CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

"...But if the sun is the center of all things—and if the world goes round and round—why, then it's sure that anything that goes up will come down - or perhaps more than that..." said the grey-haired Margaret Nutt.

"Oh, dear, this is most distressing," mourned Sorceress Glinda in an aside to Levimeyerabloch. To Nut Meg she said, "Well, it's been delightful, corporal. You nettle tea is mont stimulating. And I think we all loved the seed cakes. But we mustn't keep you..."

Outside she voiced her concern. "A frightful pity Miss Nutt wasn't careful to keep from aging!" A more sophisticated age would have mentioned the name Ahlsheimer. "She doesn't *look* much more than fifty, if that. But she remembers nothing! ...What next?"

"There's got to be some way to find out what happened to that mattress," insisted Till Orangespiegel.

"Mattress-schmattress!" cried Lev. "It's the mirror that counts. It *could* have fallen out of the mattress any time this seven years. It's worse than a needle in a haystack. It could be *any*where."

"Wait!" cried Glinda. "The Magic Picture. Ozma's Magic Picture! That would show where the mirror is. Oh, but we're leagues from there! and every minute counts."

The Sawhorse neighed loudly and Glinda gave a start. "Yes, Lignum, she assented. "You can run like the wind—and I guess you'd better! We could fly on in the chariots but I've got to get back and warn the Lords of Light; see if they can put that thing on 'hold'.

"But—all right then! Who'll go with the Sawhorse? to carry the word."

Here Button Bright twirled his new straw hat rind whistled significantly.

"Good boy!" commended his 'queen'. "I'm sorry his saddle's not available. You'll just have to hold on round his neck for dear life. It won't be comfortable. Can you cope?"

Yes, he could cope. Perhaps to his surprise the boy found himself capable of anything, just to please the red sorceress.

The pair were off in a blast of red-green divots from the lawn. The others watched them go. "Anyway those two aren't going to care about a lack of conversation on the journey," laughed the Good Witch. Then she urged those remaining to reboard the chariots without delay and they too were off with a mighty flap of wings into the south. Yes, south was at least still south.

Ex-corporal Nutt watched them out of sight with a puzzled expression. "Now let me think," she said; "who might they have been?"

Glinda had a long conference by telephone with the Grand Master of the Lords of Light. The Lords promised to go on across-the-board alert. Not a soul would leave the Castle of Light while the emergency prevailed. Turf would be torn up and the vast underground mega-magnets, not used once in a generation, nay, once in a century, exposed and primed for instant action should it be necessary. If the Lords, who could control revolutions of the earth and, for a need, bring off eclipses of the sun and moon, could not deal with a tiny satellite no bigger than a billiards table it would be a serious blot on their scutcheon.

Somewhat reassured, Glinda set herself to pore over the Great Book of Records all night long, searching for any tiniest reference to what Corporal Margaret Nutt might have done with

a battered orange mattress and all that it contained any time in the previous seven years.

Meanwhile at the Emerald City the Palace of Magic was turned upside down—or anyway front-to-back. (Reread chapter one; only this time the whole routine took place on a croquet pitch.) The celebrities were all discussing the situation (of which, this time, they were not unforewarned) nineteen to the dozen as the sun sank luridly in what had been the east. Then the Sawhorse and his rider dashed up.

"Oh, thank heavens, Lignum! " cried the dainty Girl Ruler throwing down her mallet. "Please don't let me let you go away again! I may need you any time at a moment's notice—" But here she broke off to give Button Bright first aid. 'The boy was ashen: both from road dust and extreme exhaustion. His new straw hat and one shoe were missing.

"Lemonade!" he gasped and fell in a faint.

As it happened Princess Trot had set up a lemonade stand beside the playing field so help was on its way in a moment. "Give him some popcorn too " urged Princess Betsy who was managing *that* concession. "He always eats twice the amount whenever he is out of order."

Lemonade and popcorn soon revived the youth. His urgent message was delivered and they all trooped off to the View Room to consult the wonderful Magic Picture.

