

Shattered by the awful news she had fortuitously been auditor of, Lurabelle Lady-Insect lay nearly prostrate throughout the night and lost valuable time. It was noon the next day before, flying erratically, she got herself home to the Snow Queen hibiscus bush, mumbling over and over to herself: "How could they do it?... I thought deathlessness was the rule in Oz—but that would be worse than death... Animals themselves, and yet they could talk so flippantly of pulling somebody's wing off... Of course none of them were winged creatures.... Two were cats, I'm almost sure—but I've never heard voices like the others had... Yes, cats are heartless—besides being wingless. Timothy Inchworm is my witness to that... What should I do? We can't just let them go on and actually rip off a wing... The ring-leader is a villain called 'Ojo.' But how can I find out where..."

The said Mr. Inchworm noticed his neighbor flying disorientedly around in circles. 'Almost as if one of her wings were incapacitated,' thought Timothy, and he called to her.

"Oh, Timothy; thank goodness," gasped Lurabelle, coming in on a wing and a prayer for a landing beside him. "I've just had the most awful experience." She outlined the nature of the episode. "Apparently there are whole expeditions organized for small-game hunting. This one is going out after butterfly wings. I suppose they nail them up on their walls as trophies. But the point is: what should I do?! to try to save some unwitting insect from a dreadful fate."

"Do?" said Timothy, thoughtfully chewing a mouthful of leaf. "I hardly see how one ladybug—"

"I'm saying 'ladybeetle' now," Lurabelle broke in gently. In her distress she still had not forgotten conclusions provisionally come to in her talk with Stella Stick-Insect.

"Very well:—how one ladybeetle, on her own, can do anything at all. At least it doesn't seem they're gunning for ladybeetles... yet."

"Oh, that's egocentric," dismissed Lurabelle, in psychiatric

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terms. "I'm other-directed. Always have been, rather. I can't be happy if I know people are going around tearing the wings off my fellow insects, even if not ladybeetles."

"Admirable, I'm sure," approved Timothy. "Well, I suppose you could mount a counter-expedition—to try to put a stop to their marauding."

"Ye-es." Miss Ladybeetle was thoughtful. "I don't know about my organizing ability though. I'd have to have help."

"I'm awful sorry I can't be of more assistance," regretted the inchworm. "I'd be useless to an aerial task force—which I suppose is what's indicated—"

"I must consult the Rev. Mr. Mantis," decided Lurabelle. "He's reliable, don't you think?"

"Maybe a bit stiff and wooden in his manner," opined Timothy, "but essentially scund, I'm sure."

"And of course I must warn Bettina—"

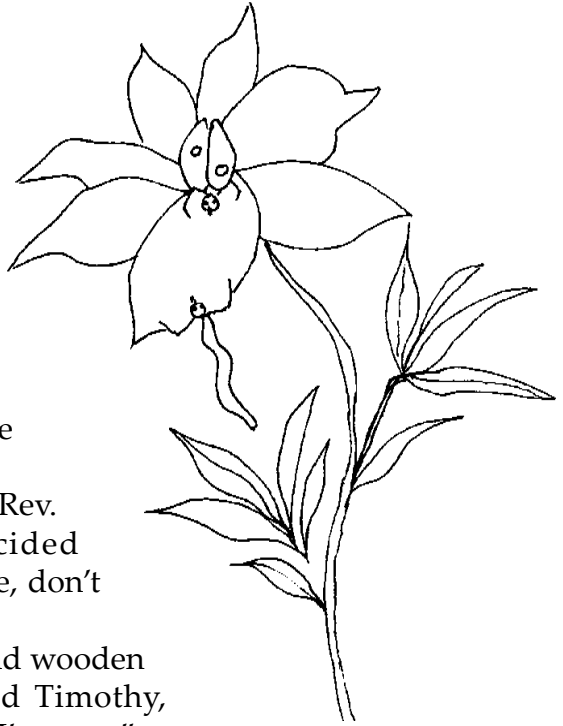
"Oh, you've met her, have you? Isn't she the flightiest thing!"

"Well, in this case flight is just what's wanted. Naturally Bettina herself isn't at risk, being pink—"

"Yes, we're just near the Quadling border here, where things start being red," supplied Timothy.

"Jut the butterfly will be concerned for her own kind, I know, even those who are yellow. I'll go and see her. Anyway, I want to thank her for introducing me to Stella."

When she had rested a while and browsed on a few aphids



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(suddenly Lurabelle felt guilt-stricken; after all, aphids were people too, with their own hopes and dreams), she took her courage in hand and flew off. She knew that Bettina, though of no fixed address, like to hang around the rosery down near the lake. Before long she found her, backed into the corner of a Mrs. McGready by the Rev. Mr. Mantis, who was giving her a talking-to about her light-living ways.

"Oh, sir," Miss Ladybeetle interrupted, alighting near the pair, "I want your advice—and Miss Butterfly's help! There's something more serious afoot, I fear, than differing views as to codes of behavior. If what I've heard is correct there are gangs of ruffians abroad bent on tearing the wings off living creatures. I'm so upset I don't know which way to turn, but I feel I must do something. It just never crossed my mind that such things are allowed in Oz!"

"No more they are," assured the reverend gentleinsect with appropriate gravitas. "Our country's queen, renowned Ozma, specifically forbids it. But tell us what you've heard."

At first during the recital Bettina Butterfly was inclined to fidget and flutter but when she heard that the goal of the trophy hunters was her very own kinsinsects she abruptly grew serious and even displayed traits of leadership. "*Yellow butterflies!*" she ejaculated. "That would be the Clouded Sulfurs—though of course their less numerous cousins, the Uncloudeds, will be at risk too: perhaps even more so. I'll round up us Roseates and Shocking Pinks and we'll be off in a body to spread the warning."

"Splendid, Miss Bettina!" cried Mr. Mantis, delighted at the quantum leap toward responsibility his parishioner had taken.

"But oh, be sudden, Bettina!" urged Lurabelle. "I've already stupidly lost so much time. From what I overheard that safari is starting out today. Why, they may already have encountered some of your relations and wrought their fell purpose upon them."

"Oh, I'll fly fast," promised the butterfly. "We can be in the Winkie country by evening and meeting the first fritillaries."

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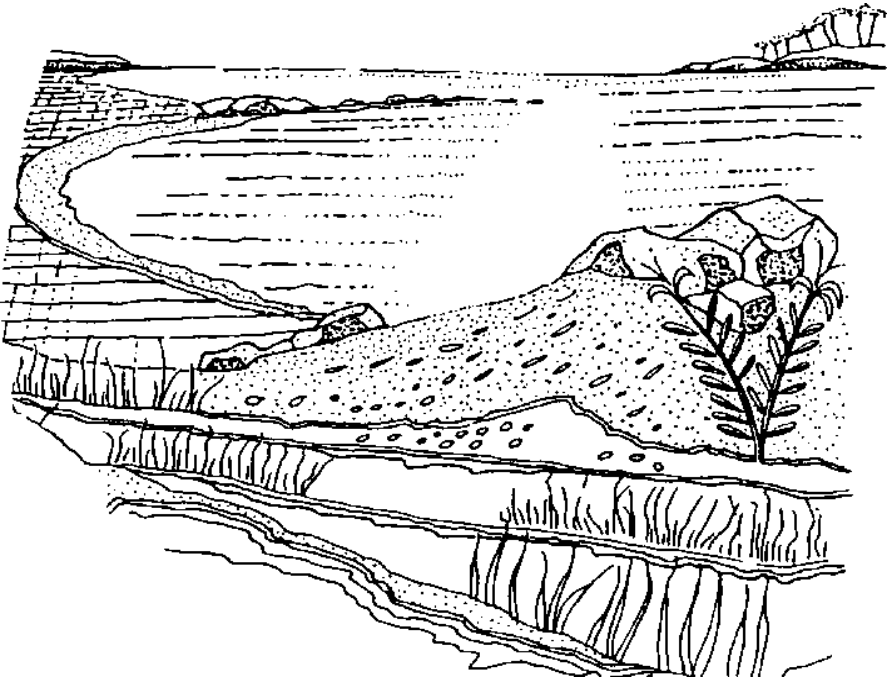
They'll spread the word to the others: to be on guard and take cover."

The ladybug bewailed her tininess. "I wish I could go along! but I'm afraid I couldn't keep up. But I'll tell you what: I'll open a liaison office here, to co-ordinate the plan of campaign. We won't stop at warning butterflies. Mr. Mantis! you'll want to help, won't you?"

"Oh, surely," said the minister, "but I'm not sure what—"

"Spread the word to the grass! It will tell it to the trees and they will tell the birds and bees and everyone will know! Meanwhile, I'll—Oh, there's Gloria Swan! I've got to let her know. Forward, friends! We still may not be too late...!"

And the little red-winged Samaritan flew boldly off across the waters of Lake Quad on her errand of mercy.



