

Well, finally Ozma woke up. She'd certainly had a nice restful long night. 'But,' as she said to herself while looking at her rosy face and tumbled brunette locks in a hand glass before rising, 'I just can't believe there's anything seriously amiss with my friends even if they have gone astray in such a delightful garden as this.' She had a premonition that the solution to the mystery was just around the corner and that it would be a neat and simple one. She wanted to spin out the time before the inevitable early return to bland everyday at her palace in the Emerald City.

The princess had a leisurely breakfast in bed. She sent word asking for those of her followers whose silhouettes she could see through her tent walls in the bright morning light to quit pacing like caged beasts in their anxiety to confer with her and learn what her plans were. She allowed in only one. That was Glinda, the wise Sorceress of the South.

"Well," said Ozma as the two of them buttered fragments of brioche and sipped the linden tea, "have you been able to diagnose the case?"

"Yes, I think so, Your Grace," replied Glinda. *She* had not been a sleepyhead but had sat up all night, going over her notes, conferring with such of Ozma's counselors as had special knowledge, meditating, and doing a little plain old hexing.

"What do we have to do?" enquired the Girl Ruler engagedly.

"First thing, I should say — when you're *quite* ready, dear — is to make a short jaunt to the famous old Deadly Poppy Field. I think you may see something there that will surprise you."

The ceremonial progress that Ozma ordained left the Wizard's tent city and proceeded at a leisurely pace across the fields and down to the stream. When at length it came up the opposite slope to the top of the ridge even Glinda saw something that surprised her.

Where they had thought to see all fixed in a ghastly trance of sleep, there was *movement* in the field of red. Five beings were

displaying vivid wakefulness—or five and a half, if you counted Jack Pumpkinhead’s headless body, which blundered about here and there, falling down a lot.

“Lignum!” cried Ozma delightedly. “How did you get here?” The glad Sawhorse rushed to his mistress and dropped down in a kneel before her, all a-tremble with emotion and devotion, sweating splinters. After him undulated the ABC-serpent and it too knocked its blocks together in sign of respect and enthusiasm. The china pug, the glass cat, and the blue bear-skin were more restrained in their greetings.

The Sawhorse was never much given to long speeches but in this case some words of explanation seemed obligatory. “Your Majesty!” gasped the horse and whinnied loudly with satisfaction. “We were exactly on the point of going off again to try to find you! We’ve only been here a few minutes but even so it was time enough for everybody to fall in a faint—” Thus did the animal diagnose the powerful soporific effects of the magic flower field.

The long train of Queen Ozma’s followers, with the two highest-ranking royal dames in the van, now moved on to the very verge of the red field and the Sawhorse pointed out the slumbering Lion and Tiger, the snoozing cab-horse and the unconscious mule, the somnolent Woozy and the sleeping dog Toto, as well as an untimely hibernating bear and a napping cat.

“But luckily,” ended Lignum, “not quite everybody passed out. We five were just going to be off—” He counted. “Hey, wait a minute. Where’s Toby?”

A glance about revealed the magically living little pug again lying doggo next to his friend, the comatose Pink(ish) Kitten, whom he did not plan to abandon even to go in search of rescue.

“Hello, Toby,” regreeted Ozma. “This is a parlous state of affairs, isn’t it?” The china dog had nothing to say in denial.

Now the young queen’s attention moved on and so did she. As she tried to stifle her own yawns she walked about the flower field, trampling down any number of wickedly exhaling poppy

blossoms—and richly they deserved it. At various times she came upon two of her girl friends, from the Palace of Magic, another pretty flower princess and a rainbow fairy, a large frog, a leprechaun, a blue kangaroo, and an elephant. “Goodness me,” sighed the fairy ruler. “What a mixed bag.” She was very touched at the plight of so many worthy creatures who, for whatever reasons, had been trapped untimely by the fatal flower beds.

Then she happened to glance under the elephant. “Good gracious!” she cried. “Carter Green! You here too?”

The Vegetable Man genuflected, as far as such was able to be performed by a head only. “Pardon me, Your Grace, for not rising,” he apologized. “Our friend Kabumpo is holding me down.”

“So I see. Does it hurt?” enquired the kindly queen.

“Oh, no,” Green reassured her. “Only, I can just imagine what long roots I’ll have put down, all the while I’ve been lying here. I seem to feel them fraternizing with roots of the poppies, which of course is not a thing I would most have favored.”

“Oh, dear.” Ozma smothered another yawn. “We must do something about that.”

“Yes, indeed,” took up her companion, the good witch of the South, rather sharply. She knew Ozma was stretching and sighing, not out of boredom, but as a result of the insidious influence of the opium flowers. Even so, it didn’t appear too well to her followers. “Also,” she pursued her sovereign’s thought, “about a good deal else. It’s high time we put to rights this wretched poppy field. It’s caused trouble enough for far too long a time—”

“Yes?” said Ozma and stopped blinking. “What shall we do? That is: you...” Her sentence trailed off.

With the Oz queen’s tacit *carte blanche* Glinda put down the capacious satchel she carried and took from it an enormous flit-gun of metallic-red metal (called *quadlingum*: found only in a limited area near the desert border of the red country). While the train of courtiers watched in awe she aimed the instrument at the nearest bank of poppies and fired.

A silver mist shot from the weapon and spread itself across

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an expanse of flowers perhaps twenty yards broad. At once, with a weird sizzling or tiny popping noise (after all, they were poppies), red flowers by myriads vanished into air, roots, stems, blossoms, and all. From where they had grown Polychrome the rainbow's daughter and a big kangaroo slowly righted themselves and looked about in bewilderment.

The sorceress worked quickly. She strode forward to the retreated rim of the flower field and fired again. Soon she was almost running as she followed the dwindling poppy acreage into the middle distance.

The courtiers who had remained awake surrounded with glad cries the newly waking ones. Everybody was talking at once when presently they saw the Southern Sorceress returning to them, as she blew down the muzzle of the flit-gun and restored it to her satchel. In the far distance the people could see a clump of poppies about ten yards square: all that remained of a dangerous flower field that over the years had grown to cover a whole square kilometer.

