

very least we ought to make some provisions for the night.”

“Maybe Davy could be induced to come down and provide us lodging,” said Glinda, suddenly gay.

“I suppose that is the logical solution,” agreed Kabumpo. “Wait a bit, all. I’ll just fetch him.” So saying, the Elegant Elephant stepped off the rock and went away at a loping trot down the ravaged beach to launch himself on great leathery purple wings.

It was the only moment in history when fond friends could watch both an elephant and a whale cavorting in the sky.



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

“Till,” said Ozma, Queen of Oz, “I have a treat for you — and a very great responsibility.”

“Oh, Your Highness!” said Till, thrilled, “I’m so honored. May I ask..?”

“I don’t know how long this expedition to the North will take. I don’t care to feel rushed. During my absence you will act as my prime minister; would you like that? In comparison to Unnikegwick, you know?”

For once Till was speechless. Then he managed to gasp out some broken phrases of gratification. In a sudden unexpected turn of the tables all those who had spurned upon him with their foot were now to be his underlings. But it is to the Orangeman’s credit that, faced with the chance for greatness, he decided to be great, not petty.

Ozma guessed something of what was going on in his mind. “It will be your chance to prove yourself. I shall be depending on you. I know you won’t let me down.”

Nor did he. In the fortnight he ruled Oz he went hog-wild and founded a historical museum, an art gallery (named, admittedly, the Orangespiegel Collection), a lying-in hospital, five day-nurseries, a minigolf course, a distillery (let’s face it: called “Till’s Stills”), and a new sports stadium. He set his mark on Oz so it would never be erased, like crazy Ludwig of Bavaria, whose castles live! while the wars his people wanted him to wage instead with the money have been forgotten.

Ozma, meanwhile, after a glance at the Magic Picture (which made her goggle), was off very rapidly in the Red Wagon with nobody for company but a little orange frog. What she saw in the picture was a crowd scene made up of a number of would-be humans, a few fairly conventional-looking animals, about two *unconventional*-looking monkeys (they had wings), and upwards of a hundred blobs (the total varied), of different colors. They were all doing something *very* unconventional. They were walk-

ing into the mouth of a vast wooden whale.

The princess was itchy to be off but she couldn't help watching to see what happened next. In fact, what happened was not very spectacular: the whale seemed to twitch about a little until it apparently got a depth of water under it, then it carefully backed out of the sands, drifted out to deeper water, and submerged. The viewer was left looking at a scene of dark blue sea, sugar-white sand (or sand-white sugar), and a huge amorphous pale-salmon-to-brown thing that inched along so slowly its movement could not be detected.

Merely puzzled, Ozma switched off the picture and made ready to depart. One thing the scene had taught her: both the individuals they were off to find, Glinda the Good Sorceress and the Frogman of Oz, were water-borne, no telling where, but presumably on their way back to Oz. She'd just go and get this little matter at Mombi's cottage taken care of and be back ready to receive her friends at the Emerald City, which they were sure to make for eventually.

She parked Till Orangespiegel on the throne (symbolically) and called all the courtiers to come see. Princess Dorothy sulked a little because she thought *she* ought to be regent but as the queen explained, "Darling, you're only a little girl. I know!: I'm not, in appearance, much older, but at any rate I've had experience at ruling for forty years now. I really feel easier in my mind having a mature person in charge. In fact, I would choose the Wizard, for preference, but he, as you of all people know, swore off ruling Oz the time he left here in the balloon."

"Well, couldn't I be chief adviser to the Prime Minister?" returned the girl. If she couldn't be on the throne it would at least be something to be the power behind it.

"That, of course," stated Ozma affably. "I was just going to suggest it."

So the little hurdle was negotiated. As it happened, this was the first time it had been presented to Princess Dorothy that there might be some disadvantages to being eternally young and innocent. She began to think about completing her studies and in the fullness of time did so.¹³

Incidentally, Till and Dorothy got on together like a house afire. He ended by naming three of the day nurseries after her and her great chums Trot and Betsy.

