

CHARMED GARDENS OF OZ

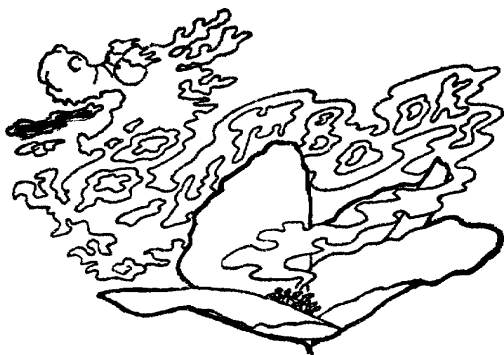


FOUNDED ON
& CONTINUING
THE STORIES
BY

March
Laumer



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This book is dedicated with love to Ruth Tuttle,
original of the Queen of Dreams.

With best thanks to Michele Dymond for a musical assist.

With hitherto un-book-published illustrations
by John R. Neill, © 1913

Where the Munchkins' land meets that of the Emerald City the grass is the richest blue-green in Oz.

Strange things grow in the lush soil and the ripe climate there: things seen nowhere else. It has been supposed that it was there that the wonderful seeds first appeared that started the odd saga of the Wooden Soldiers. On a towering green stalk the pods had just burst the night a wild storm blew through in the direction of Oorfene Deuce's lonely cottage. There too is the marvelous Fiddlestick Forest where Notta the clown and his friend Bob Up were treated kindly long ago.. But those are other stories.

I believe you have seen that countryside-yourself...? Could you really be sure when you left the Emerald country and passed into Munchkinland? In some parts, of course, the Munchkin River is a convenient boundary line. Behold: the grass on the Emerald side is brightest green while over the river in the Munchkin country skies are always blue.

It is a little world in itself. Nowadays in Oz no one remembers the time when (or if) great events took place there.[§] People from this corner are rarely seen at the court of the girl ruler Ozma. No one takes much account of territorial rights and sovereignty in Oz. This market-garden region is in fact an anarchy. Under the watchful eye of Princess Ozma none cares to seize the peaceful peacock-colored land and declare himself its overlord. Vaguely bounded, vaguely governed, vaguely populated, the area nevertheless thrives.

The lushness of the greenery does not, I say, belie the climate. This is one region of Oz where rain is frequent. It pours down monsoon-like for an hour or more out of almost every twenty-four. Given the rich soil, the result is a nearly junglous profusion of turquoise-colored vegetation.

The area is about as populous as any other part of the Oz

See *The History of Oz*. Editor's note.

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hinterland. Inhabitants are not thick on the ground. A plantation or three: truck gardens to serve the appetites of the citizens of the capital are to be seen as you follow the yellow brick road, but even so you can walk for long distances and not meet a soul or see a house or any sign of human life.

And yet, if you had been glancing over a hedge by the yellow road on the damp morning of the eighth of Oztober in a year not too long ago you would have seen quite a procession coming along the way.

It seemed to be a crowd of girls on foot, each with a basket in her hand or a light hiker's pack on her back. With them were a number of curious creatures who might be termed "men", although they looked like no men you ever see in the world of everyday. One was a scarecrow stuffed with straw. Another was a tall lanky individual with a jack-o'-lantern for a head. The third was really a vegetable, although he moved along the road for all the world as if he were a human being. Those who have been to Oz before will recognize some of the party at once. But who were the young ladies exactly?

Shh. They're passing the hedge now. Maybe you can hear what they are saying.

"Do you think-it's much farther, Urtha?"

"Well, really Betsy, it's been so long, I'm not absolutely sure..." The girl's voice died away uncertainly.

"Don't worry, girls," spoke someone else with an air of authority. "I have the Professor's sketch map right here. It shows the turning just a little way on."

"But, Dorothy," said someone else quietly, "that turning is shown just past the one to the Fiddlestick Forest, and we left that behind ages ago."

"I suppose you're right, Trot," agreed the important voice ruefully. But then it brightened. "Oh, look, there's someone at last! Let's ask."

For the girl had caught sight of you peeping over the long hedge that bordered the road. You didn't have time to duck out of sight. Anyway, you weren't sure you wanted to, for by now

you had recognized the royal coronet perched on the yellow locks of Princess Dorothy of Oz.

The girl came quickly toward you and "Pardon me!" she said. "I'm afraid we're a little lost—"

"Yes," put in the girl called Betsy, "and it's coming on to rain."

"We're on our way to the Garden of Gorba so-called," went on Dorothy, "but we must have missed our turning. Could you help us?"

"Oh!" you said, thrilled at the encounter. "I'd like to so much."

"Well," said Dorothy after a bit of a pause, "where is it?"

"Oh, I'm afraid I don't know where the turning for the Garden of Gorba is," you said, with an awful feeling that the magic moment would be snatched away like a lost dream because you weren't immediately able to answer their question. "But... but anyway," you stammered on, "—as you say—I think it's going to rain and... and I can show you to a place where you can stay dry; and maybe they can tell you..."

"Oh, fine," said the quiet voice of Trot. "Do come along then."

So you got down and crawled through an opening in the hedge and joined an Oz adventure. You pointed, awestruck, further along the road, and the group of travelers moved forward confidently under your direction.

"What's your name?" said Betsy, looking at you curiously, and you told them.

"Well, I'm Betsy Bobbin," said the girl and then she introduced her companions. "That's Princess Dorothy, of course, and this is Princess Pretty Good, now Queen of Ragbad—but we all call her 'Urtha'—and we're on our way to try to find again a strange and beautiful garden where she once lay under an enchantment. (We want to be sure the bad old magician who held her captive has really gone away.) And this is my friend Marye Griffith—"

"But everyone calls me 'Trot'," put in the serious brunette girl.

"That's right," went on Betsy. "And there's our dear friend the Scarecrow, and Mr. Jack Pumpkinhead, and Mr. Carter Green,

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who's an expert on plants. Urtha was on a visit to us in the Emerald City and on the way home she meant to go by the old Garden—if it's still there. So we all decided to come along and keep her company, and have a holiday at the same time. Only now... silly things—we've lost our way."

"I'm sure it can't be very much farther along," supplied Urtha. "But it's been such a long time since I was there. Things must have changed. But you say you don't know it?"

"No, ma'am," you replied, blushing in disappointment at being of so little use to the charming-looking girl.

"Don't you live around here?" asked Betsy curiously.

"Well, no, not exactly," you replied truthfully. "I just happened to be there when you passed by. But I do know the country a little," you hastened to add, so that they wouldn't think you a complete ignoramus. (And that sentence, too, of yours was truthful. 'But how..?' you wondered.) "I'm sure where I'm taking you they'll be able to tell you all you want to know... I think."

"What place is it?" asked Dorothy, looking at her map. "Is it Baroquea—or Bottle Hill?"

"No," you answered. "It's just called 'Gardenia'."

There was a pause. "Just 'Gardenia'?" Trot asked. "Not 'Gardenia House' or anything?"

"I have an aunt," broke in Betsy, "who lives in a house called 'Honeysuckle Cottage'."

"No," you said doubtfully, and repeated: "It's just called 'Gardenia'."

"How funny," said the girls in chorus. Then for a few moments you all walked on in silence.

Having got acquainted with the young ladies, who, charming and friendly as they were, were after all just girls, you were now secretly glancing at the other three members of the party, who certainly were not the sort of people you meet every day.

You had heard so much about the famous Scarecrow of Oz that you could scarcely keep your eyes off him. It all seemed so queer: there he actually was, just a few feet away from you and

you could easily have reached out and touched him. Yet he wasn't just exactly like you'd pictured either. For one thing his costume wasn't nearly so shabby and wrinkled as you had thought from the pictures you'd seen. Maybe at the tail end of a scary adventure his peaked hat might be knocked askew and his knees baggy, but the party had clearly left the Emerald City no later than the early hours of that morning and the Scarecrow, who after all had once been an Emperor—or anyway Ruler of All Oz—had had himself turned out very neatly for the excursion. In the course of the many years of his adventurous life the ever youthful Scarecrow had worn out a good few suits of his blue Munchkin clothes. A new set had clearly been made for him lately, for his tall belled hat was crisp and pointed and his wellingtons shiny-polished—nor on the yellow brick road on this damp day had they grown dusty.

More to be wondered at than his hat or boots was the Scarecrow's blue suit. You'd always thought of it as being of some rough material like denim or even a sort of burlap. The jacket and trousers that he sported today were actually of a fine faintly shiny material like taffeta or sateen, and they were of a rich purplish azure rather than the plain flat blue that you'd seen illustrated.

In short, his apparel was much more appropriate now to a person of the rank and honor of the Scarecrow than the cast-off garments of the farmer in which he had started out in life so long ago.

Other things too about the man of straw were different from what you'd expected. You noticed that he was not falling down all the time but stepped along quite dapperly and briskly. After looking at him for a bit you came to the conclusion that he must have had a stiff framework, perhaps of wire, built into his interior at some refurbishing session in the past. It seemed sensible. The good old Scarecrow was always being called on to take a leading part in some unlikely and harum-scarum adventure, and it was asking too much of cloth and straw-to do it all without a little stiffener inside.

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Alas, these fascinating speculations were soon at an end. Here on the left began the high greenstone wall that surrounded the place called Gardenia and in a moment Princess Dorothy was calling out, "There it is, folks! See the gateway up ahead?"

The party hurried on—and with good reason, for the faint mist of rain that had begun was turning now into a heavy down-pour. You were nearly left behind as they scampered on to the gatehouse in the wall.

"Look!" cried Dorothy. "You were right!" she called to you, and stopped for a moment in the falling rain to point up to the round arch that crowned the entry port. "GARDENIA" it said in big flat blue stone letters against the greyish green of the arch.

But the others were of no mind to linger over the historic moment. They hurried past the princess and crowded into the little open-ended room under the arch, and you followed them.

"Take a seat," you said encouragingly and pointed to the stone benches on either side of the enclosed area under the arch. "You're safe from the rain here."

But "Oh!" cried Trot. "How heavenly."

The others crowded alongside her at the wrought gate leading inward to a vista of misty blue dales and paid no attention to you and your invitation.

Indeed the scene *was* "heavenly". You had often come here, you seemed to remember; it was your beautiful secret place such as everyone has; and here you would stand alone, gazing through the iron-work gates on the view of sloping meadow: equally lovely in yellow sunshine or blue rain, with a round green hill in the middle blue distance. Blue-brown cows grazed placidly in the rain and there were round and tall-triangular and shaggy-shaped trees standing singly or in groups here and there as far as eye could see. The wetness didn't detract from the beauty of the view but seemed to give the scene a certain coziness, as you all stood safely in the snug porch and gazed gardenwards.

The rain had slackened and you were just going to say "Knock at the porter's door there," when Betsy cut you off by exclaiming, "Why, it's open!" and she pushed the wrought-iron

gate ajar and stepped out into the blue-green world.
Abruptly Betsy disappeared.

There was tumult among the party of friends under the green-stone portway. Everybody cried out at once in consternation and *you* didn't know what to think. But you scarcely had time to think anything for in an instant golden-haired Princess Dorothy had again pushed open the gate, which had fallen to with a little click, and had followed her friend Betsy out into the blue-green landscape.

Just as suddenly she vanished.

Now the remaining friends were panic-stricken. But instead of turning accusingly on you, as you feared, they rushed like one man through the gate, leaving you behind.

Inside the grounds the excited newcomers found Dorothy and Betsy standing talking together quietly. The others ran to them, all crying at once: "What happened! Where did you disappear to?"

"What do you mean?" said Betsy. "I didn't disappear anywhere. I've been right here all the while."

"Yes, it's very odd," agreed Dorothy. "Like you," she said to the others, "I thought Betsy had somehow vanished, but as soon as I stepped into the garden I saw her standing on the other side of this shrubbery."

"You know," said Trot solemnly, "I had an idea for just a minute that that helpful person who showed us here might be some kind of fairy or witch and had purposely—"

But Dorothy had interrupted: "Yes! Where is—" and then turning to the gate cried, "There you are! Aren't you coming in?" She started back toward the open-grillwork gate and the others followed.

Dorothy went on talking as she drew near: "Come in with us!" she invited. "It's all right. The rain has stopped now. I think the sun is going to come out."

But you made no reply and continued to stare through the ironwork of the gate with a worried look on your face.

"How funny," breathed Dorothy. "Can't you hear me?" she

insisted. And this was silly, of course, because she had by now brought her head up to within a foot of yours and was talking quite loudly.

"Dorothy," said Trot in awe, "I think our friend has fallen into a trance... so still and unmoving."

"Yes," agreed Dorothy uneasily. "It is a little odd." She moved away a bit. "It's almost as if we can't be seen or heard."

"Of course!" said Urtha, coming in her turn a little closer. "It's an enchantment! We weren't mistaken before, my dears. I'll bet by anyone standing outside the gates we can't be seen or heard or sensed in any way."

"Oh, dear," said Trot and began to sniffle.

"Don't be silly, Trot dear," commanded Betsy, throwing a comforting arm around her friend's shoulder. "We don't have to stay here." She let go of the girl and took hold of the gate and made to push it ajar.

But it did not open.

The muscular sports-loving Betsy pulled and shook but the two wings of the blue-green iron gate remained fast. Then Trot bent and looked closely at the join of the two sections of the gate. She put a hand against Betsy's hip and said quietly, "Don't, dear. The gates are locked."

Sure enough. A blade of heavy metal was seen to run from the lock mechanism in one wing of the gate very solidly into a slot in the other.

"We'll just have to find the key," put in the Scarecrow wisely.

"So you're a witch after all," breathed Trot, looking through at you in awe. "Oh dear, whatever shall we do?"

They all began to scream at you at once, but you did not react and presently they got tired of it and moved away and you saw them no more—and had not, of course, for many minutes past.

The Scarecrow, with his thoughtful brains, at this point took charge of the party. "If we can't get out through the gate," he said, "we'll just have to look for another way. Come, let's follow along the wall and see if there isn't a place where we

can get over."

But though the group walked along the length of the high green wall for what seemed hours, they never found a spot that was low enough to scale, or even a tree growing close enough to it that they might have shimmied up and got onto the top of the wall that way.

Fortunately the rain had really stopped. By the time the party of girls flopped down exhausted and famished, the sun was shining merrily in the bright blue sky.

"Let's have a picnic," said Urtha.

"What a good idea!" answered Dorothy, instantly planting herself on the grass and swinging around before her the faithful old basket that she had carried on so many adventures since the day she stepped out of her wind-blown cottage over the shriveling body of the Wicked Witch of the East.

"Come on, girls," she said, "let's enjoy ourselves. After all, Ozma will soon look in the Magic Picture and come and rescue us."

They all sat down in a row and spread out on the grass the provisions they had brought along. The Scarecrow and Jack Pumpkinhead were neither tired nor hungry but they took pleasure in sitting with their young friends and keeping them entertained with conversation as they ate. But, "Oh, where's Carter?!" cried Betsy suddenly.

Betsy was the vegetable man Carter Green's original friend at court in the Emerald City and she always felt a little responsible for him on the occasions when he appeared among her friends at the palace. It was a long time since they had started out together on the curious Adventure of the Hungry Tiger. They had always remained good friends and now when Betsy was invited to go with Urtha on the mission to her former vegetable haunts the little man whose every thumb was green had seemed a natural companion to ask along. But Carter had an unfortunate tendency to take root if he stopped still anywhere for very long. What if while they had all been searching worriedly along the great garden wall he had paused to admire some particular

plants and was by now no longer distinguishable from them?!

But Betsy did not have to worry long. Just at the moment when she realized the Vegetable Man was lost he was found again. The relieved party saw him come stumping toward them from out of a thicket of thumbtack bushes with his hoe over his shoulder.

"What a paradise this is!" he chortled, "—for me! It's one vast plantation of garden plants."

"I suppose so," agreed Dorothy placidly, eating a chicken-salad sandwich. She herself had noticed some petunias as they went along. "It's called 'Gardenia', isn't it?"

"But it's much more than a garden, princess!" said the excited Carter. "I mean, it's the quintessence of garden. Every plant in the world must be growing here—and even every plant in Oz! There's no end to them..."

"What have you found, Carter?" said Betsy interestedly.

"I'm afraid I wandered a little away from you, my dears," admitted the Vegetable Man ruefully. "But I was so fascinated. You know, I've already noted examples of the umbrella tree and the dama fruit and the useful travelers' tree and—oh, a number of others of the unique plants of Oz. It's almost as if someone had dreamed up this place as an arboretum and herbarium just for the purpose of exhibiting every species of plant known to Oz and the world. There are desert cactus too and date palms and Arctic cloudberries and even a few edelweiss, I noticed."

"Curious," said Trot thoughtfully, crumpling her napkin in her hands, "that we have never heard of Gardenia before. It's so near the Emerald City too."

"It's not *so* odd, Trot," demurred the Scarecrow. "You know the Ozite is a very incurious creature. It's not his nature to go exploring. Most country people in Oz scarcely know the region beyond the nearest town."

"Yep, that's right," agreed the pumpkin-headed man. "It took people from the outside world to do any explorin' and uncover most of the funny things in Oz."

"But," said Dorothy, "it's so many years now since the first

travels-of exploration were made. Can there really be new places to find?"

"There will always be new undiscovered countries in Oz, Dorothy," said the Scarecrow sententiously. "That's part of its magic."

"Even so," said the girl, "I wish Professor Wogglebug would make that 'definitive exploration' trip he's talked of so long and bring us back a *complete* map of Oz."

"Yes," agreed the Scarecrow. "He was speaking of it only last night. Well, perhaps we can talk him into it as soon as we get back to the Emerald City now. That would be an adventure and a half: touring all the crazy provinces of Oz one after the other.[§] But," he went on, "you could give him most of the information for his map already, my dear. I guess you have taken part in more of the travels of discovery than anyone else in Oz, Dorothy," said the straw man. After so many years of comrade-ship he knew just how best to flatter his little friend.

"Yes," said the girl complacently, and she wiped her fingers in the grass. "There were a good many of them, weren't there? Let's see: first of all the Adventure of the Wonderful Wizard himself. Remember those days, my old friend?"

She sighed nostalgically and leaned back against the bole of a great northern pine.

"Yes, indeed," said the Scarecrow, wiping a painted tear from his eye. "And never a cross word between us in all the years since. There aren't many friendships that last that many years!"

The other picnickers began to be a little fidgety as this display of sentimentality went on. Dorothy, noticing it, hastened to say, "Yes, and then there was your adventure with Jack here—and then Ozma's own adventure—"

"Oh, Dorothy," broke in Betsy, "I hope you all don't mind my saying so but Billina always says that one ought to have been called the Adventure of the Yellow Hen. Ozma actually didn't do anything but get turned into an emerald grasshopper. Some-

§ This expedition did, in time, take place, although, alas, not with the Scarecrow's participation. See *The Great Map of Oz*. Editor's note.

one else won the day by her cleverness in bringing about the disenchantment of all the Gnome King's bric-a-brac—"

"I wonder who that was," said Trot with a solemn twinkle in her eye.

"You're right, girls," admitted Dorothy. "But Ozma's so sweet; no one liked to say anything."

"Actually, she had her own adventure later. You remember: the story of the Lost Princess."

"Wasn't that the one where she got turned into something else?" said Betsy naughtily. "A peach pit, if I remember correctly?"

"Well—er," said the Scarecrow hastily, "there was your second adventure with the Wizard, Dorothy—in which you discovered all those strange regions under the earth..?"

"Yes," said the girl. "That's four, by now. Then there were my travels on the Road to Oz, and those of 'The Emerald City'. Our group really came upon some oddities that time, didn't we? I wonder how Miss Cuttenclip is getting along? I really must go and pay her a visit again. I haven't seen her in years."

"The adventures came rather thick and fast there for a time, didn't they? There was your uncle and aunt's visit to their old house—and the incidents connected with the Careless Kangaroo—right around the same time. And then we had our adventures of the Patchwork Girl, together," recalled the Scarecrow.

"That sounds a little odd, doesn't it?: 'our adventures of the Patchwork Girl'," said Dorothy. "But that's how it worked out."

"You know, Dorothy," said the straw man, "I must confess something. I've always felt a little guilty about the way we took over that adventure and left behind the poor old Woozy and the Glass Cat, who after all were charter members, you might say; of that particular set of fun and games."

"Oh, come, Scarecrow," said Dorothy, bridling. "Our knowledge and experience were needed or Ojo might never have got his friends safely disenchanted. Think of the dangers on the road for that poor inexperienced boy and the wild Patchwork Girl. Why, some of them were so awful that the account of them wasn't

even allowed to be published!"

"Oh, come yourself, my dear," returned the Scarecrow. "Have you ever known an adventure in all the years of our time together that didn't turn out well for our side? We've got such powerful sorcerers looking after us, how could anything go wrong?"

"I suppose you're right. Anyway, if you felt awkward at our taking part in the adventures that time, I for my part made up for it in the story of the Tin Woodman's quest later on. I felt so bad when I wasn't allowed to go along with you to look for Nimmee Aimee."

"Did you, dear? I'm sorry to hear it. But if it's any satisfaction to you: when I had my own titular adventure, it wasn't really my story either. Just as with Ozma in her tales, I was the victim and not the hero. It should have been called the Adventure of Trot and Cap'n Bill," he said, smiling at the quiet little girl on his other side.

"Anyway I got into Ozma's 'Lost Princess' adventure all right—" said Dorothy complacently.

"And later on I was in the Tin Woodman's."

"And then I again in Sorceress Glinda's."

"And I in the story of the Royal Book!"

"Yes, if ever a book should have been called *The Scarecrow of Oz* it was that one."

"After that we got rather neglected, didn't we?" said the Scarecrow a little wistfully.

"Oh, I managed to take part in the adventures of Grampa and the Lost King," said the princess, polishing her nails on her lapel. "And in the one about the Wishing Horse."

"And then we all went Ozoplaning together."

"Yes," admitted Dorothy grudgingly, "but there were so many people along on that trip you can't really call it ours." She sighed. "And those were merely some of the officially chronicled stories that everyone knows. If you count all the others that have never been properly written up..."

"Yes, as far back as in the days of the Wooden Soldiers,"

agreed the Scarecrow. "My, those were times, weren't they? And that business of the Underground Kings. It's odd that so few have heard of those affairs. We really outdid ourselves there."

"Of course they did take place on an alternate time-strand," said his little friend. "Even so, I keep hoping the accounts will be published. They really ought—Oh, but, good gracious, look!"

For the first time in twenty minutes the young princess gave a thought to her other companions. She looked around now to find them all sound asleep, even Jack Pumpkinhead and Carter Green, who otherwise never slept.

"Goodness me, Dorothy," said the Scarecrow. "We've been talking our heads off. What will the others think of us!"

"Good heavens!" cried the girl. "Scarecrow, do you see what I see?—or rather, what I don't see?"

"What is it, dear?"

"Betsy has disappeared!!"

When your new and oh, so exciting acquaintances vanished through the mysterious garden gates and were seen no more, you continued to stand staring in for ages. You couldn't understand it. You'd gazed through the gates lots of times and the scenery there was always enchanting and very much the same each time. Admittedly you'd never seen people within—but if there *were* any there surely you'd see them? But now these palpable individuals had stepped in—you'd *seen* them step in—and then in an instant they'd vanished—you'd *seen* them vanish! What could be the explanation of it?

You fell into a half trance (as you charmingly have the habit of doing) and kept on gazing through the gate bars into the turquoise depths of Gardenia for a long time, and then it came to you as in a dream: you'd better do something!

While gazing you hadn't been completely dreamlost. You'd been doing some low-key cogitating as well. You knew from what you'd overheard that the Emerald City was just down the road: walking distance for not *particularly* fast-strolling people. The Ozites had left the capital early this morning and apparently hadn't been much more than sauntering, up to the time of your meeting. The entry into Gardenia had been impromptu. You knew the party were expected elsewhere: at least, expected by themselves. By now it had become clear that they weren't going to make any immediate re-exit from the garden. What had you best do? Trot along to the Emerald City and alert their friends? Or go to this 'Gorba' garden they had said was near, and let people know there?

While you were thus dithering, the door of the porter's lodge opened and a kangaroo stuck her head out.

"Oh, hello," she said and bent to pick up the bottle of milk. "You waiting for someone?"

"Well, yes, I am—sort of. I was with some people and we ducked in here to get out of the rain. I know we should have asked you but instead one of the girls tried the gate and then

they all went in—and, well, disappeared!”

“Oh, yes, that’s normal, you see,” said the kangaroo. “That’s a charmed garden and all sorts of peculiar things go on there. They just disappeared, you say? They didn’t turn into hypogriffs?”

“I don’t... *think* so. What’s a hypogriff?”

“A cross between a hypocrite and a griffin. They’re very rare, actually. But I have seen it happen. One just never knows.”

“Knows what?”

“Why, what will happen. It’s never the *same* thing that happens when one goes into the charmed garden. But, changing the subject: are you in a hurry? Come in for a cup of coffee.”

“Oh, well, thank you very much,” said you, always polite. This was in the days before rudeness became a way of life and people would say to their uncle: “I just can’t *force* myself to say Thank You to anyone’.” “That would hit the spot,” you said.

You went up the three butternut-colored stone steps into the porter’s (portress’?) quarters. It was darkish in there on the dark day but cozy withal. You sat at a high little table beside the casement window with its dimity curtains and view into the gardens. The kangaroo called, “Tronto!? Do us coffee, won’t you? There’s a good girl.” A thumping was heard overhead and then in a room somewhere beside. “Tronto learned to make good coffee. It’s her one accomplishment.”

“Who is Tronto?” you wondered, courteously showing interest.

“My daughter. She’s the only one left. The others flew the coop when I left Quadlinga to come here.”

“Oh?” you said invitingly.

“Maybe I should introduce myself,” said the red marsupial, taking a big flower-painted tin from a cupboard and rationing out the cookies. “I’m the Careless Kangaroo of Oz. They thought I’d be just perfect as Chief Careleaver of Gardenia, so I gave up my home in the south and came here.”

“‘Careleaver’?” you half spluttered in some amusement.

“Yes. They wanted someone to be in charge of not tending

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the gardens or doing any weeding or hoeing or picking up trash or sweeping away fallen leaves or minding the gate or checking on visitors—and I fitted in just fine for that.”

“Those were things they did *not* want done?”

“Yes. They felt it would spoil the natural ungroomed look of the park if people in white coats with spiked sticks were all over the place.”

“I see. And do you not care for it all alone?”

“Oh, people are very kind about coming to help keep me from getting bored. My old traveling companion Professor Wogglebug will drop in for an afternoon and then we neglect the garden together. Or Polychrome the Rainbow’s Daughter. Or the Shaggy Man. Or Eureka, the pink kitten. Even old Grandmother Gnit comes up from Fuddlecumjig as often as once a year and spends a weekend with me.”

“How marvelous,” you breathed, thrilled to hear the names of those celebrities brought out so casually. “So I really am in Oz—and then some!”

“Why, of course. Where did you imagine you were?” snorted the kangaroo, refilling the cups.

“Oh, I thought I was in Oz. I just didn’t understand how I got here.”

“Aren’t you from Oz?” said the surprised kangaroo. “You seem to fit right in—that is, sort of. Perhaps you do seem a little—how shall I say?: dreamy? But where are you from then?”

You described your background in some little detail but remarked again that you had no idea how you came to be in Oz. It just happened.

“Not bad happening,” applauded Mme. Mar. “You’re not in a hurry, are you? You’ve got time to stay and have an Oz adventure?”

“I don’t *think* I’m in a hurry,” you returned. “I just don’t remember.”

—because it looks very much as if you’re about to *have* an Oz adventure,” promised, or threatened, the kangaroo. “Those friends of yours have been inside an hour now. To judge by your

description they're some of our celebrities. If they don't turn up soon they'll be missed in high places and then I dare say there'll be some coming and going until they're rescued."

"Rescued'!?" you cried. "Are they in danger?"

"Maybe not danger—though that's not precluded but anyway lost."

"In a *garden*?" you said, catching alarm for the first time. "But then why are we dawdling here? I must go look for them!"

You started up from the table. "It's probably against your custom, Mrs. Kangaroo, but could you possibly help? I don't want to lose *myself* in the gardens."

"Oh, sure," agreed the kangaroo. "As it happens I don't have anything else I have to do. Careleaving's a very easy job. But wait, I'll fetch a bumbershoot. I think that rain is coming on again."

She cleared away the coffee things and went to a capacious closet by the little entry-way. Indeed it was a "bumbershoot" she took: not any prim little parasol or unassuming umbrella but a great big durable domed rubber-covered rainresistor that looked as if it might easily double as a boat in a pinch. Mar opened it out to demonstrate. (But in a house!; that's bad luck, they say.)

She called upstairs to the invisible Tronto. "I'm going out and I may be some little time." Haunted words.

Then she laid a motherly paw on her guest's arm and together they left the little house. Mar took a ring of big keys from a hook outside the door.

"But the gate's not locked," you remembered.

"Not to get in, no," admitted the kangaroo. "It may be a different story, getting out. The garden is jealous."

A little tremble ran down your spine. You might be getting in for more than you bargained for here, you thought. But it was a rather pleasurable little tremble.

Yes, indeed, the lively red-haired favorite, Betsy, was nowhere to be seen. But before the friends could panic she turned up, running through a little copse of hazel bushes near them.

"Darlings!" she panted. "Do forgive me! I got so restless listening to you two reminisce—"

"You don't mean 'bored', do you, Betsy?" asked the Scarecrow with a sly twinkle in his eye.

"I wasn't going to use that word, Scarecrow," said Betsy with a laugh. "Anyway, I sneaked away, thinking I'd try to find some other way out of this place, so I could be all ready to lead you when the others had finished their naps..."

The said naps were being finished now amid the little commotion of Betsy's return. Trot opened her eyes and looked at the others benignly in a way that made them think she might only have been pretend-sleeping, but Urtha gave a good honest yawn and stretched her arms about her flowery hair that was of a fragrance and a lilac hue found only in the tresses of certain Oz maidens with a herbal heritage. The flames came on in Jack Pumpkinhead's eye-holes again and he leaned over with a creak of his wooden-pinned joints to give a hand to Carter Green, who had grown fast all along the side he had been lying on. It took the combined pulling of the whole party to uproot him before Betsy could go on.

"Well," she said, dropping down on the grass. "I got into this little hazel thicket right away oh, here's a few nutsies for you—" She broke off and scattered among the friends around her a handful of green-twiggged cobs. Foresightful Trot produced a nut-cracker from her rucksack and the girls got busy.

"The thicket goes on for quite a way," Betsy pursued, "but as you get in the bushes change character. There are some very queer ones farther on and others with no character at all. I'm not sure I liked all the bushes I saw. But on the far side of the copse where it dwindles off on the brow of a hill I came on one that might really be useful. I call it the Advice Bush. Look!"

Here she opened her other hand and a clutch of pale green leaves with queer colored tracery on them fluttered to the ground. The others reached over and picked up examples.

"Live and learn," read Dorothy from hers.

"Never say Die," said Trot, looking at spidery red writing on the heart-shaped leaf in her hand.

"Don't give up the ship," read Jack Pumpkinhead.

"Stop, look, and listen," quoted Urtha.

"Hmm," said the Scarecrow sagely. "That's advice, it's true. But is it really useful? These are general admonitions that we might well have said to ourselves, but they're not much help in our particular present circumstances.

"Anyway," said Dorothy authoritatively, gathering up her things, "let's go look at this bush. It may be able after all to tell us something more to the point."

The party did as they were told and made ready to move on. Carter had been hopping from one foot to the other to keep from growing fast again in this all too fertile and fecund soil. He took one of Betsy's now empty hands and the two started off to lead the group to the Advice Bush.

The way through the hazel thicket tilted at first slightly downhill. At places they came into little clearings where they again had a view of the countryside. Again they would stand for a moment, enchanted by the prospect. The rich blueness of the grass, the grey-green hills that rose from the valley floor, the damp tangles of honeysuckle that festooned the branches of the shrubbery round them, those spotted cows which decorated the landscape—but always at a distance, never near them: all these things exerted a peculiar spell over the watchers. "I declare," said Betsy, "I'm falling in love with this place." Then she stepped on to explore it further.

"Yes, it is pretty," agreed Dorothy. "But of course we mustn't linger. We have our own business to attend to at Urtha's own garden. We want to make sure it's no longer infested by the spirit of the dreadful Gorbabrog."

"I thought Ozma took care of that," remarked Carter Green.

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"Didn't she, Dorothy? Wasn't he turned into a little brown mouse—or something?"

"Yes, indeed," assured the girl, "but what's to prevent a brown mouse from eventually resuming its status as a wicked sorcerer? Brown mice are as fully viable people as anybody else in Oz."

"I suppose you're right," sighed little Princess Pretty Good. "I can't say I'm looking forward to any reunion with him. Anyway, this garden's lovelier."

Now Betsy cried, "See! Here we are!" And she ran to a bright-silvery-green bush whose every branch was brandishing bunches of heart-shaped handbills.

The others crowded after and ringed the little fluttering shrub that stood apart from the other plants of the thicket. A leaf trembled to the ground and the Scarecrow picked it up. "Try me!" he read.

