

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

“Awk!!” squawked the white cat and leapt off her mistress’ shoulder to land not at all lightly on the entry-way mat and skitter under a bed two rooms away. “That awful old tramp!! What in the world is he doing here?!”

Eureka’s memory was good and she had no trouble at all in recognizing a man she had observed for ten minutes only from the ridgepole of Uncle Henry’s farmhouse the previous summer. She had (alas) had the memory drummed into her later that month when Dorothy was back from Oz and bragging about the adventures she had had in the company of the disreputable bearded wanderer.

But the man was changed! The clothes were shabbyish and the face whiskery enough to recognize, but even so! he certainly had come up in the world since he had appeared at the Mankato-Gale fence and begun chatting up her little (former) mistress. That hiking costume he wore was nothing like the tattered business suit of his first appearance. But though the face hair was much reduced Eureka would recognize anywhere the broad flattened nose and the bushy eyebrows. How in heaven’s name had the creature ever found his way here?

Curiosity was killing the cat. No matter how great her aversion to the wretched individual she *had* to know what was going on. Stealthily she crept from her place and insinuated herself along the skirting-boards until she could hear what was being said around the open door to the kitchen.

“—believe my ears,” the interloper’s voice was saying, “when the kind lady said I could take it with me!

“‘But this is too much,’ I protested. ‘That’s quite a valuable piece.’

“‘Oh, not really,’ she went on. ‘See, there’s a chip off it. And it’s been out of sight for years. My best-belov’d too thinks it is hideous’ though I’m not quite sure what she was quoting. ‘And maybe it will help you to find her.’

“I certainly couldn’t refuse—and didn’t want to! After the

THE CARELESS KANGAROO OF OZ

fantastic coincidence of coming to the very house where the animal I sought had taken shelter, it would be mocking fate to ignore this opportunity of carrying the search on to a successful conclusion if I could. All I had to do, we figured, was make my way on eastward, asking at every house that could possibly harbor a cat—”

“‘CAT’?” thought Eureka with a splutter of exclamation marks. ‘Is he talking about *me*?!!’ All she had heard so far seemed hauntingly familiar and the word “cat” left no doubt in her mind. But she was missing vital information.

“I resigned my little job as telegrapher and hit the road. I’ve been asking every person encountered for the last two weeks if they’ve seen a stray white cat—”

“And I had!” declared Miss Gulch in no uncertain terms. “So have you, by now. What do you think?”

“I don’t know, ma’am. I only got a glimpse. And as you know I’ve never seen Eureka—”

The eavesdropping cat nearly split. And indeed, she didn’t know whether to split or go blind. How thrilling: to have two adult humans disquisitioning about her fate. There was attention for you—and she adored it. But let her not be hasty: how could she best turn this situation to her advantage? and what did it all mean?

Certain facts were clear. The tramp she herself knew to be the one Dorothy had decamped to Oz with was back in Kansas and asking after herself. That could only mean the feckless Dorothy had sent him to find her, and *that* meant that she still cared.

Though she had stupidly left her pet behind she now wanted to make all right again. Was Eureka going to hold a grudge?

Well, no, she didn’t think she was. But what of Almira? The cat had just about decided to throw in her lot with her and become a witch’s familiar. Could she now just leave in the lurch the individual who had paid her most honor since her unceremonious abandonment by everyone else all those week ago? It would be hard. But Eureka thought of a way out. Let the woman herself decide! If she put up a scrap for her, why then, Eureka was con-

tent to stay. And if she didn't, it was nice to know some body was waiting for her in Oz (even if there, admittedly, they did not show her so much honor).

The cat gave a hasty lick to shoulder fur, silenced any form of verbalizing (no one was to know from anything *she* said whether she was pleased or vexed), and with tail erect stalked into the kitchen looking neither to right nor left. "Pretty puss!" said the woman.

"Eureka!...?" said the man The cat said nothing.

She did happen to glance up, however. What she caught sight of there made her instantly forget her objectives. Oh heaven! her darling friend of the Butterfield attic! And was it not winking its goggle eyes solemnly down at her? And was its pink bow not the prettiest thing she had ever seen? Eureka took one violent spring and was on the table-top next to her idol. She knew then that whatever should be its fate must be hers, too.

Polychrome was all a-tumble. Her mortarboard had fallen off and her draperies were tangled and blown in every direction in a way she had never achieved in even the wildest of her dancing dithyrambs. Luckily she had had forethought enough to hook her "diploma-case" around her neck and under her arm before boarding the rainbow, so that was spared to her now when all else was topsy-turvy and helter-skelter.

Now, incredible as it may seem, the rainbow's daughter had never been in a cloud before. The rainbow by definition is always in sunshine, though of course very close to where water vapor hangs in folds and gathers. In the mist she couldn't seem to find a foothold. She just kept plunging and lurching about, unable to see a thing but the lavender and blue and pink fog all about her.

Still, that couldn't go on forever. Polychrome never wore a watch, of course, and she was much too upset to think of counting by seconds, but still she had the impression that about an hour's worth of this pointless head-over-heeling had gone on when suddenly she fetched up against a smooth hard surface. Visibility inside the cloud was poor but she thought the surface was an undistinguished grey. Nor could she stand up on it. The direction of the pull of gravity seemed to indicate that the surface was a perpendicular wall.

