with a groan and a creak, and out of the interior shot a folding ladder, spiraled quickly upward, and vanished among the clouds before you could say 'Jumpin' Jimminy!'

"Oh, Ozma!" squealed Dorothy at the top of her voice, "it's a spiraling staircase!"

"Well, 'staircase'," put in Scarekewers, the linguistic purist. "'Ladder' and 'stairs' are not quite the same thing. If they were we wouldn't need two words."

"Never mind, children," soothed Ozma. "We have two strikes out of three: it's certainly spiraling and 'vanishable' both past and present. Tell me, sir," the girl ruler went on, addressing the shopkeeper: "had you never occasion to open this trunk before?"

"No, ma'am. I only got it in last month. Just hadn't got around to it. But you can see it's more than a century old: it's precisely the type of steamer trunk the American President Polk had with him on his voyage from Washington to New Orleans when he left the White House in 1849..."

This led of course to an interesting discussion of one of the most able of American chief executives and his tragedy: dying of cholera at age fifty-three only three months after leaving the office in which he had served so capably, and missing 'greatness' because he refused to serve for more than one term. In America only presidents are considered great if they have done duty for at least part of two terms or more, which stricture allows Grant, Coolidge, and Nixon into the highest pantheon.

But meanwhile the spiral ladder wavered in the air and gave no sign of falling down. "Do you suppose this *could* be it?" wondered Ozma and tapped a foot.

"Oh, I'm sure of it," breathed Dorothy excitedly, and the Scarecrow said he'd give his vote for its being the correct 'staircase'.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

Ozma counted on her fingers. “Gosh, only one more day to reach the Cloud King. We’d better at least give this apparatus a try as being the one intended. It fulfills some of the stipulations at least.” Here she checked again with the lacquer-lettered agenda, which she had taken to carrying in the pocket of her jump suit. “‘Spiraling’: check. ‘Vanishing’ —” She lifted her eyes high up to some cirrus clouds where the ladder certainly disappeared. “‘Appearing once every hundred years’. At least it came out of a container where it *could* have been since a century ago. Very well: I’m game,” declared the little ruler courageously.

The climbers stopped when they had reached the thirtieth rung or thereabouts and took time to pull out their handkerchiefs and wave to Mayor Carom, the antiquities dealer, and ointment-headed Coily standing in the courtyard of the curiosity shop. It was an opportunity also for Dorothy to hook securely over her shoulder the remaining basket, into which the travelers had crammed Pastoria's portrait and the family trees. There was room, for their food supply was gravely diminished. "We'll just have to subsist on cloudberries for a while," Ozma had said.

At the hundredth rung their Springer friends, greatly diminished, were scarcely visible and by the five-hundredth rung not at all. But now there were fabulous vistas out over Springer Town and all the Oz country round. From this viewpoint they could see what a funny tall narrow peak Doorknob Mountain really was. Everything was blue-violet and the travelers realized that the mountain probably marked the boundary in that region between the Munchkin and the Gillikin countries.

Then on and upward again. The Scarecrow was bringing up the rear, when near the thousandth rung he happened to glance down. "Yikes!" he shrieked. "Look there!"

The girls got a firm purchase, then inclined their heads. "Dear, oh dear," gasped the little queen. "'Vanishing' is right. I didn't realize there were to be this many forms of vanishing." From about twenty rungs below where they clung the ladder 'steps' were invisible.

"Let's pretend they're really still there," suggested Dorothy; "we just can't see them. Obscured by the curvature of the earth, or something."

"That may indeed be best for our peace of mind," admitted Ozma and climbed on.

Of course the climbers had observed from the word Go that the ladder was woven of thick silver fibres. They were not prepared though for the wonderful changes that the silver ropes

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

and bars would undergo the further up into the heavens they climbed. The silver strands seemed to become transparent and now when errant sunbeams struck the ladder it gleamed like crystal or sparkled in rainbow colors.

Fatigue began to make itself felt. Not with the tireless Scarecrow, of course, but the girls after a measured strength-conserving clamber of an hour knew that despite all husbanding of energy they could not go on much longer. Every moment they thought would be their last—because they would get where they were going and could rest! Not a bit of it. The climb went monotonously on and on, unvaryingly.

Dorothy screamed faintly and let go. She had reached that point where the living organism, clinging fervently, desperately, to life, has to relax its hold and fall to its doom. The ladder relented: the plucky Kansas girl saw that the very next rung above her was a plank: She dragged herself up onto it, and could sit!

The others joined her there and the three sat squashed together, the Scarecrow offering comfort rather than needing any relief himself, for half an hour. After that they could go on. And each time either girl came to the exact end of her tether a sitting-plank would appear in the succession of silver rungs, and they would seize sweet respite.

Nor was exhaustion the only hazard. A certain tempo for their climb seemed dictated. As long as they kept on at a 'prescribed' rate the vanishment of the rungs lower down stayed at a fixed twenty levels below them. And apparently the rest-period planks were a 'free zone': as long as they stayed there the visible lower twenty rungs did not shorten. But once the Scarecrow who brought up the rear looked down to see that the space of grace had decreased to eighteen rungs. Then every quarter of an hour they lost one more rung.

The climbers did not spend much time looking upward to see where they were going. They were always headed into mere cloud which always seemed to hang there, a hundred feet above, no matter how high they climbed.



Now there came a change. They caught up with the cloud layer and climbed through woolly whiteness. This was consoling in one way, as blotting out the dizzy depths below, but dangerous in another, as disorienting the strugglers more than ever.

Surcease came at last. Half an hour's cloud-climbing brought them to a regular platform, beyond which rose a flight of steps. So much for your Spiraling 'Stairway'! This was the only part of the ascent that was anything like a staircase. The comrades mustered the strength to scramble to the top.

The awfulness was over. Here was a monumental gateway in wrought silver and beside it hung a big silver summoning bell-pull. Queen Ozma tugged for all she was worth. Slowly the great double gatewings swung open. The travelers had reached the confines of the Cloud Kingdom. Or was it Cloud-Cuckooland?

The three made no pretense of doing anything but flopping down in the big white cotton-battingly cushion clouds and going to sleep—all those who could. But repose was not long. The Scarecrow, sitting guard, plucked the sleepers awake. "Look!" he whispered.

In the far distance had appeared three silver dots that appeared to be moving rapidly. A few minutes revealed the dots to be cloud horses, racing with the wind and ridden by small silver elf-like creatures. These, as the voyagers were soon to learn, were Silverlings, the only sort of 'people' the cloud kingdom afforded.

Now the tensely expectant Ozites could see that two of the silver beings carried lances and the third a large silver net. They were heading straight for the gate at breakneck speed, yet not so fast but what the waiting ones had time to wonder why the horses were not flying, as each was equipped with wings like Pegasus. The wondering stopped short when all three stallions rose in the air and circled over the newcomers with a roar of beating wings.

It was too much for the flimsy Scarecrow, who was whirled

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

away into the distance and plummeted out of sight into a clouddrift. The weightier earth maidens could only shriek and cling together.

The net-bearer with a skillful cast slung his web over and about the cowering duo. The two with lances thrust them through the lines and hollered, "Catch hold!" The girls could see instantly there was no use in struggling. If each caught a lance under her elbows she might be borne away in relative dignity, rather than riding possibly upside down entwined in the meshes.

"Why are you doing this to us?" Ozma found breath to scream. "We come in perfect peace to beg a boon!"

The net-elf replied in what could indeed not be faulted as a coarse or impertinent tone: "His Royal Skyness, the King of the Clouds, has ordered your capture. You are to be brought before His Majesty in the Cloud Castle."

"But I," Ozma yelled on, "am as royal as he. I can not suffer myself to be treated like rude cargo. I can perfectly well *walk* into the Cloud King's presence. Release me, I say!"

"Sorry, ma'am. You could never walk over this cloud surface. Only silverlings can cope with that. You'd never make it, honestly as you might try. Believe me: this is the best way."

So saying, the horse-elves raised high the tangle of net on their lance ends and, in close formation, prodded their steeds aloft. But Ozma was far from content. "Wait! wait!" she shrieked on. "Our companion, the worthy Scarecrow! He must not be left behind!"

"We come with no instructions about hay-bags," retorted one of the lancers.

And away they went, riding up the sky.

Over the clouds they flew. It might have been quite exhilarating if one hadn't been so depressed. Ozma could hardly reply to her captors' mild efforts to be conciliating. They made conversation about the weather ("Fair and cloudy") to try to put their captives at ease. As the girls maintained a stubborn silence, the net-thrower finally said:

"For myself, I'd let you go if I could. It would be my mass though if I did that: melted totally to become a bar of silver in the royal treasury. Of course that's where we come from in the first place: spun out of solid silver at the royal silversmithy but nobody likes to retreat to the womb untimely."

The Oz queen in turn was melted a little by this speech. "Never mind. Ride on. We don't choose to be responsible for the deliquescing of inferiors. Such, however, is never the practice in *our* realm. What sort of monster can this Cloud King be?" The question was only rhetorical.

Back and forth, from side to side, swayed the ladies as if within a giant enclosed hammock, as they rode across the cloudscape. The journey went on for a long time. 'I had no idea the Cloud Kingdom was of such wide extent,' thought the earth queen, forgetting that the dominion of the upper air was not like her own land: of fixed boundaries, but waxed and waned with the weather.

Still, all bad things must come to an end and now before the eyes of the trussed travelers rose the battlements of the Cloud Capital in all their splendor and glory. 'Gosh,' thought Dorothy, 'this place is as grand in its way as the Emerald City. Fantastic! Not so substantial-seeming, perhaps, but really, you know, prettier! Let's face it: the Emerald City *is* rather monotonously green. But this town is every color of the rainbow. And what could be more logical?: a rainbow city amidst the clouds!' The central stronghold of the Cloud King's capital might be built of spun silver but here in the outskirts everything was cellophane and nothing more glamorous was ever seen than sunlight striking

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

through thin sheets of transparent cellulose of every imaginable hue. The streets were paved in layers of blue cellophane. The buildings were of cellophane 'balloons' cunningly fitted together. Windows were of clear cellophane, roofs aped tiles in red cellophane, there was even 'grass' of thin shredded green cellophane, and what look for all the world like natural flowers in every cellophane shade.

Their captors had freed the earth girls from their constraints and allowed them to enter the city gates and proceed along the streets under their own power. Why they didn't break through the cellophane sidewalks the visitors never understood—but they did not.

The streets were busy with cloud 'people' going about their tasks. These appeared to be all of one general sex and, indeed, when everybody was 'born' of silver filigree in a furnace, what need of gender distinctions? Otherwise, the silverlings seemed to be and behave like humans generally. They gaped at the newcomers with normal curiosity, stopping in their daily tasks of sweeping stardust off their porches or looking over the rainbow trout at the fishmonger's or carrying moonbeams home in jars.

