

C H A P T E R F O R T Y

Acting Queen Fattywiggins sat on the Throne of Oz and tapped her foot spasmodically. She had been there almost continuously since Ozma had left town. She didn't want a moment of her being Regent of Oz to get away from her. To leave the seat royal of that majestic land to do anything mundane like eating or sleeping would have seemed a sin to her. Luckily there was a tiny retiring room a few feet away behind a drape so she did not need to keep any utensils of the bath beside the throne.

She had early learned to keep some of her cronies about her so that she did not become too bored during the long hours in which nobody came to crave an audience. These included, first and foremost, her companion of past adventures, Xavier Jaxon. He came to assume nearly a role of Prime Minister to the Acting Queen and ran errands for her that she could not afford to leave the throne to do herself.

Another constant attendant was Serena, the Sweetly Singing Seamstress. The harpist now left her instrument permanently set up in the throne room and there during many hours of the day beautiful melancholy Celtic lays enchanted the air. At other times she stitched away on orders for gowns that had come to

THE CROWN OF OZ

her both before and after her arrival in the capital.

Then of course the customary celebrities of the Court of Oz very often dropped in to keep their unlikely sometime sovereign entertained or brought up to date on current events. Among these were Scraps, the Patchwork Girl, and the Shaggy Man. Jack Pumpkinhead, the Tin Woodman, and the Scarecrow paid protocol calls when they arrived in town to attend the Birthday Ball. They were more than a little exercised to find a delightful tub of lard sitting on the chair that usually contained a honey-haired fairy the angels named "Ozma".

The Scarecrow was there today, along with the regulars, as Fattyw held her usual morning policy meeting. Restlessly she thumbed through her notes. "Xavier," she addressed that courtier, "have yon a progress report for me on the setting up of the communications poles?"

The Scarecrow pricked up, as well as he could, his painted ears. Communications poles? "Which communications poles were those, Your Corpulence?" (This honorific had been selected as the most suitable in view of the Acting Queen's physique.)

Minister Jaxon took the word. "Her Corpulence deemed it wise to augment speed of communications in the land by authorizing the erection of a network of telegraph and telephone poles throughout Oz."

"You had telephone poles erected in Oz?" said the Scarecrow, horrified, and not bothering with any honorifics.

"It was to go along with my essay on the beauty of telephone and telegraph poles," explained Queen Fatty urbanely.

"How could you?! Without Ozma's consent," cried the Scarecrow.

"It was just for the sake of art. As for Ozma, she never even bothered to look at or listen to my essay," said the ruler pro-tem, who had a grudge to nurse. "But when she put me in charge here she obviously meant me to do whatever I liked. By setting up the poles I saw to it that my ideas didn't go to waste."

"Dear, oh dear," mourned the Scarecrow. "What will our dear sovereign say when she finds out?" But perhaps, he thought

privately, Ozma would make it back in time to put a stop to the desecration before many of the poles were planted. He protested only weakly, "I should have thought your unicycle messenger service was sufficient to deal with the problem of fast communications. Look how speedily they carried the word far and wide about a matter even as trivial as the kidnapping of the caresso-pigs—"

All the courtiers shushed him wildly, but it was too late.

"Kidnapping of Caresso-pigs!" screamed Fattywiggins. "My good Scarecrow, *whatever* are you on about?"

The poor Scarecrow sank through the floor shamefast. It was left to Xavier Jaxon to convey the sad word to the regent. "It's true. Princess Ozma meant to keep it from you. Two of your Caresso pals were stolen by trolls. Fairies brought the news here to the palace, but the kidnap party was also sighted by more than one agent of the unicycle service and they passed on the word wherever they went."

"Stolen!" sobbed Fatty in a broken voice. "Stolen..."

Then she amazed everyone by getting up off the throne for almost the first time in days and rushing to the corner where she had thrown down her roller skates. Seizing them up she pulled open, unaided, the doors to the antechamber and ran out, followed a moment later by all her court as soon as they grasped what she was doing.

"But, Your Corpulence," Jaxon called after her in the corridor, "where are you going?!"

All Fattywiggins answered was a gasping "My pigs! I must go to them!"

The procession streamed down the hallway toward the outer door, from which, following her recent accidents, Acting Queen Fattywiggins had had laid down a smooth wooden ramp of gradual gradience leading to the great outdoors. Here she plopped down on the sill and fastened on her skates.

Her counselors tried to reason with her, pointing out that the very (actual) Queen of Oz herself was attempting to deal with the problem of the shanghaied shoats, and what could a

THE CROWN OF OZ

mere mortal do more?

Fattyw would have none of it. Without even designating who should keep the Throne warm against her return she stood up, gave a violent foot-shove, and sped away down the ramp.

Her flight was splendid but brief. It ended by all eight of the wheels of her skates skidding and whirling off and away, leaving the skater to make her way on as best she could on the naked 'insteps' of the skates alone. This she did by flying bottom side up off the ramp and coming down head first in a herbaceous border.

Fortunately (for the future history of Oz) the landing knocked her out. Fattywiggins may have been a fathead but the layer of fat was not sufficient to cushion the blow and prevent her losing consciousness. The courtiers streaming after her gathered her up approximately and, after the shocked and sorrowing Xavier Jaxon had unstrapped the skates, they carried her tenderly in solemn convoy back up the ramp.

"That's funny," said Xavier, examining the skates. He observed that all the screws intended to fix the wheels to the skates were missing. How amazing. It was a miracle that the skater had got as far as she had before the wheels fell off. What mystery was here?

In the event, Fattyw's oblivion did not last long. Perhaps it was the noise that helped to restore her to consciousness. As her attendants were carrying her along the hall past the ballroom, she suddenly came to. All memory of her former preoccupations blown away (as often happens in cases of knock-out blows to the head), she cried, "'Whatever's that frightful din?!"

The procession stood still to listen. "Why, Your Corpulence," supplied Serena the harpist, "that's the palace band practising. Actually, I ought to be with them myself."

"But why are they making such a hideous racket?" complained the patient. "Oh, my aching head."

"Why, that's the musique moderne your grace was so good as to suggest that the band please Princess Ozma with on her

birthday.”

“Well, tell them to stop it—at once! It’s too dreadful. As for that Kapellmeister, he can get lost. I never want to see—or, even more, hear him again.”

As it turned out, that was the end of the Herr Kapellmeister’s brief brilliant engagement at the court of Oz. But he had already had his revenge on the chubby buttinski who had been his nemesis at the Palace of Magic.

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

Mombi was composing another poison-pen poem to send to 'her sovereign' (hmpf!). Perhaps it is as well, for the sake of the interested reader, to publish it here—just in case it never gets sent. The sorceress was in a sad mixed-up mood. She didn't know what she ought to be feeling in the current phase of her love-hate relationship to her foster son/daughter. Despite rebuffs should she persevere in her secret campaign to prove to herself that she could do good? Or should she allow the old ennui and self-loathing that were the natural result of so many years of being wicked to resume their sway?

Her veiled confession went thus:

"I am so tired of being human.
How? how can I molt this skin
And rise to a height above
The weight I call my flesh?
Freedom from my cage:
When? when will I achieve it?
When shall I be ageless,
Without age?
I am so sorry to be human.

What? what will people say
Of her who tires of being human
And seeks the grave without delay?
Strange that I cannot feel a soul.
Why? why would it seem a blessing?
Will this too be called wickedness?:
To live for the day I die."

Then the witch heard the bell-pull go again and she had to dash the tears from her eyes.

Queer. She was not expecting any guests. She had just seen off one lot, the carrion crows who periodically kept her supplied with gobbets of gossip and bits of raw news from at home and abroad.

She went to her door and there were the Caresso-pigs, dressed again in all their finery. "What's this?" asked the witch indulgently.

"Oh, Miss Mombi," explained Beenie, unaccustomedly taking the lead, "we couldn't sleep for mourning over Lazlodes and worrying about Wee and Nilnul. We can't just sit around at home, not knowing. We have get to be *doing* something. Have you got any ideas?"

"Besides," added Twee, "we were curious about the treat you were planning for us."

"Oh, that," said Mombi with a deprecatory snort. "It's all ready. It can be partaken of at any time. But come in. I'll mix up a tub of swill for you. You might as well spend the afternoon." So saying, she laid aside her manuscript.

After the pigs had enjoyed their slops Homer reverted to the topic of how to pass the time profitably. "We feel we have to be helping," he explained. "Of course Queen Ozma will rescue our stolen siblings all in good time but it's hardly fair for us to just sit around waiting for the good news to come. What can we do? What would you suggest?"

"All I can think of is what you tried before: to send to that other witch, Glinda—"

THE CROWN OF OZ

Here all the pigs broke in—and broke out in tears. “Oh, that’s where Lazlodes was heading that time when... !” Cleo broke down, and the party broke up: the Caressos left the table and threw themselves in various poses of weeping abandon on the floor, the settee, the window sills. Twee even collapsed in sobs in the swill tub.

Mombi let the swine enjoy the cathartic and curative effect of grief for half an hour, then she threw a chart on the now cleared refreshment table, passed out handkerchiefs, and bade her guests rejoin her. “I’ve just had word,” she related, “as to where the Sorceress of the South has relocated. It seems we can’t manage our-own affairs here in the north. The so-called ‘Good Witch of the North’ has been phased out as a practitioner of white magic. Any black magic needed I could have supplied, but I won’t! The carrion crows told me I’m already being accused of instigating this wave of Purplitude that’s sweeping over the country. I protest my innocence...”

The caresso-pigs had dried their eyes and were staring at Mombi, mouths agape. The sight restored her to a sense of what she was about. She ceased her diatribe. “But never mind that,” she proceeded. “You want to get to the Red Witch’s? Look here—” The hex indicated for them on the map of Gillikinland their present location and its orientation in relation to the mines and headquarters of the Trolls and to the new temporary residence of Sorceress Glinda.

“Presumably Ozma’s still in litigation with the trolls over the release of the hostages,” reasoned Mombi. “But you could cut across the mountains to Glinda’s tower without encountering the girl ruler’s entourage. I know a short cut. See here...?”