It gave the girl something to do, however, to feel around on the surface, to let the swirling of the cloud vapor bear her this way and that, and so doing she came presently to an unevenness which proved in fact to be a window-sill. She gripped it in failing fingers and looked through the window.

Without its being dark beyond the pane she yet couldn't really make out anything. It was almost as if the opposite surface of the glass were painted the same color as the wall in which it stood. What if it was merely a false window! Oh, she couldn't bear that disappointment. She continued to stare distractedly into the glass (if glass it was).

Suddenly the window flew open, pushing her, as it angled

outward, back into the mist again, and a round moony voice cried, "My dear young lady! What in the moon are you doing there?!"

Poly was no more disconcerted than that she could keep her wit about her as she paddled dog-stroke fashion back through the fog and said, "Nothing in the moon. But in this cloud I'm trying to tell heads from tails. Where *am* I?!"

"Why, this is the control room of Sky Island." As she swam nearer Polychrome could see that a pale moon-face was speaking. "I'm the engineer. And who might you be?"

After having been invited to swim through the window opening and get her feet on what seemed solid ground again, Poly presented her credentials. To her surprise, once the window was shut the room seemed quite adequately lighted from some indeterminable source. She looked around her and was very much impressed. It was like being on the bridge of a ship (not that the rainbow's daughter ever had been aboard any vessel more complicated than a sand-boat). On each wall were instrument panels and information consoles and, aimed in the four directions, there were long spy-tubes: actually, periscopes, but Polychrome wasn't to know that.

The moon-face of her interlocutor was placed above a lanky nondescript body. At the ends of the angular arms were very capable-looking hands. One of these was holding the girl graduate's gossamer paper testimonials and the moony voice said, "Mmm, very nice. It's agreeable to meet a fellow initiate into arcane lore."

"Yes, and I know a lot about unusual subjects too," assured the fairy. It was almost as if she were standing for a job interview.

The engineer looked at her quizzically. "You've been very forthcoming about your origins," he said. "I can be no less. I am Ezra P. Tinker, late a resident of the moon[§], now pinch-hitting as driver of this aerial island. How may I serve you?"

Poly simpered agreeably and said, "Well, perhaps first it might be nice to have a sip of something or other. My struggles in the

§ See *The Man in the Moon in Oz*. Editor's note.

THE CARELESS KANGAROO OF OZ

cloud seem to have worn me out rather. If you happen to have any dew drops..."

"Well, no," regretted the man, "but I keep a few moon-cakes in this cupboard—" and he stooped to a little door close by.

The rainbow's daughter took a fragment of a crumb and found it to her liking. She nibbled down into the bland sweet clayey substance of a cake and seemed to enjoy it, until she was brought up short by the surprising presence of a hard-boiled egg. She pushed the plate genteelly a little aside.

The engineer was back at his spy tube and button panel. "And now?" he said, when he noticed his guest had completed her collation.

"All I really want is to get on home to the rainbow," confessed the maiden. "But I must admit I'm most intrigued by everything here. You mean this place is that doughnut-wrapped affair that sometimes on the rainbow we've seen floating by at a distance?"

"That would seem to be us all right," agreed the moon man cheerfully.

"How frightfully interesting," murmured the girl. "I'm full of the questions that must naturally occur to any newcomer here, like: How did such an aerial island get started? and why? And who lives here? And how do you decide which direction to fly in? And how do you propel it along?"

"Oh, dear me," laughed the engineer, "those are questions indeed! I'm afraid I can't answer the historical one. I'm really a stranger here myself. But I do know that Sky Island is a fairy country, so I suppose it must have been created at one time by the fairies. Why, or for what, is all unknown to me," he quoted. In his spare time he read the classics.

"—but the mechanical" he went on. "I can enlighten you there. Every day a message is sent down by the Pinks, telling me which direction to steer in.

"The Pinks?" queried Poly.

"Yes. You've noticed pinkish glints in the cloud? (as well as blue). The floating island is divided into two countries, a pink and a blue. The Pink people seem an intelligent race and take an

interest in the management of the island. The Blues are a surlier tribe but luckily are also far less alert mentally. Apparently they have never realized that the island is in fact dirigible, so at least we don't get any conflicting signals from them, for, alas, the Pinks and the Blues are great rivals, even enemies."

Poly looked solemn. "And what makes it go?"

"Oh, the island's air-borne all right. This huge band of cloud (known as the Magicianio Cloud) is magically constituted and acts as a vast doughnut-shaped balloon, carrying the whole thing along."

"How awful," shuddered the sunshine girl, "—I mean, to live in this fog all the time."

"That's why I have the windows taffeta-painted," explained Mr. Tinker. "See: according to which angle you look at them from you see a different and pretty, *sunny* scene. It's only when you look straight into the glass at right angles that you see what's actually outside. Usually that is only unvarying fog but today I was delighted to see *you* there."

