

**A
FARE
WELL
TO
OZ**

BY
GERARD LANGA, MARCH LAUMER,
ANITA MCGREW & DINA BRIONES

Dedicated
to the memory of

KEITH LAUMER
1925 — 1993

He loved Oz so.
Alas, he left
almost too late
going there
in life...

A FAREWELL
to
OZ

THE OZ BOOK FOR 2000

By Gerard Langa, March Laumer, Anita
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Edited by Paul S. Ritz.

Founded on and Continuing the
Stories by March Laumer





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C H A P T E R O N E

"Poor guy. Looks like he died of boredom."

"Yes, I think he could have. See the control panel? But there's nothing on the screen."

"That's right. Yes, look—if I can get it out of his hand—. Yeah. You press the button and nothing happens."

"How awful."

"How do these things work anyway? Are there batteries? or what's the story?"

"Search me. I suppose a technician would know. But if the thing was dead..."

"Yeah. And he couldn't move. That is to say, he couldn't any longer get up, stand up and move to the set... There, see? It works all right if you push the buttons on the box itself."

"Oh, turn it off! Terrible. What was that? *Andy Griffith*? Or the *Beverly Hillbillies*?"

"One or the other. He liked both of them."

"How could he? Mindless."

"Well, you get like that if all you've got left is the T.V. He gradually gave up everything. Got so he couldn't even turn over in bed. And yet, you know, he could still see without glasses—"

"Yeah, good eyesight seemed to run in the family."

"—and he could still operate the T.V. handpiece okay. He

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wouldn't do anything else. But it was as if as long as he could see those images flickering over the screen—"

"Yeah. There was still something to hold onto: an illusion."

"But if the control went... Well, then there was nothing left. Pity everybody'd gone out. I can see it now: without the pictures on the screen, well, he couldn't face it. Or rather, then he had to face it and he couldn't."

"So he literally died of boredom."

"I guess it would seem like that. What do you do when you're propped up somewhere and there is literally, absolutely, nothing to do?"

"Go to sleep, I suppose."

"He did that eighty per cent of the time anyway. That too was a fugue from boredom. But the human engine literally *can't* sleep a hundred percent of the time—not unless you're in a coma. So there he was: stuck. No show. It was no use yelling. We'd all gone out. So he just took the only way out. Croaked."

"Heart, I suppose?"

"That's what an autopsy would show, I dare say. He'd been diagnosed as having signs of an aneurism. Of course, in the last analysis we all die of heart failure."

"But you think this was actually boredom?"

"I'd say so. It's the most terrible affliction there is. I'm sure it's the basis in more than half of all suicide cases."

"Oh, that's saying a lot! I think inability to face up to problems is what tips most suicides over the brink."

"I'll admit that seems logical. But look at the statistics: suicide is virtually unknown among primitive tribes where the mere struggle to stay alive takes up populations' full time. It's the so-called civilized societies where suicide's rampant. In Europe—Denmark!—certainly a society where there's help to be called for in any acute problem in living you might have. No, it's the life situation where you've got so much leisure to mull over your ills that they get to be too much. And it's the loss of interest in living that makes even a small dislocation in life-style seem unbearable—where you'd rather take the quick way

out.”

“Kinda looks then like society ought to ‘*force* people to have fun’.”

“Certainly bring some kind of pressure to bear to motivate, even obligate, people to take part in something constructive. In the long run a feeling of creating something, contributing something—and something better than total trivia—is the only thing that can keep life in us. It’s the only thing that doesn’t become utterly boring at last.

“And like we see, boredom is fatal.”

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So I kept my nose to the grindstone. I didn't want to go that way.

For quite a few years it was all right. To be sure, everything else failed. No success, no recognition, not even any money, ashes-like reward though that might be. No charming companion, not even a steady sex partner. But there was the work, the writing—of a kind that no one else in the world could do. If you're going to make a contribution worthy of the name it's got to be individual, even unique.

That's why the arts that fully satisfy are not as many as you might think. Besides writing there are just the pictorial ones; then composing; acting; maybe—though somewhat trailing behind—dancing, singing, performing music, but there you get into areas where making a markedly individual impression isn't as important—and can't be as common—as simply executing what the creating artist intended. Maybe it's why domestic arts aren't touted as high as the "fine" arts. Hard to display an immediately recognizable signature in a job of sewing (as opposed to fabric or costume *designing*) or a dish of mayonaise (though the first inventor of it remains immortal).

In my case maybe nobody, to speak of, was able to read my writings; yet even fewer could have written them. For a long

time that seemed enough.

And then at last, you know, it wasn't. Too late now for the acclaim. No good them all crying "Hooray! Write another!" With the best will in the world there wasn't the inspiration. No new ideas. Nothing one hadn't already said a couple of times and then without anyone paying much attention or taking up the thought.

It was time for boredom to step in. It looked like boredom. Actually it was just the main-spring having gone slack. People said that Churchill had pneumonia. He himself diagnosed it better: "I'm just so bored with everything."

No. I'd fight that to the last. Not the way Dad went. But there was another likeness between him and me. That fluttering at the heart.

But the little pain at the top of the skull was new. Funny, I recognized it first thing. I hadn't had it before and it didn't run in the family, but I'd read about it, once even attended a lecture on it.

The fellow told about George Gershwin (not that the story was new to me): the massive tumor and how, even if they might have been able to operate, the thing would simply have grown back and caused the unbearable pressure all over again. "How does a thing like that get started?" I asked indignantly. "Nobody knows." So much for the highly touted know-how of medicine. And why it should strike one rather than another. To snuff out at thirty-eight the brain that could invent so many charming tunes.

The dull—or sometimes pretty peppery—pangs had gone on for quite a time now. Pretty tiresome actually. I wasn't afraid of dying. Luckily I'd got over that the summer of 'eighty-five when I told myself that by the law of averages you couldn't keep bouncing back after five operations in a row. On September twelfth I folded my hands under my cheek and said to myself, "I'm not going to pull out of *this* one."

You know; it just didn't matter one little bit. Let it all go. What did I care, really?

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Now I thought it would merely be extremely agreeable if there wasn't any pain.

Even pain was all right if it was getting you anywhere. Ever since leaving childhood I had minded less going to the dentist than to the barber. The latter was *just* total boredom and discomfort, but the pain in the dentist's chair meant you were going to feel all that much better afterwards. It was pain 'well spent'.

But the pain that meant danger of death. It was that aspect that made it terrible. Hooray for painkillers! Let them be disseminated with bounteous hands. There is absolutely nothing to be gained in suffering pain or any moral purpose served whatever. So you're gonna die? Okay, but keep that pain at the rock-bottom level until the fatal moment.

Afterwards? There was nothing. I knew that. It was a place, as a brother had written movingly, "beyond all pain, beyond all sorrow," and of course beyond all consciousness.

But I was still conscious; very much so. I had been dreaming. What was I dreaming? I don't know. It had got away, as so often. But suddenly I realized: the pain was gone! Oh, fabulous. I felt marvelous. I wanted to get up—though it was the middle of the night—and whip a barrel of tigers!

As it happened, that wasn't what I was called on to do. Instead, I was to receive visitors.

I didn't know they were coming but I really liked it better that way. When "friends drop in" you don't have to worry that the place isn't straight or refreshments ready, waiting to be served. You can take it easy. It was *their* idea.

The first I knew was the sound of music. It was like a tune being struck on infinitely thin tin 'soap' bubbles. It hovered about in the air like bubbles, echoing minutely. It was "The Oz Two-Step."

Great heavens! Just like Dorothy heard that time on the *LURLINE II*. I recognized the melody at once.

Where was it coming from? It seemed to be all around. Very soon though I could determine that it was more nearly centered

on the tiny entré or hall (if an area three feet by five could be a “hall”) this side of the door to the stairwell.

Now actually from the bed in the southwest corner against the book-cases you can’t see the outer-door handle or, naturally, the key-hole. But I could. I could see the aperture, an inch high and about a sixth of an inch wide, that had been there since the management had installed safety locks about ten years before. The hole was bathed in a soft green milky light coming seemingly from outside.

Ozma and Dorothy came through the keyhole. Just like that.

Which “Ozma” and “Dorothy”? Well, the ones from Oz. You know.

But that’s crazy. Ozma never leaves Oz. The most she ever did was when she went to Ev in her second book, before the non-foreign-travel tradition set in. Oh, and one time when she stepped—or rather, got dumped—out on the Impassable Desert briefly in *A Fairy Queen in Oz*.

Dorothy, of course, is always gallivanting out in the outer world. She hadn’t been back too long from that expedition all around the Pacific: New Zealand, Alaska, etc.^s But even she doesn’t enter premises through keyholes.

Come to think of it though, I guess she could. When the ultimate disaster happened to Oz, Ozma’s (wise?) solution was to plump for reducing all animal life to a hundredth of its natural size. That provided plenty of room for the on-going floods of refugees to settle in Oz. It also made everybody half an inch tall and well able to go calling via keyholes.

In they flew. Flew? Well, Ozma’s a fairy and, though wingless, never wanted to give up the fairy prerogative of moving freely via the air.

But Dorothy then? She had hold of Ozma’s hand. I guess that’s all you need.

They landed on the counterpane.

“Good evening,” said Ozma of Oz.

Not panicking I answered, “Good evening, your highness.”

§ See *The Ten Woodmen of Oz*. Editor’s note.

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Actually she wasn't that 'high.' And yet again, higher than I'd thought. In fact, the two girls as they sat on the bed looked very much the size of (admittedly petite) normal young girls. A trick of perspective, I suppose. They *were* near enough to reach out and touch.

"Congratulations," offered Queen Ozma.

"Thank you!" I replied, in awe and delight. Then I ventured to ask: "On what occasion?"

"You're one of those invited to visit the Emerald City at this time."

"How marvelous!" I gushed. "I can't believe it. But I would still be pleased to know why I should receive such an honor."

"Everyone out in the world who has had anything even slightly constructive to do with the development of our fairyland is being invited to the big gala."

"A gala? It sounds like wonderful fun. But... is it for your grace's birthday party perhaps?"

Ozma laughed tinklingly, like the sound of fairy bells. "That's not 'til August!" she cried. "No; haven't you guessed?"

But dear Dorothy couldn't stand the mystification any longer. She blurted, "It's the hundredth anniversary of my arrival in Oz," and rubbed her nails on her lapel a bit ostentatiously.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

What a gab fest we had. The ladies didn't seem to be in any sort of hurry. I fetched a couple of ornamental pillows from the guest bed and plumped them up for them. I was glad I was wearing a longish nightshirt—which I didn't by any means always. But the headache had made me feel the need for even such flimsy comfort as a bed garment might afford. I didn't let on to my visitors that I'd been feeling under the weather. Indeed, I had never enjoyed talking about my health. Like religion it was a topic best kept to oneself, I'd always thought. When outright pressed for details I'd make a tale of comic contretemps out of it.

And yet, here I am, telling *you* all about it. Oh, well, "a foolish consistency..."

No, I was too keen to make all the comments and ask all the questions one has wanted to discuss all one's life. Like: what did it feel like to be an immortal? Didn't unagingness get to be a bit of a bind? Did one ever long for the 'reality' of the life of an ordinary mortal? Were there any things about Oz one would change if one could? How did you account for the fact that so many thoroughly disagreeable individuals, even whole communities, existed in what everyone readily conceded was the most attractive fairyland in the world?

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Or mundane things like: what was the favorite color of each of the two Oz girls? When was Dorothy's birthday? and which year was she born in? Which of the stories about her parentage that had got out was one to believe?[§] Did she know what had actually happened to her mother and father in the end? Where exactly was the original Kansas farm located?

There were a million questions, tiny and great, and we couldn't settle them all that night. After I'd served vanilla tea and my rock-hard own-baked macaroons I turned up the lamps and gave them a tour of my tiny quarters: 'flat' or 'apartment' is altogether too grand a word for it.

The two tripped around after me obligingly as I pointed out a few treasures. "Oh, how interesting," said Ozma politely. Dorothy didn't say anything.

The first item to catch the eye, as being at the outer end of a shelf in the free-standing bookcase that juts into the room, was the modest row of 'original' ("canonical") Oz volumes. "I've got the whole set," I explained, "—back in the States, in storage. These are just a few I brought over from time to time for background for various stories I was doing. *The Giant Horse*, for instance—"

"Of course," said Ozma. "For *The Good Witch of Oz*."

"That's right!" cried I, delighted, and caught myself in time from saying anything gauche like 'Gosh, has your majesty read my books?' Naturally a thoughtful sovereign like Princess Ozma would have done so. Being born to rule, she didn't need to spend her whole career in being a politician—with resultant inability to be a statesperson, philosopher, or just ordinary cultured individual. Ozma knew about art and thought, as well as mere mob psychology.

"There's *The Wizard*," remarked Dorothy.

"Yes. This is just a working copy, a stripped-down version with nothing attractive about it. But there, beside it, is a first-edition facsimile my brother gave me."

[§] See *Aunt Em & Uncle Henry in Oz* and *Uncle Henry & Aunt Em in Oz*. Editor's note.

"Keith?" said Ozma, amazing me.

"Yes! How did —"

"From his published reference to a book, *The Sorceress of Oz*. It actually exists, you know—in 'Alternate Oz'. He entered the pantheon that way. Pity he never actually got around to writing an Oz book on his own."

"Yes, I guess so." That had once been a regret of mine, but later on...well..

"Now, ladies, look at that edition of *Emerald City*. Isn't it a beauty? with the original metallic-bronze-green in the illustrations."

Ozma opened the volume thoughtfully. "'March Laumer... 1935,'" she read out. In my dear mum's beautiful handwriting. Memory flew back to the cardboard carton filled with things for Christmas that Mom had picked up on a little foraging trip of her own to the second-hand bookshops on Chippewa Street that we kids haunted. There were five or six Oz books in the lot but this was the one that had caught my imagination and that survived in my possession down the years.

"Speaking of inscriptions," I enthusiasticized, "what about this!" and I opened proudly to the "This Book Belongs To" page of *Captain Salt in Oz*:

"For March Laumer—

I'm wishing you here

Oz luck and Oz cheer

And enough fun to last you

A day and a year!

Ruth Plumly Thompson

July — 1956"

"Why, I declare," said Ozma. "That's in Miss Thompson's own handwriting!"

I marveled again. The little Oz ruler could recognize Oz authors' handwriting?!

"Yes, indeed," I bragged. "Miss Thompson and I had quite a correspondence when I was a boy. I was always impressed to death when I'd get a letter from her. Her letter paper half-sheets

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with a picture of a roly-poly in one corner got to be quite familiar to me. So the year *Captain Salt* was due out I asked her to send me an autographed copy, and this is it. *What* a thrill. Unfortunately the book itself is one of her lesser efforts. No story, really, just a travelogue—and I've always thought a travelogue about non-existent places is just a loss of time—"

"How do you mean, 'non-existent'?" put in Dorothy sharply—and I blushed crimson.

"How stupid can one get," I blundered, and changed the subject.

"Later I got to meet Miss Thompson," I reminisced.

"Some of us were at a writers' conference at Milford, Pennsylvania, in 1967: Keith and a girlfriend of his, and we invited her to lunch. She was just as charming and obliging as you could have wished. I remember the scene so plainly: she on my right, with her back to a south wall.

"I remember I made so bold as to ask her which was her *least* favorite of her books. I was nearly bowled over when she said *The Lost King of Oz*!! In fact, I was so astonished I never even got around to asking *why*—because *The Lost King* was just exactly my favorite of her books, along with *Royal Book* and *Gnome King*. Those are the three Ozziest books in the entire canon, for my money. The two 'King' books have the most quintessential Ozzy openings of any of the stories: that combination of the droll and the magical..."

"Yes, they're good," agreed the Oz ruler. "But I wonder why she—"

"Said she liked *Lost King* least?" I came back. "As I say, I wasn't quite bold enough to ask her for any details of a negative critique of her own writing but thinking it over later it struck me as quite obvious what she meant. I'm morally certain it was because she killed off Witch Mombi in that book—"

"Miss Thompson didn't 'kill off' Mombi," asserted Princess Ozma. "I had my foster mother destroyed! It sounds dreadful, stating it that way, doesn't it?! Miss Thompson merely recorded what happened. *She* shouldn't have felt any qualms."

“No, but I know what she meant,” I countered, speaking as a *soi disant* author myself. “People not in the know; people, that is, who think the stories are just made up, would accuse her of eliminating characters invented by the ‘onlie begettor’, Mr. Baum, which of course would be a most high-handed thing to do, and that would no doubt bother one’s conscience afterwards.”

“Hm,” mused Ozma. “I’m a bit sorry we got onto that topic. I’m the one who’s had conscience qualms all these years. I would give a great deal—now—to be able to bring back Mombi. She was a problem, and source of disasters, but after all...”

I had been given food for thought. For the moment, however, I sought only to turn the edge, to keep the dear princess from being disgratified by what was clearly going to be my only visit by her *ever*. Surely I wasn’t going to be cheated of the social success. Hastily I grabbed up another volume. It was—er, *The Gnome King of Oz*.

“See?” I urged. “The original—or nearly so—‘pale emerald’ binding, *and* with the first-edition full-color tipped-in illustrations. I remember I paid a dollar and a half for it—seems incredible, doesn’t it?—new! in the book section of a department store in downtown Buffalo. I think it must have been in 1934 or so. See: ‘Bum Laumer’: another brother. I gave it as a get-well present, I seem to remember. Speaking of get-well presents, look at this: *Pirates in Oz* with an inscription by my dad: ‘To March / July 31st 1935 / Daddy’.

“Isn’t that a fine bold handwriting? But you know what was most impressive about the gift? My father didn’t really approve of our reading the Oz books. He thought they were ‘for girls’—”

“Well, they are,” said Dorothy matter-of-factly.

I gaped and couldn’t help saying “What!?”

“Of course,” continued that famous young lady. “I mean, they’re *about* girls, aren’t they? All the heroes are heroines. [*This was of course poetic license on Dorothy’s part. In the canon as a whole there are many instances of boy heroes. Editor’s note.*] It’s well known

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that boys don't read books about girls. And all the fan letters came from girls."

Good heavens. Worlds seemed colliding. But Dorothy appeared to have thought rather deeply on the subject. "Can you imagine a *boy* reading *Alice in Wonderland*? 'Children' have it read to them—when they're too young for any distinction to be made about sex. *Men* read it; there's a reference in a war play, *Journey's End*. But boys, as such, are almost on their honor not to read anything that's mainly about the weak sex."

"But I devoured the Nancy Drew mysteries."

"Well—l," drawled Dorothy, implying volumes. But our sub-acid rivalry had been long known.

I flushed again. "Anyway, I thought it was great of Dad—when the chips were down—I was badly ill and in awful pain from an ear abcess—to give me for a get-well present what he knew I'd really love. And I'd never read *Pirates* before that either."

So we went on. Ozma wanted to see the originals of some of my own stories. I told her the manuscripts, in plastic bags, were all down in the cellar. Most of the typed texts as well, for xeroxing from. But here was the shelf filled with my own publications that were actually in print, including the whole set of Oz.

"I thought I came off best in *Fairy Queen*," mused the little fairy queen.

"I'm pleased, your highness," I acknowledged. "You understood, I'm sure, that you could be considered eponymous for that work—"

"Together with dear Queen Lurline, of course," the fairy replied with a smile.

"As a matter of fact," put in Dorothy, "I think I came out best there too. I didn't much like the treatment you gave me in *China Dog*."

"We both had egg on our faces in that one, didn't we, dear?" said Ozma a trace chidingly.

I was learning what it could entail to play fast and loose with living characters who could come to reproach one in the fullness

of time.

Once more Princess Ozma smoothed the waters. “*A Fairy Queen* was like *The Good Witch*, in which the reader is not quite certain which of two characters is alluded to in the title. There it was Glinda or Tattypoo/Orin/Diane.”

“What about *Frogman*?!” inserted Dorothy. “—with three eponyms.” She calmly coined a usage for which at least the others of us didn’t know a synonym.

You can envision how thrilled I was at all this talk of, and evident familiarity with, my books by these figures that, in all the world, one would most like to be noticed by. But then Queen Ozma looked at her two-way wrist radio-watch and said, “It’s been delightful but...”

Dorothy took a last cookie. “You’re right. It’s not far off daylight and we’ve far to go before we sleep.”

I was suddenly a-dither. “Oh, where’s my air mask?!”

“Never mind,” said Ozma comfortingly.

“Oh, I never go out without it, your grace,” I protested. “Besides, it’s Swedish law. If you’re caught outdoors without it, it means a stiff fine. It seems the state can’t do anything about the toxic levels of air pollution except enforce the wearing of the mask—”

“You won’t need it,” the queen murmured low.

I understood.

Without a backward glance I took the hand of the Queen of Oz, and with my other that of Princess Dorothy, and we advanced—somehow or other!—to the keyhole. There was a brief burst of tinkly bells and a glow of green light, infinitely soft...

C H A P T E R F O U R

Just the same I had pulled my Moroccan djellaba on over the nightshirt. Waltzing around in just the latter might look a bit too peculiar.

Ozma wasn't like Cinderella and having to get home before cock-crow. It was just that if she was ever to get home at all she'd better begin rounding up the roster of people due to be collected for participation in the gala.

So here we were, strung out for miles, it seemed—well, anyway for many yards: an infinite chain of people, holding hand to hand and hovering effortlessly on through the rainbow-colored light. (Ozma thought it would be too depressing for us, traveling on for hours through darkness at noon [courtesy of world-wide six-mile-deep smog], so she enchanted our eyes to see just varicolored light.)

I'd fallen back in the procession by now. Ozma had the charming custom of starting out with each newcomer at her own hand. Dorothy was also up front somewhere. But now I found myself holding hands with William Denslow and Jack Haley. Not that I had all that much to say to either of them. I'd always preferred John R. Neill's illustrations (he was farther along, still up nearer the head of the column) and regretted that Buddy Ebsen hadn't played the Tin Woodman. Still, they were worthy

personages and we made amiable small talk. The only one I really ducked out of greeting was Maud; I could never forgive her for burning all the manuscripts in the back yard.

Now there was a big treat coming up. We'd finally got to Philadelphia. I suppose Ozma had left it so long because there were so many people to join our train there: Peter and several of Button Bright's family and, most of all, Miss Thompson! and various of her (pertinent) relations and friends: all the dedicatees, naturally. I was all agog to see R.P.T. again. I wondered if she'd have the faintest recollection of me.

Word had filtered down the line that Miss Thompson was scheduled to meet us on the sidewalk in front of 254 South Farragut Terrace. Yes, I know the address is now that of a multistory car-park and the Afr-Am Crack Dispensary, but Ozma insisted that people were to be picked up in milieux they'd frequented in life.

The rainbow glow thinned and we could see reality. Yes, there they were. Gosh, what a crowd. Janet Thompson and Dorothy Thompson Curtiss, "Mother", Aunts Joe and Gertrude, Richard Sheaf Thompson and Richard Sheaf Junior, Olive Cromwell Curtiss and Dorothy Bispham Curtiss, Janet Ruth Thompson, Florence Linn Edsall and Mary Josephine Ritchie, Major William J. Hammer, George F. MacEwan, and Mabel Hammer Assheton, and in the center of the assembly tiny little Ruth P. herself, smiling, indeed laughing, and patting people—as all her characters always did. Ozma alighted, and the mob of us after her, and there were long-drawn scenes of welcome and cordiality. No danger of anybody there knowing who I was.

Then on again, to Long Island, where it developed that we were to collect William (Uncle Billy) Harmsworth. I was keen to see Speedy and his wife, having written quite a bit about them, but I was disappointed. Oh, not that they were to miss out on attendance at the gala. It was just that they could get there "on their own," whatever that meant. Ozma didn't specify.

Now we zagged back in the direction of Ohio. Jam was to join us there, and did. Another reshuffling of positions in the

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daisy chain. Word had been passed down that there was going to be a short interlude. Jack said in his fruity vaudeville diction, "Her Highness is reminding us that every proper expedition to the fairyland has to have a child in it. So far there's nobody. We're all of us old geezers—by definition! So she's planning to halt about here somewhere and pick out somebody. Let's watch."

The rate of advance had certainly slowed. Admittedly the whole thing had something of an air of unreality about it. For instance, as we flashed over them we could see through the varicolored smog farms and factories (mostly the latter) but we could feel no cold or wind and seemed to have no difficulty in breathing the thick smoky air. As far as we could tell, the sun was shining. At least we could distinguish no clouds round about or above us and certainly it wasn't raining.

We were leaving behind another of the great conurbations: Clevelanderie? or Detroitledo? and almost open fields were vaguely discernible. Yes, as Ozma guided us lower we could make out grey-green grass dotted with grey-yellow flowers and there in the middle of a meadow a couple of grey children, duly togged out in air masks.

They were running about rather haphazardly. Oh, yes, now we could see that they were chasing a big grey-orange butterfly. Gosh! Were there still butterflies? I'd forgotten. But then I suppose even such delicate creatures could develop strains resistant to mercury, lead, cadmium, and whatever else was tincturing the atmosphere so richly these days.

We stopped, just like that: in mid-air: another unrealness about our magical progress. We watched, all eighty of us as we by now approximately were. We had all long sensed that we couldn't be seen.

The children laughed with delight. Yes, laughing must be what they were doing that accounted for the rapid pulsing in- and outward of the soft parts of their cloth-and-metal masks. As far as could be made out from the unisex clothing they were a boy and a girl. Yes, one had long hair so that would be a boy.

The pair followed the fritillary into the middle of a patch of

dandelion flowers. Like butterflies, dandelions too had apparently developed resistant forms. Anyway there the plants stood, looking quite thriving despite the soot on their leaves and blossoms. The butterfly alighted on a particularly large flower that had gone to seed; of course all the delicate seed spills fell off and drifted to the ground.

Looking disconcerted the insect flapped on awkwardly to another plant. Here the muddy-yellow stamens gave a firmer footing. Slowly and quietly the pair of tots crept up on the butterfly.

Suddenly, just as the boy reached for it, the insect flew upward. "Oh, balls, Jimmy, you missed it," cried a girl voice. The pair watched their quarry flutter above their heads and disappear in the direction of the supposititious sun.

"Yeah, lover, looks like I did," admitted the boy called Jimmy affably. "Could you do any freakin' better?"

The girl didn't vouchsafe an answer but bent and carefully twisted from its stalk the flower head. Silently she lifted her mask, inclined her face, and blew on the yellowish blossom.

"What are you doing?" said Jimmy.

"Close your eyes," ordered the girl. Her companion complied, but that seemed to be the extent of any taking place of events.

Opening his eyes again the boy said, "What the suck are you doing?"

"You know the way we always wish on dandelions. I'm wishing we could go to Oz," replied the girl. (All of us in the aerial queue gave a start. But still greater coincidences than we could guess were lying in wait.)

"Oh, crap," said Jimmy mildly. "You can't wish on the freakin' fresh flowers! It's got to be one that's gone to seed." (To spare adult sensibilities we'll elide further reproduction of the children's expletives. But you get the idea.)

Instructed, the little girl made grabs at nearstanding seedheads but of course her abrupt movements instantly reduced each flower to loose-flying puffs of silk. "Go at it slowly,

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Sarah," warned Jimmy. "You picked that first, yellow bloom carefully enough."

Now the girl applied procedure to conditions and succeeded in severing from its roots an especially ethereal-looking seed-gone flower stem. Again with joined hands and closed eyes the children wished. "We want to go to Oz!" They both took deep breaths and blew.

It would seem that this was what fairy Ozma had been waiting for. Her hand was lying on her Magic Belt (which she never left home without). Was there now an infinitesimal pressure? The seed umbrellas swirled away from the children like a flurry of dusty snowflakes. As they settled down at a distance from the pair that pair vanished!

Word passed down the airborne line of pilgrims. "They're gone!" "Has Ozma sent them to Oz?!" "Anyway their wish has been granted."

We all understood that Jimmy and Sarah could not have joined our incorporeal travel train. But they would be in Oz and we would see them at the gala.

Then the rest of us moved on to Chicago to pick up Messrs. Reilly and Lee.

C H A P T E R F I V E

It was late afternoon when we alighted on the dome that covers Oz. When in her 'flightful' fairy phase Ozma chose not to make her entry via one of the vast ground-level gate doors. It was such a job getting them open, now that everyone was a hundredth of the size he had been when the twenty-four doors to Oz had been set up.

It was easier just to drop down on the slight peak in the center of the (blackened) dome, which was of course directly above the Palace of Magic in the exact middle of the Emerald City and of Oz. There was found a trapdoor for access to the fabulous fairyland below. Queen Lurline and her bunch would use it, for instance, when flying in for a state visit, or just to have tea.

Ozma herself pulled the ring. The trap lifted easily despite its size and then I got my first surprise. Regardless of all the times one had visited Oz in imagination certain aspects of the place had escaped one's attention. Did you know that the air of the magic land is at all times scented faintly but most delightfully? Not just routine flavors either, like roses or peppermint. It might be roasting coffee or the smell of beer brewing.

Also of course the waft of fresh hay and spearmint that struck

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our nostrils now was particularly remarkable in contrast to the awful stink of the untreated air outside, of which we caught a last whiff as we dived through the trap hole into the sea-green air within.

We let go hands now, Ozma setting the example for that. We were in Oz and couldn't be hurt by any free fall from no matter how great a height. Anyway, creatures less than an inch tall can hardly be damaged by a drop to earth whether in a fairyland or anywhere else or from whatever height, provided it be not bare rock or concrete they strike on. In our case it was grass.

Grass on top of the Palace of Magic? Well, no. Admittedly there is a little 'pent'-garden up there, on a flat part of the roof, where the Queen of Oz will sometimes invite visitors for a lawn party in secluded circumstances. But there is always a breeze circulating in Oz (carefully maintained by air-movement machinery now that the enclosed country is virtually cut off from outside weather influences). That breeze was sufficient to waft us featherweight travelers southwestward from the palace where we were all soon sprawling on the sward.

"Ooph!" said everybody and sat up and looked through the grass-straws. What now? But it was only a moment before our bemused comments turned to shrill screams.

Two dreadful giants were loping towards us from the direction of the great looming palace.

They didn't look to be paying much attention to where they were treading and the idea that they would be stepping on us in a very few moments was sharp in all our minds. We yelled and wanted to get out of the way, but which direction to run in?

Princess Ozma, however, must have been, as usual, wide awake and alert. I had no time to do more than realize that the pair of giants were Jimmy and Sarah (I recognized him by his hair) when they abruptly vanished.

When we had forgathered in the shade of a lawn sprinkler (now sadly corroded since there was no longer anyone big enough to operate the palace-plant machinery) and were waiting for the now suitably-sized youngsters to find us, we heard the

story. “You may be sure I did a double-take and cried ‘Oh, fudge!’,” related Ozma from her temporary throne in a buttercup, “when I saw that pair lurching about—”

But now those on the perimeter of our circle could pass the word that a couple of young children in masks had been sighted making their way along a path. Shouts went up, the tots pricked up their ears and began to trot forward toward the (now perfectly visible) crowd of us newcomers from America.

Ozma actually rose from her buttercup seat, a way was opened through the throng, and Jimmy and Sarah from Ohio advanced. As the little queen extended both her hands the children ran to her and gave her a bear hug each.

“You’re Ozma of Oz!” stated Sarah as the fairy adjusted her ear poppies and tried not to appear thrown off base by the energy of their greeting.

“Wow,” marveled Jimmy. “You really exist! Uncle said so, but you weren’t in the movie,” he accused.

At first the Queen didn’t know what he meant but she smiled benevolently as the two youngsters sat down crosslegged among the grass leaves at her feet. “Now we can get acquainted comfortably,” she vouchsafed.

“Would you believe it?” she again addressed the crowd. “I quite forgot about size when I wished our young friends to Oz. Traveling via Magic Belt they would of course retain their natural dimensions even here inside the fairyland. The rest of us, moving in a different mode and under the influence of fairy hand contact, would adapt to prevailing norms, so we were all the ‘right’ size already when we got here.

“We hadn’t seen the children’s faces but luckily I remembered what outfits they’d been wearing. Knowing who the two giants must be I had no hesitation—in an emergency such as this—in touching the belt and wishing them down to our size... By the way, my dears, you may put aside your air masks here in safely ventilated Oz.”

When she had done so the little girl, Sarah, looked up perkily into her hostess’ face. “Well, I’m Sarah, Princess Ozma,” she

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stated, “and this is my brother Jimmy.” Both children stood up again and took a bow, to general acclaim.

“Jimmy’,” mused the queen. “That’s a familiar name already here in Oz. In the palace stables lives Jim the Cabhorse. After his first visit here many years ago he came back later to stay with us for good[§].”

Jimmy looked around proudly. He was used to having the same name as a lot of other people (even animals) and regarded it as a little badge of worth. He felt a kinship with anyone else named James, Jim, or Jimmy and was sure he was going to be good friends with the old horse.

Meanwhile he had other plans. “Ozma,” he said, dropping titles and ignoring honorifics, “we want to go visit Jack Pumpkinhead. How about it?”

“Oh,” said Ozma, affecting to be delighted by the charming highhandedness. “I dare say that could be arranged. There’s plenty of time. The ‘gala’ is to be an all-summer festival. Such a trip might do very well as one of the program points. But why Jack in particular?”

“We want to be sure he’s real,” the boy explained. “You see, he wasn’t in the movie either, with the *real* Oz characters. Our uncle’s been reading us some books that are supposed to be about Oz but they’re so different from the movie and we’ve got so we don’t know what to believe. Like: were the magic slippers ruby or silver? Were the Good Witch of the North and Glinda the same person? Does the Cowardly Lion walk standing up on his back legs? That’s what we wanted to come to Oz for: to check out who’s lying.”

That was quite a speech for the little fellow and Ozma was impressed. A rustle of subdued comments passed through the crowd standing or sitting about.

“If it will do any good, I can assure you,” said the fairy queen, “that Jack Pumpkinhead does exist—and still looks very much as he’s pictured in the early history books.”

“That’s not good enough,” said Jimmy forthrightly. “We want

§ See *Jim the Cabhorse in Oz*. Editor’s note.

to see for ourselves. When can we start?" he demanded.

"You're asking me?" marveled the Girl Ruler. "Right away, I dare say." She didn't add 'the sooner, the better'.

So Ozma, Queen of All Oz (including the branch offices at Burzee and Aigues Strimes), led the way in procession to the Royal Palace.

The "Junior Palace", that is. In the year and more since the miniaturization of Oz the fairyland had been a beehive of busyness. In the Emerald City all those idle pebble-tossers in the tent city across the street in the park had been put to work as day laborers in the total new-building, to scale, of the Palace of Magic and its grounds, as well as in the rehousing of the whole population of the capital, now grown too tiny to be able to function in their old dome dwellings any longer.

The royal residence had been reproduced in miniature on the palace lawn at a distance from the windows of the old orangery. To it now led a wonderland of crisscrossing paths and lanes through the old greensward lawn. It had been O.Z. Diggs, the Wizard's, chief care to do a crash course in botany and plant engineering and thus produce strains of plants and flowers suitably reduced in scale to be of use to the now centimeter-tall inhabitants of the capital. Now in clearings in the grass forests were to be seen many charming glades of emerald lawn with grass-blades so tiny they could not be made out by the naked eye of normal-sized humans (had there been any such there to observe).

It was along one such path that Ozma led the way. In only twenty-five minutes (time units had not shrunk during the general miniaturization) the great concourse of Oz visitors, guided by the dainty princess and her closest advisers, had come up to the terrace before the junior palace.

There a new treat awaited Sarah and Jimmy—well, the rest of us too, but so far we were just spectators at the great pageant. Ranged in a more or less row at the top of the steps ahead stood all the famous Beasts of Oz, headed naturally by the crowned king of them all, the Courageous Lion.

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That was the beginning of the ‘re-education’ of the two representative American children. The great icon cupboard of American childhood, the film of *The Wizard of Oz*, underwent the first step in its gradual despoliation. The Lion was standing on all fours—and did not speak Brooklynes!

“How do you do?” said His Lionness when told who Sarah and Jimmy were.

“Hi, Lion!” greeted the two energetically. “Say, we want you to pull the Red Wagon when we go to see Jack Pumpkinhead.”

The Courageous Lion retired gravely backward upon his haunches and prepared to instruct. “Normally, here in Oz, we call each other by our names. Is that not so in America?”

“Sure! I called you ‘Lion’,” reported Jimmy foursquare with hands on hips.

“As I might call you ‘boy’,” returned His Majesty.

“Wait a minute! Aren’t you Mr. Cowardly Lion? So ‘Lion’'s your last name.”

“I presume you haven’t kept up with the literature[§],” opined the tawny beast. “It is long since established that my style is ‘Rex the X, Lion King of Beasts’. As for other appellations, the phrase, I believe, is ‘the Courageous Lion of Oz’.”

“Oh, well, pardon *me*,” said Jimmy, nettled. “Never mind. We’ll get the Sawhorse to pull the wagon.” He meant to add something like ‘We wouldn’t want to bother a *king* to do pedal labor’ but he was never very good at formulating sarcasm or irony in sufficiently hard-hitting terms.

“Yes,” chimed in Sarah. “So there, too!” She looked around. “Say, where *is* the Sawhorse?” She wanted to be sure he existed before she hitched him up; he wasn’t in the *Wizard* film either.

The wooden animal was skulking behind the Woozy some distance down the line. He didn’t say anything, but that was par for his course. Instead the gracious Queen of Oz had this to say: “I’m afraid the good Sawhorse is a mite tiny to pull *that*.”

With a suggestion of bright laughter the queen waved her

§ See “The Cowardly Lion Changes His Name” in *In Other Lands than Oz*. Editor’s note

sceptre in the direction of a vast red-painted construction that stood on the (to our witnesses) boulder-sized gravel before the state portals to the Old (large-scale) Palace in the distance.

“That’s where the Red Wagon was standing the time Witch Glinda the Good and I miniaturized the inhabitants of this country,” vouchsafed the ruler. “We left it there as a monument. However, there are plenty of small red wagons in the palace mews. Constructing them has given useful extra occupation to our carpenters and carriage-makers over the past year.”

