CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

The Ohio siblings' translation to Oz had been instantaneous.

One moment they were standing in a sooty field near Sandusky, the next they were sprawling on the lush green lawn surrounding a palace in the pristine Emerald City. Afterwards they traveled in a red wagon drawn by the Saw-horse or floated on a ferry raft along Oz waterways. Now was the first time they were covering ground in a 'realizable' magic way.

It was so simple. Later they would think, 'Why, I can do that!' But they couldn't. It took the magic touch of a green fairy, helped (at least not hindered) by a little bluish pixy, to lift the earth-bound-tending mortal children and waft them through the air.

It also took a little time—at the tiny size they still maintained. They started at a reasonable hour of the morning but it was latish afternoon before, floating along like thistledown—or dandelion spills—, they found themselves flying over the varicolored patch-work fields of a cotton kingdom.

Then "Look!" cried gold-green Floraline and pointed out two gilded roofs, a great and a small, rising from among garment gardens, a neglected and a well-tended. "I'll bet you that's the royal palace of Patch."

So it proved. And it appeared that the aeronauts had arrived at a crucial moment. Something was going on in the green and

pink front garden of the smaller palace, something involving what looked like a pink and green tornado. "What in the world..!?" yelped the flyers and stood still in air to watch.

A cloud of dust was swirling furiously—but not getting anywhere. Unlike real or full-scale tornadoes this one just whirled in one spot, viz., over the center of the green/pink garden, while all around the perimeter of the plot little people—and one great big copper man—shrank back aghast. The wind howled. Contrary to usual wind behavior it howled *words*.

"Ow-w-w!" moaned the wind. "Ay-ay-ay-y!" shrieked the wind. "Oh, my aching back!" shrilled the wind.

"That's no usual wind," diagnosed Floraline right away.

"No, and that's no usual garden either," assessed sharp-eyed Dementia, gazing down. "It looks to me more like a big carpet spread out there."

"You know, I think you're right," said Floraline. "I wonder what's going on."

"Let's go down and see!" demanded Jimmy. At first the children had been a bit nervous about the whirlwind, pint-sized though it was, but now, reflecting that nothing bad could happen to them in a fairy tale, plucky Jimmy was all for getting involved.

"Yeah!" seconded Sarah. "I can see Dorothy down there. Let's go!"

Even as the airborne group cautiously descended, the little tornado, duly operating on a centripetal principle, was growing progressively narrower, hovering over the center of the great pink and green rug.

"Why, look at that!" said Dementia, awed. "It's taking on an outline of something... What..?"

"A whale!" shouted Jimmy.

"No, an elephant!" constated Sarah.

"No, it's not. It's a giraffe."

"No, it's more like a giant person!"

"Not so giant. See there? A big man, but not all *that* big."

"No, a little old woman!"

It was so. All the dust (every atom of it) that had swirled up out of the musty moldy old carpet (leaving it gleaming in its pristine if threadbare colors) had by now coalesced into a nearly solid-appearing shape of a little (at least, in comparison to the size of Tik-Tok) crone in an old-fashioned Mother Hubbard gown, who danced and cavorted on the rug, uttering shrieks and groans of a character nobody could make out.

"Who dares to stick a pin in me?!" it raged at one moment, but, "Whee! I'm alive again!" it chortled at the next. "Curses!" it cried. "I'll be revenged!" Then, "No, I won't! I'll give somebody a hug for setting me free!" the figure jubilated.

The crowd of miniature figures around the edges of the carpet had recovered from their first terror at the violent apparition in their midst and, drawing tentatively nearer, all of us were looking at each other with amazed and querying glances and wondering what it all meant.

At least two people knew. The Wizard of Oz, of our land-based party, and fairy Floraline of the just now alighting airborne group exchanged looks with a common question in their eyes. Those two, if anyone, could not fail to recognize the apparition.

"It's Mombi!" they gasped as one.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

Garth, the tin man, was standing on his (well covered) back porch gazing out into the storm. He felt invigorated by the violent show. Nay, more, he felt drawn to it, an impulse he had to admit was foolhardy for a metal man to be feeling. Step out into *that* and in five minutes he would have ground to a halt that would be permanent—unless somebody came along to find him and give him a lubrication job.

He was tempted, even so. There was something so fascinating, so alluring, about the tons of water smashing down. Dare he just run out into it for a second? oh, no more) and then back under his porch roof while the first momentum still lasted? Just to see what it felt like?

The mad yen was so far irresistible that he did at any rate stick out a hand from under the shelter of the roof. Splash! dash! In an instant the hand was dripping and he drew it back in.

A violent glare of lightning lit the scene and sent blue and green reflexes sparkling from the wet hand. Rain that gleamed in colors? That was strange. In fact, unique. As the thunder roared to deafen him he stared at his hand.

Curiously he rubbed thumb and forefinger together. It felt strangely slick. He snapped his fingers and a blue spark jumped. Instantaneously a bright ripple of elf-fire ran over his hand and

was gone. How queer!

In the half-light from the kitchen doorway he peered at his hand. It felt hot! and it looked *dry*, where only a moment before it had been dripping wet.

Garth moved to the top step and thrust his arm again out into the elements. This time when he pulled back the hand he put a finger to his lips and extruded his tongue for a taste.

A 'taste'? A metal man? Would a person constructed never to be able to eat even have a tongue? Why, yes, to talk with. And if the tongue couldn't taste it could feel. It would be a metal man's most sensitive organ for distinguishing the enemy water from, for example: oil!

There was no mistaking the way his tongue slid over his tin plate. It was raining oil! It was not merely raining, it was thundering down oil. Without an instant's more thought Garth took a nose-dive out into the oleaginous 'element'. What could be more heavenly for a tin/steel man than to be bathed in the one substance of all on earth that could benefit, could virtually *nourish*, him? It was like for one of us to be able to plunge into a sea of raspberry crème or rich soup.

It was indeed very like a sea. It was raining so hard that Garth's back yard was ankle-deep already and the place was in a fair way to becoming an oil pond. He waded around at a joyous prance, snatches of impromptu odes spilling from his lips, and when he reached the picket fence he lifted high his arms and prayed to the unknown witch whose storm this was.

"Mother storm goddess!" he cried. "I know you're there! Come down to me in tangible form! I mean, in a shape I can talk to. I want to thank you for this benison!"

Actually he was not expecting any reply. It was just a joyous vocalizing of the delight he felt. Garth was a little disappointed when the storm suddenly slackened. It was as if the oil ceased to fall with such violence but also as if what fell fell more thickly. In only moments it was of the density of an oil lake standing on end in Garth's back garden. The lightning had stopped but there was still a mutter of thunder reverberating.

