a fairy Queen in Oz

founded on & continuing the stories by

MARCH LAUMER

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This book
is dedicated
with appreciation
to
Howell V. Calhoun
to
Mr. Charles Regal
and the staff of
Matson Navigation Company
and to
Sallie Keller
my loyalest fan

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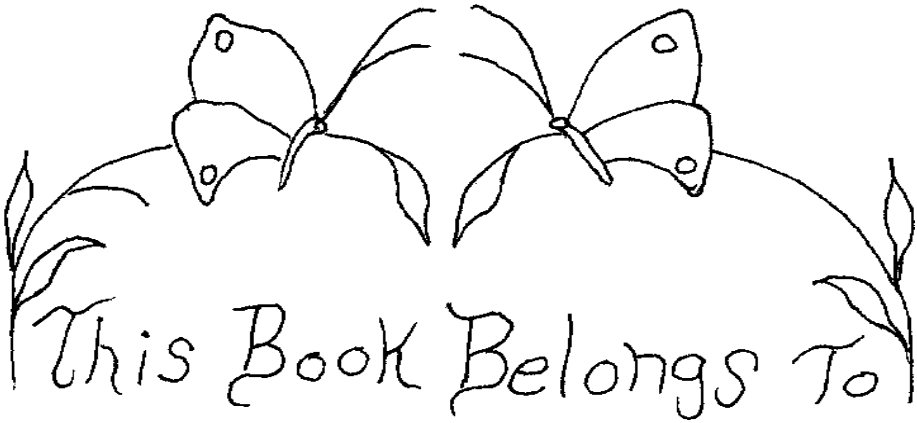
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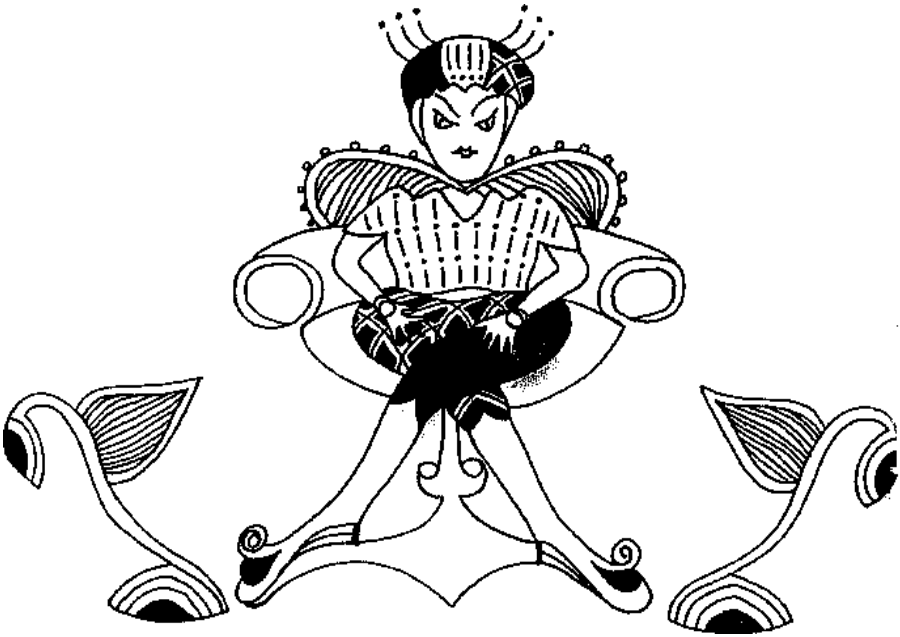

c h a p t e r o n e

It was her birthday and Lulea, queen of the fairies was opening the letters of felicitation that had come in from all over. Of course, being a queen, she didn't open them herself but reigned on her toadstool throne and let Feebimble and Ereol and Ozzod and the others do that, but when there would be an especially fun one they would read it out to her. Then the Queen would laugh merrily when some conceit pleased her or shed a sentimental tear when something touched.

"Now here's one!" said Ozzod, impressed by the blue and yellow letter paper. "Embossed and all—"

"Pass me that one, my dear," said Lulea and yawned delicately.

"Oh, very well, your grace," said Ozzod, cheated of her chance to hold—a tiny limelight while reading the letter aloud.

"Hmm," said the queen when she had scanned the missive—*not* aloud. She held the letter by one narrower end and waved it like a flag. Her attendants looked at each other and wondered what whim of the Queen's was this.

Finally Ereol dared to speak. "May we share with Your Maaajesty...?" she drawled.

"I suppose you must," begrudged the queen. "I'd like to keep

it a mystery and tease you, but I dare say I'll need your help... perhaps even your concurrence."

The fairies were used to these ploys by their doyenne to introduce a little surprise and color into their actually rather monotonous lives. It's a little dull when you're an immortal and cannot possibly suffer any discomfort, let alone pain or constraint, that you do not specifically choose to suffer—and of course you don't. So life is JUST uninterrupted beer and skittles—or, in the fairies' case, dewdrops and magic-working—and it gets tedious.

Fairies can eat or not, just as they like, with no ill effects. They can sleep or not. Cold or heat mean nothing to them. There is nothing that can touch them, physically, that is. Only spiritually can they be got at, and that not easily. Hence, in order to get to feel anything at all, they had to make up little traumas for themselves. Lulea, oldest of the group, was also the most experienced in trying to manufacture surprises and suspenses and mysteries to keep her followers entertained. The others recognized the present scene as one such attempt.

In a moment, Ereol, placing to one side her bejeweled vanity case and adjusting her mauve pinafore, said: "I must give my spirit a polllish" (for which she normally used a patented preparation), and she did so with a fold of her pinny.

Over the centuries each of the thirty-one fairies of the band had developed her own idiosyncrasy—just to tell her apart. Fairy Ereol's was to play the coquette and to devote much attention to her appearance. Since it took her no more than five hours a day to arrange her face, hair, and dress, she spent the rest of her active hours in attention to what she fondly alluded to as her "spirit." This she did because of course she could not speak of her 'soul,' a fairy being by definition "in folk lore a tiny immortal inhabiting woods and fields and pictured as beautiful and delicate, like humans in appearance but possessing no soul."

Of all Queen Lulea's fairy band Ereol was the one who missed this possession the most and her whole life was filled up with trying to pretend she had one. Yet never having experienced soul she didn't know what form it took or whether it was something

one only felt or was an attribute more substantially present. Ereol preferred the latter conception and her "spirit" could be plaited, varnished, woven, currycombed, preened, marcelled, brushed, massaged, shampooed, polished, or put up in curlers just as she felt inclined.

Thus this particular sprite was able to keep herself continuously busy. Her ruse for the relief of tedium came particularly into play in situations such as now when Ereol felt her dignity threatened by her sovereign's reluctance at once to admit her followers into her utmost confidence.

"Polish away, dear," said Lulea complacently and stuck a (non-habit-forming) ambrosia-flavored dope-stick between her lips as Ereol made some ambiguous passes with the corner of her pinafore. (No one quite knew where the fairy's spirit was located and any vague gesture with cloth, brush, or curling-iron was accepted as being a swipe at the said spirit.)

After this digression there was a return to the topic at hand. "Yes, you see," went on the Queen, "this is an invitation—as well as a felicitation—"

"An invitation!" cried her court as one. They loved to be invited but in fact it happened rather seldom, as most people were too much in awe of the fairies to think of asking them to anything, or else didn't know how to go about it.

"Indeed," said Lulea. "It's from the Governor, Mayor, and corporation of a town in Sweden—"

"In Sweden!" exclaimed her attendants.

This perplexed them very much as they had heard that if there was any place in—or out of—the world that would know nothing of, and take no interest in, fairies, it would surely be Sweden. So cold, so blue, so unmagical.