Polychrome danced around the good-sized room, enchanted to discover that what she had thought was a colorful but static mural in fact shifted every instant as you moved past it, to reveal a thousand facets of different and charming landscapes. But always the narrow band *exactly* opposite your eyes showed the gloomy fog. She stopped. "But what about the poor Pinks and Blues?... Or do they live behind taffeta windows too?"

"Oh, dear, no. They live at either end of the island and those ends aren't cloud-covered at all. The cloud only envelopes about a third of the whole territory, right across the middle. Of course there are creatures living there too but they're such as love the damp and they don't seem to mind the fog."

The rainbow maiden sighed. "It's all been most fascinating, Mr. Tinker. But I suppose I had better be off and find the leader of these Pinks."

The engineer turned from his steersman's calculations and quizzed her. "Why do you want to see the Pinks?"

Polychrome stared. "Why, to get them to authorize you to steer

THE CARELESS KANGAROO OF OZ

us toward the rainbow again, so I can go back home.”

“Hmm.” Tinker turned back to his wheel. “I suppose you would want to go, wouldn’t you?... For just a bit I was thinking how nice it would be if you just stayed here.”

“Oh, Mr. Tinker...” By now Polychrome was getting used to human creatures falling under her spell. But she mustn’t forget her heart was already given. Slowly but surely she thought she was getting nearer to the heart that held hers and she mustn’t delay her progress now.

Wistfully the moon man showed her the door that opened on a spiral stairway climbing up and up through the substance of Sky Island. “At the top it’s to the right,” he said, and then he kissed her hand in farewell.

c h a p t e r t h i r t y - o n e

Princess Ozma had at last to go into conference with her mentor, the Sorceress Glinda. For moral support she took along her house magician, the wizard Oz, who was on his way to becoming quite a clever magic-worker himself, though of course he knew nothing about *fairy* magic. The day was never coming when the Wizard would turn into a fairy!

They traveled by Sawhorse-drawn red wagon and were at the Pink Palace in time for late lunch. "The rainbow maidens were quite overwrought," said Ozma over the broccoli soup. "I quieted their fears as best I could, but I really didn't know what to suggest. The problems are beginning to pile up. It was bad enough with the complications caused by the new pall of invisibility—"

"Yes," put in Glinda, "I'm afraid we were a bit premature with that. You and I actually never even conferred about the measure before I just up and did it. But I must tell you, my dear, I was so sickened and disgusted by the idea of so much nastiness invading Oz—"

"You refer, of course, to those Whimsies and Phanfasm and things, your grace?" inserted the Wizard, just for the record.

"That's right. We have some pretty peculiar peoples living in Oz itself," said the sorceress, "but they're small potatoes: pesky but not really dangerous. But those Erbs are genuinely evil. It was unthinkable that they be allowed to circulate freely in Oz—and I'm afraid I *didn't* think, I just concentrated my powers and brought down on Oz the heaviest spell I was capable of—"

"Entirely understandable," broke in Ozma fervently. "Just what I would have done myself. You have nothing to reproach yourself for, my dear. Only now we must undo the enchantment—"

"We can't."

"What?"

"I'm more sorry than I can say. The spell was a Three-Year Spell."

"Oh, dear," gasped Ozma, who knew what that implied.

THE CARELESS KANGAROO OF OZ

“Exactly. With such powerful formulas as I invoked, the magic *cannot* be undone. All the magic in fairyland would blow its fuses if any such thing were attempted. There is only one consolation. At the end of the three years—actually a thousand days, to be quite exact the spell self-destructs. More than being simply revocable, it passes away of itself. After that it must be *reinvoked*, if need be.”

“Oh, Faerie forbid,” cried Ozma. “These sideeffects are much too troublesome to be coped with! We must simply employ the thousand days to think of some *other* way to keep undesirable elements out of Oz.[§] But for now: what are we to do? Ozites are disappearing over the border and never being seen again. Their friends are starting to panic. We can’t Just leave them out there...”

“And there’s no way to locate them,” added the Wizard, “even if we could employ some form of long-range retrieval.”

“There’s only one ray of hope,” said the red witch thoughtfully. “Oh, pardon me a moment—” The fairy-phone was ringing. She opened the window at her elbow.

The fairy-phone service operates for all fairies by means of any bell-shaped flower. The blossom is both speaking-tube and receiver. You “dial” by speaking into it and are at once connected with the bellflower nearest your desired interlocutor. Others can by invitation be initiated into the secret of receiving fairy phone calls but only a fairy can *place* a call. The witch Glinda was such an initiate and all the morning glories and columbines and nasturtiums that twined around her palace walls were hooked up to the system.

“Lurline!?” the sorceress was heard to exclaim. She gestured imperatively for the others to carry on eating. “What a marvelous coincidence! We would probably have been trying to contact you ourselves in about ten minutes. Who? Yes, she’s right here, You’ve been trying to get through to her?... Well, if we need to phone back I’ll get her on the line: as a fairy— Yes, we’ve heard about what happened to Poly. That’s one of the things we’re in con-

§ For how other means were tried—and failed—see *The Ten Woodmen of Oz*.

ference about.. Yes, Ozma told me. Sky Island. Well, how splendid! Now surely she'll have presence of mind to communicate with you... No! I hadn't thought of that. But obviously, it's the perfect solution! Yes, of course, as a fairy and as a fairy country — Yes, exactly... But what luck that she studied with you. I'm afraid that's another dumb law that managed to get on the books: no magic in a fairyland!... But of course not: it wouldn't apply to her. She's not an Ozite and she's not in Oz... But *what* luck! Now it all depends on Polychrome. Well, wish her luck from us. Thanks so much for calling, Your Fayship. We'll be in touch..."

