

**A
FARE
WELL
TO
OZ**

BY

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ANITA MCGREW & DINA BRIONES

Dedicated
to the memory of

KEITH LAUMER
1925 — 1993

He loved Oz so.
Alas, he left
almost too late
going there
in life...

A FAREWELL
to
OZ

THE OZ BOOK FOR 2000

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Edited by Paul S. Ritz.

Founded on and Continuing the
Stories by March Laumer





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C H A P T E R O N E

"Poor guy. Looks like he died of boredom."

"Yes, I think he could have. See the control panel. But there's nothing on the screen."

"That's right. Yes, look—if I can get it out of his hand—. Yeah. You press the button and nothing happens."

"How awful."

"How do these things work anyway? Are there batteries? or what's the story?"

"Search me. I suppose a technician would know. But if the thing was dead..."

"Yeah. And he couldn't move. That is to say, he couldn't any longer get up, stand up and move to the set... There, see? It works all right if you push the buttons on the box itself."

"Oh, turn it off! Terrible. What was that?: Andy Griffith? Or the Beverly Hillbillies?"

"One or the other. He liked both of them."

"How could he? Mindless."

"Well, you get like that if all you've got left is the T.V. He gradually gave up everything. Got so he couldn't even turn over in bed. And yet, you know, he could still see without glasses—"

"Yeah, good eyesight seemed to run in the family."

"—and he could still operate the T.V. handpiece okay. He

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wouldn't do anything else. But it was as if as long as he could see those images flickering over the screen—"

"Yeah: there was still something to hold onto: an illusion."

"But if the control went... Well, then there was nothing left. Pity everybody'd gone out. I can see it now: without the pictures on the screen, well, he couldn't face it. Or rather, then he had to face it and he couldn't."

"So he literally died of boredom."

"I guess it would seem like that. What do you do when you're propped up somewhere and there is literally, absolutely, nothing to do?"

"Go to sleep, I suppose."

"He did that eighty per cent of the time anyway. That too was a fugue from boredom. But the human engine literally *can't* sleep a hundred percent of the time—not unless you're in a coma. So there he was: stuck. No show. It was no use yelling. We'd all gone out. So he just took the only way out. Croaked."

"Heart, I suppose?"

"That's what an autopsy would show, I dare say. He'd been diagnosed as having signs of an aneurism. Of course, in the last analysis we all die of heart failure."

"But you think this was actually boredom?"

"I'd say so. It's the most terrible affliction there is. I'm sure it's the basis in more than half of all suicide cases.

"Oh, that's saying a lot! I think inability to face up to problems is what tips most suicides over the brink."

"I'll admit that seems logical. But look at the statistics: suicide is virtually unknown among primitive tribes where the mere struggle to stay alive takes up populations full time. It's the so-called civilized societies where suicide's rampant. In Europe: Denmark!: certainly a society where there's help to be called for in any acute problem in living you might have. No, it's the life situation where you've got so much leisure to mull over your ills that they get to be too much. And it's the loss of interest in living that makes even a small dislocation in life-style seem unbearable—where you'd rather take the quick way out."

“Kinda looks then like society ought to ‘*force* people to have fun’.”

“Certainly bring some kind of pressure to bear to motivate, even obligate, people to take part in something constructive. In the long run a feeling of creating something, contributing something—and something better than total trivia—is the only thing that can keep life in us. It’s the only thing that doesn’t become utterly boring at last.

“And like we see, boredom is fatal.”

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So I kept my nose to the grindstone. I didn't want to go that way.

For quite a few years it was all right. To be sure, everything else failed. No success, no recognition, not even any money, ashes-like reward though that might be. No charming companion, not even a steady sex partner. But there was the work, the writing—of a kind that no one else in the world could do. If you're going to make a contribution worthy of the name it's got to be individual, even unique.

That's why the arts that fully satisfy are not as many as you might think. Besides writing there are just the pictorial ones; then composing; acting; maybe—though somewhat trailing behind—dancing, singing, performing music, but there you get into areas where making a markedly individual impression isn't as important—and can't be as common—as simply executing what the creating artist intended. Maybe it's why domestic arts aren't touted as high as the "fine" arts. Hard to display an immediately recognizable signature in a job of sewing (as opposed to fabric or costume *designing*) or a dish of mayonaise (though the first inventor of it remains immortal).

In my case maybe nobody, to speak of, was able to read my writings; yet even fewer could have written them. For a long

time that seemed enough.

And then at last, you know, it wasn't. Too late now for the acclaim. No good them all crying "Hooray! Write another!" With the best will in the world there wasn't the inspiration. No new ideas. Nothing one hadn't already said a couple of times and then without anyone paying much attention or taking up the thought.

It was time for boredom to step in. It looked like boredom. Actually it was just the main-spring having gone slack. People said that Churchill had pneumonia. He himself diagnosed it better: "I'm just so bored with everything."

No. I'd fight that to the last. Not the way Dad went. But there was another likeness between him and me. That fluttering at the heart.

But the little pain at the top of the skull was new. Funny, I recognized it first thing. I hadn't had it before and it didn't run in the family, but I'd read about it, once even attended a lecture on it.

The fellow told about George Gershwin (not that the story was new to me): the massive tumor and how, even if they might have been able to operate, the thing would simply have grown back and caused the unbearable pressure all over again. "How does a thing like that get started?" I asked indignantly. "Nobody knows." So much for the highly touted know-how of medicine. And why it should strike one rather than another. To snuff out at thirty-eight the brain that could invent so many charming tunes.

The dull—or sometimes pretty peppery—pangs had gone on for quite a time now. Pretty tiresome actually. I wasn't afraid of dying. Luckily I'd got over that the summer of 'eighty-five when I told myself that by the law of averages you couldn't keep bouncing back after five operations in a row. On September twelfth I folded my hands under my cheek and said to myself, "I'm not going to pull out of *this* one."

You know? It just didn't matter one little bit. Let it all go. What did I care, really?

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Now I thought it would merely be extremely agreeable if there wasn't any pain.

Even pain was all right if it was getting you anywhere. Ever since leaving childhood I had minded less going to the dentist than to the barber. The latter was *just* total boredom and discomfort, but the pain in the dentist's chair meant you were going to feel all that much better afterwards. It was pain 'well spent'.

But the pain that meant danger of death. It was that aspect that made it terrible. Hooray for painkillers! Let them be disseminated with bounteous hands. There is absolutely nothing to be gained in suffering pain or any moral purpose served whatever. So you're gonna die? Okay, but keep that pain at the rock-bottom level until the fatal moment.

Afterwards? There was nothing. I knew that. It was a place, as a brother had written movingly, "beyond all pain, beyond all sorrow", and of course beyond all consciousness.

But I was still conscious; very much so. I had been dreaming. What was I dreaming? I don't know. It had got away, as so often. But suddenly I realized: the pain was gone! Oh, fabulous. I felt marvelous. I wanted to get up—though it was the middle of the night—and whip a barrel of tigers!

As it happened, that wasn't what I was called on to do. Instead, I was to receive visitors.

I didn't know they were coming but I really liked it better that way. When "friends drop in" you don't have to worry that the place isn't straight or refreshments ready-waiting to be served. You can take it easy. It was *their* idea.

The first I knew was the sound of music. It was like a tune being struck on infinitely thin tin 'soap' bubbles. It hovered about in the air like bubbles, echoing minutely. It was "The Oz Two-Step".

Great heavens. Just like Dorothy heard that time on the *LURLINE II*. I recognized the melody at once.

Where was it coming from? It seemed to be all around. Very soon though I could determine that it was more nearly centered on the tiny *entré* or hall (if an area three feet by five could be a

“hall”) this side of the door to the stairwell.

Now actually from the bed in the southwest corner against the book-cases you can't see the outer-door handle or, naturally, the key-hole. But I could. I could see the aperture, an inch high and about a sixth of an inch wide, that had been there since the management had installed safety locks about ten years before. The hole was bathed in a soft green milky light coming seemingly from outside.

Ozma and Dorothy came through the keyhole. Just like that.

Which “Ozma” and “Dorothy”? Well, the ones from Oz. You know.

But that's crazy. Ozma never leaves Oz. The most she ever did was when she went to Ev in her second book, before the non-foreign-travel tradition set in. Oh, and one time when she stepped—or rather, got dumped—out on the Impassable Desert briefly in *A Fairy Queen in Oz*.

Dorothy, of course, is always gallivanting out in the outer world. She hadn't been back too long from that expedition all around the Pacific: New Zealand, Alaska, etc.^s But even she doesn't enter premises through keyholes.

Come to think of it though, I guess she could. When the ultimate disaster happened to Oz, Ozma's (wise?) solution was to plump for reducing all animal life to a hundredth of its natural size. That provided plenty of room for the on-going floods of refugees to settle in Oz. It also made everybody half an inch tall and well able to go calling via keyholes.

In they flew. Flew? Well, Ozma's a fairy and, though wingless, never wanted to give up the fairy prerogative of moving freely via the air.

But Dorothy then? She had hold of Ozma's hand. I guess that's all you need.

They landed on the counterpane.

“Good evening,” said Ozma of Oz.

Not panicking I answered, “Good evening, your highness.”

Actually she wasn't that ‘high’. And yet again, higher than

§ See *The Ten Woodmen of Oz*. Editor's note.

