

A brilliant rainbow arched from shafts of sunlight to a cottony white cloud landscape. Pretty Polychrome and some of her many sisters were executing a complicated pas de quatorze across the top of the bow, just to afford their father a good-morning treat. Poly swept to a wind-up curtsy, with her extended forefinger supporting her chin.

Just then she noticed something. Why, it was a bundle of old damp rags someone had discarded in the clouds. How odd. Why didn't the moisture-logged mess sink on through and fall to earth? There must be some magic at work here.

"Saintly sunbeams!" cried the affrighted rain maiden on a nearer inspection. "It isn't—it isn't! yes, it is: it's his excellency, the Scarecrow of Oz! However in the world—"

But the Scarecrow was still quite capable of offering explanations, if in a somewhat moist voice. "A full account would take days, dear Polychrome. I will just give you the last chapter: I climbed the infamous Vanishing Spiral Staircase, made it through the gates into this cloud country, then fell among thieves. At least: they've stolen two Oz princesses—and left me to flounder in this soft wet stuff that nobody could walk on."

"Why, sure they can," rebutted Poly and ran lightly across cloud-cotton to the Scarecrow's side. She put out a pretty prismatic hand and grasped his coat sleeve. The fairy was an athletic dancer and had no trouble in pulling even a sodden scarecrow to his feet. She virtually carried him the few paces to the rainbow. Here she tapped her fairy foot in commanding wise and instantly the opalescent arch firmed up and became capable of supporting weights: at least if they were no heavier than a few-pound scarecrow.

"Daddy," spoke the fairy, talking to the rainbow itself. "Will you be a pet and not fade away for a bit just now? I'm talking to my friend the Scarecrow and he couldn't do with just nothing under his feet. He doesn't fly, you know, as we do." Here she smiled around at her sisters who looked on with great curiosity.

"Poly," said Scarekewers in the most solemn tones, "I fear the dear Girl Ruler of Oz and my own special benefactrix Dorothy of Kansas are in mortal—or even immortal danger." Here he enlarged on the dread scene he had (partially) witnessed (what little he could see across the billowing cloudfield in which he had landed): the kidnapping of every Ozite's most admired pair of dames.

"Oh, I hope—and trust—you exaggerate their danger," breathed Polychrome. "Those horseguards you describe are obviously minions of the old King of Clouds, a great friend of my father's going way back—oh, into the dawn-time of Oz. Why, Scarecrow, I have never known King Welkin to hurt a bowfly or a rainbug, let alone princesses."

"I sincerely hope you're right," said the Scarecrow but was not much reassured. "I only know what I saw looked most ominous. Those horsemen were not being the least bit polite to our dear Ozma."

"The Cloud King *is* a bit of a joker," admitted Polychrome. "He's always threatening to turn his courtiers into silver bricks with a bolt of lightning. But he never does it."

"Would you help me, Poly?" begged the Scarecrow. "Help me to get to where that king is—in some cloud castle, I suppose—so I can plead for clemency at his feet?"

Polychrome did not hesitate. "I'm just sure this is going to turn out a tempest in a teapot," she insisted. "Why, jolly ol' Welkin!: what you tell me just sounds too incredible. But certainly: I'll go with you and add any weight I can to your suit. I'll just let Daddy know..."

Here the lovely sun-spangled girl tripped back to her sisters and had a flurried exchange with them, in the course of which were heard a few giggles that struck the Scarecrow as highly unseemly. Then the rainbow sisters scattered to the two ends of the bow, talking to each other—and to their parent?—as they ran.

The rainbow's remaining daughter rejoined the Scarecrow and took from among the profusion of trailing scarves with

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which she was always decked out a rainbow-hued length of airy but tough tissue. She knotted an end of this about the Scarecrow's waist, then tied the other to her wrist. "This way we can't be separated, you see. I know you know one can meet up with gale-force winds up here at times. Today, fortunately, the breeze is mild: just what we need to get where we're going."

Polychrome was an agile dancer—and so was the Scarecrow, as we have seen. A few lithe steps along the rainbow reassured the rain maiden as to this last. "Now be ready, my dear Scarecrow," she alerted him. "We've got to do some fancy stepping when the right pair of cloudlets comes along."

Attached as he was to the rainbow girl the Scarecrow seemed to participate in her weightlessness and had no trouble doing a flying pas de deux with her onto the first appropriate fluffs of vapor. Off they floated at quite a lively speed in the direction in which the hay man thought he had seen his friends and their captors disappear. "Where are we going?" he asked.

"Oh, there isn't much doubt but that the ladies have been taken direct to King Welkin's Cloud City. We'll make for there first."

There was leisure for talk. Polychrome had said they might be as much as an hour or two in reaching the cloud capital. The Scarecrow was starting to frame in his mind the leading points in the impassioned plea he meant to make but Poly, light-minded maiden, broke into his train of thought to say, "What are a few of your favorite things?" Clearly she was just making conversation.

The Scarecrow obliged with a short list of activities: the first that crossed his preoccupied mind: "Actually, I quite like lying in a stubble field and watching clouds drifting by. Even more, I like to see children at play. Dancing a jig with my great friend Scraps is great fun too. But let me see: best of all, perhaps, I enjoy sitting and watching the wheat straws grow in the fields near my corn cob home."

Some of these seemed like very mundane amusements to the high-flying rainbow maiden. However, she couldn't fault

the watching of clouds.

"Clouds *are* a wonderful thing to observe," she agreed. "Those and rainbows and lightning flashes and thunderstorms. I love them all. But maybe the sun's rays striking out from behind cloud masses into the empyrean are the noblest sight of all." The pretty rainbow girl seemed quite moved by her own romance.

Presently, "Scarecrow," said Poly, "I'd better warn you about cross currents."

"Cross currents?"

"Yes. Winds can move in varying directions on different levels. To zero in on the Cloud City it may happen that we have to change clouds at one of these sky crossroads. I hope you'll be ready."

This warning rather put the wind up the hay man. He had been sitting at his ease but now he hoisted himself awkwardly aloft, just to be ready in good time. But the good Scarecrow could be teetery on his pins at the best of times. On this vapor footing he gave a lurch, flailed with his arms, and fell off the cloud.

It was a small alarm, though, to be the only one of the couple's journey. Sitting Polychrome dug in her heels, tensed her arm against the jerk of the hay man's plunge, then proceeded to haul him back in like a fish by their 'umbilical' length of sky-tissue.

There was a tense moment when they had to cross from their northwesterly drifting cloudlets to one scudding due west but after all they made the transfer without mishap. Then nothing merited recording until the standing Scarecrow, peering with hand-shaded eyes like Columbus or stout Cortez, sighted at some distance what he took to be another cross-cutting cloud-proved jet stream. He called Polychrome's attention.

"Oh, goodie!" cried the girl. "No, that's not another cross wind. Those are the ramparts of that very Cloud City we've been seeking. Scarecrow, we've arrived!"

Before their cloud 'cart' reached the city gates the Scarecrow had time to grow aware of a great puzzle, and to get it solved.

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“Poly,” said he as the urban cloud embankment loomed larger ahead of them and the castle towers grew ever solid-looking, “of course I’ve always heard of cloud castles, but I thought that was just a manner of speaking. Cloud formations can look like mighty bulwarks or fleecy towers but of course we realize they’re not ‘real’ —”

“Do we?” asked Polychrome with a sly smile.

“Well, so I always thought. But now this great big heavy-looking city ahead!: how can it stay up? I mean, gravity —”

“I’ll try to answer your question, though I’m no meteorologist nor yet a sky engineer. It’s like this: earth gravity is different from that up here among the clouds and rainbows...”

“Yes”

The rainbow’s daughter rubbed her little nose and paused, embarrassed. “As I say, I’m no technician. I just know such a city can, and does, stay up. Anyway, think of Sky Island and Umbrella Island. It’s magic. You of all people wouldn’t be expected to ask for logic or a strict application of physics, now would you?”

Indeed, there was much in the hay man’s origins that had so far defied close scrutiny. He wistfully filed his gravity conundrum under ‘Pending’ and watched the great grey-silver-white city loom nearer.

Their cloud carrier bumped quite comfortably against the ramp that led up to the gates and the passengers stepped off gratefully. Their cloud caught against the cloudstones of the city wall, turned round like a wood chip trapped for a moment at the edge of a stream, then floated away ‘backwards’ on the summer air.

“Who goes there?” growled a guardsman from his sentry box beside the gates. He too brandished a lance and looked menacing.

“It is I,” announced Polychrome proudly, “Daughter of the Rainbow and personal acquaintance, indeed friend, of most potent Welkin King of Clouds.” Poly knew about that picture etched on the Cloud King’s throne. She thought it would be as

well to play that ace at once.