When the animal quartet had explained their mission and Rod Litenin had decided to join them, the party, moving rapidly, arrived by mid-afternoon on a wide desolate moor. A violent wind was blowing (par for the course when Rod was present) and for greater security he had distributed the animals in his big pockets and was outright carrying in his arms the bigger, cuddlable (though so squarez) Woozy, which from time to time stuck up its head to lick the man's scarred face with its square leathery tongue. Rod's stride was phenomenal and he confidently expected to reach the Dainty China Country by nightfall.

"Hello," he said, sighting the chromium pole that had replaced an old swinging sign that had hung there thirteen years earlier. On top of the pole was a stainless-steel disc inscribed "AntMagCoop". After reading it Rod was just as wise as before and he moved nearer to the building at the crossroads to get an idea of what its purpose was. The animals, hearing his "hello", stuck their heads out of his pockets to see what was what.

The quaint old shop with its drooping eaves was as if gone with the wind. In its place was a flat-roofed stucco-plastered box with no windows. Over the square entry way was repeated the legend "AntMagCoop". In addition there was a sign on the wall reading: "Attention! Do not enter if afflicted by magic!"

That brought the party up short. Rod was very well aware of the magic characteristics of at least three of his four passengers and had no intention of introducing them into a problematical situation. "What about it, friends? Do we look in here? or give it a miss?"

Toby had seen the sign and said, "It *would* be interesting to know what 'AntMagCoop' means. But otherwise..."

"Go ahead in, Rod," urged the Glass Cat. "You on your own. The rest of us will wait out here. We wouldn't want to

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go against their prohibition, naturally," she ended ironically. For in fact all four of the animals were "afflicted by magic" to a certain degree. Three of them wouldn't be alive at all but for that nowadays forbidden entity and even Eureka, who was originally a natural cat, was only pink and kittenish by virtue of a little hexing. Left to nature she'd be an aging white cat by now.

Litenin hauled up the creatures and set them down on the ground in a row and they looked on with interest as he pushed aside the swing door and disappeared into the building.

Inside all was painted plywood and chromium. Banks of uniform numbered drawers lined the walls. There was no display window but on the steel-topped sales counter stood a little china dog with a large head. It looked strangely incongruous and that chiefly because it was the only object of any color in the room. It was purple. Behind the counter stood a blonde white-faced young woman in a white laboratory gown. "What do you wish?" she said with a non-committal scowl.

"Wish'?" said Rod Litenin, bemused. "Oh, lots of things. That I had a new suit of clothes—and that my rubber shop could be rebuilt—and that my friends will find what they're looking for."

"No wishes granted here," stated the woman crisply. "This is the Anti-Magic Co-operative. Didn't you read the sign? But if you've got any wishes you want *anceled*, we can oblige."

"Anti-Magic, eh? What does that cover?" enquired the customer.

"Everything magic, of course. If you have anything that's contaminated by charms, bring it in here and we'll disinfect it for you. It's part of Queen Ozma's campaign to exterminate wonderworking in this country, root and branch."

"Oh, like that, hey? I hadn't heard," apologized Rod. "Tell me more, please, if you've got time."

The clerk seemed mollified by his ingratiating tone and relaxed a millimeter. "Why, when the new girl ruler assumed power her first act was a decree doing away with the practice of

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magic in the fairyland except by herself and her Chief Commissar, O.A. Glinda, formerly a witch—so-called.”

“‘O.A.’,” repeated the visitor. “What do those letters stand for?”

“Occult Adept. A highly responsible post. On Ozma’s orders Glinda has converted all the old-fashioned magic shops to *anti*-magic dispensaries such as this one. We give out preparations for eradicating magic in environments that may be infested with it.”

“What about enchantments? You got anything that’s good against them? I’ve got a couple of pesky transformations I’d like to clear up.”

“Here!” said the young woman and yanked open a drawer behind the counter. “What form do you need? Pills? Sprays? Maybe in liquid form? But be careful; this is powerful stuff. However, we’re keen to eradicate any effects still left from the time of the old regime.”

“I tell you what,” said Rod confidentially. “Let me have a carton of each kind. I know of various old spells hanging on; some may need one treatment, some another. I think I can get rid of a lot of magic for you.”

The clerk almost essayed a smile. “We’ll be glad of any co-operation on the part of clientèle. I’ll wrap these for you.”

“Oh, yes, please. I—er, don’t suppose those preparations can affect anything unless applied directly?”

“No. The emballage is air-, water-, and gas-proof. Use precaution, as I say, once they’re opened though.” The attendant handed across the parcel. “Here,” she added as an afterthought and offered the little china dog. “A bonus for collaborating customers. We’re getting rid of all the junk—er, sorry: curios that had collected up in the old booth on this site.”

With polite noises Litenin moved toward the exit. Then he turned back. “You wouldn’t,” he said, “—er, have any remedy for—well, offensive body smells?”

“Caused by magic?” asked the girl.

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“Well, no; entirely—congenital, I guess you’d say. Natural. From birth.”

“Sorry. I can’t help you.”

When the customer had gone the clerk did a bit of discreet snorting and snuffling to rid her nostrils of that customer’s strange effluvium.



"Yoo-hoo, Mrs. Swan!" called Lurabelle Ladybeetle, circling about the head of the queen of the lake but not *too* near. She supposed swans mostly lived upon things they found on, in, or under the water but she wasn't absolutely sure they were above snapping at airborne creatures.

The swan jerked back her head, turned it, and fixed the revolving insect with a stern black eye. "Who calls my name?"

"We spoke briefly the other day," reminded the beetle. "I was admiring your wisdom and aptitude in the rearing of your young."

"Oh, yes," acknowledged Madame Swan.

"Something rather awful has come up," reported the ladybug. "It's a mater I feel concerns closely all us winged persons." She began to tell her tale when Gloria Swan broke in to say,

"If you're having trouble flying and recounting at the same time, you may alight on my head. That will be quite all right."

"Oh, thank you," gasped the little red insect. Her flying *was* mostly limited to short whirring dashes and to do anything else at the same time made serious calls on her resources.

The swan drifted placidly, her head steadily erect, as Lurabelle related her adventure, and the cygnets coasted after her. Only when Miss Ladybeetle came to the punch line about the dastardly plot to tear off the wing of a living flier did Mrs. Swan rise on the water and flap her own wings threateningly.

"Obscene," she opined succinctly. "It must be put a stop to. What measures have you taken in hand?"

"I've notified everyone I know. I'm new here, you know: have hardly met anybody, but those few I've alerted. Bettina and the other butterflies are off at once, she promises, to rouse their yellow brethren and herd them to safety."

"That's not enough," declared the sear.. "Can butterflies fly fast enough to catch up and pass an expedition of that sort? so as to warn their fellows who may be in the line of march. By the way, what does the safari group consist of?"

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“Oh, the ring-leader is a criminal named ‘Ojo’, apparently a human boy. But they talked of ‘they’: I don’t know how many or of what races.”

“Take the boy as the limiting element. They have no vehicles or riding animals to speak of here in Oz, so the pirate crew will presumably be walking. Butterflies can’t go much faster—but swans can.”

“Oh, Mrs. Swan, you don’t mean—” started Lurabelle, thrilled.

“Not myself, naturally. I couldn’t leave my babes. But my husband Swen is off somewhere on the lake. I’ll have a word with him. There are not many creatures faster than swans when they get going. It’s the wing span, you see.”

“*Would* you!?” cried the ladybug. “How marvelous! What arrangement shall we make?”

“You’ll want to start at once.”

“Start? Me?” Lurabelle was taken aback. “Oh, well, yes, of course!” And she’d thought she was going to have to remain dully behind, womaning the liaison office! “I can be ready immediately.”

“You can burrow in among Swen’s neck feathers and ride perfectly safely,” decreed Gloria. “Watch out for the children now, will you? Perch there on Cygney’s head. Now you children behave! This lady-beetle’s going to nanny you for a bit while I go find your dad. The two of us’ll be back before you know it.”

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## c h a p t e r

## t w e l v e

"Splendid," said Toby the china dog when he heard Rod Litenin's report.

The traveling party had moved off some distance from the AntMagCoop and sat down under a lonely tree. Unfortunately it was an elm and as soon as Rod sat under it it began to develop elm blight. However, it would probably stand as long as their conversation lasted.

"Now I'd like to propose that we go somewhere else," continued the dog; "not to the China Country."

"Oh, not there?" said the others wonderingly.

"That was just somewhere to go out of interest really just curiosity," explained Toby. "But now we could have a goal of real significance."

"Do tell," urged his friend the kitten.

"These magic-canceling compounds Rod picked up. 'Think now what I would speak.'" (While in Rod's pocket Toby had been taking a look in the pocket *Shakespeare*.)

"Say on, my loving dog." The glass cat had had a peek at the same scene in the book!

"Where do we know of where they could use some demagicifying urgently?"

"Dr. Pip't's!" screamed the cat, and of course everything fell into place for everybody all at once.

If they had means to undo enchantments they could restore their friend Ojo's uncle to life and then the boy's quest was sure to have a happy outcome, even if not by his own achievement. This, of course, was what of Rod Litenin had had in mind when he elected to try the wares of the AntMagCoop.

