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

There it was at last: the most haunting garden in the world. It was evening: just the right time to see it first. The night could hold a thousand charms but perhaps *most* charming was blue evening, as vapor trails, shooting day stars in reverse, climbed straight up the western sky, a faintest yellow-azure.

Somehow it seemed right too, to arrive by umbrella. The concentration of life in the air was so dense that the bumbershoot was long since talking to you and giving out a running commentary on scenes flown over. It seemed a very knowledgeable bumbershoot. Being pure magic, it knew everything, I guess. Anyway it was giving the Sand Man a run for his money as guide.

"It's a star garden, I see," stated the umbrella, whose name, new-minted but full-fledged, was Fleg.

"How do you figure that?" demanded the Sand Man proprietorially. "I fancy it yclept 'sky garden'."

"'Sky garden'?" mused Fleg. "That's a contradiction in terms, isn't it? A garden by definition must have earth in it for things to grow. Earth in the sky, which of course is no very rare phenomenon, would rain right out of it at the first downpour. And if you sowed sky in earth it too, by definition, wouldn't be sky any more—ust as rain, once fallen, is no longer rain but simply water."

Jinjur was bored by these dialectics. She was no academic. "What are those lights down there?" she broke in.

"I was getting around to that," Fleg hastened to supply, forestalling the Sand Man. "Those are starflowers: millions of them. When you get closer you'll see they're every color of the rainbow—and lots of colors that aren't in the rainbow, such as plarsh, fint, pawdle, and the various shades of clow—"

But the Sand Man was not to be denied. "Your license, gentles!" he said, dangling. "I needs must warn you while the time affords. An what I divine is right, not merely are the dreams on life in this witch-brew of viviation but even thoughts, day

reveries, and wishes. And as for visions, pray to have a care! Dare not to picture in your mind a thing lest that thing front you, made material and rife with frightful life."

"'Frightful'?" you said. "Why so? If I dream of, say, a mountain of grape ice cream, what would be frightful about that?"

"Behold!" The Sand Man pointed. Amid the myriad of tiny pinpoints of light that the travelers now could clearly see carpeting the shadowed world below there seemed to be a sort of upheaval. The crowds of lights swayed out toward all the cardinal points and also came closer. Suddenly the umbrellists were all treading ground, then pitching face downward in something pale and cold.

"Squoolsh!" said the something. "Have a care...! Or now that you're here, have a handful!"

As it happened, you already had a handful—or two. With only a moment's hesitation you raised one to your mouth. "Grape all right," you declared. And of singularly good quality too. You licked your hand clear and groped for a second scoop.

You did not omit to keep your wits about you. As the ice cream mountain sang a plaintive Latin melody you crawled the few paces to Jinjur and the bumbershoot and grabbed their hand(les). "Captain! Sand Man!" you cried. "Seize hands!"

Not a moment too soon. Body warmth had already melted you knee deep into the ice cream as you spoke to its "Sorry, old man. You'll be more use to us as rock candy."

Abruptly the fundament firmed up and you were busy for a moment or two pulling your legs free of the impeding glassy jumble of the earth you stood in.

"Keep together!" you commanded. "Let's start making our way down. Fleg, can you fly on your own?" The umbrella answered by a haughty silence, flapped itself closed and open in your face, and fluttered down hill. The Sand Man and Jinjur still had each other by the hand and they stumbled toward you.

"Sleep not," the Sand Man was entreating. Captain Jinjur dragged her eyes open. "'Tis what's most fell in this my situation," mourned the man. "None can stay waking in my pres-

ence. Our friend even now succumbs. You, though, do last remarkably well. Yet I fear—”

“Keep pinching her!” you broke in, “or whatever.” Fall asleep? You were not about to do that—with so much going on!?” “And here! let’s try this.” You envisaged the praline ground exhaling superoxygen. In a moment you were all refreshed as by a plunge in a mountain brook. To be on the safe side you imagined the Sand Man sandless; with that his soporificity dwindled away, at least for the present. Go to sleep? While worlds hung in the balance?!

Next thing, you envisioned that it was night on a branch line of the Milky Way railroad, which of course it was, for did you not hear that lonesome whistle blowin’ ’cross the trestle and see the little station house of Cassiopeia looming up ahead? You headed your crowd in to the ticket window and the Sand Man spoke to the station master in Japanese. In a moment, with your midnight-blue tickets in your hands, the bunch of you jumped aboard the last car as it only slowed down, then put on speed again.

With Flerg over your arm you sat down next to Campanella, whom you recognized at once from your reading.[§] “There’s something I’ve been meaning to ask,” you said without any ado. “You and your friends are all Japanese and yet some of you have got Italian or French names. Why is that?”

“Don’t tell anyone,” whispered the rather sanctified-looking boy in flawless International, “but I think the fellow who wrote about us was a bit enamored of foreign phenomena. You know, foreign places have a wonderful reputation with people who’ve never been there.”

Campanella pointed out the window. “Look! He wasn’t sure whether this countryside looked more like Lancashire or Connecticut. I suppose it could seem to him like one as much as the other, since he’d never been in either.” In fact, the grove of royal palms through which the train was passing (dreamed up by yourself for the Occasion) looked remarkably like neither.

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

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“Fascinating,” you breathed, though scarcely as comment on what the young Japanese had said. Gradually growing overwhelmed by the possibilities of this land where not only anything (as also in Oz) might happen but *everything did* happen, you bade a courteous adieu to your traveling companion, re-gathered your party, and left the train.

Without noticing it, you had come down to level ground again. You cast an appreciative thought to the (by now fruit-cake) mountain, now out of sight in the night somewhere behind you, and left it on the landscape to delight other travelers. You had miles to go before the dawn and you reviewed in your mind just what you were after.

