

The Frogman of Oz

The Oz Book for 1947.

*In which are related the adventures of
the Frogman, DesPlessis d'Arc, Lucky Bucky,
Davy Jones the Wooden Whale, Princess Gayelette,
Prince Quelala, Glinda, Ozma, Cheecheecheepip,
Till Orangespiegel, Kabumpo the Elegant Elephant,
Gene the Giraffe, the Great Grey Goose, Mombi, Dayna, Tip,
Kaliko, the Guck, and others too numerous to mention as
they trek forward on their quests to destroy the Abominable
No-Man, win independence for the Wulfenite City,
obliterate the Winged Monkeys, and solve the mystery of the
disembodied human and animal limbs and body parts
littering the otherwise beautiful Land of Oz.*

Founded on and continuing
the stories by March Laumer.

Based on characters and situations created by
L. Frank Baum, Ruth Plumly Thompson
and John R. Neill.

Lund, Sweden, and Florida,



The Frogman of Oz

by March Laumer.

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C H A P T E R O N E

"Big day, hey?"

"Mm-hmm."

"What time you start?"

"Guy's supposed to be here at nine."

"Who is it?"

"Don't know. It's not one of the regulars."

"Oh... Look, here comes a piece of spit and polish.
Maybe it's him."

"Probably is."

"Well—good luck, hunh?"

"Yeah. Thanks."

"Your name DesPlessis d'Arc?"

"Yessir."

"What kind of name is that?"

"French...?"

"Yeah, you got the coloring. What do they call you?"

"My family call me 'Sples'."

"That's just about as off-beat."

"Call me 'Fritz', sir. Most people do."

"Okay. You know the routine, Fritz?"

"Pretty well, sir."

"I see here you got top marks straight through basic. Hmm... that's interesting. Says here you're able to stay submerged without air access three times longer than they've ever recorded before at the School. How do you account for that?"

"Don't know, sir. But it is what gave me the idea of going for Underwater Demolition in the first place."

"I see. You'd last five minutes longer than anybody else if you got cut off. Pressure'd play a part, of course. But anyway you'd have those five minutes. Okay! Ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"Got a oar outside. It's ten minutes over to the dive-test area. It's not all that deep. No place is, in the Bay. But it's enough for the first steps. You'll soon be going forty

fathoms. What's the deepest you been so far?"

"The course limit was a hundred and twenty feet, sir."

"Yeah, but I mean ever. I suppose you never escaped from a sinking ship or anything? I was wondering how you'd react in deep-water emergency."

"I'm not the boasting type, sir."

"Go ahead and boast."

"I guess I hold the world's record—private, unofficial, unregistered—for continuous submersion."

"How long?"

"I don't boast, sir."

"It's an order."

"More than—a week."

"Impossible."

"I told you I don't boast, sir."

"Or lie either?"

"No, sir."

"Man, there'd be brain damage—not to say you'd survive at all... Maybe there was."

"It's okay to laugh, sir. Wasn't my idea. But I'll just say: the circumstances were a little special. That helped."

"They must have been. Well, if you're not handing me guff, your experience will stand in good stead. You'll do all right with us."

"That's my hope, sir."

"Here we are. You're in gear—under your clothes?"

"Yessir."

"Likewise. We pick up masks and the rest in that locker room. Go on in. I'll join you in a minute."

...

"That's the demarcation line, sir? That row of poles?"

"That's it. We'll keep surface for about eight hundred yards. Then it's fairly directly down—to Dead Man's Deep."

"Swell name, sir."

"Yeah. All the men love it... But it's not a misnomer. It's

rigged specially — with every hazard you're ever likely to encounter. We haven't had a fatality yet. Don't be the first."

"Not planning on it, sir."

....

"You got all that, Fritz?"

"Yessir. But I'm getting interference. Lots of buzzing."

"Screw your regulator to the right a tad. We can't lose voice contact... That better?"

"Loud and clear."

"Go to it, boy. I'll be right behind you, keeping score. There's nineteen hurdles, as I say. Last one's the 'sealed room' effect—in the dummy wreck. Clear that and then surface directly. Don't wait for me."

....

"Sir?"

"Fritz?"

"Just wanted to hear your voice, sir."

"You're doing okay. I don't distract you where you need your wits about you. Number seventeen coming up. This is the Simulated Mangrove Tangle. A few men have flubbed it here. Take care."

....

"Sir!"

....

"Sir!.. Sir!.. I felt a yank at my phone! Sir, answer me!!.. Oh, Christ, now what? It's so freaking dark I can't see what's holding it... No panic! Feel back along the line. Don't confuse with the vegetation. Feels like it's knotted. How the hell did that happen?!.. It's not coming loose. Well, I can't stay down here forever. I'm going to have to yank... That tore it! Literally. Phone's gone west. But the air intake's all right. I better get up and out of this... What the hell is this above me? Can I have got under the wreck somehow? I'll have to go lateral. But it's so black. Or else a very very dark brown..."

C H A P T E R T W O

Divine discontent was eating at Fred Fruakx the Frogman again.

This time it wasn't from the stultification of being cooped up in a pond that was too small. It was, rather, the opposite. He'd been with the traveling sideshow for twenty-eight years. There literally wasn't a lane in Oz he hadn't been down. He'd been everywhere. He thought he'd like to go somewhere else for a change.

The place he was feeling a nudging urge to go to was some quiet corner where he could sit down and digest his experiences and write a book about them all. He'd just call it, tout court, *The Frogman of Oz*. There he'd relate in amplitude all the adventures of the road he'd been through. Some of them had been pretty hair-raising too—if you had any hair to raise.

There was the time he'd had to rescue the Bearded Lady and the Waltzing Seals from a burning tent. The lady's attraction had been completely singed away.

Then there was that other occasion when the whole troupe had been tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail for dancing (on a tight-rope high wire) on a Sunday.

And of course a high point of the account would be the Adventure of the Frustrated Chef. Gracious, that would send a shiver down his spine even now.

It seemed that he and the two Americans (Notta Bit More the clown and young Bob Up were still with him then), together with the small remainder of the troupe, had strayed into the domain of the Compleat Cook of Oz. The vast biceps and tree-trunk thighs of the cook complemented the dimensions of his Kitchen Mansion, which consisted of a huge cooking hall plus a modest dining room and a few closets for such subordinate things as sleeping, bathing, and sitting in.

The carney troupe in those days had been reduced to a

group of five strolling players who went about in medieval fashion, knocking at great folks' buttery doors and entertaining the kitchen help with juggling, acrobatics, and prestidigitation. They thought they'd lucked onto a good thing when they saw the Cook's great steamy kitchen, redolent with a hundred cooking smells, where the walls were lined with every pot, pan, skillet, canister, cauldron, bottle, decanter, jar, ewer, carafe, salver, cruet, samovar, tankard, jug, kettle, pitcher, basin, saucepan, tureen, casserole, gravy-boat, dipper, spatula, toasting fork, cleaver, ladle, and spit known to man.

The cook himself was a bit overawing but they were used to winning their way into the good graces of butler, scullery maids, and bootboys with cozening words and ingratiating gestures. Such persons were small fry but their good will served to grease the path into the presence of whoever was lord of the manor. What was the company's startledness in this case to discover very soon that the Cook was the lord of the manor! and ruled in solitary magnificence in his kitchen court.

