

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - S E V E N

It was true: Queen Lurline and her entire fairy band, all of them who were in Gillikinland anyway, had gone all purple, and almost without realizing it. That's the way purplitude takes you. Once you've been attacked, you don't even know it; you've become a purpley yourself and thenceforward work for the hegemony of purpleness without remembering that at one time you may have had reservations against it. Lurline's efforts in opposition to the purple scourge had resulted in one significant act which in time would have important results, but after that the fairies did nothing more against the prevailing pervasion. All they remembered now was that they were supposed to make Gillikinland safe for swine.

To that end the fairy Queen now grasped at straws. She had heard that there was at least one nice Troll; Mustardseed assured her that the story was true. Now she wanted to know how he got that way. In order to find out she winged it over the deep damp purple forests of Gillikinland toward a certain sea.

Her flight was not far but there were few landmarks to guide her. She wondered if she would have difficulty in finding it, but she need not have worried. The Soup Sea is always shown much too small on the more familiar maps. In fact it rivals in size, if it

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does not surpass, the great Inland Sea far over near the Winkie border.

Lurline was just imagining she could make out down below the path leading to the opening into the underground Illumi Nation when the salty expanse of the Soup gleamed on her sight to the south. As she flew nearer, the sea presented a strange appearance.

Its prevailing hue was purple, of course, but where its various constituents were principally one or another ingredient it took on the natural coloring of that component. Tomato Bay was purply-red, Pea Pond was greenish, and Oxtail Inlet a rich brown.

The fairy flew lower, searching out those cliffs under which she supposed the grotto of the Ugliest Troll to lie. And there they were! A headland that stood out significantly between Bouillon Bay and Consommé Cove at the deepest part of the Gulf of Gazpacho.

But how to get in? The queen-sprite could just make out a shallow arch that seemed to promise an opening under the base of the cliff, but even it was only revealed when the sloshing billows receded prior to dashing once more against the cliff.

Oh, well, nothing for it; she held her nose and took a one-armed header into the tepid liquid. Once well and truly dunked, Lurline struck out with arms and wings and soon popped up like a crouton on the surface of the soup inside the seacave.

The fairy dashed the broth from her eyes and looked about her. A soft violet light pervaded the cavern. There were the serried ranks of books, bound in the skins of defunct sea creatures, just as she had heard described. Yes, and there on a rock-cake, conveniently low, reclined the most dreadful-looking creature one could well imagine.

The long slimy hairy furrowed figure seemed to be holding forth, with occasional references to an open volume supported between its flipper fins, to a little jasmine-and-apricot fish that gaped from the soups of the grotto lagoon. Lurline heard the words "...where love reigned supreme." She was caught and listened on, quickly making herself invisible so as not to

distract the speaker from his(?) period.

Waving vaguely in the direction of the inmost wall of the grotto, the ugliest Troll (yes, it was he) read out:

"There, in a cavern passage, something unique is commemorated. For lo, it is there that is deposited the wonderful crown of Love and Wisdom of Oz, said to be the prerogative of the true ruler of the land but only to come to him or her when his dealings have deserved the jewel and his wit has claimed it.

"Now the resting place of the Crown is beautiful. It is formed all of gold, hyacinthine, and mother of pearl." The troll nodded knowingly, almost as if he had been witness of the fair site. "But the surroundings pale in comparison with the diadem itself. What words can describe the perfection of the intaglios that shape the—

"That's funny," the troll broke off. "It's printed 'emeralds' but that's crossed out and someone has written in 'amethysts'. It wasn't me!"

"Never mind. Go on," said the little black-eyed fish.

"Each is carved in the shape of a heart and these represent love, while alternating are scrolls of gold and these stand for wisdom. Each heart is pierced by an arrow representing suffering and each scroll is sealed with a pearl signet for endeavor. Within, the crown is lined with—again 'emerald' erased and 'amethyst' substituted—lined with amethyst velvety embellished with ermine..."

"Sounds quite magnificent," said the little fish.

"It is," assured the Ugliest Troll.

"You've seen it then?" cried the fish.

The troll put a flipper finger to what in him approximated to lips and read on, "It is not known to the world outside where the Crown is kept, for this is the great secret and mystery surrounding the Crown of Love and Wisdom. Of it has been truly said: you have only to see it once for instantly to forget it—"

"Wait a minute," demanded the little fish. "If nobody can remember it, how can you read out from a book about it?"

"Oh, easy," dismissed the troll. "The author—" He flipped

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to-the front pages of the sharkskin-bound volume. "G. Theurgist, M.M.—"

'Godfrey!' exclaimed the eavesdropping fairy to herself. 'Has he been here?'

"—was actually looking at the display when he wrote down the description. Once in writing, that doesn't disappear as does memory of the crown itself."

"Hm," said the fish, not fully convinced. "You read, 'It's not known where the Crown is kept,' but the author must have known if he was looking at it."

He put his fins on his hips (or nearest approximation) triumphantly.

"Undoubtedly he did," replied the troll unruffled, "but he wasn't telling. If he did, all the world and his wife would be beating a path to its door, wanting to melt it down for its costly constituents." Here the troll revealed his essential troll mentality. No other race in Oz would think of wanting to turn a beautiful symbol of majesty into articles of barter.

The troll continued the recitation. "When the Crown is found this is almost always by accident. Then it is well to be provided with knowledge of the ritual to be enacted in order to release the ineffable power of the jewel. Curiously, this information, once acquired, is not automatically lost to memory.

"The method is as follows:

"Upon a large hard flat surface sprinkle a jot of fairy dust—"

Here Lurline put a hand to her pocket but withdrew it hurriedly. Whatever fairy dust she had with her was for the nonce swimming.

"Dram upon the dust a circle nine palms in diameter and, in the center, a pentacle. Along the circumference of the circle distribute fifteen candles of myrtle wax, of even length and standing evenly apart. Light them with an Indian taper and when they burn reach across to inscribe the Rune of Power within the pentacle..."

Queen Lurline was trying. to memorize furiously. It all

sounded most intriguing. How strange that *she*, queen of all the fairies, had never heard of the wonderful Crown of Love and Wisdom. 'But no, silly!' she said to herself. 'It wasn't strange at all.' As she had just heard, it was in the nature of the thing that it could not be remembered. But if she was not going to be able to remember about the crown, at least she'd try to keep in mind what to do if she ever should run against it.

Meanwhile she had business with that troll.

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - E I G H T

“Oh, look,” spoke Ozma and pointed down to the garden patio beyond the now refilling fountain basin. “Cool drinks are being served. Let’s go and have one.”

Servants were carrying out the afternoon refreshment and depositing it on a beach table shaded by a giant flower-patterned umbrella. Even from the distance of the terrace one could make out lemonade with strawberries floating on top and a pitcher of iced tea with lemon slices. If eyes were not deceived there were also little tarts which closer acquaintance revealed to be filled with blueberries, raspberries, and further strawberries.

When she had taken her seat under the umbrella, Princess Ozma had off her coronet and placed it conveniently at hand on the table. (It had a tendency to fall off when she tilted back her head to drink.)

“Oh, you fellows,” she remarked to the ex-throneroom doorkeepers, Draxton and Lapstart, who were doubling today as waiters, perhaps in the expectation that they could do that less embarrassingly than they doorkept. “Please remain,” said the princess.

Tenderhearted as she was, she was having qualms since having had to have the two employees on the carpet, or, rather,

on the lawn, the previous afternoon. She told them then that it just wouldn't do to cough, roll one's eyes, or stick out the tongue while guarding the doors of the audience chamber. Did they think they might do better with employment in some less conspicuous part of the palace complex?

Lapstart had said they might shovel coal in the cellars but Draxton objected that that would make him cough worse than ever. It would be better if they could work outdoors. In the end and with misgivings the girl ruler put them on probation, serving at garden parties.

Now she wanted to make up to them for having been annoyed and she invited them to join her guests—just this once—at the refreshment board. In fact, she had an aim to accomplish and thought to kill two birds—etc.