The crowd followed to the malachite front steps of the palace and waved as the Princess rode off. She spent the first night in a travelers' hostel on the lavender-green meadows at the frontier. King Quelala she carried to her room in a paper bag so as not to startle the chamber maid. Once alone, they could relax and be themselves. Ozma even managed to catch a few flies for the king's dinner.

"What do you think, your majesty?" she said. "Are you going to want to resume your erstwhile (if unnatural) human form?"

"That depends," answered the frog equivocally. "Partly, I should say, on whether you, your majesty, rediscover old Mombi's recipe for the procedure. Without it, there's no point in setting my heart on it."

"Oh, well, as far as that goes, witch Glinda could manage some sort of transformation without it, I think. Although that raises a most interesting point. Could a different witch, using a different formula, turn you into the same person you'd been before? For I take it there's little point in becoming some other person than the familiar King Quelala."

The frog could give his unequivocal sanction to *that* supposition. And so they retired for the night.

They reached Mombi's cottage toward evening the next day. Of course in the many intervening years since Tip-

¹³ See AUNT EM AND UNCLE HENRY IN OZ. Editor's note.

Ozma had left the place it had fallen a good deal into disrepair. The witch had lived on there, at intervals, until her destruction some twenty years before the time of our story. Nobody in honest Oz had thought to go there and carry away anything, so Ozma felt fairly confident of finding what she sought.

"It's rather a strange feeling, you know," said Ozma to her passenger on the dashboard. "I actually have not been back here since I left with dear old Jack Pumpkinhead in—let me see, that would be 1903, great world time. But I seem to recall it all as if it were yesterday. And the place where Mombi hid her library of spells was—well, you'll see shortly."

"Has no one lived in the cottage, your majesty?" asked Quelala.

"Not that I know of. You know Mombi had a rather fierce reputation. I guess no one has wanted to live in her aura, and you can't blame them." Ozma laughed. "And so the boyhood home of Ozma, beloved queen of Oz, is not even marked by a plaque. It's rather droll."

Quelala seemed a little puzzled. "Forgive me, your highness—"

"Do call me 'Ozma,' King Quelala," said the Princess. "Everyone does."

"I should be honored—if Princess Ozma will in turn call me by my name."

"'Birrdiepe'?" said Ozma with a smile.

"If you like. I can't be ashamed of my frog ancestry."

"Of course not. 'Birrdiepe' it shall be. But you were saying...?"

"Yes. Dayna and I had a visit some time back from the Count and Countess of Gillequin. I remember in talk with Lady Diane that she told me how *she* had once lived in the cottage formerly inhabited by a witch called 'Mombi'."

"Dear Tod; of course. That lady has been any number

of people, you know. While she was Tattypoo, Witch of the North, she did indeed dwell in the cottage—hardly more than a hut, really—from which she had ousted the horrid Mombi. But that was quite a different cottage from the one we’re going to now.”

“That’s interesting,” said Quelala Birrdiepe. “May I hear the story?”

And while they rode on, Ozma told it.

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

Sorceress Glinda concluded her conference with the leader of the group of Winged Monkeys—if a quite fortuitous collection of the simians could be said to have a leader. They were a gathering of some twenty-five who had arrived individually to drop a detached limb or other fleshy bit into the pit of the Abominable No-Man only to find the vast organism gone, it having crawled willy-nilly or half-fallen down the broken mountain-side.

The miraculous saved party of mountaineers had signaled to the first arriving monkeys and they in turn rounded up their fellows as—one by one—they put in an appearance doing police-detail as they had been commanded so long ago by the Witch of the East. The flesh fragments they were on their way to deposit at this time were, on Glinda's instructions, gathered instead in a heap discreetly out of sight behind a great crag of rock-candy left over from the fall of the mountain-side.

"It won't do, Mupmufmup," she said to the representative of the monkeys. "We must discuss the situation and plan an alternative disposal routine. We'll do that, once aboard the whale."

This they had just done. An equitable arrangement had been arrived at which simultaneously proved for clearing the Oz countryside of the unaesthetic sight of dismembered bodies and detached limbs and gave consideration to the comfort of the still living lumps of protoplasm. The monkeys were in fact delighted that they no longer needed to fly all the way across a desert and an ocean to carry out their duty. Instead they had only to journey as far as Glinda's palace—or a reception depot, rather, half a mile from the witchly residence.