They didn't quite like the way the Cook smiled across his whole face, rubbed his hands, and drooled when he saw them. With the deepest of courtly bows he ushered them into the kitchen and sat them on stools. There was some pleasure in being offered huge cups of hot cream with nutmeg and cardamom sprinkled with ground nuts and lumps of chocolate and marshmallows floating on top, together with plates of vast greasy steaming crullers for dunking. But they exchanged uneasy glances when the cook seated himself opposite them and leafed in a much-thumbed recipe book, while muttering to himself: "Hm, yes, clown in aspic: that will do nicely."

The cook glanced at Bob Up, and shuffled rapidly. "Boy meatballs... say, twenty dozen." In a moment was heard "Blanquette de fat lady... I can salt down the extra—if there is any, after rendering the fat." A bit later: "Tattooed man un-

der glass. I've never tried that! What fun." But the moment of greatest satisfaction for the cook came when he opened at "Frog's legs" and saw twenty-four methods of preparing them.

He gave a large sigh of pleasure and left his seat to come squeeze the Frogman's thigh appreciatively. So tender! (The Frogman's, of late years, had been a sedentary life: just sitting on the buckboard holding reins.) The chef would live high for a week on frogs' legs!

With one accord the belatedly wary guests bolted for the door. But, alas! the door was bolted for them.

Then began the torment to their souls. The chef, with many oily gestures, welcomed them back to the great deal table (too late they saw how closely it resembled a chopping block), where he intimated in his rough Russian accent that they should finish their beverage. But somehow they had lost all appetite.

Now there was nothing for it but to conduct them to a passage which opened off the kitchen and was lined with firm-barred cages. Into these the visitors were popped, one to a customer, and the chef began to prepare for a real culinary tour de force.

Fancy the terror and pity of the prisoners when in time they saw Eloise the poor Fat Lady led away to be turned into a year's supply of chitterlings. Would Princess Ozma never look into the Magic Picture and come to their rescue? Then it was the turn of the Tattooed Man, who became not only nourishing but decorative when the Cook sent away his skin to be made into lamp-shades.

Now came the *pièce de résistance*. The chef had prepared himself with fasting and prayers and hoped so earnestly that he would not fail in one of his life's greatest challenges. He was going to make Frogs' Legs *Suprême au Bon Beurre*.

Bob Up and Notta stopped their ears when they heard the groaning screams that came from the kitchen. They thought

their friend the Frogman was going to croak — so to speak — but then they remembered that they were in Oz and even the benison of death would be denied the sufferer.

Alas, the chef was not only a cannibal (though not, actually, in the present instance) but a sadist as well. When the giant legs were done to a turn and served up on a great platter, he invited the remaining prisoners to witness the feast. I think he had some idea of encouraging the two actually to assist in partaking of their friend, but this was out of the question. The pair did not open their lips except to sob. It was the reason, however, that the cook left their arms free to negotiate when he chained their legs to the respective kitchen chairs.

The most horrific feature of the meal was that what remained of the Frogman, still, in Oz, as alive as the chitterlings in the side dish or the lamp shade overhead, was required to be present at the breaking of bread. It tickled a perverse nerve in the chef's sense of humor that the victim should watch himself be consumed.

Here, though, he overreached himself. The sufferings of the poor Frogman were frightful (even now, thinking over them, cold sweat ran down his brow). He had not merely to contend with the continually searing pain at his yet unhealed hips where the cook, with not surgeon's finesse, had chopped off the legs at the top of the thighs. Far worse was the agony experienced in his still living limbs as they were first flayed, then par-boiled, and finally spitted and grilled. To have now to watch the legs be bitten and chewed added only insignificant insult to the Frogman's overwhelming catalog of injury.

Even in the midst of his distress the good frog kept his wits about him. If he could still feel in the severed legs he could at any rate also still to some extent manipulate them. This discovery filled him with wonderment — and gave him a faint hope.

The scene was set, the table spread, the horrified guests

were at the board. The bread was buttered, the pepper and vinegar at hand, and the huge burly chef took his place at the head of the table. He shook out a fresh napkin as big as a bed-spread and then pulled the great plate toward him.

This was the moment the Frogman had waited for. Before the chef could stick a knife into him and cut vital tendons, rendering any further insignificant movement in his legs by the owner mechanically impossible, the Frogman tensed his mind for an effort. Fortunately the front end of his right leg lay closest to the edge of the platter when the Cook drew it up under his chin. With a mighty effort the Frogman caused his disembodied knee and foot to start up in a powerful kick that caught the diner totally unprepared. It knocked his head back against the great tiled stove and he fell out of his chair unconscious.

“Quick, boys!” croaked the frog. “Do what you can to get away while there’s still a chance!”

The expression of Bob Up and the Clown switched from ones of grief and woe to amazement and then dawning hope. They jumped up, but as quickly sat down again when they saw that their chained legs could probably do no more than upset their chairs, which would achieve nothing.

“Now’s the time for thinking fast, Bob my boy,” cried the clown. “What can we do?”

Now Bob Up had not given way totally to misery while in his cage. He had done some thinking—and altruizing. Unlike Hansel and Gretel he had not thrust a gnawed bone through the bars to make his jailer think him inedibly skinny. Instead, in order to lend color to the idea that he was delightfully plump and ready for plucking—and thus might be chosen first for consumption and so give his friends some little longer lease on life—he had always held a fat sausage forward for testing at the poorly lit cage door.

The result of the maneuver was that the chef had, indeed, got the idea that Bob Up had become a regular little

fat boy and so when he selected leg irons for him he chose one of a larger size than might well have fitted a normally-grown youth. Now Bob found that by thrusting off his shoes and with a great deal of pulling and scraping he could get one foot free.

This made him ambulatory, though admittedly his constant companion remained the lurching wooden chair. Hurriedly the orphan lumbered around the room looking for keys that might unlock further leg cuffs. In vain! The cook had not be quite improvident and where he had hidden the keys was never made clear.

But luck ran smooth. On the floor Bob found a hairpin dropped by the luckless Eloise on her way to execution. He brought it to the eager Notta Bit More—who had doubled as prestidigitator and escape artist with the traveling carnival. For Notta it was the work of a moment to winkle open Bob's remaining ankle cuff.

"Now, Bob, old fellow," said the clown, with both hands on hips in the chair where he sat fast, "it's off like the wind with you to the nearest place where you can get help. Sorceress Glinda's, I guess, is the closest—"

"Notta! I'm not going to leave you!" whimpered the boy.

"Yes, you must! We can't abandon poor Mr. Fruakx—and we can't possibly carry him with us to where we can get assistance. I have to stay here and watch out for him. Off you go now. I'll have myself out of my irons in a jiffy and do what I can toward saving us. But hark! The chef is groaning! He may be coming to! Away with you before he wakes up and catches you again!"

Bob did as he was told. It was an exciting two-day run he made to Glinda's palace¹ and it was crowned by success.

"What a frightful creature!" said the Good Witch of the South. "I made sure we'd done away with all cannibals in Oz the time the Tin Woodman slew the dreadful People-

Eater². But that was, admittedly, in an alternate-universe Oz. Do you suppose that in this one he somehow survived, unnoticed all these years?—in a slightly different gestalt, of course.”