"Indeed," returned the guard. Maybe he was new on the job or he might have recognized the rainbow maiden even without I.D. card. However, "And that gunny sack of rubbish at your side: why do you bring that here?"

"I!" roared (yes, he could when he tried) the Scarecrow, "am the former Ruler of the Emerald City and present confidant of Her Grace, Ozma, Queen of Oz!"

With scant grace, but convinced, the guardsman about-faced, nodded curtly, and accompanied the strangers within the gates. Along three streets and through a bazaar they passed and crossed the city's public gardens. The shrubs and flowers were only cellophane but they made a brave show.

At the castle gate stood other guardsmen who relieved the first of his charges. Poly and the Scarecrow were not sorry to take leave of that surly companion. Now, by the law of averages, they ought to meet somebody nice.

If so, it wasn't these further royal minions. They were merely impersonal. They quick-stepped the visitors to the Private Apartments. Here two footmen in livery took over. Names were given, doors thrown open, and the distinguished callers announced.

The King of Clouds was to be seen seated in an easy chair of silver plush, twisting his long porcelain locks round his fingers. He did not look to be altogether happy. Yet, "Why, hello, Polychrome!" he piped, amiably enough. "What in the clouds brings you here? Does your papa know you're out?"

"Yes, your majesty," spoke Polychrome modestly, "but I've come here on my own initiative—to ask a great boon."

"Boon away, dear," said the affable(!) monarch.

"It's all a great misunderstanding, I'm sure. It almost appears that you have taken in custody—by mistake, of course!—two great friends of ours. At least, we know they intended to come pay you a visit *and* were last seen heading in this direction. Not under their own steam, however, and that's what makes us so anxious. Guardspeople with lances and a net..? And so we have come to plead for their release." Poly said her little speech nicely.

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"I know the very people you speak of," assured the king genially. "They are held for high crimes and misdemeanors."

"Not Princesses Ozma and Dorothy," stated Polychrome definitely. "They have never committed crimes nor misdemeaned themselves."

"What would you call trying high-handedly to make me give up some of my most prized property?"

"Oh, your majesty," cried the rainbow maiden in total disillusionment. Her old family friend had now blown his rep with her for sure.

All was lost by now for Welkin in his niece's eyes. He might as well 'walk on his phonograph records'.^s "Guards!... Guards!" yelled the Cloud King. "This sack of old leaves, or whatever: Away with it! Hurl it in the dungeon with the others."

Polychrome was aghast. She really couldn't believe her ears or eyes. But the old wretch was going on: "Polychrome, you should know better! Traveling about my kingdom with a suspicious character. Still, I will forgive you this once; only, don't let it happen again. Otherwise I'll have to take down your picture from my throne."

"Remove it and welcome!" spoke the rain fairy doughtily. "Indeed, I prefer *not* to be seen on your throne."

That made the irascible old ruler blow his top again. "GUARDS!" he shrieked. "Item number four for that cell!"

The girl surrendered without a struggle. Down dark circling stairways she was led. There was a pungent smell of mildew. Cloud rats scurried. And though so far undercloud a shrill draft blew from somewhere.

The cell door which was yanked open, then slammed to, was narrow. She could not see but only feel the cloud-brick ceiling nearly touching her head.

Polychrome was always known as a most sunny personality. This, however, was for her total night—and no moon. She began to weep uncontrollably.

§ See John O'Hara: *Appointment in Samarra*. Ed's note.

The Rainbow's daughter was still crying but just for the moment it was tears of gladness. A kind voice had spoken to her! and a kind hand lent a handkerchief. But in the pitch black she could see nothing. She felt the warmth though. All around her in the darkness she could now sense sympathy and fellow-feeling.

That voice! But of course she knew it. "Dorothy! Princess Dorothy of Kansas. Is that you?"

"Yes, indeed. But who are you? Your voice is familiar."

"I should hope so. We know each other well. I am Polychrome, the rainbow's daughter."

"Poly!" cried Dorothy and Ozma together. "How splendid! But how..?!" They had a hundred questions.

Relief was general. Misery shared was lessened and the three prisoners could even laugh a time or two at funny scrapes related. The rainbow fairy was only a little surprised that the others had not instantly guessed who she was. "Isn't the Scarecrow here with you?" she wondered. "I distinctly heard the horrid old cloud king order his underlings to fling the 'sack of leaves' in with the others, meaning you."

"No, he isn't here," they affirmed. "But what marvelous news that you rescued him. A great part of our misery was not knowing what had happened to him."

"Where can he be? They surely haven't—oh, they *haven't...*!" The thought was too awful. What if he had been thrown out with the discard and even at this moment was paying the supreme penalty on a bonfire!

At that the three girls began to cry again and cried themselves to sleep.

The earlier two captives had been there twenty-four hours when Polychrome joined them, so they knew the prison routine and they duly enlightened their fellow sufferer next morning. "First, we're wakened by the squeaking of the cloudrats—if we haven't been kept awake by it all night. Then

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we wash our faces in the moisture dripping down the cell walls. Soon the jailers arrive and prod and poke us along to the rooms we have to clean that day. We were promised jobs as maids and bootblacks, but not a bit of it: we're set to work as common slaves. Oh, the shame of it. Actually the work isn't that hard, merely boring and demeaning. And in the evening, regular as clockwork, we are given a trencher of broken bits from the royal table, before being herded back to our cell."

Poly herself got to experience the thrill of all this that day. She was told off to the water-carrying detail and hauled two silver pails up and down for many hours.

The only incident of note was the joyous discovery of the Scarecrow. It came about in this fashion: The old stump of a broom that the Queen of Oz was set to tidying a guest bedroom with was admitted by the housekeeper (nearly as tough an old bird as the jailers) to be at its last straws. The girl ruler was sent to a distant broom closet to arm herself afresh. When she opened the closet door the Scarecrow tumbled out!

The dopey Silverlings, largely unfamiliar with living beings other than of their own ilk, regarded Ozites as weird and wonderful creatures. What then of a Scarecrow, who was unique? Never had they seen such a figure before; never would it occur to them to assess it as a person. Why, no: this was clearly a bag of straw, fit for binding into broom tufts the next time the broom supply became really exhausted. Nor did they have wit enough to pull open the Oz worthy's jacket front and make the discovery that, for the nonce, he did not even contain straw but only hay.

Ozma was quick-witted. With a whispered word: "Courage!", she tore off the Scarecrow's head and thrust it in her sweepings bucket. Then she picked up in one hand the hay man's torso and carry-dragged it to the bedroom, scene of the hour's labors, where she pulled handfuls of mashed hay from the 'bag' for mopping in tight corners.

Once the day's work was fairly in swing the overseers tended to leave the labor force to its own devices. Thus it was

that presently all three of the Oz newcomers were in the stately guest chamber. Polychrome went so far as to lie down on the massive four-poster bed with its canopy and hangings of silver sheen. She longed to escape in sleep but the others warned her that might be trespassing *too* far on lax overseerage.

The girls had a problem: how to smuggle their faithful old friend away so that he would not end up back in the broom closet? Their device was rather ingenious. When at day's end they were driven back to their dungeon Ozma was wearing the Scarecrow's trousers and boots (she had practice in going in man's attire from old Tippetarius days), Dorothy sported his jacket and gloves, and Polychrome had his head and hat fastened somehow under her diaphanous draperies. After all, they had experience of transporting their friend as empty clothes from already earlier on this expedition.

Next day the workwomen left the viable remains of their friend rolled up in a corner of the cell. They would never be discovered in that black hole by the inquisitive.

The day's labors were on the ramparts of the castle. They were to do sweeping and scouring of the sentries' walks. The trio had been on the walls but a few minutes—and most fortunately no overseer within earshot when Dorothy screamed, "There's the Emerald City!!"

The other two rushed to her side. "Where? Where!"

"Over there—beyond those trees. See? a sort of open place."

"That's the municipal park," related Polychrome, who had been there.

"But that can't be my royal city," objected Ozma. "That pile of rubble? It doesn't sparkle and glimmer a bit."

Young Dorothy, perhaps more worldly-wise and sceptical, sniffed, "They'll have torn every jewel from its socket."

The desolate Queen sank down behind a crenelation, pulled her knees up under her chin, and sobbed.

The others sought to comfort her. "Dear Princess," said

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Polychrome, her voice, too, full of tears, “help is on the way. Daddy Rainbow knows more or less where I was going and will send a posse of thunderbolts.”

Even more realistically Dorothy reminded the assembled sisterhood that wise Glinda in the Ruby City was following their every move in the pages of the Book of Records. “She’s not going to let us suffer on indefinitely. Let’s relax and savor these experiences. Don’t forget: ‘They’ll go good in the book.’ One day we’ll remember with marveling these dangerous times, where recollections of birthday parties will be ho-hum.”