The decision had been hastened along by a rather grim incident. No more than half a dozen of the apes had left their grisly freight behind the candy rock when a new arrival, told to deposit his load "with the others," returned

to report that there were no others.

The crowd rushed to look. Sure enough, a creature, compound of a wolverine's head, the greater part of a sheep's body, some dog legs, and a human arm, had apparently grown together (the process, incredibly enough, took little more than half a day) into one ambulatory horror and loped off among the scattered shattered shards of the candy mountain. Now the dessert island had a new living inhabitant for sure.

At that Glinda commanded that further arriving monkeys drop their load in the ocean and she hurried on the departure of the wooden whale.

"And what of the Abominable No-Man, your grace?" asked Mupmufmup as his conference with Glinda ended.

The sorceress whispered her reply. The facts were frightful and she didn't want to depress the company with a general announcement. "The... er, substance will gradually flow down-slope into the sea and there..." Now she spoke so low even the ape a hand's breadth away could scarcely hear her. "It is to be hoped that it will eventually be eaten by fishes, and therewith an end to the matter. 'Tis very grievous to be thought upon."

Even Mupmufmup shuddered at the thought and it was with relief that the two conspirators heard the Austrian Ostrich (who preferred to be known by her French name, *I'Autruche de l'Autriche*) call for a morris dance.

Buck Jones rushed to claim the hand of Pucella, the Minute Maid, and Gayelette and the Frogman approached each other shyly and agreed to be partners. The Elegant Elephant and Gucks, now assembled as one great big toothachy creature nine feet tall, made a pair. (While at home on the dessert island the being had in some strange indescribable way absorbed about a boxcar's worth of the sugar substance of the isle.) The goose and the gnu were a couple (they had their G's in common). The giraffe and the

ostrich (a tall one) stood up together — well, almost. The Ardent Aardvark performed as chirp with the Musical Monkeys as they instrumentalized on combs with parchment paper. She sang “Time After Time” and “I Wish I Didn’t Love You So” as the crowd moved in a grave-gay sarabande.

Glinda was in at least one of Fritz d’ Arc’s arms and frankly enjoyed the sensation. What *was* there about this man that seemed so elusively familiar to her? Not that she needed a prior acquaintance to find him attractive, with his quiet manly manner and dark good looks. The morris dance had long since given way to a foxtrot and the two could converse quietly as they danced. He told of his frustrated career at under-water-demolition school and how professional predilections had led him to think of detonation as the solution to the problem of the awful No-Man.

“I must admit it’s hardly worse than the solution that now seems to have taken out of our hands for execution,” sighed the sorceress. “One can only cry bitter tears for the fate of the pitiful creature.” By now she had intimated also to Fritz d’ Arc what was likely to be going to happen (and she was not going to try to stop). “But aside from the unsavoriness of the results of your method, nothing would really have been accomplished, you know. The creature would simply have been blown into a quantity of still-living fragments, for protoplasm once rendered deathless in the Oz ambiance — by whatever means it is that that happens — goes on being immortal. At least this way the undead protoplasm will become part of viable living creatures. Better, I should say, to share the consciousness of a living fish in the Nonestic Ocean than to remain on as, to say the least, an uncomfortable and bored bit of a huge and hideous unmoving island of flesh.”

And that really was the last word on the gruesome subject.

CHAPTER THIRTY - NINE

"This is the spot," said Ozma and took her spade and began to dig.

Poor King Quelala did all he could to help but there really isn't all that much a three-inch frog *can* do to help a lady dig a hole except squat nearby and look on encouragingly.

After half an hour Ozma wiped her brow and said, "Times like this I could wish I was a boy again." Then she stood quite still and listened to the echo of her own words. "Come to think of it, there are *lots* of times I wish I was a boy again." A look of distress crossed her face.

Quelala peered up at her questioningly. He knew Oz history, of course. As a crowned head he had made it his business to know it. He had also taken some interest in it for its own sake. Furthermore no one could have read *The Marvelous Land of Oz* and not known what a marvelous land it was in those days and what marvelous fun Ozma had had when she was the boy Tip.