"With pleasure, little bush!" he laughed. "How do we do that?"

Another leaf detached itself from the trilling twigs of the plant and fell. Carter Green snatched at it nimbly before it reached the ground. "Ask me a question!" said the leaf.

"Where are we?" asked Jack Pumphinhead unexpectedly.

There was a moment's pause while they all waited to see what the shrub would answer. But it answered nothing at all. The trembling branches fell still and no leaf was dropped.

Jack reached and picked a leaf off the bush at random. "Look before you leap!" he read.

"Hmph," he said, nettled.

But, "Oh, Jack, don't mind," consoled Betsy. "Of course! Remember, I called it the 'advice bush'. It gives advice!—not general information."

"Anyway we know where we are, Jack," added Dorothy, but appended doubtfully, "—sort of. At least we know the place is called 'Gardenia'."

Trot asked a thoughtful question. "How can we get out of here?"

At that the bush was full of vivacity again and shook itself free of four or five leaves. Willing hands reached down to seize them. "Get busy!" one read, and another, "Don't waste time looking for exits!", and others: "Watch out!" and "Look for the key!"

"How funny!" they all agreed. The Scarecrow summed up their further impressions when he said, "The bush has very definite ideas about what it wants us to do. It just leaves it a bit vague how we're to set about them."

"Oh, dear, it's a bit frustrating, isn't it?" Trot complained gently. "It doesn't tell us where or why but only what to do."

"It's more like a command bush than an advice one," condemned Jack, now rather disenchanted.

"But I'm sure it means to help," insisted Betsy, who had been the one to find the bush and somehow wanted it to prove itself. "Let's try again: Where is the key?" she questioned.

A single leaf dropped from a twig. The girl read it out. "Hunt for it." Her face fell. This was a rude response to her trusting query.

But she looked at the little silvery plant again and felt reassured. The trembling had stopped and every little leaf was looking up into her face expectantly.

"Poor thing," said Betsy. "It wants to be helpful but it just isn't built to give anything but advice and orders. We'll have to phrase our questions another way."

So the excursionists stood around thinking, trying to invent questions that could be answered by commands: ones that would be helpful to them. Then "How—" said six voices at once. Then they all stopped and laughed.

The Advice Bush trembled once more in anticipation. It was "How" questions it wanted.

"How," pronounced Princess. Dorothy gravely, "can we best look for the key?"

"Go as far as you can," said the next leaf to fall.

"How should we go from here?" now asked Trot.

"Go down the hill and over the stream, then along the path to the right and into the forest," they read.

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“How will we know when we get where we’re going?” said Urtha.

“Use your heads,” commanded the bush.

“Have you any other advice to give us before we go?” said the Scarecrow.

The plant twitched all over and a big blue leaf fell off a lower branch. When the straw man it picked it up in his cotton glove fingers, “Don’t worry!” he read.

Yet after all you didn't step into the Garden that beckoned so. You couldn't have said why. After so many times of peering in, longingly, fascinatedly, surely you were going to take the chance of a guided tour with the very custodian of the place. It was only a wonder you hadn't tried the gates and ventured in by yourself days, weeks, months ago! (How long *had* you known of Gardenia and its allurements? And why did it seem that, really, you'd always known, yet only actually arrived here moments ago? All most puzzling.)

But no; you weren't going in. Not just now. You tried to analyze your feelings. Gradually it came to you, as in a dream—or nightmare!: you were afraid.

Perhaps it was the Careleaver Kangaroo's words: "The garden is jealous," that warned you. Was it like a great gorgeous flycatcher plant that tempted with its scents and beauties, only to snap shut on the unwary and slowly digest them? Or was it another kind of fear entirely?: a fear of loss, of regret, rather than of danger?

You couldn't be sure. You only knew you shivered and your weak and nerveless hand fell from the latch after the kangaroo keeper had passed in. You turned then and hurried out of the Gatehouse, along the road toward the Emerald City. That was it!: there *was* danger—and yet not to yourself. There was something uncanny about Gardenia and you had to hurry to the capital and explain the circumstances to the fairy ruler of Oz while there was still a reasonable chance of sending relief to the wanderers stranded in the Charmed Garden.

You wrapped the borrowed bumbershoot tighter and hastened along. By the look of those clouds you were going to be very glad to have that bit of equipment with you—and at no distant hour either.

Your sensible shoes thumped on the yellow bricks. You bent down once to touch a yellow brick. Just imagine: *you* were walking over the celebrated Yellow Brick Road of Oz. Oddly, it felt as

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a sort of relief to you to note that the paving blocks were the color of real yellow bricks: a kind of dingy grey-white yellow. That made it, as it were, more genuine, more believable to you, than would have been the case with butter- or even egg-yolk-yellow bricks as in a certain film (which, admittedly, never looked “real” in a single frame of its Oz scenes—not to mention the *gold* bricks that some seemed to think the famous road was made of.

As expected, you did not meet or pass any fellow travelers along the road. It is traditional in Oz that one never sees on the road any person or creature except such as are to play a part in the adventure at hand. That is what leaves the mental image that Oz is a relatively empty, unpopulated land. Thus, when in the green western distance you did finally spy — and even hear — a crowd approaching, you knew you were heading for a significant encounter. You got ready.

In the lead of the oncoming party of walkers, as by right of birth and rank, stalked the courageous Cowardly Lion of Oz. You knew him at once by the hair-ribbon in his mane. At his side paced what could only be the Hungry Tiger. Behind them crowded or straggled a live sawhorse, a woozy, a raw-boned old (real) horse, a mule, a blue bear (or at least its skin), a pink bear, two cats and two dogs, and an enormous — and very strange serpent.

You hurried forward with a pleased recognitive smile. The others did not do the same. When they noticed you hurrying and smiling they tended contrariwise to slow down and look puzzled. You obviously recognized them a lot more than they recognized you.

“Hi, Cow!” you called jauntily to the lion. “Hi, Hung!” The animals so designated stopped short and looked distinctly offended.

“Hi, Sawks!” — and then you realized you weren’t making a hit. After all, those creatures had been celebrities for a great many years and were grown stiff and formal and top-heavy with their own dignity. “Hi, Wooze...” you trailed away but the Woozy grinned an affable toothless grin and you felt reassured.

You took off your hat, opened and shut your umbrella ritualistically, and advanced, creeping low: a sort of ambulatory genuflection. This mollified the lead animals and the Cowardly Lion deigned to humm: "Do we *know* you?"

"Oh, no!" you hastened to assure him. "But I know you! From all the books, you know. And the film... and from my dreams. I dream of you all the time, though we've never met before."

"I'm not sure we've met now," objected the Hungry Tiger. "There have been no formal introductions."

There was no neutral third party to do the honors but you told them your name, with many protocolistic gestures and courtesies, and hoped it would be enough.

"I suppose that will do," begrudged the Tiger.

After all your exertions you felt a bit miffed and "I'm obeising myself as much as I can!" you complained.

"I'd rather you'd obese yourself," grumbled Hungry. "Then I'd feel like eating you. That would make you immediately more acceptable."

"Tige is just having his fun," the Woozy put in placatingly. "May I ask: where are you bound for?"

"Oh!" you cried, reminded of your mission. "I'm glad you asked. I'm on my way to warn Princess Ozma. Her friends are in danger!—I think."

"What friends?" huffed the lion. "We're her friends—and I for one don't feel at all threatened."

"No, these others are just people friends," you admitted. "Still, I think the Princess may be worried."

"Not 'til you tell her there's something to worry about," put in the sober Sawhorse. "If it's Princess Dorothy and that lot you're talking about, they only left the Palace this morning. They wouldn't have gone far enough to get into any danger yet."

"Oh, but they have!" you tried to reassure yourself—or rather, redistress yourself. You told of your fears and dreads and of the most unsettling view of things which you had jumped to. "I think they're trapped in Gardenia!" you ended. "I'm sure one or two of them at least would have come out long ago, if

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they'd been able."

"Now, by Saint Paul, this news is bad indeed," stated the Lion solemnly, quoting Shakespeare and looking grave and statesman-like.

"What are we waiting for?" growled the tiger. "Let's go and rescue them."

At this the little pink bear began to cry and said, "What about Bamse's birthday party?!"

"Oh, drat, that's right," said the Cowardly Lion. Then he explained. It seemed the LittlePink Bear had come all the way to the Emerald City to invite all the animals at the Palace of Magic to a surprise party for his friend, the Large Lavender Bear. They were on their way there now.

"What's the problem?" dismissed the tiger. "We'll rescue the girls and then go on to the party. They're in the same direction." He brushed his forepaws against each other concludingly. (Admittedly, for this he had to sit down.)

"What about it?" said the lion, turning to the others, and he took a straw vote. The consensus was that the party of animals should indeed rescue the party of people. "And you," said King Rex, coming back to you, "will you go to give your censure in this business?" (still quoting Shakespeare).

"Er," said you. You'd already been through the routine of attending people to the garden gates, twice running. You somehow didn't think the third time would be charming. "I feel I really should go on to Princess Ozma and let her know," you parried. "But please! You can't miss the place," and you gave directions for finding the entrance to the charmed garden.

The animals easily let themselves be conned and with expressions of (at last!) esteem to you they hurried off along the road. You turned again and bent your steps (no easy trick) in the direction of the Emerald City, whose jeweled walls you could already see gleaming greenly on the horizon.

The party of Ozites in Gardenia set off at a smart pace—but presently slowed down. They all felt themselves falling more under the spell of the strange silent garden. (They never noticed birds. Now why was that?) Even with the sun in the sky (for the moment) there would come instants when the world around looked all one blue haze: a melancholy but bewitching gloom that made them dawdle and daydream.

It was an enchantment. But was it a deliberate spell to lull the intruders into forgetfulness, even fatal sleep? Or was it just natural enchantment, claiming them, leading them on, binding them with blue-green beauty?

When they got to the bottom of the gentle slope it was better. Here there were no ravishing vistas of blue distances to keep them dreaming. Here the grassy turf rolled forward under low lunch-box trees. The girls gathered a few of those fruits for future use, just in case. As the ground still trended slightly downward they thought the mentioned stream must be yet a little way off.

Presently, through the stillness of the lunchbox grove they began to hear a rustling and a rushing. Betsy, always the most enterprising, pushed on and was the first to see the brown brook with its blue highlights rippling past. “Ooh,” she exclaimed, delighted, and knelt to refresh herself at the stream, after the meal and the run they had had. But “Phoo!!” she cried and jumped back from the bank. “It’s whisky!” With the back of her hand she wiped her mouth as if it burnt.

Her friend the Scarecrow looked at her and at the brook with anxiety. He never ate or drank; he had no conception of what taste and flavor were. But the clever fellow was well-read, and now he said, “You may be mistaken, Betsy,” and went on interestedly, “I wonder if it isn’t, rather, brandywine! I’ve heard of a river like that—but I had no idea it flowed through Oz!”

“Good gracious!” ejaculated Princess Dorothy, scandalized. “To think of Ozma allowing such a thing to exist in Oz.”

"Why so, my dear?" said the thoughtful stuffed man. "Spirits can be a helpful thing to man—in emergencies. In time of exposure or exhaustion human lives have been saved by a swallow of distilled spirits. It's only when use of them is overdone that they become a danger—and of what may that not be said?! Anyway, Ozma knows most of her subjects are too sensible to overdo, whatever it might be."

"I'm not sure," said Dorothy, unreconciled. "I've always heard that liquor is sinful and wicked. "

"A prejudice handed down from a time when everything was black or white," said the Scarecrow sententiously. "A new age has dawned now. When knowledge and truth take the place of ignorance and superstition, our splendid Oz, best of all fairylands, must not lag behind," he pronounced, veering dangerously near an excursion into metaphysics.

"But tell us," said sensible Trot, homing to divert the two friends who had not differed in all these years but who seemed today to be often coming perilously close to it, "how do you think we're to get over the stream?"

"Yes!" said Betsy with a laugh. "Somehow I don't much like the idea of even wading through whisky. I wonder," she mused on: "if it would burn your feet like it burns the mouth!"

"The advice bush forgot to advise us on that point," said somebody. "Just 'over the stream', it said."

"It said 'over', not 'through'," said Dorothy with logic, "so there must be a bridge somewhere."

"Right you are, my dear," said the Scarecrow, glad to be in agreement with his old friend. "Let's look for the 'Brandywine bridge'. You and I'll go left, Dorothy, and Jack, you come with us. The rest of you can go the other way, and whoever finds the crossing first, sing out, and the others will join them."

The proposal was followed. The trio for the left walked along the brook as it meandered through a wirewood copse and had just lost sight of the others when they heard voices calling. "Oh, that was quick," said Dorothy, turning. "Let's go back. They've found it."

The three hurriedly retraced their steps, went on past where they had parted from their friends, and then around another bend in the stream saw a graceful little bridge of brown blown glass.

The span was no more than three yards long but sufficient to carry one dry-shod over the Brandywine. It arched prettily in Japanese fashion. There was a trellis hand-rail along the middle of it to hold onto.

That was the bridge then. But where were Betsy and her friends?

Wait a minute; this was getting monotonous! Betsy had disappeared!

“Now which—?” said the Careless Kangaroo, turning to you, but broke off when she saw you were nowhere in sight. “Now what—!?” she altered her question, peering about. “Now where—!”

She leapt back to the gate, seized it in both vestigial forepaws, and pulled. No result which, by now, of course, doesn’t surprise *us*. She bent and looked. Bolted. How very queer. She hadn’t locked the gates after her; of that she was sure.

Never mind. She swung the big heavy-ring of keys off her shoulder and tried the proper one. At least “proper” as she had always been taught to view it. But now the key ran round and round in the lock hole and there was no hint of a turning of the tumblers.

How queer. Never had the key(s; she hastily tried all of those on the ring) failed to work before. On the other hand, never had she had occasion to try them before. The gates had always opened by themselves, with no locks; being locked or needing to be unlocked. That she remembered clearly. Or did she? She had *been* in the garden before. Of that she was sure. Or was she?

Now that Mme. Mar came to think about it and recalled that her employment was to occupy the porter’s lodge and carefully not to care for the gardens and their floral denizens, she could not remember that she had actually ever come in past the gates before. The park took care of itself and she took care of herself and ran the gatehouse and received visitors and chatted with them over a nice cup of something—and that was it.

She swung round and took a look. That’s right!: now she was quite sure she’d never seen the garden view from just this angle. Only from out of the lodge windows. Actually the scene was much more beguiling even than she had realized. Those blue-green expanses: how they beckoned, so like Schlaraffenland. Maybe it *was* Schlaraffenland!

As long as she seemed to be locked in, she might as well improve the time by exploring. But first: through the gates—

dimly, it is true, as through a haze—the kangaroo saw you start out upon the road, carrying the only umbrella too! But never mind: you too had realized there was something queer about the gates and you were going to get help. You couldn't get in through the mysteriously bolted portway and you sensed that your friends couldn't get out. Good luck to you! You'd meet again one days no doubt. So reasoned Mar the kangaroo.

Then she turned and thought no more about it and set off to explore. I don't know what she had in mind exactly. She hadn't herself observed the party of Emerald City celebrities go in and had only a theoretical notion, from your own recounting, of their presence in Gardenia. I don't think she was actively looking for them. If she was, she set off in the wrong direction ever to encounter them.

Mar leapt off to the right, attracted by a distant view of what she took to be eucalyptus. The way led somewhat downhill. Somehow she never came to the gum trees. She also missed out on seeing dama fruit plants, thumbtack bushes, or rivers of brandy. Instead, after a bit of a leapabout, she presently came to the broad Munchkin River at a place where it 'shattered' into a Danube-like spray of flat willow islands, among which the blue water flowed dark and quietly.

The nearest of the sizeable islands was no farther away than that a narrow causeway led to it, broken by swift river channels that in turn were bridged by rustic railed walkways. Over the first of these rose an arched trellis, making the effect of a gateway, upon which was inscribed in green-painted wire lettering the legend:

"Come back to the old isle where the shamrock is green and life is bright as in the old days."

Mar took a cambric handkerchief from her pouch and dabbed at the corner of an eye, touched by an intimation of romance. Who had composed those lines? she wondered. It had been done by somebody who surely knew the ingredients of romance: loss, longing, remoteness, and beauty.

The kangaroo had never lived anywhere where the sham-

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rocks were green (where she came from they were red) but she was suddenly filled with a yearning to see them “again”. Would the reality be anything like the dream? She had to find out. Even if it turned out not to be like reality, a dream remained: the most compelling thing in creation.

The kangaroo took a modest step forward. She couldn’t help it if it was a muted leap; that was the way kangaroos moved. Now she was on the willow-railed walkway and soon she passed under the lettered arch. Faintly she could hear the breeze moving. But since when do breezes move in tune? There was a *melody* in this wind. It went:



All at once Mar remembered Yeatts’ words that went to that tune:

“‘I am of Ireland, and the holy land of Ireland
And time goes by,’ said she.
‘Come, out of charity, and dance with me
In Ireland’.”

The marvelous skew grace of those lines. One didn’t really need “charity” to obey such a summons. Humming the codas Mrs. Supial moved forward.

She crossed the last of the little bowed bridges and stepped upon the lush blue greenness of the island proper. Just then a wild scraping of the strings of a harp filled the air. Mar glanced

down to find that her brownish pink fur had changed in a twinkling to a light cabbage green. How extraordinary.

But there was more. She stepped onward—and really “stepped”, not leapt. Something had happened to her legs and she found that she could walk sedately, almost gliding. Furthermore, her hands (which now appeared down about her waist somewhere) were encased in white lace gloves and on her head was a tall narrow bonnet such as Miss Trotwood wore. About her shoulders lay a light pelerine. She was dressed for going to a tea party!, should she be invited.

Gnarled trees with dark green foliage, much like yews, obscured the view beyond the immediately nearest few yards of the path. Mar proceeded along the walk, which wound and wove invitingly. Someone was playing the pipes of Pan close by. Transparent gauzeous green fairies flew hastily past. The kangaroo got the impression they were heading somewhere important and she hurried after them.

The little brown road wound over a hill to a little white cot by the shore. At a little green gate she waited by the trellis and in a moment a pretty girl in green-sprigged muslin came smiling toward her from the cottage door.

“You’re just in time!” said the young lady gaily. “A minute more might have been too late,” she went on mysteriously.

Mrs. Supial followed her hostess into the little house, whose door opened directly on a large parlor room where ladies in dark mourning green sat about in attitudes of melancholy expectancy quite at odds with the sprightly manner of the lady of the house.

“I’m Mrs. Forrester,” confided the young woman in a subdued voice, seeming to have been reminded of a solemnity that was due. Then she led the kangaroo about, introducing her to her friends before showing her to a seat.

Now when Mrs. Forrester gave a party in her baby-house of a dwelling, and the little maiden disturbed the ladies on the sofa by a request that she might get the tea-tray out from underneath, everyone took this novel proceeding as the most natural

thing in the world, and talked on about household forms and ceremonies as if they all believed their hostess had a regular servants' hall, second table, with housekeeper and steward, instead of the one little charity-school maiden, whose short ruddy arms could never have been strong enough to carry the tray in, if she had not been assisted in private by her mistress, who by now sat in state, pretending not to know what cakes were sent in, though she knew, and they knew, and she knew that they knew, and they knew that she knew that they knew, she had been busy all the morning making tea-bread and sponge-cakes.

When the next to last cake was gone and hot water been placed for the third time on the leaves, the maiden entered with a wooden salver on which stood small glasses partly filled with a clear amber-green liquid. As Mar took hers she whispered to her neighbor: "Who is it?"

The neighbor looked startled, put a finger to her lips, and nodded toward the doorless doorway to an adjacent room. The kangaroo drew her pelerine about her and tiptoed to the door. There lay the dark green oak casket resting on trestles: but when Mar ventured nearer she saw that the coffin was closed. Now she would never know...

She retraced her steps to the parlor door. Was she really surprised when she saw the room empty, the floor covered with dust, broken plaster, and tufts of thatch, the window holes gaping, and even the upper corners of the room crumbled and open to the sky, and rain dripping through disconsolately? Mme. Mar's ring of keys, left on her chair, was gone with the chair and all that the room had held. Never to be seen again, the visitor supposed.

Shivering, she hastened across the chamber and out of the abandoned cottage. The sun was shining greenly through the green rain but it wasn't enough. The kangaroo hurried to the shore and along it, still looking for that brightness of life as in the old days.

Then the cries came again.

The Scarecrow recognized them for what he had already feared before. In the wirewood copse he had had a momentary sensation that the shouts he heard were not halloos but cries of distress. Now he was sure.

"Quick, Dorothy!" he said. "Run on ahead. You're nimbler than we. See what the matter is."

The girl flung him her basket, now nearly empty, and dashed forward. The two artificial men followed as quickly as creaky wooden joints and horsehair-stiffened straw would allow. When they came to the other side of a clump of pussy-willows whose furry catkins were mewling plaintively, the two were just in time to see Dorothy fly at a host of brown, winged creatures that clustered so thick about the "lost" party that the girls and Carter Green could hardly be seen.

Suddenly the Scarecrow stopped short. He would have grown pale if such a thing had been possible. "Oh... oh!" he moaned, caught in a terrible dilemma. He *must* go to the aid of his friends but he *could* not go! Fire! was the one thing that struck terror to the stout heart (figuratively speaking) of the straw man.

From the hand of nearly every one of the winged creatures extended a burning wand: in fact, a long sputtering sulphur match that flickered balefully in the green gloom of the glen. The fluttering fliers were not ungraceful in their brown draperies and smoky hair but they menaced like savage dragonflies the scared quartet who had fallen, crouching, to the ground. As Dorothy rushed at them the creatures ringed her round and forced her to the brownsward as well.

The Scarecrow and Jack Pumpkinhead stared in awe as the air was rent with the shrieks of the demons:

"Oh, do try me!"

"It's great fun!"

"Everybody does it."

"Come on, be a sport!"

"You want to be one of the gang, don't you!"

"What are you: sissies?"

"It's the grown-up thing to do."

"It's glamorous!"

"You'll get used to it."

"After a while you'll really enjoy it."

"You won't be able to stop."

"Oh, *do* try one!"

"Try what?" asked Jack of the cowering Scarecrow.

"I—I'm not sure," quavered the poor straw man. "But I have an awful suspicion it's the dread cigarette fairies. I've heard about those evil spirits."

By this time a couple of the darting demons had noticed the two men and flew swiftly toward them but after a glance at their construction were swerving away again disdainfully when the Scarecrow cried: "Wait! ... No, don't come too near with those matches!.. Who are you? What do you want with our friends?"

The sprites returned and hovered at a safe (for him distance from the man of straw. "I'm Emphysema," called one in a rough wheeze. "We are the cigarette fairies."

"And I'm Carcinoma," rasped the other. "We want these people to join us. It's wonderful among the band of smokers. Everybody should belong."

"Everybody who *has* any body," croaked Emphysema. "You're no good to us. You obviously haven't got any lungs."

The two dusky creatures flitted away again.

Carter Green, who had proved to be of equally little interest to the tobacco fairies, had now crawled away from the cowering group on the grass and he reported to Jack and the Scarecrow:

"We had just come in sight of the bridge when these demons appeared in the air from the other side of the stream and rushed at us. The girls didn't know what to make of it at first: whether the creatures meant to take us prisoners or to destroy us—"

"Both," said the Scarecrow, without further comment.

The others looked at him in fright.

But, "From what I hear though," the straw man presently went on, "it will take a little while."

The three artificial men turned their eyes again toward the luckless girls. Now they had to watch a pitiful scene. The young princesses and their chums were only human. Without *very* strong wills they were obliged at last to give in to the blandishments of these enemies who tried to put on the guise of friends. The four sat in a circle on the grass and meekly put between their lips the white tubes the sprites held out to them.

The sparkling wands were put to use and then the crowd of fairies rose in the air a little and watched with gloating eyes as their victims took their first tentative puffs on the cigarettes. Poor Trot began to cough at once and looked up pleadingly at the brown imps but these descended on her again with threats and she put the cigarette back to her mouth. The other girls were more fortunate. They were able to blow out big clouds of smoke without apparent discomfort.

"I don't understand," said Urtha though. She had a sort of family sympathy for the tobacco plant, but "What is the point of doing this?" she asked.

"Why, don't you like it?" said Emphysema in her husky voice.

"What is there to like?" put in Dorothy. "It simply tastes like burnt paper and hay."

"But you'll get used to it and love it!" rasped Carcinoma.

"Oh, there are lots of *pleasant* things I love already," resumed the little earth princess, "without first having to get used to them." With that she stubbed out her cigarette decisively in the springy brown turf.

"I guess I don't mind the taste too much after all," said Dorothy. "But Aunt Em says smoking by girls is sinful and wicked, and I don't want to do it!" So saying, she threw her cigarette into the nearby brandy stream where it flared in a blue flame and then was drowned.

But Betsy said, "I don't know, Dorothy. 'Sinful' and 'wicked': those words don't mean anything. They're just what prejudiced people say about anything they don't approve of."

CHARMED GARDENS OF OZ

Tell me" —and she raised her face toward the hovering smoky-draped fairies about her— "if I smoke, will I get a lovely voice like yours?"

"Of course!" croaked Emphysema.

"And will my hair be like yours?"

"Sure," wheezed the sprite. Flattered, she brushed the fingers of both hands through her grey tresses, releasing a little haze of smoke.

"Will my breath smell like yours?" Betsy asked another fairy.

"Just the same!" sneezed Carcinoma.

"And my teeth look like yours?"

"Exactly!" cried the brown-fanged creature.

"Well, in that case," said Betsy with decision, "please let me have *all* your cigarettes!"

The delighted fairies clustered round her with shrieks of glee. They thrust into her hands, until they were overflowing, all the little parcels of cigarettes they were carrying.

"*And* your matches, please," commanded Betsy. "It's no use without some way to light up."

Gladly the fairies acceded and gave up their wands.

"And now," said Betsy, stepping to the side of the stream, "our dear Princess Dorothy has set a perfect example." So saying, she threw the entire armload of smokes into the Brandywine where they sank, sodden, in no time.

"Oh-h! Oooh!" wailed the sprites. "You cheated us! You made out like you were a friend, only to undo us in the end!"

"The very *same* to you, my dears," cried Betsy and laughed in their faces.

"Undone, undone!" croaked the cigarette fairies all in chorus, and, coughing and wheezing, flew slowly and sadly away.

“My dear,” (just fancy: Ozma of Oz was calling you “dear”), “what you say astonishes me greatly. A large and magnificent garden virtually outside the gates of the Emerald City? How could it have escaped my notice all this while?”

“It’s all very mysterious to me too, Your Majesty.” (How you enjoyed saying “Your Majesty” with capital letters!) “It’s as if I’ve always known of the garden and yet I wasn’t actually there until just lately.”

“And how did you get there? I realize you’re not an Ozite,” said the percipient girl ruler.

“Oh, no Your Highness.” (You enjoyed saying that too.) Then you gave your history succinctly. “But as for getting to Gardenia, it was well, like in dreams, you know? Suddenly you’re just there and you have absolutely no idea of how it happened but it all seems perfectly natural.”

“An enchantment, most surely,” conjectured the princess. “We must presently get to the bottom of it. But for now: you say my friends are in danger?”

“Yes, I think so. At least: they said they were on their way to the garden of Gorba—or Abrog? or Gorbabrog?—but now it’s getting on and they haven’t come back out of Gardenia and I think something may have happened.”

“There’s only one thing to be done. Come,” said Ozma. “We shall consult the Magic Picture.”

Heavens, what a thrill: to be going to look at that fabulous and famous work of art! You couldn’t believe your luck, and you made plans to take utmost careful note and see just what it was like. You’d heard so many conflicting reports that by now you didn’t know if it was a huge mural covering half a wall or a little bijou landscape one could hold on one’s lap, nor whether the painted scene constantly shifted or instead showed one steady view until called upon to present some specified person or place, or—most equivocal of all—whether things seen in the painting could also be *heard*. You thought this last highly

unlikely and you were, in an odd way, gratified when Queen Ozma had invoked the spell of the picture and you saw the Scarecrow and Jack Pumpkinhead pushing their way through a pussywillow thicket, obviously deep in discussion but making never a sound that was audible to you in the Chamber of the Magic Picture.

"That's Scare-kers, my old rag-bag friend," chortled the irrepressible Patchwork Girl, one of the crowd of courtiers who had followed you and Ozma into the chamber.

"And Jack P. too, I trow.

I wonder how this tale will end.

I wish I knew that now."

"Why so, Scraps?" queried the Queen, bemused.

"Well, I'm going with you when you go to rescue them! That stands to reason" (though only the Patchwork Girl could immediately see what reason). "But look at that threatening black sky! It appears to me like it's going to pour—and I'm never much use in a rainstorm. I don't know if I'll be more use going along or staying at home."

"We'll carry thumbrellas, of course," stated Ozma, "so you won't get wet. Come along if you like."

"Yes," you seconded, thrilled, obviously, to be talking to the veritable Patchwork Girl of Oz, but possibly the least bit blasé after all the celebrities you were by now acquainted with? "I think that would be a very good idea. And the Wizard ought to go with you too! and Tik-Tok, naturally, and Uncle Henry and Aunt Em," you recited, naming every denizen of the Palace of Magic you could recall from your reading, without even looking around to see whether each and all of the famous ones you named were in fact resident here at the moment. Why were you so insistent?

"Wel—I," said Queen Ozma hesitantly. "It's just half an hour—by Sawhorse—down the road. Oh, no, pish!" swore Ozma genteelly, "Lignum has gone off with the others to the bears' birthday party. Why, the palace will be quite deserted when—I mean, *if* we all go..."

Quite so. But the throne could not remain empty, the sceptre unswayed. How you dreamed of swaying that sceptre! The dream made you bold. “Er Your Highness,” you ventured, “I could stay here and keep an eye on things until you get back.”

“You?” said the Girl Ruler in obvious surprise. And then, to *your* surprise: “Why, yes. I suppose you might. I don’t see anything wrong in that. Only, I thought you would be showing us the way.”

“Oh, no,” you hastened to demur. “It’s very easy to find—” and you gave exact directions. “I know everyone at the court will want to take part in rescuing your friends. Then if anything *should* come up I would be here and could always give a call to the Good Sorceress of the South. What’s her number, by the way?”

“Here,” said Ozma and slipped off with a dainty gesture her two-way wrist radio. “Just press this tiny knob and you’re keyed in directly to Glinda’s office.” The Queen of Oz clasped the bracelet round your wrist. This was almost *too* easy. You weren’t sure you wanted it to be quite that effortless.

You tried out something. “May I borrow your sceptre while you’re away? Your Grace,” you said, emboldened already to use the less subserving honorific.

Ozma handed it over meekly. “I suppose you’ll be wanting my ear poppies next,” she said with almost a joking pout.

You laughed delightedly at the sally. “No,” you assured, “those look much better on you... And now, I really think Your Majesty ought to be off if you’re going to make it by lunch-time.”

Everyone took amiably to this virtual command and they all flocked out of the Chamber. You followed and were in time to see Ozma at the vestibule passing out thumbrellas. These looked for all the world like an office worker’s rubber thumb-guard, but you heard the little queen explaining:

“Just slip it over your left thumb. You’ll hardly realize it’s there. But if it starts to rain, the first drops will activate the device, and it will blow up into a sturdy rubber umbrella and last that way to protect you as long as the rain goes on. As it gradu-

ally dries afterward it will gradually shrink. Any questions?"

Scraps had one:

"What if I sprinkle it by hand?

Will my thumbrella understand?"

"Yes—and blow right up into a king-size umbrella," assured Ozma. "But that might be awkward if it isn't really raining, because you can't collapse the thumbrella by hand and put it aside. It will only come off your thumb when it's dried and shrunk back to thumb size again."

The warning was probably enough to keep the Patchwork Girl from doing any experimenting. Nobody packed any provisions for what they thought might be an hour or two's lark. You stood on the palace steps and watched them trail off by twos and threes across the lawn to the ornamental gates and soon they were lost to sight in the city's park-like streets.

Then you hurried back to the Throne Room and seated yourself on Ozma's throne. Gee, that was the quickest takeover bid in Oz history. Hastily you issued a whole lot of edicts but when the palace staff read them and looked at you with frowns of disapproval you speedily rescinded them. Right away you had learned the first rule for the wielding of absolute power: Never to do anything that will make you unpopular with the people you have to associate with daily. It's a horrible feeling to be obviously hated and to know that people only do things to please you out of fear.

"Well done, Betsy!" said the Scarecrow, and the others too looked at her with gratitude and admiration.

"But now," said the no-nonsense heroine, "let's get to that bridge and be on our way."

They all ran away cheerfully to the little high-arched glass bridge and with Urtha leading the way put out their hands to grasp the hand-rail.

"Oh, look," said Trot. "There's a word cut in it."

Sure enough, incised in the glass handhold bar, making a decoration in filigree tracery that ran the length of the rail, were the letters

M-O-D-E-R-A-T-I-O-N.

"I guess that's right," said the Scarecrow, looking down into the brown liquor that gurgled along below them. "It's the only safe and sensible way past the dangers that may lie down there."