A mutter? No, distinct utterance of discrete sounds, actual phonemes. It sounded like: “So..? Well..! Liked that... did you?” Since when did oilbursts talk?

Garth retreated in fright under his porch roof, leaving ugly puddles of oil on the nice mat. As he stood, the blur of falling oil before him thickened into a column, the column into a dense ball, the oil-ball into an amorphous shape such as frozen lubricant can take. Finally the figure, in the otherwise now dry air, solidified into that of a little old woman whom at first glance you would think quite ordinary until you noticed that the returning sunshine glinted off her in hues of olive green and brown and gold such as heavy machine oil can show.

The unguinous figure took a step toward the shuddering tin man on the porch. “At last,” it said. “Somebody with a decent word to say for a person. It’s about time.”

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

"Mombi!?" everybody moaned. We all knew how awful *she* was. But what—? how—? why—?

The Wizard had a pretty exact idea but only, drastically, lacked time to tell us about it. This was, rather, a moment for action.

"Hail! great spirit!" he had no hesitation in yelling, thus drawing the apparition's attention to himself. Indeed, the figure of the dust-deviless was very "great", in the sense of 'huge', in proportion to us, if not quite in the connotation of 'outstanding and worthy to be honored'. Diggs could mean just the former while leaving the reincarnated, or, rather, impulvated, witch to be flattered in assuming the latter.

"What?!" bellowed the figure, which had at least heard, it would seem, the tiny shriek of the Wizard if it had not as yet discerned him by sight. Diggs waved his arms and now the giant Mombi dust-shape, still pink and green and faintly eddying in her agitation, croaked, "There...? Ah, there you are!.. It looks like that old charlatan, O.Z. Diggs. But what are you doing so tiny?"

"I can't explain now!" cried the Wizard. This was the second explanation in as many minutes that he had no time for. "We're under a spell!—an okay one—but I won't take time for that.

Where did you come from?! [Silly question. It was obvious to all of us.] I mean: what's happened? How did you—"

"Your guess is as good as mine. Here, wait a second." The vast dust-cloud shape seemed to make an effort of will and shrank further 'til it came to appear as a dense figure of varicolored earth and fabric, still about three times as tall as we were. Then it stopped. "That's better," sighed Mombi. "What was I saying?" She rubbed her hip.

"Er—about what happened," stammered the Wizard, still greatly dismayed at having his old rival so suddenly and overwhelmingly confronting him. "Er—to you..."

"The last time I remember anything a hose happened, that's what!" cried Mombi and flared up in fury again. "A hose, full of water. Wet woeful water, wicked washing wasting water... Wonderful water—" The witch stopped ranting suddenly. "That's right: wonderful! Liberating water!! What was I afraid of all those years?! Water released me! I have the freedom of all the elements now, all substances! Oh, what an idiot I've been! I should have taken the water cure centuries ago!" The wicked woman burst into a gale of gay laughter as ancient scales fell from her eyes.

Abruptly she clapped her hand to her hip. "Just the same!" she roared, "somebody stuck a pin in me! I don't like it."

"No, we never!" piped up the Queen of Patch, getting back her courage now the whirlwind was reduced to no more than a shape of a poor old woman, be she ever so tall. "It was a needle!"

"Needle, schmeedle!" blustered the witch. "Nobody sticks a pin in *me*!" She made a surprisingly ineffectual grab at the doughty little (in comparison) queen.

"It was my prized magic needle!" cried Sewsan in self-exculpation. "I always start any sewing project with a stitch of the magic needle. It makes the work go faster."

"Magic, ey?" Mombi reconsidered. "Maybe that's how..."

"Of course it was!" now thrust in Wizard Diggs again. "I see it all." And with hands cupped megaphone-fashion around his mouth he shouted up at Mombi (while we all edged nearer, gaping):

"When Sir Hokus of Pokes and the Scarecrow 'put you out' —in that little workroom of the Palace of Magic—with a hose led in through the window from the garden, you dissolved into the old carpet: destroyed—though not dead, of course. It was only a matter of time until, in some fashion or other, you would be reconstituted. Meanwhile you were smelling up the place and rotting the rug. We had no choice but to close up the room. Now all that work has been undone by the magic agency of Queen Sewsan's needle."

"Jolly good job!" chortled the revived witch. "Maybe I'll forgive you after all," she condescended to the little Patch queen. "I'm not quite sure how you did it but you did it. And now..!" She paused a second to reflect on the glories of the renewed career of wickedness now open to her. "I'll allow you to live. As for these others... let me see. Perhaps I'll pull them limb from limb, like wings from flies. Since I can assume any size—" and here she proved it by growing ten feet taller.

But bad Mombi had not reckoned with the impulsiveness of the audacious Jimmy. The travelers with fairy Floraline had during the commotion quietly joined our crowd around the borders of the green/pink carpet and listened with as much astonishment as any of us to the unraveling of the ancient mystery. The Ohio kiddies had wished for an encounter with a wicked witch and here was one, in spades.

Without a word of warning that intrepid boy Jimmy now shot forward, raised high the kitchen knife he had stolen in Jack Pumpkinhead's pumpkin patch, and plunged it into the great stockinged foot of the towering dust-enchantress.

Everybody gaped—even Mombi. That's all though. No scream of pain or fear. The witch gazed at her foot, from a gaping tear in which dust eddied.

Jimmy dropped his knife and boggled. Sarah rushed forward to give her sibling moral support. Mombi yelled, "Oh, you would, would you!?" and lunged down to seize, one in each great knotty cloth fist, the two naughty children.

Then she laughed! "Thanks for reminding me," she said, "I

seem to have lost my boots somewhere along the way[§]. I'll need replacements."

Here she dropped Jimmy and took hold in a pinch of a fold of Sarah's flesh and plucked it like a harp string. "Good elastic youthful hide," she opined. "You'll do."

Then with a piercing gaze at the youngsters, one in each hand, but without benefit of fairy wand or witch's thorn or magic ring, without the slightest ado, she turned the kiddies into a pair of sturdy walking shoes.

Everybody screamed, aghast, when they saw what she had done. But Mombi, nothing daunted, dropped the shoes on the carpet and stamped a giant pink-green dust foot into each. "These boots were made for walking," she informed us and then suited deed to word.

§ See *The Lost King of Oz*, chapter 21. Edit. note.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Metal Man Garth was not conventional-minded and not very flappable and, though amazed, he was not averse to inviting indoors the strange apparition his oil storm had solidified into. "What can I serve you?" he enquired politely.

"Why, a cup of herb tea and a cruller would do nicely," said the visitant, from force of habit. Then it stopped on its progress up the back-stoop steps and said puzzledly: "No, it wouldn't. I couldn't eat a thing. I mean literally: it's impossible for me to eat, at any rate by putting things through this hole in my face. Now isn't that queer!"