The young orphan had not opinion on that. But he did say, “The Frogman said he had a Russian accent.”

“Indeed?! Then it must be the old Lyudoed in very fact! How strange. Well, we must put a stop to his antisocial activities.” And here Glinda ordered up a swan chariot and in half an hour she, Bob Up, and the Minute Maid were off, the latter carrying the sorceress’ satchel of spells and simples.

They found the kitchen castle in a sorry state. All the fine smells of cooking had been dissipated and they discovered Notta Bit More and the Frogman subsisting on cold canned beans in the diminutive lounge. The great kitchen hall had been too redolent with bitter memories for them to want to venture back there.

In the kitchen, however, remained the Compleat Cook. While he was still unconscious from the blow to his head produced by Fred Fruakx’s skillful kick, Notta had made haste to confine him hand and foot with the irons he had taken from himself and young Bob Up. With the Cook immobilized, the two prisoners had no hesitation in remaining at the Kitchen Court, in preference to wandering helplessly in field and forest. At the Court Bob Up and whatever aid he summoned would know where to find them.

Sorceress Glinda had a private interview with the Cook, as a result of which he promised faithfully not to eat any more people, or even frogs, when they came as big as, and acted like, humans. With that the Compleat Cook of Oz passes from our present story.

Now the witch gave her attention to the sadly mutilated Frogman. About the Tattooed Man and the Fat Lady, who were not dead but very effectively destroyed, she

1 See AN ORPHAN IN OZ. Editor’s note.

2 See A. Volkov’s VOLSHEBNIK IZUMRUDNOGO GORODA. Editor’s note.

could do nothing. The prospect of trying to reassemble viable human beings from a tureen of chitterlings or six lamps shades was too daunting. All she could do was to cause the erection of a simple dignified monument commemorating the sacrifice of the unfortunate mummers.

After dreadful bleeding the Frogman's hip stumps had somehow autocauterized. Glinda had to give the Cook credit for having made sharp clean blows with his axe. The wounds were healing nicely and there was no sepsis. But how was Mr. Fruakx to become ambulatory again?

Nick Chopper, who had risen from being a rusted wreck in a forest to Emperor, had succeeded in making so unsavory a thing as metal prostheses popular in Oz. Therefore Glinda had not hesitation in asking Fred F. if he'd like to have her fit a couple of metal legs. His horrified response made her rethink her attitude toward the Woodman's originated fad.

"Dear me, what then?" she said. "It is possible, technically, to regrow your natural limbs, where severed—but for that your wounds would have to be reopened drastically, then kept so, under sterile conditions, for up to several years. We could, certainly, rig up a ward for you at my residence—if you can face the prospect...?"

"I can face any prospect but leglessness, your grace," averred the great frog gravely.

And so it was done. It was the end of his life with the traveling road show.

And even now when the frogman reminisced he sweated.

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

“Once we were a free people, living happily in the great forest, flying from tree to tree, eating nuts and fruits, and doing just as we pleased without calling anybody master. Perhaps some of us were rather too full of mischief at times, flying down to pull the tails of the animals that had no wings, chasing birds, and throwing nuts at the people who walked in the forest. But we were careless and happy and full of fun, and enjoyed every minute of the day. This was many years ago, long before Oz came out of the clouds to rule over this land.

“There lived here then, away at the North, a beautiful princess, who was also a powerful sorceress. All her magic was used to help the people, and she was never known to hurt anyone who was good. Her name was Gayelette, and she lived in a handsome palace built from great blocks of ruby. Everyone loved her, but her greatest sorrow was that she could find no one to love in return, since all the men were much too stupid and ugly to mate with one so beautiful and wise. At last, however, she found a boy who was handsome and manly and wise beyond his years. Gayelette made up her mind that when he grew to be a man she would make him her husband, so she took him to her ruby palace and made him as strong and good and lovely as any woman could wish. When he grew to manhood, Quelala, as he was called, was said to be the best and wisest man in all the land, while his manly beauty was so great that Gayelette loved him so dearly, and hastened to make everything ready for the wedding.

“My grandfather was at that time the King of the Winged Monkeys which lived in the forest near Gayelette’s palace, and the old fellow loved a joke better than a good dinner. One day, just before the wedding, my grandfather was flying out with his band when he saw Quelala walking beside the river. He was dressed in a rich costume of pink silk and purple velvet, and my grandfather thought he

would see what he could do. At his word the band flew down and seized Quelala, carried him in their arms until they were over the middle of the river, and then dropped him into the water.

“Swim out, my fine fellow,” cried my grandfather, “and see if the water has spotted your clothes.” Quelala was much to wise not to swim, and he was not in the least spoiled by all his good fortune. He laughed, when he came to the top of the water, and swam in to shore. But when Gayelette came running out to him she found his silks and velvet all ruined by the river.

“The princess was very angry, and she knew, of course, who did it. She had all the Winged Monkeys brought before her, and she said at first that their wings should be tied and they should be treated as they had treated Quelala, and dropped in the river. But my grandfather pleaded hard, for he knew the Monkeys would drown in the river with their wings tied, and Quelala said a kind word for them also; so that Gayelette finally spared them, on condition that the Winged Monkeys should ever after do three times the bidding of the owner of the Golden Cap. This Cap had been made for a wedding present to Quelala, and it is said to have cost the princess half her kingdom. Of course my grandfather and all the other Monkeys at once agreed to the condition, and that is how it happens that we are three times the slaves of the owner of the Golden Cap, whosoever he may be.

“Quelala being the first owner of the Golden Cap, he was the first to lay his wishes upon us. As his bride could not bear the sight of us, he called us all to him in the forest after he had married her and ordered us always to keep where she could never again set eyes on a Winged Monkey, which we were glad to do, for we were all afraid of her.”

Princess-Sorceress Gayelette would seem to be a lady who had everything: a lofty social position, great power, beauty, wisdom, and a gorgeous man to be her husband. Of these

qualities only her wisdom might be called in question. It was perhaps not very wise to make enemies—and on so trumped-up and trifling grounds—of the winged Monkeys, who bided their time but in the end proved to be just as vindictive as the princess herself.

All the while the monkeys were in the thrall of the Cap they took care not to cross the irritable sorceress. Who knew what tricks she might come up with to increase the ornerousness of their bondage? But when witch Glinda freed the simians from the curse of the Cap³ they felt themselves to be independent agents again and might dabble a little bit in revenge—as long as they made very sure Gayelette did not suspect them as the originators of her troubles.

For a revenge campaign with these specifications the monkeys had need of a cats-paw. As soon as they had returned to their home in the Gillikin forest, their leader Cheecheecheepip instituted a survey to determine who in all Oz combined the qualities of capability and orneriness to the greatest degree.

It was of course no use inviting the ‘good’ witches and magicians of Oz to help him. They would be very skeptical of a plan to enchant someone out of hand just on a revenge kick and particularly when that someone was a member of their own guild. Nor was it sensible to employ an agent who would prove powerless before Gayelette’s magic arts. Hence, ordinary criminals (supposing any such to exist in Oz!): kidnappers, blackmailers, hoods, were out, as well as giants, trolls, and ravening beasts.