"That's enough of that!" stated Glinda. "Even though it's a bad thing, the Deadly Poppy Field has come to be a cherished landmark of old Oz, like wicked witches, for instance, and gnome kings — so we won't do away with it entirely. But I've surrounded it with a ring of invisible fire. That will keep it within bounds — and blundering visitors out!"

c h a p t e r t h i r t y - s e v e n

Now you knew—and dawn was coming. It was time to hurry on to the end of everything.

Silently you poled to the farther shore of Star Lake, being careful not to wake your companions. The little twenty minutes' sleep did wonders for them. They woke with a start and felt quite fresh as the raft nudged the shore. You gave a hand to help them onto land among the glowworms that clustered thickly just there. Cool blue breezes were riffing the grass as the world stirred to returning day.

Fleg was waiting for you on the bank, having made an incredibly quick trip to Oz and back. It had even had time for a brief snooze too, having spotted your raft from on high and made a quick calculation as to when and where you would land. "Now then," it said, feeling fairly restored, "drop those pogo sticks. You won't need them any more."

"No," you agreed. "And we mustn't tarry. First it's off to the Sand Bank. That's right, isn't it, Sand Man?"

The rumpled fellow looked a pang. "I dare say." He remembered the thousand and one things he would have to oversee in restoring order in the disasterstricken land of dreams. It would have been so much more fun to continue this dream adventure. To go to Oz and meet again (they were old friends) the Wizard and Wam the necromancer and the sorceress Glinda and others whose spells spread almost as universally as his own.

At the Sand Bank you left him preparing to enter the vaults and see if anything was to be traced of the fortune in sand dollars he had had cached there for many ages. They (as in Oz) used no money in the Kingdom of Dreams but the Sand Bank account was regarded as a national heirloom. The Sand Man hoped to refind the money amidst the debris of the shifted bank and to reconstitute the account, if he could, as a heritage for future ages.

Now there were the yellow sands of the desert to be crossed again. As you and Jinjur clung to the bumbershoot handle, with

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Natalie hanging on any old how and fluttering in the breeze, you were gratified to see that the tragic undead on the barren wastes were there no longer. You allowed yourself a happy hope that, unable to die, the shriveled forms had blown away to some land where they could live, recover, and put on weight. After all, life was now burgeoning in every mote of dust hereabouts. Why should not corpses live? to add a note of ghastly color.

The sun was high when you reached the Pink Palace. Now your heart was torn. You knew the sands were running out, yet how could you pass this way this last time ever and not salute once more *the lady*? In the end you parked the umbrella and its flower passenger with Corporal Cinna Munn and ran in with Jinjur. You found the melancholy Queen in Glinda's wavering morning room. Her children were with her. You sensed their spectral presence as you went to one knee and pressed the lady's hand with fervor. "I may not stay," you announced star-crossed-romantically, "but I needs must bring the news. You may return to your kingdom in safety."

The pale grey eyes lightened to a gleam.

"The disaster is over," you went on, "— was already, so soon as a star had crashed—once only in a region near your western border. The results, after the initial destruction, are nearly all favorable!"

Wordlessly you spoke of a hundred wonders you had beheld: of a purple-blue horizon shot with pink, of the soft wet clouds that boiled at the rim of a desert, of red, black, and blue trees catching the sun and tossing it back in the beautiful Rainbow Forest, of rolling prairies where not a blade of grass had died; a white river that carried off the sweet refuse of countless dreams; two tumbled cities—that yet lived! and would rise again; topless towers whose every stone could speak; fallen trees fanning in a star-burst; winding roads that tied themselves in knots; an ochre mount of sand and an ochre figure that capered nimbly, speaking Old Somnian ["My Sand Man!" said the Queen of Dreams in delight]; a tale of terror told, but with a happy ending; a flight à trois by bumbershoot; cloud streamers in a

twilight sky; a mountain of grape ice cream or rock candy or fruitcake; night on the Milky Way railroad; a grove of royal palms, already growing upright; a convolvulus that told its story [you showed a single blossom in your button-hole]; the brilliancies of a star garden by starlight; the miracle of walking plants; an umbrella that flew away loaded with flowers; a park of flourishing pogo plants all briskly upright too; a midnight-blue lake from beyond space; a water journey to the heart of knowledge; and some friendly glowworms who welcomed a new day.

“I shall go back!” cried Queen Sonyo’s mind to yours.

Then you knew that you had told your story well.

“Of course they’re not grown for food!” snorted the eel woman contemptuously. “I can assure you, if we were going to grow human parts as fodder we wouldn’t waste our most valuable acreage on bony heads but would plant out the entire area to thigh thickets and buttock bushes.”

Dorothy blushed but managed to cover her embarrassment by asking, “What *do* you grow them for then?”

“Spare parts! We do a thriving business supplying hospitals and clinics. Nobody can die in Oz, of course, but body parts can get badly mangled and then they want replacing.”

“It’s not just to pander to some folks’ vanity then?” realized the Scarecrow with satisfaction. “I had some idea they were raised merely to supply people like Lady langwidere... or as ammunition for the Scoodlers.”

“We have better things to do with our time, and more respect for our produce, than to waste them on frivolities like that.”

“Good!” exhaled young Dorothy heartily. “So ‘Garden of Meats’ *is* an unworthy misnomer? No wonder the phrase got censored! But the real purpose of the garden need not be despised.”

The woman looked at her with grudging respect. “What would *you* call it then? ‘The Flesh Farm’?”

“We—ll... I still feel a little gingerly about that word too. But what about—er, the ‘Plantation of Protoplasm’?”

The woman laughed harshly. “That’s splendidly obscure, and dodges the issue nicely.”

“Maybe ‘the Replacements Ranch’?” suggested Ojo.

“Ha-ha!” The woman now laughed really delightedly, and suddenly seemed to get into a good mood, though no better a one than that she continued to express her usual derision. “That’s a real gem of euphemism and circumlocution. All right: I’ll suggest it at the next directors’ meeting.”

