



**T
H
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**U
MBRELLAS**

**OF
OZ**



This Book
is dedicated to
MICHAEL J. MICHANCZYK
Obliging
and
Dependable
Collaborator

THE UMBRELLAS *of* OZ

THE OZ BOOK FOR 1953

By March Laumer
with a seminal chapter by Irene Schneyder

Founded on and Continuing the
Stories by March Laumer

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C H A P T E R O N E

<<1952—three months later>>

The annual meeting of the O.B.O. was being held, as most often, in New York that year and William “Speedy” Rapidan came over from Rent Rock. He was in a funny mood; not the kind that made you laugh either. The tool and die works were ticking over nicely. Nothing to complain of there. His health was okay. There were no affairs of the heart to unsettle him. Why then was he in a melancholy taking like this?

Speedy’s uncle Bill had died in the year between. Was that the reason? It was always a treat to have lunch with Uncle at Giovanni’s or the Four Seasons whenever the younger man came to town. Sometimes he stayed over with him for a night or even two. Uncle had taken an interest in Speedy’s Oz interest, had even met Peter and Sples on a couple of occasions. Now he wouldn’t be around any longer. New York seemed empty.

Looking out the train window at the yellow leaves he hummed a little under his breath. He did that—when on his own—and it didn’t necessarily mean merry-and-bright. Music meant mood. “Autumn in New York.” He hummed that surprisingly genuinely mood-rich song.

That’s how he felt: ‘dreamers with empty hands may sigh

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for exotic lands.' He didn't know if he was exactly sighing for exotic lands but he had the empty hands to do it with. Rent Rock Tool & Die was going too well. There weren't any challenges left in it.

Oh, he could put on a sales campaign and probably bring in plenty of extra cash. What would he want more cash for? He couldn't, and wouldn't, eat any more than he did already. What was the point of several extra zeros in the bank book? That was all that having more money than you needed boiled down to. You didn't actually have a bedroom drawer full of greenbacks that you gloated over. As for blowing all the cash to buy a lot of goods and services: he had all the goods and services he wanted. Rainy-day requirements? Speedy had always thought that keeping your health, and your smarts, was all you needed to guard against a rainy day. And if you lost those, who wanted to live anyway?

'Autumn in New York is often mingled with pain.' Yeah. Not positive pain. Speedy had nothing substantive to complain of. But negative pain: emptiness: the absence of the carrot dangling before your nose to keep you at whatever it was you 'ought' to be kept at. For anything to matter you had to be looking forward to some kind of a goal. Just now he couldn't think of any kind of goal he had.

'It spells the thrill of first-nighting.' That was an idea. Maybe he'd take in a show. He didn't know if the guys would be staying over night. He would, maybe even a couple, now that he would be there anyway. Then they could all go together. Otherwise, just him on his own; Uncle wasn't there.

'Glittering crowds, and shivering clouds, in canyons of steel.' Well, those didn't exactly match. Others might sparkle in evening attire and jewels but his plain dark suit, still slightly Norfolk in style, was not going to set anything alight. As for the clouds, for the moment that was all wrong. It was a glorious fall morning and the fiery beauty of the trees inexpressible. He peered out of the train window and got lost in the glamor of gold, yellow, brown, orange, and red.

Speedy hadn't traveled all that much—though his two big ventures abroad had been as exotic as anybody could wish for—but he had an idea that the autumn coloring that, centered on east-central North America was something unique in the world. Nowhere else were there sugar-maple trees—that he ever heard of—and they were the ones that went brilliant, scarlet when the frost got them.

Autumn in New York: it brings the promise of new love. Hmm. He wasn't so sure about that. Of course New York always had on offer plenty of what some people called love, but William Rapidan had never confused sharp but fleeting physical needs with "love." Love was when you thought somebody was so marvelous that simply to sit and look at her was as great a happiness as anything else at all you might do in her company.

He hadn't loved all that much, not if love (by a different definition) was when you cared so deeply and lastingly that you had to know she was still getting along all right even after you weren't "in love" any more. How many did he know like that? He'd had a deep and lasting regard for his uncle, but that was different. Anybody else? Well, one person.

Thoughts of that person kept Speedy occupied until the train slid into Grand Central. Soon he was out on Park Avenue. Wine in the air! (not yet too tinctured with carbon monoxide). Why did it seem so inviting?

Autumn in New York. It was good to live it again.

C H A P T E R T W O

<<1914>>

But to go back aways: thirty-eight years, to be more or less exact.

Button-Bright was being naughty. He was a little old for being “naughty” but that’s what it amounted to. We aren’t told what year he was born but he was already old enough to get lost on his own in 1907^s. Now it was 1914, so at the utmost youngest he must have been eleven. His family had told him and told him not to take the heirloom umbrella. He took it anyway. Wasn’t that being naughty? Or was eleven old enough that what he did against orders was outright delinquency? if not exactly criminal.

Eleven was old enough to monkey with explosives. Old enough too to hide some fireworks after their supervised use on the fourth of July. You never knew when they might come in handy. You could hit firing caps with a mallet any time and induce an amusing terror in tiresome old aunts or great-aunts who came to tea and were not expecting an explosion in the passage outside the parlor. The cheerful red cherry bombs he kept for more serious occasions.

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

Now was one of them. It was summer and he was bored. His tutor had just gone, leaving him a weekend's worth of homework to do. "Homework". It was *all* homework. He never went off to school like other kids but had his lessons in the old "nursery" upstairs. After the tutor left Button Bright just sat there. He was supposed to memorize the names of some geographical features of his home state but he didn't feel like it.

It was time to get lost again. He sensed it quite distinctly. It was three years now since his extensive adventures with that girl and her old pal from California[§]. In the interval there had been only small unimportant lost-gettings. Just around Philadelphia. There wasn't any way to get lost farther afield, darn it. Not since they'd taken away the umbrella.

The latter move was the work of Dr. Bright, Button's courtesy "father". The boy had never known his real father, who died at his birth. He had lived all his life with his mother's brother and accorded that gentleman all the fear and trembling due to a natural father. The warmth and comradeship one might also expect in the case of a father and son were absent. Though the boy in the ordinary way called himself "Button Bright" he knew his name was really Saladin Paracelsus Lambertine Evagne von Smith and that his father-figure was actually his uncle.

He was a stern uncle. It was just like him to lock up the beloved bumbershoot. Even favorite Uncle Bob Bright out at Germantown shared in the family sternness. The first time Button Bright made use of the magic umbrella Uncle Bob looked sharp and said he ought to leave it alone. He must have gone and tattled to his brother too because when the boy returned from Sky Island, though he had been as circumspect as could be, everyone in the house knew the old umbrella had been missing and had a pretty shrewd idea in whose company. Button Bright was put to bed without his supper and never saw the umbrella again.

Until right now.

He took no leave of anybody: his officious uncles or his quiet

§ See *Sky Island*. Editor's note.

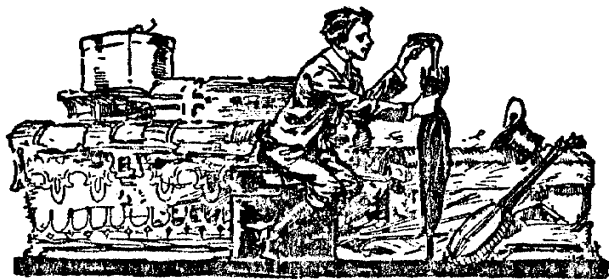
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shrinking shadowy mother (the only one in the family who didn't share the trait of throwing his/her weight about; it was of course from his mother that the youth had his touch of feyness and tendency to fade out of sight). He just took his cherry bombs and a supply of matches to the attic. He knew very well which big strong chest (there was only one) in the attic contained the desired umbrella.

He placed two round red fireworks the size of crab apples under two corners of the chest and blew the side of it to smithereens. Before anybody in the house had time to react to the sound of the explosion the boy had groped inside the smoky shredded interior of the trunk and hauled out the sought flying gear. Oh, dear, the elephant-headed crook had been shattered. But lucky, thought Button Bright on maturer consideration, that the damage was no worse.

Stumbling over disused bird cages and rolls of carpeting, he made his way quickly to the round dormer window at the end of the long garret room. Even as he got the hasp open he heard loud steps on the stair. He thrust his legs out the window, sat on the curving casement, expanded the bumbershoot—and only now bethought him of where he was going.

Help! He hadn't a clue. In a panic he recalled the geography lesson ("the rivers of Pennsylvania") just ended. He was torn between Susquehanna and Monongahela and then he heard the attic door thrown open with a bang and had no time to say more than "Take me to Mo—" before hurling himself out into the air—which was promptly taken from him before he could complete his word.



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

<<1914>>

Despite his name Button Bright was not the brightest. Or let us say, since in fact there was nothing really wrong with his intelligence, that he was unmotivated to learn. Still now, and especially as a younger child, his favorite phrase was “Don’t know”, which rather gave the lie to the story usually retailed by the family circle: that he had been called “Button Bright” because he was “as bright as a button^s”.

Indeed there was a lot he didn’t know. He could tell left from right and up from down but it was stickier with east from west. Hence, it was not easy for him now (shortly after noon) to tell you, had you been there, whether he was going north, east, south, or west. At first he could see Philadelphia spread out below, and then a river, but, his lesson unlearned, he couldn’t have said which one. After that there was plain land for a very long time.

Curious as it may seem, the boy felt quite composed, aside from a few hunger pangs, as long as there was ground underneath, although an unsupported fall down upon it would have been deflating, to say the least. But when the elephant-headless umbrella moved out over ocean, Button Bright trembled. He took

§ For the true explanation, see *The Magic Mirror of Oz*. Editor’s note.]

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a firmer grasp of the stump of the handle and hung on with *both* hands.

He wished there were some way to make the magic vehicle speed up. Besides being scary it was boring flying over indistinguishable waves. Wherever he was going must be on the other side of what even Button Bright could tell was an ocean. He knew this because he had, in the course of time, absorbed *something* from his geography lessons and knew that there were oceans to left and right of North America. The sole 'sea' that abutted on the United States was a very large one and wasn't even called that, but rather "gulf".

Where was he going? "Mo—" ? He recalled vividly enough that he had got that much out before the umbrella had taken off. As soon as he had got his breath he had said, "—nongahela", but he knew it was no good. From prior experience he was aware that the device never altered its destination once it had received its initial instructions.

So there must be a place called "Mo". As a matter of fact there was, but American Button Bright hadn't pronounced as "moo" (as one ought) the name of the seaport town in northern Norway, Mo i Rana (home of deluges, as high mountain ranges rising from the sea scrape water-laden clouds and dump their contents on the defenceless town). The umbrella 'heard' "moh" and to Mo(h) it headed.

A whole night of hanging on passed. You can be sure it was a desperate thing to try to keep from falling asleep and ineluctably letting go. Like Lindbergh later, Saladin von Smith just barely managed it. What a relief it was to see land ahead in the early morning light. The umbrella, maltreated as it had been at Button Bright's hands, now did its best for him. It came in for a light landing at the first spot that could technically be called "Mo". This was at a slight protrusion of the mountain frontier of that land, opposite the dominions of King Scowleyow. Button Bright put his foot to the ground one foot inside the border.

Two or three more feet inside, and that far within only so as to avoid actually lying on the pathway, the boy from Philadel-



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phia (L. Frank Baum version) fell down in a myrtleberry patch and slept for twenty hours.

He was young. He could take it. His phlegmatic nature allowed him to put up with physical discomforts, such as long periods of near-immobility in awkward circumstances, in a way that was going to stand him in good stead in days to come.

Even as long as he slept he only awoke due to a poke.

If he'd had time to think about it he might have thought the poke felt like that of an umbrella ferrule, but when he groggily opened his eyes in the early grey of dawn he saw no umbrella. No umbrella?'. Abruptly Button Bright sat up and stared about him. Besides the hand-high myrtle shrubs he saw nothing but a woman in a voluminous crystal-colored cloak, who was looking at him quizzically.

"You're a fine young man," said the woman

"Am I?" said Button Bright. Up to now he had been in the habit of thinking of himself merely as a boy.

"Yes," assured the woman. "But what I wonder is: why are you sleeping in the myrtle patch?"

The Philadelphian told her. The information she asked for was such as he actually possessed, and when he knew something—which wasn't so often—he didn't mind imparting it. What he did not know was where his magic umbrella was. Now you won't believe this but Button Bright actually had sense enough not to reveal anything about the magicality of the bumbershoot. He finished his speech by merely saying, "I don't know where my umbrella is," in a plaintive voice.

"Oh, did you have an umbrella?" said the woman.

"Yes, and it looks like it's going to rain. I need it." The boy was not being quite ingenuous. "Have you seen it?"

"Why, no, I haven't," replied the stranger. She wasn't either. "As you say, it would be useful now." The gentle rain began.

"But I can spare you a flard of my cape. That is, if you're going somewhere. Maybe you're staying here?"

"Don't know." Then, as the rain went on to pelt, he knew. "No, I'm not," declared the youth and scrambled up and under

a trailing edge of the big colorless mantle.

He even remembered to say “Thanks”, which was going some. He actually added, “That’s pretty nice of you.”

“Oh, I am pretty nice,” admitted the woman, “—a lot of the time. At least, if I’m not crossed—or bored. Then I can be quite shrewish. People say I have a terrible temper.”

“Oh.” Then as the two moved off Button Bright added, to make conversation, “Can you give me some examples?”

The woman, who said her name was “Jrumm”, complied, with a crooked smile. She told it as a story. It passed the time as they went on their ambling way along the valley path, just stopping occasionally to listen to a bird.

“Once upon a time I had a son. He too was a fine young man. Rather like yourself actually, though a good bit younger—at the time we parted.”

Button Bright murmured. “Yes,” assented the traveling woman, “we parted. Not through any wish of mine, or even fault, unless you call rubbing the local petty tyrant the wrong way a ‘fault’. It’s not my *fault* that I suffer—oh, to just a very mild degree—from kleptomania. I assure you I never take things for any *good* they might be to me. I just get this feeling that they ought to be taken. So it happened that I got reported quite a few times to this local tyrant. Finally he sent his minions to arrest me.

“I was dragged with scant ceremony before the despot’s judgment seat. I freely admitted that stealing was not my fault: I just couldn’t help it.

“‘Ah,’ said the cruel tyrant, ‘so you admit that you have stolen?’

“I looked down at my hands, of a bright cerise color, and shrugged. How could I deny it?

“‘If we practise clemency, will you drop the habit?’ demanded the ruler.

“‘How can I do that?’ I wanted to know. ‘My mania might come over me again at any moment, and it’s irresistible, you know.’

“‘Perhaps this will teach you to control the urge,’ said the harsh judge. ‘Guards, seize the youth!’ And they did, wrestling to the ground my dear young son, who of course accompanied me.

“Well, that’s when I flew into a rage, lost my calm completely—and at once stole whatever I could lay my hands on. I wrapped around me my cloak of invisibility and left town.”

“Gosh,” said Button Bright, impressed. He was not to know that the tale was mostly make-believe, though with certain cardinal points of verisimilitude.

“Here, I’ll show you.” The woman drew aside a part of her cloak that Button Bright wasn’t under and showed him a small

bird cage she carried sheltered in the crook of her arm.

"Oh, that's a baby bird," said the boy. "Right the first time. But what kind?"

"Don't know," said Button Bright, surprising no one.

"It's a mocking-bird," informed the woman. "But just a young one, as you point out. It hasn't learned any songs yet—well, only a few—and I'm at present traveling about the countryside, letting it acquire those of any birds we run up against."

"Which ones has it learned?" Button Bright wanted to know, without guaranteeing to be much the wiser if told.

"Let's see. So far the agami, the albatross, the bittern, the blackbird, the bullfinch, and the bunting. We're doing them alphabetically. That was a bunting we listened to just now."

Button Bright requested a demonstration. The tiny green-grey birdlet obliged with a capable warbling and twittering that was for all the world like the song of the blackbird. The boy was delighted. "Isn't it clever!" he said.

"Yes," agreed the bird-owner, "she can imitate any musical sound she hears... Do you know a tune?"

"Only Faure's Third piano impromptu," apologized Button Bright. He whistled that captivating and never-played melody. The little bird gave it right back and the youth clapped his hands. "My governess tried to teach me to play it," he explained, "but I'm not musical." (The truth of this statement is attested by Button Bright's evaluation of *Allegro da Capo*, the cacophonous "musicker" met on the road to Oz[§] during an earlier exploit of the boy's.)

It seemed the two wayfarers had enough to talk about. They went on their way, under intermittent lemonade rains, one of them having no idea where they were going but the other with a very good idea indeed.

§ See the volume of that name. Editor's note.

C H A P T E R F O U R

<<1952>>

Speedy checked in at the Chesterfield. It was where he'd stayed once or twice before, when Uncle had been out of town, or he'd arrived late and didn't want to impose with midnight phone calls.

That was funny. They gave him room 317 and for some reason he recalled that it was the number he'd had almost the last time he ever saw Uncle Billy. He had the boy drop the bag and flung himself shoes and all on the bed with a pillow bunched behind his head. How queer. The last time he ever saw Bill sitting down was in *that* chair, right there. Mr. Harmstead died of a stroke and his nephew had seen him *lying* at Mount Zion but not sitting, ever again.

'Oh, gosh, Uncle,' muttered the man. That's all you could say when somebody long familiar and much loved was suddenly gone and you had nothing to repent of but everything to regret and nothing you could do about it.

He remembered Unc at Yellowstone, sucking on his pipe, sketching in his notebook, pulling up pegs from a canvas cover that concealed—Terrybubble!, if they had but known it. Terrybubble, that irrepressible and wholly unlikely monster who

for a season had been the youthful William Rapidan's great friend and companion. Oh, Terrybubble!, the world's only living dinosaur skeleton. Where were you now?

That brought Speedy's thoughts right back to the one girl, of course. For the dinosaur skeleton had remained on the aerial island, together with all that country's overweight and braided court and, chiefly, the one girl.

Speedy's ricocheting memory now settled on a topic even harder to shake than his preoccupation with the personality and absence of his loved uncle. Uncle was gone, forever, and nothing to be done, but Gureeda was not "gone" in that sense, and possibly something could be done.

Gureeda! that was her name. Or actually it wasn't her name. Only a nickname and, so Speedy had always secretly thought, a singularly ugly one. You immediately thought of "Grr-eedy" and the slim and modest young girl wasn't in the least greedy. It appeared she had been jokingly called "Gureeda Book" by some tiresome old wizard at her royal father's court, and "the name had stuck". Mm, like chewing gum and about as delightful. Actually the child's name was "Reeda" and Speedy thought it a pleasant one; in his thoughts he often used it. Perhaps an Umbrellian version of "Rita". He must ask one day. Reedy—and Speedy.'

No! He mustn't think like that. The man jumped up from the bed, went to the window, and peered down on Forty-ninth Street. Gureeda Book: how idiotic. In the first place there was no reason to urge the child to read. Her nose was always buried in a book. It had been written that even during pompful state visits at her palace home "the Princess could not be coaxed to raise her eyes from the printed page". She even (to Speedy, a bit shockingly) "preferred reading about adventures to having them". Indeed, if anything (unlikely) could, it was just that issue of reading versus reality that could represent an incompatibility in their natures. Things being so, why exhort her to read even more, and to the extent of plastering the admonition on her as a name?

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“Gu”-reeda? People didn’t talk like that, except in Brooklyn, where the Umbrella Islanders had never been. If you were urging anyone to read in earnest, you would say “Go read.” Speedy’s acquaintance with the locution was aural. and so he knew that the “Gu” was pronounced “guh” and not “gew”, which wouldn’t have made any sense in the context. But “guh-read-a-book” was of a family with “guh wahn!”, a slurred way of talking connoting over-familiarity, even contempt. Why had the dear little girl put up with it all those years?

Nuts. Speedy grabbed his hat again and left the hotel. He wasn’t meeting the guys ‘til seven. It was only two now. What to do in the time between? The fun only really began when the bunch were together. He didn’t after all feel like catching a matinee and besides it was Thursday.

He sauntered west on Forty-ninth and found himself on Eighth Avenue. The back door of Manhattan, he had always felt it. Certainly when you stood on Eighth Avenue you felt that “everything” was east. Were there really buildings and people doing things that mattered on Ninth and Tenth Avenues? Search him; *he’d* never been there and *he’d* been coming to New York all his life.

He came past a Shamrock saloon and on impulse went in. It reminded him *he’d* never had any lunch. The Shamrock did a one-dollar special. *He’d* have that. A lot of it was salad stuff like pickles and cole slaw anyway. It wouldn’t fill him so *he’d* lose the appetite edge for blini and caviar later, or Giovanni’s saltimbocca.

Sneedy sat in the half-dark booth and enjoyed. Why did New Yorkers prefer to eat in the dark? He never did understand that. He understood perfectly why the management preferred it: save on electric bills and too-careful dishwashing. Rut why did the diners go along with it? If they cared at all about what they were eating they’d want to see it.

It was supposed to be glamorous to eat by subdued lighting. A businessmen’s lunch in a dive in the un-chic part of town? Who needed it? or was conscious of any glamor? But in a minute Speedy realized why customers didn’t complain. These half-concealed booth seats were ideal for pick-ups. You had to squint

to recognize anybody seated opposite you and there was no view at all of what patrons might be doing under the table-top. A floozy sat down facing him.

"This place taken?" she whispered confidentially. Rather a charming voice, actually. Like Veronica Lake. Husky, intimate.

"Oh—uh, no!" assured the young man. Thirty-one. I guess that's young, even in 1952.

Speedy ate on in silence. The blonde just sat there. In fact, she wasn't all that blonde. Maybe there was a bit more to her than pure tart.

He got curious. There was no table service in a Shamrock. You fetched your food on a tray, paid at the cash register by the door. What was she waiting for?

"You got a cigarette?" the girl asked.

"No. I kicked the weed," Speedy said, trying to sound sporty. In fact he'd never started. That was Uncle Billy's fault. He'd often said, tamping his briar, "Don't start, Speed. Nasty habit. And unhealthier than nasty." Out of respect for his uncle's opinions, the youth obeyed. By now, only fifteen years later, he was finally glad he had.

"Here's a match though," he said. He'd picked that up from Uncle too: always have useful small items in your pockets: penknife, pencil stub, up-foldable brush, tiny torch, tweezers.

The girl took the match clip, struck one—then blew it out. She *was* different. "I don't want to smoke," she said.

"Oh?" Pretty daring, Rapidan went on: "What do you want to do?"

"For now? Whatever you want to do."

"I want to talk," Speedy came right back at her "You see, I've got this gir—"

"Oh?"

"Yeah. At least I had this girl. That is, I knew a girl. At the time she was only eleven—"

"Wait a minute!" The woman bridled. Even she had *some* standards.

"It's okay. You see, I was twelve. It was like this...."

C H A P T E R F I V E

<<1914 continued>>

"Are you afraid of dragons?" asked Jrumm. "Don't know," said the boy from Philadelphia. "There aren't any, around where I live."

"You'll have a chance to see, in a while," the woman predicted confidently.

The pair had entered a highland forest, a rather gloomy place on the foothills of a range that marked the northern boundary of the land of Mo. Presently a rumbling was heard away at some distance.

"Is that the dragons?" asked the boy.

"You know, it does sound rather like dragons," admitted Jrumm. "But no, at least it's not the ones I meant. I guess I shouldn't have said merely 'a while'. It'll be nightfall, or even later, before we get to *my* dragons."

"I'm hungry," announced Button Bright presently.

"That's lucky," said Jrumm. "As it happens, we're coming to a nice orchard and nut grove, just beyond the forest. You're going to have to eat your way through that."

"Oh, yum-yum," commented the youth placidly. Just where they descended to the level plain there flourished a magnificent

grove of edible-seed-bearing trees of every description. Nature seemed not to care that she had allowed both palm trees and temperate-zone rowans and plums to thrive in the same area. Another peculiar thing was that all of such fruits as there were appeared to be ripe at the same time.

With cries of satisfaction the American boy ran among the trees picking up juicy windfalls and stuffing himself with Burgundy cherries and Chinese oranges as well as maple walnuts and butter pecans. The woman too partook. As she did she cheered on her companion: "Eat your fill. You may not pass this way again, or if you do it may not be the same."

Button Bright wondered what she meant. It is true that, when he was well and truly gorged and they were leaving the grove Jrumm halted, drew a stick from under her seemingly all-enveloping cloak, and waved it briefly while uttering unintelligible words and pointing back at the fruit trees in a significant manner. The boy couldn't see any change among the glistening fruits or the glossy leaves or the sturdy tree trunks. Just the same he said, "Say, are you a sorceress?"

"Oh, now you've gone and guessed it," cried the woman mock-ruefully. "Never mind. It won't affect you. But just in case you *should* come here again, be advised: don't eat any of the fruit." She didn't explain why not.

They traveled on and came to a fork in the path. Without thinking Button Bright was about to take the right-hand branch when his companion said, "No. That way leads back into the mountains. We'd fetch up at the same place eventually but this other way is shorter." They went left.

Now they came to a river. Quite an ordinary river, flowing quietly through a mild yellow-green gumbdrop landscape. It was only when you got up to it that you saw that the 'water' was white.

"What's that?" asked Button Bright, surprised. The river clearly wasn't flowing fast enough for the color to be the white of churning water and foam.

"Guess," said Jrumm.

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"Well, it looks like milk, but *that* can't be."

"Why not? It's flowing out of the Cows," countered the woman, and she pointed to the distant range of hills to the north. Indeed, the outline of the ridge did look a little like the backbones of a line of unmoving cattle. "Those are the Mountains of Moo" (etymologically related to "Mo").

"Oh," said Button Bright, wiser than before. "Now do we get across the milk—if we do?"

"Close your eyes," commanded Jrumm. "You won't be bothered so much that way."

But if the sorceress thought the American was going to be perturbed by a little inexplicable air transport she was mistaken. Button Bright did as he was told, however. After a moment's application by Jrumm of her magic stick the two found themselves on the western bank of the stream.

It was all right for him to look again, but Button Bright was blasé: he'd had to do with a good deal of magic, on his way to and in Oz and on Sky Island. The present little prestidigitation didn't seem to him anything much. He waited while Jrumm invoked a spell on the Milk River, then he said, "Now where are those dragons?"

"A bit of a hike still," confessed Jrumm.

But by late afternoon the now tiring hikers came in sight of a range of low purple mountains blocking the western horizon. As the sky grew orange behind the sierra and things darkened to prune-color, Button Bright began to see sombre turrets rising from among forest trees.

"That's the castle of the purple Dragon," informed his companion.

"'Dragon' singular?" asked Rutton Bright feeling defrauded. "I thought you said 'dragons'."

"Oh, there are, there are," the sorceress hastened to reassure. "It's just that the purple one is in charge. But the place is crawling with dragons, literally. All colors—and consistencies."

"'Consistencies'?"

"Mn. Now wait—and be surprised."

"What are we going to do there?"

"Deliver this bird."

The American had almost forgotten the little grey mocking-bird chick. It was hours since it had picked up any new tunes. Just the cries of the buzzard, the canary, the capercaillie, the coot, and the cormorant: creatures encountered by field and stream during the day's promenade. "It's still got thirty-six to go," volunteered its owner. "At the end I want it to be a 'fifty-tongued' bird."

Button Bright was always literal-minded. "Fifty tongues?" he enquired. "Will there be room in its head for that many?"

"Of course I mean," said Jrumm, spelling it out, "the ability to sing *as if* it had the expert tongues—and larynxes and esophagi, et cetera—of fifty different sorts of fowls."

"Oh." Then said the boy, "How are you going to do that?"

"Let it out in the woods and fields, by marsh and mountain. These are the Hills of Tweet we're coming to. They're haunted by every kind of bird known to man—and by some that aren't."

C H A P T E R S I X

<<1952 continued>>

Speedy didn't mention Terrybubble. He didn't want the girl to think he was completely bonkers. Or, actually, even partly. That's why he also didn't mention Umbrella Island as such. Who in a bar on eighth Avenue, New York City, was going to believe that a small blue-eyed fairy—really true—lived on a perfectly solid rock island that floated around in the sky supported by a vast umbrella?

He skipped all that part and just said, "I was on summer vacation when I was twelve and spent time on an island overseas." That sounded better than 'overairs'. "As a matter of fact. I washed up there kind of accidentally and at first I didn't have any way to get off. But I met some people: this girl I mentioned and her old dad, who ran the island, as it turned out, and some of his ... employees.

"I had a pet with me and—"

"Pet'?" said the woman, curious.

"Yeah, a d—" Rapidan caught himself in time, lied, and turned "dinosaur" into "dog". "It liked to chase the girl's cat." There; that fitted in okay and in fact was more lifelike than the life had been. Who could suppose that dinosaurs, in life—or

after it!—would chase cats? About like the supposititious dog chasing flies The scale was all wrong. They just wouldn't do it.

"While I was there I was able to help the people in charge against some outsiders they had trouble with." The form of words summed up uninformatively the story of Umbrella Island's unlucky and temporary shipwreck between those other and warring islands of Norroway and Roaraway. "That put me in good with the boss man.

"Now, as it happened, this little girl wasn't all that little after all—just in retrospect. In fact, she was the same size I was *and* looked like me. There'd been a kidnap threat against her and some of the k—" On second thought Speedy turned what would have been "king" into "captain". "—aptain's henchmen thought it would be a good idea to substitute me for the p—" Just in time what would have been "princess" became "—oor young kid— when the time came to turn her over as a hostage."

The girl across acted interested but, understandably, puzzled. "How could they substitute a boy for a girl?"

"Oh, I forgot to mention that on that island they had a kind of funny dress code. More or less unisex. By then I was wearing the local costume of T-shirt and slacks for both sexes. Neither one of us had boobs yet—" He put in that little brassy note so the pick-up girl would think he was an all-right guy. "—so we really did look like twins.

"But by now I was in the captain's good graces and he wouldn't hear of such a thing. At the last minute he got help from outside and neither one of us had to go into captivity with the kidnapper. What would have made that a bore was not that the snatcher would hold us for ransom but that he wanted the victim for a servant. You can figure we weren't very keen on that."

"And the girl?"

"Reeda. Yeah ..." Speedy dreamed. "While all this was going on the kid and I were thrown together a lot. I guess we got pretty fond of each other. In fact I know damn well we did. Rut the fun and games—as they seem to be, looking

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back—were over all too soon.

“I had help leaving the island—so I left.”

“Why?” said the floozy.

Speedy looked at her with admiration. She was all right. She grasped the essentials. “That’s what I asked myself right at the time: Why did my thrilling, adventures and friendships have to end” Wouldn’t it be better to spend the rest of my days on the island instead of returning to a humdrum existence in America?

“But you know what dopes people are. Creatures of routine. Back I came... I guess I’ve been regretting, it ever since.”

“Yeah. Well...” The girl in the booth didn’t seem to know what to say. Maybe she was wondering, if she ought to make a play for him now after all?

But the fellow was going on. “You know what almost the worst part of it was?”

Well, no, she couldn’t guess that, so he told her. “At that time I was living in this country with an uncle of mine who was an inventor. If I’d stayed on the island he and I would sure have missed each other—but we’d get over it. But while I was there I got wind—plans and all—of a new kind of submarine cannon. Based on natural water pressure and the action of the tides. It fired sea waters but lethally. And I knew how it worked.

“Kid that I was, I couldn’t resist getting back to my uncle and bragging about that gun. He was impressed all right. With my specifications of the general principles he went to work to perfect it as a powerful weapon and when the war came along he turned it over to Uncle Sam.”

“Oh, wow,” said the girl. non-committally. Rapiden was glad of that. An uneducated (presumably) girl of the streets, she couldn’t be expected to have other than standard trite attitudes like “Hooray for our side” and “My country, right or wrong”. But just maybe, deep down somewhere, she had essential decency that didn’t make her cheer when she heard about engines of destruction.

“What I picked up by accident on an innocent holiday ended by causing death and destruction for hundreds—what do I

know? thousands?—of people during World War Two. Helped our side win, of course. I’ve always felt guilty...”

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

<<1949>>

Once upon a time there lived a King who had a daughter of such beauty and goodness she had become renowned throughout the land. Everyone spoke of her in awed whispers, for there was a mystery surrounding her. Although her beauty was acknowledged by all, no one remembered ever seeing her, for the King was said to keep her well guarded. Not even the servants and courtiers at the palace were afforded a glimpse of her.

In this kingdom there also lived a Young Man who often dreamed about the Princess of great goodness and beauty. This dream took hold in his heart and became a consuming fire, with the result that he became determined to have the Princess as his wife. He knew the King would not allow anyone near the Princess, but his love for her gave him courage to go to the palace and ask to see the King. When the King was informed about the Young Man he was impressed by his boldness and ordered him brought in. The Young Man told the King how he had dreamed about the Princess and how this dream had become a consuming fire so he thought of nothing else but his love for her.

The King gazed at him for a long time and then said, "If your love is so tremendous, there must be nothing you wouldn't be willing to do to gain her."

"I would go to the ends of the earth in order to get but a glimpse of her," said the Young Man.

"Well," said the King, "then you would not mind getting for me the Fifty-Tongued Bird.

If you succeed, the Princess will be yours, to have and hold."

The Young Man gasped when he heard this for he knew that many had tried to get possession of the Fifty-Tongued Bird but none had succeeded. The road that led to where the Bird was reputed to be was fraught with dangers and mysteries and none who went seeking it ever returned. But the Young Man was brave and his desire for the Princess so great that he told the King he would find the Bird, and he started on his way.

He had not gone far when he saw a sign by the road that said "*He who travels this road will never return again.*" Now the Young Man stopped for a moment for he knew that the sign spoke truth. None of those who had gone by this road had ever been heard of again. But he also knew that this was the path leading to the place of the Fifty-Tongued Bird and that unless he brought the Bird to the King he would never have the Princess. So he mustered all his courage and continued along the road.

He had not traveled much further when he saw an Old Woman sitting on a rock. When he approached, the Woman said, "My son, did you not read the sign by the road which said that whoever takes this path will never return again?"

"I did," said the Young Man. "But I am determined to marry the Princess and the King has said I cannot have her unless I bring back the Fifty-Tongued Bird."

The Old Woman studied the Young Man for a moment and then she said, "I see that you are really determined and I admire your fortitude. I will, therefore, give you some advice. Farther along this road there lives a Witch. You will find her baking bread in a large outdoor oven and burning her hands as she puts the

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loaves into the oven. If you will help her she may help you, for she alone knows the secret of the Fifty-Tongued Bird."

The Young Man thanked the Old Woman and resumed his journey. Farther on, as the Old Woman had foretold, he saw a Witch baking bread in a bakehouse open to the road. Every time she put loaves into the oven she burnt her hands. The Young Man would not have thought her a Witch for she had quite a pleasant expression in spite of the fact that she must have been in pain from her burns. The Young Man went up to her and greeted her and asked if she would not let him bake the bread for her.

The Witch accepted his offer gratefully and all the rest of her loaves were baked without further suffering on her part. After the bread was done she asked him what he was doing, traveling on such a dangerous road. The Young Man told her of his love for the Princess and how nothing could dissuade him from trying to get the Fifty-Tongued Bird for the King so that he could have the Princess.

"You are a fine Young Man," said the Witch when he had finished relating his story, "and I can be of some help to you in accomplishing your goal. In the forest beyond there is a large stable filled with horses. They are the most beautiful horses you will ever have seen: shiny black horses, brown horses, brown and white ones, horses as white as snow. In the beck of the stable there is a scrawny, sickly-looking yellow horse. That is the horse you must take in order to get to the Fifty-Tongued Bird. He is my son, who has been changed into a horse by an enchantment, and he alone knows the way.

"You will go up to him and whisper, 'Your mother has sent me,' and then you must do exactly what he tells you. I will give you a salve to put on your body as its scent will put to sleep the dragons which guard the stable, so that you can get away safely."

The Young Man thanked the Witch. He rubbed the salve on his body as she had instructed. Then he proceeded into the forest to look for the stable. As it was very large he had no trouble in finding it. As the witch had predicted, the dragons which

guarded it went to sleep as he approached them and he was able to get inside the stable without awakening them. Once inside he saw indeed the most magnificent horses he had ever seen. Among the throng the Young Man did not know where to look first. Each horse, of whatever color, seemed more splendid than the last.

But sure enough, in one dusty corner of the stable stood an ancient-looking, scrawny, sickly, mud-colored horse. 'Surely,' thought the Young Man, that horse would never be able to make such a hazardous journey. The Witch must be mistaken and this may be a trick. However, he remembered that all of those who had gone before him had failed, so he thought he had better follow the Witch's advice. He went up to the sickly horse and whispered in his ear, "Your mother has sent me."

As if by magic, the sickly horse took on life and vigor and said, "Mount me quickly:" The Young Man, startled to see the change in the Horse, obeyed, and the Horse galloped out of the stable and beyond the reach of the dragons as if it had acquired wings. Once they were safely away the Horse asked the Young Man if he was seeking the Fifty-Tongued Bird. The Young Man, amazed that he would know this, replied that he was. "Now," said the Horse, "you must do exactly as I tell you or else you will surely die. We will soon come upon an orchard where grows the most delicious-looking fruit you have ever seen. This fruit will entice you to eat it. You must resist, for if you do not then you will indeed surely die."

Soon after the Horse had said this they came to a wonderful orchard full of the most luscious fruit. There were cherries of deep burgundy as large as walnuts, peaches of fragrant aroma, ripe and tempting, golden apples, succulent pears, large purple grapes, oranges and tangerines and many other fruits which the Young Man had never seen before but which he would have loved to taste. Each fruit was at its peak of ripeness, juicy and fragrant, and each spoke to the Young Man in an enticing voice "Pluck me; eat me; I am delicious."

The Young Man was intoxicated by the perfume of the

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orchard and he thought that he would have to eat one of the fruits or die. He felt himself weakening and reasoned that one luscious cherry could surely do no harm. Fruit as beautiful as this could not be deadly. But just as he was about to succumb to the temptation he remembered his love for the Princess and his goal and he resisted. Then they came to the end of the orchard and the Young Man gave a sigh of relief.

"Now," said the Horse, "we will go over a mountain. This mountain will be covered with snow and ice and will try to freeze you. As long as you hold on to me you will not freeze, because it cannot freeze me. But should you let go, I won't be able to help you."

No sooner had they left the orchard than they started climbing up the mountain. The horse had no trouble going up its icy slopes but the Young Man felt his teeth chattering and his breath congealing. He pressed his body as close to the Horse's as he could, trying to get some warmth, but the closer he got the more the cold seemed to penetrate his bones. He felt his feet grow numb and his fingers lose all sensation. 'I can hold on no longer,' he thought. 'This cold will surely do for me.' But still he clung to the Horse as best he could and just as he knew he could endure no more they passed beyond the mountain.

It was now night and still chilly and the Young Man had not been able to warm his cold body before the Horse said, "We come now to the last of your trials. We will pass through a river. This river will try to drown you. No matter how high I rise it will rise with me. It cannot drown me, but if you let go you will drown."

Seemingly out of nowhere the river came up to meet them. The higher the Horse rose, the higher rose the river, seemingly determined to drown the rider. The Young Man's hands grew slippery as the river rose up along the Horse's body. The Horse rose higher; so did the river, up to the Horse's head, and still it rose. The Young Man doubted his ability to hold on against the river's swelling flow but still as long as there was breath in him, he was determined to struggle on. The river rose up to his neck.

The Young Man closed his eyes and opened his mouth, gasping for air. This is the end, he thought. But when he opened his eyes again, he saw that they had passed the river. "We have now arrived at the land where the Fifty-Tongued Bird is guarded," said the Horse. "From here on, you are on your own. I will wait for you by the edge of the river for I cannot go with you to the castle where the Bird is kept. You must gain access to it by yourself. Once inside, you will go to the topmost room and in that room you will see many doors. You must open the door in the center. Inside you will find dozens of cages of gold, silver, and precious stones. They will contain the most beautiful birds imaginable. You will ignore them all and take a rusty dusty old cage with a little grey bird inside. That is the Fifty-Tongued Bird."

The Young Man thanked the Horse for his help and started along the road leading to the castle. As he approached it, he saw that the castle was guarded on all sides and no one was allowed to go within.

The Maids who worked in the castle, however, often came out to take the air. Soon the Young Man made friends with one of them. She fell in love with him and found it difficult to refuse him any request. One day he asked her if he might look inside the castle.

At first she refused vehemently, reminding him that it was most stringently forbidden for any stranger to pass the gate. But as he persisted she gave in at last and led him into the castle by a secret passageway.

Once inside the castle the Young Man asked to see the topmost room.

"Oh, no," the Maid protested. "No one is allowed up there."

"But if you loved me as you say you do, you would not hesitate to let me in."