"Is it?" asked host Garth. "I know so little about you. But not eating is not strange. I never eat." He made a round gesture indicating his oil-guest should make free of a chair at the kitchen table.

"Don't you indeed?" said Mombi. (You'd guessed that already.) "That's one way we're alike then."

"Oh, several ways," amended the tin man. "We both thrive with oil. I dare say we both admire the play of the elements. And we like a kind word. At least, I think I heard you say 'somebody with a decent word'—rather as if you'd been missing such words, and liked them."

"I do!" assured the wet witch and helped herself to one of

the fresh-washed tea towels to sit down on. She'd never sat as an incarnation in oil before but she had an intelligent idea that it might leave stains. "I suddenly realize it's what I missed most all my life. But then I'm realizing lot of things since my transfiguration."

"You were transfigured, were you? Please tell me about it," urged Garth. "This is all fascinating to me. I've never met an oil goddess before."

"I'm not an oil goddess," disclaimed Mombi forthrightly. "That's just one of the apparitions I now seem able to assume... this time, apparently, from mingling with a rather nasty petroleum-laden desert storm." But this only seemed to mystify further her amiable host rather than serve as any kind of clarification, she started over right from the beginning.

"It all began a long time ago," she related. "It seems I burst full-blown from the head of Baum. That's the self-styled Royal Historian of the Land of Oz, you know. At least, he had nothing to say about me in the first volume of Oz history he turned out. Indeed, he virtually denied my existence, for there he enumerated the witches, both good and bad, extant in Oz and did not name me. When he finally decided to tell the whole story, some years later, he first claimed that I was *not* a witch. He said I was simply an older woman who worked spells. What's the difference? I'd like to know. It's not as if you had to take a college degree in necromancy to be acknowledged as a witch. Anyway, by the end of that book he was blithely designating me a 'witch' —which I was, of course."

"Why?" said Garth.

"Why a witch?" gasped Mombi. "Well, who would not work magic if he could?! And if you do, without being on the stage or sprouting wings, people will call you a witch. Besides, it's all I had to do."

"How do you mean?"

"I never knew my parents. My earliest memories are of being alone in a hut in a forest. How I survived babyhood I'll never know. I must have *had* parents of course. I just don't

remember them. But somebody taught me to talk! and ever since I can remember I've known how to do certain things: the general principles of existence, you might say: how to make a fire, how to clothe myself, what was safe to eat. I'll say this for my parents: they gave me brains. I was no dumbie, and early on I knew how to make use of what utensils there were in the hut where I found myself.

"What I lacked was company. Deep in that forest no people ever came near me. My friends were the animals—"

"Just like me," put in Garth, and spoke briefly of squirrels and deer.

"The animals loved me," bragged Mombi. "Still do. I couldn't say the same for humans—when I finally ran across any. As I grew older and dared to venture away from the cottage I would meet twig gatherers and charcoal burners in the forest. They would yell and run away from me. I didn't know why. I would go home and look in an old stained mirror that hung there. I had nothing to compare with and I didn't know if I was ugly or beautiful. I modeled my clothes on those of people I caught sight of, but they were no fashion plates! How to use a needle was one thing I had figured out for myself.

"As the years went on I came to realize it hadn't been my strange-looking garments that had scared people off. It was my face. A thing my parents had not bequeathed me was looks. So now: how could I make myself beautiful? I pondered long and deeply, for I had no wish to be hated and shunned for my appearance.

"I began to experiment with the contents of certain jars and boxes that I found in the house. From the start I had determined that the substances weren't to eat! Why then had they been kept? Of course I couldn't read so the penned labels on the containers told me nothing. (My illiteracy lasted for years, until once a wandering gypsy woman happened my way. *She* was not frightened of my looks and welcomed my hospitality. She stayed five months and in that time she first taught me that there was such a thing as reading, and then how to do it.)

"I knew, as I say, that the materials in the rows of bottles and jars had a purpose. I experimented. I mixed tiny amounts in water and swallowed them. One powder turned my skin (temporarily!) polka-dot blue, otherwise the substances seemed to have no effect. I set fire to a pinch of this, a dab of that. One such try produced very creditable gas dragons, but that's all. I sprinkled drops of a liquid, grains of a powder—and brought a footstool to life. I had invented magic—all by myself!

"Of course that put a wholly new face on things. I went mad for magic and forgot all about trying to win friends and influence people by looking attractive. It's been my life—my whole life!—ever since then to become ever more capable as an enchantress. Very little else has meant much at all. And now—!" Even Mombi was awed.

"Now?" echoed Garth obligingly. "What has happened now?"

"As you see, I'm not just a witch in a gingerbread cottage any more, I'm a spirit in a whirlwind! Oh, the possibilities..!"

"I can see it would be fabulous," agreed Garth. "We've always called the frightful storms that sometimes pass over here the 'Witch's Storm', without, I think, having any particular witch in mind. You must be she!"

"I don't know about that," confessed Mombi freely. "I'm new on this job. I only started yesterday."

"Tell me more, please," urged Garth, thrilled at the fount of interest and entertainment that all unexpectedly had gushed up in his humdrum life. He longed to have details of the whole story.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

Screams were general but didn't help much. It was O.Z. Diggs, the Wizard, who first had presence of mind to shout to Tik-Tok: "After her, my friend! Follow the wind witch! whithersoever she goes. We can't let her get away!"

Great Tik-Tok had looked on at the proceedings with as much absorption as any of us and his methodically working (if not very speedy) brain had already reasoned out that if anyone was going to be able to do anything it was he. He thus turned smartly and began to tramp off in the direction the disappearing witch had taken.

The effort at once proved vain. The big copper man with his ungainly body and spindly legs could not run but that the mighty witch and mistress of configurations could very well do, and did. Before she was even out of sight we saw her expand into a dust cloud and blow away to the north. Tik-Tok carried on plodding in the direction he had been programed to go.

Now we had time for regrets and recriminations. While everybody swarmed over the great and now pristine, if worn, carpet and gathered in groups to marvel and discuss, Dorothy Gale, princess and witch-destroyer, sat right down in a heap and cried disconsolately.

"Don't weep, my dear," cried Scraps, concerned.

"You needn't fear.
We'll get them back somehow.
Though pers'nally
I'd rather see,
Than them, a purple cow."

"Oh, I'm not weeping for the two tots!" exclaimed Dot passionately, dashing the tears from her eyes, "though that's bad enough. Whatever will Ozma think? No, it's because this is all my fault!"