"Yes, it's quite remarkable, isn't it?" Lulea smiled whimsically. "However, there's a reason for it. But the thing is: I'm tempted to accept—"

"O, do! your Feyness," burst out her fairies-in-waiting, for if there was one thing they wanted more than another it was for their beloved leader to have a good time.

"You encourage me strangely," said the queen. "I might almost find it in my heart to obey your urging."

"Oh, do," repeated the thirty fairy voices. "Pretty please," they said, just to make it irresistible.

"Done!" declared the queen. "I'll go. Oh, but wait: I can't go on my own."

When the fairy band heard that they were quite overcome. It was centuries, in some cases, since they had been out of the Forest of Burzee or other fairy lands forlorn. Some of them could not recall *ever* having gone abroad. Goodness knows they had longed to often enough but the occasions for it had been so limited and Lulea, the pace setter, seemed ever content merely to lead her maidens in dance, direct them in song, and occasionally produce a little excitement with some original and inventive magic-working. Yet the truth was that the greater number of the girls were just too well endowed mentally to be able to find contentment in only and always fleeting the time carelessly. The thought of travel remained ever in the back of their minds as an apparently never-to-be-granted ideal.

Would it, could it, be possible that some, any, *one* of them might get to accompany their Queen to Europe?! Some of the fairies went into actual tizzies at the thought.

c h a p t e r t w o

Blow the wind westerly, westerly.

Well, never mind telling it to do that. It did it all the time anyway. Had been doing it, in fact, ever since the Earth decided to spin in a west-to-east directly, The winds, caused by drag on the would-be inertia of earth air, followed along in the direction of planetary spin and once they got going there was no stopping them. There might be little temporary cessations of perceptible blow and there were relatively brief local occurrences of wind from north, south, and east, but by and large winds were always westerly.

As regards the land of Oz, the result of this—and other—tendencies was as follows: those western winds blew across a wide—and deadly—desert and then came to the magic land dry. They had no moisture to bring. On the contrary, they were arid *absorbing* winds and, far from dumping rain on the western Winkie land, they tended to suck up what moisture they found in the yellow country, rendering the latter what it has remained: the driest part of Oz. There the yellow sun shone incessantly (by daylight): that was appropriate too in that xanthic land.

The wind kept on blowing and of late years it had blown

harder, and drier, than ever. Populations out in the great world complained of unseasonable and long-lasting droughts, and in Oz it was no better. Where once yellow grass grew yellow winds blew. Winkies observed that grass straws powdered into dust; thus it was also with the earth wherein the grass grew. The never-stopping air currents picked up the yellow dust and carried it eastward. As the land of the Winkies grew drier it also grew greater in extent.

The shape and size of the constituent countries of Oz had always been determined by something as unchanging and peaceable as the color of the earth. If you leaned and scooped up a small wad of red clay from the ground and pressed it into the hand of your passionate friend, saying: "Yes, there is something you love better than me, though you may not know it," well, you were either in Georgia or in the red land of the Quadlings of Oz. If you scratched through the blue grass to reveal blue mould you knew you were in Munchkinland and not Kentucky. And everywhere that the ground was yellow was clearly a part of the land of the Winkies.

Ordinarily this state of affairs led to no confusion or dispute. The purple particles of Gillikin-land did not budge from where they had been deposited by the hand of Nature. The blue and red earths of the other lands, the green fundament of the Emerald country, remained where they were. But now for the first time, at least in living or historical memory, the same could not be said of the friable soil of the land of the Winkies. It did not stay put. It mounted in quantities equaling some tons a day—when the breeze was at its best—and wafted eastward mile after mile 'til it settled as a film of fine dust over everything unenclosed.

That didn't bother the Winkies much. They were used to it. It was tiresome having to dust and mop so frequently but there was nothing *disturbing* about it. But the situation was different in the lands that bordered on that of the Winkies.

The Emerald City was too far in the interior to be much affected but the fine powdering of yellow dust upon the red earth of Quadlinga and the purple soil of the Gillikins had far-reaching,

and very differing, results. Quadling red and Winkie yellow blended to make an orangeness of earth that grew more and more pronounced with the stealing years. The upshot of this tendency, as well as of other factors, has been recounted elsewhere.*

In the north the effect was in its way more disturbing. For one thing there was a perceptibly greater strength to the prevailing winds up there. More yellow Winkie dust and sand got dumped on Gillikinland than in regions more southerly. Then, the widespread mountain ranges of the northern land, highest in all Oz, caught and precipitated the dust, confining it to the western rim of the country. Yellow dust upon purple soil produced a nondescript shade of grey-brown. But that didn't last too long. As the centuries passed the yellow overlay grew deeper and deeper. Passing generations forgot that far down underneath the earth was purple. The upper soil, many yards deep, was yellow. Little by little the Winkie border in the north crept eastward. Still, it happened so gradually that nobody got excited.

It was only when Oz began to be "opened up" in the beginning of the twentieth century with the arrival of Miss Dorothy Gale, the return of the renowned wizard, O.Z. Diggs, and then the virtual streaming in of other 'outlanders' that attention came to be focussed on the cartography of Oz. Professor H.M. Wogglebug, T.E., toyed for years with the idea of undertaking a grand-scale mapping of the country.** Though the project was postponed from year to year the professor did get put together a rough and ready outline chart, locating many of the by-then discovered curious countrylets of Oz and tentatively sketching in the boundaries of the larger lands. This last he did by placing a ruler on a drawing of a large horizontally oriented rectangle with a green spot at its center and tracing a big X. That was indeed sufficiently rough and ready.

But it wasn't good enough.

One day a letter arrived at the Palace of Magic in the Emerald

* See *The Magic Mirror of Oz*

** *See The Great Map of Oz*. Editor's notes.

City for Princess Ozma. This was a daily occurrence. Indeed, on some days the lovely Girl Ruler's fan mail amounted to five or even six letters. Mostly, however, they were much the same:

"Dear sweet Princess Ozma,

You are the dearest and sweetest. At least, I think so.

Your devoted subject forever,

Deera Swiety"

or

"'Ray, 'Ray, 'Ray for Queen Ozma! We think you're the greatest—even if you were once a boy.

Signed, Cheerleader Gang of

East Munchkin High"

or

"Most Honored High Potentatress of Oz and surrounding deserts,

I am your humble subject. I am not worthy to kiss the hem of your expensive gown. You have everything. I have nothing. Please send me a diamond ring. I enclose 2 ozlings for postage.

Yours truly, Fawn N. Gruvvle"

But the letter that came that spring morning was a little different. It said [spelling sic]:

"Deer Pwinsess, How iss oo? [The writer had clearly been reading too much *Sylvie and Bruno*.]

I iss fine. At leest I whir—tilll I looked at oo map of Oz. I iss a Winky. I lives in the NORRTH of Oz. I can tel cawse when I looks out the windo at the sunwise it's all sand on the lefft. That's a dezzert! But on oo map it shose I'm a Gilly Ken. PERPLE! I iss all confoosed.

I loves oo. Lana Peethisaw

P.S. I iss 5."

Princess Ozma had to smile indulgently. "How odd," she murmured. "I wonder what she means." And she sent for a copy of the Processor's sketch-plan of her queendom.

Yes, just as the girl ruler was quite sure she recalled, the boundary line between the Gillikins and the Winkies was shown to run arrow-straight to the far northwestern corner of the land. There was no way you could be a Winkie, at home, and look toward the rising sun while discerning a desert on your left. Winkieland was pretty dry but it hadn't yet turned into an actual sandy waste. But that reports indicated it was on its way to so doing was a worry. The whole matter was worth a look-see. "Maybe I'll just go an pay a visit to this Miss Peethisaw," the thoughtful regent murmured on.

Queens can't go anywhere on their own, of course. Lulea, queen of fairies, had stated that axiom. I'm not sure why it is but it seems that solitariness is considered less noble, less worthy, than constant attendance by adoring followers. The bigger the train of courtiers the more impressive, of course, but even the most minor, the most private excursion by a ruler must see at least one attendant on hand. Not just to carry a handbag either, or do anything at all menial. Simply to be there.