Her gnarled old finger traced the route. “It’s pretty wild up in those hills—but I’ll come with you part of the way. I’ve got business up there, as it happens. See? ‘Salt Sea Hot Springs’? We can go that far together... And by the way, on your return, mind you stop at the Springs...”

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

The trolls continued to fight it out just long enough to lose what it was they were fighting about. Suddenly all five of them stopped and looked about them in the (to them, just relative) dark.

“Oh, curses!” cried one.

“Yeah!” answered Numskul. “The swine are getting away! We’ve got to stop them, or there go our dreams of picked pigs’ feet,” he shouted.

“Quick. After them!” yelled all the others and ran off in, naturally, the wrong direction. Nobody had in fact seen the caresso-pigs steal away and, even had the trolls been capable of imagining, they could not have imagined that Nilnul and Wee would penetrate further *into* the mine, where even the dumbest troll had realized the pigs were blind. With an erring sense of the actuality of things the trolls dashed away as one along the winding passage back toward the mine entrance.

They burst out into the daylight, in which, blinking, they peered to all sides.

“Dang! We’ve lost them! Now no pork pies,” ejaculated Numskul. But that was not the limit of his surprises. Right in the middle of his speech he was struck on the head by a rain

THE CROWN OF OZ

of nuts.

The trolls gaped, stared around, and up. There, ranged on a nearby tree limb, nicely out of reach, a row of squirrels and chipmunks were hurling acorns at them. Merrily they jittered and taunted, "Get lost, you creeps!" "Your party has gone." "They went thataway!" and a few of the rodents paused in their nut-casting to point misleadingly toward the west.

Suddenly a flight of arrows cleft the air. Many of the missiles truck on target and the trolls were gingered up by a sensation as of red-hot needles in their flesh. It was the porcupines! shooting their quills with unerring aim out of the underbrush.

The troll quintet waited for no further urgings but set out at a run, psychologically, assisted by the sight of the rear quarters of any number of black and white skunks with tails stiffly erect and glands at the ready. An abhorrence of stench lent wings to the heels of the discriminating but disconcerted trolls. And roundabout them as they fled they heard the tinkling laughter of invisible fairies.

It seemed no time before they had gained the road of lilac bricks. They bolted out of the copse just in time to be run over by the forward-barreling bicycles of three ponderous cows. The trolls fell down, the cows fell off, and the fairies fell over, laughing.

Then quickly the latter made themselves visible and flew in a body to the handlebars of Queen Ozma, who braked abruptly and granted them an audience, all ranged as they were, from left to right, at her fingertips.

"Oh, Your Majesty!" gasped Cobweb, leader of the detail appointed to alert the forest creatures. "You're just in time! These wretched trolls have kidnapped two of the darling Caresso-pigs. We've managed to direct the villains back on the path of virtue but it looks as if the pigs themselves have got lost in the shuffle! Maybe you could find out...?"

Gravely Ozma signaled Wizard Diggs, General Battles, Private Langley, even good Farmer Brownthum about her and took counsel. Even without command the members of the Honor

Guard had jumped from their velocipedes and overpowered the crestfallen trolls. Now they brought them to the girl ruler and caused them to kneel before her cycle and to swear allegiance to her lips, her eyes, her hair.

By now the trolls were rather fatigued with their own skulduggery and they submitted readily enough. questioned by the Wizard they confessed all and revealed all. Yes, the erstwhile kidnapped pigs were somewhere in the mine shaft, wandering who knew where. No, there were no further trolls in attendance upon there. Yes, the ancient mine workings were extensive. No, it would not be an easy job tracing the errant swine.

Now it was breaking-up time, there on the open road. Princess Ozma told off General Battles to take in charge the sinning trolls and march them back to the Emerald City, there to install them in the town jail until summary justice might be meted out. Private Langley and up to six of the palace guard would go in that detail.

The princess gave her hand to Farmer Brownthum. "The dear cows came in handy after all, did they not?" she congratulated him. "Now you'll be wanting to get them on home. No, keep the cowcycles. They may still speed your journey — and perhaps be useful on future occasions."

The farmer insisted on serving a refreshing quaff of plain, mint, or chocolate milk all round before leading the lowing herd away o'er the lea, still pedaling slowly.

Thus far Ozma had not succeeded in her intention of getting rid of her two unsatisfactory underlings, Draxton and Lapstart. Now a fiendish plan entered her mind: she would send them back to the main entrance of the mine workings passed half an hour previously. There the circling picket line had informed her in surly tones that of course nothing had been seen of any hogs stolen by righteous trolls. However, when pressed, they did admit grudgingly that the two watch-tower guards had run off in a suspicious manner shortly before. Ozma and her party had been following up the lead when fallen over by the fleeing kidnapers.

THE CROWN OF OZ

“Now you understand,” she said to blinking Lapstart and coughing Draxton, “you are to make your way in by hook or by crook to the presence of the chief trolls and declare our ultimatum: back they go to work, gem shipments to be resumed —and no questions will be asked.

“Otherwise—” Here Ozma made a most uncharacteristic hand gesture suggesting a knife cutting off a head. She did not articulate even to herself whether she envisaged troll—or guardsman—heads falling.

As these deliberations and delegations were dispatched the weary crowd of cyclists had mostly descended from their vehicles and sought surcease of striving by stretching out beside the road. As the various departing groups made their way off, the puissant Queen turned to her slimmed-down entourage and said, “The rest, that love me, rise and follow me.”

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

Fairy Queen Lurline rose from the waves like Venus, though not nude, and only slightly soupy. Needless to say, her sudden apparition created a sensation along the Ugliest Troll and the little fish. She soon calmed their fears and then said, “A word with you, sir,” to the gawking troll.

“I have heard—and overheard—that you are in fact a very amiable troll, though so ugly. How do you account for that fact, if I may enquire?”

“It isn’t ‘though so ugly’, Your Feyness,” answered the troll willingly enough, “but rather ‘because so ugly’. My kind are not noted at the best of times as a physically attractive race, but *my* plainness turned out to be so intense that it had my fellows retching all the time. For the peace of their stomachs I had to be expelled.

“Now all along I had tried my best to be troll-like curmudgeonly with the best of them. Perhaps my heart was not in it but I did try. It was exhausting work. ‘Ugly is as ugly does,’ said the others, but I must have been sending mixed signals. I looked more dreadful than the most but I didn’t *do* nearly dreadfully enough. They didn’t know what to make of me.

“I was allowed to tag along when the mass migration to Oz

THE CROWN OF OZ

took place but immediately afterwards, as the tribe was settling into caves in the various highland ranges of the Purple land, I was sent missing. They took me down to a deep-most bowel of the earth and let me go, with a warning not to darken their door again.

“At first, strangely, I felt only relief. It was so delightful not to have to struggle against my nature any more. I needn’t be surly to strangers or suspicious of kindness. I needn’t toady to superiors or bark at subordinates or practice deceit to get ahead. I didn’t have to raise my voice or employ violence or bite off heads, figuratively or literally. I never *could* develop a taste for heads.

“So now a wave of bliss overwhelmed me. Borne upon it, I drifted off along the pansy-colored cavern passages. With my native untraviolet sight I could make out shapes well enough. As time went on I did get a bit hungry or thirsty, but then I would lick at the cave walls which dripped a tasty brine: corundum salts, I think it was.

“It got a bit lonely, but what would you? It would not be less lonely to huddle in some cavern nook and feel sorry for myself. I plodded onward up and down the winding underground ways. I could not have what you might call adventures, although a time or two I had to negotiate some narrow cleft among rocks or swing across a gaping chasm. But mostly there was nothing to see or any creature to speak to.

“Then one day—or night? How could I tell?—it seemed to me the dark light grew faintly less opaque. As I wandered on I grew sure of it. From somewhere was coming an amethystine glow and every turn of the cavern passage showed it brighter.

“I was now at the lowest level of the interminable chain of tunnel-like caves. That ‘deep bowel’ of the earth where my fellows had abandoned me now seemed by comparison ethereally high and far exalted in some ultimate rock pinnacle.

“For now I had come to the Chamber of the Crown!

“Looking back I feel it must have been. When I read in that volume of violet vellum of the great Crown of Love and

Wisdom it all seemed so reminiscent. From my own memory, alas, I cannot say.

“Some time elapsed. Some space as well. I think they must have done, for the next thing I can surely recall is that I was somewhere on level rock and the jewel glow behind me was fading. It grew darker again, I roamed on, and some time, late or soon? I stumbled through a rocky defile and found myself in this book-lined grotto beside the sea. It seemed to me that I had reached some place that was an end, a finality.”

The Ugliest Troll ceased speaking and there was silence in the sea cave, troubled only by the mild slosh of soup against the rocks.

Lurline had not come much forwarder in her scheme of learning how to deal with trolls by making friends with a less forbidding member of the race. Instead a wholly new and different preoccupation seized her. The fairy found herself consumed by a vast curiosity about that so-called Crown of Love and Wisdom.

She knew that she herself had had a very great role to play in the original formation of the fairyland of Oz. It stood to reason that she herself had had something to say about the creation and placement of the fabulous jewel. Granted that she, or anybody, would not now, by the very nature of the gem, be able to recall anything about it. But that would make it all the more of a thrill to see—again...

The Queen of the Fairies thought back upon her obligations. She was to pacify the obstreperous trolls and to make Gillikinland safe for swine, but were those tasks so pressing she could not spare a day—surely, not more?—to see this marvelous Crown? She thought not.

The job of persuading the Ugliest Troll to lead her through the caverns to that mysterious chamber full of lavender light turned out to be no job at all. His only regret was at having to leave behind his beloved friend, the little fish.

“Don’t think of me,” whistled the fish generously. “It will be one more glamorous story for you to tell me on your return,” he

THE CROWN OF OZ

urged.

The little fish waved his apricot-colored fins in farewell as fairy queen and ugly troll made their way to the rear of the grotto. There they entered a passageway strewn with dimly scintillating amethyst boulders.