The armed guard remained on alert duty to each side of the captive visitors. They did not actually prod them with their lances but neither did they brook delay when the two earthlings, captivated despite themselves, seemed inclined to stop and watch, or even speak to, the natives.

At last the party arrived before the great castle/palace. This was altogether a more sombre structure than anything they had seen in the prismatical parts of town. Little was to be sensed of the silver splendor within. The great walls looked to be built of dense grey fog encased in the cellophane/balloon bricks peculiar to Cloudland architecture, and each turret was topped with a brooding black cloud similarly sealed up. The only note of color was, in the castle courtyard, three yellow cellophane banners that flapped in the breeze. Each flag bore a large scarlet letter: 'W', 'K', 'C'.

“‘Welkin King of Clouds’,” explained the net-bearer gruffly.

The entrance into the castle proper was almost as impressive to the newcomers as the first sight of the city itself. Once they were inside every prospect pleased. The furnishings were of the finest, rare tapestries graced the beaten-silver walls, and on stands, in display cases, and depending from the ceilings were rare works of art and sculpture. But think of Princess Ozma’s horror when, as focal point of the longer wall in one particularly sumptuous chamber, she gazed upon her own Magic Picture!

The queen shuddered and stopped in her tracks. “It’s all true then,” she gasped: “the very worst we feared.”

“Move along there,” barked a lancer and gestured meaningfully with his weapon.

Forgetting her royal dignity and even her manly past as a boy, the Princess broke down and sobbed all the rest of the way to King Welkin’s audience chamber.

Then there was an odd little passage—just as the captives walked forward along the broadest big passage they had seen yet. At its end rose a grandiose doorway. The girls were marching ahead, ever urged onward by the menacing lances behind them. Something: an unexpected hush? caused Dorothy to look round. They were alone!

“Oh, thank goodness,” cried the girl. “What a relief.”

“What is it?” murmured Ozma raising sob-soaked eyes. Dorothy gestured.

“Isn’t that strange!” they sighed together. And Dorothy: “Dearest, do you think we could make a break for it?”

“Not a chance, I shouldn’t think. They’d never have left us if there was any way to go but on. Come.” The girl queen seized her chum’s arm in a fond but nearly desperate clutch. “Let’s get it over with.”

The pair moved on again. And slowness would serve nothing. They almost sped along the hall. As they came up to the great double doors these silently fell open.

It was the magnificent Hall of the Throne. But King Welkin

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

was not perched, in usual Oz fashion, on his throne. After all, this was not, strictly speaking, contiguous Oz; customs could vary. No, the Cloud King, in a silver brocade dressing gown, was lounging chastely on a chaise longue.

"Aha, my dears! there you are," he boomed out heartily. "Do come in, I pray you—and kneel just there at my feet."

"Feet, sheet!" blurted young Dorothy rudely. "We'll do nothing of the sort."

"Shush, sweetings," pleaded Ozma. "I'll handle this. Sirrah!" she cried—louder. "I come against my will into your presence, the never defeated Princess of an independent realm. It is not fit that I should bend the knee to anyone."

"Oh, well, just as you will." The king waved the show of spunk aside with a careless gesture. "But just in case you were thinking of ever getting a certain green city back again..." He let the thought dangle. "Come. I want to show you something." He rose languidly and passed beside the unwilling visitors to the doors of the chamber.

His victims followed willy-nilly. The way led back to that imposing salon where the girls had seen the Magic Picture hanging.

"Behold," bragged Welkin: "my marvelous picture that rumor has it once hung somewhere in your own dwelling."

Both earthlings were crying now. Was there never to be an end to the indignities? and them so utterly undeserved. It was most miserable to experience—and not all that much fun to read about either.

Shame prevented the pair from looking where King Welkin's hand directed at first—but curiosity forced them to lift their eyes at last. "Picture," muttered the king, "do not pause for pity. Show us now the Emerald City."

The bland anonymous landscape (not unskillfully painted, however) that always met the first glance of anyone examining the canvas now blurred and ran together in rippling greenish swirls. When the blur had cleared the Ozites saw the outlines of a once great capital, now sacked and ruined, despoiled of every

precious stone that had formerly made it magnificent and world-renowned. Indeed, the princesses could scarcely recognize the ghost city as a place where they had reigned and dwelt for so many happy years.

Princess Ozma fell on her knees, not in genuflection, but just out of disgust, despair, and general exhaustion. Princess Dorothy was not far from following her to the floor. The King of Clouds gloated.

"Ah, you do bend the knee after all," he beamed in gratification, deliberately misreading motives. "That will do nicely."

Dorothy flared up. "You dreadful—well, you're not a man, either in substance or worthiness—you dreadful creature. Princess Ozma will never, ever, forgive you."

The jovial monarch's face fell. Then he rallied: "Well, never mind—as long as you do my bidding."

Both girls looked up. Bidding? What further acts were required of them? now that they had reached the ultimate degradation.

"Why, yes," went on the king. "That is, if you still entertain any hopes of being given a certain Emerald City as a present."

What horrors had he still in store for them? They must hear the worst.

"It's like this," instructed King Welkin. "The Dorothy girl is to be my personal handmaiden and attendant for the next fifty years. The so-called Queen of Oz shall have lighter duties. She need but polish my boots every day for the same period of time."

Ozma surprised them both. "Very well. If you will promise—and by an oath that cannot be broken—to return, unchanged from their former glory, my Emerald City and my Palace of Magic to my people... I surrender."

A brilliant rainbow arched from shafts of sunlight to a cottony white cloud landscape. Pretty Polychrome and some of her many sisters were executing a complicated pas de quatorze across the top of the bow, just to afford their father a good-morning treat. Poly swept to a wind-up curtsy, with her extended forefinger supporting her chin.

Just then she noticed something. Why, it was a bundle of old damp rags someone had discarded in the clouds. How odd. Why didn't the moisture-logged mess sink on through and fall to earth? There must be some magic at work here.

"Saintly sunbeams!" cried the affrighted rain maiden on a nearer inspection. "It isn't—it isn't! yes, it is: it's his excellency, the Scarecrow of Oz! However in the world—"

But the Scarecrow was still quite capable of offering explanations, if in a somewhat moist voice. "A full account would take days, dear Polychrome. I will just give you the last chapter: I climbed the infamous Vanishing Spiral Staircase, made it through the gates into this cloud country, then fell among thieves. At least: they've stolen two Oz princesses—and left me to flounder in this soft wet stuff that nobody could walk on."

"Why, sure they can," rebutted Poly and ran lightly across cloud-cotton to the Scarecrow's side. She put out a pretty prismatic hand and grasped his coat sleeve. The fairy was an athletic dancer and had no trouble in pulling even a sodden scarecrow to his feet. She virtually carried him the few paces to the rainbow. Here she tapped her fairy foot in commanding wise and instantly the opalescent arch firmed up and became capable of supporting weights: at least if they were no heavier than a few-pound scarecrow.

"Daddy," spoke the fairy, talking to the rainbow itself. "Will you be a pet and not fade away for a bit just now? I'm talking to my friend the Scarecrow and he couldn't do with just nothing under his feet. He doesn't fly, you know, as we do." Here she smiled around at her sisters who looked on with great curiosity.



"Poly," said Scarekickers in the most solemn tones, "I fear the dear Girl Ruler of Oz and my own special benefactrix Dorothy of Kansas are in mortal—or even immortal danger." Here he enlarged on the dread scene he had (partially) witnessed (what little he could see across the billowing cloudfield in which he had landed): the kidnapping of every Ozite's most admired pair of dames.

"Oh, I hope—and trust—you exaggerate their danger," breathed Polychrome. "Those horseguards you describe are obviously minions of the old King of Clouds, a great friend of my father's going way back—oh, into the dawn-time of Oz. Why, Scarecrow, I have never known King Welkin to hurt a bowfly or a rainbug, let alone princesses."

"I sincerely hope you're right," said the Scarecrow but was not much reassured. "I only know what I saw looked most ominous. Those horsemen were not being the least bit polite to our dear Ozma."

"The Cloud King *is* a bit of a joker," admitted Polychrome. "He's always threatening to turn his courtiers into silver bricks with a bolt of lightning. But he never does it."

"Would you help me, Poly?" begged the Scarecrow. "Help me to get to where that king is—in some cloud castle, I suppose—so I can plead for clemency at his feet?"

Polychrome did not hesitate. "I'm just sure this is going to turn out a tempest in a teapot," she insisted. "Why, jolly ol' Welkin!: what you tell me just sounds too incredible. But certainly: I'll go with you and add any weight I can to your suit. I'll just let Daddy know..."

Here the lovely sun-spangled girl tripped back to her sisters and had a flurried exchange with them, in the course of which were heard a few giggles that struck the Scarecrow as highly unseemly. Then the rainbow sisters scattered to the two ends of the bow, talking to each other—and to their parent?—as they ran.

The rainbow's remaining daughter rejoined the Scarecrow and took from among the profusion of trailing scarves with

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

which she was always decked out a rainbow-hued length of airy but tough tissue. She knotted an end of this about the Scarecrow's waist, then tied the other to her wrist. "This way we can't be separated, you see. I know you know one can meet up with gale-force winds up here at times. Today, fortunately, the breeze is mild: just what we need to get where we're going."

Polychrome was an agile dancer—and so was the Scarecrow, as we have seen. A few lithe steps along the rainbow reassured the rain maiden as to this last. "Now be ready, my dear Scarecrow," she alerted him. "We've got to do some fancy stepping when the right pair of cloudlets comes along."

Attached as he was to the rainbow girl the Scarecrow seemed to participate in her weightlessness and had no trouble doing a flying pas de deux with her onto the first appropriate fluffs of vapor. Off they floated at quite a lively speed in the direction in which the hay man thought he had seen his friends and their captors disappear. "Where are we going?" he asked.

"Oh, there isn't much doubt but that the ladies have been taken direct to King Welkin's Cloud City. We'll make for there first."

There was leisure for talk. Polychrome had said they might be as much as an hour or two in reaching the cloud capital. The Scarecrow was starting to frame in his mind the leading points in the impassioned plea he meant to make but Poly, light-minded maiden, broke into his train of thought to say, "What are a few of your favorite things?" Clearly she was just making conversation.

The Scarecrow obliged with a short list of activities: the first that crossed his preoccupied mind: "Actually, I quite like lying in a stubble field and watching clouds drifting by. Even more, I like to see children at play. Dancing a jig with my great friend Scraps is great fun too. But let me see: best of all, perhaps, I enjoy sitting and watching the wheat straws grow in the fields near my corn cob home."

Some of these seemed like very mundane amusements to the high-flying rainbow maiden. However, she couldn't fault

the watching of clouds.