“And we’ll let Ozma know,” offered Dorothy. “She’ll want to have it changed on the maps.”

“Ozma?!” The eel woman stopped short. “That’s right, I do seem to have a vague memory from when you were here before that you know the ruler of Oz...”

“Of course,” said Dorothy with almost a sniff. She couldn’t forget that she was a Princess of Oz; in her own right. “The dear Queen and I—we are... very close.” She suddenly realized that bragging and name-dropping are not socially very graceful.

“Maybe you could do something for us,” said the woman. She moved on again down the rows of growing heads. Our friends followed after, treading terribly warily as if it really were human heads they moved among and fearing to put a toe in somebody’s eye. The situation was not helped by the chorus of chatter and groans and whistles and calls of greeting that issued from the produce.

“Hm!” snorted their guide in an aside. “I wonder what’s come over them. I’ve never known them to be so jabbery before. Usually they hardly ever speak... But you hear what they’re saying, don’t you?”

The visitors stood still to listen. “This one’s asking for a drink,” reported Dorothy of a russet-haired girl-head at her feet who looked remarkably like her own friend Betsy Bobbin.

That wasn’t what their guide woman meant. Nevertheless she called to an enormous kohlrabi gardener who was working with a watering can four rows away. He looked up with a start and hopped nervously nearer. Unlike the majority of the vegetable workers they had seen here this one’s vegetable body really was his body, not his head. The body was fairly nattily dressed in a tailcoat (ideal for gardening wear) and a polka-dotted shirt open to the breast for greater comfort. He brought his can forward and as the plant tilted its head expectantly he put the spout to the mouth of the girl and gave her a big drink.

“That takes care of that one anyway,” sniffed the woman. “Don’t know what it wants a drink for, after those downpours all day yesterday. Probably just trying to attract attention.” With only a curt nod of acknowledgement to the kohlrabi she moved on. “You didn’t hear them?” she pursued.



“Ma’am, do you mean,” put in the Scarecrow, “their cries of ‘Help, help!’ and ‘Rescue!’? I heard that right enough.”

“Just so. The whole crop is overripe. They’re all panicking to get picked. September is their normal harvesting time but there’ve been almost no orders for them. I guess people are being more careful not to get their heads mangled these days. They’re afraid they’ll go to seed! or get thrown on the compost heap.” She laughed again callously. “Anyway, that’s what we’d like to send to the Girl Ruler about: has she got any bright ideas about what we can do with the crop, rather than just plough it under?”

“Oh, we’ll be sure to ask!” Dorothy hastened to affirm. “Ozma knows everything. She’s certain to think of something.”

“Here!” Bending down suddenly and dropping her eel (who took the undoubtedly looked-for opportunity and slithered away among the head-stalks), the woman, with a firm grasp and an expert twist of the wrists, snapped off a delicate-looking woman’s head with long turquoise locks. “Carry that along! as an example,” she ordered, and handed the head to Scraps. “What about the rest of you? Samples, anyone?”

The Scarecrow, with a sensitive gesture, declined but the two children, captivated with the idea of a head toy apiece for one’s very own, accepted eagerly. Dorothy chose the Betsy’ head and Ojo opted for an old gentleman who, he said, reminded him of his Uncle Nunculus.

After ten minutes the party reached the end of the head beds, which petered out in the shadow of a plantation of rabbit bushes. “These of course do get eaten,” indicated their guide. “We ship a lot of the fruit to the capital. I believe quite a number of ravening beats live there: a Cowardly Lion?—” She looked a question.

“‘Courageous’,” corrected the Scarecrow.

“And a Terrible Tiger—”

“‘Hungry’,” softened Dorothy.

“Oh, that’s right. He apparently consumes a vast amount of rabbit fruit. And there are others. Since the Ruler’s edict against

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eating fat babies, we've never had any trouble in unloading our animal-meat crop."

Here the woman pushed through another slatted gate in a high dark-red hedge and the travelers found themselves looking out on an ordinary pink Quadling meadow. "That's the limit of the—er, ranch," stated the caretaker. "Now don't forget what I asked you."

"But—" Dorothy hastened to say, cradling her head vegetable, "which way is the Emerald City? Is it far?"

"You can be there in an hour and a half—if you step on it," said the eel woman and she showed them the way.

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

The scenes of joyful reunion were indescribable. Let's describe them.

Polychrome and Mar the kangaroo, as the first to revive, rushed into a brief fond congratulatory embrace, then looked around for the Frogman, whom they had just been in the act of going to rescue when something greater than either of them had overwhelmed them. They were amazed to see that they were in the midst of a great crowd of people and other creatures and they supposed rightly that these had had something to do with their own timely awakening. They had not far to seek to persuade themselves of the good Frogman's equally fortunate revival, for there he was, scaling the flanks of the purple mountain's majesty in the middle distance.

Fred Fruakx of frog fame clambered up on the Elegant Elephant until he came to his free ear, on which he pulled long and heartily. At last the exercise paid off for the great animal slowly raised its head and said, "WRRRNH!", before the head fell to the ground again. Kabumpo was suffering not only from anesthetization but also a hangover, so he was the very last of all the victims of the poppy field to come fully round.

When he did, he rose to his feet, drew himself up to his full thirteen-foot height, and blew a blast on his trunk heard round the world. It was also heard by Carter Green, the Vegetable Man, who had the marvelous good fortune not to be trampled when the great pachyderm finally stood up. He now set up a piping wail and when Kabumpo looked down and saw him he wrapped his trunk around his old acquaintance and neatly tweaked him up by the roots.

Sure enough, in the many hours since he'd gone to earth the vegetable man had put down long rootlets. Now he commandeered the errant Jack Pumpkinhead's bark body (with which Jack at the moment wasn't doing anything sensible anyway) and sat down on it (so as not to reroot at another point) to snip off all

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superfluous tendrils, much as we might sit and cross our legs to clip toenails.