No, the agent must be a magic worker, but a wicked one.

Alas, the only two really celebrated wicked witches of Oz didn’t exist any more. Who was left? It took Cheecheecheepip’s spies three years of seeking out and inter-

³ See *THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ*. *Editor’s note.*

viewing every two-bit magician in the country to come to the surprising conclusion that in fact the fairly mild-seeming little old witch Mombi just down the road was as good—or bad—a witch as Oz any longer afforded.

Now Mombi was a brilliant but not very *soignée* woman who suffered from a bad complex. She had trained in magicology and being a Johanna Factotum was in her own conceit the only sorceress in a country. Imagine then her annoyance at seeing all the plum witch roles in Oz go to the notorious triumvirate of weird sisters: Glinda, Bastinda, and Gingemma. They, of course, were daughters of the great Lurliné and had an unfair advantage when it came to claiming powerful positions in the land. Since Lurliné had been responsible for making Oz a magic country in the first place, she had the inside track on picking out people to be rulers and she naturally gave preference to her children.

‘Actually,’ Mombi sometimes mused, ‘it’s funny Lurliné, who is supposed to be so “good,” should two times out of three have spawned such baddies as Gingemma and Bastinda.’ But, good or bad, Mombi hated all the sisters and rubbed her hands in glee when she heard of the demise of the latter two. (Actually, she hated all sorceresses except herself, and even there she had a kind of love-hate relationship.)

When in those early days Oz was parceled out by colors in five divisions, the Lurliné tribe seized the four big countries. The fifth, the green but small land of the center, remained up for grabs. It was understood that powerful magic workers were to be in charge in all the various countries and Mombi, as far and away the most capable witch in Oz after—or possibly even along with—the half-fairy sisters, had no trouble in claiming jurisdiction the insignificant green portion. Though it lay in the heart of Oz there was no Emerald City there in those days and Mombi’s position was like that of an imaginable ruler of Rutland

or Rhode Island, small semi-autonomous enclaves that were there but of very little importance.

Her frustrations and sense of injustice embittered the witch. She would have given anything to get one up on any of the more influential Oz rulers. Thus when the self-styled "Wizard," O.Z. Diggs, turned up from America she thought she saw her opportunity to enlist a powerful ally and she went along with the plans he outlined. She was to cede the trifling green country to Oz (the amazing duplication of name of the circus magician and the magic land was one point that helped persuade people of Diggs' "manifest destiny" in the country). In return, he, as self-proclaimed ruler of all Oz, declared her to be the official witch of the northern country and gave her gifts of jewels and also a valuable hostage, a mysterious young child, who might in a pinch be employed as a pawn in a play for power.

The other witches' reactions when they learned that they had been disestablished by Oz as proxy sorceresses of the North are not recorded. It would seem that Glinda for one took up an attitude of "He's got to be kidding." Perhaps already from the start in her heart of hearts she realized that O.Z. Diggs was only a flash in the pan and would soon be superseded, with her own position as top "good" witch of Oz reaffirmed.

But it was a come-lately witch called Tattypoo, who by a strange chain of circumstances ousted Mombi as Witch of the North⁴, that the latter hated even more than the superior but more distant Glinda. When Cheecheecheepip turned up to enlist her aid she was delighted at this sign of homage to her presumed pre-eminent power in the North. She never found out that the monkey politician had chosen her to do his work not strictly because she was so powerful as that she was the nastiest witch in Oz.

⁴ See *THE GOOD WITCH OF OZ*. Editor's note.

C H A P T E R F O U R

Quelala was a prince with a difference. And yet, paradoxically, there was also a sameness about him.

In the first place, he had become prince in a somewhat unusual way. He was not born royal, or noble; in fact, nobody (including himself) knew where or how he had been born. He just suddenly appeared one day in the streets of Kinnigil, a little capital town in a mountainous part of the generally rather mountainous land of the Gillikins. The day was remembered: quite simply because Quelala as so fine-looking a youth who at once became a prominent personage. In default of a known birthday, the day of his "turning up" was kept for the celebration of his yearly anniversary. It was August twenty-seventh.

From appearances one supposed that he was about twelve years old. Though he was soon to prove himself "wise beyond his years," in the first days of his life in Kinnigil he was backward to a degree far short of "his years." He could not read or write and indeed when they asked him who he was he was unable to understand what they were saying! Nor could he even speak except to gurgle a sound like "kwuhh-luh-luh." This was transcribed as "Que-la-la" and was used as his name.

They took him to the court of King Gil, where he was made page. His natural intelligence soon caught him up to his apparent age—and presently he even passed beyond it in thoughtful wisdom. But it remained his looks that won him in-pass with everything. Besides his facial charms he had particularly beautiful muscular thighs that helped him excel at all running and jumping sports and he was of course also a powerful swimmer, witness his river dunking by the naughty Winged Monkeys, which was to Quelala a mere laughing matter.

His coloring was unusual: bright yellow-orange hair: not usually considered very attractive but on him most striking against his warm dark mat skin tone. Of course

there were splendid white teeth, finely glowing, just slightly protruding eyes, and a comfortable height of five foot eleven when he reached maturity.

Quelala at once became the darling of the nearly childless Queen Quenn. It was she who shortly demanded that he be created prince—though he remained on duty as her page. I'm afraid Quelala might have become a spoiled plaything of royalty if the gruff King Gil had not put his foot down from the very start. If he was going to have any attractive foundlings about his court, they were going to have to be manly. He issued an edict against kissing and fondling and saw to it that this was strictly enforced.

It worked. Quelala grew up handsome, good, wise, and manly. Before he got that far, however, he was seen by Princess Gayelette and that decided his fate. The royal lady came on a state visit to Gilkenny and the youth served her also as page. As soon as Gayelette saw him she realized how more beautiful he was than any other male she had ever seen.

She was not long in proposing that his foster parents cede him to her. "Fiancé? Yes, of course," she replied when they inquired delicately whether her intentions were honorable, "when he comes of age. Meanwhile he shall want for nothing—and I shall myself instruct him in all arcane arts so that he become in the end wiser than the wise."

Naturally both Gil and Quenn could see that being affianced to a princess was a better position for their protégé than being merely prince-page in their own court, and they let him go—not however without many tears and sighs on the part of Queen Quenn.

Quelala's attitude to his new mistress was a curious one. Of course he was pleased by her obvious devotion and her generosity. When she wanted, Gayelette could be quite charming and the boy liked her whole-heartedly. But after all, underneath all, there was resentment.

No one had asked *him* if he wanted to be the princess's husband. It was assumed, it was taken for granted, and it was as inescapable as fate. So he liked the princess. But he did not *love* her — and far from his thoughts was the notion of being passionately “in love” with her. What? A woman who, when they started out, was quite apparently old enough to be his mother?!

Naturally he said nothing of this to Gayelette. He saw which side of his bread was buttered. Without the princess he was nothing, and he was far too wise to endanger his position by revealing dissatisfaction of any sort. The result, however, was that he grew to manhood a rather bland personality, without strong drives, who took the path of least resistance and bore all vicissitudes with a smile, whether it was being dropped in a river for a joke or marrying a princess.