So who should just be there in this instance? The Queen of Oz thought for a moment and then said to herself, 'Why, the Professor, of course!', and to her maid, Jellia Jamb, who was standing nearby—to carry handbags, or to serve cups of tea, or to deliver letters, or whatever"—: "Please get in touch with Professor Wogglebug at the College, will you, Jellia? and ask if he can spare a few days to take a little jaunt with me."

Ozma would go by swift Sawhorse, naturally, and the wogglebug, IF he was available, could fly along on his own wing-power. That would leave room on the strong wooden steed for something else, should such be wanted and of course the more was the merrier. Somebody *light*.

Well, who could be lighter than the favorite old Scarecrow? He weight all of eleven pounds, bran brains and all. That wouldn't tax the Sawhorse's strength. Would the wise Scarecrow, as advisor, be willing to come? Ozma thought so.

chapter three

"Then be it so," quoth the Queen of the Fairies, "and go we to determine who they shall be that straight shall post to Ludlow."

"'Ludlow,' your grace?"

"Oh, sorry, I meant 'Luleå'." The fairy blushed slightly.

"'Loolly-oh,' your grace?" Feebimble was insistent.

"Oh, bother," said the Queen, employing the vernacular. "I meant to keep it a secret a while longer."

"'A secret,' your grace?" Feebimble was getting tiresomely repetitious.

"Yes, well, you see, the place—the people—who have invited me are the leading lights of a town called 'Luleå,' spelt L-U-L-E-A-with-what-looks-like-a-circle-over-it. I don't think that's just a flyspeck. No, see here?: the postmark? The little circle is repeated there."

Feebimble, and the others, had been trying to picture the spelling in their minds but not succeeding very fast, but when they saw the cancellation stamp on the blue and yellow envelope they gasped. "Great fays!" they cried. "Your Majesty's own name!"

"Almost," said Lulea and smirked gratifiedly. "Actually," said the queen, who was a tick more knowledgeable than any in her

band and happened to know that '**a**' and Swedish '**å**' are two as different letters as '**o**' and '**q**' or '**f**' and '**e**', "the final letter is not quite the same—but near enough. It's quite a coincidence, isn't it?"

"'Coincidence,' nothing," said Moth, who was rather apt to blurt things out. "This town has clearly named itself after you, Your majesty! What a charming gesture. Isn't that what the letter says?! I'm not surprised you want to go see your namesake."

As a matter of fact the letter had seemed to the queen more (and very) curiosity-arousing than strictly flattering. Perhaps that was partly the reason she had not at first been too keep to divulge all its contents. It contained phrases like "the very startling similarity of names" and "we would be very much gratified if you would present yourself—" She sidestepped Moth's question and said, "Indeed, I am *most* curious to see what Luleå is like."

"And will your majesty not choose on an alphabetical basis the servants who will accompany you?" asked Aaala, the Hawaiian fairy. (Fays from widely dispersed parts of the world had been recruited in those ancient days when the Forest of Burzee was getting together its resident fairy band.)

"Oh, surely not!" cried Zyzzifer, dismayed.

Eapa and Ereol were not averse to the alphabetical choice, figuring that at least a dozen would be called and they stood a good chance of squeezing in. But Mab and Titania (some of the sprites had not hesitated to take the names of colleagues celebrated in other contexts) were not at all satisfied with any arrangement of that sort.

"Surely the Butterfly Band are most worthy to bear Queen Lulea's train," ventured Moth, speaking for a special sorority within the larger congregation of fairies. At that, a dozen voices were raised in confirmation.

"Propriety demands it," stated Farfalla in no uncertain terms and Butterfly herself said, "Dat's de troof if Ah evah huhd it!"

Then Squash and Dreamsweet and Seventeen and finally the rest of the thirty got into the act, all clamoring to be heard and advancing their claims to be, if anyone, taken along on the expe-

dition to Sweden. They wrangled for what seemed hours and then went back to plan A. By then the gypsy's dose was taking effect. The crowd simmered down and paused to wonder at their recent excitement.

"This honeydew is potent stuff," murmured the queen. "Remind me to lay in a new supply the next time Nantalengro passes this way."

Feebimble, who usually served as secretary, made the indicated note. "And plan A, your grace?" she said, goose quill raised.

"Why, that the whole importunate crowd of you be assigned to go with me," quoth Lulea with a laugh that was almost a groan.

"Grand!" said Moth, highly gratified.

"The only eqqquitable thing," agreed Ereol.

"At least it means *we*'ll all get to go," said Farfalla, looking around at her sorority sisters.

"As by right," second Borboleta.

"Anyone can understand that," affirmed Papillon.

"Raht! Ah kin unnerstan' it," exclaimed Butterfly.

"It's far from obvious," stated Squash pettishly. She was by no means resigned to the Butterfly Band's assumed hegemony. She thought her own little group much more important and Marrow, Gourd, and Calabash agreed with her.

"Never mind," said gentle Espa. "What are we going to wear? That's the important thing."

A veritable chorus of shrieks set up as each lady fay announced what wonder her wardrobe was going to provide.

"I shall wear my green organdie," said Heartsease.

"And I my tailored navy," told Titania.

"Won't that be a bit severe, dear?" asked Mab.

"That's nothing," declared Zyzzifer. "I'm going in my neat little black."

"Great fays!" ejaculated Petalutha. "A fairy in black! That *will* look odd."

"*I* shall appear all in silver," announced Dreamsweet.

"That will be lovely, darling," assured her admirer Dib. "Would watermelon pink do for me?"

"It will be enchanting."
"I can't decide—"
"—have to be altered—"
"Can it be ready in time?"
"And for evening wear?"
"Are elbow gloves in this season?"
"I always catch cold with bare shoulders."
"They say they're wearing fichus..."
And so it went on for many hours, far into the night.

chapter four

"Hey!" squawked Billina, the yellow hen.

"Are you referring to my insides?" asked the Scarecrow.

"Not exactly," called the hen, running toward the stopped Sawhorse. Ozma held the bridle and displayed an indulgent smile. "I thought your insides were mostly straw anyway."

"Well, they are," confessed the scarer of crows, "but I always admix a bit of hay—for body, you know, and bouquets hay smells nicer than straw, which in fact doesn't smell of much of anything."

"Be that as it may," dismissed the hen, "where are you off to?"

Ozma took up the word. "We've received puzzling reports about the territorial extent of the Winkie country. We plan to see just what the situation is."

"Can I come too?" Billina boldly invited herself, and made a snap at a winged insect. She missed—and looked bewildered. It wasn't that her eyesight was failing due to age. The hen was careful to invoke daily the non-aging clause in the Oz constitution. But the fact remained that she had taken for a vagrant ladybird a foot above her beak the circling Professor Wogglebug twenty yards up in the air.

She tried to brush off the incident and regain poise by bus-

tling forward and going into an extended spiel:

"Winkie Country? Hmph! That's MY country, if the truth were known. If chickens could be queens I might have been chosen to rule over the Winkies—rather than that tin fellow, who isn't even yellow."

"Oh, no, he's not yellow," confirmed the mentioned one's great friend, the Scarecrow. "There's no one braver than Nick Chopper—unless it be the Cowardly Lion."

"Hah!" laughed the hen. "Touché! You're right, he's no more yellow than you're blue," and she eyed the Scarecrow's Munchkin suit askance.

"No, I try to keep merry and bright," admitted the straw (and hay) man. "What's the use of worrying? It never was worth while."

"Too true. But seriously: Queen Ozma, may I go along? I'm fed up nursing this never-ending stream of chicks. The current batch are old enough to fend for themselves. And it's ages since I got to take part in an adventure—after my starring role the time I saved you from a career as a jade grasshopper," she bragged shamelessly.