From her sleeve she drew the licked-dry but still faintly sticky green letter and asked of the feckless pair, "You didn't happen to see anyone slip this under the door, did you? at yesterday's audience.

"Oh, no, Your Majesty!" exclaimed both of the men together, a little too pat.

"Who else was on duty in the antechamber or hallways during the period when the letter was delivered?" enquired the princess.

"Langley, Your Majesty!" cried the pair in chorus. It was like they'd planned the whole thing in advance.

"Yes, of course," said Ozma. The third guardsman had been in and out of the throneroom all the morning; had among other errands introduced that strange woman in the veil. But the princess at once dismissed Langley as a possible author of the screed. He was well known to be deeply attached, and with reason, to his Gillikin girl friend, Serena. Well then, who...?

Ozma got no further with her thought before Fattywiggins yelped, "Hey, look at that! It's another one!" for she had seen Draxton take from his pocket a second letter, twin to the earlier one in question, and with a deal of tongue-extending lay it on the table.

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The child was just reaching to pick it up when her sovereign got to the fair before her, snatched it up and thrust it down her bodice. She directed her gaze at Draxton severely.

"An explanation, if you please."

Poor Draxton fell into a coughing fit but Lapstart spoke for him. "We found that under a yew tree clipped in the form of the Princess Dorothy in the topiary garden while waiting there for Your Grace yesterday afternoon."

"Oh. And why have I waited twenty-four hours to receive it?"

"When we got our walking papers we were afraid to bring up anything else controversial."

"That seems reasonable," admitted the girl ruler. "Again, there's no danger that you put it there yourselves?"

"Oh, heaven forfend. Your Grace!"

Both men tugged their forelocks, swallowed noisily and retired from the discussion, concentrating rather on the refreshments, which they continued to swallow noisily.

Fattyw captured everyone's attention by saying, "I know who put it there."

"Please tell us," requested her sovereign.

"Well, it stands to reason, doesn't it? Who's employed nowadays to deliver messages in Oz? The unicycle brigade!"

Ozma thought it over but the Wizard said at once, "Don't be foolish, Fatty. The unicyclists were introduced, at your own suggestion, just to bring messages speedily from hand to hand, not to stick them under doors or topiary bushes."

Fattywiggins retired in confusion and sat fiddling with Ozma's coronet. She was tempted to try it on her own head but thought just at the moment that might not be polite.

Then right on cue a green messenger came hurrying across the grass from the steps leading from the palace. They glimpsed the head and hand of Langley in the distance showing the man the way.

"Oh me, what now?" sighed Ozma.

The U.B. man touched his cap. "Express from Her Good-

ness, Glinda, Your Grace. A verbal message, if you please. She sends to say the Trolls are up in arms and every hour more confederates flock to the rebels and still their power increases!”

“What!” cried the Queen, springing to her feet. “Rebellion? Here in Oz?! The mind reels. But what can Glinda know? She’s in the south—though why?! When she should serve her sovereign in the north.”

“The great Book of Records, Your Grace,” reminded the respectful messenger.

“I cry you Mercy,” exclaimed Ozma, going all Shakespearean under stress. “Of course. But flocking to arms? What can they mean?”

“It’s rather an armed strike, your highness—as I can learn,” went on the man in green, stooping to slip off his ankle guards. “The trolls have always been paid in gold—of their own digging. But now it appears they want double the value, and in amethysts!”

C H A P T E R T W E N T Y - N I N E

It had been two days since word had arrived of the strike of the Trolls but Queen Ozma had been prevented from taking any decisive action. This was the first time she had ever been faced with a large-scale insurrection among her own subjects. The attempted invasion by the (g)Nomes^s didn't count. They were foreigners. (Incidentally, it would not surprise the girl Ruler if the Nomes were to be found to have incited their cousins, the trolls, in the present instance.)

What was she to do? She couldn't order out the troops to quell a rising of her own peoples. Well, "own people"; the trolls were no more "Iowa" than that they had been allowed to immigrate freely into Oz from the time when the kingdom got definitive word of the pogroms aimed at world faerie around the globe, especially in Scandinavia. Then trolls crawled out of mountain caves and from under bridges, picked up their satchels, and hit the refugee trail to Oz.

Once arrived, they had elected almost at once and almost unanimously to populate the mountainous north, whose terrain was reminiscent of the homelands they had left. Plenty of scope for their mining propensities there as well and this was a reason

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

Ozma was particularly glad to welcome the trolls. With them as willing workers, Oz would no longer be dependent on the Nomes for the importation of the precious stones that were so necessary to the country's life style.

The only tiresome thing was that the trolls insisted from the start on maintaining the crass system of money trade and wages that they had obtained among them out in the world. The Oz princess had been forced to go along with their demands if she was to have an uninhibited flow of jewels to the Emerald City and about the country. She condescended to allow the workers to retain a proportion of all the gems they mined, and when she thought about it she couldn't but concede that that was no more than fair.

But now! The latest word from newsreader Glinda was that there was total embargo. *No* jewels at all were going to be supplied, costless, to the court of Oz or elsewhere. It was to be strictly cash on the barrelhead. This meant that all of Oz was going to be forced back into the market economy that had, admittedly, prevailed in the magic land until quietly phased out under the beneficent rule of the Scarecrow as king and of Ozma herself .

There seemed to be nothing for it but to mobilize for armed conflict with the rebels and to force them back to the kindly ungrasping system of barter that had flourished so smoothly these late years. Only, mobilize what? What troops were there to "order out"?

The Royal Army of Oz consisted of one 'troop', the old Soldier with the Green Whiskers, Wantowin O. ("Omby Amby") Battles. Ordering him out wouldn't accomplish much. Anyway, it would be a pity to disturb the fellow in his present happiness with his second wife, kind Tollydiggle.

There was the Princess' own honor guard, of course, consisting of a dozen men, but that was strictly ceremonial. The guardsmen were not even armed. As well attack the trolls with any dozen men picked up in the street.

Well, the Girl Ruler hated to do it. *Must* she always be

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running to the great Sorceress of the South to have her chestnuts plucked out of the fire for her? Yes, it kind of looked like she did. What's more, in the present emergency Ozma thought of suggesting to Glinda that she outright take up her residence in the northern country until all the problems that currently afflicted that benighted region be resolved. In addition to this latest emergency with the obstreperous trolls one was not to forget the resurgence of the Purpleys nor yet the less pressing problem of the paucity of pork on Gillikin tables and the absence in the land of its heraldic animals for trotting out on state occasions.

Ozma sat on her throne in her dressing gown. She sometimes did that when she was going to have a good think. She personally locked the doors to the Throne Room. As she sat deeply pondering now her hand in her pocket encountered a piece of stiff paper.

She drew it out. Oh, that ridiculous second note. She had been going to look at it in bed last night but then forgotten. Now, idly, she opened the emerald envelope and read.

“Biped soufflé
Or Russian roulette:
Oh, this is the way
You'll 'do your thing' yet.
When you cook with a gun
Then life can be gay.
When you're shot, then you're done.
It's slack! and olé!
You're biped soufflé!

Take a gallon of milk,
Add some lemon to sour—
Or elderbloomr wine!
That'll make flower power.
Of saltpeter a pinch
And of toothpaste a tube.

Add a peck of corn meal
And of bouillon a cube.
(If you do, you're a boob!)"

So far the thing scanned and the princess began to be quite interested. But suddenly it was as if the poet lost control. He/she/it continued,

"Boob, boom, boobity-boom—the heart.
Coronary thrombosis.
Whiz, whir, whizzity-whir—the nerves.
Ordinary neurosis.
Think fast!
Life's past!
Damn! Blast!
(Watch out for cows, emeralds, and glockenspiels.)"

Perhaps providentially the queen had no time to contemplate what the rigmorole might mean before there was a polite but insistent knocking on the door of the antechamber.

Hastily Ozma snatched off her housecoat and threw it behind the throne, then moved with grace to the double doors and unlocked them. There a little deputation waited upon Her Grace.

There was faithful Omby Amby (who had clearly done the knocking) and handsome Langley of the Honor Guard and the dear old Wizard of Oz. The soldier said, "General Battles—and company—at Your Majesty's service." He saluted and clicked his heels together.