The great day of nuptials came — and before long it was also over. Gayelette had dubbed Quelala Crown Prince when she first took him under her wing, and now he was Prince Consort. At once a multitude of duties devolved on him. He smiled, nodded, shrugged, and did as he was bid.

One of the first things Princess Gayelette did now was to send her bridegroom on a good-will tour of every pretty court in Oz. There was a plethora of these, divided into two sorts. One was the seat of kings, queens, princesses, sultans, barons, etceteras who ruled over kooky countries inhabited by people with wheels for feet, people with flat-topped heads who carried their brains in cans, people who stood still while their possessions moved about, people who were only shadows, people made of rubber, and the like — or different. The other sort of court was that of monarchs who presided over small nations of normal ordinary people with no distinguishing marks whatever. Naturally it was these last that the bland Prince Quelala preferred to visit.

He and his entourage were away from Princess Gayelette's realm, which incidentally was called Tresgaie, for many months. In the end even Prince Quelala grew bored with the never-varying routine of receiving lines, formal banquets, speeches, and baby-kissing. By the time the party reached the Winkie-Quadling border, on the farthest opposite side of Oz from Gayelette's country, Quelala was ready to kick over the traces.

"Let's do something very daring," he proposed to his eleven attendants. "Let's dress up as forest robbers—or no, better make that students—and descend on this next little town incognito. Who knows? We might actually *meet* some *people*, not just royalty and flunkies."

Only the staidish old Minister of Finance objected but Quelala said, "You can be our tutor! And if you find we're getting out of hand you have but to command—and we'll obey."

The minister was equally horrified to think of ordering his prince about but on mature consideration he decided he might quite enjoy the fleeting exercise of power, so he went along with the plan.

They rode into Thobdibnub Elsqualspil on a gray Thursday morning. The sidewalk cafés were just closing but they persuaded one bistro owner to remain open an hour longer so they could get coffee and croissants.

The occasion seemed routine enough, even a bit week-day drab and glum, but in fact the great romance of Quelala's life was about to begin. The "students" were flicking their riding crops against their boots and their "tutor" was drumming his fingers idly on the sidewalk table-top when, off-stage, Lola's aria from *Cavalleria* was heard and gradually came nearer.

All ears pricked up, all eyes roamed, and in a little while, just in time for the singer to break off on cue, a lovely maiden in a dirndl with red-golden hair appeared, bear-

ing a great tray covered with coffee cups. She stopped speechless when she saw who her customers were.

It was Jeanette MacDonald, of course. She immediately recovered herself and launched into *Beyond the Blew Horizon*. Quelala, played by the young Nelson Eddy, replied with *Golden Days*.

Then to everyone's delight all the windows on the opposite side of the street flew open and the burghers and their buxom wives leaned out, rendering the "Humming Chorus" from *Butterfly*.

Finally Jeanette (the role was taken by a girl called Dayna, daughter of the café owner) joined with Quelala in *Sweetheart*. Fortunately for all concerned it was springtime: May!

C H A P T E R F I V E

It seemed like old times. The young frogman had to switch all his body processes to neutral, he went into the familiar hibernation act, and for a full three weeks he drifted. Possibly by the time he had groped his way nearly free of the underside of the pseudo-wreck the reflex had begun to work, for he never afterwards remembered how he got out of the sea trap and into open waters.

It was as well, there in the real world, that his aqualung continued to function. Whether he rolled on face or back he went on being supplied with good breathable air. When occasionally ocean currents caught him and sucked him down he kept right on receiving his mix of hydrogen/oxygen to breathe. Porpoises pushed him about playfully but he didn't come to and panic. Sharks cruised by but the drifter was encased in rubber and incidentally not bleeding so they didn't bite. An octopus tickled him but got no change. Fritz just went on drifting.

What his subconscious was looking for was land, of course. It was not until his body drifted gently up on a sandy beach and lodged there that his "soul" came to find him again and he summoned himself up from his deep trance.

Fritz d'Arc raised himself up on his elbows and looked about him.

Was he in heaven?

Mile-wide stretched the white-grain beach. Before him was blue ocean and over him blue sky. But most amazingly: just behind him rose very gradually a rock-candy mountain that peaked far away in a snow ice-cream cone. Near at hand throve a few windblown eclair and cream-puff bushes. He stretched out his hand and knew nirvana.

Fritz had always been partial to sweets—but he liked popcorn too. Yes, when he looked further he descried a young tree just fruiting with sticky popcorn balls and he had a few. His scuba gear he left on the sands and

wandered on in shorts, barefoot, 'til he came to a lemonade spring. Here his cup ran over.

Afterward he began to think of the future. To find an edible landscape was a good thing but he couldn't just lie around gorging himself indefinitely. He must make plans. Most pressing in his mind was the consciousness of having flubbed his finals at Annapoluxent. He'd been top in his class! and now he wasn't going to be—or—already!—hadn't been—around on graduation day. He'd come so near proving himself! Proving that he not only could do things but knew things. Now it had all come to naught and he was a lonely wanderer again, with no point to his existence. He wasn't happy at this moment, even if he was in heaven.

What could he do? Well, clearly nothing until he met people who could tell him where he was and direct him to the nearest telegraph station. Somehow, though, the thought of a telegraph office on a near-endless beach of granulated sugar seemed unreal. Perhaps he would be better served striking off into the mountainous terrain behind him.

Fritz returned to his original landfall, rolled up his waterproof gear in a neat bundle, bound it with his breathing tube, slung it over his shoulder, and was off. In the glistening sugar sand he sank to the ankles but once he reached the candy rubbles on the higher ground he was all right. The pebbles crunched and shattered enjoyably under foot.

As darkness came on he sought shelter for the night. Not a living creature had he met all day. As far as attracting wild life went, the desert island had made no progress in thirty years. But vegetable life of a sort there of course was. He chose a sugarplum tree and threw his traps down under it. From the ground he picked the fallen and desiccated fruits of a sugar bush and presently had a fine bonbon-fire going.

He wished for something to eat which was not sweet but in this he was doomed to disappointment, for such was not to be found on the island. In the end he pulled a few licorice lianas from among the branches of his tree and chewed on those. Afterwards, feeling thirsty, he went to look for another lemonade spring but was not successful. Instead he nearly strayed into a morass of molasses—and drew back in fear. Molasses tonight could strike more terror into the soul of Fritz than could the substance of a thousand men that fishes gnawed upon. Sea death was real and could be fought but the thrall of treacle might be unending.

He spent a troubled night, longing to be able to brush his teeth, and woke bleary-eyed with the awful taste of overnight carbohydrates in his mouth. The day boded ill. Even the fine blue sky had sicklied over to a sort of lavender gray and as the young frogman made up his bundle he found that it was raining candied violets.

He pushed on, up the ever mounting terrain. It was growing colder and the violets were beginning to drift. Fritz had supposed that somewhere he would find a pass through the sierra and be able to get down to the other side of the island, but gradually it was borne in upon him that he was going to have to climb right up into the region of the ice-cream peak. He thought wryly that he ought to make a banner reading “Excelsior!” but he had nothing to make it of. He hardly wanted to use his underwear for the job. He needed them for the extra warmth, inside the rubber suit he had been forced to re-don for protection against the cold.