At last Carter was ambulatory again and whom should he rush to congratulate but his own original friend at court, Betsy Bobbin? who was still rubbing her eyes and yawning after having crawled out of the pile of girls. She looked around her with joy at seeing everyone restored from the spell of the poppies. Or nearly everyone. She gaped. Dorothy had disappeared)

“Oh, gracious!” cried the girl. “Where can she be? And poor Jack! he’s lost his head. And... and—oh, no: the Scarecrow too. Where’s he?!”

No one had an answer to this question. Trot and Urtha, however, expressed themselves so gratified to see Betsy safe and sound that they were not inclined to repine at this moment. Suddenly Betsy caught sight of her companion from her original arrival in Oz, Hank the Mule, and she let out a scream of delight that quite dispelled for the moment her concern for the safety of Dorothy and the Scarecrow.

Hank galloped near and heehawed with excitement. Then he said, “Betsy, my dear, here are our friends Jim and Lignum. Jim too was knocked out by the poppy fumes. I guess we all know how that feels by now. I’m glad it’s over.”

“Oh, so am I!” breathed Betsy. “But who do we have to thank for it?”

“Sorceress Glinda,” supplied Lignum the Sawhorse, who, being true to his name, saw the whole thing. “She used a sort of magic repellant propellant—and that’s the result.” The Sawhorse raised a gold-shod hoof to point at the vastly shrunk poppy field in the distance.

In the middle distance between, the group observed some cats and dogs and bears and their attention was distracted. Arm in arm Betsy, Urtha, and Trot moved nearer to the animals, who were celebrating their release from the fell spell by performing a ring dance round the figure of the Elegant Elephant as Oztober-pole. Their equine friends followed af-

ter the young ladies, although not arm in arm, and they all joined the dance.

There was even music! The Frogman used a couple of sticks to pound out a hollow-sounding cakewalk on the graduated blocks of the ABC-serpent doubling as xylophone. Siko Pompus the leprechaun drew from his pocket the inevitable miniature harp, on which he kept up an obbligato.

But the problem of their missing friends would not go away and soon Betsy and Trot slipped quietly from the circle of the dance and diffidently approached Ozma and Glinda, whom they at first could scarcely see for the number of crowned heads clustering around them in earnest confabulation.

Ozma, as is well known, was all-aware, so it was not many moments before she moved through the crush, still talking, and took the two little girls each by the hand. Breaking off her reasoned exposition, she said, "Welcome back, dears! You were long gone in sleep, weren't you? But now we've dealt with those naughty poppies. They won't bother anybody any more."[§]

"Thank you so much, Ozma!" enthusiasticized the girls. "It really was awful—in that violent rain-storm and yet not being able to stop going to sleep. But yet..."

"Yes?" said the queen. "What is it?"

"Well," volunteered Trot, "we're *almost* as worried still, because we can't see Dorothy or the Scarecrow anywhere. Do you know what's happened to them?"

"That's exactly what I've been discussing with my counselors. You see, not only are the Scarecrow and Dorothy unaccountably missing but so are the Patchwork Girl and Ojo the Lucky!"

The girls looked alarmed but of course had nothing to suggest. Ozma went on: "We've finished our business here. Nearly all the missing friends have been found. I suggest we move on back to the exit gates. A quick return to the palace

§ But see *Aunt Em & Uncle Henry in Oz*. Editor's note.

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seems in order for a look at th Magic Picture to see where the truants are.”

Again the girls were silent, remembering the unbudgeability of those gates, but they were confident the fairy would find some way to part them. For a last time a royal progress was made down the slope to the Brandywine, some taking last looks from the ridge top, though hardly fond ones, at the troublesome poppy field in the far distance.

You took a last sip of the raspberry tea Captain Jinjur had ordered laid on and swallowed the last bite of walnut cake. The table trembled. "I wish it wouldn't," said Queen Sonyo, articulating for the sake of the general.

"It's one of the side effects," you reminded her. "Everything's come to life, you see. Everything that the weather can get at, that is. The life element rains down with every precipitation and so the palace is now alive. As we see, it jitters and jumps quite a bit. Let's just be glad the table itself hasn't yet found life."

"I'll see to it that it doesn't rain on it," declared Jinjur grimly. She took a surreptitious chaw off her plug, for dessert.

"And I'll do what I can," you promised, ever mindful of your demonstrated great power of wishes. Only, it seemed a pity to go devitalizing things right and left just because you weren't used to seeing them alive and because they were more useful to humans when inert.

The moment came. "Now, my dear Lady, I must away. This is goodbye, perhaps not to meet again." There followed a sentimental scene between you and the Queen of Dreams over which we'll draw a discreet veil.

"Look after her," you cautioned the captain as she followed you out.

"I warrant you, my liege," muttered the guards-woman, and you knew the gentle queen was in safe hands until Witch Glinda should return to speed her back to her rightful realm and to *all* her children.

Now you shook hands with Jinjur, exchanged salutes with Corporal Munn, and flew away by bumbershoot with Natalie Nightglory streaming behind, as alive as ever but admittedly not at her sprightliest by morning light. Up you rose over the red clover fields, the pink palace fell behind, and you winged it across murmuring meadows, prattling prairies, and babbling brooks toward the green city far away.

The first that there did greet your stranger soul was Dorothy

Gale in her sunbonnet and bearing an extra head. ‘What in the world!’ you wondered. Instead of landing on the palace roof as you had planned you swooped down to alight in front of the startled girl as she with three companions approached the carved olivine portal of the Palace of Magic.

“You!” near-shrieked the young princess and was close to dropping her other head as she appeared to want to launch at you with her fists. “*You’re* to blame for all this!—for all of us being trapped in that awful garden [“Awful”!? Your lovely garden that you so longed to see, just because it *was* so lovely!] — and and usurping Ozma’s throne [Dorothy was after all not so grown up but that she pronounced it ‘uswerping’] —and, oh everything!”

You could have wept. In fact probably you secretly did weep. To be thus stormed at by, of all little girls in the world, the one you would most like to be liked by!