"Yes?" said the queen, alert. "How may I help you? What do you wish?"

The Wizard took the word, saying, "How may we help *you*, dear Princess? We sensed you might wish counsel."

"Quite right. Come in, do." Democratically the young ruler took her seat on the top step of the dais and signaled her visitors to group themselves about her.

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"As you all know," said she, "there has been an uprising—well, up to now they're calling it a 'strike'—among the troll laborers at our northern amethyst mines—"

"It's just not the right time for that kind of thing!" exclaimed the Wizard indignantly. "With Your Majesty's twenty-first birthday ball coming up and all."

"There is never a right time for that kind of thing," stated the Princess. "But to come to conclusions quickly; naturally we are not going to be drawn into armed conflict. We must conduct ourselves at all times as if violence is not thinkable. Unfortunately, on our own unaided own we can accomplish little by magic. For that sort of powerful assistance we must apply to great Glinda in the south. But first, do you think it would be lost motion to send a deputation to call on the trolls?"

"An armed deputation, your majesty?" asked Omby Amby, doing present-arms with an imaginary rifle.

"Oh, I hardly think so. And yet a delegation of bold bluff men who would not at once be frightened off by any threatening action the trolls might perform."

Langley signified that he would like to speak and was allowed to. "It seems the natural thing that Your Highness' palace guard should go," he proposed, "commanded of course by brave General Battles."

"Well—," pondered Ozma. "Yes... you may be right. What do you think, Mr. Diggs?"

The Wizard responded fervently. "My Queen, whoever journeys to the Trolls, for God's sake let not us two stay at home. Recall that you have other business too in Gillikinland; you will want to take action before the Purpleys spread over all of Oz."

"Yes, that's right," agreed the fairy ruler. "I keep forgetting that. I think I must myself view this vaunting purplitude if I'm to be convinced of it."

"Has your grace seen out the window yet this morn?"

"Why, no. I came straight here from my repose, to have a think. Why...?" And here the little queen sprang up and ran to the nearest embrasure.

Guardzman Langley, with all due reverence, lifted her by the hips so she could see out into the gardens. "Good gracious!" she cried. "The grass and trees are all grey!"

The Wizard had followed to glance out. "That's what one gets when violet overlies green, your majesty. In time no doubt the violet will darken and then your capital will be as purple as any part of Gillikinland."

Ozma had paled. "All this is bad indeed. How soon can you be ready to leave, gentlemen?" she addressed her supporters.

"Almost at once, Your Grace."

"Then bustle, bustle! Caparison my horse!—or no, drat! My horse is away with Dorothy and her kin. No help for it. We'll simply have to walk."

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y

Ozma and company were not the only ones to be setting out for the North. Even now Glinda the Good Sorceress was on the roof of the Pink Palace overseeing the loading of a fleet of swan chariots.

The pressure had at last grown too great. Glinda hardly had time to eat a meal or catch a nap so occupied was she in following in the Great Record Book the bulletins that were entered in its pages in a steady stream. All of them these days appeared to be about developments (none of them good) in Gillikinland.

It seemed unreasonable to remain seated far off here in the remotest corner of Oz from the scene of activity. When those fatal words appeared concerning the kidnapping of Caressopigs the wise and kind sorceress knew she must act. It was her own doing that the pigs had been encouraged to settle in the swine-deprived north. She could not now calmly remain at home and let the pigs stew in their own juice or, worse yet, other people's.

She would establish headquarters at a strategic point in the Gillikin country and *stay* there until purplitude and troll rebellion were brought under control. For that she could not be without her helps and guides and that is why she now stood on

the pink gravel of the flat rooftop and directed as her sweating girl guards carried the laboratory equipment, trundled the globes, and struggled to hoist the vast Book of Records onto the largest flatbed transport chariot. In the end the Sorceress herself, good-sportively, lent a shoulder to tip the book the last bit of the way.

Now, was there anything else? Oh, well, it would not hurt to determine just where she was going! Brusquely she jerked from its already stowed place in the main carriage the roll of maps and spread them on the parapet. Her aides, Sergeant Jinjur and Lance-Corporal Cinna Munn, leant (respectfully) closer to have a look.

Let her see now. She'd want to be somewhere rather central, not too far from the home of the caresso-pigs, and, too, it would not be amiss to keep a watchful eye on Mombi, who, as far as Glinda knew, had given no sign of being a reformed character. But the great thing was to be within range of the Trolls' mine workings at the far end of the Gillikin mountains. With that in mind the good witch finally settled on a location overlooking the junction of two branches of the Gillikin River, opposite the great gloomy Rain Forest. There was sure to be a ruined castle or abandoned stately home somewhere in the vicinity. She would seek one out as she flew over the district with her swan fleet.

It was not as if Glinda contemplated transferring her headquarters right across Oz permanently. Well red as she was, she knew her proper place to be, in the last analysis, among her own people in the crimson country of the Quadlings. But just now, with everything at sixes and sevens in the purple land and she knowing herself to be the only one in Oz who could *really* cope, it was unrealistic to remain budgeless far off in the South. Ozma had hinted her need of her up there. Tonight the sorceress would put in a call to the fairy ruler and let her know her unarticulated wish had been made reality.

Nothing now remained but to take flight. The pink potentate shook back her snooded locks, stepped aboard the lead chariot, and took the reins. Her faithful rose swans took a long

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speed-collecting run along past the rows of brick chimneys, and rose. Hi-yo! Away! The other seven chariots swung into V-formation behind.

In less than an hour the fleet neared the outskirts of the Emerald City and there Glinda received a shock. Below spread the streets and parks and jeweled towers of the capital in all their familiar splendor. How violetly they shone! “Violet”?! Glinda gasped. Not only was “the Emerald City” a misnomer for a metropolis totally lilac-colored but purplitude was visibly nibbling at the edges of the red expanse of Quadlinga itself. It did produce, admittedly, a most gorgeous magenta hue that spread over field and stream in lovely profusion

The Good Sorceress knew she had not been a moment too soon in electing to come to grips with the expansion of the Purpleys.

She shook the reins imperatively, even used the whip—though of course only for sound effect—and urged her faithful swan bearers on to the top of their bent. Onward flashed the fleet, and in just under another hour the far-peering sorceress saw what she aspired to.

At the upper end of a small spur valley on the northern slope of the Gillikin range a dark tower rose from the depths of a purple forest. Glinda handed the reins to Corporal Munn and crouched down where the front guard-rail of the equipage gave lea for her to examine hastily the map without its blowing away from her. Strange. No tower, or any other construction, was indicated at that site.

Mysteriousness aside, the place seemed ideal. Almost too much so. Though clearly unoccupied, the tower—or castle really, and of some magnificence—appeared to be in fair repair. It was a bijou chateau, certainly in comparison with the witch’s wonted splendor of accommodation at her own palace.. But then she wasn’t going to stay there forever. She sent signals for the swans to alight in the only clearing near the pile.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - O N E

It was not quite as easily done as said.

Ozma dispatched her attendants to get ready to travel, then sent for her maid, Jellia Jamb, and made several requests of her. She had got no further than asking the girl to open the windows of the throne room and to pick up the dressing-gown coat from behind the royal chair, when there was a flutter at those windows and some fairies came flying in.

"Peaseblossom!" called Ozma. "How nice to see you again!" She also named by name Peaseblossom's companions.

"Oh. Your Majesty!" cried the lead fairy. "Can you forgive me for not standing upon the order of my going the last time I had the honor of being received by Your Grace!?"

"I did rather wonder where you'd got to," admitted the Girl Ruler.

"I'm afraid when your favorite, darling Fattywiggins, offered to sit down on me, I panicked," explained the fairy. "Do. please, forgive me! But now I bring tidings from our well beloved Queen Lurline. I am sorry to have to report that the naughty Trolls have kidnapped a couple of the Caresso-pigs."

"Oh!" cried Ozma and burst briefly into tears. "So many calamities! And whatever will Fatty say when she hears!"