Both Queen Sonyo and the Sand Man wished principally to discover just what it was that had happened in this most western region of the Dream Kingdom and how to deal with it. The man of sand himself could have told the queen about the comet. He was, however, so thoroughly shaken by the vast happening that it was of no avail expecting wise counsel from him as to what to do about it.

One thing was abundantly evident to everybody by now: the mere physical effects of the collision blast aside, the great overriding result of the comet’s crash to earth was that life had been imparted to every physical object—for how far a range was yet to be ascertained—and also to phenomena as unsubstantial as the content of dreams and imaginings. But, you reasoned, if life and concomitant intelligence had been transmitted to things as diverse as an ice cream mountain and the train you had just got off of, would not memory also appertain? What if you asked one of these star flowers that clustered thick around your feet or hung from the trellis over the door of Aquarius station which you had just come through?

You asked. You leaned against the arbor and queried confidentially: “What’s your story, morning glory?”

Before retiring for the night beneath her pocket handkerchief (which the Wizard had converted temporarily into a rose-pink boudoir tent) Princess Ozma passed a spell, under the terms of which all her friends whether at home or abroad would pass a comfortable night. Then she read Paul Herring's delightful *Sir Toby and the Regent* until she fell asleep.

How diverse were the nights of some of her friends and acquaintances Ozma could not have imagined. She knew of those who were slumbering in tents round about her but she had no idea of thirteen animals crouching underground or of people passed out near the banks of the Munchkin River or crossing a star garden in the Kingdom of Dreams by train and pogo stick nor yet arranged in decorative heaps beside a gaudy poppy field. In fact Ozma was breathing so deeply in slumber—hough, heavens!, not snoring—that she was not even aware of what the non-sleeping members of her own entourage were doing.

For instance, she failed to wake when the irrepressible Patchwork Girl, bored at sitting around sleepless all night and frankly worried at what might have been the fate of her flesh girl friends from the Emerald City, left the tent she had been assigned to and came to that of the little fairy queen to look in and see how the land lay. Scraps had some idea that Ozma might be poring over some quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore in order to get a fix on this strange garden that was not marked on any map.

She smiled when she saw what the girl ruler was really doing. "Ah, well," sighed she benevolently,

"'tis well: the Queen sleeps well.

I would not fain dispel the spell.

She's only human, come what may.

Or no! she's not! she's fairy!... Say!

I'd better shut my trap and take

Myself to someone still awake."

With that she pressed her cotton hand to her mouth and let

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fall the princess's tent flap.

What Scraps purposed was easier said than done. At every tent she investigated the tenants were slumbering blithely. Crowns were tucked under pillows while the heads that normally wore them were horizontal and dreaming. But finally, at nearly the last handkerchief-tent, a candle shone dimly behind the canvas.

The Patchwork Girl stuck her head in and there was Ojo, sitting up in bed and writing in his diary. He gave a start when he saw the tent flap open silently, then he grinned. "Scraps!" he greeted in a whisper, not wanting to wake his dad or Unk Nunkie in the other two cots.

The girl addressed only made a beckoning gesture of the arm and waited for him outside. Ojo the Lucky seized up his belled hat, pinched out the candle, and joined her. He'd been lying in bed in his clothes to get the feeling of really roughing it. "What's up?" he whispered.

"I'm not so fond of sitting still
When Trot—or Dor'thy!—may be ill—
Or trapped, enslaved—or what you will.
Come! Let's go look up yonder hill!"

and the Patchwork Girl waved a cotton-gloved hand in the direction of a ridge far off to the south that lay attractively paved with late moonlight.

"Right!" said Ojo, game for a midnight lark.

The heights were farther away even than they looked but after half an hour's stumbling along shadowy lanes the two began to climb. Here trees were thicker and visibility less. "I wish that comet were still in the sky," said Ojo.

But relief was near. When they came out onto the crown of the ridge the countryside lay open and they could make out quite a lot. Far away in the north rose the dull dome of Stone Mountain, grey in the moonlight. Somewhat nearer, to the west and south, the Munchkin River glided soundlessly. But most impressive and not far away at all was a region that lay all black. Beyond a jumbled landscape of thickets and glades, beyond what

must be a little stream winding through a tunnel of greenery, with another slight ascent on the other side, spread a wide uncluttered meadow of mysterious: darkness. But then red does often look black by moonlight.

“Wonder what that is,” mused Scraps. “Our friends: you think they could be there?”

“Let’s go find out—if you would care,” Ojo, in high spirits, rhymed her line.

Among a wide range of choices of places for disappeared people to be concealed, the dark field seemed as likely as any. The pair started off down-hill. Soon they were blundering among trees and shrubbery again. It took them quite a while to find one of the little bridges of Brandywine but after that they hadn’t gone very far up the opposite slope when they ran into the Scarecrow of Oz!

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c h a p t e r

t h i r t y

“It was a fabulous journey,” reminisced the morning-glory (actually, an evening or nightglory: of the same genus as the morning-glory but lively at a later hour and of, naturally, a midnight blue shade). “Funny I can remember all that: rushing through space eons ago, and right up to last week—while now I’m fixed immovably in this soil. At least, I think...” She jerked a knee tentatively.

“You say you come from beyond Outer Space?” you queried, “and that everything is alive out there?” You had trouble picturing it and wanted reconfirmation.

“Yes, and never dies. In fact, it *can’t* die, no matter how hard it tries. It’s rather awful: to go on living forever and ever, regardless of how bored you may get, or how uncomfortable—or even in pain.”