Glinda hung up—or anyway let the flower go. It trembled into silence. "That was Fairy Queen Lurline," she said a bit redundantly.

c h a p t e r t h i r t y - t w o

“Magic?” said Almira Gulch, “Tell me more. And do have another slice of cake.” She pushed the commercial coconut cake towards the Shabby Man. She couldn’t understand why but she thought this was the most delightful old codger she had ever seen. She felt she could deny him nothing.

“Well, yes, in my travels I’ve seen a great many things and I can assure you: magic does exist.”

“You don’t say? Magic, ey? And would that be anything like—er, witchcraft?” Almira had some little sneaky designs of her own.

“Yes, indeed,” assured the Shabby Man. “Some witchcraft is very respectable—and almost as strong as ‘real’ magic. I’ve seen all sorts.”

“Oh, of course it’s the respectable sort I meant. Do you—er, happen to be able to *do* any magic?”

“Well, no, not personally. But I’ve seen a lot of it done,” the man bragged, exaggerating even to the point of falsehood. “I think I’d almost be able to tell by watching whether a spell or a charm was being done properly.”

“Oh, you would? Mm, how interesting. And having seen so much magic, you don’t, I take it, object to it in principle?”

“Oh, goodness, no,” affirmed the visitor.

“Or—er, witchcraft?”

“Why, no,” said the same man, perhaps not quite so affirmatively but thinking of all the benevolent enchantments of Glinda the Good and possibly also of the innocent tricks of the Wizard of Oz.

“I’m glad to hear you say that,” admitted Miss Gulch. “You see, I’ve taken up a new hobby, since I retired and moved over here to the river. It helps to pass the time. I was hoping to have the assistance of this naughty creature—” Here she roguishly pulled the tail of the white cat that curled around the statuette of a pug dog. The cat growled indulgently. “But seeing you’re the associate—almost—of magicians, that’s even better.

“I’ve been wanting to try an experiment. I think I’m almost

ready for it. And the dealer I order from in Kansas City says the ingredients are guaranteed to work.”

“What experiment do you have in mind?” said Shag complacently, pretending interest. Actually, now that he’d found Eureka he was impatient to be away back to Oz. But there was not that great a rush. Besides, he had somehow to lure the cat a way from its de facto possessor. It might be a good idea to see if the old woman had any actual—er, witchcraft that might be a factor that would have to be reckoned with.

“Now you won’t be shocked at what I’m going to propose?” the woman wheedled, almost simpering. After all, what she had in mind would be strictly illegal—if legislators had enough imagination to believe it were possible.

“Oh, I’m sure a fine woman like you wouldn’t be planning to do anything wicked,” flattered the Shabby Man grossly.

Miss Gulch was just vain enough to be able to accept the assurance as genuine. “Well, I’m going to try—no, let’s sleep on it! I’ll need all evening ‘til late in the night to get ready. You’ll see tomorrow. I’ll make you up a bed on the sofa, and in the morning—”

“Not too late?” The Shabby Man had a sly purpose of his own that he likewise was not going to reveal untimely. It had to take place at noon.

So that’s what they did. The wanderer enjoyed a real indoors night for a change. The horsehair sofa was no slicker or more overstuffed than that he could rest quite well on it. Then a session in the bathroom allowed him to appear even a notch or two less shabby when he reported for breakfast.

Eureka had spent the night on the kitchen hearth still curled around the base of her favorite figurine. Now she stretched in a dozen awkward postures and then was ready to eat something from the curds bucket.

Miss Gulch was the least well-rested and composed. She wasn’t well-rested at all and her grey hair stuck out in unsightly wisps and straggles. She tended to be snappish and the visitor got a glimpse of what the old Miss Gulch had been like before she

THE CARELESS KANGAROO OF OZ

mellowed.

“Do your own breakfast!” she commanded roughly. “An old knockabout like you knows how to fry a bit of bacon over a fire, I’ll be bound. There’s everything you want in the ice chest. I’ll be busy in the next room,” and without more ado she re-entered the mysterious pantry and slammed the door.

The Shabby Man looked at Eureka and winked an eye gravely. “You won’t be sorry to leave a tyrant like that, will you?” He thought the old woman was playing into his hands. He didn’t know feline motivations were not the same a human’s. Eureka never minded what people *said*; it was what they *did* that counted. Almira Gulch had taken her in and coddled her; Dorothy had abandoned her. It was by no means certain which way the cat would jump.

The slices off that flitch of bacon tasted good and the Shabby Man wasn’t worried. Every day at noon, Ozma had said. He just had to pick up Eureka round about eleven-fifty-five and hold the magnet clearly visible in his hand. And just in case anything missed fire there was the wishing pill.