The Maid was torn between her loyalty to the keepers of the castle and her love for the Young Man. Her love proved the stronger motivation and so she led him through the many rooms of the castle until they reached the one on top. There he

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saw many doors, just as the Horse had described them. He asked the Maid to open the door in the center.

She, fearful, yet knowing that she could not refuse him anything he really wanted, gave in to his wishes and opened the middle door.

The Young Man's eyes were dazzled by the sight of the beautiful bird-cages that filled the room. There were gold cages with emerald inlays, silver cages with rubies, platinum cages with diamonds. Inside the cages were gorgeous birds of every iridescent color. In a far corner of the room, hardly noticeable, stood a dusty rusty cage with a small grey bird crouched on its floor, seeming more dead than alive.

The Young Man doubted that this could after all be the prized Bird the King wanted in exchange for his daughter. But he remembered that all the Horse had told him up to now had proven to be true, so without another moment's hesitation he took the dusty cage and ran out of the castle without looking back.

The Maid was distraught at what she had done, for now the Guards were alerted and began to chase the Young Man. But having had a head start he was able to reach the Horse before the Guards caught up with him. Clutching the cage securely, the Young Man mounted the Horse.

The Guards, coming in close pursuit, shouted, "Drown him, River; Drown him, River!" But the River was calm and would not rise up to drown the Young Man for he had once passed it successfully.

The Guards, ever more frustrated, shouted, "Freeze him, Mountain! Freeze him, Mountain!" But the mountain disdained to freeze him.

The Guards, raging furiously and ever pursuing, shrieked, "Eat the fruit! Eat the fruit." But the fruit of the orchard had become wilted and wormy and unappealing. Realizing that their efforts were useless, the Guards returned defeated to the castle. The Young Man on the Horse returned safely to the forest stable where now the Witch was awaiting him. She took the cage and said something over it which its rescuer could not grasp. Then

she returned the cage to the Young Man, saying, "Beware of the King:" He did not understand her warning but he was anxious to be away; he thanked the Witch and the Horse for all their help and bade them farewell.

When the Young Man arrived at the palace with the caged bird the King was much surprised for he had not expected ever to see him again. "Seize him," he said to the guardsmen, "and throw him down the well." The Young Man had hardly time to express dismay before he found himself being dragged out of the palace and forcibly cast into a well. As he was being hurled down he seized hold of a stone that jutted out from the inside of the well and held on for dear life. A few days later a Farmer came to the well to draw water and saw the Young Man inside. He threw him a rope and helped him to climb out.

"How did you get down there?" the Farmer asked.

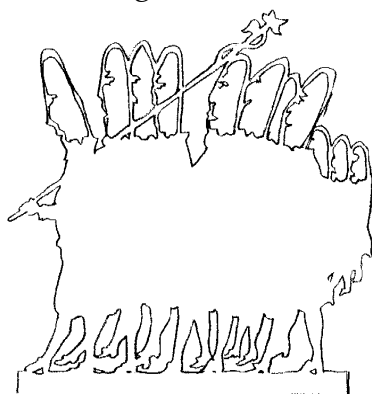
"Don't ask," said the Young Man. "It's a long sad story."

The Farmer let the Young Man stay in a shed beside his house and had him help with the farm work.

By now the Young Man, glad to be still alive, no longer thought about great adventures or of marrying the Princess. He was content to live a simple life and carry out his daily chores.

But one night the Young Man was awakened by the most beautiful singing he had ever heard. It was as if angels were caroling; as if fifty songbirds were singing together. He opened his eyes and saw the loveliest young woman he had ever seen.

"Who are you?" stammered the Young Man.



"I am the Princess," replied the lady. "I am the Fifty-Tongued Bird. Many years ago, when I was only a child, a powerful Witch had a quarrel with my father. It was she who bewitched me and turned me into a bird. Only a love strong enough to meet and overcome all perils would free me from her spell. You alone had the intelligence and courage, you alone were able to release me from captivity and so break the enchantment."

"Yes," said the Young Man thoughtfully. "But your father is a cruel man and acted dishonorably to me."

"Do not fear," said the Princess. "I will speak to my father. He must be moved when I tell him all that you endured for my sake." So it was that after many trials and having lost all hope of gaining his great prize the Young Man was married to his Princess.

They lived happily ever after.

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

<<1914>>

Jrumm flew into a passion. At least, she pretended to. She had to keep up her reputation for testiness.

Something appeared to have riled her. It was the absence of dragons.

Button Bright *had* thought it was a little quiet as they trudged up through the woods, stumbled over wet stones in a beer brook, and came upon a path that was almost paved. No roaring. Those dragons (if that's what they were) earlier in the day hadn't waited to be seen to be heard, but here, where dragons ought to be seen, they weren't seen or heard either.

By the time the copper-colored portcullis in the castle's great portway was sighted Jrumm was uttering imprecations that boded no good. As she reached the crisscrossed bars and vainly tried to shake them she was yelling.

Button Bright was startled at his companion's loss of composure. Still, she had said she had an awful temper when provoked. "What's the matter?" he asked mildly.

Jrumm had no grievance against the boy. He had one against her but he didn't know it. She controlled herself a bit and said, "Here ought to be dragons! There aren't! They've gone away

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and, what's more, locked the portcullis after them. Oh, I have only myself to blame. I thought I was being so smart, making haste slowly. I imagined they'd never think to look for me *on foot*, so I dawdled fatally. It's perfectly obvious: that villain has sent swift steeds and got here ahead of me.

"Those dragons! They *were* dragons. You were right: I should never have passed by so blithely those sounds we heard in the forest. I'll bet that—"

The sorceress muttered and imprecated and Button Bright hadn't a clue what she was going on about. Meanwhile she was not losing time in gaining ingress to the castle. From under the crystalline robe she drew a silver cord in a big ball, loosened an end of it, and sent the rest flying and un-twining to a window embrasure high up. There the rope end slung itself about an iron stanchion, knotted itself, and spied down on its mistress with a smirk—if ropes can smirk.

"Right," pronounced the wonder-worker. "Up you go."

"Me?" whispered the boy.

"Sure. You're a fine young man, aren't you? Nimble, and that? If I can climb the rope you can."

Button Bright didn't like to imply he wasn't at least a normal boy so he took hold of the cord in grubby hands and began to try to haul himself up. It went easier than he dared hope. The rope, which was of a convenient stiffish texture like reed or bamboo, had a pleasing way of dangling in what were virtually footholds. With the slightest adaptability—which Button Bright had—one soon learnt to grasp with both hands and feet, and the trick was accomplished.

The sorceress made one or two adjustments under her mysterious cloak and then she swarmed after. By the time the two crawled over the wet sill of the unglazed single-barred window opening she seemed to be in quite a good humor again. "Maybe there's a silver lining," she muttered. "Having raided this place once, he won't think to look here again, anyway not right away..."

Button Bright paid little attention. He was a fairly incurious youth and what curiosity he did have was richly preoccupied

by the appearance of his present surroundings.

For a start, there were no people to be seen. That gave an air of mystery and solemnity to the place. The halls were spacious, the walls paneled, the doorways boasting stone jambs and massive wooden doors. Everywhere haunting scents hung in the air, faintly intermingled with the smell of brimstone, and perhaps of something else not even that pleasant. It seemed the dragons were not long gone.

The sorceress had no time to linger over the appointments. Quickly she led the way up shallow-stepped circular stairways to the topmost room in the keep. Here she flung wide the door and revealed to the American a stately but empty room.

"This is to be the aviary," stated Jrumm, "though so far untenanted. That will soon be remedied. In time you may want to help in catching birds.

"As for you—" Here she drew from under her cloak the trumpery cage with its little occupant. She gave the cage an oddly affectionate-looking pat. "This corner should do for the likes of you." So saying, the sorceress set the cage down any old where.

She turned back to Button Bright. "Can I trust you?" she demanded.

The boy thought a moment. "As much as I can trust you," he said, really wisely.

"Hmh" said the woman. That wasn't much. But this was an emergency. "I didn't think there'd be any rush once we got here. Now there is! I can't spare a moment. I have to be off to reconnoiter those dragons we think we heard. You'll be in charge here. Can you cope? Never mind if you can't. All you've got to do is water and feed the birdling. There's seed in the kitchen. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Button Bright took all that with aplomb, which is not to say he necessarily gave it his imprimatur. He trailed after as Jrumm bustled down and back to the portcullis. From a spike on the inner wall she took a key that unlocked a little door in the grille, passed through, relocked the door, and pocketed the key. "Trusting each other as much as we do—" she explained. "Have fun.

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Take a look around. As I say, 'til soon," she ended.

"Well," said Button Bright, hands on hips. He watched through the bars the crystal-cloaked woman stride down the slope and disappear into the forest.

C H A P T E R N I N E

<<1952>>

They walked east on Forty-second.

"I'm glad we met," said Speedy Rapidan "Too bad it couldn't be for longer. I'm meeting some pals of mine for a reunion dinner..."

"Oh?" said the girl. She'd said her name was "Pat". She seemed to have all the time in the world. If she was a hustler (or was that word reserved to male street-walkers?), at least she wasn't hustling him. "What, kind of reunion?"

That was a facer. Now were you going to explain to a common or garden lady of the evening—or, in this case, mid-afternoon—that you had seven friends with whom you had one single, but that a compelling, thing in common?: that you had all spent time in a make-believe—but perfectly real—country where animals talked and everybody lived forever. There might come a time when, through circumstances, pros would come to believe in, and even visit, Oz[§], but that time was not yet.

"In our youth," fabulated Speedy, "we all had a lot of fun at different times in places like that island I told you about. Places most people never get to see. Met some funny people there too.

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

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And when we can't get back there all the time we like to meet and talk about it once a year anyway. Kinda helps keep it alive."

"Why can't you go back?" enquired the tart reasonably. "You look pretty well-heeled to me."

"Question of time, mostly—not expense," Rapidan lied glibly. "The place's very remote. Like: you couldn't get to the interior of Tibet just over a weekend, could you?"

"Tibet, ey?" He hoped that seemed inaccessible—and unfamiliar -enough. "Did you see yaks there?" No, it wasn't: But still, she had taken the bait.

"Not yaks, but orks." There: he'd been able to insert a little truth at last, even if the truth was the unlikeliest bit of all the data he'd mentioned yet.

"Orks?"

"Yeah, a rare kind of bird." He didn't tell *how* rare, or totally impossible-seeming. Quickly Speedy ransacked his memory for personages of Oz he could describe without immediately and completely making Pat think he was kidding her or was crazy. The Tin Woodman, the living Scarecrow, Jack Pumpkinhead, Tik-Tok the mechanical man, the Patchwork Girl, a human-sized Frogman, a djinn who lived in a jar... Good night, wasn't there anybody in Oz that. sounded normal enough to talk about? A raft of little preteen girls, of course, but he didn't want, to bring in any more of those.

The engineer's darting memory came up with one conventional figure who was unwaveringly present at the court in the Emerald City. "One of our buddies there is in the army." No use stating that he *was* the army. "Great of guy. Well, I guess he's not all that old. Forty-five maybe. Has a funny nickname: Omby Amby. As a matter of fact he's making the trip this time: first time ever—in this direction. It'll be a kick showing him New York."

"What's so special about the soldier?" she wanted to know.

"Special?" Now how did she guess that?

"Yes. You don't need to go overseas to meet a soldier."

"Well, mm, he's very proud of his long beard—"

"Yuck."

"Yeah, well, maybe. But the thing is: it's green."

Now came that stare he'd been hoping to avoid. Nuts. In an effort to keep the boat steady Speedy went on: "Yeah, he dyes it green."

"Well, isn't that the sweetest thing," she mocked.

That was even worse. Better incredible than effeminate. "Yes," said Speedy. "Ordinarily it's blue."

C H A P T E R T E N

<<1914>>

Not bad; lord of a castle after less than twenty-four (conscious) hours in a country. Button Bright strolled around as enjoined, with hands in pockets.

Actually, other than the massive fittings there wasn't that much to see, but what there was was freely accessible. No doors seemed barred. The visitor wondered rather what it was all in aid of: dragons and dropped portcullises guarding what? The empty room on top? Surely not; even that room wasn't locked.

After stepping over the fourth pile of dragon spoor the boy came to the conclusion that this was or had been, simply a harbor home for unparticular dragons. They hadn't been guarding anything; they just lived there. Maybe the portcullis was for keeping them *in*, rather than anybody out. He became quite sure when he reached the vast kitchens. There were no haunches of venison, or even corn flakes. Ranged all down one wall were seven-deep stacks of cases of oil-cake and fireseed. In cauldrons over the fire still smoked molten sulphur. Not much joy there.

Suddenly Button Bright realized he was ravenous. Rations had been spare on the road: really little more than the fruit of sugarplum trees at odd intervals after they left the fabulous fruit

grove. Fe tasted a pinch of fireseed and spat it out directly, then dashed to the pump over the slop-stone. Thank goodness, at least there was real water: even rather good pure-flavored water from some deep well. That reminded him of the poor little bird in the mildewed cage. He had been told to keep it supplied with water. And “bird seed”! Surely by that was not meant fireseed. He nosed about a bit more and did come across a big bin full of what looked like coriander kernels.

He tasted one. It didn’t taste like much but at least it wasn’t fireseed. For a moment he applied himself to the problem of his commission and soon came to a logical conclusion. Instead of carrying seed and water up seven flights, and who knew for how many days?, he would bring Mahomet to the fountain.

Back once more in the kitchen with the caged bird he set the coop in the seed bin and opened its door. The chick just sat there. Then it said “Peepity peep”, as buntings do.

“Sure,” said Button Bright. “I agree.” The birdlet tentatively shifted position on its rung.

“Oh, water,” remembered the youth. He pumped the slop-stone full. “When you get thirsty enough I guess you’ll fly over here.”

He took a long healthy swig of the tingling water himself. It was really good. But it made his hunger more overpowering than ever.

Alone, abandoned, with nothing to eat! Was that the sorceress’s way of insuring his co-operation? He couldn’t stay there and starve.

He quitted the fruitless—and also meatless and vegetableless—kitchen and sought elsewhere. Full dark had long fallen by now and though the odd flamboy burned here and there the castle remained spooky and unsettling. Button Bright poked his way into all the rooms along one corridor but found nothing resembling a dormitory. He soon remembered: this wasn’t a people castle but a dragon one. Dragons presumably needed no couches to sleep upon. Presently he did like a dragon and slept on the floor.

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In the morning the usually phlegmatic boy was roused to do something. Even if this was a magic land he might very well die of neglect in the un-accommodating castle. He went to the kitchens, where the little mockingbird greeted him with “peepity-peep”, then rendered the whole of the mating aria of the *male* capercaillie. Button Bright was touched but could perform nothing in return. He shared the bird’s breakfast though: he chewed *and* swallowed a whole handful of the coriander seeds or equivalent.

“Bwaa,” he said when he had finished. It wasn’t good enough. He had to escape. There was no help for it. He carried the chick on his finger to the rim of the slop-stone just so it would get the idea. It complacently dipped its bill and swallowed.

“Goodbye, bird,” said Button Bright and left the castle kitchen forever. He revisited the portcullis but found no satisfaction there.

Then he remembered the casement they had climbed in by. He didn’t recall seeing the sorceress wind up the ball of silver cord after use. There was just a chance.

Hooray! The best of sorceresses can commit an oversight and Jrumm had been in a tearing hurry. By straining Button Bright could just reach the sill. He hauled himself up and grasped the rope which still entwined the stanchion.

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

<<1952>>

At least it seemed like ever after.

In fact, it was only one or two years that the Young Man and the Princess lived together before discovering that they really knew nothing about each other. The little they did know they didn't much like. For starters, the young man was tone deaf, while the princess, naturally, was constantly caroling across a golden street in the city as the sun sank low. They had their own little palace in old Scowleyow's capital and when the arpeggios would get too insistent the young man would send his wife out to sing in the park opposite.

The wedding had been done with great pomp and ceremony and that part they both enjoyed. The princess was able to wear all her finest new gowns and jewellery and display the fact that she was as beautiful as people had all been saying for decades. The young man concentrated on the consuming fire he had formerly been subject to. He fought stoutly against the realization that spiritual fires are much easier to be consumed by when they are theoretical than when one is faced with the living presence of the supposed adored one across the breakfast table.

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For instance, the princess *would* insist on eating bird seed. "Don't be silly," she said when her husband protested. "I was raised on it. Am I supposed to give up the habits of a lifetime and start eating roast guinea hen—like a cannibal? I wouldn't hear of it."

But the young man concentrated on the consuming fire and didn't let the discussion degenerate into a quarrel.

Yet he was not without fault either in the princess' eyes. The main thing was that he was so plebeian. He never said anything about his family background but it was evident to the princess from the start that he didn't know much about how to behave in a royal court. She remembered but too clearly how at home and comfortable the young man had appeared in the shed beside the farmhouse where she'd found him. She suspected rural outhouses had been no unfamiliar phenomenon to him in his childhood.

Still, she was so good, and she had been told that a part of goodness is not to be snobbish about people's antecedents. She filled her basket with the broken meats from the breakfast table and prepared to go her rounds of bringing succor to the poor.

"Do you mind?" said the young man, for one of the meats was the slice of breakfast ham he had been in process of eating. He forked it out of her basket and back onto his plate.

But the princess too was resolved to live happily ever after and not quarrel. She sat down again and bit her lip and was silent.

The young man went on reading the paper and was silent too. They both knew it was impossible to have an argument if neither party spoke.

Presently a sigh escaped her. The young man put down his paper and fixed his wife with an accusing eye. "What's the matter now?"

"Oh, I was just thinking," said the princess in a small voice. "Y.M."—she called him "Y.M.", you see. Somehow he had never got around to telling her his name. No wonder. It was "Ignatz". "Y.M., it's no good, is it?"

"What's no good?"

"Our marriage. We were a couple of mad things, ever to wed. Weren't we?"

"Were we?"

"Yes. I did it out of the gratitude I was popularly supposed to feel for your having rescued me, and you because of all the effort you'd made TO rescue me and I think it must have seemed like lost motion to you not to carry through with it. But we were... 'already taken', weren't we?"

The young man was silent some more. Odd. For the first time, in the midst of their confession of failure of love, he felt a little stab of fondness for his wife. She was wiser, more full of insight, than he had guessed.

He laid down his paper. "How long have you known?"

"Oh, from the start I could sense that what you felt about me was awe, not really passionate love. That, and triumph at your success in having accomplished the great task you'd set out on... And—dare I name it? You won't be angry?—a wee bit, at least, of gratification at social climbing. There, now you're going to be cross—" The princess lifted her eyes to him hopefully-fearfully.

"By no means. Actually, you've hit the nail on the head," the young man confessed magnanimously. "But you said 'already taken'. What did you mean by that?"

"I knew it on the wedding night. Awe and triumph and social success didn't add up to what you were meant to be feeling—and showing. I knew there was somebody else."

Now a sigh escaped *him*, but a deep manly one. In fact, it was more like a dry sob.

"Come, my dear." The princess ventured to lay a hand on her husband's. "Tell me, do."

Such sympathy was heart-tearing. If only they'd confessed their lack of love, or the existence of *other* love, years ago, what a comfort they could have been to each other. Now there were actual tears as Y.M. said, "It was when I was rescuing you. I met a young girl. The first I'd ever known, really. I'd never been acquainted with a *pretty* girl. There were none where I grew up.

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All I knew about lovely ladies was from reading the papers. Completely theoretical, you see. And that's how I acquired a consuming fire for you. For the *idea* of you. Because the newspapers, which was all I had to read, praised you always as the most beautiful—if not the *only* beautiful—girl in the world. I *was* consumed—until I met reality."

"But who was she?" cried the princess, all agog. "My sweetheart? A young girl. She worked as a slavey in that grim castle where I found you. Who she was? I don't know anything about her. I don't know much about a shining star. I only know I'm lost without her. That's all I know. I loved her as I always will. Princess, I love her^{s!}"

It was like an aria from opera. If this story is ever put on the stage, be sure and let Y.M. sing that to the tune of the Flower Song from Carmen. The libretto can be altered so that the character is not tone-deaf.

The princess was exactly the one to hear the music in her husband's confession. She replied in full coloratura: "'Sweet-heart!' 'sweetheart'? sweetheart, will you love her ever? Will you remember in May how you were happy and gay^{ss}? —You were happy and gay, weren't you?"

"I think my little friend *was* happy for a brief time while she abetted me in setting free the fifty-tongued bird. But in my single-minded devotion to the quest I was scarcely gay. Now I wish we *had* had a few more lightsome moments together. There was a picnic in the woods the time I talked her into letting me into the keep. But it was over so soon..."

The princess was now veering a little in sympathy. "But how could you let her go?" she demanded, almost indignantly.

"Oh," the young man philosophized, "people with cheap mentalities" (he knew himself: stout fella) "will always chose money, glamor, and position over true mutual affection. I did too. It's only after you've got them that you realize money, glamor, and position are hollow possessions—if they are all

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there is."

"I found that out too. We supposed to be living happily ever after but in blunt fact I have not been happy since I left the castle of the purple Dragon. Only today, talking so confidentially with you, my dear, do I feel a faint sweet breath of something like contentment—"

"You were happy in captivity? Locked in a cell within a cell in a prison castle!? How can it be?" cried the young man reproachfully. Good heavens, it looked like the famous rescue was turning out to have been a blunder from both sides.

"Well, yes," hesitated the princess. "I have to confess it. I had delightful companionship in captivity and of course that's worth more than jewels."

"But who was it? When I took the bird of the fifty tongues it was all alone in the strongroom. Just surrounded by jeweled cages—which were there merely to confuse pursuers, as I understand it."

"Oh, those jeweled cages. I can tell you how *they* got started. But didn't you notice what was in the cages?"

"Just some birds. Why? Rather gorgeous ones, I'll admit. But there was no one in the room for you to make a 'companion' of!"

"Anthropomorphising as usual," sighed the princess, feeling her little flare-up of love for her husband fade. It was this lack of sensitivity, of knowing how one properly *should* be thinking and feeling and acting, that most irritated her about him.

"'Just birds', you say. It doesn't occur to you that I was a bird? and naturally I throve in the society of my own kind. We had a ball! up in that topmost chamber: chattering away all day and night, singing in competition—those of us who could sing— and of course I was delightfully bucked, always to win. And boasting about and admiring our own and others' splendid plumage and cage jewellery—though I came off last in *that* contest.

"But most of all I had the adoration of my dear Dicky Bird.

(His name was ‘Bert’ but. I never called him that. So plebeian.) He seemed awfully struck with me from the start and his devotion never wavered, all down the years. I missed him terribly when you ‘rescued’ me—and I still do. T wonder if he still lives...”

“Why don’t you go and see?” said the young man gruffly. Being a man, he couldn’t show the kind of tender concern his lady wife could. Yet he wasn’t *all* hard cheap feelinglessness where others were concerned. (Like many unempathetic people he was sensitively aware of his *own* emotions.) He really wished the princess well and was even almost ready to help her achieve such well-being.

“Please don’t think I haven’t thought of it,” replied the wife. “But we’ve been having to live happily ever after. I couldn’t shatter the illusion by revealing that I hadn’t been happy once.”

“But now?” suggested Y.M.

Suddenly man and wife stood up as in one gesture. “What are we waiting for?!” they cried together and ran each to his own chamber to get ready for the trip.

C H A P T E R T W E L V E

<<1914>>

Free, white, and half twenty-one: that was Button Bright's condition now. He skipped out of the forest, refugeeing south. Sometimes he almost forgot he was hungry it was such a nice day and he so insouciant, apart from humming the Miss-Meals Blues. Then when his stomach gave a pang he would recall. Simultaneously he would forget he wasn't in Oz and there weren't cherry-pie trees around every corner or hot-dog bushes in the undergrowth. There *were* candy canes and bonbon brambles but they were no good. He lost a lot of time looking for food in the wild.

The first hours of his escape were made musical by the birds which well and truly, as described, infested the forest. Not though Button Bright knew he heard the calls of the corncrake, the crane, the crow, the cuckoo, and the curlew (there were lakes in the hills, round which such could wade). Now he was out on the open plain again, the sun shone, and he missed again his bumbershoot, which might have served as a parasol. He wondered what had become of it.

But one thing he wondered at more than that: he never saw any people, not since the forest. There he had sighted a number

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but then it was early morning and fewness of persons to be expected. Now in full day, out on the plain, there were none.

Why was that? wondered even the traditionally incurious boy. This was a pretty good country, it could obviously grow things, so there would seem to be no reason why humans shouldn't thrive there. Yet they didn't. Plenty of all other sorts of creatures though. A coypu ambled across his path. Button Bright addressed it but it made no reply. Was that because it couldn't speak or from sheer indifference?

No, Mo seemed to suffer from the same ailment as dear old Oz: out in the country you never saw people unless they were destined to play some part in your own story. By now Button Bright was wishing quite much that somebody would come along and play a part. He'd had fun so far, after a fashion, and was doing so still, strolling along with his hands in his pockets, kicking at stones (which were often rock candy) in his path, but there was just the chance that he might grow bored if something didn't happen soon. Boredom, of course, was the worst possible fate for a growing boy.

Right on cue things got better.

The path had strengthened to an actual road and now it lifted to pass over a bridge. The boy dangled over the railing for ten minutes, looking down into the brown river fairly far below. What could he use that for? he wondered. It wasn't quite of the color you'd want to drink, though he didn't go so far as to wonder what made it brown. Then a little breeze lifted off the stream and brought to his nostrils a faintly sweet smell. Sweet, but not actually of a sweetness one cared for. Sassafras!

At first he didn't believe it. True, he'd already made acquaintance with a milk river in this peculiar country, but, it had been indicated to flow from "cow mountains." What could give rise to a sassafras stream?

He'd better make sure. He crossed on over the bridge, scrambled down the bank, and stuck his fist in the river. He licked it. Oh, pew, root beer. This was the famous Root Beer River, about which others had heard so much, but he nothing. He just

went on mildly wondering how it got there.

Then it occurred to him that root beer was a sort of food, though not a much better one than all the sweets that littered the landscape. He speculated as to whether he should drink some, just on humanitarian (to himself) grounds.

He decided against it and regained the road. Sassafras and licorice. He wondered why it was he couldn't stand them when all the other kids adored those tastes. He just barely liked peppermint. On the other hand he enjoyed *spearmint* a lot. Funny, but there you were.

If Button Bright had been the least bit of a contemplative type he might have gone on to wonder why it is that one person, without having been frightened by it in the womb, will all his life detest root beer, while an own sibling may love it. A profound question though seemingly so trivial. If he'd wondered that he could have claimed the Nobel Prize as one of the great thinkers of mankind.

Anyway he'd now had an adventurette and the hours could go on uneventfully again. Once more the roadway devolved to a path. The boy was driven to wonder why there was even a path if no one but, himself ever came this way.

There was one little further frisson the time he came to a crossroads. Only one arm remained to a signpost standing there. It said "To the Wise Donkey", which was of no interest. Poor Button Bright. If only he'd known, the easterly of the three unmarked ways led to the Fruitcake Island and on to the domains of the Duchess Bredenbutta (who no doubt could have spared him a little). He did not know — and proceeded on south.

Long about sundown the path Button Bright had cleaved to came to another stream. This time there was no bridge and the path had to turn rather sharply to follow the creek up into the highlands again. Since the boy had no idea or plan as to where he was going (as long as there might be food there) a highland was as good as a plain to him. He hitched up his pants and headed for the hills.

But now he hadn't gone far when at last he met another foot

passenger. The fellow marched out of the gloaming from among trees and came to a sharp military halt when he saw Button Bright. "Who goes there?" he cried, as if he weren't any more used to seeing other wayfarers than was Button Bright himself.

The boy saw a tall lank individual in a uniform that was clearly a soldier's though with accessories of a diplomat's. The newcomer's most striking feature was a long dark flowing beard.

"Gosh," said Button Bright. "The soldier with the green whisks."

<<1914>>

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

<<1952>>

They were in Xavier's bar in the east Fifties. That's where the bunch always rendezvoused. Anybody could enter a bar and hang around indefinitely. Not like in a hotel lobby, where you got bored if you did nothing but maybe questioned by the house dick if you read a book or newspaper for too long. Ever notice?: in a bar people waiting for people can talk to each other, but not in a hotel lobby.

William Rapidan had somebody to talk to, medbragt. The Danes had a word for it: "with-brought". You couldn't say it in one word in English. In other words he'd brought with him his own talk partner. Now the job was to get rid of her in half an hour because then it would be seven o'clock. Peter'd phoned the other day from Philadelphia to confirm for the usual hour, and incidentally to mention that Wantowin Battles would be coming along. He'd said the two of them—well, some others too—had a fun story to relate.

The two weren't in a booth this time. Speedy didn't want them to get to feeling too ensconced. He hoped she'd be gone by the time the guys turned up. He wasn't ashamed to introduce her. Far from it. Pat was an okay girl. He might like to see her

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again—if his attachments didn't lie elsewhere. But he was alert to social nuances and you just didn't bring a girl to a stag party, welcome as she might be to the same men at some other kind of party. He didn't want to have to ask her to go. He wanted her to know it on her own.

To that end he paradoxically involved her in talk so absorbing she *couldn't* break in and say "I'm leaving." He said, "The 'Old 'Boys' club is made up of just the male foreigners—and that basically means Americans—that have been to that country—"

Pat broke in: "Hasn't the country got a name?" He should have seen it coming and maybe he did, back a ways, because he *had* planned he'd say 'Oz'—just like that—and count on her being the ignorant moll she ought to have been. Now, and for quite a while, he didn't see her that way any more. But he'd let the question of name go. He stopped, but only for a second. He was quick enough to say, "Sure it has."

Then while she said, "Yeah? What is it?" he had a couple of seconds to thank fast in. "Shangri-La."

"Funny name." She mused. "But okay. I've heard of it. Go on."

That was a narrow escape. She just could have heard of the Oz film but *Lost Horizon* was that bit less celebrated, that smidgin older—and even so she knew the name existed.

"There's seven of us then," related Speedy. "The oldest is a farm fella from California..." He told about Zeb Hugson, who had gone to... Shangri-La in 1906.

"Nineteen-six. He'll be kinda long in the tooth by now."

"Yeah, that's right. Zeb's getting along there, but he's far from the oldest of the fellows that have been to—um, Shangri-La."

Just then and, curiously, for the first time Speedy realized something. Plenty of men had gone from the United States to Oz but not all of them belonged to the Old Boys. Now why was that? The very Wizard himself, O.Z. Diggs: highly honored; indeed, held in awe; yet nobody'd ever proposed him for membership in the O.B.O. And Dorothy Gale's Uncle Henry. Who

could be more of an authentic American transplanted to the fairy-land than he? Or the Shaggy Man (nameless there forevermore) and the Shaggy Man's brother (even nicknameless forevermore, with only a designation by category)? Or Cap'n Bill Weedles. Or Netta Bit More, the clown.

The little puzzle didn't last long. Of course: it, was because it was the Old *Boys* of Oz. The genius of the group, even if unenunciated, was that it was composed of individuals who had known Oz as boys: men who had become, partially or in some sense, Ozites themselves, as Uncle Henry or Cap'n Rill could never be. Indeed, the "boy" aspect of the matter had been more regarded than the ex-Oz origins of the members, for were not Ojo and Randy of Regalia and Zip and Woot honorary participants? The club was for people who had been boys in Oz, regardless of what stage of maturity they might afterwards have achieved. And that's why Princess Ozma herself was Royal Patron of the society. Sex-change operations didn't count! Ozma too had known Oz for at least a decade as a boy!

These reflections perhaps slowed down the tempo of Speedy's voiced reminiscences to Pat but not enough to make her lose the thread or even feel he'd grown distant and preoccupied. She found it entertaining to hear that Peter was quite a well known architect of West Philadelphia but in his youth a champion baseball pitcher who had once saved the day with a well-aimed "twirler." She heard that Ojo had turned out to be of royal blood but that Robert Up still knew nothing of his ancestry nor was ever likely to. She learned that Zeb was content down on the farm though having seen Shangri-La, while lucky Buck Jones had on paired off with a local girl and settled in that distant country for good. His luck still held and he's missed the coconut Grove fire.

Then Speedy Rapidan looked up and saw Sples Smith heading his way.

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

<<1914>>

"Yes," exclaimed the man, coming nearer. "The Soldier with the Green Whiskers. But how did you know?"

"That's easy," said Button Bright. "You're dressed like a soldier and you've got green whiskers."

"True," admitted the private-general.. "Mostly people act as if 'Soldier with Green whiskers' is my name and I suppose I've got in the way of thinking like that myself, so when you said those words I thought you recognized me."

"I do. You're the Soldier with the Green Whiskers."

"Oh, goodness, here we go again. Do you always talk in riddles?"

"Don't know," muttered the boy, reverting to his usual practice.

"Let's put it this way," said the Soldier with the Green Whiskers, for indeed it was he! "Am I to you A soldier with green whiskers or *the* Soldier with the Green Whiskers?"

"The," said Button Bright.

"Aha. So you know me?I"

"Sure. You stand around outside Ozma's palace and look important. If there's a war you run the other way. And when the

Guardian of the Gate is off duty you take his place."

"Just so," said the soldier, stopping to gaze at the boy thoughtfully. "So you do know me. Do I know you?"

"Now *you're* kind of talking in riddles. Yes, you know me. I'm Button Bright."

"Aha." The soldier thought hard. "But last time you were wearing a sailor suit—and were only about half as tall."

"I've changed," stated the boy succinctly.

"Do you still get lost?" asked the soldier, remembering.

"Yes. I'm lost now."

"Oh." That wasn't good news, because the soldier himself had been going to ask directions. He wasn't lost but he had no more than a rough sketch map of the area with him and he was far from knowing where his next turning might be.

He asked anyway.

"The Palace of the Monarch of Mo?" echoed Button Bright. "Search me. But one thing I can tell you: it's not the way you're going. I've just come from there and not a palace did I see, or much of anything except just tame countryside."

"Perhaps you've not come far?" posited the soldier.

"I mean: there might be a capital city on beyond, the other way, past where you started."

"I don't think so. I walked all day and where I started was way on the other side of the country. There was a castle there but there was nobody in it."

"Oh, dear," said the soldier and sat down under a hornbeam hedge. He fanned himself with his hat. "But I made sure this was the way—" He fumbled for the piece of parchment on which Queen Ozma had traced ways and landmarks.

"Maybe you missed a turning," suggested the boy, and looked at the sketch—upside down.

"There was only one," informed the soldier, "and the sign said 'To the wise Donkey'. 'That was of no interest.'"

"No." Button Bright had come to the same conclusion. Now he looked at the map right side up. "But maybe after all that road led on, after the donkey, to other places." He described

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his own confusion at the road sign whose other arms were missing.

“What do we do now?” he asked.

C H A P T E R

F I F T E E N

<<1914>>

"It was unbearable," recalled Omby Amhy, the soldier with the green whiskers, dealing his companion the last biscuit from his dispatch case.

"Your marriage, you mean?" said Button Bright, sounding for a moment oddly grown up.

"Right. My wife had—has—had an awful temper. I sometimes think now that she was disappointed in me. That's why she scolded me so much."

"Disappointed about what?" Maybe if Button Bright had been a little older he would have been embarrassed to venture such a question to a married man, but he was the age he was.

As it turned out, the question was safe enough and the soldier answered blandly: "She was ambitious. She thought that I, as the Royal Army of Oz, should have gone on to glory, with her riding on my coattails and shining by reflection. But nothing happened and I just went on from year to year standing around like any recruit on sentry duty."

"Too bad," sympathized the boy, who couldn't see much harm in the soldier's way of life. Not everybody could be ambitious. "There's no room in the world for everybody to be a star."

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"Yes, it's bad when you are ambitious," knew the soldier from experience, or his wife's, as reported. "Then nothing seems worth anything unless it promotes your dream. That's why people struggling for recognition are usually unhappy. Even with success you can't be hearing applause *all* the time and all the time you're not you feel dissatisfied, like you're wasting your time and life is getting away from you and you might as well be dead."

"Gee, is that what it's like?"

"So my wife said. Anyway she railed at me constantly. Everything I did was wrong."

"Why didn't she do anything on her own then if she was so keen to be famous or glamorous or whatever it was?"

"Oh, she did, finally. She left me. That's why I'm here."

Button Bright didn't get the connection but probably he wasn't meant to, not yet. He made himself more comfortable on the grass under the hornbeam and settled to hear the story out.

"I'm sort of a mild kind of person," admitted the soldier. "I didn't have any ambition. Never did—though others have had it for me. Why, in my very cradle my military family tried to build it into me. They named me 'Wantowin'."

"That's funny," said Button Bright. "I thought your name was 'Omby Amby'."

"That's just a nickname. Maybe I'll tell you about that later." The soldier twiddled with his umbrella in almost a significant way. "In fact my name is Wantowin G. Battles—"

"What's the 'G' f or"

"'Great'—but I never lived up to any of my names. My family put me in military school. I hated it. Then my father, who had been a well known general during the time of the old king, used his influence to get me appointed to guard duty at the Palace of Magic in the Emerald City. It should have warned them: the way I let myself be pushed around was a sign I probably wasn't going to win any battles. I got pushed into my marriage too. My wife believed in my names, you see, and not in what she saw before her eyes.

"What with one thing and another I was pretty miserable.

So it was kind of a relief when my wife disappeared."

"Disappeared?" asked Button Bright, almost feeling curiosity.

"Yes, we had a grand blow-up. I always thought it took two to quarrel but she taught me different. The next day she was nowhere to be seen."

"What do you suppose happened to her?" said Button Bright to be polite. "You didn't murder her or anything?" With that question he thought he was being very naughty but in fact he was just being unrealistic. No one can die in Oz.

Omby Amby looked aggrieved. "And I such a mild peaceful bland fellow who wouldn't say Boo to a goose? I see you don't know me after all."

"Sorry," said Button Bright, who didn't really like offending people, "Please go on."

"Well, the relief was so great that for a year or two I didn't do anything. But then, you see, I met a nice woman. For the first time I wanted to get married. But how could I? not knowing but what I still was."

"What did you do?"

"My would-be bride advised me. I would never have presumed to bother our dear Queen myself—"

"That'd he Ozma?"

"That's the one. But Tollydiggle—that's my adored one's name—*would* urge me. She's so nice, and she swore Ozma would be just as nice. So finally last week I went to the Girl Ruler, threw myself on her good graces, and asked what I should do."

"And what was that?"

"The first thing Ozma said was that we ought to look at the Magic Picture and discover where my wife *was*. So we did."

"Where was she?"

"In a castle. Talking to a purple dragon. 'Good gracious,' said Ozma, 'that's the Purple Dragon of Mo!' The dear princess went on to tell me about this Purple Dragon. She recognized it, you see, by the silver star on its forehead. 'I've nagged and nagged the animal,' she said—though one can't imagine Ozma nagging—

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‘to come and live in our Gillikin country. He’s so very purple, you know, and would give a cachet to our purple land.’

“‘But my wife,’ I put in mildly. It was she, of course, in whom I was most interested.

“‘Let’s watch a bit,’ suggested the Girl Ruler. ‘Perhaps we can find out more about their circumstances.’ So we did. The two were in an arras-lined room—”

Button Bright had to break in to ask what “arras” was or were. Not though the soldier knew, someone had blundered and named wall tapestries after a town in France, so ever after when a person said ‘Lift up the arras’ or ‘Makes a pass through the arras’ you couldn’t be quite sure if he was talking about fabrics or the things you shoot from bows. Battles knew nothing of that. He just said “wall coverings” and went on:

“They were playing chess. That quickly palled—for us—but the clever little queen made a discovery. ‘See the men:’ she said, and behold: the chess ‘men’ were animals, on the model of the King of England’s beasts: boars, harts, bulls, wyverns.” Before his auditor could ask what wyverns were the soldier hastened on: “So Ozma knew they were the dragon’s chess pieces and therefore this must be the dragon’s own arras-lined room, and not my wife’s. ‘That’s the castle of the Purple Dragon,’ she deduced, ‘and that’s in the land of Mo.’

“‘But my wife?’ I wondered.

“‘Now you know where she is you can go and bring her back,’ said the Princess delightedly. ‘I’ll designate you ambassador-at-large and then you can go to Mo, officially, as soon as you like.’

“‘But I don’t want her back—if it please your grace,’ I protested. ‘I only reported her absence to see if Your Highness could make it permanent. I wish to marry again.’

“Ozma looked grave. ‘You cannot mean I should compass Mrs. Battles’ death,’ she stated. ‘Thus, you must be speaking of divorce.’ She continued to look disapproving. ‘That’s just as bad.’” (Don’t forget that this was in 1914, when they didn’t yet have world wars, genocides, concentration camps, terrorism, or inner-cities, so as to know what really bad was like.)

“‘Anyway,’ went on our beloved Queen, ‘divorce isn’t permitted by the laws of Oz. Perhaps, in time, that may change^s, but for now I don’t know what to suggest.’ She was still looking solemn.