On the other side of the Brandywine they found a pathway, as the Advice Bush had predicted, and the party took its rightward branch. The way led gently up through a turquoise-colored meadow dotted with up-trees. The travelers knew enough, however, since Bob Up and Notta's recitation of the dangers inherent in such grasping plants, not to venture too near any of them. Consequently they avoided making their way out of the mysterious gardens by way of regions perhaps more threatening than the one they still found themselves in.

But the dangers were not trivial even in this periodically quite enchanting place.

As the group toiled up the slope first Trot, then Urtha, and then Dorothy began to yawn and to straggle in their march. "Come on, Dot dear," rallied the Scarecrow; "don't fall asleep here—oh!"

The straw man's exclamation revived the young princess. "What is it, Scarekers?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing. This situation just reminded me of something... Dorothy, are you feeling *very* drowsy?" he demanded,

a little anxiously.

"No, just average," said the girl. "But it *would* be lovely to lie down and have a nap."

"Dorothy," put in Trot, "what is that sweet smell? That's what's making *me* sleepy."

"Yes, now you mention it, Trot: I realize I've been smelling it too. It's like—" Dorothy stopped short and looked at the Scarecrow with big eyes.

"What is it, dear?" said her old friend, alarmed.

"Of course: you can't smell it, can you, Scarecrow? And it wouldn't affect you... *just like last time...*"

"Dorothy, you don't mean—?!"

"Yes," said the girl in awe. "The deadly poppies."

"I was afraid of that," confessed the Scarecrow. "Yes, it would have been more or less in this region that we ran against the poppy field that time long ago. Quick! let's go back. Jack!... Carter!" he yelled at those two, who had tramped on ahead, unsuspecting.

By now all four of the girls were rubbing their eyes and looking for places to sit down. The Scarecrow ran to Urtha and tried in his straw-stuffed way to pull her to her feet. "Girls!" he cried in a panic. "Don't lie down! We'll never get you up again. Betsy! help me!"

The other girls, now thoroughly alarmed, ran to the Scarecrow's side and in an instant had Princess Pretty Good, yawning and blushing, on her feet again. The fright of knowing there was insidious ruin in the temptation to sleep had aroused them all—for the time being.

Jack and Carter, who had reached the summit of the ridge, came back now, in response to the Scarecrow's summons. "What are you waiting for?" they called. "There's the most gorgeous field of flowers on the other side.

"That's what I feared," panted the Scarecrow. "We've got to turn back! Dorothy and I know the Deadly Poppy Field. The girls could never survive trying to cross it."

"They don't need to cross it," reassured the two. "The path

runs alongside—and we can see the forest at the other end.”

“Come on,” said the straw man with authority. “I’ll reconnoitre with you. Girls,” —he turned “go on back toward the Brandywine stream. We’ll join you there in a minute.”

With determined steps the three men retraced the way up the meadow to the top of the ridge. There indeed the Scarecrow saw again, spread before him in all its gay allure, the rippling blanket of scarlet flowers that had so nearly dished the plane of himself and friends so many years before. He, stuffed and sewn and painted creature, unable to smell or taste or feel except with his figurative heart—could stand in safety, as could his two companions, and survey without peril the tempting trap.

“Yes,” he said thoughtfully; “just as I remember it. See the river off there in the distance?”

“The Munchkin River, isn’t it, Scarecrow?” said Carter Green.

“Yes. We had just crossed it, on our way to seek the Wizard—or rather, the others crossed, but I got stuck on a pole in the middle of the stream and had to be rescued by a stork... Just think: if we’d turned this way through the poppies instead of carrying straight on to the Emerald City, this strange region of Gardenia is where we would have come out.”

“That means,” put in Jack Pumpkinhead thoughtfully, “that this garden isn’t walled all the way around. We could walk through the poppies and so make our way out and on home again.”

“Not a wall but as good as a wall!” mused the Scarecrow. “Yes, *we* could do as you say, Jack but what of our young-lady friends? No, I still think the plan of the advice bush is quickest: to find the key and then make our way back to the gate quickly.

“But how are we to do it?” asked the Vegetable Man. “Far from crossing the poppy field, you say the girls could not even come as close as we are now.”

“No, but I have an idea. How are you fellows feeling? Fresh enough for a brisk trot?”

Jack and Carter glanced at each other and then at the Scarecrow. “We’re pretty much like you, Scarecrow,” said Jack. “We’re

not all that *strong*—but we're tireless."

"I may wilt a little around the edges when I get too hot and dry," added the Vegetable Man, "but I never get what you might call tired. Lead on!"

"Fine. Here's my plan..." As the three again tottered down the slope after the girls the Scarecrow outlined what he had in mind.

The Careless Kangaroo missed her bumbershoot now. Its sturdy dome would have protected her nicely from the ever more heavily falling rain. Not that the rich fur of a kangaroo, however green, needed to be protected from rain. She was thinking more of her bonnet and shawl (which were already well and truly sodden) and not least of her lace mitts, which she had soon decided were really nicer than the mittens she had affected in earlier days. She thought back on that time now[§], as she walked on through the rain, and remembered that after all the alarms and excursions occasioned by the need for mittens she had gone off the use of them. Her refound pair still lay, no doubt, in the dresser drawer in Quadlinga where she had last seen them a generation before. How time flew.

The breeze that had wafted the green fairies past an hour ago had risen to quite a gale, she noted, and yet through it all the green sun kept shining. How peculiar. What was it this all reminded her of? There was something artificial about this scene: something stagey. As she peered through the veils of misty rain that swirled on the wind everything looked filmy. Filmy!: of the films. That was it! Mme. Mar was no great cinema-goer but she caught the occasional movie and now she remembered one called *The Luck of the Irish*, in which the scenes taking place in Ireland were printed on green stock. That was what this was like!: the whole world around her and everything in it was green, even things that were not green. What an odd impression it made.

She continued along the river bank. The river, aqua-colored (well, that figured) with all the green rain that had been falling into the otherwise blue stream, swirled on rapidly. Now she was coming to the point of the island. What shamrocks there might have been were by now so waterlogged that the bemused kangaroo never noticed them. Instead she saw a green rainbow (forty shades) arching down just ahead and at its foot something

§ See *The Careless Kangaroo of Oz*. Editor's note.

gleamed emerald-like.

It took Mrs. Supial no time to realize what the shining thing must be, nor was she at all surprised to find a leprechaun in charge of it. What she had not expected was that Polychrome, the rainbow's daughter, should come dancing down the green bow and skip ashore from it, just between the kangaroo herself and the forest-green sprite.

There followed a scene of confused and delighted acquaintance-making and re-making, as the verdant rainbow retreated up the teeming sky. "Poly!" cried the kangaroo. "It's been such centuries! Well, decades anyway—"

Polychrome stated the number of years precisely. Since the time of her university studies she had become something of a pedant and (well, today) greenstocking and always strove for exactness.

"I've caught a glimpse of you," recalled Mar, "once or twice since then, at birthday parties and such. But we've had no real time together since we worked to combat that awful invisibility spell over Oz."

That threw the Rainbow's daughter into a retrospective mood as well, but meanwhile the civilities had to be observed. "Who's your friend?" asked Poly. "And what's he doing with my pot of gold?"

"He's not *my* friend," declared the kangaroo. "I only just noticed him there. But given the circumstances I'm pretty sure he's a leprechaun, so I suppose he's trying to disappear with the gold."

Polychrome burst into a merry peal of laughter. "He'll have some trouble doing that!"

Indeed, the three-foot-high mannikin was pulling and tugging at the green-gold pot and budging it not at all. He kept disappearing and reappearing every time anybody looked away but it was pretty obvious that he didn't have any intention of disappearing completely until he had got possession of that pot of gold.

"Do stop," Poly urged him.

"Why the won't it move?!" whined the larrikin.

"It's a magic pot, naturally," explained the rainbow's daughter. "It's from the rainbow. It can't be moved, not by you or anybody. It must stay where it is and then it gradually turns into a flower cup. After that nobody bothers to take it."

Even as the fairy spoke the earthenwarish-looking crock had begun to shrink—at which the leprechaun snatched away his hands in alarm—and grow less substantial and emptier and more delicate and paper-like, and in a moment more it was just a greenish-gold buttercup growing in the green river meadow, and the leprechaun gave it a kick in sheer disappointment. "Sure to, and all!" he muttered.

"Who are you?" asked Polychrome. The three moved away together undecidedly, in the direction of a little green-blue bridge that led to another island.

"Siko Pompus," muttered the sprite ungraciously. Then he told his story.[§]

"Yes, I know it's not a very original name: 'Pompus' is the name of the king of Pumperdink. But then, you see, we're family. Pompus is the only purple leprechaun in existence.^{§§} But as for me...well, among my unusual traits is that of wish-granting and a beard that grows when it catches fire: again unoriginal: one of the characters in the book *Jack Pumpkinhead of Oz* had the same sort of chronically growing beard, they tell me. Never mind... I'm very well connected. Have you heard of that great heroine, Jenny Jump? She's my godchild. We once had some famous adventures together before I took off for New Jersey to get myself a foine piece of pepper-cheese..."

They all stood and enjoyed the downpour while this rambling exposition went on.

"And what are you doing here?" wondered the inquisitive rainbow girl. "Is this island your home?"

"The, and all! it is," protested the churlish fellow. "I was just out for a walk, prospectin', and then I found myself here. For a

§ See *The Wonder City of Oz*. Editor's note.

§§ See *A Leprechaun in Oz*. Editor's note.

bit, when I saw how green it was, and that bit o' gold, I thought it might be all right. But now! The himself!" he cursed.

"How are you going to get home?" put in the kangaroo.

"Is it meself that knows?!" burst out the peppery gnome. "The!"

"For that matter," said Poly thoughtfully, "how are any of us going to get home? I was silly to get off the rainbow that way, without agreeing with Dad where to pick me up again. But something seemed to urge me..." she reflected puzzledly.

The trio moved on again then, through the misty rain to the low green-blue porcelain bridge. At its end, wreathed in blue haze, they could make out trees and hills of a blue landscape. There, perhaps, in the midst of the blue world their hearts would be innocent and free.

"You remember," the Scarecrow said to Dorothy, as he and Jack Pumpkinhead, one on each side, hurried with the girl up the slope and along the path that skirted the poppy field, "how we managed last time?"

"Yes, indeed. When I finally fell asleep you and Nick carried me on through to the other side."

"That's right." Even at this tense moment the old memory was exciting and fun. "Jack and I will do the same now if you don't make it along the edge of the field to the forest."

"I'm still feeling all right, Scarekewers," said the girl. "If we hurry, we should make it. You know I got half way across the field itself *by* myself in the old days."

"That's what I'm counting on."

They hastened on, but little more than half way toward the forest edge Dorothy slowed to a stroll and rubbed her eyes.

"Dorothy!" cried her friends. "Don't slow down! Keep talking!... Anything to keep awake..."

The girl switched her basket to her other arm and made a fresh effort at hurrying her steps. "Talk? Yes, I must! Let's see..." She stopped and rested her chin in her free hand. "What subject should I talk about...? Let me... think..."

The Scarecrow simply threw his soft body at her and shoved her onwards. She was startled and ran a few steps.

"No, I have to talk!" Dorothy repeated. "Oh, I know: what about Queen Ramina and her field mice? Do you suppose they're still about here? Remember how they saved poor Rex that time?"

"Good girl," encouraged the Scarecrow. "Only a few yards more now... Yes, and Ramina was helpful again that time you had to find the way into the underground land of the Miners."^s

"Mmm," said Dorothy dreamily. "The Queen of the Field Mice has been a good friend to us. What a shame I didn't bring along my whistle this time. It would have been nice to see her again."

§ See *The Wooden Soldiers of Oz*. Editor's note.

By now they had come into the shadow of the great beech forest and the sudden shade and coolness were reflected in a marked decrease in the spicy and overpowering scent of the poppies. The Scarecrow and Jack seated the girl on a fallen log and her travel basket fell unregarded beside her.

The two men hurried back the way they had come. "Phew!" said the pumpkinhead. "That was kinda rough, wasn't it?"

The Scarecrow admitted as much. "I didn't like to say anything to Dorothy. She was badly rattled already. But I get the impression that the reek of the flowers is much more potent now than it was when we were here before."

He came to talk of this again as he and Carter Green reran the path with Princess Pretty Good. Her ancient enchantment into a little lady made all of flowers-had left in the girl a deep and lasting fascination with all growing things but especially with flowering plants. As they hastened past she gazed raptly at the enormous red cups of the fatal flowers.

"How huge they are!" Her voice was full of admiration. "They're so much bigger than any poppies I've ever seen."

"That's so," said the straw man. "It seemed to me too that the blossoms are much bigger than when we passed here before—and also," he went on, keeping up the talk at any price, even that of emphasizing their danger, "that the field itself is much larger."

"Why, sure, Scarecrow," put in Carter, the plant expert. "Nothing ever dies in Oz, so in all likelihood the very blooms whose scent Dorothy and the Lion breathed all those years ago are still right out there. Since all things that grow in the earth continue to get bigger as long as they live, it's only natural that the flowers would be bigger now and thicker on the ground than ever."

The Scarecrow looked troubled as he continued to urge the earth princess on. "Hmm," he hmmed. "Ozma may have to send a platoon of the wooden workers out here one day soon and get a large part of this plantation rooted out. Otherwise it could spread to the very gates of the Emerald City."

"Not to worry," soothed the Vegetable Man. "In a paradox land like Oz things have to grow very slowly. If not, they'd eventually grow over each other into vast jungles, building up such a weight that at last they must collapse and destroy themselves."

That proved to be enough conversation to get Urtha through to join her friend Dorothy in the forest. While the Scarecrow kept Trot company at the Brandywine Carter and Jack accompanied Betsy along the poppy-skirting path. The stalwart Betsy led her friends a chase, chattering all the way.

"We're really being stormed at with shot and shell this trip, aren't we?" she said gaily. "First whisky, then cigarettes, now dope! That's all this sleepy-making odor is, of course: opium—"

"Shh!" said Jack Pumpkinhead, afrighted. "Don't even say such a word in Oz, Betsy."

"'Opium'? Why not? It's quite a pretty and fascinating word."

"Maybe so, but it's dangerous. You'd be best advised not to mention or even think about it."

"What a funny idea," said Betsy. "What's in a name? The mere *word* 'opium' can't hurt anybody. A jaguar or a shark are dangerous things too and enemies to man but we're not forbidden to talk about them. There's no shame attached to saying their names. Anyway, ignorance isn't a weapon. I think it's better to say 'opium' right out and then think about ways to fight it."

"I guess you're right, Betsy," admitted the honest wooden man. "It was dumb of me not to think of it that way by myself."

Carter Green glanced at Jack and smiled kindly. Being all vegetable and living, as it were, closer to the soil, Green supposed he was freer of prejudice about growing things than the emptyheaded fellow made of dead wood. To Carter the red poppies, in spite of their potentiality for harm, were charming creations. He regretted that his human friends could not linger and enjoy the blossoms' crinkly scarlet beauty, the delicacy of the tissue-paper petals that floated on the breeze.

Carter also considered himself to be nimbler than the pumpkinhead. Jack had a tendency to gawkiness and clumsi-

ness, whereas the veg man's limbs were of a plant-like pliability. As long as he did not stand still for very long they served him admirably. Now, having got the smartly marching Betsy through to join her friends, he had no occasion for stopping still. He left Jack to keep the three girls company while he hurried back to fetch Trot.

Perhaps it was just bad luck. Or perhaps, after all the non-men were feeling some ebbing of their forces. The breeze changed course and now, from eddying in the direction of the poppy field, it veered to blow *from* the field upon the Scarecrow and Carter Green as they made their way, with Trot between them, along the now familiar path.

Many minutes went by. The young ladies in the wood, chatting cheerfully with their funny hayseed companion Jack, were amused and content. All had gone well so far. In a few minutes, an hour at most, they would have got possession of the Key and would be on their way again along the yellow road, merely an odd little adventure the richer.

It was Pretty Good, the earth princess, who, lifting her face as she laughed at a joke of Jack's, suddenly fell silent. Her eyes had gone to the high covering canopy of the trees' boughs and she said in a hushed voice, "How dark it's grown."

Betsy exclaimed, "You're right, Urtha! Drat, it's going to rain again."

Dorothy looked back along the way they had come. "Where are the others? They ought to have been here long since."

Alarmed, the four companions rose as one and started at a trot out from under the forest verge and along the path back toward the threatening red field in the middle distance. They all talked at once and stirred up each other's fears.

Suddenly they caught sight of the Scarecrow stumbling toward them. "Thank goodness!" he yelped, stopping. "Come on, all of you! There's not a moment to lose."

The group came up to him with worried faces. As they all sped back along the dangerous track he warned them: "Work fast when we reach the other two! But try not to breathe deeply.

The wind changed. The poppy smell must have got overpowering. Trot's a splendid little thing. She fell asleep while she was running, and fell... She may have hurt herself. Carter wouldn't leave her. He grew roots as we tried to pull her to her feet. There's not all that much strength in a small vegetable man or a poor old stuffed scarecrow. She's still there, asleep and Carter with her. I did the only thing I could think of and ran to get your help."

"Of course!" cried Dorothy. "You did exactly right, Scarecrow."

"If only we're not too late," gasped Urtha.

For now the breeze-borne breath of the poppies had grown to a stiff wind and the sky was full of dark hurrying clouds. In their race against time the girls could not do otherwise than breathe in heavy lungfuls of the enopiumed air.

"That stuff," choked Betsy, "growing here all those years—never dying—. It must ferment or something—in the blossom—and get stronger and more poison all the time..."

Then they came in view of the tragic little group in the middle of the path: Trot fallen with her face among the very poppies themselves and Carter Green with both feet firmly anchored in the dirt of the walkway, still struggling with his hands about Trot's arm to pull her upright.

The friends rushed to his side and Dorothy took command. "Urtha, you and I must carry Trot back while Betsy and the Scarecrow help Carter!"

This was easier said than done. All three girls and the Scarecrow and Jack, hauling together, had stiff work to lift the limp and slumbering girl. Precious minutes passed as they jockeyed to get her arms draped about the necks of two of the girls and her body supported among willing arms, while the wind rose to a storm.

At last they were on their stumbling way. Betsy and the Scarecrow, with Jack's well-meant but awkward assistance, pulled and yanked at Carter's ankles, trying to free them from the soil for which they had such an affinity.

"This is no good," cried the Scarecrow in a few moments. "Betsy! Run after the other girls! Get clear of this. Jack and I can't be affected by the air. We'll stay... we'll get him loose."

"Carter wouldn't leave Trot," retorted Betsy in a manner both stubborn and dreamy. "I'm... not leaving... him..."

These were brave but famous last words. Before another minute had passed the plucky girl had sunk to her knees; in another she was fast asleep.

"Get away, you two!" cried Carter Green. "Get help! Don't bother about me. I'll grow a little, that's all. I'll be all right when you come back in a day or a week."

Jack Pumpkinhead and the Scarecrow looked at each other and then without a word, as the rain began to fall heavily, did as they were told.

The two part-cloth-constructed men, neither of whom would be improved by a wetting, plunged through the increasing down-pour in the steps of the fleeing trio of girls. These by now were out of sight. Alas, they did not long remain so. The two pursuers found them fallen in a heap, half among the fatal flowers. There they slept sweetly, their arms on or about each other, as the rain streamed over their hair and clothes.

The poor 'made' men panicked. "Oh ... oh!" wailed the Scarecrow, beside himself. "What an end to our happy party."

The pumpkinhead said nothing at all but plunged incontinently into the field of poppies. The flowers looked so big and dark, wetted and blown all one way by the storm. Jack was last seen galloping on his high-stepping gangly legs away through the field toward the west:

The Scarecrow, lone survivor of the once lighthearted group, looked around once desperately, then set off stumbling back toward the at least still conscious Carter Green. Long before he got there he fell to the ground, a sodden mess of soaked cloth, straw, and horsehair.

You got on the radio to Glinda. Not because there had been any further threatening occurrences but just because you were experiencing one of the drawbacks of high position and power: loneliness. All the court flunkies who approached you backed away when their errand was done. You couldn't have a proper confidential chat with anyone who never turned his back on you. You buzzed the Good Sorceress.

"This is the temporary ruler of Oz," you explained when you heard the witch's warm contralto voice.

"I beg your pardon?" said the voice, startled and several degrees less warm.

"Yes, the beloved Princess Ozma has been called away in an emergency and appointed me regent before departing," you explained.

"Please tell me more," urged the sorceress, concerned.

You relayed the main heads of recent developments. To disguise the real reason for your call you said, "I thought it only right to inform you. If they don't come back, it may be urgent for us to confer."

"Don't come back'?" spoke Glinda rather sharply. "Why on earth should not the Queen return from a garden you say is an hour's distance from her home?"

"Oh—well, I don't know for sure, but everything has been turning out so peculiarly: not like one expects at all. So when I expect her back I now begin to think I probably won't see her."

"Hmm." The sorceress seemed to be considering the logic of that. "Right. Don't do anything abrupt, will you? I'll have a look in the Book of Records and then be off at once to confer with you."

"Oh, Your Sorceressness," (you supposed that was the correct term), "is ex-General Jinjur still on detached duty with you? Bring her along, won't you? And everyone else of importance at your court."

"As it happens, Till Orangespiegel is here—and his sister,

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and their friend Levimeyerisbloch—and even Cook Cayke, and also the Frogman: kind of oldhome week. But what is the intention? Why should they come to the Emerald City?”

“I don’t know. That’s just it,” you explained pitifully. “I just have a feeling it would be a good idea.”

“Odd.” There was a short silence. “Very well; we’ll make an outing of it. Except Jinjur; she’s needed here. But no one else, please. There’s a limit to how many can find places in the swan chariot.”

“Oh,” you spoke in disappointment. “I was hoping to see your colleague, the Witch of the North, perhaps and, er; I don’t suppose the Red Jinn is available?”

“Not” said Glinda, now distinctly sharply. “You are a foreigner, aren’t you? Be he never so red, the Jinn doesn’t live in Quadlinga. He’s at home—in his own country, I should suppose.”

You had to be content with that. Anyway, you knew the Red Jinn was not in Oz, so that was all right... But *why* was it all right? That’s what you couldn’t figure out, but just simply *knew*.

You had just rung off when a Round Robin, a busy member of the famous Bird Messenger Service, flew in and settled on the arm of your throne. “Message from Oorfene Deuce,” it chirped chirpily. “But who are you, I wonder? And where is Her Graciousness” (that was a term you’d have to learn! and make use of) “Princess Ozma?”

“Oh—er; she was called away,” you explained. “I’m now Acting Regent of All Oz!” (or ARAO—as you henceforth caused yourself to be called).

“Okay, Your—what would that be: Araotion?”

“You may call me ‘Your Regency’,” you graciously decreed, “just as I shall call myself ‘My Regency’.”

“Fine, Your Regency,” fell in the Round Robin comfortably. “Now what message shall I take back to Deuce?” (Deuce’s own message to Ozma having been duly relayed).

“Tell him to bring his forces and meet me presently—at Baynard’s Castle,” you intoned.

“Where?!”

"Oh, sorry! That was Shakespeare."" (Not you, too?) "Tell him to meet me here. I'm not going anywhere!" (that you knew of. Having reached the Throne of Oz in one easy move, you'd be a twit to leave it and go anywhere else.)

"Right, Your Regency," acquiesced the bird. "As for his 'forces', which are those?"

"Hasn't he got any forces?" you wondered. "I thought he used to take over Oz with wooden soldiers and things."

"Yes, 'things': those dopey Maronnes. I suppose he could bring along a few of those. They've made up and he goes to play volleyball with them now and then. But otherwise, as of course you know, Your Regency, Oorfene keeps no retainers about him. He just lives quietly with his eagle owl for company."

"Oh, yes, let him bring with him Gwommokolahtokint," you instructed. "And magnate Boq, certainly! and also the royalty of the Ozure Isles, not to omit the king's chief advisers there, either. And—oh, everyone else important in the Munchkin country."

"I don't suppose you'd be passing the Tin Woodman's?"

"Are you kidding? On the way from the E.C. to Munchkinland?" The Round Robin scoffed briefly and omitted to call you "Your Regency". Then he relented: "Of course I *can* contact the Emperor for you—if that's what you want...?"

"Splendid!" you enthusiasticized—to make up for your booboos, "that's just what I do want. And then: if someone might alert Joe King and Queen Hyacinth and the royals of Pumperdink and King Randy in Regalia..."

The Round Robin took a notebook from under his wing and selected a quill from among his penfeathers and made jottings.

"Oh, and just a word to the queen of Oogaboo *when* you get a chance."

The robin was no less clever than that he realized you were summoning to the capital everyone of importance in the entire land of Oz. He didn't ask why, and you couldn't have told him!

After the Round Robin—his name was Rori, by the way—had gone it was not long before Sorceress Glinda landed on the

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roof of the Palace of Magic with her swan fleet. Palace Housekeeper Jellia Jamb threw wide the ivory double doors and Glinda and all her company trooped in.

"In the end," explained the sorceress after the hubbub of presentations had died down, "we had to dust off two extra chariots from out of storage, to get everybody in." You had recognized—with joy—several famous personages you'd forgotten to suggest that Glinda bring along. The Frogman and those inseparable companions of the big top, Notta Bit More and Bob Up. (There they were! and presently you made occasion to speak to them companionably and recall their experiences in the Fiddlestick Forest and other events of 1923, though you found it unnecessary to mention the birth of any obscure authors that year.)

When in the lively excited general talk there came a lull you said in an aside to the Good Sorceress, "The Book of Records! What did it say?"

"The thing was maddeningly cryptic, as so often," complained the encoded sovereign with rue. She reached into her reticule. "I've copied it down: 'Un-dreamed-of (in one sense) discoveries made at walking distance from the Emerald City. The ruler of Quadlinga takes along big medicine.'" I had *just* that moment packed my first-aid kit. Sometimes, I get the impression the Book is trying to advise, as well as just record. But that's all it said. Because of the mention of my own activities in that connection, I can only suppose the discoveries' refer to this... Charmed Garden, you call it?" The southern sorceress looked frankly mystified, though no more than yourself. But you were thrilled by her confidential tone.

"Oh," you said, registering co-conspiratorial disappointment. "I was hoping it would supply some kind of a hint of an explanation."

"Oh, no," assured the book's proprietor. "The dear old thing just tells what, never why.

"But now: I want to hear everything you can tell me from your side about what seem to be very-strange goings-on. Where

did this mysterious garden you speak of come from?"

"Come from'?" you stuttered.

"Yes, indeed," said Glinda briskly. "Professor Wogglebug may be a bit dilatory in getting around to doing his once-and-for-all definitive mapping of Oz, but this supposed 'charmed garden', by your report, lies in the immediate vicinity of his own College of Knowledge. I put through a call to the Professor and had confirmed that as late as yesterday afternoon there were no large, mysterious, uncharted gardens in the area—nor, indeed, anywhere else in Oz."

"Good gracious," you said, making a feeble effort to sound surprised. But there had already happened today so much that was surprising that you as it were, had worn out your capacity to be startled by anything. As regarded the Garden, the unexpected was the norm. "To me the Charmed Garden has always been there," you stated.

"Possibly," replied the witch. "But *you* have not always been here—in Oz. Where do you come from? and how?"

To the first question you gave the sorceress a complete answer. To the second you had none to give.

Glinda made a note on her pocket recorder: "Method of transit unknown." "Hm," she said. "Most curious. I don't believe I've run up against any arrival in Oz of this nature before... I hope it's not catching."

You felt wounded at that and said nothing. The good witch was perceptive and rightly interpreted your momentary silence. "Of course it's a pleasure to have *you* here," she lied. (You had done nothing, so far, that anyone in Oz could rate as pleasure-giving.) "But you realize, I am sure, that it wouldn't do at all if anything occurred that made possible unlimited immigration to Oz."[§]

"Oh, no," you hastened to assure, though in fact you had never thought about it and, if asked, would have said that it would be wonderful if everyone in the world might realistically

§ Alas, that's exactly what was to take place one day. See *The Ten Woodmen of Oz*. Editor's note

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dream of getting to Oz some time.

"So you see," went on the red sorceress, "we must determine how you got here and put a stop to it."

"Oh, yes, indeed, Your Sorcery," you coincided glibly. Inside, you weren't enjoying at all the way this interview was going. To be talked to in this fashion by the glamorous Sovereign of the South whom you—and all right-thinking people—had always so much admired: it was downright hurtful. You decided to put an end to it. "I'm sure you're right. But just for now, ought you not to be thinking of ways to solve the situation at Gardenia?"

"Yes, surely. I daresay there's nothing for it but to be off to the scene of the supposed emergency. You will accompany us, of course?"

That, however, was one thing you by now knew your own mind about quite definitely.

"Most regrettably," you announced from the dignity of the Throne of Oz, "that won't be possible. I must remain in control here. Others of the crowned heads of the realm have been summoned to conference. I expect them every moment. But you yourself..."

"Yes?" said Glinda imperiously.

"Well, I mustn't keep you. If you wish to proceed on to Gardenia..."

The Sorceress of the South frowned. "It seems I have no choice," she said, and it wasn't clear whether the frown was one of displeasure or puzzlement.

"That's right: you haven't," you said to yourself but were too politic to let the red witch know your thought.

"I shall take my retinue with me," Glinda announced.

"Oh, yes, you do that, Your Sorceressness," you encouraged genially. You gave a secret exhalation of satisfaction, only to ask yourself a second afterward why that should be. Hadn't you summoned this crowd hither for the longed-for opportunity of getting to know them? Were you sending them all on to the charmed garden with everything of that left undone? Yes, you were.

Only, "Will Your Grace leave me your keys?" you asked.

"My keys!?" ejaculated the great enchantress.

"Yes. You see, I may need to consult the Great Book of Records in your temporary absence," you stated. "The parlous sate of the nation may demand it."

"I see," muttered Glinda without seeing at all. She detached the great ring of keys from her girdle and singled out a red ruby one. "This opens the door to my private cabinet. The Book lies within."

"Thank *you*... And now... I shall see you and your party to the roof," you informed regally.

Glinda's escort acted surprised when they found they were to continue their journey at once. They had expected refreshments and sociability. You caught one or two looking at you ruefully, almost as if they regretted the failure of opportunity to get to know you better. Well, no more bitterly than you regretted in your turn the loss of their company. But duty called.

The poor swans had to leave off their browsing on the succulent water lilies and duckweed the palace attendants had scattered in appealing heaps about the tarmac covering of the palace roof. The travelers climbed into the chariots. You stood by one of the ornamental chimneys and waved dutifully as the Sorceress of the South gave commands and the swans ran for a take-off.

You watched them out of sight. Then your eye descended to survey the bumbershoot from Gardenia that for a reason unknown to you you had carried with you to this scene of parting. You looked at it speculatively.

Tronto was standing in the doorway of the keeper's lodge, sipping a cup of cool coffee she had found in the pot after her mother's disappearance. She began to wonder if she ought to do something about the said disappearance. Then a strolling menagerie straggled into the gatehouse and engaged her in talk. Tronto counted a lion, a tiger, a woozy, two kinds of horse, and some bears before she lost interest.

"Cup of coffee?" she said.

"Rmmrh," rumbled the tiger. "But if you've got any fat babies, one of those might just hit the spot."

"I'll look." The young kangaroo withdrew into the lodge pantry. One or two of the animal visitors strayed in after her.

"No *fat* babies," reported Tronto with her head in a cupboard. She mistook a rag doll flung negligently in a flour bin for a thin baby. The Hungry Tiger thrust his head in beside her and snuffled in contempt. Tronto explained: "Mother's never cared for babies and I didn't learn how to prepare them before I quit my cooking course. How do you do them?"

"En brochette is best," opined Hung. "But they fricassee up very nicely too. In a pinch one can even eat them raw."

"Never mind that," intoned the Courageous Lion. "We are here to enquire, my good kangaroo, if a number of celebrities of Oz have passed this way and if you will lead us to them?"

"Celebrities?" ejaculated Tronto all of a piece. "My mum was having a snack with someone here an hour ago but that was certainly no celebrity. Whom did you have in mind?"

"A scarecrow, for starters," told the lion. "Then there was a man composed all of vegetables and another with just one vegetable: a pumpkin head—"

"Don't forget those girls," warned the blue bear-skin.

"That's right; there were three young American girls who look exactly alike except for different-colored hair, plus another young lady you couldn't miss: she's all over flowers."

"What sort of flowers?" asked Tronto, putting down her cup

in the sink in pure concentration.

"Let's see," reminisced the lion. "I don't know Urtha all that well but I seem to remember she had violet eyes and pink lips and rosey cheeks and lily-white hands—oh, and she wore a nest of robins in her hair—in lieu of a hat, you know."

"I didn't see her," said Tronto.

That was a let-down, but the lion persevered. "We were informed quite certainly that the party had come here—and were now in some danger—"

Tronto gaped, "Danger!? At Gardenia? You must be joking. Nothing ever happens at Gardenia, certainly not anything exciting like danger."

"There was some mystery about a gate that only worked one way..? and yes, definitely danger."

Tronto stepped back outside. She went to the turquoise gate and pushed it open. She stood for a moment with her paw holding it ajar, then she let it fall to again. "You see? I can both open and close the gate. I don't know what other possible third way you would have it work."