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I'd thought. In fact, the two girls as they sat on the bed looked very much the size of (admittedly petite) normal young girls. A trick of perspective, I suppose. They *were* near enough to reach out and touch.

"Congratulations," offered Queen Ozma.

"Thank you!" I replied, in awe and delight. Then I ventured to ask: "On what occasion?"

"You're one of those invited to visit the Emerald City at this time."

"How marvelous!" I gushed. "I can't believe it. But I would still be pleased to know why I should receive such an honor."

"Everyone out in the world who has had anything even slightly constructive to do with the development of our fairyland is being invited to the big gala."

"A gala? It sounds like wonderful fun. But... is it for your grace's birthday party perhaps?"

Ozma laughed tinklingly, like the sound of fairy bells. "That's not 'til August!" she cried. "No; haven't you guessed?"

But dear Dorothy couldn't stand the mystification any longer. She blurted, "It's the hundredth anniversary of my arrival in Oz," and rubbed her nails on her lapel a bit ostentatiously.

C H A P T E R T H R E E

What a gab fest we had. The ladies didn't seem to be in any sort of hurry. I fetched a couple of ornamental pillows from the guest bed and plumped them up for them. I was glad I was wearing a longish nightshirt—which I didn't by any means always. But the headache had made me feel the need for even such flimsy comfort as a bed garment might afford. I didn't let on to my visitors that I'd been feeling under the weather. Indeed, I had never enjoyed talking about my health. Like religion it was a topic best kept to oneself, I'd always thought. When outright pressed for details I'd make a tale of comic contretemps out of it.

And yet, here I am, telling *you* all about it. Oh, well, "a foolish consistency..."

No, I was too keen to make all the comments and ask all the questions one has wanted to discuss all one's life. Like: what did it feel like to be an immortal? Didn't unagingness get to be a bit of a bind? Did one ever long for the 'reality' of the life of an ordinary mortal? Were there any things about Oz one would change if one could? How did you account for the fact that so many thoroughly disagreeable individuals, even whole communities, existed in what everyone readily conceded was the most attractive fairyland in the world?

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Or mundane things like: what was the favorite color of each of the two Oz girls? When was Dorothy's birthday? and which year was she born in? Which of the stories about her parentage that had got out was one to believe?§ Did she know what had actually happened to her mother and father in the end? Where exactly was the original Kansas farm located?

There were a million questions, tiny and great, and we couldn't settle them all that night. After I'd served vanilla tea and my rock-hard own-baked macaroons I turned up the lamps and gave them a tour of my tiny quarters: 'flat' or 'apartment' is altogether too grand a word for it.

The two tripped around after me obligingly as I pointed out a few treasures. "Oh, how interesting," said Ozma politely. Dorothy didn't say anything.

The first item to catch the eye, as being at the outer end of a shelf in the free-standing bookcase that juts into the room, was the modest row of 'original' ("canonical") Oz volumes. "I've got the whole set," I explained, "—back in the States, in storage. These are just a few I brought over from time to time for background for various stories I was doing. *The Giant Horse*, for instance —"

"Of course," said Ozma. "For *The Good Witch of Oz*."

"That's right!" cried I, delighted, and caught myself in time from saying anything gauche like 'Gosh, has your majesty read my books?' Naturally a thoughtful sovereign like Princess Ozma would have done so. Being born to rule, she didn't need to spend her whole career in being a politician— with resultant inability to be a statesperson, philosopher, or just ordinary cultured individual. Ozma knew about art and thought, as well as mere mob psychology.

"There's *The Wizard*," remarked Dorothy.

"Yes. This is just a working copy, a stripped-down version with nothing attractive about it. But there, beside it, is a first-edition facsimile my brother gave me."

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

“Keith?” said Ozma, amazing me.

“Yes! How did—”

“From his published reference to a book, *The Sorceress of Oz*. It actually exists, you know—in ‘Alternate Oz’. He entered the pantheon that way. Pity he never actually got around to writing an Oz book on his own.”

“Yes, I guess so.” That had once been a regret of mine, but later on...well..

“Now, ladies, look at that edition of *Emerald City*. Isn’t it a beauty? with the original metallic-bronze-green in the illustrations.”

Ozma opined the volume thoughtfully. “‘March Laumer...1935’,” she read out. In my dear mum’s beautiful handwriting. Memory flew back to the cardboard carton filled with things for Christmas that Mom had picked up on a little foraging trip of her own to the second-hand bookshops on Chippewa Street that we kids haunted. There were five or six Oz books in the lot but this was the one that had caught my imagination and that survived in my possession down the years.

“Speaking of inscriptions,” I enthusiasticized, “what about this!” and I opened proudly to the “This Book Belongs To” page of *Captain Salt in Oz*:

“For March Laumer—

I’m wishing you here
Oz luck and Oz cheer
And enough fun to last you
A day and a year!

Ruth Plumly Thompson

July — 1956”

“Why, I declare,” said Ozma. “That’s in Miss Thompson’s own handwriting.

I marveled again. The little Oz ruler could recognize Oz authors’ handwriting?!

“Yes, indeed,” I bragged. “Miss Thompson and I had quite a correspondence when I was a boy. I was always impressed to death when I’d get a letter from her. Her letter paper half-sheets

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with a picture of a roly-poly in one corner got to be quite familiar to me. So the year *Captain Salt* was due out I asked her to send me an autographed copy, and this is it. *What* a thrill. Unfortunately the book itself is one of her lesser efforts. No story, really, just a travelogue—and I've always thought a travelogue about non-existent places is just a loss of time—"

"How do you mean, 'non-existent'?" put in Dorothy sharply—and I blushed crimson.

"How stupid can one get," I blundered, and changed the subject.

"Later I got to meet Miss Thompson," I reminisced.

"Some of us were at a writers' conference at Milford, Pennsylvania, in 1967: Keith and a girlfriend of his, and we invited her to lunch. She was just as charming and obliging as you could have wished. I remember the scene so plainly: she on my right, with her back to a south wall.

"I remember I made so bold as to ask her which was her *least* favorite of her books. I was nearly bowled over when she said *The Lost King of Oz*!! In fact, I was so astonished I never even got around to asking *why*—because *The Lost King* was just exactly my favorite of her books, along with *Royal Book* and *Gnome King*. Those are the three Ozziest books in the entire canon, for my money. The two 'King' books have the most quintessential Ozzy openings of any of the stories: that combination of the droll and the magical..."

"Yes, they're good," agreed the Oz ruler. "But I wonder why she—"

"Said she liked *Lost King* least?" I came back. "As I say, I wasn't quite bold enough to ask her for any details of a negative critique of her own writing but thinking it over later it struck me as quite obvious what she meant. I'm morally certain it was because she killed off Witch Mombi in that book—"

"Miss Thompson didn't 'kill off' Mombi," asserted Princess Ozma. "I had my foster mother destroyed! It sounds dreadful, stating it that way, doesn't it?! Miss Thompson merely recorded what happened. *She* shouldn't have felt any qualms."

“No, but I know what she meant,” I countered, speaking as a soi disant author myself. “People not in the know: people, that is, who think the stories are just made up, would accuse her of eliminating characters invented by the ‘onlie begetter’, Mr. Baum, which of course would be a most high-handed thing to do, and that would no doubt bother one’s conscience afterwards.”

“Hm,” mused Ozma. “I’m a bit sorry we got onto that topic. I’m the one who’s had conscience qualms all these years. I would give a great deal—now—to be able to bring back Mombi. She was a problem, and source of disasters, but after all.”

I had been given food for thought. For the moment, however, I sought only to turn the edge, to keep the dear princess from being diagratiified by what was clearly going to be my only visit by her *ever*. Surely I wasn’t going to be cheated of the social success. Hastily I grabbed up another volume. It was—er, *The Gnome King of Oz*.

“See?” I urged. “The original—or nearly so—‘pale emerald’ binding, *and* with the first-edition full-color tipped-in illustrations. I remember I paid a dollar and a half for it—seems incredible, doesn’t it?—new! in the book section of a department store in downtown Buffalo. I think it must have been in 1934 or so. See: ‘Bum Laumer’: another brother. I gave it as a get-well present, I seem to remember. Speaking of get-well presents, look at this: *Pirates in Oz* with an inscription by my dad: ‘To March / July 31st 1935 / Daddy’.

“Isn’t that a fine bold handwriting? But you know what was most impressive about the gift?: my father didn’t really approve of our reading the Oz books. He thought they were ‘for girls’—”

“Well, they are,” said Dorothy matter-of-factly.

I gaped and couldn’t help saying “What!?”

“Of course,” continued that famous young lady. “I mean, they’re *about* girls, aren’t they? All the heroes are heroines. [This was of course poetic license on Dorothy’s part. In the canon as a whole there are many instances of boy heroes. Editor’s note.]

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It's well known that boys don't read books about girls. And all the fan letters came from girls."

Good heavens. Worlds seemed colliding. But Dorothy appeared to have thought rather deeply on the subject. "Can you imagine a *boy* reading *Alice in Wonderland*? 'Children' have it read to them—when they're too young for any distinction to be made about sex. *Men* read it; there's a reference in a war play, *Journey's End*. But boys, as such, are almost on their honor not to read anything that's mainly about the weak sex."

"But I devoured the Nancy Drew mysteries."

"Well—l," drawled Dorothy, implying volumes. But our sub-acid rivalry had been long known.