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

Acting Queen Fattywiggins was back on her throne, her head in a sling and with one hand assisting wearily in the holding of it upright. For worlds she wouldn't have confessed to anyone that she was sick to death of being Ruler (even pro-tem) of Oz.

There was nothing she could do. She was not, no matter how great a knowitall, a mistress of magic and without magic she saw no way of restoring her pig friends to freedom, coping with the troublesome troll multitudes, or preventing the empurplement of all Oz.

Sadly she called her aide Xavier Jaxon to her. Tagging after him came the indefatigable seamstress Serena, dispenser of soothing melody by voice and strings. Those two seemed to be seeing a lot of each other and not minding it, despite the disparity in age. The Regent wondered what Guardsman Langley would think of that when presently he returned to court.

"Xavier, my good friend," queried Fattyw, "what ever became of those eggs the old woman presented to the Queen? Wasn't there something about their being magic?"

The eggs had created a mild sensation about the Palace, and Fattywiggins and Xavier Jaxon had heard all about them. Jaxon had in fact been called in by ruler Ozma to help deal with the

THE CROWN OF OZ

question of the disposition of the ovate gift. It was he who had suggested that a sandbox in the palace conservatory be set aside for their preservation. It was not known whether the eggs were meant to hatch or what, but Ozma concurred in the belief that a mild even temperature, neither too cold nor too hot, might be the most advantageous for the well-being of the eggs.

"Something of the sort," Jaxon confirmed the impression of his sovereign. "Provokingly, their donor didn't specify what one was to do with them. I think the Princess said she was told that the eggs 'would be of help in the crisis' and 'assist' as a 'measure' against 'purplitude'."

"Gosh," sighed Fattywiggins. "If I could just do something about the purplitude, that would be—well, something."

"Yes, indeed," agreed her prime minister. "And I think the Professor" (by this he meant the wizard, O.Z. Diggs) "went so far as to point out that there was, in any case, no harm in accepting the gift. In a pinch, if all else broke down, they might be eaten. He said that guinea-egg omelette is rather tasty."

Fattywiggins meditated. "Do you suppose those eggs will really do what the old woman said they would?"

"It's against all scientific probability," replied the laboratory technician, prepared to instruct, "that eggs could have any effect on a phenomenon like the discoloration of a landscape together with everything in it. Remember that both fairy Ozma's and witch Glinda's magic, at any rate from a distance, was unable to bring about any amelioration. It seems to be a force of nature, almost impervious to the action of magic. Viewed from that perspective, how could a few poultry eggs have any effect on the purpleness, let alone put an end to it?"

"But this is Oz," protested the rotund ruler, "and anything can happen!"

"True. But such things must have a *little* reasonableness and likelihood or how will anyone believe in them?"

"That's so," the pretty seamstress, Serena, ventured to put in. "If someone said, 'They threw the eggs in the air and caught them again and then all the purplitude faded away,' I for one

could have trouble believing it.”

“I suppose you’re right,” agreed Fattyw. Then she brightened. “But it wouldn’t do any harm to try.” Startled, her attendants followed loyally after as the near-invalid teetered gingerly down from her throne and began to make her way toward the doors. Xavier Jaxon carried the acting queen’s beslung head for her, as gently as if it were a fragile egg itself.

At the green-room sandbox Fattywiggins played Easter with almost a return of her old insouciance. When she had found three of the big purple eggs and they had been drawn out into the light, the girl commenced to juggle them, while Serena and Xavier looked all around attentively to see if anything grew less purple.

“Rats!” muttered Jaxon after three minutes and no change.

The expletive was enough to put Fatty off her stroke. She dropped one of the eggs, which landed with a luscious and immense splash on her foot. Far from turning everything back to green again it turned a large portion of the floor of the conservatory bright yellow. Fattywiggins dissolved in sobs but did at least remember not to throw down the other two eggs in pique.

While the Acting Queen ministered to her tears the other two, rueful, solicitously returned the remaining eggs to their sandy nest. “Lots of things seem unscientific at first,” pontificated Xavier, “but if we rely upon our instincts we sometimes find they will give us a hunch in the right direction.”

“What does your instinct tell you now, Xavier?” asked Serena.

“If we follow the old woman’s instructions, such as they were: to have the eggs handy in moments of crisis, we stand to lose nothing and perchance to gain much.”

At least her counselor’s words gave Fattywiggins something to ponder upon in hours to come. As she dabbed at her shoe she issued a solemn edict, declaring that the eggs were to be preserved and carefully maintained and, come what might, were neither to be boiled nor scrambled.

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

Queen Ozma of Oz bade goodbye to her bicycle for the immediate nonce. Though the cycles provided fleetness, in one way she was not sorry to give up their use just now. Bicycling did have this disadvantage over against walking: it was a loner affair. You could not, as in walking, engage in deep (and often) comforting discussion with a companion. For some time now Ozma and the Wizard and the others she might have shared her thoughts with had whizzed along each separately. It would be good now to be able to confer moment by moment with her dear supporters as she stepped out upon what she somehow sensed would be the climax of her quest. Fairy ruler, helpful adherents, and fairies by the throng left the impromptu parking lot in the woods just as soon as Ozma had enjoined willing wolverines and ready raccoons to keep an eye on the bicycles and to let no one near them who might seek to do them any mischief. "We'll want them for our return to the Amethyst City, you see." And all the badgers, porcupines, and chipmunks nodded sagely. They understood.

The wild trappings of many trolls had left a path clearly legible in the brush and it was not many minutes before Ozma and her party came up to the doorway of the ancient mine work-

ings. The princess paused just a moment under the dilapidated planking of the entrance framework, took a deep breath, and plunged in.

Wizard Diggs brought a powerful pocket torch from his black bag. This in combination with the lovely lavender effulgence given off by the fairy host who at this time switched on their lighting provided all the illumination that would be wanted.

At first the way to go was evident. There was but one tunnel leading into the mountain and the passage remained one as far as the rock chamber where the troll bandits and the two Caressopigs had parted company. There a few minutes were lost in determining which of three branching galleries of the quarry their quarry might have gone off along.

It was one of the Princess' honor-guardsmen who spotted in the dust the traces of the tickled pigs' feet. 'Tickled' because the shoats had been free at last! from terror-struck bondage and their tracks showed they had fairly scampered in making them.

"They must have had light," commented Ozma, "to have been able to make their way so evidently confidently."

"Yes, indeed, Your Grace," reassured Cobweb. "Moth and the others will have lit themselves up to full candle-power the moment they were out of sight of the trolls."

At the speed Nilnul and Wee had been traveling it now became clear that catching up with them might not be the quick accomplishment Ozma had counted on. She supposed that the escapees had at most a good hour's head start, but as the hours spun on and no sign of their nearness was found the girl ruler came to the conclusion that the two pigs must be going on at near-express-train rapidity. There was nothing for it but continuously to increase her own speed. The pursuers found themselves galloping along one tunnel and racing down another.

One sharp change in the nature of the surroundings occurred when the search party had been following the pig tracks for about four hours (and outside night must have fallen). The smooth, slightly descending, and sufficiently broad miner-made tunnel broke through into, and ended at, a system of interconnecting

THE CROWN OF OZ

caverns and underground river courses. A rough staircase hacked in the rock led down to the amethyst shore of a magnificent subterranean lake.

There was clearly no way to go but down. Yes, sure enough, at the bottom of the stairs they picked up the trail of pig trotters again. The track led to the brink of the lake and stopped.

This was a facer.

"The dear pigs can't have plunged into the water!" exclaimed Ozma. "It hardly stands to reason. Right here is where we should have caught up with them; stopped by the nature of things."

"Hm," said the Wizard thoughtfully. He had been pensive for some time, plunged into meditation by something he, as a scientist, had observed while the others had not. It was the thickness of the air.

"Perhaps your grace has not noticed," he ventured cautiously. "I think it may be a case of another 'nature of things'. You are aware, I'm sure, of the euphoria we feel...?"

"'Euphoria'? Why, yes, I do feel quite euphoric—and not a bit tired either, though we've been tramping for hours."

"It's the air, your majesty. You can't see it, of course, as more than a faint heliotrope hue about us, but it is of a very concentrated blend of oxygen and nitrogen. We're breathing much richer air than we would on the surface. It produces that feeling of well-being. But if I mistake me not the air grows thicker yet as we go lower and just here we reach the threshold where air becomes in truth liquid. That lake before us is not one of water. It is liquid air."

"How fascinating! How strange. But it does look like water..." breathed Ozma, awed.

"Touch it, your grace, if I may advise. Touch the surface of the lake."

Gracefully the little fairy leaned and touched. She drew back her hand with almost a scream. "It burns me!" she cried.

"Not 'burns', my dear," said the Wizard, now avuncular. "Freezes. Its coldness is so superconcentrated it strikes as a burning sensation. But neither does it freeze you in actual fact.

Freezing normally only occurs at the junction line of two blends of elements, in most cases air in contact with water. But by now we are all air! We have breathed this concentrated effluvium for so many hours that it has in some degree replaced the water in our systems. We are like fish who live and flourish in Arctic seas, who if taken from the water would freeze solid in an instant on contact with the frigid air. As long as we stay bathed in 'super' air I believe we cannot suffer harm from it."

"How marvelous," breathed the queen again. It was all 'breathing' now; the water in everyone's system had become air, while the air that filled the lake seemed water.

"Air is our element now," summed up Diggs. "This must be the essence of the Purplitude that has swept over Oz, pervading everything, as air does when allowed to. Being all air we can suffer no ill from air. If Your Majesty wishes..."

Here the Wizard put a foot in the lake — and drew it out again, his shoe apparently no wetter than before. "Shall we go a promenade in the lake?"

Ozma hesitated, still so surprised, but presently she walked in stately grace into the flowing-air basin, and all her train followed.

Under the purple cool translucent wave everything looked lighter, brighter, clearer. They saw with the eyes of creatures born to the deep and moved as freely. They did not exactly swim but strode, with flowing sweeping seven-league strides. And sounds carried, more bell-like if that might be, than ever they had done in the little-resonant air of surface Earth.