"What makes you think we're going to have an adventure?" questioned the girl ruler indulgently. "This is just a brief business trip."

"Never mind. Something fun *could* happen. And just the trip would be a change."

"Come along," relented Ozma, and the hen flew up and nestled in the soft interstice between the Scarecrow on the Sawhorse's rump and Ozma in the saddle. Then it was *hiyo!* and away. None but Wizard O.Z. Diggs and Tik-Tok the clockwork man saw off the equestrian party at the Emerald City's north gate.

With the wogglebug flying lookout they clove to the Winkie-Gillikin border line from where it began just beyond the northwest corner of the Emerald City-state. No proper road went that way but the Sawhorse was adept at negotiating broken country, leaping fences, and clearing brooks with scarcely a break in his gallop. By midday they had reached Kite Island, bypassing Loonville, Marshland, and the Serpent Tree in the middle distance.

The Border River appropriately enough formed the border here and when they saw its left bank yellow and its right back purple they knew that they had not gone wrong so far. Where the river widened to enclose the little island the horse-borne party crept quietly round the Gillikin shore, admiring from a distance the varicolored kites that flew over the isle. They felt they didn't want to get held up—or even sent up—by a bunch of kiting enthusiasts and they took care not to let their presence be known.

Beyond Kite Island the travelers got into an area of moorland, the celebrated Bordermoor. Here anyone might go astray and our friends promptly did so. Though the river remained a guide there was nothing, color-wise, to mark the boundary. Everything was the hue of autumnal heather and bracken—even in June!: a sort of yellowish purplish brown. When the river began to trend actually northeast they knew it was time to cease using it as an indication of where a *western* boundary was to be found. They struck off northwest again.

For quite a few miles, indeed for about a quarter of the whole length of the Winkie-Gillikin frontier, all went well: straight northwestward they sped, with reassuring glimpses of Dwindlebury, the Laughing Willows, and the land of the Hoppers on the right, while Hotchinpotch, Tidy Town, and the wilderness trail to Wackajammy lay to the left. Say, they were doing swell until they fell for somebody else's line—or rather, some*thing* else's: something which had produced a perimeter that swept 'round the Gillikin forest and suddenly headed almost due north. It was a different river that formed the border here but when that too veered west the yellow aspect of all landly things still continued to fill the eye toward the north.

Now Ozma saw in earnest what that "something" (the wind) had done. Even as she watched, motes of dust, grains of sand, wafted past from the west and settled to earth, imperceptibly yellowing yet further the purple ground under foot. 'And this has been going on for centuries,' she thought, but said nothing to alarm her companions. 'If it keeps up, in time—quite a *long* time—there'll be nothing left of poor Gillikinland,' she mused, and gazed into

the depths of the great purple forest nearby, whose nearer leaves were already sicklied over with a pale cast of buff. 'I wonder if the Gillikins realize. Surely the must. But how pleasant that they've never complained, at least in my hearing. Amusing that the protest should come from a *Winkie* miss!'

The party pressed on, intent now to discover, at once, the extent of the damage. The remaining quarter of the frontier-following journey was made in nearly due-northerly direction. Just at nightfall the Sawhorse clattered out across a still recognizably purple area of stony ground and came to a place that appeared, in the dim evening light, to be quite without color: neither violet nor yellow nor anything between, but instead a characterless grey. "The Impassable Desert," announced the Queen of Oz, awed in spite of herself. The night-murky sky northward brooded over a seemingly endless waste.

Professor Wogglebug circled down for a landing. "Yes, your highness," he confirmed, "it's a desert as far as the eye can reach. The Oz border runs quite distinctly as a virtually straight line east and west. The purple stands out sharply against the sort of grubby pearl color of the waste. But I don't understand this yellow section..."

Here the savant twiddled with his compass and sextant, which had done the journey inside an oiled-silk bag depending from the insect's next. "As near as I can calculate, without recourse to tables and slide-rules," he apologized, "about one sixth of the whole northern rim of Oz—and a generous sixth at that—appertains to the Winkie country! A serious oversight in my former drafting of the map of Oz! There must be an immediate new edition," and the professor made copious notes on his cuff.

"You mean, then," said the Scarecrow, "that the other five-sixths—"

"Say that again!?" broke in the professor, rather oddly, raising his eyes to stare at the straw/hay man with a twinkle. "That last word...?"

"Sixths...?" complied the Scarecrow.

"Very well done!" crowed the wogglebug. "And without a

tongue, to boot. Did you know that 'sixths' is the most difficult word to pronounce in the whole Ozish language? 'Kuh, suh, thuh, suh'—all in a row, with no vowels between. Even elocutionists have failed. Stout fella!" he praised the pleased Scarecrow again. "But you were saying...?"

"Oh, it wasn't a deep or well thought-out remark," demurred the other. "Just that five-sixths are all that's left of the Gillikin territory, you say? It must be the smallest, then, of the four big lands of Oz?"

"Who knows?" said Wogglebug, chagrined. "With my unwarrantedly assumed boundary delineation shown up now for the hollow mockery it was, who knows what size the various lands really are? For one thing, we can suppose that in the south the same thing as here is going on at the Quadling frontier: whole tracts of Winkie land being lifted up to blow east and en-orange the Quadlings' southwest border marches. 'Tis very grievous to be thought upon."

"I see that strong measures must be taken," replied Ozma in similarly Shakespearean vein, "and that at no distant date, to halt what seems to be a serious disequilibricizing of Oz geography. I wonder how long this has been going on..."

"Forever?" posited the professor. "I mean: winds have always been from the west, and Winkieland soil always dry, I suppose, and easily to be borne aloft by the wind. But shall we press on? to assess the extent of the disturbance."

"Hardly tonight, I think, Professor," said the queen, with a smile in her voice. "It's nearly full dark. See, Billina has tacitly given us the lead." Indeed, the yellow hen, on the Scarecrow's lap, had tucked her head under one wing and was breathing peacefully in sound sleep.

"What to do?" said the wogglebug, suddenly brought from his cartographical considerations and now apologetic. "Your majesty must have shelter!"

"We must have shelter," corrected the considerate queen. "We, plural, that is."

chapter five

And then they all met at Penn Station—or, in this case, at Centralstationen in Stockholm. Petalutha actually WENT to the Pennsylvania Station, New York—but then, she was always confusing things and missed out on a lot that way. This time she missed out on the whole Swedish adventure and its aftermath and only caught up when all was over.

Ereol was standing in the middle of the arrival-hall diligently applying her nail-brush when some of the others showed up. "Look," she said, pointing with her brush. "That's clevvver, isn't it?"

Moth, Butterfly, Kelebek, and Mariposa followed her indication. They read a long banner sign that said "BANANBANAN", with underneath some words inviting travelers to go by that line rather than another.

"I don't get it," said Kelebek, who was always a little slow. All the fairies had of course provided themselves with Swedish for use during their outing so Kelebek knew what the word meant; she just didn't think there was anything very "clever" about it.

"It's a play on worrds," explained Ereol patiently, "—or on word constituents, one might better say. You see the element

'banan' occurring twice in that word—"

"'Banana-banana'," translated Kelebek obtusely. "Why is that clever?"

"Oh, but 'banan', by Swedish morphology, also means 'the track' or, in this case, 'the railway line'," clarified Ereol. "Stress here on the firrrst syllable, of course. So the word as a whole means 'the banana line.' I don't think Ozzzish allows of any such combination. It's quite clevvver."

"The Banana Line," mused Mariposa. "That's the one that goes toward Central America, I suppose. Might be fun to take it."

"Alas," said Ereol. "We're to go rrright in the opposite direction: norrrth."

"What line do we want?" said Moth, gazing around. She spotted placards promoting the charms of other trains. "'Bon-banan.' That's the one for you, dear," and she gestured impudently to Ereol. "'The polish line'."