“Oh, well,” you rejoined (something of a philosopher in your own right, “pain is mostly awful because it’s so threatening. You think it may be a prelude to death. But if you know pain isn’t going to be fatal it takes a lot of the sting out of it.”

“You may be right,” acknowledged the flower, who had never known pain and only knew *of* it in theory.

Having won your point you hastened to reinforce it. “Like a visit to the dentist,” you compared. “There the pain of drilling and probing may even be a little gratifying, because you know it’s going to make you feel better in the end.”

The night-glory had no teeth, so she wouldn’t know about that either. “Nor is our longevity related to environment,” she went on. “Even here on your planet we’ll go right on living.”

“‘We’?” you wondered.

“Sure. Every atom of the original slushball carries on living indefinitely—unless it’s destroyed. I’m not even sure we can be destroyed—”

“Just like Oz,” you put in.

“‘Oz’?” echoed the flower. Then you had to explain about the magical country where you had just been spending time.

“That’s right,” said the plant interestedly. “I think we did notice a blue-yellow-purple-red country sort of rectangular?— as we circled this planet a few times. You’re from there?”

“Not exactly ‘from’, but I know it well.”

“I hope you all are prepared for a wave of living over there,” the flower remarked a bit somberly.

“‘A wave of living’?”

“Yes. As soon as air currents get to wafting our atoms about, everything will begin coming to life. Your Oz is to the east, isn’t it? With what I notice to be prevailing western winds, Oz will likely get the full brunt of it. Things will be almost like here.”

You were only too well aware what she meant. The trellis to which the flower vine clung was vibrantly alive. The pebbles under foot were instinct with life. The vivacity of the station house could not be doubted. The animation with which your hat was talking to your collar somewhat disturbed the flow of your own conversation.

The implications of what the night-glory had said were borne in upon you more and more. So much of what had been seen and said was coming clearer. That ice cream mountain that sang a plaintive melody. The living dead on the surface of the Deadly Desert. The remarks of the Queen of Dreams.

“Is that all?” you asked.

“‘All’? Isn’t that enough?” ejaculated the blossom. “A plague of life sweeping the planet!” A note of triumph could be heard in the voice of the flower as it announced the tidings of world nondoom.

“I mean: it’s not a political take-over, or a mass expulsion of native populations, or anything?”

“Not that I know anything about,” said the nightglory doubtfully. Your remarks seemed to concern concepts unfamiliar to her.

“So there’s no reason why the ruler of this country, with all her people, could not come back and rein on?”

“Why, no. I think that might be perfectly permissible,” judged the flower. So that was settled and one of your goals achieved.

“Would that apply to the Sand Man too?” you enquired. You indicated your traveling companion, who was talking quietly with Captain Jinjur on a bench nearby. They were only minimally disturbed by the tendency of the bench to dance a six-step.

“Does he want to rule something too?” asked the night-glory.

“Only the realm of dreams,” you explained, “which is not to be confused with the Kingdom of Dreams. Besides being adviser to Her Majesty, the Queen of Dreams, he’s in charge, world-wide, of people going to sleep and dreaming as they sleep.”

“I don’t see, off hand, anything wrong with that,” assented the flower. “He’d better watch out though. With him right here at the source and focal point of this wave of life, some of those dreams he brings on might turn out to be a little realer than he expects: a little more alive.”

“I’ll warn him.” You went on: “So, this wave of living: you really think it may be serious?”

“‘Serious’? Yes, indeed — if by ‘serious’ you mean ‘in earnest’, ‘bound to take place’. As for the other, I don’t know if you’ll think it serious’ — or , just fun — that in the lands downwind doors will open and shut themselves, chairs will sit down, beds will sleep, tables will turn, and pianos play themselves, while chimneys smoke, books read, ladders climb, houses carouse, roads travel, and time flies.”

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

Time, by the way, heals all things. By now, helped by dry weather and a brisk breeze, it had healed the sodden waterlogged condition of the Scarecrow. Slowly he felt his limbs grow lighter and not long after dusk he found he could raise himself on his elbows. He looked about him—straight into the faces of rather too many scarlet poppies.

He did a double take. “Faces”! That wasn’t just a turn of phrase. The flower cups actually resembled small faces, the black and deep purple splotches in their depths assuming the form of eyes, notsrils, lips. These were winking, sniffing, and grimacing in a very unsettling manner. When the flowers saw the straw man was looking at them they stuck out their stamens saucily and giggled together. A common impulse seemed to sweep over the flowers which had a view of the man: they aimed their pistils at him and cried, “Stick ‘em up!”

When the poor stuffed fellow tried to obey, his head and shoulders fell back to earth, whereupon the poppies all laughed heartily.

“Aren’t you ashamed?” chided the supine Scarecrow.

“What of?” crowed a couple of the nearest blooms.

“Waylaying innocent travelers and making them fall asleep forever!”

“Do we do that?” said the poppies. They looked at each other in puzzlement, though not noticeably in chagrin.

“You do it and don’t even know it?!” ejaculated the Scarecrow. “Fie!”

“We didn’t know *anything* ‘til just now, that is: a few hours ago. Since—oh, I think since that heavy rain.”

“You’ve just come to life?” marveled the man of straw.

“No! of course not, stupid.” No one had called the Scarecrow that for a very long time. “We’ve been alive practically forever, but for some reason we never sensed or thought or saw or talked before. It’s all rather strange—but also quite nice.”

“How queer,” mused the Scarecrow. He was very far from

being able to give any explanation of the phenomenon.

As he dried on he continued to chat desultorily with the flowers. He learned that they had no control over their soporificity, hence it was no good asking them to “turn themselves off” so that his friends might revive from their unnatural sleep.