“Oh, well, good,” commended the two youthful visitors. “That was bright of you. I guess you knew we’d need one if we ever decided to come to Oz.”

The fairy princess went all pink with pleasure at the praise of the winsome tots.

“But now,” went on Sarah, “shall we get on with it?” She’d finally spotted the wooden horse in the line-up of palace animals and she marched to him now and seized his bridle. Jimmy followed close behind.

“Come on then,” directed the girl. “Whadda ya waiting for?”

Sawks was of distinctly fourteen minds about whether he was going to lend himself to an expedition that, as far as he could see, was fairly unauthorized. He strained his neck against Sarah’s clutch on his leathers and looked to the potent potentate of Oz.

From a distance Queen Ozma gave a nod and a little wink. Anything to please a child—and, as a spin-off benefit, to spare the company the presence of these two for a few days.

Jimmy and Sarah dragged the Sawhorse away, although it was he who had to indicate the direction to the stables. When the kids didn’t turn up for dinner we figured they’d made it off on their expedition all right.

C H A P T E R S I X

"Miss Thompson?"

"Yes?"

"Forgive me for butting in but I felt I just had to be there when you meet, at last, Mr. Baum."

"Yes, that's just coming up, isn't it? I'll make a confession: I'm quite... nervous! But, have *we* met?"

"You and I? Oh, yes, but you might not remember that. It was ages ago: the summer of sixty-seven. Laumer?"

"Low Mare?"

"Yes; that's my name. Bit weird, isn't it?"

"Let's see: The Low Mare of Oz..? No, it doesn't convey much of a picture, does it?"

"Now that you mention it, I'd like to offer that as a book title for you. It was you who introduced horses to Oz! Very rightly too. But it never got properly explained how the race of equines made entry into Oz subsequent to Mr. Baum's writing flatly that there existed *no* horses here. Maybe the story could be told in *The Low Mare of Oz..?*"

"Might be. Let's throw it out as a title and see if anybody'll bat at it! But you mean, of course, no horses in Oz *Except sawhorses.*"

"Yes. That's a bit embarrassing, isn't it? If horses had never

been heard of in this country, how would people know that a wooden prop for sawing boards across vaguely resembled the shape of a horse, and thus be able to give the object that name? What do you think? Should we ask Mr. Baum?"

"Oh, I don't think I'd dare. You know, I always thought he just dashed these ideas off the top of his head, without bothering to check what he might have written elsewhere. He might think it awkward if we asked."

"I agree. I wouldn't want to discomfit the grand old gentleman. But, you know—oh, my apologies! of course, you wouldn't—but when I wrote I took it as axiomatic that every statement in the books, at least every one where the author is speaking as author, was true. That's why most of my tales were at least partly concerned with elucidations—which of course also were fact!—which the original authors had merely overlooked including..."

"Authors'? You mean you worked over others than Frank Baum? That kinda sounds like—"

"I do apologize! Well, yes, I did, for instance, spend a whole book making clear how it happened that for a time the Winkie and Munchkin countries got reversed, so the yellow one was in the east—"

"It *is* in the east. It was, every book I wrote anyway."

"Oh, dear Miss Thompson. I wouldn't, for the world, want to say anything to offend you but it states in the first line of Baum's *Magic of Oz*: 'On the east edge of the land of Oz, in the Munchkin Country...' The author's foreword there is dated nineteen-nineteen, which means Mr. B. went to his death believing east was blue, and yellow in the west."

"Don't be alarmed, my dear man. I'm not as tetchy as all that. It's true: the kids did write me now and then asking for explanations about the directions. But I couldn't keep flip-flopping on the orientation so I just let it ride. It's the fault of those idiots at Reilly and Lee—"

"Shh. They're standing just over there."

"Those *darlings* at Reilly and Lee, I meant, of course! Even

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so, they were numbskulls. Think of sending out a map with locations reversed and not saying a word to anybody. I was green in those first days and trying to keep in their good graces, so when I received that mailing of an Oz map and a letter saying ‘You will want to consult this when planning your stories,’ I thought it was company directive and I just complied. Then I was stuck with it.”

“We all understand perfectly. Nevertheless it *was* confusing. And yet after all it was fact. During the twenty years of your authorship the Munchkins *were* in the west. There was only wanting the book that explained how it happened to be so^s.”

“I never spent any time in explaining away booboos! I wanted to get on with new material.”

“Of course! I was the one who got a kick out of papering over cracks and so I was the one to do it. It all worked out nicely.”

“What’s that!?” interjected Miss Thompson. “Oh, gracious! It gave me a start. The gong for dinner It’s about time! May I take your arm?”

“I would be so honored.”

§ See *The Magic Mirror of Oz*. Editor’s note.

C H A P T E R S E V E N

The children arrived at Jack Pumpkinhead's pumpkin patch. Like Oz royalty, who are always found sitting on their thrones, Jack was always discovered doing something pumpkinly: hoeing among the plants or picking them or carving one into a jack-o' lantern. He was doing the latter as Jimmy and Sarah drove up. He grinned his wide Hallowe'en-head smile.

Sarah turned to look at Jimmy at the reins. "He exists all right," she constated.

"Yeah. I guess the books are right after all. That's three already we've confirmed that weren't in the movie."

"Oh, more. I noticed the Hungry Tiger and the Woozy and Hank the Mule in the line-up at Ozma's."

"Howdy, folks," inserted Jack and greeted the children warmly. To keep up a flow of welcoming small talk he went on: "You're in the yellow country of the Winkies in the western part of Oz."

"We know that," said Sarah. Then, looking aside to her brother again: "Well, come on. Might as well get on with it."

The two jumped off the red wagon, advanced to the gawky wooden figure that had risen to its feet, and joined hands to dance around the quaint celebrity. "The marvelous land of Oz!" they cried. "Our favorite fairyland!"

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Jack was touched and a couple of big pumpkin-juice tears rolled down his cheeks. The kids could be real charmers when they wanted to. Abruptly they stopped their joyful demonstration.

“Well..?” Sarah addressed the odd fellow.

Jack’s jack-o’ lantern smile went rigid. “‘Well’?”

“Well, aren’t you going to invite us to your pumpkin house to serve us pumpkin pie and Oz-cream?”

“Oh—*er*, yes, sure, of course. Right this way.” The amiable larrikin turned and led the way across the rutted pumpkin field toward the round orange house in the lane that skirted his farm.

The house was a normal-sized pumpkin of the sort that grew in Oz before the ‘smallification’. Nowadays of course Jack grew only the Wizard’s new strain of mini-vegetables. And the lane wherenext the pumpkin house was situated? It was as wide now in proportion to Oz residents as a football field.

Behind his host’s back Jimmy bent and deftly palmed the sharp kitchen knife Jack had been using to carve the pumpkin. Sarah aimed a swift kick at the half-finished jack-o’-lantern, which split and splattered (it was rather on the ripe side) satisfyingly. Having performed their tricks the children followed along for their treat.

Jack continued to make conversation as they went. “What brings me the pleasure o’ your visit?” he asked courteously.

Sarah was the better at quick extempore responses. “Princess Ozma, the Fairy Ruler of Oz, sent us to collect some pumpkins,” she fibbed easily. “She wants them to decorate her palace — for Hallowe’en.”

Jack did a double-take. “Hallowe’en?! But this is June.” To reassure himself of the truth of his statement he looked about him for some proof. His eye lit on a puff-headed white dandelion and his foot sent its spills flying. “See? it’s dandelion first-seeding time. Early June.”

“My sister got it wrong,” Jimmy jumped into the breach. “The princess wants ‘em for the big gala festival she’s holding. I suppose you’re going to that.”

“Oh, yes, I wouldn’t miss it. The hundredth anniversary of Princess Dorothy’s arrival! But I won’t be going to the Emerald City for a few weeks yet.”

“Oh, yes, you will!” cried the visitors gaily. “We want you to show us the way to the Scarecrow’s house. We’re going on there from here—before we head back.”

Jack grinned foolishly in acquiescence. It was nice to be wanted. And he could show the way as well as anybody, unless it be the Sawhorse, who was now following along taciturnly, dragging the little red wagon among the pumpkin hillocks.

Inside his fascinating maxi-pumpkin residence Jack headed for the freezer while the children looked around the orange-lit room. They also smelt around. Cut off the top of a big pumpkin and stick your head inside. That’s the way it smelt inside Jack’s house, only in spades. It was like sea-water in that it was unexpected, faintly distasteful, and yet after all likable.

Jack unwrapped a pre-baked pumpkin pie and slapped it in the microwave. “I’ll put it on medium—low,” he announced. “That way it’ll just be piping hot when we get back from the field. Come on.”

Naturally the children didn’t much like being told what to do and they hung back. But after all, they presently reflected, collecting some pumpkins was their own and only ostensible reason for being here, so they slowly followed outdoors and stood around while Jack deftly tweaked from their fleshy stems a dozen or so of the roundest and orangest of the melons. The kids even helped to load the sturdy fruits in the back of the wagon.

The pie was perfect. Sarah and Jimmy tucked into it with a will. The ginger-custard ice cream on top made it doubly tempting and before they knew what they were doing they had eaten the entire pie. “Oh, I feel sick!” complained Sarah.

“What the luck did we go and eat the whole thing for!” rued Jimmy. He went to be sick down the outside steps, but nothing came of it. He’d just have to live with his cholesterol.

Jack took the disappearance of the pie as an expression of

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appreciation and discounted the complaints. "Well, guys," he said, when the plates had been piled in the sink and forgotten, "may I invite you along for a ride to the Scarecrow's farm?"

Jimmy eyed him quizzically. "What do you mean? *We* invited *you*."

"That's right. So you did." Jack took the rebuff in good part. "Maybe what I meant is: shall we be starting?"

C H A P T E R E I G H T

This was it. Queen Ozma had taken her seat and she turned to the Royal Historian of Oz on her right and gestured further along the table on that side. "Sir," she said, "may I have the pleasure of introducing Miss Ruth Plumly Thompson?"

The Historian beamed genially. "Ruth who?" There was a brief awkward silence until the Oz queen said smoothly, "The lady who kept up the chronicles of our land after you laid down your pen."

Mr. Baum extended a nicotine-stained hand. "Delighted, I'm sure! Of course: the histories are all here, in the Royal Library. But when one has been a witness to events in the flesh one tends not to consult accounts of them at second hand. But certainly the name was mentioned to me—though admittedly never in life."

"That was my greatest regret, Mr. Baum," said Miss Thompson, "that I never had the experience of knowing you. Had I, perhaps I could have done a better job of carrying on in your tradition. As it is, I have a long overdue apology to make to you: for blaming *The Royal Book of Oz* on you."

"Ah, yes, the... er, *Royal Book*. Yes. I remember. No apologies in order! A sprightly tale—I remember it well—and a very good title, by the way. I must make a little acknowledgement myself:

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I always—though practice doesn't seem to have borne this out—had a liking for titles that were not just 'This-Person-or-That of Oz'. That way, I liked best of my own titles *The Road to Oz* and *The Magic of Oz*. *The Royal Book* somehow fits that tradition."

"Why, thank you. But I've got further apologies up my sleeve. I have just been admitting to our friend here that it was *lése-littérature* to switch the Munchkin and Winkie countries around. I hope you weren't too put out."

"Oh, those were exciting times," reminisced the first royal historian. "I took part myself in the councils of state whenever we'd be reminded of the directions switch. But just the same I'll admit I was glad when they finally settled down again in the old orientation."

"You're most kind, Mr. Baum," said Miss Thompson with a charming abashed smile, "but let me get this confessional over with while I'm at it. I did something awful—"

Everybody stared. Even officer Omby Amby who was serving as wine steward on this special occasion paused in refilling the Queen's glass with glowing Chateau Emeraude.

Miss Thompson knew how to pause for dramatic effect.

"That was *lése-littérature*, if you like, or *lése-auteurité*, or whatever you'd call it. Certainly if there's one thing you ought to do for an author it's to let his fictionally surviving characters go on living—if you have any say in the matter. I'd been handed your characters on a platter, and what did I do? In my very fifth book about the Oz fairyland I killed off your leading villain—villainess, rather. I'm not even going to attempt the effrontery of asking forgiveness for that. But I do want it on record—where you can hear it!—that I regret it. If I had it to do over, I wouldn't."

"Sportsmanly spoken," said Frank Baum with a round gesture. "We need not refer to the incident again." However, I noticed he did not go so far as to say he didn't mind Mombi's being destroyed.

Meanwhile the little Girl Ruler at the head of the table had grown pale. It was all very well for the chroniclers to sit here and pretend that they had any choices to make in what they

recorded, but *she* must bear responsibility for having actually authorized the execution of her foster mother. 'Rats!' she said, strictly to herself, in a seldom-used expletive, and looked solemn. More of her mis-mood she wouldn't let her celebrating subjects see. But her evening was ruined.

Nothing guessing, her guests chattered on. "Mr. Baum," Miss Thompson remarked, "if I do say so I think we complemented each other very well as authors of Oz. Whereas you, a man, populated the fairyland almost exclusively with girls, I, a woman, righted the balance by bringing a number of boy and men protagonists to Oz. I've always wanted to be reassured: I hope you approved...?"

"By all means, my dear. I always intended that the fairy country should be appealing to both girls and boys. But I'll let you in on a little secret: I'm afraid I did come to think of myself as writing mostly to (and hence, about) girls, for ninety per cent of my letters came from little girls."

"Oh, interesting!" exclaimed the later author. "Now I didn't notice anything like that. My fan mail seemed to come about fifty-fifty from both sexes."

"I know of at least one male who wrote you," I ventured to insert roguishly, and received the stare and uncertain smile I merited. Nothing daunted I forged on. "Miss Thompson," I gushed, "the one time I had the pleasure of meeting you I asked which of your own books you liked least—"

"What did I say?" put in the writer.

"Oh—er, *Lost King*: you know, where Mombi—er—" ("I wish he'd stop talking about that!" exclaimed Princess Ozma to herself. 'There!—he's reminded me again.') "Of course I ought to have asked which was your favorite!"

"*Kabumpo in Oz*," the historian shot right back. "Oh, yes, I think I can say without any hesitation the Elegant Elephant was one of my best inventions." (Good heavens, the way these people kept talking as if they'd made the whole thing up.)

There was a little chorus of approval from the diners sitting nearest and someone said, "Oh, yes! He's clearly one of the most

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distinctive characters in the whole Oz pantheon.” (I hope it wasn’t me because whoever it was was looking now at Mr. Baum as if he expected him to be not best pleased.)

To clear the air I hastily inserted: “You know, I always regretted that book wasn’t called ‘*The Elegant Elephant of Oz*’. Somehow I always like more the titles as ‘The Something-de-Something of Oz’ rather than just somebody’s name.” I seemed to be echoing Mr. Baum’s dictum. “Made-up names are a dime a dozen.”

“I charged more than that for mine,” said Miss T. waggishly.

Thus encouraged I pursued: “But I have to confess I didn’t like the title you chose there for the further reason that it ought properly to have been *Kabumpo of Oz*. Mr. Baum, what was your policy as to prepositions in your book titles?” I queried, and go ready to soak up wisdom at the feet of the master.

“Let me see,” said the sage and put down a fork weighted with roast beef (steak tomato!). “‘Prepositions in titles’? Do you mean like ‘The Wonderful Wizard of Oz’?”

“Yes, exactly! If you’ll forgive my impertinence, I assessed that title this way: Mr. Diggs here” (I nodded to the amiable Wizard seated across the table) “though not originally a resident of Oz, was, however, only a wizard *in* Oz. He was the Land of Oz’s Wizard, hence ‘The Wizard of Oz’. Is my reasoning just?”

“Well, yes. I think that’s quite fairly expressed,” conceded the Original Historian. “Normally my policy was: ‘of’ if the eponymous individual was by birth an Oz denizen, hence *Ozma of Oz*, but ‘in’ if the person of the title was only a visitor, or immigrant, as in *Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz*, even though here it was that same original Wizard ‘of’.”

“Just so,” I pushed on, encouraged, “and almost consequentially throughout your series: ‘The Patchwork Girl’, ‘Scarecrow’, ‘Tin Woodman’, and ‘Glinda of Oz’, whereas ‘Rinkitink *in* Oz’.”

“Just so,” Mr. Baum echoed my phrase and looked well content.

“But then,” my voice went grave—on several scores;

mournfully it continued: “—there’s *Tik-Tok of Oz...*”

“And then?” queried Mr. Baum, looking surprised.

“Well, but *Tik-Tok* wasn’t an Ozite originally. He came from Ev. I would have thought *Tik-Tok* in Oz.”

The author looked discomfited but Miss Thompson said gaily: “Oh, I never bothered with that! I wrote whatever sounded good: *Kabumpo in Oz*, *Ojo in Oz*, but *The Gnome King of Oz*.”

Ozma put in a word: “Ruggedo was certainly not ever a king of any part of Oz, however much he may have fancied himself so,” she stated primly.

“I think you do yourself an injustice,” I commended to Miss Thompson. “The larger part of your prepositions were after all the logical ones. Well, probably *Grampa* and the *Wishing Horse* ought to have swapped prepositions. The man was a native Ozite but the horse was not.”

“You’re right, no doubt—logically. But...” the authoress let her utterance trail away.

Suddenly I remembered something that I’d been shocked by all those years before in Philadelphia. The talk had come round to the use of logic in writing. I’d maintained that it had to be maintained carefully, no matter how frivolous the composition.

“Oh, pooh,” Miss Thompson had dismissed, “children care nothing about logic.”

Yes, I was shocked. Besides seeming to denigrate the character of children in one undifferentiated lump, the statement simply wasn’t true. Not if “logic” meant, as I thought, an insistence on a consequential following-through of principles once established.

“Children are *very* logical,” I’d protested, and gave the first example that came to mind: “I remember a little boy, child of a friend who was visiting, and he just learning to talk. He came in from playing and announced, ‘I goed out and I comed back’.”

But I didn’t want to drag up old disagreements. Instead I deflected the conversation back to Mr. Baum and said, “Speaking of logic, sir, I hope you won’t be distressed if I relate that one scene in your books never pleased me.”

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The Historian turned kindly to accept the further bombard. "Which was that?"

"The one at the end of *Road to Oz* where the characters are all sent home inside big soap bubbles."

The author looked disappointed. "I thought it seemed a rather charming and magical concept."

"Oh, indeed: pretty and graceful. But not logical. After all, it's stated they were 'soap' bubbles, not made of steel or aluminum or even reinforced rubber. If we were to believe they were made of blown soap-suds we would also have to believe they could never lift weights of up to more than a hundred pounds, or if they tried, that they would instantly burst, as soap bubbles do. No, much as I would have liked to, I just couldn't accord belief in that scene, and it spoiled the end of the book for me."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Baum. But it was ninety years too late to do anything about it now.

C H A P T E R N I N E

Jack Pumpkinhead sang a funny little song to help pass the time as the Sawhorse trotted merrily down the yellow brick road. Jimmy and Sarah quickly learned it and sang along.

Then Sarah grew bored. "Oh, put a sock in it, do," she sighed. "Yeah, knock it off, Jack," seconded Jimmy solidarily.

"I've been meaning to ask," went on Sarah, leaning over the side of the wagon. "Why are these bricks that queer color? That's not the way they were in the movie." The children had, of course clued Jack P. in as to their taking the classic Hollywood film as their bible and standard for how everything should be in Oz.

"Yeah," said Jimmy. "In the movie they were bright yellow, like butter—or egg yolks, or something."

"Gold?" suggested his sister.

"No, gold's gold-color, of course. Anyway, if Judy had seen they were gold she'd have dug up a couple and paid her own way home instead of all that bother about going to see a wizard."

"I guess that's right," acquiesced Sarah. "Just the same, these bricks are a very funny color. Sort of a greyish white, not a real yellow."

"They're the color yellow bricks *are*," protested Jack Pumpkinhead rather proprietorially. "Professor Wogglebug once told me that at the time Mr. Baum was writing his histories

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yellow bricks were used a lot for pavements and in building factories and churches and tenement houses. These are the color 'yellow bricks' *are*," he repeated.

"I don't like it," summed up Sarah. "When we get back to the Emerald City we'll get Ozma to change it."

Jimmy's interest had been deflected by Jack's mention of the Professor.

"He's another one," he announced. "Sarah, we'd better check out whether he exists either."

"Okay. Where does that wogglebug hang out, Jack?" said the girl. "Or is supposed to? We won't know for sure 'til we see it with our own eyes." However, the monotonous regularity with which things and people not shown in the M.G.M. film were proving to be real in the real Oz was wearing down the tots' scepticism. "After that we can go back and stay with Ozma again."

Even with relative distances so much greater in minimized Oz it was not long before the swiftly propelled red wagon reached the tower of the Scarecrow.

It was shaped exactly like a giant ear of Indian corn! And there was the right shade of yellow, if you like! Every rounded wooden panel that made up one of the 'kernels' of corn in the building's siding was painted a shiny buttercup hue. A clump of tall swaying wires of brownish-green ozyinium on top suggested corn tassels.

A treat was in store: when the sound of wagon wheels over bricks had been heard within *two* heads looked out the front door of the Scarecrow's dwelling.

It was the resident straw man and a man made of tin (actually, tin-plated steel—but never mind). Yes, the Tin Woodman just happened to be paying a visit to his great friend of a century's standing. All Oz was titillated by its being the centenary and people's thoughts went back nostalgically to the old times and awoke desires to re-meet.

As the carriage rolled to a stop the two men threw back the house door and came down the steps doing a soft-shoe number.

For just a second the kiddies could almost believe it was Ray and Jack. But then the Scarecrow fell down and rolled the rest of the way. He'd always been much too wobbly on his pins to manage anything like a dance step.

"Oh, nuts!" exclaimed the children gaily. "They don't look the least bit like Mr. Bolger and Mr. Haley!"

"Or even like Montgomery and Stone," added Jimmy, who had spent some time studying the endpapers of his uncle's early edition of *The Marvelous Land of Oz*.

"No," admitted Jack Pumpkinhead ruefully as he wound the reins around the whiffletree. "They just look like themselves."

Jimmy and Sarah ran and hugged the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman. That was the habit at home, now that the stiff and formal shaking of hands had become old-fashioned. Nowadays you hugged everybody, even the mailman or the guy coming to read the electric meter. It didn't mean anything.

However, in this case the two got a shock. The straw man was much too soft to be hugged. He squeezed all out of shape and fell down again. When the group had hauled him to his feet and poked him more or less into shape, the tots turned and hugged the tin(-steel) man. But he was much too hard to be hugged.

Sarah in her embraciatory enthusiasm got a bruised elbow and a scraped knee. She started to cry. But that was just what the doctor ordered. Nothing touched the soft heart of the Tin Woodman like a creature in distress. That heart went out to the weeping child, who at once became a firm and lasting favorite of his. With the very wariest of hands extended he drew her into the Scarecrow's house and went to find arnica, mercurochrome, and bandages.

Jimmy took more to the Scarecrow. Perhaps it was the attraction of man to man. Somehow there had always been a subtle but general and pervasive feeling that the Scarecrow was more macho than the Tin Woodman. Was it because of the touted hardness of the straw man's head, i.e., his sturdy intelligence, that contrasted with the famous softness of Nick Chopper's

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heart?

Already well immersed in meaningful conversation the two fellows followed along after the 'rescue' party into the house, leaving Jack Pumpkinhead to see to the wellbeing of the Sawhorse and the pumpkins for the period that they might have to wait outdoors.

The patient was comforted with lemonade and butter cookies. Wasn't it thoughtful of the two bachelors, who themselves could eat nothing, to have on hand a supply of such comestibles? And fresh too. Though still reasonably full of pumpkin pie Jimmy joined his sister with gusto in tucking into the goodies.

While they ate the children made up a reason for having come to the Scarecrow's house. It was out of curiosity, of course, to see the famous Ozite, but they didn't care to express such flattering interest as that. Instead—and not quite originally; it was the same excuse they'd used at Jack's—they blamed it all on Ozma. "She wants some ears of corn for decorations," they fibbed again. This time they didn't bother to pretend it was for Hallowe'en.

"Right!" said the Scarecrow. "I just happen to have some stalks with ripe ears."

"Yeah, we noticed," asserted Jimmy. "That's why we asked."

The fields surrounding the Scarecrow's corn-ear dwelling were a-rustle with maize stalks in all stages of maturity. Even the two Ohioans, who didn't pay all that much attention to the displays of nature, knew that normally fruits all ripen at about the same time. But Oz was like Florida, where one may see ripe oranges hanging on trees that also gaily sport fresh blossoms.

The Scarecrow fetched a couple of bushel baskets and the party went outdoors, where a good time was had by all in twisting from the towering cornstalks a harvest of fine cobs. When the load had been deposited among the pumpkins in the back of the red wagon, Jimmy looked judiciously at the sky and said, "Well, I guess we'll be on our way."

"Don't be silly, James," (Sarah sometimes called her brother

that when in a corrective mood), “it’s getting dark. We’ll stay here.”

Thus informed of his role as lodging supplier the Scarecrow fell in genially with a “Right-o. It’s time my bedrooms got a workout.” He pointed aloft at the five further stories of the house above the ground-level apartments. “Those are all bedrooms—and I’ve never yet filled ‘em all up.”

“We’ll have to see about that,” offered the helpful Jimmy. “Maybe we’ll give a house party for you” —by which of course he did not mean ‘We’ll invite you to a party’ but rather ‘We’ll announce a party for you to play host to.’ Sarah started planning the guest list.

As it happened it was as well that the travelers stayed over. In making conversation with his guests the Scarecrow happened to ask how they came to be in Oz.

“We wished on a magic dandelion!” boasted Jimmy.

“In Ohio?” The thoughtful Scarecrow looked puzzled.

“Sure, Ohio. Why not?” Jimmy flared up. “Why shouldn’t there be magic dandelions in Ohio?”

“It’s not a case of whether they ‘should’ or not,” explained the Scarecrow mildly. “I just never heard that there *were* magic flowers there. When one knows that a condition has never been heard of one tends to think it *could* not be heard of. I’m just surprised, that’s all.”

“It is a little bit queer, Jimmy,” admitted Sarah. “We’ve wished on dandelions hundreds of times before and it never came true. Why did it this time?”

“That’s what I wondered,” resumed the Scarecrow. His burlap brow wrinkled in thought. “It must have been a magic dandelion, sure enough. But how did a magic flower come to be growing in the great outside world?”

“How does *anything* come to be growing out there?” put in Nick Chopper caustically. He remembered only too well how corrosive polluted air had devastated even metal in the dicey days before Oz had been roofed over.[§]

§ See *The Ten Woodmen of Oz*. Editor’s note.

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“Resistant strains will of course have developed,” reminded the Scarecrow and then lectured for twenty minutes on biology, botany, and the survival of the fittest, most adaptable, individuals.

“Just the same,” he then resumed, “I don’t see how a wish-granting dandelion type could have occurred in Ohio,” and a little later he said, “I’d like to consult the learned Professor Wogglebug about this.”

Jimmy looked at Sarah and they both shrugged their shoulders. Finally, “Come on along then,” said Jimmy. “I guess we can cram you in the wagon somewhere.”

“What about you, Nick?” asked Sarah. It almost sounded like she might be encouraging him to join the party.

Thus urged of course the amiable Tin Woodman gave his assent. The group adjourned for the night, quite looking forward to what the morrow might bring.

C H A P T E R T E N

After the thrills of the grand dinner party on the night of our arrival we outer-world visitors spent the next day resting up. But the invigorating air of Oz didn't foster lassitude or idleness. We wanted to be doing things. It seemed that our stay in the fairy capital was to be open-ended. I had no idea what my hostesses had in mind for me but my own nature had always been such that I couldn't just drift, waiting to see what might happen.

When, therefore, the third day dawned and, after my breakfast in bed, nobody appeared to tell me what the day's program was, I made one for myself. I stood at my open window looking down on the crowds that milled about the palace and especially at the vast looming green marble walls of the 'once—and future?' capitol of Oz that towered a hundred (old-style) yards away.

Even though it remained vastly out of proportion to all mobile life in Oz today, that huge barn was the one and original Palace of Magic. I wanted most earnestly to see it, to observe whether my imaginings of all the years matched the reality. I knew that it was kept unchanged. In the course of talk it had come out that nothing in the great palace had been altered since that day, a year and a half before, when master-magic had made

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everyone alive in Oz minuscule.

“Alive,” I say, for the first thing of all I wanted to see at the old premises was a huge copper statue that stood in the central hall. It was a famous celebrity of Oz from the very early days but one who had been ‘left behind’ when all the living breathing world had been minified, for this was Tik-Tok, the Clockwork Man, who “thought, spoke, acted, and did everything but live.”

Now he stood where he had stood when his works ran down after the great transformation.

When Queen Ozma of Oz in collaboration with the all-powerful Sorceress of the South had effected the vast change she intended it as a one-time-only stroke. She knew that she had far overreached her prerogative when she thus high-handedly, without consulting anyone, reduced all mobile life in her kingdom to one hundredth of its size. She would dabble no more in magic. “Now my charms are all o’erthrown,” she quoted. Actually that wasn’t strictly true, but she knew what she meant. “And what strength I have’s my own—which is most faint.”

In fact she still had the Magic Belt, also phenomenally reduced in dimensions (though not in power) through having been worn by her at the moment of the enchantment. Ozma also had her magic wand, though this was an instrument she somehow rarely invoked. But she would not use these tools for chopping and changing in the one broad area of size manipulation now she had made her master stroke.

Therefore she knew her first pang of chagrin at what she had done when she, grown infinitesimal, together with tiny Glinda ventured out from under the rococo chair in the library and the two made their way minutely to other chambers of the palace. The first that there did greet their stranger souls was the huge looming copper form of the mechanical man stalking flat-footed along the marble corridor.

“Prin-cess Oz-ma!” he called. “Dor-o-thy! Wi-zard! Where is ev-ry-bo-dy?”

Ozma screamed a greeting but the clank of his own metal feet drowned out the sound for the copper man. Only when

Glinda joined the chorus, and also blew on her wizard-whistle, was the sound loud enough to attract the attention of the old favorite.

He looked around, then down. He had to be sharp-eyed to see the couple, infinitesimal as they were, but he was.

Carefully he angled himself down on his knees and inclined his spherical body. Luckily his copper derby was well screwed to his copper head so it did not fall off and annihilate the two minute women as Tik-Tok's head loomed over them.

Ozma knew the deliberately thinking man would not instantly comprehend who she was or what had happened, so her first words were "Tik-Tok! This is your Queen—Ozma! There has been a great change. You won't any longer find any of your friends. I'm sorry! But don't be sad. Above all, don't go outdoors!

"There," she went on in more normal tones to Glinda. "I forgot. We might have included him, by a special clause, in the spell. It's too late now. No use in explaining the whole arrangement to him and just making him unhappy. He'll merely be puzzled—until he runs down. But I wanted to be sure *that* didn't happen outside, where he'd stand and corrode in the elements."

"I see," assented Glinda. "I suppose we *might* manage somehow to keep him wound up—by magic means."

"I don't want to cut corners; start hedging on the one bold magic stroke," returned Ozma earnestly. "Solving by natural means the problems that our creation of more space has brought will be our business now. Tik-Tok won't *die*, having never been alive, but what's the sense of having him roaming about the region now, all alone? And probably, all unknowing, trampling people under foot..."

So they let him go and eventually, in the great entrance hall of the Palace of Magic, he came to a stop forever—or until further notice.

That was where I found him now, when I joined one of the guided tours that left every hour to make the circuit of the palace rooms.

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How fabulous to stand at the feet of the great copper colossus. I came almost up to the level of the top of the sole of his spatted shoe. I reached and touched it: this shoe sole that had rested down a well in Ev for weeks until Miss Betsy Bobbin had hauled him back to the light of day.

By the way, that was something I'd want to bring up with the Royal Historian when next we met: how it was that, whereas the competently tin-plated Woodman could be counted on to rust solid even when sprinkled with a few tears, no one ever referred to any danger that the equally metal man from the workshops of Smith and Tinker might undergo if exposed to the elements. If tin-plate steel will rust, copper will go powder-green with verdigris after a reasonable time in the rain, or even down a dry well.

Still, wise Ozma had seen to it that Tik-Tok wasn't in the rain now. I stared upward at his round old-fashioned face. No one in the westernized world since the death of Hercule Poirot wore that kind of curly moustache. And the middle-parted hair. Well, of course no one nowadays combed his hair, let alone parted it, but if he did it wouldn't be in the middle.

But the tour party was moving on and I trotted to catch up. We plodded through state apartment after state apartment. Obviously it was fascinating to see Ozma's ancient throne and the Hall of the Magic Picture. There they allowed a few of the tour party to direct the painting to show desired scenes, but these turned out to be mostly the whereabouts of relatives not present with the tourists and the greater part were in the outside world, where of course little could be distinguished through the eddying clouds of smog.

More than a few of us were getting cricks in our necks from heads strained to look up at eighty-to-ninety-degree angles the whole time. We began to wish the tour were over with but we had been at it for only one and a half hours so far. There was still half the palace to navigate and that on the ground floor only. Hopeless to think, for instance, of scaling the winding stairway to the Wizard's tower.

The great doors in the Palace remained as they had stood at the moment of Ozma's transformation. This meant that most were neatly closed but of course that was no impediment to our entering the chambers. The doors were not close-fitted to sills and at one and a half centimeters tall we could all comfortably get under them. We duly entered each room we came to.

All but one.

From under a door down a hall leading to the palace gardens came a curious smell, and not a pleasant one. But the guide hurried us past that door and without an explanation. My curiosity was piqued. I thought I knew, by report, every room in the palace, at least all those on the ground level. But which was this?

Not a large room, because the next door, which was duly entered, was not far along. But I didn't follow the rest. I was tiring and felt I wouldn't, in any case, complete the tour. I fell behind, then outright turned back. I wanted to have a look.

Holding my nose against the really quite offensive smell I crawled under the mysterious door and into a small (but still, to me at my size, spacious) cubicle. It had the look of a general utility room, part office, part tool shed. And yet, being situated in a royal palace, it had appointments of some amenity: a carpet on the floor, some chairs against the wall, a small table, curtains (though of hessian) at the windows. Or was it a detention cell? The two not large windows were barred.

As for the bad smell, its source was not quite obvious. It seemed to infect the room generally but was perhaps concentrated slightly more in the surprisingly worn-looking old rug than elsewhere. What *was* that haunting fragrance? Dust, for one thing, and dirty dust too, if you take my meaning. Then was there not a faint admixture of preservative: formaldehyde or chloroform or something? But overriding those stinks was, I'm sorry to say, a distinct aroma of corpse.

How had Princess Ozma come to let any such thing persist in the royal palace? No wonder the room was closed to tourists. I couldn't fault that prohibition.

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Slowly I turned and made my way out of room and vast palace, deep in thought. That night at dinner, sitting between the Wizard and Mayre Griffith, I brought up the topic.

"I did the guided tour of the Old Palace today," I informed my neighbors. "*Most* interesting. But there is one detail I thought I'd better bring to your attention, Mr. Diggs." I lowered my voice. "One of the apartments not open to the public needs airing rather badly, I think."

"Oh?" said the genial Wizard. "Which was that?"

"A name for the—er, chamber wasn't mentioned but it is..." I gave an orientation for the room in relation to the Throne Room.

"Oh," repeated my interlocutor in a falling tone. He appeared embarrassed, then, "Yes, I'm sure you're right. I—that is—well, don't be concerned; the matter will be looked into. Something will be done."

It was clear the topic was one best not discussed at the royal dinner table. I let it drop.

But a day or two later I joined another party going through the Old Palace. With great interest I waited to see what had been done about what I was coming to think of as "the Stinky Room."

Already when I sensed the odor several inches (like yards, to me) from the doorsill of the mysterious room I divined the worst. A glance confirmed it. Nothing had been done.

C H A P T E R

E L E V E N

Jimmy and Sarah got out of their twin beds, all agog at what excitements the day would bring. They ran to wake everybody up.

In the Scarecrow's roomy kitchen they found their host, Nick Chopper, and Jack Pumpkinhead sitting around the old deal table, having a deal. "Oh," said the children. "You're already up." A just perceptible hint of reproach was in their voices.

"Actually, we never went to bed," confessed the Tin Woodman. "We can't sleep, you know. We've been playing cards all night."

"Deal you in?" invited the Scarecrow kindly. "What's your game? Black-jack?"

"I like five-card stud," revealed Jimmy. Then they had a few rounds while Pumpkinhead fried some flapjacks.

Fortified by breakfast the children were eager to be off. The Scarecrow closed up his corncob house and they all went to join the patient Sawhorse who had stood in the traces all night long, not thinking much of anything. (I'm sure I wouldn't have thought much of such treatment either.)

"Giddy-Ap! Away!" cried the excited tots and used the whip freely, until the Scarecrow shook his head discreetly but pointedly.

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“Sawks could turn balky,” he explained in a low voice, “if one tries to ride too much herd of him.”

To cover their confusion the brother and sister broke into song, giving a lively rendition of one of Jack P’s funny songs from the day before, substituting a different tune and making up their own words as they went along. It went something like this:

“Hurry up, babuh!
Gotta git there, babuh.
Ye-uhh! babuh—gotta GIT there.
So hurry on, babuh!
Where we goin’, babuh?
Doan know, babuh.
Who cares, babuh?—”

At this point Sarah interpolated: “Of course we know where we’re going! It’s to Professor Wogglebug at the Royal College, located in Munchkinland around on the other side of the Emerald City.” She suddenly remembered the map Ozma had given them on their departure from the capital.

The party had been heading vaguely southwest but now for a moment they didn’t head anywhere at all. Sarah had called a halt. “How stupid!” she cried. “What idiot planned this trip?!” She might well have used the plural as there had been two planners.

“What’s the matter now?” asked the Tin Woodman indulgently.

“Well, look.” Sarah pointed at the map accusingly. “This thing shows Jack’s house just across the border from the green country, inside the yellow one, and then your place, Scarecrow, farther on to the west. But this Wogglebug college is right in the opposite direction. We’re gonna have to go right straight back through the District of Oz to get there. How boring!”