"Or 'Bön-banan'," said Mariposa. "How odd: 'the prayer line.' Doesn't sound very safe, does it?"

"Dat's de one fo fokes goin' on pil'mages," guessed Butterfly.

"What about 'Ben-banan'?" said Kelebek, catching on and getting into the game. "'The Bone line'—" and, stretching her imagination, added: "Maybe that one runs out to a local cemetery," and she was rewarded by a round of approving laughter from her sisters.

"Well, don't forget 'ben' also means 'leg'," put in Moth; "'the leg line.' That would be for people who'd really rather walk," and all the fairies laughed even louder. Passers-by looked at them sternly.

But not all the local train routes made play with echoes of the word "bana." Mariposa spotted "Lur-banan." "'The Lur-line'," she part-translated haltingly. "What does 'lur' mean?"

"'Horn' or 'trumpet'," supplied Ereol, who had done her homework especially thoroughly. "But in fact it's mostly used in reference to the ancient Viking battle horns—"

"It could mean 'the Swindle Line'," interrupted Moth in her saucy way. "As a verb that word means 'cheat' or 'swindle'."

And amid the general merriment Butterfly said, "Less doan us take DAT line, whutebbuh we does!" The crowd roared.

Passers-by began to stop and stare, with hands on hips, disgustedly. Shocking! Young women laughing in a public place! and a large railway station at that. They must be drunk. And women drunk in a public place could only be one thing.

Ereol caught a glimpse of an elderly person hastening away to pluck a strolling policeman by the sleeve. "Er—let's move onnn, girls," she urged. "We must be blocking the way."

Thank goodness: Lulea and her larger entourage were gathered out in the departures hall near track F. "Oh, there you are, dears! We wondered where you'd got to."

The Queen counted. "Twenty-five, twenty-six..." Then she recounted but still didn't get further than twenty-seven. "Oh, dear, three of us missing. Whatever can have happened?" Each of the fairies had been meant to get to Stockholm station under her own steam, there to rejoin the band for the train journey north. This latter exercise was intended to accustom the ladies at least a little to the Swedish scene and manners before their taking part in this gala at the far-northern port town.

"We'll just have to go without them," sighed the fairy queen. "And reservations and all... We must simply hope they'll catch us up at Luleå."

Even so the fairy band filled nearly half the compartments of a coach. For the first half hour they gazed fascinated out the windows.

After that they gazed with less fascination. Finally some of them hardly gazed at all. Moth expressed the general opinion. "It's just like at home, isn't it? All forest. Only not so interesting as Burzee. There we've got plenty of deciduous trees but this seems to be *all* spruce—"

"Yes, I think we must have got on *gran*-banan," Ereol made a linguistic joke—then remembered to remind Kelebek that 'spruce' was 'gran' in Swedish. "—though of course there's plenty of fir and pine as well."

"I pine to see some fur," Moth punned further. "I thought the

Swedish woods were supposed to be full of animals. I haven't seen one."

"I can't bear it either," added Dib, getting almost too subtle, but Dreamsweet caught it and said: "Oh, deer!" and brought down the house. She followed it up by announcing, "I did see some golf lynx back a ways but they weren't in the forest." At this the others grew quite hysterical.

It was too much for the gentleman who, after tipping his hat and asking whether Petalutha's reserved place was taken, had occupied the sixth seat in the compartment. The fairy girls' laughter, and the causes of it, had issued from by no means bridled throats. Now the man could be seen making strange gestures with his shoulders behind his newspaper. At last he lowered the *Skellefteå Stiftstidende*, adjust his pince-nez, stood, reached into his breast pocket for his case, and presented his card. "I beseech your pardon for intruding, my dear young ladies, and beg to be permitted to introduce myself." Here the card was passed around. "I could not help but overhear—and ask to be allowed to join in the laughter."

chapter six

The Flathead reached for his can of brains, jabbed in the point of the can-opener, and began to crank round, annoyance in his every gesture. Damn!, he'd been wanting to keep his vintage brains safe until the end, but this situation called for thought, tact, memory, social graces: all things which, unlike talking, you couldn't manage without the use of your intellect.

Angrily he raised the tin and dumped its contents out onto the level surface of his skull without even looking in the mirror. Some of the lumpy grey matter ran over the edge and a thin trickle of liquid leaked down beside his ear. He stuck a forefinger in the can and ran it around, then scraped off on the rim of his skull whatever adhered to it.

"Well?" he said disgruntledly, tossing the can in a corner.

Those of his onlookers who could gagged. Then Ozma said, "You are the chief Flathead, I understand?"

"What about it?"

It was hard for the Princess to maintain her usual gracious dignity in the face of such churlishness but she tried. "My part and I—" she gracefully indicated her four companions of various races "—have been benighted. We wish to request lodging of you

for the night. Any simple arrangement—"

"Heck, no!" blurted the chief Flathead—but then paused, as the brains exposed on his head-top began to firm up and function. "...your majesty...?" he went on haltingly. He'd spotted the traveling coronet on Ozma's head and even without brains knew this was a situation somewhat out of the ordinary. *With* brains, he began to realize he was putting his foot in it rather badly.

"Oh," said the Queen in momentary startlement. "You decline then?"

"I didn't say that. I just said *no*." The fellow's brains were not yet *fully* functional. "—Er, Your Majesty... You ARE a majesty?"

"I am Ozma, Queen of Oz," said the girl, drawing herself up, "and your Sovereign."

Instantly the Flathead groveled offensively.

Ozma spurned him lightly with her foot. "Get up," she commanded. "We do not permit such displays." She waited. "Well...?"

"Of course, Your Majesty! Yes, indeed, Your Highness. Certainly, Your Divinity—"

The princess interrupted him. "Nor do we allow such terms of address. 'Your grace' will do. Say, have we your permission to lie here somewhere until morning?"

At once there was a great snapping of fingers and peremptory gestures as the now embrained Flathead gave orders to others o his race. People rushed about, bumped into each other, dropped things, and all talked incoherently to themselves and each other, but, amid the melee, arrangements did get made and ultimately some sort of order was restored. The chief Flathead was giving up his own dwelling, already the best furnished of the poorly appointed residences of the community, for the use of the fairy ruler.

Umbrella stands, ironing boards, china cupboards, cedar chests, footstools, and whatnots were carried out and day-beds, linen, wash-stands, ewers, and chamber pots were brought in. Soon an almost charming bower for the queen of Oz was established, with, in the same room, a roost pole for the chicken. In the male dormitory was a comfortably appointed shelf for Professor

Wogglebug and a corner for the Scarecrow to stand in. The Sawhorse was catered for in a shed behind the building.

In the central apartment a festive board was spread with things that both queens, chickens and wogglebugs could eat, and there, after freshening up, our party regathered. The chief Flathead acted as waiter, nor did the fairy princess hinder him in this. A meal of principally greens and cereals was partaken of.

"Tell us," said Ozma, declining the bowl of parched corn that was offered her again and indicating that the waiter-chief should draw up a chair, "something of your history. Have you always lived on the mountain?"

"As far as our traditions show, your grace," said the Flathead, whose brains were now operating capably, with the result that his behavior was now neither gross nor groveling. It is really only brainlessness that causes people to act in either of those ways. A protective membrane was even beginning to form over the damp pile of brains on his head and the unsightly dripping had stopped. However, he wore a modified top hat to cover the sight. It might not be the done thing to sit down covered in the presence of royalty but on balance Ozma thought she preferred that to what otherwise would be on show.

"How far back do your traditions go?" asked the interested princess. "I mean, have you always been like that?" She raised her glance delicately to the top hat.

"Brainless you mean? Oh, yes, that's traditional. It is our belief that we were created thus in the dawn of history. It would have been the creator Goorikop, no doubt—in his legendary whimsical mood—who thought it would be amusing to see how people with no brains at all would behave." The chief sighed.