"Clouds *are* a wonderful thing to observe," she agreed. "Those and rainbows and lightning flashes and thunderstorms. I love them all. But maybe the sun's rays striking out from behind cloud masses into the empyrean are the noblest sight of all." The pretty rainbow girl seemed quite moved by her own romance.

Presently, "Scarecrow," said Poly, "I'd better warn you about cross currents."

"Cross currents?"

"Yes. Winds can move in varying directions on different levels. To zero in on the Cloud City it may happen that we have to change clouds at one of these sky crossroads. I hope you'll be ready."

This warning rather put the wind up the hay man. He had been sitting at his ease but now he hoisted himself awkwardly aloft, just to be ready in good time. But the good Scarecrow could be teetery on his pins at the best of times. On this vapor footing he gave a lurch, flailed with his arms, and fell off the cloud.

It was a small alarm, though, to be the only one of the couple's journey. Sitting Polychrome dug in her heels, tensed her arm against the jerk of the hay man's plunge, then proceeded to haul him back in like a fish by their 'umbilical' length of sky-tissue.

There was a tense moment when they had to cross from their northwesterly drifting cloudlets to one scudding due west but after all they made the transfer without mishap. Then nothing merited recording until the standing Scarecrow, peering with hand-shaded eyes like Columbus or stout Cortez, sighted at some distance what he took to be another cross-cutting cloud-proved jet stream. He called Polychrome's attention.

"Oh, goodie!" cried the girl. "No, that's not another cross wind. Those are the ramparts of that very Cloud City we've been seeking. Scarecrow, we've arrived!"

Before their cloud 'cart' reached the city gates the Scarecrow had time to grow aware of a great puzzle, and to get it solved.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

“Poly,” said he as the urban cloud embankment loomed larger ahead of them and the castle towers grew ever solid-looking, “of course I’ve always heard of cloud castles, but I thought that was just a manner of speaking. Cloud formations can look like mighty bulwarks or fleecy towers but of course we realize they’re not ‘real’ —”

“Do we?” asked Polychrome with a sly smile.

“Well, so I always thought. But now this great big heavy-looking city ahead!: how can it stay up? I mean, gravity —”

“I’ll try to answer your question, though I’m no meteorologist nor yet a sky engineer. It’s like this: earth gravity is different from that up here among the clouds and rainbows...”

“Yes”

The rainbow’s daughter rubbed her little nose and paused, embarrassed. “As I say, I’m no technician. I just know such a city can, and does, stay up. Anyway, think of Sky Island and Umbrella Island. It’s magic. You of all people wouldn’t be expected to ask for logic or a strict application of physics, now would you?”

Indeed, there was much in the hay man’s origins that had so far defied close scrutiny. He wistfully filed his gravity conundrum under ‘Pending’ and watched the great grey-silver-white city loom nearer.

Their cloud carrier bumped quite comfortably against the ramp that led up to the gates and the passengers stepped off gratefully. Their cloud caught against the cloudstones of the city wall, turned round like a wood chip trapped for a moment at the edge of a stream, then floated away ‘backwards’ on the summer air.

“Who goes there?” growled a guardsman from his sentry box beside the gates. He too brandished a lance and looked menacing.

“It is I,” announced Polychrome proudly, “Daughter of the Rainbow and personal acquaintance, indeed friend, of most potent Welkin King of Clouds.” Poly knew about that picture etched on the Cloud King’s throne. She thought it would be as

well to play that ace at once.

"Indeed," returned the guard. Maybe he was new on the job or he might have recognized the rainbow maiden even without I.D. card. However, "And that gunny sack of rubbish at your side: why do you bring that here?"

"I!" roared (yes, he could when he tried) the Scarecrow, "am the former Ruler of the Emerald City and present confidant of Her Grace, Ozma, Queen of Oz!"

With scant grace, but convinced, the guardsman about-faced, nodded curtly, and accompanied the strangers within the gates. Along three streets and through a bazaar they passed and crossed the city's public gardens. The shrubs and flowers were only cellophane but they made a brave show.

At the castle gate stood other guardsmen who relieved the first of his charges. Poly and the Scarecrow were not sorry to take leave of that surly companion. Now, by the law of averages, they ought to meet somebody nice.

If so, it wasn't these further royal minions. They were merely impersonal. They quick-stepped the visitors to the Private Apartments. Here two footmen in livery took over. Names were given, doors thrown open, and the distinguished callers announced.

The King of Clouds was to be seen seated in an easy chair of silver plush, twisting his long porcelain locks round his fingers. He did not look to be altogether happy. Yet, "Why, hello, Polychrome!" he piped, amiably enough. "What in the clouds brings you here? Does your papa know you're out?"

"Yes, your majesty," spoke Polychrome modestly, "but I've come here on my own initiative—to ask a great boon."

"Boon away, dear," said the affable(!) monarch.

"It's all a great misunderstanding, I'm sure. It almost appears that you have taken in custody—by mistake, of course!—two great friends of ours. At least, we know they intended to come pay you a visit *and* were last seen heading in this direction. Not under their own steam, however, and that's what makes us so anxious. Guardspeople with lances and a net..? And so we have come to plead for their release." Poly said her little speech nicely.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

"I know the very people you speak of," assured the king genially. "They are held for high crimes and misdemeanors."

"Not Princesses Ozma and Dorothy," stated Polychrome definitely. "They have never committed crimes nor misdemeaned themselves."

"What would you call trying high-handedly to make me give up some of my most prized property?"

"Oh, your majesty," cried the rainbow maiden in total disillusionment. Her old family friend had now blown his rep with her for sure.

All was lost by now for Welkin in his niece's eyes. He might as well 'walk on his phonograph records'.<sup>s</sup> "Guards!... Guards!" yelled the Cloud King. "This sack of old leaves, or whatever: Away with it! Hurl it in the dungeon with the others."

Polychrome was aghast. She really couldn't believe her ears or eyes. But the old wretch was going on: "Polychrome, you should know better! Traveling about my kingdom with a suspicious character. Still, I will forgive you this once; only, don't let it happen again. Otherwise I'll have to take down your picture from my throne."

"Remove it and welcome!" spoke the rain fairy doughtily. "Indeed, I prefer *not* to be seen on your throne."

That made the irascible old ruler blow his top again. "GUARDS!" he shrieked. "Item number four for that cell!"

The girl surrendered without a struggle. Down dark circling stairways she was led. There was a pungent smell of mildew. Cloud rats scurried. And though so far undercloud a shrill draft blew from somewhere.

The cell door which was yanked open, then slammed to, was narrow. She could not see but only feel the cloud-brick ceiling nearly touching her head.

Polychrome was always known as a most sunny personality. This, however, was for her total night—and no moon. She began to weep uncontrollably.

---

<sup>s</sup> See John O'Hara: *Appointment in Samarra*. Ed's note.

The Rainbow's daughter was still crying but just for the moment it was tears of gladness. A kind voice had spoken to her! and a kind hand lent a handkerchief. But in the pitch black she could see nothing. She felt the warmth though. All around her in the darkness she could now sense sympathy and fellow-feeling.

That voice! But of course she knew it. "Dorothy! Princess Dorothy of Kansas. Is that you?"

"Yes, indeed. But who are you? Your voice is familiar."

"I should hope so. We know each other well. I am Polychrome, the rainbow's daughter."

"Poly!" cried Dorothy and Ozma together. "How splendid! But how..?!" They had a hundred questions.

Relief was general. Misery shared was lessened and the three prisoners could even laugh a time or two at funny scrapes related. The rainbow fairy was only a little surprised that the others had not instantly guessed who she was. "Isn't the Scarecrow here with you?" she wondered. "I distinctly heard the horrid old cloud king order his underlings to fling the 'sack of leaves' in with the others, meaning you."

"No, he isn't here," they affirmed. "But what marvelous news that you rescued him. A great part of our misery was not knowing what had happened to him."

"Where can he be? They surely haven't—oh, they *haven't...*!" The thought was too awful. What if he had been thrown out with the discard and even at this moment was paying the supreme penalty on a bonfire!

At that the three girls began to cry again and cried themselves to sleep.

The earlier two captives had been there twenty-four hours when Polychrome joined them, so they knew the prison routine and they duly enlightened their fellow sufferer next morning. "First, we're wakened by the squeaking of the cloudrats—if we haven't been kept awake by it all night. Then

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

we wash our faces in the moisture dripping down the cell walls. Soon the jailers arrive and prod and poke us along to the rooms we have to clean that day. We were promised jobs as maids and bootblacks, but not a bit of it: we're set to work as common slaves. Oh, the shame of it. Actually the work isn't that hard, merely boring and demeaning. And in the evening, regular as clockwork, we are given a trencher of broken bits from the royal table, before being herded back to our cell."

Poly herself got to experience the thrill of all this that day. She was told off to the water-carrying detail and hauled two silver pails up and down for many hours.

The only incident of note was the joyous discovery of the Scarecrow. It came about in this fashion: The old stump of a broom that the Queen of Oz was set to tidying a guest bedroom with was admitted by the housekeeper (nearly as tough an old bird as the jailers) to be at its last straws. The girl ruler was sent to a distant broom closet to arm herself afresh. When she opened the closet door the Scarecrow tumbled out!

The dopey Silverlings, largely unfamiliar with living beings other than of their own ilk, regarded Ozites as weird and wonderful creatures. What then of a Scarecrow, who was unique? Never had they seen such a figure before; never would it occur to them to assess it as a person. Why, no: this was clearly a bag of straw, fit for binding into broom tufts the next time the broom supply became really exhausted. Nor did they have wit enough to pull open the Oz worthy's jacket front and make the discovery that, for the nonce, he did not even contain straw but only hay.

Ozma was quick-witted. With a whispered word: "Courage!", she tore off the Scarecrow's head and thrust it in her sweepings bucket. Then she picked up in one hand the hay man's torso and carry-dragged it to the bedroom, scene of the hour's labors, where she pulled handfuls of mashed hay from the 'bag' for mopping in tight corners.

Once the day's work was fairly in swing the overseers tended to leave the labor force to its own devices. Thus it was



that presently all three of the Oz newcomers were in the stately guest chamber. Polychrome went so far as to lie down on the massive four-poster bed with its canopy and hangings of silver sheen. She longed to escape in sleep but the others warned her that might be trespassing *too* far on lax overseerage.

The girls had a problem: how to smuggle their faithful old friend away so that he would not end up back in the broom closet? Their device was rather ingenious. When at day's end they were driven back to their dungeon Ozma was wearing the Scarecrow's trousers and boots (she had practice in going in man's attire from old Tippetarius days), Dorothy sported his jacket and gloves, and Polychrome had his head and hat fastened somehow under her diaphanous draperies. After all, they had experience of transporting their friend as empty clothes from already earlier on this expedition.