The crowd of would-be rescuers just stood around and looked perplexed.

Suddenly Tronto had an idea. "Danger? I know what you must be thinking of. Gorbabrog's garden! There's a dangerous one for you if you like. What if you went along and tried there? It's a good way from here but the entrance to it is right on along this road. I'm sure that'd be your best bet."

Rex the Lion struck his forehead with his clenched paw and roared: "Of COURRRSE! How stupid can we get? Urtha told me this morning that's where she and her lot were heading! Naturally we'll go on there. Sorry to have troubled you, miss."

Even so the animals argued about it for quite a while but this was only because a sudden cloudburst descended and it was so nice and cosy inside the gatehouse port as opposed to out in the teeming rain. In the end Tronto set out bowls of steaming coffee for as many of the beasts as could drink. She even turned up a barrel of hay crackers that proved popular indeed

with certain of the visitors.

But when the downpour slackened the party moved out and on. This had been more or less tacitly understood from the start. "There's been some misunderstanding in this whole affair," the Lion grumbled to himself. "That foreigner we met got it mixed up. The Princess' intended destination *is* a place of many pitfalls. We've always known that..."

They thanked the amiable-casual kangaroo again for her hospitality. Then they set out along the road at an even less leisurely pace than before.

Once he got over his disappointment at missing that pot of rainbow gold Siko Pompus proved not to be too uncomfortable a companion. At least he assumed without grousing the role of male protector to the delicate rainbow maiden and the equally delicate—in her way—lady kangaroo. He got in front as they stepped upon the blue porcelain bridge and jumped up and down a few times to make sure it would bear their weight without collapsing in sharp shards. “Sure, will ye be followin’ now?”

Things *were* blue. Everything blue in all the world seemed collected on that blue island. From blue china they stepped off on blue Oz: a sward of blue grass as juicy as any Kentucky has to offer. Blue rain was making it bluer and wetter than ever but still it didn’t stop blue skies from smiling at them. They dreamed of two blue orchids so full of love and light that they wanted to possess each tender bloom. Blue dahlias too, and round about flew bluebirds, singing a song about blue days and all of them gone.

Presently there came a rainbow after the blue, blue rain but it was too far up in the sky for Polychrome to reach it or call it down. But the happy little bluebirds flew beyond the rainbow leaving the travelers in rather a mood indigo.

“Am I blue?” whispered Poly a little forlornly.

The others looked at her. “Actually, you *are* a bit azure around the edges,” they pronounced.

“But you’ve got a right to sing the blues,” decided the kangaroo. At the moment she did not look to be in the pink herself. No wonder: her green complexion acquired on the emerald isle had changed to a haunting cobalt.

“It’s me own cruishkin I wish I had by me now,” muttered the leprechaun, sensing the general melancholy.

Polychrome’s eye brightened. “Blue champagne!” she cried. She had tasted it once in an unguarded moment and never forgotten it. “Yes. We all of us could do with a little refreshment now.”

Suddenly out of the blue a little parade of shops appeared ahead. The others suspected that the leprechaun's wish-working ability was operating to his own advantage this once. No one was going to be surprised if a package store, with cruishkins available, loomed up at any moment. They passed a small cinema showing blue movies and yes, there it was on the corner!

The hikers stepped into a blue room where every day was a holiday and approached the bar. "A pink cocktail for a blue lady!" ordered Siko Pompus. "And what will you have, me dear?" he asked genially of Mar the kangaroo.

"Oh, I'll just have one of those blueberry tarts," she said and pointed to a glass bell she'd noticed a little way along the polished blue spruce counter. Her tea had not been overly filling and was, moreover, some time since.

While they partook they questioned the bartender, encouraged by the genial look in his blue eye. "We're after bein' strangers here," confided Pompus. "We seem to have lost our way. Where will we fitch up if we follow this road outside?"

"Beyond the blue horizon," replied the man, scratching his blue beard as he eyed them speculatively. "Or if you wait at the depot down at the end of the street you may can catch the Blue Train, though it only stops once in a blue moon."

"Trains! In Oz?" they all exclaimed at once. But the bartender had briskly stepped aside to serve another customer.

"In Oz," said Polychrome, "anything is possible though I did think they drew the line at railways."

The party had just finished their drinks or snacks when a spectacular rattle and slash pounded on the roof and they knew it must be raining blue murder. There was no going anywhere in that weather, so they ordered another round and fled the time carelessly. When they finally stepped out in the blue of evening it was colder than a blue goose and they realized that half the rain that had fallen was hail and sleet. The ground was crunchy with ice-blue fragments. "It *is* Oztober after all," reminded the kangaroo.

Anyway the rain was over for good and all. But "The sun's

far down the sky," constated Polychrome wistfully and gave a little shiver.

"Yes, we must hurry on," urged Mar and drew her by now dried-out pelerine closer about her.

Soon they had passed the depot and stepped off the plank sidewalk. A little way on began a grove of blue-gum trees that, to the kangaroo at least, had an air of homeyness. Her house far away in the Quadling country had nestled in a clump of gum trees.

The chill continued to be felt in several ways. As they came to the end of the wooded region the others excused themselves and 'disappeared', leaving the rainbow maiden standing looking out on a wide expanse of blue moonlight. She looked up in the sky and murmured, "Blue moon! You found me standing alone—without a dream in my heart, without a love of my own," and she remembered the times she had loved and lost. "Fex," she said in a tiny voice. "Where are you?"

She looked up into the sky once more and sighed. "And there's a blue star, looking down... asking where you are..."

A blue tear slid down her cheek. Altogether Polychrome felt blue.

You continued to look speculatively at that rubberized umbrella. It looked just like a certain other (magical) umbrella you had heard of, once in a lullaby, or maybe read about. And why not? No one quite knew what the ultimate fate was of Button Bright's umbrella.[§] That it was here in Oz, was believed, in some quarters, to be almost certain. Yet if it had ever been found, the fact would have been recorded in Glinda's great record book. You had not heard of such a discovery.

The present umbrella had not been "discovered" either. The Careless Kangaroo had produced it from a closet. Still, who knew what might not have been the destiny of a magic bumbershoot between the time young Button Bright let go of it over a popcorn mountain, and now?

Never mind. It couldn't hurt anything just to *try*. You untied the umbrella's flap strap and shook it out. You lifted it above your head and shot the expansion bolt. Wheesh! said the umbrella in a pleasant little anticipatory fashion.

You grasped the handle, which was *not* carved in the shape of the head of a parrot or an elephant or anything else. "I wish to be at the other end of the roof" you said.

The umbrella tugged invitingly. You let your feet say goodbye to the ground. You rose a few inches and then began to drift leisurely east, just the way you had imagined. This was not flying. This was just going somewhere else in an easy unupsetting way that merely relieved you of the necessity of working your feet. Before you reached the eastern parapet those feet were scraping the ground. Then you halted. You had been delivered where you'd asked to be.

Now for that western parapet. You turned about. With a little flipflop of your stomach you spoke the words that would prove, you thought, once and for all the magicity of this umbrella. The bumbershoot gave a jerk, as if to say, 'What are you waiting for, slow-poke?' You found yourself fairly having to run to keep up.

§ But they would. See *The Umbrellas of Oz*. Editor's note.

with its impetuosity. With a lurch you were swinging in the air. Then in another moment you were running on the tarmac again, having to brake so as not to tumble over the low western wall.

How exhilarating. You realized you'd forgotten all about your abandoned throne and the Regency of All Oz and the plight—if plight it be—of all the famous figures trapped in the Charmed Garden of Oz. You just wanted to play with this fascinating new toy. You were just about to say, 'Carry me out over the palace park and back again,' when a voice came from the open trap door at roof center.

You turned. There was the head of the Soldier with Green Whiskers and it was looking at you, with desperately smothered curiosity. "Er... Your Regency..." it had said.

"Yes?" you replied with as desperately smothered impatience.

"Er—the other crowned heads are beginning to arrive. Shall I put them in the Emerald Room?"

"Yes!" You halted. "No. Tell them not to bother to take off their hats. As they report in, invite them to be off again to the newly discovered Charmed Garden. You know its location?" You described how to get there. "Former Queen Ozma requires their assistance—or, anyway, attendance. For myself, I am going off and I may be some little time." You had heard someone say those words just lately—where was it?—and they sounded so destiny-laden, so... haunted. They accorded well with the sense of your own importance that you were finding so delightful at the moment.

You could hardly wait for the soldier's wondering head to disappear before you fairly sprinted to the south parapet, stepped up on it, and commanded: "Carry me to the Pink Palace of Glinda the Good!" Past were all hesitation, all unsureness. You *knew* now what your power was. Even without an umbrella to wish upon you were pretty sure you were to get your own way.

To go back a ways—say, a million years, give or take a few hundred thousands—a small ball of slush was hurtling along at just incredible speed through outer space. Actually it was *beyond* outer space. It was so far out that even space began to grow thin there.

Anyway, it was hurtling in the right direction. It could feel space getting thicker and thicker. Every few hundred years the slushball, whose name was Glod (probably related to Swedish “glöd”, meaning ‘glow’), would think, ‘I can feel space getting thicker and thicker.’

Glod came from a region where Space completely disappeared. Out there there was no space at all. It was totally solid; there was not even a crack for any space to be in. Furthermore, it was not black dark like space is; it was total light. There was no shadow—or substance. Solids, liquids, gasses, and vacuum all blended together in one blinding amalgam, something like a very thick soup. Most surprising of all: it was all alive. There was, not an atom of non-space that was not throbbing and kicking with implicit life. It was also cozy and warm all the time—if one could speak of “time” in a region where everything waxed and waned and grew older and younger and/or stayed just the same age and was timeless all the time.

For the atoms in non-space it was party-party without stopping. No one (if one could speak of “one”) ever had an opportunity to grow bored. There were, however, atoms that grew thoughtful. This was particularly true of those who lived near the edge of non-space. They would sometimes get a glimpse of the vast dark of Outer Space and think to themselves, ‘I wonder what’s out there.’ Divine curiosity, you see.

Finally after (or before) a few eons some of these thoughtful inquisitive atoms got together and formed a Society of Space Thinkers (called Sospathink, for short), and it was at a meeting of Sospathink that the incredible thought was first thought: ‘I wonder if there is non-life in space...!’

The thought swept through the Society like wild-fire. The atoms, couldn't stop thinking about it, night or day (though of course no such entities as those existed). In the end it got to be too much for one atom and he/she/it said, "I'm going to find out."

"How are you going to do that?" said the others.

"Why, go there!"

They scoffed. "You'll never make it. You're too small."

"Well, I could get bigger!"

"How're you going to do that?"

"I'll take up a collection. How about it? Any of you want to join me?"

Well, of course the thought of whether there was non-life in space exercised all the atoms in Sospathink terribly. It was not many minutes (though there was nothing like those either in non-space) before enough curiosity-driven atoms had clustered around the original venturer to make up a clump about as big as a basketball. "Whoa!" cried the others who were remaining behind. "You're big enough."

The super-glomerated atom mass shouldered he/she/it's way right to the edge of non-space and said, "Give, us a shove, will you?"

Somebody (though of course there *was* no such thing out there) put out a foot (or that either!) and gave the glob a nudge. The glob moved out into the vacuum of way-way-out space and inertia kept it moving forever.

The move into space could be likened to the plucking of an apple in another setting infinitely remote from that of the flying slushball. At once frightful knowledge set in. The first thing the ball knew was the sensation of cold. In the first few minutes (there were plenty of those now) the soupy atoms of the glob, going at the time no faster than they were, jelled rock-hard. The ball flew along for a few thousand years just numbed with cold.

Eventually it met things going the other way. That was the universe exploding outward, of course. Specks of dust hurtling along at thousands of miles an hour ran into the ice ball and

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knocked it into the middle of next week, at once shattering its solid consistency and adding to its momentum. In a few hundred thousand years the ball had met and picked up so many dust motes that it was now able to accept actual whole granules with complacency.

The horrors of knowledge continued to flow in. Boredom had declared itself almost from the start. Danger became a familiar concept. Survival began to be deemed a desirable thing. Purpose was a motive the atoms had had from the start. However, they lost that almost at once. They had been going to find out if there was non-life in apace and the first dull mote they met told them the answer to that. It shot in among the ice crystals it had shattered and then just lay there.

The non-space atoms looked at each other and said, "What is it?"

Then one hardy soul (I don't know whether there are any of *those* in non-space spoke to the mote itself, saying: "What are you?" But answer came there none.

A wild surmise began to trouble all the live atoms. Quickly they ran a few simple chemical tests and the truth was revealed: the mote was inert. It was a piece of inorganic matter. The atoms looked at each other once more, with big eyes(?). So there *was* non-life in space!

The shock of the realization made them all go into stasis for a few eons. Meanwhile, the slushball rushed on through space, which got thicker and thicker. More motes, then kernels, then whole grains joined the ball until there was serious danger that it was going to be more inorganic than living pretty soon.

The live-atom fraternity solved that problem almost accidentally. In a misplaced effort to be friendly and deeming it a pity that the inert material was taking part in this joy ride without even being aware of it or getting any fun out of it, some of them tried to impart some of their own life to non-living atoms. In an unguarded moment they got too close and fused with them.

The result was not what they expected. Instead of receiving life from the living atoms., the inert materials began to affect

their hosts. The live atoms turned into molecules! characterized by all sorts of chemical chains; they had never dreamed of having before.

That was a Pandora's box, if you like! No sooner had the new molecules collected their wits than they gobbled up all the inert matter that that had joined them from space over the ages. The whole thing chain-reacted into one single living organism with all the qualities and capabilities assimilated from its former loose uncohering constituents.

The first-thing the new organism did was give it self a name. It invented nomenclature! Recalling the never-dimming brilliance of its home in nonspace, the slushball dubbed itself "Glod", just to keep up its spirits and remind itself that it itself also glowed dimly, the only thing in all space that had any light at all.

"But this is ridiculous," Glod said to itself, "with all that light out there in non-space just going to waste, you might say, and here it's all so dark..." Glod said, "Let there be light!" And there was light.

What a spectacle! All the stars in the universe suddenly winked on—and Glod was there to see it.

It was all subjective, of course. No change occurred in the nature of the myriads of heat-source bodies in the universe. Glod had merely willed itself to be able to see. It had created not light but sight. It was simply a case of interpreting *as* light the heat of those trillions of stars and calling into being incandescence.

Of course seeing light is quite a different thing from *being* light, which had been the modest situation of the slushball before. Indeed, when Glod looked back at itself it was quite ashamed to see what a dim little thing it was. It manipulated its molecules and beamed out suddenly with many hundreds of thousands of watts.

"Hey, Ma!" it yelled (meaning, I suppose, its matrix, the infinite mass of shining non-space it had come from). "Look at me! I'm a star!"

"Oh, hello, dear." Ozma looked up from under a rather dull nerdy-looking bush and brushed back a strand of hair from her forehead. She appeared a bit warm and flustered. "I rather thought we might be having the pleasure of seeing you. Isn't this the oddest situation?"

"Yes, I must confess I've known nothing like it," said Glinda, curtsying briefly before her sovereign. "I'm glad to have found you so quickly. But may I ask what you're doing?" The sorceress thought she'd get that settled before going on to larger questions of policy.

"Well may you ask," answered the little queen of Oz half ruefully. "We know our friends are to be found some place in this vast garden but there seems absolutely no clue as to where. So we—" she waved vaguely at the Frogman, Scraps, and Ojo the Lucky, who could be glimpsed moving among the topiary — "are simply beating the bushes as we go."

She turned back to the tall nondescript plant before her. It was clipped inexpertly in the shape of an elephant but with many twigs and excrescences in the wrong places. "These plants have not been properly tended. No one seems to care about them. It's rather sad." She lifted an identification tag that hung limply from a lower branch. "'George'," she read. "How odd. I thought the label might tell me what kind of a specimen this is—but I guess we'll never know." She moved on down the line.

"Would you have expected the truants to be lying *under* the shrubbery?" asked Glinda, following her leader.

"We just don't know, you see," explained Ozma. "They must have had to take cover from that frightful rainstorm that just passed over, and so far we've seen nothing in the way of a building anywhere in these grounds, not even a gazebo."

"On the other hand," pointed out the good witch, "there seems to be nothing whatever in the gardens that could pose a threat to visitors. You would not expect to find them lying senseless, would you?, or worse: bound and gagged?"

"Oh, surely not," exclaimed the gentle little queen, startled. "But then the grounds are immense. Who knows what might lurk beyond some of these heights or copses."

The two walked on for a space, scanning in all directions. Gradually they lost sight of most of their celebrity companions as all the members of both parties fanned out to investigate. The Oz rulers fell into discussion of general principles. "Have you any inkling, my dear," asked the Girl Ruler of Oz, "as to how this garden got here? Or who that individual is who moved in so briskly to occupy my throne?"

"None," replied the sorceress in a tone of chagrin. "But I accuse myself of negligence. The whole past week I've only looked at the Great Book to keep tabs on that comet that's been so spectacular. Do you watch it?"

"Oh, yes! We go up on the palace roof for an hour every evening. It's marvelous, isn't it?"

"Indeed. But as for other entries I haven't paid attention. I only jotted a couple of the very latest as I set off in response to that curious summons from the—well, we can really only say 'usurper'."

"I somehow thought a call might go out for you. You see what's happening, don't you?" spoke the wise Ozma; "all the more celebrated and/or powerful individuals in Oz are being gathered into this charmed—but, so far, scarcely charming—garden. For what purpose: who can guess? But what did your jottings say?"

Glinda quoted the exact wording.

"Isn't that odd," said Ozma. "Odd" seemed to be her favorite word this afternoon. "Have you been able to interpret its deeper meaning? I know the Book of Records often 'speaks' oracularly. Many words have significances not always at once apparent."

"I think I may be having the beginning of an idea," admitted the witch, "but I won't say anything about it just yet. It wouldn't help us to find our friends anyway. But as soon as possible I must get back to the Book. There's bound to be a good deal of

earlier exposition that would explain a lot.”

“Well, let’s hurry on and locate these scamps. There’s really no excuse for their disappearing this way!” complained Princess Ozma joking-vexedly. “The Scarecrow’s with them and he always keeps his powder dry and his brains alert.”

“Hmm,” wondered Glinda. “But if he didn’t keep his brains dry...?” she spoke answeringly jestingly—but more aptly than she conceived.

"Sa-a-a-an Fra-a-a-an-cisco!" hummed the Woozy.

"Why do you hum like that?" said the Sawhorse.

"Oh, just because I see a golden gate," returned the square animal and snickered.

They all saw a golden gate. They were lined up in a row in front of it and one or two of the creatures were breathing rather hard. They'd had quite a trot along the road down toward the quadling border and then rather a squeeze into the hollow tree that Tronto had warned them was the principal entrance into the underground land where the Gorbabrog Garden had its being. (Their informant on the road that morning had said nothing about a hollow tree. This couldn't be right!) Afterwards they'd walked for what seemed hours along the perimeter of an endless tall dense hedge (too high to jump over.

It was all down in the Oz history books that the Garden of Gorba was surrounded by an impenetrable fast-growing hedge, hence they had recognized the place as soon as they came to it, but they hadn't realized that the garden boundary-marker was so infinite in extent. It was quite a relief to come to the gate in the lengthening shadows of late afternoon. (What sun cast those shadows it would have been hard to say.)

The two cats did not stand on ceremony but scrambled, each up a golden gatepost, to the top and looked over. "The Garden of Gorba" called out Bungle, reading from a sign within.

"That's 'Abrog' spelled backwards," informed the Woozy in an aside.

"Yes, I know," said the Sawhorse and hoofed the ground meditatively.

"What are we waiting for?" grumbled the Hungry Tiger. He held his nose and took the plunge. The gate swung aside easily.

The troop of animals marched in and then stood under the sign uncertainly and pondered what to do next. Somehow it did not occur to them to do what was being done elsewhere in similar circumstances: they did not fan out. Rather, the Coura-

geous Lion was confirmed in office as leader (only the Glass Cat returned a vote of No Confidence) and he kept the brigade bunched up as they stepped out to explore. They took a course more or less eastward. As animals, it did not occur to them to keep to the neatly delineated paths intended for human visitors.

What a feast of beauty met their eyes—if any of them had noticed. Animals, however, do not react to what strikes human observers as the fantastic giftedness of nature in planning displays of floral magnificence. Except for bees—and none of our friends were bees. Only the Woozy, who was related to a *bee-hive*,^s had some inkling and would turn occasionally to notice a particularly breathtaking begonia or fabulous philodendron. The plants wasted their beauty on the desert air—not to mention their fragrance—and this was the more pity after all the rain that day that had presently dripped down through the cavern ceiling out of sight above and left the flowers all looking their freshest and most appealing.

Nor did anybody notice the asters and chrysanthemums trying to spell out messages of warning. There were two reasons for this. They were four-footed *animals*, after all, and simply didn't stand high enough to be able to look about and see that any meaningful arrangements of varying blossom colors were being created. All except Jim the Cabhorse and Hank the Mule, but they, on the other hand, couldn't read. A fairly general illiteracy was the other reasons why the beasts read nothing.

What the adventurers *could* do in an effort to locate their missing friends was to sing out and this they did from the moment they set out through Gorba's garden. "Dorothy!" they roared, neighed, squeaked, brayed, growled, barked, howled, and hissed. In the same way they pronounced the names of the Scarecrow, Princess Pretty Good, Betsy Bobbin, and others. No one replied.

"Maybe they're not here," said the little pink bear.

"There *is* always just that possibility," concurred the lordly

^s See *In Other Lands than Oz*. Editor's note.

Lion. "However, for the time being we'll overlook it. We were given distinctly to understand that our friends were last seen entering a charmed garden. If they aren't at that last charmed garden we passed, they must be here. After all, how many charmed gardens are there in Oz?" He paused ironically.

"Oh, there's the Story-Blossom Garden," mentioned the Pink Kitten.

"And the Garden of Glass Rain," supplied Bungle, the glass cat. Even she had heard of that.

"Yeah, and what about the Garden of Meats?" put in the Hungry Tiger with obvious interest.

"That's so," admitted Rex. "But luckily they're all so far away that they couldn't be the one that person was referring to." As a matter of fact the Gorba garden had also been too distant to jibe with the specifications, at least insofar as you had reported them.

The animal posse walked on.

"What's with this garden anyway?" asked Bungle, who made a point of knowing nothing of Oz history. Her own history and nature occupied her consciousness to the exclusion of all else. "Who?—or possibly what—is Gorba?"

"Oh, he's a nasty old slime ball," interpolated Hank the mule unexpectedly, "who goes around turning sweet, lovely, and good maidens—mostly princesses—into dirt."

"There's probably something deeply psychological there," pontificated the Lion.

But now Eureka the kitten was puzzled. "What does he get out of that?"

"He does it so he can marry 'em," explained Hank.

"He's just dirt himself," stated the tiger, "and like seeks like."

Eureka was still mystified. "But why turn maidens into mud?—or princesses into puddles? Why not just propose to a puddle from the start?"

"Yeah, like that one over there." Toby the Life-Sized Pug seconded his friend.

The group had been going gently down hill ever since entering Gorba's Garden and had now reached the lowest point in

this part of the park. There it appeared that all the day's rain drippings had collected in one enormous puddle: almost a pond except that it was so thick with mud it could never have risen above the designation of "puddle" or, at best, "sump".

The talk of puddles had made them all curious. They turned aside to go and stand in a row along the lip of the ugly waste and stare at its murky surface, which seemed to seethe just faintly with obscene life. It was the only hideous thing in an otherwise captivating landscape dotted here and there with the cool pristine beauty of clumps of autumn crocus.

As the animals turned presently to move on, china Toby's foot with its broken toe slipped. Before you could say "Gorba the Zreek" the pug's whole slick body had followed his foot and he slid into the pool and sank without a glub.

"Oh, help!!" screamed Eureka. Every pink hair on her body stood out like a ramwire so she looked suddenly twice her size. "Save my darling friend!! Oh, do! Oh, do!!"

"Save him yourself," said black Toto churlishly. No love had ever been lost between those two.

His three words proved fatal.

In a sudden transport of fury the pink kitten hurled herself at the curly-haired dog and propelled him galley-west into the depths of the mud: a sort of Gorba-shove.

"Tut-tut," deplored the stately Lion, ashamed at the behavior of his fellow fauve, and he waded into the mirey pool. Out of loyalty to his friend Dorothy it was the least he could do to save her pet and, incidentally, his own old comrade of the fabled past. The lion's, huge mane at once soaked up half the watery mud in the sump.

Seeing what his friend had done, the Hungry Tiger leapt into the puddle with a mighty splash. That was a signal for all the remaining animals to get into the act. Horses, bears, a woozy here, a serpent-there: they all flocked into the pool intent upon rescuing somebody. All except Bungle, the Glass Cat, who averred that mud would destroy her transparency, a thought not to be borne.

Big as the sump was, its muds were fully absorbed by the furs of the flounderers. The animals appeared as huge mud balls while the puddle itself disappeared completely, save for one lump of it that squished about at what had been the deepest point. In the end the puddle's last remnant annoyed by its refusal to lie down and dry up. The lion placed his paw upon the lump, whereupon it cried out, "Oh, be careful there! It's only me!"

"Toby!" shrieked the brown kitten and flopped across the sticky sump-bottom to her friend's side. She began to lick his face, but stopped abruptly. "Awk!" she gasped and began to spit violently. "This mud!" she raved. "It tastes too horrible!" and she was sick on the spot.

That naturally roused the curiosity of the others and they all stuck out their tongues, if they had any, and licked tentatively around their lips. They all agreed that the taste was abominable, though none took on as exaggeratedly as did Eureka. But it was a signal for all of them to turn and gallop out of the puddle bottom and put as much distance between themselves and the nasty place as possible. The glue-like mud upon their bodies they were, alas, not able to leave behind.

As the trio of fairy beings stepped off the bridge that led back to the mainland, beginning now to look around a bit anxiously for some shelter against the night, they saw Jack Pumpkinhead come racking out of the wilderness.

"Jack!" they all cried as one. No one could fail to recognize Jack Pumpkinhead even by moonlight and even if one had not previously made formal acquaintance. There aren't many characters, even in Oz, whose frames are topped by a big orange fluted globe, and Jack had carved a fresh head, just to be on the safe side, in honor of his setting out with his friends that morning.

Hearing his name called, Jack's head whirled round and he kept on coming. The travelers' cries turned from ones of beckoning to ones of warding off: "Stop!... Jack, stop... oh, help!!" Polychrome fell to the ground and was trampled by the pumpkinhead as he galloped on in his boondockers toward the plank bridge leading to the blue island.

Siko Pompus' dander went up, his beard caught fire, and he issued a no-nonsense (magical edict: "Stop!" With one foot in the air Jack stopped indeed, frozen in mid-stomp. Quickly the nimble elf sprang to the stoppee and said tersely, "That's better. Stop this cutting up and come back and act sensibly."

The spell worked. Meekly Jack turned and followed Siko (energetically slapping at his blazing beard back to where the rainbow fairy was picking herself up, dusting herself off, and starting all over again.

"Now, Jack, my friend," said she, "whatever can be the matter? Why did you ignore our calls except to trample us? Where have you been all day? And most important of all: what's happened to all the friends who set out from the Emerald City this morning?!" She had heard all about this: from Mar, the Kangaroo, you see..

That same Mar was now the one to show most aplomb in the face of the present encounter. She just held out one of her

mitted paw-hands, meaning to exchange a grip with the newcomer.

But the hand was not taken nor Poly's questions answered. When at last Jack Pumpkinhead vouchsafed to speak, he said, "Er...uhh...hmmm," and then capped that by saying, "Drrr."

This was unsatisfactory. However, two of the three fellow travelers had fairy powers, and soon Polychrome and Siko Pompus put their heads together, made a few passes, and produced a Jack Pumpkinhead who was able, at least for the moment, to utter sensibly:

"Wow, that was cold turkey! Thanks! Yes, it's been a bad case of opium poisoning but you seem to have cleared it up nicely. Let me know the name of your preparation—in case I should get off on another high. I can feel in my sticks I'm not thoroughly away from out of in under the influence even yet. I who supposed pumpkins were free of affectability by poppy fumes. But I guess if you've been lying with your head down among 'em all day long you'll begin to feel something or other even if that head is a pumpkin. I was desperate; thought I had to get help for the others and there was no way out that I could see except right through those killing fields. I risked all and dashed in among 'em. Otherwise, you see, my friends were lost, laid under an enchantment of fatal sleep that might last forever—"

"Oh, nonsense," Mar broke into this long exposition. She didn't like to hear the character of her own Charmed Garden thus impugned. "You must be cracked!" she accused stoutly.

"Ah, you've noticed, I see," said the wooden man and reached up to take down his head and trace with a gnarled finger the deep fissure that ran from vine-stump to neck hole along the line of one fluting. "It was rather tragic. It was pouring down rain at the time, so thick I couldn't see where I was stepping. As I belted along my foot must have caught in a disused rabbit hole or something, for in an instant I was down and my head rolling heaven knew where. I've spent all day in that field—for I see it is night now groping about, feeling for the head. It's no wonder if it and I are thoroughly saturated from the insidious exhalation

tions of the Deadly Poppy Field.”

“The Deadly Poppy Field!” cried the others. “Oh, heaven!” For the tale had carried far and wide of that most threatening of natural phenomena in all Oz.

Too late!

Already the powerful fumes in which Jack’s clothes had been steeping throughout the livelong day had wafted from him in the cool evening air and were attacking the olfactory organs of the three travelers. One after another, Polychrome first, they slid into comas—while Jack looked on chagrined.

Still, I suppose that was as good a way as another to get through the night in that region far from any shelter. The night breezes and the passage of time were salutary. Gradually the poisonous fumes dissipated. When they were no longer breathing them in, it was not long before the rainbow maiden, the kangaroo, and the leprechaun awoke refreshed. They stretched, and greeted the orange sun that was just peeping over the blue-green trees in the east.

“Oh, I’m famished,” declared Polychrome. “Even I!” She recalled the cold turkey treatment that Jack Pumpkinhead had received in the night and wished she had a slice.

If Polychrome was famished you can imagine how the others felt. They scarcely said ‘Good morning’ to Jack, who had sat guard over them through the night, before they were all talking at once about how hungry they were.

“I can’t get rid of the thought,” said the leprechaun, “of that foine piece of pepper-cheese I went back to New Jersey for. At the moment I’d even settle for a piece of New Jersey.”

Meanwhile Mar’s food fantasies were making her see sandwiches in stones and cooks in the running brooks (one flowed into the Munchkin River just nearby). “Look!” she exclaimed, straining her eyes toward the vermilion dawn, “aren’t those gum trees?” Her mouth watered at the thought of a bale of the succulent leaves. Like her compatriots, the koalas, she knew what was good.

“Why, no, I believe they’re damas,” contradicted the rain-

bow fairy, "source of the divine dama fruits, the most ambrosial food in Oz!"

She set off running, followed but a few paces behind by the kangaroo and the leprechaun. Poor uneating Jack Pumpkinhead was left sitting bewildered on a stone.

It turned out the kangaroo was right: they *were* gum trees. Chewing gum. "Ooh," groaned the ravenous trio, desperately disappointed. Have you ever breakfasted on chewing gum? You'll know how they felt. That the ground below the gum trees was thickly overgrown with sugar bushes was not much help. The starvers gathered a few handfuls of the leaves and licked them disconsolately as they returned to their companion on the rock.

"I wish I could help," said Jack.

Siko Pompus looked at the pumpkin-headed man and suddenly a wicked gleam appeared in his eye. "Sure, ye could an' all—if only we had a pot."

"What do you want a pot for?" queried Mar Supial. "Because you wouldn't have to wait long. I noticed any number of pot plants back there at the grove. To the right of the pan-trees."

That was all the leprechaun was waiting for. He was off at a run back toward the trees in the east. "Now what in the world...?" muttered the kangaroo.

For once Jack Pumpkinhead was thinking faster than his companions. "I'm afraid I know," he said. "There were sugar bushes, you say? And a bit of water from the stream... Oh, well, I'm cracked' anyway... Stewed pumpkin can be rather tasty, I understand... when there's nothing else."

“Official business,” you said, flashing your C.D. card at the soldierette on duty at the garnet gate. It was Captain Jinjur herself.

“Right you are. Straight through, around behind, and second door on the right. That’s the tradesmen’s and diplomats’ entrance.”

You decided not to protest. You pleaded inexperience and requested accompaniment by the captain (formerly general) herself. You didn’t explain that you were Ruler Pro Tem of All Oz—or no, ARAO, that’s what you were calling yourself.

You had suggested to Sorceress Glinda that she bring old-time star Jinjur along with her to the Palace of Magic but you were reminded now again that she hadn’t. Having this ‘second’ chance to meet the former celebrity, you weren’t going to let the opportunity for a little togetherness escape you again.

You knew from your reading that the former general, bored with her life as a farmer (and farmer’s wife) in Munchkinland (even if it was a candy farm), had sent a job application to the Witch of the South and been taken on. For many years now Jinjur had given satisfaction as chief of the palace guard at the all-woman court.