"Your fault, Princess?" put in Queen Sewsan, not wanting Dorothy to grab *all* the credit. "I thought it had been established that my magic needle—"

"Oh, that isn't what I mean! Not just what's happened now. Something of the sort was due to take place about this time anyway. Isn't that right, Wizard? Creatures who get 'destroyed' in Oz usually reappear again after a while. I know the Witches of East and West came back after eighty-one years[§]. It's been seventy-five since Witch Mombi got put out. But it was *my* fault she got put out! don't you see? And I can never forgive myself! Oh, boo-hoo-hoo!"

Everybody looked non-plussed. We stared at the sobbing girl and at each other. After a moment even I dared to intervene and say, "But, Miss Dorothy, the witch was wicked. We've seen that now. She remains what she always was: wicked."

"Yes!" stormed Dorothy in return, giving me quite a start, "but is that any reason for *me* to become a murderer?! I wish now I'd never heard of wicked witches!"

"But, darling," put in Miss Thompson, "wicked witches were what first put you on the road to fame and fortune. First you won the love of the Munchkins by killing the Witch of the East and then the adoration of the Winkies by washing out the dreadful Witch of the West. But for these executions I wonder whether Oz would have paid much attention to you at all."

"All *right*!" retorted Dorothy, incensed. "So I'm celebrated as an executioner. Really neat! But the shameful part is that I

§ See *Aunt Em and Uncle Henry in Oz*. Edit. note.]

preened myself on having done those things. I lapped up the plaudits of the multitude—for murder!"

"Oh, not murder, my dear," soothed Queen Sewsan. "Say womanslaughter, which is really all it was. You never *meant* to kill the witches."

"Exactly!" concurred the distraught princess. "Okay, so I enjoyed the praise for getting rid of the wicked women but at least the deaths were accidental..."

"That's right," we all cheered, relieved. "You never intended to destroy them so it's all right!"

"Oh, idiots," sighed Dorothy, disgusted. "Don't you see it corrupted me? By the time we got around to dealing with Mombi and *her* wickedness I'd let myself be brainwashed into thinking that destroying people was all in a day's work. I told Ozma to wash out the witch! With malice aforethought I suggested how a fellow creature should be put to death. Or no, not even 'aforethought' but just off the top of my head: casually I said 'Why not put her out like I did the other witches?' while I fanned myself with my crown[§]. You see how callous I'd become?"

Miss Thompson was making moaning noises as if *she* might be somehow to blame but we all shushed her lovingly and told her not to try to claim credit for what she'd merely recorded, not invented.

"All right, princess," now said the Wizard. "We understand your viewpoint—and greatly sympathize. But that really plays no part in the present contretemps. I could wail and gnash my teeth at, myself, having once had dishonorable dealings with that same Mombi. But since then I've had time to work through the regret and remorse. The great thing, as you too have learned, is to put bad behavior behind one and resolve not to do the like again. For the present the question is: what to do to stop Mombi from starting a new reign of error? I confess I'm stumped."

§ See *The Lost King of Oz*. Editor's note.

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

"That's how it all began, my dear... that's how it all began." Mombi in nostalgic mood had just related the whole of the intrigue of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, including especially her own part (off stage) in the proceedings.

"At the time of the arrival of O.Z. Diggs by balloon many years ago I was already so accomplished a sorceress that I could well hold my own when he and I met to exchange secrets. We got on so well that as a personal favor to him I accepted the fosterage of an infant who rather stood in his way in his aim of ruling in the green country, the District of Oz."

"How so?" enquired Garth, absorbed in the tale.

"It seemed the child was the heir to the rightful ruler in those parts. Through some cabal I've in fact never learned all the details of, the former royal family had disappeared and when Diggs arrived in his balloon the people seemed to be living in a state of peaceful anarchy."

"The best state, really," commented the tin man.

"Just what I've always thought," agreed Mombi heartily. "At least, I never cared for anyone higher up telling *me* what to do. But human nature is bad. Left with only the honor system to guide them—with no threatening force held over them to make them do right—humans will always soon sink to the lowest

standard of behavior. O.Z. Diggs knew that and was right to take charge in the rulerless green country. I kicked myself for having come on the scene just too late. But in fact political rule was never my bag. It was personal power through magic that fascinated me. Now I had a new toy to play with."

"The child."

"Just so. It would be my Guinea pig for trying out new spells on. Incidentally it would be a bit of company for me too, though that was not my first consideration. However, I was perfectly kind to it—in the beginning."

"I notice you always say 'it'. Which—?"

"Originally it was a girl. But early on I had one of my greatest successes at transformation. I turned it into a boy! As the child grew older that guise proved slightly more advantageous to me, so I left it. A male child could be put to somewhat rougher tasks than a female servant—"

"'Servant'?" said Garth and sounded disappointed.

Already the storm-cloud witch was so far partial to the liking of her new acquaintance that she felt it worth her while to backwater. "Well-l, a younger person about the house *would* be asked to do things. I could require—that is, ask—the boy to chop wood and haul water the way I might have hesitated with a girl, you know.

"But somehow all my fostering wasn't enough. The boy grew up perfectly healthy and strong. *He* didn't have to languish in a state of illiteracy as I had done. I taught him to read, and also much much more. Even so, he turned against me. What was it? Not liking to be used in my magical experiments? Or was it, all over again, my looks? I'll never know. He ended by running away. That was the end of my foster-parenthood."

Could it be that the witch suppressed a sigh? Despite his tendency to awe of the patently powerful conjurer Garth could see that tenderness might be a quality she had lacked. Perhaps it would be cruel to tax her with that lack now. Instead he said:

"But looks...? Of course it's superficial, and it's the person inside that counts. But would it have been so wrong to use your

magic, as it seems you so easily could have, to give yourself bodily beauty? and lower the number of strikes against you, as it were?"

"It never crossed my mind!" declared Mombi. "Make up to a mere child by putting on a surface of false prettiness? I would have scorned to do so even if the thought had occurred."

"I understand," agreed Garth thoughtfully. "Your sturdy independence of character. And yet... I suppose..." He hesitated to risk provoking the possibly tetchy and certainly prepotent dust-deviless. "—you *could* have—er..."

"Made myself gorgeous?" With the faintest of twitches Mombi abruptly appeared as ZsaZsa Gabor, down to the last blond ringlet. "Dig that!"

"Ooh!" said Garth, overcome in spite of himself. "No, wait!" as the witch proceeded to slip back toward hideousness, "—if I may counsel you: stay as sweet as you are! Don't let a thing ever change you!"

"Wel—l... seeing it's you..." murmured Mombi. *WERE* men so silly-superficial they actually judged you by how you *looked*?! The sorceress backtracked toward ZsaZsa, then put the look on Hold. "Of course I *can*," she went on. "Incidentally, that's the first thing that struck me when I came to read of the witch trials out in the 'great' world back in the seventeenth century: the illogicality of the whole thing. If those poor old women had actually been witches they obviously would have used their powers to stop being ugly poor old women. The ones the authorities ought to have been suspicious of were the good-looking and the rich! I'll be many a handsome heiress—or heir—was a witch—if *any*body was..."