“I’m sure you’re right, Dorothy,” admitted the little Oz queen with a squeeze to the hand of her spunky companion. “I’ll try to put a braver face on it.”

The King of Clouds entered without ceremony the Royal Stables which the girls were dunging out. He found all three resting on their broom handles, having a natter. "What's this?!" he exploded. "Fluffing off?" But not one of his prisoners was looking the least bit fluffy *that* morning. The king frowned ferociously. Nor could he justify his servants' sloth by a constation that they'd already completed the job. Steaming silver heaps still lay dotted here and there in the stalls.

Dorothy, self-appointed spokeswoman, turned and faced the king squarely. "Her Royal Highness has seen what you've done to her city and refuses to work for you another instant. So do the Rainbow's Daughter and I. So there, too."

"Recalcitrant, ey?" muttered King Welkin, with a quite unaccountable twinkle in his steely eye. "Quite sure?"

"Sure."

"Positively," confirmed the Girl Ruler.

"Oh, well, you force my hand then," stated Welkin sadly. "'there's nothing for it but to exile you back where you came from."

"But the Emerald City?" demanded the spokesgirl. "You promised to return us our capital if we worked for you!"

"For six days? Don't make me laugh. The agreement was for fifty years—at least. Can't you count?"

"But my people then," put in Ozma. "Where are my Emerald Citizens to live?"

"Let them refugee south—or wherever. What do I care? Now silence; not another word!" He began forthwith to wave his arms in a significant fashion.

Dorothy thought he was just having an apoplectic fit out of sheer annoyance but fairy Ozma twigged instantly. The enchanter king was prestidigitating. "*Wait!*" she shrieked.

The cry gave even the high-handed monarch pause.

"We cannot possibly quit our confinement without our belongings!" stated the Oz ruler imperiously. "There is a bundle

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of clothing rolled up in the corner of our cell—”

“Oh, very well,” mumbled the king with scant grace. He raised his left hand, with middle finger rigidly extended, toward the zenith, and piped a brief whistle. Instantly a pile of old rags plumped to the still-wet cobbles of the yard. Incidentally, the girls’ battered old travel basket appeared there too.

The far-flung gestures of the royal arms resumed. The king reeled off a magic spiel at breakneck pace while slinging his arms three times toward the right, then twice back toward the left. He also did a very fast soft-shoe routine.

As the last syllables were heard the entire stables filled with a cloud of greyish-green electric-flavored mist. Flashes of lighting, claps of thunder struck and reverberated.

When the fog cleared there was only one individual left standing in the echoing mews. That individual was Cloud King Welkin, of course.

The others who had instants before been in his company found themselves seated on a silver toboggan descending at incredible speed out of the clouds. Princess Dorothy discovered that she was clasping tight to her lap both a basket and a roll of old clothing. For a space, all three travelers were speechless with the suddenness of it all.

Dorothy was the first to speak. “I didn’t have time to blink,” she informed her companions.

Ozma didn’t say much of anything. She was luxuriating in not scrubbing and sweeping. If nothing else, she had by her recent vicissitudes learned one advantage of being a pampered Princess. Polychrome was enjoying just being out in the open sky again. The rainbow maiden delighted as well in the rainbow colors of Oz spread out below them and every moment coming nearer.

In almost too quick a time (so charming an impression made their flight) the Ruby capital of Glinda the Good loomed below and before them. The flying toboggan braked—but gently: no good pitching everyone out on her/his head after so many horrors had been safely survived. The vessel glided in for a

smooth-bottom landing. Then, incontinently, it disappeared—just like something else silver long ago on delivering someone safely home.[§]

And who should be standing on the steps of the ruby palace but sorceress Glinda the Good herself? attended ceremonially by a couple of her maids of honor. She opened her arms and all three arriving girls rushed into them. This was no occasion for preserving formalities of address.

“Yes, I know,” she gently reminded young Dorothy who was about to launch into a circumstantial report on everything that had happened. Dorothy blushed. Of course: Glinda’s Book of Records. The good witch would have been glued to it the whole time.

But Dorothy with quick inspiration came back with a good answer: “Then you’ll have harvest-fresh straw all ready to repack the Scarecrow..?”

Glinda pointed down back behind the carved pink-granite balustrade of the steps. Now the girls realized they had been scenting something delightful: the aroma of new-scythed wheat straw. They all leaned over to have a look.

The wise witch had at once observed the look on Princess Ozma’s face after the momentary gladness of reunion was over. She wanted to prevent another crying jag, of which such the Record Book had kept her fully apprised. “What if—?” she ventured, and Dorothy twigged at once.

“Oh, let’s!” she cried. “It’ll be great fun. Even like a belated wind-up to our on-going outdoor party.”

So all six (honor maids included) gathered up great armloads of the straw and redumped them before the steps and they all sat down, unrolled the (former) hay man’s clothes, and in a very short space of time had a well-filled walking talking seventh member to their party.

But something was not yet quite right. Dorothy took out her pocket sewing kit, which had miraculously remained by her through so many trials, and expeditiously stitched burlap head

§ See *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Editor’s note.

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to twill collar, glove hands to jacket cuffs, and soft-leather boot tops to trouser ends. "There," she sighed. "Now have I done a good day's work." Restoring a nearly annihilated individual to viable life must always be a source of satisfaction.

Now the amiable Scarecrow could assist in the good sorceress' scheme to ward off further tears from Ozma's emerald eyes. He executed a nimble buck-and-wing before the pink steps just to demonstrate how back to normal he was. All the ladies had to laugh. Really, in certain lights he looked exactly like Ray Bolger. Glinda gave a sidelong glance. Yes, Ozma's eyes had stopped welling.

Now the party could speak of strategy without tears. "I feel I have failed my people," stated the Oz queen. "How will they, hereafter, be able to love me? I did my very best. It was useless."

Fairy Polychrome here spoke up. "If only I could reach my father," she said wistfully. "He has powerful magic too, of his own sort—and he's great friends, as well as relatives, with the Cloud King. He ought to be able to do something."

Poly, even more than the Scarecrow, was a famous dancer. Perhaps something in her own suggestion cheered her, for now she sprang away to the garnet gravel and executed her own buck-and-wing, followed up by a spirited bourrée, while the others discussed her idea.

"Maybe she has something there," acknowledged the Kansas miss.

"She may at that," agreed Glinda. "I too know Father Rainbow, and for almost as long as I have been acquainted with the Cloud King. It might not be out of place to pay him a visit."

You might have thought that half of those in attendance had had enough of "visits" for the present, yet all spoke up in agreement with the scheme. The Scarecrow said, "May we all go?"

The red sorceress looked solemn. "I thought of this as a stripped-down task force. I have planned to suggest that even our dear Princess Ozma remain behind. She, I feel, has need of total relief from stress for a bit, to help her cope with her grief. You, my friend," she turned again to the Scarecrow, "I would

ask, you being an experienced (former) head of state, to assume my official duties here in the Ruby City during my absence." At this the Scarecrow looked more cheerful.

"And now, good friends," proposed Glinda, "as a complete change of pace and, by you, richly deserved relaxation I invite you back to your apartments for a wash and brush-up, then attendance at a little gala luncheon."

"I couldn't eat a thing," joked the Scarecrow. "I feel stuffed."

But the others could—in spades.

"I relish the thought of some southern home cooking," confessed Dorothy. Ozma too admitted that she felt empty in more ways than one. And Polychrome announced that she could tuck into a moonbeam sandwich with gusto.

The good sorceress' kitchen staff were well aware of their mistress' most honored guests' culinary preferences. That's why, an hour later, the rose damask dining table cloth was decked with biscuits and gravy for Dorothy, lady-fingers and cold milk for the Queen of Oz, and jellied dewdrops for the Rainbow's daughter, sprinkled with powdered sugar and served on mint leaves. And round that table waited expectantly all the celebrities from the Emerald City, eager to greet and hear all the news from the girl adventurers (plus Scarecrow).

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

The luncheon party was just coming to a fairly festive close, everyone drowning his sorrows in rose-petal pretend wine, when a most awful noise shattered the air around them. Pink glass showered to the floor. "Good heavens!" they all cried as a scarlet fireball ricocheted about the dining hall.

"Bad heavens, I'd say," cried Princess Dorothy pertly. "Polychrome, what's the meaning of this? You know all about meteorology."

"I can't imagine," confessed the rainbow's daughter. "Unless this is Dad's answer to our message and request."

Some answer. Boom. Boom. Boom. Crackle. Crash went the thunder strokes with no time in between to catch one's breath. Lightning flashed in every direction to north and south, the two directions the dining hall looked out on. The crowd, figuring that lightning didn't strike twice, flocked to the windows to stare out at the pyrotechnics, which raged for two hours.