Of the said sleeping friends he supposed that there were even more now. Since the sudden, brief, and flattening passage of the Elegant Elephant with three of their common friends in tow, the Scarecrow had seen or heard no more of them. He could only (rightly) guess that the fatal field had eventually merely gained two new victims.

Ho-hum. The dark hours passed slowly. It was midnight before the straw man discovered by frequent trial and error that at last his drying substance could support itself, after a fashion. He got up and wobbled along the path, stumbling among the poppies, who all derided his efforts good-humoredly.

The motion was good for him though. Moment by moment he felt his fibres stiffening and he was more than ever gratified that he had had that horsehair framework inserted within him. When he was able to walk more or less normally his first goal was the dark hillock he could just make out in the distance. He hadn't realized there was any hill in the Deadly Poppy Field.

When he got nearer he realized he knew that hill. Usually it was separated from the ground by four legs. It was Kabumpo, an elephant.

No good talking to the hill though. But wait: there was a head of lettuce just faintly discernible growing out of a crack between the hill and the level ground. He knew that head too; it was that of the Vegetable Man, Carter Green.

“Carter!” cried the man of straw, and knelt down to get nearer. The poor vegetable man appeared to have had the misfortune to fall under an earthquake. “How terrible! What happened?! Are you in pain? How can I help?”

The (still) cheerful Green replied to these questions in reverse order. "Alas, I fear there's nothing you can do. Faith may move mountains but I don't think straw can. But I'm feeling no pain; we vegetables can't, you know." Then he went on to describe the disasters that had overtaken the Elegant one's bid to be a hero. "What now?" he ended.

"Somehow we've got to get rescued," reflected the Scarecrow fairly obviously. "The fact that there are elephants and frogs we didn't know about in this garden would seem to indicate that somebody's become aware of our plight and is trying to do something about it. Didn't the Frogman give any details?"

"Not a word. I merely got the impression our predicament was no surprise to them. They were fully occupied trying to get some of us safely away when they themselves fell down in a coma."

"We've got to get word to Ozma, there's no other recourse," declared the Scarecrow. "But woe is me; how are we to go about it? You're pinned down, everybody else is unconscious, and dear of Jack P. was last seen galloping away, none knows whither." The straw man stood up suddenly to his full height. "Wait here—!"

"I could hardly do otherwise," remarked Carter.

"Er—quite so. I'll scout around and try to find somebody who's still conscious. Eventually I've got to get across this frightful poppy field and back in the direction of the Emerald City. But oh! if only Dorothy would revive! She's always a tower of strength in situations like this. Her advice would be—" The straw fellow stopped. "That's, an idea. I wonder if I could find that Advice Bush again. It would be better than nothing—if only a little.

"Carter, you hold the fort! I'll be back as, quickly as I can." With that the doughty Scarecrow made off toward the north, down the slope toward the Brandywine.

It was then, of course, that he ran up against the night-sky-larking Patchwork Girl and Ojo the lucky.

"Well met by moonlight, noble friend!" hailed the always sprightly young dame.

"We heard you'd disappeared.

It's good to find you out, about,
And not dead, like we feared."

"'Dead!'" echoed the Scarecrow, shocked. "Please watch your language! Our flesh friends up on yonder rise are too close to that state for it to be joked about."

At that news Scraps and the Munchkin boy grew solemn. It had all been a lark for them so far. This was the first inkling that something really serious was to be blamed for the unexplained disappearance of their friends. "Please tell us all you know," pleaded the Patchwork Girl with complete gravity.

Meanwhile they all proceeded up the slope again, the Scarecrow quite forgetting his mission to the advice bush. Real living moving friends were much better. In a rush, as they hurried toward the ridge crest, he related all that had befallen the party of innocent garden-goers that had started out so blithely from the Emerald City the morning before. "Now I have to get across that poppy field, come what may. But first I want to revive Dorothy. If you two will help—"

"You don't need to ask!" the pair exclaimed. Ojo added, "With my strength I'm sure we can pick her up. With you two at least not falling asleep, we may even get her out of the field." And that was what happened. As in a giant game of spillikins the trio selected the young Kansan from out of the pile of girls on the field path, then by main strength and awkwardness dragged her straight across the poppy plantation, to the accompanying wails of downtrodden flowers.

"That's funny," Ojo gasped with exertion and yawned with encroaching sleep. "I never heard of the Deadly Poppies being able to talk before."

"Don't *you* talk," commanded the Scarecrow. "Save your breath for hauling! As it is, you'll be lucky if you get out the other side awake."

“Lucky’s my middle name,” reminded the boy. “I’ll make it.”

And he did. The cool breeze blowing off the river helped a lot. It came straight at them and wafted the field’s poison exhalations off behind. Any grogginess Ojo felt had quite left him by the time they reached the bottom of the slope to the south. Looking back, they saw now that the Deadly Poppy Field occupied an elevated tableland between the confluence of the Brandywine with the great Munchkin River.

There on the bank they laid down their sleeping burden and waited for nature to take its course. “As soon as she’s awake,” declared the Scarecrow, “we’ll be off to the Emerald City. It’s only an hour’s stiff trot. And then Ozma will put everything right again—”

“Ozma!” cried the other two in dismay. “Why, she’s back there in that charmed garden!”

“And anyway,” added Scraps irreverently,

“I wouldn’t say

She puts a whole lot right.

She talks away the live-long day

And then she sleeps at night!”