Now she stacked her peppermint rifle and followed along with a shrug. You gave her sidelong glances as you walked together toward the Pink Palace, until the young woman got irritated at the covert inspection and made conversation by saying, “You one of the refugees?”

“‘Refugees’?!” you echoed in surprise.

“Yeah. The Queen of Dreams is in there—with her whole dang family. Thought maybe you were her secretary of state or somep’n like that.”

You gaped in the greatest astonishment you had felt all day, even including your reaction to the amazing ease with which you had taken over the, government of Oz. “The Queen of Dreams a refugee!” you marveled, “—like from the Kingdom of

Dreams... off there across the desert?" You waved vaguely in the indicated direction.

"That's the one," confirmed Jinjur, shifting her chewing tobacco. "I hear that everybody that can make it is heading out of Dreamland as quick as they can go."

"But what in the world?..." Now you had one reason more, and an urgent one, to get a squint at the Great Book of Records. What had been going on in Oz? and, indeed, the whole continent of Sempernumquam?! "Has Her Majesty mentioned why?"

"Said something about an invasion but didn't give any details. She'll be waiting to unload it all on the Sorceress when she gets back."

You could have said something about the likelihood of Glinda's returning to her palace any time soon but you held your peace. Instead: "Never mind about the Record Room. Take me to Her Highness first," you instructed. The captain followed commands.

You wondered what the queen would be like, and how to address her. Why, you didn't even know what her name was. None of the Oz books you'd ever read had mentioned it. Indeed, you didn't even know the Kingdom had a queen, though it was a thing by no means to be marveled at. You wondered if Jinjur would be puzzled if you asked if the visitor was a "queen regnant". But anyway you could ask:

"What is Her Majesty's title exactly?"

"Why, just 'Queen Sonyo', I guess," replied the captain nonchalantly. She rapped briskly on the door of the Reception Chamber.

"Not 'Sonya'?" you whispered.

"'Sonyo' is the way I heard it."

Then the door was opened wide and you were both inside.

Near tall French windows at the end of the gracious room was a soft-blue-pink chaise longue with one large romantically flared back-rest corner. On it sat a pale lady. She turned as you entered and raised a hand benignantly in token of—what? You could hardly say.

CHARMED GARDENS OF OZ

You were carried away at once in admiration. It was so strange: she looked exactly as you had always pictured her. But when was “always”? for you had not known of her existence until this moment.

Queen Sonyo rose and advanced to greet you. Of course!: a real queen would not stand on ceremony, nor yet like a statue, and just wait to be approached. She would extend a hand, now clearly in gracious welcome, and you would know enough to take just the finger tips, lightly, and make a gesture toward an obeisance.

The doors clicked just audibly behind you. Even manly Captain Jinjur was perceptive, sensitive, in the vicinity of the charming queen! You were alone with the lady—or... not quite. For was the room not crowded with presences scarcely glimpsed, transparent, ghost-like? You could not be sure. Were there not sighings and whisperings just below the threshold of consciousness? Queen Sonyo too had an air of listening, of half glancing about, as she led you to the light from beyond long russet drapes.

You stood in talk, although there was no need of words. Silently you told each other all about yourselves and reached a perfect understanding. Presently you groped unseeing for the arm of a chair and sank into it. The news, though so gently imparted, was overwhelming.

It seemed that something like a vast explosion had taken place within the last week in a remote part of Somnia (which, with Morphia, comprised the territory of Dreamland). The Queen wasn't sure about prime causes. She only knew that in the depths of night suddenly every window in the Palace of Dreams was blown in—or out—and she and everyone within hurled away, in some cases hundreds of miles. The queen had come to herself to find that she had been carried quite across the great desert into the land of Oz.

Her sufferings had been intense but she didn't allow herself to dwell on that. Certainly you could see no traces about her person of her recent travail. In her evanescent draperies (you would not have been able to say what colors they were), with

her silvergold hair, and wearing a discreet coronet, she was enchanting. What would be her age? you caught yourself wondering. Oh, ageless.

And the children of Queen Sonyo? What of them?

As she had made her way onward through Oz, seeking sanctuary, the queen had encountered many of her countrymen of Dreamland who shared in the fate of unforeseen and violent exile. Among them were some of her own children, who were of course numberless. They were about you now. Did you not see them?

But the distresses of individual Dreamers were not what counted. Such would pass. What wrought upon the queen's mind without ceasing (though you could see no signs of the great internal turmoil) was a thing which she could in no way define. However, as it seemed to her, the cataclysm that had struck her country, far from bringing death and destruction, had given rise to life and creation—but oh! in terrible abundance.

How was this evidenced? you wondered. In silence the Queen communicated to you a thousand examples: things seen by herself or told of by the refugees who were arriving every moment at Sorceress Glinda's palace. (Strange. You had seen none about.) Tales of life where no life should be. Reports of whispering grass and blabbering trees, of talking machines and moving pictures, of living rooms and living languages, of animated films and inspired speeches, of spirited music coming from vital organs, of vivid colors, particularly quick silver, of walking shoes and dancing slippers, of running noses and flying saucers, of brisk walks and live wires. The list seemed endless. Everything that couldn't live was doing it anyway. Nor was the process of unholy coming-to-life diminishing in spate. The prospect was terrifying. Had you seen nothing of all this in your own travels?

No, you told the Queen: in your walkabout in Oz you had seen some pretty incredible things but nothing, really, that you had not, as it were, been warned might be alive. Neither subsequently, during your air journey by umbrella, had you encoun-

tered anything that was living out of turn, though now that you thought about it the forests below *had* seemed to seethe, rather, in an unpropitious manner and the brooks leapt in a way that was uncalled-for.

Even that was not the worst, the queen confided. What she was absolutely unable to accommodate in her philosophy was that something had happened that changed the very nature of dreams and dreaming themselves!

Glod went on shooting—or falling; it all depends on where you were viewing it from. It kept meeting particles from the expanding universe and swallowing them whole. Now that it had learnt to convert inert matter into living tissue its own life merely extrapolated furiously. That life nourished itself on all the universal waste it met and the slushball kept getting more vital with every eon that passed.

It didn't grow all that much in size. Rather, it transformed mass into energy. It was so alive it just wasn't true. Gone were the days of freezing solid in a huff. Glod had to stay loose, really to close around and convert to vibrant life every pebble it ran into.

The slushball was impatient now. It felt all this splendid life going to waste and it wanted to get somewhere and do something with it: populate worlds, create empires, turn universes into paradises. Consequently, by an act of will, it speeded itself up so as to get in quicker to where space was really thick and there was something to choose from.

Glod trained itself to be able to intuit oncoming rocks from far away and to alter course subtly so as to be able to derive maximum additional velocity from the impetus of the colliding body. It didn't mind the thumps. It only gloried every time it doubled its former speed, to streak one finally, at almost the velocity of light. It didn't intend to *exceed* the speed of light because then it wouldn't have been able to see and admire its own starry glow.

One day, obviously, the comet was going to meet something big. By now it had delusions of grandeur and determined that it was not going to be satisfied crashing on some puny asteroid where no way could you get a respectable empire going. It steered its way expertly through the broken field of (by now) Inner Space, still gobbling up debris small enough to make use of but dodging small stars and planets that didn't offer sufficient scope. Then one day it caught sight of a little solar system

that looked inviting.

Now, Glod's favorite color was blue—closely followed by green. It couldn't have said why; it was just so. Its really ideal color was a sort of teal or aquamarine. When it saw a blue star (just like Polychrome) shining down asking where Glod was, the comet thought 'That's for me!' and made straight for it. Actually the star was a planet but just then shining so bright by reflected glory that Glod was confused.

Well, you (if you are reading this book, now that your adventures are over) will have guessed what happened. Glod streaked past Mars, narrowly missed the Moon, and swung briefly (by comet time) into orbit round the blue planet. It was not landing without casing the joint. Oh, perfect!: everything that was not blue on this world was green. Whups, wait half a tick!; there were some unpleasant yellow and white patches on it. Glod hadn't time to zero in precisely if it was going to get maximum advantage of its momentum. Don't forget the comet was still not quite the size of an elephant. When it spied another one of those unpleasant yellow streaks coming up ahead it braked as best it could and plummeted straight into the first/best area of blue-green surface still left to it.

Without a murmur (of complaint) but with a splat heard round the world the slushball buried itself in a forest in the Kingdom of Dreams, some distance from the Growleywog border. That was the end of Glod as an independent agent. But its pulsing life was by *no!* means extinct.

Released from the loose confederation of its constituent mass, the molecules of Glod (we'll call them 'glodules') burst out in every direction and were most of them miles away by the time the last trees in the Grove of Academe stopped falling.

Some glodules penetrated deep into the earth and brought to life boulders of basalt and pebbles of plagioclase that had never dreamed of living before. This does not, however, imply that they sprouted arms and legs and began going anywhere. They just ricocheted back and forth a while under the ground, producing an untoward boiling of the earth for dozens of miles

roundabout that lasted for a week. Afterwards they more or less fell to rest in the same sort of jumble they'd been in before, with only this difference: that earth in that region could think long thoughts.

Those glodules that flew along the surface of the earth were able to wreak more. Having throughout hundreds of millenia been used to infusing with over-bubbling life everything they encountered, they couldn't stop now. They blasted away in all directions (though prevailingly east) and brought life to every entity they ran up against: every bit of earth, all water, the very air itself sprang into sentience. Every branch on every blown-down tree at Academe became a mini-tree in itself and every twig a personality, and all of them talking at once, discussing in excited, almost hysterical, terms what had just (be)fallen.

The wraith-like dreams and Dreamers who inhabited the country were most of them blown far from home and family and came to themselves in countries far away. They were already (both sorts) living beings and now, far from dying from the blast, they became more alive than ever before. Now they were alive not only as individuals; from here on every part of them had its own separate life. Each hair, for instance, on a Dreamlander's head was now alive in its own right. When a head of hair got to chattering a among itself—with a sort of twanging stringlike speech from each individual strand—the effect was deafening to the poor head itself. Many people (if one could call the Dreamers people exactly) went insane from the cacophony and confusion and had to be put away.

One understands that every form of order and control in Dreamland was dispelled. All over the world people's dreams began to go haywire. Within the Kingdom of Dreams itself it was total chaos, utter anarchy. If Glod had any longer been able to think and plan as an integral personality it would have realized that on its way to world empire it had already won two kingdoms (the Growleywogs collapsed without a struggle in one fell—very fell—swoop).

If Glod's sense of oneness was gone, its ambitions too had

atomized and now were found in each particle of life-giving life that it had disintegrated into. Each glodule could only think and do one thing: take over, take over, take over! by means of infesting everything in the whole world with insidious life.

c h a p t e r t w e n t y - t h r e e

The two chief Oz rulers had finally come upon a pleasant pergola and made it their temporary capitol. There they met with the various heads of state from all over Oz, and even from lands beyond the Desert, who now came flocking to the Charmed Garden of Gardenia, impelled by the various summonses that had gone out.

“What’s it all in aid of?” said the Elegant Elephant, who was present as Principal Pachyderm of Regalia.

The Wizard of Oz replied, “It’s not of our doing. Ozma and I are just innocent bystanders. It’s all been arranged over our heads. But no doubt the Usurper” (as you were now being called in snide asides) “means something by it... Oh, excuse me, there’s the Blue Emperor. I must just have a word with him.”

The crowned heads were all circulating as if it were a garden party. In fact, that was just what it was turning out to be. The Wizard had done one of his party tricks and erected a charming blue-green and white pavilion under a spreading chestnut tree; there guests could get tea or ozade and hot croz buns.

Ozma had given up her rather half-hearted search for the missing people from her court and was in conference with some of the sagest of her counselors from all over Oz in an effort to provide her people with guidelines on a larger scale. Only particularly devoted individuals were continuing to look for old cronies, the Tin Woodman, for instance, ducking the girl ruler’s council and clumping off in the wrong direction to seek the Scarecrow. As it happened, none of those still hunting chanced to cross the Brandywine brook.

Kabumpo strolled on. Presently he ran into the Frogman, who had taken leave from his traveling sideshow to accept the invitation of Glinda, at whose court they were entertaining. “How are Notta and the boy?” asked the elephant.

“You can ask them themselves,” replied the frog jauntily. “They’re about somewhere. And yourself? You’re looking in the purple.” Here he fingered the elegant one’s new velvet robe.

"I was born to it," dismissed the giant. "Come on! Want to give a gander after Dorothy and that bunch? It's coming on for evening and I don't like the idea of those frail girls wandering in the cold somewhere."

"Sure." After all, that's what the forgathering in Gardenia was principally in aid of. The frog was happy to lend a foot. For a wonder the two started off south, instead of northeast or west, whither the other vain searchers today had strayed in their quests.

"Glad it's stopped all that raining," remarked Kabumpo as they respectively lumbered and hopped along. "Any more wet would turn the girls' situation from awkward to downright unhealthy."

"Mmm," agreed Fred the Frogman. "Pretty windy though. Look at that bush." The silver-green leaves of the little shrub were fluttering in the greatest agitation.

The elephant's thoughts were elsewhere, though. He tramped squarely on the bush, flattening it to the ground. It sprang back again at once and lifted all its crumpled leaves beseechingly but found itself shaking them at the backs of the retreating pair. So much for the assistance of the Advice Bush this time around.

Kabumpo broke down a good many aspens and alders making his way through the thickets down the slope. After half an hour they came on an attractive brown-bubbling brook. Fred Fruakx gave a mighty leap and cleared it but the elephant stopped for a draught of the tempting waters.

"'Waters'?" he gasped, too late, after a barrellful of brandy had gone down. "Phawww!" But there was little he could do to get the burning taste out of his mouth or the natural reaction to the drink out of his system.

The pair blundered on, now gently upward again. Progress grew a little slower as the Elegant Elephant stopped occasionally to dance a jig or seize up the Frogman in his trunk and whirl him round briefly in a gesture of defiance. Fate was not going to be allowed to bring his young girl friends to any harm now that he, Kabumpo, was actively enlisted in the ser-

vice of their rescue!

Fred the Frogman was bewildered! The penny had dropped for him immediately and the two were not yet out of sight of the Brandywine before he realized his companion was inebriated. But he, Fred (Fritz) Fruakx, had taken nothing. How then could he be so suddenly feeling so sleepy? and what was that slightly sickish sweet smell in the air? Kabumpo's breath, naturally. But how did he continue to smell it also when moving along Upwind of the elephant?

The arrival at the top of the ridge was a sobering experience for both the would-be saviors. The Frogman's half-daze fell from him in an instant and even Kabumpo stopped singing and emitted a startled trumpet-noise as they surveyed the Deadly Poppy Field in all its glory.

"Well, *boy!*" gurgled the pachyderm. "Thass somep'n, idn't it?! A deadly popple fee—uhh, a feadly doffy pield... oh, you know what I mean..."

"Quite so," replied the frog, cold sober and wide awake—for the moment. "And what if our friends have strayed into it and are lying out there somewhere...? That would account for our not seeing or hearing a peep from them all this time."

"Avanti!" cried the elephant and plunged among the poppies. He did not stop to consider that he too could and would fall victim to their fumes; it just might take a bit longer in his case, as compared to mere people. Fritz the frogman thought of that but had no means of calling a halt to his large friend's progress. Willy-nilly he followed after.

Of course it was not very long before they came upon a slumbering Betsy Bobbin with a firmly rooted Vegetable Man beside her. Kabumpo set up a hullabaloo to wake the dead, though, alas, not the living. Sleepers of the poppy sleep never responded to mere speech. Why?!, he wanted to know, in the name of all that was mos' precious had Garter Creen allowed Betsy to come even within sight of the deadly flowers?!

Though just a plant now Carter could still talk. He did it—rapidly. *His* thoughts were not beclouded. "All will be known to

you in due course," he said quickly. "For now, be a good fellow and wrap that trunk around my stalk and pull me up by the roots."

Kabumpo had just enough of his wits about him to do as he was told. Fred meanwhile had managed to tilt the sleeping Betsy upright. Now that the Vegetable Man was mobile again and quickly darting away along a path the frog gestured for the elephant to seize up the girl and swing her high as the pair of newcomers set out in Carter's wake.

Lurching from side to side the mighty elephant swung along. He failed to notice the still waterlogged Scarecrow lying on the path and trampled him flat, though at the same time expressing useful amounts of moisture out of the former ruler of Oz. Carter and Fritz let fall a symbolic tear at the straw-stuffed favorite's fate as they, in turn, stepped over him and hurried on. The state of the trio of (hopably) still mortal Oz girls was more to the point just now.

In minutes they came upon the collapsed bevy, lying just where they had fallen, half in the fatal field of flaming flowers, half on the path. Kabumpo added Betsy to the pile and looked about for a place to sit down. He was incautious. As he stumbled to his knees, well away from the slumbering maidens, and gave up the ghost, collapsing onto his colossal side, he again played ducks and drakes with a celebrated Oz personage and pinned Carter Green, the Vegetable Man, to the ground.

That left just the Frogman as viable negotiator in the parlous state of affairs. Night was falling fast and his friends were falling faster. What ought he to do? Leap like mad, obviously, back to the vicinity of the crowned heads, who by now were sitting cosily about campfires, roasting marshmallows and wieners. But, alas, there was, no time for that.

Fred felt insidious sleep creep over him and he had no time to do more than clamber groggily over the elegantly sleeping elephant, unbuckle his great flowing blanket robe, and tug the loose end of it free and away to where he was just able to cover with it the sleeping girls. Gently he tested the sleepers' dresses

and hair ribbons. Well, that was all right. By now the afternoon breezes had dried up the worst of the soaking they had got. Nobody would wake up with pneumonia.

Fred (Fritz) Fruakx, frogman friend-in-need, crawled some yards off along the path and then subsided into snores, final victim for the time being of the fatal floral fumes.

Though distinctly stated to be under ground, the Garden of Gorba shared in a curious way in the seasons and diurnal changes of the world above it. Thus its insistence on having autumn flowers in bloom now that it was Oztober. Similarly, it got dark in the garden right in rhythm with the natural world out 'on top'. That was happening now as the animal heroes made their way back along the way they had come.

With no words of discussion being required, the party had with one impulse determined to give up the venture. Their hearts hadn't really been in it for some time. They had discovered nothing even slightly suggesting that this was where their Emerald City friends had disappeared. They had merely got a mud bath for their pains.

They ignored the blandishments of the "stepping stones" which slid up to them and insinuated that the beasts might ride rather than going on walking. With twice as many feet as humans to complicate direction-giving to the stones, how could they have any assurance they would stay together and not end up all in different far corners of the vast estate?

All except the ABC-serpent, of course. It suffered from a complete lack of feet. Probably if it slithered onto one of the traveling flagstones the stone would not go anywhere at all. Yet the creature was willing to try. "Shouldn't we do *something*," it complained, "while we're in this bewitched garden? What about destroying the magician, Gorba? Princess Pretty Good did say he's a nasty old thing. It could be our good deed for the day."

It seemed as if serpents had learned little since Eden about not conspiring awful fates for humans—if Gorba *was* (sometimes) human...?

"You see a Gorba, you destroy a Gorba," advised the lion leader laconically. "Myself, I'll leave bad enough alone for the time being."

So the animals just plodded on back up the slope toward the golden gate and were at any rate safely through that even be-

fore the mud impacted upon them had dried.

The drying process went on, however, apace during the long haul along the garden hedge to the roots of the hollow tree. By then night had encroached until the subterranean world lay in total darkness. No moon or stars here to give an orienting faint light for the guidance of travelers. It was literally impossible to do more than crouch to the ground and wait for morning. As it happened, the creatures' coating shells of dried mud kept in natural body heat so that, though they suffered from the stink, they did not experience inconvenience from any night chill.

Daylight brought some alleviation. For one thing, the now thoroughly hard-dried mud began to break off in larger or smaller chunks. The animals left a trail of trod-upon and re-trod-upon evil-smelling dust behind them as they toiled up the endless-seeming stairway inside the hollow redwood. This great tree had the disgrace of appearing no more than eleven feet tall outside on the surface of the earth. All its grand and noble length was taken up with extending down into the soil and on to the subterranean world where its actual roots at last found fundament in the fecund earth beside the enchanted garden.

It was still early daylight when one by one the animal crew stepped, or slithered, out of the hole in the redwood and found themselves back at square one. They were beside the road that led ultimately to the Emerald City, and the little pink bear was crying.

"What's the trouble now?" asked, kindly, its new companion, the blue bearskin.

"Bamse's birthday party is all over!" said the pink bear. "*That* was yesterday." And it wept woefully.

"Never mind," said the blue bear. "Didn't you say it was to be a surprise party? Maybe the lavender bear will have been just as surprised by there *not* being a party."

With that cold comfort the pink bear had to be content. For now, as the animals as a unit turned back toward home, new mysteries came to assail them. It began charmingly enough. "Hi!" cried some Michaelmas daisies growing beside the road and they

waved their leaves jauntily in make-believe gestures of hitch-hiking.

"I beg your pardon," stated the stuffy old Courageous Lion. "Did you address us?"

"Well, we did rather," giggled the daisies but would say no more. The Hungry Tiger lowered his head to sniff at them but found the plants, aside from their conversability, uninteresting and left then in peace.

"That was peculiar, wasn't it?" said the Lion as they walked on. "Do daisies normally talk in Oz? I hadn't realized."

"No. They don't," said a mailbox on a post close by the road-way.

At this the lion was obliged to beg pardon again. "You did speak, didn't you?" asked Rex.

And how. The box's flap was open and it proved a real blabbermouth, its big lower lip bobbing up and down as it talked a Munchkin-blue streak. "Sure, I spoke. Been doing it non-stop since yesterday. Why, the mail-man could hardly get a letter in edgewise. You can guess I had plenty to say. I've been waiting a lifetime to talk but never could 'til yesterday. Then suddenly, right after that heavy rain, remember? I realized I had vocal cords. Funny I'd never discovered the fact before! but there was no gainsaying it. First I tasted the letters in my mouth but so far I haven't learned lip-reading so I couldn't tell what they said. But never mind: pretty soon a robin perched on me and we had a rare old natter. *He* didn't gape when I spoke to him but took the novel proceeding as the most natural things in the world and talked on about household forms and ceremonies—"

"About *what*?" gasped the lion, constrained at last to interrupt. It was all getting more unbelievable by the minute.

"That's right. His wife had sent him out, much against his will, to find twigs and straw for a new nest. When he pointed out that birds don't move nest in the autumn, she said—"

"Okay, okay, we get the picture," broke in Hank the mule. During the many hours of their slow-motion adventure he had at last grown seriously anxious about the well-being of his dear

friend Betsy Bobbin and was now concerned to push onward and to find the true garden of her confinement.

None of the party was averse to passing forward in some haste, leaving the mailbox to chatter to itself. The animals had too much to say to themselves to allow of much dawdling in talk with others. "Fluent flowers and muttering mailboxes," mused the Woozy. "What can it all mean? *Animals* have always talked in Oz, but then we're alive. How can lifeless things talk?"

"Daisies aren't lifeless," reminded the Sawhorse.

"No, but they can't move," said the brown-pink kitten. "Talking seems to go with being able to move."

"Except sometimes," put in Bungle and recalled to their minds the Fighting Trees, who were more than just arboreally alive and could move in purposeful ways, although admittedly not flitting from place to place.

"Maybe there are degrees of life," suggested little Toby, the life-sized pug, who never spoke a lot but when he did it was to the point. "And real complete aliveness would be when you can walk and talk and do everything—the way we can."

"And eat?" barked Toto and smirked at his cocanine a little derisively.

"Well, no," said Toby, "some of us aren't *that* alive."

"How about flying, Mr. Smarty-Pants?" put in Eureka in support of her friend, to Toto who was not her friend. "I don't suppose anyone could claim to be fully alive who can't fly on his own."

That brought a chorus of protests from all the others—who were four-footed and earthbound. They considered themselves to be as fully living as any mere bird.

"Let's agree," said, finally, Jim the Cab-horse, settling the argument, "that there are degrees of life and that whatever level one oneself is on is as alive as anything needs to be!"

Queen Sonyo beseeched you in the most compelling terms to travel into Dreamland and to try to find out just what had happened. What *was* that explosion that had wrought such havoc? What was the condition of her beloved country now? Most urgent of all: what was the nature of the change in the character of dreams that her soul divined?

Thrall, now and forever, to her charms; naturally you agreed. But still, you asked to know: what could she tell you of that change in dreams? You knew of course, even as a lay person, that no one, scientists and psychologists included, knew anything about dreams. Dreams were the one thing that, by themselves alone, negated all the wisdom of pragmatic science. There was nothing in the Record of the Rocks that would ever explain how we can *see*, as in a vivid picture, the events of a dream: the colors, the textures, the most minute details of things that were never in this world.

But if anybody *could* give an inkling, surely it was the Queen of Dreams herself. What and how! did she know? Could she define processes?

No, she couldn't. Still conversing without the need for words her mind told yours. In the present case all that she knew, or sensed, was that the overwhelming 'enlivening' of all and everything that had succeeded the frightful explosion extended into the nature of dreams themselves. Dreams were now, in some unfathomable way, alive. That was all she could say.

You remained as puzzled as ever, shook your head, and knelt to take your leave of the queen of your dreams. Afterwards you saw that she turned to the tall window and looked out—and her shoulders shook as silent crying claimed her.

Brusquely you went to do your duty, to meet your destiny. You thought of it that way now. Just the same, you would like company in the great undertaking and as you passed the guard-house you looked in.

"Captain?" you said. "I'm bound away. Little matter I have

to attend to for the Queen. I think I could use assistance. Could you take leave of absence...?"

Jinjur looked up from doing the crossword in *Boys' Own*. In her surprise she stopped chewing her quid. "Hm," she vouchsafed. "That comes up behind me a bit. Still, why not? I'm chief of the guard. I can designate authority when I need to. Munn, my aide, will pinch-hit for me. When are we off? and for how long?"

You admired her. "This minute—for as long as it takes," you said. "Not long, I think."

Jinjur bent to her new-fangled intercom and spoke terse orders. Then she joined you. "Transpo?" she asked.

"That's taken care of." You indicated the carefully rolled bumbershoot.

The captain's reply was laconic but unprintable. When she had got that out of her system she spat her plug, then grabbed hold with a vengeance. There was *just* room on the handle for a hand of each of you. You were off.

The mechanics of the flying umbrella, such as you had (re)devised them, were of this nature: so long as you were in *touch* with the apparatus you were supported by it. There was no exhausting hanging on with the strength of your own arm bearing up all your gravity-logged weight. That would have rendered umbrella-flying torture in the first five minutes. No, as long as your hand touched the handle of the device you were as if weightless; you seemed to be borne along as in a vacuum. Even the buffets of the wind were inconsiderable.

You directed your course outward; at the same time you told the umbrella to put on some speed.

Across the red landscape you flew and ever higher and higher. Afterwards you could hardly tell, looking down, where the pleasant prairies of Oz verged into the sands of the Deadly Desert.

Mostly your eyes were ahead, peering to discern the first signs of that land of dreams we all yearn toward. But you could not help but notice, flying lower, over that desert so barren of all

markings, anything that might be found upon the trackless waste. Alas, there were things to be seen down there. What were they? Small shriveled things, of indeterminate color and shape. Then there were more of them as you drew nearer to the kingdom of Dreams.

It came to you, indeed as in a dream, that those were the remains of dreams. Blown out of their homeland in some mighty blast they had fallen to earth to parch and expire. All, then, in the wake of the great catastrophe, was not a pure springing to life.

And yet... As you swooped still lower for a dreading look you saw the horrid desiccated shapes reach out phantom fingers, struggle onto bone-bare knees, hold up brittle things like arms in vain acts of supplication. With horror you realized there is such a thing as living death.

Gratefully, that term of trial now ended quickly for you. At hand was the purple horizon, shot through with streams of pink, and this was the approach to the Kingdom of Dreams. You glanced at Captain Jinjur and she at you, both too awed by now for words or need of them.

Yet on you flew, still keeping low, wanting to find clues in the landscape. Soft grey banks of cloud lay upon the desert border, where the moist air of the interior met the oven heat of the wasteland.. Then green trees; yes, lovely. Then blue trees. Fine. Purple and violet trees? You saw too that many were but skyward-reaching arms of tall timber that had fallen flat to earth at no great backward distance in time. But red and black and silver trees?

It was the Rainbow Forest, of course. If you had been able to read up on Dreamland geography and topography you would have known. The Rainbow was the greatest of all the forests in the kingdom of Dreams, a land itself very largely given over to forests—to those and to some areas of more open prairie. This last was rolling country covered with flower meadows, with the occasional dale and something here and there approaching a mountain. For the landscape of dreams must be varied. Only a

seacoast was lacking to the Kingdom: that vital ingredient of many dreams. And yet again, dreams *are* enclosed things, not open ocean-like to the wideness of the world.

Even so there were riparian opportunities. Across the country, diagonally from corner to corner, flowed the river Lethe. It arose in the white highlands beyond the southern frontier. Where the river passed between the capital towns of Somnia and Morphia it achieved a considerable breadth, only to peter out in a morass near the desert rim of Dreamland. The Lethe supplied most households of the kingdom with drinking water, and the water was sweet! Made so and renewed by the run-off from the sugar wasteland of Boboland. The precipitation there was mostly powdered sugar, not nourishing to the soil, with the result that the highlands resembled, and were called, a desert. But occasionally a shower of real rain fell and succeeded in keeping things ticking over dextrosely.

Something of all this you saw as onward you flew. You passed over dreamy valleys and sleepy towns, guided always by the orientation of the fallen trees. These pointed diametrically away from the epicenter of that unexplained blast that had leveled the fair land in vast chaos. The signs of the devastation were everywhere. Flattened fences, havocked houses, topless towers; roadways covered with debris; water courses choked with flotsam; nor anywhere a sign of people moving.

And yet the landscape pulsed with life. The toppled trees bristled with new leafage, the roads were rolling and winding in apparent efforts to shake off their loads of fallen rubbish, the lakes and streams seethed, and the broken buildings groaned and complained about the damage they had suffered.

The fliers were led by their tree guidelines northwest. They saw the flattened twin towns beside the river, where Queen Sonyo and her friends had suffered, but it was clear that whatever had happened had its center yet farther west. The umbrellists crossed the Lethe at the point where the river angled northeast near a vast sandbank.

You were leaving behind the white waters of the river of sleep

when Jinjur said, "Look." You followed her gesture's direction and succeeded in making out a tiny tan figure that leapt about on the summit of an ochre-tinted mountain of sand. A human(?) shape still abroad in the depopulated land was a novelty and you dropped down for a nearer look.

Nor were the motions of the prancing figure without purpose, you soon saw. It proved to be a little withered yellowish man (no wonder that some people, seeing him on the verge of sleep, supposed him to be Japanese?) and he was waving his arms at you quite desperately.

He appeared to be all alone and certainly he looked harmless. With a nod of agreement exchanged with the captain you pitched down in a soft billow of sand of the consistency of dust. In a moment the two of you had scrambled up and you ran, half stumbling and tripping in the footclog soil. Jinjur laughed, for the first time since you had known her.

"What is it?!" you called when still at a distance. That the fellow understood your language you never called in question. In dreams one is always able to communicate. You may dream of speaking in foreign languages yourself but as good as never does anyone speak to you without your understanding.

"Rescue, fair friend, or else the land is lost!" cried the little fellow in romantic wise. You thought it a little antique-flowery, but you enjoyed it.

"Well met," you cried in matchingly bookish language. "How may I serve you?"

"I must from hence! Canst give a lift upon yon bumbershoot?"

"Maybe we can. But what is your cause? And how are you bight?"

"I am that Sand Man known of yore, and this my realm. But reel 'tis all laid waste!" The poor chap seemed shaken by dry sobs.

"Your realm?" you returned, still not venturing to tutoyer. "I made sure one Queen Sonyo was prince of the realm."

"'Tis true. My lady reigns. But I be the power behind the

throne. I am he who determines who shall dream what and when—At least, I was! Now I be not so sure.”

The man’s plight seemed pitiable but still you hadn’t got any clear picture of what was actually ailing him. It was evident he hadn’t suffered any great bodily damage during the recent disaster. The ills must be psychological. “Now tell us all your story,” you requested.

Without ado the three of you sat down on the sandbank and the Sand Man began with a flourish:

“A star fell out of heaven—”

“Right into your arms?” interpolated Captain Jinjur, who, among her off-beat interests, liked to keep up with the lyrics of old popular songs.

“How did you guess?” The Sand Man boggled. “Yes, almost literally. I was on a field trip in the woody hills along the Growleywog border and became benighted. The night holds no alarms for me, of course. I hung myself—”

“‘Hung yourself’!?” interrupted Jinjur again.

“Yes,” said the little man and looked a question. “Not ‘hanged’! I just hung myself up, tengu-fashion, by the scruff of the neck to a tree branch and prepared to spend the night—”

“‘Tengu’?” The captain *would* keep interrupting.

“Verily. An ilk of goblin that dwells in Japan. We—*they* often sleep in that position.” (Maybe there *was* a bit of the Japanese about this sand man.) He went on to give a rather full account of the nature and habits of tengu,^s then gradually got back to the point.