Jimmy confirmed what his sister had said. “Yeah. Slit! We don’t want to just go back the same way we came. Maybe we better not go to this professor’s place at all.”

“Oh, come on,” cajoled the Scarecrow. “After you’ve

brought us out so far and made us trot so quick? At least Sawks here. I wanted to consult H.M. about your magic dandelion, you know."

"Brawls, Jimmy, that's right," conceded Sarah. "We want to get to the bottom of that mystery. Let's go on. Only—" Here she consulted the map again, "—this shows the directest way there would be along this river, the—um—'Winkie River'," she read. "What if we tried to *sail* there? There seems to be a waterway the whole way."

"That's the river that flows past my property," informed the Scarecrow. "But here it's veered away from the road."

"Hm." Tin Woodman rubbed his chin and looked judicious. "Water." He was known not to be too fond of the corrosive element. He remembered a time when he and his old pal, the Scarecrow, had voyaged on that very river and with what an unfortunate issue^s. Still, second time could be the charm and he could even supply the information that there were ferrymen to be engaged at all crossing points not provided with bridges. Perhaps one of them...?

"Well, o—*kay!*" encouraged Jimmy. "Drive on!" The Scarecrow could inform them that the river would be coming up again shortly, and the Sawhorse startled everyone by actually saying something: "That's right," he vouchsafed. "I can smell water ahead."

In fact the little road they were following proved to be one of those it had not been considered necessary to link to the opposite shore with a bridge. When the tiny wagon drew up on the bank of the vast river there was nothing to indicate that travelers might ever be able to get to the other side dimly visible in the distance. But then, far away, they saw a moving point on the river surface. In only a few hours it had reached their bank and they saw that *lo* it *was* a flat-bottomed ferry raft.

Nor was the ferryman the sort of uncooperative brute that

§ See "The Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman" in *The Little Wizard Stories of Oz* Editor's note.

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Princess Ozma had encountered on one of her escapades disguised as a boy[§]. This one showed himself to be quite amiable as he leaned against the guard rail and stuffed his pipe with dried corn silk. “Mr. Wogglebug’s college, eh? Yeah, you can get there by the river road all right. Have to crank up the help motor once we get past Lake Quad, o’ course. You’ll be goin’ *upstream* there. But it can be done.”

The children danced for joy and insisted on hugging the ferryman. So they set sail; that is to say, hauled up the anchor rock and began to pole down-stream.

It was still not late when they arrived on the broad bosom of green Lake Quad. One fitting side effect of Queen Ozma’s miniaturization of Oz denizens was that the modest pond in the grounds of the royal Palace of Magic now really did strike observers as a true “lake.” It took our heroes two hours to cross it.

In that time there was opportunity for the launch party to be discovered by various creatures who made their home near the lake. Lurabelle Ladybird and Bettina Butterfly came winging along and paused to rest on the guard rail.

“Oh, a butterfly!” cried Jimmy, delighted, and made a grab for the tiny celebrity.

Now no one had made a grab for Bettina in almost longer than she could remember, not for a great many years in any case. Since that alarming affair of the search for the wing of a yellow butterfly to facilitate some magic spell or other, thought expedient at the time^{§§}, no one had dreamed of dewinging butterflies in Oz or indeed of making any aggressive moves against them at all. Thus the pretty pink fritillary was caught off guard and did not move fast enough.

Jimmy got his wish, or if not an avowed wish an overt intention. He caught the butterfly in his hand and closed it, sharply if involuntarily, crushing the insect’s wings.

He was a bit startled at what he’d succeeded in doing and

§ See *The Mysterious Chronicle’s of Oz* by Onyx Madden.

§§ *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* and *The China Dog in Oz*. Editor’s notes.

opened his hand at once, whereupon Bettina fell to the deck of the ferry-raft and lay stunned. Not so Lurabelle the Ladybug, who circled fast down to her fallen friend uttering the tiniest (though full-voiced) screams anyone had ever heard.

This was a contretemps for sure. Everyone stopped dead in his tracks, even the ferryman forgetting to steer. Both Nick Chopper and, when she heard him doing it, Sarah burst into tears. Jack Pumpkinhead and the Sawhorse eyed each other worriedly. It was left to the Scarecrow to look at the little boy sternly though almost at a loss for words of reproach for such a sin.

Jimmy tried to bluster it out. "What's the matter? We catch butterflies all the time in Ohio. We pin 'em to a big board Uncle's got in his study room. We've got forty-one different kinds already..."

The Scarecrow said, "We don't *brag* about *murder* in Oz."

Maybe that was the beginning of learning for the American boy.

The Scarecrow was going on: "Luckily this *is* Oz. The butterfly isn't dead — though it must be suffering greatly." Bettina still had not stirred, or spoken to reveal the extent of her agony. "We must get her to hospital quickly. But how —"

Lurabelle Ladybug had ceased her screaming and moaning and now sprang into action. "Gloria Swan!" she cried. "We passed her on the lake just before we reached here. Quick! you people: can you see a swan anywhere on the water?"

The alert ferryman had already noted one such and now addressed the tiny polka-dotted insect. (You may be sure she was tiny: a hundredth of the normal size of a ladybird?) "Shall I call to it for you?! What's your name?"

He could only barely hear the reply but boomed it forward across the green water. Gloria Swan looked round regally but when she heard the ferryman's message she dropped all posing, swept rapidly into flight, and a moment later flopped down beside the raft.

People had stopped crying by now and got busy with first

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aid. The shamefast Jimmy supplied a handkerchief, not too dirty, and Sarah, with tear-streaked face, knotted two ends of it into a loose sling, in which they laid the comatose butterfly. Lurabelle scurried to nestle in Gloria's nape feathers while the bird lifted the handkerchief sling cautiously in her beak. She looked gravely around for directions.

"To the emergency ward at the Royal College infirmary, Madam Swan!" commanded the Scarecrow. "With all speed! And thank you!"

There was no need to thank Gloria Swan who had been the two insects' great friend and confidante for many decades. It was the least she could do in this misadventure.

The stricken ferry party watched her fly off to the east. Then they turned and looked, with hands on hips, at the unfortunate Jimmy.

C H A P T E R

T W E L V E

I was, frankly, bored.

Imagine: bored in Oz! It's like being bored in heaven. But just think if you *were* in heaven and wearing a long dress and wings and strumming a lyre and singing the same old songs of praise around the feet of God age after age. It would be heavenly but after a time also boring. It wouldn't seem to be getting one anywhere, nor would anything constructive seem to be being accomplished.

All the regular denizens of the (New) Palace of Magic had their daily routines of useful things to do. We newcomers didn't. Of course a great many were content just to sit and read Oz books in the lounge or library while sucking (innocuous) "dope"-sticks. Others played croquet or shuffleboard all day on the lawns or grounds, or strayed in the gardens, or rowed on Lake Quad.

But I, perhaps perversely, needed a project, and I soon found one. I had not been a week in the Emerald City when I made my way up the 708 steps to the door of Wizard Diggs' laboratory. Even at my age I could still manage that without undue strain.

The genial Wizard opened at once and I was soon in full flight of a tour of his work benches and magical paraphernalia. Here was something to cure boredom! And for half an hour I looked fascinatedly.

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My problem was, I knew, not going to go away permanently. “Professor Diggs,” said I (this honorific was always used, at least, in the Wizard’s own sanctum), “I need to feel useful... And I’ve thought of a way how...”

I waited to be encouraged by my kindly host and he duly said the animating words.

“We spoke once,” I pursued, “of a certain room in the Old Palace. It is one I think of, to myself, as the—er, ‘Odiferous Chamber’,” I euphemized after a hesitant instant.

But the Wizard was looking uncomfortable himself. He only admitted, “I remember.”

“I don’t want to probe!” I hastened to reassure. “I quite realize that for some reason the phenomenon is one that strikes the Court as awkward—not to use any stronger word. But still the fact remains that the situation is one I, and, I think, many, would consider not suitable for what is after all the most venerated building in Oz. I would like to offer a suggestion...”

“Oh, do, by all means,” encouraged Diggs with an expression on his face both sympathetic and wary.

“I have been to the room several times,” I related. “I have tried as well as I could to determine more nearly the source of the—er, disturbance. I believe myself to have ascertained that the seat of the trouble is the curiously threadbare old carpet that covers the entire floor.”

“Mm, well, yes,” said the Wizard. “You may well be right...”

“I have thought that if the carpet could be got out of the room... and destroyed—it would seem to be beyond repair—”

“Oh, no!” the Wizard startled me by exclaiming. “That would never do!”

I confess I goggled. This matter clearly lay nearer palace sensibilities than even I had guessed. “I assure you,” I hastened to repeat, “I will not press for explanations! I retract the suggestion of destruction.

“But cleaning... We know the gracious Ozma is particularly fastidious in matters of dirt and disorder[§]. She cannot want the

§ See “The Woozy’s Sticky End” in *In Other Lands Than Oz*. Editor’s note.

source of smells to remain unattended to in the nation's capitol where every day hundreds of tourists—"

The Wizard broke me off. "Granted. We would like to put an end to the nuisance. But how? Our beloved Princess has set her face against any further manipulation of size—unless it might be some extreme case of life or destruction, which this clearly is not. How would you propose to convey the—to us—vast carpet out of the room for any project of decontamination?"

"It is just that point that I have done sober cogitation upon," I announced. "For the transport of the undiminished great rug we would need the assistance of an undiminished person. That is, if Princess Ozma did not see fit to arrange dry-cleaning by magic means..."

"Ozma is to be left out of this!" barked Diggs. "It is a matter she finds personally extremely repugnant."

Odder and odder. Never mind. I had been doing my mental homework. I proceeded: "There remains an unshrunk personage from the old days, and a strong and tireless one too. I refer to the worthy Tik-Tok, the Mechanical Man of Ev and Oz. Do you think—?"

"The very idea!" enthusiasticized the Wizard gratifyingly. "He could have that carpet rolled up and out of there in no time. Let me see; I don't quite remember: is Tik-Tok wired to smell?"

"Yes, indeed, sir," I was able to remind. "He does *everything* but live."

But Diggs was cogitating on aloud and had soon hit on the problem I had long mulled over myself: how to wind up the colossal copper robot?

"Do you," I began, "think Ozma—" I finished—abruptly.

The Wizard had broken me off with "Forget it! Ozma—"

"—doesn't want to know!" I broke *him* off. "I know. But all we need is one little—well, perhaps not *so* little—magic act. Tik-Tok's key is hanging there on him, right under his left—er, shoulder blade. If only we could get it introduced into his wind-up hole—and then..."

"Don't look at *me*," warned the Wizard. "Naturally I have

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sworn to go along with our dear princess in not doing anything to seem to counteract the smallification. I mustn't expand myself even for a moment to wind him up."

"And yet," I puzzled, "the actual winding up wouldn't seem to be verboten. It's a perfectly normal mechanical act, just made impossible by our size. Hmm." It looked like magic was what was wanted after all.

Diggs was following my thinking. "Glinda!" he suddenly exclaimed. "The great Sorceress of the South. She was in on the reduction from the start. In fact, her spells played almost as large a role as the Magic Belt in bringing off the enchantment. And I have never heard that she took any vow not to meddle with the minification..."

"We wouldn't be 'meddling' with that, in actual fact," I reassured. "We simply need to do a single act that requires size to bring it off. Sorceress Glinda would surely be able to suggest something..."

C H A P T E R T H I R T E E N

The Ohio tots, properly contrite, would of course not leave Bettina Butterfly's hospital bedside until she was off the critical list. There she hung, both wings in traction, and just moaned slightly now and then. Lurabelle Ladybird in nurse's cap and protective green gown buzzed about, coddling the patient.

Thus had the travelers found them when, proceeding of necessity more slowly on the ferry, they had finally come ashore in blue Munchkinland and the swift Sawhorse had whirled them to the steps of the Royal College. Registrar Fex had reassured them that the patient had been rushed into intensive care the moment Madame Swan had deposited her on the roof of the (newly reconstructed in miniature) college infirmary. Professor Wogglebug and the chief of the Medical School met them at the doors of the casualty ward.

"How is she, doctor?" spoke Nick Chopper earnestly.

"She'll live," assured that worthy. Of course, this being Oz, that had not been in doubt but the anxious party needed to know more. Bettina wasn't going to be an invalid?! She would re-emerge as the gracious raspberry-pink flutterby they knew of old? "It's touch and go," admitted the physician.

The party passed to Bettina's bedside and silently Jimmy laid on the counterpane a bouquet of tiny forgetmenots the children

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had gathered on their way up from the river. Some thought they saw the invalid smile and no one reflected that Jimmy was perhaps that one in all the world Bettina most might like to forget.

The worried friends took up the bedside vigil but of course no one stayed there twenty-four hours a day. Other matters also claimed attention. For one thing, there was the ever-present problem of feeding.

"Are you hungry, my friends?" asked Professor Wogglebug as they sat on blue velvet couches in the college library, to which several of the visitors had adjourned after the first call at the sick-room.

"Yes," said Sarah. "I want to eat supper."

"Me too," said Jimmy. "I like to eat." He could say that again.

"They haven't had anything since we left my tower house," informed the Scarecrow.

"And it was a long day's travel," added the Tin Woodman, not mentioning the emotional stresses that might also be supposed to contribute to appetite.

"Then be my guests at once!" exclaimed the professor cordially. He reached into his waistcoat pocket and took out a small tin box. Twisting off the lid he offered of the contents to Jimmy and Sarah.

"Candies!" cried Sarah and took a handful of pretty pink pills with a pattern of purple polka dots.

"Oh, just one, my dear!" cried the wogglebug in some alarm.

The children stared. Unpractised in social graces themselves, they were very much alert to failures of heartiness in others. Was this over-size bug going to turn out to be a skinflint?

Just to assert his rights as a guest Jimmy grabbed three of the capsules and swallowed them.

"Oh, dear," said the professor. "It wasn't to be stingy! Perhaps I should have warned you in advance. These lozenges are my own invention. They are the 'seven-course dinner pills'. A single capsule provides a full meal. Have one, my dear, do." Again he offered the tin to Sarah and indulged, himself.

Returning to Jimmy, "You've had twenty-one courses," he said. "I do hope—"

"I can taste bread and butter!" interrupted Jimmy, "and chicken soup."

"Yeah!" cried Sarah delighted. "And mashed potatoes! And peppermint ice cream."

The Wogglebug too was enjoying. "The breaded pork chops are delicious," he declared. "Tender and not at all dry. And the salad is crisp: just the way I prefer it."

"I like this corn on the cob," said Jimmy. "Not sure about that asparagus though. And—oh, wrap!—broccoli; I can't stand it. Oh, well, that's better: fruit cake and rum sauce—"

"I'm full," announced Sarah. "Thanks, Prof; that was an okay supper."

The Wogglebug, finishing off with a demi-tasse and a Viennese chocolate, was also replete.

But Jimmy went on: "More soup? Mulligatawny this time, and roast beef and succotash and corn bread. Snow peas, oysters on the half shell—I don't like those shells very much... Ugh, I don't feel so good."

Sarah, Professor Wogglebug, the Scarecrow and Nick Chopper looked concerned. (Jack Pumpkinhead couldn't, being in attendance just now at the bedside.) The boy started looking around him a bit anxiously.

"Bacon sandwiches, tomato aspic, chili con carne, plum pudding." Abruptly he got up from the couch, holding his belly. "Where's the crapper?" he cried.

But the worthy professor was not learned in American street slang and failed to reply immediately.

"Butterscotch pudding!" exclaimed Jimmy and stared wildly about. "Braised parsnips!" He ran toward the tall library windows. "Sweet and sour spareribs!" He clambered up on the radiator. "Clam chowder!" croaked Jimmy, fumbling with the latch. Not a moment too soon he flung the window wide. "Cookies!!" he shrieked. And forthwith tossed them.

C H A P T E R F O U R T E E N

Professor H.M. Wogglebug came often to visit the children at Bettina Butterfly's bedside. There were long and ample hours to discuss their problem. While the pumpkins spoiled in the back of the red wagon and the ears of corn grew ever more dessicated, they rehashed the situation. Both Jack Pumpkinhead and the Scarecrow had given the savant accounts of Jimmy and Sarah's journey to Oz and he had heard it as well from their own lips. The Scarecrow was even now with them as Wogglebug polished his spectacles with care.

"There's no doubt about it, in my view," declared the highly magnified and thoroughly educated Professor Wogglebug. "After impartial consideration of the various stories of your translation to Oz, I deduce that you got here by... *magic*." He brought out the stunner with a flourish.

The children cheered and applauded. Then, "We figured that out long ago," announced Sarah. "The question is: what kind of magic?"

"The only kind of magic they have in America is scientific," asserted the Scarecrow. "They do wonderful things with machines and technology there."

"They have another kind of magic too, Scarecrow," reminded the Wogglebug, who had done graduate studies in

the United States^s and knew whereof he spoke. “The magic of imagination. However, I don’t think that’s the way the children reached here, not this time anyway.”

“Why don’t you ask us? Just to be sure,” offered Sarah pertly.

“All right,” agreed the professor. “Sarah and Jimmy, we others are not just imagining that you are here with us, are we?”

“No,” said Sarah and “Course not!” scoffed her sibling.

“And *you* are not simply imagining a like state of affairs, are you?” queried the great bug in order to be quite positive.

Jimmy didn’t bother to answer but Sarah murmured “No” again.

“I didn’t think so,” confessed H.M.

“Our uncle,” hedged Sarah, “did tell us we could go to Oz any time we liked, but he said we had to pretend. Only we’re *not* pretending. Are we?” Sarah looked to her brother for confirmation.

Jimmy just rolled his eyes and looked resigned at all this tramping around in the obvious.

“Well,” summed up Professor Wogglebug, “I’m all at sixes and sevens. I can’t make it out. Logically you shouldn’t be here; you *can’t* be here. On the other hand, you are.” He supported his proboscis on a feeler tip and pondered. “Who might know? Who might have some inkling as to what—Ah! I have it! My esteemed colleague, Oscar Diggs, Wizard of Oz, would surely know. May I suggest—”

“The Wizard?” queried Jimmy. “You mean that old geezer with the bald head that hangs around Ozma?”

This description scarcely tallied with everybody’s laundered conception of what Wizard Diggs was like but they couldn’t help realizing who was meant by Jimmy, who was going on: “If *he* had a clue about how we got here he would have said some’n while we were with him.”

Sarah was always a little fairer than Jimmy. After all, her blonde crew cut was eight shades lighter than the chestnut locks of her brother. She inserted: “You know, Jimmy, we didn’t

§ See *The Ten Woodmen of Oz*. Editor’s note.

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actually talk about this at Ozma's. We were too busy checking out whether people who weren't in the movie really existed. I guess a whole lot of them do," she ended with a resigned sigh.

"I recommend," pursued the Wogglebug, "that we all go to seek out the worthy Wizard and ask for his view of this extraordinary phenomenon.

"Oh, you too?" wondered Jimmy. "Well, I guess we can cram you in the wagon somewhere."

"For a need," hmfed the insect educator, miffed, "I can fly." He had been intrigued by the mystery and now wanted to plumb its depths even despite rebuffs.

Of these there was a sufficiency. "Oh, okay," agreed Jimmy, "'cause we'll want room in the wagon for those other bugs. I guess the butterfly won't be able to fly right away when she first gets out."

"Let's go see how she's doing, Jimmy." And taking her brother's hand Sarah pushed through the swing doors back into the invalid ward.

C H A P T E R

F I F T E E N

The next afternoon Bettina was taken off the critical list and four days later the lepidopt was declared well enough to be released into the tender care of her friends

“You still got your pill box, prof?” asked Jimmy. “We’ll put her in that.” Somehow he couldn’t seem to get away from thinking of Bettina as a collection specimen rather than a living breathing person in her own right with her own dreams and aspirations. In the end a little gossamer swing was rigged up just behind the front seats in the red wagon and there the butterfly perched, her new-healed wings gingerly folded, as the carriage rode away on its journey.

The kids had casually dumped all the rotten pumpkins and dried-out corn ears on the college lawn and then announced with satisfaction: “There, Wogglebug, there’s a seat for you after all.” It was really nice of them. The farm produce had only been a pretend excuse in an emergency anyway; Ozma didn’t want all that junk; and they abandoned it with complacency. Registrar Fex stood looking after the departing wagon and thinking that if the University had been granted those pumpkins a week ago they might have made nice pies for serving at High Table. Possibly the maize might still be used for seed.

The party departed but Oz itself hadn’t shrunk and the way

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from the Royal College to the Emerald City was just as long as it had always been, which was a hundred times longer for the tiny travelers than it had been in the days when you could cover the distance, behind the swift Sawhorse, in an hour. He strained his powers to the utmost but still it was long past midnight before the group reached the city gates.

Twilight had replaced daylight and then night took the place of dusk. Fireflies blinked in the trees. A full moon rose over Oz, looking enormous to the enmidgeted travelers. On whizzed the red wagon by its silvery light. The motion of the dashing vehicle jostled to sleep everybody that *could* sleep—and on it flew.

At about three o' clock the Scarecrow gently nudged the sleeping children awake. "Stop it!" mumbled the pair and moved aside by reflex from the soft fumbling glove hands. So the Scarecrow and Jack Pumpkinhead and the Tin Woodman and Professor Wogglebug had to enjoy the spectacle of the moonlit green towers and turrets on their own. Nor did they disturb the sleeping ladybug or butterfly.

The bejeweled walls of the city sparkled like green fire in the crystal moonlight. The City of Emeralds looked just as wonderful as these old denizens had always known it, even if the stately buildings only made up a ghost city now. All life there went on at no higher than curbstone level.

The Sawhorse's lightning run ended at the miniature guardhouse built at the foot of the one formerly used. Yawning and stretching, the Guardian of the Gates came out to check the travelers' credentials. For this it was necessary that all sleepers be stirred awake.

With whines and burpings Jimmy and Sarah sat up and looked about them. "Oh, futch!" cursed Jimmy. "Why the heck didn't you wake us?! We wanted to see the approach to the big city." Sarah also registered a complaint.

Glumly they stared at the round-faced official who, last of all the citizens of the Emerald City, still wore big green goggles. When he didn't also wear handlebar moustaches or look like Frank Morgan the children denounced him for an imposter. Nick

Chopper shushed them embarrassedly and signaled for the Sawhorse to pull on, while Professor Wogglebug tried to distract the young visitors by pointing up to a horseshoe-shaped object mounted at the peak of the gate archway.

"That's the famous Love Magnet," the pedant said with reverence. "It was given to the city by the Shaggy Man. Perhaps you know about him?"

"Yeah, there was something about him in the books. Some crummy old tramp, wasn't it?" vouchsafed Jimmy.

"He wasn't in the movie," declared Sarah disapprovingly.

"Anyway he gave it," related the professor. "It hangs over these gates so that all who enter here may be loved and lovable."

"Big deal," grunted Jimmy, still not recovered from his untimely wee-hours waking. Professor W. thought that if anybody might profit from the influence of the Magnet it should be these two.

Not long afterwards the wagon rattled in over the cobblestones in the inner courtyard of the new Palace of Magic.

The Soldier with the Green Whiskers, roused, came out to do the honors of the off-hours reception of the arrivals. He helped the sleepy girl and boy descend from the carriage as Prof. Wogglebug carefully gathered up the butterfly invalid's swing sling and the Tin Woodman managed to get Lurabelle Ladybug transferred to the tip of a tin finger. Then they all entered the palace, while Omby Amby accompanied the valiant Sawhorse to the stables for a well-earned surcease of labors.

Wasn't it quiet in the faintly moon-luminous green halls! Just for the heck of it Jimmy, finally thoroughly awake, let out a Calgary yell. Sarah tittered delightedly but the others looked shocked. It wasn't long before startled exclamations were heard from behind bedroom doors, one or two heads were poked out, and lady slippers were heard coming tapping along in agitation.

It was Jellia Jamb in a dressing gown. She had come tumbling down from the servants' gallery to see who dared thus to disturb

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the repose of august Ozma and her court. When she saw Jimmy she couldn't believe so much noise had come from one little boy. She had been going to scold—in a deferential way, of course—but when she saw it was a child, well, that made it all right. Children could do no wrong and Jimmy was still far from the age when he would graduate to drugs, switchblades, and general delinquency.

The pretty serving maid gave a hand to each and said: "I'll show you to your room. Two beautiful beds for the dearest little boy and girl in the world." And you know? There was no irony in her speech!

The tots stared sulkily. What was this? A gag? They both started to say something smart-aleck. Then suddenly they didn't.

This too was the beginning of wisdom. The kind green maiden was too nice to sass.

C H A P T E R

S I X T E E N

Jimmy and Sarah had had a very late night but I had had an early one, and hence an early morning. I was rendezvousing quietly with the Wizard at the car port, where we boarded one of the Scalawagons: a king-size one, as we were not traveling *à deux*. No, various ones had got wind of our expedition and requested to come along. Historians Baum, Thompson, and Neill had no interest in sticking in the lounge and reading Oz books. They seemed to know them by heart already! Nor were any of them games enthusiasts, no matter what they may have been in younger days. They didn't care about croquet or tiddlywinks.

Then of course Princess Dorothy never knowingly got left out of any excursion, so she was there. Finally, Scraps the Patchwork Girl declared that we needed more females to average out the sexes. She wanted to bring along Billina the Yellow Hen to make it really four of each but at the last moment the doughty fowl couldn't be found.

Of course we said nothing to Princess Ozma about our intentions. In matters connected with the "Smelly Room" she 'didn't want to know.' But we left word with General Omby Amby in case the girl ruler should ask after us.

Away we bowled out of the city. The new fleet of mini-Scalawagons was equipped with all the latest technology so all

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we had to do was set the controls at “auto” and plug in “Pink Palace” on the destination panel. We could look around and enjoy the morning-fresh countryside without automotive preoccupations.

We were still bouncing over cobblemeralds on our way to the south gate when the Patchwork Girl opened the conversation by saying:

“You know, I had no way of knowing,
So just one question: where we going?”

“Oh, Scraps, you’re incorrigible,” Dorothy pretended to sigh. “We’re off to see Witch Glinda.” In her merry morning mood she seemed to fit her second sentence to the tune from the film.

“Which Glinda’?” echoed Scraps.

“There’s only one,” said Dot insouciantly. “Tell her, Wizard dear.”

“We want to wind up Tik-Tok,” explained the savant willingly enough, “—and by the least magic means possible. We don’t want to seem to be going against our ruler’s decision to adapt to the new miniature state of things without a lot of hedging and recourse to magic. We thought Glinda might have some ideas.”

“Whadda ya wanna wind him for?” asked Scraps. “He’s way too big—forevermore!”

“But that’s just it. We need somebody out-size for a project we have in mind.” Mr. Diggs told the interested company all about the scheme to cure the stench in the Old Palace side chamber by cleaning and airing the carpet. “The Mechanical Man, at his size, could do that easily.”

“Yeah, the old (big) clothes lines are still up in the laundry courtyard,” reminded the Patchwork Girl and recalled, sheepishly, an occasion when she herself had hung there for a time[§]. “I can show him where the rug-beater paddles are kept.”

“Fine,” we applauded. But I myself had a codicil:

“You know, Professor,” I said, “as much as a cleaning that old rug needs a repair job. I couldn’t believe how threadbare it

§ See “The Woozy’s Sticky End” in *In Other Lands Than Oz*. Editor’s note.

looked—and still in use in a Palace apartment! What would have worn it out like that?”

“I can’t think,” said Diggs, but I noticed he looked somewhat abashed, somewhat awkward. “It was still fresh-looking the last time the room was used, but that was years and years ago.”

“It’s funny,” I said. “Of course all the apartments in the Old Palace are a bit dusty by now. But in that room the dust seemed to lie thicker than anywhere else, and especially on the floor. No wonder, really, that it smelt pretty badly fusty. But there was something more: it was as if the carpet itself had—how shall I say—decomposed. The dust looked like the powdered remnants of the rug itself...”

“Queer,” everyone agreed. Thus encouraged I enlarged on the theme. “I wonder if some kind of microscopic organisms, weevils or mites or something, could have attacked it?”

“Or mice!” suggested Dorothy suddenly. “Remember how Queen Ramina’s clan devoured the flying carpet in the adventure of the Yellow Fog[§]?”

“No, my dear!” said Wizard Diggs in, this time, no hesitant terms. “At least we’ve been able to keep the old building rodent-free.”

“Anyway,” I reverted, “it would help a lot if at the same time as Tik-Tok gave the rug a beating he could somehow get it repaired too... But I don’t suppose he’s much of a sewer—”

“I think you must mean ‘needleman’, my friend,” put in Miss Thompson drolly.

“Or ‘seamster’,” Dorothy capped her mot. “A member of the Seamsters’ Union.”

“But joking aside,” I pursued. “If it’s even to survive a beating that rug needs a—”

“Patch!” cried Scraps and sat bolt upright in her seat and stared at me with her suspender-button eyes wide.

“Oh, more than a patch,” I countered. “An entire reweaving, for preference—”

“No, Patch, the *place*!” exclaimed the girl of rags. “My

§ See *Yellow Fog Over Oz*. Editor’s note.

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kingdom," she added modestly and lapel-polished her cotton finger tips. "They have charge of all Palace sewing. That's since *way* back."

"Yes, of course," I recalled, with *The Gnome King of Oz* fresh in mind. We had been talking of it only lately—oh, when? "I believe the reigning queen is Mistress Susan—"

"Susan Smiggs!" cried the Patchwork Girl. "Of course as Queen she spells herself 'Sewsan': short for 'Sews and Smiggs'. I forget exactly what smigging is. Anyway I had a letter from her just the other week. She used to do all the palace mending here but now that she has assumed the royal dignity in Patch we send all our fabric-repair work there to be done."

"I see," I replied, catching the implications at once. "Tik-Tok would want to carry the carpet to Patch right off, probably without risking a dry-cleaning job on it first. Well, that would be quite in order," I pursued, thinking that to get the smelly old rug away from the Emerald City would be a plus in itself, no matter what disposition of the artifact might be made later.

"I'll go along!" declared Scraps, now in nostalgic mood. "It's time I paid my old kingdom a visit and saw how things are getting on. It's been—heavens!" She counted on her cotton fingers and mentioned a startling number of years, if not quite the seventy-three since she had reigned there herself.

I turned in my seat to address myself to the Patchwork Girl more directly. She was sitting next to Miss Thompson and I could distribute my bouquets equally between them. "I've wanted to say, ladies," I began, "that I admire the opening of the saga of the Patch succession as the equal of any sequence in the canon for sheer Ozziness."

The ladies simpered, one for having lived the events, the other for recording them.

"Ozziness," put in the Wizard. "We all recognize it but what is it really?"

"Drollness," stated Mr. Baum at once, and if anyone ought to know, surely it was he.

"'Drollness!'" we all cried and clamored to know more.

"Yes," said the genial author, comfortably lighting up a pseudo-cigar (it tasted like fine Havana but made no smoke to bother the rest of us). "As you can picture, I've had time here to think over what I was up to when I penned the stories of Oz." He leaned marginally closer to his fascinated hearers and blew out to one side a cloud of non-smoke. "My idea when I wrote *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was to present a funny queer odd country—something on the order of Carroll's Wonderland but lighter, jollier, not so threatening. As with Wonderland there was no idea of making it a *fairyland*, per se."

That set us back a notch or two, as you can imagine. "Not fairy!" I dared to cry. "But what about Princess Ozma?! Always described as a fairy, or, at least, part. And—and Queen Lurline and her magicification of Oz? And—er..."

How peculiar. I couldn't think of any particular fairies in Oz! And you had to have fairies to have a fairyland, didn't you?

Baum smiled knowingly. "There, you see? No fairies to speak of. And the fairy queen's enchantment of Oz was an afterthought—when demands began to be expressed as to the why and how of everything. In the first book I didn't bother."

"Didn't bother explaining the marvels?" interpreted Mr. Neill.

"Exactly. I had the Scarecrow being alive but never troubled to tell how. I had the Woodman lopping off his extremities with apparently no debilitating loss of blood. I had animals that talked and trees that fought and china figures that moved, and nowhere a word of how it all came to be. And the amusing part was that the public accepted it so and loved it. They wanted the drollness. They really didn't care how it got like that."

We were all set musing and mazing.

"And it's gone on that way. It's drollness that is the keynote. That's Ozziness," summed up the Royal Historian.

"But magic," I gasped. "There's certainly no scarcity of magic in Oz. Why, it even gets into the title of one of your books. So you must have felt—"

"Oh, sure, magic," Mr. Baum agreed. "But if you'll notice, it's almost never *fairy* magic. It's witches and magicians and

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sorcerers who bring that off. Despite the much-referred-to film even the *good* witches of North and South are not presented in the books in fairy apparition but rather the one as a kindly grandmotherly type and the other as a stately chatelaine.”

“So Oz is a *magic* land but not specifically a fairyland,” summed up Miss Thompson.

“Just so. The one word ‘magic’ sufficed to account for all the kookinesses—as our friend here would have it.” The Historian waved a graceful cigar in my direction. “Who perpetrated the magic was in many cases left unsaid.”

Miss Thompson and I looked at each other and winked. We’d both spent books and books explaining away drollnesses that our great mentor had blithely set down as Ozzy effects without causes. After all, it was the effects that counted. The causes were secondary.

And yet... Man is a reasoning animal. He doesn’t only want to know *what*. He wants to know *why*. The Baum books largely, the Thompson tales in part, told what. It was left to me to go round examining structural strains and explaining why/how. I like to think my jottings filled a need.

But sales figures probably demonstrated which sort of writing was the more appreciated.

C H A P T E R S E V E N T E E N

“Braaawkwk! Wake up, sleepyhead!”

Jimmy and Sarah opened their eyes and sat up. There, perched at the foot of Sarah’s bed, was a plump yellow hen wearing a pearl necklace.

“Billina!” cried Sarah.

“Good morning, Billina,” said Jimmy politely.

“Good morning to you both,” cackled the hen. “I told Jellia Jamb I’d make sure you two were up before she comes in to help you dress. How did you sleep?”

“Fine,” said Jimmy.

“Me too,” said Sarah.

Jellia Jamb entered pushing a serving cart. She greeted the children and drew aside the green draperies. Sunlight poured in through the windows.

“My, it’s a lovely day,” she said. “You’ve slept late so I’ve brought you breakfast here. The others have already eaten.”

“Do we have to eat pills?” wondered Sarah.

“Like the Woglebug gave us?” added Jimmy somewhat fearfully.

“Goodness, no!” exclaimed Jellia. “So you’ve tried those, have you? The professor’s pills may be useful in a pinch but here in the Palace meals are prepared with real food. But before you eat

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you must get dressed. The royal laundress has washed and pressed your clothes for you.”

“I can dress myself,” boasted Jimmy. “But Sarah may need a little help.”

“Yes,” confessed Sarah.

Soon the children were sitting down at a table just their size. Jellia served them eggs and oatmeal and hot chocolate, a dull menu perhaps but welcome after the culinary excess they had lately been a party to. After all, to paraphrase Thornton Wilder: Our stomachs are not strong enough to thrill every moment. At least Jimmy’s wasn’t.

As the tots ate, the yellow hen perched on a chair back and entertained them with an account of her own presence in the Emerald City. “I roosted under one of these beds last night. What a surprise to hear you stumbling in in the middle of the night. But Jellia there gave me the story in a few well chosen words.”

“Where are your children?” Sarah wanted to know.

“What children?” clucked Billina in surprise. “I gave up turning out eggs years ago. Let other generations get on with that job. I’m visiting my great-great-great-great-grandchildren, as long as I’m here for the centenary celebrations anyway. By the way, I’ve got somebody I want you to meet.”

“Oh, who’s that?” said Jimmy with his mouth full.

“Mastication first, conversation afterwards,” preached the hen.

“Oh, all right!” gulped the boy gracelessly but did shut up while he chewed.

“It’s the young lady I live with,” related Billina. “She and Gerry the Giraffe and I came down together for the festivities.”

“‘Young lady’!?” guffawed the not yet completely regenerated Jimmy. “We don’t need any young ladies!— anyway, more than Jellia here,” he amended loyally.

“Well, ‘little girl’,” amended the hen in her turn. “She’s just five—has been for quite some time. She’ll be a nice playmate for you.”

“I want to meet her,” announced Sarah in certain terms.

So after breakfast that's what they did. They found Lana Peethisaw sliding down the Grand Staircase bannisters. As soon as she landed hugs were exchanged all round.

"May we join you?" add Sarah and giggled at her own unwonted formality. But actually, it was kinda fun calling Lana "Miss Peethisaw" and talking like grownups. I think it was then that Sarah began to realize that childishness is only engaging as long as it is not deliberate, whereas deliberately grown-up behavior can be charming.

"I usually do this with the Patchwork Girl," related Lana. "She's nice about letting me slide off the newel and fall on her for protection. But I couldn't find her this morning."

"Oh, she's gone off with the Wizard and them to call on the Witch of the South," informed Jellia while keeping a careful eye on the tots' sport.

"Well, twit!" yelled Jimmy, stopping his play abruptly and thrusting hands on hips. "The Wizard was supposed to tell us about our magic... translation" (he'd decided he liked that curious usage) "to Oz. *Now* how'll we find out?"

"Let's see," pondered Jellia, taking the boy's complaint as a legitimate problem. "Who might know about something like that? What about Professor Wogglebug that came here with you? He's awfully learned. I saw him in the palace library when I was dusting there."

"Aw, heck, Jell," said Jimmy, quite amiably for him, "*He's* the one that advised us to ask the Wizard."

"Well." Jellia cogitated further. She didn't want to bother the Queen, who was dealing with the day's mail in her office, about what was after all a kiddie question. Nor did she like to dismiss the children's concern as of no importance. "Princess Dorothy might have some ideas but she's gone off too with the party to see Sorceress Glinda. But maybe you'd like to ask Dorothy's aunt and uncle?"