Until now a bizarre silence had hung over the island. The only sound was the occasional rustle of the breeze in the mille-feuilles. But suddenly a frightening creaky shriek rang on the traveler’s ear. It was exactly like the sound of snowballs clinging. Startled, he turned to see approaching

him rapidly up the winding track the strangest beings in the world.

If they could be compared to anything it was to gumdrops—with extremities. There were perhaps a couple dozen of them and as they rolled quickly along the extremities were always uppermost and positioned for grabbing. Fritz stopped in amazement and then began to laugh. To be grabbed by gumdrops: that would surely be the oddest fate in history—and he waited to see if it would happen.

Instead, the creatures gathered around him in a ring and their creaks and shrieks ululated eerily. Fritz began to realize that they were speaking to each other in a language all their own. Some voices were low and sweet and spoke in honeyed tones but mostly their talk grated on the ear like coconut and was of a peanut brittleness most unpleasant to listen to. Fritz would like to have candied words with them but they seemed to understand nothing of what he said.

The hubbub rose and fell and the gesticulations were intense. Then suddenly it came to blows! The gucklings—for that is what they were—appeared to choose up sides and then rushed upon each other. The frogman now was witness to the most curious phenomenon of all in the family life of yon guck.

As two gucklings flew at each other they coalesced into one, bigger guck. These larger units would then attack others and in less time than it takes to tell the whole crowd had metamorphosed into one big quivery pudding of pale green jelly that stood on two rubbery legs and spoke out of no visible vocal orifice to say in sugared accents:

“Pleased to me chew?!”

C H A P T E R S I X

The Frogman leapt vibrantly along the purple path. Glory be! it was good to leap again! That session in the intensive care wardlet at Glinda's had been rugged—and long: two years—but it had been crowned by success.

When he emerged with his regrown limbs they had been normal in size and completely formed, down to the last webbed toe. He longed to go somewhere and leap and leap. But oh, he was so weak at first.

"You must remain on a course of exercise therapy for some time to come, my friend," warned the Sorceress of the South. "Get all the motion you can. I would advise hopping everywhere. Don't ride. Start today." Then she went inside to write up to date journal on this experiment unique in medical practice.

The Frogman made a feeble lurch and fell on his side. He struggled to his feet and crawled back to bed. The next day he lurched without capsizing. By the end of the week he could make actual hops.

At the end of a month he had hopped away, with many cordial thanks, from the pink palace and had been leaping ever since. That was already ages ago.

Now he needed a place to hide away, for he believed in yesterday—and wanted to get it all down while time was. Where was such a place to be found? It had to be remote, where one or others of his celebrity friends wouldn't be dropping in on him all the time and distracting him.

The remotest place in Oz is those high sierras in the far northeast of the land of the Gillikins, those peaks and ridges so high that even the Good Witch of the North, in one of her incarnations, had trouble getting across them on her wedding journey. The Frogman headed that way when he wanted to really rusticate.

The way he could leap now, the altitude and the sharp ascents didn't bother him. He could do a standing jump of thirteen feet, *almost* straight vertically, and that proved

adequate for any crag-to-crag he found himself having to negotiate. His only serious problem was the cold, and that only at night in the higher reaches of his line of march. By day he kept up a nice warmth by his exercise, in the almost never failing sunshine of the magic land.

At night though! Well, even the newly hale and heartier-than-ever Fred Fruakx couldn't carry on leaping all twenty-four hours of the day. The problem was complicated by the fact that he had left off wearing clothes as being impeding to his agility in foot travel.

That raises an interesting question: When is it indecent or not for a creature human-sized, human-behaving, and treated by others in almost all ways as human to reverse an established habit and appear in the altogether? For, let's face it: it is not general practice for frogs to wear clothes.

Is it size that does it? And when, exceptionally, a frog is, like the celebrated Frogman of Oz, as big as a person, he must appear fully clad or be hustled off to jail? Surely not—for elephants walk around in the nude, even in downtown Lund, Sweden, and nobody takes offense.

Is it perhaps intelligence? When you're as bright as a human being you've got to be covered up like a human being? Still, they don't put chimpanzees into Mother Hubbards when they compete—and win—in I.Q. contests with human children.

Or is it habit? Once you've started wearing clothes you can't ever quit? Yet doting dog-owners who solicitously bundle up their Mexican hairless in winter have no compunctions about letting the animals frisk naked when summer comes.

The Frogman decided it was none of these so he walked around in his noddies whenever he felt like it. All except his gold top hat, of course. That had been awarded him by the grateful citizens of Thobdibnub Elsqualspil for his part in the series of events that led to their town being selected

as the capital of the land of Unnikegwick. When he decided, during his convalescence, not to go back to the flashy garb it had pleased him to wear as barker for the traveling road show, the gold hat was the one exception. He wore it in springtime, in the merry month of May, and also the rest of the year.

The high “roof of Oz” was left behind and now he leapt vibrantly along a lane bordered by hyacinths and irises while all about lavender foliage whispered softly in the evening zephyrs. Presently a thick hedge of clipped mulberries, with boysenberry brambles filling the interstices, caught his attention as it began to march beside the road. It was so thick you couldn’t see what lay beyond it and of course that soon piqued Fred Fruakx’s curiosity.

He began to jump higher in order to see—if not through, then *over* the obstructing hedge. And what he saw made him *leap!*

Could he believe his eyes? Enclosed within the encircling hedge in an area of perhaps five acres was the loveliest violet pool any frog could ever wish for himself. Herself, rather. For beside the pool—and the near side at that with her make-up case open and ready at hand squatted the most radiant—and *only*—full-grown-woman-sized purple frog lady in the world.

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

"Go answer the bell, stupid."

"Oh, all right!" Reluctantly Tip dropped the latest number of *Boys Own* and swung his legs off the window seat. The pull bell kept on jangling and it sounded like somebody wanted attention pretty badly.

It was only a couple of yards to the door, and soon the door was open wide and they were both inside—both being a most imposing great ape with enormous tawny eagle-wings and a little big-eyed winged marmoset carrying an attaché case as big as he was. Tip gaped as he stepped back in awe.

"Greetings!" spoke the ape. "Your name Mombi?"

"Of course not!" blurted Tip indignantly. Actually his name was Tippetarius but people called him Tip. "Do I look like a woman?"

"One never can tell," said the big monkey. "You could be in disguise—or transformed. I'm told the woman Mombi specializes in transformations. That's why I'm here. And no doubt she's not above transforming herself as well—for advantages."

"Well, I'm all boy," boasted Tip. "I wouldn't be a girl if they paid me!"

"Commendable attitude," approved Cheecheecheepip, for of course it was he. "I would never prefer bangles and beads either... But your mistress—is she at home?"

"I haven't got a mistress!" protested Tip again. "I'm way too young—and planning to remain so!"

"Well, I don't know that I agree with you on that point," stated Cheecheecheepip, who possessed a sizable harem.

"If you mean that old witch who runs this place and keeps me here to fetch and carry for her, she's in the kitchen fixing lunch."

Actually Tip was surprised that Mombi, who must have overheard the commotion at the door of the not over-large cottage, had not put in an appearance before now. He was

not to know that she had reached the crucial moment in the preparation of tournedos à la Zilch (for herself, of course; Tip would get bread and water as usual).

Now, however, the preparation could be left in the chafing pan and Mombi came into the bigger room wiping her hands in her apron.