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Clump, clump went the great copper feet again as Tik-Tok strode over hill and dale. It was easy to see which way to go. Mombi in her passage had left a trail of wreckage, as if a small tornado had passed that way. Tik-Tok had but to take note, with his sharp eyes and clever mind, of flattened fences, swathe of laid-low grain, sheds with roofs missing, and he knew which way to go.

Nor did it hinder that presently two little figures came flying after him and settled on his hat brim where lately so many had ridden. It was Floraline and Dementia, making use of their fairy wings which others in the consternated crowd in front of the royal palace of Patch lacked. After hurried counsel-taking with the Wizard and Queen Sewsan and other persons of authority it was settled that the best thing the fairies could do to aid the common cause was to go after the copper man and lend him advice and encouragement in his undertaking. Maybe by their fairy power they could even speed up the tempo of his progress.

Now when greetings had been got through and Tik-Tok had said, "Oh, ve-ry well! Hap-py to have you a-board," the sprites' first order of business was to wave their wands and invoke such spells as they commanded. Sure enough: the legs of the Me-

chanical Man became a copper blur as they whizzed across the landscape—keeping always away from roads and paths and built-up areas where there were tiny wayfarers to avoid trampling upon. By nightfall Tik-Tok had come to Gate Twenty-Two in the great protective-shell dome that covered Oz. Here was proof, if you like, of which way the witch whirlwind had passed!

The travelers noted various panes of the oztic that made up the panels of the Dome blown out and all around on the ground before the gate lay the pulverized remains of whatever had existed in that area before today. It was obvious that something like a small cyclone had whirled and worried on this spot before it forced a way out. Gate Twenty-Two was of course missing. Any sort of unwanted interloper might have made his entry into Oz unchecked just now and just there.

"Oh!" exclaimed Tik-Tok. "We must tell Oz-ma. We must tell the Queen." But time enough for that when they had settled more pressing issues.

Gate Twenty-Two stood at the northern desert border of Winkieland. By the last lavender light of day the rescue party could see where a trail through the disturbed dunes led away ever northward over the sandy waste.

The rescuers didn't let night stop them. Having observed that Mombi had followed a due-north course all the way from Patch across several small Oz countries they supposed she wasn't going to deviate now. With confidence they spent the dark hours tramping rapidly on over the Impassable Desert. Now, too, they didn't have to worry about stepping on anybody. No one, normally, ever ventured willingly out on the trackless sands.

When olive-grey dawn light began to filter through the smog from the east (where else?) Tik-Tok and the fairies could see where the sandy nothingness of the great desert was winding down to the sagebrush-and-cactus-covered confines of the land of Ev. Here was a sorry contrast with the brilliance of familiar Oz landscapes. Where everything the eye had scanned yesterday was some bright shade of yellow or gold, here on what should ordinarily have been grey-white sands lay a thick film of

greasy blackish brown precipitate. But in a backhanded way this condition was favorable to our travelers, for the black-brownness was not complete. From the direction in which they had come and going straight on northward into Ev was a swath of stirred-up-ness and a resultant marked lightening of the color of the ground that indicated all too clearly the way that the whirlwind that was Mombi had gone. Reassured, Tik-Tok marched forward.

"What are we going to do when we get there?" queried little Dementia not a moment too soon.

"It depends a good deal on where 'there' is," stated Floraline thoughtfully. "If we find the sorceress sitting, for instance, on a rock or in a tree we must face her and have a showdown."

"What with?" wondered Dementia.

"'What with'?"

"Yes, what are you going, to use to show her down? She's a lot more powerful than we are. She might turn you into a dandelion again."

At that reminder Floraline did turn pale. But Tik-Tok had been listening and he said, "What mat-ter? We have to do our du-ty, e-ven if we per-ish in the at-tempt. We would not want to ex-ist af-ter-wards if we failed in that."

The fairies agreed soberly that that was so. The thought seemed to give them courage to face the dawn which, sometimes, was as much as one could ask.

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

"Oh, Oz!" remarked Mombi. "Foop."

Garth the metal man had heard of Oz, indeed in terms so favorable that he couldn't understand how anyone with the entrée there could willingly leave the fabulous fairyland. Yet here was the mighty oil witch declaring she had done just that.

"But," he objected, "hovering round the throne of Ozma, strumming a harp?: it must be very heaven."

"People haven't taken to actually worshipping the wretched girl," humphed Mombi. "Only in fan clubs out in the great world. At the Palace of Magic they're more level-headed.

"But me? I've seen all of her I want to. It's not as if people around her have mellowed. I come back into existence after three quarters of a century of being destroyed and what do I find? Individuals as malevolent and vengeful as ever. Did I tell you a little boy I'd never laid eyes on plunged a knife into my foot? Without a word of warning or anything in the way of a by-your-leave."

"How very unkind," agreed Garth. "I can see you'd be wounded."

"As a matter of fact I couldn't. My dust-mote composition absorbed the blow, closed up the hole, and it was as if it had never been. But I took the deed for the word: he hated me. His

action spoke louder than any words."

"What did you do?" wondered Garth.

"Turned him and his pesky playmate—I rather think it was his sister—into this pair of walking boots," boasted the witch. "I think they're rather fetching." And she preened a bit, sticking her right foot out.

"Oh, dear," sighed the would-be-adoring metal man. "I'm sorry. That's not received behavior. And I want so much to admire you."

The dust-deviless appeared discomfited. She too looked on her swain with a gracious eye and wanted to keep in his good books. As for the boots, she now surreptitiously slipped them off under the kitchen table. They seemed to be pinching her feet in rather a spiteful way.

"I need some footwear though," she returned. "What would I do if I left off wearing them?"

"I'll carve you some shoes," exclaimed Garth enthusiastically. "I'm an expert wood-worker. There is a willow grows aslant a brook. I'll cut a limb of it and make you shoes!"

"Wooden shoes?" mused Mombi. "They might be more comfortable than these of hide at that."

"And the children?"

"Do me the shoes first, my friend. Then we will talk of that matter."

So it was done. And if it were done when it was done, then it were well it were done quickly. Now that Mombi had stopped storming the sun had come out over Alloya and there was no reason why the oddly assorted soulmates should not stroll out of the village, following the course of the little stream where it flowed into the forest.

Mombi sat on the leaning tree trunk itself while Garth with a small saw detached a limber branch of willow and set to work to work it.

Thus they fleeted the time carelessly—until sharp-eared Mombi heard a sort of clanking noise in the distance, rhythmically repeated. "What's that?" she wondered. "Otherwise it's

seemed so quiet around here—since I stopped raining."