Dorothy herself was crying even harder and the Patchwork Girl had to put her arms around her and try to console her, while looking at you reproachfully.

Oh, to be looked at reproachfully by Scraps, the magic Patchwork Girl! Was this what your marvelous Oz adventure had devolved to? When all the time all you wanted was just to be helpful to the famous personages and to become, if in any way possible, their friend. It *was* a crying shame.

You lent Dorothy your handkerchief. She grabbed it without saying thanks. Anyway the two fellas, the Scarecrow and — surely that was Ojo with his belled blue hat? — were looking at you more curiously than inimically. You addressed a quiet word to them. “Could we go inside—to the, er, throne room and talk things over? I have some explaining to do.”

“Yes, indeed.” The genial Scarecrow strode forward, pulled the antique doorbell, and in a moment in response to the muffled jangle of the clapper the soldier with the green whiskers opened the door.

“Thanks, O.A.,” you said quietly if familiarly, and waited for the others to pass ahead. Dorothy, a little shamefast now, had

stopped her sobs and marched authoritatively in front of the rest up the ceremonial staircase and forward to the central sanctum of the royal Palace of Magic.

As Acting Regent of All Oz you moved ahead to assume the royal seat and thence you looked benignly at the others. You spoke. "I have had revealed to me the secret of this, our mystery. It *is* a mystery—almost in the religious sense. I won't go into that now. I must only say that shortly all will be over, and everything—and -body—restored to its rightful place. Quite inadvertently I have been the cause of some upsetting experiences for many of you, but I want you to know it was not of my doing. My only wish was to be liked by you all—of whom I myself have so long been so fond."

Princess Dorothy looked a little mollified at that. "But who are you?" she pressed. "And how did you get your—well, it looks like great magic powers? For instance, I notice you're carrying poor Button Bright's magic umbrella." (This famous totem was pictured in all books of Oz lore and its appearance known to every Oz schoolchild.)

You stared at your bumbershoot. "Good heavens! So it really *is*—" you muttered, before remembering to appear to the others as all-knowing. You related briefly how the custodian at the gatehouse at Gardenia had handed it to you. But you didn't elucidate as to how you had made that happen.

"Hi, Dot," now put in the umbrella cheekily. "How's Trot? and Cap'n Bill?"

Dorothy just stared. The total of things today that were talking and living where they had no occasion to was beginning to be overwhelming for the girl.

Now yet another being declared itself: "That's a mighty nice head you're carrying, miss," spoke up Natalie the night-flower. "Hello there!" she addressed the head directly, and Dorothy's bundle simpered prettily and lowered its eyes.

"It's a souvenir from the Garden of—er, from the Replacements Ranch," said the princess. "I kept it because it reminds me of another of my friends, Princess Betsy Bobbin—. But that's

neither here nor there." She placed the head from her on an occasional table that stood near the throne. Natalie inevitably wavered toward it, while Dorothy spoke again to you: "What we want to know is what you're going to do about all this. You can't go on sitting on Ozma's throne indefinitely, you know," she said righteously.

"Er—no, of course not," you hastened to placate. "I've told you, I'm only ruler pro-tem, just until the Queen returns from her business abroad."

"But she's not *going* to return!" nagged Dorothy. "That's just the trouble: she's locked in that wretched garden of yours, just like we were—"

"But you got out," you countered.

"Yes, but only because my friends forced the passage of the Deadly Poppy Field. That seems to be the near-impassable barrier on that side of Gardenia."

The Deadly Poppy Field! Heavens, had that got into the act as well? How exciting. How was the dear old Field getting along? You scarcely dared ask. You loved it—as you did all things Ozian but perhaps the Ozites themselves didn't feel that way.

Once more you felt the pang of loneliness that all rulers know. How you'd love to talk over all these things with someone who knew and cared, and who better than actual denizens of the famous realm itself? Then all of a sudden you threw ceremony to the winds. This was after all the only time; it was now or never.

"Tell me, Princess," you spoke, "what is the real feeling here in Oz about the celebrated Poppy Field? Do you, in fact, love it? in spite of its frightening reputation—and, indeed, its demonstrably frightening effects?"

Dorothy looked gratified to be thus consulted, but also vexed. "Are you crazy?" she exclaimed, scarcely according you the courtesy you might have expected a ruler of Oz, however pro tem, to merit. "'Love the Deadly Poppy Field'! It's far too threatening a thing for that. But whatever can you mean?"

This was something you'd thought about a lot. You were aware of how the great villains of literature were often better loved by the public than the less colorful, conventional heroes. Oz contained one of the great examples of this. You said, "There was a movie—a moving picture, you know—about Oz—"

"Of course," said Dorothy with hands on hips. "And I was in it! At least, someone was pretending to be me but she was so big! and her hair the wrong color. It was called *The Wizard of Oz*."

"Marvelous!" you breathed. "So the film's been shown here..."

"Naturally. Ozma commanded a performance right after it came out. They sent a projector along with the film and Professor Nowitall knew how to run it. He'd been used to magic lanterns from way back.

"All of us attended. Oh, how we laughed! We've never enjoyed anything so much, have we, Scarecrow?" The girl from Kansas gave the straw man her hand, now quite restored to good humor, it seemed.

"Oh, glory, how fascinating," you said, and knew you could spend the next two weeks asking for Dorothy's opinion of every single frame of the movie.

But there weren't two weeks. Half an hour at the most. You hurried on: "Well, the wicked witch has turned out to be the best-loved character in the film apart from you two, of course!" you hastened to amend. Everybody loves Margaret Hamilton.

"Now that's in direct contrast to the public reaction to the *books*. There the Witches of East and West are hated from first to last. Nobody ever has a good word to say for them—"

"Well, they *were* awful old creatures!" exclaimed Dorothy, who had killed both of them. I guess she could say no less.

"Oh, to be sure!" you made haste to placate. "Of course! everybody feels the same. If anyone ever did dare to say a kind word about them, there would be no end to readers' irate letters to the editor. That's why I was moved to ask: is the dangerous poppy field disliked that way too, here in Oz? Because if so,

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well, maybe I could do something about it. I want so badly to do *something* for all of you here in the beloved country..."

