

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

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

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

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

gleamed emerald-like.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Do stop," Poly urged him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Shh!” said Jack Pumpkinhead, afrighted. “Don’t even say such a word in Oz, Betsy.”

“‘Opium’? Why not? It’s quite a pretty and fascinating word.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Okay, Your—what would that be: Araotion?"

"You may call me 'Your Regency'," you graciously decreed, "just as I shall call myself 'My Regency'."

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

"Tell him to bring his forces and meet me presently—at Baynard's Castle," you intoned.

"Where?!"

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

“Right, Your Regency,” acquiesced the bird. “As for his ‘forces’, which are those?”

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

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

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

“I don’t suppose you’d be passing the Tin Woodman’s?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Oh, no,” assured the book’s proprietor. “The dear old thing just tells what, never why.

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

did this mysterious garden you speak of come from?"

"Come from'?" you stuttered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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dream of getting to Oz some time.

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes?" said Glinda imperiously.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"My keys!?" ejaculated the great enchantress.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Cup of coffee?" she said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

in the sink in pure concentration.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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with certain of the visitors.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why, go there!"

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

"Well, I could get bigger!"

"How're you going to do that?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Glinda quoted the exact wording.

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

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

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earlier exposition that would explain a lot.”

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

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

“Sa-a-a-an Fra-a-a-an-cisco!” hummed the Woozy.

“Why do you hum like that?” said the Sawhorse.

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

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

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

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

“That’s ‘Abrog’ spelled backwards,” informed the Woozy in an aside.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The animal posse walked on.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

His three words proved fatal.

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

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

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

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

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

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