“I gulped and didn’t know which way to look. But I was lucky in remembering how miserable I was not to be able to wed dear Tollydiggle fair and square, and that gave me courage.

“‘Your Highness spoke of an embassy,’ I reminded. ‘Could that still be? You say my wife finds herself in Mo. Perhaps she’s now a resident of Mo. And perhaps in Mo...’ I didn’t quite have the courage to go on.

“Ozma saw through my ploy at once. ‘Perhaps in Mo,’ she echoed, ‘there is no prohibition of divorce. Well, I ought not to wink at circumvention of laws I am bound to enforce, but in fairness I cannot see the rightness in obliging to stay together people who are unhappy so.

“‘Very well. You may go. Not to your wife’s presence itself, I take it? but to the court of the Monarch of Mo. He’s merry as well as Magical and perhaps will take a relaxed view of your objective, possibly even grant, your suit. It’s worth a try, I dare say.’

“So it was decided and all things set in train that I might start out on my mission. Of course I must go in uniform, so as to look official, but not in that of the loyal Army of Oz, for that might look warlike. Princess Ozma had a new outfit tailored for me that, as you see, displays elements from my two professions: soldier and ambassador.”

“And the umbrella you carry?” asked Button Bright, who from the moment of meeting had shown a particular interest in that accoutrement.

“Oh, well, that,” said Battles, looking a bit, discomfited. “It’s not very presentable, is it? But you see, I had to carry something. I would feel naked without my rifle, my bayonet, or my sword, but all those would look out of place in the grip of one come to seek a boon, not launch an attack. The Queen and I

§ See *The Good Witch of Oz*. Editor’s note.

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pondered a whole day as to what implement would be suitable for me to bear.

"It almost never rains in the Emerald City, as perhaps you remember, and so for a long time nobody thought of an umbrella. But at last Ozma did so and declared that such would be ideal, as nothing could be more peaceable-appearing than a rolled broolly. Besides, she happened to know that it does rain in Mo, though only lemonade. And there was a third reason."

"Oh? What was that?"

"The Queen was mysterious about it. 'It's the only umbrella in the palace,' she said, 'so it will have to be the one. It's very old-fashioned to look at, though in perfect working order, I assure you.' She led the way to an obscure clothes cupboard and took out a yellow umbrella of indeed an antiquated type.

"'This umbrella has magical properties,' Ozma stated. 'I myself am not sure of the full extent of its capabilities but one thing is certain: it will protect the user absolutely from all peril by liquids. Thus was it constantly used by its original owner. Of course,' the Princess hastened to instruct, 'it must be opened in order to function properly. It was its owner's failure so to operate it that proved fatal—and led in the end to its coming into our possession.'

"But that was all she said, and I didn't like to press. I accepted it gratefully and presented shoulder-arms with the old rolled bumbershoot. I was about to open it out for testing when I recollected that it is counted unlucky to open an umbrella withindoors. The Girl Ruler, however, sensed my perplexity and said with a smile, 'Go ahead. Open it out! It was the previous owner's *failure* to open it. indoors that proved unlucky!'"

C H A R T E R

S I X T E E N

<<1952>>

King Scowleyow was getting a bit dodderly but was still enough of a practising curmudgeon to withhold permission for his daughter's expedition. What that upstart so-called son-in-law of his did he could not care less. The king had never really gone along with the miserable swineherd's marriage to his daughter.

Hence, the two had to depart in secret. They'd thought of going with an immense retinue, to impress everybody wherever they went, you see. But now they found themselves sneaking out of town on asses in the dead of night, just the two of them. They got as far as a roadside inn a few miles out and, finding they were not pursued, stopped there to wait for a more practical hour for serious travel.

Fairly early the next morning the young man and the princess got on the way again and had soon passed the frontier. Now they began to feel fairly safe from pursuit. Scowleyow always had been a bit unpredictable when people ran off with his daughter.

In the dark of the previous night the couple had missed the sign that said, "He who travels this road will never return again,"

if it was even still there any more. By now people were returning all the time along that road, so leaving the sign up would have been a bit pointless. How it happened that they were able to travel back and forth there you'll see in a moment.

If this were a fairy tale the old woman would still be sitting on the rock three years later—but it isn't so she wasn't. Who was still to be encountered on the old road into Mo was the witch who, ineptly and very un-witch-like, had been in the habit of burning her hands while baking. She'd now acquired oven mitts and cleared up that problem.

This time the witch was not found in the act of baking when the young man passed by. She was minding the store. Yes, now that the rivalry of king and sorceress had subsided and the road between them was no longer sown with booby traps, the amount of traffic along the road had grown phenomenally. The travelers needed commodities and it had not taken witch Jrumm long to catch on and open a shop. She called it 'Mother Jrumm's Goodies'. Fresh-baked bread was of course one of the specialities.

"Well, what do you know!" said the sorceress when the bell above the door tinkled and the royal couple walked in. The three, though old acquaintances, had never been together as a trio before. For obvious reasons the witch had not been invited to the wedding. If she had, she might have spotted one or two anomalies about the ceremony. She had picked up a lot of miscellaneous learning in the years since she'd left home and set up as a sorceress.

Relations between the young man and the witch were quite cordial, those between princess and witch less so. It was no credit to Jrumm that the enchanted mockingbird had been happy in captivity. While Y.M. and Jrumm were having a big hello, the princess stood looking on rather sceptically. She was so good, however, that she didn't say anything.

The young man had a purpose in making this call. Without it, he judged, their journey right well be lost motion. After the first round of greetings was over Y.M. said to the witch, "You got a minute?"

"Yes indeed," said the shopwoman amiably. "Come on up to the house. Pernille, you take over, will you?" The couple recognized one of the serving maids from the old days at the castle of the Purple Dragon. Y.M. in particular felt a pang. What if it had been his erstwhile sweetheart? Pernille's presence here warned him that all was no longer likely to be exactly as he remembered it at the western stronghold.

Cordial as they were all pretending to be, or perhaps in one or two cases actually were, something alerted the young couple not to reveal the true purpose of their quest. They gave out that they were just having a second honeymoon, escaping the tiring glamor of court life by traveling incogniti on asses. Just for sentimental reasons they were going back to visit the old castle where they had first met. They wanted information on the perils, if any, that lurked along their road. "What about the stable guarded by dragons?" Y.M. demanded over a good cup of coffee—and cinnamon toast, made of the witch's own bread.

"Oh, that's all changed," declared Jrumm with a laugh. "Since your dad and I,"—here she turned to the princess—"signed our non-aggression pact everything's been put back in place. My son has been restored to me. Actually I restored him myself, but that's another story. And the dragons were released and allowed to go back to their old home. In fact, the stable's been abandoned and, I believe, is merely being allowed to fall down."

"So there are dragons at Dragon Castle?" said the young man, startled. "And what about the guardsmen who used to be on duty there and—er, other personnel?" He could scarcely breathe for anxiety, and inevitably the true purpose of their journey began to leak out.

"Still there, I guess," said the witch nonchalantly. "I never asked. The King's terms for my making up with him and ceasing hostilities were so generous that I didn't care to put any awkward questions—" She noticed the cold looks of both her visitors and tried to backwater. "It was rather naughty of me, wasn't it? Some of those servants had been acquired at considerable expense or trouble. I hope they didn't end up as dragon

fodder.”

Her guests started up in dudgeon, hardly able to utter. Only the princess gasped, “Do dragons eat birds too?!”

Jrumm was amazed. Here were people who actually cared about somebody besides themselves, and mere servants at that! The motivation was one very alien to herself. However, there was no cause to tease her callers unduly. “I’m not sure,” she stated soberly. “But the point is moot. I sold all the jeweled cages after your own escape.”

“And their bird contents?” demanded the princess.

“Them too. The ones I couldn’t shift I just let go, back into the woods and fields of Tweet. They are there to this day, I dare say.”

The princess was sniffing openly. “Oh, Richard,” she mourned. “You were free to leave and yet you never came to see me.”

Her husband was critical. “With you returned to human form and happily married? The bird may have had more discretion than you give him credit for.”

In fact the rebuke cheered the forlorn wife. “That’s right! I hadn’t thought of that. So my Dicky Bird could be anywhere. There’s hardly any point any more in my going to the castle. Oh, where should I look for him? I wouldn’t know how to begin.”

“Tell you what I’ll do,” said the sorceress, for whom light was dawning more and more. Her curiosity was piqued. Besides, there might be a chance for wreaking amusing mischief. Certainly there was nothing to keep her at home. She didn’t find petty commerce, and the baking routine, all that compelling! “If you like, I’ll go with you. I could probably be of some help in trying to trace your friends.”

The essentially naive couple had no reason to wish to remain strictly alone on their quest. They accepted with very little demur. “Oh, but wait,” said the young man. “We haven’t got any extra asses. How will you travel? Have you a mount?”

“Why, yes indeed. You haven’t forgotten Hræ stevrod — your old helper?”

"The rangy mangy old horse?"

"He wasn't so awfully old! Only forty-two when you knew him."

"Forty-two! That's ancient for a horse."

"He *wasn't* a horse: At least not to start with. He was my son. He's still my son, for the matter of that. And he's still a horse."

The witch's speech, if you analyzed it, didn't sound logical, but it accurately described the situation.

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

<<1914>>

Button Bright and Wantowin Battles stumbled up the road. It was now full night and that was odd because the sun never sets in Mo, a curious state of affairs and one not adequately explained by the original discoverer of the country, who certainly describes a “night” spent in the magical kingdom.

They’d spent a long time talking and getting acquainted under the hedge, and Button Bright in eating up the soldier’s modest supply of provisions (yet he was still hungry). They felt they ought to be getting on, inasmuch as the hornbeam hedge offered no ample accommodation for over-nighting.

It was too dark to study Princess Ozma’s map any further. They could barely make out the path. Button Bright was insistent that the soldier would get no nearer the Monarch of Mo by going along the way he himself had come. Perhaps too the boy was motivated by a wish always to see new country, not retrace his own steps. He mentioned again the ambiguous crossroads Battles had passed and won the day in urging him to return and try the other fork. It seemed tacitly understood they would travel on together.

See *The Scarecrow of Oz* 1915 edition, page 100. Editor’s note.

The trail now wound rather steeply upward. They did a good deal more stumbling but kept it up for an hour. Finally Wantowin said, "It's no good. In this dark we may miss the turning. In fact maybe we already have. I've got a feeling we're getting near the top of this mountain, and I didn't do that myself earlier in the day."

"What'll we do?" wondered the yawning and weary boy.

"Sit down and wait for morning," proposed the weary and yawning man.

That's what they did. At first they sat together and Button Bright even attempted a little conversation. "Tell me about your name," he requested. "How come you're 'Wantowin Battles' sometimes and 'Omby Amby' others?"

"A freak of childish mispronunciation," the soldier explained succinctly. "At first as an infant I thought my name was 'Me' but the grown-ups soon showed me the error of my way. 'No, no,' they said, 'you're Wantowin G. Battles.'"

"Think of the perplexity of a tiny child at trying to say that name. All I could manage was 'Womm wim' and I got no further into 'Battles' than 'B'. I called myself 'Womwimbee'. In the course of time that turned into 'Omby Amby', but it was never more than a nickname. I don't know how it got such currency that some people thought it was my real name."

But by now the young boy was fast asleep. The head of the soldier himself was drooping sadly. He lurched quietly to his feet and for propriety's sake moved off some yards down the path where he laid himself properly to sleep, with the old yellow umbrella opened out and propped above him as a make-shift tent.

Although high up the mountain, the travelers did not feel cold, and this was odd, additionally, because it was the middle of the night. Indeed, toward morning it grew delightfully balmy—as it began to snow!

Button Bright was the first to discover this. Once he got going, the Soldier with the Green Whiskers was a much heavier sleeper, but the boy, being unprotected by an umbrella roof, was

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awakened by the peppering upon his person of many little light but solid things. He stirred in his sleep, and felt and heard a crunch. That woke him.

He tried to sit up—and couldn't. Now he realized that he had been hearing and feeling the tiny bombardment for quite some time. Latterly it had become a regular avalanche, and yet not stiflingly heavy. What could it be? If this was snow it was of a most unusual sort. Normally too snow doesn't smell; certainly not delightfully of corn and butter.

It was dawning, but Button Bright couldn't know that, lying face down and half covered in a drift of popped popcorn.

It was natural that a growing boy would open a mouth and taste what was close about him, especially when it smelled so nice. The moment Button Bright did that he was in seventh heaven and had no call to move any muscle beyond those of his jaw, tongue, and throat. The traveler's solitary unrequited wish for food! had been granted whilst he slept. Suppose he were still sleeping!? and this was all a glorious dream? He'd better not make any abrupt movements and wake himself up!

Button Bright did well to eat popcorn while he could. In fact, it is the most beneficial food known to man: rich in protein, calcium, phosphorus, iron, zinc, thiamin, riboflavin, and niacin, containing but, one calory per kernel, and a sovereign form of roughage. I don't know why they never mention popcorn when extolling the wonders of molasses, oats, bananas, yoghurt, citrus, cod liver oil, or soya bean sprouts as ideal forms of nourishment. Perhaps they think it's a frivolous food, being traditionally consumed in circumstances of more or less merrymaking: at circuses, cinema shows, and children's parties. Popcorn is not solemn and pretentious enough to count!

Well, Button Bright lived a dream from which he would just as soon never have awakened. Unfortunately he did, for, startlingly, he heard voices. On the instant he lay as quiet as could be. Maybe the voices were just a badness in his dream and would go away. But alas, the boy's feet betrayed him by sticking out of the corndrift.

In a moment a loud man's voice was heard exclaiming that someone must have got lost in a storm and expressing the pious hope that the victim might still be alive. "Let's pull him out and see," the man ended.

He took hold of one foot and the Bumpy Man took hold of the other. Then they both pulled and out from the heap of popcorn came a little boy. When drawn from the heap the boy was chewing a mouthful of popcorn and both his hands were full of it. So at first he couldn't speak to his rescuers but lay quite still and eyed them calmly until he had swallowed his mouthful.

Then he said: "Get my cap," and stuffed more popcorn into his mouth.

While the Bumpy Man began shoveling into the cornbank to find the boy's cap, Trot was laughing joyfully and Cap'n Bill had a broad grin on his face. The Ork looked from one to another and asked, "Who is this stranger?"

"Why, it's Button Bright, of course," answered Trot. "If anyone ever finds a lost boy, he can make up his mind it's Button Bright. But how he ever came to be lost in this faraway country is more'n

I can make out."

"Where does he belong?" inquired the Ork.

"His home used to be in Philadelphia, I think; but I'm quite sure Button-Bright doesn't belong anywhere."

"That's right," said the boy, nodding his head as he swallowed the second mouthful.

"Everyone belongs somewhere," remarked the Ork.

"Not me," insisted Button Bright. "I'm half way round the world from Philadelphia, and I've lost my Magic Umbrella, that used to carry me anywhere. Stands to reason that, if I can't get back I haven't any home. But I don't care much. This is a pretty good country, Trot. I've had lots of fun here^s."

§ For Button-Bright's further adventures see *The Scarecrow of Oz*, *The Magic Mirror of Oz*, and *The Frogman of Oz*. Editor's note.

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

<<1914>>

Private-General Battles dreamed on.

Perhaps it was naughty of Button Bright not to have mentioned the soldier's near proximity when he himself was untimely rescued out of the cornbank. But the youth was possibly wiser than we have always been taught to think. What use would a one-legged sailor, a "bumpy man", or a little girl from California be to the green-whiskered soldier on his quest?

Mayre Griffith had been a little pot-like when she called Button Bright "lost." The boy was exactly as much or little lost as the girl and her companion Cap'n Bill themselves, for all of them had left the United States with an equally sketchy idea of where they were going and were now on matching footing as to knowledge of present whereabouts or future destination.

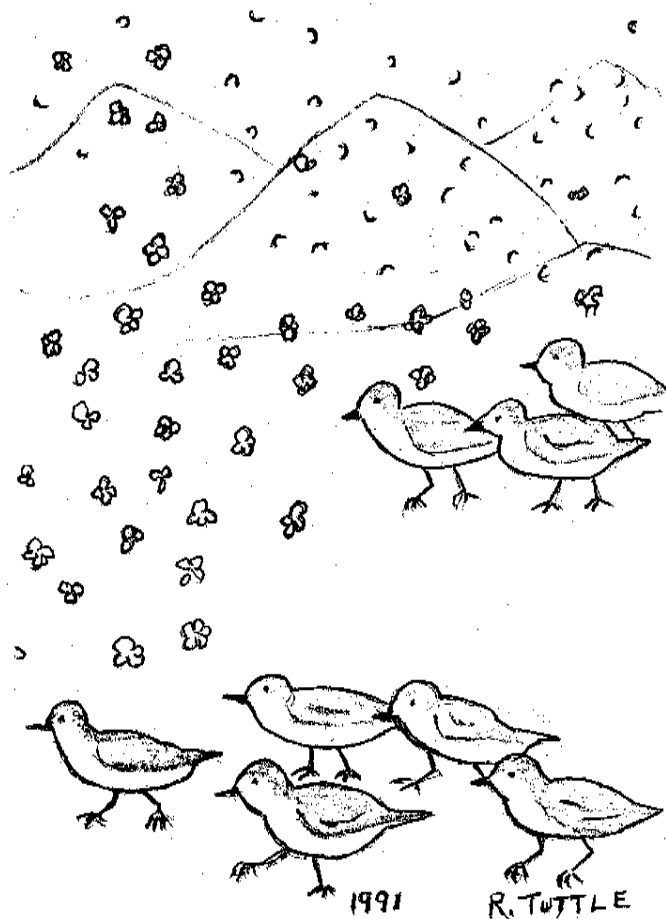
Omby Amby (to give him his everyday appellation) had, in contrast, specific knowledge of his own location and reason for being there. Besides, he carried fairy Ozma's own hand drawn map of the region. Meeting further newcomers would only have slowed him down.

His umbrella tent screened him from the fall of corn. He slept on until the onslaught of the mountain's maizofagous birds un-

covered his shelter and exposed him to the light of a by now advanced day.

"Say, will you look at that?" exclaimed a flamingo-like bird and gave an exploratory peck at the ferrule of the yellow umbrella. Perhaps its color confused him and he thought it was a well-buttered and unusually vast corn-pop.

His mates pecked on industriously and quickly the dimensions of the obstruction were laid bare. All the hopping, twitting, and pecking soon roused the soldier and he stuck his green-whiskered face out, from under the rim of the bumbershoot. "Birds and popcorn!" he exclaimed. "What's happened?"



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The birds said nothing. Maize consumption absorbed them to the exclusion of all other concerns except being taken prisoners, as had been the fate of several of their number recently! Only when the whole surface of the mountain had been pecked clear of corn by the ravenous flocks did a few of the more curious return and engage in conversation the onward-hiking Ozite, who, for a time, had been the birds' competitor in stuffing into himself great quantities of the delightful delicacy. Ever afterward the charming food remained a favorite of the soldier's^s.

A little bird landed on Battles' modified helmet (with diplomatic embellishments) and said, "What'cha doin'?"

Omby Amby was used to talking birds back home in Oz so he was nothing startled and replied, "Oh, just walking along this path."

"I SEE that," said the bird somewhat testily. "But in aid of what? That is, if you don't mind my asking."

"No, that's all right. It makes a change. Well, I'm traveling to the court of the Magical Monarch of Mo to ask for a divorce."

The little blue-green tit-like avian thought for a second (not long enough) and said, "But what if he still loves you?"

Omby Amby smiled. "Oh, I'm not married to the monarch myself. If that were so I'd be a queen and could grant my own divorces."

"*Would* you be queen?" mused the bird. "I wonder. There was quite a little scandal some time ago, in the country next door to this, about a king's wife who didn't make queen. Still, it might be worth a try," opined the bird. "Oh, but no, I'm forgetting: that might be bigamy. Since you're wanting a divorce I assume you're married to someone already."

"Yes, to a third party altogether. It's from her I want the Monarch to divorce me."

"Why?" It was a pert bird that thought nothing of asking, intimate questions.

"She's a shriek. She used to impale me on her barbed words," the soldier waxed poetical.

§ See *Speedy in Oz* 1934 edition, page 273. Editor's note.

"Oh, goodness, you're married to a bird!"

"Not necessarily. I just mean, I was badly henpecked."

"Wait a minute, I thought it was a shrike."

"What would you call someone who screeches and rails from morning to night?"

"Rails'? More than one? So you *are* a bigamist!?"

"You're not listening. I'm trying to say my wife browbeat me so much, and for no reason, that I sometimes thought she was cuckoo."

"Gosh, it was a whole aviary. But I think you just *had* all those birds; you weren't actually married to them?"

"Whatever. The problem now is to get rid of them—her! Do you know this region?"

"Like the back of my claw. I'm probably the best-traveled bird in the country."

"Well! that *is* something to crow about."

"Why? You want guiding?"

"Now about coming along to show me the way to the Monarch's capital?"

"We-l-l ... okay. It might be fun."

"Yea, indeed. It'll be a lark!"

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

<<1952>>

"Who was that?"

"Oh, girl.? Pretty nice girl actually. Her name Pat.. I don't know. "

"She looked familiar. Friend of yours?"

"Oh, I guess so—but not what you might expect. We just talked. I might even run into her again some time."

"Well, neat... Where's Peter?"

"Search me. We're the first ones. I thought he might be coming with you."

"No, he's got Omby Amby in tow. Pete invited him to Philly."

"Oh, that's good." Speedy had his own opinion of Philadelphia. Slums were all very well in their way but not when they took over whole historic cities so you didn't intentionally walk alone there after dark. "What's that I hear about you and him and a mix-up over umbrellas?"

The two had sat down to wait and now Smith brought out again from under the table the unlikely big bumbershoot he wasn't going to need on this fine Indian summer evening. "You recognize it?"

"Would I? Have I ever seen it before?"

"Maybe you did. Or maybe again you wouldn't have. Ozma didn't keep it out in view, gathering dust. It stayed in a closet somewhere—actually, several somewheres, it seems—"

"Sounds nicely mysterious. You're gonna tell me all about it when the time comes, aren't you?" But a barman had come over and they had to order something. It'd be Speedy's second Martini and he determined to sip it slowly. No point, in getting groggy before the fun even properly began.

"It's the umbrella I went to Mo with, a long time ago." Smith dropped the bombshell quietly.

"No! Cripes, that. really *is* news! I thought you lost your Magic Umbrella over a popcorn field and it was never seen again!..?"

"That's the story that got around. Actually I never said I lost it in the popcorn drift. The loss had happened several days before that.

"I used to wonder a lot about where it finally fetched up but I never tried seriously to find out 'til this past summer—"

<<1951>>

But now there was a hubbub and the whole Oz contingent materialized in a body. Speedy and Sples Smith were used to such phenomena but it must be admitted that other patrons of Xavier's did a double take and thought they'd already had one too many when eight men were suddenly visible where none had been a moment earlier. They rubbed their eyes while Prince Randy of Regalia as more or less spokesman for the newcomers hailed the two men at the table.

"Wherever you are, Hello!" he quoted from Speedy's own book, not exactly aptly.

"We're right here!" cried William Rapidan, jumping up. And then there was a confused scene of general hello-saying. The whole mob trooped at once to the exit. The bartenders too had failed to see the group come in. Less complicated if they immediately saw them go out.

But Peter and his/everybody's guest weren't there yet, so the bunch hung around on the sidewalk. They'd only be a minute.

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Over the years the Old Boys of Oz had promulgated the rule that you were punctual in meeting, or not at. all. Whoever had not turned up within half an hour of the agreed meeting time was no longer expected.

And in good time here came the sweating pair hurrying up Third Avenue, and it was still only twenty past seven.

Handshakes all around and particular cordiality shown to Wantowin Battles, for whom it was all so new. He had a box of popcorn he and Peter had stopped to pick up at a sidewalk machine down at Sixth and Forty-Second; that's what made them an extra five minutes later. The corn was presented to Sples Smith amid pleased hilarity and some questioning eyebrows. "I don't get it," stated Woot the Wanderer. "We're on our way to dinner. Who needs popcorn?"

"Yeah, dinner," put in Speedy. "I take it that's where we're going to hear all about it.." But where's that gonna be?"

They never dined two years running at the same place. Last year it. had been the Russian Tea Room and now for a change of pace they chose Keen's Chop House down in the west Thirties. It took three taxis to get them all there.

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

<<1914>>

The Magical Monarch was nothing loth. He liked to see people smile. Sometimes they laughed outright when they got their decrees.

"But," he ordained, "there is one condition..." Wantowin Battles listened attentively. The little bird on his shoulder pricked up his—well, not exactly ears.

"Of course you must inform your former spouse. It would not be fair to leave her in ignorance. She too might wish to wed again."

'Fat chance,' thought Battles; 'not if the guy saw her coming first.' Aloud he said, "Oh, that is most considerate of your highness. But how shall the news be brought to her?"

"By personal messenger, I ween. Here is her copy of the Divorce Certificate. But I fear it must be you yourself who brings the good news. You know where she resides? Somewhere in my own dominions, I think you said?"

"I have a strong clue, our grace, as to her whereabouts," confessed the private-general. 'Durn!' he thought privately. 'If only I didn't.'

Thus it was that they set out again, Wantowin G. Battles and



Bert the Bird. The Magical Monarch could not, with a spell, wish them to where they were going, for he did not deal in magic^s. Besides, how much story would you have left, then? if every little problem were to be solved with an enchantment rather than by real people doing real things.

They traveled for many days—but not by the Lunch Isle or rocky defiles, unless one could think of lunching on fruitcake, because they did proceed via Fruitcake Island. They were in no hurry and dawdled along. Frankly, Omby Amby dreaded the upcoming interview. He was

determined to make it as brief as possible and meanwhile to delay it all he could.

As for Bert the Bird (soon shortened, for occasional use, to “Berbir”), he had no pressing business anywhere and could as well be in one place as another.

A further motivation in slowing down the pair was the soldier’s insistence on telling his (uneventful) life story to his bird companion. He tried, with moderate success, to do it in an interesting way. He started with a startling statement: “Death has been outlawed in the lovely Land of Oz and yet, each dawn I dye.”

This had the desired effect of making Berbir sit up and take notice. With his claws hooked in Battles’ epaulette he had had his head under his wing and was frankly dozing, but a case of dying, (unusual also in Mo) was worth hearing about and he

§ See *The Magical Monarch of Mo*, 1903 edition, page 4. Editor’s note.

attended. "It doesn't seem to hurt you," he commented. "I take it you've achieved a method of merely temporary dying..?"

"Well, no, it's permanent as far as it goes—" the soldier lifted his beard abstractedly "—but my whiskers grow so fast I'm quite blue about the jaws by evening."

Berbir boggled at the non sequitur but only said, "Blue?"

"Yes. You see, I was born a Munchkin^s and my hair would naturally be blue. But that was obviously no good when I came to take up my post in the Emerald City. There the dear old wizard, O.Z. Diggs, was staging a little reign of error and insisted on everything appearing green whether it was or not. I at once adopted the habit of tinting afresh my fast-growing whiskers every morning—"

"Ah," the bird broke in, enlightened: "that kind of dyeing."

"—and I've kept it up ever since. Only during this journey I haven't been able to. The dyeing kit seemed too bulky to be worth the bother of carrying along."

Berbir stared. "That's right," he said. "I thought something was getting to look different about you. There's quite an eighth of an inch of blue at the roots of your face hair."

"Not different enough to fool my wife though," said Battles with regret. "She'll recognize me immediately."

"But to continue with my history: my family with its military heritage saw to it that I attended military school. I hated it, but it didn't stop there. My father, ex-General Neverlost N.E. Battles, arranged that I win the desirable post of guardsman at the Oz ruler's palace. I'm afraid that I, having as little vocation as I did, would never have got the job if there had been any competition. But Oz is after all a country of virtually no warlike traditions. An 'officer class' hardly exists."

"That appointment was the great hurdle of my life. Once secure in my position as palace sentinel I filled up my days by growing, varieties of hair: ringing all the possible changes in the field of head hirsuteness."

Berbir was intrigued despite the blandness and triviality of

§ See *Ozoplaning with the Wizard of Oz*. Editor's note.

the topic. “‘Varieties of hirsuteness’. Please explain what you mean.”

“I was still only in my teens when I came to the Emerald City. I was fascinated by my own brand new and scarcely anticipated ability to grow hair on my face. It was the fashion in those days for men to wear the beard and I started right off following the trend. But I soon found it was no challenge merely to let nature takes its course. I learned to use a curling iron and got busy. My tender wispy adolescent whiskers were soon frizzed into every arrangement of face hair conceivable. Then I took scissors into use to achieve variations. And I even made so bold as to essay the razor—though not on my virgin face. Rather, I practised on my top hair, which, under my casquette, was more or less expendable anyway. Ever since those early days I have shaved my head on occasion, but never my face... completely.”

“But partly?”

“Oh, yes, sometimes my beard would go while the whiskers remained. Or vice versa.”

“Is there a vice versa? Aren’t they the same thing?”

“Are you kidding?” said the hair expert. “A beard hangs down from the jaw while whiskers, by definition, grow out of the sides of the face—though it is clear from his writing that the first royal historian of Oz didn’t know the difference either. He publicized me as the ‘soldier with the green whiskers’ whereas in point of fact it is the length and greenness of my *beard* which is my one truly notable feature.”

The bird auditor cocked his head and seemed to grow lost in thought. about the green-going-on-blue hair beside him.

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

<<1952>>

Maybe Jrumm the sorceress, a complicated personality, was somewhat naive as well, in her own way. It always surprised her when people didn't meekly accept the roles she assigned them and suffer on without complaint forever. Probably she was spoiled by her long marriage to Wantowin "Omby Amby" Battles. He had meekly put up with her high-handedness for years. Indeed, he played the part she allotted him to perfection, so much so that at last it got boring and she left him for someone rather more exciting.

The quick end of that second relationship surprised her but didn't teach her much. She still assigned roles and expected them to be played. Just today she had had a shock. She had formerly expected the fifty-tongued bird to be pretty bored in captivity: as a second-hand punishment to Jrumm's enemy, the bird-princess' father? Now she learned that the little creature had contrived to be quite content as a prisoner. It was surprising. And there were other such disillusionments in store.

Meanwhile the reunion of the young man with his faithful steed of yore had been quite jolly. The party from Jrumm's house strolled up the half-wooded hill behind it which was the

son-horse's grazing range. Y.M. hardly recognized in the sleek palomino the gaunt starved horse he had braved so many dangers with, years before.

<<three years before>>

The horse recognized the young man, however, although by now he wasn't quite that young any more. But the earnest look was unchanged, and the doublet and hose he wore on this new quest not so different, from those the treacherous king had outfitted him with for his earlier venture.

Hræ stevrod gave a spirited whinny of gratification as he lifted his muzzle from the grass and sighted the party. The newcomers walked up to him and there was an odd little ceremony of presentations. Many mothers would feel awkward at introducing their sons as horses but Jrumm didn't turn a hair. Her guests, though, were perplexed as to whether to offer hands. Y.M. solved his problem by clapping his old comrade heartily on the neck.

Small time was lost in setting out. His mother told Hræ stevrod what was intended and the horse complied. It would be a change for him too. Then, "I know," cried the witch: "Young Man, you ride Vrod! We ladies can take the asses. That will be more seemly, I think" — though it was perhaps late in the day for Jrumm to begin to be concerned about seemliness.

Now Y.M. began actively to enjoy the expedition. Zounds! it was good to be in the saddle again. He rode at home but that was only on mild walking-horses, about the nearby park. This was real riding! He displayed a tendency to tear off across the fields, leaving the two women on their poky steeds temporarily in the lurch, and *they* didn't have much to say to each other.

The princess was, as we have heard, good, and a part of real goodness is non-grudge-holding. However, you couldn't expect her to be really hearty with the woman who had wantonly confined her for so many years, wasting her youth in sterile perch-sitting. Thank goodness for Richard Bird (not the polar explorer). But for him she would have grown up mindless, aside from bird calls, of course.

Jrumm tried to make conversation but it was stiff work. The princess only said, "Yes, madam" or "No, ma'am." The witch offered jawbreakers from the stock of the general store but the princess glanced at them with disdain. The umbrella parasol was offered shared against the August sun but found no taker.

When Y.M. and Hrae stevrod came racing back from a side jaunt to the once ominous forest stable a little diversion was provided. The young man had time now to be curious. "Who built a stable in the middle of a forest? and what for?" he queried, in highish spirits.

"Shh," warned Jrumm playfully. "Don't enquire too closely into the genesis of phenomena in a fairy tale. They usually don't bear logical examination."

"Well anyway answer this," desired the young man: "What happened to all the magnificent horses?"

"I suppose your dad-in-law disposed of them. They were only there to confuse the issue so people poking in wouldn't notice my son in horse's clothing. Actually I used the ploy myself when I wanted to distract attention from your present lady wife the time she was a bird."

"Thanks a lot," murmured the former fifty-tongued bird with more than a soupçon of sarcasm.

What was not discussed in this conversation was what Y.M. and Hrae stevrod had, in talk, plumbed to the depths the first moment they were alone together. That was the inexplicable behavior throughout of witch Jrumm in relation to her horse-son.

Over the years: first down the well, then in the farmhouse shed, and finally in the Palace on the Park, the young man had pondered profoundly on the elements of his great adventure. It had come to him to wonder why the witch, if she knew all about what and where her son was, had not gone to the stable in the wood in the first place and set him free, restoring his proper form in double-quick time. She appeared to be a sorceress of supreme power. She could conjure up magnificent jeweled cages to decorate a prison cell. Why then did she bake bread old-

fashionedly in a rural setting and that so inexpertly that she constantly burned herself? The whole thing didn't add up. The sixty-four-dollar question was why, with all other spells off and peace declared, she didn't, release the said son from his enchantment. Or, if her capabilities were spotty, why did she not get old King Scowleyow to do it? or whoever *he'd* had cast the spell?

Hræ stevrod thought it was all very unkind and nursed the grievance. Y.M. was just puzzled.

"What does she say when yon ask her about it?" he wanted to know.

"Not a word. She just literally doesn't say anything. She fails to speak. Queer, isn't it? It's not as if I'm more useful to her as a horse. She never makes me plough the south forty, or uses me for riding. This is the first time I've been saddled since *our* run together. And as you see, she doesn't ride me herself."

The two males talked about it all the time when they were alone together but they didn't get any forwarder in their rationalizing as to what made the enchantress tick.

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

<<1914>>

The soldier's account of his changes in hair style richly entertained both himself and (possibly more moderately) his bird audience until they came to the little bridge leading to Fruitcake Island. Like Button-Bright earlier they had encountered virtually no one on their journey but now across the brown beers of the Root Beer River they could discern a few stodgy people moving about sluggishly on the also brown surface of the island. The soldier waved jauntily but the people seemed to take no notice of him.

In contrast to the apparent solidity of the island the bridge leading to it was built of spun sugar and as soon as Omby Amby stepped upon it it collapsed, pitching him into the root beer. Now *unlike* Button-Bright earlier, the soldier quite delighted in the taste of the radical fluid. He had already sampled it in the course of his transit eastward to the Mo monarch's court. Again unlike the American he knew what it was in advance, from wise Ozma's indoctrination, and had quite looked forward to tasting the unusual 'water'. This was, again, 1914, when most country streams could still be drunk of, unprocessed, without imminent expectation of poisoning or disease.

THE UMBRELLAS OF OZ

From enjoying a sip of root beer en passant it was, however, a long way to getting a kick out of being immersed in it totally. Omby Amby regained the surface and yelled, while flailing out in many directions. While the startled Bert flew about distractedly, the soldier's hand struck his umbrella, which rode serene, rolled up, upon the waves. Once again the historical bumbershoot had failed to be expanded in time to avert a drenching.

But not for long. Princess Ozma had instructed her emissary in the uses of the rain-gear. He knew that if you could once get the umbrella open it was sovereign against all threat by water. This property was so far perfected in the implement that the umbrella, up-ended, could even serve as a boat. Its struts were of reinforced ozynium and its sheathing, of unpierceable rubberized silk. If you didn't tramp around in it *too* much, the umbrella could contain in dryness anyone less weighty than an elephant.

It was, however, expecting, too much for the soldier to climb into the umbrella out of the water. Holding onto its rim he pushed it before him and paddled to shore. There his first concern was to grope for his new parchment decrees and spread them out in the noonday sun. Berbir returned and said, "Whatcha doin'?"

"My divorce papers, you know. Thank goodness the Monarch's scribe used India ink. My ex- would have been vexed if the ink had run."

"You worry a lot about your wife's reactions, don't you?" said the bird, "—even now."

"Unh-hunh," admitted the solemn soldier. "I wish I didn't have to face her. On the other hand, I've got to have this divorce document effective in every way. I wouldn't feel secure if she didn't know about it and thought I was still her property."

"Hm," said his friend and was, again, thoughtful. "But now to cases," said Wantowin. "How do we get across this stream? I do think we ought to see this island now we're so close."

"That's easy," said Berbir. "You said your broolly could double as a boat."

"Indeed," agreed the soldier. "But I haven't. any oars, and we can't count on being able to drift to the island shore before we're carried downstream past it."

"You got a thinnish piece of rope?"

"Well, let's see." Battles began to turn out his wet pockets.

"Or if there isn't any, bring a thickish piece of string."

As it happened, the provident soldier did have a whole half ball of twine in his knapsack. He held it out questioningly.

"Don't look at me," commanded Bert. "Fold one end in your hand and pay out the other to me. With you sitting, in the brolly-boat it shouldn't be too great a strain to draw you at least strongly enough to be able to move you across the current, if we act fast. Let's go upstream a quarter of a mile."

They did that. Behold, in half an hour soldier and bird steeped ashore on the soggy bank of the island of fruitcake.

The logy dwellers on the isle had, almost, with curiosity, observed across the stream the travelers' preparations for embarking and now quite a little group was gathered where they put ashore. "What do you want?" asked one or two heavily.

"Oh, we're tourists," explained Omby Amby. "Fruitcake Island is world-famous where I come from. I'd like to see it, now I've journeyed so far."

"Take a look," said the welcoming committee ungraciously. "I suppose you'll want a tour guide?"

"Well, that would be agreeable—if it could be arranged."

"You, Sukat!" barked the apparent spokesman, "that'll be your job."

A dull-looking woman wearing a hat of tangerine peel stepped forward clumsily, without protest. The other islanders turned away with no further regard for amenities vis-a-vis the visitors.

Omby Amby, with Berbir on his shoulder, followed the unspeaking Sukat as she led the way into a village a short way inland. This proved to be the only settlement on the mile-long island. The path there crossed level fields of a rich brown where nothing grew. It was the work on an unengaged moment for the

THE UMBRELLAS OF OZ

soldier to reach down and break off a piece of a clod under foot. He sniffed of it, then tasted.

"That's right," he constated: "fruitcake." That hadn't been hard to guess. Neither was it hard to understand that nothing grew on fruitcake, unless it might be a little mold, and the climate here seemed too uniformly breezy but dry for that.

If unfruitful (and yet one couldn't say *that*) the soil of fruitcake Island was not useless for other purposes. All the houses in Fruitcake Centre were built of slabs of case-hardened cake. It also appeared to be the only form of food of the inhabitants, as evidenced by displays in a few shop windows they passed. The substance was presented in a variety of shapes but when it came down to essentials it was all flour with a heavy admixture of sweet fruits and nuts.

"No wonder the people seem so heavy and stodgy," Omby Amby whispered toward his shoulder, "if this is all they get to eat."

The massive brown buildings with their roofs of thick white icing were left behind and Sukat showed the way to the apparent sole "sight" on the island. "The quarry from which we get our building materials," she identified and agitated a hand heavily to indicate a big hole in the ground some hundreds of yards across.

In the cavity many feet below men were busy with axes and saws and other pushed wheelbarrows about, all to a slow dragging tempo. Presently some of the workers took notice of the sightseers on the rim of the excavation. Two or three put their heads together and then they actually waved in greeting!

Wantowin Battles was surprised at; this sign of animation and, more, of friendliness. He felt quite touched and saluted and waved in return.

Now the men signaled to others of their comrades and nearly all the laborers stooped what they were doing and turned to hail the visitors. The latter were flabbergasted to find themselves being actually beckoned!

"What?!" stammered the soldier, "do they want us to go

down?" He turned to their guile but Sukat was already twenty yards away, her job having been phlegmatically accomplished and she going back where she came from without a word of goodbye. "Hmpf," said the nettled Battles.

The incident made by contrast the hailings of the quarry workers all the more appealing. "I wonder," muttered the sight-seer. "Maybe they need help—or something.. But there's no way

"Yes, there is," assured Berbir, who, a bird, had a sharper orientation sense than a mere human and had at once spotted a stairway carved in the fruitcakeside just below their feet. He flitted ahead and showed the place where it started.