At once the animals were all fire and flame to be off. By now Rod was such an intimate member of their group that they didn't even wonder very seriously if he would care to go along. Now they all looked at Bungle. With a cat's seven—or is it nine?—senses she would know in which direction her old home lay.

There was just one trifling incident as they got up from un-

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der the elm tree and made ready to depart. That was as Rod was storing the demagicifiers in his capacious pockets. "Sorry, friends," he said to the animals. "No room for you now. But I'll pick up a croker sack, the next store we pass. And what'll I do with you?"

He addressed the little purple dog figurine (a sort of Boston bull if not a chihuahua, to judge by the illustration\*, but the resemblance to life is not exact, Purp's head not being shown as noticeably large). This was the first the animals had seen of the new, if inanimate, member of the party, and they were delighted. Toby most, of course. "How extraordinary!" he cried. "He looks just like the picture in the book! So that means there are at least *three* of us china dogs in Oz!"

A faint loneliness that had oppressed the porcelain pug all his days (he now realized) began to blow away. This may even have been the start of a lessening of a slight melancholy that had been Toby's. "I wish I had a pocket. He could travel there," said the dog.

"Find a thinnish piece of rope," commanded the Woozy. "Or if there isn't any, bring a thickish piece of string. The little dog can ride on my back."

This was a happy solution to the problem and they all praised the Woozy for his cleverness. So they set off with a swing to find string—or anyway, with hope to find rope.

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\*See *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, chapter 20. Editor's note.

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## c h a p t e r

## t h i r t e e n

“It is with the greatest hesitation,” said the Wizard of Oz, “that I bring up a delicate issue, Your Grace.”

He was talking to the Sorceress Glinda, prepotent magic-worker and Ruler of the land of the Quadlings. Still now, six years after his final and permanent resettlement in Oz, the Wizard, O.Z. Diggs, was coming for weekly lessons in wizardry to the office of the good witch. He was getting to be very much of an adept at sorcery but still there were fine points that wanted perfecting. Besides, he had become fond, in the somewhat distant way that her rank dictated, of the wise and kind suzerain. He valued her as a confidante and especially now in these later years when at home in the Emerald City there was, by definition, no one to whom he could unburden himself on *all* topics.

“What would that be, my friend?”

“Well, umh—er. That is—” The Wizard uttered enough of such sensitive drawings-back to persuade the witch that his intentions were of the most honorable and then he came out with it. What it boiled down to was this: “Our esteemed regent, the Princess Ozma, has been a modest but very capable ruler for the land. ‘Has been’. But now that experience has been added to her natural intelligence and prudence, some indeed, a great deal—of her modesty seems to be draining away. She shows signs of becoming well, I deplore to say—a tyrant. She’s issuing decrees and prohibitions that have no sense to them. We have just now had a glaring example. Some time ago she promulgated a law that no one may pick a six-leaved clover, a perfect instance of her apparent wish to dictate the terms of life in Oz down to the smallest detail. What could be the value of such a law? Plants are not harmed by the occasional plucking of blossoms, twigs, or leaves, particularly the latter, which have no seed-bearing function. In this current case a harmless Munchkin lad had to spend a night in jail to expiate the ‘crime’ of picking such a leaf—”

“I wonder, Wizard,” Glinda interceded, “if you do not do

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our little Queen some injustice. Her rationale for the measure —”

The Wizard broke back in: “Indeed! Ozma stated that the law was aimed at persons intending to practise sorcery. It seems one particular and obscure charm calls for a six-leaved clover as an ingredient. But by the same logic she might outlaw all men, since a drop of oil from a man’s body (easily obtained by scraping the scalp and face of any male with a greasy complexion) is another component of that formula.”

“I’ve followed the case in the Book of Records, of course,” confirmed the sorceress. “‘Ojo’ I think the boy’s name is...”

“Ah me,” acknowledged Wizard Diggs, “Your Grace knows everything.”

“Hardly,” disclaimed the good witch with a smile.

“But there again,” resumed Diggs. “Princess Ozma is giving out that *she* knows everything. To that end she spends all day, what time she isn’t issuing new decrees or judging cases at law, sitting in front of the Magic Picture with her notebook, keeping an eye on everybody in the country. She’s had placards printed and posted up around the Emerald City saying ‘Big sister is watching you.’<sup>s</sup>”

“That does seem a bit supererogatory,” admitted the sorceress. She already knew of this development too, of course, but made no boast of it.

“Ozma is so formidably *just*,” went on the Wizard. “It’s getting quite frightening. Even in the folk mouth the word is that Princess Ozma is ‘just as just as she is powerful’ and everybody knows that she has total dictatorial power over the country, benevolent as it may be. But I’m afraid she complicates matters by making illegal so much that formerly was not legislated about. This prohibition on magic-working is perhaps the worst example. At a stroke dozens if not hundreds of amiable little magicians around the country are made criminals. And how meaningless and contradictory such a fiat: a fairyland without magic. If not a paradox, it certainly insures that the country become as dull as

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§George Orwell was later to make use of this device in his novel 1984.

well, Kansas, for instance.”

“There’s much in what you say, Mr. Diggs,” conceded the red witch. “I myself deplore the assumption that all unsupervised magic-workers are automatically going to perform *evil* magic. Although there were two or three fairly troublesome and malicious witches practising in Oz in former times, their influence was far outweighed by the effects of the good magic conjured up by any number of well-intentioned adepts. I at any rate never felt any compulsion to try to stamp out the use of magic—and I’ve been going along here at the old stand for a good many centuries now.”

“Just so, your grace,” acknowledged the Wizard of Oz. “Even I might be said to have merited stepping on in earlier times<sup>§</sup>, but you most sensitively did nothing about it.”

“I never willfully tried to extend my influence outside the borders of my own realm,” admitted Glinda. “Unfortunately now, *within* that realm, I’ve been obliged—by another of Princess (well, she now prefers ‘Queen’) Ozma’s decrees—to outlaw all the colorful old magic shops and replace them with rather grim agencies for distributing antimagic.”

“There you are!” chimed in O.Z. Diggs, justified. “So what I would like to ask is: can anything be done about the change in our dear ruler? Just selfishly, I would like to have back the charming and unassuming companion of such adventures as that of the Fairy Queen\* a few years back. Otherwise, I fear a development into a real reign of oppression here in the land of Oz if this pervasive and inflexible invasion of every area of life is to continue.”

“Let us keep the problem in mind,” suggested the red ruler, “and at every opportunity do what we can to soften the effects of the young princess’s stringencies. As a matter of fact, I do believe that in time a mellowing process will take place. Ozma is essentially a most decent individual.

“And now, shall we run through those routines for inducing sham transformations again?”

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§See *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

\*See *A Fairy Queen in Oz*. Editor’s notes.

The animal travelers (with human contingent) made good time speeding toward the northeast. With a bit of hustling all the creatures were able to keep abreast of the long-striding Rod Litenin except just poor stub-toed Toby and after a bit Rod simply picked him up and carried him permanently in the crook of his arm.

"That sore toe!" fumed Bungle. "I don't care if it *is* traditional and beloved, I wish it could be cured." Secretly the china pug did too.

Long after dark (and it was still only day one of their travels) the group approached the grounds of the Athletic Institute of Oz and crept under some lilac bushes for a kip (all those who *could* kip). They were already within the boundaries of the Munchkin land of Oz but they still had the whole of it to cross. Toby and Bungle whispered to each other through most of the night while the others slept.

The next day they got themselves ferried over the Munchkin River and without much conversation with the ferryman. Just as they had avoided meeting any of the students on the campus they skirted the Fiddlestick Forest, wanting to avoid entanglements that would hold them up in the accomplishment of their mission. At about noon that day they walked across the yellow brick road. It wasn't *that* road that would lead them to the house of Dr. Pipt. Besides, clacking down the hard highway would have been hard on the feet of the Glass Cat and the China Dog. All the party preferred to keep to the comfort of natural blue grass under foot.

Bungle, with the memory of recent hazards in mind, took care to lead her companions out in a big arc around the man-eating plants, but that took valuable extra time and they only managed to get within the limits of the Blue Forest before night fell impenetrably. Rod was well used to sleeping rough and he got comfortable in a blue-nut thicket with the animals grouped around him for warmth—and despite the smell.



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Blue-nuts are not very nourishing but they have a wonderful ability to fill the stomach so one has a sensation of having fed well. In that respect they are rather like water hyacinths, which cattle can graze on to their bellies' continual repletion—until they drop down dead of starvation. The case was not so drastic here. The eaters in the party filled up on nuts night and morn, feeling sure of a more substantial snack once they reached the crooked magician's.

The wayfarers made their way up the path along the forest-girded mountainside and about midmorning came to the roomy blue house of Dr. Pipt, sorcerer, in its pleasant blue gardens. They knocked. And then they waited. "The mad old fellow probably has to untie his spoons," diagnosed Bungle the cat, when their waiting was prolonged.

"Untie spoons'?" queried the human member of the party.

The glass cat had plenty of time while they waited to relate that the crooked magician when last seen had been hanging up his pots at the fire, preparatory to the laborious task of brewing another batch of his life-giving powder. For this work he stirred two cauldrons by hand and served another two with long stirring spoons tied to his feet.