"But you have brains," pointed out Ozma, puzzled, "though in a somewhat unusual form. Did Goorikop provide—"

"Oh, he wasn't entirely heartless," interrupted the Flathead. "He realized that we would sooner or later die out as a race if we didn't at least have ACCESS to brains when we required them. For the routine of daily life of course nobody needed them but occasionally there would arise situations where somebody had to

add up numbers, or solve some social problem, or make plans for a civic occasion, and for such tasks of course brains were invaluable. However, as long as we remained brainless we couldn't even think about our situation, let alone take any steps to ameliorate it.

"Things went on like that for centuries, as we ran around clothed in our own hair and subsisting on roots and grubs. Goorikop, who stopped off once in a while to observe the antics of the brainless, began to find us boring in our unvarying mindlessness, so one time he brought in a wheelbarrow-load of brains and dumped them in a corner of the big cave in the mountainside we then occupied.

"The next time he visited he was surprised to find us unchanged in our brainless behavior. But the pile of brains was gone. We had eaten them. Goorikop retched when he heard of it and accused us of cannibalism. But how were we to know? We had not the intelligence to recognize the brains for what they were.

"This time he supplied us with individual portions of brain nicely done up in sealed fruit jars— and with instructions for their use."

"Yes, I wondered about that," interjected the fairy princess. "Canning was only invented less than fifty years ago—by a Frenchman, in time for the Paris Exposition. But how did you come to change from the use of Mason jars?"

"Oh, it took a very long time. Meanwhile old Goorikop had faded away and the next thing we knew a powerful fairy queen discovered us. I think she was somehow family with Goorikop but I can't be sure. In any case, she was in charge now and determining what would happen in Oz. She had an even greater sense of humor than the original founder and thought our situation amusing in the extreme." Again a sigh of a sufferer.

"Lurline—that was her name—spent a week here. She insisted we move out of the dark unsanitary caves in the mountain and live on the latter's appropriately flat top—in houses she quickly ran up for us by magic means. In the middle of the settlement she established a brain cannery. It employs all our workers, though they are by no means overworked. There's still not much call for

brains in our daily life. Of course I'll have to order in a fresh can now. Brains once exposed to the air don't last very long: a few days and then they begin to smell, rather."

Ozma was glad she had finished her dinner before this discussion of the varying vicissitudes of loose brains began. Now she thanked the Flathead courteously for his orientation and made ready for the night.

The interlude in Flatheadland was entertaining but had of course little to do with the problem of the Winkie marches that were proceeding at a rate quite unprecedented in geographical history.

chapter seven

The gentleman in the corner seat, unobserved by any of his countrymen, allowed himself to be captivated by the charm of the five fairy girls whose artless prattle was so amusing. Of course they were strangers but then he HAD presented his card to perhaps that was all right, but they were also foreigners and that was graver. Although the ladies were fluent in Swedish you could tell by their appearance they were not natives. No self-respecting (that is, local) woman would allow herself to be seen in public in garments other than black, grey, dark brown, or—for the very daring—lilac. To ride in a train in a red dress! Unheard of! But the gentleman prided himself on his unusual broad-mindedness and thought, 'Poor things. They're foreign and can't help it. I must overlook it.'

So they all talked on as the miles clicked by. The fairies thought they had made their first friend in Sweden. Then just as the train was pulling into Luleå station they spoiled it all. Their fellow traveler had been *so* pleasant and *so* condescending that the irresponsible Moth said, "Can you recommend a hotel, sir? And won't you come and call on us there?"

Well, you can be sure the proper gentleman was at last prop-

erly shocked. To invite a perfect stranger home to one's lodgings! It was frightfully not done. The scales fell from his eyes and he saw these women at last for what they were.

He blushed violently, stammered something about "...the Temperance Hotel... Smith Street," and bolted from the compartment.

Moth stared, then burst into tears. I told you fairies could only be got at spiritually, and now Moth had. "Bu-but what could he mean by rushing off like that?" she cried.

The others tried to comfort her, or at any rate silence her, before they rejoined the ladies on the platform. This station seemed to be virtually the end of the line and what few passengers were left aboard besides the fairies scuttled away quickly after covert glances at the strangers hurriedly snatched.

The rest of the fairy band as well had been getting curious impressions of the Swedes but Queen Lulea for one was not going to let her first view of her (except for one small circle) namesake town be spoiled by an adverse judgment. She had out her guide book with town plan and read aloud for the others:

"The visitor arriving by rail at Luleå will at once be impressed by the presence of water on all sides. Although not technically an island the city has a view over water in the four directions. The station itself lies on the brink of Scrub Island Bay to the east—" The girls dutifully admired the view of crisp blue water lapping the barren rocks at the foot of the slope. "To the south is Grey Seal Bay, west is Lule Bay, and to the north of course North Bay. The orientation is east-west along the somewhat star-shaped cape that is the site of the present parish seat and county capital. But this was not always so. Originally Luleå lay fifteen kilometers to the northwest at what is now called Old Town and was only refounded in its present location in 1649—"

"How odd," put in Babbotschka. "I wonder why they moved."

Lulea consulted a footnote. "As international shipping required ever deeper draught the port facilities at the old town were no longer adequate. Luleå was dependent on its shipping, principally of iron ore from the interior—"

But the girls' attention was wandering. They wanted to stretch

their wings—no, drat! they all remembered: they'd had to disguise their wings under their unusually full-backed dresses for this excursion. SOME adaptation to standards that would be acceptable out in the great world they had after all known enough to arrange for.

"Well, our legs then. We'll stretch those," said Gourd with a laugh and made for the exit.

Gloriana was more thoughtful and felt that it would be useful to be sure where one was going before going there. She curtseyed before her queen and said, "We'll be staying at the Residence, of course? I wonder where the Reception Committee have got to..."

Lulea went pale. She'd known that the painful moment would have to occur but had put off thinking about it from hour to hour. Now she must make a confession about the limitations of her invitation. No mention of accommodations had been made! Nor any word written about being met, whether by Mayor or menials. Apparently the fairy queen (no mention either of any attendants of hers!) was expected simply to present herself at the governor's mansion when—and however—it suited her best.

"Oh, never mind, Your Feyness," comforted kind Moth, forgetting her own recent disappointment and now contriving even to reap a little gain from it. "Someone recommended the—er, Temperance Hotel. It's in Smith Street. Is that on your map?"

"Why, that's thoughtful, Moth," replied Lulea. "Thank you." Moth glowed. "Yes, here it is," and folding her street plan to the indicated area the queen fairy turned and led the way through the little station building to the street.

All the wonders of Luleå lay exposed before them: the sparse spring grass and the equally sparse windflowers in the tidy beds before the station. The row of tidy buildings in various hues of brick and stucco across the street. A tidy gilded church spire in the middle distance.

"It's tidy, isn't it?" said Queen Lulea.

No one found any further comment to make, except Titania, who said, "There's the Station Hotel," and indicated a prim building in the row opposite.

"Oh, I think we'll treat ourselves and go to the grandest the town has to offer, don't you, my dears?"

The fairies all drew nearer their leader and set up a whistling-in-the-dark piping: "Oh, yes! That will be lovely, your grace." One or two shivered.

"Now it shows here," went on Lulea, "that the City Hotel has two stars. Let's make for that, shall we?" Again she led the way: to the corner of Main Street, and they turned to the west. This seemed to be quite the avenue of hotels and they passed several before coming to the City, a neat structure faced with stone, with enamel and carved decorations all around the monumental entrance.

Twenty-eight strong, keeping together, with glances modestly lowered, and trying to look like governesses and school teachers, the fairy band crossed the lobby. They'd learned a lot just walking through the town and wished by now fervently that their orange, purple, and emerald green dresses were other colors. Oh, if only they'd had the foresight to bring dark cloaks with them! Then they might at least have concealed from general view the flowing draperies they had at first been so keen to show off.