Next day the workwomen left the viable remains of their friend rolled up in a corner of the cell. They would never be discovered in that black hole by the inquisitive.

The day's labors were on the ramparts of the castle. They were to do sweeping and scouring of the sentries' walks. The trio had been on the walls but a few minutes—and most fortunately no overseer within earshot when Dorothy screamed, "There's the Emerald City!!"

The other two rushed to her side. "Where? Where!"

"Over there—beyond those trees. See? a sort of open place."

"That's the municipal park," related Polychrome, who had been there.

"But that can't be my royal city," objected Ozma. "That pile of rubble? It doesn't sparkle and glimmer a bit."

Young Dorothy, perhaps more worldly-wise and sceptical, sniffed, "They'll have torn every jewel from its socket."

The desolate Queen sank down behind a crenelation, pulled her knees up under her chin, and sobbed.

The others sought to comfort her. "Dear Princess," said

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

Polychrome, her voice, too, full of tears, “help is on the way. Daddy Rainbow knows more or less where I was going and will send a posse of thunderbolts.”

Even more realistically Dorothy reminded the assembled sisterhood that wise Glinda in the Ruby City was following their every move in the pages of the Book of Records. “She’s not going to let us suffer on indefinitely. Let’s relax and savor these experiences. Don’t forget: ‘They’ll go good in the book.’ One day we’ll remember with marveling these dangerous times, where recollections of birthday parties will be ho-hum.”

“I’m sure you’re right, Dorothy,” admitted the little Oz queen with a squeeze to the hand of her spunky companion. “I’ll try to put a braver face on it.”

The King of Clouds entered without ceremony the Royal Stables which the girls were dunging out. He found all three resting on their broom handles, having a natter. "What's this?!" he exploded. "Fluffing off?" But not one of his prisoners was looking the least bit fluffy *that* morning. The king frowned ferociously. Nor could he justify his servants' sloth by a constation that they'd already completed the job. Steaming silver heaps still lay dotted here and there in the stalls.

Dorothy, self-appointed spokeswoman, turned and faced the king squarely. "Her Royal Highness has seen what you've done to her city and refuses to work for you another instant. So do the Rainbow's Daughter and I. So there, too."

"Recalcitrant, ey?" muttered King Welkin, with a quite unaccountable twinkle in his steely eye. "Quite sure?"

"Sure."

"Positively," confirmed the Girl Ruler.

"Oh, well, you force my hand then," stated Welkin sadly. "'there's nothing for it but to exile you back where you came from."

"But the Emerald City?" demanded the spokesgirl. "You promised to return us our capital if we worked for you!"

"For six days? Don't make me laugh. The agreement was for fifty years—at least. Can't you count?"

"But my people then," put in Ozma. "Where are my Emerald Citizens to live?"

"Let them refugee south—or wherever. What do I care? Now silence; not another word!" He began forthwith to wave his arms in a significant fashion.

Dorothy thought he was just having an apoplectic fit out of sheer annoyance but fairy Ozma twigged instantly. The enchanter king was prestidigitating. "*Wait!*" she shrieked.

The cry gave even the high-handed monarch pause.

"We cannot possibly quit our confinement without our belongings!" stated the Oz ruler imperiously. "There is a bundle

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

of clothing rolled up in the corner of our cell—”

“Oh, very well,” mumbled the king with scant grace. He raised his left hand, with middle finger rigidly extended, toward the zenith, and piped a brief whistle. Instantly a pile of old rags plumped to the still-wet cobbles of the yard. Incidentally, the girls’ battered old travel basket appeared there too.

The far-flung gestures of the royal arms resumed. The king reeled off a magic spiel at breakneck pace while slinging his arms three times toward the right, then twice back toward the left. He also did a very fast soft-shoe routine.

As the last syllables were heard the entire stables filled with a cloud of greyish-green electric-flavored mist. Flashes of lighting, claps of thunder struck and reverberated.

When the fog cleared there was only one individual left standing in the echoing mews. That individual was Cloud King Welkin, of course.

The others who had instants before been in his company found themselves seated on a silver toboggan descending at incredible speed out of the clouds. Princess Dorothy discovered that she was clasping tight to her lap both a basket and a roll of old clothing. For a space, all three travelers were speechless with the suddenness of it all.

Dorothy was the first to speak. “I didn’t have time to blink,” she informed her companions.

Ozma didn’t say much of anything. She was luxuriating in not scrubbing and sweeping. If nothing else, she had by her recent vicissitudes learned one advantage of being a pampered Princess. Polychrome was enjoying just being out in the open sky again. The rainbow maiden delighted as well in the rainbow colors of Oz spread out below them and every moment coming nearer.

In almost too quick a time (so charming an impression made their flight) the Ruby capital of Glinda the Good loomed below and before them. The flying toboggan braked—but gently: no good pitching everyone out on her/his head after so many horrors had been safely survived. The vessel glided in for a

smooth-bottom landing. Then, incontinently, it disappeared—just like something else silver long ago on delivering someone safely home.<sup>§</sup>

And who should be standing on the steps of the ruby palace but sorceress Glinda the Good herself? attended ceremonially by a couple of her maids of honor. She opened her arms and all three arriving girls rushed into them. This was no occasion for preserving formalities of address.

“Yes, I know,” she gently reminded young Dorothy who was about to launch into a circumstantial report on everything that had happened. Dorothy blushed. Of course: Glinda’s Book of Records. The good witch would have been glued to it the whole time.

But Dorothy with quick inspiration came back with a good answer: “Then you’ll have harvest-fresh straw all ready to repack the Scarecrow..?”

Glinda pointed down back behind the carved pink-granite balustrade of the steps. Now the girls realized they had been scenting something delightful: the aroma of new-scythed wheat straw. They all leaned over to have a look.

The wise witch had at once observed the look on Princess Ozma’s face after the momentary gladness of reunion was over. She wanted to prevent another crying jag, of which such the Record Book had kept her fully apprised. “What if—?” she ventured, and Dorothy twigged at once.

“Oh, let’s!” she cried. “It’ll be great fun. Even like a belated wind-up to our on-going outdoor party.”

So all six (honor maids included) gathered up great armloads of the straw and redumped them before the steps and they all sat down, unrolled the (former) hay man’s clothes, and in a very short space of time had a well-filled walking talking seventh member to their party.

But something was not yet quite right. Dorothy took out her pocket sewing kit, which had miraculously remained by her through so many trials, and expeditiously stitched burlap head

---

§ See *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Editor’s note.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

to twill collar, glove hands to jacket cuffs, and soft-leather boot tops to trouser ends. "There," she sighed. "Now have I done a good day's work." Restoring a nearly annihilated individual to viable life must always be a source of satisfaction.

Now the amiable Scarecrow could assist in the good sorceress' scheme to ward off further tears from Ozma's emerald eyes. He executed a nimble buck-and-wing before the pink steps just to demonstrate how back to normal he was. All the ladies had to laugh. Really, in certain lights he looked exactly like Ray Bolger. Glinda gave a sidelong glance. Yes, Ozma's eyes had stopped welling.

Now the party could speak of strategy without tears. "I feel I have failed my people," stated the Oz queen. "How will they, hereafter, be able to love me? I did my very best. It was useless."

Fairy Polychrome here spoke up. "If only I could reach my father," she said wistfully. "He has powerful magic too, of his own sort—and he's great friends, as well as relatives, with the Cloud King. He ought to be able to do something."

Poly, even more than the Scarecrow, was a famous dancer. Perhaps something in her own suggestion cheered her, for now she sprang away to the garnet gravel and executed her own buck-and-wing, followed up by a spirited bourrée, while the others discussed her idea.

"Maybe she has something there," acknowledged the Kansas miss.

"She may at that," agreed Glinda. "I too know Father Rainbow, and for almost as long as I have been acquainted with the Cloud King. It might not be out of place to pay him a visit."

You might have thought that half of those in attendance had had enough of "visits" for the present, yet all spoke up in agreement with the scheme. The Scarecrow said, "May we all go?"

The red sorceress looked solemn. "I thought of this as a stripped-down task force. I have planned to suggest that even our dear Princess Ozma remain behind. She, I feel, has need of total relief from stress for a bit, to help her cope with her grief. You, my friend," she turned again to the Scarecrow, "I would

ask, you being an experienced (former) head of state, to assume my official duties here in the Ruby City during my absence." At this the Scarecrow looked more cheerful.

"And now, good friends," proposed Glinda, "as a complete change of pace and, by you, richly deserved relaxation I invite you back to your apartments for a wash and brush-up, then attendance at a little gala luncheon."

"I couldn't eat a thing," joked the Scarecrow. "I feel stuffed."

But the others could—in spades.

"I relish the thought of some southern home cooking," confessed Dorothy. Ozma too admitted that she felt empty in more ways than one. And Polychrome announced that she could tuck into a moonbeam sandwich with gusto.

The good sorceress' kitchen staff were well aware of their mistress' most honored guests' culinary preferences. That's why, an hour later, the rose damask dining table cloth was decked with biscuits and gravy for Dorothy, lady-fingers and cold milk for the Queen of Oz, and jellied dewdrops for the Rainbow's daughter, sprinkled with powdered sugar and served on mint leaves. And round that table waited expectantly all the celebrities from the Emerald City, eager to greet and hear all the news from the girl adventurers (plus Scarecrow).

## c h a p t e r                    s e v e n t e e n

The luncheon party was just coming to a fairly festive close, everyone drowning his sorrows in rose-petal pretend wine, when a most awful noise shattered the air around them. Pink glass showered to the floor. "Good heavens!" they all cried as a scarlet fireball ricocheted about the dining hall.

"Bad heavens, I'd say," cried Princess Dorothy pertly. "Polychrome, what's the meaning of this? You know all about meteorology."

"I can't imagine," confessed the rainbow's daughter. "Unless this is Dad's answer to our message and request."

Some answer. Boom. Boom. Boom. Crackle. Crash went the thunder strokes with no time in between to catch one's breath. Lightning flashed in every direction to north and south, the two directions the dining hall looked out on. The crowd, figuring that lightning didn't strike twice, flocked to the windows to stare out at the pyrotechnics, which raged for two hours.

"It's like a fireworks show on the fourth of July," compared Dorothy, remembering her ancient home, "—only more so."

Silver rain poured down in torrents. Indeed, later that day gardeners swept up wheelbarrowsful of shiny silver pellets and delivered them to the palace forge.

Finally the storm moved off northwest, to pound the tin castle of the Emperor of the Winkles, and from there passed out over the Nonestic Ocean where it fizzled out.

There had been more destruction than one set of window panes in the pink palace but the downpour had been life-giving as well. All over southwestern Oz, where rain usually was at a premium, farmers rejoiced.