I flushed again. "Anyway, I thought it was great of Dad—when the chips were down—I was badly ill and in awful pain from an ear abcess—to give me for a get-well present what he knew I'd really love. And I'd never read *Pirates* before that either."

So we went on. Ozma wanted to see the originals of some of my own stories. I told her the manuscripts, in plastic bags, were all down in the cellar. Most of the typed texts as well, for xeroxing from. But here was the shelf filled with my own publications that were actually in print, including the whole set of Oz.

"I thought I came off best in *Fairy Queen*," mused the little fairy queen.

"I'm pleased, your highness," I acknowledged. "You understood, I'm sure, that you could be considered eponymous for that work—"

"Together with dear Queen Lurline, of course," the fairy replied with a smile.

"As a matter of fact," put in Dorothy, "I think I came out best there too. I didn't much like the treatment you gave me in *China Dog*."

"We both had egg on our faces in that one, didn't we, dear?" said Ozma a trace chidingly.

I was learning what it could entail to play fast and loose with living characters who could come to reproach one in the full-

ness of time.

Once more Princess Ozma smoothed the waters. “A *Fairy Queen* was like *The Good Witch*, in which the reader is not quite certain which of two characters is alluded to in the title. There it was Glinda or Tattypoo/Orin/Diane.”

“What about *Frogman*?!” inserted Dorothy, “with three eponyms.” She calmly coined a usage for which at least the others of us didn’t know a synonym.

You can envision how thrilled I was at all this talk of, and evident familiarity with, my books by these figures that, in all the world, one would most like to be noticed by. But then Queen Ozma looked at her two-way wrist radio-watch and said, “It’s been delightful but...”

Dorothy took a last cookie. “You’re right. It’s not far off daylight and we’ve far to go before we sleep.”

I was suddenly a-dither. “Oh, where’s my air mask?!”

“Never mind,” said Ozma comfortingly.

“Oh, I never go out without it, your grace,” I protested. “Besides, it’s Swedish law. If you’re caught outdoors without it, it means a stiff fine. It seems the state can’t do anything about the toxic levels of air pollution except enforce the wearing of the mask—”

“You won’t need it,” the queen murmured low.

I understood.

Without a backward glance I took the hand of the Queen of Oz, and with my other that of Princess Dorothy, and we advanced—somehow or other!—to the keyhole. There was a brief burst of tinkly bells and a glow of green light, infinitely soft...

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Just the same I had pulled my Moroccan djellaba on over the nightshirt. Waltzing around in just the latter might look a bit too peculiar.

Ozma wasn't like Cinderella and having to get home before cock-crow. It was just that if she was ever to get home at all she'd better begin rounding up the roster of people due to be collected for participation in the gala.

So here we were, strung out for miles, it seemed—well, anyway for many yards: an infinite chain of people, holding hand to hand and hovering effortlessly on through the rainbow-colored light. (Ozma thought it would be too depressing for us, traveling on for hours through darkness at noon [courtesy of world-wide six-mile-deep smog], so she enchanted our eyes to see just varicolored light.)

I'd fallen back in the procession by now. Ozma had the charming custom of starting out with each newcomer at her own hand. Dorothy was also up front somewhere. But now I found myself holding hands with William Denslow and Jack Haley. Not that I had all that much to say to either of them. I'd always preferred John R. Neill's illustrations (he was farther along, still up nearer the head of the column) and regretted that Buddy Ebsen hadn't played the Tin Woodman. Still, they were worthy personages

and we made amiable small talk. The only one I really ducked out of greeting was Maud; I could never forgive her for burning all the manuscripts in the back yard.

Now there was a big treat coming up. We'd finally got to Philadelphia. I suppose Ozma had left it so long because there were so many people to join our train there: Peter and several of Button Bright's family and, most of all, Miss Thompson! and various of her (pertinent) relations and friends: all the dedicatees, naturally. I was all agog to see R.P.T. again. I wondered if she'd have the faintest recollection of me.

Word had filtered down the line that Miss Thompson was scheduled to meet us on the sidewalk in front of 254 South Farragut Terrace. Yes, I know the address is now that of a multi-story car-park and the Afr-Am Crack Dispensary, but Ozma insisted that people were to be picked up in milieux they'd frequented in life.

The rainbow glow thinned and we could see reality. Yes, there they were. Gosh, what a crowd. Janet Thompson and Dorothy Thompson Curtiss, "Mother", Aunts Joe and Gertrude, Richard Sheaf Thompson and Richard Sheaf Junior, Olive Cromwell Curtiss and Dorothy Bispham Curtiss, Janet Ruth Thompson, Florence Linn Edsall and Mary Josephine Ritchie, Major William J. Hammer, George F. MacEwan, and Mabel Hammer Assheton, and in the center of the assembly tiny little Ruth P. herself, smiling, indeed laughing, and patting people—as all her characters always did. Ozma alighted, and the mob of us after her, and there were long-drawn scenes of welcome and cordiality. No danger of anybody there knowing who I was.

Then on again, to Long Island, where it developed that we were to collect William (Uncle Billy) Harmsworth. I was keen to see Speedy and his wife, having written quite a bit about them, but I was disappointed. Oh, not that they were to miss out on attendance at the gala. It was just that they could get there "on their own", whatever that meant; Ozma didn't specify.

Now we zagged back in the direction of Ohio. Jam was to join us there, and did. Another reshuffling of positions in the

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daisy chain. Word had been passed down that there was going to be a short interlude. Jack said in his fruity vaudeville diction, "Her Highness is reminding us that every proper expedition to the fairyland has to have a child in it. So far there's nobody. We're all of us old geezers—by definition! So she's planning to halt about here somewhere and pick out somebody. Let's watch."

The rate of advance had certainly slowed. Admittedly the whole thing had something of an air of unreality about it. For instance, as we flashed over them we could see through the varicolored smog farms and factories (mostly the latter) but we could feel no cold or wind and seemed to have no difficulty in breathing the thick smoky air. As far as we could tell, the sun was shining. At least we could distinguish no clouds round about or above us and certainly it wasn't raining.

We were leaving behind another of the great conurbations: Clevelanderie? or Detroitledo? and almost open fields were vaguely discernible. Yes, as Ozma guided us lower we could make out grey-green grass dotted with grey-yellow flowers and there in the middle of a meadow a couple of grey children, duly togged out in air masks.

They were running about rather haphazardly. Oh, yes, now we could see that they were chasing a big grey-orange butterfly. Gosh! were there still butterflies? I'd forgotten. But then I suppose even such delicate creatures could develop strains resistant to mercury, lead, cadmium, and whatever else was tincturing the atmosphere so richly these days.

We stopped, just like that: in mid-air: another unrealness about our magical progress. We watched, all eighty of us as we by now approximately were. We had all long sensed that we couldn't be seen.

The children laughed with delight. Yes, laughing must be what they were doing that accounted for the rapid pulsing in- and outward of the soft parts of their cloth-and-metal masks. As far as could be made out from the unisex clothing they were a boy and a girl. Yes, one had long hair so that would be a boy.

The pair followed the fritillary into the middle of a patch of

dandelion flowers. Like butterflies, dandelions too had apparently developed resistant forms. Anyway there the plants stood, looking quite thriving despite the soot on their leaves and blossoms. The butterfly alighted on a particularly large flower that had gone to seed; of course all the delicate seed spills fell off and drifted to the ground.

Looking disconcerted the insect flapped on awkwardly to another plant. Here the muddy-yellow stamens gave a firmer footing. Slowly and quietly the pair of tots crept up on the butterfly.

Suddenly, just as the boy reached for it, the insect flew upward. "Oh, balls, Jimmy, you missed it," cried a girl voice. The pair watched their quarry flutter above their heads and disappear in the direction of the supposititious sun.

"Yeah, lover, looks like I did," admitted the boy called Jimmy affably. "Could you do any freakin' better?"

The girl didn't vouchsafe an answer but bent and carefully twisted from its stalk the flower head. Silently she lifted her mask, inclined her face, and blew on the yellowish blossom.

"What are you doing?" said Jimmy.

"Close your eyes," ordered the girl. Her companion complied, but that seemed to be the extent of any taking place of events.

Opening his eyes again the boy said, "What the suck are you doing?"

"You know the way we always wish on dandelions. I'm wishing we could go to Oz," replied the girl. (All of us in the aerial queue gave a start. But still greater coincidences than we could guess were lying in wait.)

"Oh, crap," said Jimmy mildly. "You can't wish on the freakin' fresh flowers! It's got to be one that's gone to seed." (To spare adult sensibilities we'll elide further reproduction of the children's expletives. But you get the idea.)

Instructed, the little girl made grabs at nearstanding seedheads but of course her abrupt movements instantly reduced each flower to loose-flying puffs of silk. "Go at it slowly,

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Sarah," warned Jimmy. "You picked that first, yellow bloom carefully enough."

Now the girl applied procedure to conditions and succeeded in severing from its roots an especially ethereal-looking seed-gone flower stem. Again with joined hands and closed eyes the children wished. "We want to go to Oz!" They both took deep breaths and blew.

It would seem that this was what fairy Ozma had been waiting for. Her hand was lying on her Magic Belt (which she never left home without). Was there now an infinitesimal pressure? The seed umbrellas swirled away from the children like a flurry of dusty snowflakes. As they settled down at a distance from the pair that pair vanished!

Word passed down the airborne line of pilgrims. "They're gone!" "Has Ozma sent them to Oz?!" "Anyway their wish has been granted."