"What would they know about it?" said Jimmy sulkily but Sarah took Jellia Jamb's hand and said, "Don't bother about him. Sure, Jellia, let's go see them." She shyly gave her other hand to

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“Miss Peethisaw.”

As they left the grand staircase to follow the broad echoing jade-and-peridot North Hall the parlor maid spied two shapes ahead. “Would you like to ride?” she enquired playfully. It was the Courageous Lion and the Hungry Tiger!

Children always like to go for rides, of course, so the trio did not demur. “We’ve met them before,” informed Jimmy, remembering the time he’d tried to enlist the King of Beasts as a draft animal for their trip to call on Jack Pumpkinhead. But Rex greeted them with grave courtesy and the tiger growled recognizantly.

Jellia carried on with her friendly little scheme. “I wonder, King Rex,” she said, “would you like to take the children for a ride? We’re just stepping out to visit Princess Dorothy’s aunt and uncle.”

“It could be arranged,” conceded the monarch.

“Oh, good!” cried Sarah. “I know how. I ride my doggie Bleue sometimes. Come on, Lana.” And the two little girls were assisted up onto the broad tawny back of the lion.

“Do you want to ride me, Jimmy?” asked the Hungry Tiger.

“Sure,” said Jimmy and without any time-consuming thank-yous he climbed aboard.

Soon the party had left the palace and crossed the courtyard along which were ranged the royal stables. They called a greeting to the Sawhorse and Woozy, those long-time pals. Hank the mule and Jim the cab-horse clopped their hoofs in salutation and Jimmy was reminded of how he intended to cultivate the acquaintance of his namesake—but not just now. The group passed on into the palace gardens.

In a pause in conversation the Hungry Tiger said, “This walk is giving me quite an appetite. Pity you lot aren’t younger. I’m particularly partial to fat babies.”

Sarah and Lana shuddered and seemed about to cry but Jellia declared insouciantly, “He doesn’t mean a word of it! At least... he’s never been *known* to consume a baby. Have you, Hung?”

"That'd be telling," purred the tiger but he did not pursue the topic. Perhaps he only meant to ginger up the small fry.

But now the formal gardens gave way to cold-frames and vegetable beds and at the end of long rows of cauliflowers and eggplants the strollers spied a neat little farmhouse. An elderly man was sitting on the front porch whittling.

"Hello, Uncle!" called Jellia Jamb from a distance. The old fellow looked up. He was wearing overalls and a flannel shirt. He didn't look much like Charley Grapewin but the newcomers were prepared to overlook that. "At last!" breathed Sarah, relieved. "Somebody else from the movie. I'm sure he's real all right."

The children slid off their steeds' backs and trotted forward to give Uncle Henry the conventional hugs. Actually the old farmer was from a period when hugs *weren't* all that conventional and he was a bit clumsy. Still, you had to follow along with the times and he didn't want to get a reputation for being an old fogey. To cover his embarrassment he called "Em!" into the house.

A serious-faced woman in a calico dress presently appeared in the doorway, wiping her arms in her apron. When they were tidy she folded them across her chest and said, "So these are the little ones, are they?" Somehow nobody essayed to give Aunt Em hugs.

After introductions had been made the farm woman covered any possible awkwardnesses by saying, "I've just put a pan of batter biscuits in the oven. I'll bet you could sample a little something, couldn't you?"

Jimmy looked at Sarah. After all, it was a whole hour since breakfast. "Yes, ma'am," said Sarah. She actually said 'ma'am'.

"I've heard you're great eaters," Em confided. The Ohioans looked a bit flat. But then, they seemed to reason, it was better to be celebrated as trencherpeople than not known for anything at all. The two didn't really have many distinguishing character traits. Their rudeness and self-interest were not features they actively wished to be known by.

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When it came right down to it the party all settled around the kitchen table and ate, biscuits and honey, fried sausages, hominy, and stewed tomatoes. With coffee there were ginger snaps also just crisp from the oven. Sarah looked at Jimmy a bit anxiously as he grabbed a cookie in each hand, but it seemed that he was in a fair way to not throwing up at all after this *hors de serie* meal.

Nor were the animals forgotten in the general feeding. Those sausages were Uncle's own home-spun ones and the bones and the hide from the slaughtering were in the outbuilding fridge. He slung some of the former on a tray and served it up on the porch. The great cats growled in appreciation.

It turned out to be Lana Peethisaw who first mentioned the purpose of their visit. She having come to Oz in an exceptional way herself, she was interested in off-beat manners of 'translation' and she was almost as concerned as the newcomers to discover how they had managed to parlay a dandelion wish into an actual descent on the fairyland.

"Yeah," Jimmy carried on the enquéte, "we thought Dorothy might have some ideas. She's come here so many different ways herself. Anyway that's what the books say. But, rats, she's not here to ask."

"That's right. Dorothy went off this morning with the Wizard and them to see Miz Glinda. I forget what about," told Aunt Em.

"We never knew, Em," said Henry, taking his postprandial pipe out and lighting up. He *was* old-fashioned. The children coughed pointedly but he puffed on. "Our niece just dashed in for a minute to let us know she was going. She hardly said where, let alone why."

"Off to the Witch of the South," muttered Sarah, tending to sulk, "without inviting us along."

"Why, darlings," said peacemaker Jellia, "you were sound asleep after already exhausting travels. Mr. Diggs and the others could hardly expect you'd want to be off again."

"Why, that's the most natural thing in the world!" protested

Aunt Em, setting down her coffee cup. "Of course the young folks want to be off—back home! Aren't you worried about getting back, Sarah? When our Dorothy was first blown here that was her main concern."

Jimmy answered breezily for his sister, "Oh, Ozma can send us back home with her magic belt any time."

"Well, I reckon that's right," admitted the farm-wife with a last napkin dab at her lips before getting up and to work again. "But what about your folks? Don't you know they're anxious about you? I fretted something awful all the time Dorothy was gone."

Jimmy swallowed, then secured refills for hands and mouth. "Gee, I never thought about that. Our uncle will think we fell down a well or something. Oh, heck, Sarah, I guess we better tell Ozma to send us back home."

"All right," muttered Sarah. She was concentrating on licking ginger-snap crumbs from around her tiny mouth with a little pink tongue—before placing new ones there.

C H A P T E R E I G H T E E N

“Try this dewberry jelly,” urged the distinguished Sorceress of the South.

Not all the eating was being done by the children from Ohio. We others were getting our share of goodies as we sat around the table in Glinda’s intimate breakfast (well, brunch) nook. Gravely ‘Mr.’ Glinda, Sples Smith, went round with the pot of Greek mountain tea again. Some of us were spiking it with a soupçon of triple-sec.

“And now to your affair,” proposed the Good Witch in continuation. “Normal-sized people to give a hand to wind up Tik-Tok, you say? Well, of course there are none of those left in Oz. You’ll have to go outside the country for a start, that’s clear.”

“Yes, I thought of someone from Ev or Ix, your grace,” stated Wizard Diggs. “Those lands naturally remained unaffected by the miniaturization spell that was cast over Oz. But I haven’t made any move in that direction. Couldn’t decide, for a start, just who to invite: in fact, whom to dare to trouble ‘to make the long laborious trek over the desert and the intervening territories just to give seven twists of the wrist—”

“Not to mention the dirt they’d track in after such a hike,” reminded Glinda. We all sighed in concern at the thought of the poor dingy outside world where everything was grey with filth,

ranging to outright black in Czechoslovakia, Rumania, and large parts of China.

"Aren't there any clean people left in the world outside Oz?" demanded the spades-spades-calling Patchwork Girl.

"Oh, indoors it's not that bad," I reassured. "We manage to keep quite tidy with four or five showers a day. And when we go outdoors we keep well covered up, from hair to toes, and, not to forget, our air masks on. Have to anyway, you see, on account of ultra-violet, now that they've blown our ozone cover."

"Ozma and I," contributed Dorothy, "remembered to protect ourselves by magic means when we did our trip to the outside world. And most of the people who joined us weren't too—well, soiled. But weren't those Ohio children grubby!"

I recalled with sympathy how delighted the tots had been to throw away their masks when they discovered the air in Oz was breathable. As for their dingy clothes, perhaps that didn't matter so much when they were just going to be bowling along in the red wagon.

"It is too bad," put in Miss Thompson, "that we didn't know in time or those children could have wound up the Mechanical Man before they got reduced in size.

"Regrets, however..." summed up the Wizard, implying that such were of little functional use. "Right now we need practical advice. If only there was a simple way to summon somebody of the right size just for a few minutes—"

"There's always the Phase Plates," mentioned Glinda half doubtfully.

"Phase Plates!!" Diggs slapped his forehead. "Of course! How stupid of me not to think of them myself—and at once! We've imposed on Your Grace quite needlessly."

"Not at all," demurred the Sorceress. "It's been a pleasure I've looked forward to meeting these distinguished arrivals." Here she looked round at the circle of Royal Historians. Then, "Shall we invoke my set of plates?"

The Wizard had thought quickly, now that he'd begun. "Well, no, your highness. I think not. The point is: it's in the Palace of

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Magic we need the visitor's help. If somebody from Alternate Oz turns up *here* he'd still have the trip all the way to the Emerald City. Better to do it there."

"Quite so. Will you be off then immediately? It's been such a fast turn-around. You would be so welcome—"

O.Z. Diggs broke off the Good Witch, *most* courteously, and scarcely ten minutes later we were racing north again.

I should explain that communications, nay actual transport, between the various alternative manifestations of the land of Oz had been a regular practice for quite some time. It was to the eternal honor of the wizard Wam in Munchkinland, working in tandem with the clever artisans from "Russian Oz," Lester and his assistants, that means had been perfected for moving entities among the divers planes, or "phases," of the fairyland through the agency of sets of two great upright sheets of ozyinium impregnated with thaumaturgon. The court at the Emerald City had one such set of "phase plates" established in the Wizard's laboratory. Witch Glinda had another; so did Wammupirovocuck; and, I think, one or other authorized adepts of magic in Oz.

It appeared that when a body, be it a person or an object, was introduced in the space between the two parallel-standing plates of ozyinium and the proper levers and gears were engaged, that body was forthwith transported to the corresponding space between plates at the location to which the sender plates were tuned in. The devices worked rather like a fax transmitter except that it wasn't a facsimile or copy of the original which was sent but rather the thing itself. Also, the mechanism only served to convey entities from one alternate-universe plane to another. It had no effect at all if one ventured to try to transport objects between points within the *same* physical world. Thus, in the case of Oz, people could travel to the Emerald City we know from Volkovian Oz or from any of the other Ozzes by phase plates but not from, for example, Mo. For that you'd need an old-fashioned flying machine or sand-boat or transportation wish.

Once more back in the capital we all trailed along with the

Wizard to his tower workshops, agog to see the show. The Soldier with the Green Whiskers met us at the south door and accompanied us. He regretted that Princess Ozma could not be alerted as to our arrival. She would surely have liked to witness the attempt which our leader indicated as being in the offing. But she herself had gone off a-jaunting.

“Never mind, general,” the Wizard consoled. “This is a little project for our dear ruler’s benefit but one she prefers to remain just a bit in the dark about.” And with that cryptic comment Omby Amby had to be content.

C H A P T E R N I N E T E E N

Back at the royal stables Jimmy and Sarah gave a great hug round the neck to each of the big felines. This action represented acknowledgment of the animals' amiability in providing them transportation to the farmhouse, as it would never do merely crudely to thank them. They also hugged Lana Peethisaw as they said goodbye and transferred to her the hairs that had collected on them out of the lion's mane.

When Jellia Jamb saw the condition of their faces and clothes by now she thought a wash and brush-up would be in order. After all, the kids had been grimy when they arrived in Oz a week before: that was the price you paid for living in the great world and daring to run through meadows in the bare outdoors. Nor had the confirmed old bachelors they'd been traveling with since then thought of anything so mundane as threatening them with baths. The children had, of themselves, washed their hands and faces at various times, and now it occurred to Jellia Jamb that they ought to do it again.

To please their charming friend they agreed. Then they lay down on their beds for a rest before lunch. Inadvertently they fell asleep but resolved to keep it a secret from their friends that they had done a thing so babyish as to take a nap. They sat up with a start when there was a knock on the door and managed

to jump off the beds before the knock was repeated and they called, "Come in."

Surprise! It was Jellia, carrying a tray with a jug of steaming water, two fluffy white towels, and a cake of green soap.

"Say, what *is* this?" demanded Jimmy in his frequent stance of hands on hips. "We've already washed once today."

"Never mind, sweetheart," cooed Jellia. "You're having lunch with Princess Ozma, so you want to be especially neat and tidy."

"Why don't you just shove us under the shower," sulked Sarah, "and be done with it?"

"Oh, darling," cried the green maiden, wounded. "I could never be so cruel!"

Seeing it was Jellia, the children let themselves be mollified. Even so, before she left the room the maid said, "If you ever did want to, the bathroom, with tub and shower, is the next door along." But she managed to have the room door behind her before a pillow hit it.

Sarah and Jimmy dampened the towels, wiped their shoes in them to simulate face dirt, and were ready to go.

Out on the landing Jellia had begun to strike a gong announcing that the midday meal was about to be served. Gaily the children ran past her, slid down the bannisters, and landed at the foot of the Grand Staircase where all the celebrated personages of the Court of Oz were standing about sipping cocktails (tomato juice)—at least, all those who could swallow.

Then the tots were busy, and confusion mounted, as they moved about hugging the Scarecrow, Jack Pumpkinhead, the Tin Woodman (with caution this time), Professor Wogglebug, the Shaggy Man, Lana Peethisaw again, Billina the hen, and Princess Dorothy's dog and cat. Presently the crowd trailed after the green maid to the great dining hall.

After they had found their places Queen Ozma entered by another door: a vision in emerald satin and lace. To the muted but enthusiastic cheers of the diners she was led to her seat at the head of the long table by General Omby Amby Battles.

"Welcome, dear friends," greeted the Queen, standing at her

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place. "I hope you are all happy and well. We are privileged today to have two special guests visiting us. Jellia dear, would you please introduce them to us?"

"This is Jimmy and this is Sarah," said the maid as she paused in ladling out the madrilene and pointed with the dipper.

The children smiled and waved.

"I think," continued Ozma, "that they have already met everyone here..."

"We want to know how we got here!" broke in Jimmy impetuously.

"Why, the Magic Belt..." said Ozma, taken by surprise.

"No, *we* wished ourselves here," asserted the Ohio boy. "We just don't understand how it worked."

"I see," said the queen, corrected. "Well, we will pursue the matter after lunch. We don't want our food to get cold."

Jellia Jamb and several serving men and maids, all dressed in green, brought course after delicious course to the table, where each morsel was eaten with relish: two sorts, onion, and mango chutney.

When the dessert dishes (mint chocolate pudding!) had been cleared away Ozma announced that they would adjourn to her throne room.

The entire group proceeded down the corridor to the Royal Throne Room and Audience Chamber. The Girl Ruler seated herself on her throne and General Battles took up a position next to her on the dais. The others all sat on gilded chairs grouped in a comfortable semi-circle. When everyone was settled Ozma asked to have retold the facts concerning the arrival of Jimmy and Sarah.

Jack Pumpkinhead told what he knew of their coming. Then Jimmy and Sarah repeated as much as they knew. "We just wished on a dandelion and blew the seeds," said Jimmy. "It looked like it was snowing there were so many seeds. When they all settled we found we were in a different field. Then we saw all of you—and went to you."

Ozma had been listening intently. Her brow was furrowed

in thought. After several moments of silence she spoke.

"That dandelion must really have been magic," she said. "I know that magic dandelions do not grow naturally in America. I deduce that the dandelion must have grown from a magic seed. But where did that seed come from? Obviously not from Ohio. From Oz? But to my knowledge, though we do have dandelions in Oz, in the country of the Winkies, none of them are magic. None of them have the power to grant wishes. I'll check my books but I am certain there is no such thing as a magic dandelion. That means that the flower, or the seed from which it grew, must have been enchanted. Yet such an enchantment could not have been placed on a plant already growing in Jimmy's field. Hence the seed must have been bewitched before it arrived there and grew into a flower."

Everyone murmured and nodded in agreement with the little fairy's conclusion.

"If that is so, then we must discover who was responsible for the enchantment and why the spell was cast," said the queen. "Let us consult the Magic Picture."

Jellia Jamb drew aside the heavy green velvet drape from a nearby section of wall and revealed a pleasant painting of an Ozian landscape.

Ozma approached the picture. She raised her hands and made a magical sign. "Show me," she intoned, "the one who is responsible for the enchantment of the magic dandelion seed."

Jimmy and Sarah watched in wonder as the Magic Picture began to blur, the colors running into one another in rainbow swirls. The many hues combined until they became black. The entire canvas remained black for several seconds. Ozma looked perplexed. Then the black again became swirls of color which soon reassembled into the shapes of the beautiful landscape once more.

"Hmmm," mused the Princess. "The picture only showed blackness. That implies that the one responsible for the enchantment no longer exists."

"Perhaps it was one of the Wicked Witches of Oz," suggested

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the Scarecrow. "But which one? Of the East? the West? Or even old Mombi might be the one."

"You may be right, Scarecrow," said Ozma. "Our only chance of solving this mystery may lie with Glinda the Good, our wise adviser. The answer may be recorded in her great Book of Records. I think we should pay a visit to the famous Sorceress."

After that the gathering broke up in some confusion. "What is all this?" said a Thompson nephew to "Uncle" Billy Hammer. "We were right there when Ozma wished the kids to Oz. What kind of mystification is the Princess pulling off?"

"I'm confused too," admitted the inventor. "I almost had the idea Ozma was going to say she personally had done the trick, when the boy interrupted her. But she must have something well thought-out in mind. I kinda wish there was going to be room for me in the red wagon."

However, when that vehicle pulled out twenty minutes later the available seats were filled by Jimmy and Sarah, their great confidante Jellia Jamb, the Scarecrow, Lana Peethisaw, and Billina the hen, while the sprightly fairy Princess of Oz herself was at the reins.

C H A P T E R

T W E N T Y

The wondrous Phase Plates in the Wizard's laboratory, despite their—to us—imposing size, were of course vastly too tiny to allow of any person of (still) normal dimensions from Alternate Oz having a place between them, should any be so ill-starred as to be victims of such an attempt. At most an Alternate-Ozian fly or bee might fit in there with some comfort, though none such would be likely to be invited to make the trip.

Someone did propose that Lurabelle Ladybird's alter ego from Volkoz be sent for. Her we might deal with quite comfortably, she being of almost exactly matching size with most of us. The proposal was typical of the confused thinking that always seemed to attend these dealings in the one-to-a-hundred ratio. What use to us would be a ladybug as big as we were?

What was wanted was for our own Miss Lurabelle to go to Alternate Oz! And there to tell them what we had in mind. But there again: what role in the alternate-plane country could be played by a ladybug just one hundredth of the size of coccinellidae that normally crawled about there?

"Might as well—nay, much better—" quoth the Wizard, "send our directive by alternate—phase wireless."

And that was what he proceeded to do.

Our miniature Plates were hooked up to the normal-sized

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(that is to say, the, to us, most vast) ones in Diggs' former workshop in the Old Palace. When he keyed his message to Alternate Oz it first flashed across the fields to the standard-size transmitter and thence to the land of its destination. As with our own plates (both sets) a brilliant orange light would flash there to attract the attention of whatever technician might be on duty in the Other Oz capital and alert him/her that communication was desired.

Soon Mr. Diggs (oh, no, "Professor" in the laboratory) was chatting comfortably with Master Craftsman Lester across the void in Volkovian Oz (sometimes called "Volkoz", mostly in fun). After leisurely amiabilities had been exchanged, "Chief," said Diggs, "would one of your people have time to—er, step across and assist us with a small trifle?" He explained the circumstances.

"The Mechanical Man," repeated Lester. "Of course: I remember him well. This running down that way *is* a stumbling block, isn't it? As I see it, even when we do get him wound up, one of us will have to go along wherever he goes, to wind him up again when he again runs down. In that case we might as well do, ourselves, the job you want him for."

"Oh, no, out of the question!" demurred the Wizard and with numerous expressions of regard he insisted that we wouldn't dream of asking a guest to lug a heavy carpet on his back all the way from the Emerald City to the kingdom of Patch. Nor was there any question of anyone's being able to drive the distance.

"Well, never mind. We'll have a look when we get there," reassured Lester. "All right if I bring along one or two of my assistants?"

"Oh, you'll come yourself chief?" exclaimed the Wizard in (perhaps mock) surprise. "That will be quite splendid!"

"Now here's how we have plotted the logistics..." And Professor Diggs explained how the most practical thing would be for all parties to gather at the motionless figure of the great copper man in the foyer of the Old Palace of Magic. "You can find your way down all right from the tower apartments?"

Oh, yes, Lester didn't think they'd have any trouble about that.

Then things moved quickly. There was no reason to hang around. As we passed back down through the palace word was again bandied about that the dear Queen had herself gone off on a visit and to our own so lately visited good Sorceress of the South. Something to do with some of the throng of current guests of the court: oh, yes, the two captivating tots from Ohio.

Well, we didn't need them in what our particular little detachment of outer-world guests was up to. Furthermore it was by now gospel to us all that Queen Ozma didn't care to know about developments having to do with the Stinky Room. We trailed along outdoors and across the vast lawns toward the Old Palace.

Lester, truly, had not 'hung around.' We found him with Tik-Tok's key in his hand, and the copper man himself bowed and did the honors of introduction.

"My dear Wiz-ard," he creaked. His voice was a bit rusty—well, corroded—after a year and a half of silence. "What a pleasure to see you a-gain. Well, al-most see. You're so ti-ny! Les-ter here has been tell-ing me what hap-pen'd just be-fore I ran down. I hav-en't quite ab-sorb'd it yet."

Nevertheless Tik-Tok had his wits about him enough to present Craftsmen Koboble, Prenneret, and Eqqi (the latter a *craftswoman*) and, of the other party, the minuscule Messrs Diggs and Baum and Mlles Dorothy and Scraps. The rest of us were strangers to him.

"Have a look here, professor," put in the looming Lester to the wee Wizard of our Oz. "We just happen to have with us one or two little contrivances that might come in useful now."

The Volkozite slung from his shoulder his plumber's sack and spilled out right on the marble floor of the stately entrance hall such items as metal-cutters, wrenches, hinges, spring levers, a bale of wire, a blowtorch, and some small clockwork mechanisms. Small to him perhaps; they reared above our heads and we were careful not to come too near lest domestic tragedies

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intervene.

“My, my,” said the Wizard. “That will you do with those?” He had to holler this speech through a megaphone which he had thoughtfully brought along, in order to reach Lester’s eardrums.

“Since your call,” explained the Alternate-Oz technician, “I took a moment to think over the problem. It seemed to me that Smith and Tinker didn’t go far enough when they devised their mechanical man[§]. Surely, for maximum efficiency, Tik-Tok should be *self*-winding. His dependence on others to insert and turn his key must be regarded as a severe limitation. Now what if we were to perfect the patent-holders’ inspiration?”

“Oh, fascinating,” approved Diggs. “How do you propose to go about it?”

Actually it did not surprise many of us that Engineer Lester deemed there to be no time, or place, like the present. Subject of course to the copper man’s own approval of the scheme, he requested Tik-Tok to lie down on the wide slick lobby floor. The mechanical man’s spherical body (not the most appropriate to the purpose, in Lester’s opinion) tended to roll from side to side but one of the Volkozites went to a nearby-apartment and returned with a couple of footstools which they propped, for blocks, against the metal man’s torso.

“There will have to be certain incisions made,” Lester explained to the patient. “Will you require anesthetic?”

“Oh, I think not, doc-tor—er, mech-an-ic,” replied Tik-Tok. “I feel of course. I am pro-gramm’d to do ev-ry-thing but live. But I do not feel ve-ry a-cute-ly. Things touch-ing, e-ven scrap-ing, my ex-ter-i-or seem to re-gis-ter as a tick-ling sen-sa-tion. I be-lieve I’ll risk it.”

So said, the surgery took place. Some of us turned away our gaze as two of the technicinas, using what looked like enormously sturdy can-openers, peeled away the copper skin from Tik-Tok’s upper back in a great rectangle. All his entrails—that is to say, works—lay revealed. But the absence of blood

§ See *Tik-Tok of Oz*. Editor’s note.

enabled us to get through the trauma all right.

Lester actually poked his head inside Tik-Tok's round body and had a dekko. It was not many moments before he possessed a full grasp of the working of the copper wiring. Then it was not long before the said wiring had been rerouted to find its source of activation in the copper man's foot (the right one), where more work with the metal-clippers opened a small square aperture, within which were placed a trip-lever and a small dynamo.

In the course of an hour and fifteen minutes the patient's back had been neatly soldered up again and his entire integument given a buffing with an electric currycomb of hardest vanadium-steel so he shone more resplendent in orange-brown than he had done for years. "How do you feel?" asked the chief surgeon.

"Top hole," punned the sufferer, employing a Britishism. "At least for a while there I did."

"Do you think you could stand up?" pursued Lester.

"Yes, in-deed." And Tik-Tok suited deed to word.

"But," he reported after some moments of gingerly testing of his limbs, "it feels as if I'm tread-ing on some-thing with my right foot. Almost as if I'm step-ping on a spring."

"You are," confirmed the mechanic. "It's virtually the same as the principle of a self-winding watch, except that you yourself supply the motion that keeps the mainspring wound. Every time you tread on your right foot you give the works an additional small impulse. Just keep walking and you'll never run down. In fact, I should say that you are now become an efficient perpetual-motion machine."

Tik-Tok sighed in appreciation. Such a transformation was perhaps as far as a mechanical man could ever go toward an apotheosis. Needless to say he was keen to begin walking at once.

"And we have just the assignment for you!" confirmed Wizard Diggs. "Master Lester has already described for you in broad outline what the problem is? Could you think of walking to Patch to carry out a project of dry-cleaning and mending?"

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“It sounds a fit-ting chal-lenge,” asserted Tik-Tok. “When had you thought I should begin?”

“Well, again,” replied Diggs, “no time like the present. Will you step to a location we will point out to you?” He gestured down the hall in the direction of the Smelly Room. “But a word of caution: perhaps you would prefer to switch off your olfactory mechanism for the time being...”

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - O N E

The terrain became rockier and the road became rougher. The party in the red wagon passed through dark dense forests and over tall hills. It must have been somewhere there in that tangled landscape that Ozma's group missed our party as we made the journey from chez Glinda northward.

As the hours passed the travelers told stories of their experiences to pass the time. Jimmy and Sarah talked about their home and family, and they listened to the tales of adventures that their Ozian friends had had.

Gradually the land became smoother and small villages and farms began to appear. "We're nearing the heart of Glinda's dominions," said Ozma. "Her palace is not much farther on."

Less than an hour later the Pink Palace duly appeared in the distance. As they neared it they were met by a group of beautiful girl soldiers all dressed in red uniforms.

"Greetings to Ozma, Ruler of Oz, from Glinda the Good. Welcome to the land of the Quadlings," pronounced a girl who was evidently the leader of her twenty companions. "Glinda has sent us to meet you and escort you to her palace."

"My thanks to you all and to your ruler," said Ozma graciously. "We are pleased to accompany you."

Ten of the girls marched behind the red wagon, the other ten

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with their leader went ahead. In a short time they had arrived at the palace of the Good Sorceress and were ushered into Glinda's opulent throne room. Glinda, the wise and beautiful, came from her high seat to welcome her guests. She embraced Ozma and warmly welcomed each visitor in turn.

"Early this afternoon," Glinda said to Ozma, "I read in my Great Book of Records that you were coming to consult me. But the inscription was very brief and somewhat vague. It said, 'Jimmy and Sarah, two children from the outside world, join Princess Ozma's party and journey south to seek counsel of Glinda the Good Sorceress.' What is it you seek, my dear? How may I help you?"

Ozma explained that they were hoping to unravel the mystery of a supposed enchanted dandelion. Glinda listened with interest. She agreed with the Girl Ruler's conclusion that the solution to the mystery might lie somewhere between the covers of her immense Record Book.

"But exactly where?" said Glinda. "That is what will make this mystery difficult to solve. As you know, the Book is enormous, and it records only very briefly every event that occurs. I'm familiar with the history of Oz since young Dorothy first arrived. I'm sure there is no reference during that time to anyone enchanting a dandelion. Thus, the information we want must have been recorded before Dorothy arrived. I'll just have to read backward, page by page, until I come across it. That may well take a bit of time. I'll begin at once—but before I do I'll see to it that you are comfortably settled for the night. I've ordered a dinner party prepared in your honor, Jimmy and Sarah."

"Thank you," said the tots generously.

"You will take part with us?" asked Ozma. "The Book can wait 'til afterwards."

"I shall be delighted to, when you insist," said Glinda with a smile. "Shall we go in at once then?"

But before they could leave the throne room one of Glinda's girl attendants entered and announced that Lurline, Queen of the Fairies, and several of her band had arrived from their home

in the great Forest of Burzee. Temporarily and sufficiently reduced in size they requested an immediate audience with Glinda.

"Show them in," commanded the witch.

"Queen Lurline is the fairy who enchanted Oz long ago," explained Ozma to Jimmy and Sarah. "She brought me to be ruler here when I was just a baby."

Lurline and eight of her sister fairies entered the throne room.

"Welcome to you, Queen Lurline, and to all your sisters," said Glinda.

"That's Necile," remarked the Scarecrow to the children quietly as he pointed to a dark-haired nymph dressed in pale blue. "She's the fairy who raised Santa Claus from babyhood. I know you've heard of him!" And he went on to identify Ereol and Doraline and one or two more.

Meanwhile Lurline had greeted with embraces both Glinda and Ozma. Now she spoke. "My dears, I believe I can save you the tedious task of scanning the Record Book for the knowledge that my soul divines you seek. Allow me to shed some light on your mystery by introducing to you my long-lost youngest sister, Floraline."

A young fairy maiden stepped forward and curtsied to the Oz sovereigns. She was lovely to behold. Her dress was of pale green gossamer and she wore a coronet of bright yellow dandelions upon her flowing hair.

"Your Majesties," she said softly, "I am Floraline ... who was once an enchanted dandelion."

"Greetings, Floraline," said Glinda. "Please, will you tell us your story?"

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - T W O

Moving aside the few pieces of furniture and rolling up the deep-dusty, limp, gwutchy (there was no other word for it) carpet was for Tik-Tok the work of not very many minutes. That accomplished, he was ready to set out.

“Oh, but wait!” we all cried in dismay. “*We* want to be there too to see how the business works out.”

Lester and his bunch as well, having been instrumental in setting in motion the solitary adventurer, were curious to learn how his enterprise would prosper. They could, however, not put at risk the teeming minuscule life that now flourished on the ‘floor’ of Oz by essaying to accompany Tik-Tok in tramping across the fields to Patch. The great copper man on his own was going to be hazard enough for local populations. We only hoped they’d hear his huge metal feet clanking toward them and find time to get out of the way.

I had an idea and one that would insure our continued participation in the adventure. I broached it to the Wizard and Craftsman Lester. “There are chairs and to spare, I have noticed, in the new palace,” I began. I was well acquainted with both the old and the new royal residences by now. “And Master Lester has epoxy cement among his supplies, I have no doubt. What if he were to glue chairs to Tik-Tok’s hat brim? We could all take

part in the expedition from a commanding position—perhaps even be of assistance.”

“That’s right,” put in Princess Dorothy. Then she surprised us all by blowing an ear-piercing blast on a silver whistle she wore on a ribbon round her neck. All of us history buffs recognized it as the one the Queen of the Field Mice had given the princess long ago. “We’d want to pull our weight,” explained the girl, as magically appearing mice clustered about her feet. I thought it attractive in the Kansas princess that she would offer a functional reason for her participation in the expedition that, no matter what, she did not intend to be left out of. “As we go along,” she continued, “we could all blow our whistles—if we all *had* whistles—to warn people out of our way... Down, Ramina, down!” she concluded in warning.

“Well thought upon, my dear,” praised the Wizard. “That ought to ensure that Tik-Tok’s passage be accompanied by no threat to life or limb for anyone. As it happens, I have a gross of penny whistles in stock in my supply rooms. Shall we go to fetch them? Also clothes pins. For our noses, you know.” And here he nodded significantly at the vast roll of carpet that drooped from the copper man’s arm crook high above us. We all gasped and snuffled in approval.

Before we presently took our leave of the invaluable assistants from Alternate Oz ‘Chairman’ Diggs had a polite speech to make: “Are you and your group pressed for time Master Lester? If not, I should say stay here! Make free of the Old Palace. Everything there remains in working order. The furniture is all in place. Afford yourselves a holiday! Only, watch out for tiny tourists. They come through on the hour—I’m sure you noticed a party just now—getting the guided tour of the celebrated rooms...”

The Volkozites seemed pleased at the invitation and discussed it as they and Tik-Tok carried us (to save time) the short distance to the (to them) dolls’ Palace across the lawn. Then we little ones all ran in and grabbed an armchair each of our choice from one of the reception rooms. We brought them to the

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front terrace where Eqqi, as having the most delicate touch, glued them, facing forward, to the brim of the Mechanical Man's derby hat, well back against the crown.

While she did that Scraps ran to borrow clothes pins from her chum, the palace laundress, and the Wizard took the freight lift to his tower eyrie in quest of warner whistles.

The crowd of centenary celebration guests came out on the terrace to see us off. "What shall we tell Her Majesty?" enquired Nick Chopper, "—when she returns, that is."

"Oh, hnh, hnh," snickered O.Z. Diggs a little uncomfortably. "Just say we're away, for a few days only, to clear up a—er, a little matter of unfinished business."

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - T H R E E

“It begins long ago,” said Floraline, “when the wicked witches of the four regions of Oz were struggling to consolidate their power. I was a foolish youngster then, living happily and carefree in the Forest of Burzee. We fairies knew of the turmoil in Oz, a favorite realm of our sister and leader, Queen Lurline. It saddened us all. Daily reports of the contest came to us from across the Great Sandy Waste, the southern portion of the dread desert that surrounds Oz. Our bird messengers flew back and forth, high above the burning sands.

“My work was tending the flowers of the forest. Though I had never been in Oz I had heard of the beauties and wonders of that land, and it grieved me to think that my sisters seemed content to permit troubles to afflict that marvelous place.”

At this point Queen Lurline put in a word. “Having bestowed grace upon the land of Oz, I was determined that the peoples and forces within the country itself should shape and decide their own glorious destiny without any further outside interference. I had faith that goodness would ultimately triumph over wickedness there,” she justified herself.

“And so it has,” said the Scarecrow loyally.

“Confident,” continued Lurline, “that Glinda and Tattypoo, the good witches of south and north, were capable of dealing

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with the wicked ones and knowing that I had entrusted the infant Ozma to the wise Pastoria, who would care for her better than any other, I decided that I would only interfere in the affairs of Oz if I were summoned by its rulers. Furthermore I decreed that nor were any of my sister fairies ever to meddle in events in Oz."

Having cleared up curiosity on that score, Lurline nodded to Floraline, who resumed her story. "As I said, I was young and foolish," went on the green fairy. "Among all my sisters I was the only one who rebelled in my heart against the decree.

"One day when all the others were busy attending to their own chores in the forest, I made up my mind that I would try to do what I could for the people of Oz. I flew across the great barrier desert and over the land on the other side until I was sure that I was near the heart of Oz.

"I alighted in a beautiful field of yellow flowers. The blossoms that I had tended in the great Forest were few in number and scattered at rather wide intervals. Here I was in the midst of a field of closely sown flowers that stretched as far as my eye could see. I was overwhelmed, so much so that I abandoned my original intention. The warring factions in Oz might well wait just a little longer, I thought, for my helpful intrusion. Now I gave my full attention to kissing each blossom. You do know, don't you?" explained Floraline, "that when a fairy kisses a flower its color and fragrance are enhanced and it lives much longer."

"I didn't know that," admitted Jimmy.

"Me neither," said Sarah, forgetting good usage in her absorption in the tale.

"I spent several hours in devotion to the buttercups and daffodils. Presently I grew drowsy. The sun was warm and bright. I decided to take a nap so as to refresh myself before setting out to seek a wrong to right.

"Suddenly I woke. I was aware that an enchantment was being worked on me and sapping my powers. It was a powerful and evil woman named Mombi—"

"You were right, Scarecrow!" praised Lana Peethisaw.

"That explains why the Magic Picture went black," exclaimed Ozma. "Mombi has long since been destroyed so the picture could only show us nothingness."

"Old Mombi had been visiting the Western Witch in Winkieland," continued Floraline, "and was returning to her home when she came upon me sleeping among the flowers. She believed that it was Lurline she had found—we sisters of Burzee resemble one another greatly—and hoped that by enchanting the leader of the fairies she could prevent them from ever coming to the assistance of the good witches of Oz.

"She planned to turn the fell deed to her own particular advantage. She had helped the Eastern Witch conquer the land of the Munchkins and recently she had assisted the Western Witch to enslave the Winkie people. She hoped to bribe—or threaten, if necessary—both of those evil witches into helping subdue Tattypoo and securing the rule of the Gillikin country for herself. If they helped her she would hand over to them the enchanted Queen of the Fairies. They could go on to destroy, or not, Tattypoo just as they chose. Fortunately Mombi's powers were only great enough to enchant but not to destroy a fairy. On the other hand, if the witches refused to help Mombi become the ruling sorceress in the North, she would threaten to disenchant the queen fairy and they would all be at Lurline's mercy."

"How do you know all this?" Ozma asked Floraline.

"Old Mombi was so foolishly proud of herself that she could not resist bragging to me about what she had done and what she meant to do. The transformation she had worked on me was powerful but slow. I was still conscious all the while she was talking."

"But why didn't you tell Mombi she was mistaken about your identity?" asked Dorothy.

"I realized my only hope of rescue was that my sister the Queen would come looking for me and would discover what had happened. If Mombi and the other witches believed that

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Lurline had been eliminated, they might be lulled into a false sense of security. When Lurline should strike they would be caught off guard. Also, if I informed Mombi that she had enchanted the wrong fairy she might try to use me as bait to lure my sister into a trap. So I let her believe that she had outwitted the Fairy Queen.