“I ween ye’ll have observed the comet that’s grown apace in the night sky.” Yes, you’d been watching it many evenings, and Captain Jinjur too gave firm corroboration. “The star needs must come down some time but who could have divined it would plunge to earth some four or five miles to the southwest of my own perch tree? Forsooth I had observed it light the sky like some hundred times greater Moon but so’d it done for many days—or, rather, nights. I thought nought on’t at the time,

§ A digression we will not report here, but see *The Vegetable Man of Oz*.

weening it well would do so still some time to come.

"I had but just got off in dreams. Yea, verily, I dream! 'Tis thus I get some of my best ideas for other people's dreams. Be it as it may, in my dream I visited the Sun. Then I began to cry: 'But I go not fain into the sun!' I did but mean to *peel* it like a great orange cheese.

"Yet all my protestions went for nought. Lo, I dropped into our fiery star—or it in me; I scarce know which. All I can tell is that the world was midnight black and blinding light all at one time. I was cast with all violence into the middle of next week."

"Literally?" asked Jinjur.

"Verily. I mean: yon comet struck the earth last week, not so?—or was it sooner yet?—while I but this same very day have only dug my way from out my sand bank here. The force had blown me in it like a pile, head foremost."

You'd noticed from the start the man was sandyhaired. Now you observed sand trickling from his tattered sleeves, filling his torn pockets, and leaking from his shoes. 'Sand in your shoes,' you thought; 'that means you'll come back.'

Sure enough: that was what the Sand Man desired to do. "I needs must see the scope of havoc 'cross the land. Is there hope for this our kingdom of Dreams? And will ye bear me hence to where the comet fell? and after, home again? These are my pleas of you, this day at dusk..."

When their sleep was done, and the eating urges of the Careless Kangaroo, the daughter of the Rainbow, and the New Jersey leprechaun arranged for, Jack Pumpkinhead finally got around to telling them of the sad condition of his other friends. He did this just before they cooked his head.

Afterwards, with their hunger allayed, the trio were determined to obey the last wish of their (partly) departed companion. They wiped their fingers in the grass; they'd been compelled to consume stewed pumpkin Indian-fashion, with the fingers, for lack of tableware (aside from Siko's pocket knife). Then they held council.

"Sure, we'll go the way of the rest," opined the leprechaun, "once among the fatal blooms."

"Never mind. We have to do it," stated Polychrome in irrefutable terms. "What would the others think if we failed to try, however quixotically, to rescue our friends once we heard what a fix they were in?"

"But wait," urged the kangaroo; "the prospect for us isn't so glum as for the Scarecrow's party. You two are fairies! You can cast a spell or something and stop the poppy field from putting people to sleep."

"I can't," said Poly and looked shamefast. "I stupidly left my wand at home when I got off the rainbow. But you..." and both ladies turned to look suggestively at Siko Pompus.

"That's right," urged Mar. "You told us you can wish-grant. It's perfect! You just wish the poppy field deactivated and by the time we reach them all the poor sleepers can be awake and alert. Voila: happy ending!"

"No, I can't," retorted the leprechaun. "I can't grant my *own* wishes. Otherwise I'd never have needed to go to New Jersey to get a piece of cheese. I can only fulfill the desires of others."

"But that's just as good!" the kangaroo went on rejoicing. "I'll simply wish that—"

"No!" yelled the excited elf. "Don't tell me what you'd wish!

CHARMED GARDENS OF OZ

I can only grant a wish if I haven't heard it, if I don't know what it is."

"Oh, very well," returned liar, still fairly grunted. "Let's be off—and when we get to where the others are Polychrome and I will just wish the poppy-sleepers awake and in their right minds—Oh!"

"Yep," snickered the leprechaun; "that tore it, bedad. Whatever you wish now, it can't be that."

Poor Mar raised her mitted hand and slapped her mouth, chagrined to have been so careless: and to have lessened the chances of their drugged acquaintances of being rescued from their danger. Now she devoted herself to the useful task of taking the hand of headless Jack and leading him up the riverside meadow and into the woods. Never a word said she 'til the party of wayfarers came through the forest and out the other side. From there they had a view of the undimmed scarlet glow of the insidious poppy flowers in the middle distance.

"Now be ye quick!" said Pompus as they got within breathing range of the heady fumes. "Make yer wishes fast—yes, 'twill make for better results if ye *both* wish—for if ye don't we'll all be overpowered afore we can get away."

Though the group still hadn't come upon any of the supposed victims of the poppy field they did discern, without knowing what it was, the purple hill of Kabumpo's mighty flank rising from among the red flowers a hundred yards away: a pleasing color combination. But when Polychrome, in the lead, almost trod on the snoring Frogman she stopped short in surprise and quickly made her wish.

Kangaroo Mar, sensing what Poly had done, made *her* wish. Then they waited.

While they waited they breathed. Sparingly, it is true. But even that bit was more than enough.

Nothing happened. Polychrome frowned, at the same time as she yawned.

The Careless Kangaroo sighed and settled her shawl more comfortably about her as she lay down.

The leprechaun cursed colorfully. "Sure, the!" he yelled. "Ye'll have been and done something stupid, the pair of ye! Now what'd ye wish?" he demanded of the rainbow maiden accusingly.

"Why, uh—er, I couldn't wish our friends awake and alert again. You'd warned us against that. So I wished the fumes of the blooms to be without any effect. That way at least the sleepers would wake up after a while, when the results of breathing the poppy scent earlier would have worn off..." The fairy closed her eyes.

"Well, it didn't work! Ye see that for yersel's." He prodded the sleeping kangaroo with his foot. "Yerself there!" he shouted loud enough to bring Mar out of it. "What was yer wish now?"

The kangaroo gaped groggily and raised herself on one elbow. "'Wish'?...Did I wish?... Oh, of course. Let me see: well, you said I mustn't wish our friends wide awake again, so I—er, uhh—oh, I know: I wished all spells and enchantments here to be instantly suspended.

"What happened?"

"Nithin' happened, ye blitherin' fools!" yelled the peppery leprechaun. "There *weren't* any spells here. Not before. The poppies weren't throwin' a spell. They were just doin' what come naturally: puttin' to sleep any creature that breathed too deep of the opium. All *you* did was cancel the rainbow-colleen's spell-wish!"

But he was talking to the empty (or at least only poppy-fume-filled) air. Both lady kangaroo and fairy maiden had sunk in their tracks and were respiring sweetly. Nor did the leprechaun tarry long in doing the like. Jack Pumpkinhead just stood there.

c h a p t e r t w e n t y - s e v e n

The animal expeditionary force fairly raced down the road, to end crowding into the little gatehouse portway to the garden of Gardenia. At the last they had been driven near to distraction by being talked to by every leaf that trembled on a tree and every yellow brick they trod on. It was unnatural and terribly upsetting. It was also deafening. Everything in and out of nature was now alive and, not content with that, was chattering nineteen to the dozen at the top of its voice. All the unspoken thoughts of years, even in some cases centuries, were being given expression.

"Whew!" said the animal refugees. For some reason it was as unexpectedly quiet within the port as it was unbearably cacophonous without. The beasts flopped down and all just lay there for half an hour enjoying the stillness.

After that some grew restive. They daren't go back out into the blabbering world outside; however, here in the garden gatehouse there was just too little scope for their energies and aspirations. They could not remain there indefinitely.

The rang the porter's bell and presently Tronto opened the door, rubbing her eyes. "Slugabed!" the animals accused. "This *is* the right garden after all! Not that other one you sent us off to."

"What garden?" said the kangaroo girl, playing dense.

"The garden where our friends disappeared. They *must* be inside here. We've got to find them."

"Okay, go ahead. What's stopping you? The gate's open."

"We want you to guide us," explained the Courageous Lion. Just to be sure she didn't try anything, the Hungry Tiger laid his steel-trap jaws gently about the young kangaroo's knee.

"I'll come quietly," said Tronto, convinced.

Without offering morning coffee or thinking about it herself, she led the way, pushing through the gates and giving the thirteen beasts (unlucky amount) the freedom of the

Charmed Garden of Oz at last.

The crowd looked about them in wonderment. In the first place the charmed garden was charmingly quiet, just as quiet as the half-enclosed chamber of the gatehouse had been. Some tree boughs swayed very lightly in the morning breeze but otherwise all was still. "How charming," sighed the Woozy.

Yes, charming; that was the word. The bluegreen distances beckoned alluringly, the bluebrown cows still grazed peacefully. A few languid clouds floated in the aquamarine sky. Some turquoise shrubbery close by played a symphony in autumn blossom scents in which brewing beer and floor polish played principal parts.

"Which way now?" spoke the Lion, keeping sight of the main goal.

"Which way for what?" asked the willy-nilly cicerone.

"Why, the way our friends might have gone! This place looks vast: more like a great country estate. They could be anywhere."

"Yeah, they could at that," agreed the regrettably nonchalant Tronto. "But for a hazard let's go—um, thataway—" and she flung out a left paw. "I think that's the way that crowd went yesterday."

"What crowd?" growled the lion, faced every minute with surprises.

"Oh, a mob of people insisted on coming in yesterday afternoon—after you'd been here. Two contingents of 'em, actually. I remember the Queen of Oz was with one bunch—"

"Whot!" All thirteen animals raised their voices in one squawk.

"Yes. And then there was a lady—I think she called herself Glinda the Good, though she didn't explain what it was she was good at—"

"Great heavens," said everybody, and the Hungry Tiger added, "You say they went that way?", lifting his muzzle to indicate the southwest.

"That's right," confirmed Tronto and was left behind as

her thirteen companions dashed away in the direction of the designated compass point, “—unless it was that way.” She put out a tentative paw more toward the northwest. But nobody was there to note her gesture or hear her words.

There it was at last: the most haunting garden in the world. It was evening: just the right time to see it first. The night could hold a thousand charms but perhaps *most* charming was blue evening, as vapor trails, shooting day stars in reverse, climbed straight up the western sky, a faintest yellow-azure.

Somehow it seemed right too, to arrive by umbrella. The concentration of life in the air was so dense that the bumbershoot was long since talking to you and giving out a running commentary on scenes flown over. It seemed a very knowledgeable bumbershoot. Being pure magic, it knew everything, I guess. Anyway it was giving the Sand Man a run for his money as guide.

"It's a star garden, I see," stated the umbrella, whose name, new-minted but full-fledged, was Flerg.

"How do you figure that?" demanded the Sand Man proprietorially. "I fancy it yclept 'sky garden'."

"'Sky garden'?" mused Flerg. "That's a contradiction in terms, isn't it? A garden by definition must have earth in it for things to grow. Earth in the sky, which of course is no very rare phenomenon, would rain right out of it at the first downpour. And if you sowed sky in earth it too, by definition, wouldn't be sky any more—ust as rain, once fallen, is no longer rain but simply water."

Jinjur was bored by these dialectics. She was no academic. "What are those lights down there?" she broke in.

"I was getting around to that," Flerg hastened to supply, forestalling the Sand Man. "Those are starflowers: millions of them. When you get closer you'll see they're every color of the rainbow—and lots of colors that aren't in the rainbow, such as plarsh, fint, pawdle, and the various shades of clow—"

But the Sand Man was not to be denied. "Your license, gentles!" he said, dangling. "I needs must warn you while the time affords. An what I divine is right, not merely are the dreams on life in this witch-brew of viviation but even thoughts, day

reveries, and wishes. And as for visions, pray to have a care! Dare not to picture in your mind a thing lest that thing front you, made material and rife with frightful life."

"'Frightful'?" you said. "Why so? If I dream of, say, a mountain of grape ice cream, what would be frightful about that?"

"Behold!" The Sand Man pointed. Amid the myriad of tiny pinpoints of light that the travelers now could clearly see carpeting the shadowed world below there seemed to be a sort of upheaval. The crowds of lights swayed out toward all the cardinal points and also came closer. Suddenly the umbrellists were all treading ground, then pitching face downward in something pale and cold.

"Squoolsh!" said the something. "Have a care...! Or now that you're here, have a handful!"

As it happened, you already had a handful—or two. With only a moment's hesitation you raised one to your mouth. "Grape all right," you declared. And of singularly good quality too. You licked your hand clear and groped for a second scoop.

You did not omit to keep your wits about you. As the ice cream mountain sang a plaintive Latin melody you crawled the few paces to Jinjur and the bumbershoot and grabbed their hand(le)s. "Captain! Sand Man!" you cried. "Seize hands!"

Not a moment too soon. Body warmth had already melted you knee deep into the ice cream as you spoke to its "Sorry, old man. You'll be more use to us as rock candy."

Abruptly the fundament firmed up and you were busy for a moment or two pulling your legs free of the impeding glassy jumble of the earth you stood in.

"Keep together!" you commanded. "Let's start making our way down. Flerg, can you fly on your own?" The umbrella answered by a haughty silence, flapped itself closed and open in your face, and fluttered down hill. The Sand Man and Jinjur still had each other by the hand and they stumbled toward you.

"Sleep not," the Sand Man was entreating. Captain Jinjur dragged her eyes open. "'Tis what's most fell in this my situation," mourned the man. "None can stay waking in my pres-

ence. Our friend even now succumbs. You, though, do last remarkably well. Yet I fear—”

“Keep pinching her!” you broke in, “or whatever.” Fall asleep? You were not about to do that—with so much going on!?” “And here! let’s try this.” You envisaged the praline ground exhaling superoxygen. In a moment you were all refreshed as by a plunge in a mountain brook. To be on the safe side you imagined the Sand Man sandless; with that his soporificity dwindled away, at least for the present. Go to sleep? While worlds hung in the balance?!

Next thing, you envisioned that it was night on a branch line of the Milky Way railroad, which of course it was, for did you not hear that lonesome whistle blowin’ ’cross the trestle and see the little station house of Cassiopeia looming up ahead? You headed your crowd in to the ticket window and the Sand Man spoke to the station master in Japanese. In a moment, with your midnight-blue tickets in your hands, the bunch of you jumped aboard the last car as it only slowed down, then put on speed again.

With Flerg over your arm you sat down next to Campanella, whom you recognized at once from your reading.[§] “There’s something I’ve been meaning to ask,” you said without any ado. “You and your friends are all Japanese and yet some of you have got Italian or French names. Why is that?”

“Don’t tell anyone,” whispered the rather sanctified-looking boy in flawless International, “but I think the fellow who wrote about us was a bit enamored of foreign phenomena. You know, foreign places have a wonderful reputation with people who’ve never been there.”

Campanella pointed out the window. “Look! He wasn’t sure whether this countryside looked more like Lancashire or Connecticut. I suppose it could seem to him like one as much as the other, since he’d never been in either.” In fact, the grove of royal palms through which the train was passing (dreamed up by yourself for the Occasion) looked remarkably like neither.

§ See *In Other Lands than Oz*. Editor’s note.

"Fascinating," you breathed, though scarcely as comment on what the young Japanese had said. Gradually growing overwhelmed by the possibilities of this land where not only anything (as also in Oz) might happen but *everything did* happen, you bade a courteous adieu to your traveling companion, re-gathered your party, and left the train.

Without noticing it, you had come down to level ground again. You cast an appreciative thought to the (by now fruit-cake) mountain, now out of sight in the night somewhere behind you, and left it on the landscape to delight other travelers. You had miles to go before the dawn and you reviewed in your mind just what you were after.

Both Queen Sonyo and the Sand Man wished principally to discover just what it was that had happened in this most western region of the Dream Kingdom and how to deal with it. The man of sand himself could have told the queen about the comet. He was, however, so thoroughly shaken by the vast happening that it was of no avail expecting wise counsel from him as to what to do about it.

One thing was abundantly evident to everybody by now: the mere physical effects of the collision blast aside, the great overriding result of the comet's crash to earth was that life had been imparted to every physical object—for how far a range was yet to be ascertained—and also to phenomena as unsubstantial as the content of dreams and imaginings. But, you reasoned, if life and concomitant intelligence had been transmitted to things as diverse as an ice cream mountain and the train you had just got off of, would not memory also appertain? What if you asked one of these star flowers that clustered thick around your feet or hung from the trellis over the door of Aquarius station which you had just come through?

You asked. You leaned against the arbor and queried confidentially: "What's your story, morning glory?"

Before retiring for the night beneath her pocket handkerchief (which the Wizard had converted temporarily into a rose-pink boudoir tent) Princess Ozma passed a spell, under the terms of which all her friends whether at home or abroad would pass a comfortable night. Then she read Paul Herring's delightful *Sir Toby and the Regent* until she fell asleep.

How diverse were the nights of some of her friends and acquaintances Ozma could not have imagined. She knew of those who were slumbering in tents round about her but she had no idea of thirteen animals crouching underground or of people passed out near the banks of the Munchkin River or crossing a star garden in the Kingdom of Dreams by train and pogo stick nor yet arranged in decorative heaps beside a gaudy poppy field. In fact Ozma was breathing so deeply in slumber—hough, heavens!, not snoring—that she was not even aware of what the non-sleeping members of her own entourage were doing.

For instance, she failed to wake when the irrepressible Patchwork Girl, bored at sitting around sleepless all night and frankly worried at what might have been the fate of her flesh girl friends from the Emerald City, left the tent she had been assigned to and came to that of the little fairy queen to look in and see how the land lay. Scraps had some idea that Ozma might be poring over some quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore in order to get a fix on this strange garden that was not marked on any map.

She smiled when she saw what the girl ruler was really doing. "Ah, well," sighed she benevolently,

"'tis well: the Queen sleeps well.

I would not fain dispel the spell.

She's only human, come what may.

Or no! she's not! she's fairy!... Say!

I'd better shut my trap and take

Myself to someone still awake."

With that she pressed her cotton hand to her mouth and let

fall the princess's tent flap.

What Scraps purposed was easier said than done. At every tent she investigated the tenants were slumbering blithely. Crowns were tucked under pillows while the heads that normally wore them were horizontal and dreaming. But finally, at nearly the last handkerchief-tent, a candle shone dimly behind the canvas.

The Patchwork Girl stuck her head in and there was Ojo, sitting up in bed and writing in his diary. He gave a start when he saw the tent flap open silently, then he grinned. "Scraps!" he greeted in a whisper, not wanting to wake his dad or Unk Nunkie in the other two cots.

The girl addressed only made a beckoning gesture of the arm and waited for him outside. Ojo the Lucky seized up his belled hat, pinched out the candle, and joined her. He'd been lying in bed in his clothes to get the feeling of really roughing it. "What's up?" he whispered.

"I'm not so fond of sitting still

When Trot—or Dor'thy!—may be ill—

Or trapped, enslaved—or what you will.

Come! Let's go look up yonder hill!"

and the Patchwork Girl waved a cotton-gloved hand in the direction of a ridge far off to the south that lay attractively paved with late moonlight.

"Right!" said Ojo, game for a midnight lark.

The heights were farther away even than they looked but after half an hour's stumbling along shadowy lanes the two began to climb. Here trees were thicker and visibility less. "I wish that comet were still in the sky," said Ojo.

But relief was near. When they came out onto the crown of the ridge the countryside lay open and they could make out quite a lot. Far away in the north rose the dull dome of Stone Mountain, grey in the moonlight. Somewhat nearer, to the west and south, the Munchkin River glided soundlessly. But most impressive and not far away at all was a region that lay all black. Beyond a jumbled landscape of thickets and glades, beyond what

must be a little stream winding through a tunnel of greenery, with another slight ascent on the other side, spread a wide uncluttered meadow of mysterious: darkness. But then red does often look black by moonlight.

“Wonder what that is,” mused Scraps. “Our friends: you think they could be there?”

“Let’s go find out—if you would care,” Ojo, in high spirits, rhymed her line.

Among a wide range of choices of places for disappeared people to be concealed, the dark field seemed as likely as any. The pair started off down-hill. Soon they were blundering among trees and shrubbery again. It took them quite a while to find one of the little bridges of Brandywine but after that they hadn’t gone very far up the opposite slope when they ran into the Scarecrow of Oz!

"It was a fabulous journey," reminisced the morning-glory (actually, an evening or nightglory: of the same genus as the morning-glory but lively at a later hour and of, naturally, a midnight blue shade). "Funny I can remember all that: rushing through space eons ago, and right up to last week—while now I'm fixed immovably in this soil. At least, I think..." She jerked a knee tentatively.

"You say you come from beyond Outer Space?" you queried, "and that everything is alive out there?" You had trouble picturing it and wanted reconfirmation.

"Yes, and never dies. In fact, it *can't* die, no matter how hard it tries. It's rather awful: to go on living forever and ever, regardless of how bored you may get, or how uncomfortable—or even in pain."

"Oh, well," you rejoined (something of a philosopher in your own right, "pain is mostly awful because it's so threatening. You think it may be a prelude to death. But if you know pain isn't going to be fatal it takes a lot of the sting out of it."

"You may be right," acknowledged the flower, who had never known pain and only knew *of* it in theory.

Having won your point you hastened to reinforce it. "Like a visit to the dentist," you compared. "There the pain of drilling and probing may even be a little gratifying, because you know it's going to make you feel better in the end."

The night-glory had no teeth, so she wouldn't know about that either. "Nor is our longevity related to environment," she went on. "Even here on your planet we'll go right on living."

"We'?" you wondered.

"Sure. Every atom of the original slushball carries on living indefinitely—unless it's destroyed. I'm not even sure we can be destroyed—"

"Just like Oz," you put in.

"Oz'?" echoed the flower. Then you had to explain about the magical country where you had just been spending time.

"That's right," said the plant interestedly. "I think we did notice a blue-yellow-purple-red country sort of rectangular?— as we circled this planet a few times. You're from there?"

"Not exactly 'from', but I know it well."

"I hope you all are prepared for a wave of living over there," the flower remarked a bit sombrely.

"A wave of living'?"

"Yes. As soon as air currents get to wafting our atoms about, everything will begin coming to life. Your Oz is to the east, isn't it? With what I notice to be prevailing western winds, Oz will likely get the full brunt of it. Things will be almost like here."

You were only too well aware what she meant. The trellis to which the flower vine clung was vibrantly alive. The pebbles under foot were instinct with life. The vivacity of the station house could not be doubted. The animation with which your hat was talking to your collar somewhat disturbed the flow of your own conversation.

The implications of what the night-glory had said were borne in upon you more and more. So much of what had been seen and said was coming clearer. That ice cream mountain that sang a plaintive melody. The living dead on the surface of the Deadly Desert. The remarks of the Queen of Dreams.

"Is that all?" you asked.

"All'? Isn't that enough?" ejaculated the blossom. "A plague of life sweeping the planet!" A note of triumph could be heard in the voice of the flower as it announced the tidings of world nondoom.

"I mean: it's not a political take-over, or a mass expulsion of native populations, or anything?"

"Not that I know anything about," said the nightglory doubtfully. Your remarks seemed to concern concepts unfamiliar to her.

"So there's no reason why the ruler of this country, with all her people, could not come back and rein on?"

"Why, no. I think that might be perfectly permissible," judged the flower. So that was settled and one of your goals achieved.

"Would that apply to the Sand Man too?" you enquired. You indicated your traveling companion, who was talking quietly with Captain Jinjur on a bench nearby. They were only minimally disturbed by the tendency of the bench to dance a six-step.

"Does he want to rule something too?" asked the night-glory.

"Only the realm of dreams," you explained, "which is not to be confused with the Kingdom of Dreams. Besides being adviser to Her Majesty, the Queen of Dreams, he's in charge, world-wide, of people going to sleep and dreaming as they sleep."

"I don't see, off hand, anything wrong with that," assented the flower. "He'd better watch out though. With him right here at the source and focal point of this wave of life, some of those dreams he brings on might turn out to be a little realer than he expects: a little more alive."

"I'll warn him." You went on: "So, this wave of living: you really think it may be serious?"

"‘Serious’? Yes, indeed—if by ‘serious’ you mean ‘in earnest’, ‘bound to take place’. As for the other, I don't know if you'll think it serious’ —or , just fun—that in the lands downwind doors will open and shut themselves, chairs will sit down, beds will sleep, tables will turn, and pianos play themselves, while chimneys smoke, books read, ladders climb, houses carouse, roads travel, and time flies."

Time, by the way, heals all things. By now, helped by dry weather and a brisk breeze, it had healed the sodden waterlogged condition of the Scarecrow. Slowly he felt his limbs grow lighter and not long after dusk he found he could raise himself on his elbows. He looked about him—straight into the faces of rather too many scarlet poppies.

He did a double take. “Faces”! That wasn’t just a turn of phrase. The flower cups actually resembled small faces, the black and deep purple splotches in their depths assuming the form of eyes, notsrils, lips. These were winking, sniffing, and grimacing in a very unsettling manner. When the flowers saw the straw man was looking at them they stuck out their stamens saucily and giggled together. A common impulse seemed to sweep over the flowers which had a view of the man: they aimed their pistils at him and cried, “Stick ‘em up!”

When the poor stuffed fellow tried to obey, his head and shoulders fell back to earth, whereupon the poppies all laughed heartily.

“Aren’t you ashamed?” chided the supine Scarecrow.

“What of?” crowed a couple of the nearest blooms.

“Waylaying innocent travelers and making them fall asleep forever!”

“Do we do that?” said the poppies. They looked at each other in puzzlement, though not noticeably in chagrin.

“You do it and don’t even know it?!” ejaculated the Scarecrow. “Fie!”

“We didn’t know *anything* ‘til just now, that is: a few hours ago. Since—oh, I think since that heavy rain.”

“You’ve just come to life?” marveled the man of straw.

“No! of course not, stupid.” No one had called the Scarecrow that for a very long time. “We’ve been alive practically forever, but for some reason we never sensed or thought or saw or talked before. It’s all rather strange—but also quite nice.”

“How queer,” mused the Scarecrow. He was very far from

being able to give any explanation of the phenomenon.

As he dried on he continued to chat desultorily with the flowers. He learned that they had no control over their soporificity, hence it was no good asking them to “turn themselves off” so that his friends might revive from their unnatural sleep.

Of the said sleeping friends he supposed that there were even more now. Since the sudden, brief, and flattening passage of the Elegant Elephant with three of their common friends in tow, the Scarecrow had seen or heard no more of them. He could only (rightly) guess that the fatal field had eventually merely gained two new victims.

Ho-hum. The dark hours passed slowly. It was midnight before the straw man discovered by frequent trial and error that at last his drying substance could support itself, after a fashion. He got up and wobbled along the path, stumbling among the poppies, who all derided his efforts good-humoredly.

The motion was good for him though. Moment by moment he felt his fibres stiffening and he was more than ever gratified that he had had that horsehair framework inserted within him. When he was able to walk more or less normally his first goal was the dark hillock he could just make out in the distance. He hadn't realized there was any hill in the Deadly Poppy Field.

When he got nearer he realized he knew that hill. Usually it was separated from the ground by four legs. It was Kabumpo, an elephant.

No good talking to the hill though. But wait: there was a head of lettuce just faintly discernible growing out of a crack. between the hill and the level ground. He knew that head too; it was that of the Vegetable Man, Carter Green.

“Carter!” cried the man of straw, and knelt down to get nearer. The poor vegetable man appeared to have had the misfortune to fall under an earthquake. “How terrible! What happened?! Are you in pain? How can I help?”

The (still) cheerful Green replied to these questions in reverse order. "Alas, I fear there's nothing you can do. Faith may move mountains but I don't think straw can. But I'm feeling no pain; we vegetables can't, you know." Then he went on to describe the disasters that had overtaken the Elegant one's bid to be a hero. "What now?" he ended.

"Somehow we've got to get rescued," reflected the Scarecrow fairly obviously. "The fact that there are elephants and frogs we didn't know about in this garden would seem to indicate that somebody's become aware of our plight and is trying to do something about it. Didn't the Frogman give any details?"

"Not a word. I merely got the impression our predicament was no surprise to them. They were fully occupied trying to get some of us safely away when they themselves fell down in a coma."

"We've got to get word to Ozma, there's no other recourse," declared the Scarecrow. "But woe is me; how are we to go about it? You're pinned down, everybody else is unconscious, and dear of Jack P. was last seen galloping away, none knows whither." The straw man stood up suddenly to his full height. "Wait here—! "

"I could hardly do otherwise," remarked Carter.

"Er—quite so. I'll scout around and try to find somebody who's still conscious. Eventually I've got to get across this frightful poppy field and back in the direction of the Emerald City. But oh! if only Dorothy would revive! She's always a tower of strength in situations like this. Her advice would be—" The straw fellow stopped. "That's, an idea. I wonder if I could find that Advice Bush again. It would be better than nothing—if only a little.

"Carter, you hold the fort! I'll be back as, quickly as I can." With that the doughty Scarecrow made off toward the north, down the slope toward the Brandywine.

It was then, of course, that he ran up against the night-sky-larking Patchwork Girl and Ojo the lucky.

"Well met by moonlight, noble friend!" hailed the always sprightly young dame.

"We heard you'd disappeared.

It's good to find you out, about,

And not dead, like we feared."

"Dead'!" echoed the Scarecrow, shocked. "Please watch your language! Our flesh friends up on yonder rise are too close to that state for it to be joked about."

At that news Scraps and the Munchkin boy grew solemn. It had all been a lark for them so far. This was the first inkling that something really serious was to be blamed for the unexplained disappearance of their friends. "Please tell us all you know," pleaded the Patchwork Girl with complete gravity.

Meanwhile they all proceeded up the slope again, the Scarecrow quite forgetting his mission to the advice bush. Real living moving friends were much better. In a rush, as they hurried toward the ridge crest, he related all that had befallen the party of innocent garden-goers that had started out so blithely from the Emerald City the morning before. "Now I have to get across that poppy field, come what may. But first I want to revive Dorothy. If you two will help—"

"You don't need to ask!" the pair exclaimed. Ojo added, "With my strength I'm sure we can pick her up. With you two at least not falling asleep, we may even get her out of the field." And that was what happened. As in a giant game of spillikins the trio selected the young Kansan from out of the pile of girls on the field path, then by main strength and awkwardness dragged her straight across the poppy plantation, to the accompanying wails of downtrodden flowers.

"That's funny," Ojo gasped with exertion and yawned with encroaching sleep. "I never heard of the Deadly Poppies being able to talk before."

"Don't *you* talk," commanded the Scarecrow. "Save your breath for hauling! As it is, you'll be lucky if you get out the other side awake."

"Lucky's my middle name," reminded the boy. "I'll make it."

And he did. The cool breeze blowing off the river helped a lot. It came straight at them and wafted the field's poison exhalations off behind. Any grogginess Ojo felt had quite left him by the time they reached the bottom of the slope to the south. Looking back, they saw now that the Deadly Poppy Field occupied an elevated tableland between the confluence of the Brandywine with the great Munchkin River.

There on the bank they laid down their sleeping burden and waited for nature to take its course. "As soon as she's awake," declared the Scarecrow, "we'll be off to the Emerald City. It's only an hour's stiff trot. And then Ozma will put everything right again—"

"Ozma!" cried the other two in dismay. "Why, she's back there in that charmed garden!"

"And anyway," added Scraps irreverently,

"I wouldn't say

She puts a whole lot right.

She talks away the live-long day

And then she sleeps at night!"

You fell into one of your half-trances and had to pull yourself up with an effort. Well, it was about time. You'd been on the move without even forty winks for going on twenty-four hours... No wonder even you were falling asleep. And being right here in the middle of Dreamland, to boot! You shook yourself and attended once more to the night-glory's after all sparkling conversation. Like all the flowers in the sky garden the blooms of the trailing convolvulus gleamed in the dark. It was easily the most magical thing *you* had ever seen.

The night-glory's particular glory was that infinitesimally fine lines of dark blue light continually shot out from each blossom heart along the radials to the petal tips, where they vanished into the night dark with a tiny firework-shower effect. You'd been fascinated from the start. Once while you talked you had put out a finger and been rewarded with a just perceptible little electric shock as it touched the edge of a petal.

It was of course a manifestation of all the ions and electrons of far outer space that had been clustering to the comet through the millionenia of its celestial flight. They had to go somewhere and when the magical slushball struck Earth they were shot into the ground in their billions and boiled off in all directions. While the atoms of the comet's own matter turned everything alive, the spatial ions turned everything alight. Every seed in the soil was electrified like it had never been electrified before. The seeds mutated madly and sprang into sudden burgeon and fantastic flowering almost over night. The present night-glory was just one very modest example of the gorgeous display. How fortunate too that you and your friends were seeing the star garden by dark, when it was at its most spectacular.

Now the night-glory was speaking again. "You're leaving? Oh, how I wish I were going with you. There must be so much that is fabulous to see, out on this strange planet—"

"Not more fabulous than right here in the Star Garden," you assured her. "You've got the best of all worlds right here."

"Mmm, quite possibly," admitted the plant. "But you know what the result of unvarying perfection is?... Boredom. And when one comes right down to it, boredom is the most unbearable thing in the universe. Don't we know? We've had billions of years of it, streaking along unvariedly through space. Coming to your planet is far and away the most exciting thing that's happened to us atoms since we left our home beyond outer space. But now to be stuck here, immobile, in one spot...! Oh, how I wish..."

"What?"

"Well, that I was really alive—that is, able to move about. Can there ever be *real* life without movability?"

"I wouldn't like to experience it," you admitted. You tried to picture it: being in possession of one's full intelligence, with use of all senses, but confined as if in the straitest strait-jacket, unable to budge the smallest muscle. Of course you'd go insane in half an hour. Was that how it was for this obviously sensible flower? "But I thought plants quite liked standing in one spot all the time."