"Your Majesty," he said, "—er, Ozma. You once said that if you didn't like being a girl you would insist on being transformed into a male youth again. Have you ever really been tempted?"

"Oh, often and often," cried Ozma, close to tears. "I even managed once to resume my dear old shape as Tip—just very briefly—but Princess Dorothy, who had never known me as a boy, was distressed.¹⁴ I think now I was too abrupt in resuming the Ozma form. In time Dorothy, and the others, might have got used to my male presentation. I've been unlucky..."

The fairy put down her spade and rested on an upturned wheelbarrow. Quelala could tell another story was in the offing and he couldn't have been more fascinated. "Ozma—er, Tip...?" he said encouragingly.

"Yes, you see, it was in an era that was totally male-

¹³ See *IN OTHER LANDS THAN OZ*. Editor's note.

dominated that I was restored to my — so they claimed — ‘true’ form. At that time human (and, by extension, fairy) females were the complete captives of the males — unlike among some life forms. And it was the pleasure of the human males to insist that women and girls be the most divine, delicate, and defenseless creatures that had ever existed. If there happened to exist a choice, then an individual they liked would, by these males, be shoved without question into the rarefied female sex, not relegated to the rough, rigorous — and fun! conditions of malehood.

“So that’s what happened to me. In 1903 everybody assumed I should be charmed to become a girl. Nowadays they would not be so quick to deprive me of the status of male, once I had, by whatever questionable means, achieved it. For obviously anybody, given the choice, is going to prefer to be a man, just as anybody given the choice would rather be white than black. Not because there is anything superior about whiteness or maleness, but simply because you don’t have to put up with so much flack that way.”

Quelala, whose shape, but never whose sex, had changed, could only agree.

“Well, too late now,” said Ozma and gave a deep sigh, stood up, and took her spade again. “I’ve become so imbedded in the Oz matrix as a female by now that I’ll never get out.” She dug again.

No go, however. She spaded down here and there in the earth for all of an hour and a half and finally had to admit defeat. “I *know* Mombi had her trove of magic spells and recipes in a box she kept buried in this cow-stall. She must simply have moved it. No doubt she knew I knew. After I was turned into Ozma, and she took an oath not to practise magic again, I suppose she thought I’d tell about her magic belongings, so she moved them to another hiding place.”

Ozma made a shakedown of herself — actually on the old bed-rack she had slept on for years as a boy — and spent the night in Mombi's house. The next day she attacked the problem logically and searched in all the logical places where Mombi might have secreted the treasure. That too, alas, produced nothing. On the following day she looked in all the illogical places.

The fairy queen had almost worn out the overalls she wore over her leotard. All the scrambling about she'd done! The wall-paper in the residence hung in tatters, the floors had been pried up (Mombi in later years had indulged in the little extravagance of parquet flooring: easy to take apart, and secrete things under!), and the thatch was like a honeycomb with all the holes that had been poked in it. still the longed-for chest had not come to light. At the same time Ozma had been able to ascertain by all the signs that no one had been in the house and able to carry off the prize.

On the third day she happened to cast a glance up at the house chimney from the front garden. That stork's nest on the top of it. Yes, the fairy remembered a stork's nest from the old days. She even remembered the stork: the one, at any rate, who had been in residence then. Olivette was her name — and her husband: wasn't it Rupert? But they were long gone and no one sat on the nest now. (Storks like the warmth of the heat coming up the chimney; no point in staying on at a vacant house.)

But a stork's nest still, after twenty years (since Mombi's demise)? Wouldn't wind and weather have picked it to pieces by now? And now that the princess looked again: wasn't that an unusually *deep*, and solid-looking, nest? Before Ozma had time to complete the logical train of her thought, she had the ladder up against the cottage wall again and was climbing.

She scrambled across the torn-up thatch and plunged her gauntleted hands into the nest. Exactly! A false bottom.

In no time she had flung the 'real' part of the stork-nest to the winds and had got down to the fundament: a durable pillow-shaped object, about a foot deep, of some metallic-sharkskin-resembling fabric or fiber, whose gray color had been easily masked under a camouflage of dirty twigs. The 'pillow' had a convenient zipper across the top! Ozma grasped the finger-flap with Tip-like decisiveness and ripped...