Polychrome stood at her bedroom window, gazing up into the now brilliant clearing sky. She hummed a rainbow tune:

"There ought to be a rainbow somewhere

'Cause it's raining while there's sun.

There ought to be a rainbow somewhere

But there's none.



There ought to be a silver lining.  
There ought to be Cloud Nine—for two.  
I see only clouds unnumbered  
    And I'm blue.  
There ought to be a happy ending.  
There ought to be a dream come true,  
But the only happy ending  
    Is for you.  
You're leaving with your lover, laughing.  
Rain descends; the sun shines hot.  
That ought to make a rainbow somewhere.  
    It does not."

No, no rainbow. At least: there was the biggest broadest most glamorous rainbow arching over the zenith that Polychrome had ever seen—and that was going some. But she received no message. Daddy Rainbow hadn't come to the rescue, yet, with anything tangible. Or did the big bow mean that she should jump out the window and run up it?

She had despaired too soon. At that moment there was an effulgence of pink-gold light and out of the aureola sprang a dozen of Poly's rainbow sisters, led by charming Arcenciel. "Poly, Poly, Poly" they cried, hovering before her rose-crystal casement, which she instantly flung open. "Hurry, hurry, hurry!" they chorused. "Father wants you home—and without a moment's tarrying. He has a surprise for you!"

"How lovely. What can it be?" mused the opalescent girl.

"Don't stand there dreaming! Come on! come on!" shrieked the sisters. "We must hurry back before the clouds are quite gone and the sun sets. You know Dad can't keep stretched out up there without the proper background conditions."

So, without even taking a moment to pin a note to a curtain Polychrome reached out her arms to her sisters and they rushed her away to the sky.

Bright and early the next morning they discovered the truancy. "She must have left in an awful hurry," speculated Dorothy.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

“Yes, but not irresponsibly, I dare predict,” opined the red sorceress. “But, Princess,” went on the wise-woman, “I don’t feel we ought just to sit about awaiting developments. Would you care—”

“Of course!” yelped Dorothy, ever game for an expedition or adventure. “How will we go?: by swan chariot, I hope!”

“Very well.” Glinda smiled indulgently. And Dorothy skedaddled, to go get herself decked out in her smartest travel togs.

Maybe she was a bit *too* speedy. Witch Glinda still had not descended from her boudoir when the younger miss arrived in the front hall all set to go. To improve the time Dorothy walked to the palace kitchens and asked the staff to put together a tasty assortment of red comestibles in a lunch basket.

The other famous ones from the Emerald City had been informed of the impending expedition and they were now all standing around outside waiting to see the take-off of the swan chariot. Trot and Betsy were idly knocking croquet balls about when suddenly, totally unexpectedly, brilliant lights flashed out in the northern sky, a sort of northern lights only so much brighter and at full day. Everybody stood and stared—a bit gormlessly, because they immediately felt blinded and one or two started on splitting headaches.

Queen Ozma was there, looking on rather sadly. Suddenly, “Quick, everyone, into the palace! and avert your eyes. This *could* be something like the ‘day of the triffids’ and we’ll all go blind.” The well-read little ruler also knew well that the earth’s ozone cover had been blown and if people didn’t go blind in a moment they might well do so over time, with cataracts brought on by ultra-violet rays.

The Patchwork Girl put the situation into rhyme:

“Alas and alack for a pair of green glasses!

If we should go blind we will all feel like asses.”

But Faramont, Guardian of the Gates of the Emerald City, was far away with his hoard of protective spectacles.

Inside the pink palace queen Ozma intercepted the witch of

the south as she descended the marble stairs on her way to board her chariot. "You've seen the lights," she stated. "Can you think of any explanation?"

"None. I'm as much at sea as any of you. I would say off-hand though that they must have something to do with recent phenomena: what's been going on in the Cloud Kingdom and over the rainbow, as well, of course, as that frightful storm yesterday. I wonder..."

"Yes, Glinda?"

"It's awfully impromptu, but it occurs to me: while Princess Dorothy and I are off now to try to have an interview with the Rainbow, would your grace feel up to undertaking some kind of a search with some of our friends here? It might, at the very least, take people's minds off... give them something to do."

Ozma grasped at the proposal eagerly. "Just to be doing *something*: not standing around feeling useless, impotent. We might find out something by following the lights into the north. But if we go blind on the way...?"

Glinda allowed a tiny smile to appear at the corners of her mouth. "Yes, the lights do dazzle... may even be a bit painful to look into for any length of time. But I think I may promise that the sight won't do permanent damage."

So the celebrities trailed out on the lawns again and watched as the six-team of swans raced across the sward and lifted into the air with the cockleshell chariot dangling, then straightening and gliding forward serenely over the air currents.

The modest overland expedition was to consist of the two great cats, the brave one (for close on a century now, ever since he'd swallowed that concoction of the Wizard O.Z. Diggs' which bestowed courage) and the hungry one, who served as mounts for, respectively, the Oz queen and her chum Trot, and Cap'n Bill and the Scarecrow (who had abruptly given up plans to be viceroy of the Quadling country and passed the job on to young green Jellia Jamb).

Being up in the air was nothing new to Princess Dorothy of Kansas and Oz. Not since that turn-of-the-century cyclone (read ‘tornado’) that had swept through her home state. She’d traveled lots by air since then, though odd to reflect that she’d never been in an airplane—unless ozoplanes count. So now this jaunt by swan chariot was nothing to her except mild and pleasant.

To ward off even the faintest tendency to tedium as they flew so high that nothing much at ground level was very distinct, Dorothy took to peering around the interior fittings of the chariot. Glinda of course was at the reins and with those red-gold and leather thongs she was able to direct the swans to veer left or right. But otherwise? Dorothy began to wonder how the red witch signaled to her feathered conveyers that she desired, for example, to land, or to mount to another, specific, level of sky. She asked.

Glinda was pleased to say, “Look there: on the top of the twin doorposts— What do you see?”

“Well, let’s see,” pondered the girl. “It looks like two stiffish wires—with a kind of ‘bud’ on top, like the head of a match. Oh, I know!: they’re a bit like butterfly antennae.”

“That’s right. Those are the chariot’s ‘ears’. When the charioteer issues a directive those antennae transmit it by magical means to the swans and they at once follow orders. It’s much better than trying to scream through the wind at the swans what to do.”

“Well, think of that! And aren’t they just the cutest, those ears!” said Dot with enthusiasm.

At this the antennae blushed quite scarlet.

“So if I wanted to go—just anywhere, I’d have simply to mention it and the ears would see to it I arrived there?”

“Quite so.”

“I know where I’d go if I had my say,” pursued the Kansas girl. “Straight back to that mean old Cloud King and give him a very large piece of my mind. In fact: *his* ears I’d give a

good boxing!”

“Temper... temper, my dear,” soothed Glinda. “But in fact you may very well be seeing that very King of Clouds before very long. Only... perhaps I ought to m.c. the meeting..?” jested the good sorceress.

On they flew but it was not long at all before the woman at the reins realized something odd was happening. She had given orders to mount ever higher: their business now was to be conducted on the highest levels. But every moment the chariot sank lower. “Gracious,” ejaculated the red witch, “is something malfunctioning? I hardly know what to do. My commands are not being followed.”

The descent leveled off but now the speed of the flying swans increased. This was not what Glinda had ordered either. “Do you think we’re going to crash?” asked a worried Dorothy.

“I hardly think my birds would be so silly as to allow that,” reassured Glinda. “They couldn’t wreck us without wrecking themselves.”

The ladies having self-quieted their worst apprehensions and the journey appearing to be going to go on for hours yet, the two gradually sank into a comfortable doze, which was not difficult in the down-lined chariot car.

By the time the vessel was flying over the M.G.M.-Disney village in Munchkinland it was not much higher up than the treetops. Now the swans—or whoever—seemed distinctly to be searching for something. There were some near misses with jutting tree limbs but of this, fortunately, the slumberers knew nothing. In a little while the chariot ‘sighted’ the yellow brick road, then it flew following that into the deepest parts of the blue forest and into the blue of evening.

For some reason which we will probably never know the chariot had flown northeasterly from the Ruby City to the far eastern confines of the Munchkin country and was now circling back so as, apparently, to follow the route of Miss Dorothy’s original first Oz journey. Below lay paths and turnings that Dot and her first fast friends had taken, and when presently

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

the sleepers awoke Dorothy leaned over the side of the chariot and screamed, "Glinda! I know this region like the back of my hand! See there?: in the distance? That's the Deadly Poppy Field coming up fast. And the Munchkin River. Is this where you meant us to come?"

"Never," declared the witch. "I'm just as mystified as you are."

Another half hour of steady low flying brought the chariot within sight of the blank green space where the Emerald City had once stood. In just a little while they could see the cottage of the Gates Guardian that stood just outside where the former city ramparts had risen.

The attention of the two chariot passengers was, however, distracted by something surprising just breasting a ridge to the south. "Can such things be?" Dorothy asked herself. "That's Ozma and them. They got here as fast on catback as we did in a flying chariot. Can you figure that one out, Glinda?"

"Not unless whatever's got into my chariot to take us way out there practically to the edge of the Deadly Desert did it so as to waste time and get us here in a dead heat with the ambling Lion and Tiger."

At any rate the chariot 'ears' did pay attention when the sorceress of the south pleaded to let the vessel be set down gently in the vicinity of the passengers from the south. The two parties of expeditionists rushed together and all talked at once.

"Did you get to see the Rainbow?!"

"How did you get here so fast?"

"Where's Polychrome?"

"Did you ever discover what those blinding lights were?"

"Is the Rainbow going to help get the Emerald City restored?"

"Where can I get hold of some succulent fat babies?"

"Let one person at a time speak, please," besought the Sorceress of the South. Then she assumed the right to be that person first. "We did not get to speak to the rainbow because something has happened to my chariot. It doesn't obey orders properly... At least, not my orders," added the witch, begin-

ning to have an inkling of how things stood.

While all the chatter was going on Princess Ozma had strolled away melancholically to the top of the ridge, northward of which stretched that blank green region where once her capital had lifted its dreaming spires. She sat down up there and clasped her hands around her knees. She gazed and gazed.

The strange and blinding lights that had enticed her party onward all day had faded to a glow worm's green luminescence that seemed centered in some object that fairy Ozma could just discern in the middle of the vast blank by the last light of evening. Presently she called to the others.

"What do you suppose that is down there?" she queried. "It glows rather prettily, doesn't it? I believe I'll walk down and try to make out what it is."

No one of the two parties hung back from following their little queen down the slope. It was quite a hike. Some quarter—maybe even a third—of a mile they walked. As they got nearer the green-gleaming object assumed the character of an enormous wrapped parcel.