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"May I be the one to tell her?" asked Peaseblossom maliciously.

Ozma looked up from her handkerchief and stopped crying abruptly. "Oh! Well, I think I'd better tell her. As it happens, I'm just off to the northland myself to try to get a view over various disastrous developments there. If you like, you may join us. But as for Fattywiggins, I think it might be well for you to keep out of her way."

"Nothing I'd like better," confessed Peaseblossom. "And may we indeed have the pleasure of accompanying Your Majesty north? I think we might even be helpful as guides."

"By all means," confirmed Ozma heartily. "Oh! but then of course Fattyw may *not* go. She'll be heartbroken, and I myself will miss the dear girl. But... never mind; I've thought of a consolation prize for her."

Nor was it long before the little queen sent for her favorite and imparted the news. "Fatty dear, I'm called away. Yes, I'm going to the north country for a bit to try to right matters there." Here the fairy named a few of the troubles that were afflicting Gillikinland, while taking care to say nothing of kidnapped caresso-pigs. She knew the dear girl would have a temper tantrum and kick and scream if not allowed to go and rescue her porcine pals.

Instead: "While I'm gone, my dear Fattyw, would you like to sway the sceptre? Be regent in my place?"

"Oh, boy, *would* I?" cried Fattywiggins with delight and quite forgot to be vexed because she wasn't invited to go traveling with her queen.

"You'll have the Patchwork Girl to call on if you need advice," continued Ozma.

"Oh, she'll be a *great* help," said Fats sarcastically. "No, don't worry, Ozma. I know I can cope." But suddenly she cried, "What about your birthday?! Oh. Ozma, you *can't* go! Why, all the invitations have been sent out!"

"Exactly, dear. That's why you must be here in my stead: to receive my guests and see that they have a nice time anyway."

Fattywiggins stopped her dithering at that and, mindful of Queen Victoria's dictum, she said, "I will be good."

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - T W O

Upon receiving his marching orders, Guardsman Langley of course flew to the side of his true love.

Serena had easily given way before urgings from every side to prolong her stay in the Emerald City to cover attendance at the great birthday ball. Gracious Ozma, in extending the invitation, had reinforced it by giving notice that she was making available a tidy room in the servants' quarters on the top floor of the Palace for the reception of the Sweetly Singing Seamstress. Then the gifted harpist spent her days in practice with the Emerald City Brass Band under the direction of the Herr Kapellmeister.

The lovers had various trysts planned daily, and now Langley arrived in the topiary garden on the dot to hear Serena say, "Oh, Langley, you are just on time."

"I was trying to be as precise as possible," said the guardsman a little fussily. "You know I would not want to miss a date with you." He dangled a tiny parcel from a forefinger.

"Oh, aren't you the sweet one!" cried the girl, though whether as praise for her boyfriend's punctuality or in anticipation of the gift is not clear.

Langley now made a formal and admittedly somewhat stiff speech. "Sweet enough, I hope, to make properly honeyed the words which should accompany this token of love. We have been

sweethearts since we were children in Gillikinland. Now I want to make certain that we will always be together —”

Before he could finish Serena broke in impulsively. “Indeed we were together a long time — that is, until you saw fit to join the Royal Palace Guard! Now you’re more married to them than you are to me.” She pretended to pout prettily.

“That will all change in time. I swear it! But, oh, how shall I speak it? I must be torn from you!”

“Torn from’!?” cried the girl, dropping every pretense at pouting.

“It’s true. My regiment marches in an hour! We are assigned to safeguard royal Ozma on a journey into our homeland. Although it will be fine to come to Gillikinland —”

“Why bother? Gillikinland is coming here!” Serena tried despairingly to turn the pathos of the moment to merry wit.

“Indeed, but our sovereign needs would have it so. ’Tis just this empurpling of the land she feels she has to face, as well as the overweeningness of the trolls. Now word has just come that a couple of the Caresso-pigs have been kidnapped.”

“And sold to the slaughterhouse!” cried the seamstress, who herself had missed pork chops back home beside the Soup Sea.

“Not quite. Not yet. But it tends that way. Ozma can’t countenance such cruelty. And so —”

“I’ll go with you!” decided the maiden, getting ready, like Marlene, to kick off her shoes and follow her man over the sandy wastes. “I’ll be a camp follower, a — a daughter of the regiment!”

“I’m afraid the Queen would take a dim view of that,” said Langley, placing blame a bit unfairly. But he *didn’t* in fact want to mix up career and love life. Who really does? “No, darling, we’ll be back within the week. Ozma hasn’t canceled the birthday ball. We’ll dance the cotillion! And you shall wear my ring.”

Here the lover at last relented and dropped into Serena’s cupped hands the little parcel. “Vouchsafe to wear this ring,” he ordered lovingly. “Look! how my ring encompasses thy finger. Just so thy breast encloses my poor heart. Wear both of them, for both of them are thine.”

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - T H R E E

Ozma was off! Cheered to the welkin by her loyal subjects as she walked, like Jimmy Carter in time to come, through the streets of her capital, accompanied by her honor guard, all twelve men strong (including the hapless pair, Lapstart and Draxton; I think the princess had some idea she could conveniently lose them on the way).

She walked with a will, determined to put behind her many miles in a day. To this end she had exchanged her stay-at-home slippers for sturdy green – sorry, violet – walking boots and was wearing a serviceable tailored version of her usual hostess gown. She did not plain to stop before elevenses. But here she had to think again! for suddenly the air was alive with the sound of laughter. Ethereal voices, prophesying balls. One by one a cloud of tiny sprites winked into visibility, hovering in the air about the biggest fairy of them all.

“Your Majesty!” cried Titania. “Has our dear Queen Lurline yet arrived?”

“Why, no,” said Ozma, halting despite all her intentions. “At least I personally have not seen her yet.”

“That’s strange. We made sure she must have flown hither. When we woke early this morning in the vine yards we found

her missing. We assumed she had left early to get ready for the birthday ball."

"We know she was looking forward to it," put in Mab. "—as, indeed, are all of us. We've hardly talked of anything else."

"If she has arrived she has not made the fact known to me," stated Ozma. "But here are your compatriots," she indicated, as Peaseblossom and the rest flew up. "They brought us the grievous tidings of the stealing of the pigs."

The two fairy groups exchanged a round of greetings and then they all fell in behind the purposefully onward-striding Queen of Oz. Titania burred on, "Oh, yes, shocking. We know our Sovereign was much exercised at witnessing the captivity of the two caresso-pigs. But so unlike her to leave us without a word as to where she was going."

"Never mind," said Mustardseed. "We can practise a cappella as we fly along with the dear Princess. It's better than kicking our heels at the royal palace with nothing to do but worry and wonder."

Indeed, the tuneful lilting of the fairy choir was charming entertainment as the party, partly footborne, partly wingborne, forged on to the Gillikin Gate and beyond. It was going on noon when the company caught up with another party bound for the distant north: Farmer Brownthum and his multi-flavored cows.

Involuntary aversion struck Ozma a-maze. But reason would not let her admit the feeling. She conquered it and advanced to the head of her strung-out company to hail: "Mr. Brownthum! Well met. And thank you once more for appearing so loyally at our reception. You and your herd deserve truly to rank among Oz personalities."

The countryman turned back and made an awkward but pleased bow. "Your Grace! How kind! And how comfortin'. You're travelin' north? It'll be grand to have company on the road... It was getting durned lonesome without pretty Selena here any more."

That speech made the girl ruler start, though she quickly masked it. She didn't have time to dawdle along at the pace of

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three ambling cows! But she simply lacked the heart to disappoint the good old farmer. She'd have to get out of it some way. But how?

Just for the moment she staved off the inevitable by eliding the intended break for refreshments and ordered the sandwich packets passed out for the hikers to munch as they pressed onward.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - F O U R

When Lazlodes yelled, "Come and get it! Chow is on!" everyone left the gem-grabbing game and flocked to the table which had been set up beside the Caresso-pigs' thatch-covered cottage. The pair from the kitchen served out the sweet-smelling cobs hot from the cauldron, heaping the platters to dangerous heights. There was a pitcher of sweet cider on the checked tablecloth. As a concession to their human guest dishes of butter and pepper and salt were placed, but the natural-eating pigs needed no such refinement—or debasement.