But now at last they heard sounds within the lonely house. Dr. Pipt appeared delighted when he opened the door and saw who was there. Bungle was occupying the tall Rod Litenin's shoulder and when the magician cried, "Come to my arms, my beamish cat!", she leapt across. In his arms she actually purred, and then casually introduced her companions.

"Good news, doctor," she added. "We've got something here we think may cure those stone people of yours in a jiffy. Wanna try? You know the ones I mean: your wife and the old visitor: 'Nunkie'."

"Splendid, splendid!" said the creased and crumpled little man, who however seemed not abashed or depressed by his crippled condition. "What can it be? I wonder. Come in, come in."

The travelers needed no urging. It would be nice to be under

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a roof again, even if in one case it was a roof one had lived under for a good many years and could be expected to be fed up with. But no, Bungle strolled about quite complacently and pointed out the sights to her traveling companions, while Dr. Pipt put an (extra) kettle on. There was much to be said and commented about.

Rod L. said, "Nice place you've got here."

The Woozy said, "Those are the statues I've heard so much about," and went to gaze with interest at the charming marble figures of the old man and the buxom Mrs. Pipt in the window embrasure.

The china dog said, "Please show the anti-magic packages, Mr. Rod."

The pink kitten said nothing but "The butter's spread too thick." She was on the kitchen table, checking the cold collation their host was hastily throwing together.

Dr. Pipt suddenly cried, "Oh, help! The pots are boiling over into the fire!" and rushed incontinently into his wide-windowed laboratory next door.

In a moment he returned with a puzzled expression. "No; that's queer. They weren't boiling over at all. I gave them a good stir. But there! I smell it again. Like burning rubber—and there *is* a good deal of latex in the powder-of-life mixture—"

He was turning worriedly toward the laboratory door again when Rod with easy grace said, "Don't worry, doctor. It's just me. My natural effluvium. Sorry about that. It's why I tend to stay away from people. With animals it's different. They don't seem to mind."

"Perhaps a bath?" suggested Pipt. "Fine big bathroom here. All modern cons. My wife insisted on them. Help yourself... We'll carry on with lunch afterwards."

"Say, that's mighty friendly of you," thanked Rod. "I don't mind if I do." It had been a week since he had had the treat of a bath in a brook. (Cloudburst shower baths with your clothes on didn't count.) A hot tub would be all the more enjoyable. Not that it would help his b.o. much, as well he knew.

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So Rod splashed—and even sang. He had a fine baritone, and a voice (as opposed to a breath) can't stink, so everybody who heard it could just enjoy.

Dr. Pipt, baching it now that his wife was just a knickknack and himself already an adept at preparing things in pots, now had time to cook up a pleasant nourishing dish of rice with blue peas and Indian corn from the garden, besides such frivolities as cake and pie trees, cream-puff bushes, butter-cups, and candy-tuft the Pipt garden grew mundane things like natural vegetables, for occasional serving as relief from all the desserts.

The life-size pug went about making the acquaintance, and regretting the lifelessness, of all the objets d'(in a sense)art the doctor had created in marble over the years. The house was cluttered with the bricabrac. There were the usual poultry, puppies, kittens, cage birds (now what use was a stone canary which, when living, had been yellow, weighed a hundred grams, and sang; now it was grey [with white veining], weighed a pound, and was mute), the odd mole, squirrel, and fox, and, for a more glamorous note, brownies, goblins, and both common and garden gnomes (the gardens as well were full of the latter). 'If only these were still alive,' sighed Toby to himself, 'what tales they might tell.' But there you were: art (of magic-working) imitated, in fact replaced, life—but scarcely successfully.

And Eureka, the Pink Kitten. She idly hunted for mice but found only marble ones. Then under a chair she observed a queer phenomenon. The floor boards were slowly heaving up and down in a regular fashion and squeaking in what almost seemed a meaningful way. She might have gone nearer and investigated further but she noticed a whitish powder spread along under the skirting board and took it for rat poison. No good sniffing at that! Instead, she quietly hissed her friend Bungle to her.

"What do you suppose that is?" she whispered in feline. "The floor vibrating that way. Think it's an earth tremor brought on by our friend Rod's proximity?"

"Might be at that," surmised the Glass Cat. "I guess it's about time for another of his little natural catastrophes." But then

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Bungle caught sight of the whitish dust on the floor. “No! you nut,” she cried, but instantly shushed herself. “That’s the remainder of the powder of life! It obviously didn’t all fall on that idiotic gramophone that used to stand here. That dopey thing came to life and caused us no end of annoyance.

“You see?: the floor itself is now alive! Nailed down as it is, it can’t move any more than this, and with nothing to serve as a mouth it can only squeak. Funny that old Pipt never noticed it. Typical man; he’s never done any housecleaning in the week since the accident.”

She paused and Eureka could see her pink brains whirling round and round. The glass cat was clearly doing some heavy thinking. Apparently the brains were good for more than just looking attractive. “I don’t think,” she said presently, “we ought to just leave the powder there—”

“Tell Dr. Pipt?” suggested the kitten.

“No!” vetoed the older cat. “What good would that do *us*?”

“Use it to bring those two people back to life?”

“Are you crazy? What use would two live one-ton statues be to anybody?” (Bungle was exaggerating. The statue of Uncle Nunkie weighed only about four hundred pounds, that of the buxom housewife perhaps a hundred more.) “Besides, they’re scheduled for coming back to *real* life with the demagicifier as soon as we can get Rod to work on it. Here, see if you can find that gold salt-shaker! It should still be lying about on the floor somewhere, if I know Pipt’s housekeeping. Of course the bottle’s alive too by now but I don’t think it could have rolled very far with no feet or hands.”

Eureka espied the little gold flask in no time and batted it into a conveniently obscure corner under a hanging drape. “We’ll get Rod to scrape up the powder,” whispered Bungle, “when the magician isn’t looking.”

But now Litenin came from the bathroom wrapped in an old zodiac robe of the doctor’s—and smelling like fresh-burnt rubber. The sauerkraut scent was almost eliminated, overlaid by some attar of roses the man had found in the medicine cabinet.

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They had a right jolly lunch, all sitting up to the table except the awkward Woozy, who had a dish of honeycomb on the floor. Dr. Pipt spread some mouse-paste on Eureka's portion of the rice-vegetable ragout; that made it more palatable for the flesh-eating kitten.

When the table was cleared came the big moment. Litenin drew from his coat pockets the parcels from the AntMagCoop and spread them out for the sorcerer's inspection. "Ah, yes," said the adept, rubbing his hands and recognizing everything. "Just think, this stuff is being mass-produced now! But they've always been farther along technologically down there in the south. And of course it's always much easier to dispel magic than to create it. Sometimes just with a word..."

In the nature of things the demagicifying tablets would not do for the treatment the friends planned, nor with the best will in the world could the statues, though the mouths of both were slightly ajar, be brought to swallow a draught. As for the varnish for spreading over a surface to be rendered magicless: "Too little of it," declared the magician, holding the bottle up to the light. The clear red fluid sparkled magically, even though its effect might be the opposite. "This would cover only about half of Margolotte, to say nothing of Nunk.

"It will have to be the spray," he constated, showing round the atomizer can, which was the largest of the containers the travelers had brought. "It will cover a wider area, although it does have the drawback of being less precise. That simply means," Pipt went on, "that we can't do the demagicifying here, inside the room. A whiff of it might get on you." All the animals shuddered. "Or some of this crowd of kickshaws might go back to their original condition—and my wife is so fond of them as they are. Not to mention all the rest of the products of my years of magic-working. No, I'm afraid the only thing is to get the statuary out of doors."

Everybody looked solemn. The statues in massive marble didn't look as if they would be easy to transport anywhere. "Never mind," cried Dr. Pipt, taking fresh courage. "Mr. Litenin!

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if you'll lend a hand..."

Rod left the table as the crooked little man darted into a bedroom, opened wall cupboards, and hauled forth quilts and blankets. "We'll wrap the statuary in these and roll them outside. We two between us ought to be able to manage that, and without breaking any hearts—or fingertips."

The animals watched with more than common concern as the operation was carried out. "Further away from the house!" warned the magician. "No good getting live garden gnomes under foot from out of the herbaceous borders. There! right in the middle of that shrubbery, I think. Good job it's virtually wind-still. We can aim the spray-jet more exactly."

So they dragged and shoved the two heavy statues under some box bushes and drew aside the blanket wrappings. "Woops," said Dr. Pipt; "better pull the coverings away completely. We know what happened the last time we brought a quilt to life." The sorcerer, in the excitement, must have been confused, for unless those blankets were magically affected already, nothing was going to happen to *them*. Still, it was a funny situation: marble statues were expected to come to life by a process of *removing* magic from them!

Now it would seem that all was ready. The magician unsealed the spray can. He aimed it at his wife's marble head and pressed. Okay! The strong features relaxed and the eyes opened. Quickly the adept sprayed down the length of the statue's form, then switched to the feet of the enstatued Nunkie and began to demagicify there.