“Ah! Madam Mombi!” cried the winged ape, knowing where he was at last. He astonished everyone by going down on his knees and knocking his forehead against the (trampled dirt) floor.

This behavior naturally put Mombi in an amiable mood. (That was the idea.) She adopted the manner of a chatelaine. “Arise, good ape!” she commanded. “To what do I owe the courtesy of this call?”

Cheecheecheepip glanced around. “If we might speak in private...?” he responded, carrying on the chancellery style.

“Tip, go outside!” ordered Mombi. The boy obeyed and went and leaned among the hollyhocks, kicking his heels and eaten up with curiosity to know what was going on inside the house.

What was going on was the winged monkeys propositioning of the capable witch. The tournedos, even under their cover, had gone quite cold by the time they got it all arranged.

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

“Yoo-hoo! Dearest!... I’m home!...”

That was Prince Consort Quelala hollering to Princess Gayelette as he strode along the broad violet-velvet-carpeted corridor to the Throne Room. Like all good Oz rulers, Gayelette spent all her daylight hours sitting on her throne, just in case visitors dropping in who would require to be duly impressed.

Skittery-clittery-clipp! Quelala listened for the rapid passage of the dainty shoes of his royal wife as she raced to fling open the Throne Room doors and throw herself in his arms. After twenty-three years Gayelette was as much in love as ever and could never sit still a moment after she was aware that her husband had returned from his annual good-will tour.

But this was queer. No skittery-clittery-clipp did Quelala hear, and he had to do his own Throne-Room-door-open-flinging. What was his astonishment to see the great pink-plush-and-purple-satin-covered chair gaping vacantly. The prince’s brow furrowed.

Then it cleared. Briskly he strode past the throne to sweep aside a puce curtain and open a door to the—er, private offices. There he gave a twist to the dripping tap but spied no wife of his.

By this time of course flunkies had hastened to the scene. “Where have you been?” demanded Quelala sternly. “Why are you not in attendance on my lady princess? And where is my lady princess?!”

“Oh, your grace!” cried the trembling servants. “We were in the garden and the park and on the croquet pitch—and along the hen houses—and down by the river—”

“Come, come!” cried the impatient prince; “that answers my first question adequately! What about my second and third? Where is Princess Gayelette?”

“That is what we crave your indulgence to impart,” replied the cherry-faced majordomo, fencing nervously

with his staff, “—if we dare...?”

“Dare? Come, fellow, out with it!”

“Princess Gayelette has disappeared!”

Prince Quelala received this surprising news with an instant silence, then took up his cue like a loyal consort and cried out, registering anxiety:

“When?! How! What are the circumstances?”

“We hardly know,” quavered the majordomo. “Her princely highness was first seriously missed late this morning when she did not appear at the weekly Council of State. But when she was actually last seen was late yesterday afternoon. She gave word to her maidens of the bedchamber that they need not attend her that evening—and the princely supper was canceled.”

“*Who* saw her last?” next demanded the prince.

“I did, your grace,” confessed the servant. “Princess Gayelette was receiving visitors—as usual in the afternoon. Then she called me to her and said that she would see the next arrival in her private closet and was not to be disturbed.”

“And who *was* that next arrival?”

“Nobody knows! I saw out Madame Violet Mauve after the Princess’ half-hour singing lesson—and no one observed any following visitor enter.”

There obviously was some jiggery-pokery involved here but no amount of questioning and investigation ever revealed who the mysterious visitor had been. Just suddenly Tresgaie was without a ruler, and Prince Quelala had to take over, since Crown Prince Gay-Lala was only fourteen years old.

The case roused rather vexing questions of protocol. Quelala himself had been created Crown Prince in the days of his first patronage by the powerful princess. When they married his title became that of Prince Consort while that of Crown Prince (and with it the specific understanding of

Quelala's being heir to the throne) was assumed to have lapsed. This was all the more the case when Gay-Lala was born and the joyful parents bestowed on him in his cradle the vacant title. Who in those early years expected that the throne of the young (-seeming) and vigorous Gayelette would fall empty in the foreseeable future?

Pending the earnestly longed-for return of the Princess, who was actually reigning Prince? The question lay on the shelf and would be turned to good—or bad—account one day. Meanwhile, the older prince was Regent.

The years went by and people continued to hope Gayelette would turn up. Quelala's annual progresses, now that he was de-facto ruler of Tresgaie, were perforce of much shorter duration than formerly. But then as young Gay-Lala grew older and could take over some of his father's administrative functions the regent's stays abroad again grew longer.

What was the attraction for Quelala in remaining long away from a pleasant purple country where he was ruler? I'm afraid to say it was the charms of the sprightly grisette (or, in her case, rougette) Dayna way down yonder in Thobdibnub.

Yes, the pair had been carrying on a secret romance for a quarter of a century. The revelation is quite shocking for my readers, I know, but Quelala rationalized it this way: Taking to himself the right to love whom he loved for two months out of every twelve, he could play a comedy the other ten, let who loved him love him, and succeed in not blowing his top in very frustration. Up to now the scheme had worked very well.

We must give Princess Gayelette credit for one fine trait of character. She was not suspicious of those to whom she had never been anything but good.

C H A P T E R N I N E

"I beg your pardon?" said DesPlessis d'Arc.

"Want to me eat you do?" said the guck eagerly.

"Do I want to eat you?" interpreted the American, catching on. "Why, no, I never eat my acquaintances on my first date." He had decided to treat the whole unlikely occurrence as a spoof.

"Oh may you but!"

"No, honestly, I've had my fill of sweet things just for now. And you look to be as sweet as can be."

"You oh thank," said the guck and simpered most affectingly.

"We might walk on together a little though," suggested Fritz, who was keen to question the creature. "If you're going my way...?"

But at this the guck grew pale. (Can gucks grow pale? Actually, yes, but of that more anon.) It wobbled violently on its rubbery legs and appeared unwilling to take a step.

"What's the matter?" asked Fritz, astonished.

"Safe isn't it!" blurted the guck. "Way lives the that... No-Man Abominable!"

"An abominable no-man? That doesn't sound very frightening... Is it a woman, perhaps?" jested Fritz.

"Partly. Probably." The guck seemed to do better with language when it spoke in isolated words. "I too afraid children am."

Children didn't sound too cheering. One didn't want children to be a part of anything abominable. Fritz began to feel graver. At the same time his curiosity increased.

"But that's the only way to go," he urged, "this path. The ground rises around on all sides... And I don't feel much like going all the way back the way I came."

"Better it be might," urged the guck.

"Oh, come on," pleaded Fritz. "I've got to find a pass through somewhere and maybe we'll run upon it before we get to the No-Man."

The guck didn't like the plan one bit. But it did seem to have taken a liking to Fritz d'Arc. Reluctantly it slithered forward, though whether it was walking or rolling would have been hard to say. Its members (of which there were consistently just two) appeared now as legs, now as arms, or again as an arm and a leg—or other appendage (Fritz thought he caught a glimpse of a pachydermous trunk at one point). Its head and body were co-extensive.