"She transformed me into a flower, a dandelion. I blended in with all of the other yellow flowers in that Winkie field, yet Mombi could find me because I was the one and only dandelion. It was also her subtle way of humiliating me, by turning me into a weed."

"I like dandelions," declared Jimmy forthrightly.

"Me too," echoed Sarah as usual.

"And me too," laughed Floraline. "I have often felt that the poor dandelion is the most unfairly treated and underappreciated of flowers."

"You showed great thoughtfulness," now declared Glinda. "You may have been foolhardy but you were not foolish. What exactly was the nature of this transformation?"

"Mombi claimed that I could never be disenchanting until such time as someone should pick me and at the same moment say the word 'Oz', a combination of circumstances that clearly would never happen. As she talked on, I felt myself dwindling and I gradually assumed the form of a flower. I felt my feet take root in the soil. And when Mombi saw what she had done she hugged herself with pleasure and hobbled away."

"If Mombi held such a powerful bargaining tool," mused Ozma, "I wonder why the wicked witches didn't help her defeat Tattypoo."

Floraline laughed. "The old rascal's scheme almost succeeded. I waited for days and days for Lurline to find out my fate and come and rescue me, but no rescue came. I have only lately learned that our dear queen assumed I had left the fairy band of my free will.

"In the meantime Mombi had been negotiating with the two other wicked witches. She had convinced them that she was

telling the truth about having captured Lurline. As there had been no evidence of interference by the fairies of Burzee they believed that our Queen had been immobilized.

“One afternoon Mombi and the witches of east and west came to the flower field to claim me, but—” Here Floraline laughed again. “But they couldn’t find me. I had gone to seed! My essence had passed into a single flower seed and I had blown to earth at some distance from the original spot of my enchantment. You should have seen them! Mombi was frantically uprooting every yellow flower she could lay hands on, while crying ‘Oz! Oz!’ at the top of her voice. The two other witches were furious, believing Mombi had deliberately led them on a goose chase. They finally stormed off, cursing her. Eventually Mombi too gave up and left the field, still muttering.

“Seasons passed. I took root and grew into a blossoming flower again, then again went to seed and drifted across the field to a new spot. I took root again, and the cycle was repeated many times. Twice I grew among the yellow flowers in the original field, three times in the green meadows near the Emerald City, and three times in the blue grass of the Munchkin country.

“The last time after I had gone to seed in the blue country something very unusual happened. A terrible wind blew across the field, drawing me and the other white fluffy seed-heads from the stem. As I swirled around in the gale I saw a little old house fall from the sky and land with a crash in the meadow where I had grown. The same wind that had dropped the house carried me far far away, across the desert and across the sea, and to another and unfamiliar land—”

“Why, that must have been the storm that dropped Dorothy’s house on the Wicked Witch of the East!” said the Scarecrow.

“Yes, I think it must have been,” agreed Queen Ozma.

“The great wind deposited me in a field in this new land and I grew into another tall strong dandelion. The years passed and I grew into flowers and blew as seeds across many fields.

“It seemed that long ages went by. My memories of those distant times when I had lived and been a flower fairy and

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danced with my sisters in sun and shadow in the Forest of Burzee faded until I wondered if they had ever been real. My only companions now were bees and butterflies. And still the seasons passed and the breezes blew, I grew and was scattered and grew again. Now too the world was growing darker and I wondered if we would soon see the end of all..."

The fairy paused and seemed lost in reverie. Then she bethought herself and resumed briskly:

"A few days ago I had just gone to seed yet once more. Then I became aware of people near me. One was a great yellowish butterfly and I thought it might be he who would release my seed-spill this time. But no, he only fluttered here and there, and then I realized he was being chased by a couple of creatures with masked faces.

"In the end it turned out to be one of these who picked my flower stem and then said something including the magic word 'Oz'. A moment later I found myself in my own fairy form again and in the yellow field in Winkieland where it had all begun."

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - F O U R

Tramp, tramp, tramp along the highway.

Tramp, tramp, tramp across the fields.

That's what Tik-Tok did and we, at second hand, with him. At first of course there wasn't much tramping across fields to be done as there was a perfectly adequate road of yellow bricks leading westward out of the Emerald City. In these days it was three-lane and busily trafficked by the tens of thousands who now thronged Oz.

How were we going to avoid trampling to destruction any number of our-size people as-we clanked along? It wasn't all that hard, really. At first we blew our whistles like mad but we had not even reached the western city gate before we found that that was going to be for the most part unnecessary. Who was going to fail to observe coming along a creature as tall, in relation to average-sized Ozites, as a hoisting derrick? And Tik-Tok kept to the middle lane, leaving ample room for tiny traffic to move in both directions along the side lanes.

Even at the copper man's sturdy but measured pace we came to the city gates in less than an hour. Then there were two hours of green countryside to enjoy. Immigrants to Oz, hearing by the grapevine that primary colors played an important role in the fairyland, had long been in the habit of bringing with them as

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much as they could lift of objects in the various hues, as if feeling that these provided a sort of *carte blanche* or passport to admittance to that land of all the world's desire. Once arrived and finding the open-sesame materials no longer (or ever?) necessary they threw them way along the roadsides as they trekked to their new homes. That was why the green District of Oz was now littered, in heaps, with decaying watermelons, broccoli, and leeks, emeralds, shamrocks, flags of Egypt and Pakistan, Irishmen, bits of jade, dollar bills, supermarket stamps, classic Coca Cola bottles, and the leaves of every known variety of tree and shrub (except copper beeches). The area also boasted unexpectedly large populations of transplanted Carolina parakeets, frogs, lizards, and grasshoppers. With some of these we had to contend as we went along. Dragonflies rested, though briefly, in great numbers on Tik-Tok's hat-brim.

Then we crossed the line into Winkieland and had the whole thing over again in yellow.

"Yellow," I said, introducing a new angle. "Tell me, Mr. Baum," I requested, "how did it happen that so famous a color-keyed phenomenon as the road of yellow bricks was first observed in the predominantly *blue* country of the Munchkins, whereas it is only by latter-day extension that we have an actually so denominated Yellow Road in this country, where *all* the roads, brick or not, are yellow?"

The Historian, in the fresh honeysuckle-scented air, was not sucking on a cigar. His mouth was free immediately to say, "I should advise you to put that question to Ms. Dorothy here, who actually experienced those scenes from the start."

The young lady (who had chosen the sweet age of sixteen to remain at permanently) was not at all loath to relate. We saw her close her eyes briefly and surrender to the dear old spell. Then she opened them and said, "Munchkinland in the beginning *wasn't* blue. My first impression when I arrived there was of its great greenness. The green sward, the green banks. Munchkinland was no more blue than Kansas was grey which it never was, except during a dust storm. Even then it was, at

most, a pale brown... But I've discussed this issue in my article, 'The Bluing of Munchkinland' —"

— which it might have been supposed we all had read. Alack, I had not, but I was at least cognizant enough of the Kansas girl's scholarly attainments that I could guess it dated from the period of her work for her Master's.

"Blue," she pursued, "was merely the *favorite* color of the Eastern people. They used it for preference when any choice of color scheme was to be made: in personal apparel or in the painting of houses and fences. It was by no means exclusive. The witch of the Munchkins wore *silver* shoes. In places the ground was carpeted with yellow, white, and purple flowers— and not to forget the deadly poppies, which were scarlet. So at the time a road of yellow bricks in the Munchkin country struck me as nothing exceptional.

"It is, however, curious that the road remained always a distinctly Munchkinland phenomenon. If other 'yellow brick roads' are mentioned in other of the countries it is always felt that they are but extensions of the Munchkin one. But mostly they are just roads: no particular color or type of paving is indicated, as, for instance, the road on which the boy Tip played his trick on witch Mombi—"

"Mombi!" broke in the Patchwork Girl. "Mombi is as Mombi does—

And that's not too attractive.

I guess, it's best she's gone to rest

And is no longer active."

"Yes, well..." continued Dorothy, perhaps not best pleased to have undue attention called to that departed member of the Oz pantheon. After all it was at her suggestion that the Gillikin witch had met the fate she did. "To get back;" she pursued, "the heightening of color predominance in the various lands was a slowly accreting process. Remember that at the time of my first arrival— gee," she broke off in young-girl-ish dismay, "was that really a whole century ago?! I can hardly believe it. It makes *me* an antique, doesn't it?" she exclaimed with sudden laughter.

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Everyone hastened to tell her how childlike, in her poke bonnet, she still appeared. But her moment's chagrin was over. She went on:

"When I first visited the Emerald City it only looked green because we put on green glasses. By now those have gone totally out of fashion—because unnecessary! The Emerald City now really is an emerald hue all over.

"I date the increase in what we may call the 'colorification' of Oz to as early as nineteen-four, for we find in *The Marvelous Land of Oz* of that date that 'everything in Gillikinland was purple' and that included specifically grass, trees, houses, fences, and the gravel surface of roads. Young Mr. Tippetarius, as our dear Ozma was called then, stated so and he should have known. He is also our authority for the information that similar conditions prevailed in the other countries as regards their chosen colors, and we soon see this borne out in the case of the green District of Oz, where, even without the benefit of green spectacles, walls, rifles, and a soldier's whiskers were green.

"As earlier, however, and despite what Tip says, the prevalence of the national color was not total. We find that normally and very orange pumpkins grew in Gillikin fields. And another interesting aspect of the phenomenon is that the preference of the natives for the dominant color is shown to be not exclusive either. Hunting for garments for his creation, Jack Pumpkinhead, Tip came across ones in red and pink as well as purple.

"We may say, perhaps, that the over-riding *tendency* in each land was towards its favorite color but the condition was by no means absolute. For instance, things never *changed* color in order to match up. The Scarecrow's blue Munchkin clothes remained blue also on the green throne of the Emerald City, and Jack Pumpkinhead's garments stayed red, pink, and purple, nor in the land of the Winkies did his orange pumpkin head go yellow.

"The first time I ever met our beloved Princess Ozma, newly crowned regent of the Emerald City, she was wearing a silver-colored dress. Also, we returned together from the Land of Ev

to the specifically *green* meadows of Munchkinland. Two years later my first sight, on a new arrival in Oz, was of the both green and yellow hills of Winkieland. Later, in the emerald Palace of Magic, we admired furniture upholstered in cloth of gold with embroidery in red, and our friend the Shaggy Man could get some of his favorite fruit, *red* apples, and put on a pink frock coat with cream-colored accessories.

“So it went, on through the years. The colorification process seemed to wax and wax and wane. As late as 1919—when you came to Oz, Mr. Historian,” Dorothy addressed Mr. Baum, “—Sorceress Glinda in the red country was still weaving emerald cloth, while in purple Gillikinland yellow leopards and grey apes still roamed in Gugu Forest.”

“How do you,” I put in, “explain this—what we might call—‘erraticism’ of the ‘key coloration’, Ms. Dorothy?”

“I don’t,” said she, “except possibly as an illustration of the fourth law of thaumadynamics, which is that characteristics never remain constant; they must always grew more so or less so.”

“I know how I’d explain it,” put in the Original Historian a little surprisingly, and we all gaped, agog. “It was because, as I was writing along, I’d forget all about that predominant-color business—if it wasn’t germane to the action in hand.”

There was an embarrassed silence.

I myself broke it by putting in knowingly, “Never mind, chief. *Whatever* you wrote was fact. You couldn’t help it, you see.”

I thought this subtly put in their place once and for all persons who would presume to declare that they had invented out of whole cloth anything about Oz.

Dorothy changed the course of conversation with charming abruptness. “You know what?” she said. “Just as there was no reason why there should not be a yellow road crossing the green/blue countryside of Munchkinland, I’ve sometimes thought how nice it would be if there was a road—*this* road, for instance—that was *green*—or blue—crossing the yellow country. Wouldn’t that make a refreshing contrast?”

Everyone approved the idea and at once proposed an

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Orange Brick Road for Gillikinland and pink pavements for the Emerald City.

But why stop at recolorations for only specifically Oz phenomena? some pondered. The Patchwork Girl sang:

"I've never really been content
With red and white for peppermint!
I cannot eat—for stomach-lack—
But just the same I'd like it black."

"But there's licorice, Scraps," objected Miss Thompson. "Surely that supplies that need?"

"Oh, but licorice should be olive green!"

"And olives then?"

"White."

"How bizarre everything would look," mused Dorothy.

"But how bizarre everything does look," rebutted Scraps. "Did it never strike you as most strange that the sun is orange? It isn't even a—primary color. Pale green would be much more suitable—and more restful to the eyes."

"It *is* odd," put in Mr. Neill, "that the sky is blue. I've often thought that. If outer space is all black—as it seems to appear to us—a little light flooding in locally should only lighten it to various shades of grey, I would have thought."

"Like the poet Federico García Lorca," I dropped a name, "I like green. But still I wish grass and trees were the colors of lilac blossoms. I love all shades of violet and you just don't see enough of it. One gets rather fed up just seeing green everywhere."

"Roses are brown,
Violets are grey," recited Scraps.

"When the sea's yellow
Will be the day!"

"Yes!" agreed somebody. "Water, when deep, is green or blue. Why not maroon? Or yellow?"

We gave it up. No accounting for hue, though no doubt laws of physics, if any of us non-scientists had known them, could have been brought in to explain the causes of colors. But just the same I didn't see why butter should not be pink—or blood sky-blue.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - F I V E

Who remembers men made of metal? Trees that whisper secrets of the forests? Or the dreaded and dreadful black clouds that cried salt tears? No one? Oh well, no matter. Sit and listen ever so carefully and without a sound and I will tell you of that time and place so long ahead and far away.

In a land not too far from the one some of you know as Oz lived men made of metal. Where those shining faces and clanking bodies came from no one knew but they had lived in Alloya as long as anyone could remember; perhaps always? They were lumberjacks, blacksmiths, and carpenters. They lived in houses much like you and I inhabit: some made of brick, others of stone, and some men even occupied cabins built of logs with their own hands.

Now being men of metal, they required no daily food (as we know it) or water (which is quite understandable) for their survival and well-being. The only nourishment that their tin or copper or aluminum bodies did partake of—it being essential in every way—was oil. Any oil would serve but the tin men, for instance, of Alloya always preferred the sweet corn oil that came from their own fields of maize, which they grew specifically for that purpose. The copper men chose tung oil; it kept off the verdigris; the iron men, plain petroleum.

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For some reason the inhabitants of Alloya were not respected or accepted in any of the neighboring towns or villages. Consequently they had learned, over the ages, to be completely self-sufficient. They bartered and traded for each other's goods and services and had no need of aid or assistance from outsiders. They built each other's houses, shod their horses, shared the precious lubricating oils, and provided for one another whatever help was needed.

The metal men of Alloya had no families: no wives, sweethearts, or children. As far as anyone knew the only creatures ever to have lived in Alloya were the men of metal. They worked all the days through and rested when the sun went down each evening. (Even they could feel metal fatigue.) This was what their lives were made of. Oh, sure, they visited each other and could sit for hours discussing the workings of machinery and the fine points of metal ornamentation, and on clear nights of moon or stars you could hear them clinking and clanking as they danced in merriment around huge bonfires. Mainly though, their lives consisted of work and rest and work and rest. They did not mind, for this was all they knew. Such was the life of a metal man in Alloya.

Alloya was a very beautiful village. Surrounded by deep thick forests on all sides, it sat almost sunken in their midst. Directly in the center of town the men had erected a pyramid monument made of the finest sterling silver. Its peak towered over the houses but not so high that the trees of the forest did not surmount it and hide it from would-be robbers and vandals.

Curiously enough, the metal men were all blessed with green thumbs, so to speak, and they all cultivated the most remarkable gardens around their homes. Again curiously, all their ornamental plants were wildflowers. The blossoms were purple and orange, violet and pink. None had structured seeds. As well as in the planned gardens these flowers also grew here and there haphazardly and untended. They were of the kinds you could see in fields and meadows cared for

by mother nature herself. Certainly they were beautiful and well loved and they grew in abundance.

Alloya being enveloped in forests, many of the forest's creatures, unlike their human counterparts, befriended the metal men and made their own homes in and around the village. Soft quick rabbits, shy wide-eyed deer, sly but friendly foxes, and at least twelve varieties of birds were to be found there. Nests, dens, and burrows concealed here and there in nooks and crannies gave evidence of the ongoing and trusting friendships that had been cemented between the metal men and the animals. Yes, the men were gentle kind souls, a fact that shone plain for all who would see.

Now while Alloya seemed warm and welcoming to all who sought entrance there, the forests were to a great extent not so inviting. Hence it was seldom that a visitor wandered into the village, for to do so he had to brave the deep dark Forest of Whispers. Though no one knew of specific dangers lurking in or about the trees and dense greenery, it was thought advisable not to tempt their secrets. For the trees did whisper secrets, secrets no human had ever heard. Were they secrets about forest life itself? Or about some unknown evil that flourished, hidden there? It was not known for sure but some believed the trees knew about the beginnings of the metal men themselves. The fact that the men did make their home right in the heart of this fear-haunted woodland caused the people of the towns and villages beyond to grow increasingly leery of the poor metal fellows. None of them ever ventured near the Forest of Whispers or as far as the village of Alloya.

If the forests themselves were not dark and forbidding enough, there came every now and then what was known as the Witch's Storm. When this happened, not only did the townspeople outside go in fear of their lives but the metal men too ran at the first sight of the dreaded black clouds. For these were not ordinary dark grey storm clouds; no, they were heavy and black as a witch's eye and everyone knew that the rains that fell out of these clouds could sting and burn even

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the toughest leather. For the metal men there was even a greater fear, for the smallest sprinkling of those acid drops could corrode them and turn them into no better than statues. Yes, the Witch's Storm frightened all who knew its wrath. Its mercy was very strained and it dropped alike on everyone and everything.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - S I X

“Well, shi’ite!” said Jimmy. Like all normal vital American children he spent all his time at home in front of the T.V. screen and could thus not help being exposed to frequent news broadcasts with their recurrent references to the on-going wars in the Near East and the various teams participating. Religious names are always satisfying expletives but of course you didn’t want to say anything directly sacrilegious like “God!” or “Christ!” The names of sects were a sufficient substitute.

“Shi’ite!” he said. “What about *us*?” — meaning to say he couldn’t quite see what Floraline’s release from some ancient spell had to do with him and Sarah. No way could her return to a former shape and a former venue have caused two average kids to be transported to Oz. They would have to come up with a better one than that.

Ozma explained. “It’s simply a very great coincidence. I admit my mind boggled at the aptness of it.” Here she told how she had been looking for a couple U.S. children to go to Oz so as to make her roundup of participants in the great centenary celebrations complete.

“We were invisible, of course,” she related — though Jimmy and Sarah couldn’t see any ‘of course’ about it. “We saw you wishing on dandelions and were frankly bowled over by the

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aptness of your mentioning our fairyland. Knowing you actively wanted to come here I had no hesitation in touching my Magic Belt and accomplishing it."

"Well, why the heck didn't you say so in the first place?" demanded Jimmy impulsively. "Save us all this running around."

"Well, bruvver, we wanted to check out Glinda anyway," reminded Sarah fairly. "So it's not a total loss."

"Frap," he replied with scant courtesy. "So there's no such thing as a magic dandelion after all."

"Not if you mean one that automatically grants wishes," conceded Princess Ozma. "How could there be—in *Ohio...?!'*", as one who would say 'Now if it had been Indiana...' "But," she continued, "a dandelion that was the incarnation of a magical being: that, yes. It was wonderful that you should happen to say the befreeing word. I'm sure Floraline—"

"Yes, your majesty," broke in Lurline of Burzee, "that's why we're here now. When Glinda chanced to mention during our radio chat this morning—" Here she displayed her wrist with its delicate two-way radio in opal and onyx. "—that the Big Book had alerted her to your visit, I thought we could save some time by intercepting you here—"

Then the fairy queen in turn was interrupted by the joyous and vivid, newly mobile Floraline: "Oh, Your Majesty, let me speak, I pray you!" Of course Lurline gave consent.

"As the spell was broken," spoke the green fairy, "I was magically returned to the original site of my enchantment in that Winkie field. When I realized that I was free of Mombi's spell at last my joy was so great that I quite forgot about the two children who had delivered me. I sped back to the Forest of Burzee to be reunited with my sisters. I'm sorry I left you in the Ohio field," she addressed Sarah and Jimmy.

"I'm not," said the latter. "Sarah and I had neat adventures because you did."

"Even so I want to thank you both for rescuing me," said the fairy, and she kissed each of the children on the forehead. "To show my appreciation I hereby declare that any time you wish

to come to Oz all you need do is wish upon a dandelion and I will bring you here."

Jimmy and Sarah joined hands and jumped for joy. It was joy-jumping time anyway. The tots were tired of standing around half-way between Glinda's chair of state and the door and they wanted a change of pace. By the time they finished jumping they were *at* the door and Jimmy was looking significantly at his digital watch.

"Now dandelions *are* magic flowers after all," said the Scarecrow. "At least for Jimmy and Sarah."

"I wish there were some around here then, said Jimmy. "I would wish we could go ahead and eat dinner."

"Indeed," said Glinda. "Now that the mystery has been solved and Floraline has been restored to her sisters let us celebrate," she commanded.

The merry group went into the dining room, where a wonderful repast was served. The food was delicious. Girl musicians played beautiful music during the meal. And afterwards Lurline's band of fairies danced. Before the evening ended the red sorceress ushered everyone out onto the great balcony of her castle/palace. From here the happy companions watched a magnificent display of fireworks.

When it was over it was time for Lurline's band to fly off to their forest home. As the fairies did the rounds bidding everyone goodbye Floraline drew the two Ohio children aside.

"It's all very well making arrangements for you to come to Oz next time," she said. "But what about this time? Are those people taking care of you?" She meant Glinda and the Scarecrow and company. "I'm so grateful to you," she repeated. "I want to be certain you're having a nice time. You're not bored, are you?"

Jimmy and Sarah looked at each other. "Well," they confessed, "there was a *little* excitement the time Jimmy squished that batty butterfly, but it didn't last too long. We want some horrors—like in the movie. Safe ones, of course."

"Hmm," said Floraline, bemused.

"Yeah," supplemented Jimmy. "We haven't seen any fighting

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trees or deadly poppies or flying monkeys—”

“What about wicked witches?!” demanded Sarah. “We haven’t met witch one.”

“Glinda’s a witch,” reminded Floraline.

“She doesn’t count,” declared Jimmy. “Anyway they call *her* ‘sorceress’ all the time. Let’s face it: *real* witches only do bad things.”

“Yes, you’d want some bad things, wouldn’t you?” agreed Floraline thoughtfully.

“Yeah, to make it more fun after,” explained Sarah, “when the witches or whatever got killed.”

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do,” said Floraline with an air of decision. “I’m in your debt, as I say. I’d like to help you have fun. The fairy band got along without me for a century. Another few days or weeks won’t matter. Wait here a minute, will you? I’ll just have a word with the dear queen—”

Fitting deed to word the charming golden-green fay flew after the fairy train that was nearing the south portal of the pink palace.

Then she returned. “Right,” she summed up. “I’ve got a week’s leave. And Dementia’s coming with us!” Here she introduced a little blue-green pixy with a delightfully daffy look. “Let’s go see if we can’t find you a fun wicked witch..!”

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - S E V E N

As we neared the Winkie Village of the Field Mice Dorothy couldn't resist blowing her magic whistle again and once more summoning all the wee rodents. Queen Ramina ran up with her paws on her hips, metaphorically speaking, and shrieked, "What is it this time, Princess?" She and her entourage had been called out in vain several times during the day whenever Dorothy had thoughtlessly blown on the whistle for other purposes. What had got into the girl?

Luckily, way up on the hat brim of the onward-stalking Mechanical Man Dorothy couldn't hear the queen's near-indignant greeting. She could just barely *see* her and that with the help of Wizard Diggs' binoculars. She waved and called down to the mouse court: "Hi! your majesty. We were passing and I just couldn't go by without saying hello." On one of her earlier vain summonings of the magic mice she had explained that we were off to Patch.

Ramina could hear the traveler all right and, good-natured little thing, she squeaked, "Well, if you need any help just let us know." But Dorothy didn't hear that either and she merely waved again merrily and rode on. (As author I knew what Ramina said but as a character I couldn't hear her either, way down there and so tiny, so I couldn't pass on her message to the princess.)

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After a time of steady plodding by our copper conveyance we passed within sight of Bookville and Ice Town but we didn't pause. Only at Lake Lily did we stop for a drink and to stretch our legs. The liquid of the lake was perfume, of course, but just of a very refined subtle scent that in no way interfered with our enjoyment in quaffing the fluid. We just all had lovely breaths afterwards. It was natural flower essences, none of your chemically produced ethers, and it was no more disagreeable than sipping the dew from the heart of a rose. Curiously, according to where you knelt along the lake's rim, its waters smelt and tasted of *different* flowers. I got a rich swallow of lilac for my pains.

Then it was on again for an hour or two 'til we camped for the night. The Wizard did his usual trick with pocket handkerchiefs and provided comfortable tents for the wayfarers. Just imagine what it was like, actually living under a magic canopy for a night, after having read about them and dreamed of them for so many years. It was a thrill, I can tell you.

Over magically produced delicacies at collapsible camp tables we authors that evening couldn't help getting into a discussion of the processes involved. It was all very well ascribing the catering to magic but after all the physical constituents of the celeriac sandwiches we were eating must come from somewhere. Summoning them to our table was magic enough. Don't tell me the foods were examples of something made out of nothing!

"Oh, no," said the genial Wizard. "They come from the Magic Soup Kitchens in Ev. I believe they've been written up^s."

"If they have," put in Mr. Neill, "I don't know about it. What's the story, Mr. Diggs?"

He told us, reminding those in the know that the kitchens themselves were, indeed, not magical. The dishes were prepared by master chefs from produce grown in a rich farming area that the kitchens lay at the heart of. It was only their instant delivery by small blackamoors to customers near and far that was magically arranged.

§ Yes, indeed. See *The Enchantment of Oz*. Editor's note.

Well, one thing more. The dishes were always 'just enough.' They were so delicious that no one could ever stop eating until he had finished his plate, at which point he found that he was just exactly satisfied and did not want another bite. This was a built-in trait of the servings. It saved the Servants of the Plate having to throw away a lot of perfectly good leftovers, an always antisocial act.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - E I G H T

That day started like any other fine day in Alloya. The sun was bright and white puffy animal-shaped clouds filled the sky. All the woodland's little creatures busied themselves with their daily tasks and chores. The metal men proceeded to their lumber yards, fields, and stables without a thought that this day might be different from all others.

Garth rose from his great wooden bed, clanking and feeling a bit stiff, and made his way to the pantry where he would find the shiny tin oil-can. The oil would loosen up those kinks and give him the extra punch he needed in the morning to be able to get on with the day.

Oh, he was stiff this morning! Clank, clunk, he crossed the hall, bending and stretching all the way. Nope, these silly physical jerks weren't going to do the trick; straight for the corn oil! There on the second shelf beside the jar of acorns for his little tree friends. Ah, yes: a little squirt here and a little squirt there, in his joints at the knee, shoulder, and elbow. "There, that'll get any ol' man of tin going on any ol' kind of day," said Garth to himself with a smile as he replaced the can where he had found it.

Heading for the back door with almost a dance in his step, Garth laughed and made the head-knocking gesture that meant he had forgotten the breakfast jar for his squirrely pals. He

clanked his way back to the pantry and grabbed the acorns.

Sitting in his yard on the stump of a tree that he had chopped down just the day before, Garth handed out the nuts one by one to a group of six or seven little furry people who greeted him every morning on hind legs with noses eager and front paws outstretched. Six or seven of them: Garth never knew in advance because sometimes they would bring along a stray who had wandered into their domain. But there was always plenty to go round. Why, one morning there had been *ten* squirrels waiting and hungry when Garth sat down to dole out the portions. "No matter," he chuckled. "Glad you could bring your friends."

He sat there smiling and chatting with the squirrels for perhaps half an hour. As he did so he admired the way the sun glinted through the branches of the trees, lighting up the leaves as if they were transparent or made of silk. 'This is a glorious morning,' he thought. To his little friends he said, "I do believe you would gnaw the last nut in the jar if I gave it to you. I think you've all had quite enough for this morning. Run away now and play; that's *your* job in this world, isn't it?" Then he screwed the lid in place and shoed away the squirrels with his shining arms.

Now Garth was a lumberjack and woodworker and bordering on his garden sprawled a section of the Forest of Whispers so deep and thick that no matter how many trees he cut down a person could still get lost in the midst of it. Not that Garth did a particular lot of chopping these days for the inflow of newcomer residents in Alloya had thinned almost to a complete halt by last spring. There just weren't any metal men moving into the village any more and all that were there had already built their houses and stables.

All Garth could do was cut firewood for his neighbors and the townsmen and, with this new spring coming on, even the need for that would dwindle considerably. But that would be all right for the rains would be coming soon as they did every year at about this season and he could spend his days in the house doing what he loved most in the world: writing poetry.

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Oh, there was no demand for poetry in those parts. Where is there? But then a poet or artist doesn't create because there's a "demand" for it. That's where non-artists get confused. Artists and poets, as opposed to hucksters, do it because they have to.

Still, at moonlight gatherings Garth would offer readings to his companions and all would enjoy the pictures he could paint with his words, but by and large verse was pretty much a private pleasure for woodman Garth. He found much peace and contentment in writing about all the beauty and sentiment that were still to be noted in this darkening world. Somehow writing seemed to put a 'topping' on it all for him. 'It completed the picture,' was how he put it.

He wrote about the animals he saw and knew and even some he didn't. He liked to imagine unheard-of creatures, strange and giant birds, or little whirring spinning insects. He would give them names and build worlds for them to live in.

Garth would write about the trees and how old they were, about where their long long roots ended, and of how they entwined and mingled with other trees' roots and were intimate, in arboreal fashion. Flowers and rainbows also made their way into the metal man's word portraits, as did his metal friends and the life they lived.

But Garth could also write sadly at times. He would put his innermost emotions and desires on paper and now and again a tear would stain the ink. It isn't good for a tin man to cry so he tried hard to hold back the flood but once in a while the droplets would fall. Solemnly he would take his oil-can, squirt the corners of his eyes, and then try to think of lighter and happier words to write.

Garth's principal sadness stemmed from his desire for a life's companion. In contrast to the general and hard-headed celibacy of his metal-town fellows he had the blues for someone to love. By definition it needn't, even couldn't, be an erotic love, but *oh!* just to have the fond company. He didn't like living alone and it pained him to have no one to share the charm and beauty of the world with. He sometimes wondered if he was the only metal

man in the world who ached in that way, for all his local friends seemed content and never mentioned sharing any such feelings.

That was what turned Garth to make friends of animals and birds. It was the only thing he could think of that might ease the pain. Most of the time it did but then there would come those rainy days when he was all alone, cloistered in his house and feeling the loneliness of utter solitude. Those times were when the words of darkness and despair would flow freely from his pen to paper.

Yet Garth loved life and living. He called the sun his mother and the moon his father, rather reversing the genders we tend to apply to those heavenly bodies (at least in English). The forests were his spiritual home and the animals within it his family. He had his metal pals too and his work to do: wood to cut, stories to tell, and poetry to indite.

It looked very much as if Garth had a heart. He had *something* there that could hurt. Yet when he was first made the tinsmith had told him that he had forgotten to put in a heart but that he really didn't need one and that he would do very well without it, leading a normal metal man's life.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - N I N E

"Where is everybody?" demanded Jimmy engagingly. They were back in Queen Ozma's throne room in the Emerald City.

"I'm here," stated the Queen.

"So am I," said fairy Floraline, and the pixy Dementia echoed her.

"You're only fairy godmothers—sort of," asserted Jimmy. "I want more uncles here to welcome me. There's that Wizard? And the old geezers you said wrote the books?"

"You wouldn't mean Mr. Baum, would you, angel?" asked Jellia Jamb, shocked.

"I guess that's his name. And those other guys."

"I'm a 'guy'," the Scarecrow reminded the visitors.

"Oh, Scarecrow," said the two kids, giving him a perfunctory, if careful, hug. Even they had grace enough not to advert to the fact that straw was the extent of the Scarecrow's 'guy-ness.' Yet in one way he was quite right: the stuffed fellow's form fulfilled the classic definition of a "guy."

But now the Soldier with the Green Whiskers came hurrying in, a bit belatedly, to acquaint the Girl Ruler and her entourage with the fact that during her absence in the south the Wizard and Dorothy with other celebrities and visitors had gone off on Tik-Tok's hat brim.

"Tik-Tok's hat brim?" echoed fairy Ozma amazed. "That requires some explanation."

But here Omby Amby hemmed and hawed. Wizard Diggs had warned him that the royal Princess, for reasons best known to herself, was not really keen to be informed about the motivation for the expedition to Patch. It was for her advantage but not at her instigation. So finally the general came out with: "Oh, it was just a sight-seeing jaunt, your grace, hit on at the spur of the moment. They'll be back before you know it."

"Kurds!" protested Jimmy. "Sight-seeing?! And they left us out? I like *that*."

"I wanna go too!" exclaimed Sarah and started to cry.

"You're tired, darlings," diagnosed Jellia Jamb. "Come. It's off to bed with you."

The kids let themselves be persuaded. But they didn't forget their grievance. Next morning they went into a huddle with Floraline and Dementia.

"They didn't wait for us!" they accused. "That's the second time now. That bunch went off to see Glinda without us and now they've gone to Patch. What's the idea? It almost looks like they don't care about our company."

"Oh, no, kiddies," Floraline hastened to protest. "It couldn't be *that*." The fairy was no dummy and she had already sized up the tots, but nothing could alter the fact that she was under an obligation to them and she'd play along for a while yet.

"Well, nerts," said the delightful duo. "What are we supposed to do *now*? We came here for adventures. We're not just gonna stand around playing croquet like Trot and Betsy or whatever those kids call themselves."

"No, no one's going to make you do that," the fairy assured them. In fact no one was going to force them to do anything. Oz was like that; that was part of its charm. But the result might be that the pair would be left kicking their heels.

"Hey," said Sarah, remembering something, "I thought you were going to show us a wicked witch."

"Yeah, that's right," her sibling backed her up faithfully.

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"How's about it?"

"But I want to go to Patch too!" announced Sarah contrarily. She'd got wind of the fact that Patch was a country where the national industry was sewing and that interested her.

Floraline looked thoughtful. "Maybe we could combine the two," she said at last, giving off an attractive aura of mystery.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y

As metal-man Garth sat on in the back yard dreaming about his poetry and thinking how lonely and essentially unappreciated he was he presently became aware that the sun had clouded over. Oh, heck, maybe it wasn't going to be another in the current chain of fairly golden days after all.

He looked off to the south from which the cloudbank was moving. That meant that if it rained it would at least be a warm one, the clouds having passed over the sizzling convections of the Impassable (but not to clouds) Desert, which lay not very many miles off beyond the frontier of Ev. He'd better get in the bit of washing he'd hung out just before going to bed.

Garth didn't wear clothes. That is to say, such clothes as he (of course!) appeared to wear were part of him. Like their famous confreres in the land of Oz the metal men of Alloya came with made-on decor that simulated clothing: bow ties, collars, and spats, for instance. Or one might sport a tailcoat or another a weskit or boondockers. Functionally there was no reason why they should not have perfectly asexual robot-like bodies, which of course would dispense with such frills as the illusion of garments. However, it would seem that the 'philosophy' behind the creation of the Alloyans was that they should imitate as much as possible human beings. And of course ninety nine percent of

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humans, in the ordinary way, go clothed.

Garth had built-on overalls as befitting his callings of forester and wood-carver and his wrists were equipped with flanges suggesting gauntlets.

Even so, the tin man had belongings of cloth that occasionally wanted laundering: tea towels, table cloths, curtains, oil rags. A modest array of such hung on the lines and hastily he gathered them in. A little clean rain wouldn't hurt them, of course, but in fact clean rain was alas but a pleasant memory for the people of Alloya and the towns beyond the forest and indeed in all of Ev.

As everywhere on earth in that time the air even in non-industrialized countries like Ev was not clean. Why, the very North Pole itself was afflicted by "Arctic haze," an effluvium of airborne filth from the south. Even in the year two thousand man had not as yet got to planting factories on the ice floes of the Arctic Ocean so that that region could supply its own pollution.

It is true that when it rained it still tended to clear the air but what you saw afterwards where the rain had fallen was streaks of mud or oil. It was marvelously nourishing for the soil but it did not serve to satisfy people who had a yen for fresh cleanliness. The metal men were perhaps more fortunate than some in an era when rain was less water and increasingly phylocarbons. Or was it even a case of "fortune"? Might it not be that their wise creator(s?) had just some such development in mind when he/they had had the metal fellows on the drawing board?

Garth stood at the kitchen window. Kitchen? A curious adjunct to the living arrangements of a non-eating person. But most of the Alloyans were of a genial disposition and would not rule out the possibility that they might sometimes have food-consuming guests. Then a kitchen would come into its own. Meanwhile Garth's cooking room with its adjoining pantry served as a storage place for the squirrels' nut jar, while otherwise performing more or less as an indoor tool shed.

He watched the sprinkle turn quickly into a downpour that

streaked the windows with grime. At the same time the wind had mounted and was blowing a regular gale. He hoped his forest pals were snug in their nests, in *solid* trees, and that his buddies in the village had made it indoors in time. Granted those wishes, he could quite enjoy the battle of the elements.

As is no doubt the case in all situations of fear there was some admiration mixed with Garth's dread of rain. Blasts of lightning, shatterings of thunder, and the roar of rain are the most violent manifestations of natural forces that many people ever see. If you can pull your head out from under the bedclothes and look at the storm impartially you have to admit that it is dramatic and magnificent. No one would deny its excitement, even if it be a type of excitement one could well do without. In Garth's case the stirring of emotion went even further.

"The Witch's Storm" they called this kind of thing. He'd never known quite why. Was some particular witch supposed to be responsible? Or was it just a theoretical name, hit upon because this sort of wild dance of fury was what a witch would likely stage if witches *could* run the weather?