But alas! Rod Litenin was present and, as Bungle had pointed out, it must have been time for a little unprogrammed weather such as he so frequently occasioned. Out of a clear sky a tiny whirlwind swept into the shrubbery and blew the squirting demagicifier spray right through the box hedge which, being a fully natural thing, suffered no change—and onto the two stone kalidahs which guarded the path on the other side of the bushes.

With frightful roars the two beasts resumed vivid voracious life. Our friends had cause to be grateful for that roaring

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because it instantly alerted Dr. Pipt to the realities of the new situation. "Good Goorikop!" he swore. "The Kalidahs!!" But even these exclamations the clever doctor had presence of mind to make sotto voce. "Quick!" he hissed to his assistant, "into the house!"

The return to life of Unc Nunkie and Mrs. Pipt was startling for the two, to say the least. They hadn't an instant to think what had happened before their hands were seized, they were dragged to their feet, and set stumbling and scrambling along the path and in through the kitchen door, which the magician slammed behind them.

Swen Swan, with his tiny passenger, flew fast and far. Whenever they'd sight a swarm of insects (mosquitoes were the most common) the swan would settle somewhere unobtrusively and Lurabelle Ladybeetle would crawl out of the swansdown and wing off to pass the warning word to the smaller fliers. Actually Lurabelle was in a fair way to establishing an insect messenger service to rival the Bird Messenger Service of Oz, already some years in operation. In the present case, Lurabelle didn't think the birds, notorious devourers of insects, would be quite the agents to whom to leave the main spreading of the alarm.

"Listen, friends!" she'd cry in her tiny voice. "There's a terror abroad in the land! It doesn't threaten yourselves" (unless she was talking to butterflies) "but I feel sure you'll want to help." Then she'd briefly outline the situation. "Would you scatter and warn every butterfly you meet to take cover? while passing the word to any of *their* fellows they meet. They should beware especially of human boys, those noted predators."

Her proclamation was greeted by every reaction from indifference (by the wood-lice) to rousing enthusiasm. The locusts were the most excited. "Oh, shocking!" their ring-leader hissed. "We've got to do something about that! It's just about time for us to swarm again. We'll make that the theme of this year's drive: 'Bomb a Human!' That'll make 'em sit up and take notice—and realize insects are not to be trifled with!"

"Oh, please," pleaded the ladybug. "Don't, I beg of you, do anything drastic! *Just* warn any butterflies, especially yellow ones, that you run into, to keep out of the way of humans for the time being. That's *all* that's wanted... And thanks ever so!"

On they flew, gentleman bird and ladybird. By the evening of the second day they had reached the far northwestern corner of Oz, warning all minifliers in their path. There was little they could do at night. Many species of insects were of course abroad then in force but, save for the lightning-bugs, it was so hard to see them at any distance.



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Swen Swan settled down on a small swamp by late light and Lurabelle, who was getting hungry, flew off on a short hop to try to find some of the plants that harbored her favorite form of nourishment.

Like most insects she was attracted by night lights. That's how it happened that she blundered into an open doorway of a human dwelling. Humans were the very enemy she was warning her co-arthropods about, but the light! humans generated about them at night was so attractive that the poor little ladybeetle grew dizzy and fell for its charm.

Luckily, it was a little girl, not a boy, who stood in the open doorway, talking to a giraffe.

"Oh, Gerry!" she said, "say it again!"

"Why what was that, my dear?" said the giraffe, inclining his long neck as low as he could, which wasn't really very low.

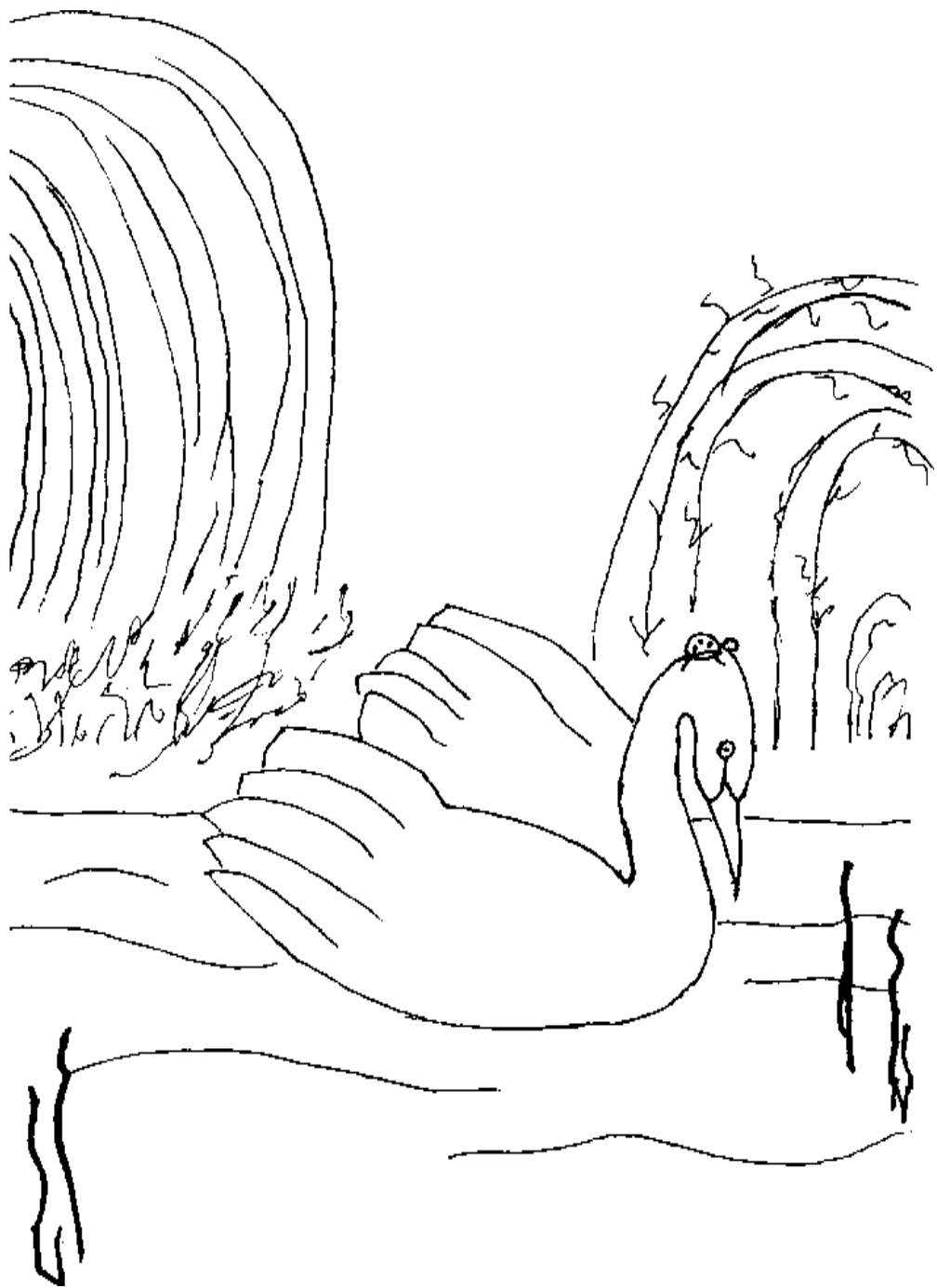
"You know: a little while ago, when we were talking about my writing—my stories."

"Why, I just expressed my admiration for your industry in doing something creative in your spare time, instead of just running around playing like most little girls, I believe, do. It's—well, adorable."

"Well, thank you. But it was more specific than that, what you said. It was over so soon, you know. It takes hours—days, sometimes—to write a story, but any praise one gets for it is over in seconds. I wish that part could last longer somehow."

"I said," said Gerry, speaking *very* slowly, to make it last longer (undeniably the result was a bit stagey): "I can't tell you how much I enjoy reading your works! Your puns, lists of details, and wordplay thrill me as much as your intriguing plots, original ideas, and character exploration. *Please* never cease writing!"

"How lovely," said the little girl, basking. "It's *so* nice of you to feel that way, Gerry. It's for you I write, of course, and for the very few other fans I've got. Sometimes I think our remote little corner of the world is a little *too* remote: nobody can hear about my stories. Of course Princes Ozma—"



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At this word the little ladybeetle gave a start and whirred confusedly across the light. Her motion in turn made the little girl break off and she exclaimed, "Oh, there's a ladybird!"

"Now we're three," commented the giraffe cozily.

"No, we're not. Help!" returned the girl. "We're four! There's Billina. Oh, little ladybird!" she cried, "Have a care! Don't go near the fire."

This warning was well given, for on a basket before the glowing hearth drowsed a yellow hen who would just as soon swallow you as look at you, if you were a ladybeetle.

Lurabelle L. based and came to her senses and quit flying brainlessly toward light sources. "Oh, thank you, miss," she exclaimed and settled on Lana Peethisaw's shoulder. "I mustn't give way to impulses, I know. I'm on an important mission."

"How exciting!" said the girl, whose sharp hearing could just make out the words of the insect near her ear. "Do tell... We perish for a little news of the great world here," she continued in an aside.