The metal man too held back his hand with the knife in it and listened. "I never heard anything like it. Or rather, I hear it every day but not quite in that timbre. If I didn't know I'd almost say it was copper, whereas we fellows here in Alloya are all iron or tin or steel. Those make a shriller clank than bronze or copper when struck."

"Who would be striking copper then?" the witch wanted to know.

"Oh, not being struck," corrected Garth. "Rather, itself striking. That would be the sound of copper—or bronze—feet hitting the earth as a creature of bronze—or copper—tramped along."

"A creature of copper! Great Scot!" cried Mombi, jumping hastily from the willow bole. "There's only one of those I know of. I saw him no longer ago than yesterday. But how in the world—? They must have sent him after me, of course, as, so it appears, the only being of normal former dimensions in all Oz. At least, all the Ozites I saw yesterday had shrunk amazingly to less than bite-size. I can't think what—"

"Why would they send someone after you?" asked Garth, seeming for once a little slow on the uptake. "Oh, I see: the boot tots. They'd want rescuing, of course."

"But Tik-Tok," marveled Mombi. "He's as slow as molasses in March. He couldn't..."

Witch and wood-worker hurried from the willow bank to the road not far off that led south out of the forest. Sure enough. Fifty yards away they saw marching toward them the celebrated, if dusty and greasy, Mechanical Man of Ev and Oz, and coming on too at no uncertain speed. He carried a stout stick picked up in a hickory thicket through which he had followed the whirlwind trail.

"Oh, metal man!" witch Mombi adjured her companion in sudden consternation, "will you go with me and be my guide? in my most need to go by my side? I have a bad feeling Tik-Tok is gunning for me!"

"Right," agreed Garth cheerfully. He wanted to be the champion of the powerful sorceress he had come to admire so much.

Thus it fell out that when Tik-Tok caught sight of a shiny silver-colored figure standing astride the path with a knife in one up-raised hand and a saw in the other he naturally lifted his baton in an almost involuntary reflex action. He meant nothing threatening by it, certainly no more than did the merely protectively motivated Garth himself. But Mombi, ever suspicious and with every reason to be wary of Tik-Tok, reacted in her turn impulsively. She suddenly doubled in size.

This was enough to startle anyone. It not only startled but it gave two fairies riding on the copper man's hat-brim furiously to think. Look she never so much like ZsaZsa Gabor the oncoming dust woman could clearly be none other than their sought quarry, the enchantress Mombi. The tiny fays hissed this suspicion to Tik-Tok, one into each ear.

"Ah ha, I see!" the hero quickly caught on. In a trice he was charging at the dust witch with club up-raised still, but when he brought it down it landed on another head. It was that of the other metal man, who had somehow (on purpose) got in his way. Yes, the hickory stick banged down on the tin head and dinted it terribly.

This event raised the motivation of Garth, which up to now had been strictly a protective one, to dire ire. He had a personal stake in the contest now. He surged at Tik-Tok and with no trouble at all toppled the heavy/round-bodied mechanical man off his spindly legs and left him rolling impotently in the greasy dust of the roadway. Not content with that Garth knelt on his prey and sawed off his right arm. Copper gives way easily to fine-tempered Toledo steel. Tik-Tok wouldn't be doing any more battering with a stick.

There was a few instants' deadly silence. Then were heard two tiny voices raised in doleful lament. It was Floraline and Dementia. The others hadn't even noticed them before now, so tiny were they. "Oh, oh," they keened, "that is too dreadful! Such things can't happen in Oz!"

Mombi could hardly hear what they were saying so she abruptly passed a spell and brought them up to normal fairy size—which in that part of the world is quite sizeable. It was for the sake of the decibels and indeed the voices of the wailing fays now rang out clearly. "A famous Personage of the court of Oz of the court of Oz can't get mutilated in an Oz book!" they protested amid tears.

Not only could Mombi now hear the fairies properly she could also see them and she proved that age could not wither her infinite memory by exclaiming, "Bless my blasphemy! it's the little sprite I turned into a dandelion—oh, ages ago! Tell me about it, my dear!" she croaked. "What have you been up to? And how did you get here?"

Floraline dashed the tears from her eyes furiously. Neither was she in any doubt by now as to the identity of their adversary. She cried, "There's not time for that now! What are you going to do about poor Tik-Tok?!"

"Do?" puzzled Mombi. "Why, nothing. He's well done for already."

Floraline raged. "You'll never be forgiven! It's unheard of! Actually *hurting* a celebrity from the Emerald City—!"

"Don't give yourself airs, my dear," countered Mombi mildly. "Have you forgotten *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*?" She seemed to be always citing that book. "There your famous Scarecrow of Oz had all of the straw pulled out of his clothes and head and his garments were made into a bundle and thrown into the top of a tree, while the beloved Tin Woodman was dropped a great distance upon rocks where he lay so battered and dented that he could neither move nor groan. Tik-Tok's not that badly off. Hear? He's groaning quite distinctly."

"Just the same!" put in Dementia and pouted in her turn. "You're a bad old witch and everyone hates you."

"No, they don't," declared Garth the Metal Man whose ire had cooled now it had been satisfied and he was able to assess what he had done and how things were. "I adore her. I would do anything for the great wind witch."

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

Well! Mombi had never heard words like that in all her born days.

It worked out, thus, that tin man Garth did permanently what even Princess Dorothy of Kansas and Oz had only been able to accomplish temporarily: he melted the witch.

The sorceress could feel it as a distinct physical sensation: the hard knot that was her heart was softening like butter, and this even though she was occupying for the nonce a form that was no more than a concentration of dust particles. Yes: softening and melting and running so she couldn't control it. All her feelings flowed out in a great surging wave to break on the metal man — and eventually almost to overwhelm him. From now on he was the witch's lord and master. His smallest desire was her command.

Poor Mombi. That's all she had been waiting for all those years: someone to love her. She hadn't known it herself and she *certainly* hadn't known how to attract any love, even if she had realized that she was in the market for that commodity. Who had there ever been to instruct her that there existed this crazy thing called love? Most of what we feel we only feel because our elders tell us there are such things. Perhaps, even, if there had been someone around to say: 'There is love. Take it or leave it,'

she might have chosen to dispense with the pesky, gets-in-the-way emotion. But it was too late now. She was in over head and ears.

Meanwhile, Garth, being the sensitive creature he was, experienced the most awful pangs of contrition. With his trusty saw he had hacked off a fellow being's arm, and a fellow metal man at that. How ever was he going to live it down? But his immediate physical act was to return hurriedly to Tik-Tok's side and raise him into a sitting position. With his free hand he groped for the jettisoned copper arm.