"It's like a fireworks show on the fourth of July," compared Dorothy, remembering her ancient home, "—only more so."

Silver rain poured down in torrents. Indeed, later that day gardeners swept up wheelbarrowsful of shiny silver pellets and delivered them to the palace forge.

Finally the storm moved off northwest, to pound the tin castle of the Emperor of the Winkles, and from there passed out over the Nonestic Ocean where it fizzled out.

There had been more destruction than one set of window panes in the pink palace but the downpour had been life-giving as well. All over southwestern Oz, where rain usually was at a premium, farmers rejoiced.

Polychrome stood at her bedroom window, gazing up into the now brilliant clearing sky. She hummed a rainbow tune:

"There ought to be a rainbow somewhere

'Cause it's raining while there's sun.

There ought to be a rainbow somewhere

But there's none.

There ought to be a silver lining.
There ought to be Cloud Nine—for two.
I see only clouds unnumbered
 And I'm blue.
There ought to be a happy ending.
There ought to be a dream come true,
But the only happy ending
 Is for you.
You're leaving with your lover, laughing.
Rain descends; the sun shines hot.
That ought to make a rainbow somewhere.
 It does not."

No, no rainbow. At least: there was the biggest broadest most glamorous rainbow arching over the zenith that Polychrome had ever seen—and that was going some. But she received no message. Daddy Rainbow hadn't come to the rescue, yet, with anything tangible. Or did the big bow mean that she should jump out the window and run up it?

She had despaired too soon. At that moment there was an effulgence of pink-gold light and out of the aureola sprang a dozen of Poly's rainbow sisters, led by charming Arcenciel. "Poly, Poly, Poly" they cried, hovering before her rose-crystal casement, which she instantly flung open. "Hurry, hurry, hurry!" they chorused. "Father wants you home—and without a moment's tarrying. He has a surprise for you!"

"How lovely. What can it be?" mused the opalescent girl.

"Don't stand there dreaming! Come on! come on!" shrieked the sisters. "We must hurry back before the clouds are quite gone and the sun sets. You know Dad can't keep stretched out up there without the proper background conditions."

So, without even taking a moment to pin a note to a curtain Polychrome reached out her arms to her sisters and they rushed her away to the sky.

Bright and early the next morning they discovered the truancy. "She must have left in an awful hurry," speculated Dorothy.

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“Yes, but not irresponsibly, I dare predict,” opined the red sorceress. “But, Princess,” went on the wise-woman, “I don’t feel we ought just to sit about awaiting developments. Would you care—”

“Of course!” yelled Dorothy, ever game for an expedition or adventure. “How will we go?: by swan chariot, I hope!”

“Very well.” Glinda smiled indulgently. And Dorothy skedaddled, to go get herself decked out in her smartest travel togs.

Maybe she was a bit *too* speedy. Witch Glinda still had not descended from her boudoir when the younger miss arrived in the front hall all set to go. To improve the time Dorothy walked to the palace kitchens and asked the staff to put together a tasty assortment of red comestibles in a lunch basket.

The other famous ones from the Emerald City had been informed of the impending expedition and they were now all standing around outside waiting to see the take-off of the swan chariot. Trot and Betsy were idly knocking croquet balls about when suddenly, totally unexpectedly, brilliant lights flashed out in the northern sky, a sort of northern lights only so much brighter and at full day. Everybody stood and stared—a bit gormlessly, because they immediately felt blinded and one or two started on splitting headaches.

Queen Ozma was there, looking on rather sadly. Suddenly, “Quick, everyone, into the palace! and avert your eyes. This *could* be something like the ‘day of the triffids’ and we’ll all go blind.” The well-read little ruler also knew well that the earth’s ozone cover had been blown and if people didn’t go blind in a moment they might well do so over time, with cataracts brought on by ultra-violet rays.

The Patchwork Girl put the situation into rhyme:

“Alas and alack for a pair of green glasses!

If we should go blind we will all feel like asses.”

But Faramont, Guardian of the Gates of the Emerald City, was far away with his hoard of protective spectacles.

Inside the pink palace queen Ozma intercepted the witch of

the south as she descended the marble stairs on her way to board her chariot. "You've seen the lights," she stated. "Can you think of any explanation?"

"None. I'm as much at sea as any of you. I would say off-hand though that they must have something to do with recent phenomena: what's been going on in the Cloud Kingdom and over the rainbow, as well, of course, as that frightful storm yesterday. I wonder..."

"Yes, Glinda?"

"It's awfully impromptu, but it occurs to me: while Princess Dorothy and I are off now to try to have an interview with the Rainbow, would your grace feel up to undertaking some kind of a search with some of our friends here? It might, at the very least, take people's minds off... give them something to do."

Ozma grasped at the proposal eagerly. "Just to be doing *something*: not standing around feeling useless, impotent. We might find out something by following the lights into the north. But if we go blind on the way...?"

Glinda allowed a tiny smile to appear at the corners of her mouth. "Yes, the lights do dazzle... may even be a bit painful to look into for any length of time. But I think I may promise that the sight won't do permanent damage."

So the celebrities trailed out on the lawns again and watched as the six-team of swans raced across the sward and lifted into the air with the cockleshell chariot dangling, then straightening and gliding forward serenely over the air currents.

The modest overland expedition was to consist of the two great cats, the brave one (for close on a century now, ever since he'd swallowed that concoction of the Wizard O.Z. Diggs' which bestowed courage) and the hungry one, who served as mounts for, respectively, the Oz queen and her chum Trot, and Cap'n Bill and the Scarecrow (who had abruptly given up plans to be viceroy of the Quadling country and passed the job on to young green Jellia Jamb).

Being up in the air was nothing new to Princess Dorothy of Kansas and Oz. Not since that turn-of-the-century cyclone (read ‘tornado’) that had swept through her home state. She’d traveled lots by air since then, though odd to reflect that she’d never been in an airplane—unless ozoplanes count. So now this jaunt by swan chariot was nothing to her except mild and pleasant.

To ward off even the faintest tendency to tedium as they flew so high that nothing much at ground level was very distinct, Dorothy took to peering around the interior fittings of the chariot. Glinda of course was at the reins and with those red-gold and leather thongs she was able to direct the swans to veer left or right. But otherwise? Dorothy began to wonder how the red witch signaled to her feathered conveyers that she desired, for example, to land, or to mount to another, specific, level of sky. She asked.

Glinda was pleased to say, “Look there: on the top of the twin doorposts— What do you see?”

“Well, let’s see,” pondered the girl. “It looks like two stiffish wires—with a kind of ‘bud’ on top, like the head of a match. Oh, I know!: they’re a bit like butterfly antennae.”

“That’s right. Those are the chariot’s ‘ears’. When the charioteer issues a directive those antennae transmit it by magical means to the swans and they at once follow orders. It’s much better than trying to scream through the wind at the swans what to do.”

“Well, think of that! And aren’t they just the cutest, those ears!” said Dot with enthusiasm.

At this the antennae blushed quite scarlet.

“So if I wanted to go—just anywhere, I’d have simply to mention it and the ears would see to it I arrived there?”

“Quite so.”

“I know where I’d go if I had my say,” pursued the Kansas girl. “Straight back to that mean old Cloud King and give him a very large piece of my mind. In fact: *his* ears I’d give a

good boxing!”

“Temper... temper, my dear,” soothed Glinda. “But in fact you may very well be seeing that very King of Clouds before very long. Only... perhaps I ought to m.c. the meeting..?” jested the good sorceress.

On they flew but it was not long at all before the woman at the reins realized something odd was happening. She had given orders to mount ever higher: their business now was to be conducted on the highest levels. But every moment the chariot sank lower. “Gracious,” ejaculated the red witch, “is something malfunctioning? I hardly know what to do. My commands are not being followed.”

The descent leveled off but now the speed of the flying swans increased. This was not what Glinda had ordered either. “Do you think we’re going to crash?” asked a worried Dorothy.

“I hardly think my birds would be so silly as to allow that,” reassured Glinda. “They couldn’t wreck us without wrecking themselves.”

The ladies having self-quieted their worst apprehensions and the journey appearing to be going to go on for hours yet, the two gradually sank into a comfortable doze, which was not difficult in the down-lined chariot car.

By the time the vessel was flying over the M.G.M.-Disney village in Munchkinland it was not much higher up than the treetops. Now the swans—or whoever—seemed distinctly to be searching for something. There were some near misses with jutting tree limbs but of this, fortunately, the slumberers knew nothing. In a little while the chariot ‘sighted’ the yellow brick road, then it flew following that into the deepest parts of the blue forest and into the blue of evening.