Dorothy dropped the Scarecrow's hand and put her own back on its hip. "Wait a minute! You mean you want to *destroy* the field or something?!"

"Well, er. I do seem, as you pointed out, to be able to do wishes and I thought—er..."

"No," said the princess. "Please don't! We'd better leave to Ozma any destroying that's got to be done. But if your wishes are as powerful as you think..."

"Yes?" Oh, anything to please this radiant maiden whom the angels named Dorothy!

"Wish us back to that charmed garden of yours and let's get an end put to all this mix-up."

"Oh. Er. Well, all right." You hadn't meant for your last lingering on the Throne of Oz to end quite so abruptly. But where Dorothy herself of Oz ordained...

The princess assumed her wish was your command and turned to collect her parcel from the occasional table.

But! Betsy's head had disappeared!

The little advice bush waved its leaves in greeting as the royal procession passed by, but no one, except possibly sensitive Trot, paid any attention. Poor bush. It had tried so hard to be helpful but in the end its admonitions had gone unavailing. Nothing it had advised had come to play any part in the working out of events. They had never got properly into the forest. Where was "the key"? Nobody knew—or by now seemed to care. And as for the advice "not to worry", that's about all they *had* done.

As the party moved along it presently picked up some stragglers. The Tin Woodman and companions had gone astray in the far northeast corner of the gardens but by now had wandered back, telling of marvels of horticulture they had encountered: upsidedown trees that waved their roots in the air; a thicket of splendid shrubs whose every leaf was a different shade of a single color: purple, grey, orange. The perfume vines were a wonder too: silver-brown trumpet blossoms that tooted out blasts of a world of scents: cooking marmelade, tea-rose, striking matches, sea water, raspberry, sulphur, brewery, hyacinth, frying onions, Chanel number five, and roasting coffee. Those who could smell, related Nick Chopper, had stood fixated, unable to tear themselves away.

Then there were King Rinkitink and Prince Tollydiddle who had fallen into the Munchkin River and almost escaped the enchanted garden that way but in the end had struggled ashore and now rejoined the main party looking rather bedraggled.

Just before Ozma's entourage regained the main gates they ran across kangaroo Tronto sitting under a banyan tree smoking up a storm. She had met and fallen an instant convert to the blandishments of the fell cigarette fairies!

And now the gates and freedom!

Clever Glinda and competent Ozma joined enchanters' hands and took up a position in front of the gates. Mar the marsupial had lost her ring of keys so anyway no time need be lost in trying mechanical means to gain egress. The great

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adepts simply waved their wands, invoked spells, and did some powerful wishing.

Nothing happened. Betsy, trying the gate, found it bolted fast as ever. Glinda frowned. Ozma looked concerned. Their combined magic availed nothing? Right here in the middle of their own fairyland, just an hour from the Emerald City? This blocked gate must be under the most potent enchantment in the world.

"It's as I feared," confessed the Red Sorceress. "We're up against the barrier of mind. It's the most durable barricade known to man or fairy, far more indestructible than any matter of steel or stone."

"What are we to do?" spoke Ozma.

"Just wait. Your usurper is bound to turn up again some time. Too, I have a shrewd suspicion that the Scarecrow and Dorothy may have gone to get help. They've never failed us in the past. There's just a chance..."

"And meanwhile?"

"I'll try to get through to Fairy Queen Lurline by wrist radio. She may have a suggestion. But there again, I'm not sure..."

"Our wrist radios have never been known to fail either," stated Ozma. "Why shouldn't you be able to summon her? Or she, to do something?"

"I'm not sure, as I say. It just may be that nothing, not the most potent fairy charm that ever was, can work unless your usurper wills it so."

Admittedly your conversation had been absorbing. Everyone had been engrossed, his attention completely claimed. Even the soldier with the green whiskers, greatly curious, had followed you into the throne room and hung on every word. But that a living head should have got up unnoticed from a table top close at hand and walked off! And this was all the more odd because, you know, it hadn't any feet.

However, it was the work of a moment to find the truant. "There she is!" called out one of the other heads: the Patchwork Girl's lady's head which Scraps' cotton hands had placed, for safety, on the floor some time before. The head pointed—not with a finger exactly, but it aimed an eye significantly—in under the high-standing throne.

There they lay, in connubial bliss: the Betsyhead and Natalie Nightglory. Or if such a thing is too shocking in Oz, let us say that they had grafted, though that word too may have unfavorable connotations. The simple fact is that they had united and become one being, joined indissolubly, now and forever, world without end. The Betsy head had been in sore need of a body and the mobile nightglory had the greatest possible use for viable eyes and ears, smelling and tasting organs, in addition to its own wealth of speaking trumpet blossoms. Each had been attracted to the other's fetching appearance and now they—or henceforth we must say "she"—lay exhausted but beatific after having triumphantly given birth' to herself.

When she saw you all squatting and peering under the throne, the Betsy head raised itself weakly and murmured, "At last I'm a complete woman!" Then she seemed to swoon away, rather. You thought the head looked awfully big in relation to the long trailing convolvulus stalk. You could only hope that in time the two vegetable constituents would grow into greater structural harmony with each other.

Now you and the others drew back. You stared at each other with expressions of amazement, embarrassment, and delight.

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Would wonders never cease? No, not in Oz.

The accouchement had reminded you of something. "Come!" you whispered loudly and led the way out of the hall. You quite forgot to take a last look at the Throne you left forever. With the others following you went out into the palace park and looked for Lucion, the gardener.

The bucolic fellow was standing leaning against his potting shed. In your capacity as ARAO you said to him: "I sent an umbrella-load of plants here last night. This umbrella brought them." Fleg took a bow. "How are they doing?"