As Mombi hobbled to a seat she was introduced by Biff and Cleo who had by now come to terms with their tears. The old woman smirked and said, "Good things happen to good neighbors," at which everyone groaned but forgave her, knowing she meant well. She just wasn't used to saying pleasant things and performed it only indifferently. To forestall further platitudes someone shoved a plateful of corn in front of her. The analogy was not lost on the alert-minded woman. She helped herself to a couple of ears.

To make conversation Mombi said presently, "You mean you pigs can sniff out precious stones in the ground?"

"Well, yes, we can," admitted Homer. "But since all the rock

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in Gillikinland seems to have turned into amethyst, there's no special art to that. Every little pebble is a jewel."

Suddenly Biff threw down his half-chewed ear. "Here we sit, stuffing our faces and making polite chitchat when all the while our Wee and Nilnul are held in captivity! Aren't we going to do anything?" he demanded.

"Yes," sniffed Cleo, perilously near weeping again. "If the trolls *have* got them, they're not going to come home by themselves."

"What do you think we should do?" asked Homer, directing his question to their guest, of whose intelligence he was beginning to get a fair impression.

"Would that I could be of help to you," declared Mombi, safe in her benevolence, knowing that she couldn't. The thing was that the witch all her life had done nothing but evil. She didn't know *how* to do anything constructive. It was the realization of this limitation to her craft that had lately produced the seeming softening in her attitude. She wanted to do some good deeds just to see if she could!

In the present case all she could think of was to pass the buck to another. Her fellow witch Glinda of the South was notorious for her goodness—and her power. Let the pigs apply to her. And she said as much:

"You might be well advised to go to Sorceress Glinda down in the Quadling country. She's about the only one with the know-how *and* the motivation to deal with the various unpromising developments here in the North.

"Indeed," the witch went on, "I wonder that Glinda hasn't come up here to have a gander at things herself. Even if she would, she can't do much, sitting way off there in her pink palace."

The pigs were enthusiastic. Oh, to be *doing* something—just about anything—rather than hanging around home and worrying themselves sick. "Then we'll go to Glinda!" cried Lazlodes, "to get our sister and brother back. I'll take—uhh, Homer with me—and Twee. Is that all right?"

"I think you're being wise," approved Mombi, while all the swine in chorus seconded her opinion.

"So that's settled," said the thoughtful Homer. "We'll leave for the Ruby City this very afternoon."

"I'll pack some things for you," said helpful Suze, eldest of the family females, who tended to play mother.

There was a general breaking up. Mombi thanked the caressopigs for their hospitality and was preparing to take the road when she looked away along the path she meant to follow and spied a large carriage proceeding in their direction very slowly and cautiously.

All the pigs ran to the pigget fence to have a look. Traffic on the puce brick road was rare enough that a conveyance of this size and description could create a sensation. As the equipage came on they could see that behind the carriage car trailed a wagon-bed loaded with an enormous oblong crate. As it drew nearer yet they made out the label words "Fragile", "Handle with care", "Caution!" and "This side up" stenciled on its sides. None of the words, however, gave a clue as to what was within.

"What is it?" the pigs called to the driver. "What have you got? What's inside the big box?" Two attendants who followed the load on foot answered for him.

"We're transporting a birthday gift to Princess Ozma in the Emerald City." The driver just looked straight ahead, keeping his eyes on the road.

"But what is it?! And who from?"

"That's all we're authorized to give out!"

The pigs dissolved in "oohhs" and "ahhs" but Twee said, "We'll get to see what it is when we go to the ball."

"Oh, do you have invitations?" asked Mombi interestedly.

"Yes, they arrived just yesterday. We suppose it must have been Fattywiggins who arranged for them. She loves us and naturally wouldn't want to see us left out."

Meanwhile the carriage and wagon, after holding a brief pause, were proceeding on down the road when Suze ran out of the house with a carpetbag clutched in her jaws. "Oh, wait!" she

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called, dropping the bag. "Kind wayfarers!" she cried. "Can you give our siblings a lift? They're on their way to the home of Glinda the Good!"

At last the haughty coachman condescended to look round. "All right. But make it snappy."

The carriage door was flung open and the strolling attendants pitched Lazlodes, Twee, and Homer up and in before the three sudden travelers had time to think what they were about. They scrambled to stick snouts out of the open window and wave desperately as they were driven off. (As there were no horses to speak of in Oz at this period bullocks were doing the hauling.)

"I hardly ever attend balls," resumed Mombi as those remaining behind turned away, she to take up her baskets and the caresso-pigs to do the dishes.

"Oh?" said Suze. In reality her mind was on another aspect of the approaching festivity. "Then you won't get to see how splendid our boys will look in their satin tuxedos. And the girls have ordered ball gowns from Serena the Sweetly Singing Seamstress."

"Oh, yes, I know her," said Mombi, then in a moment: "Listen, before you all take off for the ball, come over to visit me, will you? I'm just up the road, you know. I have something I'd like you to have, to take along to the capital."

Suze gave the witch her assurance but stood looking after her thoughtfully as Mombi hobbled off. To offer an al fresco meal to a passing sorceress was one thing but to actually seek her out in her own disreputable hut...?

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - F I V E

As it turned out, the by now rather unwieldy company of voyagers from the Emerald City (two hundred strong, what with all the fairies that had joined them) were still together at the next important encounter, and it didn't get any wieldier as a result. It was well into the deep purple of darkest Gillikinland that the party came face to face with the oncoming bullock carriage and truck loaded with the great crate for Ozma's birthday.

The wizard Diggs had been entertaining. "About this novelty I have designed for the cabaret show during the birthday festivities," he said, and he held out a deck of cards, at each end card of which a thin wire handle appeared to be attached. Diggs put a finger through one wire end-loop, then with a practised gesture flipped the whole deck high in the air. The cards flew out in perfect line formation 'til each was clearly visible between its mates, then the whole fifty-two flew back again into a tidy deck in the Wizard's hand. "How's that?"

Ozma nodded abstractedly. She was thinking about the proclivities of cows.

"Now watch this!"

The Wizard shuffled the playing cards expertly within his

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two hands, not even requiring a tabletop to rest them on, and, even more strangely, without the near-invisible attaching wire seeming to get in the way. The prestidigitator halted at one point to show that the cards were just a deck of ordinary playing cards, though Ozma already knew that they were *not*. Still, the deuce of spades, the ol' Jack o' Diamonds, and the Queen of hearts looked very much as one was used to seeing them.

The Wizard shuffled the cards intensively another three times, presented them to his sovereign to affirm that they were well and truly jumbled, then again he flung the deck by its wire handle up in the air. He gave a quick twist of the wrist and the whole flight of cards turned over, to show the *backs* of the pasteboards spelling out in perfect order: "HAPPINESS IS OZ AND OZ IS HAPPINESS AND OZMA'S THE CAUSE OF IT ALL" before the whole articulated deck collapsed back into his hand.

"How do you like that, your majesty?" asked O.Z. even as the little queen politely clapped her hands. But her thoughts remained elsewhere. She smiled and nodded her head in a vague sort of way. She seemed distinctly worried.

Diggs looked at her askance. Well, of course she would be worried. The fairy sovereign was only making this trip because of her concern about things being out of kilter. A purple tide that spread over everything like a great skin cancer. An immigrant population that was not measuring up against the admittedly high standards that obtained in the great fairyland. The outbreak of crime in the form of pignapping. Perhaps worst of all was the danger that the whole country might be drawn into something as sordid as a market economy.

Yet when the kindly old gentleman kindly and gently enquired why it was that his queen stalked along with her eyes on the ground, the answer was none of these. Still pensive, with her chin in hand, Ozma replied:

"It's a volatile mixture we've got here. Have you noticed how restless the cows have become? They may not be only the mild and passive creatures we observed in the Audience Chamber. Remember how they moaned and moored *more* at the reception

the other day? And only stopped when fairy Peaseblossom took her departure? Something is agitating the bovines and I think it's all these fairies. Cows and fairies are not a good combination. I hope it's not going to cause problems as this expedition goes on. I'm trying to think how we can lose Farmer Brownthum without hurting his feelings."