After that it was no time before the soldier had scrambled down and gone to meet his pals at the 'cutting edge' within the cake quarry. Down at the bottom the cake was even firmer than by the top of the excavation, though here and there lay shallow pools of root beer seepage. These Omby Amby carefully skirted as he came up to the others.

"Want to give us a hand?" said one who seemed to be in charge of the work gang.

"At quarrying cake? Sure," said the soldier good-naturedly, though also, as it turned out, gormlessly.

With a heavy-set fellow with a cast in one eye he teamed up to operate a two-hand saw—and then the fruitcake fairly flew! Slab after slab of the building material was cut .from the cake face and Wantowin began to glow from the exertion (which soon finished drying his clothes from within) but also with the sense of impressing his new-found mates with his industry and dexterity. Most of the other cakesmen gathered about and stood, frankly admiring the prowess at quarrying of the soldier and his partner.

Evening was beginning to draw in. Presently the boss called quitting time. Not at all too soon, really. Omby Amby had passed from the stage of enjoying the plaudits of his new friends to one of dawning boredom with the task and a wondering as to how best to retire from the arena of his feat with all admiration intact. Now when the others proposed that he join them about a

campfire and share the evening meal of fruitcake toasted on skewers over the flames and hot root beer he was happy to take part.

By then the soldier was beginning to think about the question of overnighting. The question was resolved for him without discussion. The crowd had relaxed for an hour with (non-habit-forming) dope sticks (fruitcake-flavored, of course) about the dwindling fires. Dried cake, it appeared, burned readily, like turves of peat, giving off a rich winy scent. Then, "Come along," beckoned Battles' cast-eyed teammate.

Omby Amby followed along down an alley cut in the cake earth that he had not noticed before. On either side stretched a row of small dark cells cut in the solid pastry; the workers' sleeping quarters. The soldier was assigned an empty cubicle, farthest in along the corridor. A surprisingly comfortable bench of cake had been left un-cut-away within each cell. There were bedclothes, even a cake chair, and a night candle on a ledge.

Berbir perched on the candle shelf and chirped his companion a thoughtful good-night. The vicissitudes of the day past gave Battles a good appetite and he woke only to a bugle's clear call at dawn.

He looked out. Blue sky above the narrow canyon of the sleeping-quarters passage. It would be good to get on the road again, restored by a fair night's sleep and after more exposure to fruitcake than the soldier hoped ever to have again.

But alas, it was not to be as simple as that. His mates insisted on his attendance at a breakfast of cake. Then he was astonished to have his saw-mate thrust into his hands again half the handles of the big sharp-toothed quarrying implement.

Enough was too much. Battles fairly flung down his end of the saw and made as if to march to the staircase at the far fruitcake wall.

But Bert the bird was ahead of him, was in fact returning from a quick orientation tour. He alighted on Omby Amby's shoulder and squeaked in his ear: "That stairway is gone! They must have cut it clown in the night. There's no way out for you. We're prisoners here!"

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

<<1914>>

Berbir was just being loyal and solidaritable. He, bewinged, was no prisoner. But he was not going off and leaving his less functionally endowed comrade. Wantowin was touched but, more urgently, he was angry and frightened. Courage had never been his strong point and now he pondered furiously how to behave.

If he bolted from servitude whither would he bolt? A chase around the quarry bottom would leave the cakesmen, lethargic as they were, masters of the situation and himself with every shred of dignity destroyed. Quickly he determined to put the best face possible upon it. He turned back and took the saw handle. If there was to be any escape it would have to be by cunning, not by physical revolt.

Wantowin Battles worked all day. Admittedly not with the verve of his first tour of duty, but steadily and, withal, maintaining his poise. He tended to remain silent, speaking, dignifiedly, only of necessity. The islanders were to understand that he was not best pleased but he would not give them the satisfaction of crowing at his discomfiture. And he worked well, producing with his teammate significantly more slabs of build-

ing cake than any other pair. This ability, was of course the reason for his entrapment. With him at the cake-face all the other quarrymen could take it easier, practise sluggish indolence, which was what they liked best, and still meet their daily quota of work delivered.

At night in the cell Battles and his bird would discuss their plight. The soldier was barren of ideas for arranging an escape. "Eventually Princess Ozma will look at the Magic Picture and send a rescue party," he prognosticated a bit bleakly. "It's just for us to hold out with patience 'til then, I guess."

For the alert Berbir that wasn't good enough. "I'm not a prisoner," he boasted. "I'm free as a bird. But how can I use that state of affairs to help you? Going and complaining to some headman in Fruitcake Centre won't serve. And farther afield? What if I fly back to the Monarch at Motown and let him know?"

"Good idea," opined Battles. Then, on second thought, "But he hasn't, got any army or police force, as he was at pains to let us know when we visited him. How could he send to rescue us?"

"He's 'magical' after all. That. must mean some-thing."

"Mmm, it's magical that such an old duffer could maintain control in this far-ish-flung country just by sitting on a throne and looking wise."

"But he can do things like wearing heads made of candy, dough, or wood, as he was at pains to boast of, or more magically yet, his own head after it had been half digested by a dragon."

"Those are merely the sort. of kookie-marvelous things that can happen in this magical country, but they don't indicate the monarch can do anything magical himself that would help us. No, on reflection I think the one you ought to fly to is Ozma herself. If you could be bothered," the soldier added modestly.

"Oh, I could be bothered," assured Berbir. "It. is just that my physical strength wouldn't last

to cross the great desert. Admittedly I might not be overcome by fumes rising from the sands. The deserts between just

here and Oz aren't strictly poisonous. But there'd be nothing to eat and I fear I'd sink down on the sands exhausted long before I reached the fairyland.

"Speaking of food, fruitcake isn't the proper diet of dickey-birds. I'm feeling a BIT unnourished already. What about you?"

"More than 'a bit'," admitted the Ozite. "I really think that's the single worst aspect of this vile durance. I don't know if I'll be able to hold out, eating nothing but Fruitcake."

In the end he couldn't. After a week Battles put in a formal complaint to the foreman. Would he not get permission from whoever was highest up on Fruitcake Island for the strangers to be allowed *something* else to eat? Unlike the natives they could not perform at their best and turn out their quota only on pastry.

The works boss, favorably impressed by the slave laborer's unresisting good behavior, promised to see what could be done. In fact he did get word to the Chief Confectioner at Fruitcake Centre.

"Might the new-impressed worker and his mate, the bird, be allowed an extenuation of diet? Just to keep up their strength for the labor?"

Put the answer that was presently returned was fairly predictable: "Let them eat cake."

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

<<1914>>

In the event they were saved by the weather.

In Mo, as in Ev, Oz, Ix, and other beside-the-desert countries, rain, though occasional and in most cases adequate, was not a usual characteristic of the meteorology. References to it in the literature are rare and, as we have seen, in some regions it was as likely to snow popcorn as to rain water. Moreover, when in Mo rains did come they dropped as gentle lemonade from heaven.

Battles had been about a month in slavery in the fruitcake quarry. He had changed. The unaccustomed physical labor from dawn to dark had put muscle on him that a former career of just standing around looking military had never occasioned. The hard work also gave him an appetite and, gag as he might, he stuffed the cake in, and put on weight. Nay, he was even beginning to look rather filled out: a drastic change from the gaunt figure known of yore. But, the severest change was in the soldier's face.

Cast-eyed Caspar, his team-mate at the saw, had taken no more than a week to grow exasperated at Battles' constant flinging back of his long beard over his shoulder before taking a

grip on the cakesaw. One evening the fellow crept into Omby Amby's cell, sprang on the sleeper, and before he knew what was what had hacked off the offending (and, let's face it, idiotic) adornment with garden shears, close under the chin.

At a stroke the "soldier with the green whiskers" had gone out of existence. What remained was only a going-on-burly quarryman with a fringe of very dark blue hair around his jaws. A few stray green side whiskers that Caspar had missed were negligible. When Bert the Bird got a look at his pal by daylight he had to laugh. "What a change! I'd never know you. But you know what? I like you better this way. You look like a rugged man now, not just a weirdo—oh, sorry! But you will admit that it was never your appearance that was any source of your charm, but rather your winsome manner and jolly spirits, your discipline in war, wisdom in peace, your bounty, virtue, fair humility..."

Berbir fantasized freely for a space. Omby Amby the while, as people often do when praised for qualities they have not intended to display, swore inwardly to resume his former condition at the first opportunity: beard, greenness, and all.

But in point of fact the new relative beardlessness *was* more practical. The soldier discovered what the Vikings had found out in ages past: in hand-to-hand combat you didn't want a dopey long beard hanging down that your opponent could grab for a pivot while lopping your head off. Many hands were to grasp at Omby Amby before escape became a reality.

It began mildly enough on the twentieth of August. The sun misted over before noon. By two o'clock actual clouds were making the day dark.

The clouds were yellow, of course, but had shifted before long to a dark ochre color. Then lightning split the air, and sent the superstitious quarrymen flying to any corner or cranny for shelter. Battles fled with them, back to his cell.

The thunder burst and the clouds followed suit. Oh, how it lemonaded! It also "eliminated" any possibility of further work that day. The men could only stand under ledges and look up

at. the punishing sky.

It was amazing how quickly flooding began. In half an hour any so imprudent as to venture out were up to their ankles in lemonade freely mingled with root beer, as the river (and the water table) rose under the swamping rainfall upstream.

An hour later the cakesmen were bitterly regretting having cut away the quarryside staircase. Not that lemonade-softened cake steps would have borne the weight of the escaping workmen anyway. They began to panic right and left, running to the quarry walls and screaming up for help. But the citizens of Fruitcake Centre were busy shoring up their own collapsing housing and had no thought for strugglers out of sight.

Those that could not swim drowned early (as much as one could drown in magical Mo). The rest paddled around disconsolately with nothing to hang onto that would float. There had been next to no equipment made of wood within the quarry. That was a commodity at a premium on the island; all. wooden objects had to be imported from beyond the river.

“Nothing that would float”: oh, there was one thing: Omby Amby’s umbrella. It took the street-wise dickey-bird to warn the soldier not to expose his umbrella to the gaze of the desperate miners. Man and bird huddled in the soldier’s cell until the beer-ade was up to his neck, then refugeed suddenly in the spread umbrella.

The dormitory corridor with its softening and dissolving cake walls was the first worst hazard. It was here that panicking men floundered through the flood and made grabs at the brolly and its passenger. It seems miraculous that none succeeded in stopping the cruise of the bumbershoot. At least they could have wrecked it so that nobody could escape! for that it could safely have carried more than three at most was excluded.

Somehow, and without a paddle, Omby Amby made it out of the passage with his vessel intact. From there on, the vast lake that the quarry pit had become was safer. There were no surviving swimmers out in the open lemonade. It. was now but a question of enduring until, and if, the liquid rose to the level.

of the top of the excavation.

It did, but it was after dark when that happened. Quite suddenly soldier and bird felt their brolly-boat begin to move, rapidly, downstream, as the beers of the rampaging river engaged with the lemonade that had crested the rim of the quarry. Not long after that the two could feel in the dark that the rain was stopping.

The long-term cloudburst had done its job. But I don't like to think that, fairy Ozma sent it! to rescue her emissary at the cost of so many lives—and so much fruitcake.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - F I V E

<<1914>>

The rest of the long-interrupted journey to the castle of the purple dragon was accomplished without noteworthy incidents. We note them as follows.

“The umbrella-borne pair rode out the night and the flood, their makeshift boat now richly demonstrating its river (if not sea) worthiness. Never a drop of the flood beers broke over the rim of the brolly’s sheet-metal-like integument. There was no bailing to be done. Incidentally, for the enlightenment of those who may wonder that the up-ended, open umbrella did not fill up with lemonade during the downpour, it should be stated that the device was totally and completely proof against liquids from whatever direction arriving. It did, however, require to be expanded before its magic would operate. Rolled, it was just a brolly.

As a lemonadey dawn came the soldier with the blue stubble lifted himself from a slumped position to spy over the umbrella rim a pretty house up to its eaves in root beer. He recognized it from Ozma’s illuminated sketch map, as the stately home, though not outright castle, of the Duchess Bredenbutta, regent of West Credia. West Credia, unlike most of Mo, supported a popula-

tion large enough to motivate the rule of a duke (or duchess) over it. For the time, this dignitary was Her Grace, Bredenbutta, enlightened lady and duchess.

And behold: there was Her Grace, sitting on top of her chimney-cluster with her wet ladies about her, frantically flapping a sodden handkerchief. But, alas, what could gallant Omby Amby, oar-less, do to assist? Of course he waved widely his military-diplomatic casquette and did all the obeisance that was possible across an eighty-yard expanse of lemon beer. Yet the urgent torrent bore him on, out of sight of the helpless ones. He could only solace himself with the thought that the Duchess had solid brick beneath her, not fruitcake. It would no doubt bear her up in safety until such time as the beer should subside.

That was the next thing that happened. By two in the afternoon the floaters could see treetops still in position, projecting above the flood. Twenty minutes later the umbrella drifted into one such web of bedraggled branches and leaves and there it stuck.

The inundation was rapidly in retreat. By three o'clock Omby Amby could (and must, or else be tipped out by the listing umbrella) descend into the tree itself, a great ash. Then level by level he followed the beer down, until he stood on wet ground.

The desolation was vast. The going was not easy as Battles and bird headed northward over sodden riparian plains. What with the chocolate mud and scattered debris they had made but a few miles by dark. They spent a miserable night huddled in a trash-filled box thicket. The boxes had all been swept away in the ravening flood, so what they might have contained of useful seed-sorts the soldier never knew. At least it, did not rain afresh and by dawn the voyager was even almost dry of garments, if sticky.

The sun made a welcome reappearance out of clouds. As Berbir flew lookout Battles tramped on, retracing, not though they knew, the route young Button-Bright had followed so many weeks before. By nightfall they were at Brig-a-Beer and before noon next day at the foot of the gloomy grey castle the Mo

monarch had pinpointed for the soldier on Ozma's map.

There Wantowin Battles paused to shudder. All day his dread of facing his erstwhile wife had grown on him and Bert the bird had had to talk to him like a Dutch uncle. "You're free of the woman now!" insisted the dickey. "What have you got to fear? But the bill of divorcement in her mailbox and be on your way."

"Oh, I have to see it in her hands, to be certain," objected the far from gay divorcé. "Besides, we only know that she was at the dragon's castle at one period, not that she actually lives there."

"Have it your way," gave up Bert. "But try to show a little grit! You've proven on this excursion you've got qualities of a man: strength, endurance, even a kind of reverse courage itself; anyway you didn't weep when the going was diceyest. So why let this woman make a woman of you?"

"Oh," cried the frightened soldier, "what if she hits me with her broom?! It wouldn't be the first time."

"Grab it and break it over her neck," advised the impatient avian.

"Oh, dear," moaned Wantowin, and was still at it as he pulled the bell rope at the portcullis.

It was not a wife with a broom who presently appeared but a maid with a mop. She curtsied politely and looked at Omby Amby with what seemed admiration

"Er," said the hero "Is your mistress in?"

"Dame Jrumm?" (The very name! Oh, grief!) "Why, no, she's away, teaching her bird to sing,. But I expect her back directly. Won't you come in?"

Such courtesy was delicious and Wantowin, who had expected nothing like it, was charmed. He followed, almost incredulous, as the pretty slavey led the way through marble halls.

"Maybe you'd like to freshen up, while you wait?" said the maid. She opened the door to another marble-walled, though much smaller, room.

"A bath!" said Omby Amby and marveled. No such contrivance for comfort had fallen under his eye since he had received

his orders in Queen Ozma's office and happened to glance through into the boudoir.

"I'll leave you to get on with it," said the girl and curtsied again, withdrawing.

The servant's cordiality had done wonders for Wantowin's ego. As he wallowed in the pump tub he actually dared to let his voice rise in song, though not so loudly as to penetrate the bathroom door and perhaps bring on his ex-wife untimely. Then he put on the spare shirt from his knapsack: wrinkled and lemonade-damp but quite clean.

The most important event in the bathroom was the adjustment of his facial hair. Battles stared into the looking glass appalled. All was a wild tangle. The scalp hair had grown apace and the jaw hair, unburdened by the weight of the knee-length beard, actually tended to curl up and out. Omby Amby grabbed the scissors that bung on a cord beside the wash basin (indoor plumbing! in a remote corner of the land of Mo; it was scarcely credible). He made short work of the few remaining wisps of greenness in his sideburns. Then when he'd used the hairbrush that depended from a ribbon on the other side of the mirror he turned to Berbir. "How do I look?"

"A regular bluebeard!" crowed the bird, delighted. "Now all you've got to do is hint at the other six wives in the locked closet and this one will be too scared even to look at a broom. Shove the decree at her and leave, no nonsense permitted!"

"I'll do my best," swore—well, no, he wouldn't so that; say 'promised' the soldier with the blue beard and stiffened his backbone.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - S I X

<<1914>>

"Woodcock, woodpecker, wren, yellowhammer," said Jrumm, checking off her list. "That's the lot. You're on your own now, my pretty." And she gave the young bird a little tap on the head.

"Chee-weep," replied the bird. Though now able to sing in fifty different voices and speak Human, the little grey mockingbird never said anything intelligible to the witch. Maybe that was because, though so young, she understood how great an injury the woman had done her and no amount of later amiability was going to make up for it.

The sorceress clicked-to the door of the cheap cage she used when carrying the bird into the woods for her singing lessons. She hitched up her skirt and strode across the drawbridge.

"What ho, within!" she hollered, and strong halbardiers quaked. They hurried to raise arms and erect an arch of crossed weapons for her to enter under. Flurried maids hastened forward and the pretty one said,

"You have a visitor, madam."

"Nonsense," snorted the witch. "In this benighted dragonless castle? Who would bother to come here? Who is it?"

"A puissant knight—I think," stammered the wench. "He didn't give his name but he wears a uniform and looked most awful: that is to say, inspiring awe. He required at once to go to the bathroom and there he is now."

"But will issue forth, I take it? I'll see him in my office

Now Omby Amby behind the marble door of the bath heard this exchange and quaked like the halbardiers. But Berbir raved him a tweak to his ear and said, "Excelsior! March out boldly! Let's to it pell mell. If not to heaven, then hand in claw to hell."

This adjuration was just what Battles needed to make him yank back the heavy door and stride into the hall with fierce mien and blue beard bristling ferociously.

Jrumm saw him and had to agree with Pernille the maid: it WAS a bold bruiser and one to be admired. She simpered immediately and said, "Where may we serve your lordship withal?"

Wantowin Battles stopped short; and scowled terrifyingly and terrified. "Lordship"? Did the woman not recognize him then? But he had propulsions enough in reserve: the exhortations of his bird pal, the opinion of the young tweeny who favored him, and the clear indications of success he was having by not acting like a shrinking violet! He resumed motion, strode further forward, planted himself twosquare, with feet wide-spread and fists on hips, like any bold pirate, and said to the wondering witch: "Know, dame, we come as emissary of one Ozma, Queen of all she surveys and particularly of the Land of Oz! We have those messages we would impart and certain writs for your receipt which cannot be denied! Take this! and this!"

Here he thrust out his crumpled commission as Ambassador Extraordinary to His Majesty of Mo and the rolled and ribboned decree of divorce.

But witch Jrumm was having none of that, at least not suddenly, without protocol! "Good master!" she cried. "Such screeds as these appear to be can only be received in state, not, standing in this drafty passage! And you! must be royally entertained, as coming from such a Queen!" ('Uppity little snit,' thought Jrumm, who remembered Ozma from the old days when the virgin

princess knew completely nothing about wielding a sceptre.)

"Lead on then, Mistress Jrumm!" commanded the soldier, now aware of his oats and noticing for the first time ever how delightful it feels to act with confidence in your role.

"First I must pop in here," said Jrumm as they repassed the bathchamber door. "I would freshen up after a day by field and stream. Pernille, bring my sprigged muslin," she ordered in an aside. "And you, honored emissary," she returned to Battles, "may wish a brush-up yourself."

In fact the ambassador's uniform could well have enjoyed a total dry-cleaning after the strabassings of the past month, not to mention last night spent in the muddy underbrush. There was neither time nor facility for that. The most that could be afforded was a hasty sponging, and pressing by Pernille while the soldier, momentarily resigning boldness, shivered in a closet off the kitchen.

At least, while there, an occasion was had for brief conference with Berbir. "I don't get it," worried Omby Amby.

"The hag has changed, but not that much! I knew her at once. But impossible as it seems she doesn't know me. What can be the explanation?"

Bert the Bird answered in a curiously distraught fashion. "Hm..? I didn't notice. My eyes were elsewhere. Did you observe that bird in a mildewed cage? A pitiful sight to see."

"Bird? Cage? Oh, yes, she was carrying a cage, but, I didn't notice what was in it. But advise me, trusted friend: what do I do now? CAN it be true I'm not recognized?"

Berbir made an effort to concentrate: "What is it: eight years since your wife disappeared? Of course a guy could change! Where are your green whiskers that you say were all anybody ever noticed about you? This bristling blue beard is nothing like. The rainbow-striped diplomat's uniform looks far different from the way you've described your green guardsman's outfit. You're broader, fatter, more virile in appearance than even when we met, a month ago. Most of all, just for a moment there, you acted like a stout corsair! Keep on that way and I think you'll carry it

off—if we don't hang around *too* long."

Those words, all of which Omby Amby had heard before, were like wine to his soul. To think! that with a little forthrightness he might escape entirely the painfulness of the interview he had so dreaded. He'd buck up and do his durnedest, play the role of he-man to the hilt. He could always wilt afterwards and resume his milktoast character if the ploy didn't pay off. He scrub-rubbed his hands in anticipation.

When Pernille knocked with the touched-up suit he put it on with panache, with bravura brushed his hair and beard the wrong way, and issued forth to hand her something with benign command and flashing merry eye: "Put this, my dear, in that umbrella stand I noted in the foyer. It hardly fits the image I would fain present!"

The girl received the soldier's brolly with a knowing lilt of the head and did as she was bid. Then she returned to lead Ambassador Battles—oh, no, just for now he was calling himself "Envoy Extraordinary Barbleue"—to the room where the sorceress chatelaine kept a chair of state.

There she was, herself now also unrecognizable in friendly flounces of sprigged finery and plainly trying to appear captivating.

The witch had had sense enough, if she was going to woo this attractive stranger, the first eligible man she'd seen since she stole the child princess from her dastardly father, to have her throne-chair pushed to a shaded corner and what light bulbs there were exchanged for pink ones. Now he wouldn't see her wrinkles! and she might get somewhere.

Omby Amby signed with satisfaction when he saw that arrangement. He fluffed up his chin whiskers and pulled his forelock further into his eyes, then advanced with his dispatch case at the ready.

Jrumm enticingly indicated the tea table and said, "To our affairs then. I believe you have intelligence for me...? I shall accept the documents now."

The ambassador had been doing some unusually useful

thinking, for him, and now replied: "Just so, your excellency. But there is a condition to the presentation. My mistress commands me say that this communication—" Here he fingered the divorce certificate meaningfully. "—being most secret, is only to be opened by yourself in utter privacy, and after I myself, have taken my leave."

Here he passed across the scroll and Jrumm stared at it with curiosity. The soldier also displayed his warrant. While in the kitchen closet he had had foresight, to call for ink and a knife and had altered, not too crudely, "Battles to "Parbleue."

These formal matters disposed of, witch Jrumm poured out. You can imagine the emissary's fright when he saw fruitcake on the dainty hoard! Gratefully there were watercress sandwiches as well and the deprived man ate of them with gusto.

The interview was conducted with amiability but Battles did not linger. He pleaded fatigue after his long journey. Jrumm, thinking, that tomorrow there would be time enough for pleasant dalliance, fell in with his demur and sent for Pernille to show him to a hastily prepared guest chamber. The parting of sorceress and ambassador was formal and most civil.

As soldier and servant paced the passage Omby Amby whispered urgently, "Please send my bird to me! good girl. I left him at the kitchen."

"Oh, yes... your bird. I'm not sure... I'll have a look, to be sure," promised Pernille.

The soldier waited in utmost nervousness behind his chamber door. There would take place no restoring slumber here: He knew Mistress Jrumm's insatiable curiosity. She would not wait for his departure from the castle to open the dispatch. Then all would fall into place with a crash. Ten minutes at most he had. He bit his nails and counted. His knapsack was on his back. At minute nine he opened the door noiselessly and fled along the darkened corridor.

Down by the entrance hall he fumbled briefly at the umbrella stand. Then he strode silently across to the one drowsing man on sentry duty. "The portcullis is up?" he hissed urgently.

The fellow jumped. "W-why, no. But I can open the postern wicket. Your worship is going out?" The guard marveled, glancing out into the sombre night.

"Something has come up,?" muttered 'Barbleue' scarcely informatively. Just let that gate-door in the portcullis be opened! and the man could think what he would.

The ambassador sped out into the trackless night. He lost himself quickly in the forested hills. What matter that he didn't know where he was if his wife didn't either! By morning's light he could make shift to find his way back to that spot on the Mo frontier on which Princess Ozma kept the Magic Picture trained. He didn't know the extent of the wife-witch's power but he thought there was just a chance he might make it to the rendezvous without her tracing him in the trackless expanses of the Hills of Tweet.

An hour later he had time to hug himself with satisfaction that so far he did not seem pursued. He had now completely divorced the Xantippic Mistress Jrumm and could begin to dream of a happy life hereafter. He had only one regret but that a sharp one. He missed his little pal, Bert the Bird. With a furtive tear he sent a silent thought in his direction. 'Whatcha doin'?' he wondered.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - S E V E N

<<1914>>

As it happened, just at that moment Berbir was not missing Omby Amby in return. He was far too engrossed in a new fascination.

When the blue-bearded soldier in his new-brushed uniform left the kitchen to meet his destiny in conference with witch and wife, Bert only scantily noticed him go. He had noticed something else far more compelling. On the old deal table in the middle of the kitchen stood the rusty cage of the little grey bird.

Perhaps the cage bird was the first avian Berbir had seen in several days, but why should just that poor shabby little thing in its far from prepossessing cage make such an impression on him? Why, it wasn't even his own species and there could be no hope of a real romance. Yet something in the grey bird's abjection called to him and he knew that whatever should be her fate must be his too.

Berbir took up an unobtrusive position on a curtain rod and waited in silence until the maids had all left the room on domestic duties. Then he fluttered down to the table, perched, cocked his head, and said, "Whatcha doin'?"

The mockingbirdlet lifted its drooping head. It fluttered

one wing tentatively and turned a wondering eye on its interlocutor.

Then it was marvelous to see the bird seem to rise and grow and expand and come to life and throw back its head and warble in the voice of the nightingale the sextet from “Lucia”: a stirring rendition that made the rafters ring.

Now all at once Bert the (other) bird knew (partly) why he so admired the occupant of the cage. It was not only the sympathy of pity. The creature had charms of a very positive kind. Soon, in fact suddenly, he would know more of them.

For when the singer had drawn to a climactic close she switched to the declarative tones of the thrush and chirped:

“Singing! You asked what I was doing. That’s what. Now. A moment ago I was drooping. I was feeling sorry for myself. Me, a king’s daughter! in this moldy cage. The indignity of it! I thought I would hang my head and die. Then you came along. Who are you? How did you get here? I feared I’d seen the last of my kind forever, now that I’ve learned my fifty songs. Yes, fifty. Count them. Why fifty? I don’t know. The old woman never tells me anything. Not that I’d answer if she did. I’ve got nothing to say to *her*. After what she did? I was minding my own business, playing on the floor beside my dad’s throne. Then that woman grabbed me up, did something or other—I never understood what—and there I was, turned into the form you see now: a miserable mockingbird. I only even know what species I am because when we got to ‘M’ the witch said, ‘Never mind. You don’t need to *learn* mockingbird; you’re that already.’ She brought me here, teaching me bird songs every step of the way. She didn’t say why—or why fifty songs. Just a number she grabbed out of the air, I guess. Anyway I now possess the singing abilities, such as they are, of the albatross, the bittern, the bunting, the coot, the cormorant, the cuckoo, the dunnock, the luck, the flycatcher, the goose, the grebe, the grouse, the jackdaw, the kingfisher, the lark, the linnet, the martin, the nightjar, the oriole, the owl, the peewit, the phalarope, the pheasant, the plover, the quail, the robin, the sandpiper, the sheldrake, the

sparrow, the swan, the swift, the teal, the tern, the tit, the wax-wing, the wigeon, and the wren, to name but a few. There are others, but that's enough to give you an idea. It's balmy, isn't it? What's it all in aid of? Being a mockingbird, I can imitate any other bird's call on one hearing, but what I'm supposed to do with all these voices—! The witch calls them 'tongues'. I'm the 'fifty-tongued bird'. But I just find the whole thing depressing. To have all this ability to sing, and no reason to do so. Not 'til I saw you anyway! You're quite a glamorous figure of a cock. I like those mixed green and blue bands on you. What species are you? I don't remember seeing any in the woods or fields like you. But oh! what am I to do? I shudder when I think of it. Poor old dad: he'll be at his wit's end—I trust! I hope he is planning to punish the sorceress for stealing me. And all my pretty things from when I was a princess. What will have become of them?: my jewels and dresses. I was so lovely, everyone said so. Now here I sit, an ugly little bird in a rusty old cage. I'll be forgotten and pine away. Oh, boo-hoo-hoo..."

To say that Berbir was amazed is to understate. Neither was this spate of words a feature in itself designed to win his heart, though it was encouraging to realize that the die-away-looking cage bird was not in fact as peaked as it had seemed. But the information imparted! That she could sing in fifty voices was delightful to discover, especially for an avian who, though bright, and perky, couldn't actually *sing* above a chirp. Was it her brilliant talent that he had sensed in her and that made such an appeal? Or was it her royalty? for the caged bird was, or had been, a princess! or so she claimed. It would seem that Bert had a sense for class without even knowing it.. Finally: she was a damsel in distress. She was no common or garden cage bird, a phenomenon no doubt deplorable but one so usual that you grew accustomed, even resigned, to it. No, she was a caged kingsdaughter! and as such must needs be rescued, if one could manage it.

Now the maids were coming back. Without ceremony Bert flew to a high shelf and lurked there amongst, the parchment-

paper and second-best candlesticks. The cage-bird hung, its head again and was silent.

“What about this poor thing?” said Pernille to her mates. It was not for them to make disposition of the witch-chatelaine’s belongings. They sprinkled some garden seed in the cage and put a saucer of water within reach. Beyond that time went by eventlessly for the birds in the kitchen.

Meanwhile witch Jrumm spent some time in daydreaming about her unexpected caller. Thus she was not so quick off the mark as Wantowin Battles had anticipated in unrolling the fateful scroll he had delivered to her.

Really, she ought to have known better. She had never had any luck with her men. After wrecking her first marriage she had run off with an importunate suitor who soon left her in the lurch. He was a lot quicker than Omby Amby had been to get fed up with her hasty temper, nor had he been any too pleased to discover such traits as her compulsive kleptomania and her prowess as a liar. When he went he did not punish her thievery by taking anything. Instead, he left her something: a pregnancy, that was destined to complicate the woman’s life wonderfully. But now she did not think of him but of another.

Presently, dreamily, Jrumm stretched out a hand and grasped the scroll. In a moment there were screams to wake the ravens in the castle eaves. The drowsing household staff were brought up standing. Where?!! the witch wanted to know, in no uncertain terms, was that scoundrel and villain, the soi-disant ambassador?!

The trembling man on portcullis duty confessed his crime in allowing the envoy to escape. “His bird familiar with him, I expect?” shrieked the witch.

Well, no, the sentry hadn’t noticed any bird in the company of the departing guest. A knapsack and an umbrella; that was the lot.

“Find me that bird!” roared Jrumm. She could vent some spleen there, meagre as was the scapebird.

It was no trick at all to discover Berbir on his high kitchen

perch. With brooms and mops (she was a whiz with those) Jrumm, with the frightened assistance of the maids, brought him down. The obvious thing was to thrust him in the cage beside the mockingbird. The witch paused only a moment before doing so. She had no way of sensing the stranger bird's sudden devotion to the other prisoner. She did consider briefly whether anything was at risk in such an arrangement, but at least until tomorrow it would do. Then she would order in a supplementary cage. Or cages! That was an idea. To populate the top-floor jailroom with multiple birds. If anyone came seeking to rescue anyone, he wouldn't know which bird to choose.

The ascent was made. Jrumm bore the bird cage and the maids the lamps and candles. The witch put down her burden in its usual dusty corner. The prisoners need not expect they were going to be waited on wing and claw just because they were now two. The maids would perform necessary chores here, the guards would ward off snooping strangers, and Jrumm could get back to her own domestic affairs at her own residence. It was well that the dragons had been transported elsewhere. Unaware of the use to which their stronghold was now being put they would have the less reason to complain.

At her own hearth witch Jrumm would have time and to spare to mull over the 'double' decampment of her earlier rejected but only now regretted husband, as she, too late, had recognized "Envoy Barbleue" to be.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - E I G H T

<<1952>>

The travelers by horse and ass had come to the fabulous orchard. Here, after gorging themselves on the fruit, they made camp for the night. Since the booby traps along the old road through Mo had been deactivated the marvelous grove was allowed to be just an ordinary marvelous grove. Admittedly, not all the fruit were (or appeared to be) at the height of perfection all the time. They got ripe in their proper season and just now, in August, the picnickers found plump plums, early apples, and good gooseberries perfect for plucking.

At one side of the orchard, not noticed by the young man on his previous passages that way, was a little farm cottage, seemingly that of the tenders of the fruit plantation. The sorceress went ahead and had a word with the householders, returning to say Yes, the travelers could get a shakedown there for the night. The animals were turned loose to graze in the grove over night and ate more apples than was perhaps good for them.

Curiously, the old couple in residence kept out of sight. The witch herself performed as virtual hostess and showed the princely couple where to doss down. But Y.M., in going to the privy, caught a glimpse of the old wife tenant and was startled

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to realize it was the same old woman who, sitting on a large rock, had given him travel directions years before.

<<1949>>

Back in bed, he discussed it with the princess but they were unable to come to any conclusion as to what it meant.

The following day the party had sense enough to take the trail that led around the mountain rather than over it. It took longer but they were in no great hurry.

There was, however, no avoiding the river. There it spread, broad and white. The three riders came up to its brink and halted.

"That's strange," said the young man, deep in thought and recollection. "I never knew the river was white. It looks like milk!"

"It is milk, silly," said Jrumm, speaking more familiarly than was at all warranted. "That's the Milk River."

Horse Hræ stevrod put in a word. "It was night, Master Y.M., the time we passed this way before, and the river was on the rampage. You wouldn't have observed its true nature."

"But coming back?" objected Y.M. "But that's right," he recalled, "it was late evening then too. But even so, how odd."

While they sat their mounts and marveled the well-traveled witch gave a little introductory lecture. "If you had been readers—" she began, when the young man broke in to say with some indignation:

"I am! I love reading."

His wife, however, in the interest, of candidness, put in: "Just newspapers, darling. Not geography books or history."

"I'd sure read them if there *were* any at the palace," Y.M. defended himself, yet he could not gainsay the fact of his general ignorance.

The witch went on: "The Milk River is one of the sights of Mo. Unlike in much of the country it rains milk in the Moo Mountains, nor are heavy deluges unknown. It must have been one of those you felt the effects of at the time of which you speak.

A milk cloudburst would have swelled the river greatly."

Nobody contested her word. Jrumm mused on. "I recall passing this way—" Here she twirled her umbrella reminiscently. "—with a young fellow years ago. It was the time I was teaching you bird calls, my dear." She turned to 'he Princess.

"I have not forgotten," said the young woman in what, if she hadn't been so good, might have struck one as an ominous tone.

"It was a boy calling himself 'Button-Bright'. I wonder what ever happened to him. I left him in charge at the former dragon castle but when I came back he was gone. I dare say you might tell..."; the witch turned again to the princess.

'In any case I wouldn't tell *you*,' thought the princess. Aloud she said, "That boy was good to me—in his limited way. I too would like to know what became of him."

Then they got to the other side of the river, which they swam, mounted—and assisted significantly by witch magic—they got their wish.

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

<<1952>>

As diligent readers will know, the difficulties of Button-Bright were not over when he was “rescued” from the popcorn drift by Cap’n Bill and Trot. He tagged along to Oz with them and got lost again.

He stayed that way intermittently for three years. Besides himself he’d lost his magic umbrella, which seemed to be good and sufficient reason for him not to go back to Philadelphia. Princess Ozma could have strapped on the Magic Belt and wished him there in an instant but he never indicated any interest in going. Maybe the disaffection between the boy and his uncle was greater than anyone (except the principals) suspected. It would seem that Button-Bright’s mother, from whom he got his vagueness and tendency not to know where he was, was no drawing card to impel him home; he is never known to have mentioned her. Poor lady, she just didn’t make much impression.

Then, in 1917, Button-Bright surfaced again and came to play quite a role in the adventure of the Magic Mirror of Oz. Admittedly, for his pains he ended up, like the Young Man, down a well. Alas, no farmer, or anyone else, came along to rescue him,

at least until it was almost too late and he had ceased forever to be button-bright and had become treacle-dark (or “d’Arc”).

As a result of his long ordeal the molasses had entered into his soul. He resolved to quit Oz, return to America, get an education, and try to be somebody. In the end he succeeded rather well, if having become the (by now grown-up) consort of the great and good sorceress Glinda of Oz was any sign of achievement.

They had been together now for several years: years rich in satisfaction for both the partners and in further maturation and deepening of his personality for one who had been so gormless as a youth. He had become even a pensive person, going off by himself for extended periods just to think about things.

One time he returned from such a meditative retreat to say to his wife across a tired grapefruit: “I’ve been remembering my old faithful magic umbrella. I wonder what ever happened to it.”

“That could he ascertained, my dear,” assured Glinda, who was mistress of endless magical devices including the Great Book of Records, which (in abbreviated, sometimes even cryptical, form) told everything that happened in the land of Oz. She mentioned this latter adjunct to her learning.

“A nice try, darling,” said Mr. ‘Sples’ Smith (to give him his true name). “But don’t forget I lost the bumbershoot in MO.”

Glinda colored attractively. It wasn’t often she was caught out. “So you did. And the other methods I might try, to get on its trail, are slower. What you really ought to do, I think, is ask Ozma to look at the Magic Picture. That would soon show you where to head on your quest. I can see you do intend a quest,” the sorceress ended with a small trill of laughter. It was hard. Her husband had just been away for a week meditating and now she was faced with his absence again, if her hunch was right—and they always were.

But Mr. Smith was a good husband and full of consideration for his jewel of a spouse. He was not going to go bolting off this very day, or even week. He’d do a little thoughtful. planning

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first. But Glinda's suggestion had given him food for cogitation.

"No," he said, "I don't think I want it made too easy. That's the trouble with up-to-date magic. You just make a wish and everything comes true. I don't doubt, Glinda, that after a few hours at your alembics and retorts you could produce the lost umbrella right here in your laboratory. Where would be the fun of that?"

The good sorceress was saddened at this seeming denigration of her craft but she knew how the husbands of queens regnant and other driving women must feel and she made allowances. The boy (she still always thought of him that way) was a good and true one and she would allow him his attitudes of manhood. Let him go a-questing.

Smith continued, "There*is* something I'd like to check with at the Emerald City before going, though. Or rather *somebody*."

"Who might that be, dear?"

"My old comrade of the road, Omby Amby Battles. He's traveled more than I have in the land of Mo and might have some tips for me. In fact, I wouldn't mind having him along. It'd be like old times."

"Right you are!" agreed the fond witch. "By swan chariot? I could give word to have the birds harnessed at once." So much for waiting 'til next week to be parted again.

"Will you go to E.C. with me, darling?" invited the intending voyager.

"I'd love to. I was hoping you'd ask."

The contented couple flew off that very afternoon and got to Queen Ozma's Palace of Magic in time for tea.

Now that green spectacles for use in the capital had gone out of style the Guardian of the Gate had little to do. Nowadays everything worth noticing in the Emerald City really *was* green. The disemployed Guardian found himself spending much of his time in the Russian variant of Oz, where they gave him plenty to do[§].

Meanwhile such gate-guarding as needed doing, mostly of

§ See *The Wooden Soldiers of Oz*, *Syem Podzyemnych Koroli*, et al... Editor's note.

a ceremonial nature, was performed by Private-General Battles. The soldier was of old a favorite celebrity in Oz but he was also still Ozma's standing army and as such he spent his time standing, not sitting down at tea parties.

Today, however, when the Girl Ruler heard the burden of the errand of her visitors from the south, she sent for the good guardsman and bade him join them at the festive if modest board.

"Oh, help!" gulped Omby Amby when Ozma's call came through to his sentry box. "May I have half an hour to brush and perfume my beard?"