So Lurabelle Ladybeetle recounted her adventures, and Lana relayed the tale to Gerry Giraffe, who'd got settled, hunkered down in the doorway, to hear this bed-time story. It made a nice change for them.

Concluding, the ladybug said, "Say, you wouldn't happen to have some aphids about, would you? I actually came here on a foraging expedition; haven't had a thing since morning."

"Gosh, aphids," said Lana. "Honestly, I don't think I do. But I'd love to serve you something. What about a drop of milk? or a dab of honey? They be any good?"

Lurabelle wasn't sure but was by no means averse to trying them. In the end she did make a meal of sorts. Then she turned to go.

Lana was disappointed. "Won't you stay the night?" she invited. "You'd be quite safe here on the mantelpiece!"

But no, the ladybird thought her traveling companion might grow anxious. "I'd better return au côté de chez Swan," she said, breaking for some reason into French.

“What did you call us?” snarled the ravening tiger-headed monsters.

“‘COLLeeDOZZ’ ...?” said the life-sized pug from his secure location on the eaves.

“Where did you get that weird pronunciation from?” sneered the two. “sounds like ‘collie dogs’: about the tamest, least threatening breed known.”

“Er—well, from reading,” apologized the pug. “I read about you fierce creatures with bear bodies and tiger heads in a book of Oz history. There was no glossary with the book, and the spelling: ‘K-A-L-I-D-A-H-S’, with that odd ‘H’ in there, made me think that’s where the stress was: ‘DOZZ’.”

Surprisingly the two beats burst into a loud guffaw, which they quite seemed to enjoy. Then, “we’re COLLIDERS!” they roared. “That’s the main thing about us: we’re tigers—literally—at colliding with things, usually with other animals, which we proceed to devour. And when there’s nobody else around we collide with each other—just for fun.”

“Well, then; goodness you do,” put in the pink kitten at Toby’s side. “I guess you were making up for lost time when you ran into each other just now. I bet your heads are sore. Anyway it gave our friends time to get inside. Much better, really. Now we can talk sensibly.” She looked along the roof gutter where her dog and cat friends perched beside her. The heads of the humans plus the square forepaws of a Woozy were just visible from that vantage point, at a couple of windows below. The predators paced on the garden path.

“Funny,” the china dog went on musing. “I wonder why you’re spelled with a ‘K’ in the book.”

“‘K’, schнай!” derided the kalidahs. “We’re no scholars and we don’t know what it says about us in any book. But we’re wasting time. Come down, you flesh ones, and let us devour you. We haven’t eaten in a long time.”

“I’d soft-pedal that yen, if I were you,” purred the pink kit-

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ten smugly. "Being away, as it were, so long, maybe you don't know what's happened."

That brought the ursofelines up with something of a start. "'Happened'? What's happened? It looks pretty much the same around here as when we arrived to eat the householders."

"Good heavens, animals!" cried out Dr. Pipt from the window beneath. "That was thirty years ago. A lot could happen—and did—in that time."

Eureka, as an inmate of Queen Ozma's palace, knew most about it and she told the tale. "The Queen, who is as just as she is powerful—and that's going some—put out a decree ordering 'the destruction of all Kalidahs in Oz for the general good of the inhabitants of her realm' was the way it was worded, I think."

"But that's awful," bemoaned the two beasts. "You mean all the rest of our kind are gone? Putting to death an entire species! And what for? Consuming other creatures? That's our nature! What's just about punishing us for that?"

"Oh, Ozma's ideas of justice," explained the kitten, "go beyond merely strictly enforcing all the existing laws. She issues edicts just on general principles—and getting rid of you lot was one such move. Anyway, yes: your kind were destroyed, root and branch, so you two are the only ones left. I'd tread a bit cautiously if I were you, if you don't want to become totally extinct. Especially, don't eat any people!"

"But they're so delicious," wailed the kalidahs. "They're our favorite dish. And we have to eat *something*."

"How about fish?" suggested Eureka. "As part feline, like me, you must like fish. Try to find some piranhas and eat those. I don't think Ozma would object to that at all. Or snakes—"

"Ugh! I hate snakes," complained a kalidah, the female one. "They're so slithery."

"Well, rats!" said the kitten, visited by an inspiration. "They're a bit small so you'd have to catch a lot of them. But that's all to the good."

"We-l-l." The ravenants weren't sure. But you could see they were rattled by the bad news. They seemed to be going to slink

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away.

"If you'll be nice now," Eureka called after them, "we'll put in a good word for you at court. After all, you're an endangered species now."

The Kalidahs cast a surly growl over their shoulders. Ha, ha, very funny. Then the nearest fringe of a thicket, leading to the Blue Forest, swallowed them up.

As the crowd regathered in the kitchen the others praised the kitten for her valuable contribution. Meanwhile Mrs. Pipt and the old gentleman, like the Kalidahs, were hungry after a protracted period of emmarblement and they were glad to see the conjurer blow up the cook-fire. The housewife slung on her apron. The first fine brief rapture of reunion had already taken place right in the middle of the encounter with the tiger-bears, but there still was much to be explained and exclaimed over. The first shock came when the crooked magician turned to old Nunk and spoke his name.

"'Nunk' nothing!" exclaimed the oldster, and everybody fainted. Two whole words at once! It was feared that Ojo's uncle was suffering from oral diarrhea.

More was to come. "The name's Nunculas P. Gennet. I hope you'll take note. I want to thank you, sir," he addressed Dr. Pipt, "for breaking the spells I—that is, we—" Here a graceful gesture in the direction of Mrs. Margolote at the stove, "—were under."

"'Spells' did you say?" spoke Pipt, who was not hard of hearing. "I was only aware of a single enchantment, that of emmarblization."

"Oh, no," said Gennet. "I've been under an earlier spell as well, going back into well-nigh ancient times. You must all have noticed? This taciturnity: everyone must have known that was abnormal. That would cause a healthy, non-psychotic young man to limit his speech to one word at a time? Yes, it was a spell—put upon me by a fell witch at the time we were driven into exile. The witches weren't sufficiently cruel to 'Kill off' the royal infant, Lord Ojo, and someone had to care for him while he

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grew up. They threw the curse of taciturnity over me. The idea was that I shouldn't be able to give Ojo grandiose notions by recounting at length our noble past. But that's over now. Eventually we must do something about reclaiming our royal heritage. But where is the boy? I long with all my heart to see the Prince."

Everybody kept fainting and refainting at the incredibility of this speech but enough were conscious at the end of it so as to be able to relate in a few well chosen words that Ojo had loyally gone off to find the ingredients for a potion to undo his uncle's transformation.

"Splendid boy," said the uncle. "I'd have expected no less. I in turn must be off to find him now. Which way did he go?"

They told him, adding that the youth was now known to be wandering somewhere in the yellow Winkie country on the other side of Oz, past the Emerald City. "I shall make ready," pursued Nunculas. "Dame Margolotte, may I borrow a pair of scissors, and of you, sir" —turning back to Dr. Pipt— "a razor? I must get rid of this nasty old beard: another concomitant of the enfeebling spell put upon me. Nor was I allowed the right of every Ozite: to prevent my own aging. I've grown old and grey — while my elder brother, Ojo's father, was a young lusty man to look at when I last saw him. I wonder how it will have gone with him — and where he is ..."§

But none of those present was able to tell him.

The preparations for lunch, part II, were just at an inviting stage when N.P. Gennet came from the bathroom. The dreary old breast-length beard was trimmed to a smart Van Dyke. This seemed to have taken years off his age and he now appeared a spry sixty-year-old. Gennet scarcely seemed able to finish his well deserved meal in his eagerness to be off on his quest.

The old man was most interested to learn that he could expect company on his journey. The mixed bag of animals plus the tall gaunt wanderer Rod Litenin would now also be going to the Emerald City to let Princess Ozma know of the happy out-

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§ See *Ojo in Oz*. Editor's note.

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come of affairs.

But wouldn't they at least spend the night and rest up after all they had been through? the Pipts, in dismay, wanted to know.

Oh, no—Rod and his friends agreed—they ought to bring the good news to the capital as soon as might be. They could be well on down the road by nightfall.

And so it fell out. The happily reunited couple, Margolotte and her Doctor, stood arm in arm at the Dutch door and watched their brief but so beneficial visitors go down the garden path.



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## c h a p t e r                    s e v e n t e e n

N.P. Gennet was trailing ten yards behind Rod and the animals. The smell had finally got to him. And yet he couldn't deny that the stalwart Litenin was an attractive personality, despite the odor and even if the road did tremble under him in small landslides from time to time. Legerdemain Lane was splitting down the middle at this very moment but happily the earth tremor took a breather before they reached the house at the end of the road.

Mrs. Lucinda came to the door of the blue-purple cottage and welcomed the arrivals kindly. She shook hands with Rod Litenin, gagged as the breeze was in the south, but recovered quickly, invited the company inside, and went to let her husband know.

Nunculas Gennet was charmed by the silver-suited youth Zippiochoggolak who now made an appearance, attracted by the commotion at the front door. "So like my own boy," said the old man, "though he's a few years younger than you—to look at."