Why not give better than you got though? When the fixings were all ready Shag knocked at the stillroom door and called, “There’s a nice plate of bacon and mush for you here!” before anybody could bite his head off. And when still no one did, “And a hot mug of coffee,” he added.

The door perked open, hands grabbed the plate and sup from the floor, and the door shut again, though not actually slammed this time.

It was about ten-thirty when the pantry door finally opened for good. Eureka had spent the time purring and sleeping beside the china statuette, Shag in twiddling his thumbs and humming the new hit number “Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life”; he had to keep his voice in trim and now was a very good time to practice.

“Oh, there you are!” said Miss Gulch, now all smiles and even with her hair tucked roughly into place. “Thanks for my breakfast,” and she slid plate and mug into the tin wash-tub. Something seemed to have gone well, to produce this geniality.

“Er—how are you, ma’am?” said the Shabby Men hesitantly. “And now we’re to have the treat of seeing a sample of your—er, witchcraft?”

“Quite so,” said the woman archly. “I’ll need your presence for it. Step this way. But first! Well, I must tell you: I’m planning to bring something to life... Ha-ha! that surprises you? Still, I can but try. Might as well be hanged for a sheep as a goat. But what shall it be? Not that it matters. It’s whether I can do it, not what it happens to, that counts. There! that dog: bring that along. I don’t suppose Madam Puss will mind if her great love comes to life.” Miss Gulch cackled very like the proverbial beldam as she led the way into the swept and dusted and oh, so peculiarly arranged stillroom.

c h a p t e r t h i r t y - t h r e e

"It's been a long time since we've been heard from, hasn't it?" said the wogglebug.

"Well, there was nothing to hear, was there?" agreed the quiet kangaroo. "Anyway it's not as if Princess Ozma had a magic phonograph that would play whoever's sounds one wanted to hear."

"Hmm. No. But that's an idea. A sort of companion piece to the Magic Picture, you mean? I might work on it with the Wizard when—or rather, *if I ever* get back to the Emerald City."

"But I suppose Ozma *has* been seeing us—in the said picture..." pursued the kangaroo.

"Oh, yes, I've told you that before. According to my estimate of the situation she will continue—now this sounds paradoxical, I know—to be able to sight everything that's invisible. That is: everything that is subjected to the same magic-induced invisibility as the land of Oz itself, which includes Ozma *herself*, and the magic picture, and everybody in Oz, and everybody that may have strayed out of Oz. But she can't see anything visible, that is, everything out in the world beyond the spell of invisibility. Ergo, she can see us; she just can't see where we are. And without being able to get a 'fix' on us she can't transport us back to Oz."

"Oh, dear, oh, dear," sighed the crestfallen kangaroo. "So it's back to yet another month's leaping and crawling?"

"Well, I can fly occasionally," reminded her companion, "just for variety. But yes, by and large, it's just crawling and leaping. Unless somebody somewhere comes up with a good idea."

Now as it happened, somebody had come up with an idea. It stands to reason that the whole of Faerie was not going to stand by with folded hands and indefinitely do nothing in the face of this awkward situation that had settled down over one of the most important fairylands in the business. After what seemed an infinity of time—and was—the weary and utterly bored crawler and hopper saw something other than the sporadic bird, or group thereof, that flapped across the colorless sky. They saw something *else* in the sky.

"Mar! do stop a moment," cried the sharp-eyed insect. "Do my eyes deceive me or is that an island up there?"

It *was* an island, hazy, indistinct at first, looking very much like a stylized representation of Saturn: a flattish disc projecting horizontally from a round shape wrapped about it and extending up and down above and below it. When the apparition got nearer the vertical part resolved itself into a cohesive but distinctly cloud-like shape, while the lateral bit looked like a floating millstone.

The two earth creatures just gawked as the aerial island drifted nearer. There was an oddly hesitant atmosphere about it; it seemed to hover from side to side; if it had been a sentient creature, one would have said that it seemed to be looking for something.

Well, that's what it was doing: At least, that's what an eye inside its pilot's cabin was doing. Suddenly the eye caught sight of our invisibility-bound wanderers and a hand connected with the eye caused the island to steer directly towards the pair.

Now the two on the invisible ground could see faces: healthy pink faces lying above and at the edge of a grassy bank and peering down at them. "Hurrah! hurrah!" the heads could be faintly heard shouting. "The first ones! Be quick and let down the ladders!"

Now rope ladders were slung down from the green-rimmed verge of the island. The ends of them dangled a hundred yards out of reach. That didn't bother the wogglebug, who took a long skittering start and raised himself on his brown-striped wings and circled high and higher into the sky until his erstwhile companion saw him disappear over the edge of the high-flying body of land. She felt awfully much alone, did the cast-off kangaroo. No way could her highest bounds bring her within reach of the rope-ladder ends that tantalized, still a hundred feet above her. Nor if she could have caught the rope rungs could she have held on by her weak little forepaws or mounted higher.