"Don't bother," said Ozma unfeelingly. To tell the truth the Princess had never been greatly keen on beards. She thought of them as an antiquated hangover from the 1870s and rather unsavory to boot. Ozma had a thing about physical daintiness[§]. "Just come as you are," she said. "We'll all be pleased to see you."

"Oh, but—er," said the sentryman, cast down by the disallowance of a brush-up, "Your Highness, may I bring my wife? She'd be so thrilled to take tea with Your Grace and Your Grace's guests."

"Bring her, do," urged the young(-looking) regent genially. Ozma was no snob, whatever other faults she might, though unlikely, have.

Wantowin shed like green lightning to his house, formerly his wife's and, in fact, in her capacity as town jailoress, still so. While he had a nervous breakdown out of sheer excitement Tollydogle put on her hat and calmly waited for him at the door.

They proceeded to the palace and took tea. "Try these asparagus sandwiches," urged Ozma.

Wantowin was quite agog at seeing the former Button-Bright again. "I once lost you in a drift of popcorn," he recalled affably.

"Yes," Smith remembered too. "Those were the days. Does it still snow popcorn in Mo, I wonder?"

"I'm not sure, your honor," said Battles. "But last I knew it

§ See *In Other Lands Than Oz: The Woozy's Sticky End*. Editor's note.

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certainly rained lemonade.” Spiritedly he described the flood he’d taken part in, now thirty-eight years before. Once started, he went on to touch lightly also upon the highlights of his brief call in the castle of the Purple Dragon.

“I’m glad you mentioned that,” said Sples. “I’ve got around to thinking it was pretty dumb of me to drop my prized Magic Umbrella in Mo and never go back for it. I have a mind to now.”

“How interesting, your honor,” admired Omby Amby, little guessing whither the talk was tending.

“Yes, and I thought maybe you could put me on the track. You see, on mature reflection I now think it must have been that witch woman, Jrumm, your former wife, who pinched it from me. In those days I was too clueless to suspect her. I know I had the old bumbershoot with me when I fell down to sleep, exhausted, by the roadside. When I woke up, Jrumm was there but the umbrella wasn’t. She let me think some previous passerby must have made off with it. It was only later that I came to know there just *weren’t* passers-by in Mo. It’s such a deserted country, in most parts. It could only have been Jrumm.

“So I have to find her. Will you go with me?” Smith dumped his little bombshell. Omby Amby turned seven shades of purple (with the green beard, a beautiful combination). He started up from the table and gasped, “Oh, Mr. Smith, please excuse me! I’d rather go *anywhere* than to meet my ex-wife again. I wouldn’t put any vengefulness past her. It’s a dog—not to use another word—I’d prefer to let lie. I’m surprised she never sought me out here in the Emerald City to exact revenge for escaping her clutches.”

Smith was amused—and bemused. He recalled the nine days’ wonder of the old soldier’s return to the Palace of Magic in ‘fourteen, not too long after his own arrival there. As chance would have it, he’d been among the group before the Magic Picture when Princess Ozma tuned in to the scene on the Mo frontier whence Battles was to make his return to Oz on completion of his ‘antihoneymoon.’

The by-then sturdy-looking soldier had gasped, “Oh, what

a narrow escape, Your Highness!" Then he had hastily let his blue beard grow into green "whiskers" again. He had been confirmed in his preference for timidity. Putting on a bold front had nearly landed him in the embrace of his awful wife again.

Ozma had smiled soothingly and said, "I seem to recall your wife. Her name was Jrumm, was it not? Wasn't it just about the time of the state visit of that rather daunting King Scowleyow that she disappeared? Well, never mind. All has now ended propitiously."

"And may I be excused, your majesty, to hasten to my dear Tollydiggle and pop the question?"

"Do that, by all means," encouraged the fairy ruler. "It will be a quiet civil ceremony, I suppose, you having been married before."

"Well, actually, my dear one has sometimes spoken wistfully of orange blossoms..."

"Orange blossoms then, certainly, affirmed Ozma, being rather daring for 1914. "The wedding shall be celebrated right here in the palace."

Indeed, the marriage of Miss Tolydiggle and Private-General Battles proved to be one of the brightest social highlights of that season in the Emerald City.

You couldn't blame the old soldier, thought Mr. Smith. And so now he'd be doing the expedition on his own then. No, you couldn't fault good old cowardly Omby Amby for not wanting to stir up a hornet, as the tricky, light-fingered (and, to hear him talk, vengeful) Jrumm woman might well prove to be.

Still, the remeeting with the old guardsman was not lost motion. Over more tea, the dedicated venturer amassed a wealth of small data on the topic of travel in Mo. "If you can arrange it, miss Fruitcake Island!" advised Battles as they got up from table. "A colorful locale but, on balance, better given a miss."

Before leaving Glinda's Pink Palace Sples had got together his kit for the journey. That included a rubber diving suit, in case he wanted to essay the frogman gambit during his travels. Now that he'd had his Mo briefing there was really

nothing to wait for.

“What if I shot on off from here, my girl?” he asked Glinda after they had parted company with General and Mrs. Battles. “Get it over with?”

The good witch herself thought that what sounded like a not very fun operation would be as well accomplished now as later. Accordingly they went with Ozma to the Throne Room, where the dainty princess kept the Magic Belt in a special gold-and-glass case. There it was but the work of a trice for the fairy to slip on the cincture and wish her good friend Sples Smith into the presence of the daunting-sounding witchwoman Jrumm (cognomen-less but formerly “Battles”).

That presence proved to be on the west bank of the Milk River in the Land of Mo, a spot where the two individuals had also been in each other’s company for a moment thirty-eight years earlier.

It was as well this new reunion didn’t take place five minutes sooner. Then Mr. Smith might have wished he’d put on his wet-suit in advance, for the meeting would have been in mid-stream, where witch Jrumm was up to her ass in milk, and it up to its neck.

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

<<1952>>

The Land of Mo was in important ways more like Shangri-La than Oz. As we have seen, it did not suffer from overpopulation. No more did Oz, of course, at this period, but later...[§] More significantly, death was in Mo not an unknown quantity as it had become in the fairyland across the desert.

In its opportunities for death Mo resembles more the Tibetan paradise: extinction is rare and selective. But what was common for all three lands was the infinite slowness of aging.

We have observed that the fairy tale Princess was a child in 1914 and yet, in 1952, still in appearance no more than a charming young woman. No one thought anything of that. King Scowleyow was in his lusty crusty years at the earlier period and also at the later. Witch Jrumm, translated from Oz, saw nothing strange in appearing thirty-five in the one country and almost half a century later the same age in the other.

Thus it was that when Sples Smith appeared on the river bank and looked at the travelers who were scrambling up it, shaking the whiteness off them, he had no trouble at all in picking out his old acquaintance.

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

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"Allow me!" he cried, dropped his hit of gear, and ran to grab the clutched umbrella which was obviously getting in the older woman's way as she sought to descend from her mount.

"Oh, thank you," said the witch, making only a feeble attempt to hold onto her broly. Drenched skirts were impeding her and she *must* get down. The poor ass was slipping and sliding deplorably, trying to mount the muddy bank with a passenger aboard. And now the polite stranger was running to seize the bridle of the Princess, who murmured her name and rank, and even finding a moment to extend a hand to the Young Man as he jumped off his horse. "How lucky!" cried the newcomer, "that I happened to be passing," he misrepresented genially. "There ought to be a bridge here!"

"I've said the same thing to his Magicality every time I've been at court," grunted the witch half-cryptically as she bent to wring out her skirts. Smith twirled the umbrella, as it were to fling off pretended drops of milk, then, as if playfully, expanded it and muttered rapidly, "Take me to the Emerald City!"

Destiny held its breath for five seconds. Then it could exhale.

Darn. Just as he'd been fearing. To get possession of his very own (well, maybe not quite "very") Magic Umbrella in the first five minutes of setting out on his quest had seemed to Smith to be a little too marvelous good luck. Something was wrung.

He collapsed the broly and prepared to hand it back. No one had noticed. The ladies were grappling inexpertly with their asses' reins and the young man and his horse were stamping about shaking off milk. Sples stared at the umbrella as he held it out to Jrumm.

At first glance he'd thought it *was* his: the same rusty yellowish blackish greenish color of aged cloth. But the handle was different. Well, of course he'd blown off the elephant head. A substitute would have been supplied in the years between. As he transferred the umbrella from one hand to the other he briefly studied the crook and saw a plain knurled surface.

Whatever the explanation this clearly was not his umbrella.

No use in hanging onto it. He handed it over, feeling sure the witch had remarked nothing.

Then after all it *was* thirty-eight years, and he didn't absolutely *know* she was the purloiner of his broolly. But now where was his quest?!

People were staring. The coming ashore had been accomplished. Now the equestrian party clearly meant to continue their journey. First though, their would-be Samaritan should be thanked, but he was standing as if lost in thought.

"What is troubling you?" asked the pretty Princess puzzledly.

"Oh, nothing, thank you, your grace," said the court-trained Smith on cue. He was still pondering rapidly. What was he to do? On impulse he blurted, "I was wondering: perhaps I right join your party? I am only on a walking tour, with no particular goal. It might be that I could be useful on your journey."

"Join us, by all means," said the young man.

Though not, royal, as a male he considered himself the decision-making head of his party.

"Just one thing," put in Jrumm: "what will you ride on? We're all mounted, you see."

"Oh," said Smith with a smile, "I can walk as fast as an ass" — only, being American, he called it "donkey," of course. Americans are famous euphemists: "rooster" for cock, "bathroom" for toilet, and they would never say "die", at least of anyone they felt respectful about.

So they set out together. The presence of the stranger was a diversion for the others and Smith was active in leading the conversation. If he were ever to learn of the whereabouts of his enchanted umbrella thirty-eight years on, it could only be by means of congenial talk. No one was likely to reveal much in response to blunt questions, and even less to outright accusations.

He had an advantage that occurred to him early. Unlike others he himself had changed vastly in the intervening years. He had grown up, gone from blond to deep tan (hair and all), and gathered many gorms along the way. He was certain Jrumm

would never recognize him. Perhaps he could play on that.

Trey crossed the wide plain of north-central Mo. As they grew more confidential details of past personal history were revealed. Sples, for example, related that he had been an American navy frogman. Then he had to tell what a frogman was and in illustration unrolled his black wetsuit, to the amusement and amazement of the others. "Now that might, have been useful at the Milk River!" commented the pensive-seeming princess.

"I thought of that," said Smith. Vibrations early made clear to him that he was more on a wavelength with the young woman than with the others.

The party in turn told more of who they were. More importantly, they disclosed that their travel group comprised not three but four (at least crypto-)humans. "Yes, you may as well know," said Jrumm. "That great beast there" — she pointed her umbrella at the strapping twenty-hand palomino — "is my son. He's under an enchantment."

The American marveled when he, heard that news.

Not for the reason you might expect. He had a lifetime behind him of acquaintance with magic. It was no problem for him to admit of a transformation. But he knew that the older woman in their party was a powerful witch and he at once joined the other three travelers in being unable to fathom why that witch did not disenchant her own magic-struck son. Of his knowledge he could say nothing. The others' ignorance was a weapon in his hands, as long as he could maintain it.

That proved to be no time at all.

In reply to Jrumm's revelation Smith dared utter only polite condolence. Then he walked up beside the fine stallion and in lieu of a handshake clapped his shoulder, murmuring, "How're ya doin'?"

The princess was riding beside her husband. As it happened, her ears were closer to Smith's question than were the young man's. She turned her head sharply. The words had reminded her of a little question she had been fond of long ago.

Presently she fell back a few paces. So did Sples. Freshly

reminded, nostalgic, melancholy, she came to tell. more of her history. The American received new surprises. "We're on our way to an old castle," the lady confided. "I used to live there long ago. Well, 'live'. I was kept. a prisoner there for years and years—"

Smith expressed polite, if not quite candid, wonder. He knew very well about unagingness in Mo but he said, "Your grace doesn't seem old enough to have lived anywhere 'years and years ago'."

"Oh, yes," said the princess with a disclaiming, sad little laugh. "Thirty-eight, to be exact."

That gave the American a recollective start. Perhaps it also prepared him in some small measure for what came next.

"Like Hræ stevrod there, I was under an enchantment," the princess revealed. "I'd been turned into a 'fifty-tongued bird'—"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the former Button-Bright, thrown off balance after all by his astonishment. "You were the little grey bird in the mildewed cage?!"

Now it was the princess' turn to be amazed. "That describes me very well. But how could *you* know...?" Too late now. Still, Sples had felt for some little time that the lady was his ally in the present connexus. He dared frankness: "I used to give Your Grace your birdseed!.. Is *that* the castle where you're going?!"

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

<<1952>>

It had been four years since last time but Maxwell, maitre d' at Keen's, claimed to remember the group. At any rate their churchwarden pipes were duly hanging up on the serried racks. That was partly why they'd come here this evening. Sentimentally they didn't want the statute of limitations to go into effect and arrive to find their pipes had been broken up and disposed of.

Most of the fellows didn't smoke, but heck, at Keen's you wanted to play along with the traditions, so they all had a few puffs. Of course Omby Amby had to be initiated and ceremonially receive his own yard-long narrow-bowled white clay pipe. As a matter of fact the soldier did smoke, so he may have ended as the one most enjoying the little ritual.

They all had mutton chops of course. Even now in the fifties the idea of eating mutton was an antiquated concept for Americans. Naturally everyone knew that the Bordon family had eaten mutton soup on that fatal day in Fall River but that was in 1892, an era where everyone might eat that meat as an accepted thing. In fact, plenty of it was eaten *now* but never without the appellation "lamb". Only at Keen's did they baldly confess "mutton".

The entire membership of the O.B.O., as well as everyone else who experienced it, agreed that a Keen's mutton chop, medium, was the best piece of meat they had ever tasted.

The ale was poured, the chops were chewed, the crisp salad enjoyed. In those days you could still get the salad *with* the meal and were not obliged to guff it all down while the waiter, with hands on hips, waited, determined never to bring the main course until those salad plates had been carried away.

The great Tale of the Year was told at last. Smith and Battles took turns. They harked back first to the original happenstance encounter that ended in a popcorn storm, each giving his version of what happened before and after. Then the former Button-Bright moved on to recenter times and his vow to seek his former true agent and companion of thrilling adventures by air, the Magic Umbrella. He described the trek to the Castle of the Purple Dragon and the Midsummer-Night's-Dream-ish encounters in the forest of Tweet. Finally Omby Amby rounded off with his account of seeing off the group on the anticlimactic visit to the Charmed Garden of Oz.

"Well!" and "Wow" said everybody and was much edified. Only Speedy, hearing of journeys ending in lovers' meeting, was melancholy.

"Everybody nicely paired off at the end," he constated. "Makes a guy kind of miss it."

"What, *you*, Speedy?!"

"Confirmed old bachelor!"

"I always understood life was perfect at Rent Rock as it was —"

Rapidan held up an abashed silencing hand. "Yeah, but you know it was always on the books" — and, certainly, printed *in* at least one book — "that some day I would return, marry the Princess, and become King of Umbrella Island." He displayed, a wistful smile and drew on his long pipe. It had gone out but that didn't spoil the bit of business.

There was an appalled silence.

Surprise, combined with shamefast sorrow, rendered all the

fellows around the table literally speechless.

Speedy was no dummy and caught on immediately. He dropped his pipe-holding hand and barked: "What's up? What's the matter?"

It was Omby Amby Battles, perhaps as being near adjutant to her majesty, Queen Ozma of Oz, repository of all important knowledge in the fairylands, who first essayed to make an answer. "I'm awful sorry, Mr. Speedy. The Princess of Umbrella Island is lost...!"

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

<<1952 still 3 months before O.B.O. meeting>>

The dragons roared and blew volleys of flame.

But after all, if you're a dragon, how else are you going to express satisfaction and welcome? You can't purr or whinny and if you wag your tail you knock over houses.

The dragons, as many as could crowd on, were crouched on the drawbridge, watching the equestrian party approach. Each monster did his distinct thing in token of welcome: one was puffing magically, another was gnashing his candy-cane teeth, and a third flashed her thousand-watt-lantern eyes on and off.

Mistress Jrumm nodded in appreciation. "One has to keep one's dragons happy you know. Otherwise they might turn on one. I've tried to be good to these."

A way was cleared and the riding party clattered over the resounding boards. Menservants gathered round. They took the place of what had been guards and halbardiers in an earlier age. The dragons could do their own guarding! and the men served as grooms and flunkies. They led away the horse and asses to stabling, while the riders went within.

How tame. Now unspectacularly the questers returned to that ancient scene of triumphs and defeats. Yet one heart beat

fast. Not the princess'; she mourned for her little lost friend. No longer did glamorous capes and exotic birds fill the top-floor room. As for the former Button-Bright, he felt only passing curiosity to see again the marble halls where he'd once spent a single night. But the Young Man! At any moment he might catch a glimpse of that brown-haired charmer he had loved without knowing it until it was too late.

But now the witch Jrumm was giving orders and some wondered why she was, this being "the castle of the Purple Dragon". It was a story that would come out in time. Certainly the Purple Dragon exercised at least matching authority with the enchantress on the premises. That was why he was not down at the portcullis bidding welcome. He was ceremonially in the Room of State and that is where Jrumm led the way.

Smith and the princess gave themselves to the study of the company about them. Never had either of them beheld a dragon before—and now to see so many! The American realized that his long experience of magic phenomena had after all been lacking in an important respect. Never to have known dragons! No life could be complete without it.

Let us start with the first: the Purple Dragon himself. The Dragon was not alone naughty; it was big and fierce and strong. Raspberry juice ran in its veins. It was most disagreeable to fight with. The teeth of the Dragon went through the jaw and were clinched on the other side. It stretched as easily as if made of India rubber.

It was stretching now as it sprawled in the presence chamber and spewed its welcome all over the callers: lavender firefoam with pink highlights. The display looked impressive but harmed no one. They soon caught on that the Purple Dragon was all bluster with a heart of toffee.

Jrumm and the great dragon held converse. The other newcomers continued to stare about as more and more of the creatures crowded in. Luckily many of these were of different textures from your run-of-the-mill everyday dragons, who have the solidity, size, and general appearance of medium-size

dinosaurs (their spiritual ancestors). There was only room in the Room of State for one of the latter and that was the Very Purple one himself. But many other sorts came congregating: smoke dragons, cloud dragons, vegetable and fruit dragons, gas dragons, ornamental stone dragons, chewing-gum dragons! and even one small dragon draggin' behind him the bottle he ordinarily lived in. These all made conversation and entertained the visitors until it was time for supper.

Sples Smith noticed that the appointments of the castle were a good deal more civilized now than in his own time. No dragon spoor was allowed to defile the passageways. Handsome retiring rooms of all sizes were provided. The guest chambers were nicely furnished. They had had running water laid on!: no more tiresome labor at the pump to get a drink or take a bath.

Let us follow the Young Man in his ardent search for the serving maid of his dreams. He did this after the others had retired to their quarters but naturally before the staff had done likewise. He called at the kitchen, he popped into the pantry, he sought the sewing room. Though he saw pretty maids all in a row (and officiously advised them to stop rowing and go to bed), no one could tell him anything of Fanciulla, as she had called herself.

"Brown hair? Blue eyes? But that could be anyone. Awfully pretty? But most of our girls are that. A charming affectionate manner? We look for it in hiring young persons. You think she was clever at weaving. She sewed on a button for you? She wore her hair in a pigtail? She often had a book in her pocket? She liked tapioca pudding. Significant traits, sir, but still they don't ring a bell—and I've been here for a number of years," quoth the motherly housekeeper whom Y.M. interviewed in her dressing gown in her cosy room.

He wandered away disconsolate.

What was he to do next? *Somebody* must remember his love, even if she was just an expendable slavey, and though the turnover of domestic staff at the castle was considerable. No doubt it was a bit much asked of servants to go around

cleaning up after dragons. Yet there was no dearth of hired help that he could see.

He wondered about those dragons. Where did they come from? He searched his memory. Dragons... dragons. There certainly hadn't been any here the time he rescued the fifty-tongued bird. Yet he had a vivid recollection of such at another locale: the stable where he had first made contact with Hræstevrod the horse.

Funny. There'd been a purple dragon there; also, if his memory didn't play him false, one of chewing gum. He remembered almost netting stuck on it the time he rubbed on that magic liniment and they all went to sleep. Could it be the same one?

By now Y.M.'s nocturnal prowlings had brought him again to the big room of state. He took a peek in, and was surprised to see by the light of a flickering flamboy (they hadn't gone *completely* modern at the castle) the great purple reptile curled up with a good book. Hat in hand, the young man creft nearer, noted the book title: *Poems of Mystery and Imagination*, and cleared his throat

"CHRRRRMM!" roared the dragon, shrank to the wall with its claws at its throat, and looked around. "Ooh! you startled me," it exhaled in relief. "It's only you. Pleeeze! don't creep around like that in your stocking feet. A person could get a fatal shock."

"A dragon?! But dragons are the fearsomest of all living beings. How could you be frightened?"

"Never mind; I could. But how may I serve Your Grace? I take it you've got a Grace, since you are consort to one I've had pointed out to me as a Princess..?"

"I think I've got grace," said the young man wistfully, "but admittedly it's never been made official. I'm still just 'the husband of the Princess'. Annoying. But, then again..." Y.M. took his chin in hand and pondered. Maybe it was fairly neat that he wasn't too widely known as 'Consort', in case he were now to refind one he knew he'd rather consort with.

He went right to the point. "Your Saurianty" —he guessed

that was right as an honorific—"when last I had the honor of visiting your castle some years ago, you yourself, and the others of your kind, were not in residence—"

"No!" exclaimed the Purple one, "and that was a very bad thing. We were in captivity!—can you imagine?—and for thirty-five years, no less.

<<1914 + 35 = 1949>>

It was awful, although at the time we knew no better. We did get our three squares a day and all we wanted of what we like best: roaring and breathing fire at strangers to warn them off."

"Mm, I know," admitted the young man. "Only a certain kind of ointment was proof against your ferocity. I once ran up against members of your race at a fortified stable in a forest far from here—"

"The very place!" croaked the dragon. "But how did you..."

"Don't ask," said the young man. "It's a long story." Could it be modesty that so often forebade him to relate the tale of his achievements? or just boredom? "I'd rather hear *your* story."

"About how we got out of durance and restored to our own demesne? Search me—if you'll pardon the colloquialism. It was all due to enchantments above and beyond our frame of reference. One day we noticed a strange reek seeping in through the scissures here. Straightway we all of us lost consciousness, *and* our memories. Next thing we knew we were waking up in the environs of that forest stable you know of. We never did get our memories back while we were there. Only now, when the whole thing's over with, can we recall the sequence of events. Just as well, I suppose. We'd certainly have been discontent all those years we served on guard duty—for horses!—if we had known we had really been reserved for a much more glamorous state."

"Interesting," said Y.M. For just a while he *was* interested, even to the exclusion of his preoccupation as to the whereabouts of his lost love. "And curious. Did you ever find out who, or what, was to blame?"



Dr. J. J. '91

"We never could make up our minds! We think it might have been a certain King Scowleyow, or else that very enchantress Jrumm who at this moment sleeps within the castle walls. There's evidence in both directions. What we do know is that Jrumm *released* us from the spell. For that we're grateful, so she remains persona grata here. Still, I have my doubts..

"However! I feel sure it was not to hear this tale that so stilly you came stealing..."

Poe! That's right. The Purple Dragon was quoting from his reading.

"Yes," admitted the young man. "May I be frank?" He threw himself on the mercies of what seemed to be after all quite an amiable dragon.

"Be my guest," urged the monster. The young man was so already, but no matter.

"My estimable lady, the Princess, is all that could asked in terms of goodness, beauty, charm, talent, intelligence, learning, kindness, generosity, sympathy, capability. However, the fact remains that somebody else got in first, and it's her I love. For me the princess was an imagined ideal—but the other girl was real. I could feel her vital palpable affection streaming out to me in a way that was never attempted by my wife, who only married me as part of a package deal. For getting released from captivity and enchantment she had to wed whatever bozo brought it off. Luckily I didn't have two heads or bad b.o. but just the same, who can expect a lady of royal blood *and* so many virtues to love some fellow just because he rescued her on a bet?"

"No one."

"Anyway she didn't. *She's* in love with a dickey bird. By the way, does Your Saurianty have any dickey birds about the place?"

"Not a one. Sorry."

"And I love a lovely girl—well, anyway an averagely pretty girl, with just what it takes to please me—"

"Quite romantic."

"Exactly. And I would go to the ends of the earth to get but

another glimpse of her."

"Oh, you probably wouldn't have to go that far. What's she like?"

Y.M. gave a minute description of Fanciulla as he remembered her, girlish and gifted (*he* thought) and full of charm.

"Fanciulla', ey? Those are of the west, aren't they?" The Purple Dragon, thinking of Puccini, was momentarily confused and failed to realize that fanciulle are found at all four points of the compass. "I would advise you then: go west, Young Man."

"She's not around here then?" said Y.M. with heaviness of heart.

"Alas no. All the hired help fled when we arrived back, not long apparently after your own previous visit. You say she was fond of reading? I do recall that one of the workwomen decamped with a bulging valiseful of books to read where it was peaceful, which admittedly it wasn't, around here, once we dragons were back in the saddle."

"Your Saurianty said 'the west'. Were you in earnest?"

"As it happens, yes. We heard later from passing birds that groups of our fleeing servants had been sighted in the hills of Tweet, which lie between here and the Great Desert to the west."

"I'll seek her that way! where'er she be," vowed the young man. "But first let me get a good night's sleep. We've traveled far today."

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - T H R E E

<<1952 three months later>>

The guys all talked at once.

"Yeah, terrible thing!"

"Feared kidnapped."

"Maybe even—but no! nobody dared to think *that*."

"Couple of years back now."

"But we only got word of it at the Emerald City last year."

"There seemed no sense in telling you. It wasn't as if you could do anything."

"People weren't sure you were even that interested any more. It *has* been about twenty years—"

Speedy Rapidan groaned and would have buried his head in his arms if there hadn't been a lot of his compeers around.

Instead, fire flashed from his eyes. "Let's have it! straight. No mealy-mouthed crap now. Tell me what happened!"

It fell to Wantowin Battles to relate. He'd been on the spot at Ozma's palace as the various items of intelligence came in. Now he hauled his umbrella into view from between his legs. He had refused to be parted from it at the checkroom. He'd lost his prized adjunct to storied adventures once. He didn't want to be responsible for losing it again. Like the key from Notori-

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ous or the crown of thorns at the Democratic National Convention in 1896, Battles' umbrella was the ideal illustrative symbol to highlight a speech-making occasion.

"Umbrella," he said and shook the broolly, "Island has suffered a national emergency. Well, by now it has gone over into a period of national mourning.

We at the Emerald City knew nothing about it for quite a while, a couple of years in fact. Then one day the island anchored above town and three former guests of our Princess Ozma came down on their bumbershoots and made their way to the gates of the Palace of Magic.

"It was I who conducted to the royal presence King Sizzeroo and his advisers Naddy and Bamboula. But who would have known them? In former times all three had been grossly fat. Apparently the court on Umbrella Island have nothing to do but sit around and eat. But now we learned a different occupation had them all in thrall. It was mourning and grieving! The three were thin as rails—and all the better to look at for that," added the Soldier with the Green Whiskers, who had always been noted for his gauntness. (The one time he'd grown stocky he hadn't been at all himself.)

"I noted that their braids were all in disarray. You remember that braided hair had been one of the characteristic mannerisms of the Umbrella Islanders. But with what was worrying them who had a thought for sitting before a looking glass and knotting and combining his locks? The king's side braids had fallen loose and his whiskers hung to his breast. The wizard Waddy's dark beard had grown almost as long as my own. I must say, he had become a rather striking figure of a man. But his air of solemn sadness spoiled the satisfaction one could take in the sight.

"Our puissant Princess had them all in to the Council Chamber and there we heard the grim tale. It seemed that after your own visit to the Island, Mr. Speedy, things had gone along for many years in their accustomed way. I remember indeed on two occasions the island halted over the Palace and some of the

islanders came down to pay an informal call on the Girl Ruler.” The soldier paused. “I do believe your friend Princess Reeda was among them once. Yes, I remember now—but she was no longer the young girl we recalled you describing. Quite a young lady, very charming, and always with a book under her arm.

“Then for years we heard nothing—until last autumn when, as I say, the three from the Umbrella court turned up. They related how they had come to stop once, in their continual sky-cruising, over the land of Mo and made one of their descents. Nothing unusual in that. They picked up supplies: items available at the Magical Monarch’s capital but not on the Island Itself.

“They made a night of it. The monarch even gave an impromptu ball in their honor. Everyone came in costume. The young Princess was remarked particularly in her pert outfit of a humble dairy maid. The merriment was intense. Everyone danced ‘til three in the morning. There were champagne and streamers and funny hats and a most tasty buffet, they say, served at midnight, which of course the chubby Umbrellians especially enjoyed.

“But alas, woeful and abiding grief. When it came time for the visitors to ascend to their home in the sky the Princess was nowhere to be found! She had vanished, as simply as that. No one had seen her go. The last ANYone had seen was the young lady standing by the balustrade of a terrace, fanning herself and apparently catching a breath of moonlight. The servant who had noticed her was tortured but had nothing further to reveal.

“That is all. Princess Reeda—Gureeda, as she was most often called—had gone, and she has never been seen since. Umbrella Island hung over the Mo monarch’s capital for a year, vainly waiting for news from the various search parties that scoured the land. When nothing was heard the Umbrellians at one time even threatened war and planned to drop bombs from their aerial location, but fortunately nothing came of it.

“In time someone suggested seeking help of the Oz adepts of magic. Queen Ozma, Sorceress Glinda, the Wizard Oz, and

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others were referred to, but nothing was ever learned. Or at least: something negative was discovered. That is, the Magic Picture and Glinda's Book of Records, when consulted, had virtually nothing to impart, which simply meant that any kidnapping or imprisonment of the Umbrella princess had happened outside Oz, which of course was not a surprise to anyone. What to do or where to look, beyond the confines of their own magic land, was all unknown to the Oz practitioners of magic.

"Thus does the matter stand today," concluded Omby Amby sorrowfully.

You can imagine that that year's gathering of the Old Boys of Oz broke up in sadness and confusion. The customary formal little "business meeting" was not even held; strictly speaking there was nothing very urgent about such a conference. Sneedy Rapidan continued to let his raspberry sherbet melt. He reached over and laid his hand on the crook of Sples Smith's umbrella where it hung on the back of his chair. Neither had Sples wanted to surrender his priceless broolly to the wardrobe woman.

"Sples, my friend," spoke Rapidan solemnly, "would you consider lending me this fabulous instrument for something I have to do?"

Smith looked around in wonderment. "I'd do practically anything for you, Speedy, old pal. What have you got in mind?!"

"You heard him." The two men looked in the direction of the Soldier with the Green Whiskers. He still grasped *his* umbrella and looked on in bewilderment.

"My girl's gone lost. Your flying umbrella would take me to where she is."

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - F O U R

<<1952—earlier than chapter 33 >>

They were all going off once more. Just a one-night stand at the castle of the Purple Dragon. That was par for the two men. As for the girl, she'd already spent more than three decades in that topmost room so she'd had the castle up to there.

The wicked-kindly witch Jrumm, whose motivations were always unfathomable, was for some reason sticking like a limpet to the princely pair. If they were going love-seeking in the Hills of Tweet she was going with them, and where she went the former Button-Bright was sure to go. Jrumm grabbed her umbrella from the stand and off they set. All the dragons crowded to the drawbridge to see them go.

The way led steeply up-hill. No one thought of mounting. They led their animals by the bridles and very soon the castle of the purple dragon was screened from view by millions of leaves of many colors. "How pretty," said the princess, bending to pick up a fallen pale blue leaf shaped much like that of an oak, and she pinned it to her collar.

The asses were nibbling grass still juicy, though summer was so far advanced. Among the grass lay some lavender pandanus-looking leaves which they bit accidentally. When the

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animals realized how marvelous they tasted they quickly gobbled up all that lay about and looked around for more. By straining, the young man could just pull down some from high overhanging boughs and he indulgently held the leaves so the beasts could browse on.

Hræ stevrod was tall enough that he could reach branches on his own and he soon discovered that certain fire-engine-red elm-ish leaves were the grandest thing he'd ever tasted. He went almost hog-wild guffing down great healing stomachfuls of the delicacy. Unavoidably the progress of the party slackened.



Jrumm was laughing up her sleeve. Presently she explained why. "Ever notice that there are few or no people in western Mo?" she queried rhetorically. "It's partly because they can't keep any livestock! All the animals of Mo long ago learned that they could get a delicious living year round in the forests of Tweet, so they've all moved here—and the people after them."

"Hmm," interrupted Mr. Smith. "*Animals* can get a living most anywhere—where there's grass."

"Oh, grass!" dismissed Jrumm. "That's boring. Would *you* stay anywhere on an exclusive diet of spinach if you learned that down the road hamburgers and hot fudge sundaes, or things that tasted as good, literally grew on trees? Sure not. Rabbits scorn grass when they can get at lettuces. Horses forget about grass when there's oats or apples on the menu. And so on. They've all flocked here."

And indeed, once the party had got out of the proximity of the after all somewhat alarming dragons, they found the woods teeming with people and animals in one merry mix-up. There didn't seem to be much order to their coming and going. People, *and* animals, lay here and there, strumming stringed instruments or chewing the cud. There were no villages or corrals to be seen, indeed scarcely houses, just, the odd shanty or lean-to, and they not noticeably occupied.

Jrumm explained. "Besides being colorful, good-tasting, and nourishing to man and beast, the leaves contain a mild euphoric. People and animals eat them and then can't be bothered to do much else. So, by the way, if you're intent upon your quests I'd advise not consuming any leaves or berries or whatever. You might decide to drop your expedition and just sit around playing on a dulcimer and fleeting the time carelessly, as they did in the golden age."

Actually, doing as folks did in the golden age didn't sound like too bad a plan to one or two of the travelers. However, they hitched up their pants and convinced themselves that they really were serious about finding lost umbrellas or dickey birds or girl friends and made a vow not to sample the vegetation.

"You know dope-sticks?" said Jrumm suddenly.

The royal couple didn't even grasp the question but Smith replied, "Yes, you mean those little tubes people suck on and get a glow? My wife uses them now and then." (And this despite the protests of readers) who reacted Pavlovianly to the word "dope" and never bothered to ask what the sticks actually contained.)

"They're flavored with essences from these leaves," explained Jrumm. "They're non-habit-form-ing and just make users of them feel marvelous."

"So Glinda says," confirmed Smith. "I never bothered to try them. But they don't make her sit around strumming stringed instruments. She says they give her that boost she wants every day to keep her keen about her work."

"That's right. In the mild form of the dope-sticks they're just an inspirer and stimulant. It's only when you actually chew or even swallow the leaves that you go overboard and feel the important work's already been done and there's nothing left but to sit and be blissful."

The party moved slowly on all day through the marvelous forest, their animals (who *had* swallowed the narcotic leaves) going slower than the slowest and sometimes stopping to ask themselves why they were going on at all. A heel-kick on the rump reminded them.

They stopped once along about noon for a picnic (put up by the kitchen staff at the Castle. Nowadays the dragons stocked more than just oil cake and fireseed.) It was so pleasant in that cool color-spangled woods on a summer day.

The princess was making a collection of leaves, one of each different color, and she already had aqua, brown, cerise, dun, ebony, fawn, green, heliotrope, indigo, jonquil, khaki, lavender, magenta, nasturtium, ochre, pink, quince, reseda, silver, terracotta, umber, violet, white, xanthin, yellow, and zaffer, but she felt she was just beginning. Her husband pointed out that her handbag was already filled to bursting. "You don't want them to get crushed, do you?"

No, she didn't, the Princess concurred and hummed a little tune as was her wont.

Having once laboriously learned to sing so many songs, the princess had kept up her interest. As a human she also enjoyed the possession of a fine voice. As we have seen, she was often sent across the street by her doting husband to carol in the park. Now in the midst of a great wood there was no stopping her and she small-sang all day long.

The others didn't greatly object. As they made their meandering way onward through groves and glades they listened patiently to Stella by Starlight, Street of Dreams, the soprano part of the Belleville duet from "Il Tabarro", the Derry Air, the doll's song from "Tales of Hoffmann", Heaven Drops Her Curtain Down, Autumn in New York, songs of the Auvergne, She is Far from the Land, Falling in Love with Love, Im Chambre Separée from "Der Opernbal", and Elmer's Tune.

Late that afternoon as the group still plodded euphorically onward and were reaching a high highland region where the trees, and consequently the animals and people, thinned out, the princess was nostalgically trilling a little lay she'd made up herself:

"Whatcha doin'?"

Can I help ya?

Things done double

Are more fun.

Need a buddy?

I need one too.

One two three four!

Come on.! Run!

Whatcha betcha?

You can't catch me!

Can ya really?

Well, okay.

Mind if I perch

On your shoulder?

If ya don't mind

Here I'll stay."

Suddenly they all heard a squeak and a squawk, and a little blue-green bird dashed out of an orange-leaved thicket and plumped down on the princess' tallyho hat.

"Whatcha doin'?" it asked.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - F I V E

<<1952; the three months later >>

They were in Speedy's hotel room. Most of the gang had made the sign of Oz on the sidewalk outside Keen's and gone back to the Emerald City, agog with the news they had now to relate there. Three men took a taxi with Zeb Hugson to Penn Station and saw him aboard his Pullman for California. Then they walked on to the Chesterfield.

Those three were William Rapidan, Saladin von Smith, and General Wantowin Battles. Somehow discussion hadn't been necessary. If Speedy was going into danger and the unknown, umbrella-borne, the two whose destinies had been so woven in and out of the saga of the umbrellas would go with him. The others would tell Ozma why two of her argonants of the Magic Belt had not made the expected return to the Palace of Magic.

They sat for a long time in silence and then talked again of Reeda as they remembered her, girlish and gifted and full of charm, and of the years that had altered her, and of so many mysteries of time and age and of the mind. "Do you think you will ever find her?" they asked.

"I've got to die trying," said Speedy solemnly, "if that's what it takes. Life wouldn't mean anything if I made no effort, left the

little girl to her fate. That's how I feel it."

"Right," said Sples Smith. "And three are better at that than one. My umbrella carries that number." Once more there was reminiscence: of an umbrella wafting high off the California coast and its handle giving strong support to rope-slung slat seats on which cruised, carefree, a sturdy old peg-legged sailor and two children, bound for stirring times on an island in the sky.

Speedy too remembered adventures on a sky island and was prepared to do whatever he could to restore the life and times that made such adventures possible. "Off to bed now, you guys. We'll talk more on the early train. A look-in at Uncle's old workshop at Rent Rock and the broolly'll be in better shape for travel than it ever was. While we're at it, you want the elephant head restored? Nothing simpler."

Smith looked grave. Making good his 'crime' in the attic of thirty-eight years ago would be sweet achievement. "It won't affect the magic?" he queried doubtfully.

"There wouldn't be anything taken away from the substance of the device," assured Speedy. "It'll make just a few more ounces the umbrella has to carry. It ought to be okay."

Three grown men in a midtown Manhattan hotel room talking of a planned excursion over land and sea by magic umbrella. Were they crazy? No, you see, they'd been that route before and knew that magic was real.

Next morning saw them on the train and by noon they were in Rapidan's workshop. The two visitors attended with interest as Speedy lathe-turned a new handle-end for the umbrella, then dexterously chiseled it into the shape of a flap-eared elephant's head. They took turns doing small umbrella lifts about the grounds, just to be sure they had the knack, while Speedy contrived a sturdy arrangement of ropes and seat-boards.

When the device was ready to go the various angles of the support ropes were weighted with dependent bags of equipment. This was to be no lightsome excursion to a visible off-shore island on a summer day but an expedition of unknown duration, in all likelihood out across a notoriously capricious

ocean. It was best to be prepared for eventualities, so small inflatable floats, flares, tools, and concentrated provisions were packed.

The morning of October eighteenth looked as good as they were going to get. It was late in the season, of course, and days were shorter, weather colder, and winds unpredictable. But a girl was to be rescued now, not at some future balmy season when meteorological conditions were nearer an optimum. The men left the rambling studio house, Speedy checked all padlocks, and on the back lawn near the row of sycamores, safe from observation by incredulous eyes, they gathered round—oh, that after all so fragile-looking apparatus! The Magic Umbrella. Would it bear them. They had to try.

Instead of two broad seats where a couple of children could sit abreast, or an equivalently broad-beamed old sailor, such as Capt. Bill Weedles had rigged up forty-one years before on the other side of the continent, the men had opted for three super-lightweight narrow plywood perches that would dangle like a grapefruit cluster, back to back to back, providing constant outlook in every direction as they flew. Now they took up positions, each with his seat slat held against his rear, and Sples Smith, as owner, spoke the fateful words:

“Carry us to the presence of Princess Reeda of Umbrella Island!”