Just standing there all by itself in the midst of the darkling plain.

The package must be the most glamorous that any of the assembled group had ever seen. It was rather a curious-looking package. It wasn't just green luminous wrappings done up in ribbons of four not altogether surprising hues: brilliant blue, pungent purple, the sunniest of yellows, and a wonderful deep red. No, there was even a shining silver eight-dimensional star on top and riding above the star a motley collection of grey cotton-batting clouds. These last seemed not to be quite connected to the parcel but floated above it in a startling way.

In the general stampede to reach the world's most glamorous package children were trodden under foot: Trot and Dorothy. The feet belonged to a lion and a tiger: four each. The great cats with a bound and a spring were literally upon the package: it was just large enough to hold them comfortably. The star got knocked sideways and the cotton clouds took off affrighted. Rip, tear, shred! The Hungry Tiger struck with his razor claws. The Courageous Lion bit and chewed. The emerald wrappings, a kind of celluloz, hung in tatters in next to no time.

Too late now for any of the humans to have a part in the fun. Or no, there did remain one yellow ribbon unripped. Dorothy took out her sewing scissors and handed them to her sovereign.

The last of the coverings fell to the ground and the adventurers saw a large box made of oztek. Ozma had to stand on tip-toes to reach up and lift the fitted lid, having first entreated her feline friends to give way. Still nobody could see inside the box from where they stood. Ozma made a sign to the Hungry Tiger to jump up and catch hold on the side of the box for a glimpse down inside.

"Hsss—s—t," spat the cat contemptuously. "No babies in there."

"Was there *anything* there?" entreated the little queen of Oz.

"Well, yes: a little silvery green thing. It looked like a brick," the tiger confessed.



"A brick," said Ozma astonished. "Now why should a thing like that remind me of the Tin Woodman?"

"I can't imagine," said the red sorceress with a frown. She knew her immortal fairy friend was not in the first stages of Alzheimer's but could think of no other logical explanation for such a far-out remark.

Cap'n Bill now climbed awkwardly (wooden leg, you know) up on the Courageous Lion's back and had a dekko. "Brick, sure enough," he confirmed. So saying, he took out his sailor's jack-knife that *he* never left home without and tore a great cleft down one side of the oztek. Now others could pull and rip and soon there was a gap great enough for everyone to step through and inside the parcel.

Princess Ozma stooped and took up the green brick. "On second thought," confessed the Girl Ruler, "this reminds me more of the Emerald City—as once it was." The Good Witch sighed with satisfaction. 'Ozma's herself again,' she thought.

Everyone thought the brick in the enormous package must be a joke or hoax but just the same they looked about to see if there should be any note of explanation. Cap'n Bill again to the rescue: he it was who discovered a big green tag attached to the yellow ribbon Ozma had cut, when presently, in a gesture of tidiness, they pulled all the tattered wrappings out from *underneath* the box.

The card was handed to the girl ruler of Oz. She received it with hastily beating heart. "Oh, how attractive," she breathed. The large single tagcard of fine thick parchment had a border of fluorescent green glitter. There was a design of Kelly-green hearts and flowers. On the back, at the bottom, it said: "TALLDARK. It costs no more to send the very best. Copyright © 1994; violators will be prosecuted."

"How touching," murmured Ozma in whimsical mood.

"Is that *all* it says?" demanded Princess Dorothy with fists on hips.

"Why, no, dear. It also says: 'Have a good one! For best results, tap contents on ground at spot marked X'."

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

“Ooh, thrilling!” everyone agreed.

But, “It doesn’t tell who sent it?” wondered Dorothy.

“Not a word.”

“And where’s the spot marked ‘X’?”

No one had noticed any such spots. It was almost dark by now so that fact in itself was not surprising. The only light was the glow-worm glow of green that came from the ravished gift-box. By this illumination the crowd now fanned out to scout the area and in only a few moments little Trot could cry, “Here’s a cross of green bricks! Could this be it?”

There was surely no harm in trying. The queen of Oz approached the spot, knelt down, then brought her own green brick crashing down upon the cross-point of the two short lines of bricks imbedded in the turf.

The results were surprising. The held brick shattered with almost explosion-like violence and chips and crumbs of baked clay flew out in every direction, giving, in fact, quite nasty stings to such legs and ankles as they encountered. Where bits fell to the ground they appeared to ‘re-explode’ and send showers of further brick dust off to north and south, east and west. And each tiny particle carried with it its own ‘grass-lamp glow’.

Within a very few minutes a vast area all round the group of enchanted spectators was gleaming greenly. Still the progression continued, until a region of about a mile in every direction was paved with light. Only then did the atoms of brick dust seem to quit boiling and frothing and for a magic moment all lay still. The watchers didn’t dare breathe.

Then began the horror.

The green-gleaming ground began to heave and buckle. Earthquake! The terrified group of friends flew together in a clump and clung to each other for dear life. Were they all to be killed as a climax to the enchanted moment by falling debris?

Well, debris, if any, was not falling, it was rising. But that didn’t mean that anybody was safe. The adventurers could feel they were rising with it!

Nor was it debris. It was a surface of jade-green tiles that

appeared to the panic-stricken Queen of Oz, when she dared to open her eyes, strangely familiar. Where had she seen that pattern before?!

The upheaval continued at express-train speed. The horror-filled Ozites could feel the very wind of their passage upward. Or was it simply an evening breeze wafting about in the upper air, where all had been wind-still at ground level?

In about ten minutes it was all over. Ozma had identified the green tile pattern. It was the same as that which floored the lookout platform on the top of the central tower of the Palace of Magic at dead center of the Emerald City, capital of all Oz.

## c h a p t e r   t w e n t y

What the enchanted, then horrified, then vastly edified travelers had not noticed, in their fascination with the tile pattern at their feet and also the glamorous view of a magnificent silent emerald-gleaming city spread all about them in the night, was another city that hung a hundred feet above them enclosed in clouds in the dark sky.

Suddenly a vast hand, on an immensely long thick arm, shot out of this cloud formation and seized Princess Ozma in a mighty grasp. This culmination to an arduous time of stress and grief was too much. The poor little fairy passed out.

She didn't stay fainted forever, of course. The faint passed over into sleep, of which the sorely tired, tried young ruler had sufficient need.

When she awoke it was brilliant morning and, when she sat up startled, then relaxed and yawned, also, she happened to recall, the very morning of her birthday. 'I wonder if I'll survive it,' she mused, recalling the frights and threats of a week of previous mornings.

Ozma looked about her. Good gracious: she was in her own bed at home. Warily she pulled the service bell cord.

The bedroom door opened and Jellia Jamb put her head round it, then entered and curtsayed. "Yes, your grace?"

"Jellia, am I dreaming? or what's the story?"

"Why, no, your highness," said the girl, then saucily, "Or if you're dreaming then so am I, because we're in this dream together." Then she remembered: "I have the honor to wish your grace the happiest of happy birthdays!"

"Why, thank you, my dear," said Ozma, the teeniest bit reassured. She went on: "It would be happier if I understood even a particle of what is going on."

"Oh, the King of the Clouds can explain everything," reassured the maid. "He sends most cordially and desires to meet Princess Ozma in her own throne room as soon as may be."

"He does, does he?" grunted Ozma. "Let him wait. Jellia dear,

bring me a jumbo breakfast in bed. After all I'm the birthday child. Just for once..."

"I meant to, your grace, in any case. And all your friends are waiting to offer you felicitations of the day.

"Well, send them in!" cried the queen gaily. Then, "Or no: just breakfast for now — to give me fortitude to face that dreadful old tyrant. I'd like to get that disagreeable interview over with and then give myself to the pleasures — I hope — of the day."

Dressed in severe gabardine the Princess walked into her Throne Chamber an hour later. Welkin King of Clouds reposed in all his capacious sprawl across the royal seat.

"Get off that chair!!" shrilled Princess Ozma in a voice her friends would scarcely have recognized. "You old reprobate, how dare you!"

Startled, the Cloud King rose involuntarily, and, once risen, stayed risen.

Ozma stepped past him, making sure no part of her person touched him. She flicked fastidiously at the velvet cushions with half a square yard of chiffon and sat down.

She struggled to command her temper. One furious outburst would have to do. She was not going to carry on like a fish-wife. After all, she remembered who she was and atrocious behavior by another was not going to make *her* behave atrociously.

But it was in cold tones that she enunciated: "What did you wish to say to me?" She, like her friend Dorothy some time back, skipped honorifics.

"Do you recognize this room by any chance?" asked the Cloud King gormlessly.

Ozma frowned. Had the old goof taken leave of his senses? Or think she'd taken leave of hers? "Naturally. It's my own throne room." For form's sake she glanced about her. Funny. She had to admit that all the furnishings and hangings appeared especially fresh and crisp. She cast a look down at the outer left side of the chair where a frayed place had once been neatly mended by Jellia Jamb's careful sewing fingers. The pink kitten used to flex her claws there until warned off in serious terms.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

The frayed place was gone. This green watered silk was brand new! What was going on?

The silly old cloud king approached the seat royal with a diffident air. He held out a pair of green spectacles—in one hand, until he remembered that in the orient, if you have the least bit of respect for the recipient, you always hold an object in both hands to present it. “Here. Try these.”

“I think you mean,” instructed the seated queen: “‘If you please, you might like to put these on.’ Run it past me again... if you please.”

The king was getting a crash course in how to behave. He’d obviously spent far too many eons having his own way and never needing to try to please anybody. This was salutary instruction. He did as he was told.

Queen Ozma deigned to put on the specs. Just in time too, because the four sets of double doors, one at each cardinal point, now burst open suddenly and a glare of emerald brilliance might have dazzled the young ruler save for the spectacles.

Butlers stood at each door, footmen tried to make presentations, but all was a chaos in moments as all Ozma’s friends poured in at every doorway and shouts of “Surprise!” and “Have a happy!” and “Felicitations!” rent the air. The Cloud King was shunted to one side and got lost in the shuffle.

He had prepared a presentation speech but now, put in his place, he just muttered it into a corner and then quitted the throne hall. “This is my gift to you. I wanted you to have the brightest city in all Oz.”

Just as well Ozma never heard that inept little spiel. She might have been tempted to retort tartly: ‘You picked a funny way of going about it. What did I ever do to you that you should abuse me so grossly?...’

Just the same, the Emerald City really did look splendid. Every ornamental emerald, down to the very smallest, was back in its (code-numbered) place and sparkled with a lustre never seen before even when the stones were fresh-carved. This was because King Welkin had caused them to be coated

with a magical wash that enhanced the natural green gleam, reflected sunlight with even more than natural brilliance, and also automatically shed air pollutants. If the Emerald City now shone with an effulgence that nearly rivaled the 'northern lights' that had near-blinded the crowd at the Ruby City it was not surprising.