He didn't know, but as he watched the mud-balls clinging he couldn't help a sneaking feeling that he'd like to get a look at any witch capable of bringing off such a display.

Little did he dream...

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - O N E

“There!” Tik-Tok flung down the limp old carpet on the lawn in front of the patched palace (or quilted castle. Oz writers seemed not to know the difference between a castle and a palace. We are told that an early Patch ruler looked out of her “castle” window. But now that I have seen them I can affirm that the buildings [an old, normal-sized, and a modern miniature version] are in fact palaces, or rather, a rambling sort of wooden pavilion whose cracks are stuffed with rags.).

Dust flew up and everyone sneezed briefly. A window in the smaller of the two royal residences flew open and the head and shoulders of Queen Sewsan leaned out. “Whatever—!?” she cried.

“Oh, hi, Suze!” called the Patchwork Girl gaily.

“We’ve got a job of work for you.

We want this carpet made like new.

It’s badly tattered and it stinks

But can’t be washed in case it shrinks.”

“Oh,” said the Queen, peering with considerable interest. “Sounds like it will need smigging.”

“What *is* smigging exactly?” queried Scraps after Tik-Tok had carefully deposited his hat on the ground and we could all get off and walk about. The quilted girl approached her friend at

the window. "I was trying to explain it to my friends but the fact is, I've forgotten."

"Oh, it's very like simple needlework," explained Queen Sewsan comfortably; "it's a procedure for mending and cleaning in one operation. We use needles cut from soapstone. The process is much used where the material is too old and fragile to stand cleaning *before* repair."

"Exactly the case here!" chortled the Patchwork Girl. "Will you see what you and your people can do?"

"That can be arranged," conceded Queen Sewsan. She contemplated the project more closely. Tik-Tok had by now unrolled the carpet and it was seen to cover the broad front garden of the palace. "It's rather large, isn't it?"

"That's just the point," confirmed Scraps. "If it had been pocket handkerchiefs we could have done the job at home, but the size necessitated the intervention of experts tooled up for large-scale production. That's you Quilties!" the girl brought out her clincher.

"Oh, I think we can cope." The Patch queen continued to cast an appraising eye. "It's quite pretty, actually." She meant the carpet's old-rose ground with the pea-green-going-on-aqua surround. "But I can't make out the pattern. It's strangely diffuse, as if blurred by dust or something."

"It *is*." Then the Patchwork Girl had to give a thumbnail history of the furnishing and hinted that there was a bit of mystery connected with the rug. "The main thing though," she wrapped up the dissertation, "is the smell of it. We can't keep something like that in a royal palace and we didn't know what better to do than bring it to you, hoping you could help. It's a job for your launderers more than for your needlepeople perhaps."

"When did you need it?" asked Sewsan.

"While we wait—I guess." Scraps looked to the Wizard for confirmation. "We haven't got any other priorities. We thought we'd just stay here as long as it takes to get the work done... if you can put us up..?"

"That's no problem. Delighted to have you. Well, come on

A FAREWELL TO OZ

in." The Queen left her window and went to her door, where she shook each of us by the hand as we entered. All except Tik-Tok, who was invited to make himself free of the old (big) palace across the fields.

Queen Sewsan sent the Scissor Bird to alert the citizenry to the project and presently we saw them all coming in groups of two or three from their houses in various directions beyond the cotton fields. All were armed with the tools of their trade and seemed quite cheerful at the prospect of a sort of giant quilting bee.

Meanwhile the queen had summoned the palace staff to provide us with refreshments and show us to the guest rooms. We all wanted a freshen-up after our night on the road but were none of us too tired to assist at the gay scene that presently was unfolded on the lawn. All the comfortable Quilty women in their bright patchwork dresses settled down around the periphery of the miles-wide-seeming carpet and in amongst them were not a few of their seamster menfolk, and all of them with clothes-pins on their noses against the stench. These latter the Wizard of Oz had supplied from his gross of them, which he had providently brought along, foreseeing some such necessity. Consequently no one seemed too oppressed by the smell. When Queen Sewsan came with her magic needle and the needlepeople set to work they would soon take care of all manifestations of the carpet's age and rundown condition.

Now the momentous act was at hand. Involuntarily we all held our breaths for an instant as the Queen took her place at the middle of the edge of one of the long sides of the rug, raised her sparkling platinum Magic Needle on high, and, reaching far out, plunged it into the spongy fabric of the vast floor-cover.

None of us was prepared for what happened next.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - T W O

The Ohio siblings' translation to Oz had been instantaneous.

One moment they were standing in a sooty field near Sandusky, the next they were sprawling on the lush green lawn surrounding a palace in the pristine Emerald City. Afterwards they traveled in a red wagon drawn by the Saw-horse or floated on a ferry raft along Oz waterways. Now was the first time they were covering ground in a 'realizable' magic way.

It was so simple. Later they would think, 'Why, I can do that!' But they couldn't. It took the magic touch of a green fairy, helped (at least not hindered) by a little bluish pixy, to lift the earthbound-tending mortal children and waft them through the air.

It also took a little time—at the tiny size they still maintained. They started at a reasonable hour of the morning but it was latish afternoon before, floating along like thistledown—or dandelion spills—they found themselves flying over the varicolored patchwork fields of a cotton kingdom.

Then "Look!" cried gold-green Floraline and pointed out two gilded roofs, a great and a small, rising from among garment gardens, a neglected and a well-tended. "I'll bet you that's the royal palace of Patch."

So it proved. And it appeared that the aeronauts had arrived

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at a crucial moment. Something was going on in the green and pink front garden of the smaller palace, something involving what looked like a pink and green tornado. “What in the world..!?” yelped the flyers and stood still in air to watch.

A cloud of dust was swirling furiously—but not getting anywhere. Unlike real or full-scale tornadoes this one just whirled in one spot, over the center of the green/pink garden, while all around the perimeter of the plot little people—and one great big copper man—shrank back aghast. The wind howled. Contrary to usual wind behavior it howled *words*.

“Ow-w-w!” moaned the wind. “Ay-ay-ay-y!” shrieked the wind. “Oh, my aching back!” shrilled the wind.

“That’s no usual wind,” diagnosed Floraline right away.

“No, and that’s no usual garden either,” assessed sharp-eyed Dementia, gazing down. “It looks to me more like a big carpet spread out there.”

“You know, I think you’re right,” said Floraline. “I wonder what’s going on.”

“Let’s go down and see!” demanded Jimmy. At first the children had been a bit nervous about the whirlwind, pint-sized though it was, but now, reflecting that nothing bad could happen to them in a fairy tale, plucky Jimmy was all for getting involved.

“Yeah!” seconded Sarah. “I can see Dorothy down there. Let’s go!”

Even as the airborne group cautiously descended, the little tornado, duly operating on a centripetal principle, was growing progressively narrower, hovering over the center of the great pink and green rug.

“Why, look at that!” said Dementia, awed. “It’s taking on an outline of something... What..?”

“A whale!” shouted Jimmy.

“No, an elephant!” constated Sarah.

“No, it’s not. It’s a giraffe.”

“No, it’s more like a giant person!”

“Not so giant. See there? A big man, but not all *that* big.”

“No, a little old woman!”

It was so. All the dust (every atom of it) that had swirled up out of the musty moldy old carpet (leaving it gleaming in its pristine if threadbare colors) had by now coalesced into a nearly solid-appearing shape of a little (at least, in comparison to the size of Tik-Tok) crone in an old-fashioned Mother Hubbard gown, who danced and cavorted on the rug, uttering shrieks and groans of a character nobody could make out.

“Who dares to stick a pin in me?!” it raged at one moment, but, “Whee! I’m alive again!” it chortled at the next. “Curses!” it cried. “I’ll be revenged!” Then, “No, I won’t! I’ll give somebody a hug for setting me free!” the figure jubilated.

The crowd of miniature figures around the edges of the carpet had recovered from their first terror at the violent apparition in their midst and, drawing tentatively nearer, all of us were looking at each other with amazed and querying glances and wondering what it all meant.

At least two people knew. The Wizard of Oz, of our land-based party, and fairy Floraline of the just now alighting airborne group exchanged looks with a common question in their eyes. Those two, if anyone, could not fail to recognize the apparition.

“It’s Mombi!” they gasped as one.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - T H R E E

Garth, the tin man, was standing on his (well covered) back porch gazing out into the storm. He felt invigorated by the violent show. Nay, more, he felt drawn to it, an impulse he had to admit was foolhardy for a metal man to be feeling. Step out into *that* and in five minutes he would have ground to a halt that would be permanent—unless somebody came along to find him and give him a lubrication job.

He was tempted, even so. There was something so fascinating, so alluring, about the tons of water smashing down. Dare he just run out into it for a second? Oh, no more! And then back under his porch roof while the first momentum still lasted? Just to see what it felt like?

The mad yen was so far irresistible that he did at any rate stick out a hand from under the shelter of the roof. Splash! dash! In an instant the hand was dripping and he drew it back in.

A violent glare of lightning lit the scene and sent blue and green reflexes sparkling from the wet hand. Rain that gleamed in colors? That was strange. In fact, unique. As the thunder roared to deafen him he stared at his hand.

Curiously he rubbed thumb and forefinger together. It felt strangely slick. He snapped his fingers and a blue spark jumped. Instantaneously a bright ripple of elf-fire ran over his hand and

was gone. How queer!

In the half-light from the kitchen doorway he peered at his hand. It felt hot! And it looked *dry*, where only a moment before it had been dripping wet.

Garth moved to the top step and thrust his arm again out into the elements. This time when he pulled back the hand he put a finger to his lips and extruded his tongue for a taste.

A 'taste'? A metal man? Would a person constructed never to be able to eat even have a tongue? Why, yes, to talk with. And if the tongue couldn't taste it could feel. It would be a metal man's most sensitive organ for distinguishing the enemy water from, for example: oil!

There was no mistaking the way his tongue slid over his tin plate. It was raining oil! It was not merely raining, it was thundering down oil. Without an instant's more thought Garth took a nose-dive out into the oleaginous 'element.' What could be more heavenly for a tin/steel man than to be bathed in the one substance of all on earth that could benefit, could virtually *nourish*, him? It was like for one of us to be able to plunge into a sea of raspberry cr me or rich soup.

It was indeed very like a sea. It was raining so hard that Garth's back yard was ankle-deep already and the place was in a fair way to becoming an oil pond. He waded around at a joyous prance, snatches of impromptu odes spilling from his lips, and when he reached the picket fence he lifted high his arms and prayed to the unknown witch whose storm this was.

"Mother storm goddess!" he cried. "I know you're there! Come down to me in tangible form! I mean, in a shape I can talk to. I want to thank you for this benison!"

Actually he was not expecting any reply. It was just a joyous vocalizing of the delight he felt. Garth was a little disappointed when the storm suddenly slackened. It was as if the oil ceased to fall with such violence but also as if what fell fell more thickly. In only moments it was of the density of an oil lake standing on end in Garth's back garden. The lightning had stopped but there was still a mutter of thunder reverberating.

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A mutter? No, distinct utterance of discrete sounds, actual phonemes. It sounded like: "So..? Well..! Liked that... did you?" Since when did oilbursts talk?

Garth retreated in fright under his porch roof, leaving ugly puddles of oil on the nice mat. As he stood, the blur of falling oil before him thickened into a column, the column into a dense ball, the oil-ball into an amorphous shape such as frozen lubricant can take. Finally the figure, in the otherwise now dry air, solidified into that of a little old woman whom at first glance you would think quite ordinary until you noticed that the returning sunshine glinted off her in hues of olive green and brown and gold such as heavy machine oil can show.

The unguinous figure took a step toward the shuddering tin man on the porch. "At last," it said. "Somebody with a decent word to say for a person. It's about time."

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - F O U R

“Mombi!?” everybody moaned. We all knew how awful *she* was. But what—? how—? why—?

The Wizard had a pretty exact idea but only, drastically, lacked time to tell us about it. This was, rather, a moment for action.

“Hail! great spirit!” he had no hesitation in yelling, thus drawing the apparition’s attention to himself. Indeed, the figure of the dust-deviless was very “great,” in the sense of ‘huge,’ in proportion to us, if not quite in the connotation of ‘outstanding and worthy to be honored.’ Diggs could mean just the former while leaving the reincarnated, or, rather, impulvated, witch to be flattered in assuming the latter.

“What?!” bellowed the figure, which had at least heard, it would seem, the tiny shriek of the Wizard if it had not as yet discerned him by sight. Diggs waved his arms and now the giant Mombi dust-shape, still pink and green and faintly eddying in her agitation, croaked, “There...? Ah, there you are!.. It looks like that old charlatan, O.Z. Diggs. But what are you doing so tiny?”

“I can’t explain now!” cried the Wizard. This was the second explanation in as many minutes that he had no time for. “We’re under a spell!—an okay one—but I won’t take time for that.

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Where did you come from?! [Silly question. It was obvious to all of us.] I mean: what's happened? How did you—"

"Your guess is as good as mine. Here, wait a second." The vast dust-cloud shape seemed to make an effort of will and shrank further until it came to appear as a dense figure of varicolored earth and fabric, still about three times as tall as we were. Then it stopped. "That's better," sighed Mombi. "What was I saying?" She rubbed her hip.

"Er—about what happened," stammered the Wizard, still greatly dismayed at having his old rival so suddenly and overwhelmingly confronting him. "Er—to you..."

"The last time I remember anything a hose happened, that's what!" cried Mombi and flared up in fury again. "A hose, full of water. Wet woeful water, wicked washing wasting water... Wonderful water—" The witch stopped ranting suddenly. "That's right: wonderful! Liberating water!! What was I afraid of all those years?! Water released me! I have the freedom of all the elements now, all substances! Oh, what an idiot I've been! I should have taken the water cure centuries ago!" The wicked woman burst into a gale of gay laughter as ancient scales fell from her eyes.

Abruptly she clapped her hand to her hip. "Just the same!" she roared, "somebody stuck a pin in me! I don't like it."

"No, we never!" piped up the Queen of Patch, getting back her courage now the whirlwind was reduced to no more than a shape of a poor old woman, be she ever so tall. "It was a needle!"

"Needle, schmeedle!" blustered the witch. "Nobody sticks a pin in *me*!" She made a surprisingly ineffectual grab at the doughty little (in comparison) queen.

"It was my prized magic needle!" cried Sewsan in self-exculpation. "I always start any sewing project with a stitch of the magic needle. It makes the work go faster."

"Magic, eh?" Mombi reconsidered. "Maybe that's how..."

"Of course it was!" now thrust in Wizard Diggs again. "I see it all." And with hands cupped megaphone-fashion around his mouth he shouted up at Mombi (while we all edged nearer,

gaping):

“When Sir Hokus of Pokes and the Scarecrow ‘put you out’ —in that little workroom of the Palace of Magic—with a hose led in through the window from the garden, you dissolved into the old carpet: destroyed—though not dead, of course. It was only a matter of time until, in some fashion or other, you would be reconstituted. Meanwhile you were smelling up the place and rotting the rug. We had no choice but to close up the room. Now all that work has been undone by the magic agency of Queen Sewsan’s needle.”

“Jolly good job!” chortled the revived witch. “Maybe I’ll forgive you after all,” she condescended to the little Patch queen. “I’m not quite sure how you did it but you did it. And now..!” She paused a second to reflect on the glories of the renewed career of wickedness now open to her. “I’ll allow you to live. As for these others... let me see. Perhaps I’ll pull them limb from limb, like wings from flies. Since I can assume any size—” and here she proved it by growing ten feet taller.

But bad Mombi had not reckoned with the impulsiveness of the audacious Jimmy. The travelers with fairy Floraline had during the commotion quietly joined our crowd around the borders of the green/pink carpet and listened with as much astonishment as any of us to the unraveling of the ancient mystery. The Ohio kiddies had wished for an encounter with a wicked witch and here was one, in spades.

Without a word of warning that intrepid boy Jimmy now shot forward, raised high the kitchen knife he had stolen in Jack Pumpkinhead’s pumpkin patch, and plunged it into the great stocking foot of the towering dust-enchantress.

Everybody gaped—even Mombi. That’s all though. No scream of pain or fear. The witch gazed at her foot, from a gaping tear in which dust eddied.

Jimmy dropped his knife and boggled. Sarah rushed forward to give her sibling moral support. Mombi yelled, “Oh, you would, would you!?” and lunged down to seize, one in each great knotty cloth fist, the two naughty children.

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Then she laughed! “Thanks for reminding me,” she said, “I seem to have lost my boots somewhere along the way[§]. I’ll need replacements.”

Here she dropped Jimmy and took hold in a pinch of a fold of Sarah’s flesh and plucked it like a harp string. “Good elastic youthful hide,” she opined. “You’ll do.”

Then with a piercing gaze at the youngsters, one in each hand, but without benefit of fairy wand or witch’s thorn or magic ring, without the slightest ado, she turned the kiddies into a pair of sturdy walking shoes.

Everybody screamed, aghast, when they saw what she had done. But Mombi, nothing daunted, dropped the shoes on the carpet and stamped a giant pink-green dust foot into each. “These boots were made for walking,” she informed us and then suited deed to word.

§ See *The Lost King of Oz*, chapter 21. Editor’s note.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - F I V E

Metal Man Garth was not conventional-minded and not very flappable and, though amazed, he was not averse to inviting indoors the strange apparition his oil storm had solidified into. "What can I serve you?" he enquired politely.

"Why, a cup of herb tea and a cruller would do nicely," said the visitant, from force of habit. Then it stopped on its progress up the back-stoop steps and said puzzledly: "No, it wouldn't. I couldn't eat a thing. I mean literally: it's impossible for me to eat, at any rate by putting things through this hole in my face. Now isn't that queer!"

"Is it?" asked host Garth. "I know so little about you. But not eating is not strange. I never eat." He made a round gesture indicating his oil-guest should make free of a chair at the kitchen table.

"Don't you indeed?" said Mombi. (You'd guessed that already.) "That's one way we're alike then."

"Oh, several ways," amended the tin man. "We both thrive with oil. I dare say we both admire the play of the elements. And we like a kind word. At least, I think I heard you say 'somebody with a decent word' — rather as if you'd been missing such words, and liked them."

"I do!" assured the wet witch and helped herself to one of

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the fresh-washed tea towels to sit down on. She'd never sat as an incarnation in oil before but she had an intelligent idea that it might leave stains. "I suddenly realize it's what I missed most all my life. But then I'm realizing lot of things since my transfiguration."

"You were transfigured, were you? Please tell me about it," urged Garth. "This is all fascinating to me. I've never met an oil goddess before."

"I'm not an oil goddess," disclaimed Mombi forthrightly. "That's just one of the apparitions I now seem able to assume... this time, apparently, from mingling with a rather nasty petroleum-laden desert storm." But this only seemed to mystify further her amiable host rather than serve as any kind of clarification, she started over right from the beginning.

"It all began a long time ago," she related. "It seems I burst full-blown from the head of Baum. That's the self-styled Royal Historian of the Land of Oz, you know. At least, he had nothing to say about me in the first volume of Oz history he turned out. Indeed, he virtually denied my existence, for there he enumerated the witches, both good and bad, extant in Oz and did not name me. When he finally decided to tell the whole story, some years later, he first claimed that I was *not* a witch. He said I was simply an older woman who worked spells. What's the difference? I'd like to know. It's not as if you had to take a college degree in necromancy to be acknowledged as a witch. Anyway, by the end of that book he was blithely designating me a 'witch' —which I was, of course."

"Why?" said Garth.

"Why a witch?" gasped Mombi. "Well, who would not work magic if he could?! And if you do, without being on the stage or sprouting wings, people will call you a witch. Besides, it's all I had to do."

"How do you mean?"

"I never knew my parents. My earliest memories are of being alone in a hut in a forest. How I survived babyhood I'll never know. I must have *had* parents of course. I just don't

remember them. But somebody taught me to talk! And ever since I can remember I've known how to do certain things: the general principles of existence, you might say. How to make a fire, how to clothe myself, what was safe to eat. I'll say this for my parents: they gave me brains. I was no dummy, and early on I knew how to make use of what utensils there were in the hut where I found myself.

"What I lacked was company. Deep in that forest no people ever came near me. My friends were the animals—"

"Just like me," put in Garth, and spoke briefly of squirrels and deer.

"The animals loved me," bragged Mombi. "Still do. I couldn't say the same for humans—when I finally ran across any. As I grew older and dared to venture away from the cottage I would meet twig gatherers and charcoal burners in the forest. They would yell and run away from me. I didn't know why. I would go home and look in an old stained mirror that hung there. I had nothing to compare with and I didn't know if I was ugly or beautiful. I modeled my clothes on those of people I caught sight of, but they were no fashion plates! How to use a needle was one thing I had figured out for myself.

"As the years went on I came to realize it hadn't been my strange-looking garments that had scared people off. It was my face. A thing my parents had not bequeathed me was looks. So now: how could I make myself beautiful? I pondered long and deeply, for I had no wish to be hated and shunned for my appearance.

"I began to experiment with the contents of certain jars and boxes that I found in the house. From the start I had determined that the substances weren't to eat! Why then had they been kept? Of course I couldn't read so the penned labels on the containers told me nothing. (My illiteracy lasted for years, until once a wandering gypsy woman happened my way. *She* was not frightened of my looks and welcomed my hospitality. She stayed five months and in that time she first taught me that there was such a thing as reading, and then how to do it.)

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"I knew, as I say, that the materials in the rows of bottles and jars had a purpose. I experimented. I mixed tiny amounts in water and swallowed them. One powder turned my skin (temporarily!) polka-dot blue, otherwise the substances seemed to have no effect. I set fire to a pinch of this, a dab of that. One such try produced very creditable gas dragons, but that's all. I sprinkled drops of a liquid, grains of a powder—and brought a footstool to life. I had invented magic—all by myself!

"Of course that put a wholly new face on things. I went mad for magic and forgot all about trying to win friends and influence people by looking attractive. It's been my life—my whole life!—ever since then to become ever more capable as an enchantress. Very little else has meant much at all. And now—!" Even Mombi was awed.

"Now?" echoed Garth obligingly. "What has happened now?"

"As you see, I'm not just a witch in a gingerbread cottage any more, I'm a spirit in a whirlwind! Oh, the possibilities..!"

"I can see it would be fabulous," agreed Garth. "We've always called the frightful storms that sometimes pass over here the 'Witch's Storm', without, I think, having any particular witch in mind. You must be she!"

"I don't know about that," confessed Mombi freely. "I'm new on this job. I only started yesterday."

"Tell me more, please," urged Garth, thrilled at the fount of interest and entertainment that all unexpectedly had gushed up in his humdrum life. He longed to have details of the whole story.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - S I X

Screams were general but didn't help much. It was O.Z. Diggs, the Wizard, who first had presence of mind to shout to Tik-Tok: "After her, my friend! Follow the wind witch whithersoever she goes. We can't let her get away!"

Great Tik-Tok had looked on at the proceedings with as much absorption as any of us and his methodically working (if not very speedy) brain had already reasoned out that if anyone was going to be able to do anything it was he. He thus turned smartly and began to tramp off in the direction the disappearing witch had taken.

The effort at once proved vain. The big copper man with his ungainly body and spindly legs could not run but that the mighty witch and mistress of configurations could very well do, and did. Before she was even out of sight we saw her expand into a dust cloud and blow away to the north. Tik-Tok carried on plodding in the direction he had been programmed to go.

Now we had time for regrets and recriminations. While everybody swarmed over the great and now pristine, if worn, carpet and gathered in groups to marvel and discuss, Dorothy Gale, princess and witch-destroyer, sat right down in a heap and cried disconsolately.

"Don't weep, my dear," cried Scraps, concerned.

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“You needn’t fear.
We’ll get them back somehow.
Though pers’nally
I’d rather see,
Than them, a purple cow.”

“Oh, I’m not weeping for the two tots!” exclaimed Dot passionately, dashing the tears from her eyes, “though that’s bad enough. Whatever will Ozma think? No, it’s because this is all my fault!”

“Your fault, Princess?” put in Queen Sewsan, not wanting Dorothy to grab *all* the credit. “I thought it had been established that my magic needle—”

“Oh, that isn’t what I mean! Not just what’s happened now. Something of the sort was due to take place about this time anyway. Isn’t that right, Wizard? Creatures who get ‘destroyed’ in Oz usually reappear again after a while. I know the Witches of East and West came back after eighty-one years^s. It’s been seventy-five since Witch Mombi got put out. But it was *my* fault she got put out! Don’t you see? And I can never forgive myself! Oh, boo-hoo-hoo!”

Everybody looked non-plussed. We stared at the sobbing girl and at each other. After a moment even I dared to intervene and say, “But, Miss Dorothy, the witch was wicked. We’ve seen that now. She remains what she always was: wicked.”

“Yes!” stormed Dorothy in return, giving me quite a start, “but is that any reason for *me* to become a murderer?! I wish now I’d never heard of wicked witches!”

“But, darling,” put in Miss Thompson, “wicked witches were what first put you on the road to fame and fortune. First you won the love of the Munchkins by killing the Witch of the East and then the adoration of the Winkies by washing out the dreadful Witch of the West. But for these executions I wonder whether Oz would have paid much attention to you at all.”

“All *right!*” retorted Dorothy, incensed. “So I’m celebrated as an executioner. Really neat! But the shameful part is that I

§ See *Aunt Em and Uncle Henry in Oz*. Edit. note.]

preened myself on having done those things. I lapped up the plaudits of the multitude—for murder!”

“Oh, not murder, my dear,” soothed Queen Sewsan. “Say womanslaughter, which is really all it was. You never *meant* to kill the witches.”

“Exactly!” concurred the distraught princess. “Okay, so I enjoyed the praise for getting rid of the wicked women but at least the deaths were accidental...”

“That’s right,” we all cheered, relieved. “You never intended to destroy them so it’s all right!”

“Oh, idiots,” sighed Dorothy, disgusted. “Don’t you see it corrupted me? By the time we got around to dealing with Mombi and *her* wickedness I’d let myself be brainwashed into thinking that destroying people was all in a day’s work. I told Ozma to wash out the witch! With malice aforethought I suggested how a fellow creature should be put to death. Or no, not even ‘aforethought’ but just off the top of my head: casually I said ‘Why not put her out like I did the other witches?’ while I fanned myself with my crown^s. You see how callous I’d become?”

Miss Thompson was making moaning noises as if *she* might be somehow to blame but we all shushed her lovingly and told her not to try to claim credit for what she’d merely recorded, not invented.

“All right, princess,” now said the Wizard. “We understand your viewpoint—and greatly sympathize. But that really plays no part in the present contretemps. I could wail and gnash my teeth at, myself, having once had dishonorable dealings with that same Mombi. But since then I’ve had time to work through the regret and remorse. The great thing, as you too have learned, is to put bad behavior behind one and resolve not to do the like again. For the present the question is: what to do to stop Mombi from starting a new reign of error? I confess I’m stumped.”

§ See *The Lost King of Oz*. Editor’s note.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - S E V E N

“That’s how it all began, my dear... that’s how it all began.” Mombi in nostalgic mood had just related the whole of the intrigue of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, including especially her own part (off stage) in the proceedings.

“At the time of the arrival of O.Z. Diggs by balloon many years ago I was already so accomplished a sorceress that I could well hold my own when he and I met to exchange secrets. We got on so well that as a personal favor to him I accepted the fosterage of an infant who rather stood in his way in his aim of ruling in the green country, the District of Oz.”

“How so?” enquired Garth, absorbed in the tale.

“It seemed the child was the heir to the rightful ruler in those parts. Through some cabal I’ve in fact never learned all the details of, the former royal family had disappeared and when Diggs arrived in his balloon the people seemed to be living in a state of peaceful anarchy.”

“The best state, really,” commented the tin man.

“Just what I’ve always thought,” agreed Mombi heartily. “At least, I never cared for anyone higher up telling *me* what to do. But human nature is bad. Left with only the honor system to guide them—with no threatening force held over them to make them do right—humans will always soon sink to the lowest

standard of behavior. O.Z. Diggs knew that and was right to take charge in the rulerless green country. I kicked myself for having come on the scene just too late. But in fact political rule was never my bag. It was personal power through magic that fascinated me. Now I had a new toy to play with."

"The child."

"Just so. It would be my guinea pig for trying out new spells on. Incidentally it would be a bit of company for me too, though that was not my first consideration. However, I was perfectly kind to it—in the beginning."

"I notice you always say 'it.' Which—?"

"Originally it was a girl. But early on I had one of my greatest successes at transformation. I turned it into a boy! As the child grew older that guise proved slightly more advantageous to me, so I left it. A male child could be put to somewhat rougher tasks than a female servant—"

"'Servant'?" said Garth and sounded disappointed.

Already the storm-cloud witch was so far partial to the liking of her new acquaintance that she felt it worth her while to backwater. "Well-l, a younger person about the house *would* be asked to do things. I could require—that is, ask—the boy to chop wood and haul water the way I might have hesitated with a girl, you know.

"But somehow all my fostering wasn't enough. The boy grew up perfectly healthy and strong. *He* didn't have to languish in a state of illiteracy as I had done. I taught him to read, and also much much more. Even so, he turned against me. What was it? Not liking to be used in my magical experiments? Or was it, all over again, my looks? I'll never know. He ended by running away. That was the end of my foster-parenthood."

Could it be that the witch suppressed a sigh? Despite his tendency to awe of the patently powerful conjurer Garth could see that tenderness might be a quality she had lacked. Perhaps it would be cruel to tax her with that lack now. Instead he said:

"But looks...? Of course it's superficial, and it's the person inside that counts. But would it have been so wrong to use your

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magic, as it seems you so easily could have, to give yourself bodily beauty? And lower the number of strikes against you, as it were?"

"It never crossed my mind!" declared Mombi. "Make up to a mere child by putting on a surface of false prettiness? I would have scorned to do so even if the thought had occurred."

"I understand," agreed Garth thoughtfully. "Your sturdy independence of character. And yet... I suppose..." He hesitated to risk provoking the possibly tetchy and certainly prepotent dust-deviless. "—you *could* have—er..."

"Made myself gorgeous?" With the faintest of twitches Mombi abruptly appeared as ZsaZsa Gabor, down to the last blond ringlet. "Dig that!"

"Ooh!" said Garth, overcome in spite of himself. "No, wait!" as the witch proceeded to slip back toward hideousness, "—if I may counsel you: stay as sweet as you are! Don't let a thing ever change you!"

"Well—l... seeing it's you..." murmured Mombi. *Were* men so silly-superficial they actually judged you by how you *looked*?! The sorceress backtracked toward ZsaZsa, then put the look on Hold. "Of course I *can*," she went on. "Incidentally, that's the first thing that struck me when I came to read of the witch trials out in the 'great' world back in the seventeenth century: the illogicality of the whole thing. If those poor old women had actually been witches they obviously would have used their powers to stop being ugly poor old women. The ones the authorities ought to have been suspicious of were the good-looking and the rich! I'll bet many a handsome heiress—or heir—was a witch—if *anybody* was..."

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Clump, clump went the great copper feet again as Tik-Tok strode over hill and dale. It was easy to see which way to go. Mombi in her passage had left a trail of wreckage, as if a small tornado had passed that way. Tik-Tok had but to take note, with his sharp eyes and clever mind, of flattened fences, swaths of laid-low grain, sheds with roofs missing, and he knew which way to go.

Nor did it hinder that presently two little figures came flying after him and settled on his hat brim where lately so many had ridden. It was Floraline and Dementia, making use of their fairy wings which others in the consternated crowd in front of the royal palace of Patch lacked. After hurried counsel-taking with the Wizard and Queen Sewsan and other persons of authority it was settled that the best thing the fairies could do to aid the common cause was to go after the copper man and lend him advice and encouragement in his undertaking. Maybe by their fairy power they could even speed up the tempo of his progress.

Now when greetings had been got through and Tik-Tok had said, "Oh, ve-ry well! Hap-py to have you a-board," the sprites' first order of business was to wave their wands and invoke such spells as they commanded. Sure enough: the legs of the Mechanical Man became a copper blur as they whizzed across

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the landscape—keeping always away from roads and paths and built-up areas where there were tiny wayfarers to avoid trampling upon. By nightfall Tik-Tok had come to Gate Twenty-Two in the great protective-shell dome that covered Oz. Here was proof, if you like, of which way the witch whirlwind had passed!

The travelers noted various panes of the oztic that made up the panels of the Dome blown out and all around on the ground before the gate lay the pulverized remains of whatever had existed in that area before today. It was obvious that something like a small cyclone had whirled and worried on this spot before it forced a way out. Gate Twenty-Two was of course missing. Any sort of unwanted interloper might have made his entry into Oz unchecked just now and just there.

“Oh!” exclaimed Tik-Tok. “We must tell Oz-ma. We must tell the Queen.” But time enough for that when they had settled more pressing issues.

Gate Twenty-Two stood at the northern desert border of Winkieland. By the last lavender light of day the rescue party could see where a trail through the disturbed dunes led away ever northward over the sandy waste.

The rescuers didn’t let night stop them. Having observed that Mombi had followed a due-north course all the way from Patch across several small Oz countries they supposed she wasn’t going to deviate now. With confidence they spent the dark hours tramping rapidly on over the Impassable Desert. Now, too, they didn’t have to worry about stepping on anybody. No one, normally, ever ventured willingly out on the trackless sands.

When olive-grey dawn light began to filter through the smog from the east (where else?) Tik-Tok and the fairies could see where the sandy nothingness of the great desert was winding down to the sagebrush-and-cactus-covered confines of the land of Ev. Here was a sorry contrast with the brilliance of familiar Oz landscapes. Where everything the eye had scanned yesterday was some bright shade of yellow or gold, here on what should ordinarily have been grey-white sands lay a thick film of greasy

blackish brown precipitate. But in a backhanded way this condition was favorable to our travelers, for the black-brownness was not complete. From the direction in which they had come and going straight on northward into Ev was a swath of stirred-up-ness and a resultant marked lightening of the color of the ground that indicated all too clearly the way that the whirlwind that was Mombi had gone. Reassured, Tik-Tok marched forward.

“What are we going to do when we get there?” queried little Dementia not a moment too soon.

“It depends a good deal on where ‘there’ is,” stated Floraline thoughtfully. “If we find the sorceress sitting, for instance, on a rock or in a tree we must face her and have a showdown.”

“What with?” wondered Dementia.

“‘What with’?”

“Yes, what are you going to use to show her down? She’s a lot more powerful than we are. She might turn you into a dandelion again.”

At that reminder Floraline did turn pale. But Tik-Tok had been listening and he said, “What mat-ter? We have to do our du-ty, e-ven if we per-ish in the at-tempt. We would not want to ex-ist af-ter-wards if we failed in that.”

The fairies agreed soberly that that was so. The thought seemed to give them courage to face the dawn which, sometimes, was as much as one could ask.

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“Oh, Oz!” remarked Mombi. “Foop.”

Garth the metal man had heard of Oz, indeed in terms so favorable that he couldn't understand how anyone with the entrée there could willingly leave the fabulous fairyland. Yet here was the mighty oil witch declaring she had done just that.

“But,” he objected, “hovering round the throne of Ozma, strumming a harp? It must be very heaven.”

“People haven't taken to actually worshipping the wretched girl,” humphed Mombi. “Only in fan clubs out in the great world. At the Palace of Magic they're more level-headed.”

“But me? I've seen all of her I want to. It's not as if people around her have mellowed. I come back into existence after three quarters of a century of being destroyed and what do I find? Individuals as malevolent and vengeful as ever. Did I tell you a little boy I'd never laid eyes on plunged a knife into my foot? Without a word of warning or anything in the way of a by-your-leave.”

“How very unkind,” agreed Garth. “I can see you'd be wounded.”

“As a matter of fact I couldn't. My dust-mote composition absorbed the blow, closed up the hole, and it was as if it had never been. But I took the deed for the word: he hated me. His action spoke louder than any words.”

"What did you do?" wondered Garth.

"Turned him and his pesky playmate—I rather think it was his sister—into this pair of walking boots," boasted the witch. "I think they're rather fetching." And she preened a bit, sticking her right foot out.

"Oh, dear," sighed the would-be-adoring metal man. "I'm sorry. That's not received behavior. And I want so much to admire you."

The dust-deviless appeared discomfited. She too looked on her swain with a gracious eye and wanted to keep in his good books. As for the boots, she now surreptitiously slipped them off under the kitchen table. They seemed to be pinching her feet in rather a spiteful way.

"I need some footwear though," she returned. "What would I do if I left off wearing them?"

"I'll carve you some shoes," exclaimed Garth enthusiastically. "I'm an expert wood-worker. There is a willow grows aslant a brook. I'll cut a limb of it and make you shoes!"

"Wooden shoes?" mused Mombi. "They might be more comfortable than these of hide at that."

"And the children?"

"Do me the shoes first, my friend. Then we will talk of that matter."

So it was done. And if it were done when it was done, then it were well it were done quickly. Now that Mombi had stopped storming the sun had come out over Alloya and there was no reason why the oddly assorted soulmates should not stroll out of the village, following the course of the little stream where it flowed into the forest.

Mombi sat on the leaning tree trunk itself while Garth with a small saw detached a limber branch of willow and set to work to work it.

Thus they fled the time carelessly—until sharp-eared Mombi heard a sort of clanking noise in the distance, rhythmically repeated. "What's that?" she wondered. "Otherwise it's seemed so quiet around here—since I stopped raining."

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The metal man too held back his hand with the knife in it and listened. "I never heard anything like it. Or rather, I hear it every day but not quite in that timbre. If I didn't know I'd almost say it was copper, whereas we fellows here in Alloya are all iron or tin or steel. Those make a shriller clank than bronze or copper when struck."

"Who would be striking copper then?" the witch wanted to know.

"Oh, not being struck," corrected Garth. "Rather, itself striking. That would be the sound of copper—or bronze—feet hitting the earth as a creature of bronze—or copper—tramped along."