"This is what the Caressos were moved to do," surmised Queen Ozma.

"I dare say," concurred Diggs; "advised by their guardian spirits, the fairies."

In truth, it was not long before the party came on the pigling pair asleep in a great cup-like formation in the 'under-air' rock. Exhilarating as the fluid air might be on all animal tissues, the stress of the days just past had overcome the pig siblings after all. They had fallen to profound rest. Round them in the

THE CROWN OF OZ

midnight-violet liquid drifted their fairy guardians, half of them too asleep.

“Moth?” whispered Titania, bringing back to consciousness her sister fay. “So this is where you got to...”

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

Glinda the Good had put in a most accomplishful morning and part of the afternoon drawing up an inventory and plan of her new residence. By now, nearly a week after her arrival, she had had time to go over every inch of the estate, except for following to their ultimate end the strangely extensive cellars of the building. Based on her researches, she had herself cartographed the property. Now she knew exactly what she had to deal with, what resources and amenities she could count on.

Curious about those cellars. She had an idea they had originally served as wine depositories for the abundant product of the region. Next week she must mount a little expedition to discover the full extent of them.

But now it was mid-afternoon and time for tea. A serving maid entered with the tea things and set them down upon a table destined for that use. While the girl was busy placing the tongs and tea-cosy a messenger was announced. It was an agent of the Unicycle Brigade.

"You have brought me word from the Princess Ozma," said Glinda.

"Yes, Your Magicity."

THE CROWN OF OZ

"What is your news?"

"Your Grace, the Princess orders me to inform you that she is dealing with the problem of the disturbance at the mines. She is hot on the trail of the purloined pigs and has sent the fell kidnappers to Coventry, that is, to the former 'Emerald City', under guard, there to await trial for their crime. She herself has pressed on to discover the pig victims who, though at liberty, are not yet exactly in safety."

Glinda placed two lumps of sugar in her teacup, manipulating the tongs most elegantly. More sweetening for her raspberry tea she did not require. Then she took a small bite from a muffin.

"Thank you for your message," she resumed the exchange. "Will you please tell Princess Ozma that I commend her action and thank her for her assistance in dealing with those problems that oppress the land. She should know that I am taking in hand the question of the pervading purplitude—although now that I am here in Gillikinland I no longer find the issue to be of such great gravity..." The sorceress ceased speaking, with just a faint expression of puzzlement lingering on her face.

"Is that all, Your Magicity?" enquired the messenger.

"Yes. You may go now and relay that message to the Princess Ozma."

Glinda was still in a starry state of mind, half forgetting her muffin, when the Minute Maid made a minute's appearance in the chamber. "The Caresso-pigs are here to wait upon Your Grace."

"Please send them in. I have news for them," said the sorceress and walked to the alcove where lay, enchained, the vast and invaluable Great Book of Records.

"There are five of them, madame," stated the confidential servant.

"Never mind. I can deal with that many," reassured Glinda. "Usher them in."

The Minute Maid went out and in a moment the five swine came scampering in, stumbling over their dresses. The girls both

wore hair ribbons in different colors, although they had no hair.

"You are Homer, Mark, Biff, Cleo, and Twee," said the witch with a welcoming smile.

"Oh, Your Sorceress!" cried Cleo, getting the honorific wrong, "how could you know that?"

"Simple," said Glinda simply and indicated the spread pages of the Great Book. "Is that all of you there are?"

"You tell us," piped Twee saucily.

Glinda referred to the page. "No, there are two more who stayed at home. They are Suze and Beenie."

"Three," corrected Biff. "There's Lazlodes. He stayed home forever." At this all the pigs burst into tears.

"I know," murmured the sorceress tenderly. "Yes, I know. And you have other sorrows. Two of your number have been kidnapped. But now I have good news for you. Nilnul and Wee are at liberty! Word has just come from our dear sovereign—"

"Oh, Your Magicity," cried Homer, getting it right. "That's what we've come about. How wonderful! Where are they? We want to go where they are!"

"The dear Queen is truly as great as they say," declared Twee, pulling on her hair ribbon.

"They also say you know everything that happens in the kingdom," said Homer, wanting to praise Glinda herself a little.

The witch brushed her nails on her lapel. "I do try to keep track of everyone as best I can," she admitted. "But now, how can I serve you further?"

"Like we said," put in Biff. "We want to go to Wee and Nilnul. Where are they? if you please."

"Oh," said Glinda. "That one's a bit harder. Actually the great book is a bit cryptic on that score. But it is known that our dear girl ruler is even now tracing the missing ones in the mines and caverns that underlie much of this region. I expect to hear further from her every moment."

All the caresso-pigs sighed with relief. "Then, summed up Homer, "we may even meet our sister and brother on the way home, depending on where Ozma comes up."

THE CROWN OF OZ

Glinda agreed. "You, and all of us, owe the fairies a lot," she reminded. "It seems they watched over the kidnapped ones throughout their captivity to make sure nothing *really* bad happened to them. Now it is our own native fairy, Princess Ozma, who is going to deliver them back to you."

"And so all our cares are overt" rejoiced Mark, "—though not, completely, our sadness."

"Nor, alas, your danger, I'm sorry to say." Glinda looked grave. "Furthermore I don't know what precautions can be taken to insure that you not be harassed in the future."

"Of course you realize that you are a very attractive family. You appeal very much to—um, a particular type of person."

"The type of person who'll eat pork," said Biff matter-of-factly.

"Er, yes, that is what I meant." The sorceress laughed nervously. Glinda didn't at all know the form of words to use to intimate to the caresses that they would do beautifully for smoked ham or that even she personally might be tempted if confronted with one of them piping hot from the oven with the crackling at a peak of perfection.

"If I could only work some magic spell that would keep away evil-doers," she pondered. "But I don't remember a single incantation that would serve as a specific against just pork-eaters—of whom, unfortunately, there are an inordinate number just in this region of Oz. Only yesterday I had to receive a delegation from Joe, King of the Uplanders, demanding to know what I planned to do to restore a plenitude of pork in Gillikinland."

What If Your Magicity were to turn us into something else equally viable," suggested thoughtful Homer, "but less immediately appealing as food? Maybe if we all became talking turnips or ambulatory augergines we'd be safe."

Glinda considered the proposal. "Indeed, that could be achieved. But I'm not sure that you would be any less attractive as vegetables. No," she continued upon maturer reflection, "we could not subject you to any such humiliation as that."

Mark, Biff, and Homer tended to agree. "I think we'd rather remain pigs despite hazards," was their consensus.

But Twee surprised them. "I want to be a watermelon," she chimed in merrily.

"Why a watermelon exactly?" enquired Glinda.

"Because I would have beautiful green stripes and be red inside," stated Twee, a bit surprised in her turn at the necessity for enunciating anything so obvious. "I'd want to be the seedless kind, of course," she went on, fantasizing freely. At her still tender age she had no ambition of becoming a mother, even of watermelons.

The others murmured appreciatively, understanding Twee's motivations. "This is how I would walk," elucidated the pigling female. Holding her breath Twee waddled a few steps at a rolling gait with belly distended and feet splayed out.

"It's true that watermelons are not as sought-after as pork," said Homer judiciously.

"Indeed, there may be something to be said for turning you into watermelons," concurred Glinda.

"But I wouldn't care to be one," protested Cleo quietly, smoothing down her velvet frock. "I'd rather be a cantaloupe or, in a pinch, a honeydew melon."

"In that case we might end up being known as the Cuddlefruits," prophesied Homer.

In this mood of mild (and healing) hilarity all the Caressopigs began to parade around with their sides puffed out and limbs kept as far as possible in the background as they sought to look like pears or pomegranates.

Suddenly a sound as of a great sigh and a wind like a great ghostly breath blew through the council chamber and sent the rich magenta drapes bellying too.

In a moment the hall was filled with a countless throng of fairies.

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

The amazement of the guardian fairy Moth may be imagined. "Titania!" she cried. "However did you get here? I thought you were in the Amethyst City preparing for the Fairy Fanfare and Fugue performance in honor of the well loved Ruler of Oz, who, by the way, I observe is in your company! Now how...?"

"I'll tell you later. Just now what we want, I think is 'not the cheese; we just want out of here'! Tell us, I pray; which is the way to the surface?"

"If only we knew! We've been seeking the way ourselves 'til we're distraught. The poor pigs are panicky to get back home, and we fairies are by no means happy stopping underground."

"What are the options?"

"We seem to have three choices: back the way we all came—"

"Oh, how boring," was the comment that, alas, escaped the lips of both one of the Honor Guardsmen and many of the fairies.

"Or we can go on down the course of the air river."

"That indeed is a possibility that ought to be considered," put in the Wizard.

"Or we can stay here and wait for somebody to notice we've gone missing and come and rescue us," Moth stated the remaining option.

"Alas, my dears," Ozma deigned to enter the discussion at last, "that choice is closed to me as puissant ruler or all Oz. I must be the captain of my fate, if you'll allow me."

"By all means, Your Majesty," the fairies, all 366 of them, said in chorus.

Afterwards there was nothing for it but to drift on, dreaming, down the stream of the always deeper-tending lake-river of fluid air.

And then, they thought, there came a change. Was it becoming ever so slightly less easy to stalk on through that fluid air? What did it mean when one of the guardsmen, on a whim, walked back up to the surface of the purple stream and, thrusting his upper body through, saw icicles hanging sharp and rigid from his hands, nose, and chin? "Ice!" he creaked in a splintery voice and speedily resubmerged.

"Now that *is* strange," commented the Wizard when the man had reported back. "You mean to say you were all ice?"

"I fear so, professor," answered the guardsman, not knowing what to make of his experience.

Ozma in her turn attracted the general attention, a thing easy for her to do at any time, by remarking, "What is that alluring glow I seem to spy down there full fathoms five?"

She pointed through the ice to where a faint lilac radiance, refracted a million times through ice crystals, struck on their sight.