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

You fell into one of your half-trances and had to pull yourself up with an effort. Well, it was about time. You'd been on the move without even forty winks for going on twenty-four hours... No wonder even you were falling asleep. And being right here in the middle of Dreamland, to boot! You shook yourself and attended once more to the night-glory's after all sparkling conversation. Like all the flowers in the sky garden the blooms of the trailing convolvulus gleamed in the dark. It was easily the most magical thing *you* had ever seen.

The night-glory's particular glory was that infinitesimally fine lines of dark blue light continually shot out from each blossom heart along the radials to the petal tips, where they vanished into the night dark with a tiny firework-shower effect. You'd been fascinated from the start. Once while you talked you had put out a finger and been rewarded with a just perceptible little electric shock as it touched the edge of a petal.

It was of course a manifestation of all the ions and electrons of far outer space that had been clustering to the comet through the millionenia of its celestial flight. They had to go somewhere and when the magical slushball struck Earth they were shot into the ground in their billions and boiled off in all directions. While the atoms of the comet's own matter turned everything alive, the spatial ions turned everything alight. Every seed in the soil was electrified like it had never been electrified before. The seeds mutated madly and sprang into sudden burgeon and fantastic flowering almost over night. The present night-glory was just one very modest example of the gorgeous display. How fortunate too that you and your friends were seeing the star garden by dark, when it was at its most spectacular.

Now the night-glory was speaking again. "You're leaving? Oh, how I wish I were going with you. There must be so much that is fabulous — to see, out on this strange planet —"

"Not more fabulous than right here in the Star Garden," you assured her. "You've got the best of all worlds right here."

“Mmm, quite possibly,” admitted the plant. “But you know what the result of unvarying perfection is?... Boredom. And when one comes right down to it, boredom is the most unbearable thing in the universe. Don’t we know? We’ve had billions of years of it, streaking along unvariedly through space. Coming to your planet is far and away the most exciting thing that’s happened to us atoms since we left our home beyond outer space. But now to be stuck here, immobile, in one spot...! Oh, how I wish...”

“What?”

“Well, that I was really alive—that is, able to move about. Can there ever be *real* life without movability?”

“I wouldn’t like to experience it,” you admitted. You tried to picture it: being in possession of one’s full intelligence, with use of all senses, but confined as if in the straitest strait-jacket, unable to budge the smallest muscle. Of course you’d go insane in half an hour. Was that how it was for this obviously sensible flower? “But I thought plants quite liked standing in one spot all the time.”

“Maybe those do who are not fully alive,” conceded the night-glory. “But we’re not like that. All of our atoms are bursting with sentient life. It affects whatever we were bombarded into; in my case, this plant I’ve grown into from a mutated seed. I don’t want to just stand here wasting my fragrance on the desert air—”

This was an exaggeration. The environs of the little station were far from being a desert. It was more like a jungle of rank and flashing vegetation. You even thought you might do well to make use of that path before you before it was completely overgrown. But the night-glory’s marvelous blue scent, a bit like hyacinths’, truly ought not to be wasted on just yourself and your companions while you remained in this one spot.

“Have you tried?” you asked, hardly yourself aware of what you were suggesting.

“Tried what?”

“Well; going somewhere?”

“Rooted in the soil as I am?” demanded the flower. “Yes, I

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have!" With that she gave a heave in her stalk: a *very* magical thing to be able to do when one has no second stem to brace against. Then she sighed. "No use. I can't pull up my whole root system by myself. Pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps' is after all only an expression... But if you wanted to help...?"

You marveled. "Pull you up by the roots? But wouldn't you die?"

"I've said," reminded the plant with some impatience, "I *can't* die. The only question is: could I walk on my roots once I got loose?"

"I could help you," you offered. "Actually, I don't see why you couldn't if you can move your roots."

"Of course I can," declared the flower. "I move my toes further and further through the soil whenever I like. That's how I pick up my nutriment. Shall we have a go?"

You called the Sand Man to you, just in case this was going to be a stiff tug. When you laid hands on the tough vine stalk near the ground you felt again that electric charge go through you. The flower plant felt it too and shrieked in excitement.

When the extraction was completed, "There," you said, dentist-like, "that wasn't so bad, was it?"

But the convolvulus clung to the trellis and looked faint. Luckily its tendrils were too closely twined round the woodwork for it to be able to fall.

Some minutes passed. Then the vine seemed to recover somewhat from the traumatic experience. She lifted a rootlet and waggled it tentatively.

"That's right," you encouraged. "Now if that root can just support you—"

"Why shouldn't it?" snapped the plant feistily. "My roots are the strongest part of me."

It happened. Your chance acquaintance became the first walking plant on our planet. As simply as that.

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

Since the crazy old times when they laid down elaborate brick roads to connect the main parts of Oz but forgot to install bridges or a ferry service for travelers to cross rivers, much had changed in that country. When Ozma came to the throne she rationalized a number of matters that had thitherto been insufficiently thought out. One of the most urgent of these was to bridge all rivers at reasonable intervals.

That is how it happened that half an hour after Dorothy came to, was greeted joyously by her friends, and decided to join them on a quick mission to the Emerald City, the party arrived by blue moonlight at a fine structure linking the left and right banks of the Munchkin River. They ran across and then came to a halt, their only important water barrier behind them.

The Scarecrow took a reading by certain stars known (or thought to be known) to him and directed the group to make a sharp turn to the right.

"A shame there's not a boat about," declared the Patchwork Girl.

"It means that we are barred
From floating down the Munchkin stream
To Ozma's own back yard."

Everyone knew that the long broad Munchkin River debouched very unlikelily but most magically into what was no more than a rather large pond in the Emerald palace gardens. It was called "Lake Quad" and it could be seen from the windows of the royal residence.