For some reason which we will probably never know the chariot had flown northeasterly from the Ruby City to the far eastern confines of the Munchkin country and was now circling back so as, apparently, to follow the route of Miss Dorothy’s original first Oz journey. Below lay paths and turnings that Dot and her first fast friends had taken, and when presently

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the sleepers awoke Dorothy leaned over the side of the chariot and screamed, "Glinda! I know this region like the back of my hand! See there?: in the distance? That's the Deadly Poppy Field coming up fast. And the Munchkin River. Is this where you meant us to come?"

"Never," declared the witch. "I'm just as mystified as you are."

Another half hour of steady low flying brought the chariot within sight of the blank green space where the Emerald City had once stood. In just a little while they could see the cottage of the Gates Guardian that stood just outside where the former city ramparts had risen.

The attention of the two chariot passengers was, however, distracted by something surprising just breasting a ridge to the south. "Can such things be?" Dorothy asked herself. "That's Ozma and them. They got here as fast on catback as we did in a flying chariot. Can you figure that one out, Glinda?"

"Not unless whatever's got into my chariot to take us way out there practically to the edge of the Deadly Desert did it so as to waste time and get us here in a dead heat with the ambling Lion and Tiger."

At any rate the chariot 'ears' did pay attention when the sorceress of the south pleaded to let the vessel be set down gently in the vicinity of the passengers from the south. The two parties of expeditionists rushed together and all talked at once.

"Did you get to see the Rainbow?!"

"How did you get here so fast?"

"Where's Polychrome?"

"Did you ever discover what those blinding lights were?"

"Is the Rainbow going to help get the Emerald City restored?"

"Where can I get hold of some succulent fat babies?"

"Let one person at a time speak, please," besought the Sorceress of the South. Then she assumed the right to be that person first. "We did not get to speak to the rainbow because something has happened to my chariot. It doesn't obey orders properly... At least, not my orders," added the witch, begin-

ning to have an inkling of how things stood.

While all the chatter was going on Princess Ozma had strolled away melancholically to the top of the ridge, northward of which stretched that blank green region where once her capital had lifted its dreaming spires. She sat down up there and clasped her hands around her knees. She gazed and gazed.

The strange and blinding lights that had enticed her party onward all day had faded to a glow worm's green luminescence that seemed centered in some object that fairy Ozma could just discern in the middle of the vast blank by the last light of evening. Presently she called to the others.

"What do you suppose that is down there?" she queried. "It glows rather prettily, doesn't it? I believe I'll walk down and try to make out what it is."

No one of the two parties hung back from following their little queen down the slope. It was quite a hike. Some quarter—maybe even a third—of a mile they walked. As they got nearer the green-gleaming object assumed the character of an enormous wrapped parcel.

Just standing there all by itself in the midst of the darkling plain.

The package must be the most glamorous that any of the assembled group had ever seen. It was rather a curious-looking package. It wasn't just green luminous wrappings done up in ribbons of four not altogether surprising hues: brilliant blue, pungent purple, the sunniest of yellows, and a wonderful deep red. No, there was even a shining silver eight-dimensional star on top and riding above the star a motley collection of grey cotton-batting clouds. These last seemed not to be quite connected to the parcel but floated above it in a startling way.

In the general stampede to reach the world's most glamorous package children were trodden under foot: Trot and Dorothy. The feet belonged to a lion and a tiger: four each. The great cats with a bound and a spring were literally upon the package: it was just large enough to hold them comfortably. The star got knocked sideways and the cotton clouds took off affrighted. Rip, tear, shred! The Hungry Tiger struck with his razor claws. The Courageous Lion bit and chewed. The emerald wrappings, a kind of celluloz, hung in tatters in next to no time.

Too late now for any of the humans to have a part in the fun. Or no, there did remain one yellow ribbon unripped. Dorothy took out her sewing scissors and handed them to her sovereign.

The last of the coverings fell to the ground and the adventurers saw a large box made of oztek. Ozma had to stand on tip-toes to reach up and lift the fitted lid, having first entreated her feline friends to give way. Still nobody could see inside the box from where they stood. Ozma made a sign to the Hungry Tiger to jump up and catch hold on the side of the box for a glimpse down inside.

"Hsss—s—t," spat the cat contemptuously. "No babies in there."

"Was there *anything* there?" entreated the little queen of Oz.

"Well, yes: a little silvery green thing. It looked like a brick," the tiger confessed.

"A brick," said Ozma astonished. "Now why should a thing like that remind me of the Tin Woodman?"

"I can't imagine," said the red sorceress with a frown. She knew her immortal fairy friend was not in the first stages of Alzheimer's but could think of no other logical explanation for such a far-out remark.

Cap'n Bill now climbed awkwardly (wooden leg, you know) up on the Courageous Lion's back and had a dekko. "Brick, sure enough," he confirmed. So saying, he took out his sailor's jack-knife that *he* never left home without and tore a great cleft down one side of the oztek. Now others could pull and rip and soon there was a gap great enough for everyone to step through and inside the parcel.

Princess Ozma stooped and took up the green brick. "On second thought," confessed the Girl Ruler, "this reminds me more of the Emerald City—as once it was." The Good Witch sighed with satisfaction. 'Ozma's herself again,' she thought.

Everyone thought the brick in the enormous package must be a joke or hoax but just the same they looked about to see if there should be any note of explanation. Cap'n Bill again to the rescue: he it was who discovered a big green tag attached to the yellow ribbon Ozma had cut, when presently, in a gesture of tidiness, they pulled all the tattered wrappings out from *underneath* the box.

The card was handed to the girl ruler of Oz. She received it with hastily beating heart. "Oh, how attractive," she breathed. The large single tagcard of fine thick parchment had a border of fluorescent green glitter. There was a design of Kelly-green hearts and flowers. On the back, at the bottom, it said: "TALLDARK. It costs no more to send the very best. Copyright © 1994; violators will be prosecuted."

"How touching," murmured Ozma in whimsical mood.

"Is that *all* it says?" demanded Princess Dorothy with fists on hips.

"Why, no, dear. It also says: 'Have a good one! For best results, tap contents on ground at spot marked X'."

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"Ooh, thrilling!" everyone agreed.

But, "It doesn't tell who sent it?" wondered Dorothy.

"Not a word."

"And where's the spot marked 'X'?"

No one had noticed any such spots. It was almost dark by now so that fact in itself was not surprising. The only light was the glow-worm glow of green that came from the ravished gift-box. By this illumination the crowd now fanned out to scout the area and in only a few moments little Trot could cry, "Here's a cross of green bricks! Could this be it?"

There was surely no harm in trying. The queen of Oz approached the spot, knelt down, then brought her own green brick crashing down upon the cross-point of the two short lines of bricks imbedded in the turf.

The results were surprising. The held brick shattered with almost explosion-like violence and chips and crumbs of baked clay flew out in every direction, giving, in fact, quite nasty stings to such legs and ankles as they encountered. Where bits fell to the ground they appeared to 're-explode' and send showers of further brick dust off to north and south, east and west. And each tiny particle carried with it its own 'grass-lamp glow'.

Within a very few minutes a vast area all round the group of enchanted spectators was gleaming greenly. Still the progression continued, until a region of about a mile in every direction was paved with light. Only then did the atoms of brick dust seem to quit boiling and frothing and for a magic moment all lay still. The watchers didn't dare breathe.

Then began the horror.

The green-gleaming ground began to heave and buckle. Earthquake! The terrified group of friends flew together in a clump and clung to each other for dear life. Were they all to be killed as a climax to the enchanted moment by falling debris?

Well, debris, if any, was not falling, it was rising. But that didn't mean that anybody was safe. The adventurers could feel they were rising with it!

Nor was it debris. It was a surface of jade-green tiles that

appeared to the panic-stricken Queen of Oz, when she dared to open her eyes, strangely familiar. Where had she seen that pattern before?!

The upheaval continued at express-train speed. The horror-filled Ozites could feel the very wind of their passage upward. Or was it simply an evening breeze wafting about in the upper air, where all had been wind-still at ground level?

In about ten minutes it was all over. Ozma had identified the green tile pattern. It was the same as that which floored the lookout platform on the top of the central tower of the Palace of Magic at dead center of the Emerald City, capital of all Oz.

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

What the enchanted, then horrified, then vastly edified travelers had not noticed, in their fascination with the tile pattern at their feet and also the glamorous view of a magnificent silent emerald-gleaming city spread all about them in the night, was another city that hung a hundred feet above them enclosed in clouds in the dark sky.

Suddenly a vast hand, on an immensely long thick arm, shot out of this cloud formation and seized Princess Ozma in a mighty grasp. This culmination to an arduous time of stress and grief was too much. The poor little fairy passed out.