The Wizard prepared to pontificate. He'd read up the whole subject just recently. "It's traditional, of course. At least since the Dark Ages, and perhaps going all the way back to Greece and Egypt, it was a fond folk belief that when cattle went off their milk-giving or turned crazy and ran wild, it was the doing of the wee folk who deliberately tormented them. I dare say that's what Farmer B's animals are feeling now. They're afraid."

"Oh, Wizard, how silly of them. We fairies would not hurt a fly!" said the princess, aggrieved. "Do you really think that's the explanation?"

"I dare say it's involuntary. Intellectually the cows may know that fairies nowadays have—saving your graces—reformed and no longer tease cattle. But they can't help it. It's like a cat when it scents a dog: it can't help its hair and tail rising up and itself scooting up the nearest tree."

"But the cows have seemed sweet enough when just I was around, and I'm a fairy," puzzled Ozma.

"But your highness has human antecedents as well. That may have made the difference."

Alas, both queen and courtier were way out in left field in their analysis of cow motivation. This was revealed at last and suddenly at the moment when Bossie and Chippie and Shamrock came over the brow of a rise and saw the bullock-drawn carriage not twenty yards ahead.

There was instant pandemonium. Now that they saw (they thought) the solution to their problem, Bossie and her pals knew in a trice what had been eating them. Without a word of warning they set into a gallop, straight toward the carriage team.

The four plodding bullocks (or oxen), faced with an oncoming stampede of co-racialists and not realizing the purely

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amative nature (or maybe they did!) of the onslaught, panicked.

They too took off, to try to get out of the way, and dashed forward and to one aide, where in the twinkling of an eye they had upset the carriage in the deep ditch, spilling pigs in all directions, not to mention the coachman and off-riders, and ending with the grand collapse of the big birthday crate on its side in four feet of purple mud and water.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - S I X

On a door torn from the wrecked carriage by the united efforts of sturdy members of the Palace Guard, they carried the casualties along to the house of the Caresso-pigs, the nearest habitation, a couple of miles on.

The casualties were two: Lazlodes, sparking power of the pig team that had set out so short a time before to consult with witch Glinda; and one of the hauling-team out-riders. Nursed diligently by motherly Suze, who was helped by her sister Cleo, the carriage attendant recovered. He was after all an Ozite and *couldn't* die. In the end he regained almost his old vigor, after a broken leg and bad bruising. Lazlodes died.

This was what Ozma's soul had all along divined. Now that it had happened—strange, even unfeeling, as it may sound—it was a sort of relief to her. We have all experienced the same. To dread something, to be uneasy in our inmost heart about some event, known, or unspecifiable, that must happen, and then when it has done so and the worst is known, a lightening of the spirits. Perhaps it is to be replaced by regret or grief but at least the intolerable dread is over.

Lazlodes drowned, underneath the carriage in the four feet of mud. He was dead before the combined strength of all the

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human survivors succeeded in uprighting the vehicle, dead when they hauled him from the slime and laid him on the door, dead on arrival at home.

The trouble, you see, was that he was mortal, a visitor from outside Oz. Though he might share in the famous unagingness of even newcomers to Oz on taking up residence in the wonderland, he could not lose his mortal status, could not become an immortal. Death remained always a possibility. And Ozma had known.

That was why she heeded the old soothsaying that she had most to fear from domestic animals. That was why a pall of worry had descended upon her when her party joined the herd of cows. It was the first time in her reign that anyone known to her had died. It was hence the greatest defeat of her time on the throne. She had done right to divine disaster.

The Caressos were thrown into a despair beside which the kidnapping of their other siblings faded to the status of a minor distress. Nobody in all the crowd that now filled the pig bungalow had ever seen death before and they were devastated. The funeral, in the garden, was a sombre occasion and one almost unique in Oz annals.

Unfeeling bacon-fanciers such as Joe King and Queen Hyacinth might have thought it a waste to bury thirty pounds of prime pork but any other idea naturally never crossed the minds of the mourners in the cottage. (Cremation might have smelt disconcertingly appetizing!)

But afterwards life had to go on.

The poor bullocks, inadvertent authors of the tragedy, had been freed from harness early on in the course of the emergency and turned out to graze in a pasture along the way to the cottage of the caresso-pigs. As a matter of fact Farmer Brownthum's cows joined them there. Now that the milkgivers had realized the extent of their fatal misconception they were properly contrite. All frenzy had fled. They mingled with their co-racialists in the field amicably and very docilely. As for the rest of the southward-bound travel train, nothing was attempted

until the day after the mishap. The parties spent the night encamped in pavilions that O.Z. Diggs, wizard, erected from pocket handkerchiefs in a meadow abutting on the property of the Caressos. After the solemnity of the funeral in the early morning, Ozma revisited the scene of the sad accident.

"What *is* the big crate?" she enquired of the dour driver as she gazed at the great heliotrope-colored container, now stained by the mud more purple than ever.

"It was to have been a surprise for Your Majesty's birthday," informed the custodian. "I suppose you may as well know now. It looks like the case will never reach the Emerald City anyway."

"Who sent it?" wondered the Princess, groaning curious even in the midst of her distress and on-going worry.

"The U.P.S.," stated the coachman in some surprise. He was of those who believe that what they know everyone must by nature know.

"Ah" said Ozma. "The Unicycle Production Service. I recall; their workshops are in the north. Just this side of the Forest of Gugu, are they not? Well, how kind of them to think of that."

"Your Grace did found the operation, after all," said the driver, unbending a bit. "The managers are grateful."

Ozma had to get on with her mission with as little delay as possible but she did not feel she could leave the matter of the wrecked travel train unresolved. In the end the whole morning went in rounding up all able-bodied men and cattle and dragging the half-submerged coach and freight cart once more upon the road.

Then said the queen, "Now that I have received, so impromptu, my gift, shall we not open it? It will save you having to try to make your way on to the capital in your somewhat disabled condition."

The caravan attendants concurred, a crowbar and hammers were brought out (from under the seats of the coach), and the gift displayed, there on the open road. Ozma smiled for the first time since the tragedy.

Bicycles!

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Or fairycycles, to be more exact. (Proud as they were of their principal product, the manufacturers did not expect that ordinary immortals would be able to cope with *unicycles*!) Fairycycles, in all shapes and sizes, wrought of feather-light lavender-tinted magic tin: as thin as ordinary sheet tin but of incredible durability. A whole bicycle weighed two pounds, if that.

Princess Ozma was captivated. So were O.Z. Diggs and General Battles and Guardsman Langley and his mates and even the sorrowing caresso-pigs. They pulled out any number of the fifty assorted machines and tried them on the puce bricks of the (once) yellow brick road. The fairycycles proved easy to steer and pedal and their fairyation was further evidenced by their ability to remain standing upright even if not supported by a third prop.

“Oh, just what I wanted!” cried Ozma, elated. For her speeding mind at once saw how the devices could help her make up for the time her expedition had lost. Nay, more: flying down the road on bicycles her party could do in hours what would have taken them days on foot.

When nearly all fifty machines had been offloaded they were seen to number among them also four-pedaled versions. Now who—?! But in a trice Ozma saw who. Four-footed friends, of course. “Here, Biff,” said she. “Try if you can manage.” She pointed to a low four-pedal (but still just two-wheeled) model. These were guided by a snout-bar on top!

The well-balanced caresso-pig mounted the little vehicle. After just a little wobbling he trundled off down the road as deftly as you please, and stopped only by running into an old plum tree by the side of the road and falling off.

“Hooray!” cried all the watchers and at once everybody picked out a bike to suit him. Ozma, looking into the bottom of the nearly empty crate, saw something that cleared away even one more small preoccupation, namely how she was to disappoint Farmer Brownthum not too disappointingly. She wasn’t.