But the end was not yet. Now she saw, oh, so far away and wavering star-like beyond the rim of floating earth, an angel face, a glowing hand that waved a shining wand. Then the kangaroo

THE CARELESS KANGAROO OF OZ

felt her mind plunked like an all-enveloping cord of a violin. When the reverberations died she found she was standing in a field of rosy clover and a young woman with a merry smile was saying, "That's better. You're safe now. Your cares are over. I think you are the questing kangaroo of Oz. My name is Polychrome. I am the Rainbow's Daughter."

c h a p t e r t h i r t y - f o u r

With her wand case round her neck, leaving her arms free, the daughter of the rainbow mounted higher and higher. The floating island on—or rather in—which she found herself was of considerable lateral extent: big enough to contain two small independent countries plus an intervening sort of no-man’s-land, but it was not very thick. It needed to contain no mountains and only one very shallow lake, with rivers flowing into it that were scarcely more than a few feet deep. Still, one didn’t want heavy inhabitants (a giant frog king, for example) putting a foot through the crust of earth and exposing the mockery of the confection, so the island was as much as a mile thick in places. Just where Poly was climbing the thickness was about half that.

Dim light came from somewhere and when the maiden reached the top she found a glass door facing out on the fog. She was still within the region of the island-girdling cloud, but she had her instructions. She emerged on a damp and squelchy path and took the turning to the right. In about half an hour she came out of the fog into a pretty landscape where everything was pink.

The mist maiden clapped her hands in delight. For the first time since she had parted from her fairy mentor Lurline all those hours before she felt she had a grip on things. Perhaps she might make it home before dark after all.

There she was premature, however, in her hopes. She had the litigious and procrastinating nature of the Pink people to deal with first. The place where Poly emerged from the cloudbank proved to be right at the central point of the Pinkland frontier. She had been lucky in encountering in the region of fog no furious frogs or tiresome turtles but now, safely out in the sunshine as she was, her luck ran out. Marching away from her toward the Pink City was the invisible but fiercely fought-over front line in a war between the Sunrise tribe and the Sunset tribe. Pink mud pies were hurtling back and forth and Poly had completed no more than a few delighted dance steps when a pie caught her in the back of the neck and brought her up short.

THE CARELESS KANGAROO OF OZ

“Ha, ha! a spy!” yelled some rabid voices and a detachment of rednecks ran out of what Polychrome had supposed was an idyllic rose-colored copse nearby.

The rainbow girl was on the verge of tears as she dabbed ineffectually at the mud that spattered her hair and shoulders. “No. I’m not!” she cried indignantly as the angry-hopping Pinks surrounded her.

“Who are you then?” asked one who seemed to have appointed himself spokesman, and the others stood in a circle, knuckles on hips, and made like a tribunal.

“I’m a rain—” started the girl, then checked. With her new university training and graduate fairy’s degree she was beginning to know to be circumspect. It might come in handy in a moment to be able to reveal herself as of another profession that that of rainbow maiden and she didn’t want to have disqualified herself by already having claimed a social niche that might be of no value.

“Yes?” shrieked the Pinks. “You’re a what?”

“That’s my name. I am Lady Ima—” lied the quickly cerebrating girl. Having gone so far, she took the bit in her teeth and began to fantasize wildly. “Reigning Spirit of everything moist upon this island. It has come to my attention that you have been taking my mud in vain and I am much displeased...” Oh, if only she could get her hands on her wand, she would show these raving red-necks what was what. But the wand case was at her back; it also grossly besmirched by these wretches’ projectile, she had no doubt. She must play for time until she could get at it with dignity.

“First, I shall require you to fetch sponges and remove from my draperies the traces of your handiwork. Afterwards I must be borne is state to the presence of your ruler, where I shall inform her what is to be your fate.”

Splat! A rich red pie hit Poly on the forehead and another her knee. Before she knew what was happening the ring of rednecks had jumped her and pinioned her arms. Sponges and state carriages were forgotten as the rainbow’s daughter with scant ceremony was hustled off to spend her first night in a pink prison.

Needless to say, in the visitation of her person the wand case with its precious contents was taken away. So was the two-way wrist radio. Well-educated as the girl graduate was (and able to sense keenly every indignity offered her), magically Poly was powerless without her wand.

She spent a dreary two weeks in jail, until the tide of battle in the Mud Mutiny turned. Polychrome was not quite sure whether her captors were of the Sunset or the Sunrise tribe. What difference did it make? The whole conflict was so trivial. What it amounted to was that a quarrel had broken out because the Sunrise bunch wanted the ruler of the Pinks to direct the island pilot so to steer and tip Sky Island that it should always, throughout the daylight hours, appear to be dawn. Naturally, when the Sunsetters got wind of the scheme they protested and, not content even with having things remain as they had always been, required that the island be so directed that it should always seem to be sunset. The exchange of mud pies (there was no proper munitions industry on Sky Island) on the frontier between the two regions was the result.

The insurgent Sky Islanders of the opposing force (be they of the ilk of Sunrise or Sunset) stormed through the streets of the village liberating right and left. When they came to the jail they found a pretty girl crying in a corner and raised her to their shoulders, making her their goddess of freedom for the nonce, and stuck a liberty cap on her head. "But wait!" cried Polychrome. "I can't go without my personal effects!"

"What personal effects are those?" said a redhead who had been denominated ringleader.

"Well, there's a stick I always carry, and a sort of an etui to carry it in. And then I had a nice bracelet I wore for luck. Can you find them anywhere?"