Feebimble as social secretary, and thereby 'interference runner' for the queen, approached the reception desk as the others hung back discreetly. She put on her most authoritative air. "Madame requires accommodation for herself and her twenty-seven novices," pronounced the fairy with a flash of inspiration. "Of Saint Birgitte Convent, you understand..."

But God was not mocked. Canary yellow, silver, and fire-engine red gave the immortals the lie. The reception clerk, in cutaway coat and high collar, looked up, looked around, gasped, and looked down. "I regret; we're fully booked."

THIS was a situation the fairies had not envisioned. What was to be done? The clerk's statement must be taken at face value. Of course this WAS the town's grandest hotel (for lack of an actual Grand Hotel) and most travelers of a certain class would make for it. Though still so light of doors in this northern clime it was late evening, and the fairy band had been the last to leave the arriving evening train.

Out they trooped and went to the Park Hotel next door. Here twenty-six fairies waited outside while Lulea and Feebimble—but in red and gold!—alone approached the counter. The former put on her most queenly and withal bewitching manner and implied, without actually stating a lie, that she was Nellie Melba.

The clerk was not mocked. If anyone as celebrated as the opera diva were in this remote back-country town he would have heard of it. What he did not doubt was that these women were "on the stage"—if not the street—and as such could have no place in the Park Hotel.

Lulea left the hotel in a fury. "What a shocking thing! I've never been so insulted in my life! Of course! there was room, at least for some of us..." The fairy looked round her crowd of loyal followers in, for the first time, serious dismay. "—and the rest could have been lodged elsewhere," she finished falteringly.

"Never mind, Your Highness, we'll try another place," consoled Dreamsweet. "They can't all be full," she pursued, keeping up the fiction for a little while yet.

But at the Cecil and the Baltic their luck was no better. The manager of the latter actually suggested that the queen and as many of the other fairies as he caught sight of were no better than they should be. Certainly there was no accommodation for them at the Baltic. "Try the Diana, down by the ore docks," he called after them tauntingly. So they knew that was one hotel they need *not* bother trying.

"What was the name of that place you mentioned?" Lulea, holding in her anger, asked Moth. "The Temptation?"

"The Temperance Hotel," Moth hastened, chastened, to supply. "Oh, I do hope... It's in Smithy Street," she reminded, getting back to practicalities. "That's the last street we crossed."

The group retraced their steps to the Temperance but unfortunatley received the same reply, though the manageress, a woman herself, realized the ladies were all they gave themselves out to be: honest virgins and blameless travelers. The Temperance really was full on this Saturday night.

"There's the Station Hotel," she said. "Have you tried there?"

"Titania," said Lulea, brightening, as she always did when anyone was the least bit kind; "your hotel!" and to the hoteliere, "No, we haven't. Yes, we'll go there."

"Wait, I'll telephone through and see if they can suit you," said the woman, unsmiling—well, I mean she wasn't going to go *all* the way—but well-intentioned.

"Oh, would you?" asked the queen and simpered gratefully.

The hotel woman did her job well: got a commitment by the clerk at the Station Hotel that they could cater for twenty-eight lady travelers—*with* a bit of squeezing—and the party were duly expected. Was there very much luggage? Should a porter with barrow be sent?

The manageress looked again and her heart sank slightly. "No, there isn't a great deal. That will be all right." In fact, there was NO luggage, apart from a fairly capacious satchel of Lulea's that Ozzod carried. That did seem to the woman a little suspicious, after all.

Queen Lulea and her train thanked her most cordially, though traying, as became a Queen and her court, not to overdo, andthe padrona stayed behind at her desk, trying in her turn not to believe she had betrayed her profession by recommending clients so very much outside the ordinary as these.

Alas, the most expectant-looking face of the receptionist at the Station Hotel darkened the moment he saw the burgundy dress in which the fairy queen was arrayed and the smile on the face of the young lady called Titania and the sprightliness with which Mab, Wob, and Dib ran up to the check-in counter. This exchange followed:

"Yes?" [severely]

"The lady at the Temperence Hotel telephoned. We have reservations."

"Indeed? I see no record here. Your name?"

"Fay McQueen." [thinking rapidly]

"Sorry. No record."

"Oh, but we made sure! You have room (with squeezing) for twenty-eight ladies!"

"We have, alas, no such thing. I'm very sorry." [lying]

"Oh, how terribly disappointing. But we can pay! Look!" [opening of valise, which appeared to be full of gold pieces: fairy gold, but the clerk wasn't to know that]

"That isn't the point. We have no wish to accommodate you. This is a respectable hotel."

At that Lulea hit the ceiling. I keep telling you fairies can only be got at through their feelings.

If she hadn't been inherently such a decent person (not, admittedly, a human being, but surely after all a "person"), Lulea might have changed the clerk into a lump of odiferous ambergris on the spot. As it was, she turned, white-faced, and marked straight out of the hotel, her court following crestfallen after.

The night chill cooled the fuming fairy as she hurried across the street and back to the railway station. Unfortunately the last train for the night had gone. All approaches to the interior of the building and to the tracks were locked and barred.

Feebimble took charge. Several of the other fairies crowded close about their queen to offer warmth and sympathy but Feebimbled called the turns. "See," she whispered to Ereol, "the benches," and pointed to the dark green seats that alternated with the scrawny flower beds in the gazon that stretched the length of the front of the station complex.

"But they're taaaken!" urged Ereol in reply. Alas, too true: men of various ages but the same appearance: collars unbuttoned, hats askew, and eyes bleary (when visible) occupied places on four of the seven benches.

"Never *mind*!" hissed Feebimble. "They couldn't be any worse than what we've run up against already," and she began to bustle the girls of the fairy band toward the seats.

Now the fairies, in essaying to visit the realm of mortals, had taken on the usual size of humans. But this could be changed, for a need, and now Feebimble got the distraught Lulea to authorize the girls' shrinking a tad so that seven of them could sit abreast on a bench. That filled the empty three benches and the remainder of the fairies placed themselves diplomatically on the other

seats, choosing ones whose drunken occupants had passed out, thus offering minimal risk to the young ladies of the band of immortals as they prepared to sit out the short-long light night on park benches.

c h a p t e r e i g h t

Bright—well, not *so* bright: the sky was full of a yellow haze—and early the next morning Ozma rebridled and resaddled the Sawhorse and led him out of his stall. "Ready for another heavy run, Lignum?" she asked caringly. "We still have far to go before we can even think of turning home."

The Sawhorse said nothing but blew out his lips and shook himself spiritedly and his mistress knew that he was willing. The others took their places and Ozma turned to look graciously at the little group of Flatheads who stood about in the yard to watch the party off.

It was hard to love people who were so declaratively brainless. The Flatheads' stupidity shone out of their dull eyes and was communicated by their open-hanging mouths. But they were as God—or rather Goorikop—had made them and Queen Ozma had not yet reached a stage in her spiritual development wherein she allowed herself to go around altering the manifold variety and colorfulness which, when she ascended the throne, she had found characteristic of her country.

Away galloped the Sawhorse, and the wogglebug flew overhead. The road led down corkscrew-fashion about the sides of

Flathead Mountain (which was not all that high) and very soon the travelers were at the frontier, if so one may call a place without fences or guardhouses or gates or troops on patrol. It was simply that round about a certain point the color yellow took over completely and no more trace of purple, violet, mauve, lavender, heliotrope, or lilac was to be seen on the surface of the ground (no matter what conditions might exist some yards below). But the trees and bushes! the concerned reader will say: THEY'D go on being purple if they were Gillikin. Well, no, as the silent centuries crept on and yellow dust overlay everything, purple plants dried out and yellow ones took over.

"This is not right," stated Ozma as the Sawhorse raced on. "The north of Oz is known from time immemorial to be purple and at this moment we are far nearer the northern edge of Oz than the western. This ground should not be all yellow! Something must be done to bring it back to what it undoubtedly was of old."