Like a magnet it drew them. Queen Ozma, Wizard Diggs, the guardsmen, the newly awakened piglet pair, and more fairies than you could shake a stick at moved, descended, followed the thrilling gleam of a lavender light infinitely far away.

A rainbow of purple shades flowed throughout the cavern, lighting everything with a tempestuously living brilliance. It was something ineffable; of that all were persuaded. But what was it whence streamed the violent violet effulgence?

THE CROWN OF OZ

Nobody had a clue.

Could it be the glow of earth-surface light shining through the purple ice? Was it the searchlights of a rescue party making its way toward them? Or was it some other powerful radiance entirely? something so incredible that its like had never before been seen in Oz—or under it?

Yes.

The party, of ice and through ice, moving on and down, came to a new and vast underground cavern hollowed out in the shape of a perfect sphere. Out of it crashed in thrilling rays of unearthly brilliance a lilac light. And in the very center—

But wait! Before they got so far something intervened. Ozma and her supporters espied two figures wavering uncertainly in the orchid emanation.

What wonder was this? From the hand of one of the figures struck magenta gleams that meant that the being was of the divine order.

“Our Sovereign!” screamed 366 fairy voices at once.

What was sorted out of the subsequent confusion of fabulous events and supreme emotions, complicated by the tendency of everyone to forget all about it, was this (the Wizard jotted furiously in his notebook the whole time; otherwise no recounting of the proceedings they all witnessed and forgot would have been possible):

Queen Lurline and the Ugliest Troll told Ozma how they had managed to penetrate to the Cavern of the Crown and see the fantastic jewel suspended in icy space at its heart. They had been enraptured by its magnificence (they thought; by now they couldn’t quite remember). But they had experienced what they had known and forgotten: that the diadem could not even be closely approached by other than the one for whom it was intended. Lurline, majestic Queen of All the Fairies, to say nothing of an insignificant and hideous troll, had not been able to draw near it. Neither could they tear themselves away from its fabulous spell.

Thus had they wavered, suspended between two worlds,

until now, so miraculously, she to whom the Crown belonged had come, all deserving but all unknowing, to claim it. Heaven knew what might have been their fate, they thus enthralled, if she had not!

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

The better to enjoy, they believed, the triumphal return in majesty, the fairies in Princess Ozma's joyful band elected to be of average human size as they crowded into the council chamber of Glinda the Good. The result was a frightful crush. Don't forget that there weren't just the multiple hundreds of fays but also a number of guardsmen, a massive troll, an old wizard, and two pigs to swell the throng.

As was fitting, the Good Sorceress started from her chair of state as soon as she caught sight of Queens Lurline and Ozma and advanced with the intention of welcoming with solemnity her august visitors. Before she was able to do so, however, the in-swarving masses cut her off. Her prior visitors, the caressopigs, underfoot, fared no better. They found themselves buffeted back against the dais. The three boys succeeded in scrambling up on the tea table where they took advantage of the confusion to swallow what remained of Glinda's muffins. Young Twee gave a leap and vaulted onto the cushions of the throne-chair itself. What became of Cleo for the moment is not recorded.

Thus, it was somewhat of an anticlimax when the eighteen fairies, retaining 'normal' fairy size, came winging in slowly, carrying the gorgeous Crown of Love and Wisdom in awful

pomp upon its amethyst velvet robe.

They looked for a place to set it down. But woe! Amid the mob they could not at once distinguish which heads were accustomed to being crowned. It couldn't be that tall lady with the auburn hair. She was already wearing a coronet above her snood. And the crown-bearers had to keep moving! They were unable to hover stock-still in the midst of the lavender air. Or what if they began to move in different directions and the great Crown wobbled and fell off? It would be too shameful.

So, as one, they aimed for the seat semi-royal. They couldn't go far wrong letting it rest on that. They ended setting down the crown on whoever was occupying that chair!

An utter shocked silence struck the hitherto freely chattering throng.

Oh, what an awful gaffe—and example of *lése majesté*! A crowned pig, and crowned with the most sublime diadem in all of Fairyland. The mistake would never be able to be lived down. It was so terrible that... there was nothing for it but to laugh.

Even so did Queens Ozma and Lurline and the latter cried, "All hail the first pig queen!"

Twee had been at first startled and alarmed to be blanketed in velvet, with something hard and rather heavy resting on her head. She snuffled and snorted and tried to move whatever it was that was preventing her from seeing out. She lifted one handfoot to draw aside the drape, realized she needed two, and stood upright upon her hind legs.

At this the velvet robe fell gracefully about her shoulders, the inclusive verge of golden metal was round her brow, and Queen Twee stepped forth to gaze with majesty upon the multitude gathered to do her homage.

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

All seven of the caresso-pigs ran up the hill path leading from the tower castle of Glinda the Good. In the air above them hovered the ghost of an eighth caresso-pig, drawn from his spectral home far away to be present at the exaltation of his siblings. This had been their day of glory and they must needs rejoice. Now they were hurrying home to share their bliss with Beenie and Suze.

They were almost too excited for talk. However, as they drew near the famous Salt Sea Hot Springs "Her Grace", as she was now, and would always be, called by her sisters, turned to Wee and said, "Wasn't I something special today!"

"Yes, darling," acknowledged Wee gladly. "You are the first pig ever to be crowned Queen in Oz... and I dare say the *only* one."

"At least with the Crown of Love and Wisdom itself," admitted Twee, who supposed that in a land like Oz there might well exist one or even plural pig principalities, with their own forms and ceremonies. "Do you think I made a nice queen?"

"You were perfectly lovely as Queen," assured her sister, who herself enjoyed as much delight as was possible, simply at having been delivered from the fell clutches of the heartless trolls.

"I hope Princess Ozma will not feel the Crown has been sullied by my wearing it," spoke Twee low, "when she now comes to assume it at her own coronation."

Here Wee reached across to squeeze her sister's handfoot. They knew what it meant to belong to an untouchable race.

But now all the males had sprinted ahead to be the first to get to the spring. This was a steaming pond, almost a lake, that bubbled up in a grotto some distance off the highland trail. The boys leapt the fence and scrambled down the path leading to the hollow.

The pool of warm steaming water did look inviting. Mark stuck in a trotter, then took a taste of his extremity.

"Say, the water really does taste salty, like sea water!"

"It *is* sea water," declared the more informed Homer. "At least it comes from a 'sea': the Soup Sea. So old Miss Mombi declared."

"How does it get here?" Mark wanted to know.

"Nilnul could tell you that. He knows there's chains of caverns and great underground cracks extending all the way here from that sea."

"Where are the girls?" somebody broke in.

"You mean 'Queen' Twee and them?" laughed Biff.

"Those are the ones."

"They were just behind me," Mark could relate. "They should be catching up soon." He had lost no time in getting out of his unaccustomed clothes and now he made briskly for the briny waters of the pond. Despite the lavender steam that rose from the surface you could, when close to, see the sandy bottom sparkling clear.

Homer, Biff, Nilnul, and even the ghost of Lazlodes also pulled off their clothes. The grand jackets, trousers, and shirts were flung approximately on huckleberry bushes that flourished around the pool.

"Last one in is a fat sow!" shouted Biff and all five pigs dove into the water at once. There were many oohs and ahhs as the warm steamy water enveloped their bodies. "This is the way we

THE CROWN OF OZ

should always take our baths!" Biff chortled on.

By now Mark had swum to the opposite side of the pond which lay shrouded in the mist. "Say!" he hollered suddenly. "Did you know, there's a waterfall that empties into the pool this side?"

The others swam over to see. Peering up through the fog-steam they could just fail to make out the top of the cataract which rose perhaps thirty feet in the air. But: "I *thought* I heard a sort of rustling, splashing sound," reported Homer, "but I couldn't tell where it was coming from."

The squeals and shouts of the happy swine echoed through the misty air and activated a device that had been set up—by I wonder who!—near the brink of the falls, a device that could only be triggered by the grunts and oinks of hogs. It was a modest-sized grey box placed on a rock and when it 'heard' hog calls its side opened to allow a heap of peony-pink powder to spill out into the rushing water of the stream just beneath it. The powder crystals foamed up immediately into terrific clouds of soapy bubbles with a sweet scent.

The girl pigs, approaching the bathing pool more sedately, were the first to notice the big pinky-purple globes that, lighter than air, were already drifting away from the brink of the falls. The bubbles moved like tiny silent ghostly dirigibles through the fog-dimmed air.

"Hey, boys, look at that," cried the sisters and hurried the last bit of the way down the path to the water's edge.

By now the tide of bubbles had cascaded down the length of the falls and on splashing contact with the warn pool water rose up again in their fluffy thousands. The bathers were enchanted and stopped their splashing and shouting to stare.

"Boys, you had better be careful," called Cleo from the bank. "Those bubbles look mighty big!"

"So what?!" yelled Biff. "What harm can bubbles do us? Anyway they're soap—I can smell—and we forgot to bring soap with us." So saying he reached out and gathered a great leg-load of the floating froth and proceeded to lather himself up with

bubbles.

All the others, males and females alike, got into the act, tumbled and cavorted in the enchanted half-world of bubbles and water, and had the bath of their lives.

As, delightfully tired and ever so clean, the Caressos dried themselves off on their jettisoned garments (velvet's okay as a towel, but not satin), "I wonder," said Mark, "where all the soap suds came from," at the same moment as Cleo pensively enquired, "What could have made the pool get all of those wonderful bubbles?"

As usual Homer hadn't been just goofing off but also thinking. "This was as far as Miss Mombi accompanied us. And remember? she also insisted we come home by way of the Salt Sea Hot Springs—and 'stop' here..."

"That's right. She did!" someone confirmed. "And you further recall she was planning some kind of surprise for us. I wonder if this isn't..."

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

Unlike the Caresso-pigs who (most of them) had felt fresh and chipper for their journey home, Queen Ozma's entourage were exhausted after their day, night, and day underground. The same could not be said for Queen Lurline's bunch, as fairies are inexhaustible. They would probably sit up all night regaling each other with tales of their various adventures.