"No," admitted the Scarecrow. "That would be convenient. But if we step out as smartly as we can, we should be there by dawn anyway."

If the Scarecrow, being the smartest man in Oz, thought himself thus able to trot, the others could hardly do less. They all set off with a will.

It must have been a trick of the moonlight. Or was it just possible that the straw man's quartering by the stars was off by

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a few degrees? At first none of the four travelers noticed when the colors around them changed gradually to others. Just as red can look black by moonlight it can also be confused with blue.

The four marchers moved briskly for the expected hour and thought they'd end up in the southern suburbs of the Emerald City. They ended up nowhere. They knew they would much prefer to be somewhere and so they hurried on hour after hour. Two of the companions were tireless. Of the others, one was just up from an entire day of restorative sleep and the other was a boy who naturally could do no less than hold out as long as any of the rest of the party.

Dawn broke, an exceptionally red dawn. Princess Dorothy drew attention to the fact. "The pink in the sky is lasting unusually long, isn't it?" she commented.

"It's lasting long, it's stretching wide," confirmed Scraps.

"It's doing more than that. It's turning everything bright red. I wonder where we're at!"

The Scarecrow stopped short and compared his Munchkin trouser leg with the rhododendron bush beside him. Its flowers were all gone in Oztober but that didn't stop the plant's leaves from being various attractive shades of carmine, scarlet, and magenta. "Red," stated the Scarecrow and would listen to no quibbles.

"Oh, dear," sighed Dorothy. She sat down on a cushion bush and almost wept. "It means we've been getting farther from the Emerald City with every step for gracious knows how long!"

"If only we had some magic with us," yearned Ojo. Alas, they had none. Ingenuity was the only tool at their disposal, but everyone knew the Scarecrow had plenty of that. He had only to think for two minutes and then he knew.

"Sharp right," he repeated his command from many hours before.

Dorothy jumped up from her seat and the group set out at a run: a few paces further along the lane and then they dived down a path turning off to the north.

"Dived" was almost the right word. The path descended very

steeply and at the bottom of it was a small lake. The lake was of just that shade of red so dark it is nearly black which artists have tried in vain for centuries to capture. The walkers had to brake sharply to keep from falling head-over heels into the sombre water.

They found themselves standing on a narrow strip of shingle between encroaching reddery and the pebbles of the immediate lake rim.

“What a strange place,” breathed Dorothy. She stuck the toe of her slipper just centimeters into the thick, sullenly slurping liquid of the lake. The brown leather went black, and heavy red drops fell from the toe and stained the sand that lay among the pebbles. The girl shuddered. “And yet, you know,” she said, “it’s not so strange—”

“I know what you mean, Dorothy,” said Ojo. “We’ve been here before...”

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

“Natalie” was the name the night-glory chose now that she was going to be a movable person. It was all right, in fact the expected thing, to have no name when you stopped in one place all the time, but she quite understood that as soon as you moved around you needed one. The reader will confirm this—and you did at the time!: your cat and/or dog has a name, your aspidistra and/or African violet does not, yet the only practical difference between the two, as far as being loved familiars goes, is that one moves, the other stays put.

In fact, Natalie Night-Glory was delighted to assume the new distinction. She soon proved to be the spark plug of your party of travelers. All the rest were falling asleep, including the very Sand Man himself. Why, even the flying bumbershoot had a tendency to fold its flaps and tuck its handle under them. But Natalie N. said, “We’ve so many miles to go before the dawn.” Actually, you weren’t sure just where *she* had to go but she clung to you faithfully as you stumbled along, wondering how it would end.

The blue-black sky arched over you, pierced by a million stars. The deep blue vale of the Sky Garden spread below, lit by a million star-flowers. In your sleepy head was the idea that you were seeking the precise point of impact of the comet. There you would learn some truth that would resolve everything. Then you could turn back, your mission accomplished.

As your group moved groggily onward Natalie Night-Glory was rabble-rousing. She kept stopping to speak to anemones, asphodels, asters, aubretias, bachelor’s buttons, begonias, bluebells, buttercups, carnations, chrysanthemums, and so on through the alphabet. She was telling them how marvelous it was to be free, to be ambulatory and able to go where one liked and make what sort of a life for oneself one chose.

The flowers needed hardly any persuading before they were leaning together and helping to pull each other out of

the ground. Then they all tripped and flopped after you, singing hymns to liberty. Some, however, were so small, little forgetmenots and mignonettes, even some lazy nasturtiums, that they pleaded with you to open the umbrella and let them ride along in it.

You could not, of course, resist their pretty pleas. You got Captain Jinjur to help you and between you you hauled the thing along like a big shallow shopping bag, stopping frequently to allow more pinks and violets to clamber in. Some oranges and olives tried to do the same but you would have none of it and ate them instead. This raised the age-old question, proposed, among other places, in *Alice*: was it right to eat someone to whom you had been introduced? You had not solved the problem to your satisfaction when there was an onslaught of roses and greens, clamoring to be let ride in the bumbershoot. With a gesture of giving up you commanded Fleg to obviate the question by flying away to Oz. *Without* tipping out any of its overflowing contents. It was to deposit the fair freight there and then return. You walked on.

You were now passing the idyllic little grove called Pogo Park. You directed your party to enter. There you all selected pogo sticks for the relief of tired bodies as you made your way onward. The dry sticks broke off easily, close to the ground. They came in all sizes and weights, so even Natalie found a very tall slim bamboo-like pole she could negotiate on. Then you hopped on.

The garden walks all led gently downward. You were never in doubt about which direction to take. It stood to reason that the spot where the space slushball had struck was going to have been rendered lower than surrounding areas. What you had not foreseen was that rains since the date of the cosmic collision had collected in the impact hollow and created a pretty lake that glimmered appealingly under the light of stars in the sky and all about on the ground.