She didn't stay fainted forever, of course. The faint passed over into sleep, of which the sorely tired, tried young ruler had sufficient need.

When she awoke it was brilliant morning and, when she sat up startled, then relaxed and yawned, also, she happened to recall, the very morning of her birthday. 'I wonder if I'll survive it,' she mused, recalling the frights and threats of a week of previous mornings.

Ozma looked about her. Good gracious: she was in her own bed at home. Warily she pulled the service bell cord.

The bedroom door opened and Jellia Jamb put her head round it, then entered and curtsayed. "Yes, your grace?"

"Jellia, am I dreaming? or what's the story?"

"Why, no, your highness," said the girl, then saucily, "Or if you're dreaming then so am I, because we're in this dream together." Then she remembered: "I have the honor to wish your grace the happiest of happy birthdays!"

"Why, thank you, my dear," said Ozma, the teeniest bit reassured. She went on: "It would be happier if I understood even a particle of what is going on."

"Oh, the King of the Clouds can explain everything," reassured the maid. "He sends most cordially and desires to meet Princess Ozma in her own throne room as soon as may be."

"He does, does he?" grunted Ozma. "Let him wait. Jellia dear,

bring me a jumbo breakfast in bed. After all I'm the birthday child. Just for once..."

"I meant to, your grace, in any case. And all your friends are waiting to offer you felicitations of the day.

"Well, send them in!" cried the queen gaily. Then, "Or no: just breakfast for now — to give me fortitude to face that dreadful old tyrant. I'd like to get that disagreeable interview over with and then give myself to the pleasures — I hope — of the day."

Dressed in severe gabardine the Princess walked into her Throne Chamber an hour later. Welkin King of Clouds reposed in all his capacious sprawl across the royal seat.

"Get off that chair!!" shrilled Princess Ozma in a voice her friends would scarcely have recognized. "You old reprobate, how dare you!"

Startled, the Cloud King rose involuntarily, and, once risen, stayed risen.

Ozma stepped past him, making sure no part of her person touched him. She flicked fastidiously at the velvet cushions with half a square yard of chiffon and sat down.

She struggled to command her temper. One furious outburst would have to do. She was not going to carry on like a fish-wife. After all, she remembered who she was and atrocious behavior by another was not going to make *her* behave atrociously.

But it was in cold tones that she enunciated: "What did you wish to say to me?" She, like her friend Dorothy some time back, skipped honorifics.

"Do you recognize this room by any chance?" asked the Cloud King gormlessly.

Ozma frowned. Had the old goof taken leave of his senses? Or think she'd taken leave of hers? "Naturally. It's my own throne room." For form's sake she glanced about her. Funny. She had to admit that all the furnishings and hangings appeared especially fresh and crisp. She cast a look down at the outer left side of the chair where a frayed place had once been neatly mended by Jellia Jamb's careful sewing fingers. The pink kitten used to flex her claws there until warned off in serious terms.

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The frayed place was gone. This green watered silk was brand new! What was going on?

The silly old cloud king approached the seat royal with a diffident air. He held out a pair of green spectacles—in one hand, until he remembered that in the orient, if you have the least bit of respect for the recipient, you always hold an object in both hands to present it. “Here. Try these.”

“I think you mean,” instructed the seated queen: “‘If you please, you might like to put these on.’ Run it past me again... if you please.”

The king was getting a crash course in how to behave. He’d obviously spent far too many eons having his own way and never needing to try to please anybody. This was salutary instruction. He did as he was told.

Queen Ozma deigned to put on the specs. Just in time too, because the four sets of double doors, one at each cardinal point, now burst open suddenly and a glare of emerald brilliance might have dazzled the young ruler save for the spectacles.

Butlers stood at each door, footmen tried to make presentations, but all was a chaos in moments as all Ozma’s friends poured in at every doorway and shouts of “Surprise!” and “Have a happy!” and “Felicitations!” rent the air. The Cloud King was shunted to one side and got lost in the shuffle.

He had prepared a presentation speech but now, put in his place, he just muttered it into a corner and then quitted the throne hall. “This is my gift to you. I wanted you to have the brightest city in all Oz.”

Just as well Ozma never heard that inept little spiel. She might have been tempted to retort tartly: ‘You picked a funny way of going about it. What did I ever do to you that you should abuse me so grossly?...’

Just the same, the Emerald City really did look splendid. Every ornamental emerald, down to the very smallest, was back in its (code-numbered) place and sparkled with a lustre never seen before even when the stones were fresh-carved. This was because King Welkin had caused them to be coated

with a magical wash that enhanced the natural green gleam, reflected sunlight with even more than natural brilliance, and also automatically shed air pollutants. If the Emerald City now shone with an effulgence that nearly rivaled the 'northern lights' that had near-blinded the crowd at the Ruby City it was not surprising.

Each and every of the scattered Emerald Citizens had been magically transported back to their home town. Thus it was that the Wizard of Oz and Scraps the magic Patchwork Girl were in the reception line that filed past Queen Ozma's throne. Standing, the Girl Ruler received gratefully the handshake and kiss of Glinda the Good and Princesses Dorothy, Trot, and Betsy, and of hundreds of others great and small, as the day wore on and she was, frankly, getting the least bit weary. Thank goodness for that fine night's sleep!

Toward noon the chastened Cloud King crept back into the throne room and resumed his place in the corner. At last the crowd around the throne was beginning to thin. He saw his erstwhile prisoner surreptitiously wipe her hand down the thigh of the gabardine suit and then reach out to new hands that desired shaking.

Welkin, for all his subdued manner now, had not lost a whit of his power or majesty. Now he drew himself up, fetched a breath, and clapped his eighty hands together. It was a true clap of thunders! Everyone in the hall stopped in his tracks as if shot.

With a genial grin the Cloud King turned to direct attention to the south doors of the throne room. There a portable table (not a collapsible card table exactly) was being borne into the hall by a cluster of footmen, while close behind followed Glinda the Good and Wizard Diggs arm in arm and looking rather smug.

The table was set down conveniently close to the receiving line so that Ozma wouldn't have to stop giving her subjects the grip while she admired what now was disclosed.

It was a cake. But not one of your ordinary cakes. This one was eight feet wide and four high and seemed inordinately heavy. It was covered with brown and purple icing two inches

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thick and was stuck full of statuettes of Oz celebrities molded out of marzipan and painted (in vegetable dyes) true to life. Ozma was quite bowled over and got a stomach ache just thinking about eating any of it. Good thing she'd had a bang-up breakfast. Maybe she'd be able to put off tasting the cake indefinitely, pleading fullness.

"How splendid," she cried at her first encounter with the cake. Then, adept at public relations, she asked every question under the sun about it: who had designed it, how many had been involved in the construction of it, how long had it taken?

Chef Etam Upp and all the palace bakers and confectioners beamed at the interest shown and Ozma was treated to an exact description of every stage in the production of the fabulous pastry.

"Took a week to create, eh?" said the girl ruler musingly. "And I never knew a thing about it."

"No, that's because you were away," Chef Upp hastened to clarify for her.

"Er—*where* did you bake the cake?" asked the queen with true curiosity.

"At the palace kitchens of His Majesty the Emperor of the Winkies," said Upp. "Emperor Nick had everything in readiness and we went straight to work as soon as we reached there."

"That's strange," said Ozma. "The decision to send some of the displaced Emerald Citizens into the Winkie country was very impromptu. No one there knew you'd be coming."

"Sure they did," insisted the chef. "Everybody knew the Emerald City was going to be—'borrowed' for a bit. You know: so it could be tarted up—oh, sorry, Your Grace!—cleansed and polished and embellished and made like new and better than new."

"Oh, indeed?" spoke the little queen, great light bulbs going on in balloons over her head. "I did not. You say *everyone* knew? As, for example, Glinda the Good, Sorceress of the South? or O.Z. Diggs, Wizard of Oz? or perhaps one Princess Dorothy of Oz and Kansas..?"

"Everyone, Your Majesty," affirmed the chef. "Everybody except just you."

It was only then, at the expression on the young queen's face, that the great goof knew he had dropped a brick greater even than that Queen Ozma had had dealings with the night before. Poor Chef Upp: he had supposed that the great and wonderful surprise had been revealed while he still toiled in the subterranean kitchens, spraying the vast purple-chocolate cake with (edible) emerald glitter.

Icily Ozma turned to Glinda and the Wizard who had drastically lost that smug look. "You knew?" she spoke.

There was a dreadful silence throughout the hall of the throne. No one dared to speak. Through the mind of the Girl Ruler rushed a succession of memories: of her feeling of desperation at the theft of her dear city, of freezing all night in a tatty tent on the road to the Ruby City, of the queer indifference of witch Glinda to her distress while the refugee party had resided at her palace, of the privations and alarms of the long journey to the town of the Springers, of the exhaustion and tedium of the endless climb up the Vanishing Spiral Staircase, of the indignity of capture by ruffians above the clouds and being transported trussed up in a net like so many fish, and of the barbarous treatment she had received at the hands of the King of the Clouds. 'I shall never, never, forgive him,' she vowed.