Each and every of the scattered Emerald Citizens had been magically transported back to their home town. Thus it was that the Wizard of Oz and Scraps the magic Patchwork Girl were in the reception line that filed past Queen Ozma's throne. Standing, the Girl Ruler received gratefully the handshake and kiss of Glinda the Good and Princesses Dorothy, Trot, and Betsy, and of hundreds of others great and small, as the day wore on and she was, frankly, getting the least bit weary. Thank goodness for that fine night's sleep!

Toward noon the chastened Cloud King crept back into the throne room and resumed his place in the corner. At last the crowd around the throne was beginning to thin. He saw his erstwhile prisoner surreptitiously wipe her hand down the thigh of the gabardine suit and then reach out to new hands that desired shaking.

Welkin, for all his subdued manner now, had not lost a whit of his power or majesty. Now he drew himself up, fetched a breath, and clapped his eighty hands together. It was a true clap of thunders! Everyone in the hall stopped in his tracks as if shot.

With a genial grin the Cloud King turned to direct attention to the south doors of the throne room. There a portable table (not a collapsible card table exactly) was being borne into the hall by a cluster of footmen, while close behind followed Glinda the Good and Wizard Diggs arm in arm and looking rather smug.

The table was set down conveniently close to the receiving line so that Ozma wouldn't have to stop giving her subjects the grip while she admired what now was disclosed.

It was a cake. But not one of your ordinary cakes. This one was eight feet wide and four high and seemed inordinately heavy. It was covered with brown and purple icing two inches

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

thick and was stuck full of statuettes of Oz celebrities molded out of marzipan and painted (in vegetable dyes) true to life. Ozma was quite bowled over and got a stomach ache just thinking about eating any of it. Good thing she'd had a bang-up breakfast. Maybe she'd be able to put off tasting the cake indefinitely, pleading fullness.

"How splendid," she cried at her first encounter with the cake. Then, adept at public relations, she asked every question under the sun about it: who had designed it, how many had been involved in the construction of it, how long had it taken?

Chef Etam Upp and all the palace bakers and confectioners beamed at the interest shown and Ozma was treated to an exact description of every stage in the production of the fabulous pastry.

"Took a week to create, eh?" said the girl ruler musingly. "And I never knew a thing about it."

"No, that's because you were away," Chef Upp hastened to clarify for her.

"Er—*where* did you bake the cake?" asked the queen with true curiosity.

"At the palace kitchens of His Majesty the Emperor of the Winkies," said Upp. "Emperor Nick had everything in readiness and we went straight to work as soon as we reached there."

"That's strange," said Ozma. "The decision to send some of the displaced Emerald Citizens into the Winkie country was very impromptu. No one there knew you'd be coming."

"Sure they did," insisted the chef. "Everybody knew the Emerald City was going to be—'borrowed' for a bit. You know: so it could be tarted up—oh, sorry, Your Grace!—cleansed and polished and embellished and made like new and better than new."

"Oh, indeed?" spoke the little queen, great light bulbs going on in balloons over her head. "I did not. You say *everyone* knew? As, for example, Glinda the Good, Sorceress of the South? or O.Z. Diggs, Wizard of Oz? or perhaps one Princess Dorothy of Oz and Kansas..?"



"Everyone, Your Majesty," affirmed the chef. "Everybody except just you."

It was only then, at the expression on the young queen's face, that the great goof knew he had dropped a brick greater even than that Queen Ozma had had dealings with the night before. Poor Chef Upp: he had supposed that the great and wonderful surprise had been revealed while he still toiled in the subterranean kitchens, spraying the vast purple-chocolate cake with (edible) emerald glitter.

Icily Ozma turned to Glinda and the Wizard who had drastically lost that smug look. "You knew?" she spoke.

There was a dreadful silence throughout the hall of the throne. No one dared to speak. Through the mind of the Girl Ruler rushed a succession of memories: of her feeling of desperation at the theft of her dear city, of freezing all night in a tatty tent on the road to the Ruby City, of the queer indifference of witch Glinda to her distress while the refugee party had resided at her palace, of the privations and alarms of the long journey to the town of the Springers, of the exhaustion and tedium of the endless climb up the Vanishing Spiral Staircase, of the indignity of capture by ruffians above the clouds and being transported trussed up in a net like so many fish, and of the barbarous treatment she had received at the hands of the King of the Clouds. 'I shall never, never, forgive him,' she vowed.

That was all. Ozma put on an electric smile, never alluded by a syllable to anyone of the horrors, and silently thanked feckless Button Bright who created a diversion by yelling, "Let's eat!" and seizing a fistful of purple chocolate out of the monstrous cake before anyone had had time to blow out a candle or sing "Happy Birthday".

Button's eyes, bulging at the sight of the glorious cake, had got the best of him, or was it perchance his stomach, which had been fasting for many hours just in preparation for this gustatory orgy? This was not the original Button Bright, of course, but a clone of him from tissue contributed by Sples Smith, witch Glinda's husband, into whom the original inimitable boy had

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

duly grown in the course of time. Everyone, especially when in the mood of recreating famous early times in Oz, had mourned the lack of a boy to get lost so endearingly just whenever you least, or most, expected it. Mr. Smith had very willingly undergone the tiny surgery and state-of-the-art medical technology had brought forth the present irrepressible youth.

The Cloud King, scarcely daring to hope that all was well, stood by observing the celebrations that he so chiefly had been instrumental in bringing about. He was in his genial mode and registered tender feelings in his heart. His face wore a beatific smile: not just any old smile but the kind that makes the smiler's ears curl and cheeks turn crimson red (even if you're made of solid silver). His steely eyes twinkled.

Princess Ozma gritted her teeth and advanced to where the Cloud King stood. She was going to play this noble forgiving role to the hilt. It was all she could do. She was after all trapped in the part and must play it through eternity. "I trust you are enjoying the frivolities, Your Skyness," she intoned.

King Welkin breathed a silent sigh of relief. The young ruler wasn't going to hold a grudge then. "Oh, capitally, capitally," he blustered. "I very much hope Your Grace was not too much put out by some of the things that happened. Your imprisonment had to seem realistic, you see. There seemed no other way to prevent a person of your percipience from suspecting the loving plot.

"Now I so much hope that you will enjoy through many long years your newly refurbished palace and city."

It was a pretty speech and perhaps, who knows?, in time to come the Princess might recall it and be mollified.

She did, in fact, go out on the balcony at the dying of the day and waved a handkerchief as a big billowing cloud of mist descended from on high and enveloped the monarch of the clouds.

## c h a p t e r   t w e n t y - o n e

By the time Princess Ozma had finished opening the drifts of gifts that had piled up for her (“Ooh, just what I wanted:” she always cried whenever she received a stuffed baby alligator with a light-bulb in its mouth), Princess Dorothy was frankly tired. She hung on while the Girl Ruler expressed appreciation for small statues, games of all sorts, and a paddle ball, then she passed a quiet word to some of her closest friends that it was time for her to retire for the night. Dorothy stood up, curtsied to her sovereign, murmured a last “Happy birthday, dear,” and walked across the room, out the double doors, and up two flights of stairs.

Once in her private apartment, however, the girl found it almost impossible to go to sleep. She called on the sleep and dream pixies to come forward and lend assistance. They do this habitually all over the world, including Scandinavia. The way we can know this is that when we wake in the morning and go to wash our face, we need to wipe pixies’ sleep dust from the corners of our eyes. The moral is: if you want a really good night’s sleep never wash your face before going to bed.

The pixies failed to put in an appearance and Dorothy ended taking a Nyquil. That helped. Lordie, how she dreamed. She dreamt of all she had gone through in the past week, recalling events as vividly as though they were still taking place. And yet she didn’t think of her dream as a nightmare.

She called back her various visits to the Ruby Palace of the Good Sorceress and all the plotting and planning and secret-keeping she had done in connivance with that wonder-worker. They really fooled ol’ Ozma!

She remembered the wild goose chase to the Hollywood village in Munchkinland and their meandering search for the Vanishing Spiral Staircase. Briefly she wondered whether the silver ladder had collapsed back into the steamer trunk or mayhap had gone on to find some other receptacle in which to spend the next hundred years. And Mayor Carom and

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

Coily: what of them?

She had to laugh in her dreams when she remembered the people of Springer Town. How funny they were and how extraordinary their buildings. Even now she could see with her mind's dreaming eye how buildings had sprung up on every side, then stood wobbling like shapes of jelly.

And then her dreams jumped forward in the hot and sultry month of August. She seemed to be looking out of a window, with her chum Princess Ozma beside her, and noting how awful the scaled-down Emerald City looked without its emeralds. The streets were dreadfully grey. "You know, dear," she said, turning to her dearest friend, "when you lost your last emerald it was as if something died in me." Ozma burst into tears and Dorothy wondered what she might do to comfort her.

Mercifully Dot's dreams skipped lightly over the horridnesses of the sojourn in the City in the Clouds and delivered her to the Throne Room in the very building in which she now reposed. She dreamt of the last deed of the great King of Clouds and how sweet it had been of him. Oddly she couldn't quite recall what this last deed was but she was sure it was something. Ordering Ozma's birthday cake? No, the Wizard and Glinda had put in the order for that a week before.

So passed away a night of spirited happy dreaming. Now that the trials that might be fun to hear of but certainly were not so to experience had shifted into another mode, a person could dream of them with impunity.

The dream and sleep pixies vanished and Dorothy began to stir. She sat up in bed—and experienced a faint feeling of let-down. All the fun was over now. It was back to daily routine. She supposed she'd have to pitch in, removing the acres of torn gift wrappings from all the ground-floor apartments.

At this same time Queen Ozma was gazing into the mirror on her boudoir dressing table and thinking: 'Gosh, for the first time after one of these birthday celebrations I can notice that I definitely look older.' But she shrugged and determined to enjoy herself until the next time of testing

arrived the following August.

Still, she couldn't help mulling over in her mind the horrific slyness that had been demonstrated by *everybody* around her: old friends proven and true that she would never in her wildest have suspected of going to do anything sneaky like this recent caper.

Was there nobody she could trust? She picked up a note that Jellia had placed by her pillow:

"Dear Your Highness,

I ought to be here to help you dress this morning but I'm completely bushed. Have stayed up most of the night: cleaning the reception rooms, you know, and most of the Palace. Am sure you will forgive me if I sleep in.

Your devoted handmaiden,

J.J."

Jellia too. She had been in on the big cover-up. No more would she be privy to the queen's most private thoughts.

Ozma wrapped her fur and satin dressing gown around her and drifted down to Princess Dorothy's bedroom door. She tapped, then when there was no answer opened the door a crack and peeped inside. "Dorothy, Dorothy, are you awake?"