As it turned out, they could. In a drawer in the desk in the jailmaster's office, carelessly slung, were the objects mentioned. The rainbow maiden's captors had not seen any virtue in the wand nor beauty in the "bracelet" (it *was* more functional than strictly pretty) and, for want of a wastebasket, had thrown them

THE CARELESS KANGAROO OF OZ

in the drawer.

The spokesman handed Poly the magic wand—just like that: as easily as that. She no sooner had it in her hands than she recited a spell she had had a whole fortnight to get word-perfect. At once all the side that had set her free were made heroes and all the side that had jailed her dropped dead. Well, not really, but they were dead ducks as far as the Mud Mutiny was concerned. Her liberators were declared the winners and herself the glorious heroine of the day.

Away they marched to the Pink City, with Polychrome urging them on like Delacroix's Liberty, though with draperies safely up to her chin, and the defeated Sky Islanders bound to the victors' chariots, either pulling them or being dragged behind them in the mud.

The Pink City was neutral. The citizens didn't much care what quarter of the sky the sun was in but they did mind the island going around in circles. When the victorious tribesmen arrived and went to the humble dwelling of the country's Girl Ruler, she praised them highly for winning the war but regretted that she was unable to give them the palm. Not only did the losing side object to its always being sunset (or whatever) but so did the Pink Citizens. It was two against one. What to do?

"Oh, for someone really wise," sighed the ruler, "to decide this weighty issue. Or anyway someone with a law degree..."

"I've got one of those!" exclaimed the delighted Polychrome. "Wait a minute. I'm almost sure why, yes, of course, I had Law as my major minor at R.C.O. I'm sure I've got a diploma in that." She turned out her wand case, into which she had stuck her various entitlements from the Royal College as well as her gossamer degrees from the Fairy Lurline.

"Here it is!" The rainbow girl passed around the paper for everyone to see. Then an awed silence fell over the crowd that filled the hut room. The Ruler of the Pinks got up from the kitchen stool which was her throne and indicated that Poly should take her place there.

The Rainbow's Daughter smoothed down her ruffled draper-

ies and tried to appear grave like a lady lawyer. Oh, how she regretted the loss of her mortarboard at that moment. Then she spoke:

"The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven,
And when it doth a rainbow oft appears,
Creating beauty out of sorry tears.
So let it be among you. Peace! I say,
And where you warred let friendship hold its away.
As for the rise and setting of the sun,
I here declare it must be half and half:
The sun may mount until the stroke of noon.
Beyond that time allow it to go down.
Remember too that half one's goal achieved
Is better far than strife and loss of all.
Obey my counsel and—you'll have a ball!"

The crowd around all exhaled with satisfaction, and then a deafening cheer was raised and Poly was hoisted high and borne in triumph through the city streets.

"What brilliance! What wisdom!" everyone said. "Whenever in future we have a problem the Rainbow's Daughter, Lady Ima, the Raining Spirit, must solve it."

"Yes, and so simple too. The situation now is just like it was before the war."

"Exactly! Such genius!"

c h a p t e r t h i r t y - f i v e

“Hello, central? Get me Sky Island!”

Fairy Queen Lurline tapped a toe impatiently.

“What?! Not on the line?... Oh, of course! How stupid of me.” The queen let go of the tiger lily and turned to Ozma and Glinda. “How idiotic. I forgot what I was about. Naturally there’s no fairy-phone connection with an aerial island. I was supposed to be keying my wrist wireless!”

Belatedly Lurline did as she ought. While she waited, “Do you girls have these?” she enquired, briefly waving her wrist at the others.. “Never mind. I’ll send you each one... Hello, Polychrome Rainbowsdaughter? Is that you? Well, at last! Where have you been? I mean, where has your wrist been? I mean, where has your radio been?! Oh. I’m so rattled. I’ve been trying to get you for weeks now—well, days anyway. Listen, dear, something’s come up. I’m in conference with these people at the Emerald City... ‘Who?’ Wait a second. You there sorry, darling, what’s your name? Ozma! Yes, exactly and her friend... Oh, you know: that witch that lives in the South. Yes. Well, we’re worried silly. You know that ridiculous spell they cast over Oz—You don’t?! Well, of course, you wouldn’t; as a fairy you’d pass right through and never notice. But anyway they’re at their wits’ end—me too, of course, but I got to that state even sooner. I’m no good in a crisis, you know that. But the thing is: Oz is now invisible—to everybody except fairies. Radio and telegraph waves still get through; the thing only affects *sight*. Well, Ozites are beginning to disappear left, right, and center. We’ve got to retrieve them somehow but the way this spell works we can’t see where they are any more than the outside world can see into Oz... Yes, I could, of course! but, Great Fays, I’ve got to get back to Burzee, I can spend time flying around the whole of Sempernunquam looking for stray bobolinks that have wandered out of Oz. I’ve got a waiting list of artisans that need to get asses’ heads attached. But listen, dear: we realized you’d got ravished away well, obviously not literally!—by this floating island, and then it struck me: *you’re a fairy and*