"If seven maids with seven mops swept it for half a year, do you suppose," the Scarecrow said, "that they could get it clear?"

"I doubt it," said the Queen of Oz and shed a bitter tear. It was distressing to find for the very first time in her reign that there was something demonstrably wrong, unjust—or anyway unlike what it was credited with being—about her kingdom.

On they rode, now following the left bank of the Yellow River. This took its name not from any Chinese namesake but simply because of the fact that it was choked with yellow silt. On the dry upland steppe, so near the Impassable Desert a few miles to the north, the stream spread out thin and languid, like the Rio Grande of west Texas: "too thick to drink, too thin to plow." The Sawhorse was kept busy leaping little wandering meanders of the river, while the sky grew yellower and yellower.

Traversing the south bank the travelers missed passing through Corabia, Samandra, and Corumbia, thus leaving those enchanted lands to be officially discovered a dozen years later. But they did pass through Quick City—fast. Not there was the address of Miss Lana Peethisaw.

No, Lana lived the life of a little lady in a cunning cottage on the outskirts of Cut-out County. There it was always afternoon. Everyone had just had a bath and was fresh and neat; nobody was ever hot and feddy in Cut-out County. Nothing was ever an effort there. Everything came ready cut out, which is not to say cut and dried. Nothing ever changed and everything was always very nice. Maybe not exciting but just as you would always, in memory, prefer to have it.

Lana lived at number ten, Lullaby Lane. 'Hm,' thought Ozma. 'At five she won't be too old for lullabies.' An odd little wave of tenderness washed over the fair.

There was a hitching post out front, knee deep in dusty yellow grass, and there they hitched the Sawhorse. Just in case he felt like having a well-earned rest there was a pile of springy hay beside the post for him to lie down on. In Lignum's case, of course, this was all superfluous. He could never tire.

Before the Oz princess and her party knocked they had a look, by the dark yellow light of day, at the outside of the little girl's house. The building was drawn with thick bold smooth lines: the yellow plastered walls, the red shutters, the steep brown thatched roof, the blue door. It made you want to touch it and when you did you were surprised. The low-hanging charming roof was not compact of sturdy straw stalks but seemed to be all one piece. When Ozma, puzzled, learned nearer she saw the roof was made out of enormously thick pasteboard. 'Of course!' she realized, 'cut-outs!'

The realistic-looking silver-colored door-knocker thunked cardboardenly against the beaver-board door, which flew open to reveal a dark-haired little miss dressed à la Kate Greenaway. "Good day," said the girl. "Come in. I was expecting you."

The callers were taken aback. How could—!? They had got there quicker than any letter could have arrived—which was why Ozma had never sent one.

The princess smiled a little bewilderedly. "Miss Peethisaw? You were expecting us?"

"Yiss. Nothing is ever a surprise in Cut-out County—except

planned surprises, like birthday parties. It would throw us off if anything unexpected happened. So we expect everything."

Ozma decided that that was not unreasonable. Still she was puzzled. "I am Ozma, as you no doubt expected. But *I* expected a much younger young lady. That is to say—" Ozma waffled, unusually for her. "I knew you were five years old—from your letter—but your speech is different from your style of writing..."

"Oh, that," said Miss Peethisaw, welcoming in her guests with a graceful gesture. She bent to clasp Billina caressingly on the back. The hen clucked in appreciation. "I never write like I talk. I use all different styles in writing. It's my hobby, in fact. As for my letter to your majesty, it says in my *Manual of Correct Letter-Writing* that that's how children talk. Of course the book was printed in 1867, so it may be out of date. It also says that on no account must children WRITE like that. I'm afraid I was being rather naughty."

"Indeed, admitted Ozma, "a little of that might have gone a long way. I like you better as you really are." Then, "I think, in fact, I might say that of most persons.

"But now," the princess went on, when all had been seated around a table and Miss Lana was handing round the syrupy-sweet malted milk and the doughnuts, "your problem has caught my attention. During our journey here I found indeed that what you posited was correct: the Winkie Country does look to be way out of line. I had no idea—and can't account for it. Can you?"

"No; that's why I wrote you," said the matter-of-fact Miss Peethisaw. "I didn't know until I saw the new map of Oz that this part ought, by rights, it seems, to be purple. Here people believe it's always been Winkie—and yellow. But either that's wrong, or your map is. Something's got to give."

'This is a very grown-up five-year-old,' thought the princess, without, however, liking little Lana the less. Aloud she said, "Oh the map is obviously wrong. *That* must go. But a larger issue is this: does it matter if a whole sixth of the north of Oz is not, as it has always been reputed to be, Gillikin at all but Winkie? We might just rewrite the textbooks and let it go at that."

"Perhaps that's a good idea, your highness," agreed Miss Lana

sagaciously. "It might after all be troublesome to have to move whole countries. There are any number of them, you know, east of here and all yellow and fondly believing themselves to be Winkie. How would they take to being done over purple?"

"That indeed is a point that ought to be considered," quoted Ozma with a swallowed laugh at the drollness of this learned conference with a little girl. But Miss Peethisaw was special. What WAS it about her?

However, "Another point," the queen went on, "and to my mind the gravest of all, is that Winkie-land, not content with being already the largest of the constituent lands of Oz, is still growing! I hardly think that will do, do you? We don't want the purple Gillikin country to disappear completely."

"I suppose that *wouldn't* do," agreed Lana. "Would it? I, of course, as a Winkie, can't see that the Gillikins should mind. Yellow is such a wonderful color, isn't it!" she said with enthusiasm.

"*Are* you a Winkie?" asked Ozma speculatively. "You'll forgive me but you don't seem quite as yellow as the rest."

"Oh, no, I haven't been here long enough—" began the girl but broke off suddenly and seemed curiously a little flustered. "But I'm forgetting my manners! I'm afraid I do forget them, rather a lot. I see you looking about and of course I haven't showed you over the house yet!" She stood up from the tea-table abruptly.

Ozma *had* been casting sidelong glances at the furniture and hangings. Everything was distinguished by being edged with a thick border of black, no matter what its own dominant hue might be. How odd. Surely not an emblem of mourning? No, nobody ever mourned in Oz. It went against the genius of the country for there ever to be cause for grieving.

Suddenly, before Miss Peethisaw had yet said a word in explanation, it came to the girl ruler: of course! the things were cut-outs! The black lines were a guide for clipping out, and now Ozma could see where shears had gone round every piece of the furnishings: occasionally not too evenly. She suspected that children had had a hand in the scissor work. Possibly Miss Peethisaw herself.

"You live here all alone, do you?" asked Ozma as Lana showed the way into the kitchen. No cook or serving maid stood there.

"Yiss, all alone," and the girl gave voice to a trill of laughter—that cut off sharply.

"And your parents, my dear," said Ozma kindly. "Where are they?"

But Miss Peethisaw stumbled violently as she followed the others over the threshold onto the back porch, and somehow the princess' question went unanswered. Queen and Scarecrow and wogglebug all put out their hands (or feelers) to support their hostess. "How silly of me!" Lana cried. "But oh! look at the sky. It's never been that dark before—and it's only five o'clock..."

Until this the wogglebug and the Scarecrow and the hen had been content to listen, over the table, to the talk of the two female savants but now the Professor offered a third expert's view: "Yes, it's storming up there. As we came along I noticed wind resistance growing ever stronger. Strange how still it is on the ground—"

"That's because nothing ever varies here in Cut-out County," Miss Peethisaw put in, seeming relieved at the change of topic. "There's always just a faint breeze. It makes things more 'average' that way."

"I see," said the Scarecrow, who had been quietly sizing things up. "Averagity is all. No rocking the boat."

The young girl looked at him with respect. "That's it. We've all had our boats rocked enough when we came here. This is the quiet backwater we long for."

But by now Ozma had guessed enough not to ask further discomfiting questions.