That was all. Ozma put on an electric smile, never alluded by a syllable to anyone of the horrors, and silently thanked feckless Button Bright who created a diversion by yelling, "Let's eat!" and seizing a fistful of purple chocolate out of the monstrous cake before anyone had had time to blow out a candle or sing "Happy Birthday".

Button's eyes, bulging at the sight of the glorious cake, had got the best of him, or was it perchance his stomach, which had been fasting for many hours just in preparation for this gustatory orgy? This was not the original Button Bright, of course, but a clone of him from tissue contributed by Sples Smith, witch Glinda's husband, into whom the original inimitable boy had

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duly grown in the course of time. Everyone, especially when in the mood of recreating famous early times in Oz, had mourned the lack of a boy to get lost so endearingly just whenever you least, or most, expected it. Mr. Smith had very willingly undergone the tiny surgery and state-of-the-art medical technology had brought forth the present irrepressible youth.

The Cloud King, scarcely daring to hope that all was well, stood by observing the celebrations that he so chiefly had been instrumental in bringing about. He was in his genial mode and registered tender feelings in his heart. His face wore a beatific smile: not just any old smile but the kind that makes the smiler's ears curl and cheeks turn crimson red (even if you're made of solid silver). His steely eyes twinkled.

Princess Ozma gritted her teeth and advanced to where the Cloud King stood. She was going to play this noble forgiving role to the hilt. It was all she could do. She was after all trapped in the part and must play it through eternity. "I trust you are enjoying the frivolities, Your Skyness," she intoned.

King Welkin breathed a silent sigh of relief. The young ruler wasn't going to hold a grudge then. "Oh, capitally, capitally," he blustered. "I very much hope Your Grace was not too much put out by some of the things that happened. Your imprisonment had to seem realistic, you see. There seemed no other way to prevent a person of your percipience from suspecting the loving plot.

"Now I so much hope that you will enjoy through many long years your newly refurbished palace and city."

It was a pretty speech and perhaps, who knows?, in time to come the Princess might recall it and be mollified.

She did, in fact, go out on the balcony at the dying of the day and waved a handkerchief as a big billowing cloud of mist descended from on high and enveloped the monarch of the clouds.

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

By the time Princess Ozma had finished opening the drifts of gifts that had piled up for her (“Ooh, just what I wanted:” she always cried whenever she received a stuffed baby alligator with a light-bulb in its mouth), Princess Dorothy was frankly tired. She hung on while the Girl Ruler expressed appreciation for small statues, games of all sorts, and a paddle ball, then she passed a quiet word to some of her closest friends that it was time for her to retire for the night. Dorothy stood up, curtsied to her sovereign, murmured a last “Happy birthday, dear,” and walked across the room, out the double doors, and up two flights of stairs.

Once in her private apartment, however, the girl found it almost impossible to go to sleep. She called on the sleep and dream pixies to come forward and lend assistance. They do this habitually all over the world, including Scandinavia. The way we can know this is that when we wake in the morning and go to wash our face, we need to wipe pixies’ sleep dust from the corners of our eyes. The moral is: if you want a really good night’s sleep never wash your face before going to bed.

The pixies failed to put in an appearance and Dorothy ended taking a Nyquil. That helped. Lordie, how she dreamed. She dreamt of all she had gone through in the past week, recalling events as vividly as though they were still taking place. And yet she didn’t think of her dream as a nightmare.

She called back her various visits to the Ruby Palace of the Good Sorceress and all the plotting and planning and secret-keeping she had done in connivance with that wonder-worker. They really fooled ol’ Ozma!

She remembered the wild goose chase to the Hollywood village in Munchkinland and their meandering search for the Vanishing Spiral Staircase. Briefly she wondered whether the silver ladder had collapsed back into the steamer trunk or mayhap had gone on to find some other receptacle in which to spend the next hundred years. And Mayor Carom and

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Coily: what of them?

She had to laugh in her dreams when she remembered the people of Springer Town. How funny they were and how extraordinary their buildings. Even now she could see with her mind's dreaming eye how buildings had sprung up on every side, then stood wobbling like shapes of jelly.

And then her dreams jumped forward in the hot and sultry month of August. She seemed to be looking out of a window, with her chum Princess Ozma beside her, and noting how awful the scaled-down Emerald City looked without its emeralds. The streets were dreadfully grey. "You know, dear," she said, turning to her dearest friend, "when you lost your last emerald it was as if something died in me." Ozma burst into tears and Dorothy wondered what she might do to comfort her.

Mercifully Dot's dreams skipped lightly over the horridnesses of the sojourn in the City in the Clouds and delivered her to the Throne Room in the very building in which she now reposed. She dreamt of the last deed of the great King of Clouds and how sweet it had been of him. Oddly she couldn't quite recall what this last deed was but she was sure it was something. Ordering Ozma's birthday cake? No, the Wizard and Glinda had put in the order for that a week before.

So passed away a night of spirited happy dreaming. Now that the trials that might be fun to hear of but certainly were not so to experience had shifted into another mode, a person could dream of them with impunity.

The dream and sleep pixies vanished and Dorothy began to stir. She sat up in bed—and experienced a faint feeling of let-down. All the fun was over now. It was back to daily routine. She supposed she'd have to pitch in, removing the acres of torn gift wrappings from all the ground-floor apartments.

At this same time Queen Ozma was gazing into the mirror on her boudoir dressing table and thinking: 'Gosh, for the first time after one of these birthday celebrations I can notice that I definitely look older.' But she shrugged and determined to enjoy herself until the next time of testing

arrived the following August.

Still, she couldn't help mulling over in her mind the horrific slyness that had been demonstrated by *everybody* around her: old friends proven and true that she would never in her wildest have suspected of going to do anything sneaky like this recent caper.

Was there nobody she could trust? She picked up a note that Jellia had placed by her pillow:

"Dear Your Highness,

I ought to be here to help you dress this morning but I'm completely bushed. Have stayed up most of the night: cleaning the reception rooms, you know, and most of the Palace. Am sure you will forgive me if I sleep in.

Your devoted handmaiden,

J.J."

Jellia too. She had been in on the big cover-up. No more would she be privy to the queen's most private thoughts.

Ozma wrapped her fur and satin dressing gown around her and drifted down to Princess Dorothy's bedroom door. She tapped, then when there was no answer opened the door a crack and peeped inside. "Dorothy, Dorothy, are you awake?"

The named one, of course, was at this moment stretching and yawning and suffering post-party blues. When she heard her friend's voice she ducked her head under the covers and pretended to snore. Then with elaborate pantomime she made as if she had been wrenched from deepest slumber. She got out of bed and staggered groggily to the door. She tried to focus her eyes, looked at her wrist and saw her watch was not there, and muttered, "What time is it?"

"Never mind about what time it is," replied her sovereign testily. "I want to tell you something. Last night, while I was tossing and turning, trying to get to sleep, I thought of something—"

What was this? Talk about *lése majesté*. Dorothy, obviously uninterested in the conversation, had climbed back into bed, where she gave every sign of wanting to return to sleep.

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Who could the poor Queen talk to? She paced about the room addressing herself for lack of any other interlocutor. Then her eye fell on Dorothy's little black dog Toto snoozing on his mistress' bed-end. Toto, of course! *He* hadn't taken any part in the great deception. Ozma recalled how the dog had been the only one not to say anything during all the discussion about ways and means at witch Glinda's pink palace. *Toto* should be the restless princess' confidant!

Ozma placed a caressing hand on the dog's black tangles of hair, eliciting a low growl. However, when he saw who it was he did go so far as to lick the queen's hand. He turned his head around and looked at Dorothy, wondering why she was pretending to sleep. He knew when people were lying doggo. Well, he'd put a stop to that artificiality. Toto sprang to his feet and began barking as loudly as he could. "RFFF! RFFF! ARF! ARF! ARF!" he yapped: enough to wake the dead if not the living.

Just then the doorbell rang and Ozma went down to answer, relieved perhaps at the chance to get away. It looked, alas, as if Toto were not going to work out as chief recipient of the girl ruler's most private communications.

It was Polychrome. "Poly darling!" cried the delighted young queen. *Here* was a dear person who very distinctly had not been in on the insidious plot. Here was someone she could confide in in future. Ozma had an idea she was going to be seeing a lot of the Rainbow's Daughter in days to come.