You named the place Star Lake (it was even vaguely star-shaped and wondered how you would cross it.

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"Why not ask?" suggested Natalie Night-Glory.

"Ask?" You stared.

"Yes, surely."

"Ask whom?" (You remembered your cases even at this juncture.

"Why, the little lake. It's alive, you know." The convolvulus, being star-born, was more continuously conscious of the vividity of all things than you.

Once suggested the idea seemed a good one. With Jinjur and the Sand Man looking on from under drooping eyelids, you knelt down, stuck a finger in the lake to call its attention, and asked politely: "How do we negotiate you?"

The lake sloshed convivially and replied in liquid tones, "There's some shattered timber washed up in various places along my shore. You might make do with a piece of that as a raft."

A reasonable plan. You all pogo'd along the shore a way and in due course found a nice selection of shards and scraps from mighty kings of the forest laid low by the frightful smash of the previous week. One of these (still alive, of course) helped you drag itself free of shoreline entanglements and with only a minimum of wet feet you all clambered aboard.

The 'raft' was of an odd irregular shape and an even more irregular surface but it was just the right *size* to contain you all. It posed no problems for you in poling yourselves forward across the rather shallow water by the use of your pogo sticks.

Just for a moment, there in the middle of that night-blue lake that was wrought by the stars, leaning back-to-back with your companions, with the convolvulus clinging companionably about you, you experienced a sense of perfect equilibrium: a little respite, a breathing space, in this adventure of all adventures.

Your head inclined forward. It was all so comfortable and repleting that sleep seemed like the best next thing to follow. But that would never do! You must keep up and doing, with

a heart for any fate. You stood and gave another thrust with your stick to keep the raft moving. As you did you saw the first pink finger of dawn poke the east.

In that magical moment you remembered your business and you knelt again at the raft's edge. You posed a question to the lake. It, surely, was the repository of all the secrets of the stars. "What is the meaning of it all?" you said.

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

"You remember her?" whispered Ojo. Dorothy just nodded and even Scraps thought of nothing saucy to say. The same weird sense of familiarity oppressed all four of the travelers. They didn't remember just exactly but they were *almost* sure...

The person in question was a tall woman, not old, not ill-featured, who stood by the red shore of the turgid sea, idly twirling an eel. She wore a sort of tailed liberty cap and her dress of red doe-skin was laced up at breast and hip with pink leather strings. She had on curly-toed boots rather like the Scarecrow's and there was no doubt that she was a native Ozite.

The two children approached her warily. "Please, ma'am," said Dorothy, then left her utterance hanging.

The woman proved to be cross and bad-tempered. "Well, what is it?" she snapped, scarcely deigning to turn to look at the quartet of travelers from where she stood moodily staring out over the lake.

"Er—," said Dorothy; then Ojo took up the word: "Would you tell us where we are, please, ma'am?"

"You're right here," said the woman scornfully, "beside this notorious and ill-omened lake—for all the good it may do you."

"What lake is that?" spoke up the Patchwork Girl, getting her sprightliness back in the face of so much rudeness.

"You might explain.

We're strangers here

And we would fain

—If you'd show how—

Be off again."

"It's the Lake of Blood," barked the woman bluntly—and everybody shuddered.

"B-but!" stammered Dorothy, "—in Oz?! Home of everything that's sweet and pretty...?" She couldn't believe her ears, though her eyes bore witness to the truth of the proposition.

Now the woman turned at last and brandished a finger at the shocked children. "Oh, come off it!" she commanded. "You're



not a bunch of pantywaists, are you? — like those publishers who wouldn't let my dismal story appear in the sacred canon of Oz lore. They didn't mind, of course, having in the books the humor of such things as Princess Langwidere's multiple heads or the canned brains of the Flatheads but, as hypocrites, they wouldn't allow the poor Historian to explain how and from where such drollnesses derived. He had the chapter all written up and then they censored it out. I'm still fuming!"

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"Ah," said the Scarecrow, light dawning. "We all had a sort of vague half-memory of having been here before, but we couldn't be sure. That explains it. We *were* here, that time just after you first came to court, Scraps, remember? But when the adventure didn't appear in the finished book I guess we tended to forget it.

"It's coming back, though. I seem to recall... yes ...isn't here a so-called Garden of Meats just downstream from the lake?"

"Yes," said the ill-woman, apparently beginning to thaw a little, perhaps at finding some recognition implied in the Scarecrow's speech; "—nourished by the lake, of course."

"Ooh." Dorothy shuddered again.

"Of course," repeated the woman. "You don't think meat plants are going to be sufficiently fed by insipid water alone, do you? And naturally flesh, by its very character, can't draw sustenance out of the bare earth. It's the rich nutrients seeping into the soil from this lake that support them and bring them to maturity."

"By the way," went on the Scarecrow, now hardheadedly recovering from his momentary distaste for the unsavory subject, "that's an uncommonly flat-looking eel you're holding there."

"You'd be flat too," retorted the woman, "if you'd just had your crank-case drained. Look!"

"She took both hands to the unprotesting fish and wrung it out like a long stringy dish-cloth. "See? Not a drop. Like all the animals hereabout he has to go in once a month to make his donation at the slaughter house—"

"Urp!" exclaimed Dorothy and was near retching. "You *must* be mistaken! "Slaughter house!?! There's no such thing in Oz! — if for no other reason than that nothing can die here."

"You're right, girlie," admitted the woman. "It's not that, exactly. I just called it so in annoyance that my pet here—this is my favorite, Neil the Eel—has had to play donor today at the Tapping Center, as they politely call it."