The named one, of course, was at this moment stretching and yawning and suffering post-party blues. When she heard her friend's voice she ducked her head under the covers and pretended to snore. Then with elaborate pantomime she made as if she had been wrenched from deepest slumber. She got out of bed and staggered groggily to the door. She tried to focus her eyes, looked at her wrist and saw her watch was not there, and muttered, "What time is it?"

"Never mind about what time it is," replied her sovereign testily. "I want to tell you something. Last night, while I was tossing and turning, trying to get to sleep, I thought of something—"

What was this? Talk about *lése majesté*. Dorothy, obviously uninterested in the conversation, had climbed back into bed, where she gave every sign of wanting to return to sleep.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

Who could the poor Queen talk to? She paced about the room addressing herself for lack of any other interlocutor. Then her eye fell on Dorothy's little black dog Toto snoozing on his mistress' bed-end. Toto, of course! *He* hadn't taken any part in the great deception. Ozma recalled how the dog had been the only one not to say anything during all the discussion about ways and means at witch Glinda's pink palace. *Toto* should be the restless princess' confidant!

Ozma placed a caressing hand on the dog's black tangles of hair, eliciting a low growl. However, when he saw who it was he did go so far as to lick the queen's hand. He turned his head around and looked at Dorothy, wondering why she was pretending to sleep. He knew when people were lying doggo. Well, he'd put a stop to that artificiality. Toto sprang to his feet and began barking as loudly as he could. "RFFF! RFFF! ARF! ARF! ARF!" he yapped: enough to wake the dead if not the living.

Just then the doorbell rang and Ozma went down to answer, relieved perhaps at the chance to get away. It looked, alas, as if Toto were not going to work out as chief recipient of the girl ruler's most private communications.

It was Polychrome. "Poly darling!" cried the delighted young queen. *Here* was a dear person who very distinctly had not been in on the insidious plot. Here was someone she could confide in in future. Ozma had an idea she was going to be seeing a lot of the Rainbow's Daughter in days to come.

"Wherever did you get to?" the Oz ruler marveled. "One minute there you were at Glinda's palace and the next minute there you weren't... And wasn't there something about your father being asked to come to the rescue?"

"Yes. But he couldn't. He was ever so cross. He said he'd been worried sick all the time we three were in the Cloud Kingdom, and when he finally got me home again he was *not* going to let me go. I had to sneak away just now. I felt awful about missing your birthday gala and—well, I just had to come and explain."

"Say not another word, Poly dearest," soothed the happy

princess. "I understand perfectly. But come: there's something I want your moral support with." And as Ozma led the way back to Princess Dorothy's private apartment she tried to explain. "It looks as if Dorothy is trying to avoid me. Perhaps you can get something out of her. I wouldn't be surprised if she were having just a wee twinge of conscience." And Ozma retailed to the rainbow girl the details of the horrifying revelation. "Glinda and them actually *planned* that I should be exposed to such indignities. Can you credit it? Dot too of course had to suffer the trials but she at least knew the whole thing wasn't for real. I didn't. Nor did you. That means a lot to me now." She squeezed Polychrome's hand.

With two of her girl friends in the room and sitting on the side of the bed Dorothy could no longer carry on the pretense. She was giving full attention when the rainbow's daughter said, "Dorothy, did you know about the Cloud King in advance and what his intentions were?"

"I knew the very day the Emerald City was taken," confessed the girl and buffed her nails on her pajama-top lapel. It was pretty neat to know you'd been in, at the highest levels, on a coup as successful as this one.

Then she relented. "I wanted to tell you, Polychrome, sometimes when you were crying and going on. But I just couldn't. It was a secret, you see—"

"And a secret must never be revealed, no matter how cruel or unkind?" enquired Ozma.

"That's right! I knew you'd understand," and Dot grasped her (former) chum's hand impulsively. "It just could never be right to give away someone's secret. And yet I hated seeing you sobbing and weeping and spoiling all the fun. It wasn't as if all our trials and tribulations were not going to have a happy ending. And discomforts endured can even be enjoyed when you know in advance everything is going to turn out right."

"As we: Poly and I, did not." Ozma's tone was frigid.

"But I'd *promised* not to tell," cried Dorothy indignantly. "You'd never have me break a *promise*, would you?" She pouted.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

"Why, that would be downright immoral." She added, "That would be betraying the others."

"So there were others, were there?" put in the Rainbow's daughter.

"Yes! and if I were to tell they'd never trust me with another secret, would they?" Distress at the very thought made the Kansas girl break right down. She pulled the sheets up to her face and wept quietly.

"Dorothy," said Polychrome rather governessly, "please tell me whose idea this was to give a surprise party... of this description."

The girl looked up, shocked. "Oh, I couldn't do that! That— why, that would be the ultimate betrayal."

There were two eavesdroppers at the door and at this juncture they decided to step forward. It looked to them as if things might soon get out of hand and the post-birthday recriminations devolve into petty bickering if not outright hostilities.

It was Glinda the (soi-disant) Good and that famous meddler Mr. Diggs, the Wizard of Oz. Princess Ozma had her back to them and looked up, astonished, while Dorothy didn't know whether to be overjoyed or horrified. She knew that in another moment she would have gone on to betray the conspiracy.

"Your royal highnesses," (all three girls were princesses of a sort), spoke the Wizard without preamble, "It was the good witch of the south and myself who arranged for your party."

Now Queen Ozma had made the pact with herself already the day before at that awful birthday celebration that never, by word or deed, would she reproach the villains who had so sold her down the river. But now! if the culprits were here all ready to confess, why not hear them out?

She had risen and now drew herself up regally. "We shall be pleased," she stated, "to learn if there have been extenuating circumstances." She waited.

The Wizard placed his forefinger alongside his nose. "Well, my dear," he began, "it was some two months ago correct me if I'm wrong, your grace" he glanced aside at Glinda— "that the



head of the palace gardeners and the Lord General (as he styles himself) of the city street-sweeps came to Sorceress Glinda and me during one of the red witch's periodic visits here and voiced their grave concern that air pollution had severely sullied most of the city's outdoor attractions: blackened the buildings, dulled the gleam of the emerald-work, actually begun to eat away at metal and stone so that there was actual danger in the streets of the capital from falling masonry. Something would have to be done—and drastically.

“Now Glinda happened to be better acquainted than most with a certain Cloud King—or at least with his reputation. She knew that he in his cloud kingdom—unlikely venue—reigned over most capable building engineers and jewelry experts. What if King Welkin could be prevailed on to carry away the entire Emerald City and give it a thorough spring-cleaning? It wouldn't be easy, but it might be worth a try.

“Well, the Cloud King when contacted proved most amiable. He verily jumped at the chance to undertake such a challenging overhaul and at the same time be of service to a certain young fairy ruler for whom he had—by hearsay—the greatest respect.

“Acquaintance even in such a relatively remote location as the Cloud Kingdom with the date of her Ozian majesty's birthday played a role. It was the Cloud King's own idea that the restitution of the decaying city be made to fit in with the traditional offering of gifts. And of course it must all be a surprise! But the logistics of that were a puzzler. We have all seen, to our cost, how disastrously that worked out.”

Ozma was thawing a little. “I understand that you felt you had to do—what you had to do.”

Dorothy tried to cast a rosy glow over things. “Anyway our awful journey gave my dear princess and me a lot of extra time to be together,” she whitewashed. But somehow, she noted with a little pang, the girl queen dodged eye contact.

But then the charming monarch of Oz relaxed a little more. She just wasn't very good at holding grudges. “Was that what you'd call a wild goose chase, home in your native state, Prin-

cess?" she asked.

Dorothy was so glad of the wee witticism. Joyfully she joined in. "Well, we certainly carried on like a couple of silly geese, didn't we?"

Toto gave out a few queer little yipey barks, to show he was in agreement with everybody.

Polychrome put in her good-natured two cents' worth: "We did see a good many sights, didn't we? I knew from before how fascinating King Welkin's Cloud City is and I'm glad you ladies got to see it too. Remember the cellophane houses and gardens?"

"And you learned from your experiences as well," put in the Wizard sententiously.

"Yes: not to trust friends," answered his sovereign crisply. A little more loyalty might be in order in future, she opined. It might be as well to let this lot know she hadn't forgotten—quite.

A lot of people were sitting or standing around on a turret-top terrace open to the sky high up on the Palace of Magic. All the usual celebrities were there. Toto was sitting on Princess Dorothy's lap, his eyes closed and his pink tongue hanging out just a trifle, giving off an air of well-being. Perhaps at the thought of not having been taken along on that awful expedition he had heard so much about.

"My stars, what a perfect evening it is," remarked Dorothy, watching the sun going down. Its final rays of the day flashed high, making the whole zenith glow red. There were no more than one or two desultory clouds floating about.

Those clouds were rather low though and somehow a bit unmotivated-looking. Their bottoms reflected the sun's rosy glow and were further decorated by some attractive streaks of red and yellow, merging at spots into orange and vermilion.

The sky in the east was already navy blue and stars were starting to glimmer in the dark. Shadows fell, each moment heavier, over all the land of Oz.

There was a brief commotion as the Patchwork Girl joined the gathering belatedly. Rubber-gauntleted, she had been helping Miss Jellia Jamb with the washing-up. "Look up there," she cried, sitting down to hold hands with her follower, the Scarecrow.

"Where?" growled the Courageous Lion, deigning to lift his royal head. "I don't see anything noteworthy."

The stuffed duo, in tandem, directed his gaze to the underside of the nearest, oddly hovering, cloud. Now all the company could see that the heads of a couple of young Silverlings were sticking out below.

Everybody, cloud-borne or earthbound, waved. The people on the tower received the curious impression that the watchers in the cloud were just about to split with merriment. But this was perhaps not so strange. It cannot be denied that the Oz celebrities, in general, are a funny-looking lot.

## THE CLOUD KING OF OZ

---

After a bit the gentle breeze nudged the out-of-context clouds off and away. Soon the young silverlings would be out of sight, going on their way, just possibly, to some new exciting adventure in the sky. Dorothy and Ozma, hand — yes — in hand, looked on a little wistfully. “Maybe those two will come pay us a visit here in Oz one day,” posited Dorothy.

“Or those of us who missed it,” wished the Wizard, “will get a chance to go adventuring in the clouds.” He cast an almost envious glance at the two young girls who had been through so much.

“I wonder,” mused Dorothy with a soft laugh, “if every cloud has a silverling — if not a silver lining.”

As she spoke the sun disappeared down back of the horizon with a barely perceptible ‘blip’, hauling in all its long red-golden rays after it. The company of evening-viewers moved as by one accord to the railing and fluttered their hankies or scarves as the clouds faded out of sight in the eastern dark and the sun glow darkened to mysterious deep maroon in the west.