Now leave it to the incalculable wisdom of the after all incredible mechanism to know where to go. As far as they knew, nothing could stay the brolly from the swift completion of its appointed round. They need only grit their teeth and hold on. Soon or late, near or far—alive or dead!—the umbrella would deposit them where reposed the lost princess of the aerial island. Unless...

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - S I X

<<1952; before the last chapter >>

The emotion of the good and beautiful princess was touching to see. She sat right down on a fallen log and wept. “Oh, Dick, my darling duck)” (““Duck”?!’ thought Dick, that is: Bert) “I feared I’d lost you forever. Can it really be true I’ve found you again)?”

Now Bert the Bird was flattered at all this attention and said, “Looks like you *have* found me, ma’am.” But he was also puzzled and he went on, “‘Again’? Have we met before?”

The princess stared, and stopped her weeping. “Don’t you recognize me?” she cried. “But you came straight *to* me!”

“Oh, that’s because I heard someone singing. You have a beautiful voice. It reminded me of someone—though of course that someone was a bird...” Bert paused, still mystified.

“Of course it was! but it was also me!” chortled the princess, happy at last. “Don’t you remember?: all those awful, wonderful, years at Dragon Dump, as we called it. I told you many times I was really this frightfully good and beautiful princess. But maybe you never believed me? Still, it turned out to be true. You can’t have forgotten that terrible day when I was rescued and we were torn from each other? Don’t you remember the Young

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Man here? I remember shrieking Farewell! when he ran off with me and my cage—”

“Oh, ‘Princess’! My dear!! Is it really you?” Bert the bird was all overcome. His emotion now was as great as the Princess’.

Yet mixed up with the delight was another feeling he could not fathom right at first. Even feeling *S*. What was it? What were they? Because great as was his happiness to find again, well and happy, rich and famous, the dear companion of those thirty and more lost years in the topmost room, he could tell he was not *all* happy. Mixed with the loving was... disillusion. That was what those strange emotions boiled down to.

In the hours that followed he would have time to sort out the feelings. Just now everything was happening at once. The other humans were crowding round and everybody was talking and nobody was listening and Bert was straining to recognize his bird friend’s “rescuer” in one or other of the two men here present and not succeeding but recognizing all too well the wicked witch who had clapped him in a silver cage all those years ago and wanting to peck her eyes out, while she, bold thing, dared to put out a friendly finger and say, “*There* you are! Anyway you’ve got to thank me for setting you free again,” and Bert being damned if he was going to do *that*, as the titular “Young Man” stared at him and muttered, “Is *that* what the Princess prefers to me?” and looking much put out, while the other, stranger fellow just looked amused, and rather likable, and a big horse whinnied and stamped and looked the most likable of all, while a couple of docile asses took not the slightest notice but continued to graze among the trees and the grass at Kensington.

Well, not Kensington perhaps, but the lotus (and other leaf) eating inhabitants of the region had given it no other name and if not “Arcadia” then “Kensington” might do very well. When a pause in the riot of emotions and impressions came at last, somebody said, “It’s getting on for evening. What are our plans?”

With that the princess seemed to wake from her dream of

fond friendship restored and she turned to her old comrade Richard, as she had called him, or Berbir as an old soldier had once named him, or Bert as he called himself. "Is there shelter anywhere near, my dear?"

"Of course, beloved—no, I mean 'Your Royal Grace'—" stuttered the bird.

The Princess looked dashed and she exclaimed passionately, "Of course 'belovéd'! I hope I will always be belovéd of you! Nothing must change!"

"No—er, no! Certainly nothing must change." But all the same something, *had* changed. But Bert went on: "Shelter for the night? Yes, yes indeed! Yes, just follow me. I'll take you to my mistress."

Oh, dear. The princess realized her darling companion of weary caged years had become the house pet of another and she was heartbroken. But Bert flitted and darted so sprightly on before that she could not bear to voice her jealousy.

"It's not far," twittered the bird. "Just beyond the last of the forest, and then up a bit of an incline. From the other side it's quite a mountain but from this direction it won't be bad going for you... But maybe the ladies would like to mount? It might make it a bit quicker."

No amount of mounting by the others was going to provide anything for Sples Smith to ride on though and the party found themselves limited to the speed of his sturdy foot-pace. For Hræ stevrod, with his rider, the young man, that was poky going and before long the pair had disappeared ahead.

Soon the great palomino returned at a run. "There's a house on the heights ahead," announced Y.M. "Is that where we're going, Mr. Bird?"

"That's the place! Go on if you like. We'll catch you up."

Horse and rider turned and swept away in a swirl of violet scent.

Smith sniffed. "Violet," he said. "Reminds me of something..."

"That's right: smell is the most nostalgic sense," commented

the knowledgeable witch Jrumm. "And what does it remind you of?"

"Of when I was—!" exclaimed Sples and then shut up. He had suddenly realized just where they were. No wonder things had begun to seem familiar, and that despite the fact that everything was not shrouded in drifts of popcorn. And the wind was from the south. He was still not going to let Jrumm know he knew all he knew but he did essay to say to flitting Bert, the Bird: "Are we going to the house of the Bumpy Man?:"

"That's right," chirped the little guide, now perched again for a moment on the shoulder of the princess. "It's my mistress' master."

The relationships were getting convoluted but everybody supposed there'd be a clarification in a few minutes.

Now they came out on a little ridge-top and could look across a clear space two hundred yards to where an attractive stone cottage crowned what looked like the landward side of a cliff. The sight was gratifying. What was perhaps not unanimously admired was seeing in the distance the Young Man throw himself off his horse's back and run to fling his arms about someone in a maid's cap and apron.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - S E V E N

<<1952 three months later, October 18 & following >>

There were unlessees—though better not dwelt upon. For instance, the Magic Umbrella could clearly not go underground, just in case young Gureeda lay enchained in some dungeon. The aeronauts dare not let it ascend to any sky island that lay above the limit of breathable air. And it would be troublesome trying to navigate through crowded cities where the curious might try to interfere with the umbrella's progress.

There was just a little excitement of the latter sort when, as they wafted briskly over Long Beach, playful boys with air rifles, as with the Hindenburg at Lakehurst in 1937, took pot shots at them. Luckily the marksboys missed, and the umbrella party were soon out over the heaving Atlantic.

Conversation, sitting as they were, not facing anyone, was inhibited and each man was left to his own thoughts.

Omby Amby Battles, the better not to tremble at the presence of himself in the sky with a thousand feet of empty space between him and a depthless ocean, kept his eyes closed most of the time and thought of the comfort and contentment, of his home with the soft sweet compliant Tollydiggle. Would he ever see her again? What had he got himself into! And why?

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He recalled the evening when the reunionants were breaking up. Maxwell had taken their pipes and solemnly restored them to the rack depending from a ceiling beam. His gratuity had been received and he held the general's umbrella while he put on his hunter's-green greatcoat. He glanced ever so faintly disdainfully at the unfashionable old bundle in grey-green-yellow and Mr. Rapidan had intercepted the glance.

"Don't scorn it, Maxwell," he had said joking-gravely. "That umbrella is unsinkable." Then, reminded of that quality, Speedy's eyes had gone to Omby Amby's for a meaningful instant.

So of course later, when Sples Smith was taking it as obvious that where his brolly went there he went too, the gallant (or would-be) soldier had had to throw his also potent bumbershoot into the relief 'pot'. Now it dangled, firmly secured, from Battles' seat-side support. He felt to touch it and felt himself a little comforted.

Meanwhile Saladin von Smith had thoughts for his lady too: witch/Queen Glinda. She had not accompanied him to the Palace of Magic when the group of Old Boys gathered in the presence of the little Girl Ruler and her magic belt for what was thought to be going to be a jaunt, though distant, of only a few hours. Would word of what he and his companions were doing have reached the sorceress? The Great Book of Records would have chronicled their fate. Would Glinda have thought it advisable to make her way to the Emerald City and 'tune in' with Ozma to the Magic Picture? Never mind. Sples trusted to his great wife's wisdom and powers.

He trusted also to those of his fabulous umbrella and to his own resourcefulness. That's why he'd said to the fellows who were returning to E.C.: "Don't let any of them do any rescuing untimely, okay? We want to bring this off on our own, if we can. That's important to Speedy. So Ozma doesn't make any use of the Belt unless we're going down for the third time!..."

Funny he'd used a metaphor from the vocabulary of drowning! Smith glanced down speculatively at the midnight blue expanse far below them. That was a threat you could see, con-

stantly, at least for the nonce. But disaster might just as predictably come in the shape of fire, accident, attack by man or beast. You simply didn't know.

The longest thoughts were William Rapidan's. He was off on his third Oz adventure (for there was no doubt but that any ultimate remnant of this expedition would end up in Oz) and this was far the most vital of them all. Also it was the only one that was planned. The previous visits had been the unpremeditated results of departures from home by rocket and by geyser eruption. Then he had traveled without motivation, even if with a good deal of propulsion. This time his motivation was very great—and his propulsion of the skimpiest. He looked up at the bellied-out skin of Sples's umbrella above him and wondered.

No matter. Better to die trying than to live preferring to die for not having tried.

He thought about (Gu)Reeda. Pretty girl. Or rather, since she was said to have so much resembled himself, 'pretty'? He, butch he-man, didn't like to think he at any stage had been pretty. Good-looking though? Yes, he'd admit that. She wore her hair in braids, like all the Umbrellians—or now, not 'braids', was it? but A braid or "shining plait". Queer; he couldn't quite remember. It, or they, hung down her back, and her hair was golden. No, that wasn't right. Again, she resembled himself and his hair had always been brown. In the book that had been published about his journey to Umbrella Island^s and to which he had often had reference over the years, it said that "the Umbrellians were dark-haired"; specifically, that "the dark hair of the women and girls was braided." Yet all the pictures showed Gireeda as a blonde, and the artist must certainly at least once have seen his models. By now Speedy couldn't be sure what he did remember.

Strange: when he tried to picture Gureeda the image that came into his mind was the faintly wistful one of Pat, the street-walker.

§ See *Speedy in Oz*. Editor's note.

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

<<1952; before the last chapter >>

“Yes,” said Fanciulla: always a safe word to begin with. The traveling party were sitting around the old deal table in the house of the Bumpy Man, the “Ear of the Mountain”, as their host served hot toffee and lemonade. The refreshments were not much to the visitors’ taste but they felt they couldn’t choose.

“Please continue, dear,” said the Young Man indulgently and looked at his lost and regained love with a doter’s eye. The girl doted right back.

“I just can’t get over it,” she sighed and for a bit she practically gave up trying to relate her story. “I never thought I’d see you again! When the dragons all came piling back to the castle and told us the enchantment and exile and imprisonment and all the rest of it were over with and that the noble knight errant—” here she gazed yet again at the Young Man “—had married the fifty-tongued bird”—and now she glanced askance at the mildly smiling Princess—“I thought, ‘Oh, sorrow!’, and pretty soon I refugeed west. I mean, who wanted to stay around and wait on a lot of dragons? They told us there was no need. If they wanted servants they’d hire fresh ones and needn’t keep anybody who’d been pressed into service against their will. I

didn't know if that applied to me or not. I couldn't remember a time when I hadn't been in service as a housemaid. But at least it was as a maid to people: I mean, humans.

"Even so, I stayed and helped out while all the expensive bird cages from the topmost room were hauled away, and the birds too, most of them. But a lot of the birds were just shoved out over the drawbridge and told to get lost in the forest or wherever. That was when Bert and I teamed up. He'd got his walking papers too and was out of a friend now that the fifty-tongued bird had been carried off. We've been together ever since.

"In the Forest of Tweet it wasn't long before people told us about chewing what they called the rainbow leaves. Of course it was old stuff to Bert. We did it too. We lived there in the woods for a year or two and it wasn't a bad life. I read the bag of books I'd snagged from the castle library but even rationing them to myself they only lasted 'til just before we came here. When the Mountain Ear told us he could use a servant I thought it was something to do, at least. As I say, I'd always been a housemaid."

It seemed a drab little tale enough. Lots worse things had happened in times past to lovelorn maidens when they lost their true loves. In comparison, passing a few extra years as a serving maid didn't seem too bad a fate.

Now everything had ended happily and everybody had his proper friend: everybody who'd been looking for such. There'd been no need to slay dragons or rescue maidens (or even maids) or do any derring. Fanciulla just courteously told the Bumpy Man that she'd like indefinite, if not permanent, leave of absence. That was all right and she was free to go.

"Won't father be vexed!" crowed the pretty Princess, who knew her parent for an awful old curmudgeon who could only be happy if others were not. He'd been pleased as Punch when he learned that the princess and her consort were not on Cloud Nine in their marriage. It would be dreadful for him now when it transpired that each of the partners had (re)found someone he liked better.

“Shall we be trotting home again?” she went on, as she stroked the feathers of her feathered friend, who now hopped between the two young women and seemed quite pleased. He wasn’t going to have to be parted from Fanciulla, a possibility that had preoccupied him. They could all live together in what his erstwhile fellow captive had described as a “Palace on the Park”. He dared say that in time he’d get used to the restored form of the Princess, who certainly gave every sign of being as good and as beautiful as she’d always claimed to be. It was just that *he* loved the little grey mockingbird with her fifty glorious songs that he had known of old. It was all very well being humans’ pet and companion but what he really delighted in (don’t we all?) was the devoted company of his own kind. And now he knew that his bird love had gone forever.

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

<< follows chapter 37 >>

The Magic Umbrella did its job and the travelers had nothing to complain of for many hours. Blue October over the blue Atlantic and the winds coming from the west as was the custom. When the air was wind-still the umbrella could go at will in any direction. So it had done on its first employment by the boy Button-Bright. It had had no trouble in navigating westward from Philadelphia to Buffalo and on to Chicago, Denver, and the environs of far-western San Diego, all in contravention of prevailing breezes. But that had been in balmy springtime.

Same sequence the next time. Summer haze and winds indifferent. The boy passenger had never known which way the umbrella headed but, as far as he could tell it had gone straight to Mo with no detours.

But this time was different. The westerly was strong and the umbrella had the 'sense' not to complicate its task by bucking a headwind. It chose to take the great- circle route to reach the presence of the girl it sought. That might take longer but would hopably be more secure.

It was Speedy who saw the cloud no bigger than a man's hand, late that afternoon.

Provisions had been sparingly passed round a couple of times but for the best of reasons no one wanted to have an overloaded stomach. But the high blue cool, despite the protection of dense windbreakers, gloves, and ski caps, made necessary eventually a different private office which here, however, could not be performed privately. But they were all men together and Sples made a joke of it, quoting the immortal dictum of Richard Halliburton's companion on the extreme peak of an Alp. The fall here, however, was not as much as "a mile"... Other excitements there had been none.

Speedy saw the cloud and said so. He said, "That's a black one." All other clouds had been white and trifling today, albeit fast-scudding.

The others twisted to look and did not smile. By now the cloud was as big as a giant's hand and behind it came grey cohorts. A cloud became a cloudbank. There failed to be a sunset. No sunlight could penetrate the darkest vastness of the formation.

Sples shortened sail. He knew they could not rise high enough—and breathe!—to let the storm work itself out underneath them. All he could attempt was to get them low so that at any rate a crashing umbrella would not kill them on impact.

They didn't bother to panic. Each man had known this might happen, even that in latter October it was quite likely that it would happen. They took a tight hold, secured all flaps, and waited.

It hit like the side of a barn falling over. The umbrella, though magic, was 'mortal': not proof against seventy-mile-an-hour gale winds. At the very least it was constrained to blow inside out. A "blown" umbrella has no wing with which to fly. The broolly fell, its passengers with it, and though they did not lose contact with the instrument, having bound their legs fast to their roped seats, they suffered from the collision with the vastly roaring sea. But only for an instant. Private-General Battles had his finest moment when he expanded *his* umbrella in the teeth of the hurricane. Its magic was released and though gale forces

might blow it to tatters its powers were supreme. No water could touch the device nor anything which was in touch with the device.

Now followed the strangest interlude any of the men were ever to experience. All night they hurtled over the bounding main. Whirled were they, tossed, dizzy, nauseated unto death, and wretched in the drenched garments the storm had soaked before Battles had thrown up his protective wall of bumbershoot magic. But they got no wetter, they did not sink, neither did anything fall on them from above, and in time, in the weird dryness of their air cocoon, their wet clothes went to dry, and they could even sleep in sheer exhaustion.

There was room for only one of the men within the impermeable shell of the waterproof umbrella but he had a hand to strap to one of each of his companions and that kept them floating in a weird half-world, neither in nor out of the water. It went on so to dawn and through an endless seasick day. At its inception the umbrellists feared they would die and by its end, in the words of the old jest, they feared that they would not. Yet in fact they were far from death. Princess Ozma could see that, gazing unbrokenly at the Magic Picture, though there had been an instant, just before Wantowin Battles invoked the mysteries of his brolly, when she had been perilously close to pushing the panic button. Such a moment did not come again.

In the early morning of the third day of the disaster journey their incredible craft scraped ashore on the flat shale terraces of a particularly desolate bit of coast on the Isle of Purbeck, southern England.

They were in a bay backed by grey and black shale cliffs. Rounded-edged flat greasy-looking boulders encumbered the foreshore which was a scene of the wildest chaos. Fantastic seaweeds and heaps of wreckage lay among the stones of all sizes and forms that some giant seemed to have hurled and scattered over the smooth platform of the shale. But when the sun's light gleamed, flashing pools bewildered the sight and the low cliffs shone steely blue, crusted with clots of emerald-green moss.

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The men gazed and marveled. I think one or two may even have breathed a prayer of thanksgiving.

A three-day crossing of the Atlantic by umbrellas was something of a record, but the men had scant time to go on thinking of that. Now other aptitudes were going to be tested.

Speedy Rapidan sat right down on the rock beach, with a shale shelf for a workbench, assembled before him his tools, and essayed repairs. He was successful insofar as he was able to give the Sples Smith bumbershoot the appearance of a properly spread apparatus, no longer turned inside out. But the struts now possessed no strength. It was illusionary to think the umbrella could possibly rise again, at least with a load of passengers. Outside help was needed.

But what to do? This coast, never profitably employed since the great days of the smugglers two centuries before, afforded no apparent home or occupation to anyone. There was no one to apply to, no fisherman's cottage under the cliffs, no sign of any sort of life.

Only when they gained the top of the bluffs could the explorers see any evidence that people ever ventured this way. On the flanks of a sizeable small mountain to the east they could just make out, among protecting trees, the chimneys of what would seem to be a stately home. It was Smedmore House, had they but known it. But they never got that far.

The bedraggled adventurers had warned each other to look for roads, which would in due course lead to *something* they could use. Now, a few yards past where they had sighted the mansion they came on the end of a grassy lane. Following that to the north they reached a gravel track and now they might even begin to hope to see people.

An army lorry came slowly but with a roar out of a joining lane and stopped in a skip of gravel when its driver saw the strangely burdened trio of weatherbeaten men making desperate signals. He leaned out, nothing dismayed. He was a tough sergeant, who could hold his own against any trio of blokes, at least if unarmed, and these three didn't seem to be carrying any-

thing but duffle bags, boards, and umbrellas.

"Can you give us a lift?" cried Speedy. "Our boat broke up on the beach," he did not *exactly* lie. That their boat was a water-proof umbrella and that it was that umbrella's mate which had broken up were data not necessary to expound just at the moment.

"Climb in back," instructed the sergeant. "Where you making for?"

"A—" said the American. Too great ignorance of the locality did not seem expedient here. He'd been going to say "a town": *any* town, where they might find an umbrella mechanic. That sounded too weird. Instead, he blurted "London", without any assurance that they were even in England except that the man had answered in English.

"I can put you well on your way," stated the soldier, with a curious stare at another who looked a little like a soldier—but out of comic opera. He shifted gears as the men dashed for the tailgate and hoisted each other aboard.

An hour of thorough jouncing and then brakes were slammed on and the khaki-green lorry came to a declarative halt. The passengers in back were on the qui-vive. Sples Smith flung himself out to run to the driver's door and parley.

"Turnin' off for Salisbury here," grunted the surly-kindly sergeant. "London straight on."

"Great! We really thank you," yelped the (other) American. "You saved our bacon." Then he wondered briefly if that was a British idiom too.

It was strange to be in the midst of pulsing life again. Traffic pounded around the circle. (They called them "roundabouts" in England, the travelers learned later.)

But traffic was only of interest to them now as something to be avoided, escaped, without their getting run over. What they wanted was the town that presumably lay beyond the houses they could see to the south.

The men crossed the busy road and trailed along its opposite edge, looking for some lane or path that would cut through

the spacious grounds of a row of old-fashioned residences. Most had signs up indicating that the desirable properties were for sale. But the sign of one was somewhat different. "B.B", it said.

"'Button-Bright'!" Speedy poked fun. His friend was not fond, as people rarely are, of his baby nickname.

"No," Sples corrected with a grimace. "That dot is a little tiny cross. 'B plus B'. Bed and breakfast."

"The local equivalent of a 'tourist home'?"

"That'd be my guess."

The soldier with the green whiskers, usually relatively taciturn in the company of the two American 'boy heroes', now essayed a word. "A bed and breakfast sound highly desirable, gentlemen."

It was the freeing word they were all secretly aching for. Without another word they walked up the path and rang the bell.

The door to the tiny porch opened and the face of Pat of Eighth Avenue looked out.

C H A P T E R F O R T Y

<<1952; follows, as you'd expect, chapter 38 >>

Sples Smith and witch Jrumm and the big palomino Hræ stevrod were still tagging along. They hadn't found anybody to make it all worthwhile, but then they hadn't expected to, so they were no worse off, and Jrumm at least was highly amused by all that had happened.

She had always quite approved of the Young Man and she didn't mind his claiming his (belatedly looked-up) love of loves, nor, certainly, did she have any reason to have anything against Fanciulla. The Princess was a slightly different case. Jrumm had been grossly unfair to her for the space of a generation. Of course injustice constantly practised against an individual makes you hate that individual later or (usually) sooner. Jrumm reminded herself, however, that she had first been mean to the princess only in order to annoy her father. Now that she had signed the non-aggression pact with the latter it would make sense to call off any imagined antagonisms toward the former.

She being the most knowledgeable about Mo geography, the party asked her which road they ought to follow home. They supposed she would want. to make an early return to her store, while the quasi-royal trio would of course make for the capital

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of King Scowleyow to tell him how they now planned to live in a *ménage à trois* (or *quatre*, if you counted Bert the Bird, and the princess surely did). They all looked at the map of the region that Ozma of Oz had providently provided her errant subject, Saladin von Smith.

"Well," said the Young Man judicially, still assuming the man's prerogative of making decisions for the common good, "what about formal calls on Duchess Bredenbutta and the great Monarch of Mo, since they lie exactly on the most direct route home?"

The wily witch had ideas about that. Her own particular wish was NOT to go anywhere near the Magical Monarch of Mo just on this occasion. She produced disingenuous reasons why they should go another way. "Let me see," she said, fingers to cheek and looking so considerate of others while she contemplated her own best interests, "didn't you say your royal father and his court would be going to the mountains now, my dear?"

The princess, suspecting no duplicity, replied, "That's right. They always spend August at Vinte. It's the coolest part of the country. It's true: it would be a little silly just to return home to the capital while no one is in town. Besides, the hunting lodge is nearer."

Thus Jrumm had the princess producing all the logical reasons for traveling in a direction remote from the Mo ruler's seat. They had another look at the map and planned a route that would lead more toward Fruitcake Island.

While they ambled along a road that Sples Smith recalled from thirty-eight years before, Bert the bird regaled the company with an account of the horrors of life on the isle of Fruitcake: recollections dating from the same epoch.

"I wonder how the Soldier is getting along," said Bert in nostalgic mood. "'Berbir' he always called me."

Having been in the company of the Soldier with the Green Whiskers immediately prior to his coming hither to Mo, Smith could give some details of that individual's recent doings and non-doings. Did it slip his mind that his fellow traveler Jrumm

was Omby Amby's former wife? The fact had certainly been emphasized in the conversation just before they parted. Or did he just assume Jrumm would feel nothing one way or the other about a husband officially though, by her, not willingly divorced a generation before? Or was he thoughtlessly in a don't-care mood?

However it was, the effect on the witch was drastic, though concealed. "That wretch!" she fumed inwardly. "To have changed and become so attractive, and in the very same breath to inform me I'd lost him! I'll have his hide for that yet!"

Of this small storm of emotions she let the others suspect nothing. Instead, as a practised dissembler and also as an habitual traveler in Mo, she began to point out sights new to some of her companions or forgotten by others. "Mo is a land of enchantment," she declared. She had said so several times in the week just passed.

"How enchanting?" said Y.M., just to prove he was listening.

"For instance, anything can happen in this country. That's quite a charming characteristic."

"Hm," put in Sples Smith, "Just like in that other enchantment land, Oz."

"The inhabitants don't grow old."

"Interesting," said Sples. "The same as in Oz."

"They don't die."

"Convenient! Same thing in Oz, though we've only had that feature since about the turn of the century."

"Wild beasts, however, can be killed."

"Oh, well, that's good," said Smith, beginning to sound ironical if not outright sarcastic. "It's practical for humans in case some animal gets in their way and isn't wanted as a permanent antagonist."

"Some animals can talk, although that doesn't apply to all of them."

"Thanks for telling us. I was wondering. Your son Hræ stevrod talks. I thought it was perhaps because he was born

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human and just hadn't given up the speech habit when he changed his nature. But the Purple Dragon also talked, and he was never a person, was he?

"Oh, no," Jrumm assured. "He almost wasn't even a dragon. The one now ruling at the castle isn't the one celebrated in literature, of course. When *that* Purple Dragon was put to death it was only by a fluke that he left offspring. At the time of his execution he said nothing about having a family. Otherwise the thoughtful Monarch of Mo might have sought them out as well and exterminated them root and branch." It could sound like the witch was being a little satirical on her own.

"'Executed'?" said the princess, a little shocked. "'Exterminated'?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. Dragons mostly exist in order to be killed by heroes, and just then the Monarch was wanting to appear in the guise of hero. You see, he had to do something or be discredited."

"Why?" asked the witch's listeners with a show of interest. They were passing over a wasteland of gumdrop pebbles just at the moment and there was nothing specially to preoccupy the attention.

"As you'll all have observed there are many post-prandial features in Mo topography—"

"'Postprandial'?" asked the princess.

"Well, 'dessertial', if you like. In other words, 'concerned with the end of a meal': the traditional occasion for serving sweets. There's really no other generic term I know of for 'having to do with sweet foods'.

"Mo enjoys a superfluity of sweets built right into the geology. Beside ordinary meadows will run a river of root beer (we're coming to one shortly). Near a rock-candy mountain may lie a lake of regular fresh water. In the middle of a plain plain will be a custard pond or a slough of jelly mud. Confusing—but amusing.

"Of course in the long run humans cannot manage in such a landscape. Dear to the heart of a child though a praline prairie

or a fudge forest might be, usual persons leading normal lives (as after all most of us try to do) cannot thrive in a setting like that. Hence one of the reasons for the relative depopulatedness of the Mo countryside.

“But other fauna of Mo delight in the dextrosity of the landscape, and the worst offenders have been the dragons. Over the centuries the fire-breathing but candy-consuming monsters wrought such havoc on gumdrop groves, fondant farms, and syrup streams that the rulers of the land were forced to declare them outlaws. Rewards were posted for every dragon head, dripping with raspberry juice blood, that citizens would turn in. By the end of last century no dragon remained in the Land of Mo save Paul the Purple Dragon—but he was the most fearsome of them all.

“Long had Paul’s depredations caused the stoutest heart to tremble. No sweetmeat was safe from his aggression. No comfit could be comfortable, no sugarplum secure. Caramels quavered, chocolates choked, and peanut brittle broke up at mention of his name. Lollipops lolloped off at word of his approach. The protection of peppermints proved impractical and the defense of nougat nugatory. Terrified toffee, battered butterscotch, and brutalized bonbons prayed in vain to the Monarch of Mo for succor (or suckers). The terrorization of the land’s confectionery was total.

“Then the appalling Paul made his last best attack. He advanced from his castle (now familiar to you) in all his slithery slithiness, determined to have for his own the Monarch’s most prized patch of plum pudding from right in the royal palace gardens at Motown.

“You who have only seen the current generation of dragons (vitiated in nature and texture by their foreign blood) have no conception of how frightening Paul the purple really was. He was big and strong and fierce and clever, with eyes of burning glass and a very long scaly tail. He seemed ferocious and invincible and yet withal a lover of life, his own life, which he was not prepared to lose easily.

“Well I must not tire you with detail,” analogized the witch and then went on to describe minutely the course of events[§]. “Suffice it to say that the battle was joined and, incredibly, in view of the odds, Paul the Appalling was bested. The self-clinchingness of jaws and the flexibility of flesh combined in him in a fatal concatenation to permit of the creature’s being stretched out enormously thin under the united pulling of fifty strong men. Once thus attenuated the dragon was easily snipped into a lifetime supply of fiddle-strings of, incidentally, a most excellent resonance. Thus ended the reign of dragon. terror in Mo.

“The present crop of dragons is trivial as a threat to life and property. They enjoy sweets but in moderation and spend their

§ See *The Magical Monarch of Mo*. Editor’s note.

time in artistic pursuits, an interest in which they inherit from their mother's side of the family. Paul had told no one of his latter-day espousal of a dragon of mixed ancestry who dwelt far away underground. It was only after the Purple Dragon's death that his family was born and later still that they returned^s to claim their patrimony in this and other countries."

The witch's historical musings kept the party idly entertained until they came to a point on the Root Beer River midway between the Duchy of West Credia and the Fruitcake Island. Jrumm found it expedient that they cross there, although the location lacked a bridge.

The pairs of reunited best-friends had been fleeting the time pleasurably in renewed acquaintance-making. Witch Jrumm was sufficiently entertained in choosing the words in which to present the saga of the Purple Dragon and glimpses of Mo history. But Sples Smith was frankly getting a little bored.

All was going on very amiably and he hadn't so far weakened his position for bargaining for the return of his umbrella by making an enemy of anybody, more especially the witch. But was all the chumminess going to pay off? He didn't see what ploy he could adopt to gain any useful parapluvious knowledge. The only possibility seemed to be to remain so friendly with Jrumm that he might get invited to her home. Once there he could raid her clothes closets and outdoor-gear depots. It wasn't the sort of betrayal of hospitality he cared for. Still he was determined to repossess his long-neglected Magic Umbrella if he possibly could. Stealing back the stolen was a thing he was not going to allow himself to think of as bad.

Now the following chain of events took place:

The horse, asses, and single foot-passenger (light Fanciulla shared Hræ stevrod's back) drew up to the bank of the smooth-flowing brown river. Here such banks were not high and the animals could lower their heads and quaff of the running root beer, should they be so inclined. The witch descended from her steed and said, The river can be crossed in a number of ways.

§ See *Dragons in Oz*. Editor's note.

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Simplest is merely to ride in, animal-borne, and have ourselves swum across. Rut that leaves one or two of us to fend on their own—”

“Don’t worry about me, ma’am,” put in Sples Smith for his part. “I’ve got my diving suit in my kit.” He gestured at his duffel bag.

“A useful and convenient arrangement,” agreed the witch, “as you indicated earlier. However, this is even more convenient—and quick!” Here with a flourish Jrumm unclicked her umbrella latch and flung up the bumbershoot hood.

Sples Smith watched wonderingly. He saw the witch upend the instrument and set it on the surface of the eddying stream. Then she stepped daintily aboard the vessel and sat down, clutching at some bankside reeds to hold herself from floating away.

The scene reminded Sples vividly of’ something—and yet, of what? Not, it seemed, something he had experienced himself. Nevertheless an image was vivid in his imagination.

Suddenly, he had it!

He knew, absolutely as a fact, without need for further verification, that this was the umbrella of Omby Amby Battles, the umbrella in which the soldier had navigated this very Root Beer River many years before. The exploit had been related in vivid detail just days ago in the salon of Her Graciousness, Ozma of Oz, as the Smiths and the Battles’ sat over a convivial cup of tea. Of course! Now he recalled clearly that Battles had remarked on finding on his return home from Mo that he had somehow lost his own now-loved umbrella. Some mix-up at the castle of the purple dragon and he, Battles, returning to the Emerald City with a perfectly strange broolly in his hand.

Great Oz!

The sixty-four-thousand-dollar question was answered, or at least, a very strong suspicion of the solution to the puzzle had now come safely home to Smith.

What was he to do?! For the moment at least, he must play it cool. Not appear too eager. Not show any surprise. Not even

too much interest.

"Hmm," he said aloud. "I see. Convenient indeed. And is it your suggestion that I save time by crossing the beer that way, Madam Jrumm? Well, okay."

He stepped to the edge of the river and put out a hand as if to assist.

"No, that's all right," disclaimed the witch, though apparently suspecting nothing. "I'll stay here. Miss Fanciulla can mount my ass. You have your wetsuit. Maybe somebody can stick out a hand, or I'll hold on to Hrae stevrod's tail, and thus be drawn across."

In fact Sples was glad to have the time to think, as he withdrew behind a screen of weeds to change. Bathing trunks were really all that this splash required but he was glad of the business of hauling on the diving suit to plan furiously and to make certain extravagant gestures in the air. None around him could know but these were intended, by prior agreement, to alert whoever might be on duty at the Magic Picture. Far away across the lands and sands, in Ozma's palace in the Emerald City, someone would know to summon in all haste the powerful fairy princess. Now Smith was going to have to act fast, and dexterously.

The beer river crossing was nothing for a swimmer of his skill. He was first to scramble ashore on the opposing bank. Sples was at the river edge when Jrumm let herself be hauled forward to within reach of his hand. There must be an instant when she let go of the umbrella's up-thrusting center stem to step on land. When her foot left the tough 'hull' of the water-borne device and her hand was in Sples Smith's, he used his other to reach out and grasp iron-hard the handle of the storied umbrella. Then when the witch's hand left his hand, that latter hand made the "sign of Oz" with thumb and three fingers).

Sples Smith vanished, from the river bark and from Mo. The umbrella went with him.

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

<<1952; October in England >>

"I don't get it, W.G.," said William Rapidan for the eleventh time. "No two people could look that much alike and not be the same person."

The two were walking off the one's restlessness and preoccupation while Saladin von Smith remained at the umbrella repair shop, tolerated by the mechanic and carefully keeping an eye on the refurbishing of the two appliances. The walkers struck off on a gravel track along a mill stream.

"I like her singing," replied Wantowin G. Battles non-committally. He'd heard all these arguments before and was hard pressed for something new to offer.

"Same here, though that's neither here nor there. But that's funny too. I swear I heard her humming 'Autumn in New York'. How could—"

"Popular tunes become known worldwide these days, do they not?"

"Yeah, I guess so. That's right: we had 'A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square' and 'The Lambeth Walk' and 'The White Cliffs of Dover'. But just the same..."

"Didn't you say the hair of the young lady in New York was

brown? while our landlady is blonde."

"That could be fetched out of a bottle—though admittedly it doesn't look like it."

"And Miss Jane is a Welshwoman. Her speech has a special lilt. Was Miss Pat—"

"No, of course not. But somebody could put on an accent, too. I just don't get it."

"You haven't—er, asked?" said Battles hesitantly.

"Of course not that either. You don't ask an obviously long-established English—well, Welsh—lodging-house keeper if she was picking up tricks six days ago on the sidewalks of New York."

"I suppose it is just one of those strange things..."

"It's strange all right." Rapidan went on chewing the matter over in his mind as they walked along the new row of cottages a-building but he didn't speak of it again. 'Reeda', he murmured, trying to distract himself from disturbing preoccupation. It was not as if the landlady showed any marked preference for himself. She was charming to them all, apologizing for entertaining them through the thickness of three walls as she practised in a sparkling voice the 'Bachiana number five'.

Omby Amby pointed to a wooden signpost with the distinctive yellow arrow on its arm. They had begun to realize they were doing a standard "Waymarked walk". As long as they kept seeing yellow they were in no danger of seeing the grey and drab of housing estates or roadside industries.

They crossed in quick succession the "mill" stream (though they had seen no mill; a passerby had given the designation when they asked if the brook had a name) and the Dorchester railway line.

Once over the tracks they passed through a hedge and bore right, making for a plank causeway in the distance. Good job that was there. After yesterday's heavy rain the ground was a bog, but it firmed up on the other side of a stile. A broad plain stretched before them, bounded on the west and south by the invisible Avon. All rivers were called "avon" in this part of the

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world. Not to be wondered at, perhaps, when Miss Jane had told them that “avon” was the Celtic word for ‘river’.

Near at hand was a weed-choked barbed-wire fence that ran beside them for a hundred yards to intersect with a low brown stick-like-looking hedge. The two men strode along unspeaking, each with his own thoughts, then froze.

A dappled bright brown roe deer had scampered into view beside the hedge barrier, then out into the open. It sighted them at the instant they sighted it. All stood transfixed, gazing with all their eyes in fascination.

The roe danced on a few paces, then stooped to stand facing the men foursquare. It gazed and gazed, unblinking. They gazed and gazed, unblinking.

The animal seemed to want to approach and made an abortive surge forward. but it was as if some inborn sense plucked it by the shoulder and said “Don’t!” The deer sprang another few yards aside and stopped to turn and stare. It never looked side-long with just one eye. It had to turn and face due on so both eyes could see.

Only the heads of the men swiveled. The deer would perhaps not catch the tiny movement; it thought of them as stock-still figures, and somehow such appealing ones. It wanted to come nearer but that something inside would not allow it. It leapt on, stopped, turned, gazed, leapt on.

They watched ‘til it turned a final time—to glance farewell? Anthropomorphic notion: Then it sprang over a clump of weeds and vanished past the edge of a spinney they had just skirted. In its fascination the roe had described an arc of a hundred and eighty degrees about them.

The hikers felt as if they had been through a cool curing shower of unspoiled beauty. Niggling preoccupations of quotidian life were as if wiped away by a healing hand. The two philosophized.

“It’s uplifting, isn’t, it?” offered W.G. Battles.

“Yeah,” said Speedy. “It reminds you how inferior man is. Creatures in the wild are free, untrammled, pure in ways we

can never be. It makes us feel our place and I guess that's why the standard human reaction is 'Let's kill it if we can!' We don't like to see all that superiority flaunted before us, so unattainable."

"But man is superior in respect to his intelligence," reminded the general..

"And what does he use it for? In relation to other animals, only to do them harm.

"No, animals are free — where we are constrained by society and conventions. They are beautiful, where men in a wild state are dirty, squalid, and unkempt, and as often as not grotesque as well."

"Grotesque?" wondered Omby Amby. That wasn't how he thought of HIMself in his natural condition.

"Yes. Of all animal races only man seems to have an inborn urge to 'decorate' himself. All primitive tribes without exception do it, painting their bodies in garish colors, attaching feathers and plant fronds and shell jewelry, doing weird things with their body hair — oh, sorry —"

Speedy broke off, blushing. The soldier, on this fresh new day, had borrowed the landlady's curling iron and created wonders with his sideburns.

Omby Amby took the stab stoutly. "I wonder," he essayed, "if it is not a sign of man's superior intellect that he does so. Perhaps the other species would like to beautify themselves, if only they could reason, and think how to do it."

"But don't you see? they don't need to do it." Speedy returned to his philosophizing. "They have built-in beauty, whereas man, it would seem, cannot believe in the beauty of his natural self. He has to bedizen it."

"Hmh," said the general. He'd have to get used to that idea. But his whiskers drooped a little. Speedy preached on about the wonders of animaldom. "The animals are naked. We humans are trapped in clumsy-making clothes. The animals can live off the land. Human beings would scarcely live to maturity if they had to subsist on what they could digest, uncooked, from among wild foodstuffs. And then the eyesight, the bearing, the incred-

ible olfactory powers of many races of creatures. Finally, some animals can fly. Think of that! The ultimate capability, the one faculty that can enable a species to survive the crash of planets—and man will never have it.

“Can we wonder that man can only groan in envy and seek to decimate all races that can do what he cannot?”

Speedy surprised himself as well as his companion by his unwonted burst of eloquence. He was more or less silent as they skirted another broad meadow. The walkers followed another barbed-wire fence, rounded a row of trees, crossed a second stile, and came out briefly beside the Avon, visible at, last. Summer verdure had lingered long but now there was more brown in the landscape than green.

They followed a hedged track between banks of brambles that just weeks ago had been loaded with blackberries. A few half-dried ones remained and the men sampled them but they hardly tasted of anything. Autumn melancholy was hard to avoid. Speedy found the tune that hummed in his mind (almost always did) was ‘Autumn in New York’. Of course that brought his thoughts back where they oughtn’t to be.