She pointed across the lake to where the visitors could see

among the trees the red roof of a long low building. Now they noticed too, in the distance, the large mouth of a concrete run-off-pipe that emptied into the lake just this side of the building.

Their guide had begun to move slowly along the lake shore and the four followed after. "Magic isn't all as plucked-out-of-the-air as people may think," she lectured, rather unexpectedly. "I mean: if Langwidere magically has a bunch of heads in her closets, among which she chooses one or another to wear, the heads have to be produced somewhere, and you might call this region here the flesh-production workshops of Oz. It's magical enough to be able to take off one's head and replace it with another. It's asking too much that a fully functioning, seeing, hearing, talking head should be created out of mere nothing. In fact, they're not. They grow on our flesh farm right here in the Garden of Meats."

Dorothy was beginning to get her color back. "I guess I can accept plants that grow meat products; that seems rather Ozzy. But you said something about a slaughter house—"

"No, donor station," retracted the woman. "The 'Tapping Center', you know. The monthly donations: there from all the local animals are used to keep the lake's fluid level up to par. As Ozites the donors can't die and in a month they've built their vital fluids up to a normal level again."

"Hm, practical," admitted the Scarecrow, "if repellent. And what is your role in all of this, madam?"

"I'm general caretaker of the area surrounding the lake. I hate it. I'm also supposed to keep off any nosy Parkers who come poking around." Here she glanced again narrowly at her temporary companions. "Naturally the powers that be aren't too keen on word of this horrid but necessary factory getting out to the world generally."

By now the party had reached what was clearly the lower end of the lake and the eel woman pushed through a wicket gate in a rather tall hedge. "Here we are," she announced and waved her eel to indicate a most surprising scene.

A level field stretched nearly to the tree-edged horizon, all

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carefully laid out in long straight rows of growing things. It was the head-beds that first caught the eyes of our human or quasi-human friends, but presently their glances passed on to the clumps of leg- and arm-bushes, the rows of finger-ferns, and the elbow-vines climbing their poles. Verdant groves of torso trees lined both sides of the great enclosure. The foot shrubs made a brave show and there was a fine stand of hands, while toe-grass was everywhere under foot.

Neither was the supply of animal parts neglected. Fur furze was extensively cultivated. The variety of tail trees was a wonder to behold. Even the fang and claw shrubs were clearly carefully tended.

But by whom? The eel woman (who never gave her name) stamped her foot in annoyance. "Those rascals!" she fumed. "The sun's well up the sky! Even Neil here checked in at the tapping center an hour ago. What are they up to?"

She marched smartly along the border hedge to the door of a big bunkhouse and jerked it open. "All right, you lot!" she hollered inside. "Up and out! On the double! Grab those hoes and get at it!"

She stood back while from the door boiled a multitude of the most surprising-looking individuals the travelers had seen all day—or year.

If the rows of human-looking heads growing out of the red soil had startled the Scarecrow and his friends, their surprise was nothing compared to that experienced when they saw the galaxy of enormous walking vegetables that flooded out onto the garden grounds. Mustachioed carrots three feet tall, belted potatoes the size of beach balls, huge beets with their leafy tops neatly bound up, and a giant turnip wearing a straw hat were among those who reeled or rolled through the bunkhouse door and scrambled away to take up their duties in the meat fields. One particularly soigné tuber in a top hat paused to adjust his pince-nez before proceeding at a more dignified pace to exercise his calling of overseer in charge of the others.

Our friends just gaped. If humanoid heads growing out of

the ground were a shock, ambulatory vegetables were an even greater marvel. Of the dozen questions they would like to have put they asked none, as their cicerone said, quite affably for her: "Want to watch the meats getting their daily tending?"

Dorothy shuddered again—she was getting quite adept at it—and the woman noticed. "Why do you shudder?" she asked. "The meat-heads receive very good and careful treatment here. It's not every garden where the gardeners run out to put hats on the plants when it rains."

"But you call them 'meats'," objected Dorothy. "Couldn't you find some other word?: not quite so... suggestive. I mean: you don't actually raise the heads to be... eaten, do you?"

The eel woman looked at her scornfully. "Why not? What's so holy about human-appearing plants—for of course they're *not* human—that they can't be eaten? The human race is so sacrosanct that even something that only *looks* human must be shielded at all costs? Humans, except in their own eyes, are no less fit to be boiled or fricasseed than noble stags or kindly cows or majestic moose or splendid whales whom, out in the world, they grind up and serve to the dogs without even batting an eye."

That got her told. Even Dorothy had to admit the justice of the standpoint. Even so, she didn't like it. "But couldn't you call them well, 'flesh', for example?"

Even her ally the Scarecrow had to balk at this. "Good heavens, my dear," he exclaimed. "It was you yourself, way back in book one, who started everybody off by talking about 'meat people'. I thought myself at the time it sounded a bit cannibalistic."

"That's only because I was a little girl," Dorothy defended herself. "I wasn't supposed to know about a grown-up word like 'flesh'. Also of course, I had to be spared any connection with the sexual overtones of that word. Better an amusingly childish suggestion of cannibalism than anything even faintly smacking of ... *sex*."

"I'm older now, and not such a nitwit, I like to think. I move





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we stop talking about human beings—or anything that looks like them—as ‘meat’!”

“Well said!” cried Scraps and praised the girl for her sense.

“Well said indeed,” she addressed the others.

“And when you feed

On things that bleed

I hope you’ll heed

What Dot’s decreed:

It’s only when you talk of flesh that’s edible

That you can mention ‘meat’ and still be credible!”