The box.

You can imagine her delight as she perched herself on the roof-tree and prepared to have a look right then and there at the object of four days' fevered search. The lightly overcast day was nearly wind-still. No priceless document was going to blow away.

Well, about the fifth paper down was one headed "Recipe for turning frogs into princes, or vice versa."

"There you are, Birrdiepe," said the girl ruler with quiet satisfaction and handed the paper to the frog king who, ever faithful in his attendance, squatted near her on the thatch. The sheet was bigger than he was.

Having come so far, Ozma was not going to do violence to her curiosity now and she leafed further. The next document down was a matching set of instructions: "How to turn princesses into frogesses." Useful too, for future reference.

Then she found "Method to be followed in converting kings (and males generally) into chestnuts." A little later was "For making coaches of pumpkins"... Now Tod would be interested in this: "Recipe for making witches out of ordinary women—with directions for inducing memory loss."

Suddenly Ozma gasped. There under hand were "Safe, easy, cheap, never-fail rules for exfeminating girl fairies."

Without an instant's thought Princess Ozma crumpled the paper and thrust it in her overalls pocket.

Not a moment too soon either. She heard King Quelala

squeaking and looked where his tiny finger pointed.

In the sky, out of the northeast, an air chariot, drawn by six pinky-white swans, was rapidly approaching.

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

Glinda the Good and powerful Sorceress stood aside and watched admiringly as DesPlessis d'Arc and his sidekick Lucky Buck Jones bossed the loading of the explosives back aboard the land boat. Kabumpo would be in charge of the detail to deliver the dangerous freight back to its rightful owner, the Gnome King Kaliko. Then he and his troupe would go on in the boat to play the provinces west to Rash and the demesne of the Red Jinn. Gucks was going with them. He'd make a marvelous circus turn. He also looked forward to being chewed on so appreciatively by the moody gray monarch. Mainly, however, he was going that route because there simply was no room for his current four hundred pounds in the swan chariot, which Glinda had sent back on its own to rendezvous with the travelers at the land-boat's oceanside berth.

The Winged Monkeys had already departed. There was a melancholy air of breaking up and taking leave. It was a thing sure under heaven, if anything was, that just this constellation of people and creatures would never all meet again to go adventuring.

As d'Arc stepped into the chariot Glinda said, "Would you like to take the reins? Driving is simple."

"Sure, queen," said Fritz, "that ought to be all right."

Oh, what a pang that form of address caused the witch ruler of the Quadlings. She *was* a sort of queen, but the word was never used in official parlance at the Pink Palace. "I wish you wouldn't," she breathed, distressed.

"What?" said d'Arc and looked at her gravely.

"Call me 'queen.' It... reminds me of someone... I loved very much once... and lost."

"Oh? Who was that?" said the American not very circumspectly.

But for the moment the sorceress was not able to reply. The swans were running along the beach and then lifting into the air and the five passengers were all leaning out to

wave to the animals 'round the sandboat. A little controversy seemed to be going on there as to what should be the order of precedence in entering the land vehicle. The lordly purple elephant was first of course but should the giraffe be next by virtue of stature or the ostrich and aardvark in view of their sex? The confusion had not been sorted out before chariot and boat were out of sight of each other. The last thing the air travelers could see was the beached whale, shedding wooden basketballs and settling down to wait for his friend and namesake to return.

That namesake now turned back and said to Glinda: "That sounds like a story. May we hear it?"

So as the swans drew the chariot rapidly onward over the plains of Ix and out above the great desert, the red sorceress told the tale.

"You all remember stories of a boy named Button Bright? He was a charming youth, though strange and perhaps a little perverse. He was always getting lost! but somehow always managed to get found again. Except one time.¹⁵ He fell down a treacle well in Oz and stayed there twenty years. I missed him terribly and for most of that time we all thought him dead. Then when he got found again at last I wasn't there to greet him. Afterwards he left Oz and has never been seen or heard from again."