Speedy and Omby Amby were back in High Town Lane again by a little after three, when Stiles Smith could report that his mission was accomplished. The umbrella (as well as leather, china, and clock) repairman had done his job capably. No bits of possibly essential magic substances had been removed from either of the umbrellas. Their fabric, both cloth and metal, had been merely stiffened and strengthened; neither bumbershoot had ever ‘objected’ to anything being added to its content.

The three returned in modest triumph to the B and B. Speedy had paid a visit to a branch of the National Westminster and changed greenbacks for pounds for paying their room and board. As farewells were said he held the hand of Jane the landlady a second longer than an ordinary handshake would entail, but she made no sign. She was pleasant, even cordial, but nothing more than courtesy called for in relation to strange but amiable paying guests.

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

<<1952; follows chapter 40 >>

“Omby Amby?” said Queen Ozma, startled. “Yes, certainly, if that is your wish.” She touched a button bell beside the Magic Picture.

On the supposition that her husband’s sally into Mo would not take a very long time, the good sorceress of the South had remained in the Emerald City as the pleased guest of the pleased Queen of Oz. By an agreeable turn of coincidence it had been she who was on an hour’s interested attendance at the all-showing Picture when Saladin von Smith’s hand signals were observed indicating his wish to be immediately ‘retrieved’ to Oz. She had run to the little Girl Ruler in the council chamber and summoned her thence in haste. The other councilors: the famous Wizard O.Z. Diggs, the Royal Historian of Oz himself, Prof. Wogglebug, and Tik-Tok the Clockwork Man, trailed interestedly after into the Salon of the Magic Picture.

Smith appeared, snatched from within the Picture’s painted scene to stand before that scene and stare with as much fascination as everyone else at the reactions of the companions he had left behind an instant before. In his wet wetsuit he only reached to squeeze the tendered (and tender) hand of Glinda, his wife,

as they all looked on to see the Young Man and his Princess, Miss Fanciulla and Bert the Bird, stallion Hrae stevrod and even the two asses gaze around them in total mystification. But the cynosure of most eyes was the wildly capering and (though unheard, clearly) screaming enchantress Jrumm, who attracted as much attention among her own company as among the viewers gathered before the fabulous painting in the Palace of Magic.

"What's she saying?" Ozma asked. The learned Glinda, who as mistress of all knowledge also of course knew the elements of lip reading, concentrated for a moment and then said:

"I think I caught the words 'Foiled again! Find somebody attractive and then he waltzes off with your best umbrella!' — but I wouldn't care to relay some of the epithets she's using."

That was when Sples Smith spoke, virtually for the first time since his sudden arrival in the Picture Salon. He said, "Omby Amby! That's who she's referring to—in addition to myself. Great! It confirms my guess. Would Your Highness send for him? Wantowin Battles: Omby Amby?"

Then they all talked at once while they waited for the Soldier with the green Whiskers to turn over duty at the palace gates to the Woozy and Sawhorse, who happened to be playing in the vicinity at the moment. The soldier appeared in the hall, arriving in time to get a glimpse of his ex-wife jumping on her ass and galloping off in a fury. He shivered.

Ozma switched off the picture, to everyone's, and perhaps the Picture itself's, relief, and the crowd trooped back to the Council Chamber. There they took seats around the board to sort matters out.

By tacit agreement the present 'star' of proceedings, Saladin Paracelsus de Lambertine Evagne von Smith, took the word and the, to him, all-important word was this: "General Battles," he spoke, "is it the case that when you returned from your legendary mission to Mo in the year 1914 you brought home the wrong umbrella?"

"Why, y-yes, sir," stammered the bewildered soldier. "I thought everyone knew that—everyone who might be kind

enough to take an interest in the doings of mere me."

"So we did," agreed Smith. "At least I know I did. You spoke of it not a week ago here in the palace when we held conference before my own jaunt to that country. I knew that you had lost in Mo, and missed, your valuable travel adjunct, the waterproof umbrella that had served you so well there against threats from both above and below. It was a grievous loss," said the American, sneaking formally, even a little archaically. "By the way, here it is."

Smith handed across the council table to the startled, then suddenly delighted, General of the Guard the instrument he had until then been holding unobtrusively under an arm. Omby Amby could scarcely get out his amazed thanks.

"I recognized it, you see," Sples explained, "though very late in the day!"

"But for the moment my greater interest is in the umbrella you did bring home from Mo—"

"Yes, sir!" Omby Amby cut in. "It was a stupidity on my part. I've always confessed that freely. It was because of the dark, or my anxiety, or sheer carelessness. As I fled from the castle of the Purple Dragon I seized from the stand the wrong umbrella. It's the only way I can account for it."

"It's all right! The point is: what other umbrella was that? More important, where is it now?"

"Why, er—uh—" The general had to think, yet in the tension of the present crucial moment he hardly could. He didn't, for just a second, know what he knew. But he knew what he didn't know: "'What other umbrella'? Why, I don't know. I mean, it wasn't any special umbrella. It was just an umbrella... One that belonged to my ex-wife, I suppose. Dragons rarely go about with umbrellas so I can't think it was one of theirs, left behind. It could, I dare say, have belonged to one of the staff of castle servants, but they would hardly—"

"They wouldn't," Smith cut him off. "It was undoubtedly witch Jrumm's. That is to say: Jrumm's? It WASN'T hers, though she had temporary possession. It was mine! That was my Magic

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Umbrella I've been without for thirty-eight years and went all the way to Mo just now to find.

"Where is it?!"

"The—the umbrella I brought back?" stammered Battles. "It was—or at least replaced—a part of the inventory of the royal palace here and her grace, the Queen—"

Ozma spoke now and put a convenient end to the soldier's bumbblings. She said, "The instrument with which our emissary to Mo returned from his journey was placed in the hall closet, where it became available for the same uses as the umbrella which had been... mislaid. It did not, perhaps, serve quite so brilliantly—"

This sounded to Soles Smith like an impugnment of the 'genius' of his fabulous bumbershoot and he looked a hard question at the girl ruler. She, quick on the uptake, smoothly continued: "Perhaps no umbrella in the world was quite so adapted to fending off water in any form. It was, after all, the thing that had stood between the Wicked Witch of the West and destruction for many years, indeed probably ever since the first invention of the device known as an umbrella."

"The Witch of the West!?" echoed Smith.

"Why, surely," replied Ozma, surprised in her turn. "Didn't you know? Princess Dorothy brought it here to the palace after her timely destruction of the said witch. It stayed here ever after as an important implement of magic."

Sples found himself sidetracked into a little interest in general history. "It didn't serve the witch too well in the end," he reminded.

"No," agreed Ozma; "I won't say 'alas'. The mechanics of the apparatus were such that it had to be unfurled to be effective. Dorothy's pail of water came so impromptu that the witch had no time to protect herself."

"And the same," put in Omby Amby, "—if I may intrude—in my own case, your grace. The umbrella was rolled up, that time I fell in the Root Beer River, so I got a proper ducking though the instrument was in my very hand."

“Just so. But now, thanks to Mr. Sples, we have it back again, so that’s all right. But the other, mysterious umbrella, my good friend: you believe then that it was your own fabled old Magic Umbrella from the days of your adventure to Sky Island? But that instrument’s appearance was known to us all from long ago. Our Trot and Cap’n Bill had themselves traveled by it and could describe in detail its elephant-head handle—”

“I never told anybody what happened to it,” said Smith, shamefast. Now, thirty-eight years on, he confessed his crime in the attic in Philadelphia. “The elephant head was gone. Someone—the Jrumm woman, I suppose—must have had the piece repaired and the plain handle installed that you say it has now. Thai way the umbrella would look pretty much like any old-fashioned broolly.

“But still I have not found out: what happened to it?”

“Quite right,” said the princess, with a faint flush at the realization of how her faithful subject was being kept on tenterhooks. “Why, it’s been sent to be part of the equipment at the Charmed Garden of Oz!”

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - T H R E E

<<1952; forward to October >>

The day was overcast. Perhaps that was as it should be. As the umbrellanauts ascended into the wind-still sky they passed into a cloud layer and then beyond it and so never saw where they crossed from the 'real' world into the realer one. They only knew that when they came down out of the clouds again the land below was magical.

That was obvious. They were sailing low over a stand of indus-trees that were puffing away and turning out an endless conveyor-beltful of thimbles, tacks, belt buckles, tea cosies, door-knobs, roller skates, fishing lures, and spatulas. The voyagers needed none of those and passed on.

It was the Magic Umbrella that did the passing, of course. It knew that Princess Reeda of Umbrella Island was not there. It flew forward with its clinging passengers until at last it settled down before the door of a shed attached to a farmhouse, a door above whose lintel was the simple inscription (in lavender wooden letters on a pale green background): "Seventh Heaven". There the brolly quietly contracted itself and waited.

Speedy, Sples, and Omby Amby were surprised.

Since nobody knew where the lost Princess Reeda was to be

found they ought not to have been surprised to find out where in fact she *was* to be found. But somehow they had not expected it to be in a farmyard.

Speedy had to press his hand over his heart to smother its poundings. He untied himself from his wooden seat and stood up, walked to the Dutch door of what was really no more than shanty, and looked inside. The door's upper half stood wide open.

"Gureeda?" he spoke softly. "Princess Gureeda?"

In the shadowy interior a figure moved, approached, and his own face looked into Speedy's.

He of course was not wearing braids nor was he forty years ahead of his time in sporting ear-bobs. That was the only difference though. Well, and the fact that his 'other face' clearly never needed shaving.

Both people were gaping foolishly, the woman figure perhaps most. She had not expected a caller during that hour of her morning hut-cleaning, let alone one who appeared to be her double. William Rapidan was more prepared but he too had expected something different: a forlorn princess in vile durance, not a housemaid in a vile shed.

"Princess Gureeda?... of Umbrella Island?" he got out again at last.

"You mean me?" said the woman in a voice that echoed faintly of tones once familiar and dear. "I'm not a princess. I'm just Fanciulla, farmer's wife and former maid of all work. Good morning, sir!"

"Ohh!" Speedy groaned. "'Wife'?! I'm too late! Of course that chance should have occurred to me. Idiot that I am... But I just figured—"

To the man's astonishment, the housewife was blushing to her hairline. In a moment came the stammering and embarrassed explanation. "That is, we are to BE married. But just at present, well, I have to admit it's 'farmer's fiancée At least... I hope to be that."

The situation was as painful as possible. Everybody had

explaining to do and suddenly nobody wanted to do any. The newcomers wished themselves miles away (but in fact were careful not to articulate any such desire to their umbrella).

By now Fanciulla and Sples Smith had recognized each other. Far from clarifying anything, that made the two more mystified yet. The woman saw no real reason why she should explain to virtual strangers, yet at the same time she somehow felt she ought to. To anybody, in fact, who appeared to question her status.

After an agonized moment, "We'd better explain," muttered Speedy.

"Yea, I think we should," said the farm-wife, assuming a little shred of dignity. She opened the lower half of the double door and came out with a broom in her hand. "I mustn't invite you in. It's too simple for visitors. To be honest, it's too sordid."

"Sordid'?" Speedy kept finding cause to groan. "Oh, Reeda, have I really come too late?"

"I don't understand you, sir." Fanciulla took a seat on a flat-topped tree stump and indicated for a place for the others the shafts of a parked manure cart. Startled, Sples and Wantowin Battles

sat down without speaking. Speedy stood.

He told his name and those of his companions, not yet fully grasping the fact of the prior acquaintance of Smith and the woman. "And though you seem not to know it, madam, your own name is Reeda and you are the hereditary princess of an aerial island kingdom. It may seem to you marvelous but we were brought here by an instrument that was directed to find that princess and no other, and it cannot make a mistake.

"Besides, I recognize you myself, and I can see that you recognize yourself—in me."

"Yes," said the farm woman. "We are very like. But it is all a mystery to me. I have never seen you before."

"You have, though you may not know it. Tell me, please, have you ever suffered a loss of memory? Specifically, can you remember your childhood?"

Fanciulla went pale. The truth was that she had never been able to remember farther back than the day she found herself jouncing in a rustic wagon along the road to the castle of the purple dragon, where she was put in service. She confessed the failing now, and with awe.

"Now we're getting somewhere," said Speedy with a certain exultation. "You must see, surely, that you were—probably still are—under some kind of enchantment? if not suffering from amnesia. There must be someone who knows about you, about your—er, condition...?"

"No, no one," stated Fanciulla/Reeda definitely. "I am—I must be—an orphan. Who could know anything about me?"

"The people who put you in that wagon that you say is your earliest memory. Who were they?"

"Guardsmen from the dragon castle," stammered the woman, "—I suppose. But they were hirelings, and long since gone from there, I think—yes, I'm sure."

"Hirelings of whom?" demanded the American.

"Why—er, the powerful witch Jrumm, I think. We—the serving staff at the castle—always regarded her as the chatelaine, in absentia, of the so-called castle of the Purple Dragon. There were no dragons there in those days."

"Then we must find this Jrumm! and get an explanation," declared Rapidan. He could hear the soldier with the green whiskers groaning in the background. He turned to his comrade and said, "That wouldn't be—?!"

"Yes, it would!" moaned the general and fell off the dung cart in his extremity.

Sples Smith took him up tenderly and addressed a question to the young farm woman.: "Where is Jrumm, Fanciulla?" He was old acquaintances both with this girl and the witch in question, had partaken of their company as recent as two months past. Now he took quiet control of affairs. He smiled encouragingly and said, "We parted suddenly, I'm afraid. I'm glad to see you again." But he left a great deal unsaid. "We must find Jrumm. Do you know where she is?"

"No. But Y.M. would know—I think."

"Where is Y.M., my dear?"

"With his wife—with the Princess—at the Palace on the Park. He goes there often. He's trying to arrange about the divorce—so we can be married, you see."

"Yes. Then we must go there. Can you go with us?"

"Well—er, yes, of course! There's nothing to keep me." Fanciulla laid aside her broom.

"Is it far?"

"Oh, no, not at all. Just across the fields—and the park. A moment: I'll just take my shawl."

The farmgirl stepped inside her doorway and plucked the indicated garment from a hook. She paused. From the window sill she caught up a copy of *Gay Bravery* (that neglected masterpiece), to have with her, just in case. Then she left the rustic but forever.

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - F O U R

<<1952>>

"How fantastic," breathed Ozma of Oz, almost overcome at the strangeness of the coincidence.

"The Charmed Garden?" Smith had said, more distressed than he would show at word of further hurdles placed between him and the totem he had now so long sought is vain. "Why in the world...?"

"It's quite incredible, isn't it?" went on the girl ruler. "You know of the Garden, of course? Glinda—"

"Yes, your highness," put in the Witch of the South.

"Sples was not with us at the period of its 'discovery'[§] but I have told him the story in detail since then."

"So you know that your own Magic Umbrella seemed to be a part of the strange, nay, unique web of circumstances there?" Ozma asked the American.

"Yes indeed, your grace. But then all those circumstances were just figments of a dream: pretty real-seeming at the time but afterwards shown to be imaginary."

"Quite so. But to *become* real," reminded the Ruler. "We all found the Garden so alluring, so well deserving of being real,

§ See *Charmed Gardens of Oz*. Editor's note.

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that we set to work to make it so. There were so many witnesses to every detail of the elaborate dream that we had a ready-made blueprint of the area in our minds. In just a few months the entire garden was in place, bounded by the road of yellow bricks, the Munchkin River, and the shrunken remainder of the Deadly Poppy Field.

"Of course all the artifacts that had been noted there, at any rate facsimiles of them, had to be installed. Now you know umbrellas are something rarely used by the inhabitants of this land. Here in E.C., where it almost never rains, the palace has simply not been supplied with umbrellas. We possessed in fact only one. To represent your legendary Magic Umbrella I caused to be sent to the Charmed Garden—your Magic Umbrella!—though I have only found out that fact at this moment!"

Well, they all marveled at the aptness of fate, which had "given in earnest" what they had performed "in jest". Little remained but to send and relieve from guard duty the fleet and sturdy Sawhorse. The Soldier with the Green Whiskers carried out that task, saw the horse placed within the shafts of the celebrated Red Wagon, and waved off from the sentry box the crowded vehicle as it dashed away on the half-hour run to another gatehouse, that of the fabulous Gardenia.

In that one corner of Oz rains are regular and predictable. If the excursionists had thought about it they might have expected it to be pouring at the moment they pulled up at the grey stone lodge. In the flurry of their impromptu departure, however, no one did think of it. Ozma had hastily to pull from a glove compartment in the side of the wagon thumbrellas to pass around to witch Glinda, the Wizard, the Historian, and the rest. But Sples Smith she playfully sent to beg for charity of the Custodian and Chief Careleaver in the gatehouse lodge, Mar Supial, the Careless Kangaroo.

"Tell her it's raining," called the young queen merrily, "and could she lend you a bumbershoot?!" Smith jumped out of the wagon and ran into the shelter of the lodge gate. There he too fell under the spell of the Charmed Garden as glimpsed through

the wrought-iron trellis. Ten years after the first apparition of the lovely park to the enchanted dreamer from a distant land the same blue-green lawns, dotted with exotic plants, stretched to peacock-hued hillocks where placid cows browsed drowsily in the rain. Hazy feather-topped trees marched in the far-middle distance, and away at the horizon beckoned all the mystery and magic of the world: always alluring, never attainable.

Mar had heard the crunch of wagon wheels on gravel and came to the door. Before Sples had a chance to say a word the cheerful kangaroo spotted the crowd of thumbrella-sheltered celebrities in the wagon and bounded out to wave and beckon them in. They could not escape without a cup of her daughter Tronto's celebrated coffee. And there in the cosy kitchen the altered but inimitable Magic Umbrella of him who had been Button-Bright of Philadelphia, lost in the Land of Mo, was restored, thirty-eight years late, to Saladin Paracelsus de Lambertine Evagne von Smith in the heart of the blue-green depths of the land of Oz.

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - F I V E

<<1952>>

"Hello! Mr. Smith. And Fanciulla dear: you here?"

The Young Man dropped his newspaper and jumped up from the leather easy chair in the den at the Palace on the Park. Introductions and explanations were made all round. "Darling," said Fanciulla (oh, it hurt William Rapidan to hear it), "these gentlemen—at least, this gentleman—thinks I'm somebody else. It's—it's very bewildering."

"Now then, sir," said Y.M., "what do you mean?"

Speedy told him.

"A princess?" repeated the young man. "I'm not surprised to hear it. Fanciulla's instincts have always been of the most refined... and it has always been my fate to love princesses." He spoke a bit complacently. The Young Man was not above harboring small traces of conceit, courageous though he had proven himself to be. But then, who says one can't be both conceited and brave at the same time?

"Hmm," said Speedy, not overly impressed. Indeed, William Rapidan and the farm-hand-consort had scant basis for losing much love on each other. "In order to get to the bottom of the mystery it seems we should consult a certain magic-worker

named Jrumm. Do you —”

“Jrumm again!” broke in Y.M., disturbed. The enchantress had shown him particular good will on his quest to discover the fifty-tongued bird, but latterly the Young Man had grown disillusioned. The more he found out, the more it appeared he had her to blame in the first place for the restraint under which both the women he loved had lived for years. By now he didn’t know *what* he ought to be feeling for the paradoxical creature.

“We had better consult my wife,” he eventually advised.

“And where may she be?” asked Rapidan, himself feeling mixed emotions. How serious a rival should he count a fellow who, far from being espoused to Speedy’s ‘own’ Gureeda, spoke familiarly of quite another woman as his wife?

“Out in the park,” informed the young man. “I send her there,” he went on airily, “when her singing gets to be a bit much. Now she’s actually begun to talk of taking up a career in opera.” As if that were any bad thing.

So the whole group trailed down the velvet-covered marble stairway and out the front portals to walk across to the great lawns and formal gardens of Scowlgrowl Park. Speedy stared as he trod the gold paving stones of Iron Man Avenue. It reminded him of Oz’s yellow brick road, though the latter had never had a character of anywhere near such grandeur.

“‘Iron Man’?” he said, making conversation as he glanced up at the street sign.

“Reference to an incident in Scowleyow history,” recited Y.M., glad of an opportunity to display the results of his reading and his growing learnedness. “Seems an earlier King Scowleyow — the name is traditional for the regents of the country, which conforms to Salic law — had constructed a giant figure of a man out of cast iron. It was as tall as a church and, not surprisingly, as heavy as iron. King Scowleyow was at war with Mo, a country, including its monarch and all his people, whom he hated very much, and he intended the Iron Man as an instrument of destruction.”

William Rapidan was interested. Mechanics and engineer-

ing had always been his chief preoccupation both as career and hobby. He wanted to hear more, and as the group strolled across the green grass beneath the plane trees (still green too, in a wonderland that did not much concern itself with seasons) the Young Man was pleased to oblige.

"The Man was mechanical. By means of a screw in his left foot: as high as a normal person could in fact reach on the imposing stature of the image—he could be wound up to march in a straight line for a very great distance. Needless to say, his great flapping feet, each as large as a boxcar, flattened everything in their path. That was what the King counted on.

"He sent a dove ahead to alert the Movian Monarch as to what to expect and then settled down to wait until Mo and all it contained had been flattened. Then he could take over. I believe he was partial to ruling flat countries.

"Alas, plans went awry. By some means still not fully clear to us here in the land of Scowleyow the Monarch of Mo was able to get the great Cast-Iron Man turned around and headed back to its native country. Once arrived back home, the Iron Man stepped on Scowleyow and all his innocent people. It seems that, very slow-moving, they did not take care to get out of the way.

"His mission accomplished, the mighty Cast-Iron Man stalked on to the sea, and into it. As he walked on, inevitably the water rose higher and higher around him. When his wind-up energy ran down he remained standing, his visage half sunk beneath the waves. The first great storm afterwards toppled him. Now on a clear day from a glass-bottomed boat one can see, full forty fathoms down, the fallen figure. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level muds stretch far away," Y.M. paraphrased appositely.

"Thanks," said Bill Rapidan. "I'd like to get a look at that mechanical man one day."

"I suppose you might," allowed the young man. "Our present king is at this very date at the coast, organizing a salvage operation. He plans to have the great figure re-erected right in this park, as a monument to vanished glories."

"And defeats?" said Speedy.

"Those too, I suppose. The King is rather patriotic. I think he has some idea of erasing the memory of those defeats, though not quite by the further use of any cast-iron men in war-making."

The group had now come within earshot of a very pretty sound. It seemed to be a soprano voice singing a lyric at once recognizable by persons knowing Italian: this, alas, did not include any of the present party...:

"C'è là in fondo Parigi: Parigi che ci grids, con mille voci liete, il suo fascin' immortal!"

Wonderful song, rousingly rendered, although the tenor part seemed represented only by a faint, not very musical, squeaking of a bird. "Bertie!" Fanciulla was heard to cry, and even the Soldier with the Green Whiskers seemed struck.

But the lovely voice was not through. It seemed to issue from behind a towering bank of rhododendrons (not, however, in bloom in October, even in the land of Scowleyow). The words carried clearly:

"I used to dream that I would discover

The perfect lover

Some day.

I knew I'd recognize him if ever

He came round

My way.

I always used to fancy then

He'd be one of the godlike kind of men

With a giant brain and a noble head

Like the heroes bold in the books I read

But—

Along came Bill...§"

And along came Bill (Speedy) Rapidan: he rounded the corner of the rhododendrons and looked full into the face (with auburn locks) of Pat of Eighth Avenue and Miss Jane of Ringwood.

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - S I X

<<1952>>

The Princess looked pleased and Speedy looked thunderstruck.

Raising her finger for a little dickey bird to hop upon it from her shoulder the lady advanced to meet the group who had stopped short beside the rhododendrons.

Nobody knew who should speak first but then the Princess said, "Well, aren't you going to say Hello?", quoting from a favorite film of the forties.

Speedy knew the moment was extraordinary. He didn't want to spoil it by saying anything banal. A whole lot fell into place in his mind and he had made great strides in comprehension when he finally spoke and said, "It was you, wasn't it?" Then he suddenly blushed brightly.

The Princess' laughter was like a brilliant cadenza, each note a glass raindrop falling on sheerest taut metal. "I wanted you to think that! It was the easiest way to get talking. I needed to get to know you—with instant intimacy, so to say. And you were a perfect gentleman. I wanted to find that out too."

Speedy remembered some of the colloquialisms he had used on Eighth Avenue and only continued to blush. But after all he

HAD behaved discreetly. Strange: it was devotion to another girl that had kept him from advances to one who was so much more—But what was he thinking! Before his mind led him into even further gaffes there was a great deal he must find out and he'd better start getting some answers.

"Who are you, madam?" he blurted. "And how did you..? In a word, I'm wordless. Please tell me what's going on!"

The princess lifted a hand to indicate a red and yellow blanket that lay on the grass some yards away. "Shall we?" she invited. "I sometimes bring that along when sent out," she explained, "—to sing so as not to forfeit my supper." Here she glanced at the young Man roguishly.

The party of six (seven with Bert the bird) sat down around the coverlet. Turning to Saladin von Smith, the Princess began, "It is good to see you again, Mr. Smith. I'm sorry we didn't get to acknowledge our acquaintance in New York or in Hampshire. Circumstances were of course not optimum. But I felt you recognized me."

"Not in New York, no," said Sples. "You only 'reminded' me of someone. Put at Ringwood I was sure. It was curiously comforting. But I didn't want to blow your cover. When you made no sign..."

"It was most sensitive of you. No, I couldn't speak or explain. I was still reconnoitring, and dared not complicate things by clarifying—"

"Clarifying what?" broke in Bill Rapidan impatiently. "How could you be a New York street-walker—or at least give the perfect impression—and also a Welsh lodging-house keeper in England? Wigs could account for hair changes but the accent, the intimate knowledge of background—"

"Magic can do anything," stated the princess calmly. "I had fifty wishes and all of them potent as could be. Seated one day at the organ—this was over in Dad's royal palace—wary and ill at ease, I made a wish. You see, I had learned, somewhat belatedly: only thirty-six year!, that I had the power to get my dearest desires fulfilled. I took care not to abuse the privilege but it

could surely not be an abuse to ask to see the one I would one day — well, that is, the man I was destined to — well, become very good friends with.

“I arranged my wish so that I would appear to that man in a guise that would seem to him completely natural. For that, of course I would need to blend with the background as to appearance, speech, range of knowledge. It worked. That’s all. It was very gratifying for me. To know what the future held — and that it was so nice.” Now it was the princess’ turn to blush.

Speedy didn’t know what to feel. He was by no means displeased to have made an apparently agreeable impression on one so attractive. But then again: to have his future sewed up, with no consultation as to HIS wishes...? Well, for now he’d play it cool. Coolly, but not coldly, he said, “The ‘wishes’ you mention: may we hear about them? How could you discover thirty-six years late that you had such a gift? And how does it work?”

“Can you believe it?: the one who gave me the power never bothered to let me know! I had to find it out by accident: trial and error. Not being, I suppose, an individual given to vain unarticulated longing and wishing, I let decades go by before I discovered it. But it’s just like her, the queer old thing: her gifts seem like curses, her damnations turn out to be blessings.”

“Who is ‘she’?” they all asked. One or two knew already.

“Why, Jrumm, the great witch and secret eminence grise of Scowleyovian affairs!”

“Please explain,” they pleaded.

The princess set herself to rights on the red and yellow blanket. “Jrumm came to this country many years ago. It seems she’d had an unhappy marriage elsewhere —”

“‘Unhappy!’” broke in the Soldier with the Green Whiskers impulsively, feeling rightfully aggrieved. “It wasn’t for lack of walking all over her husband!” Then his friends explained to the princess just who Omby Amby was and how the woman he had been married to for what seemed like far too many years had been testy, to say the least, and made his life a purgatory

with her terrible temper.

"Yes," agreed the princess. "I've seen her little fits of rage too. I can well believe what you say. And yet at times she can be surprisingly benevolent. You know that, Y.M."

"Yes," confirmed the princess' husband. "If she takes a liking to you. For some reason she seemed to like me. I never knew why. Not even sure I deserved it," he admitted in a show of attractive candor.

"But to continue," said the princess.. "It isn't known just why she came to Scowleyow and Mo. Those years are shrouded in mystery. But she seems to have had a man in her life still, for there is the evidence that she had—has—a son..." They talked about the long-suffering Hrae stevrod (if to be a horse is to suffer), who still lived in his mother's vicinity.

"And where is that?" Speedy wanted to know. It began to look as if an interview at that address was going to be imperative.

"Oh, a day's journey from here, in the land of Mo," the princess informed. "For some reason she still lives beside that old-fashioned bakehouse far from the amenities of civilization. I don't know how she gets the time to pass, clever creature that she really is. You'd think she would be bored to death. But there are mysteries in her life. I have the feeling that what various ones of us have learned are just the tip of the iceberg."

"Hm," contributed Sples Smith. "I knew Jrumm was a clever sorceress. But my impression from last summer was that there was little love lost between you two. Now you say that it was she who gave you the gift of granted wishes. How did that come about? and how did you find it out, Princess?—if we may ask."

"Yes, indeed. It just came out in conversation! Doesn't that seem strange? It was after you left us so surprisingly, just at the spot, and in the same manner, as you first found us. As we continued our journey home I was entertaining the others by granting little wishes for them, as I had gradually learned that I could do. To my amazement dame Jrumm burst into a dreadful temper fit and shrieked at me, quite forgetting my

THE UMBRELLAS OF OZ

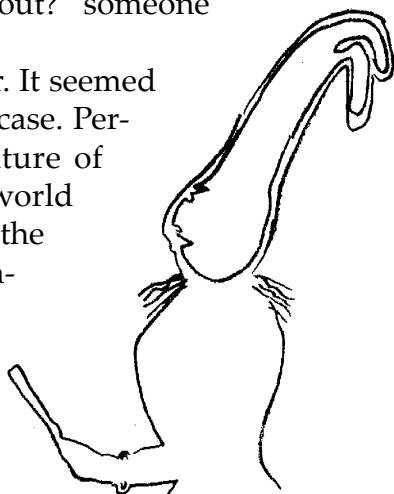
exalted place as an hereditary princess. She commanded me to hold my tongue and to stop throwing away my wishes! There were only fifty of them, and how many had I wantonly wasted already?

“Well, naturally the whole story had to come out then. I remembered since the time it happened that Jrumm had turned me at the tender age of seven into a mockingbird. Thus I remained for thirty-five years! until my kind husband here well-meaningly spirited me away from the castle where I was kept closely guarded. Then I returned to my life at my father’s court, and the rivalry between the King and the powerful enchantress was laid to rest.

“The strange woman now revealed that she had regretted that I, an innocent bystander, had had to suffer as a pawn in my father’s game of power politics. To try to make it up to me, when she created me the so-called Fifty-Tongued Bird, she gave me a wish for each ‘tongue’ or birdsong. She just. didn’t bother to tell me! But of course on hindsight I can see why. If I had known, naturally I’d have wished my enchantment and exile undone at a stroke, and so have returned home in triumph, with forty-nine wishes to the good. Where would Jrumm’s revenge on my father be then?” The Princess ended with a merry laugh at the posited situation.

“What were they quarreling about?” someone wanted to know.

“Oh, that was never made clear. It seemed to be just one of the givens of the case. Perhaps it was an example in miniature of states of affairs in, for example, world politics. One might ask: “Why do the French hate the Germans? the English the Irish?, the Americans their native Indians?’ There’s no sensible answer. They just do—and millions have to suffer to perpetuate the nonsense.”



C H A P T E R F O R T Y - S E V E N

<<1952>>

I dare say the good and beautiful Princess might have resolved all remaining problems and mysteries by just passing a potent wish. But wouldn't that be dull!

Let's do it this way. Let us say that during King Scowleyow's temporary sojourn at the coast his daughter exercised a certain limited power as regent at the capital. At the very least she had the power to order out a coach and four, so that, having spent a luxurious night in the royal palace, the party very early the next morning could board and be off. Away they rattled over the cobblestones out of the city and soon they were all where they were most used to being: upon the road, pursuing a quest.

The princess planned it in that way because she wanted time to sit in a cushioned corner and devote herself entirely to getting to know William Rapidan better. Even more to the point, she wanted to let him get to know her. She knew she had not failed to make an impression in New York and also in England. Those, however, were mere brief flights of tempting mystery for her chosen swain. They were scarcely sufficient basis for causing him to forsake all others and to kneel before her sceptre and to swear allegiance to her lips, her eyes, her hair.

How could they be, after all? "My beautiful Princess," whispered the lover, "I set out to find and cherish someone else. I've told you all about her—and there she sits!" Speedy gestured with an eyebrow to the seat opposite, where Fanciulla was seen to be hanging on the arm and every word of the well-content Young Man. "I know she seems all wrapped up in your husband but that's only because she's lost her memory. As soon as that's restored, everything will be different. You do see? She'll want to return to her sorrowing friends on Umbrella Island, and I have thought that I would be there to see it all come true."

"It's a pretty story, sorely," agreed the lady. "Would that it may come true! But just the same..." She hummed a little tune: the Intermezzo from *Cavalleria* and looked out the window at the autumn foliage, while William worried. Silly fellow. He couldn't make up his mind which way to go: the way of duty ('duty'?: to love and be true at last to his true love?) or the way of inclination.

His dilemma was just two thirds as great as that of Dick/Bert, the bird, now also being called "Berbir" by his restored old comrade of stirring adventures along the road, Wantowin Battles. As they bounced along the two were deep in reminiscences. In the nature of things Bert could no longer dream of having restored to him the fifty-tongued bird to whom he had plighted his devotion. Therefore he was exercised to try to decide which of three *human* friends he should cast in his faithful lot with. Should it be the fond pal of that early quest? or his fifty-tongued love in her human guise? or his latest loving companion, the girl Fanciulla?

Something told him none of the three was going to drop everything and have him as best-loved friend. He'd chirp a cracked note and take whatever fate would bring.

Bert noticed Sples Smith in the caddy corner, looking rather left out. He flew to him and said, "Whatcah doin'?"

"Oh, just thinking." Sples tuned to glance, bemused, at the, dicky bird on his shoulder.

"What about?"

"We've heard that a King Scowleyow sent off a cast-iron man to attack Mo but that things misfired and the giant returned and crushed 'Scowleyow and all his people'. And yet there's still a 'King Scowleyow' ruling a country of the same name—and no dearth of people that I could see."

"Oh, I think the chronicler wrote symbolically. As a matter of fact," Bert could relate, "it does appear that quite a crowd of the king's retainers gathered round him at the crucial moment, to protect him, or be protected by him. At the fall of the great iron foot they perished with him. That included all the great magnates and grandees of the court. Perhaps the historian felt that when they went they took everything. But naturally there were rustics hiding out in nooks and crannies about the kingdom and when they presently found that the coast was clear they came out and proliferated, so before very long Scowleyow was a populated country as before."

"And this present King Scowleyow? who doesn't sound like any great improvement over the former one."

"Oh, the name is traditional. All kings in Scowleyow take the name of the country as their own."

This one's Scowleyow the Twelfth. He's just a petty chieftain who when he noticed the throne empty claimed it for his own. He's a person of no learning and low motivations, who knows no better than to imitate all the baseness he's heard related of the former king."

Smith laughed. "Sounds like a grand fella. And yet he was father to the really charming Princess there?"

"There's a mystery about her birth. Nothing seems known about where and when she was born. She was not so very long at court before she disappeared again, leaving just an echo of her great beauty and goodness—which soon became a legend. I suppose that in contrast to her father anyone would seem 'good'. As for her beauty, that's easily explained, for her father, despite his character, was quite an unusually handsome man. He's getting on in years now, of course."

"Well, it will be interesting to hear what the woman Jrumm

has to relate. I hope she won't fly into one of her fits when she's asked to come clean."

"Who knows?" said Bert with a shrug. "She's powerful enough, I gather, to turn us all into cow chips if we cross her. We'll have to be on best behavior."

Others had the same forebodings. It was a rather sombre carriageload that presently drew up before the door of the country bake shop and looked out with trepidation.

The good and beautiful princess, who was also smart, had sense enough to use up a wish.

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - E I G H T

<<1952>>

"And that's how it all began, my dears. And that's how it all began!"

Jrummy was in mellow mood and I guess she felt (helped by a powerful but unsuspected suggestion) that if she was ever going to tell anyone what she had been up to all these years, now was the time. They were all there. Her ex(durn it!)-husband—but he was again appearing as the timid green-bearded jerk she had tired of ages before, and she quickly came to the conclusion that the bold yeoman in his blue period whom she had briefly admired as just a mirage; she would put her revenge yen into mothballs. There was the lovely, still young-appearing Princess whom she had so wronged for so many years (but had tried to make it up to in devious ways). The venturesome Young Man whom she didn't quite know why she favored so—or yes, she did!: he was like herself, risking all in trying boldly to take what he wanted. There was another princess, as it now seemed her visitors all belatedly knew: a princess who had also endured years of enforced servitude. And a couple of American adventurers, as well as a little dicky bird. All of them, except maybe the young man and one of the Americans, had suffered at her

hands and now was the time to brag about it and demonstrate to them just how all-powerful she had been.

The sorceress had just been describing her failed marriage with Wantowin G. Battles He had been properly put in his place as the feckless feeble fearful fellow he was. ("Thank goodness!" he breathed with a sigh of relief. Now he could return to his dear Tollydiggle, who *liked* ambitionless time-servers and gate-watchmen, with no fear he was going to be claimed at some least expected moment by this awful wife. He'd always known she was a witch! even before she became one.)

"Then one day," Jrumm went on, "the King of Scowleyow came to pay a state visit in the Emerald City. There was a handsome man. At least he was in those days—and I fell for him pladask. I was turning back the bedcovers in the Royal Visitors' Suite in the Palace of Magic when he came in unexpectedly and caught me at my work. He chucked me 'neath the chin and dalled with me. Who could resist? or wanted to? A handsome king, and I hopelessly espoused to one who would never be more than a titular Standing Army.

"Suddenly—I didn't know how I got there but there I was—within the bed whose covers I'd turned back all unsuspectingly half an hour before. When the royal party left the palace I stowed away in the baggage train. Thus I came to Scowleyow."

Everyone looked shocked and most interested and waited for their hostess to continue. She ordered Pernille to go round with the Pouilly Fuissè again and recommended the crisp crackling on the roast of pork.

"When King Scowleyow discovered I was still with him he was as pleased as his vexation allowed him to be. For a time I lived a life of back stairs and attic hideaways as I enjoyed the royal favor—when no one was looking. That couldn't last, no doubt. My early dreams proved vain: that I might at least become a wife of the left hand. My honor, such as it was, had been sacrificed, and for what? A passle of brats!" The witch laughed harshly.

"But that was not yet. First Scowleyow, scowling as usual

and living up to his name, devised a quarrel with me. Though I, still enamored, was prepared to forgive him anything he took advantage of the heat of the row to send me packing. I was horrified! What as to become of me? and in my condition. But there as nothing for it. I must needs gather my few belongings in a sack and go. Sore at heart, without even a crust to see me through, I set out on the long road, none knew whither. I walked for days, starving.

"But I was not the type to curl up and die. Thank goodness I had my temper! I swore that I was going to live through this and when it was over I'd never be hungry again. If I had to lie and cheat, steal and kill, as God was my witness I'd never be hungry again.

"Well, I had a bit of luck. As I struggled along the road, crossing into Mo, the country of my exile, I saw an old woman sitting on a rock. As I approached, she, a woman, though it was early days, realized my condition. She took pity on me. It ended with her taking me home with her to a little hut in the forest where she lived with her 'Old Man', as she called him.

"She tended me and I stayed there through long months until my twins were born—" 'Twins!' marveled her listeners. "And the time was not wasted. For this little old woman was the Grandmother of All Witches. She had been a great one in her day. Kings had trembled at her word and sorcerers had come from far and near to study at her feet. But now, weary of the world and its pomps, she had retired with her old husband to the forest to live out her life in harmless nut-gathering and charcoal-burning.

"When I learned her story and was interested, she had no objection to taking me as her last pupil and teaching me all her arts. I was not slow in turning pebbles into jewels and so was able to pay a competent midwife when my time came. This woman too found it in her heart to pity me. But alas, in my time of travail it seems I repeatedly shrieked out the name of the king of Scowleyow as the author of my woes.

"No sooner had the children been born than the midwife

made off to the palace of the King and reproached him for his neglect of me. But the effect was not what she had intended. King Scowleyow flew into a towering rage and turned the woman out of doors incontinently, though not before she had heard him shriek orders for the instant mustering of his elite corps of headsmen!

Frantic, the woman rode through the night to find me, soon after dawn, gone to the well in the lane, with my little son slung from my back. I dropped the bucket; I remember it splashed and filled my wooden shoes. I bade the midwife hasten to the hut and warn the old grandmother. Then when she was out of sight

I turned my child into a colt. I knew that a fortnight-old horse could fend for itself, as a two-weeks' child could not. I drove my darling boy off into the forest: better to take his chances there than risk what seemed his certain fate if the king caught him.