"Take this, my dear, will you?" he said to Mombi. The tin man had no idea what whirl of emotion his simple declaration of devotion had set up in the wind witch's breast. She was wanting to smother her beloved in caresses and to plight her troth at once but alas, it was not his hand she received but Tik-Tok's.

She swallowed her chagrin and cradled the copper forearm to her bosom. To care for it was her sweetheart's command. She went even further: "I suppose we do have to get him repaired," she ventured.

"Emphatically," confirmed Garth and took charge of affairs now. "To the metal clinic in Alloya! They'll know what to do. The surgeons in the casualty ward are most expert."

Floraline and Dementia could only flutter along in the wake of the loving couple as the latter, one on each side, helped Tik-Tok along the road in to the heart of downtown Alloya.

Metal people came out of their brick, stone, and wooden houses to stare as the strange procession made its hobbling way along. Garth had a word with his acquaintances at the solder-mat and soon Tik-Tok was in intensive care, so intensive that a blowtorch was being applied to his elbow. Oh, how the Mechanical Man longed for Messrs Smith and Tinker at this juncture, but, alas, Smith was dead and Tinker in the moon.

The copper man, being so constructed as to do everything but live, could well feel pain, certainly from an injury as grave as the severance of an arm. But considerately his creators had not plugged in a very *great* sensitivity to pain, so Tik-Tok felt no

more discomfort than he had done a few days earlier when Volkovian Lester and his associates performed their dorsotomy on him. He gritted his round teeth and bore it manfully as the burnisher brush whirled and sparks flew while the new join in his arm was filed down smooth.

When the job was nicely done his metal fellow flew to his side and demanded to know how he felt and if he had forgiven him for what now, of course, had been shown to be a most unwarranted outrage. Incidentally, while Tik-Tok was being welded back together Garth too received his attentions at the hands of the capable metalsmiths. They had off his head and hammered out the dent his copper colleague's stick had made there.

Afterwards they all adjourned to Garth's house for a reconciliatory tea party. Not that anyone drank the tea. The metal men couldn't, Mombi in her present form had no benefit of beverages: they would just soak and clot her dust innards, while the two fairies for their part subsisted almost exclusively on dewdrops and moonbeam soufflé.

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

We others, back in Patch, were feeling a little deflated. Our mission was accomplished, albeit in a fashion nobody had anticipated, and the great actors in the show had moved on and away, out of our ken. We could only wonder what resolution the drama would achieve under some alien sky.

Scraps, the Patchwork Girl, expressed the general feeling in rhyme:

"She's gone!
He's gone. And we remain...
And what do we do now?

That's that!
It's flat—
I feel it too...
Shall we go home?... But *how*?"

Yes, the great object of our pilgrimage had been achieved — very thoroughly, as far as the dry-cleaning of a carpet was concerned—but another issue of far greater moment had been raised that was not in the least bit settled. When Scraps asked "How?" I think it was not so much the physical method of our return to the Emerald City she questioned as the spirit in which it was to be done. Were we to go as failed perpetrators of a quest

that Queen Ozma would so little have approved of that we had had to keep it secret from her? Indeed, the pied maiden may even have been asking 'How were we going to have the nerve to face the girl ruler and tell what we had done — and how we had been *un*done?'

But the Patchwork Girl, seeing our embarrassed and downcast faces, relented. She said, "I know!: we'll return in triumph!, pretend we've had a great victory..." She waited for our response to the unlikely proposal.

"How will we do that?" asked Dorothy sceptically, subdued after her crying jag.

"Well, admittedly," conceded Scraps, "we can't carry the cleaned carpet home. It's too big! But, Wizard, maybe you could help?" She looked a hopeful question at the sometimes all-powerful-seeming savant.

Oscar Diggs lifted his little black bag ruefully. "I can put up overnighting tents for us — but those are just reinforced gossamer. And the meals I could summon are in reality pretty gossamer too. The carpet is all too solidly and enormously *there*. I couldn't shift it! not with the tools I've got with me. Nor are we near our phase plates, by whose agency I might summon our normal-size friends from Alternate-Oz to fetch and carry for us. No.

"However, once back in the Emerald City..." He let the suggestion trail away unarticulated. We all knew the great and powerful (if no longer "terrible") Oz could do *any*thing with the help of the paraphernalia. in his laboratory in the Palace of Magic.

"All the more reason for setting off immediately for that famous capital!" crowed the Patchwork Girl, determined to jolly us out of our don't-care mood.

"Oh, not 'immediately' surely?" protested Queen Sewsan. "Look: the sun's going down. You've never slept in your rooms! You must. I for one am exhausted. I know you must be too after the excitements of this day."

She was right about that. We only re-gathered for a quiet supper of rag-out, followed by a dessert of chiffon pie, before

we all, gratefully, sought our beds.

The repose was what we needed, indeed. The next day everyone felt more cheerful. Scraps, nothing daunted by yet another in her life history of sleepless nights, urged us on with renewed gaiety:

"Up, up! away!
We mustn't stay.
We've got to get on home.
Look, look! The sky!
The sun's on high
And shining through the dome."

Too true. We'd overslept, worn out by yesterday's excursions and alarms. How we must not dawdle. We had a long day ahead of us and no Tik-Tok's hat brim to ride on in making our way back to the Emerald City across an Oz now a hundred times larger in extent to some of our party than they had known it of old.

Scraps' reference to the Dome, though no doubt a fortuituous one just to make up the rhyme, proved to be topically apt. We could not know it—yet—but the gap in Oz's protective dome caused by whirlwind Mombi's breaking out of her great crystaline jail had now had going-on-for a day to allow the miasmic vapors of the outer world to waft into the normally so air-pure country. Princess Dorothy and authoress Ruth both noticed it when after breakfast they strolled outside briefly.

"That's that peculiar smell, my dear?" said Miss Thompson.

"Could it be automobile exhaust and industrial pollution fumes?" wondered the Kansas girl, familiar enough with those scents from her various sojourns in the world outside.

"You know, I think you're right," concurred the author. Then by curious coincidence she said just what someone else had done in response to the same situation the day before:

"We must tell Ozma. We must tell the Queen. There's clearly a bad leak in the protecto-dome somewhere."

This impulse to inform the fairy ruler of Oz about the danger to her land of a break in the great crystaline cupola that

covered the country was meanwhile having its somewhat belated effect at that other venue, namely among Tik-Tok and his companions. Mombi! was having qualms of conscience.

"You know," she said confidentially as she helped to clear away the unused tea things, "I left the door open when I quitted Oz. I wonder..."

"*We* noticed that!" cried the two fairies. They were now feeling somewhat mollified by the wind witch's obvious attempts to be nice in order to curry favor with her favorite, metal man Garth. "It was very bad of you," they chided. "Now all the nasty old fumes will get into Oz and choke creatures."