We all understood that Jimmy and Sarah could not have joined our incorporeal travel train. But they would be in Oz and we would see them at the gala.

Then the rest of us moved on to Chicago to pick up Messrs. Reilly and Lee.

C H A P T E R F I V E

It was late afternoon when we alighted on the dome that covers Oz. When in her 'flightful' fairy phase Ozma chose not to make her entry via one of the vast ground-level gate doors. It was such a job getting them open, now that everyone was a hundredth of the size he had been when the twenty-four doors to Oz had been set up.

It was easier just to drop down on the slight peak in the center of the (blackened) dome, which was of course directly above the Palace of Magic in the exact middle of the Emerald City and of Oz. There was found a trapdoor for access to the fabulous fairyland below. Queen Lurline and her bunch would use it, for instance, when flying in for a state visit, or just to have tea.

Ozma herself pulled the ring. The trap lifted easily despite its size and then I got my first surprise. Regardless of all the times one had visited Oz in imagination certain aspects of the place had escaped one's attention. Did you know that the air of the magic land is at all times scented faintly but most delightfully? Not just routine flavors either, like roses or peppermint. It might be roasting coffee or the smell of beer brewing.

Also of course the waft of fresh hay and spearmint that struck our nostrils now was particularly remarkable in contrast to the

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awful stink of the untreated air outside, of which we caught a last whiff as we dived through the trap hole into the sea-green air within.

We let go hands now, Ozma setting the example for that. We were in Oz and couldn't be hurt by any free fall from no matter how great a height. Anyway, creatures less than an inch tall can hardly be damaged by a drop to earth whether in a fairyland or anywhere else or from whatever height, provided it be not bare rock or concrete they strike on. In our case it was grass.

Grass on top of the Palace of Magic? Well, no. Admittedly there is a little 'pent'-garden up there, on a flat part of the roof, where the Queen of Oz will sometimes invite visitors for a lawn party in secluded circumstances. But there is always a breeze circulating in Oz (carefully maintained by air-movement machinery now that the enclosed country is virtually cut off from outside weather influences). That breeze was sufficient to waft us featherweight travelers southwestward from the palace where we were all soon sprawling on the sward.

"Ooph!" said everybody and sat up and looked through the grass-straws. What now? But it was only a moment before our bemused comments turned to shrill screams.

Two dreadful giants were loping towards us from the direction of the great looming palace.

They didn't look to be paying much attention to where they were treading and the idea that they would be stepping on us in a very few moments was sharp in all our minds. We yelled and wanted to get out of the way, but which direction to run in?

Princess Ozma, however, must have been, as usual, wide awake and alert. I had no time to do more than realize that the pair of giants were Jimmy and Sarah (I recognized him by his hair-do) when they abruptly vanished.

When we had forgathered in the shade of a lawn sprinkler (now sadly corroded since there was no longer anyone big enough to operate the palace-plant machinery) and were waiting for the now suitably-sized youngsters to find us, we heard the story. "You may be sure I did a double-take and cried 'Oh,

fudge!," related Ozma from her temporary throne in a buttercup, "when I saw that pair lurching about—"

But now those on the perimeter of our circle could pass the word that a couple of young children in masks had been sighted making their way along a path. Shouts went up, the tots pricked up their ears and began to trot forward toward the (now perfectly visible) crowd of us newcomers from America.

Ozma actually rose from her buttercup seat, a way was opened through the throng, and Jimmy and Sarah from Ohio advanced. As the little queen extended both her hands the children ran to her and gave her a bear hug each.

"You're Ozma of Oz!" stated Sarah as the fairy adjusted her ear poppies and tried not to appear thrown off base by the energy of their greeting.

"Wow," marveled Jimmy. "You really exist! Uncle said so, but you weren't in the movie," he accused.

At first the Queen didn't know what he meant but she smiled benevolently as the two youngsters sat down crosslegged among the grass leaves at her feet. "Now we can get acquainted comfortably," she vouchsafed.

"Would you believe it?" she again addressed the crowd. "I quite forgot about size when I wished our young friends to Oz. Traveling via Magic Belt they would of course retain their natural dimensions even here inside the fairyland. The rest of us, moving in a different mode and under the influence of fairy hand contact, would adapt to prevailing norms, so we were all the 'right' size already when we got here.

"We hadn't seen the children's faces but luckily I remembered what outfits they'd been wearing. Knowing who the two giants must be I had no hesitation—in an emergency such as this—in touching the belt and wishing them down to our size... By the way, my dears, you may put aside your air masks here in safely ventilated Oz."

When she had done so the little girl, Sarah, looked up perkily into her hostess' face. "Well, I'm Sarah, Princess Ozma," she stated, "and this is my brother Jimmy." Both children stood up

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again and took a bow, to general acclaim.

“‘Jimmy’,” mused the queen. “That’s a familiar name already here in Oz. In the palace stables lives Jim the Cabhorse. After his first visit here many years ago he came back later to stay with us for good^s.”

Jimmy looked around proudly. He was used to having the same name as a lot of other people (even animals) and regarded it as a little badge of worth. He felt a kinship with anyone else named James, Jim, or Jimmy and was sure he was going to be good friends with the old horse.

Meanwhile he had other plans. “Ozma,” he said, dropping titles and ignoring honorifics, “we want to go visit Jack Pumpkinhead. How about it?”

“Oh,” said Ozma, affecting to be delighted by the charming highhandedness. “I dare say that could be arranged. There’s plenty of time. The ‘gala’ is to be an all-summer festival. Such a trip might do very well as one of the program points. But why Jack in particular?”

“We want to be sure he’s real,” the boy explained. “You see, he wasn’t in the movie either, with the *real* Oz characters. Our uncle’s been reading us some books that are supposed to be about Oz but they’re so different from the movie and we’ve got so we don’t know what to believe. Like: were the magic slippers ruby or silver? Were the Good Witch of the North and Glinda the same person? Does the Cowardly Lion walk standing up on his back legs? That’s what we wanted to come to Oz for: to check out who’s lying.”

That was quite a speech for the little fellow and Ozma was impressed. A rustle of subdued comments passed through the crowd standing or sitting about.

“If it will do any good, I can assure you,” said the fairy queen, “that Jack Pumpkinhead does exist—and still looks very much as he’s pictured in the early history books.”

“That’s not good enough,” said Jimmy forthrightly. “We want to see for ourselves. When can we start?” he demanded.

§ See *Jim the Cabhorse in Oz*. Editor’s note.

“You’re asking me?” marveled the Girl Ruler. “Right away, I dare say.” She didn’t add ‘the sooner, the better’.

So Ozma, Queen of All Oz (including the branch offices at Burzee and Aigues Strimes), led the way in procession to the Royal Palace.

The “Junior Palace”, that is. In the year and more since the miniaturization of Oz the fairyland had been a beehive of busy-ness. In the Emerald City all those idle pebble-tossers in the tent city across the street in the park had been put to work as day laborers in the total new-building, to scale, of the Palace of Magic and its grounds, as well as in the rehousing of the whole population of the capital, now grown too tiny to be able to function in their old dome dwellings any longer.

The royal residence had been reproduced in miniature on the palace lawn at a distance from the windows of the old orangery. To it now led a wonderland of crisscrossing paths and lanes through the old greensward lawn. It had been O.Z. Diggs, the Wizard’s, chief care to do a crash course in botany and plant engineering and thus produce strains of plants and flowers suitably reduced in scale to be of use to the now centimeter-tall inhabitants of the capital. Now in clearings in the grass forests were to be seen many charming glades of emerald lawn with grass-blades so tiny they could not be made out by the naked eye of normal-sized humans (had there been any such there to observe).

It was along one such path that Ozma led the way. In only twenty-five minutes (time units had not shrunk during the general miniaturization) the great concourse of Oz visitors, guided by the dainty princess and her closest advisers, had come up to the terrace before the junior palace.

There a new treat awaited Sarah and Jimmy—well, the rest of us too, but so far we were just spectators at the great pageant. Ranged in a more or less row at the top of the steps ahead stood all the famous Beasts of Oz, headed naturally by the crowned king of them all, the Courageous Lion.

That was the beginning of the ‘re-education’ of the two

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representative American children. The great icon cupboard of American childhood, the film of *The Wizard of Oz*, underwent the first step in its gradual despoliation. The Lion was standing on all fours—and did not speak Brooklynesse!

“How do you do?” said His Lionness when told who Sarah and Jimmy were.

“Hi, Lion!” greeted the two energetically. “Say, we want you to pull the Red Wagon when we go to see Jack Pumpkinhead.”

The Courageous Lion retired gravely backward upon his haunches and prepared to instruct. “Normally, here in Oz, we call each other by our names. Is that not so in America?”

“Sure! I called you ‘Lion’,” reported Jimmy foursquare with hands on hips.

“As I might call you ‘boy’,” returned His Majesty.

“Wait a minute! Aren’t you Mr. Cowardly Lion? So ‘Lion’s your last name.”

“I presume you haven’t kept up with the literature^s,” opined the tawny beast. “It is long since established that my style is ‘Rex the X, Lion King of Beasts’. As for other appellations, the phrase, I believe, is ‘the Courageous Lion of Oz’.”

“Oh, well, pardon *me*,” said Jimmy, nettled. “Never mind. We’ll get the Sawhorse to pull the wagon.” He meant to add something like ‘We wouldn’t want to bother a *king* to do pedal labor’ but he was never very good at formulating sarcasm or irony in sufficiently hard-hitting terms.