Lucion took his grass straw from his mouth and vouchsafed, "Reckon you did. Seen 'em first thing when I come out this mornin'. Litterin' the whole south forty, they was. But leggy things! I couldn't bed 'em out nohow. They said they wasn't sleepy and kep' walkin' away. Durndest thing I ever see... Leastways, I did see somep'n like it or heard! Ever since those downpours yestiddy every flower-head in the park's been chatterin' nineteen to the dozen. An' the talkin' trees an' the babblin' bushes an' the whisperin' grass! What's the reason of it all?!" The good man scratched his head in puzzlement.

You were going to have to start explaining things some time. You might as well begin now and you did. You told them about the life force carried by the falling star and how convection currents and seeded rains were going to bring—or had already brought—everything in the world to intelligent, talking (often even walking) life. Or if not the whole world at least a large part of it down-wind from the Kingdom of Dreams. That's why Lucion's trowel was talking and the potting sheds prating and the towers of Ozma's palace behind you dancing in situ a stately saraband.

"Wal, I swan," swarmed Lucion. He made no demur when you and your companions ran about the grounds, catching errant nasturtiums and forgetmenots and bundling them without ceremony into the opened-out magic bumbershoot.

"I'm taking them to the Charmed Garden," you announced. "That's where they belong."

“What about us?” said Dorothy. “How are *we* going to get back to the garden?”

“Not by bumbershoot anyway,” you declared. “We couldn’t all hang onto one umbrella, and besides it’s full of flowers. I guess we’ll just have to walk.”

Actually this was part of your scheme to get to string out the time with these fascinating celebrities. Of course you could have wished them all—

“What!” Princess Dorothy broke into your thought, “with our friends trapped in Gardenia? We must get to them instantly!”

“Ozma and them aren’t going anywhere,” you knew for an almost certainty. “But let’s go look at the Magic Picture. That may be able to reassure you.”

You entered the Palace of Magic for the last time. You sent Ojo to collect Betsy Natalie from under the throne, the Scarecrow to announce to the servants who remained in the palace that their royal mistress would soon return, and Dorothy and Scraps to look at the great Picture. You yourself had a rendezvous with the royal regalia: to sway Queen Ozma’s sceptre one more time and to put away the crown in its velvet-lined case.

Then you took the road to Gardenia. On the way you explained to your friends how everything had come to be and how everything must end.

Just before you reached the old vine-wreathed gatehouse an hour later you managed somehow, as if by chance, to touch in turn the hand of each of your companions. You made some excuse to hand Dorothy the flower-filled umbrella. Then you led the way through the entry port and stepped to that magic gate.

You turned the handle, you pushed, and—

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

Dorothy flew into the arms of Princess Ozma of Oz and they hugged for ever such a long time.

When at last they drew apart, the girl ruler said, "But where is our... usurper?" She gave a little puzzled laugh to soften the harsh word.

Dorothy looked around and gasped. "Why, I don't know! How awfully strange!"

"More to the point perhaps," said the genial Scarecrow quiz-zically, "where is the charmed garden?"

Everybody stared about—and went on staring: the little group of new arrivals and the big crowd who made up Queen Ozma's entourage. The Charmed Garden of Oz was missing.

Gate, gatehouse, encircling wall, and all the magic and mystery and great beauty of Gardenia were gone as if they had never been. Our friends were standing in the middle of a vast featureless meadow crossed by the yellow brick road. Well, one feature remained: the calm cows they had sometimes glimpsed through Gardenia gates still browsed contentedly on distant grass.

"Whatever does it mean?" said several people in tones of awe.

"I think it means our visitor was greater than almost any of us can know," said Ozma solemnly. "But *she* may know," and the fairy lifted her head in the direction of the wise Sorceress of the South.

Glinda moved a little forward and spoke so all could hear. "Perhaps I have guessed a few things," she stated a bit false-modestly. "I think—I don't know: but I believe—that we, all of us, for a time were but figments of a dream in the sleeping brain of our visitor—"

"That's right!" broke in the ever impetuous Princess Dorothy. "We heard all about it on the walk here: the shooting star that fell in the Land of Dreams and brought everything to life, *including* dreams, and—oh, so many queer things that were never in this world."

But perhaps you would like to hear it in coherent fashion as the story was put together from Dorothy's account combined with the intelligent suppositions of the Witch of the South?: the whys, and wherefores of your adventures in Oz.

It all began when that unique comet struck—*just where it did*. Its inordinate life-bestowing quality did not only affect such physical objects as stood in the path of the star molecules as they drifted round the earth. Life was given also to the very dreams themselves that emanated from that magic kingdom. "Life" is to say "reality". For one time only, a dream would become real—and the dreamer happened to be you. For the space of one dream everything your sleeping mind envisaged would be fact.

Never mind that you dreamed of actual places and living beings, who otherwise presumably would have gone about their own occasions. While you dreamed, those occasions would be held in abeyance. Everybody and -thing in your dream would dance to your tune.

You see now? Well, you saw already the time the blue heart of the Star Lake spoke to you. You knew, you had sensed already, that you had infinite power—for a finite time. That was why all your favorite fantasies became facts in the Charmed Garden. Yes, and your pet dreads as well. That was why it was so easy for you to direct everybody off to the garden. That's why Button Bright's umbrella was so ready to your hand. "Wishing would make it so." You had only to wish, to dream (for dreams are but wishes—and fears made fact for a time), and it would be true.

As in dreams too you knew without knowing how you knew. You knew that the life-seeds from the crashed comet would come to blow over Oz and bring total confusion, when *everything* in the whole country would become a talking, and usually walking, living entity.[§] What could the Ozites do to restore order in the babbling gyrating whirligig their country would become?

Nothing.

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

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You alone could save Oz. And you could only save it by creating an oasis which the dread life seeds could not reach. Only in the charmed garden, Gardenia, would the life-charged element in the rain be without effect—because Gardenia did not exist.

You summoned thither all the brightest beings, and all the power-wielding crowned heads, in Oz: so that when the emergency was past that competent congress, in council assembled, could take measures to undo the damage of universal livingness. Even now Ozma and her advisers are trying out a hundred hopeful ways of dealing with the untoward epidemic of life in Oz.