Buck Jones looked ill at ease and the Frogman coughed—and then expressed the feelings of the company that it was indeed a sad little story. But what could anyone do? They tried to distract the melancholy sorceress by pointing out see-worthynesses on the ground far below.

Presently the Frogman spelled the other frogman at the reins and Fritz d' Arc went to sit beside the two older of the airborne women. Gayelette and Glinda were whispering together and Fritz, ever discreet, tried not to hear. But he couldn't help it. The red sorceress' voice was 'toward' him

¹⁵ See *THE MAGIC MIRROR OF OZ*. Editor's note.

and he heard her say: "But that's witchcraft!" A moment later: "Yes, I know! But even so I never attempt transformations."

There was a longish interval during which Princess Gayelette pleaded some cause long and earnestly, though inaudibly for all the world except her fellow magic-worker. Just once the Gillikina's voice rose in earnestness and decibels and they all heard her say, "I can't!"

Then she was abruptly silent. A little later Fritz heard Glinda whisper, "Yes, I see." The final remark he caught was "I'll take it under consideration. Wait 'til we land."

The two dames' conference broke up rather hastily and they traded places. Glinda sat down next to Fritz and laid a graceful hand inside his elbow. "Tell me your thoughts, fair sir!" she said with an effort at gaiety, but her mood was more pensive than that. Presently she was talking to Fritz again in a very quiet voice but with an entirely different air from what she had employed toward Gayelette.

They made an attractive picture as they sat there together on the rear seat of the chariot against a background of pale gray sky: he as swarthy as a pirate but with a kinder cast to his eye, she with her brilliant auburn hair gleaming through her snood. They looked to be very much of an age, though the good witch was of course hundreds of years older than the man. Glinda looked at 'Sples' d'Arc again and sighed.

Pucella and Bucky, squeezed together on one side of the Frogman who held the reins, were frankly sweethearts by now. Their familiarity with each other had already gone over to a kind of loving bantering and they both seemed thoroughly to enjoy teasing each other. Now they were at it again and *they* weren't whispering! The whole carload of travelers could hear what they said.

Names were the theme of their amorous discourse today. From the start Buck had found Pucella's name to be most unorthodox and outré. She on the other hand declared

“Buck Jones” to be not only humdrum but unoriginal. “Both you and your ‘cousin’ have names borrowed from other people,” she now complained playfully. “What is it with you Joneses? You don’t seem to be able to think up names of your own.”

“What would you have? Jehosophat Jones?” riposted Bucky as vigorously.

“Why does it have to be ‘Jones’ at all? Are you sure that’s really your name? It’s so terribly ordinary.”

“Anyway it’s not as bad as ‘Smith’,” protested Jones.

“That’s true. But then none of us here is *named* ‘Smith’,” returned Pucella. “So you still win the ordinariness contest.”

Bucky Jones blushed scarlet. Now he’d done it.

For at the same moment from across the way DesPlessis d’Arc said, “My name is Smith.”

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

“Great Lady Lurliné!” cried Ozma of Oz. “That’s Glinda’s chariot!”

Hastily, as the swan-motored air car glided down for a landing on the south forty, the girl ruler thrust the documents case back down in the chimney opening and scrambled down the ladder—not, however, forgetting to pocket King Quelala before she made off.

Once on the grass plot before Mombi’s cottage she set off running, while the occupants of the chariot also made haste across the stubble field.

“Glinda! my friend. What in the world—?” called Ozma when she was just within hailing distance.

The good sorceress was marginally more sedate as she hurried along hand in hand with a dark curly-haired man in a rubber suit. “I might put the same question to you, my dear,” she called back, all smiles and delight. “We saw a lady on a rooftop and thought you might be in distress. But I don’t see any flood hereabouts,” and her laughter rang out surprisingly for those who were used to a somewhat graver Glinda.

Ozma, however, was paying no attention to her friend’s words. She had stopped and was staring her eyes out. That man! She’d seen him before. She knew him! It couldn’t ...! It couldn’t...?

“Could it be... Button Bright?” she exclaimed in a small voice, coming nearer.