Ozma was just human enough . to want a good night's sleep herself. It was, therefore, late the next morning before she joined at brunch table the stately sorceress Glinda, who had been up since dawn as usual and busy with her astrolabe and volumes of statistical abstracts. Of course Queen Lurline took part in the intimate gathering and with her was her by now dedicated .friend, the Ugliest Troll. Though the fairy monarch ate nothing she delighted the company by her ready repartee.

"Oh, I thought I'd never see the light again," she cried vivaciously. "U.T. and I plodded on for simply ages, and though there were magnificent sights to be seen the Crown itself, the object of our researches, eluded us until just before dear Ozma here—but you know the rest. The point I wanted to make was that all the light we had was what emanated from me myself. I don't know if you know how enervating it can be to have to see

by one's own reflecting glory."

The others could imagine, and did. Glinda alone was more methodical and took notes. "How long did it actually take you to make your way underground from the Soup Sea grotto to the cellars here?"

"Oh, it seemed days! And was. We had three overnights in the caverns, didn't we, U.T.?"

The Ugliest Troll confirmed the estimate.

"And that was *before* we ran up against Ozma and her bunch."

"What is the amount of candlepower you produce?"

"In the neighborhood of three ohms, I should think. That's at a time, of course. What do you think, Ozma? You're half fairy — if not more."

Ozma answered a little distraite. Her goals were only half achieved, if that — and the lesser half to boot if the rescue of two pigs could be deemed less vital than the pacifying of a whole race of Trolls who were upsetting the vital delivery of precious stones to the capital. There was also a third thing she had a vague memory of oughting to do but what it was just for the moment escaped her.

She looked at the ugliest troll and turned the conversation. "I believe I am not wrong, dear Queen Lurline, in thinking that your object in seeking out U.T. here was to gain, if possible, an ally with inside information for use in the upcoming confrontation with the trolls. Am I right?"

"Quite." Lurline looked at U.T. benevolently. "Ought we not to be about it then? It's been extremely nice being with you, Glinda, but now I feel we must gird up our loins and face the inevitable disagreeable."

The moment of cosiness was over. Ozma and the others went to join Wizard Diggs who had breakfasted with the guardsmen and soon the whole company, taking leave of their hostess, set out along the road of puce bricks in the direction of the main entrance to the mines of the Trolls.

The eighteen bearers of the gleaming Crown of Love and Wisdom flew dutifully along in the rear. The sight of the

THE CROWN OF OZ

majestic diadem, it was thought by the fairy rulers, would do much to awe the trolls into a mood for obedience.

But a surprise awaited the company when in due course, after a detour to re-collect the fleet of bicycles, it reached the lookout tower of the trolls. The circulating pickets were for the time not to be seen and the only visible representatives of the nation the queens had come to subdue seemed to be two individuals in the tower who leaned out and thumbed their noses at the august delegation of fairy royalty. Then they stuck out their tongues, popped their eyes, snapped such fingers as they had, and made loud gagging sounds.

Ozma looked at Lurline askance and both fairies did the same to the Wizard. "What do you make of that, Your Grace?" asked Diggs.

"I scarcely know," vouchsafed Ozma, "—although it does remind me of something."

"Never mind," said Lurline no-nonsensically, and she called out to the sentinels, "You fellows up there! Come down and take us to your leaders."

The two trolls seemed curiously ready to comply. They fairly tumbled over each other climbing down the ladder. When they reached the ground the replacements for Frumple and Ankle pretended to limp and also made lewd gestures with various parts of their bodies. Without saying anything they hobbled to the big double gates opening into the mineworks proper and one of them manipulated a large amethystine key at his waist. The gates swung open.

Some hundreds of yards on, in the steeply ascending slope of the mountain gaped a black hole. The trolls made for it unerringly and Lurline turned to the Ugliest Troll. "Oh-oh, that looks familiar. Rather too familiar."

U.T., back on home grounds, extended a flipper reassuringly.

"I'm counting on you to do your stuff now," pursued the fairy queen. "Soften up your countrymen and try to make them see reason."

"I warrant you, my liege," said the bookish Troll. Down in

the mine passage it was at first gloomy until eyes accustomed to the soft amethyst lighting. The group of Oz leaders strode along in the wake of the troll guard, the crown-bearing fairies flying interference. Some hundreds of yards on they came to the works office.

The queens peeped in, while the guardstrolls cleared their throats, whistled, and picked their noses. Within the room a number of important-looking executive-type trolls sat at desks, absorbedly wagging their fingers in their ears and clacking their teeth.

"Er—pardon me," spoke royal Ozma. "We are Rulers of Fairyland and Oz, respectively. We wish to have conference with the leader of the Troll nation."

"I am the leader of the Trolls," stated a vast individual with very large ears and no brainpan.

(This was the celebrated Garble.) "What's the story?"

"Oh. Well, we are come to arrange for the full resumption of jewel shipments to the Amethyst City—and no more agitation."

"A camel train loaded with gems went off to A-town this morning," informed Garble. "That is, Old Amethyst City. Is that where you meant?"

"Hardly," replied Ozma. "I referred to my capital down in Gillikinland South, you know. It was formerly called after some other, inferior gem."

"Oh! Well, they're loading an extra-large shipment for that very destination at this moment. Wanna look?"

The troll chief seemed curiously unmoved by the majesty of the visiting royalty, nor did he bat an eye as he spotted the glowing Crown of Love and Wisdom being borne back and forth through the air out in the gallery way. He just motioned the company to follow after him.

A half-mile hike along branching mine passages brought the party to a railed-off ledge from which there was a marvelous view down across a vast violet-lit cavern, at all sides of which a host of troll laborers hacked with picks at the cavern walls. As faceted amethysts rattled down in cascades from the mining

THE CROWN OF OZ

faces they cast a million purple sparkles of reflected light. The viewers were nearly dazed by the brilliance.

"This is extremely gratifying," declared Princess Ozma at last. "We are indeed pleased to see that the recent—er, dispute has blown over. May we enquire how the—um, change of policy was arrived at?"

"You mean why we Trolls decided to straighten up and fly right? Knock off striking and get back to work?"

"Yes, something like that," answered the girl ruler, who would not herself have expressed it in just those terms.

"It was those envoys from the kid queen down in Emerald City—oh, sorry; that'd be you, wouldn't it?" Garble puffed out his cheeks and growled acknowledgingly.

"And the Emerald City's the Amethyst City now," he went on. "Yeah, well, those envoys are a couple of mellow little fellows. Right away our lot couldn't help admiring them. What winning ways: What delightful gestures! What charm! Their thousand captivating quirks of face and jerks of limbs have become all the rage here in Trolldom by now."

Here Garble yawned, sneezed, and belched extravagantly.

"Our former fill-in occupations of sitting on our hands—or fins or flippers—and hanging our heads or, in a few cases, plodding around in picket lines began to seem duller than the dullest. Suddenly all the popularity went out of them.. Instead, picking the teeth, snapping the fingers, and softshoe numbers became the great fad. The guys couldn't wait to get back to the mine faces when the envoys set the example."

Ozma was frankly puzzled. "Envoys"? She didn't remember—Great fays! he meant those two dimwits Lapstart and Draxton, whom she had dispatched offhand to get lost, if possible, in troll country. *They* couldn't have—! But she recalled with a gasp what the strange tics and fidgets of the trolls had reminded her of.

"There they are now," hummed Garble. "We appointed them gang bosses—so the workers, when they flagged, could look to them for inspiration." He pointed—and moved his feet in a

slowed-down version of a Highland reel.

The queens, wizard, and, as it proved, perfectly supernumerary Ugliest Troll peered, and at last they saw them: on a raised platform far below on the cavern floor. The two tiny figures in traditional uniforms of Guardsmen of the Palace of Magic hollered encouragingly through megaphones, in between fits of coughing, giggling enchantingly, and delivering Bronx cheers.

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

Ruler Fattywiggins had quitted the Throne at last, and forever, and taken her place on the palace balcony to witness the bicycle-borne arrival back at her capital and capitol of Ozma, hereditary regent of all the Ozzes (branch offices in Burzee and Mo). At her sides stood temporary Prime Minister Xavier Jaxon and Serena the Sweetly Singing Seamstress and a number of others of the court dignitaries, while down in the cellars the Herr Kapellmeister peeled potatoes.

“There she is how!” screamed genteelly songstress Serena in a clear high A-flat. Afterwards though she didn’t know whether to turn to Xavier on her left or Langley on her right for confirmation.

Ozma pedaled elegantly, right up to the wrought-bronze gates in the palace-grounds fence. There she jumped down and presented her credentials to General Omby Amby Battles standing at stiff attention. As everyone expected, he let her in, followed by hundreds of fairies of various sizes, a number of guardsmen, trolls, etc. No one had attention to spare to count them. All eyes were glued on the Crown of Love and Wisdom which floated on high, borne on its royal purple robe and casting off continuously rich gleams of purple brilliance.

The procession passed within the Palace and soon in the great Throne Room and Presence Chamber there were touching scenes of reunion.

"And how have you fared then, my dear Fattywiggins, as Acting Queen of Oz?" enquired Ozma indulgently when the first greetings had been exchanged.

"Oh, fair to middling, Your Grace," simpered Fattywiggins, bulging devoutly. "I—uh, got rid of that awful kapellmeister *as* kapellmeister. I arranged to dispose of one of the magic eggs that strange woman left with you. And I've started on Bergson's *The Elan Vital Comes Back*. Other than that not too much has been happening. As you see, everything's *completely* purple by now."

"That's as it should be," the true Girl Ruler surprised her favorite by saying. "As for those eggs, I suppose we'll never know what they were supposed to be used for. They would seem to be completely *de trop*. Shall we have them made into egg flips? What do you think, Fatty?"

Fattywiggins was not able wholeheartedly to endorse her royal chum's suggestion. Instead she tried to mask her disconcertion by enquiring enthusiastically after the success of fairy Ozma's quest.