But you would not be there to see it. You arranged that your carefully assembled throng of Oz leaders, once arrived in Gardenia, could not leave it. Yet once the life-depositing rain showers and their threat had passed, the leaders must be able to depart in order to be able to act. There was only one way to dismantle the Charmed Garden and its unbreakable grip. You had to wake up.

“A holy day shall this be kept hereafter,” quoth Queen Ozma.

“Yes, and a holy place,” opined her friend, the sorceress Glinda. “We must put up a monument stone to commemorate the time and place when a stranger saved Oz—or arranged at least that we might be able to save it ourselves.”

“A stone!” exclaimed the princess, and a merry laugh escaped her. “I do assure you, my dear, I don’t feel a stone will suffice. We ought to reconstruct in veritable fact the whole Charmed Garden of Oz! It’s a delightful concept. And some or others of us have, while the chance was there, seen every corner of it. Those happy ones can direct the laying out of those parts. I think it might become one of the showplaces of Oz.”

“I’m sure of it,” said Glinda and concurred with her sovereign’s plan. “If I may presume: might it not be a good idea to start by erecting here on these fields, the only spot in all Oz not affected by the uncalled-for plague of livingness, a temporary ‘winter palace’ out of which you may work in coming to terms with the infestation?”

“A good direction! wise wonder-worker,” applauded the princess.

“And then too,” went on Glinda, getting a taste for garden management, “I wonder: what about gathering here all the now perambulatory plants? Natalie Nightglory and many others of her ilk who are sure to turn up?”

“Well thought upon,” approved Ozma heartily. Then she had another idea of her own. “That oversupply of meatheads—to employ the older parlance!—at the er, Replacements Ranch: they could be invited to join forces with many of the walking, but fairly headless and unthinking, plants. There must be adaptation, of course, of the size of the heads to the dimensions of the plants that will bear them. The use of a little magic might be timely there. Then they might like to serve as caretakers here in Gardenia—or ‘careleavers’! if you will. For we will hope indeed that they will leave all cares: all those who enter here.”

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Meanwhile the mob of courtiers was crowding round and the sounds were loud and long of congratulations and cheers. The target of many eyes was the reunion of Dorothy and the Scarecrow with the Tin Woodman and the Courageous Cowardly Lion. In joy Dorothy threw her arms about the latter's neck—but as suddenly retreated, making almost a gagging sound.

"Oh, Rex!" she burst out. "Forgive me, my dear, but you smell terrible!"

The Lion blushed, but under his mane no one could see it. "Hmhm!" he half roared. "Sorry about that. Occupational hazard of visiting the garden of Gorb—"

"Oh, Lion!" now cried Urtha the flower maiden. "We were going there! I wanted to see if that wicked old sorcerer was still safely enchanted. Did you see him?"

"I too, Princess," said the lion, glad of the chance to direct attention away from his odor, "had an idea of stamping him out, but unfortunately we never got a view of the enchanter. After falling in a very nasty pool we decided we'd do better to leave the place—"

"Pardon me one moment," interjected the Southern Sorceress and advanced upon the group of reformed friends. As she came she detached from her lapel her sorcerer's-glass which she never left home without. "You permit?" she said, placing the glass in her eye and bending to examine a tuft of the lion's mane magnified a thousand-fold.

The witch stood erect again and a small smile played round her kindly mouth. "I had an idea... Princess Pretty Good ... Urtha—and Your leoninity," she addressed King Rex, "I believe felicitations are in order. My glass informs me that the dust on your coat derives from a magical compound, NG-13, a substance most often found in the composition of low-grade spellcasters and thaumatasters."

When her hearers looked blank at that, Glinda spelled it out. "It would appear that at some point Gorbabrog, the evil necromancer of the underground garden, left the form of a brown

mouse to which he had been condemned and took other shapes. Apparently his latest incarnation was that of a foul-smelling mud puddle. We can only conjecture as to why he would feel at home in such a guise. I surmise that the recent torrential rains, draining into the subterranean garden, swelled the puddle into a sizeable pool, into which you all proceeded to fall.

“If my supposition is correct, Gorba/Abrog now exists as a myriad of mud-dust particles spread between here and that famous garden down by the Munchkin-Quadling border. I fear there is little likelihood that he will ever be successfully reconstituted.”

That proved to be the star comic turn of the day. The crowd laughed until they were sick. Queen Ozma added a merry note by stating that the first order of that day should be to get the thirteen unlucky and mud-dusty animals (twelve if you excepted the cautious Glass Cat) to the nearest lake or river where a salubrious bath might be enjoyed by all.

Such a river lay just out of sight across the fields: the-majestic green-blue Munchkin. Thither the royal entourage now turned its steps.

As the merry crowd gamboled on ahead, Princess Dorothy put her arms through those of the winsome fairy Ozma and the stately Sorceress of the South and they walked on for a while in silence. Suddenly, “That was the key!” said Dorothy.

The others looked a question. “Key?” said Ozma.

“Yes! The advice bush warned us to look for ‘the key’. The key—to everything—was our visitor, of course.”

The two ladies looked at her again, in admiration. Presently the Kansas girl spoke once more:

“It is a little worrying though, isn’t it?”

“What is that, dear?”

“Well, if people’s dreams all over the world are going to come to life, to turn out, that is, to be real, there may be no end to the queer things that may happen to us. I mean: there may well be dozens—or even thousands—of people who have dreams of Oz. And if all they dream of comes true—”

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“No,” Glinda quietly reassured the girl. “I believe that dream-spell may well turn out to be unique. By now the effects of the life seeds on dreams will have passed over. No new dreams that are dreamed — of Oz, at least — will come true. The enchantment, so far, and now, I think, finally, affected just one person in the whole world.”

“Our visitor,” put in Dorothy, awed.

“I think we may say,” added Ozma, “our kind even: our noble visitor.”

“Yes,” said Glinda thoughtfully. “Just one person in all the world: the person who is reading this book...”

Weekiwatchee, June 1971

Lund, 3 August 1988