“It’s Saladin Paracelsus de Lambertine Evagne von Smith,” declared Glinda gaily, “though he has other names too numerous to mention. However, among them *is* an old childhood appellation, ‘Button Bright’.”

Ozma sat down in the stubble, over-bowled.

Now normally when a sovereign sits, lesser mortals (and immortals) remain standing, but in this case everyone felt it would show greater solidarity with the astonished little fairy to join her on the ground. So they did.

“Dare I ask?” chirped the young girl faintly, “what it all means?”

“It’s quite simple, really,” volunteered Buck Jones. “Fritz drowned out of underwater demolition school and ended up on the dessert island and found me and Davy the whale and we tried to blow up the Abominable No-Man but Glinda rescued us and then we came here.”

“Hi, Bucky,” quoth Ozma. “My, how you’ve grown. Yes, it seems quite straightforward the way you tell it. But there do remain just one or two obscure points—”

“May I?” put in Glinda, folding her legs under her and spreading out her velvet skirt. It made a nice red splash on the yellow-lavender field. “I’m still hardly over the shock myself but, as I can learn, our Button Bright, tarnished by two decades at the bottom of a well of molasses, returned to America to make a fresh start. He put the past behind him and especially his baby name, now so grossly inappropriate. He was not ‘bright,’ he was dark. So he would call himself ‘Dark’—or ‘d’Arc.’ For a first name he put together the initials of his real name: SPLES, and made a French-sounding name ‘DesPlessis,’ to match the French surname. He had some idea people would call him ‘Sples’ and so he wouldn’t be living quite a lie.

“No one managed that, however, so in the end he reverted to a name he’d admired in Oz, a disused nickname of our old dear friend, the Frogman. That was ‘Fritz.’ In a sense you could say we’ve now got two Fritzes the Frogmen.”

“Two ‘frogmen’?” said the puzzled Ozma.

Here the young frogman himself took over and told of his two years in America trying to ‘find his legs’ and how he had at last got himself accepted at the Navy Underwater Demolition School at Annapoluxent, he being more fitted by his past experiences for living submerged than for anything else.

Now Buck's thumbnail account began to make more sense for the ruler. But Ozma realized it would be long before she mastered *all* the details of the American's odyssey ex-Oz. "It's funny," Fritz ended his story, "that a frogman's greatest adventure should have been on the top of a mountain."

Glinda had the last word. "We were on our way back to the Emerald City to report to you. But we've done it just as well right here." She looked away in deep satisfaction to where the fields sloped upward to wooded hills and a violet skyline. Her hand sought Fritz's.

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

“So all,” said Princess Ozma from the head of the deal table in what had served witch Mombi as a dining- and work-room, “we need to do now is to determine if King Quelala will resume his ancient—if false—form or will remain in his natural ranidian shape. The method is now here at hand, in case it should be the former alternative. It is of course the king’s decision alone as to what his form of life will be in the future, but if anyone has anything to offer that might bear on the question...? Madam Glinda?”

The red witch had made a sign. “I was saying to someone just recently that I didn’t hold with witchcraft. In particular that might be said to be the case with respect to enchantments resulting in individuals’ being abruptly delivered over to life-styles totally alien to them.

“Yet I must recall an instance only lately occurred when, without thinking or an instant’s hesitation, I turned earth-bound creatures into flighted ones. The results were entirely auspicious and, indeed, averted tragedy on a grand scale for all of us. Thus I, for one, must admit that transformation may sometimes be condonable.”

“I,” Princess Gayelette then took the word, “wish only to record my astonishment at finding my husband, Prince—I beg your pardon!—‘King’ Quelala, in the form of a frog, which, I am told, is his true one, and to register my assurance that, should he revert to his status as human, he would have nothing to fear from me.

“To state it perhaps a trifle vulgarly: I have bigger frogs to catch.” Here the gratified-looking princess-sorceress glanced for an instant at her companion, the Frogman.

That worthy, in his turn, said, “I can only affirm that being a frog is magnificent. However, I should not omit to add that an imposing size and the delegation of duties of leadership do help very much toward inducing satisfaction with ranidianism. Further, I can say that, in certain cases, when the desire is very strong to join in closer

contact with someone greatly loved but belonging to an alternative life form, a decision to leave the ranks of frogdom *might* be justified." Here he looked very fondly indeed at Princess Gayelette.