“Yes,” chimed in Sarah. “So there! too.” She looked around. “Say, where *is* the Sawhorse?” She wanted to be sure he existed before she hitched him up; he wasn’t in the *Wizard* film either.

The wooden animal was skulking behind the Woozy some distance down the line. He didn’t say anything, but that was par for his course. Instead the gracious Queen of Oz had this to say: “I’m afraid the good Sawhorse is a mite tiny to pull *that*.”

With a suggestion of bright laughter the queen waved her sceptre in the direction of a vast redpainted construction that

§ See “The Cowardly Lion Changes His Name” in *In Other Lands than Oz*. Editor’s note

stood on the (to our witnesses) boulder-sized gravel before the state portals to the Old (large-scale) Palace in the distance.

“That’s where the Red Wagon was standing the time Witch Glinda the Good and I miniaturized the inhabitants of this country,” vouchsafed the ruler. “We left it there as a monument. However, there are plenty of small red wagons in the palace mews. Constructing them has given useful extra occupation to our carpenters and carriage-makers over the past year.”

“Oh, well, good,” commended the two youthful visitors. “That was bright of you. I guess you knew we’d need one if we ever decided to come to Oz.”

The fairy princess went all pink with pleasure at the praise of the winsome tots.

“But now,” went on Sarah, “shall we get on with it?” She’d finally spotted the wooden horse in the line-up of palace animals and she marched to him now and seized his bridle. Jimmy followed close behind.

“Come on then,” directed the girl. “Whadda ya waiting for?”

Sawks was of distinctly fourteen minds about whether he was going to lend himself to an expedition that, as far as he could see, was fairly unauthorized. He strained his neck against Sarah’s clutch on his leathers and looked to the potent potentate of Oz.

From a distance Queen Ozma gave a nod and a little wink. Anything to please a child—and, as a spin-off benefit, to spare the company the presence of these two for a few days.

Jimmy and Sarah dragged the Sawhorse away, although it was he who had to indicate the direction to the stables. When the kids didn’t turn up for dinner we figured they’d made it off on their expedition all right.

C H A P T E R S I X

"Miss Thompson?"

"Yes?"

"Forgive me for butting in but I felt I just had to be there when you meet, at last, Mr. Baum."

"Yes, that's just coming up, isn't it? I'll make a confession: I'm quite nervous!.. But, have *we* met?"

"You and I? Oh, yes, but you might not remember that. It was ages ago: the summer of sixty-seven. Laumer?"

"Low Mare?"

"Yes; that's my name. Bit weird, isn't it?"

"Let's see: The Low Mare of Oz..? No, it doesn't convey much of a picture, does it?"

"Now that you mention it, I'd like to offer that as a book title for you. It was you who introduced horses to Oz! Very rightly too. But it never got properly explained how the race of equines made entry into Oz subsequent to Mr. Baum's writing flatly that there existed *no* horses here. Maybe the story could be told in *The Low Mare of Oz..?*"

"Might be. Let's throw it out as a title and see if anybody'll bat at it! But you mean, of course, no horses in Oz *Except saw-horses.*"

"Yes. That's a bit embarrassing, isn't it? If horses had never

been heard of in this country, how would people know that a wooden prop for sawing boards across vaguely resembled the shape of a horse? and thus be able to give the object that name? What do you think: should we ask Mr. Baum?"

"Oh, I don't think I'd dare. You know, I always thought he just dashed these ideas off the top of his head, without bothering to check what he might have written elsewhere. He might think it awkward if we asked."

"I agree. I wouldn't want to discomfit the grand old gentleman. But, you know—oh, my apologies! of course, you wouldn't—but when I wrote I took it as axiomatic that every statement in the books, at least every one where the author is speaking as author, was true. That's why most of my tales were at least partly concerned with elucidations—which of course also were fact!—which the original authors had merely overlooked including."

"'Authors'? You mean you worked over others than Frank Baum? That kinda sounds like—"

"I do apologize! Well, yes, I did, for instance, spend a whole book making clear how it happened that for a time the Winkie and Munchkin countries got reversed, so the yellow one was in the east—"

"It *is* in the east. It was, every book I wrote anyway."

"Oh, dear Miss Thompson. I wouldn't, for the world, want to say anything to offend you but it states in the first line of Baum's *Magic of Oz*: 'On the east edge of the land of Oz, in the Munchkin Country...' The author's foreword there is dated nineteen-nineteen, which means Mr. B. went to his death believing east was blue, and yellow in the west."

"Don't be alarmed, my dear man. I'm not as tetchy as all that. It's true: the kids did write me now and then asking for explanations about the directions. But I couldn't keep flip-flopping on the orientation so I just let it ride. It's the fault of those idiots at Reilly and Lee—"

"Shh. They're standing just over there."

"Those *darlings* at Reilly and Lee, I meant, of course! Even so, they were numbskulls. Think of sending out a map with

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locations reversed and not saying a word to anybody. I was green in those first days and trying to keep in their good graces, so when I received that mailing of an Oz map and a letter saying 'You will want to consult this when planning your stories,' I thought it was company directive and I just complied. Then I was stuck with it."

"We all understand perfectly. Nevertheless it *was* confusing. And yet after all it was fact. During the twenty years of your authorship the Munchkins *were* in the west. There was only wanting the book that explained how it happened to be so^s."

"I never spent any time in explaining away boobos! I wanted to get on with new material."

"Of course! I was the one who got a kick out of papering over cracks and so I was the one to do it. It all worked out nicely."

"What's that!?" interjected Miss Thompson. "Oh, gracious! It gave me a start. The gong for dinner It's about time! May I take your arm?"

"I would be so honored."

§ See *The Magic Mirror of Oz*. Editor's note.

C H A P T E R S E V E N

The children arrived at Jack Pumpkinhead's pumpkin patch. Like Oz royalty, who are always found sitting on their thrones, Jack was always discovered doing something pumpkinly: hoeing among the plants or picking them or carving one into a jack-o' lantern. He was doing the latter as Jimmy and Sarah drove up. He grinned his wide Hallowe'en-head smile.

Sarah turned to look at Jimmy at the reins. "He exists all right," she constated.

"Yeah. I guess the books are right after all. That's three already we've confirmed that weren't in the movie."

"Oh, more. I noticed the Hungry Tiger and the Woozy and Hank the Mule in the line-up at Ozma's."

"Howdy, folks," inserted Jack and greeted the children warmly. To keep up a flow of welcoming small talk he went on: "You're in the yellow country of the Winkies in the western part of Oz."

"We know that," said Sarah. Then, looking aside to her brother again: "Well, come on. Might as well get on with it."

The two jumped off the red wagon, advanced to the gawky wooden figure that had risen to its feet, and joined hands to dance around the quaint celebrity. "The marvelous land of Oz!" they cried. "Our favorite fairyland!"

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Jack was touched and a couple of big pumpkin-juice tears rolled down his cheeks. The kids could be real charmers when they wanted to. Abruptly they stopped their joyful demonstration.

“Well..?” Sarah addressed the odd fellow. Jack’s jack-o’ lantern smile went rigid. “‘Well’?” “Well, aren’t you going to invite us to your pumpkin house to serve us pumpkin pie and Oz-cream?”

“Oh—*er*, yes, sure, of course. Right this way.” The amiable larrikin turned and led the way across the rutted pumpkin field toward the round orange house in the lane that skirted his farm.

The house was a normal-sized pumpkin of the sort that grew in Oz before the ‘smallification’. Nowadays of course Jack grew only the Wizard’s new strain of mini-vegetables. And the lane wherenext the pumpkin house was situated? It was as wide now in proportion to Oz residents as a football field.

Behind his host’s back Jimmy bent and deftly palmed the sharp kitchen knife Jack had been using to carve the pumpkin. Sarah aimed a swift kick at the half-finished jack-o’-lantern, which split and splattered (it was rather on the ripe side) satisfyingly. Having performed their tricks the children followed along for their treat.

Jack continued to make conversation as they went. “What brings me the pleasure o’ your visit?” he asked courteously.

Sarah was the better at quick extempore responses. “Princess Ozma, the Fairy Ruler of Oz, sent us to collect some pumpkins,” she fibbed easily. “She wants them to decorate her palace—for Hallowe’en.”

Jack did a double-take. “Hallowe’en?! But this is June.” To reassure himself of the truth of his statement he looked about him for some proof. His eye lit on a puff-headed white dandelion and his foot sent its spills flying. “See? it’s dandelion first-seeding time. Early June.”

“My sister got it wrong,” Jimmy jumped into the breach. “The princess wants ‘em for the big gala festival she’s holding. I suppose you’re going to that.”

“Oh, yes, I wouldn’t miss it. The hundredth anniversary of Princess Dorothy’s arrival! But I won’t be going to the Emerald City for a few weeks yet.”

“Oh, yes, you will!” cried the visitors gaily. “We want you to show us the way to the Scarecrow’s house. We’re going on there from here—before we head back.”

Jack grinned foolishly in acquiescence. It was nice to be wanted. And he could show the way as well as anybody, unless it be the Sawhorse, who was now following along taciturnly, dragging the little red wagon among the pumpkin hillocks.