"When as soon as I could I reached the hut it was in flames. I found the old couple hiding under a stone in the kitchen garden. The Grandmother of Witches had turned them into centipedes in the moment of emergency. As for the midwife, her fate is unknown; I never saw her again. Nor of course my daughter—not for some years—"

"Your daughter', madam?" someone exclaimed.

"Yes, of course; she sits yonder there. You call her the Princess."

C H A P T E R F O R T Y - N I N E

<<1952>>

You can imagine the consternation.

“‘Mother’?” said the princess, aghast, and didn’t want to believe. This awful woman as mother? Or was she perhaps quite *so* awful? Jrumm? whom everyone had reason to dislike and yet somehow didn’t *quite* dislike? This woman with her fits of violent temper and thieving ways and yet with unpredictable bursts of generosity? This woman who, though not aged or hideous, could not be imagined as ever young and fair.

Still, it figured. Or at least it didn’t not figure. No one else had ever been suggested for the role of mother to the Princess. At Scowleyow’s court she had been known as the daughter of her father the King and that seemed to be sufficient ancestry for anyone.

But what a lot of questions the revelation raised. When the excited babble died down Jrumm Went on: “Contrary to our fears Scowleyow did not kill his daughter but carried her in triumph to his court, where he doted on her and soon began to give out that she was a miracle of beauty and goodness. One wonders why he stressed the latter quality, he who was so ungood himself and who seemed to care not at all to be thought

good. Perhaps he believed public devotion to the image of his child would deflect some of his own unpopularity.

The old couple and I refuged west and built this place. For a period I licked my wounds and bided my time. With new determination and energy I threw myself into the study of witchcraft. The first of my concerns was to erect a shield around my remaining child and so I built that 'puzzle' stable in the forest. I filled it with mice turned into magnificent horses to be companions to my son, who by birth was no more of a horse than they.

"By great good fortune the poor midwife at court had uttered no more than 'Your woman has given birth -' before Scowleyow pressed the rage button. He never knew there were two children. He still does not suspect he has a son. That son, for his own protection, has had to remain a horse all this time. Latterly I have had him near me but never in the character of human son. What if word reached the King of this man—and potential rival—who so resembles him?.. I have sometimes, while he slept, turned Hræstevrod back briefly, just to see. As like as brothers!

"Seven years passed before I felt sure enough of my powers to face the King. I demanded reinstatement as mother of the famed and praised princess. He laughed in my face. The rest you know." Thus abruptly the woman's tale ended.

As her hearers thought it over they realized they did know the rest. What had seemed to all a cruel enchantment was seen now as protective coloration for the daughter whom the wronged mother wished to remove from the influence of the evil king until such time as a bold rescuer might come to her aid with resourcefulness enough to take his place as future and sufficient protector to the girl. That he was a plebeian with some claim to conceit and pretentiousness was not held to matter much. That the Princess could not love him might be thought a graver lack.

"But now all that's settled?" Jrumm took up the word again, addressing her daughter and son-in-law, "and each of you has settled on someone new and more to your taste?"

Here she beamed round on her relations and relations (hopably)-to-be. Suddenly her face fell. She was looking at Fanciulla. Admittedly the girl was no more than the light-o'-love of what, if all went well, was to be the witch's ex-son-in-law, but just the same she felt a bit ill at ease. She decided, now that, years belatedly, she had got into a mood for confession, to make a totally clean breast of it.

Jrumm leaned across the table and took the girl's surprised hand. "My daughter," she said, "I only seemed to abuse. You, my poor girl, I truly did an injustice."

This was what William Rapidan had been waiting for. He and those who shared his concerns. Sples Smith slowly and thoughtfully twirled a wine glass. He believed he knew something of what was coming.

"Do you remember," the witch addressed the company, "how, last summer, I would not have you pass by way of the court of the Movian monarch? I found sophistries for my advice but the truth is that I did not want the Monarch to catch a glimpse of you, Miss Fanciulla. He would have recognized you as the lost girl that your people of the aerial island hung around Mo for a year in search of.

"Yes, I was in the Mo capital the time Umbrella Island and its King, your father, paid an official visit. I was not, however, invited to that famous ball. What, I, powerful sorceress though I was, to appear among the noble ones as the rejected mistress of an unpopular foreign king? The Monarch of Mo did not approve.

"Furious, I hung around outside the banqueting hall. I saw you come out to take the air. How pretty you were! in your costume of a pert chambermaid. You reminded me of, though much prettier than, the serving wenches I employed at the Dragon Castle, where my daughter was interned.

"Suddenly I had an inspiration. The very thing! I thought. There was an extra place available among the tweenies. If I could not go to the ball I could certainly ruin the ball. Quick as thought I removed your memory.

"Afterwards it was an easy thing to send to the castle and order henchmen to come and fetch you. I did not allow your memory to begin to function again until you were safely in the cart and away —"

Princess Reeda was looking as angry as it was possible for a sensible young woman, very well-read, to look.

"'Allow my memory to function,' you said;" she spoke icily. "What must I do to get you to allow my memory of all my early life to come back to me? I find I need it now!" She looked aside to Speedy Rapidan, who had said such puzzling things.

The witch had the grace to look abashed. "Are we through here?" she asked the party round the dining table. "Then, if you will go with me into my laboratory room I shall try to make some adjustments."

C H A P T E R F I F T Y

<<1952>>

The others waited on stools and a bench in the passage while mysteries were performed inside witch Jrumm's sanctuary. Then a great cry was heard. A moment later the door was snatched open and the sobbing face of Princess Gureeda was seen as she rushed out, then froze, in additional consternation. Whom was she to run to?!

Her friends all stood gaping between two worlds. Some had no claim on her: General Battles and Saladin von Smith and the good and beautiful "other Princess". But the Young Man and William Rapidan and Bert the Bird were all heart-anchored to the girl, and clearly she could not belong to all three.

She paused for one second: the second during which one of them should have claimed her forever. Then she ran to the now vacated bench and threw herself down on it to weep distractedly.

Bert the bird, good little creature, flew to her head and perched on it. "Whatcha doin' *now*?" he piped in distress.

Gureeda raised her flaming face and sobbed, "Crying my eyes out!"

"Why?!" they all exclaimed.

“Because I don’t know what to do! I remember everything—and it’s awful!”

This was a facer. Everyone had the distinct impression she’d wanted her memory back. Indeed, they had all heard her demand it in no uncertain terms. But memory is a strange thing. It, and dreams, are two phenomena psychologists and physiologists can never convincingly explain.

Psychological exegesis concerning memory: Given the chance to have memory restored, no one would ever fain remain an amnesiac, even if aware that what memory would recall would be painful. Memory rejection is like abdicating a part of our personality, which is a thing we all cling to, dreadful as it may be. Or again, memory is like one of our limbs. Ugly and full of pain as any member of our body may be, we scream against losing it.

What Gureeda recalled was not “awful”: only the knowledge of the loss of it was so. The charming ball where she had lanced and been feted. The jolly journey of Umbrella Island to call on its fellow kingdom,

Her dear old Dad, the king, and all his fat counselors. The good people of the beautiful and unique land of Umbrellia. Her tried and true and incredible companion, Terrybubble, the live dinosaur skeleton. Her books! and the Royal Library on the flying island. And her dreams—oh, good gracious, Speedy! the boy from Long Island!

She looked around wildly for him. But all she saw was a somewhat rugged-looking thirty-two-year-old businessman: quite an attractive fellow, really, but a stranger to her. Beside him stood another man, someone she’d loved and longed for for years—and also recognized. Gureeda-Fanciulla jumped up, with the bird still in her hair. She flew to his side and made him her own, or all through her life she’d have dreamed on alone.

With a secret imperceptible sigh of relief Speedy Rapidan turned to the Princess from Scowleyow and smiled.

C H A P T E R F I F T Y - O N E

<<1952>>

Witch Jrumm belonged among the great number of people who think, when you have done something really bad and then kept it a deep secret for years, that when you afterwards confess it that makes it all right. Curious way of thought and so wide-spread. So now she supposed that, having revealed the great wrong she had done the Umbrellian princess, everything was going to be hunkydory between them. Funny. It didn't work out that way.

Gureeda-Fanciulla flew to her young man's side and her momentum carried the two of them away, out of the house and up the hillside. Speedy and the other Princess followed after, hand in hand, more leisurely.

Jrumm found herself alone in the hallway with the two she'd really been wanting to talk to ever since the unexpected arrival of the carriage from Scowleyow. She shrugged as the door slammed, without backward glances, after the departing couples. Then she turned to Sples Smith and Wantowin Battles.

The latter trembled and the former looked stern. That didn't stop Jrumm. She was out after something and she adopted an ingratiating manner. "Oh, now they've gone away, and you are

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near me," she quoted, sprightly. "How I hope that you will hear me!"

"We're listening," said Sples gravely. "There's still a lot that needs explaining."

"Oh?" The witch paused. "What else did you want to know?"

"Never mind, for the moment. You were going to say..."

"That I observe that each of you gentlemen is carrying something!"

The umbrellas!

"Yes," the woman went on. "And since both of them are mine I would request most earnestly that you return them to me."

Sples Smith uttered harsh laughter and even Omby Amby dared to titter nervously.

"Liar!" barked the American, "—and thief!"

A nice return for hospitality extended! For once the witch showed dismay. She knew of old that her ex-husband was a cowardly pushover. Also from her brief acquaintance with the adult Sples Smith three months before she supposed him to be somewhat gormless and ineffectual. This didn't sound like it.

"Wh-why, what do you mean?" she stammered.

"This has been confession day," recalled the visitor, "and general-revelation-of-identities evening. I think it's time for one more. Do you know who I am?"

"Yes, of course. The man who appeared to us so unexpectedly on the bank of the Milk River—and then disappeared from a similar riverbank similarly mysteriously, after stealing my precious umbrella!" Here the witch made a grab for it.

"Hah-hah!" shouted Sples in sudden great glee. Here was the proof at last! For the umbrella which, with a retaining grasp of iron, he had thrust behind his back, was of course his own Magic Umbrella, stolen (then too) from the Philadelphia attic. And how would the witch know to make a pass at that object unless she recognized it as having once been in her possession?

"*There*," stated Smith, "is 'your precious umbrella'." He gestured toward the old yellow bumbershoot of the Wicked Witch of the West, which General Battles held clutched with both

arms around it. "At least: the umbrella we've just been talking about, the one I took away with me from the bank of the river of root beer."

"Which *you*—*stole!*" shrieked the sorceress, launching at last into one of her fury fits.

"Oh, no," said Sples quietly. "Repossessing oneself of one's own belongings is by no definition theft."

"It *wasn't* your own belonging! It was mine, and I needed it. I've missed it so."

"Like I dare say you needed and missed my own umbrella—" Here Smith briefly displayed the powerful Philadelphia instrument, "after you first stole it and made it 'your own'."

"Nonsense! It's not yours. How could it be? Until this idiot here—" Jrumm indicated her quaking husband. "took it away, presumably in mistake for the other one, it had been in my possession since I—er, borrowed it from another little idiot, a witless American boy—" She stopped abruptly.

"A little blond idiot you found asleep in a field by the Scowleyow border?" asked Smith sweetly. "A little idiot you sheltered under your crystal cloak when it came on to rain?"

"Why, how could you—? I've never told a soul."

"You didn't need to. I could recall it all on my own. I was the little blond idiot."

"You!?" The witch gasped. "How could you be? You're dark—swarthy—like a gypsy. He was pale blond."

"I had an encounter with a treacle well[§]. But never mind that. I'm he who was the feckless Button-Bright. And you, madam, are a thief—and a liar. I see now that everything you told me that first time I trustingly traveled with you was lies. That business about the dragons: missing in one place and turning up in another. That wasn't strange to you, as you pretended. You'd done it all yourself, though heaven knows for what reasons—"

"To protect my children! With my powers I was able to shift the dragons, to guard my son who was to be found much nearer the vengeful King Scowleyow. My daughter for the time was

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

safer: in the shape of a bird and far away on the western Mo frontier. And with you left to watch out for her.”

“How ironical,” scoffed the former Button-Bright in surprisingly acid mood, “victimize me and then con me into being your assistant. I was a gullible little idiot, right enough. Lucky for me I was also just selfish enough to watch out for my own best interests and leave the Dragon castle. Who knows what further and worse battenning on me you might have done? So it was a real pleasure to ‘steal’ back an umbrella from you last summer—even if it was only a substitute for the one you stole. And now we’re even.” Sples folded his arms, with the umbrella well fixed within them, and smirked.

“Not quite even!” yelled Jrumm. “I’m the most powerful sorceress in Mo—not counting Grandma—and I haven’t forgotten my powers. Take that! and tha!” Here the witch performed a cabalistic gesture employing both arms and a knee, and waited for both her adversaries to drop dead or wake up in Little America. They stayed where they were.

“What the —!!” croaked Jrumm and ran through the routine again.

“Save your breath, and energy,” directed Sples Smith. “It won’t work.”

The witch’s fury mounted, her bafflement adding to it.

“Here we see,” taught Smith, “the drawback of ever doing anything generous. It seems you gave your ‘daughter’—so you claim—the good and beautiful Princess, some wishes to make up, as it were, for her long and dreary transformation as a cage bird. In good time she used one of them today to provide that nothing you might happen to try against any of her party to their detriment would be effective. Congratulations. I see the quality of the wishes you give out is first-rate.”

C H A P T E R F I F T Y - T W O

<<1952>>

The lover couples ran up the hill and there in the starlit hour they found their erstwhile companion and steed, Hræ stevrod, grazing on asphodels in the dark. The immortal flower was native to Elysium but Jrumm, who by now had connections most places, had managed to get some cuttings. Though she kept him in the guise of a horse she really thought nothing was too good for her son and she provided the best fodder.

The dun horse glowed very faintly under the stars and none had any trouble making him out. "Vrod!" whispered the Princess urgently. The horse whinnied.

"Old comrade," called the Young Man low.

"Good horse," cried she who had been Fanciulla. "Do you remember us?"

Speedy, who had not been introduced, said nothing. "Hræ stevrod," spoke the Scowleyovian princess again. But it is hard suddenly to accept a horse as your brother, and especially your twin, and she didn't know how to continue.

Then, mysteriously, it came to the four that they would not tell him yet: that they would wait and make it a proper occasion. But certainly they wanted the man-horse with them in what

they all now felt to be an imperative action to be taken before they could, at last, start living happily ever after: a confrontation with the wayward King of Scowleyow.

They gathered around the loyal and relatively patient animal and laid their plans. "If only we could get them to agree somehow," said the Princess, meaning the King and the witch, her parents. "There's the non-aggression pact, of course, but it doesn't seem to have meant there's any love lost between them. They're such prickly natures, both of them, and it makes everything so awkward for everyone around them. Who could actually say he loves either of the two?"

And this was odd because the good princess had always been supposed to be the favorite of her father. "No," she said to any raised eyebrows there were in the dark. "I scarcely remember him from my childhood. Was he fond? Did he pet and play with me? I don't recall. But since my return from enchantment he's been as grumpy as a boiled owl. He hated my marriage, and couldn't conceal his delight when it didn't work out."

Here she looked toward her ex-husband-to-be but she couldn't see what expression he wore, if any. "I wonder," she finished, "if he's a person anyone *could* love."

"Madam Jrumm maintains she did," reminded Speedy.

"But the hatred that replaced that love is what brought all of us to our present pass," someone also reminded.

"Never mind." The Young Man as usual now took command. "We've got to get the two of them together and settle matters once and for all. It'll be sticky. There's got to be the divorce and some new weddings and none of that can take place without the King's consent and indeed participation."

There was no dissent. The party, Hrae stevrod and all, returned to the house. They were in time to see witch Jrumm hopping with thwarted fury and Sples Smith still looking smug.

"Ah, there you are!" screamed the sorceress and began to try to hex or rehex or unhex the Princess. However, she ought to have had more sense than that. If you are going to have the power to grant effective wishes—and we have seen that Jrumm's were

top-quality—you cannot also deactivate such wishes once expressed. The princess had wished that none of “her” party could henceforth be worked on to their cost by any magic that Jrumm might employ. That wish held. All that Jrumm could hope for was that, by good behavior, she could move her daughter to pass another wish restoring the witch’s own magic capabilities. Therefore she was now prepared to wheedle.

“Madam,” said the Princess. (She couldn’t call an awful old witch “Mother”.) “We most urgently request your consent to go with us back to Scowleyow, there to confront ... the King. Our tale of woes and wanderings has gone on long enough. We need your voice, and, it may be, your power” —perhaps a hint of restitution flung out for Jrumm to gnaw on?” —to persuade King Scowleyow to grant what we require.”

“And what might that be?” whined the witch, trying hard to damp her rage and not lose any more ground by untimely temper tantrums.

“A resolution of our legal and social states: divorce for me and my husband, and remarriage for us both.”

“Hah!” The eye of Jrumm gleamed brilliantly. Indeed, here was a chance to assert her power—of knowledge, if not of witchcraft. It would be a treat to make old Scowleyow squirm. Upon the impulse she agreed. “We’ll start at dawn.” she declared, and clapped her son-horse on the muzzle.

C H A P T E R F I F T Y - T H R E E

There he was now! Standing by the shore with his earls about him and, like Canute, commanding the waves.

Unlike Canute, however, who ironically bade the sea retreat and then turned, with wet feet, to his supporters and said, "There, you see?: I can *not*, as you pretend, order the waves about," Scowleyow actually thought he *could* tell the sea what to do. Thus had his court magicians conned him. They had in fact, been able to bring off one or two little prestidigitations and on the basis of those the king was ready to believe anything of their power.

There too were the four magicians, one for each point of the compass, standing about a quadripod and adding pepper and salt to the saltpeter, sulphur, and dried newts' eyes which already smouldered in the pan. Now and again one cast a glance out to sea to see if anything was happening there.

The arrival of the coach crowded with enemies and relations provided a diversion. The king didn't know whether to flit or go blind. All these were people he disliked and had abused, with the possible exception of his daughter, or else people he *could* dislike and abuse but first he'd have to get to know them and you couldn't do that by incontinently ordering them cast in irons. He suffered them to approach.

The first that there did greet his stranger soul was Bert the Bird who flew to perch on the point of his sceptre and chirp, "Whatcha doin'?"

Scowleyow smiled. Can you imagine? No one in history had ever seen him do that before. It was magical how it softened and illuminated his face and brought out the beauty that all agreed it had possessed when he was young.

"Why, little bird," he announced genially, "I'm commanding the waves to roll back and reveal to me the figure of the great Cast Iron Man which my predecessor designed to conquer the land of Mo."

"Are you going to conquer Mo?"

"Not immediately, no. My first intention is to restore the figure and set it up as a monument in Scowlgrowl Park. Of course it would then be in working order in case I ever should need to conquer Mo."

"Oh, good. Can we watch?" requested Bert.

"Why, I suppose so. If you stay well out of the way and don't try to interfere." Here Scowleyow nodded grumpily at the others.

The newcomers had diplomacy enough to do as directed without a lot of blustering and accusations. They drew back a little toward the waiting coach and looked out to sea.

Nothing happened. The newts' eyes must have been a little off or else the saltpeter the magicians were using wasn't quite up to snuff (and they failed to think of using snuff). The grey sands continued to stretch away without being disturbed by any unscheduled ebb or flow of the tide.

People were beginning to cast uneasy glances from side to side or accusing ones at the magicians when suddenly, just when hope was out, there was a roiling, in the waters and a certain heaving of the billows and then the surface of the sea was broken by the apparition of a vast slime-smeared black shape, like a near-disintegrated ship hulk, rolling side over side out of the water and up onto the beach. The iron man! rusted into a nearly shapeless elongated mass. A loud cheer went up

from the several dozen spectators.

King Scowleyow looked vastly pleased, and the magicians looked amazed. They hadn't really expected their hocuspocus to work, any more than a priest, invoking in perfect faith a god, expects to see the deity descend and nod and beck.

One person in particular looked, and that was Jrumm the witch. She looked smug. Her magic was still potent then! It was, it seemed, only her power over the Princess and her group that had been circumscribed. Elsewhere the sorceress' gifts were untainted. Everyone ran to the recovered image to look it over. It was too heavy to lift so even King Scowleyow if he were going to give it a dekko had to shift himself and approach it. When he had nicked up a strand of seaweed to detach it from a huge half-decayed button on the iron man's coat, he turned to his magicians again and comma/ended:

"Well done: Now cause him to appear like new, and stand upright."

The magicians gasped, but thought quickly. "Oh, Your Most Potent Majesty! we have not brought with us here to the seaside our Remedies for Renewal or Specifics for Standing upright. We fear..."

"Hmph!" said the King. "What do you fear?"

"That," said the wonder-workers' spokesman, "the great figure must be transported back to the capital where, in our workshops—"

"Enough!" roared the despot, desperately disappointed after all. "Too much! What use to me is this great stiff slab of corroded metal? I wanted a walking talking Iron Man to call my own:" Scowleyow looked as if he might have begun to blubber if his anger had not exceeded his grief.

William (Speedy) Rapidan had been casting an expert's eye over the wreck. Now he dared to approach. Groveling most winningly on both knees he besought the king:

"Oh, mighty Tyrant!" (in the original Greek sense) "if I may counsel you?: give commands that the figure be, as your wise-men suggest, transported to the workshops. I have some knowl-

edge—of tool and die—that may serve you here. This know-how I put at your disposal, to further your noble aims.”

Thus unctuously flattered, Scowleyow extended his protection to Speedy Rapidan and thenceforward kept him as Favorite at court. Could it be that the old jerk was mellowing in his age and thus unwittingly evading the fate he up to now had been deserving? He had condescended to accept a whole two creatures in a day to be his protégés.

C H A N T E R F I F T Y - F O U R

The magician sages were at least able to arrange that wide-gauge tracks be laid down from the capital to the coast and a couple of flat-bed cars and an engine brought out of mothballs to haul the cast-rorn man to Scowlstead. Then Speedy R. went every day for several weeks to the Royal Factory and worked there with a willing staff of operatives bossed by the magicians, who wanted to prove that they could, in fact, do *something*^s.

From rusted black corruption the Iron Man slowly turned back into a viable flexibly-articulated figure of strong red iron and then, with chromium plating, into the same vast statue shining silver.

It/he was something to see! and King Scowleyow came to see him, attended by all his court.

Now things had not been standing still outside the workshops while all this was going on within. No, there had been showdowns galore between the ruler and his visitors, whom he half-grudgingly installed in the Guest Wing of the palace. The Princess, of course, stayed in her own Palace on the Park, and Bert the Bird often kept her company. But the Young Man and Fanciulla/Gureeda turned their backs on the farm-shed across

§ For a laborious description of just the processes involved, see the account of the construction of the giant Tilly-Willy in *Yellow Fog Over Oz*. Editor's note.



the fields and stayed with the King, in carefully separate rooms. So did Speedy and Sples and Omby Amby and the witch Jrumm.

The first face-off came the next day after the great Consummation on the Coast (as it went down in history). It began by with Jrumm's coming into the king's study bright in the morning (when he just might be expected to be in a good mood) and throwing her cards on the table. She invited the king to look them over. "You see?" she said. "All is discovered. These clever young people have forced me to reveal, contrary to the terms of your and my Non-Aggression Pact, that I am the rightful consort, though of the left hand, of Your Grace. Now there seems to be no reason any longer to keep up the fiction of the motherlessness of the good and beautiful heiress, the Princess.

"Impossible!" quoth the King. "I've gone way off you *went*

off you, ages ago. Anyway you know that I could not introduce as my Queen a former house-maid."

"Your Majesty could do anything," flattered Jrumm, though already again close to her threshold for top-blowing.

"In my eyes you would always stand as the pretty little slavey I'd seen dusting the bannisters and making the beds in the Palace of Magic."

So the witch *blew* her top: had a real orgy of calling royal Scowleyow both a coward and a caitiff, and more besides.

But luckily just then the Princess and Speedy walked in. The princess' parents suddenly simmered down. The king had no wish to appear in a disadvantageous light before his highly-reputed daughter nor yet his new favorite, the capable iron-works engineer. Jrumm for her part felt as much affection for her daughter as she could for anyone, which wasn't much. She felt obliged to give a calm cheerful greeting in return to that of the princess.

In fact the newcomers had not heard anything of the couple's quarrel. They took their mild speeches at face value. "Revered father," entreated the good and beautiful lady, trying to feel as warm to the kingly parent as she thought she ought to, "my dear William and I desire to be wed. But alas, as you know, there is an absolute obstacle: I am already married to another. Now I would ask of you most humbly: could you, would you declare a fiat of divorce affecting myself and the Young Man?"

A secret twinkle lurked behind the King's eye but he let nobody see it as he bent that eye (no easy feat) on the supplicant very gravely. "Hmm," he vouchsafed.

Jrumm saw her chance! The old goat, she thought, was going to refuse as usual, just to be contrary. It was his rule of life to be unpleasant at every opportunity afforded. She prepared herself with winged words that she would launch like arrows the moment the royal No had fallen.

But what? The regent was smiling! The gesture was getting to be sickeningly commonplace. He signed for the suppliants to take seats while he lectured them.

"I knew one day, my dear," he addressed his daughter, "you would repent of your haste in marrying that upstart. I provided for it. I never liked the presuming swineherd. If I may not marry chambermaids, you neither should mate with a farmhand. Thus much do we owe to our working-class background," said Scowleyow with amazing candor. "If we have climbed so high, let, us not, immediately begin to descend again.

"Did you not note," he went on, "that at that fictive wedding ceremony the groom did not place the ring on your finger three times?" (Y.M. had deliberately not been instructed to do so.) "Also the royal blessing was omitted. Surely you observed that lack? Ergo, the marriage is invalid. You have never been wed, my daughter!"

The Princess smiled brilliantly, despite having been tricked into living "in sin" for three years. But Jrumm railed inwardly and was more furious than ever. She'd been informed of those lapses at the nuptial ceremony and had been going to make delightful points with her child (she did after all desire such) by jumping in now and denouncing the King's duplicity. Foiled again!

"And so," Scowleyow was going on, "indeed! let a wedding be heralded. I shall give you. away once more—but this time for real—with all pomp."

"Oh—er, sir," dared Court Favorite Speedy to interject, "how is that going to work out? I'm working class myself..."

"Nonsense my boy," encouraged the King. "You have a university degree. That at a stroke wipes away the disablement of humble origins. It is the individual's own elective means to lift himself. Anyone may do it, and the product entitles him to stand with kings.

"As for your lack of royalty," sententialized the tyrant further, "happily you come from a republic. Such having no division of populace into royal and non-royal, every man is as much a prince as every other. In such a society other qualities must be evidenced to place one among the elite. You have shown talent, and affability sufficient to cause a princess to love you: some-

thing she never really did in relation to your rival. These qualities shall suffice for me. Let there be wedlock!"

'And then you'll be around when I want to send my Iron Man conquering,' thought Scowleyow, unregenerate.

C H A P T E R F I F T Y - F I V E

While plans went forward for the Princess' (real) wedding and Speedy toiled at the foundry laboratory, others came for interviews with the King. There were Gureeda and her ex-farm-hand. They wanted *carte blanche* to go to Umbrella Island, wherever it might be. Maybe Scowleyow could tell them?

No, he couldn't inform them about that, but take *carte blanche* and welcome to it! "Why you want to marry that jerk I can't imagine," confided His Highness. "But please do! Then there would no longer be any danger of having the Young Man in *his* family.

Gureeda was hurt. Naturally she wanted her admirer to appear in a favorable light with everybody. Perhaps he was a bit plebeian, a trifle peevish, a soupçon supercilious or social-climbing, but what of that? She had fallen for him for good the time he appeared as a gallant knight errant. She would never go back on that.

"You see, Your Grace," she said plaintively, "he isn't boastful or peremptory with *me*. He's sweet as he can be. Besides, he loves reading. That's a joy we'll always have for sharing. I can't wait to show him all the treasures on the library shelves at Umbrellia."

"Hmph," said Scowleyow, not much persuaded. "Should

think you'd rather go back to what I understand was your childhood boy friend, the likely Rapidan." (What was he trying to do? Break up another marriage for his daughter!?)

"Oh, Speedy's a dear boy," said the Umbrella princess with enthusiasm, "and I'll always be awfully fond of him. But there is that divergence of interests. He cares nothing, really, for books as literature, while I haven't a clue about mechanics. I think, for a lifetime's companionship, you have to have absolute compatibility, at least on the score of what you do for fun. Don't you?"

Scowleyow couldn't answer that, as he had never done anything for fun.

Then Omby Amby Battles craved an audience. The old soldier intrigued the king. He had been through the campaign of marriage to the woman Jrumm. He could relate plenty about how unpleasant that had been, thus reinforcing Scowleyow's own determination not to fall into the like trap. (It says something about the witch's forbearance that she even allowed this interview to take place.)

"But now, Your Magnanimity," finished Battles, "speaking of wives, I have a dear one at home and I would beseech you to allow—even to facilitate—my return to her."

"All in good time, my esteemed General," answered his majesty. "Surely you intend to be present at the wedding of our daughter and your good friend, Mr. Speedy."

"Oh, that, yes," Omby Amby reassured. "Therefore I pray you say: when is the royal day?"

"Just as soon as Rapidan is finished with the repairs to my Iron Man," promised Scowleyow. "Tomorrow, or next day. You can be sure I'm anxious for that fulfillment!"

It proved to be "next day" and then everybody who was anybody, and many who were not, trooped to Scowlgrowl Park to witness the unveiling.

C H A P T E R F I F T Y - S I X

Speedy had taken extra days over the reconstitution of the famous Cast-Iron Man because he wanted to introduce some finesses. He had been impressed, on hearing the story of the iron giants fate, at the dumbness of the original concept. Why dream up a juggernaut that could not be steered? It was a simple matter to string some wiring inside the great figure's hollow body and then with a hand-control panel be able to make it walk or stop, go straight forward or turn, to move fast or slowly, or even to pick up things in its great metal fists. If the man wasn't occupied flattening populations it might even be used to do the shopping.

A grandstand had been erected in the park and now everyone was gathered there. Even foreign dignitaries had been invited to witness this great day in latter Scowleyovian history. It was of course highly appropriate that the Monarch of Mo should come. After all, it was in order to crush him that the great construction had been created in the first place. The fact was that once characters and events had gone over into legend they were no longer bad or good but simply memorable. Thus it was that, in a later age, Western statesmen would attend the funeral of Emperor Hirohito or a Ronald Reagan emerge from retirement to play a featured role in The John Hinkley Story. It was

merely unfortunate that the Monarchess of Mo should inform her husband that she expected him for tea that afternoon and so he had to send his regrets. His Prime Minister sat in the front row at Scowlgrowl Park instead.

Then there were a dragon or two from the castle at Tweet and the Bumpy Man had come and Duchess Bredenbutta with a train of ladies had made the journey from West Credia. General Battles was particularly pleased to get visual confirmation that Her Grace had survived the flood on the Root Beer River a generation before. He sought and was granted permission to sit near the Duchess, who proved most kind and most condescending.

Bert the Bird had been given sanction to invite a flock of his old pals from the hills of southwestern Mo and their warbling and chirping provided a charming obbligato to the efforts of the Scowleyow Oompah Band. Some of Hrae stevrod's companions from the time of the Stable in the Forest had retained their transmogrified state as horses and they were brought to bear their comrade company. Those who had returned to the condition of mice came as mice.

The Grandmother of All Witches consented to make this one exception to her deep retirement. She was present in a seat of honor together with her husband. Sorceress Jrumm, resplendent in black and green velvet, hovered near them to be sure they had all they wanted. The two princesses with their fiancés were very much in evidence, although of course Speedy Rapidan only arrived when the Cast-Iron Man himself made his appearance. Meanwhile Saladin von Smith squired the beautiful and good heiress of Scowleyow.

Now, all in good time, here came the sweating engineer. Together with his team of artisans and the four court magicians (who wanted to get in on the credit), he loped in the wake of the great Iron Man along Iron Man Avenue. Cluck, plunk, went the vast iron feet, leaving rather ugly prints, boxcar-length, on the comparatively softer surface of the gold paving blocks.

Speedy manipulated the control panel and the giant docilely

turned in across the greensward and marched straight toward the assembled spectators. Some may have cowered a bit, recalling the fate of the previous population of Scowleyow, but Rapidan was a careful operative and his control wiring of the great figure reliable. The Man tamped to the ozyinium plinth that had been installed to receive him, stepped up, and took his stance on it. There he would stand forever (it said in the programme).

A great cheer went up, balloons were released, rattlers rattled, and penny whistles blown, while salvo after salvo of clapping stirred the welkin.

Just for a little joke, Speedy pressed a button and the giant Cast-Iron Man took a bow. Then it was all over but the shouting.

Or was it? Speedy, mopping his brow, stepped to the ceremonial chair of King Scowleyow. He knelt (he'd noticed what a favorable, mildening effect that had on His Highness) and, reciting a set speech, presented the control panel to the ruler. Most of the crowd from the grandstand came running to get a closer look.

The inventor was showing just which of the rather formidable array of push-buttons did what. It was all theoretical, of course. There was no prospect of anyone's ever again *using* the control. The great statue was simply to stand there forevermore, as a monument to Scowleyovian (and Long Island) ingenuity and know-how.

Still, there was great interest shown in just what the figure was capable of. Most of the buttons had been called into play just to walk the Man here to the park and all the others had been tested on trial runs. They had employed the great iron contraption to take up, in an easy afternoon's work, the tracks that, had taken many days to lay down between Scowlstead town and the seacoast. (Scowleyovians didn't want an ugly old railway permanently disfiguring the landscape.)

King Scowleyow was doing his best to memorize the buttons. Their functions were not inscribed on the panel. For him

the exercise was not all as theoretical as for everyone else. With a *controllable* iron giant as one's slave, what glories might one not achieve!

Witch Jrumm, unquenchable in her self-confidence, was equally interested in the workings of what struck her as being very close in nature to the magic she herself (with temporary limitations) practised. She crowded close for a better look.

Scowleyow turned in irritation at being jostled. Then he saw who it was. Curses! That infuriating ex-mistress again.

Suddenly the King had a brain wave. In his hand was the instrument for putting paid to this interfering and presumptuous creature's activities. Scowleyow was not a complete nitwit; he had taken careful note of at least some of the workings of the control panel that ruled the Iron Man. It was the work of an instant for him to motivate the colossal figure to step from the plinth and virtually run toward the royal chair.

Scowleyovians had learned through experience; hence very few of them got flattened as the giant tramped rapidly forward. Nor did the group about their royal overlord suffer, even though they did *not* throw themselves out of the path. Rather, they had time to reason that where the person controlling the iron man was to be found must be the safest location of all. They stayed where they were.

Onward heaved the colossus. Now Scowleyow worked other buttons. The giant's vast arms rose. The huge metal fingers flexed and unflexed. And then an arm swooped and snatched up the horrified witch Jrumm. Her green and black skirts fluttered as she rose, yelling, high is the air.

The King roared with glee. Quickly he pressed other buttons. But he must have fumbled in his selection of directions, for suddenly the other immense hand shot down and gathered up himself! Glee turned to terror, his roar to a shriek, and the king's own hands flew out in desperation, dropping the control device.

All the world stared in horrified fascination as the great figure, scarcely having paused, pursued its juggernaut course,

tramping energetically onward, right toward the heart of downtown Scowlstead, crushing and shattering houses as it went, to the accompaniment of the screams of King Scowleyow and of his once-favored woman friend.

C H A P T E R F I F T Y - S E V E N

“Well!” said everybody and dawdled, marveling, long enough that the iron giant was already out of sight before anybody picked up the control panel. That was Speedy. Quickly he pressed the “Turn around and come back” button. Then they all settled down to wait patiently.

Alas, the able inventor and tool-and-die man had not been able to think of everything. When he installed the remote-control wiring in the statue he did not suppose that the controlling was going to be going on as much as a mile remote from the automaton. At the giant’s jogging pace it would be all of that by now. This dawned clearly on Speedy Rapidan after just five minutes.

“Quick, Bert!” he besought. “Fly after them! Tell them not to despair. And—if she can—urge the witch to exercise her arts to get the Iron Man at least stopped. Meanwhile we’ll do all possible from this end... Good fella! Away with you then!”

Bert the Bird and all his kind rose in a cloud and made off to the northwest. With a beseeching speech already forming on his lips Speedy turned to the Grandmother of All Witches. But she, elusive lady, when the cheering stopped and she supposed the show to be over, had taken her Old Man and quietly departed for home.

Speedy grabbed people from the crowd and entreated them to fan out, and fast!, in all directions and overtake the old couple and, if possible, bring them back. But then he remembered who he was, or rather, who he wasn't. He turned, red-faced, to his dear Pat (somehow he kept on thinking of her that way), who naturally never left his side. "Sweetheart!" That is, Your Grace : pardon me! I've been usurping your functions. Of course you're regent now. You must be giving the orders."

The Princess smiled indulgently. "I'm afraid you're wrong, my dear. The Land of Scowleyow conforms to Salic law. The ruler of this country must be male. I have nothing to say, as by right, in the running of the kingdom. My role is strictly ceremonial."

"But then!" Speedy was at a loss. Who now, in this emergency, *was* in charge around here?

"But don't forget," warned the princess further: "The royal tree has left us other royal fruit! The King my father *has* a royal heir." And now the Princess in her turn looked around to beckon to her side her brother Hræ stevrod.

In her turn she was frustrated. There was no one of the old crowd to be seen but three foreigners standing left over as the gay holiday crowd dispersed noisily, talking over the surprising events of the day. "Fanciulla!" cried the Princess; by that name she would always think of the other Princess, Gureeda. "Sples! Omby Amby!..."

The three moved quickly in answer to the summons. They seemed agitated, by even more than moved the Scowleyovian princess and her consort-to-be. "Isn't it thrilling!" exclaimed Fanciulla-Gureeda. My splendid Y.M.! He *is* the gallant knight I loved!—and love. Did you see?"

"See what?" cried the Princess and Speedy together. "Y.M. has galloped off on the noble warhorse to follow the giant! It's so like him." Gureeda was right to find, and proclaim, the excellences of her chosen one.

"It's true." Smith and Battles backed her up. "They said to tell you but didn't want to lose time in leavetaking."

Speedy cased the situation in a twinkling. He turned again to his betrothed. "It's got to be you, my darling. There's no one else. Say what we're to do now."

The Princess was thoughtful. "They've all gone off toward the northwest, haven't they? I wonder whether — my Mother! — will be able to work her spells..."

Speedy broke in, seconded by Sples Smith. "Don't count on it! Drumm's is mostly manual magic, isn't it? I haven't seen her use a wand yet. But I did see how the iron man had hold of her with both her arms pinioned. If she can't use her hands...?"

"Northwest ... across the Shifting Sands. If nothing stops them, they'll come to Oz."

Pennies dropped all round the circle. "Of course! Ozma! She'll know what to do!"

"Yeah, but how are we going to let her know?"

"Don't forget!" It was the Princess of Scowleyow. "I've still got a wish or two left."

"Use it, girl!" commanded Speedy lovingly. "Use a wish for all you're worth!"

"You really think..." The Princess hesitated. But not for long. She had long since grown accustomed to believing that, whatever her husband-to-be Speedy advised was sensible and benevolent.

"All right then. Let's all join hands."

They did so. The good and beautiful Princess of Scowleyow took the hand of William (Speedy) Rapidan, her intended and beloved who gave his other hand to his dear companion of childhood days, the sprightly and bookish Princess Gureeda of Umbrella Island, who offered her remaining hand shyly to the dark and deep-pondering adventurer and one-time frogman Saladin von Smith, who grasped in firm grip the hand of the once briefly bold, now familiarly faint-hearted, Soldier with the Green Whiskers, who saw, at last within his grasp, the chance to return, in lasting peace and contentment, to his fond kind wife Tollydiggle in the Emerald City of Oz. He closed the circle with a hand to that of the expectant Princess. She wished.

E P I L O G U E

One of the great copper-studded, shagreen-covered, swing doors of the Council Chamber in the Palace of Magic opened noiselessly and two figures slipped out.

"Let them get on with it," spoke Speedy low.

"Yes. We've done all we can do," the Princess whispered back. She seemed content and under her breath she hummed a tune.

"What now?" said Speedy.

The Princess went so far as to articulate the lyric. She was trying to remember what it was she herself was humming. "...what makes it seem so inviting?, ..."

Speedy recognized it before the singer did. "Have you got a wish left?"

"Mm-hmm," breathed the young woman happily. "I think so."

Rapidan looked at his date watch. After all, it had only been five weeks.

He kissed a cheek and said, "It's still autumn in New York..."

Lund
17 August 1989—30 September 1990