"A creature of copper! Great Scot!" cried Mombi, jumping hastily from the willow bole. "There's only one of those I know of. I saw him no longer ago than yesterday. But how in the world—? They must have sent him after me, of course, as, so it appears, the only being of normal former dimensions in all Oz. At least, all the Ozites I saw yesterday had shrunk amazingly to less than bite-size. I can't think what—"

"Why would they send someone after you?" asked Garth, seeming for once a little slow on the uptake. "Oh, I see: the boot tots. They'd want rescuing, of course."

"But Tik-Tok," marveled Mombi. "He's as slow as molasses in March. He couldn't..."

Witch and wood-worker hurried from the willow bank to the road not far off that led south out of the forest. Sure enough. Fifty yards away they saw marching toward them the celebrated, if dusty and greasy, Mechanical Man of Ev and Oz, and coming on too at no uncertain speed. He carried a stout stick picked up in a hickory thicket through which he had followed the whirlwind trail.

"Oh, metal man!" witch Mombi adjured her companion in sudden consternation, "will you go with me and be my guide, in my most need to go by my side? I have a bad feeling Tik-Tok is gunning for me!"

"Right," agreed Garth cheerfully. He wanted to be the

champion of the powerful sorceress he had come to admire so much.

Thus it fell out that when Tik-Tok caught sight of a shiny silver-colored figure standing astride the path with a knife in one up-raised hand and a saw in the other he naturally lifted his baton in an almost involuntary reflex action. He meant nothing threatening by it, certainly no more than did the merely protectively motivated Garth himself. But Mombi, ever suspicious and with every reason to be wary of Tik-Tok, reacted in her turn impulsively. She suddenly doubled in size.

This was enough to startle anyone. It not only startled but it gave two fairies riding on the copper man's hat-brim furiously to think. Look she never so much like ZsaZsa Gabor the oncoming dust woman could clearly be none other than their sought quarry, the enchantress Mombi. The tiny fays hissed this suspicion to Tik-Tok, one into each ear.

"Ah ha, I see!" the hero quickly caught on. In a trice he was charging at the dust witch with club up-raised still, but when he brought it down it landed on another head. It was that of the other metal man, who had somehow (on purpose) got in his way. Yes, the hickory stick banged down on the tin head and dented it terribly.

This event raised the motivation of Garth, which up to now had been strictly a protective one, to dire ire. He had a personal stake in the contest now. He surged at Tik-Tok and with no trouble at all toppled the heavy/round-bodied mechanical man off his spindly legs and left him rolling impotently in the greasy dust of the roadway. Not content with that Garth knelt on his prey and sawed off his right arm. Copper gives way easily to fine-tempered Toledo steel. Tik-Tok wouldn't be doing any more battering with a stick.

There was a few instants' deadly silence. Then were heard two tiny voices raised in doleful lament. It was Floraline and Dementia. The others hadn't even noticed them before now, so tiny were they. "Oh, oh," they keened, "that is too dreadful! Such things can't happen in Oz!"

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Mombi could hardly hear what they were saying so she abruptly passed a spell and brought them up to normal fairy size—which in that part of the world is quite sizeable. It was for the sake of the decibels and indeed the voices of the wailing fays now rang out clearly. “A famous Personage of the court of Oz can’t get mutilated in an Oz book!” they protested amid tears.

Not only could Mombi now hear the fairies properly she could also see them and she proved that age could not wither her infinite memory by exclaiming, “Bless my blasphemy! It’s the little sprite I turned into a dandelion—oh, ages ago! Tell me about it, my dear!” she croaked. “What have you been up to? And how did you get here?”

Floraline dashed the tears from her eyes furiously. Neither was she in any doubt by now as to the identity of their adversary. She cried, “There’s not time for that now! What are you going to do about poor Tik-Tok?!”

“Do?” puzzled Mombi. “Why, nothing. He’s well done for already.”

Floraline raged. “You’ll never be forgiven! It’s unheard of! Actually *hurting* a celebrity from the Emerald City—!”

“Don’t give yourself airs, my dear,” countered Mombi mildly. “Have you forgotten *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*?” She seemed to be always citing that book. “There your famous Scarecrow of Oz had all of the straw pulled out of his clothes and head and his garments were made into a bundle and thrown into the top of a tree, while the beloved Tin Woodman was dropped a great distance upon rocks where he lay so battered and dented that he could neither move nor groan. Tik-Tok’s not that badly off. Hear? He’s groaning quite distinctly.”

“Just the same!” put in Dementia and pouted in her turn. “You’re a bad old witch and everyone hates you.”

“No, they don’t,” declared Garth the Metal Man whose ire had cooled now it had been satisfied and he was able to assess what he had done and how things were. “I adore her. I would do anything for the great wind witch.”

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Well! Mombi had never heard words like that in all her born days.

It worked out, thus, that tin man Garth did permanently what even Princess Dorothy of Kansas and Oz had only been able to accomplish temporarily: he melted the witch.

The sorceress could feel it as a distinct physical sensation: the hard knot that was her heart was softening like butter, and this even though she was occupying for the nonce a form that was no more than a concentration of dust particles. Yes: softening and melting and running so she couldn't control it. All her feelings flowed out in a great surging wave to break on the metal man—and eventually almost to overwhelm him. From now on he was the witch's lord and master. His smallest desire was her command.

Poor Mombi. That's all she had been waiting for all those years: someone to love her. She hadn't known it herself and she *certainly* hadn't known how to attract any love, even if she had realized that she was in the market for that commodity. Who had there ever been to instruct her that there existed this crazy thing called love? Most of what we feel we only feel because our elders tell us there are such things. Perhaps, even, if there had been someone around to say: 'There is love. Take it or leave it,'

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she might have chosen to dispense with the pesky, gets-in-the-way emotion. But it was too late now. She was in over head and ears.

Meanwhile, Garth, being the sensitive creature he was, experienced the most awful pangs of contrition. With his trusty saw he had hacked off a fellow being's arm, and a fellow metal man at that. How ever was he going to live it down? But his immediate physical act was to return hurriedly to Tik-Tok's side and raise him into a sitting position. With his free hand he groped for the jettisoned copper arm.

"Take this, my dear, will you?" he said to Mombi. The tin man had no idea what whirl of emotion his simple declaration of devotion had set up in the wind witch's breast. She was wanting to smother her beloved in caresses and to plight her troth at once but alas, it was not his hand she received but Tik-Tok's.

She swallowed her chagrin and cradled the copper forearm to her bosom. To care for it was her sweetheart's command. She went even further: "I suppose we do have to get him repaired," she ventured.

"Emphatically," confirmed Garth and took charge of affairs now. "To the metal clinic in Alloya! They'll know what to do. The surgeons in the casualty ward are most expert."

Floraline and Dementia could only flutter along in the wake of the loving couple as the latter, one on each side, helped Tik-Tok along the road in to the heart of downtown Alloya.

Metal people came out of their brick, stone, and wooden houses to stare as the strange procession made its hobbling way along. Garth had a word with his acquaintances at the solder-mat and soon Tik-Tok was in intensive care, so intensive that a blowtorch was being applied to his elbow. Oh, how the Mechanical Man longed for Messrs Smith and Tinker at this juncture, but, alas, Smith was dead and Tinker in the moon.

The copper man, being so constructed as to do everything but live, could well feel pain, certainly from an injury as grave as the severance of an arm. But considerately his creators had

not plugged in a very *great* sensitivity to pain, so Tik-Tok felt no more discomfort than he had done a few days earlier when Volkovian Lester and his associates performed their dorsotomy on him. He gritted his round teeth and bore it manfully as the burnisher brush whirled and sparks flew while the new join in his arm was filed down smooth.

When the job was nicely done his metal fellow flew to his side and demanded to know how he felt and if he had forgiven him for what now, of course, had been shown to be a most unwarranted outrage. Incidentally, while Tik-Tok was being welded back together Garth too received his attentions at the hands of the capable metalsmiths. They had off his head and hammered out the dent his copper colleague's stick had made there.

Afterwards they all adjourned to Garth's house for a reconciliatory tea party. Not that anyone drank the tea. The metal men couldn't, Mombi in her present form had no benefit of beverages: they would just soak and clot her dust innards, while the two fairies for their part subsisted almost exclusively on dewdrops and moonbeam soufflé.

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - O N E

We others, back in Patch, were feeling a little deflated. Our mission was accomplished, albeit in a fashion nobody had anticipated, and the great actors in the show had moved on and away, out of our ken. We could only wonder what resolution the drama would achieve under some alien sky.

Scraps, the Patchwork Girl, expressed the general feeling in rhyme:

“She’s gone!
He’s gone. And we remain...
And what do we do now?

That’s that!
It’s flat—
I feel it too...
Shall we go home?... But *how?*”

Yes, the great object of our pilgrimage had been achieved — very thoroughly, as far as the dry-cleaning of a carpet was concerned—but another issue of far greater moment had been raised that was not in the least bit settled. When Scraps asked “How?” I think it was not so much the physical method of our return to the Emerald City she questioned as the spirit in which it was to be done. Were we to go as failed perpetrators of a quest

that Queen Ozma would so little have approved of that we had had to keep it secret from her? Indeed, the pied maiden may even have been asking ‘How were we going to have the nerve to face the girl ruler and tell what we had done—and how we had been *undone*?’

But the Patchwork Girl, seeing our embarrassed and downcast faces, relented. She said, “I know! We’ll return in triumph; pretend we’ve had a great victory...” She waited for our response to the unlikely proposal.

“How will we do that?” asked Dorothy sceptically, subdued after her crying jag.

“Well, admittedly,” conceded Scraps, “we can’t carry the cleaned carpet home. It’s too big! But, Wizard, maybe you could help?” She looked a hopeful question at the sometimes all-powerful-seeming savant.

Oscar Diggs lifted his little black bag ruefully. “I can put up overnighting tents for us—but those are just reinforced gossamer. And the meals I could summon are in reality pretty gossamer too. The carpet is all too solidly and enormously *there*. I couldn’t shift it! Not with the tools I’ve got with me. Nor are we near our phase plates, by whose agency I might summon our normal-size friends from Alternate-Oz to fetch and carry for us. No.

“However, once back in the Emerald City...” He let the suggestion trail away unarticulated. We all knew the great and powerful (if no longer “terrible”) Oz could do *anything* with the help of the paraphernalia in his laboratory in the Palace of Magic.

“All the more reason for setting off immediately for that famous capital!” crowed the Patchwork Girl, determined to jolly us out of our don’t-care mood.

“Oh, not ‘immediately’ surely?” protested Queen Sewsan. “Look: the sun’s going down. You’ve never slept in your rooms! You must. I for one am exhausted. I know you must be too after the excitements of this day.”

She was right about that. We only re-gathered for a quiet supper of ragout, followed by a dessert of chiffon pie, before we

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all, gratefully, sought our beds.

The repose was what we needed, indeed. The next day everyone felt more cheerful. Scraps, nothing daunted by yet another in her life history of sleepless nights, urged us on with renewed gaiety:

“Up, up! away!
We mustn’t stay.
We’ve got to get on home.
Look, look! The sky!
The sun’s on high
And shining through the dome.”

Too true. We’d overslept, worn out by yesterday’s excursions and alarms. Now we must not dawdle. We had a long day ahead of us and no Tik-Tok’s hat brim to ride on in making our way back to the Emerald City across an Oz now a hundred times larger in extent to some of our party than they had known it of old.

Scraps’ reference to the Dome, though no doubt a fortuitous one just to make up the rhyme, proved to be topically apt. We could not know it—yet—but the gap in Oz’s protective dome caused by whirlwind Mombi’s breaking out of her great crystalline jail had now had going-on-for a day to allow the miasmatic vapors of the outer world to waft into the normally so air-pure country. Princess Dorothy and authoress Ruth both noticed it when after breakfast they strolled outside briefly.

“That’s that peculiar smell, my dear?” said Miss Thompson.

“Could it be automobile exhaust and industrial pollution fumes?” wondered the Kansas girl, familiar enough with those scents from her various sojourns in the world outside.

“You know, I think you’re right,” concurred the author. Then by curious coincidence she said just what someone else had done in response to the same situation the day before:

“We must tell Ozma. We must tell the Queen. There’s clearly a bad leak in the protecto-dome somewhere.”

This impulse to inform the fairy ruler of Oz about the danger to her land of a break in the great crystalline cupola that

covered the country was meanwhile having its somewhat belated effect at that other venue, namely among Tik-Tok and his companions. Mombi was having qualms of conscience!

"You know," she said confidentially as she helped to clear away the unused tea things, "I left the door open when I quitted Oz. I wonder..."

"We noticed that!" cried the two fairies. They were now feeling somewhat mollified by the wind witch's obvious attempts to be nice in order to curry favor with her favorite, metal man Garth. "It was very bad of you," they chided. "Now all the nasty old fumes will get into Oz and choke creatures."

"Yes," went on Dementia in a p.s., "and not to mention the awful—and full-size—*people* who might try to move into the country and develop it!"

"How could you have brought yourself—" Floraline started to demand.

"That was in my rage," paraphrased Mombi. "If I had it to do over—"

"You wouldn't?" asked the fairies dubiously.

"Probably wouldn't," admitted the witch. "A lot has happened in the last twenty-four hours. For the first time in my life I've known what it is like to be liked. It's turned my values upside-down."

"We-ll-l," sighed all her auditors, edified. It was the first time, probably, in the history of the world: someone wicked suddenly and honestly decided to be good. It was worth a little awe.

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - T W O

Princess Ozma of Oz was in sombre mood.

She'd been like that for some time really, only she hadn't liked to show it before all these visitors to Oz in what was, rather awkwardly, the centenary celebration (of the 'uncovering' of Oz) year. Frankly, the dainty girl ruler had to admit to herself, the gala couldn't have come at a more inopportune time.

That was why she'd been keeping a relatively low profile all during this book. Of course she'd had to appear to brighten up at times and take an interest, for hospitality's sake, but her heart hadn't been in it. For instance, there had been that—for her, extremely uncharacteristic—junket to the outer world. The invitation-extending had been a very convenient excuse, but what the young queen was really doing was casting a sizing-up glance over the state of the earth a year and a half after her attempt to save Oz from that world's malevolent effects by making everyone tiny.

Her investigative outing had been depressing. The earth wasn't a whit cleaner or less crowded than all reports had credited it with being twenty months ago. Ozma had all along been hoping against hope that the world would one day (soon) reverse its killing trends and come to have fewer people, less pollution, and a fall-off in crime. Nothing she had seen just now

out there had led her to believe that such a reversal was in train. She had hoped—of course!—that eventually she was going to be able to return to their own homes the hosts of refugees who were swamping Oz. Now she knew she was going to have to set that dream on hold—and it was dispiriting.

To make matters worse the conversation lately had kept turning to the old sorceress Mombi: the single greatest defeat of Ozma's whole life. Oh, to think of it: having actually ordered the destruction of the woman in whose home she had grown up! Ozma would wake nights, sobbing, from dreams of it. How in heaven's name had she ever let herself contemplate such a move? No matter *what* the old witch had done in her career of wickedness it did not entitle the innocent and high-minded girl Ruler of Oz to get blood on her hands by authorizing a judicial murder.

Why had they kept bringing it up? Wasn't it enough to have the great worries of present and future to deal with, without having the guilt of the past to weigh one down as well? No wonder she had sometimes been a bit brief with these two spoiled tots she had conjured to Oz. If she was going to burden the country with an additional two foreigners, why could it not have been modest unassuming—even gormless—creatures such as Button Bright or Zeb Hugson or the orphan Bob Up who had used to come to Oz in the old days? She had a good mind to wish Sarah and Jimmy home to sandy dusky Ohio out of hand and be done with at least one minor irritant.

Still, to do that she'd have to know where they were. Let's see, she'd seen them last here at the palace some days ago, but she couldn't quite recall. Oh, yes, they'd gone away with little Floraline and the pixy Dementia. They'd been wanting to see wicked witches or some such. Grimly Ozma's mouth corners drooped. Wicked witches were thin on the ground in Oz since she and Dorothy had brought off their coup in 1925.

After all it would provide a moment's escape from dreary preoccupations with the overrun condition of Oz, the awful awkwardnesses her miniaturization spell had wrought, and the

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qualms of guilt over that old execution, to look at the Magic Picture and see where the kids had got to.

Ozma selected a nutmeg dope stick (Oz's innocent euphoric) and tripped to the chamber of the great magical work of art, where she invoked its charm. She took an instant to make a verse à la Patchwork Girl:

"To see my visitors I'd fain:

Young James and Sarah: show those twain!"

She was shown twain all right. When the bright colors of the original painting had swirled to a mud brown and then clarified again—although not all that much: the scene that became depicted remained all brown—Ozma found herself looking at a brace of baby squirrels.

"Oh, how cute!" giggled the young sovereign in obvious relief. She hadn't realized how much she'd not been looking forward to seeing the grubby petulant faces of that pair from Ohio. They were much more attractive as squirrels. The fact that the two had undergone some kind of transformation and been turned into the young of another species did not dismay the girl ruler too much. Given the siblings' venue in a magic land and their being last seen in the company of a couple of fairly potent fairies it was perhaps not odd that they had temporarily quitted their normal shapes. Perhaps Floraline had done the enchantment as temporary protective disguise for the tots, though what threat could have been hanging over them was not at once apparent to their present watcher. The animals were seen to be snugly ensconced, sitting up each inside its battered old boot of a crib and clearly inside a capacious nest in some hollow tree.

"Hm," breathed Ozma and felt vaguely relieved. It was clearly not a situation requiring immediate banging of the alarm bell. Naturally she must investigate what droll scrape the Ohio kiddies had got themselves into, but that could wait. After all, Floraline and Dementia were watching over them—though not to be caught sight of inside the squirrel nest—and she would hear all about it when the party got home to the Emerald City.

No, while she was at it the Oz ruler directed the picture to show instead the front gates of her own palace. Was that pesky protest mob still hanging around out there like the fishwives of Paris at the gates of Versailles? For months now Ozma had had to contend with dissatisfied hordes of immigrants who massed in silent or sometimes noisy animosity outside the palace. They had all been used to staging protest demonstrations at home in the outer world and they saw no reason to stop now that they were comfortable and well provided-for in Oz. It was after all a way of life.

Yes. Sigh! There they still were. After dark they would go home to their neat round cottages but during nearly all daylight hours they were to be counted on as bivouacking at the gates and waving their placards:

“Ozites Go Home!”

“Down with everything good!”

“Ozma, get asthma! —like we’ve all got!”

“Unfair to organized malcontents!”

Bevies of them too roamed all roads, as Ozma knew. Whenever she ventured out on a progress she was at pains to shoot discreet blasts from her pocket demistifier, to render the knots of protesters invisible and soundless. She hoped the Wizard too had made full use of his similar device on these mysterious junkets he and friends were making in these days. General Battles had told her that the latest outing was in company with a reactivated Tik-Tok and a great roll of carpet. What in the world was that in aid of?

Actually, Ozma knew—but she wasn’t letting on to herself: the “Mombi room” and its ill-smelling secret that had been a silent reproach to her now for seventy-five years. There was the thought again! Why couldn’t she keep away from it? Was there no surcease of worry and regret to be found anywhere?

Ozma hid her face in the drape that screened the Magic Picture and wept.

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - T H R E E

Mombi was overdoing it a bit. Since she had discovered how popular it made her being good she went overboard and in the pouring rain was evincing such softheartedness that practically everybody was feeling sick. "How attractive the children were!" she lied. "How worn-out, misshapen, and dirty they are as shoes," she grieved.

"By the way," said Floraline, "where are the tots?"

"They were such darlings," remembered the witch. In this case her memory could be equated with her imagination since she had been cognizant of Jimmy and Sarah's existence fully a minute before she turned them into boots.

"I think in the excitement they got left beside the willow brook," vouchsafed Garth.

"Dern tootin' they did," said Mombi in an aside. "What use did I have of them after you carved me these nifty wooden shoes?" Then she went back to her self-flagellation: "I reproach myself for not having been patient," she sighed. "After all, if they are really mature adults must be patient with children. How could I have allowed my maturity to be broken, even pierced, by Jimmy's (was that his name?) behavior? Nay, worse: how could I have been so arrogant, so insensitive?"

It was when she directed the latter question to herself that

Mombi broke down. Meanwhile the group were making their blundersome way through the woods in the midst of a renewed downpour. It didn't seem to be a Witch's Storm this time. Mombi was too busy producing oily tears out of her eye-holes to be able to take charge of any larger-scale precipitations.

They had left the shelter of Garth's kitchen and house after the oil sorceress in a bout of contrition suddenly called to mind the children she had done so ill by. "Yipe," she barked. "Where are those boot tots?!" and had started up, determined to make right her wrong. Out they all burst in the darkening afternoon and plunged into the thickest of the forest outside Garth's door.

"We must rescue them from their suffering!" she declared —and that was pretty much what the two fairies and Tik-Tok had in mind as well. Only, where to look? aside from the obvious place, the brook bank. So they headed in that direction.

Each of the members of the party in turn felt constrained to come to Mombi to try to console the remorseful one. "Mombi dearest," said Garth, as he had come to call the wind witch—and without having to be beaten with wire coat-hangers—"you mustn't blame yourself."

Her only reply was further sighs. Then she decided to make up for the wrong she had done Sarah and Jimmy. She would do something to make them happy, something that would make them forgive her.

"You know, I'm be-gin-ning to think she means it," said Tik-Tok. "Most odd."

"Only, what will it be?" pondered the witch.

"You'll realize when the time comes," assured Mombi's dear close friend when she revealed her intention. "First, though, we have to find them. Then when you've turned them back into their rightful forms they will be able to tell you themselves what would make them happy."

"Yes, Mombi," put in Floraline. "Try to control yourself, my friend. Every minute that we have to spend comforting you is a minute more that the poor little ones have to pass alone and fearful in the forest. We must get to them as soon as possible."

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Dementia said nothing but "Oh, look at that bolt of lightning! Isn't it brilliant!" But otherwise the beauty of the darkling wood in the threatening storm was hardly being perceived by the plunging party. Only the two fairies would now and then whisper a bit about the wondrous greenness of their surroundings which they were penetrating for the first time ever. "It's quite like Burzee, isn't it?" opined Floraline and both the fays felt a twinge of homesickness.

Their remarks only brought looks of reproach from Mombi. "How can you admire the beauty of the woods when we're all just sick with worry over the fate of the two dear strays?" she wanted to know. "How can you think of landscapes when the poor children are cold and dirty and crawling with insects?" By now Mombi's imagination had gone into free fall.

Floraline bridled and retorted, "We care about the children too, don't you doubt that! We too are worried about them and want to find them. But our consciences are clean. That may be a reason why we can still take an interest in our surroundings and enjoy being alive. Their ordeal is not our fault."

"Hmm," muttered the witch and began to find out about the dull part of being conscience-ridden and concerned about one's misdeeds. She had thought she was going to enjoy being good for a change but all this remorse was getting boring.

Now Tik-Tok got back into the act. He said, "Let us try to keep calm, la-dies. We will not help the chil-dren or our-selves by quar-rel-ing."

So hearing, the searchers hastened onward through the rain and now in the early-gathering dusk the wind witch and the metal man could see that they were once more close to the spot where the discarded boots had been, all unthinking, left behind in the commotion occasioned by the approach of the requital-seeking travelers from Oz. "This is the place," alerted Garth of a sudden.

Well, almost the place. Actually the slant-growing willow was now an island in a roaring flood. The oil storm of the morning, followed by the present near-cloudburst, had swollen all water

channels to spate. Where two out-trodden boots had lain was now four feet under water. The rescue party could only stand on the bank and gape.

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - F O U R

Scraps was being irrepressible. This was the second day of our grueling return march toward the Emerald City and the Patchwork Girl wouldn't be repressed. We wished she would, rather. Why couldn't she leave us to be merely dismayed and alarmed for the future of Oz? And of the world, for that matter.

She sang: "Away to Ozma, there to give
the wondrous news we bring:
all problems solved and nothing left
for us to do but sing."

"Shi'ite," said Dorothy, borrowing a leaf from the Sanduskyites' book, and gave a number to a close-crowding fellow traveler upon the road who attempted to take a liberty with her. It was not sixes or sevens she gave either but a rabbit punch to render numb the non-Ozite who, spotting the nubile Kansas teenager, thought he fancied a bit of the crispy. "You can't even walk along the yellow brick road without getting insulted," said the girl, using a quaint old-world expression for 'practically raped.' "It's not the Oz I knew a century ago."

The Patchwork Girl drooped. "You're right," she confessed. "Even I got accosted there back a ways. Wonder how he thought he was gonna cut the mustard." It was a question in logistics that stimulated Scraps' lively mind. "Just the same I didn't like

it. And to think everything is just going to get more so in the world of the future. You know, world population now stands at six billion. In thirty-four years it'll be twelve billion. And Oz is bound to get the overspill."

"'Tis very grievous to be thought upon," quoted Dorothy. "It will be up to Ozma to take steps about it." That was a plus about not having been elected ruler of Oz herself. "It was very wise and noble of the dear Princess to miniaturize all living things in the fairy-land. That made plenty of room for more creatures to crowd into Oz. And, boy, have they crowded. But it's not good. We seem to have attracted an undesirable element. All this demonstrating and going on strike and the like. It's most un-Ozian—"

"Worse than that, it's boring," pronounced the Patchwork Girl."

"And also, alas, dear Princess," put in the Wizard, "it is inexact. Such disagreeable behavior is simply the result of overcrowding. Put the most adorable rats in the world in a cage with too many and they'll commence biting each other. All this antisocial behavior is just the way creatures *do* when there are too many of them."

"Well, then," decided the Kansas girl, "Ozma will just have to get rid of them."

"Hmm," wondered the Wizard. "After having gone on record as favoring the miniaturization solution our dear ruler may have to think four or five times before she admits it was all a mistake."

"But, Wizard," said Dorothy sagely, "do you think it is intelligent to let every nice place in the world get overrun and totally spoiled before *then* deciding there are too many people and doing something about it? What about saving *one* spot: Oz, while there is still some grace and amenity left to it?"

"I'm of your view completely," said O.Z. Diggs. Meanwhile a mob of Malcontents surging toward them along the road was blocking the way. As it happened, this mob had just at this time grown to crisis point, where the disorganized cries of "Down

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with this and that” gave way to a concerted intention to “do something about it.” The first thing they did was recognize the famous Wizard of Oz and the equally familiar-looking Patchwork Girl and take them as hostages. “Now,” said one who was a ringleader; “with hostages we can do a whole lot more! Let’s not mess around. Let’s march on the Emerald City and demand our rights. If they won’t grant them we’ll set fire to the Patchwork Girl and roast the old wizard on a spit.”

“Oh, grand,” cried all the rest and turned about and carried the lot of us, protesting and resisting, onward toward the capital, though not quite in the fashion we had envisioned at our start. For a long day we tramped and in very awkward wise: with our arms bound behind our backs.

That night they obliged the Wizard to create a tent city to house them all on a bit of waste ground not far from the Winkie River. Oh, the torments. We were not even allowed to brush our teeth before going to bed.

Next day on again along the dusty road. Further hostages were picked up wherever opportunity afforded. Some poor victims were even tortured—and torture in Oz is worse than anywhere else because no one can die and so the agony lasts forever.

But late that afternoon an amelioration occurred. At a major crossroads the insurgent mob ran up against another army of malcontents. This proved to be native Ozites who were fed to the teeth at the marauding of the masses of aliens who had come to Oz apparently only to make trouble. With pitchforks and knitting needles they were marching on the Emerald City to register a protest with Ozma at the numbers of wayward girls and boys who were making life in Oz a misery for your Ozite in the street.

A pitched battle took place. Heads rolled but unfortunately did not spell the death of those involved. Later, heads were picked up and jammed back on bodies that went right on living but it was most disconcerting to some eyes to look down on swelling breasts where formerly they had surveyed a flat brawny

chest. But never mind. It was all Oz and just wonderful. Even so, the result of the battle was a nasty mess, and by now it was night.

As I was led away to a prisoner-of-war compound I fell in beside a six-foot blond bruiser I took to be one of the malcontents who had been holding us prisoners. He was obviously an outlander. No bite-size Munchkin or Winkie this. I was inclined to sulk. I started rather when he suddenly said, "You look like a brother of mine—if he's turned into a ninety-pound weakling."

"Thanks a lot." In the half light I cast a glance. "Come to think of it, you look like a brother of *mine* the way he looked in 1970. But that's nonsense of course. He died in 1993 and was by then sadly far removed from his appearance as in his days of glory: paralyzed on the left and weighing over three hundred pounds." I gave a gulp, recalling days happier and lost.

The man stuck out his hand. "Eldest oyster?" he said, and looked a searching question.

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - F I V E

The next day they tried again. The flood waters had considerably receded when and where Mombi cried, "There's the willow that grows aslant the brook—and what remains of the branch you cut to carve my shoes, dear." She sent a loving look Garth's way.

But alas, not a boot could be seen. Well, that was to be expected. It would have been a stubborn shoe that resisted the spating flow of yesterday. Just the same, the search party looked carefully among the half-drowned and bedraggled flowers and weeds, the daffodils, wild roses, geraniums, orchids, and carnations that still clung to life amid the froth and wrack beside the brook.

When those yielded no clues Tik-Tok made the suggestion that Mombi whirl up (in her dust-deviless mode) into the topmost branch of the willow find do a dekko from there. She did, and spied far and wide. No dice. Then it was that the witch had an additional small weeping fit.

The others all stood along the nearest shore and gaped. "What now, dear one?" wondered Garth and waded into the water in an impulsive gesture to approach and comfort his love.

"Get back!" cried the wind witch. "No use having to list you as a casualty too: going rusty in the water. Remember how many

hours we worked last night drying and oiling you after your exposure to that rain. And that was just drops."

Shamefast, the metal man retreated to dry ground. But just the same he said, "We entreat you: tell us why you are carrying on like that. You can't see the boots from up there?"

"Nary a boot!" boothooted Mombi. "What's more, I think they could be miles downstream and buried full fathoms five." She moaned.

Garth made another emotion-swayed move to approach her. Then, so as to put a stop to his nonsense, the witch descended from the tree and breezed lightly to the shore. Garth took her in his arms. "Ow," said Mombi at the pressure of a steel elbow. Then she dropped everything to blow her nose.

Garth took advantage of the tiny lull to say, "If indeed those kid boots have sunk to some lower watery depths, you have the power to lay all bare. Do your stuff magically, my girl."

Mombi, for whom Garth's word had become law, replied, "That's right! How twitty I am to have forgotten that I can help other ways than just by weeping and wailing."

While all her friends looked on admiringly the sorceress made passes, intoned witching words, and behold: the swollen brook became an upside-down waterfall, turning abruptly in its flow to gush straight up into the now faultless (and for a bit well rain-washed) blue sky. Quickly the watchers on the bank darted past the fall and ran along the shore downstream, searching the now bare-laid creek-bed where only stones and sand remained, together with certain limp subacquaceous riverine plants.

They scampered on for perhaps a quarter of a mile but found nothing bootlike for their pains. Then Floraline had a thought. "Mombi," she said reflectively, "would you let the water column drop back into the bed little by little so we can check that the footwear hasn't been dragged along skyward by the uprushing waters?"

"Well thought upon," said Mombi and did as she was asked. Watching a by-now mile's worth of brook rain down again,

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liberally splashing them all, was tedious work but the devoted rescuers persevered. Their efforts availed them nothing.

"I'm convinced," quoth little Dementia, who wasn't all that scatty really, "the tots aren't in the river. I wonder... *if* they had washed ashore somewhere — and if somebody happened to have found them — they could be anywhere!"

"Oh, that's a big help," said Garth. He could not, however, fault the pixy's logic. Somehow those two were thrown together rather more than heretofore as the entire party spent the remainder of the long day in fanning out from both sides of the creek and for miles downstream, searching every rabbit hole and concealed cranny for a spot where at any rate one boot might have lodged. They asked every forest creature they came across too but nobody had seen hide or thread of any unfamiliar person-shoes. They had all been too busy hunting higher ground when the flood came to spare time for noting floating debris.

Next day same thing. And the next. But then luck turned. As they were searching yet a new forest glade ten miles from their starting point Dementia's attention was attracted to a squirrel who flirted across a corner of the clearing. The fairy saw that the little animal wore a tiny bright blue flower behind an ear.

"I want to talk to that squirrel," she said to Garth, who again happened to be near her. "Will you take me to it?" The fairies had gradually come to know of the tin man's intimacy with woodland creatures, particularly squirrels. "Please?" continued Dementia. "That pretty shade of blue reminds me of something. It's so unusual."

"A blue squirrel? I think I saw the animal you mean and I can assure you, little lady, it was brownish grey, not blue."

"Oh, silly," retorted the pixy with spirit. "I know we're not in Munchkinland. Of course that squirreling wasn't blue. I referred to the tiny flower or rosette it was wearing behind its ear. Did you see that?"

"No. Maybe I'm too metallic to be able to discern shapes that small. And yet *you* can see them and even make out different color shades. Oh, the power of pixy eyes," he marveled

praisingly.

“Mr. Garth, please, let’s follow that squirrel. I just love that hue of blue. Maybe it will let me have the flower—if it *was* a flower.”

Floraline happened to be eavesdropping and inserted, “Aren’t you being a bit insensitive, Dementia, to think of favored colors and the desire for flower souvenirs when the lost children are still lost?” As she spoke the lead fairy made much of continuing, herself, to push aside plant tendrils and stalks in search of shoe traces.

“Maybe,” admitted the green-blue pixy. Then she confessed her noble motivation. “But the thing is: you know I’m color conscious. Just in the moments we glimpsed her before she tragically turned into a boot I noted that young Sarah’s dress was of a particular and striking electric blue: exactly the shade of the little squirrel’s ear decor. Maybe, just maybe... maybe I’m an imaginative fool!” she ended and began to pout seriously.

“No, you’re not!” backtracked her fellow fay. “And maybe, just maybe, I ought to mind my own business once in a while. Friend Garth—”; she turned; “will you go with Dementia to interview that fugitive squirrel?”

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - S I X

"This is parlous news indeed."

"Whu' dat, boss man?"

"You remember! That's a 'quotable quote' — or a 'thing we say.' That's how I greeted you the first time I saw you, at Bay Pines after your stroke, back in seventy-one. You seemed to savor the word 'parlous'."

"It's okay. But—*va' är det för nyhet?* It's been seven years."

"Since you came here? Yes, but I only just arrived. We haven't met in the interim."

"So you're dead too?"

"I guess. It's the only way I know of for certifiably existing people to come to Oz. It's queer though. I don't exactly feel dead — and I was living to be 118."

"You look it already. I wonder..."

"Oh, well, thanks. Just as long as I *look* 118, who cares if I am it? Never mind; I looked eighty when I was fifty. It goes with the job of being me."

"I wonder."

"You said that. What do you wonder?"

"Well, see me. You more or less look the age you are. But I..."

"Yes, you've gone back to your *glanstid*."

"?"

"You know: Swedish. Or maybe it's more Danish. Or both. 'Time of gleaming.' The period when one was at one's best: heyday, golden age."

"Thanks."

"Oh, no credit to me. It's just a statement of fact. You look about forty-five, and trim to boot. You were getting on for 'beached whale' there at the last."

"Thanks."

"Statement of fact... Yeah: you've... 'mellowed.' In other ways too. Back then you'd blow your top any time anybody said anything that didn't fit your self-image."

"I guess a guy faces facts at the last."

"Oh, this is great! You—I mean 'one'—can really talk to you again at last. You don't know how I missed it."

"Don't slop over."

"We ought to have slopped over more. Why is it men—or Americans—or both—have all the time got to *not* say what they're feeling?—unless it's something disagreeable."

"The macho image."

"Oh, futt that! What the heck difference does macho make? It's being a warm sentient considerate human being that matters."

"Don't slop over."

"There *was* plenty of it when you... left. You should have seen the sobs and tears. People that hadn't cried in years took their tears out of mothballs."

"I know."

"What? Do you mean...? Fascinating! Somebody being gathered to his ancestors gets a look at what he's leaving behind?"

"You ought to know."

"That's the funny part: I don't. One minute I was just lying in bed and the next: Ozma and Dot were arriving to take me on this junket. I wonder..."

"That's my line."

"What did you see? I mean, after the crucial moment?"

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"I saw the corpus delicti—and then people coming and going—"

"Not anything... awful? Say it isn't so!"

"No trips to the undertaker if that's what you mean. I get the impression kicking off excises the grim bits. Now you just witness what matters: people caring, the odd good memory recalled, some shining hours—unmarred..."

"'Beyond all pain, beyond all sorrow'?"

"Yeah. That's well expressed. Who said it?"

"You did. In *Earthblood*, remember? 'The fair one is gone away, Roan. Now she dances before the most high—beyond...' I had a good sob the first time I read that."

"Good for you. There was some enjoyable sobbing at the ceremony, I noticed."

"The memorial gathering?! At your place that evening?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I'm glad! Everybody there hoped that—without much really expecting it. So you heard Bum? And that wonderful weepy quotation: how does it go? 'All those shadowy peoples of the past who loved and lost as we have loved. Surely there is some place beyond, where all the love we lost in life is given back—and given back forever.' Ineffable—even if it is just from some 'Victorian novel'."

"Your quote from *Spoon River* wasn't any slouch either."

"Oh: 'The echoes about the vales bring dreams of life. Where are those laughing comrades?...' I was frightfully touched when somebody said you'd known that verse by heart too. I've always loved it so much. What a shame I never knew..."

"We leave the most important things unsaid in life."

"Mm-hmh. That's par for the course. I remember once Mom said—"

"How is the old lady?"

"Fine. Still going strong—at ninety-eight. Her memory's in tatters, but otherwise... By the way, speaking of sobs and tears: did you see her at the time?"

"I forget."

"You couldn't. *There* were hysterics, if you like. The worst came one night at bedtime when I was saying good-night and she had a screaming jag: 'Oh, my baby... my Donnie!! I can't *stand* it!' she yelled."

"Stop it!"

"It was terrible. You couldn't have forgotten it if you were there. But you know, in a queer way I lapped it up. I thought at the time: if there's ever a moment that someone is truly alive it is when he's in a paroxysm of honest generous loving grief for someone lost. It's what ever being alive at all is all about. Everything shallow and selfish scorched away and just pure love remaining. It was awesome to be witness to—and I was grateful."