Inside his fascinating maxi-pumpkin residence Jack headed for the freezer while the children looked around the orange-lit room. They also smelt around. Cut off the top of a big pumpkin and stick your head inside. That’s the way it smelt inside Jack’s house, only in spades. It was like sea-water in that it was unexpected, faintly distasteful, and yet after all likable.

Jack unwrapped a pre-baked pumpkin pie and slapped it in the microwave. “I’ll put it on medium—low,” he announced. “That way it’ll just be piping hot when we get back from the field. Come on.”

Naturally the children didn’t much like being told what to do and they hung back. But after all, they presently reflected, collecting some pumpkins was their own and only ostensible reason for being here, so they slowly followed outdoors and stood around while Jack deftly tweaked from their fleshy stems a dozen or so of the roundest and orangest of the melons. The kids even helped to load the sturdy fruits in the back of the wagon.

The pie was perfect. Sarah and Jimmy tucked into it with a will. The ginger-custard ice cream on top made it doubly tempting and before they knew what they were doing they had eaten the entire pie. “Oh, I feel sick!” complained Sarah.

“What the luck did we go and eat the whole thing for!” rued Jimmy. He went to be sick down the outside steps, but nothing came of it. He’d just have to live with his cholesterol.

Jack took the disappearance of the pie as an expression of

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appreciation and discounted the complaints. "Well, guys," he said, when the plates had been piled in the sink and forgotten, "may I invite you along for a ride to the Scarecrow's farm?"

Jimmy eyed him quizzically. "What do you mean? *We* invited *you*."

"That's right. So you did." Jack took the rebuff in good part. "Maybe what I meant is: shall we be starting?"

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

This was it. Queen Ozma had taken her seat and she turned to the Royal Historian of Oz on her right and gestured further along the table on that side. "Sir," she said, "may I have the pleasure of introducing Miss Ruth Plumly Thompson?"

The Historian beamed genially. "Ruth who?" There was a brief awkward silence until the Oz queen said smoothly, "The lady who kept up the chronicles of our land after you laid down your pen."

Mr. Baum extended a nicotine-stained hand. "Delighted, I'm sure! Of course: the histories are all here, in the Royal Library. But when one has been a witness to events in the flesh one tends not to consult accounts of them at second hand. But certainly the name was mentioned to me—though admittedly never in life."

"That was my greatest regret, Mr. Baum," said Miss Thompson, "that I never had the experience of knowing you. Had I, perhaps I could have done a better job of carrying on in your tradition. As it is, I have a long overdue apology to make to you: for blaming *The Royal Book of Oz* on you."

"Ah, yes, the... er, *Royal Book*. Yes. I remember. No apologies in order! A sprightly tale—I remember it well—and a very good title, by the way. I must make a little acknowledgement myself:

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I always—though practice doesn't seem to have borne this out—had a liking for titles that were not just 'This-Person-or-That of Oz' · That way, I liked best of my own titles *The Road to Oz* and *The Magic of Oz*. *The Royal Book* somehow fits that tradition."

"Why, thank you. But I've got further apologies up my sleeve. I have just been admitting to our friend here that it was *lése-littérature* to switch the Munchkin and Winkie countries around. I hope you weren't too put out."

"Oh, those were exciting times," reminisced the first royal historian. "I took part myself in the councils of state whenever we'd be reminded of the directions switch. But just the same I'll admit I was glad when they finally settled down again in the old orientation."

"You're most kind, Mr. Baum," said Miss T. with a charming abashed smile, "but let me get this confessional over with while I'm at it. I did something awful—"

Everybody stared. Even officer Omby Amby who was serving as wine steward on this special occasion paused in refilling the Queen's glass with glowing Chateau Emeraude.

Miss Thompson knew how to pause for dramatic effect.

"That was *lése-littérature*, if you like, or *lése-auteurité*, or whatever you'd call it. Certainly if there's one thing you ought to do for an author it's to let his fictionally surviving characters go on living—if you have any say in the matter. I'd been handed your characters on a platter, and what did I do? In my very fifth book about the Oz fairyland I killed off your leading villain—villainess, rather. I'm not even going to attempt the effrontery of asking forgiveness for that. But I do want it on record, where you can hear it!, that I regret it. If I had it to do over, I wouldn't."

"Sportsmanly spoken," said Frank Baum with a round gesture. "We need not refer to the incident again." However, I noticed he did not go so far as to say he didn't mind Mombi's being destroyed.

Meanwhile the little Girl Ruler at the head of the table had grown pale. It was all very well for the chroniclers to sit here and pretend that they had any choices to make in what they

recorded, but *she* must bear responsibility for having actually authorized the execution of her foster mother. ‘Rats!’ she said, strictly to herself, in a seldom-used expletive, and looked solemn. More of her mis-mood she wouldn’t let her celebrating subjects see. But her evening was ruined.

Nothing guessing, her guests chattered on. “Mr. Baum,” Miss Thompson remarked, “if I do say so I think we complemented each other very well as authors of Oz. Whereas you, a man, populated the fairyland almost exclusively with girls, I, a woman, righted the balance by bringing a number of boy and men protagonists to Oz. I’ve always wanted to be reassured: I hope you approved...?”

“By all means, my dear. I always intended that the fairy country should be appealing to both girls and boys. But I’ll let you in on a little secret: I’m afraid I did come to think of myself as writing mostly to (and hence, about) girls, for ninety per cent of my letters came from little girls.”

“Oh, interesting!” exclaimed the later author. “Now I didn’t notice anything like that. My fan mail seemed to come about fifty-fifty from both sexes.”

“I know of at least one male who wrote you,” I ventured to insert roguishly, and received the stare and uncertain smile I merited. Nothing daunted I forged on. “Miss Thompson,” I gushed, “the one time I had the pleasure of meeting you I asked which of your own books you liked least—”

“What did I say?” put in the writer.

“Oh—er, *Lost King*: you know, where Mombi—er—” (‘I wish he’d stop talking about that!’ exclaimed Princess Ozma to herself. ‘There!—he’s reminded me again.’) “Of course I ought to have asked which was your favorite!”

“*Kabumpo in Oz*,” the historian shot right back. “Oh, yes, I think I can say without any hesitation the Elegant Elephant was one of my best inventions.” (Good heavens, the way these people kept talking as if they’d made the whole thing up.)

There was a little chorus of approval from the diners sitting nearest and someone said, “Oh, yes! He’s clearly one of the most

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distinctive characters in the whole Oz pantheon." (I hope it wasn't me because whoever it was was looking now at Mr. Baum as if he expected him to be not best pleased.)

To clear the air I hastily inserted: "You know, I always regretted that book wasn't called '*The Elegant Elephant of Oz*'. Somehow I always like more the titles as '*The Something-de-Something of Oz*' rather than just somebody's name." I seemed to be echoing Mr. Baum's dictum. "Made-up names are a dime a dozen."

"I charged more than that for mine," said Miss T. waggishly.

Thus encouraged I pursued: "But I have to confess I didn't like the title you chose there for the further reason that it ought properly to have been *Kabumpo of Oz*. Mr. Baum, what was your policy as to prepositions in your book titles?" I queried, and go ready to soak up wisdom at the feet of the master.

"Let me see," said the sage and put down a fork weighted with roast beef (steak tomato!). "'Prepositions in titles'? Do you mean like '*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*'?"

"Yes, exactly! If you'll forgive my impertinence, I assessed that title this way: Mr. Diggs here" (I nodded to the amiable Wizard seated across the table) "though not originally a resident of Oz, was, however, only a wizard *in* Oz. He was the Land of Oz's Wizard, hence '*The Wizard of Oz*'. Is my reasoning just?"

"Well, yes. I think that's quite fairly expressed," conceded the Original Historian. "Normally my policy was: 'of' if the eponymous individual was by birth an Oz denizen, hence '*Ozma of Oz*', but 'in' if the person of the title was only a visitor, or immigrant, as in '*Dorothy and the Wizard in Oz*', even though here it was that same original Wizard 'of'."

"Just so," I pushed on, encouraged, "and almost consequentially throughout your series: '*The Patchwork Girl*', '*Scarecrow*', '*Tin Woodman*', and '*Glinda of Oz*', whereas '*Rinkitink in Oz*'."

"Just so," Mr. Baum echoed my phrase and looked well content.

"But then," my voice went grave — on several scores; mournfully it continued: " — there's *Tik-Tok of Oz*..."

"And then?" queried Mr. Baum, looking surprised.

"Well, but Tik-Tok wasn't an Ozite originally. He came from Ev. I would have thought 'Tik-Tok *in* Oz'."

The author looked discomfited but Miss Thompson said gaily: "Oh, I never bothered with that! I wrote whatever sounded good: 'Kabumpo in Oz', 'Ojo in Oz', but 'The Gnome King of Oz'."

Ozma put in a word: "Ruggedo was certainly not ever a king of any part of Oz, however much he may have fancied himself so," she stated primly.

"I think you do yourself an injustice," I commended to Miss Thompson. "The larger part of your prepositions were after all the logical ones. Well, probably Grampa and the Wishing Horse ought to have swapped prepositions. The man was a native Ozite but the horse was not."

"You're right, no doubt—logically. But..." the authoress let her utterance trail away.

Suddenly I remembered something that I'd been shocked by all those years before in Philadelphia. The talk had come round to the use of logic in writing. I'd maintained that it had to be maintained carefully, no matter how frivolous the composition.

"Oh, pooh," Miss Thompson had dismissed, "children care nothing about logic."