"Yes," went on Dementia in a p.s., "and not to mention the awful—and full-size—*people* who might try to move into the country and develop it!"

"How could you have brought yourself—" Floraline started to demand.

"That was in my rage," paraphrased Mombi. "If I had it to do over—"

"You wouldn't?" asked the fairies dubiously.

"Probably wouldn't," admitted the witch. "A lot has happened in the last twenty-four hours. For the first time in my life I've known what it is like to be liked. It's turned my values upside-down."

"We-ll-l," sighed all her auditors, edified. It was the first time, probably, in the history of the world: someone wicked suddenly and honestly decided to be good. It was worth a little awe.

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Princess Ozma of Oz was in sombre mood.

She'd been like that for some time really, only she hadn't liked to show it before all these visitors to Oz in what was, rather awkwardly, the centenary celebration (of the 'uncovering' of Oz) year. Frankly, the dainty girl ruler had to admit to herself, the gala couldn't have come at a more inopportune time.

That was why she'd been keeping a relatively low profile all during this book. Of course she'd had to appear to brighten up at times and take an interest, for hospitality's sake, but her heart hadn't been in it. For instance, there had been that—for her, extremely uncharacteristic—junket to the outer world. The invitation-extending had been a very convenient excuse, but what the young queen was really doing was casting a sizing-up glance over the state of the earth a year and a half after her attempt to save Oz from that world's malevolent effects by making everyone tiny.

Her investigative outing had been depressing. The earth wasn't a whit cleaner or less crowded than all reports had credited it with being twenty months ago. Ozma had all along been hoping against hope that the world would one day (soon) reverse its killing trends and come to have fewer people, less pollution, and a fall-off in crime. Nothing she had seen just now

out there had led her to believe that such a reversal was in train. She had hoped—of course!—that eventually she was going to be able to return to their own homes the hosts of refugees who were swamping Oz. Now she knew she was going to have to set that dream on hold—and it was disspiriting.

To make matters worse the conversation lately had kept turning to the old sorceress Mombi: the single greatest defeat of Ozma's whole life. Oh, to think of it: having actually ordered the destruction of the woman in whose home she had grown up! Ozma would wake nights, sobbing, from dreams of it. How! in heaven's name had she ever let herself contemplate such a move? No matter *what* the old witch had done in her career of wickedness it did not entitle the innocent and high-minded girl Ruler of Oz to get blood on her hands by authorizing a judicial murder.

Why had they kept bringing it up? Wasn't it enough to have the great worries of present and future to deal with, without having the guilt of the past to weigh one down as well? No wonder she had sometimes been a bit brief with these two spoiled tots she had conjured to Oz. If she was going to burden the country with an additional two foreigners, why could it not have been modest unassuming—even gormless—creatures such as Button Bright or Zeb Hugson or the orphan Bob Up who had used to come to Oz in the old days? She had a good mind to wish Sarah and Jimmy home to sandy dusky Ohio out of hand and be done with at least one minor irritant.

Still, to do that she'd have to know where they were. Let's see, she'd seen them last here at the palace some days ago, but she couldn't quite recall.. Oh, yes, they'd gone away with little Floraline and the pixy Dementia. They'd been wanting to see wicked witches or some such. Grimly Ozma's mouth corners drooped. Wicked witches were thin on the ground in Oz since she and Dorothy had brought off their coup in 1925.

After all it would provide a moment's escape from dreary preoccupations with the overrun condition of Oz, the awful awkwardnesses her miniaturization spell had wrought, and the

qualms of guilt over that old execution, to look at the Magic Picture and see where the kids had got to.

Ozma selected a nutmeg dope stick (Oz's innocent euphoric) and tripped to the chamber of the great magical work of art, where she invoked its charm. She took an instant to make a verse à la Patchwork Girl:

"To see my visitors I'd fain:

Young James and Sarah: show those twain!"

She was shown twain all right. When the bright colors of the original painting had swirled to a mud brown and then clarified again—although not all that much: the scene that became depicted remained all brown—Ozma found herself looking at a brace of baby squirrels.

"Oh, how cute!" giggled the young sovereign in obvious relief. She hadn't realized how much she'd not been looking forward to seeing the grubby petulant faces of that pair from Ohio. They were much more attractive as squirrels. The fact that the two had undergone some kind of transformation and been turned into the young of another species did not dismay the girl ruler too much. Given the siblings' venue in a magic land and their being last seen in the company of a couple of fairly potent fairies it was perhaps not odd that they had temporarily quitted their normal shapes. Perhaps Floraline had done the enchantment as temporary protective disguise for the tots, though what threat could have been hanging over them was not at once apparent to their present watcher. The animals were seen to be snugly ensconced, sitting up each inside its battered old boot of a crib and clearly inside a capacious nest in some hollow tree.

"Hm," breathed Ozma and felt vaguely relieved. It was clearly not a situation requiring immediate banging of the alarm bell. Naturally she must investigate what droll scrape the Ohio kiddies had got themselves into, but that could wait. After all, Floraline and Dementia were watching over them—though not to be caught sight of inside the squirrel nest—and she would hear all about it when the party got home to the Emerald City.

No, while she was at it the Oz ruler directed the picture to

show instead the front gates of her own palace. Was that pesky protest mob still hanging around out there like the fishwives of Paris at the gates of Versailles? For months now Ozma had had to contend with dissatisfied hordes of immigrants who massed in silent or sometimes noisy animosity outside the palace. They had all been used to staging protest demonstrations at home in the outer world and they saw no reason to stop now that they were comfortable and well provided-for in Oz. It was after all a way of life.

Yes. Sigh! There they still were. After dark they would go home to their neat round cottages but during nearly all daylight hours they were to be counted on as bivouacking at the gates and waving their placards:

"Ozites Go Home!"

"Down with everything good!"

"Ozma, get asthma!—like we've all got!"

"Unfair to organized malcontents!"

Bevies of them too roamed all roads, as Ozma knew. Whenever she ventured out on a progress she was at pains to shoot discreet blasts from her pocket demistifier, to render the knots of protesters invisible and soundless. She hoped the Wizard too had made full use of his similar device on these mysterious junkets he and friends were making in these days. General Battles had told her that the latest outing was in company with a reactivated Tik-Tok and a great roll of carpet. What in the world was that in aid of?

Actually, Ozma knew—but she wasn't letting on to herself: the "Mombi room" and its ill-smelling secret that had been a silent reproach to her now for seventy-five years. There was the thought again! Why couldn't she keep away from it? Was there no surcease of worry and regret to be found anywhere?

Ozma hid her face in the drape that screened the Magic Picture and wept.