"Wherever did you get to?" the Oz ruler marveled. "One minute there you were at Glinda's palace and the next minute there you weren't... And wasn't there something about your father being asked to come to the rescue?"

"Yes. But he couldn't. He was ever so cross. He said he'd been worried sick all the time we three were in the Cloud Kingdom, and when he finally got me home again he was *not* going to let me go. I had to sneak away just now. I felt awful about missing your birthday gala and—well, I just had to come and explain."

"Say not another word, Poly dearest," soothed the happy

princess. "I understand perfectly. But come: there's something I want your moral support with." And as Ozma led the way back to Princess Dorothy's private apartment she tried to explain. "It looks as if Dorothy is trying to avoid me. Perhaps you can get something out of her. I wouldn't be surprised if she were having just a wee twinge of conscience." And Ozma retailed to the rainbow girl the details of the horrifying revelation. "Glinda and them actually *planned* that I should be exposed to such indignities. Can you credit it? Dot too of course had to suffer the trials but she at least knew the whole thing wasn't for real. I didn't. Nor did you. That means a lot to me now." She squeezed Polychrome's hand.

With two of her girl friends in the room and sitting on the side of the bed Dorothy could no longer carry on the pretense. She was giving full attention when the rainbow's daughter said, "Dorothy, did you know about the Cloud King in advance and what his intentions were?"

"I knew the very day the Emerald City was taken," confessed the girl and buffed her nails on her pajama-top lapel. It was pretty neat to know you'd been in, at the highest levels, on a coup as successful as this one.

Then she relented. "I wanted to tell you, Polychrome, sometimes when you were crying and going on. But I just couldn't. It was a secret, you see—"

"And a secret must never be revealed, no matter how cruel or unkind?" enquired Ozma.

"That's right! I knew you'd understand," and Dot grasped her (former) chum's hand impulsively. "It just could never be right to give away someone's secret. And yet I hated seeing you sobbing and weeping and spoiling all the fun. It wasn't as if all our trials and tribulations were not going to have a happy ending. And discomforts endured can even be enjoyed when you know in advance everything is going to turn out right."

"As we: Poly and I, did not." Ozma's tone was frigid.

"But I'd *promised* not to tell," cried Dorothy indignantly. "You'd never have me break a *promise*, would you?" She pouted.

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"Why, that would be downright immoral." She added, "That would be betraying the others."

"So there were others, were there?" put in the Rainbow's daughter.

"Yes! and if I were to tell they'd never trust me with another secret, would they?" Distress at the very thought made the Kansas girl break right down. She pulled the sheets up to her face and wept quietly.

"Dorothy," said Polychrome rather governessly, "please tell me whose idea this was to give a surprise party... of this description."

The girl looked up, shocked. "Oh, I couldn't do that! That— why, that would be the ultimate betrayal."

There were two eavesdroppers at the door and at this juncture they decided to step forward. It looked to them as if things might soon get out of hand and the post-birthday recriminations devolve into petty bickering if not outright hostilities.

It was Glinda the (soi-disant) Good and that famous meddler Mr. Diggs, the Wizard of Oz. Princess Ozma had her back to them and looked up, astonished, while Dorothy didn't know whether to be overjoyed or horrified. She knew that in another moment she would have gone on to betray the conspiracy.

"Your royal highnesses," (all three girls were princesses of a sort), spoke the Wizard without preamble, "It was the good witch of the south and myself who arranged for your party."

Now Queen Ozma had made the pact with herself already the day before at that awful birthday celebration that never, by word or deed, would she reproach the villains who had so sold her down the river. But now! if the culprits were here all ready to confess, why not hear them out?

She had risen and now drew herself up regally. "We shall be pleased," she stated, "to learn if there have been extenuating circumstances." She waited.

The Wizard placed his forefinger alongside his nose. "Well, my dear," he began, "it was some two months ago correct me if I'm wrong, your grace" he glanced aside at Glinda— "that the

head of the palace gardeners and the Lord General (as he styles himself) of the city street-sweeps came to Sorceress Glinda and me during one of the red witch's periodic visits here and voiced their grave concern that air pollution had severely sullied most of the city's outdoor attractions: blackened the buildings, dulled the gleam of the emerald-work, actually begun to eat away at metal and stone so that there was actual danger in the streets of the capital from falling masonry. Something would have to be done—and drastically.

“Now Glinda happened to be better acquainted than most with a certain Cloud King—or at least with his reputation. She knew that he in his cloud kingdom—unlikely venue—reigned over most capable building engineers and jewelry experts. What if King Welkin could be prevailed on to carry away the entire Emerald City and give it a thorough spring-cleaning? It wouldn't be easy, but it might be worth a try.

“Well, the Cloud King when contacted proved most amiable. He verily jumped at the chance to undertake such a challenging overhaul and at the same time be of service to a certain young fairy ruler for whom he had—by hearsay—the greatest respect.

“Acquaintance even in such a relatively remote location as the Cloud Kingdom with the date of her Ozian majesty's birthday played a role. It was the Cloud King's own idea that the restitution of the decaying city be made to fit in with the traditional offering of gifts. And of course it must all be a surprise! But the logistics of that were a puzzler. We have all seen, to our cost, how disastrously that worked out.”

Ozma was thawing a little. “I understand that you felt you had to do—what you had to do.”

Dorothy tried to cast a rosy glow over things. “Anyway our awful journey gave my dear princess and me a lot of extra time to be together,” she whitewashed. But somehow, she noted with a little pang, the girl queen dodged eye contact.

But then the charming monarch of Oz relaxed a little more. She just wasn't very good at holding grudges. “Was that what you'd call a wild goose chase, home in your native state, Prin-

cess?" she asked.

Dorothy was so glad of the wee witticism. Joyfully she joined in. "Well, we certainly carried on like a couple of silly geese, didn't we?"

Toto gave out a few queer little yipey barks, to show he was in agreement with everybody.

Polychrome put in her good-natured two cents' worth: "We did see a good many sights, didn't we? I knew from before how fascinating King Welkin's Cloud City is and I'm glad you ladies got to see it too. Remember the cellophane houses and gardens?"

"And you learned from your experiences as well," put in the Wizard sententiously.

"Yes: not to trust friends," answered his sovereign crisply. A little more loyalty might be in order in future, she opined. It might be as well to let this lot know she hadn't forgotten—quite.

A lot of people were sitting or standing around on a turret-top terrace open to the sky high up on the Palace of Magic. All the usual celebrities were there. Toto was sitting on Princess Dorothy's lap, his eyes closed and his pink tongue hanging out just a trifle, giving off an air of well-being. Perhaps at the thought of not having been taken along on that awful expedition he had heard so much about.

"My stars, what a perfect evening it is," remarked Dorothy, watching the sun going down. Its final rays of the day flashed high, making the whole zenith glow red. There were no more than one or two desultory clouds floating about.

Those clouds were rather low though and somehow a bit unmotivated-looking. Their bottoms reflected the sun's rosy glow and were further decorated by some attractive streaks of red and yellow, merging at spots into orange and vermilion.

The sky in the east was already navy blue and stars were starting to glimmer in the dark. Shadows fell, each moment heavier, over all the land of Oz.

There was a brief commotion as the Patchwork Girl joined the gathering belatedly. Rubber-gauntleted, she had been helping Miss Jellia Jamb with the washing-up. "Look up there," she cried, sitting down to hold hands with her follower, the Scarecrow.

"Where?" growled the Courageous Lion, deigning to lift his royal head. "I don't see anything noteworthy."

The stuffed duo, in tandem, directed his gaze to the underside of the nearest, oddly hovering, cloud. Now all the company could see that the heads of a couple of young Silverlings were sticking out below.

Everybody, cloud-borne or earthbound, waved. The people on the tower received the curious impression that the watchers in the cloud were just about to split with merriment. But this was perhaps not so strange. It cannot be denied that the Oz celebrities, in general, are a funny-looking lot.

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After a bit the gentle breeze nudged the out-of-context clouds off and away. Soon the young silverlings would be out of sight, going on their way, just possibly, to some new exciting adventure in the sky. Dorothy and Ozma, hand — yes — in hand, looked on a little wistfully. “Maybe those two will come pay us a visit here in Oz one day,” posited Dorothy.

“Or those of us who missed it,” wished the Wizard, “will get a chance to go adventuring in the clouds.” He cast an almost envious glance at the two young girls who had been through so much.

“I wonder,” mused Dorothy with a soft laugh, “if every cloud has a silverling — if not a silver lining.”

As she spoke the sun disappeared down back of the horizon with a barely perceptible ‘blip’, hauling in all its long red-golden rays after it. The company of evening-viewers moved as by one accord to the railing and fluttered their hankies or scarves as the clouds faded out of sight in the eastern dark and the sun glow darkened to mysterious deep maroon in the west.