"Maybe those do who are not fully alive," conceded the night-glory. "But we're not like that. All of our atoms are bursting with sentient life. It affects whatever we were bombarded into; in my case, this plant I've grown into from a mutated seed. I don't want to just stand here wasting my fragrance on the desert air—"

This was an exaggeration. The environs of the little station were far from being a desert. It was more like a jungle of rank and flashing vegetation. You even thought you might do well to make use of that path before you before it was completely overgrown. But the night-glory's marvelous blue scent, a bit like hyacinths', truly ought not to be wasted on just yourself and your companions while you remained in this one spot.

"Have you tried?" you asked, hardly yourself aware of what you were suggesting.

"Tried what?"

"Well; going somewhere?"

"Rooted in the soil as I am?" demanded the flower. "Yes, I

have!" With that she gave a heave in her stalk: a *very* magical thing to be able to do when one has no second stem to brace against. Then she sighed. "No use. I can't pull up my whole root system by myself. Pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps' is after all only an expression... But if you wanted to help...?"

You marveled. "Pull you up by the roots? But wouldn't you die?"

"I've said," reminded the plant with some impatience, "I *can't* die. The only question is: could I walk on my roots once I got loose?"

"I could help you," you offered. "Actually, I don't see why you couldn't if you can move your roots."

"Of course I can," declared the flower. "I move my toes further and further through the soil whenever I like. That's how I pick up my nutriment. Shall we have a go?"

You called the Sand Man to you, just in case this was going to be a stiff tug. When you laid hands on the tough vine stalk near the ground you felt again that electric charge go through you. The flower plant felt it too and shrieked in excitement.

When the extraction was completed, "There," you said, dentist-like, "that wasn't so bad, was it?"

But the convolvulus clung to the trellis and looked faint. Luckily its tendrils were too closely twined round the woodwork for it to be able to fall.

Some minutes passed. Then the vine seemed to recover somewhat from the traumatic experience. She lifted a rootlet and waggled it tentatively.

"That's right," you encouraged. "Now if that root can just support you—"

"Why shouldn't it?" snapped the plant feistily. "My roots are the strongest part of me."

It happened. Your chance acquaintance became the first walking plant on our planet. As simply as that.

c h a p t e r t h i r t y - t h r e e

Since the crazy old times when they laid down elaborate brick roads to connect the main parts of Oz but forgot to install bridges or a ferry service for travelers to cross rivers, much had changed in that country. When Ozma came to the throne she rationalized a number of matters that had thitherto been insufficiently thought out. One of the most urgent of these was to bridge all rivers at reasonable intervals.

That is how it happened that half an hour after Dorothy came to, was greeted joyously by her friends, and decided to join them on a quick mission to the Emerald City, the party arrived by blue moonlight at a fine structure linking the left and right banks of the Munchkin River. They ran across and then came to a halt, their only important water barrier behind them.

The Scarecrow took a reading by certain stars known (or thought to be known) to him and directed the group to make a sharp turn to the right.

"A shame there's not a boat about," declared the Patchwork Girl.

"It means that we are barred
From floating down the Munchkin stream
To Ozma's own back yard."

Everyone knew that the long broad Munchkin River debouched very unlikelily but most magically into what was no more than a rather large pond in the Emerald palace gardens. It was called "Lake Quad" and it could be seen from the windows of the royal residence.

"No," admitted the Scarecrow. "That would be convenient. But if we step out as smartly as we can, we should be there by dawn anyway."

If the Scarecrow, being the smartest man in Oz, thought himself thus able to trot, the others could hardly do less. They all set off with a will.

It must have been a trick of the moonlight. Or was it just possible that the straw man's quartering by the stars was off by

a few degrees? At first none of the four travelers noticed when the colors around them changed gradually to others. Just as red can look black by moonlight it can also be confused with blue.

The four marchers moved briskly for the expected hour and thought they'd end up in the southern suburbs of the Emerald City. They ended up nowhere. They knew they would much prefer to be somewhere and so they hurried on hour after hour. Two of the companions were tireless. Of the others, one was just up from an entire day of restorative sleep and the other was a boy who naturally could do no less than hold out as long as any of the rest of the party.

Dawn broke, an exceptionally red dawn. Princess Dorothy drew attention to the fact. "The pink in the sky is lasting unusually long, isn't it?" she commented.

"It's lasting long, it's stretching wide," confirmed Scraps.

"It's doing more than that. It's turning everything bright red. I wonder where we're at!"

The Scarecrow stopped short and compared his Munchkin trouser leg with the rhododendron bush beside him. Its flowers were all gone in Oztober but that didn't stop the plant's leaves from being various attractive shades of carmine, scarlet, and magenta. "Red," stated the Scarecrow and would listen to no quibbles.

"Oh, dear," sighed Dorothy. She sat down on a cushion bush and almost wept. "It means we've been getting farther from the Emerald City with every step for gracious knows how long!"

"If only we had some magic with us," yearned Ojo. Alas, they had none. Ingenuity was the only tool at their disposal, but everyone knew the Scarecrow had plenty of that. He had only to think for two minutes and then he knew.

"Sharp right," he repeated his command from many hours before.

Dorothy jumped up from her seat and the group set out at a run: a few paces further along the lane and then they dived down a path turning off to the north.

"Dived" was almost the right word. The path descended very

steeply and at the bottom of it was a small lake. The lake was of just that shade of red so dark it is nearly black which artists have tried in vain for centuries to capture. The walkers had to brake sharply to keep from falling head-over heels into the sombre water.

They found themselves standing on a narrow strip of shingle between encroaching reddery and the pebbles of the immediate lake rim.

“What a strange place,” breathed Dorothy. She stuck the toe of her slipper just centimeters into the thick, sullenly slurping liquid of the lake. The brown leather went black, and heavy red drops fell from the toe and stained the sand that lay among the pebbles. The girl shuddered. “And yet, you know,” she said, “it’s not so strange—”

“I know what you mean, Dorothy,” said Ojo. “We’ve been here before...”

c h a p t e r t h i r t y - f o u r

“Natalie” was the name the night-glory chose now that she was going to be a movable person. It was all right, in fact the expected thing, to have no name when you stopped in one place all the time, but she quite understood that as soon as you moved around you needed one. The reader will confirm this—and you did at the time!: your cat and/or dog has a name, your aspidistra and/or African violet does not, yet the only practical difference between the two, as far as being loved familiars goes, is that one moves, the other stays put.

In fact, Natalie Night-Glory was delighted to assume the new distinction. She soon proved to be the spark plug of your party of travelers. All the rest were falling asleep, including the very Sand Man himself. Why, even the flying bumbershoot had a tendency to fold its flaps and tuck its handle under them. But Natalie N. said, “We’ve so many miles to go before the dawn.” Actually, you weren’t sure just where *she* had to go but she clung to you faithfully as you stumbled along, wondering how it would end.

The blue-black sky arched over you, pierced by a million stars. The deep blue vale of the Sky Garden spread below, lit by a million star-flowers. In your sleepy head was the idea that you were seeking the precise point of impact of the comet. There you would learn some truth that would resolve everything. Then you could turn back, your mission accomplished.

As your group moved groggily onward Natalie Night-Glory was rabble-rousing. She kept stopping to speak to anemones, asphodels, asters, aubretias, bachelor’s buttons, begonias, bluebells, buttercups, carnations, chrysanthemums, and so on through the alphabet. She was telling them how marvelous it was to be free, to be ambulatory and able to go where one liked and make what sort of a life for oneself one chose.

The flowers needed hardly any persuading before they were leaning together and helping to pull each other out of

the ground. Then they all tripped and flopped after you, singing hymns to liberty. Some, however, were so small, little forgetmenots and mignonettes, even some lazy nasturtiums, that they pleaded with you to open the umbrella and let them ride along in it.

You could not, of course, resist their pretty pleas. You got Captain Jinjur to help you and between you you hauled the thing along like a big shallow shopping bag, stopping frequently to allow more pinks and violets to clamber in. Some oranges and olives tried to do the same but you would have none of it and ate them instead. This raised the age-old question, proposed, among other places, in *Alice*: was it right to eat someone to whom you had been introduced? You had not solved the problem to your satisfaction when there was an onslaught of roses and greens, clamoring to be let ride in the bumbershoot. With a gesture of giving up you commanded Flerg to obviate the question by flying away to Oz. *Without* tipping out any of its overflowing contents. It was to deposit the fair freight there and then return. You walked on.

You were now passing the idyllic little grove called Pogo Park. You directed your party to enter. There you all selected pogo sticks for the relief of tired bodies as you made your way onward. The dry sticks broke off easily, close to the ground. They came in all sizes and weights, so even Natalie found a very tall slim bamboo-like pole she could negotiate on. Then you hopped on.

The garden walks all led gently downward. You were never in doubt about which direction to take. It stood to reason that the spot where the space slushball had struck was going to have been rendered lower than surrounding areas. What you had not foreseen was that rains since the date of the cosmic collision had collected in the impact hollow and created a pretty lake that glimmered appealingly under the light of stars in the sky and all about on the ground.

You named the place Star Lake (it was even vaguely star-shaped and wondered how you would cross it.

"Why not ask?" suggested Natalie Night-Glory.

"Ask?" You stared.

"Yes, surely."

"Ask whom?" (You remembered your cases even at this juncture.

"Why, the little lake. It's alive, you know." The convolvulus, being star-born, was more continuously conscious of the vividity of all things than you.

Once suggested the idea seemed a good one. With Jinjur and the Sand Man looking on from under drooping eyelids, you knelt down, stuck a finger in the lake to call its attention, and asked politely: "How do we negotiate you?"

The lake sloshed convivially and replied in liquid tones, "There's some shattered timber washed up in various places along my shore. You might make do with a piece of that as a raft."

A reasonable plan. You all pogo'd along the shore a way and in due course found a nice selection of shards and scraps from mighty kings of the forest laid low by the frightful smash of the previous week. One of these (still alive, of course) helped you drag itself free of shoreline entanglements and with only a minimum of wet feet you all clambered aboard.

The 'raft' was of an odd irregular shape and an even more irregular surface but it was just the right *size* to contain you all. It posed no problems for you in poling yourselves forward across the rather shallow water by the use of your pogo sticks.

Just for a moment, there in the middle of that night-blue lake that was wrought by the stars, leaning back-to-back with your companions, with the convolvulus clinging companionably about you, you experienced a sense of perfect equilibrium: a little respite, a breathing space, in this adventure of all adventures.

Your head inclined forward. It was all so comfortable and repleting that sleep seemed like the best next thing to follow. But that would never do! You must keep up and doing, with

a heart for any fate. You stood and gave another thrust with your stick to keep the raft moving. As you did you saw the first pink finger of dawn poke the east.

In that magical moment you remembered your business and you knelt again at the raft's edge. You posed a question to the lake. It, surely, was the repository of all the secrets of the stars. "What is the meaning of it all?" you said.

c h a p t e r t h i r t y - f i v e

"You remember her?" whispered Ojo. Dorothy just nodded and even Scraps thought of nothing saucy to say. The same weird sense of familiarity oppressed all four of the travelers. They didn't remember just exactly but they were *almost* sure...

The person in question was a tall woman, not old, not ill-featured, who stood by the red shore of the turgid sea, idly twirling an eel. She wore a sort of tailed liberty cap and her dress of red doe-skin was laced up at breast and hip with pink leather strings. She had on curly-toed boots rather like the Scarecrow's and there was no doubt that she was a native Ozite.

The two children approached her warily. "Please, ma'am," said Dorothy, then left her utterance hanging.

The woman proved to be cross and bad-tempered. "Well, what is it?" she snapped, scarcely deigning to turn to look at the quartet of travelers from where she stood moodily staring out over the lake.

"Er—," said Dorothy; then Ojo took up the word: "Would you tell us where we are, please, ma'am?"

"You're right here," said the woman scornfully, "beside this notorious and ill-omened lake—for all the good it may do you."

"What lake is that?" spoke up the Patchwork Girl, getting her sprightliness back in the face of so much rudeness.

"You might explain.

We're strangers here

And we would fain

—If you'd show how—

Be off again."

"It's the Lake of Blood," barked the woman bluntly—and everybody shuddered.

"B-but!" stammered Dorothy, "—in Oz?! Home of everything that's sweet and pretty...?" She couldn't believe her ears, though her eyes bore witness to the truth of the proposition.

Now the woman turned at last and brandished a finger at the shocked children. "Oh, come off it!" she commanded. "You're



not a bunch of pantywaists, are you? — like those publishers who wouldn't let my dismal story appear in the sacred canon of Oz lore. They didn't mind, of course, having in the books the humor of such things as Princess Langwidere's multiple heads or the canned brains of the Flatheads but, as hypocrites, they wouldn't allow the poor Historian to explain how and from where such drollnesses derived. He had the chapter all written up and then they censored it out. I'm still fuming!"

CHARMED GARDENS OF OZ

"Ah," said the Scarecrow, light dawning. "We all had a sort of vague half-memory of having been here before, but we couldn't be sure. That explains it. We *were* here, that time just after you first came to court, Scraps, remember? But when the adventure didn't appear in the finished book I guess we tended to forget it.

"It's coming back, though. I seem to recall... yes ...isn't here a so-called Garden of Meats just downstream from the lake?"

"Yes," said the ill-woman, apparently beginning to thaw a little, perhaps at finding some recognition implied in the Scarecrow's speech; "—nourished by the lake, of course."

"Ooh." Dorothy shuddered again.

"Of course," repeated the woman. "You don't think meat plants are going to be sufficiently fed by insipid water alone, do you? And naturally flesh, by its very character, can't draw sustenance out of the bare earth. It's the rich nutrients seeping into the soil from this lake that support them and bring them to maturity."

"By the way," went on the Scarecrow, now hardheadedly recovering from his momentary distaste for the unsavory subject, "that's an uncommonly flat-looking eel you're holding there."

"You'd be flat too," retorted the woman, "if you'd just had your crank-case drained. Look!"

"She took both hands to the unprotesting fish and wrung it out like a long stringy dish-cloth. "See? Not a drop. Like all the animals hereabout he has to go in once a month to make his donation at the slaughter house—"

"Urp!" exclaimed Dorothy and was near retching. "You *must* be mistaken! "Slaughter house!? There's no such thing in Oz! — if for no other reason than that nothing can die here."

"You're right, girly," admitted the woman. "It's not that, exactly. I just called it so in annoyance that my pet here—this is my favorite, Neil the Eel—has had to play donor today at the Tapping Center, as they politely call it."

She pointed across the lake to where the visitors could see

among the trees the red roof of a long low building. Now they noticed too, in the distance, the large mouth of a concrete run-off-pipe that emptied into the lake just this side of the building.

Their guide had begun to move slowly along the lake shore and the four followed after. "Magic isn't all as plucked-out-of-the-air as people may think," she lectured, rather unexpectedly. "I mean: if Langwidere magically has a bunch of heads in her closets, among which she chooses one or another to wear, the heads have to be produced somewhere, and you might call this region here the flesh-production workshops of Oz. It's magical enough to be able to take off one's head and replace it with another. It's asking too much that a fully functioning, seeing, hearing, talking head should be created out of mere nothing. In fact, they're not. They grow on our flesh farm right here in the Garden of Meats."

Dorothy was beginning to get her color back. "I guess I can accept plants that grow meat products; that seems rather Ozzy. But you said something about a slaughter house—"

"No, donor station," retracted the woman. "The 'Tapping Center', you know. The monthly donations: there from all the local animals are used to keep the lake's fluid level up to par. As Ozites the donors can't die and in a month they've built their vital fluids up to a normal level again."

"Hm, practical," admitted the Scarecrow, "if repellent. And what is your role in all of this, madam?"

"I'm general caretaker of the area surrounding the lake. I hate it. I'm also supposed to keep off any nosy Parkers who come poking around." Here she glanced again narrowly at her temporary companions. "Naturally the powers that be aren't too keen on word of this horrid but necessary factory getting out to the world generally."

By now the party had reached what was clearly the lower end of the lake and the eel woman pushed through a wicket gate in a rather tall hedge. "Here we are," she announced and waved her eel to indicate a most surprising scene.

A level field stretched nearly to the tree-edged horizon, all

CHARMED GARDENS OF OZ

carefully laid out in long straight rows of growing things. It was the head-beds that first caught the eyes of our human or quasi-human friends, but presently their glances passed on to the clumps of leg- and arm-bushes, the rows of finger-ferns, and the elbow-vines climbing their poles. Verdant groves of torso trees lined both sides of the great enclosure. The foot shrubs made a brave show and there was a fine stand of hands, while toe-grass was everywhere under foot.

Neither was the supply of animal parts neglected. Fur furze was extensively cultivated. The variety of tail trees was a wonder to behold. Even the fang and claw shrubs were clearly carefully tended.

But by whom? The eel woman (who never gave her name) stamped her foot in annoyance. "Those rascals!" she fumed. "The sun's well up the sky! Even Neil here checked in at the tapping center an hour ago. What are they up to?"

She marched smartly along the border hedge to the door of a big bunkhouse and jerked it open. "All right, you lot!" she hollered inside. "Up and out! On the double! Grab those hoes and get at it!"

She stood back while from the door boiled a multitude of the most surprising-looking individuals the travelers had seen all day—or year.

If the rows of human-looking heads growing out of the red soil had startled the Scarecrow and his friends, their surprise was nothing compared to that experienced when they saw the galaxy of enormous walking vegetables that flooded out onto the garden grounds. Mustachioed carrots three feet tall, belted potatoes the size of beach balls, huge beets with their leafy tops neatly bound up, and a giant turnip wearing a straw hat were among those who reeled or rolled through the bunkhouse door and scrambled away to take up their duties in the meat fields. One particularly soigné tuber in a top hat paused to adjust his pince-nez before proceeding at a more dignified pace to exercise his calling of overseer in charge of the others.

Our friends just gaped. If humanoid heads growing out of

the ground were a shock, ambulatory vegetables were an even greater marvel. Of the dozen questions they would like to have put they asked none, as their cicerone said, quite affably for her: "Want to watch the meats getting their daily tending?"

Dorothy shuddered again—she was getting quite adept at it—and the woman noticed. "Why do you shudder?" she asked. "The meat-heads receive very good and careful treatment here. It's not every garden where the gardeners run out to put hats on the plants when it rains."

"But you call them 'meats'," objected Dorothy. "Couldn't you find some other word?: not quite so... suggestive. I mean: you don't actually raise the heads to be... eaten, do you?"

The eel woman looked at her scornfully. "Why not? What's so holy about human-appearing plants—for of course they're *not* human—that they can't be eaten? The human race is so sacrosanct that even something that only *looks* human must be shielded at all costs? Humans, except in their own eyes, are no less fit to be boiled or fricasseed than noble stags or kindly cows or majestic moose or splendid whales whom, out in the world, they grind up and serve to the dogs without even batting an eye."

That got her told. Even Dorothy had to admit the justice of the standpoint. Even so, she didn't like it. "But couldn't you call them well, 'flesh', for example?"

Even her ally the Scarecrow had to balk at this. "Good heavens, my dear," he exclaimed. "It was you yourself, way back in book one, who started everybody off by talking about 'meat people'. I thought myself at the time it sounded a bit cannibalistic."

"That's only because I was a little girl," Dorothy defended herself. "I wasn't supposed to know about a grown-up word like 'flesh'. Also of course, I had to be spared any connection with the sexual overtones of that word. Better an amusingly childish suggestion of cannibalism than anything even faintly smacking of ... *sex*."

"I'm older now, and not such a nitwit, I like to think. I move





we stop talking about human beings—or anything that looks like them—as ‘meat’!”

“Well said!” cried Scraps and praised the girl for her sense.

“Well said indeed,” she addressed the others.

“And when you feed

On things that bleed

I hope you’ll heed

What Dot’s decreed:

It’s only when you talk of flesh that’s edible

That you can mention ‘meat’ and still be credible!”

Well, finally Ozma woke up. She'd certainly had a nice restful long night. 'But,' as she said to herself while looking at her rosy face and tumbled brunette locks in a hand glass before rising, 'I just can't believe there's anything seriously amiss with my friends even if they have gone astray in such a delightful garden as this.' She had a premonition that the solution to the mystery was just around the corner and that it would be a neat and simple one. She wanted to spin out the time before the inevitable early return to bland everyday at her palace in the Emerald City.

The princess had a leisurely breakfast in bed. She sent word asking for those of her followers whose silhouettes she could see through her tent walls in the bright morning light to quit pacing like caged beasts in their anxiety to confer with her and learn what her plans were. She allowed in only one. That was Glinda, the wise Sorceress of the South.

"Well," said Ozma as the two of them buttered fragments of brioche and sipped the linden tea, "have you been able to diagnose the case?"

"Yes, I think so, Your Grace," replied Glinda. *She* had not been a sleepyhead but had sat up all night, going over her notes, conferring with such of Ozma's counselors as had special knowledge, meditating, and doing a little plain old hexing.

"What do we have to do?" enquired the Girl Ruler engagedly.

"First thing, I should say — when you're *quite* ready, dear — is to make a short jaunt to the famous old Deadly Poppy Field. I think you may see something there that will surprise you."

The ceremonial progress that Ozma ordained left the Wizard's tent city and proceeded at a leisurely pace across the fields and down to the stream. When at length it came up the opposite slope to the top of the ridge even Glinda saw something that surprised her.

Where they had thought to see all fixed in a ghastly trance of sleep, there was *movement* in the field of red. Five beings were

displaying vivid wakefulness—or five and a half, if you counted Jack Pumpkinhead’s headless body, which blundered about here and there, falling down a lot.

“Lignum!” cried Ozma delightedly. “How did you get here?” The glad Sawhorse rushed to his mistress and dropped down in a kneel before her, all a-tremble with emotion and devotion, sweating splinters. After him undulated the ABC-serpent and it too knocked its blocks together in sign of respect and enthusiasm. The china pug, the glass cat, and the blue bear-skin were more restrained in their greetings.

The Sawhorse was never much given to long speeches but in this case some words of explanation seemed obligatory. “Your Majesty!” gasped the horse and whinnied loudly with satisfaction. “We were exactly on the point of going off again to try to find you! We’ve only been here a few minutes but even so it was time enough for everybody to fall in a faint—” Thus did the animal diagnose the powerful soporific effects of the magic flower field.

The long train of Queen Ozma’s followers, with the two highest-ranking royal dames in the van, now moved on to the very verge of the red field and the Sawhorse pointed out the slumbering Lion and Tiger, the snoozing cab-horse and the unconscious mule, the somnolent Woozy and the sleeping dog Toto, as well as an untimely hibernating bear and a napping cat.

“But luckily,” ended Lignum, “not quite everybody passed out. We five were just going to be off—” He counted. “Hey, wait a minute. Where’s Toby?”

A glance about revealed the magically living little pug again lying doggo next to his friend, the comatose Pink(ish) Kitten, whom he did not plan to abandon even to go in search of rescue.

“Hello, Toby,” regreeted Ozma. “This is a parlous state of affairs, isn’t it?” The china dog had nothing to say in denial.

Now the young queen’s attention moved on and so did she. As she tried to stifle her own yawns she walked about the flower field, trampling down any number of wickedly exhaling poppy

blossoms—and richly they deserved it. At various times she came upon two of her girl friends, from the Palace of Magic, another pretty flower princess and a rainbow fairy, a large frog, a leprechaun, a blue kangaroo, and an elephant. “Goodness me,” sighed the fairy ruler. “What a mixed bag.” She was very touched at the plight of so many worthy creatures who, for whatever reasons, had been trapped untimely by the fatal flower beds.

Then she happened to glance under the elephant. “Good gracious!” she cried. “Carter Green! You here too?”

The Vegetable Man genuflected, as far as such was able to be performed by a head only. “Pardon me, Your Grace, for not rising,” he apologized. “Our friend Kabumpo is holding me down.”

“So I see. Does it hurt?” enquired the kindly queen.

“Oh, no,” Green reassured her. “Only, I can just imagine what long roots I’ll have put down, all the while I’ve been lying here. I seem to feel them fraternizing with roots of the poppies, which of course is not a thing I would most have favored.”

“Oh, dear.” Ozma smothered another yawn. “We must do something about that.”

“Yes, indeed,” took up her companion, the good witch of the South, rather sharply. She knew Ozma was stretching and sighing, not out of boredom, but as a result of the insidious influence of the opium flowers. Even so, it didn’t appear too well to her followers. “Also,” she pursued her sovereign’s thought, “about a good deal else. It’s high time we put to rights this wretched poppy field. It’s caused trouble enough for far too long a time—”

“Yes?” said Ozma and stopped blinking. “What shall we do? That is: you...” Her sentence trailed off.

With the Oz queen’s tacit *carte blanche* Glinda put down the capacious satchel she carried and took from it an enormous flit-gun of metallic-red metal (called quadlingum: found only in a limited area near the desert border of the red country). While the train of courtiers watched in awe she aimed the instrument at the nearest bank of poppies and fired.

A silver mist shot from the weapon and spread itself across

an expanse of flowers perhaps twenty yards broad. At once, with a weird sizzling or tiny popping noise (after all, they were poppies), red flowers by myriads vanished into air, roots, stems, blossoms, and all. From where they had grown Polychrome the rainbow's daughter and a big kangaroo slowly righted themselves and looked about in bewilderment.

The sorceress worked quickly. She strode forward to the retreated rim of the flower field and fired again. Soon she was almost running as she followed the dwindling poppy acreage into the middle distance.

The courtiers who had remained awake surrounded with glad cries the newly waking ones. Everybody was talking at once when presently they saw the Southern Sorceress returning to them, as she blew down the muzzle of the flit-gun and restored it to her satchel. In the far distance the people could see a clump of poppies about ten yards square: all that remained of a dangerous flower field that over the years had grown to cover a whole square kilometer.

"That's enough of that!" stated Glinda. "Even though it's a bad thing, the Deadly Poppy Field has come to be a cherished landmark of old Oz, like wicked witches, for instance, and gnome kings—so we won't do away with it entirely. But I've surrounded it with a ring of invisible fire. That will keep it within bounds—and blundering visitors out!"

c h a p t e r t h i r t y - s e v e n

Now you knew—and dawn was coming. It was time to hurry on to the end of everything.

Silently you poled to the farther shore of Star Lake, being careful not to wake your companions. The little twenty minutes' sleep did wonders for them. They woke with a start and felt quite fresh as the raft nudged the shore. You gave a hand to help them onto land among the glowworms that clustered thickly just there. Cool blue breezes were riffing the grass as the world stirred to returning day.

Fleg was waiting for you on the bank, having made an incredibly quick trip to Oz and back. It had even had time for a brief snooze too, having spotted your raft from on high and made a quick calculation as to when and where you would land. "Now then," it said, feeling fairly restored, "drop those pogo sticks. You won't need them any more."

"No," you agreed. "And we mustn't tarry. First it's off to the Sand Bank. That's right, isn't it, Sand Man?"

The rumpled fellow looked a pang. "I dare say." He remembered the thousand and one things he would have to oversee in restoring order in the disasterstricken land of dreams. It would have been so much more fun to continue this dream adventure. To go to Oz and meet again (they were old friends) the Wizard and Wam the necromancer and the sorceress Glinda and others whose spells spread almost as universally as his own.

At the Sand Bank you left him preparing to enter the vaults and see if anything was to be traced of the fortune in sand dollars he had had cached there for many ages. They (as in Oz) used no money in the Kingdom of Dreams but the Sand Bank account was regarded as a national heirloom. The Sand Man hoped to refind the money amidst the debris of the shifted bank and to reconstitute the account, if he could, as a heritage for future ages.

Now there were the yellow sands of the desert to be crossed again. As you and Jinjur clung to the bumbershoot handle, with

Natalie hanging on any old how and fluttering in the breeze, you were gratified to see that the tragic undead on the barren wastes were there no longer. You allowed yourself a happy hope that, unable to die, the shriveled forms had blown away to some land where they could live, recover, and put on weight. After all, life was now burgeoning in every mote of dust hereabouts. Why should not corpses live? to add a note of ghastly color.

The sun was high when you reached the Pink Palace. Now your heart was torn. You knew the sands were running out, yet how could you pass this way this last time ever and not salute once more *the* lady? In the end you parked the umbrella and its flower passenger with Corporal Cinna Munn and ran in with Jinjur. You found the melancholy Queen in Glinda's wavering morning room. Her children were with her. You sensed their spectral presence as you went to one knee and pressed the lady's hand with fervor. "I may not stay," you announced star-crossed-romantically, "but I needs must bring the news. You may return to your kingdom in safety."

The pale grey eyes lightened to a gleam.

"The disaster is over," you went on, "—was already, so soon as a star had crashed—once only in a region near your western border. The results, after the initial destruction, are nearly all favorable!"

Wordlessly you spoke of a hundred wonders you had beheld: of a purple-blue horizon shot with pink, of the soft wet clouds that boiled at the rim of a desert, of red, black, and blue trees catching the sun and tossing it back in the beautiful Rainbow Forest, of rolling prairies where not a blade of grass had died; a white river that carried off the sweet refuse of countless dreams; two tumbled cities—that yet lived! and would rise again; topless towers whose every stone could speak; fallen trees fanning in a star-burst; winding roads that tied themselves in knots; an ochre mount of sand and an ochre figure that capered nimbly, speaking Old Somnian ["My Sand Man!" said the Queen of Dreams in delight]; a tale of terror told, but with a happy ending; a flight à trois by bumbershoot; cloud streamers in a

twilight sky; a mountain of grape ice cream or rock candy or fruitcake; night on the Milky Way railroad; a grove of royal palms, already growing upright; a convolvulus that told its story [you showed a single blossom in your button-hole]; the brilliancies of a star garden by starlight; the miracle of walking plants; an umbrella that flew away loaded with flowers; a park of flourishing pogo plants all briskly upright too; a midnight-blue lake from beyond space; a water journey to the heart of knowledge; and some friendly glowworms who welcomed a new day.

“I shall go back!” cried Queen Sonyo’s mind to yours.

Then you knew that you had told your story well.

"Of course they're not grown for food!" snorted the eel woman contemptuously. "I can assure you, if we were going to grow human parts as fodder we wouldn't waste our most valuable acreage on bony heads but would plant out the entire area to thigh thickets and buttock bushes."

Dorothy blushed but managed to cover her embarrassment by asking, "What *do* you grow them for then?"

"Spare parts! We do a thriving business supplying hospitals and clinics. Nobody can die in Oz, of course, but body parts can get badly mangled and then they want replacing."

"It's not just to pander to some folks' vanity then?" realized the Scarecrow with satisfaction. "I had some idea they were raised merely to supply people like Lady langwidere... or as ammunition for the Scoodlers."

"We have better things to do with our time, and more respect for our produce, than to waste them on frivolities like that."

"Good!" exhaled young Dorothy heartily. "So 'Garden of Meats' *is* an unworthy misnomer? No wonder the phrase got censored! But the real purpose of the garden need not be despised."

The woman looked at her with grudging respect. "What would *you* call it then? 'The Flesh Farm'?"

"We—ll... I still feel a little gingerly about that word too. But what about—er, the 'Plantation of Protoplasm'?"

The woman laughed harshly. "That's splendidly obscure, and dodges the issue nicely."

"Maybe 'the Replacements Ranch'?" suggested Ojo.

"Ha-ha!" The woman now laughed really delightedly, and suddenly seemed to get into a good mood, though no better a one than that she continued to express her usual derision. "That's a real gem of euphemism and circumlocution. All right: I'll suggest it at the next directors' meeting."

"And we'll let Ozma know," offered Dorothy. "She'll want to have it changed on the maps."

"Ozma?!" The eel woman stopped short. "That's right, I do seem to have a vague memory from when you were here before that you know the ruler of Oz..."

"Of course," said Dorothy with almost a sniff. She couldn't forget that she was a Princess of Oz; in her own right. "The dear Queen and I—we are... very close." She suddenly realized that bragging and name-dropping are not socially very graceful.

"Maybe you could do something for us," said the woman. She moved on again down the rows of growing heads. Our friends followed after, treading terribly warily as if it really were human heads they moved among and fearing to put a toe in somebody's eye. The situation was not helped by the chorus of chatter and groans and whistles and calls of greeting that issued from the produce.

"Hm!" snorted their guide in an aside. "I wonder what's come over them. I've never known them to be so jabbery before. Usually they hardly ever speak... But you hear what they're saying, don't you?"

The visitors stood still to listen. "This one's asking for a drink," reported Dorothy of a russet-haired girl-head at her feet who looked remarkably like her own friend Betsy Bobbin.

That wasn't what their guide woman meant. Nevertheless she called to an enormous kohlrabi gardener who was working with a watering can four rows away. He looked up with a start and hopped nervously nearer. Unlike the majority of the vegetable workers they had seen here this one's vegetable body really was his body, not his head. The body was fairly nattily dressed in a tailcoat (ideal for gardening wear) and a polka-dotted shirt open to the breast for greater comfort. He brought his can forward and as the plant tilted its head expectantly he put the spout to the mouth of the girl and gave her a big drink.