What she saw was four copies of the heavy-duty cycle model:

low-slung, solid (though still fairylight-weight), equipped with four pedals and tail-guard.

Chippie, Bossie, and Shamrock would ride!

By and by all the neighborhood turned out to see the three milk cows meekly taking to the road, borne on lilac-tinted velocipedes. I have watched them myself many a time. Do you ever see cows riding bicycles in America?

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - S E V E N

While Princess Ozma and her entourage, bicycle-borne, were skimming on along the road to the north, the Caresso-pigs, in deep mourning, went to visit Mombi.

“We promised we would, you know,” reminded Suze.

“At least, I promised — sort of. Well, anyway it will be something to do to keep our minds off. We’ve nothing to occupy us but worry until the Princess gets our brother and sister rescued.”

The other pigs, despondent, agreed. They all put on the formal clothes they had originally intended to wear to the Birthday ball, and to these they applied black rosettes to indicate their funereal status. Two by two they walked up the road, not running, of course; that would have looked too much like playing.

“Look at how the leaves have turned bright shades of magenta,” said Homer. “Gosh, is it autumn already?”

“Hardly,” said Cleo. “It’s only mid-August.”

It seemed to have escaped the caresso-pigs’ notice that their neighbor Mombi had autumn or spring or whatever when *she* wanted. What otherwise was the good of being a witch if you couldn’t even have the seasons when you preferred them, at least as far as concerned the confines of your own garden?

"The leaves *are* beginning to fall off the trees," confirmed Biff. "It *must* be fall."

"And look at all those delicious apples," directed Twee, indicating the trees in the garden just ahead. "I'll bet you Miss Mombi wouldn't mind if we took a few."

However, she gobbled up only one as she ran up the path to the witch's hut and pulled the string connected to an old bell.

The bell clanged several times. "Who's there?" called a voice from around behind the little building, where Mombi was feeding her prize fowls. She pretended not to know it was the Caresso-pigs.

"It's just us, your 'good neighbors'," shouted the swine in unison. How dear Queen Ozma had gaped yesterday when the pigs related how the witch herself had made use of that unlikely phrase.

Ozma seemed unable to believe her ears when the pigs told how Mombi had recently seemed to thaw and was no longer the neighbor-keeping-her-distance they had thitherto been used to. The girl ruler was gratified. Every bit of extra peace and quiet in her realm was grist to her mill.

But when she heard that Mombi had actually invited the pigs to call and even spoken of matters relating to the sovereign's own approaching jubilee, the little fairy had grown doubtful. What kind of plot might the traditionally wicked woman not be hatching?

"No, thank you," Ozma had said when the Caessos in sudden enthusiasm suggested she go *with* them to visit the witch. No date had been set; it might be any time. "I think I ought to let sleeping dogs lie," she said. carelessly the fairy mixed a metaphor. "I've enough on my plate already. No, don't even greet her from me. Feelings are still too fragile for that." After all, it was only ten years since the very existence of the young regent-to-be was being threatened by her foster mother. "But," concluded the queen, "speak to her very kindly and assure the woman that the good will of the ruler of Oz goes to *all* who keep the peace."

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But now Mombi ran round to the front door, her apron strings flying. "Such a pleasant surprise!" she began, but then she saw the mourning rosettes and the sorrowful expressions. "Oh, dear, whatever's the matter?" For of course no one had paid a special call so far on Mombi to keep her abreast of the news.

The caresso-pigs burst into tears. Then it all came out. Their hostess made them sit down on stools or on the floor while they poured out the tale of the death of officious Lazlodes whom, nevertheless, everybody had loved.

"You poor things," said Mombi, and quickly served them cups of witch's brew, known to have a therapeutic effect. As the (mild) liquor coursed through their veins the pigs gradually gave over weeping and began to look distinctly more cheerful.

"And now dear Princess Ozma is off to restore at least our other brother and sister to us," stated Cleo.

"Ozma, bmpf," grunted Mombi, whose disaffection for her former foster son had flared up anew. She had seen the young Princess pedal past her door that morning without even turning her head. It was the ruler's own old boyhood home! Yet she hadn't let that stop her. The snub rankled.

The pigs heard her expression with surprise for they of course thought that everyone adored Ozma. To turn the conversation from what seemed might be a delicate topic Suze said, "But you asked us to call, I think? Something about something you wanted us to take along to the Emerald City?"

"Never mind," blurted the witch rudely, but then regretted her impetuosity. It wasn't the pigs' fault if she had now had second thoughts about dispatching any further birthday gifts to that ingrate foster-child. Besides, with Ozma clearly heading off into the boondocks it could look as if there might not be going to be any birthday festivities. "I mean," she corrected, "I don't want to send anything to the capital. But I—er, I have a present for you yourselves."

"Oh, goody," cried the caresses, simple souls who never could resist the lure of a new toy. "What is it? What is it you have got for us?"

Mombi thought rapidly. It was true, she had brought back from Emerald City as a treat for herself a new chemistry set. Maybe she could arrange something with that which could prove an entertainment for the pigs.

"It's a surprise," temporized the witch. "It isn't ready yet. But one day soon you'll receive it.. When it happens maybe you will recognize it as coming from me."

On that mysterious but enticing note the topic was dropped. Soon afterwards the caresso-pigs returned home feeling that good relations had been cemented with their strange neighbor.

But Mombi lingered long over the alembics that evening. Whatever was she going to dream up to amuse the pigs?

'Pigs,' she mused. Twigs, wigs, figs, jigs. Or swine, twine, brine, kine? Hogs, dogs, frogs, logs, bogs—no, that last wouldn't do; it was only an eye rhyme. Same thing with 'cogs'. Boars? doors, floors, oars, snores. In desperation she thought of shoats: boats, coats, oats, notes, motes, floats. Finally, floats, oars, bogs, and brine among them did suggest something, but it was only when she recalled the trite expression "filthy as a pig" that she at last got it right. Or course the caresso-pigs weren't filthy. On the contrary they were normally almost painfully well scrubbed. But if they liked scrubbing, then something with soap in it might be just the thing to tickle their fancy.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - E I G H T

Thousands of trolls were out of sight, invisible, and nowhere to be seen. No wonder. They were all far down within the bowels of the earth mining amethysts furiously. Their going on strike didn't of course amount to actually stopping work. The "strike" was merely one against any form of loading of supply trains to haul their product to the waiting (and by now already seriously under-engaged) workshops of the 'Emerald' City.

Now that Purplitude (they were already beginning to capitalize it) had turned the entire rock content of Gillikinland into (admittedly low-grade) amethyst, one might wonder why the trolls need labor quite so furiously. But that was it: the miners continued to busy themselves only with the highest-quality gems. And not a one was Ruler Ozma going to get unless she came begging for it herself.

"A fat chance of that!" joked watchtroll Frumple coarsely as he and Ankle climbed the guard tower. Ankle guffawed appreciatively.

The guard tower was a new construction just outside the main gate of the amethyst workings on the north slope of the Gillikin Mountains. To think that a branch of the road of yellow bricks, symbol of the ever-growing prestige and luxury of Oz,

should lead the unwary traveler to something so un-Ozian and ungracious, even hostile, as a guard tower!

But it did, and other unfriendlinesses were in wait for such travelers: the sight of a closed main gate to the mines and the sound of the dull and heavy tramp of the feet of pickets who plodded slowly in a wide circle, carrying signs which read, "Unfair working conditions", "Trolls on general strike", "A plea for higher wages", and "Amethysts make Oz a better place to live!" The picket walkers were relatively few in number. There was no need of them for going to combat with possible scabs who might question their right to the mining jobs they held. Heaven forbid. Who would want to do the dirty dark dangerous job of gem-extracting when they had immigrant trolls now to do it for them? So thought the occasional farmer on his cart or woodsman with his slings as he passed by and heard the trolls hollering to gain the attention of wayfarers and expound their grievances to them.