"All missions accomplished," exclaimed the dainty queen with satisfaction. "Your caresso-pigs were found and restored to the bosom of their family. You'll see them at the Birthday Ball! There's still time for all the festivities to go forward as planned. Now, of course, the star turn of the holidays is to be my coronation." Ozma giggled girlishly and glanced aslant at the diadem.

Along with all the rest Fattyw had noticed the majestic Crown of Love and Wisdom, which the bearer fairies at last, with much relief, had delivered to the royal heart-place of Oz. Now it depended magnificently from one of the knobs on top of the throne chair. The tubby favorite glowed at the thought of her friend's coming glamorment.

Still she was curious about the essential success of Ozma's mission. "And the trolls? Have they been pacified?"

THE CROWN OF OZ

"Oh, yes, I'm happy to say. I had a long and intimate conference with the leader of the Troll nation and got to the bottom of that whole affair. Just as I suspected, it was our friends the Nomes who had incited the trolls to go on strike. It's rather an odd story..."

Fatty was much puzzled to hear such a phrase as "our friends, the Nomes" drop from the lips of the Ruler of Oz but this did not prevent her arranging her folds on the top step of the dais and getting ready to hear a tale.

"The train of events goes back many months to a time when the Nomes were attempting, as so often, to tunnel under the desert to get to Oz where they would try for another takeover bid." So did Queen Ozma begin her recital, taking her ease on the seat royal.

"This time they did not proceed under Winkieland, where their former tunnel had been effectively plugged." Ozma had done this herself and knew. "Instead they bored through farther east, under the land of the Gillikins.

"Here they encountered something unique to that country. This was the deep-buried sources of the characteristic Gillikin liquid-air pools.

"The Nomes were mystified, then fascinated. In all their centuries of mining experience they had never run across anything like wells of richly flowing wet dryness. Naturally they tried to divert the flow of the springs - or, if they couldn't manage that, at least to destroy them.

"They introduced high explosives into all such subterranean airways as they came upon. The resultant detonations, it seems, activated a phenomenon which would, to say truth, have occurred anyway in a few hundred years, if not earlier, though by no stretch of the imagination quite this soon after the latest burgeoning of the Old Winkies."

Here Ozma took time to describe the periodic eonian cycles of the typical Oz phenomena of Munchkin flooding, Quadling volcanic activity, Winkie soil shifting, and the present Gillikin air upheaval.

“The result was the present, and so pleasant, resurgence of the Purpleys, with the all-over-sweeping Purplitude they have brought in their train.”

Fattywiggins marveled at the complacency with which the formerly so esmeraldic girl ruler spoke of the current amethystism. But the fat favorite had heard enough of the characteristics of empurplement to know that that was how it took you: once infected you went all purple—and loved it! Nor did you have any thought of wanting to revert to any former, inferior color. Fattyw looked around. Everyone in the hall was shades of violet ranging from pale lilac to plum. Only she herself remained true green. She could not herself account for it, but rejoiced in cleaving to the old faith and the one true moss(-color).

“With the liquid air sources under their thumb,” the fairy princess was going on, “the Nomes, making use of the cavern chains that everywhere honeycombed the underearth strata of Gillikinland, had soon occupied the whole country, though remaining, themselves, always out of sight below ground.

“They early made contact with their remote cousins, the Trolls, whose mining activities were concentrated in the center of the Gillikin country. These they at once subjugated, organized in unions, and instigated to go on strike against us. In fact, the troll nation, grateful for asylum in Oz, had no great desire to cause us trouble, but they had no choice. Down went their picks and out they came in picket lines.

“Appearances to the contrary, their hearts were not in it. The Trolls are industrious. We must grant them that. They hated sitting around idly and merely making mischief. They wanted to get back to work. Having no use themselves for all the jewels they mined they were not even averse to resuming export shipments, just to get rid of the surplus.

“When the two quirky guardsmen appeared they had an easy job of it persuading the trolls to go back to the status quo ante—”

Here Fattywiggins ventured to break in. “But of course the Nomes would stand for nothing of that sort... ?”

THE CROWN OF OZ

“Well, as a matter of fact the attention of the Nomes had been directed on elsewhere. They were only waiting for the completion of the empurplement of the formerly so-called Emerald City to extend their hegemony here as well. And I am right, am I not, Wizard—” Here Ozma addressed a remark to her right-hand man, O.Z. Diggs, who lounged at her right hand. “Didn’t Glinda say that half Quadlinga as well is now purple?”

“The Book of Records so indicated,” affirmed the Wizard. “I had a good browse in the Book that evening at the Sorceress’ tower. By now the Purplitude may extend on fully to the southern desert boundary.”

Fattyw was aghast. Here were all that were holy in Oz, at least to her, blandly talking of the delivery of the entire fairyland to purplitude, which meant, in practice, the overlordship of the Nomes. Was nobody going to do anything to stop it?

She sat there at Ozma’s feet, all in a quandary, as the royal fairy spoke on. Why, wondered Fattywiggins, did she herself care? Why was she too not infected with violent violetness? She was very glad she was not but just the same the oddness of it preoccupied her mightily. She missed some of what her sovereign was saying as she concentrated on the problem.

Then it came to her, as in a dream. The girl remembered something she had never understood; nay, more—had been infuriated by. That peculiar gift of purple chocolates sent by Fairy Queen Lurline (before she herself went completely purple); chocolates with tooth-breaking emerald centers. It had been so nonsensical, even malicious-seeming, and yet it appeared that the Queen of the Fairies had expected her present to be received with satisfaction.

What could be satisfying about swallowing emeralds (as she, Fattywiggins, had ended up doing)? Unless—could it be? Was it thinkable that the emeralds, absorbed by the system, had some kind of prophylactic value rendering the ingester proof against turning some other color than green? That would explain much.

“—shall we sojourn till our coronation,” Ozma was saying, as Fattywiggins tuned back in. It must have been something

endearing the (always) young Princess had said, for the assembled throng in the throne room huzzahed and there was a raffle of applause.

But Fattywiggins too was devoted to the little ruler, so devoted that she could not sit here and listen blandly to Ozma's detailing of her plans for the reception of the Nome King and his entourage, upon whose arrival only the Queen was waiting to stage the magnificent rite of the encrownment.

Fatty boggled. The dread Nome King *here*? What horror was this! Oh, Lordy, Ozma really *had* lost her mind. She strained to catch more. "Last night, I hear, they lay at Stratty Stoneford. Tomorrow or next day they will be here."

Cheers of delight rang out and Fattywiggins thought furiously. That near?! And nobody going to do a thing about it but applaud witlessly? Nomes in the Amethyst—that is Emerald—City?! Unthinkable! Well, one person was going to do something about it, or know the reason why.

In the general chatter and hubbub Fattywiggins slipped unnoticed from the presence chamber.

"All safely packed?"

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

“Yes. Have a look.” Xavier Jaxon lifted the lid of the capacious wicker basket and Fattywiggins peered in with satisfaction.

“Okay. Let’s make tracks,” urged the tubby pre-teen. “You’re sure you want to do this, Xave? I mean, you’re as mauve as the rest of them. Maybe you don’t even care to see the District of Oz green again?”

“Anything you say, Fats. We’re old comrades in arms. I don’t care one way or the other. I can take enchantments—or coronations—or leave them alone. It’s my work here in the laboratory that interests me.”

“And most interesting it is,” chimed in the learned Ugliest Troll. “Thanks so much, Mr. Jaxon, for letting me look in on your projects. My pal, the little fish, is going to love hearing about them. That device for throwing the images of a sleeper’s dreams upon a screen is extremely ingenious. I want to see more of it in action. I have quite spectacular dreams myself.”

“Right heartily,” promised X.J. “—all in good time. For now, do you bicycle?”

“Why... I hardly know,” hesitated the troll. “Until Miss Fattywiggins here introduced uni-, bi-, tri-, and quatricycles,

biking was unknown in the land — nor did we Trolls do much of it, home in Scandinavia.”

“But you have a good sense of balance?”

“Oh, yes, that.”

Fattywiggins led the way on tiptoe and Jaxon and the troll, bearing the big square basket between them, followed down the service stairway.

Distantly they could hear the crowd still applauding in the throne room. Silently they sped down the wooden ramp to the bicycle stalls.

Fattywiggins, the expert cyclist, and Xavier Jaxon, also no slouch, quite frankly had to hold up U.T.’s bike between them, each extending a steadying strong hand to his handlebars as they teetered around the courtyard until the troll got the hang of it.

One thing about cycling; once you know how you know how absolutely, and the faster — not the slower! — you pedal the safer you are. With speed the wheelborne trio sailed down the formal approachway to the mulberry-bronze palace gates, where General Omby Amby wonderingly let them through.

When the bikers had settled down to a steady unfaltering pace over the smooth new-paved country road Fattywiggins had time to talk to herself, though for the benefit of the others too. “Tomorrow — or next day,” she muttered. “They seem to be taking their time. Of course they’re on foot, and that Nome king in a palanquin or sedan chair, no doubt... ‘Stratty Stoneford’?”

Fatty had taken a moment to look at a map hung up on the wall of Xavier’s laboratory. “That looked to be about twenty miles away... I don’t suppose they started very early. Say fifteen miles at the closest. At this rate we would be that far in, say, three hours — maybe a bit more.” She spoke louder to share even more explicitly with her companions the fruit of her cogitations.

Fattywiggins hardly noticed the scenery. At first as they rattled over the cobbles in the city itself she had been a little extra preoccupied that the inexperienced troll would fall off. Not only bicycling but the purple glories of the ex-Emerald City

THE CROWN OF OZ

were all so new to him and he frankly neglected his steering to gaze around. Still, they made the Gillikin Gate all right and after that it was plain sailing.

Up hill and down dale they flew. Nobody said much. When anybody did speak to Fattywiggins she was abstracted. Gosh! Everything depended on her, she fondly told herself, and trod on the pedals with renewed determination.

Suddenly something caught her eye, something that brought home to her the oppressiveness of the all-purple landscape. The thing was a blade of grass. Green grass. Fattyw slammed on the brakes.