"Yes, I guess I aged a lot the time I was asleep in the poppy field<sup>§</sup>," admitted the young man with the stand-up hair.

But the reminiscence was broken off as the boy's mother returned with finger on lips and said, "Come along if you will. My husband's attending at the bedside of a visitor. He's dying, I'm afraid."

"Dying'!!!" cried everybody, thunderstruck. "But nobody dies in Oz. It's simply not done."

"I know," said Madam Lucinda. "One *need* not die in our country. But that's not so say one *cannot* die. And old Mr. Breign chooses to die. So he says anyway. He came here to do it. He says he wanted to be among friendly faces at the last: people who would truly understand. Of course we're flattered..." but her voice trailed off as the crowd of tiptoeing arrivals entered the sick-room.

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§ See *Uncle Henry and Aunt Em in Oz*. Editor's rote.

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On a bed arranged under windows that let in purple-blue daylight half-sat, half-lay the oldest man that they had ever seen. Nunculas Gennet felt a mere youngster in comparison. The figure was appallingly shrunken, as if both flesh *and* bones had wasted away, but the head in contrast seemed enormous. It was propped up on small crutches that rested on the man's shoulders. At his side a homely but amiable-appearing fellow was reading the newspaper through the invalid's transparent flesh.

Both turned as the newcomers stopped and stared. "Huh, huh, huk," grunted the ancient man. "You're admiring my brain crutches, I see. The thing's lame but it doesn't seem to want to quit functioning. My memory, for instance: it's as brilliant as ever. I've got so much to remember—and I still do: all of it!"

The new arrivals drew near and gazed in fascination. The ancient man's features were so wasted you couldn't tell what he looked like, but the famous lame brain amazed with its clarity. "Gosh," muttered the Glass Cat. "I thought *I* was the only one whose brains you could see working."

Host Wammuppirovocuck meanwhile had observed the duties appertaining to his position and quietly shaken hands or paws with the visitors and brought chairs. He spoke low but only not to startle the patient, who was not in pain but simply very feeble and fading by the moment.

"Who is it?" whispered Rod Litenin.

"Didn't my wife explain? ! That's Laym F. Breign, one of the co-founders of Oz. He's thousands of years old, much older than, for example even Sorceress Glinda. He was one of the great Goorikop's associates right at the very creation of Oz. But let the old gentleman tell you about it himself. He's still well up to that."

Wam leaned toward the bedside and expressed the general wish.

"Why, sure," cackled the oldster. "what do they want to know?"

Litenin spoke for all. "It seems impossible," he stammered. "It's astonishing—and extraordinary and quite incredible—"

"What is, my son?"

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"That you are still alive, father Lame-brain!"

"Oh, that's nothing," poohpoohed the old fellow. "The powerful Goorikop was well able to grant immortality to anybody he wanted to. He even built it into the structure of Oz in such a way that any latter-day resident who was clever enough could release the gift of eternal life for the benefit of all creatures living here. I see that's now been done.<sup>§</sup> And of course he didn't want his co-workers at the inception of Oz dropping off before he did himself, so he made us all immortal—with conditions."

"'Conditions', sir?" said Rod.

"Yes. For instance, if we ever *wanted* to die we could. But it wouldn't be easy! It's not. I can't seem to really put my mind to this dying business."

"Well, *don't*, sir! —if I may counsel you," urged Rod. "There's so much we'd like to hear."

"Ask away then," chortled the old gent.

"What was it like in those days—when you founded Oz? What did you have to do?"

"I don't know what Goorikop's method was. I just know he was transcendently powerful—like a god. Let's face it: he *was* a god. Anyway he was able to commandeer one of the earth's tectonic plates all for himself and he shoved it around fast, bumping into other plates and scraping bits off of them, until he'd raised himself a nice little continent. That plate remains today the fastest-roving of all such on Earth."

"That was *Sempernumquam*?" supposed Litenin, and Nunculas Gennet nodded agreeingly. "—with Oz in the middle."

"It wasn't there, in the middle, in those days. The continent's center at that time was all desert, like Australia. It was Goorikop's brilliant idea much later to turn it into a wonderland. That's when he enlisted us scientific/artistic types to help him."

"What were you supposed to do?"

"What, my own job? That was to dream up all the crazy countries the old man wanted to populate the new land with. I don't know why he thought I'd be especially good at that. I've never

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§ See *Aunt Em and Uncle Henry in Oz*. Editor's note.

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felt all that contemptuous of human beings.”

His listeners looked puzzled. Breign found himself more or less holding a lecture. “Yes. You’ve noticed how all the little odd kingdoms in Oz are populated by travesties of humans. Not animals. Those wander freely all over the country. They’re not penned up in communities like the people. Animals all have their own dignity and naturalness, unlike men, and there’s very little about them that is easy to send up. The only funny business Goorikop did with animals was to mix up parts of different species—like limoneags and kalidahs.

“But the people. ‘Do whatever you can to make humans look ridiculous,’ he said to me. So I had to invent people with wheels for hands and feet, or people who only cared about the appearance of, respectively, the inside or the outside of their houses, or people with just an empty space where their brains ought to be. It was depressing. But how Goorikop enjoyed it! He’d go around and visit these communities and laugh at the inhabitants for behaving in the ways we’d programmed them to behave.

“Of course he was being just like other gods in that: inventing creatures with particular character traits and then just sitting by and watching them stew in their own juice, enjoying seeing the messes they got themselves into as a result of those characteristics he’d given them, but never lifting a finger to help.

“I will say this for Goorikop though: he had just as much contempt for gods as he had for men. By now I have to admit he was right, since I’ve spent the last few hundred years living among them. Gods—and goddesses—are something else! But at the time I didn’t know that. I thought it was odd of the god to give me a blanket directive: ‘No churches in Oz!’ but I did what I was told. No churches nor anything related to religion: no priests, no occult rituals, no monasteries or nunneries and ergo, no satire on religion, which would obviously be a natural for one or more of the kookie countries: a land of religious fanatics or of hypocrites, for example. He could have had great sport with such—but he didn’t. Maybe, in a backhand sort of way, it

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showed a certain respect for religion: not wanting to send it up as he did everything else."

"Pardon me," said the pink kitten. A cat may look at a king and I guess Eureka thought a kitten could converse with a god's assistant. "Somebody did put a church in Oz. I don't know if it was you. My friend Dorothy Gale, a human, told me about it."

"A church? Are you kidding? Name one!" cried the old fellow excitedly.

"It was in a place called 'the Dainty China Country'—" began the kitten but old Mr. Breign broke in:

"I remember! Say no more! Oh, that dainty china country! That was almost my biggest flop. Originally it was meant to be part of a contrasting pair, like the lands of the Hoppers and the Horners, along with a 'rough crude clumsy china country' but that last really was my biggest flop and I erased it—"

"So *you* made the china church?"

"Yes—in an off moment. But I was working under pressure. I had *two weeks* in which to populate all of Oz with crazy colonies of people before old Goorikop came around with his magic staff and brought them all to life with one sweeping gesture. As I say, the China Country was one of my lesser triumphs. The main bad thing was that I made the *whole thing* out of china, the ground and all. Instantly when the chinas came to life they started falling down and breaking themselves. But alas, it was too late. I couldn't go back and change things. Luckily, I had remembered there must be *occasional* breakage, so I supplied a mender among the colony's people, with a never-ending supply of iron glue."

The old man paused. Toby the life-sized pug had by now insinuated himself into the front rank of the audience and hung on every word. "Oh, go on, Mr. Breign! please. Tell us more about the china country."

"Goodness me," said the ancient one, screwing up what remained to him of eyes. "Is that a china dog? But what a size! I never made any but miniatures, and I made all the china creatures there are in Oz."

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"I wonder if you may be mistaken, Mr. Breign," put in Rod Litenin. He drew from one of his big pockets the small, the purple, the big-headed china dog. The invalid peered blindly.

"This one's a miniature," Rod continued, "but it isn't alive, so it wouldn't be, any more than Toby, one of yours either. Where do you suppose it came from?"

"Good Goorikop!" shrieked the old gentleman. "That's Purp! How in all the wonders did he get in your pocket?!"

"'Purp'," said everybody and looked blank.

"Yes, yes, a silly nickname I myself gave the animal—and told him so when he was brought to life. It abbreviates 'purple' and has echoes of 'pup'. His full name is 'Purpupplio'.

"You're quite sure, Father Breign?" asked Wam, as puzzled as anyone.

"Of course I'm sure. See his big head. It's modeled on my own: out of proportion in relation to the body. But the last time I saw him he was alive and well and living in the Dainty China Country... I don't understand a thing."

All Rod could do was explain that the toy dog had been given him as a prize at an anti-magic emporium down in the Quadling country. He had no idea of its provenance.

"It came from the China Country," declared the ancient man. "I'll tell you that right now. 'Antimagic', you say. Wam here's been telling me about this idiotic crusade to get rid of magic in the fairyland. That's even lame-brainer than anything I ever thought up. You mean there are even stores now distributing anti-magic wholesale? Wonders will cease!"