In fact nobody stopped to gape at the trouble-makers/freedom fighters picketing rather desolately there. Why, if something like that had happened in the big city there would be crowds of on-lookers, inevitably giving the strikers a sense of their own importance. But no, the poor trolls were the underdogs of Oz. Nobody cared about them but relegated them to drudgerous mining in desolate mountain regions, rather than, as in a juster world, in city streets.

It was really too bad about the Trolls, reasoned they themselves (if they had been capable of reasoning). They were an independent and merely well meaning tribe. They claimed not to be aligned with any evil nations. They were just content to do their own thing, mining on mindlessly through the ages. They had always mined, time out of mind, also back in those countries from which they had lately fled. They didn't need anybody insidiously to suggest that they band together more closely or declare themselves as an established mining community. Still less did they require any cobolds or gnomes or goblins to initiate in their mines, if not minds, an impulse toward proclaim-

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ing themselves a labor union. And certainly the idea of going on active strike was the inspiration of the trolls alone. Wasn't it?

Thus would Frumple and Ankle have argued had they been capable of consecutive thought. As it was, they reached the same general conclusions by means of grunts and growls. They were a couple of misfits who were known to lack relish for the usual digging activities of daily life in trolldom. They might do better as trigger-happy lookout guards.

"Well, hurry up," went the sparkling repartee. "Get up there."

"Blither said —"

"Gate mustn't ever be deserted."

"Watch tower gotta have trolls in it at all times."

"Yeah. To keep a look-out."

"Hurry!"

"I'm hurryin'!" Ankle continued to scurry up the rungs of the ladder. "Don't wanna fall down and break my durn neck."

Frumple, the older, larger, and managerial troll, prodded the rump of his mate with a stick. When the two had reached the top of the tower they stared off in both directions along the road, looking for any suspicious traffic from the direction of the "Emerald" City. Due to the lie of the mountains and valleys the road ran east and west just here and of course the trolls couldn't tell in which of *those* directions the capital might lie.

"I see somep'n!" said Frumple, pointing.

"I don't see nothin'."

"Just comin' round the bend."

"What is it you see? You ain't seein' things?"

"Now don't you make a fool of me!"

"I don't see a thing around that bend."

"Now they're back o' that stand o' trees."

The lookout trolls had done well to look in both directions, for it was not from that of the Emerald City but from the opposite side that, briefly and indistinctly, a strange procession had come into view. It consisted of weary trolls, three in number, and ready-to-drop Caresso-pigs (two).

Yes, it was Numskul, Druid, Cheepix, Nilnul, and Wee.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - N I N E

After the night in the vineyard barn the kidnap party had had an exhausting long trek up hill and down dale And through the dreary great Rain Forest. It was a toss-up whether the pigs or the trolls were more fed up with the expedition by now. They were drenched through and through, starved, and suffering from worn-out feet. All the captors' mental energy had gone into keeping their legs moving and the pigs from escaping.

Too late the leader, Numskul, had an idea. The new mines guard tower had already been sighted when he said, "Look, if we bring home these pigs we're going to be expected to share them—with all the other trolls. Now follow me!"

With that he ducked, under cover of the purplery, off the road and into the brush. "Not much farther," he said to the pigs assuringly, but if that was a threat or a promise they never learned. Beyond speaking now, they trailed after him into the blackberry brambles.

Nor had the fairy band, instructed by Queen Lurline to keep the kidnappers under surveillance, slackened their trust. Invisibly they pursued the group, hovering silently in the air a few yards above and behind the walkers. They duly followed as the party under Numskul's leadership made a beeline for what

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appeared to be an old mine entrance no longer in use.

Numskul developed his scheme as the pignappers hustled their victims through the undergrowth, parted the weeds and creepers, and thrust the captives through the cave-like mouth of the old workings. It was here they would deposit the prize.

"We can tell the others our hunting expedition turned out to be zilch. We didn't find anything worth eating, certainly nothing worth bringing home just roots and nuts and berries."

A cohort chimed in. "So we keep the pork here in the mine 'til it's time to eat them? I feel like that'd be pretty soon."

Meanwhile, Ankle at last having been convinced that Frumple had seen something, something that auspiciously did not continue in normal fashion to pass along the road, the two look-out trolls worriedly climbed back down from the tower. They needed to investigate.

They hurried across the broken terrain to the copse which had screened the ducking-aside of the oncoming road party. Once among the trees they hastened forward on tiptoe. Nobody spoke until Frumple broke the silence to say, "Shh!"

"I never said nothin'."

"Then don't. Keep your trap shut. I'll do the same. Don't want to scare 'em off."

The kidnapper trolls had paused at the mine entrance only long enough to let their eyes adjust to the relative absence of light. Native dwellers underground, they could see in the dark. Such was not the case with the caresso-pigs, who stumbled along wondering how it would end. Blind and terrified, prodded by their captors, they emitted the most pitiful gag-muffled squeals of fright. Deep into the mine tunnel the group penetrated and presently took one of the many branching galleryways.

The pursuing fairies had divided into two units, one of which went to summon emergency help from animals of the surrounding fields, forest, and mountainside. The rest flew along to keep the hostages in sight, a task by no means easy even for fairies. Normally they could see by virtue of the light they themselves

gave out; only now, for reasons of prudence, they were keeping invisible.

The 'advance' party of trolls persevered until they were far enough back along the galleries to feel they need no longer fear discovery by chance passers-by Frumple and Ankle were, however, not chance pursuers. They had arrived in time to see the caresso-pigs shoved into the mine entrance. Now they hurried after astonishingly soundlessly.

Finally Numskul's group called a halt. *They* were making enough noise to mask the tiptoe sounds of anyone else. They took the gags off Wee and Nilnul. No matter how loud they might shriek now the pigs could no longer be heard at the mouth of the mine.

In fact, Wee had stopped her squealing and sobbing. She had decided to take the Stoic approach. Nilnul did the talking for them. He said, "You had better not harm us or Glinda the Good will get after you."

"Glinda the Snood?" mocked the trolls and laughed coarsely.

"We're just gonna make smoked hams out of you, that's all," foretold Numskul. "Isn't that what good swine-flesh, is for?" He laughed again and again the other trolls joined in.

"You ought to let my sister go, at least."

"What, as a sucking-pig, without an apple in its mouth? She's too rare a delicacy for that." Wee just cringed and fell into a fit of the shivers. Meanwhile Nilnul was thinking furiously. There must be some way to outwit these criminal idiots. He said, "If you won't eat us or abuse us, my sister and I might be able to help you in your gem-mining."

Further guffaws. "What do hogs know about mining? For starters, what are you gonna stand on while you wield a pick with your front feet?"

"We wouldn't try to *dig* for them, amongst rock, but we can scent out where the best-quality stones are. For instance, I can tell you that there are still some top-quality gemstones in this old mine shaft."

The trolls went all solemn. If there was one thing they liked

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better than ham, it was top-quality gemstones. "Just think," soliloquized one; "we might have eaten you and never known you could find amethysts for us."

"I'm very quick," said Wee, finally breaking her silence. "I can find gems faster than any of my siblings. But first I'd have to have something to eat. I'm awfully hungry."

"That's right," agreed Numskul grudgingly. "They, haven't had anything to eat in three days. We really ought to fatten them up until we decide what to do with them."

"Do with them'?" spoke an unfamiliar voice. It was Frumple. The pursuers had caught up with their renegade fellows. "You've got to turn them over to us, that's what. Otherwise we run you in."

"You and who else?!" Numskul tried to brazen it out.

While the trolls quarreled, finally coming to blows, the now de-gagged and unbound caresso-pigs felt about in the dark for a clue to which way they might try to steal away. What with the trolls' preoccupation there seemed little to fear from their direction, but what *other* direction among the branching galleries could the pigs take, all blind as they were, without simply ending deeper inside the heart of the mountain than they already were?

Suddenly, as if by magic, aid appeared. Well, it *was* magic. It was the guardian fairies who, as soon as the caresses had blundered past a bend in the passage, relit themselves and appeared to the pigs in all their firefly glory.

"Quick!" whispered Moth. "Follow our light." And she flew off, leading the way further through the maze of mine galleries, onward and ever downward through the rich purple air.