Then gradually the being seemed to take a firmer form. It quivered less jelly-like and the extremities settled down to being fairly sturdy legs. The truth is that it was starting to freeze in the increased coldness of their steady progress upward. The drifts of violets had long been left behind and they trudged between banks of frozen custard along a path of raspberry ice. Fritz shivered even inside his battery-warmed frogman's suit.

The way grew steeper and narrower and now at least Fritz could see, down over ledges, the nearly perpendicular drop to crags far below and in the great distance the purple sea. To attempt to descend there would be sure destruction.

Now that it was inevitable, the guck seemed to face the prospect of bearding the No-Man with somewhat more equanimity. The ultimate height was in sight. No peaks to equal this one rose anywhere around. From here the path would have to be downward. But Fritz was puzzled. No man had appeared.

Then it struck him. There *was* no man! No man was there—and there! and everywhere. Wherever you looked there was no man—but he didn't seem all that abominable. Fritz laughed heartily at the conceit and turned to praise his companion for the amusing fright he had given him.

"Yes," he said merrily, "I see No Man—but he doesn't seem so very abom—"

But he broke off. The guck was not laughing but look-

ing as solemn as a huge pale green gumdrop with no discernible face can look. Its left leg became an arm to point, rigid with awe, upward twenty feet to where the last sharp ridge edge was outlined jaggedly against the sky.

Fritz scrambled ahead, reached and hauled himself up to the ultimate rim, and peered over. He looked straight into the faces of the most terrible thing in the world.

C H A P T E R T E N

The Frogman squatted back on his haunches beside the purple hedge and took his chinlessness in hand. This required some thought.

She obviously *was* the loveliest thing that had ever lived. He was deep in love already. But could he win her? She was unique and his one chance of affection in a lifetime. He *couldn't* muff it. And the sudden leap over the hedge into the midst of her toilet could very *well* muff it.

He decided on strategy. First he must find a way into her enclosure without startling her. He hopped quietly along the path until he came to the point where hedge and path separated. Then he followed the hedge. Somewhere there surely was a break.

Nope. He could tell by the sun that he had now worked his way round to the opposite side of the hedged enclosure from where he had first spied the lovely noble frog (that she was noble, if not actually royal, he somehow felt sure).

This was it. He had to get in to her and his impatience would brook no further delay. Fred Fruakx took the famous thirteen-foot leap and cleared the hedge easily.

He landed in a thicket full of hazel bushes. That was all right. From this screen he could peer out and case the play. Lovely (he was already calling her that in his mind) was still busy with powder-puff and eyebrow pencil in the distance beyond the pond. How could he attract her attention without at the same time frightening her?

He found his heart going pitter-pat and realized that *he*, bold Frogman, was just the least little bit afraid, himself, of the confrontation. What if she rejected him out of hand? The prospect was not to be borne. Yet as little to be borne was the idea of her never finding out at all that he was nearby.

He had an idea. No one, even a noble frog, could be indignant at merely catching sight of a being resembling

him/herself if that being appeared to have no intention of discommoding oneself. The Frogman would appear—but not as if he had any errand in her direction.

But what could he be doing? He would have to be moving or she might never notice him at that distance at all. Ah! he had it. He hung his hat (he didn't quite know why) on a hazel branch and stepped forth.

He would hop! What more natural in a frog? He would hop for his love. But not towards her—menacingly. He would hop *away* from her—reassuringly. He would do his morning hop-ups, all fifty of them, as if he had just *happened* to be there, within the royal—well, noble enclosure when the time came for his exercises.

Cautiously he budged. Then surreptitiously he peeped. She hadn't noticed him. More boldly he half jumped... then jumped again—and yet again. He glanced. Was not Lovely's head livéd? Was not she looking hither across the pond?

Now he took his courage in both hands and hopped. He hopped *high*. He could see the lady frog was openly staring. She was not affrighted! Higher he hopped—and faster. Highest he hopped. He bounced.

Oh, joy. Lovely had dropped her tweezers and mascara brush and was incontinently jumping forward toward him!

Vibrantly the Frogman leapt. The thirteen-foot jump was as nothing now. In the glory of inspiration he leapt fourteen feet, even fifteen—though admittedly not straight up. If a fifteen-foot leap would not draw her, then nothing would.

Yes, one thing would. The frog of his dreams was now squatting at her edge of the pond and appeared undecided. Abruptly Fruakx dived into the filbert thicket and seized his hat. He sallied forth again. Just then a vagrant beam shot out from behind a drifting cloudlet and struck the

burnished headgear so it glared most brilliantly. He had her now for sure!

Oh, horrors! Far from yoo-hooing in glad welcome, the frog princess (by now Fred Fruakx was sure that such was her station) gave one mighty hop and disappeared definitively under the murky surface of the pool. The lily pads rippled tragically for an instant and then all was still. A mere faint waving of the water surface came near the Frogman's toes where he gaped at the pool edge.

He'd torn it now. His excesses had driven the fair one into deep (des)pond and ultimate retreat. Likely he would never see her again. He had lost her.

Sadly he turned away. He knew now the truth of the ancient maxim: "Better to have lost—and loved!—than never to have lost at all."

He was gathering up his thing: the gold hat—which in his fine frenzy had fallen off, into the mud of the pond shore—preparatory to leaving when oh, glory!—his ear and eye were caught by a splash of breaking water on the immediately near surface of the pond.

It was she! All her carefree applied powder and mascara were washed clear and her radiant face was left dew-fresh as her powerful thighs propelled her every instant nearer the enraptured Frogman.

Now he was first privileged to hear her voice. "My hero!" she croaked, melodiously and strong.

Thus it was that the loved quatrain was enacted in reality:

"Then if you wear the gold hat, if that will win her.

And if you bounce high, bounce for her too.

'Til she cry, 'Lover!

Gold-hatted, high bouncing lover—

I must have you'!"

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

Witch Mombi had plenty to think about. That's why she didn't turn herself into a pterodactyl and fly straight-way to the home of Sorceress/Princess Gayelette. Instead, she called the orphan boy to her and said:

"I've got to go into town—after, uhhh, groceries. That's it: We're all out of dill seed, moutarde fine de Dijon, dates, and buckwheat flour. The village shop doesn't carry them. I'll be gone—a few days..."

Tip didn't care if she never came back. He would never taste the delicacies she proposed collecting anyway. But when she said, unexpectedly civilly, "Try to be a good boy until I get back," he could do no less than mumble gracelessly, "I'll try."

She was off. She carried rather a large hamper for it held most of the contents of the attaché case the little marmoset had had with him yesterday, as well as a supply of snacks to chew on as she went along. Dates were a handy non-perishable food and so, relatively, were the buckwheat cakes she had fried up last night with this journey in view. They were almost as good cold as hot.

Mombi had rather a stiff itinerary before her and she had made her plans carefully and, if nothing went amiss, she could predict pretty accurately when she would be back—and she told Tip accordingly. Hence, the boy knew just how long he had to get up to mischief in. He got up to it⁵. But his adventures at that time form no further part of this book.

Mombi felt that the interview with the leader of the Winged Monkeys had gone off rather well, though much had been left unsaid that the witch would like to have had said—from the ape's side! Her own secrets she naturally had no intention of revealing. Still and all she liked the impression she had received that she was being invited to participate in concerns of national importance, even if she

⁵ See *THE MARVELOUS LAND OF OZ*. Editor's note.