The urge to speak grandiloquently now seemed to have seized everyone. Lucky Bucky tried it. "In my relatively brief experience of life I have found frogmen to be equally as good if not better companions than regular men. So I should say there is not much to choose between being either a frog or a man."

Miss Pucella also tried, but failed. But her friend's success made her think that perhaps he was not so ordinary after all. Maybe one day he, like DesPlessis d'Arc, would outgrow his baby name. If not, she would offer him hers!

Fritz d'Arc spoke last. "I too held back for many years from becoming a man. But since I took the step I have found such satisfaction that I would say that no one should hesitate to do the same."

Now all eyes turned to the little orange frog that squatted on a doily before queen Ozma's place. He glanced 'round the circle, then said, "I think you have persuaded me, my friends. Certainly as a frog I have found my size and form to be hampering to the activities that my whole life so far has accustomed me to and which I would miss if I now remained forever a frog.

"But first I have a question: If I take again the form of the human Quelala, will I lose all memory of my life to that point? ...as happened the first time I was enchanted."

Glinda the witch could give expert counsel here. "Griacious, no," she said decisively. "That is by no means an integral part of magic transformations. It was merely one of the wicked enchantress' signatures to her spells: that individuals, while enchanted, lost all memory of their previous life. Incidentally, another of that witch's trademarks was the often ironical one that a transformation could

be undone—or initiated!—by a kiss.”

There was a longish pause and then King Quelala spoke: “Very well. I consent—and respectfully request—that I be once more given the form of the man who for a time was familiar to most of you as ‘Quelala.’

“I wish my queen was here to witness the change so much desired by her. Failing that, may I ask that my good friend Fred Fruakx be present at the transformation?”

“Of course!” said Ozma heartily. “I would have suggested that if you had not proposed it. I shall want an assistant in any case when I attempt Mombi’s charm.”

She glanced briefly ‘round the table. “I see no reason, really, why the enchantment should not be carried out immediately. Your Highness?” She looked a question at Birrdiepe, then picked him up. “We’ll just step into the bathroom. Or no: we’ll make that the bedroom, where I noticed there’s an old cloak of Mombi’s hanging. For of course you’ll emerge unclothed, as a man, and the party being mixed...?”

The frogman rose and followed as the little fairy left the room.

The others looked at each other a little speculatively, not to say apprehensively. One supposed that everything *would* go all right. After all, Ozma was a fairy, though admittedly she had never been known to employ a witch’s transformation spell before. But one of those at the table looked downright anxious. This was Gayelette.

She fidgeted with her yellow lace collar, then broke out, “Just afterwards, all right?” and appeared to appeal to Glinda.

The red sorceress nodded solemnly, then leaned sideways in her chair to pluck something up from out of her open attaché case beside her on the floor.

Ten minutes passed, then eleven. What could be keeping the party in the bedroom? There’d been time for two

transformations by now.

Then at the thirteenth minute the door of the bed chamber opened and the girl ruler of Oz stepped forth, followed by the human King Quelala in an old gray robe and the Frogman of Oz—in another and even tattier old cloak!

There was a hubbub of talk as the crowd gathered round the restored king and man to offer their congratulations on his resumption of his familiar shape as good as new. First after about five minutes there came a pause—for which it could be seen that the Frogman had been waiting.

Now that gentlefrog stepped to the side of the Lady Gayelette and took both her hands in his flipper feet. “My dear...?” he said, and leant forward to offer her a kiss... that the lady by no means resisted.

An instant’s magic struck all a-pause.

And then before their eyes the form of Princess Gayelette faded and in its place was that of a huge and gorgeous purple frog.

At the same time, where the famous Frogman of Oz had stood was seen a stranger in an old gray robe: a sturdy, well built, not overly tall man, of an apparent age of perhaps forty, with just slightly protuberant eyes: quite handsome, on the whole, with a ring of blond-green curls that stood up around his bald pate rather like a princely coronet...

Copenhagen, 17 August 1985

Lund, 18 January 1986