"Wait!" she cried to her co-cyclists when impetus was hurling them on past. Dutifully Jaxon and the Ugliest Troll applied their brakes. Fatty stood her bicycle and ran back to the side of the road.

Yes, one long strand of green grass, almost a weed, amid the thousands of (an admittedly delicious) orchid hue.

How did it get there? What did it mean?

Fatty nipped off the blade at its root and twined it in a neat circlet about her finger. It would be a talisman to her as she went to face the foe.

Now as the trio whirled further across the purple miles the girl meditated upon her own greenness.

Of course Fattywiggins wasn't really green. She naturally wore an emerald frock (it only stayed green as long as she had it on) and her hair since coming to the (once—and future?) Emerald City had taken on an Irish tint, but the rest of her retained all normal tints. When Fattyw said she was green she merely meant she hadn't gone wholly violet like everyone else.

The team whizzed across a low bridge over a creek. As they did so a green fish leapt from the wistaria waters and cried "Onward!" before flopping back into its element.

Again Fattywiggins jumped from her bike. She leaned down at bridge-edge and called, "*What did you say?*"

The green fish, looking most eye-catching against its all-violet background, had time to chat. "*We're the last, you and I,*"

it judged. "You seem to be the last green girl, and I'm the only green fish left in all this river system, as far as I've been able to determine. We ought to hold the standard high. Onward!"

"Well, thank you," acknowledged Fattywiggins. "That gives me courage to face the foe."

In an ordinary fairy story Fattywiggins would have to run across three things to give her courage to face the foe. But this isn't an ordinary tale. It's extraordinary—or perhaps subordinate. Fattywiggins must do her foe-facing now with just two extra impulses, but they were enough. She never found out that the green leaf of grass and the emerald fish were merely exceptions that tested a rule. She had her courage and she pressed on.

The Ugliest Troll sighted them first; under the trees that crested a long ridge ahead. The Nomes were having a picnic meal before continuing their stately progress to the capital of their new province.

Up the ascending road rushed the three comrades. They had been on the way the expected number of hours and could feel the strain. But despair—and courage—drove them on. They sprang from their bicycles nearly as one and ran forward to the spread plaid with royal monogram on which sat the King of the Nomes with a caviar canapé arrested on its way to his mouth.

What have we here?" growled the Nome King. "An advance welcoming party?"

"Hardly that," riposted Fattywiggins pertly. "We are come to tell you you must go back."

"Back?!" echoed the king and started to his feet, dropping the canapé. All his attendant (g)nomes looked taken aback as well. "I don't think I heard you right."

"You will not go forward but will return where you came from," Fattywiggins informed the Nomes.

The King stepped forward but the ugly troll placed himself foursquare before him and barked "Halt!"

"We're on our way to our new home in the Amethyst City," protested the head Nome.

"For 'Amethyst' read 'Emerald'," retorted Fattywiggins. "The

THE CROWN OF OZ

king of Jewels.”

“Purple emeralds yet?” said the Nome as if he had a card up his sleeve.

“Purple shmurple,” said Fatty to gain time, while Xavier Jaxon cut in with “You won’t go further.”

“Who’ll stop us?!” yelled the king, at last roused and in violent dudgeon. “Not you three utterly insignificant creepy-crawly idiotic stupid ignorant uninformed badly educated moronic fat ungainly hideous poorly dressed cretins with bad breath! I *don’t* think—”

These words made Fattywiggins and her friends see green and the girl leader remembered the courage she had gathered to face the foe. “Yes, us!” she snarled and stuck out her tongue very provokingly.

The Ugliest Troll also said, “Yes, we will,” nor did Xavier J. look like giving ground.

“How do you expect to do that?” the Nomes in chorus wanted to know.

“With *these*,” cried the three friends and had sudden recourse to the egg basket on the back of Xavier’s bike. Each seized an egg and brandished it.

It was an old ploy, used time and time again, in Oz and out of it[§], to drive away unwanted (g)nomes but it never failed to work. The Nomes as one went a ghastly sidewalk color.

The Nome King was the first to regain partial poise. He gave a sickly laugh and said, “You win that round. It’s true we Nomes are scared to death of eggs. However, if you’ll check back you’ll see that hens’ eggs, when propelled against us, have no more harmful effect, in fact, than to make us hop about in transports of rage.^{§§} I’m afraid you’ll have to come up with something more lethal than that.”

Fattyw and her friends were disappointed. They had hoped for a whole lot more from their arsenal of eggs.

Now, in despair, they each picked out a Nome face for a

§ See, among others, *The Vegetable Man of Oz*.

§§ See *Ozma of Oz*, pp. 221-2. Editor’s notes.

target and hurled a purple egg at it.

Snap! Crackle! Pop! With loud reports the three sighted Nomes vanished, leaving nothing to be seen but the egg on their faces and that soon dropped to the ground.

“Hurrah! Hurrah!” shouted the joyful vigilante army, while the Nomes turned tail and fled, not even taking their picnic provisions with them. Up into the woods they sped with howls of horror, and swift the invincible three pursued them, an egg in each hand.

Fast they flew through the forest and ever and anon when a Nome would stand and try to show fight a person or a troll would throw an egg and destroy him utterly, whereupon his surviving fellows would bellow in renewed terror and race further.

That was all very well but before long there was only one egg left, and the Nomes knew it!

By now the fleeing goblin rabble and their pursuers had come out on open high ground beyond the woods. A clutch of the grey creatures were seen to run together in a hasty parley. Then one of their number turned, a solitary hero, to face his enemies.

None of the three friends was a dumbie. They all knew what the brave Nome intended. He was a volunteer to give his life for the common good, to draw off the one remaining egg. Then the freedom fighters from the Emerald City would be ammunitionless and at the mercy, after all, of the insurgent Nomes.

It was the moment of truth, and Fattywiggins was aware of it.

Then, just as all was lost, all was won.

There was a terrific yellow SPLATTT! in front of the hero Nome that stopped him in his tracks.

Our friends looked up to see a fleet of purple swan chariots zooming over and zeroing in. Those with good eyesight could even see, peering intently over the chariot sides, the faces of many intelligent pigs, plus those of a couple witches, good and bad.

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

There was a lot of explaining to be done. Glinda did it.

"After Your Highness left my castle tower," she said to Queen Ozma who sat on the Chair of State in the Palace of Magic, "I'll freely confess I felt a bit lonely and out of things. I turned for solace as so often to the big Record Book and followed with minute attention all that you enacted during your progress home. All seemed going forward splendidly for your reception of the Nome cohorts and their attendance at your coronation as Governess of the Nome province of Gillikinland South.

"There was only one fly in the ointment. A certain Miss Fattywiggins was not getting ready for the fête but instead was reported as proceeding with a couple of her cronies to some sandboxes whence they withdrew eleven big purple eggs. These I recognized at once from the printed description as a specialty of the widely suspected sorceress Mombi and you can be sure it piqued my curiosity to know what the girl would attempt with those. Had the beloved Princess of Oz nourished a snake at her bosom? Was Fattywiggins, consorting with the ill-reputed Mombi, going to turn on her sovereign and do her a mischief?

"I turned from the entries in the Book of Records and brought into use my example of Wizard Diggs' spectroscreen and now I

could both see and hear what the three conspirators were doing. Far from plotting evil it soon transpired from their talk that they had some quixotic plan in mind of saving Ozma and all Oz from a fate they were not even fearing.

"I began to grow sympathetic and followed with interest as the group boarded bicycles. Dames of Blocksburg! It looked as if they were going to go try to turn back the entire army of the Nomes with less than a dozen eggs!

"To even out the odds a bit I let harness the swan fleet and flew away promptly, still monitoring on the spectroscreen. First stop was indicated to be Witch Mombi's hut, where I needed to stock up on the prepotent purple eggs. As it turned out, I interrupted a social call. The charming Caresso-pigs were with the sorceress, apparently having called to thank her for some treat they'd recently enjoyed.

"When the group heard of the jeopardy of Miss Fattywiggins the pigs clamored to be allowed to go to her relief, while Mombi willingly gave free access to her fowl runs. It took no more than half an hour to full up the chariots and then we were off. The rest you know. No more than an additional dozen of the bombs were dropped before the Nome horde surrendered, signed a cease-fire, and scuttled back underground and out of Oz."

Ozma wiped her brow. "Truly, it was a narrow escape. And to think we were all awaiting the ultimate horror with utmost equanimity."

"Well, you know how Purplitude works—by now."

"Dare we hope the purple plague is over?" the Oz ruler needed to know.

"Oh, I think so. With the Nomes no longer stirring up things with their explosives, the Purpleys will subside again. You'll have a few hundred years, if not eons, before they'll ever make another move.

"And the purpleness will fade?"

"Just like a bad bruise. It will pale to dull blue, then a sickly yellow, until at last Emerald City faces will reappear a healthy normal pink—or green. But it will take a while."

THE CROWN OF OZ

“Til then?”

“I see no reason why Your Majesty should not proceed with your Birthday celebrations. After all, today *is* the twenty-first.”

“Oh! But my coronation; it was rather of that I was thinking.”

“I believe I see dear Queen Lurline laying out the Circle and Pentacle on the marble floor at this very moment!”

“Oh, good gracious! So soon! We have not even completed our royal plans. So many friends to thank! and to invite to the ceremony, if they are not present already...”

Ozma referred hastily to a list she had made up. No one in all the tangled tale who had contributed to (even while hindering) her well-being or that of Oz was forgotten, even down to the poor old Kapellmeister, who was raised from the cellar to wield the baton during the performance of the Fairy Fanfare and Fugue which would lead up to the august moment.

But the most important question of all remained unresolved. *Who* should hold high the diadem before placing its the Crown of Love and Wisdom, upon the honey-hued head of Her Radiance, Ozma of Oz?

But was there a question after all?

Who should it be but the irrepressible uncorruptable irritating lovable savioress of Oz, Miss Fattywiggins? And the Caresso-Pigs would hold the royal train.

Lund, 6 May 1986
Largo, 22 February 1991