you've got a brain in your head, and you're on this fairy island — Yes, of course we made it! Ages ago; I forget why. But it's the perfect thing. Being fairy it's not affected by the enchantment, so from up there you can see everything Oz and not-Oz. Now what I want you to do is fly around and pick up anybody you see wandering in the deserts. Never mind about the birds; they'll fly to *you* as soon as they see you... What? Oh, well, put her on. Hello, is that the Ruler of the Pinks: This is Fairy Queen Lurline... Well, no, I can't prove it; you'll just have to take my word for it. I want you to let Polychrome be in charge for a while— 'Who?'?! Why, that girl that put you on to talk to me... No, of course her name's not 'Ima'. She must be stringing you a line... Well, maybe she's traveling under an incognito. Anyway, I want you to let *that girl* be in charge of where the island goes for the next few weeks.. Now let me talk to Poly again. Polychrome? Whoever that was seems to think your name is Ima. Well, never mind. Now here's the list of people you're to look out for. Got a pencil? Professor H.M. Wogglebug, T.E. Oh, you do? Yes, of course! Funny thing: apparently he was looking for you when he got lost. Then there's the Good Witch of the North, some villagers from Oogaboo, Prince Tollydiddle of Doodlefump, two Yips, a kangaroo named Marguerite Supial, etc., etc... Got that? Now that part should be fairly easy. But the next bit is tougher. It seems they made an exception to the invisibility thing and one resident of Oz was let out—with his ex-Oz visibility intact. It's been weeks now. They were expecting him back much sooner. They can't do any checking up because of course this Magic Picture effect the Queen here has got won't work now. I know it's the proverbial needle in the stack but there *are* some clues. He's supposed to be in the vicinity of Kansas... 'Who?'? Wait a minute.. Yes, that's right: it's somebody called 'the Shaggy Man' ... Hello, Poly? Hello-hello!... What?!... Well, how extraordinary..."

Queen Lurline turned to her on-hearers, looking very puzzled. "They say Polychrome has fainted."

The Shaggy Man and Eureka the cat staggered from the clapboard-house scullery, coughing and sneezing, gladder but scarcely wiser, and needing fresh air badly. After them limped a little china dog. No one else followed. Almira Gulch was too busy doing an Indian war dance of triumph.

She had brought it off! She the formerly richest woman in Tolaworth county (until that wretched bank failure), had gone on to new glories! She was a practising sorceress! She had hardly dared hope so much but the bringing-to-life had gone like a charm. Well, it *was* a charm, and P. Potter Porter's packets and coils of wire and fuses had *worked*—not a little helped by her own dexterity, of course. She probably had the gift, as others had green thumbs or could see auras.

Meanwhile the stench was pretty overpowering. Those purple and grey powders had burnt with a dreadful smoke. She could hardly see what she was doing. And it probably wasn't doing her any good to remain here in the residue of the escaping fumes.

She passed through the kitchen and out into the garden. The tramp was just standing there by the gate, looking a big bemused, with a cat under one arm and a dog under the other. Also he was holding in one hand—what was it?; it looked for all the world like a small horseshoe-shaped magnet. What was he up to? But she must say, he did seem attractive; she couldn't think why. Anyway, she certainly was going to join him.

Miss Gulch walked forward and put her hand comfortably under the Shaggy Man's elbow with its resident cat.

At that the man started back and seemed to come put of his sort of trance. "Oh, no! you mustn't do that!"

Miss Gulch was hurt. "I thought you'd be pleased! You said you take an interest in magic. Have you ever seen better vivification than that?!"

"Oh, er—no. It was splendid. You—er, did very well," stutered the tramp, strangely vague in his wording. What was the matter with the fellow?

The new-baked sorceress had an idea. "You weren't by any chance thinking of making off with my familiars?" she said insinuatingly.

"Er—no. Pardon me, can you tell me what time it is?"

"What?!" Miss Gulch Looked at her bosom watch. "Seven minutes past twelve. What do you want to know that for?"

The visitor turned actually pale. For a moment he didn't say anything. "I—er, miscalculated. Something hasn't gone the way I thought." Then, as if suddenly a full realization of matters had come over him, he launched out in a most un-Shaggy-Man-like attack. "Oh, you wretched woman!" he yelled. "It's all because of you! If only I'd bided my time patiently. But no, I had to be altruistic—and now I'm stuck here forever!"

Miss Gulch's hurt and anger changed abruptly to alarm. The man was mad! She'd better see to barricading herself in her house. *What* luck that he had elected to be out of it. She turned about and fled along the garden walk. Oh, but wait! what about her familiars? She couldn't leave them in the clutches of the fiend! She cast a hasty glance back but saw the Shaggy Man glaring after her with a really terrifying look of desperation, his face all red and his always protruding eyes quite popping. That was enough. Almira Gulch rushed through the door and bolted it. Then she peered from the kitchen window to see what he would do next. She found she was quivering with apprehension. Would he set fire to the house in his weird inexplicable fit of rage?

What she saw was her erstwhile visitor turning, in his turn, and blundering through the gate and making off at a lurching run across the fields toward the west.

Oh, what a horror of betrayal, despoliation, an abandonment! felt Mica Gulch at that sight.

She threw herself down at the kitchen table and wept as if her heart would break.