Yes, I was shocked. Besides seeming to denigrate the character of children in one undifferentiated lump, the statement simply wasn't true. Not if "logic" meant, as I thought, an insistence on a consequential following-through of principles once established.

"Children are *very* logical," I'd protested, and gave the first example that came to mind: "I remember a little boy, child of a friend who was visiting, and he just learning to talk. He came in from playing and announced, 'I goed out and I comed back'."

But I didn't want to drag up old disagreements. Instead I deflected the conversation back to Mr. Baum and said, "Speaking of logic, sir, I hope you won't be distressed if I relate that one scene in your books never pleased me."

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The Historian turned kindly to accept the further bombard. "Which was that?"

"The one at the end of *Road to Oz* where the characters are all sent home inside big soap bubbles."

The author looked disappointed. "I thought it seemed a rather charming and magical concept."

"Oh, indeed: pretty and graceful. But not logical. After all, it's stated they were 'soap' bubbles, not made of steel or aluminum or even reinforced rubber. If we were to believe they were made of blown soapsuds we would also have to believe they could never lift weights of up to more than a hundred pounds, or if they tried, that they would instantly burst, as soap bubbles do. No, much as I would have liked to, I just couldn't accord belief in that scene, and it spoiled the end of the book for me."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Baum. But it was ninety years too late to do anything about it now.

C H A P T E R N I N E

Jack Pumpkinhead sang a funny little song to help pass the time as the Sawhorse trotted merrily down the yellow brick road. Jimmy and Sarah quickly learned it and sang along.

Then Sarah grew bored. "Oh, put a sock in it, do," she sighed. "Yeah, knock it off, Jack," seconded Jimmy solidarily.

"I've been meaning to ask," went on Sarah, leaning over the side of the wagon. "Why are these bricks that queer color? That's not the way they were in the movie." The children had, of course clued Jack P. in as to their taking the classic Hollywood film as their bible and standard for how everything should be in Oz.

"Yeah," said Jimmy. "In the movie they were bright yellow, like butter—or egg yolks, or something."

"Gold?" suggested his sister.

"No, gold's gold-color, of course. Anyway, if Judy had seen they were gold she'd have dug up a couple and paid her own way home instead of all that bother about going to see a wizard."

"I guess that's right," acquiesced Sarah. "Just the same, these bricks are a very funny color. Sort of a greyish white, not a real yellow."

"They're the color yellow bricks *are*," protested Jack Pumpkinhead rather proprietorially. "Professor Wogglebug once

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told me that at the time Mr. Baum was writing his histories yellow bricks were used a lot for pavements and in building factories and churches and tenement houses. These are the color 'yellow bricks' *are*," he repeated.

"I don't like it," summed up Sarah. "When we get back to the Emerald City we'll get Ozma to change it."

Jimmy's interest had been deflected by Jack's mention of the Professor.

"He's another one," he announced. "Sarah, we'd better check out whether he exists either."

"Okay. Where does that wogglebug hang out, Jack?" said the girl. "Or is supposed to? We won't know for sure 'til we see it with our own eyes." However, the monotonous regularity with which things and people not shown in the M.G.M. film were proving to be real in the real Oz was wearing down the tots' scepticism. "After that we can go back and stay with Ozma again."

Even with relative distances so much greater in minimized Oz it was not long before the swiftly propelled red wagon reached the tower of the Scarecrow.

It was shaped exactly like a giant ear of Indian corn! And there was the right shade of yellow, if you like! Every rounded wooden panel that made up one of the 'kernels' of corn in the building's siding was painted a shiny buttercup hue. A clump of tall swaying wires of brownish-green ozynium on top suggested corn tassels.

A treat was in store: when the sound of wagon wheels over bricks had been heard within *two* heads looked out the front door of the Scarecrow's dwelling.

It was the resident straw man and a man made of tin (actually, tin-plated steel—but never mind). Yes, the Tin Woodman just happened to be paying a visit to his great friend of a century's standing. All Oz was titillated by its being the centenary and people's thoughts went back nostalgically to the old times and awoke desires to re-meet.

As the carriage rolled to a stop the two men threw back the

house door and came down the steps doing a soft-shoe number. For just a second the kiddies could almost believe it was Ray and Jack. But then the Scarecrow fell down and rolled the rest of the way. He'd always been much too wobbly on his pins to manage anything like a dance step.

"Oh, nuts!" exclaimed the children gaily. "They don't look the least bit like Mr. Bolger and Mr. Haley!"

"Or even like Montgomery and Stone," added Jimmy, who had spent some time studying the endpapers of his uncle's early edition of *The Marvelous Land of Oz*.

"No," admitted Jack Pumpkinhead ruefully as he wound the reins around the whiffletree. "They just look like themselves."

Jimmy and Sarah ran and hugged the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman. That was the habit at home, now that the stiff and formal shaking of hands had become old-fashioned. Nowadays you hugged everybody, even the mailman or the guy coming to read the electric meter. It didn't mean anything.

However, in this case the two got a shock. The straw man was much too soft to be hugged. He squeezed all out of shape and fell down again. When the group had hauled him to his feet and poked him more or less into shape, the tots turned and hugged the tin(-steel) man. But he was much too hard to be hugged.

Sarah in her embraciatory enthusiasm got a bruised elbow and a scraped knee. She started to cry. But that was just what the doctor ordered. Nothing touched the soft heart of the Tin Woodman like a creature in distress. That heart went out to the weeping child, who at once became a firm and lasting favorite of his. With the very wariest of hands extended he drew her into the Scarecrow's house and went to find arnica, mercurochrome, and bandages.

Jimmy took more to the Scarecrow. Perhaps it was the attraction of man to man. Somehow there had always been a subtle but general and pervasive feeling that the Scarecrow was more macho than the Tin Woodman. Was it because of the touted hardness of the straw man's head, i.e., his sturdy intelligence,

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that contrasted with the famous softness of Nick Chopper's heart?

Already well immersed in meaningful conversation the two fellows followed along after the 'rescue' party into the house, leaving Jack Pumpkinhead to see to the wellbeing of the Sawhorse and the pumpklins for the period that they might have to wait outdoors.

The patient was comforted with lemonade and butter cookies. Wasn't it thoughtful of the two bachelors, who themselves could eat nothing, to have on hand a supply of such comestibles? and fresh too. Though still reasonably full of pumpkin pie Jimmy joined his sister with gusto in tucking into the goodies.

While they ate the children made up a reason for having come to the Scarecrow's house. It was out of curiosity, of course, to see the famous Ozite, but they didn't care to express such flattering interest as that. Instead—and not quite originally; it was the same excuse they'd used at Jack's—they blamed it all on Ozma. "She wants some ears of corn for decorations," they fibbed again. This time they didn't bother to pretend it was for Hallowe'en.

"Right!" said the Scarecrow. "I just happen to have some stalks with ripe ears."

"Yeah, we noticed," asserted Jimmy. "That's why we asked."

The fields surrounding the Scarecrow's corn-ear dwelling were a-rustle with maize stalks in all stages of maturity. Even the two Ohioans, who didn't pay all that much attention to the displays of nature, knew that normally fruits all ripen at about the same time. But Oz was like Florida, where one may see ripe oranges hanging on trees that also gaily sport fresh blossoms.

The Scarecrow fetched a couple of bushel baskets and the party went outdoors, where a good time was had by all in twisting from the towering cornstalks a harvest of fine cobs. When the load had been deposited among the pumpkins in the back of the red wagon, Jimmy looked judiciously at the sky and said, "Well, I guess we'll be on our way."

"Don't be silly, James," (Sarah sometimes called her brother

that when in a corrective mood), “it’s getting dark. We’ll stay here.”

Thus informed of his role as lodging supplier the Scarecrow fell in genially with a “Right-o. It’s time my bedrooms got a workout.” He pointed aloft at the five further stories of the house above the ground-level apartments. “Those are all bedrooms—and I’ve never yet filled ‘em all up.”

“We’ll have to see about that,” offered the helpful Jimmy. “Maybe we’ll give a house party for you” —by which of course he did not mean ‘We’ll invite you to a party’ but rather ‘We’ll announce a party for you to play host to’. Sarah started planning the guest list.

As it happened it was as well that the travelers stayed over. In making conversation with his guests the Scarecrow happened to ask how they came to be in Oz.

“We wished on a magic dandelion!” boasted Jimmy. “In Ohio?” The thoughtful Scarecrow looked puzzled.

“Sure, Ohio. Why not?” Jimmy flared up. “Why shouldn’t there be magic dandelions in Ohio?”

“It’s not a case of whether they ‘should’ or not,” explained the Scarecrow mildly. “I just never heard that there *were* magic flowers there. When one knows that a condition has never been heard of one tends to think it *could* not be heard of. I’m just surprised, that’s all.”

“It is a little bit queer, Jimmy,” admitted Sarah. “We’ve wished on dandelions hundreds of times before and it never came true. Why did it this time?”

“That’s what I wondered,” resumed the Scarecrow. His burlap brow wrinkled in thought. “It must have been a magic dandelion, sure enough. But how did a magic flower come to be growing in the great outside world?”

“How does *anything* come to be growing out there?” put in Nick Chopper caustically. He remembered only too well how corrosive polluted air had devastated even metal in the dicey days before Oz had been roofed over.[§]

§ See *The Ten Woodmen of Oz*. Editor’s note.