"Yes, I guess they will," agreed Rod. "I think I see now why the shop woman gave it to me: a sample of what you could do with a well-placed demagicifying pill or spray."

"Shocking," mumbled the old invalid. "Shocking. So much for all my work, and Goorikop's. Does this mean the whole dainty china country has been killed off?"

Here Eureka the kitten could supply information. "No," she said. "I hear all the news at court and so far there's been no word that Queen Ozma is going around putting the quietus on

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all the little magic countries.”

“Then somebody must have silenced the little dog individually. It was an ‘anti-magic’ shop, you say. Pretty obviously the staff there did it. But how did the dog get there in the first place, out of its home country? ”

Nobody could guess—but they could all wish. They all wished the china dog could speak.

“Nothing easier,” said Rod Litenin matter-of-factly and took from another pocket the gold salt shaker with the powder of life. It jumped about lively in his hand.

“What’s that?” said L.F. Breign and the wizard Wam together, and Rod told them of the salvaging of the vital substance off the floor of the kitchen of Dr. Pipt. “Shall we use it?” he asked diffidently. “After all, there’s an embargo on the use of magic now.”

“Oh, to heck with that nonsense,” dismissed Breign. “Anyway, the dog belongs alive, so to express it. Go ahead.”

So Rod Litenin did as he was authorized. Carefully he unscrewed the perforated gold cap and took out the little round of (live) cardboard he had put in during a quiet moment earlier in the day. He hadn’t wanted any of the powder to dribble out and bring his pocket to life.

With great pains he sprinkled just seven grains of the powder on the back of the tiny purple dog where it stood on old Mr. Breign’s counterpane.

Then, “Help! help and rescue!” Purple cried. “Rescue, fair lords, or else the day is lost!”

Swan and beetle swept down the dry westernmost marches of Winkieland. It was mostly desert insects who could be passed the word here but the pair did come across patches of Saffron Patches or colonies of Canary Fritillaries, who were warned to watch out for their wings. These turned up at long intervals, however, and otherwise it was dry work. They hadn't seen a pond or a puddle since leaving the little (and rather shallow) marsh near Lana Peethisaw's back door.

Mr. Swan made one of his rare comments. "Got to have a drink—and a rest—soon, Lurabelle. A swan's no good without water."

"Oh, I know, I know," yelled (so as to be heard against the wind of their passage) the beetle. "I'm feeling rather parched myself."

But it was another half hour, marked only by a short croaked alert called out to a tribe of sandfleas, before the flying couple spotted a sluggish-trickling stream of yellow fluid.

I don't say "water" because it was the immediate discovery of the thirsty pair that such it was not. "Awrrk!" squawked the swan and took to his wings again hastily. "What a terrible taste! What is that stuff?!"

Lurabelle Ladybug hadn't even had a chance to sample the liquid yet but when Swen flopped down again a few yards off on dry alkali to preen and rid himself of the viscous substance the ladybeetle crept out and flew to his bill. She took a gingerly sip.

"I don't know," she said. But, on balance, "It *is* queer—but I think I might acquire a liking for it." But one who eats aphids may perhaps be thought to have a perverted taste. "I shouldn't be surprised but what it's nourishing."

But Swen Swan was gagging, and hating every moment of the experience. "It's sticky!" he protested, and of course when something horrid is sticky as well it becomes doubly dreadful.

"Well, naturally!" whistled a third small voice near them.



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Bird and ladybird peered but could distinguish no informant. "What else would you expect of mucilage? That's Mucilage Creek," went on the speaker.

Lurabelle flew to the ground following the direction of the voice and there, nearly invisible against the grey-white alkali, made out some queer creatures like walking grains of salt. "Was it you who spoke?"

"Sure. I couldn't help but hear what your big friend was honking... I'm Gus Gumbug," said the tiny insect and stuck out a foot. It was, however, too small for even the ladybeetle to get a proper hold of.

Anyway "Charmed, I'm sure," she said. "I'm glad you spoke up. We were wondering where in the world we were—"

"Why, this is the District of Cohesion!" exclaimed the gumbug. "I thought everybody knew that. Like I said: that's Mucilage Creek. It flows across the Paste Waste down to the Glue Lagoon, which is part of Lake Epoxy."

"Oh, gosh," said the beetle, dismayed. "No help there. You see, we're perishing for a bit of water."

"'Water'? What's that?"

"Dear me." The ladybird had to think. Explaining the obvious is not so simple. "Why, it's that liquid that falls from the sky," she said, inspired; "—now and then." It was clear to her it didn't often fall in this desiccated region.

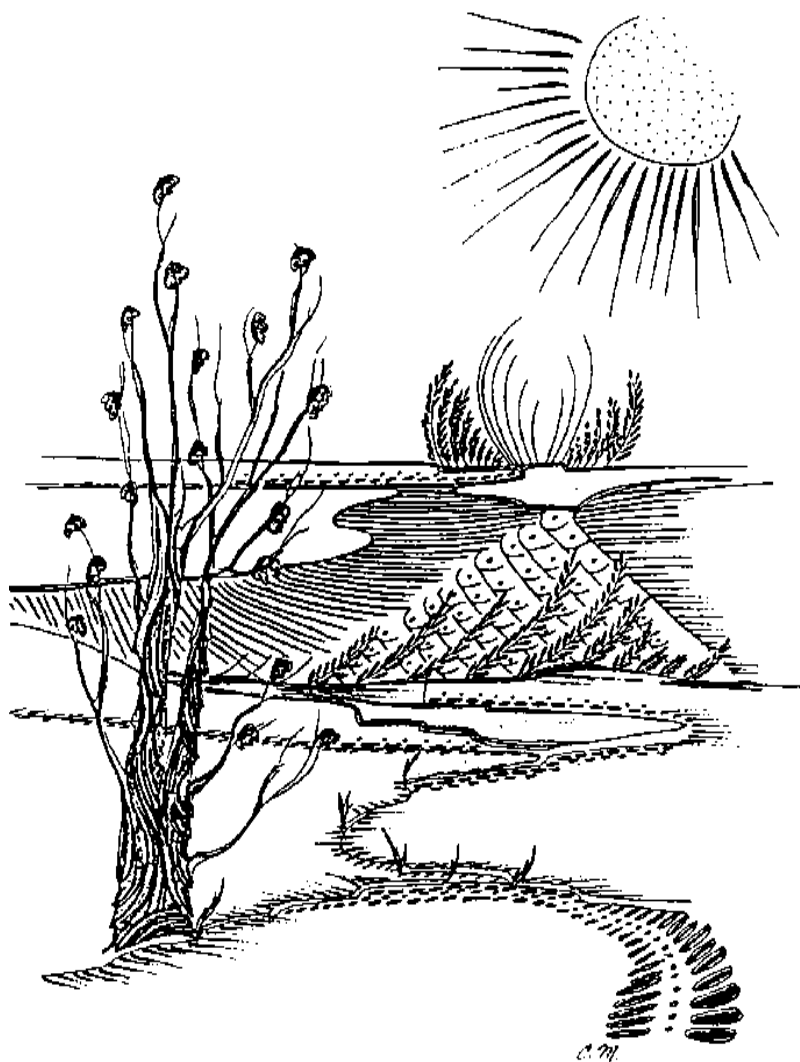
"Nothing falls from the sky here but cement dust—off the Desert there to the west, you know," informed the native. "Sometimes a few grains of putty, but that's only once in a glue moon. Otherwise nothing."

Lurabelle coughed with the dryness of it all. "I guess we'd better not linger," she said. "But thank you, Mr. er, Gumbug—"

"That's right. Like 'humbug', only different. You've heard of humbugs?"

Who had not in the land of the Wizard of Oz?

"We're not like that," declared Gus. "Humbugs don't hum or only very occasionally. We're the real thing. Just let us get at something and we'll gum up the works permanently. This whole



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Waste is nothing but the impacted bodies o' billions of deceased gumbugs: all sticking together to the end, you see."

"'Deceased'?" wondered Lurabelle. "But what do you do in this wave of deathlessness that's swept over Oz in the last dozen years?"

"Yes, that's a problem," confessed the gumbug. "Actually we're getting rather desperate. None of us can perform our natural function of adhering until we're properly dead, and now that consummation is denied us. We're teeming—" Yes, now that she was down at ground level the ladybird could see that the entire surface, as far as the eye *could* see, of what they had thought was alkali flats was faintly seething with the restless fidgeting of myriads of apparent mineral grains. "—and we don't know where to turn," finished the bug.

"Have you thought of migrating?" asked the beetle.

"Where to?" asked the puzzled gumbug. "'Who'd want a tribe of creatures that as soon as they touch liquid solidify into an unbreakable whole with whatever they're next to?"

"Hm," said Lurabelle, "that *is* a rather special condition. But I'll keep it in mind as I carry on with our present mission... Thanks for telling me. I guess it's a good thing my friend and I didn't find any water here! By now we'd be moving our feet very glue-like—"

"'Glue-like'? You'd be bonded fast for evermore," assured Gus Gumbug without the slightest accent of doubt.