"Lucky you."

"You're not scoffing. And then there was another time. I told her I was going to be talking to you—meaning this book, eventually—and was there anything she wanted to say to you? She said, 'Oh, I'd tell him so many things...' Pure sweet fondness. But she never went on to say what they were."

"'This book'?"

"Yes. And that's another thing. Isn't it ironic? Do you remember? I once read you the first two chapters of this and you broke me off, said, 'It's vile. Tear it up!'"

"It was vile."

"You don't mean that. What you mean is: it's too close to the bone. It says something real. And in your fugue from reality, into the extravagances of science fiction, you had to keep from saying anything about real life."

"Oh, is that what I mean?"

"Yes. In reality, you were the greatest romantic of them all. But you professed to spurn romance. It wasn't sufficiently macho."

"Shit."

"It's true though. And yet, romance will save the world—as I announced in my trilogy of that name. If people can forget about money and machismo and go back to following the grail in search of that which is noble and remote and desirable and

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nostalgic and lost the world will be saved.”

“Oh, super.”

“You know it’s so. The plot of every one of your novels, though you cursed me when I said it, is ‘Hard-bitten loner saves the world single-handed.’ It’s the most romantic plot in the world... And now here you are, leading this quixotic quest of the Winkies to cast out the foul—and out-numbering—usurpers and to restore the dreamland to its old beauty and graciousness. You—one—doesn’t get more romantic than that.”

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - S E V E N

The tin man took the little pixy girl by the hand and they set off. In fact they hadn't far to go before Dementia could exclaim, "There's the animal I saw! There, up on that branch. No, more to the left! See? Oh, dear, now she's ducked out of sight. Dear Garth, please try to control the squeaking of your knees. I think that's what scared her."

All Garth could do was slow his pace and walk stiff-legged so as to reduce knee noise. He also began to repeat "Hello" in a friendly voice. That had always in the past been enough to lure squirrel pals to him by the score. *They* knew the weird "cry of tin" coming from the metal man's joints foreboded no malice.

Now suddenly a different squirrel, larger than the blue-decked female, made an appearance and greeted the pursuers with some garrulity. "Hello, hello! What have we here?! A metal man and a charming young pixy! And it looks mighty like you're chasing my Nutella. My, my, *that's* a new experience for her! She's never been chased by a metal man before. In fact she's never seen a metal man before—"

"No," Garth finally broke in. "I've never seen you two before either, though I have plenty of squirrel friends in the forest. I live eight or ten miles away, in the metal men's village. Don't you ever get over there?"

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"Oh, no," said the squirrel. "We're homebodies. Just stay close to home and tend our business, which is raising our brood of young ones. You should see them. There's a lively and attractive pair for you if you like!"

"I'm sure we'd like to. And in return we can show you another metal man: different shape and color but metal pure through. He's around here somewhere. But first, if we could meet your friend..."

"That's not my friend," corrected the male squirrel. "That's my wife!"

"That's right!" squeaked the voice of a girl squirrel and now the sought-after female head with that patch of blue appeared from around the bole of a water oak, high up. Then two more tiny furry heads were also seen. One of these as well sported a minute fragment of decorative blue. "Are you safe to know?! Oh, I'm so glad. I overheard what you were saying and thought it would indeed be fun to get acquainted. Only, it's a pity you're so big," the squirrel wife lamented. "Otherwise we would be delighted to invite you into our home."

Gaining every moment in audacity from the tin man's obvious peaceableness and the lure of the charms of the pretty pixy, the little squirrel family ventured fully forth and down the tree stem. The whole family seemed struck by the beauty of the little (but to them enormous) immortal. They all moved yet nearer, nay, even reached out to touch.

"Don't worry about bigness," advised Dementia forth-rightly. "My shape's not fixed. I can change it at will." So saying she shrank alarmingly in a trice to be just shoulder high to the pater familias.

"Ooh!" gasped all the squirrels. And, "Oh, mama," cried the two young ones, "please! In, please! Bring her to our house!"

"Indeed," said the fay, "I should be strangely moved to be afforded a glimpse inside your home."

"Oh, Mama, Papa," the twins (for such they were) clamored on, "it would be marvelous to have her at our home and to play with her!"

The mother squirrel looked at her mate and he did not delay in expressing in well chosen words his willingness, even eagerness, to receive the visit of the blue-green pixy. "Bring your friend to our house!" he urged the tin man. "Follow us!" And lined up like ducks the four furries scampered away through the woods.

All in good time the party reached another, more gnarled and ancient oak of enormous trunk, that grew farther on, down on the shore of the brook.

"You won't be able to come in..." the mother squirrel, Nutella, explained apologetically to Garth. "It's a bit too far up to our home hole and you're too big. But the dear fairy girl may come," and here she fluttered her eyelids invitingly to the (now really) little Dementia, who was not slow in batting her pixy wings and wavering to the high oak crotch in pursuit of the up-scampering rodents.

From then on Garth had to experience all at second hand as Dementia called down discoveries. "The boot on the left we use for Flicker, our little girl," the mother was explaining, "and that on the right is Quicker's."

Dementia, half in, half out of, the largish entrance hole in the oak, exclaimed: "Aren't you clever! Think of using battered old boots as separate cribs for your babies. So practical! How did you ever come to do so? Loose shoes aren't that common a phenomenon in a forest."

"Too true," agreed Nutella. "We were astonished ourselves at the fortunate find. We've only had them for three days. We found them hanging tangled in the reeds near the very foot of our tree one morning right after that awful storm and high water."

Down below the squirrel father was enlarging to Garth. "At first we didn't know how we'd get them up into our nest, though we saw at once they'd be perfect beds for our two. We were lucky again in that a couple of raven friends happened to be in our neck of the woods just then. They soon joined up to seize a bootlace each and in two brisk trips they had the boots up and

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tipped in through our front door.”

And Nutella: “The children helped. It was they who lined the new cribs with moss and padded them with leaves, to make really comfy beds.”

“Weren’t they awfully wet? The boots, I mean,” put in the thoughtful pixy.

“Not that bad,” demurred the mother. “It looked as if they had caught in the reeds exactly by being upside-down and subsiding, with the water, over the broken-off stumps of two luckily placed plants. We figure they’d already had a day to drip dry before we found them.” Nutella rhapsodized on: “They’re made of the smoothest softest leather—though admittedly a bit the worse for wear. Pretty linings too. Quicker’s is amber taffeta, as you see, but even more gorgeous is this wonderful blue material. Have you noticed? I just couldn’t resist gnawing off two bits of it for rosettes for Flicker and me to wear at our ears—”

“I knew it!” cried Dementia, breaking in. “I knew it. That’s the same shade and pattern as the material of the dress Sarah was wearing all during her adventures. I remember thinking at the time that of course she’d be wearing blue just like Judy Garland when she came to Oz. These boots are our friends!”

“Oh, I’m so glad,” sighed Nutella, gratified. “We love them too. Already we’ve got so we couldn’t think of parting with them.”

“Oh, gracious, I’m afraid you must,” protested the pixy. “We don’t love them, you see, in the same way you do.” (“In fact, I don’t know that we love them at all,” she afterwards remembered thinking. ‘It’s much bigger than that.’) “These boots actually are our friends. They were turned into footwear by a wicked spell; they are really a young American boy and girl.” Nutella nearly fell out of the oak she was that surprised, even shocked.

“Part with them’?!” cried Bushy, the father, getting a garbled report of things down below. “No way! The children never had such comfortable beds in their lives. Nothing you can say could make us give up the boots. We found them by the stream and

they are ours. Finders keepers! And after we slaved over them, cleaning them of mud and rubbing them with beeswax and buffing them with our tails—all four of us! No, sir, they are staying right here with us in our home. And by the way, we don't find you welcome here any more. Please go away and leave us in peace!"

Up at the tree hole Dementia was faring little better. The Squirrel twins, feeling threatened, were sheltering behind their mother's haunches. Nutella put paws on hips and echoed forthrightly: "You would deprive my children of their most cherished possessions? And when they've only just got them and the new isn't off? No, never! Go away, the two of you!"

Dementia surprised herself by bursting into tears. After such kindness this had been a dismal thing to do! Send them away in enmity?! She was wounded to her depths. As she retreated out of the squirrel nest raining tears down on sensitive Garth at the oak foot, *he* started crying.

The squirrel family were admittedly touched. They *had* liked the oddly assorted pair of newcomers up until the moment of their unwarranted ultimatum. They softened even more when Garth sobbed: "My first failure! I've never known squirrels before that I didn't get on with. I'm quite famous in my village as 'the friend of the animals.' Why, I have a special jar on my kitchen shelf with nuts for treating my squirrel buddies."

The squirrel foursome got more impressed as Garth grieved on. "I was just now counting the moments 'til I could meet close up your two kiddies. Young are so rare around Alloya. I've never seen squirrel babies before! And I've always longed to..."

Even Dementia interrupted her tears at this report. She wavered in air and called down: "Garth? You are obliged to be kidding. Never seen a baby squirrel? You, the great animal lover!?"

Garth stopped weeping to inform: "I guess I'd got into the way of thinking squirrels were like metal-men: no offspring. But anyway it's true. Even now I've not had a proper look at these little ones—who are so rare..."

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"I guess they are pretty rare," said Bushy and buffed his claws on his chest. "But we *wanted* children—badly—you see. That's why we deliberately held off eating of the irony berries—"

Garth and Dementia looked, each from his/her direction, big question marks. "Irony berries? What are those?"

Bushy held forth again. "Why, everybody knows the strange and potent irony berries. Leastways, around here. Haven't you noticed those iron-colored shrubs with their rusty berries? They're everywhere; at least, anywhere where the air is bad and the water brackish and polluted. This low-lying part of Ev near the desert has lots of them. Could it be from the dry dusty miasmic breezes blowing in? Because it's true that deep forest regions don't seem to promote their growth. Guess tree foliage purifies the air just that crucial bit. Anyway, off-putting as they look, the tiny fruits have a most seductive taste. No creature can resist them..."

"I can hardly believe I've never heard of such a plant," puzzled Garth, who after all came from not far away. But then he reasoned: "I don't eat! That must account for it. Beings who don't eat don't spend much time talking about food." Had he been more worldly wise the tin man might have gone on to draw the parallels of non-drinkers who don't know much about particular vintages or non-smokers and the relative merits of Virginia and Latakia.

Dementia was more mundane-practical. "What have tasty berries got to do with having young?"

"Nobody knows," inserted Nutella at the oak-hole mouth, "except that if you eat them you don't. And of course if you have ever tasted one you can never again not eat them whenever you can."

"Gee," mused the pixy. "That sounds almost as good as moonbeam soufflé... Have you got any of those berries?" She was starting to drool in ever so ladylike a fashion and knew now she would have to satisfy her curiosity.

"Why, no," admitted the squirrel mother. "But they are so plentiful even squirrels would never think of hoarding any. Here,

wait..." Her ultimatum to the two newcomers to make themselves scarce apparently forgotten, she popped out of the nest entrance and down the oak, closely followed by her children. "Now, Bushy love, lead our visitors to the nearest stand of the ironies."

That was about four yards from where they stood and so it was about as many seconds before the blue-green pixy had put a single little chewy-hard berry the size of a blueberry or lingon in her dainty mouth and was savoring away.

"Oh, wow," she announced. "It's like maple malted-milk with almond croquante and a faint overtone of orange chocolate... I see what you mean!" In a moment she was gobbling away. Just as well she didn't plan on having children any time soon.

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - E I G H T

Things got confused in there. I'm still pretty confused about the sequence of events, but let's see if I can sort them out.

There was the party from Patch making its slow painful (feet, backs, and general tuckered-out-ness) way along the now hundred-times-as-long-seeming road from the cotton kingdom toward the District of Oz. They (we) were moving east-south-easterly and after two days, I think it was, we met up with that awful band of Malcontents who immediately took our puny party prisoners (notwithstanding the power of O.Z. Diggs, the Wizard). Malcontents, Inc., had been advancing south-southwestward out of Gillikinland. The little coup of annexing our bunch only deflected them to the degree that they now marched bee-line on the capital.

Next our horde crossed staffs with the valiant little party of insurgents coming up from the southwest and led by my brother. These people were the first in Oz to throw aside hypocrisy and boldly ask:

"Why the (censored) should they allow the paradise to be sullied by a crowd of evil-natured crapheads intent on merely mucking up what they had not the wit to enjoy?" I concurred wholeheartedly with their enterprise when I heard what it was. I had simply been too pusillanimous, as having-to-be-impartial

author, to say so beforehand—as I freely confessed to Keith. Yes, there he was, a loner, saving Oz single-handed.

He didn't save it much though. He had only a pair of fists and they didn't avail very long. He had no magic power to aid him; well, of words, on the printed page, but what good were they here? His cohort fell, after a spirited battle in which one and another crown got broken.

Now here we all were—oh, I guess a couple of thousand strong, camped outside the gates of the Emerald City and the Guardian of the Gates not about to issue us all green spectacles. The city was under siege.

Inside the palace, Queen Ozma consulted with Sorceress Glinda whom she had summoned urgently by two-way wrist radio as soon as the extent of the threat was known. (Funny how I as author knew everything she was doing, but I as character couldn't send her word to let her know what the score was inside the army of the besiegers nor advise her as to any likely policies to follow.)

When the (some of them) warlike Winkies got word by bird messenger of the risk to their beloved ruler they hastily threw together a makeshift army and marched on the besiegers' rear. I guess they regretted the lack of their counterparts from Alternate Oz: those brave souls who in an earlier day had not drawn back from making self-exploding cannons to assist in a rout of Emerald City threateners.[§]

This was the situation when Ozma and Glinda in concert threw up a protective shield around the green city and prepared to sit out the siege. There were plenty of kitchen gardens within the area of the old verdant capital city to feed the populace without stint for as long as the siege might last. The protecto-shell was total proof against any other sort of shell the invaders might lob. But what was to be the outcome? The Emerald City had no troops to stage a sortie and attempt to force back the besiegers. All they had was magic, though the fairy and sorceress had plenty of that. Only, they were hamstrung by

§ See *The Wooden Soldiers of Oz*. Editor's note.

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the stubborn Princess, who was bound and determined not to give an inch on the once-for-all miniaturization and free-entry-for-all she had once granted anyone who would come to the magic land. She was so noble and pure-minded, poor girl. She just wasn't attuned to how evil the human race was (of course, this doesn't include you, dear reader). Humans would never give up their cherished greed, selfishness, and mercilessness for the benefit of living things in general. ('What?! We stop throwing away half the beef on our plates for the benefit of starving Bosnians or Somalians? You gotta be kidding!')

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - N I N E

The squirrel family followed along meekly as Garth and Dementia (returned to 'life'-size and gingerly holding the much-talked-about boots) made their way back along the water meadows to where Tik-Tok, Floraline, and, high in another tree, Mombi had continued to spend time spying out the locality in search of strayed footwear.

"Mombi?" mother Nutella had said. "Yes, I *think* I've heard of her. Ah, but that was long ago—and in another country. She's not still playing a part in present-day affairs, surely?"

"I'm afraid she did in this one," admitted Garth. "She's turned over a new leaf. Now she's the greatest lady in the world. Of course, I'm prejudiced. But before she—er, went straight she left one or two little bits of unfinished business—and the boots were one of them. One boot—that is, boy—had the bad luck to vex her and quick as a wink she gave him a more immediately useful shape. I think, from all I hear, we can say that he has played a more efficient role since he became a shoe than he ever did in human form. So the fairy ladies here inform me. They had the pleasure of the children's company for many days."

"Check," said Dementia but did not add further to bad reputations.

The three who had been left behind came into view, now

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sitting on the river bank and dabbling their feet in the tepid stream: even Tik-Tok, just out of being hail-fellow. Immersion of copper in H₂O was unlikely to have any directly beneficial effect. It appeared they were having a breather from the ardors of boot-seeking.

The party by the stream heard the noise of the metal man's knees at the run some time before he appeared. All had been expecting him anxiously and they broke into applause when they saw him approaching with his companions, he now holding a boot in each hand.

Witch Mombi rushed to her lover, crying "Hallelujah!", and without an instant's ado asked that the lost and found footwear be placed on the ground. A few magic words, some hocus-pocus passes, and in less than a minute Sarah and Jimmy appeared in their old familiar (if possible, even shabbier) forms. As flatly as that.

Everyone rushed to hug and kiss and caress the children, not gagging very much at all. The tots in their turn smiled broadly if a little chastenedly and muttered their thanks over and over again to the gorgeous blonde lady who, they quickly comprehended, was she who had restored them somehow to the rightful selves. Mombi *was* looking spiffy, like ZsaZsa at thirty, and when she realized what a hit she was making she quietly subtracted another ten years from her apparent age. For a minute there Jimmy, who didn't have much of a memory for faces, thought she was Queen Lurline. Then Sarah pointed out his mistake.

Needless to say, the Ohio siblings had no idea who Mombi really was and you can be sure not she, nor anybody, was about to tell them. Actually it might have worked out better in the end if somehow, gently, the children had been led to know and accept the (after all improved) facts of the case. The former footgear were at this point feeling very much on their uppers. The two shoes were quite worn out by what they had been through. Spiritually their tongues were hanging out. They had been shaken to the depths of their soles. With the example of the

confessed and reformed witch before them they too might well have resolved to stop being a pair of heels.

But the moment was lost, and now the family of squirrels had set up a clamor. "WHAAHNNH!" screamed Flicker and Quicker on seeing their treasured boot beds turn into a couple of (to them) enormous and grubby human children. In their new shape the latter two had lost all their polish and looked unprepossessing to a degree. As mere children the pair were kissed goodbye (figuratively) by the little squirrels without a pang. But they missed their well loved cribs!

Their parents at once got back into the act and began to scold furiously. "We refuse to give them up! We said we wouldn't! We don't! Give us back our dear ones' beloved beds!"

Floraline as a flower deity offered to give them flower beds instead but the squirrel family rejected the proposal with contempt. Tik-Tok, still sitting at his ease with his feet in the water, pointed invitingly to the river bed but the animals did not even dignify his suggestion with a reply. Daffy Dementia in desperation proposed an oyster bed, though where she thought to obtain one, in the heart of the Oz continent, was never made clear.

But to Dementia, however, must be given credit for the bright thought that in the end set all matters to rights. She said, "Remember the irony berries?"

The squirrels, proprietorially, admitted they did. They didn't quite see the connection though.

"They're so yummy," recalled the pixy, "that we want to take back with us a lifetime supply. Will you show us where to hunt? We'll want to fill up some big baskets that our sorceress friend here I'm sure will make for us—to a pattern supplied in turn by our metal friend—out of willow withies. Then when the job is nicely done, our dear magical friend again—" (she was careful not to name Mombi in the Ohioans' hearing) "will surely make you beds of whatever shape and substance you desire."

The plan was carried out. Thus elegantly were all parties satisfied and the temporary exiles from Oz could blow away home at their leisure.

C H A P T E R F I F T Y

Transportation was now a matter of logistics. Mombi could easily whirl away to Oz and spread the news but she didn't like to do the trip without all her new friends with her. Wearing your acquaintances as shoes while actively transmogrified as a windstorm would just about pass but even the wind witch couldn't quite see how she was going to carry two metal men on her back while cycloning south. In the end they decided to request passage on Tik-Tok's hat brim again.

The two fairies were good at miniaturizing so it was their spell which made everybody small and then they all took places in the chairs from the Palace of Magic that Wizard Diggs had glued on the hat in what seemed a time ages past. There was Mombi looking radiant as Miss Gabor (in fact, calling herself 'Miss Gabor' to deceive the tots) and queening it on the foremost chair.

Tik-Tok hadn't lost the power once imbued by fairy Floraline to spinfoot it across the miles. The party left Ev without even a farewell glance-in at Garth's house. In dear secluded safe old Alloya things would be all right, he knew, until such time as he should return, be it in days or years. In just a day and a half the distance was put behind and the immense (to everybody else) copper man was tramping up on the outliers of the army that

besieged the Emerald City.

The returning party had by then been well briefed, to their consternation, by tiny people encountered on the road as to all that had befallen since their quitting Oz. True, the latter fate of Wizard Diggs, Princess Dorothy, and their other friends was all unknown beyond the fact of their having been made prisoners by Fear Nation, as the mob of rebels was by now calling itself. Of course our party of travelers most wanted to confront Ruler Ozma herself but even mighty Tik-Tok was restrained by the all-resisting protecto-wall that safeguarded the Emerald Citizens.

A council of war was held on the hat brim. A vote was taken that came out three-to-three. Garth and the fairies were for employing sweet reason and arguing with the insurgents to try to get them all to go back home and stop rocking the boat. Mombi/ZsaZsa and the two children found themselves allies in their more pugnacious stance.

"What, Ozma and them held prisoners in the palace?" demanded Jimmy.

"It isn't very nice," said Sarah and pouted.

"Move aside, please, and I'll blow them away," offered the wind witch, alluding to the besiegers.

"Oh, but, ZsaZsa darling," protested Garth, "you will blow away the sweet with the bitter. The good guys and the bad ones are all mixed up together in this beleaguering band."

"Hm, that's true," admitted the witch. "We may have to use guile."

The council of six deliberated on the hat brim but couldn't come up with anything very guileful. Mombi had been devious enough in the old days but that was when thinking up evil plans. When she wanted to plan constructively she proved not to be as imaginative. In the end six little heads peered over the brim into the (to them) upsidedown eyes of copper Tik-Tok.

"Got any guile wiles?" asked his metal mate whimsically. "We can't think of a way to separate the sheep from the goats here so we want to ask you. We would like to have all the loyal Ozites collected in one spot and then perhaps we can rescue

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them en bloc in some fashion. But we don't know just which ones they all are."

"Now, then," stated Tik-Tok ponderously, "while I walked a-long, re-le-gat-ed to my own com-pa-ny, I had time to think. The same pre-dic-a-ment sug-gested it-self to me. What I fin-ally came up with is this:

"Let us pre-tend to be Mal-con-tents as well! We can make our way to the ring-lead-ers and an-nounce that we have come to re-lieve the be-sieg-ers, that we have a spec-ial treat for all lo-yal mem-bers of Fear Na-tion, some-thing they will prize most highly. Then of course, be-ing the sel-fish peo-ple they are, they won't let the true Oz-ites come to share in the treat. Voi-lá...!"

C H A P T E R F I F T Y - O N E

I saw the whole thing from the other side, of course. Keith and I had been inseparable since our mutual rediscovery. Miraculous state of things! The comradeship we'd lost in life was given back—if not forever, yet for a magic while.

As a matter of fact the parting of sheep from goats proved not as awkward as Tik-Tok and company had gone along supposing. This was thanks to my brother. He had accepted no guff from the renegades of Oz, had spoken out boldly in condemnation of the siege, and openly admitted total loyalty to the young girl ruler of the fairy realm. In fact, he had been quite obnoxious to those in command in the rebel army (nameless here forevermore). The result had been the erection in the last two days of a stockade by slave labor (us) and the thrusting within its barbed-wire walls of all who proved not to be wholehearted supporters of the siege. Here there joined us in fairly short order the Wizard of Oz, the Patchwork Girl, Princess Dorothy, and the three royal historians, together with a vast concourse of the loyal Winkies Keith had led on their crusade.

We first noticed something was afoot when a pleasing and ever increasing stillness spread over the concentration camp. The internees themselves had all along kept quite a quiet, low—

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let's face it—cowed, profile. Noise had been supplied by the rowdy element among the beleaguers who were faithfully keeping up the war of nerves on the Emerald Citizens we could see behind Queen Ozma's transparent but impervious wall peacefully going about their daily tasks. They looked to be quite enjoying the lack of riots such as had made life lively (but less fun) in latter days within the capital. Interestingly enough, the numbers of Emerald Citizens who left the cool green charm of the city to join the sweaty bawling Fear Nationals were few.

One by one our guards had silently disappeared. Some of us had even been emboldened to finger the locks and bolts on the main gate and to size up the height of the barbed fence that ringed our enclosure. We were alone! Not a Malcontent could longer be seen patrolling the perimeter with slingshot or crowbar at the ready. But Keith alone had dared to say, "What've we got to make a battering ram out of?" before that ominous rumble and roar began on a low note away beyond the high ground in the east.

Miss Thompson had been keeping lookout in that direction. Now she reported: "I noticed our captors moving off by twos and threes that way. They've been at it for going on an hour. Isn't it eerie! Whatever can be in the wind?"

We didn't have long to ponder the question. The wind indeed. Every gaze was soon riveted by a sight right out of the Judy Garland film: a twirling stocking of dark cloud that rose in wild fury, grew every moment vaster and more twisty, and soon darkened the sky totally in that eastern quarter. Unlike in Miss Garland's experience the tornado did not approach in the direction of us spectators. Praise be. It blew the opposite way and, speedy as such things are, it hastily took its departure over beyond the rise, subsided below it, and soon was out of sight.

"Well—I!" we all exhaled. "Whatever was that?" No answer was forthcoming. Still we gazed on through the wire netting, expecting to see our captors return.

They never did. Instead it wasn't long before enormous Tik-Tok came stalking into sight down the slope. His aspect was

most solemn but yet not ungratified. At first we thought he was quite alone but then we spied two tiny fays riding on his hat brim and weeping infinitesimal tears as if hearts were breaking.

Our curiosity was at the point of hysteria but Tik-Tok would only say: "We must tell Ozma. We must tell the Queen..."

C H A P T E R F I F T Y - T W O

It was with considerable relief that the vast assemblage of centenary-year visitors, Palace of Magic courtiers, and plain Emerald Citizens strolled the few yards to the Old Palace and dusted off seats in the Audience Chamber. A lot of us had to stand and at last the place was jammed, for there was no one who would willingly miss attendance at this most important council in Oz history.

How delightful it was to be expanded again to one's natural size! Only now did we realize how frightfully cramped it felt to be one hundredth of normal in every way. I think each of us wished inwardly but fervently that Ozma never again would feel impelled to practice any miniaturization. Already directives had gone out to the twenty-four gates of Oz not to allow any new individuals to enter the fairyland unless the fairy ruler be there in person to approve it. Enough was enough, sometimes!

"My good friends and loyal subjects," spoke Princess Ozma from the throne, "I know a world of questions remains unanswered. Now is the time to pose them. First we shall call upon fairy Floraline to explain much."

With charming grace the green immortal flew over the heads of spectators to alight at the Oz queen's side and genuflect delightfully.

“Your Majesty, assembled citizens, hail!” she spoke. Then through a moving half hour the much-traveled fairy retraced the tale of desert pursuit, a struggle of metal titans, a search of days along a river bank, a reconciliation of sometime antagonists in the form of fairy-tale creatures, forest squirrels, and human children.

“We followed the squirrel family back to their oaken home,” she recounted further. “Mr. Bushy and mother Nutella had decided that nothing would be quite so homey and familiar as acorn cribs. They themselves selected two fine firm specimens from their own home tree. Madam Mombi, in her whirlwind mode (lowest potency), levitated to the home hole, tossed in the acorns with a careless gesture, and casually caused them to become the two cosiest squirrel beds in the world. Young Quicker and Flicker scrambled inside and soon we heard squeals of delight. Our last view of the family was of four squirrel heads and a couple of squirrel paws waving tiny handkerchiefs of a particular shade of blue in merry farewell.

“The new-restored children from Ohio enjoyed the long jaunt by hat brim across the desert. Not that they remembered—thanks be—anything of their ordeal as boots, but this was surely a more gratifying trajectory of the wasteland than they had experienced heretofore. We made our way in through the still-destroyed Door Twenty-Two to Oz. Sorceress Mombi may have had a pang when she saw again what she had done, but for our present purposes it was fortunate.

“Of course we were looking forward eagerly to relating to dear Princess Ozma and all here the happy endings to several stories. Imagine our chagrin at finding the royal court impossible of access! A great army of siege blocked the approaches.

Still, by the time we had proceeded so far we had been alerted as to the state of affairs and had a plan of action in readiness. We did not delay in putting it into effect.

“It was as follows: the besiegers were invited to come and taste of the irony berries...” Here the fairy made a break in her narrative to describe the strange fruits which were the best thing

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anyone had ever tasted. The Malcontents had been *well* content to get to experience them, she related.

“Now attend well,” instructed Floraline. “I want you to picture the scene. Sorceress Mombi (radiant as that beauty of earlier days, Miss ZsaZsa Gabor), her fond friend Garth, the man of tin, my pixy companion and I, and the two dirty but dauntless Ohio children, at the center of a rowdy but enthusiastic mob of little people in that stubble field. Great Tik-Tok loomed over us and at his feet were the laden berry baskets that he had carried all the way from Ev. There were berries for all and the Fear Nationals were not backward in claiming their share. We heard them telling how they were going to keep some back and plant them and grow their own crops of these most wonderful-tasting fruits. That of course was just what our sorceress colleague had in mind.

“The time was nearly ripe to carry out the scheme that Tik-Tok had devised. We who were in the know had begun to cast glances at each other. When would the mighty wind witch begin?

“And then came the fatal words:

“‘Mombi dearest,’ spoke her true love, the man of metal, ‘is it time to work your spell..?’

“Well! Never had anyone dreamed of such a denouement. We saw how the children Jimmy and Sarah stopped in their tracks as they handed out berries to all comers.

“‘Mombi!?’ cried little Sarah, aghast—and burst into tears. She had admired the beautiful enchantress so—and now to learn thus abruptly who she really was!

“‘Mombi!!’ yelled forthright Jimmy, and for a second time without an instant’s thought of consequences launched himself on the wind witch (this time at scarcely larger than his own size) with flailing fists. The knife he’d used before was, most fortunately, no longer to hand but he could do great damage to that lovely face with tearing fingernails.

“Mombi/ZsaZsa fell back horrified—but only for a step or two. Then her old witch nature must have reasserted itself. She

did what she had been on the point of doing anyway—but now in spades! Our plan had been for Mombi to become a mild but irresistible zephyr and waft all the unwelcome malcontents away to the far corners of Oz out of harm’s way.

“Instead a hurricane boiled up out of that graceful figure of the former movie queen and all the world around was engulfed in the maelstrom. Great Tik-Tok, the ponderous copper man, was a bit too heavy to lift efficiently but even he was toppled as the whirlwind roared up and away. Dementia and I were carried off willy-nilly and were miles distant before we caught—if not our breaths—our senses and quickly worked spells of our own to bring us back to where we’d started from.

“What a strange scene of desolation! Where minutes before a great throng had populated the stubble field, now only a Mechanical Man lay on his back and rocked powerlessly from side to side. Dementia and I in concert worked a charm sufficient to get Tik-Tok to his knees and from there he was able to stand on his own.

“Once more and for the last time we rode his hat brim as the copper man marched up over the rise and down to the beleaguers’ prisoner compound. There he warned the loyal Ozites within to stand back out of harm’s way. Then he trampled the barbed-wire fence into the ground and all were set free, to stream in a great flood toward the impervious protecto-wall that Queen Ozma had set up around the capital. You Emerald Citizens saw us coming and sent word to the court. A moment more and then—but the rest you know.”

As Floraline fell silent a great chorus of questions and protests arose. “What now?!” “Where are the besiegers? What has become of them?!”

“Mombi—is she bad or good?!”

“What happened to those children from Ohio? Will the outside world ever forgive us?”

“And the noble metal man!? What is his fate?”

Ozma, with her scepter in one of her hands, raised both to appeal for quiet. “Much can be told,” she said. “I have been

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diligent before the Magic Picture—what time I was not shedding tears of frustration in the silken folds of its covering curtain.

“To start with your last query first: the—yes, noble—Man of Metal:

“When, many days ago, I asked to see our little friends, the fairies Floraline and Dementia, I made acquaintance at one remove with that curious community in Ev, the forest town of Alloya. At once I was struck by a fact which, I now learn, seems to have escaped those, perhaps less well read in the period, who had to deal with the metal men in person: the inhabitants of Alloya were animated suits of medieval-type armor! fitted in many cases with modern accessories, as for instance Garth’s overalls.

“Such a suit of armor was a perfect habitation for any being capable of form-changing, or perhaps even for one who was not. What more thrilling experience for one in love than to be able to climb right inside the one you adore! Such, I imagine, will be the joy of the witch Mombi now at times, when she and her friend are one, far from human sight, and where the conditions are right for magic manifestation.

“So Garth who yearned to love and Mombi who longed to be loved found each other at last. Strange and unlikely couple—but love is where you find it. I think those two will be greatly content as now they blow about the world: a steel-girt Joan of Arc who frequently metamorphoses into a storm cloud of great potency.

“The solution is not what I should have chosen: not one that I as humane governess of a dreamland *could* think of choosing. But it may be effective. Is not annihilation by violent windstorm to be preferred over that by starvation? For natural or man-made disaster is what faces the present vastly over-populated earth as absolute certainty.

“But let us not think of that, since we can ourselves do nothing to avert it. Let us rather pin our hopes to another process that Mombi and Garth, among others, have, perhaps

half unwittingly, initiated.

“I speak of the irony berries. Of course some few of us leaders here in Oz have long known of the existence of the fantastic plants. A tiny import trade in them has even been carried on. ‘Ironia’ is the active ingredient in the so-called ‘dope sticks’ that I and Sorceress Glinda and Historian Baum and some others have long enjoyed; they induce a mild non-habit-forming euphoria and act, besides, as contraceptives.

“The ‘irony’ consists in two features of the plants, one being namely that, though at once so delicious, so euphoric, and so generally conducive to good health, they at the same time produce something so apparently negative as sterility. But in the present day, alas, that is what the human race needs most of all. Reduce world population and *every* problem facing mankind will shrink to easily managed proportions. And secondly, though so propitious for *existing* life, the berries thrive explicitly in life-negative surroundings. Sow irony berries in barren ravaged pollution-plagued areas and they will flourish mightily! The filthier the earth becomes the more likely the ironies are to take root and burgeon—to the benefit of men. Animals don’t need them; there is no non-human population over-represented on this planet. Luckily the irony plants do not do well in just those clean well-lighted, well-watered regions of the earth where animals live best.

“We can hope that the bushels of berries blown away by rampaging Mombi have already in places begun to germinate to take root and cover the soil—”

“Princess Ozma,” I here ventured to intrude, “the picture you paint is encouraging. But what of the protecto-dome of Oz? All that auspiciousness you speak of must have been frustrated when the whirling wind of Mombi with its heavy freight of humans ran up against the enclosing walls...?”

“That was the first thing I thought of when you brought me word of the contretemps outside the city,” reported the Girl Ruler. “I repaired where I had spent so many hours, even days, in later times: to the Magic Picture.

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“There I witnessed how great heaps of creatures were striking the interior walls of our dome and sliding to the ground. Mombi, it seems, has had the compassion to let down lightly everyone she’s blown away—so far! But I saw too how she had, with ease, burst all the doorways on the eastern side of Oz and commenced the mopping-up operation of sweeping the blowees out into the great world. If her one-woman clean-up campaign prospers, who knows? Perhaps I shall not need to keep closed and guarded, as planned, the doors to Oz.

“Mombi is good. How curious that I, who was first to suffer at her hands—I mean, by years of captivity as a kidnapped hostage—should be the one now to affirm to the world that ‘the wicked witch is dead,’ that a kindly and all-powerful witch of the wind has taken her place. I believe she will do much good. Perhaps one day we may even meet again. Then I may ask—and grant—forgiveness.”

The little Princess of Oz was silent.

“And Jimmy and Sarah then, Your Grace?” fairy Floraline fain would know. And I saw that pixy Dementia and chambermaid Jellia and the little ghost girl Lana and others of the Ohio children’s one-time associates hung on her words.

“The Magic Picture again,” cited Ozma. “I looked for them first thing. I saw them tumble down in a dirty field in Ohio, then sit up and rub their eyes. I think I may safely predict that they will believe they fell asleep among the dusty dandelions and had the most fantastic dream. Maybe even, in retrospect, it may occur to them that they might have left behind a sweeter-smelling memory in the Oz of their dreams if they had sometimes tried consideration and courtesy. Still... let us not expect *too* much...”

“And then—and then...” piped up the effervescent Patchwork Girl, new-sudsed by her pal the palace washwoman after her term of trial as a hostage outside the gates. “Well,

“I guess all’s said and done—and then

That’s why you made us big again?”

“Yes,” affirmed the little ruler of Oz with an enchanting smile. “That is my ‘investment in the future’: I want to believe that all

trends on earth are now to go into a more—nay, completely—propitious channel. In this spirit of hope, and with the expectation that Oz from this time forward will have ample space for all who live here, I have restored the old dimensions to all living moving things within the gates of the kingdom.”

“And that makes easier a last detail, Your Grace,” called a voice from the crowd. All eyes turned to look at artisan Lester standing with his little group of helpers. “We’ve been out of work for weeks now! May we request permission to hike to Patch and pick up the cleaned carpet for the—er, ‘Mombi Room’...?”

“Such shall be its name, verily,” concurred the queen. “If ever the great sorceress should see fit to come again where she was wrongly lost to life for so many years, that place could be her bedroom. And there she would receive all honors I could bestow...”

“Princess Ozma!” spoke up another voice—to me so intimately familiar for more than sixty years. “Give me leave”—he seemed rather to demand than ask—“to join that party. I have never seen Patch—except in imagination for the length of a lifetime. I would like to see it in reality.”

“So would I!” cried jolly Jellia Jamb, who, in dusting out bedrooms in the Palace of Magic, had never had occasion to make the trip.

“And I! And I!” called out others, many who *had* visited Patch but who longed for the treat again.

In the end the Pilgrimage to Patch became one of the high points of the centenary celebrations. It was next day that the procession faced a golden dawn as we tripped down the steps of the Palace of Magic. Outside the palace gates we turned north and all through the magic day we strolled north and west, stopping for a picnic here, lingering to drink at a spring there, singing the old songs of Oz, gossiping of the late remarkable happenings in the fabled land, and, at the close of day, walking into the sunset.

Lund, 10 April 1991

Dade City, 9 March 1993