"That takes care of that one anyway," sniffed the woman. "Don't know what it wants a drink for, after those downpours all day yesterday. Probably just trying to attract attention." With only a curt nod of acknowledgement to the kohlrabi she moved on. "You didn't hear them?" she pursued.



"Ma'am, do you mean," put in the Scarecrow, "their cries of 'Help, help!' and 'Rescue!'? I heard that right enough."

"Just so. The whole crop is overripe. They're all panicking to get picked. September is their normal harvesting time but there've been almost no orders for them. I guess people are being more careful not to get their heads mangled these days. They're afraid they'll go to seed! or get thrown on the compost heap." She laughed again callously. "Anyway, that's what we'd like to send to the Girl Ruler about: has she got any bright ideas about what we can do with the crop, rather than just plough it under?"

"Oh, we'll be sure to ask!" Dorothy hastened to affirm. "Ozma knows everything. She's certain to think of something."

"Here!" Bending down suddenly and dropping her eel (who took the undoubtedly looked-for opportunity and slithered away among the head-stalks), the woman, with a firm grasp and an expert twist of the wrists, snapped off a delicate-looking woman's head with long turquoise locks. "Carry that along! as an example," she ordered, and handed the head to Scraps. "What about the rest of you? Samples, anyone?"

The Scarecrow, with a sensitive gesture, declined but the two children, captivated with the idea of a head toy apiece for one's very own, accepted eagerly. Dorothy chose the Betsy' head and Ojo opted for an old gentleman who, he said, reminded him of his Uncle Nunculus.

After ten minutes the party reached the end of the head beds, which petered out in the shadow of a plantation of rabbit bushes. "These of course do get eaten," indicated their guide. "We ship a lot of the fruit to the capital. I believe quite a number of ravening beats live there: a Cowardly Lion?—" She looked a question.

"'Courageous'," corrected the Scarecrow.

"And a Terrible Tiger—"

"'Hungry'," softened Dorothy.

"Oh, that's right. He apparently consumes a vast amount of rabbit fruit. And there are others. Since the Ruler's edict against

eating fat babies, we've never had any trouble in unloading our animal-meat crop."

Here the woman pushed through another slatted gate in a high dark-red hedge and the travelers found themselves looking out on an ordinary pink Quadling meadow. "That's the limit of the—er, ranch," stated the caretaker. "Now don't forget what I asked you."

"But—" Dorothy hastened to say, cradling her head vegetable, "which way is the Emerald City? Is it far?"

"You can be there in an hour and a half—if you step on it," said the eel woman and she showed them the way.

c h a p t e r t h i r t y - n i n e

The scenes of joyful reunion were indescribable. Let's describe them.

Polychrome and Mar the kangaroo, as the first to revive, rushed into a brief fond congratulatory embrace, then looked around for the Frogman, whom they had just been in the act of going to rescue when something greater than either of them had overwhelmed them. They were amazed to see that they were in the midst of a great crowd of people and other creatures and they supposed rightly that these had had something to do with their own timely awakening. They had not far to seek to persuade themselves of the good Frogman's equally fortunate revival, for there he was, scaling the flanks of the purple mountain's majesty in the middle distance.

Fred Fruakx of frog fame clambered up on the Elegant Elephant until he came to his free ear, on which he pulled long and heartily. At last the exercise paid off for the great animal slowly raised its head and said, "WRRRRNNH!", before the head fell to the ground again. Kabumpo was suffering not only from anesthetization but also a hangover, so he was the very last of all the victims of the poppy field to come fully round.

When he did, he rose to his feet, drew himself up to his full thirteen-foot height, and blew a blast on his trunk heard round the world. It was also heard by Carter Green, the Vegetable Man, who had the marvelous good fortune not to be trampled when the great pachyderm finally stood up. He now set up a piping wail and when Kabumpo looked down and saw him he wrapped his trunk around his old acquaintance and neatly tweaked him up by the roots.

Sure enough, in the many hours since he'd gone to earth the vegetable man had put down long rootlets. Now he commandeered the errant Jack Pumpkinhead's bark body (with which Jack at the moment wasn't doing anything sensible anyway) and sat down on it (so as not to reroot at another point) to snip off all

superfluous tendrils, much as we might sit and cross our legs to clip toenails.

At last Carter was ambulatory again and whom should he rush to congratulate but his own original friend at court, Betsy Bobbin? who was still rubbing her eyes and yawning after having crawled out of the pile of girls. She looked around her with joy at seeing everyone restored from the spell of the poppies. Or nearly everyone. She gaped. Dorothy had disappeared)

“Oh, gracious!” cried the girl. “Where can she be? And poor Jack! he’s lost his head. And... and—oh, no: the Scarecrow too. Where’s he?!”

No one had an answer to this question. Trot and Urtha, however, expressed themselves so gratified to see Betsy safe and sound that they were not inclined to repine at this moment. Suddenly Betsy caught sight of her companion from her original arrival in Oz, Hank the Mule, and she let out a scream of delight that quite dispelled for the moment her concern for the safety of Dorothy and the Scarecrow.

Hank galloped near and heehawed with excitement. Then he said, “Betsy, my dear, here are our friends Jim and Lignum. Jim too was knocked out by the poppy fumes. I guess we all know how that feels by now. I’m glad it’s over.”

“Oh, so am I!” breathed Betsy. “But who do we have to thank for it?”

“Sorceress Glinda,” supplied Lignum the Sawhorse, who, being true to his name, saw the whole thing. “She used a sort of magic repellant propellant—and that’s the result.” The Sawhorse raised a gold-shod hoof to point at the vastly shrunk poppy field in the distance.

In the middle distance between, the group observed some cats and dogs and bears and their attention was distracted. Arm in arm Betsy, Urtha, and Trot moved nearer to the animals, who were celebrating their release from the fell spell by performing a ring dance round the figure of the Elegant Elephant as Oztober-pole. Their equine friends followed af-

ter the young ladies, although not arm in arm, and they all joined the dance.

There was even music! The Frogman used a couple of sticks to pound out a hollow-sounding cakewalk on the graduated blocks of the ABC-serpent doubling as xylophone. Siko Pompus the leprechaun drew from his pocket the inevitable miniature harp, on which he kept up an obbligato.

But the problem of their missing friends would not go away and soon Betsy and Trot slipped quietly from the circle of the dance and diffidently approached Ozma and Glinda, whom they at first could scarcely see for the number of crowned heads clustering around them in earnest confabulation.

Ozma, as is well known, was all-aware, so it was not many moments before she moved through the crush, still talking, and took the two little girls each by the hand. Breaking off her reasoned exposition, she said, "Welcome back, dears! You were long gone in sleep, weren't you? But now we've dealt with those naughty poppies. They won't bother anybody any more."[§]

"Thank you so much, Ozma!" enthusiasticized the girls. "It really was awful—in that violent rain-storm and yet not being able to stop going to sleep. But yet..."

"Yes?" said the queen. "What is it?"

"Well," volunteered Trot, "we're *almost* as worried still, because we can't see Dorothy or the Scarecrow anywhere. Do you know what's happened to them?"

"That's exactly what I've been discussing with my counselors. You see, not only are the Scarecrow and Dorothy unaccountably missing but so are the Patchwork Girl and Ojo the Lucky!"

The girls looked alarmed but of course had nothing to suggest. Ozma went on: "We've finished our business here. Nearly all the missing friends have been found. I suggest we move on back to the exit gates. A quick return to the palace

§ But see *Aunt Em & Uncle Henry in Oz*. Editor's note.

seems in order for a look at th Magic Picture to see where the truants are.”

Again the girls were silent, remembering the unbudgeability of those gates, but they were confident the fairy would find some way to part them. For a last time a royal progress was made down the slope to the Brandywine, some taking last looks from the ridge top, though hardly fond ones, at the troublesome poppy field in the far distance.

You took a last sip of the raspberry tea Captain Jinjur had ordered laid on and swallowed the last bite of walnut cake. The table trembled. "I wish it wouldn't," said Queen Sonyo, articulating for the sake of the general.

"It's one of the side effects," you reminded her. "Everything's come to life, you see. Everything that the weather can get at, that is. The life element rains down with every precipitation and so the palace is now alive. As we see, it jitters and jumps quite a bit. Let's just be glad the table itself hasn't yet found life."

"I'll see to it that it doesn't rain on it," declared Jinjur grimly. She took a surreptitious chaw off her plug, for dessert.

"And I'll do what I can," you promised, ever mindful of your demonstrated great power of wishes. Only, it seemed a pity to go devitalizing things right and left just because you weren't used to seeing them alive and because they were more useful to humans when inert.

The moment came. "Now, my dear Lady, I must away. This is goodbye, perhaps not to meet again." There followed a sentimental scene between you and the Queen of Dreams over which we'll draw a discreet veil.

"Look after her," you cautioned the captain as she followed you out.

"I warrant you, my liege," muttered the guards-woman, and you knew the gentle queen was in safe hands until Witch Glinda should return to speed her back to her rightful realm and to *all* her children.

Now you shook hands with Jinjur, exchanged salutes with Corporal Munn, and flew away by bumbershoot with Natalie Nightglory streaming behind, as alive as ever but admittedly not at her sprightliest by morning light. Up you rose over the red clover fields, the pink palace fell behind, and you winged it across murmuring meadows, prattling prairies, and babbling brooks toward the green city far away.

The first that there did greet your stranger soul was Dorothy

Gale in her sunbonnet and bearing an extra head. ‘What in the world!’ you wondered. Instead of landing on the palace roof as you had planned you swooped down to alight in front of the startled girl as she with three companions approached the carved olivine portal of the Palace of Magic.

“You!” near-shrieked the young princess and was close to dropping her other head as she appeared to want to launch at you with her fists. “*You’re* to blame for all this!—for all of us being trapped in that awful garden [“Awful”!? Your lovely garden that you so longed to see, just because it *was* so lovely!] — and and usurping Ozma’s throne [Dorothy was after all not so grown up but that she pronounced it ‘uswerping’] —and, oh everything!”

You could have wept. In fact probably you secretly did weep. To be thus stormed at by, of all little girls in the world, the one you would most like to be liked by!

Dorothy herself was crying even harder and the Patchwork Girl had to put her arms around her and try to console her, while looking at you reproachfully.

Oh, to be looked at reproachfully by Scraps, the magic Patchwork Girl! Was this what your marvelous Oz adventure had devolved to? When all the time all you wanted was just to be helpful to the famous personages and to become, if in any way possible, their friend. It *was* a crying shame.

You lent Dorothy your handkerchief. She grabbed it without saying thanks. Anyway the two fellas, the Scarecrow and —surely that was Ojo with his belled blue hat? — were looking at you more curiously than inimically. You addressed a quiet word to them. “Could we go inside—to the, er, throne room and talk things over? I have some explaining to do.”

“Yes, indeed.” The genial Scarecrow strode forward, pulled the antique doorbell, and in a moment in response to the muffled jangle of the clapper the soldier with the green whiskers opened the door.

“Thanks, O.A.,” you said quietly if familiarly, and waited for the others to pass ahead. Dorothy, a little shamefast now, had

stopped her sobs and marched authoritatively in front of the rest up the ceremonial staircase and forward to the central sanctum of the royal Palace of Magic.

As Acting Regent of All Oz you moved ahead to assume the royal seat and thence you looked benignly at the others. You spoke. "I have had revealed to me the secret of this, our mystery. It *is* a mystery—almost in the religious sense. I won't go into that now. I must only say that shortly all will be over, and everything—and -body—restored to its rightful place. Quite inadvertently I have been the cause of some upsetting experiences for many of you, but I want you to know it was not of my doing. My only wish was to be liked by you all—of whom I myself have so long been so fond."

Princess Dorothy looked a little mollified at that. "But who are you?" she pressed. "And how did you get your—well, it looks like great magic powers? For instance, I notice you're carrying poor Button Bright's magic umbrella." (This famous totem was pictured in all books of Oz lore and its appearance known to every Oz schoolchild.)

You stared at your bumbershoot. "Good heavens! So it really *is*—" you muttered, before remembering to appear to the others as all-knowing. You related briefly how the custodian at the gatehouse at Gardenia had handed it to you. But you didn't elucidate as to how you had made that happen.

"Hi, Dot," now put in the umbrella cheekily. "How's Trot? and Cap'n Bill?"

Dorothy just stared. The total of things today that were talking and living where they had no occasion to was beginning to be overwhelming for the girl.

Now yet another being declared itself: "That's a mighty nice head you're carrying, miss," spoke up Natalie the night-flower. "Hello there!" she addressed the head directly, and Dorothy's bundle simpered prettily and lowered its eyes.

"It's a souvenir from the Garden of—er, from the Replacements Ranch," said the princess. "I kept it because it reminds me of another of my friends, Princess Betsy Bobbin—. But that's

neither here nor there." She placed the head from her on an occasional table that stood near the throne. Natalie inevitably wavered toward it, while Dorothy spoke again to you: "What we want to know is what you're going to do about all this. You can't go on sitting on Ozma's throne indefinitely, you know," she said righteously.

"Er—no, of course not," you hastened to placate. "I've told you, I'm only ruler pro-tem, just until the Queen returns from her business abroad."

"But she's not *going* to return!" nagged Dorothy. "That's just the trouble: she's locked in that wretched garden of yours, just like we were—"

"But you got out," you countered.

"Yes, but only because my friends forced the passage of the Deadly Poppy Field. That seems to be the near-impassable barrier on that side of Gardenia."

The Deadly Poppy Field! Heavens, had that got into the act as well? How exciting. How was the dear old Field getting along? You scarcely dared ask. You loved it—as you did all things Ozian but perhaps the Ozites themselves didn't feel that way.

Once more you felt the pang of loneliness that all rulers know. How you'd love to talk over all these things with someone who knew and cared, and who better than actual denizens of the famous realm itself? Then all of a sudden you threw ceremony to the winds. This was after all the only time; it was now or never.

"Tell me, Princess," you spoke, "what is the real feeling here in Oz about the celebrated Poppy Field? Do you, in fact, love it? in spite of its frightening reputation—and, indeed, its demonstrably frightening effects?"

Dorothy looked gratified to be thus consulted, but also vexed. "Are you crazy?" she exclaimed, scarcely according you the courtesy you might have expected a ruler of Oz, however pro tem, to merit. "'Love the Deadly Poppy Field'! It's far too threatening a thing for that. But whatever can you mean?"

This was something you'd thought about a lot. You were aware of how the great villains of literature were often better loved by the public than the less colorful, conventional heroes. Oz contained one of the great examples of this. You said, "There was a movie—a moving picture, you know—about Oz—"

"Of course," said Dorothy with hands on hips. "And I was in it! At least, someone was pretending to be me but she was so big! and her hair the wrong color. It was called *The Wizard of Oz*."

"Marvelous!" you breathed. "So the film's been shown here..."

"Naturally. Ozma commanded a performance right after it came out. They sent a projector along with the film and Professor Nowitall knew how to run it. He'd been used to magic lanterns from way back.

"All of us attended. Oh, how we laughed! We've never enjoyed anything so much, have we, Scarecrow?" The girl from Kansas gave the straw man her hand, now quite restored to good humor, it seemed.

"Oh, glory, how fascinating," you said, and knew you could spend the next two weeks asking for Dorothy's opinion of every single frame of the movie.

But there weren't two weeks. Half an hour at the most. You hurried on: "Well, the wicked witch has turned out to be the best-loved character in the film apart from you two, of course!" you hastened to amend. Everybody loves Margaret Hamilton.

"Now that's in direct contrast to the public reaction to the *books*. There the Witches of East and West are hated from first to last. Nobody ever has a good word to say for them—"

"Well, they *were* awful old creatures!" exclaimed Dorothy, who had killed both of them. I guess she could say no less.

"Oh, to be sure!" you made haste to placate. "Of course! everybody feels the same. If anyone ever did dare to say a kind word about them, there would be no end to readers' irate letters to the editor. That's why I was moved to ask: is the dangerous poppy field disliked that way too, here in Oz? Because if so,

well, maybe I could do something about it. I want so badly to do *something* for all of you here in the beloved country..."

Dorothy dropped the Scarecrow's hand and put her own back on its hip. "Wait a minute! You mean you want to *destroy* the field or something?!"

"Well, er. I do seem, as you pointed out, to be able to do wishes and I thought—er..."

"No," said the princess. "Please don't! We'd better leave to Ozma any destroying that's got to be done. But if your wishes are as powerful as you think..."

"Yes?" Oh, anything to please this radiant maiden whom the angels named Dorothy!

"Wish us back to that charmed garden of yours and let's get an end put to all this mix-up."

"Oh. Er. Well, all right." You hadn't meant for your last lingering on the Throne of Oz to end quite so abruptly. But where Dorothy herself of Oz ordained...

The princess assumed her wish was your command and turned to collect her parcel from the occasional table.

But! Betsy's head had disappeared!

The little advice bush waved its leaves in greeting as the royal procession passed by, but no one, except possibly sensitive Trot, paid any attention. Poor bush. It had tried so hard to be helpful but in the end its admonitions had gone unavailing. Nothing it had advised had come to play any part in the working out of events. They had never got properly into the forest. Where was “the key”? Nobody knew—or by now seemed to care. And as for the advice “not to worry”, that’s about all they *had* done.

As the party moved along it presently picked up some stragglers. The Tin Woodman and companions had gone astray in the far northeast corner of the gardens but by now had wandered back, telling of marvels of horticulture they had encountered: upsidedown trees that waved their roots in the air; a thicket of splendid shrubs whose every leaf was a different shade of a single color: purple, grey, orange. The perfume vines were a wonder too: silver-brown trumpet blossoms that tooted out blasts of a world of scents: cooking marmelade, tea-rose, striking matches, sea water, raspberry, sulphur, brewery, hyacinth, frying onions, Chanel number five, and roasting coffee. Those who could smell, related Nick Chopper, had stood fixated, unable to tear themselves away.

Then there were King Rinkitink and Prince Tollydiddle who had fallen into the Munchkin River and almost escaped the enchanted garden that way but in the end had struggled ashore and now rejoined the main party looking rather bedraggled.

Just before Ozma’s entourage regained the main gates they ran across kangaroo Tronto sitting under a banyan tree smoking up a storm. She had met and fallen an instant convert to the blandishments of the fell cigarette fairies!

And now the gates and freedom!

Clever Glinda and competent Ozma joined enchanters’ hands and took up a position in front of the gates. Mar the marsupial had lost her ring of keys so anyway no time need be lost in trying mechanical means to gain egress. The great

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adepts simply waved their wands, invoked spells, and did some powerful wishing.

Nothing happened. Betsy, trying the gate, found it bolted fast as ever. Glinda frowned. Ozma looked concerned. Their combined magic availed nothing? Right here in the middle of their own fairyland, just an hour from the Emerald City? This blocked gate must be under the most potent enchantment in the world.

"It's as I feared," confessed the Red Sorceress. "We're up against the barrier of mind. It's the most durable barricade known to man or fairy, far more indestructible than any matter of steel or stone."

"What are we to do?" spoke Ozma.

"Just wait. Your usurper is bound to turn up again some time. Too, I have a shrewd suspicion that the Scarecrow and Dorothy may have gone to get help. They've never failed us in the past. There's just a chance..."

"And meanwhile?"

"I'll try to get through to Fairy Queen Lurline by wrist radio. She may have a suggestion. But there again, I'm not sure..."

"Our wrist radios have never been known to fail either," stated Ozma. "Why shouldn't you be able to summon her? Or she, to do something?"

"I'm not sure, as I say. It just may be that nothing, not the most potent fairy charm that ever was, can work unless your usurper wills it so."

Admittedly your conversation had been absorbing. Everyone had been engrossed, his attention completely claimed. Even the soldier with the green whiskers, greatly curious, had followed you into the throne room and hung on every word. But that a living head should have got up unnoticed from a table top close at hand and walked off! And this was all the more odd because, you know, it hadn't any feet.

However, it was the work of a moment to find the truant. "There she is!" called out one of the other heads: the Patchwork Girl's lady's head which Scraps' cotton hands had placed, for safety, on the floor some time before. The head pointed—not with a finger exactly, but it aimed an eye significantly—in under the high-standing throne.

There they lay, in connubial bliss: the Betsyhead and Natalie Nightglory. Or if such a thing is too shocking in Oz, let us say that they had grafted, though that word too may have unfavorable connotations. The simple fact is that they had united and become one being, joined indissolubly, now and forever, world without end. The Betsy head had been in sore need of a body and the mobile nightglory had the greatest possible use for viable eyes and ears, smelling and tasting organs, in addition to its own wealth of speaking trumpet blossoms. Each had been attracted to the other's fetching appearance and now they—or henceforth we must say "she"—lay exhausted but beatific after having triumphantly given birth' to herself.

When she saw you all squatting and peering under the throne, the Betsy head raised itself weakly and murmured, "At last I'm a complete woman!" Then she seemed to swoon away, rather. You thought the head looked awfully big in relation to the long trailing convolvulus stalk. You could only hope that in time the two vegetable constituents would grow into greater structural harmony with each other.

Now you and the others drew back. You stared at each other with expressions of amazement, embarrassment, and delight.

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Would wonders never cease? No, not in Oz.

The accouchement had reminded you of something. "Come!" you whispered loudly and led the way out of the hall. You quite forgot to take a last look at the Throne you left forever. With the others following you went out into the palace park and looked for Lucion, the gardener.

The bucolic fellow was standing leaning against his potting shed. In your capacity as ARAO you said to him: "I sent an umbrella-load of plants here last night. This umbrella brought them." Flerg took a bow. "How are they doing?"

Lucion took his grass straw from his mouth and vouchsafed, "Reckon you did. Seen 'em first thing when I come out this mornin'. Litterin' the whole south forty, they was. But leggy things! I couldn't bed 'em out nohow. They said they wasn't sleepy and kep' walkin' away. Durndest thing I ever see... Leastways, I did see somep'n like it or heard! Ever since those downpours yestiddy every flower-head in the park's been chatterin' nineteen to the dozen. An' the talkin' trees an' the babblin' bushes an' the whisperin' grass! What's the reason of it all?!" The good man scratched his head in puzzlement.

You were going to have to start explaining things some time. You might as well begin now and you did. You told them about the life force carried by the falling star and how convection currents and seeded rains were going to bring—or had already brought—everything in the world to intelligent, talking (often even walking) life. Or if not the whole world at least a large part of it down-wind from the Kingdom of Dreams. That's why Lucion's trowel was talking and the potting sheds prating and the towers of Ozma's palace behind you dancing in situ a stately saraband.

"Wal, I swan," swarmed Lucion. He made no demur when you and your companions ran about the grounds, catching errant nasturtiums and forgetmenots and bundling them without ceremony into the opened-out magic bumbershoot.

"I'm taking them to the Charmed Garden," you announced. "That's where they belong."

"What about us?" said Dorothy. "How are *we* going to get back to the garden?"

"Not by bumbershoot anyway," you declared. "We couldn't all hang onto one umbrella, and besides it's full of flowers. I guess we'll just have to walk."

Actually this was part of your scheme to get to string out the time with these fascinating celebrities. Of course you could have wished them all—

"What!" Princess Dorothy broke into your thought, "with our friends trapped in Gardenia? We must get to them instantly!"

"Ozma and them aren't going anywhere," you knew for an almost certainty. "But let's go look at the Magic Picture. That may be able to reassure you."

You entered the Palace of Magic for the last time. You sent Ojo to collect Betsy Natalie from under the throne, the Scarecrow to announce to the servants who remained in the palace that their royal mistress would soon return, and Dorothy and Scraps to look at the great Picture. You yourself had a rendezvous with the royal regalia: to sway Queen Ozma's sceptre one more time and to put away the crown in its velvet-lined case.

Then you took the road to Gardenia. On the way you explained to your friends how everything had come to be and how everything must end.

Just before you reached the old vine-wreathed gatehouse an hour later you managed somehow, as if by chance, to touch in turn the hand of each of your companions. You made some excuse to hand Dorothy the flower-filled umbrella. Then you led the way through the entry port and stepped to that magic gate.

You turned the handle, you pushed, and—

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c h a p t e r f o r t y - t h r e e

Dorothy flew into the arms of Princess Ozma of Oz and they hugged for ever such a long time.

When at last they drew apart, the girl ruler said, "But where is our... usurper?" She gave a little puzzled laugh to soften the harsh word.

Dorothy looked around and gasped. "Why, I don't know! How awfully strange!"

"More to the point perhaps," said the genial Scarecrow quiz-zically, "where is the charmed garden?"

Everybody stared about—and went on staring: the little group of new arrivals and the big crowd who made up Queen Ozma's entourage. The Charmed Garden of Oz was missing.

Gate, gatehouse, encircling wall, and all the magic and mystery and great beauty of Gardenia were gone as if they had never been. Our friends were standing in the middle of a vast featureless meadow crossed by the yellow brick road. Well, one feature remained: the calm cows they had sometimes glimpsed through Gardenia gates still browsed contentedly on distant grass.

"Whatever does it mean?" said several people in tones of awe.

"I think it means our visitor was greater than almost any of us can know," said Ozma solemnly. "But *she* may know," and the fairy lifted her head in the direction of the wise Sorceress of the South.

Glinda moved a little forward and spoke so all could hear. "Perhaps I have guessed a few things," she stated a bit false-modestly. "I think—I don't know: but I believe—that we, all of us, for a time were but figments of a dream in the sleeping brain of our visitor—"

"That's right!" broke in the ever impetuous Princess Dorothy. "We heard all about it on the walk here: the shooting star that fell in the Land of Dreams and brought everything to life, *including* dreams, and—oh, so many queer things that were never in this world."

But perhaps you would like to hear it in coherent fashion as the story was put together from Dorothy's account combined with the intelligent suppositions of the Witch of the South?: the whys, and wherefores of your adventures in Oz.

It all began when that unique comet struck—*just where it did*. Its inordinate life-bestowing quality did not only affect such physical objects as stood in the path of the star molecules as they drifted round the earth. Life was given also to the very dreams themselves that emanated from that magic kingdom. "Life" is to say "reality". For one time only, a dream would become real—and the dreamer happened to be you. For the space of one dream everything your sleeping mind envisaged would be fact.

Never mind that you dreamed of actual places and living beings, who otherwise presumably would have gone about their own occasions. While you dreamed, those occasions would be held in abeyance. Everybody and -thing in your dream would dance to your tune.

You see now? Well, you saw already the time the blue heart of the Star Lake spoke to you. You knew, you had sensed already, that you had infinite power—for a finite time. That was why all your favorite fantasies became facts in the Charmed Garden. Yes, and your pet dreads as well. That was why it was so easy for you to direct everybody off to the garden. That's why Button Bright's umbrella was so ready to your hand. "Wishing would make it so." You had only to wish, to dream (for dreams are but wishes—and fears made fact for a time), and it would be true.

As in dreams too you knew without knowing how you knew. You knew that the life-seeds from the crashed comet would come to blow over Oz and bring total confusion, when *everything* in the whole country would become a talking, and usually walking, living entity.[§] What could the Ozites do to restore order in the babbling gyrating whirligig their country would become?

Nothing.

§ See *The Wonder City of Oz*. Editor's note.

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You alone could save Oz. And you could only save it by creating an oasis which the dread life seeds could not reach. Only in the charmed garden, Gardenia, would the life-charged element in the rain be without effect—because Gardenia did not exist.

You summoned thither all the brightest beings, and all the power-wielding crowned heads, in Oz: so that when the emergency was past that competent congress, in council assembled, could take measures to undo the damage of universal livingness. Even now Ozma and her advisers are trying out a hundred hopeful ways of dealing with the untoward epidemic of life in Oz.

But you would not be there to see it. You arranged that your carefully assembled throng of Oz leaders, once arrived in Gardenia, could not leave it. Yet once the life-depositing rain showers and their threat had passed, the leaders must be able to depart in order to be able to act. There was only one way to dismantle the Charmed Garden and its unbreakable grip. You had to wake up.

"A holy day shall this be kept hereafter," quoth Queen Ozma.

"Yes, and a holy place," opined her friend, the sorceress Glinda. "We must put up a monument stone to commemorate the time and place when a stranger saved Oz—or arranged at least that we might be able to save it ourselves."

"A stone!" exclaimed the princess, and a merry laugh escaped her. "I do assure you, my dear, I don't feel a stone will suffice. We ought to reconstruct in veritable fact the whole Charmed Garden of Oz! It's a delightful concept. And some or others of us have, while the chance was there, seen every corner of it. Those happy ones can direct the laying out of those parts. I think it might become one of the showplaces of Oz."

"I'm sure of it," said Glinda and concurred with her sovereign's plan. "If I may presume: might it not be a good idea to start by erecting here on these fields, the only spot in all Oz not affected by the uncalled-for plague of livingness, a temporary 'winter palace' out of which you may work in coming to terms with the infestation?"

"A good direction! wise wonder-worker," applauded the princess.

"And then too," went on Glinda, getting a taste for garden management, "I wonder: what about gathering here all the now perambulatory plants? Natalie Nightglory and many others of her ilk who are sure to turn up?"

"Well thought upon," approved Ozma heartily. Then she had another idea of her own. "That oversupply of meatheads—to employ the older parlance!—at the er, Replacements Ranch: they could be invited to join forces with many of the walking, but fairly headless and unthinking, plants. There must be adaptation, of course, of the size of the heads to the dimensions of the plants that will bear them. The use of a little magic might be timely there. Then they might like to serve as caretakers here in Gardenia—or 'careleavers'! if you will. For we will hope indeed that they will leave all cares: all those who enter here."

Meanwhile the mob of courtiers was crowding round and the sounds were loud and long of congratulations and cheers. The target of many eyes was the reunion of Dorothy and the Scarecrow with the Tin Woodman and the Courageous Cowardly Lion. In joy Dorothy threw her arms about the latter's neck—but as suddenly retreated, making almost a gagging sound.

"Oh, Rex!" she burst out. "Forgive me, my dear, but you smell terrible!"

The Lion blushed, but under his mane no one could see it. "Hmmh!" he half roared. "Sorry about that. Occupational hazard of visiting the garden of Gorba—"

"Oh, Lion!" now cried Urtha the flower maiden. "We were going there! I wanted to see if that wicked old sorcerer was still safely enchanted. Did you see him?"

"I too, Princess," said the lion, glad of the chance to direct attention away from his odor, "had an idea of stamping him out, but unfortunately we never got a view of the enchanter. After falling in a very nasty pool we decided we'd do better to leave the place—"

"Pardon me one moment," interjected the Southern Sorceress and advanced upon the group of reformed friends. As she came she detached from her lapel her sorcerer's-glass which she never left home without. "You permit?" she said, placing the glass in her eye and bending to examine a tuft of the lion's mane magnified a thousand-fold.

The witch stood erect again and a small smile played round her kindly mouth. "I had an idea... Princess Pretty Good ... Urtha—and Your leoninity," she addressed King Rex, "I believe felicitations are in order. My glass informs me that the dust on your coat derives from a magical compound, NG-13, a substance most often found in the composition of low-grade spellcasters and thaumatasters."

When her hearers looked blank at that, Glinda spelled it out. "It would appear that at some point Gorbabrog, the evil necromancer of the underground garden, left the form of a brown

mouse to which he had been condemned and took other shapes. Apparently his latest incarnation was that of a foul-smelling mud puddle. We can only conjecture as to why he would feel at home in such a guise. I surmise that the recent torrential rains, draining into the subterranean garden, swelled the puddle into a sizeable pool, into which you all proceeded to fall.

"If my supposition is correct, Gorba/Abrog now exists as a myriad of mud-dust particles spread between here and that famous garden down by the Munchkin-Quadling border. I fear there is little likelihood that he will ever be successfully reconstituted."

That proved to be the star comic turn of the day. The crowd laughed until they were sick. Queen Ozma added a merry note by stating that the first order of that day should be to get the thirteen unlucky and mud-dusty animals (twelve if you excepted the cautious Glass Cat) to the nearest lake or river where a salubrious bath might be enjoyed by all.

Such a river lay just out of sight across the fields: the-majestic green-blue Munchkin. Thither the royal entourage now turned its steps.

As the merry crowd gamboled on ahead, Princess Dorothy put her arms through those of the winsome fairy Ozma and the stately Sorceress of the South and they walked on for a while in silence. Suddenly, "That was the key!" said Dorothy.

The others looked a question. "Key?" said Ozma.

"Yes! The advice bush warned us to look for 'the key'. The key—to everything—was our visitor, of course."

The two ladies looked at her again, in admiration. Presently the Kansas girl spoke once more:

"It is a little worrying though, isn't it?"

"What is that, dear?"

"Well, if people's dreams all over the world are going to come to life, to turn out, that is, to be real, there may be no end to the queer things that may happen to us. I mean: there may well be dozens—or even thousands—of people who have dreams of Oz. And if all they dream of comes true—"

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"No," Glinda quietly reassured the girl. "I believe that dream-spell may well turn out to be unique. By now the effects of the life seeds on dreams will have passed over. No new dreams that are dreamed — of Oz, at least — will come true. The enchantment, so far, and now, I think, finally, affected just one person in the whole world."

"Our visitor," put in Dorothy, awed.

"I think we may say," added Ozma, "our kind even: our noble visitor."

"Yes," said Glinda thoughtfully. "Just one person in all the world: the person who is reading this book..."

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