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“Resistant strains will of course have developed,” reminded the Scarecrow and then lectured for twenty minutes on biology, botany, and the survival of the fittest, most adaptable, individuals.

“Just the same,” he then resumed, “I don’t see how a wish-granting dandelion type could have occurred in Ohio,” and a little later he said, “I’d like to consult the learned Professor Wogglebug about this.”

Jimmy looked at Sarah and they both shrugged their shoulders. Finally, “Come on along then,” said Jimmy. “I guess we can cram you in the wagon somewhere.”

“What about you, Nick?” asked Sarah. It almost sounded like she might be encouraging him to join the party.

Thus urged of course the amiable Tin Woodman gave his assent. The group adjourned for the night, quite looking forward to what the morrow might bring.

C H A P T E R T E N

After the thrills of the grand dinner party on the night of our arrival we outer-world visitors spent the next day resting up. But the invigorating air of Oz didn't foster lassitude or idleness. We wanted to be doing things. It seemed that our stay in the fairy capital was to be open-ended, I had no idea what my hostesses had in mind for me but my own nature had always been such that I couldn't just drift, waiting to see what might happen.

When, therefore, the third day dawned and, after my breakfast in bed, nobody appeared to tell me what the day's program was I made one for myself. I stood at my open window looking down on the crowds that milled about the palace and especially at the vast looming green marble walls of the 'once—and future?' capitol of Oz that towered a hundred (old-style) yards away.

Even though it remained vastly out of proportion to all mobile life in Oz today, that huge barn was the one and original Palace of Magic. I wanted most earnestly to see it, to observe whether my imaginings of all the years matched the reality. I knew that it was kept unchanged. In the course of talk it had come out that nothing in the great palace had been altered since that day, a year and a half before, when master-magic had made

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everyone alive in Oz miuscule.

“Alive,” I say, for the first thing of all I wanted to see at the old premises was a huge copper statue that stood in the central hall. It was a famous celebrity of Oz from the very early days but one who had been ‘left behind’ when all the living breathing world had been minified, for this was Tik-Tok, the Clockwork Man, who “thought, spoke, acted, and did everything but live”.

Now he stood where he had stood when his works ran down after the great transformation.

When Queen Ozma of Oz in collaboration with the all-powerful Sorceress of the South had effected the vast change she intended it as a one-time-only stroke. She knew that she had far overreached her prerogative when she thus high-handedly, without consulting anyone, reduced all mobile life in her kingdom to one hundredth of its size. She would dabble no more in magic. “Now my charms are all o’erthrown,” she quoted; actually that wasn’t strictly true, but she knew what she meant. “And what strength I have’s my own—which is most faint.”

In fact she still had the Magic Belt, also phenomenally reduced in dimensions (though not in power) through having been worn by her at the moment of the enchantment. Ozma also had her magic wand, though this was an instrument she somehow rarely invoked. But she would not use these tools for chopping and changing in the one broad area of size manipulation now she had made her master stroke.

Therefore she knew her first pang of chagrin at what she had done when she, grown infinitesimal, together with tiny Glinda ventured out from under the rococo chair in the library and the two made their way minutely to other chambers of the palace. The first that there did greet their stranger souls was the huge looming copper form of the mechanical man stalking flat-footed along the marble corridor.

“Prin-cess Oz-ma!” he called. “Dor-thy! Wi-zard! Where is ev-ry-bo-dy?”

Ozma screamed a greeting but the clank of his own metal feet drowned out the sound for the copper man. Only when

Glinda joined the chorus, and also blew on her wizard-whistle, was the sound loud enough to attract the attention of the old favorite.

He looked around, then down. He had to be sharp-eyed to see the couple, infinitesimal as they were, but he was.

Carefully he angled himself down on his knees and inclined his spherical body. Luckily his copper derby was well screwed to his copper head so it did not fall off and annihilate the two minute women as Tik-Tok's head loomed over them.

Ozma knew the deliberately thinking man would not instantly comprehend who she was or what had happened, so her first words were "Tik-Tok! This is your Queen—Ozma! There has been a great change. You won't any longer find any of your friends. I'm sorry! But don't be sad. Above all, don't go outdoors!"

"There," she went on in more normal tones to Glinda. "I forgot. We might have included him, by a special clause, in the spell. It's too late now. No use in explaining the whole arrangement to him and just making him unhappy. He'll merely be puzzled—until he runs down. But I wanted to be sure *that* didn't happen outside, where he'd stand and corrode in the elements."

"I see," assented Glinda. "I suppose we *might* manage somehow to keep him wound up—by magic means."

"I don't want to cut corners: start hedging on the one bold magic stroke," returned Ozma earnestly. "Solving by natural means the problems that our creation of more space has brought will be our business now. Tik-Tok won't die!, having never been alive, but what's the sense of having him roaming about the region now, all alone? and probably, all unknowing, trampling people under foot..."

So they let him go and eventually, in the great entrance hall of the Palace of Magic, he came to a stop forever—or until further notice.

There was where I found him now, when I joined one of the guided tours that left every hour to make the circuit of the palace rooms.

How fabulous to stand at the feet of the great copper colos-

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sus. I came almost up to the level of the top of the sole of his spatted shoe. I reached and touched it: this shoe sole that had rested down a well in Ev for weeks until Miss Betsy Bobbin had hauled him back to the light of day.

By the way, that was something I'd want to bring up with the Royal Historian when next we met: how it was that, whereas the competently tin-plated Woodman could be counted on to rust solid even when sprinkled with a few tears, no one ever referred to any danger that the equally metal man from the workshops of Smith and Tinker might undergo if exposed to the elements. If tin-plate steel will rust, copper will go powder-green with verdigris after a reasonable time in the rain, or even down a dry well.

Still, wise Ozma had seen to it that Tik-Tok wasn't in the rain now. I stared upward at his round old-fashioned face. No one in the westernized world since the death of Hercules Poirot wore that kind of curly moustache. And the middle-parted hair. Well, of course no one nowadays combed his hair, let alone parted it, but if he did it wouldn't be in the middle.

But the tour party was moving on and I trotted to catch up. We plodded through state apartment after state apartment. Obviously it was fascinating to see Ozma's ancient throne and the Hall of the Magic Picture. There they allowed a few of the tour party to direct the painting to show desired scenes, but these turned out to be mostly the whereabouts of relatives not present with the tourists and the greater part were in the outside world, where of course little could be distinguished through the eddying clouds of smog.

More than a few of us were getting cricks in our necks from heads strained to look up at eighty-to-ninety-degree angles the whole time. We began to wish the tour were over with but we had been at it for only one and a half hours so far. There was still half the palace to navigate and that on the ground floor only. Hopeless to think, for instance, of scaling the winding stairway to the Wizard's tower.

The great doors in the Palace remained as they had stood at

the moment of Ozma's transformation. This meant that most were neatly closed but of course that was no impediment to our entering the chambers. The doors were not close-fitted to sills and at one and a half centimeters tall we could all comfortably get under them. We duly entered each room we came to.

All but one.

From under a door down a hall leading to the palace gardens came a curious smell, and not a pleasant one. But the guide hurried us past that door and without an explanation. My curiosity was piqued. I thought I knew, by report, every room in the palace, at least all those on the ground level. But which was this?

Not a large room, because the next door, which was duly entered, was not far along. But I didn't follow the rest. I was tiring and felt I wouldn't, in any case, complete the tour. I fell behind, then outright turned back. I wanted to have a look.

Holding my nose against the really quite offensive smell I crawled under the mysterious door and into a a small (but still, to me at my size, spacious) cubicle. It had the look of a general utility room, part office, part tool shed. And yet, being situated in a royal palace, it had appointments of some amenity: a carpet on the floor, some chairs against the wall, a small table, curtains (though of hessian) at the windows. Or was it a detention cell? The two not large windows were barred.

As for the bad smell, its source was not quite obvious. It seemed to infect the room generally but was perhaps concentrated slightly more in the surprisingly worn-looking old rug than elsewhere. What *was* that haunting fragrance? Dust, for one thing, and dirty dust too, if you take my meaning. Then was there not a faint admixture of preservative: formaldehyde or chloroform or something? But overriding those stinks was, I'm sorry to say, a distinct aroma of corpse.

How had Princess Ozma come to let any such thing persist in the royal palace? No wonder the room was closed to tourists. I couldn't fault that prohibition.

Slowly I turned and made my way out of room and vast

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palace, deep in thought. That night at dinner, sitting between the Wizard and Marye Griffith, I brought up the topic.

"I did the guided tour of the Old Palace today," I informed my neighbors. "*Most* interesting. But there is one detail I thought I'd better bring to your attention, Mr. Diggs." I lowered my voice. "One of the apartments not open to the public needs airing rather badly, I think."

"Oh?" said the genial Wizard. "Which was that?"

"A name for the—er, chamber wasn't mentioned but it is..." I gave an orientation for the room in relation to the Throne Room.

"Oh," repeated my interlocutor in a falling tone. He appeared embarrassed, then, "Yes, I'm sure you're right. I—that is—well, don't be concerned; the matter will be looked into. Something will be done."

It was clear the topic was one best not discussed at the royal dinner table. I let it drop.

But a day or two later I joined another party going through the Old Palace. With great interest I waited to see what had been done about what I was coming to think of as "the Stinky Room".

Already when I sensed the odor several inches (like yards, to me) from the doorsill of the mysterious room I divined the worst. A glance confirmed it. Nothing had been done.