"You do the honors, Scraps!" whispered Queen Ozma urgently, and the Patchwork Girl intoned;

"Great magic picture on the wall,

You've got your audience in thrall.

Now show us what we want to see:

Where can the Magic Mirror be?!"

Strictly speaking, the crowd was not an 'audience', since the magic picture never *said* anything. Still, it got the idea and the conventional landscape scene on the canvas melted to reveal ... a totally black surface!

"Or else a very very very dark brown," said Button Bright when faced with the puzzling scene, and became quite thoughtful.

All the rest burst into tears, or very nearly. "Oh, Ozma, what does it mean?" wept Betsy.

"Just that the mirror - and perhaps the mattress as well—is in a very dark place. I'm afraid we have no other clue."

"And that means..?" prompted Trot.

"That there is no way to operate on that swiftly approaching satellite *magically*. As I understand it, the flying 'tea-tray' has a cathode relationship to the little magic hand-mirror. It reacts to magic impulses, but only from its positive pole, the small mirror."

"And then that means?" urged Princess Dorothy in her turn.

"That we're powerless!" Ozma almost wailed. "All we can do is wait and see what happens. Maybe the space mirror will fly on by, and out of Earth's gravity field. Then things will go back to normal."

"And if it doesn't?" asked the Wizard of Oz. But he knew better than his ruler what the awful effect would be. Ozma at once deferred to him and he explained to the group gathered before the black picture - which gradually faded back to its accustomed green rolling landscape scene, to everyone's relief.

"The satellite," said Oz, "will go into orbit round the earth. It would be a bit too coincidental if it were to assume a speed exactly complementary to that of the rotation of the earth. No, it will be

moving faster or else slower than the earth's rotation. The rest of the planet is of course impervious to the action of a magically motivated mirror but every time the glass passes over Oz it will reverse all our directions here, make us mirror images of ourselves, unable to read our own handwriting. In fact, we won't know whether we're coming on or going," he ended verily with a lapse into the vernacular.

"Oh, hove dreadful," gasped in awe more than one voice.

Radio consultation with the Sorceress of the South and the Lords of Light was held. Then the palace settled down in a grim emergency mood to await developments.

All except Button Bright. He "disappeared" as usual. That is to say, without bothering to say goodbye to anybody he set out to walk back to Queen Glinda's pink palace.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

"Oh, how lovely!" said Ozma of Oz.

She and the Wizard and the Royal Historian were gathered in the cupola atop the Wimugiqua Hotel, which, unlike the music room at the palace or, curiously enough, even the lower level of the Wizard's study-cum-observatory, looked out to all directions. Ozma hadn't wanted to perch on the end of the Wizard's telescope to get a far horizon view to every side, and anyway she wanted Frank in on their deliberations so the two royal-palace denizens had hopped in the red wagon and driven over before sun-up.

What was lovely (in Ozma's opinion, and that counted for something!) was the distant view of Winkle wheat fields dark golden under the dawn sun. The fairy ruler had loved the golden east since it first appeared to her seven years before. To be truthful, she had missed it. This was her first sight of it since then.

"It is rather fine," the Royal Historian had to admit.

"I've often pondered on the Oz color scheme," confessed the Wizard. "Is it known how those particular colors became identified with the particular regions?"

"Probably picked out of a hat - or off the top of somebody's head," opined the Historian, "without any thought behind it at all."

But actually the Wizard's question had been directed at Ozma, who might be expected to retain traces of family memory of ancient lore. Had possibly some old forebear of hers decreed it? But all she said was; "Lurline once told me that the Emerald country for ages lay under a vast lake and when it was drained everything growing up from the rich muck of the former lake bottom remained an emerald green.

"As for the rest of the country: since Oz lies in the northern hemisphere, red somehow seems suitable for the land of the 'hot' south. Contrariwise, perhaps violet is appropriately 'cool' for the north - though blue would have seemed even more appropriate.

"And as regards the western yellow and eastern blue, well, you know I feel they're backwards. But just at the moment the colors are right!" And she fell to joying again, her elbows propped on the cupola railing.

Alas, her enjoyment was short-lived. Even as they watched, the far eastern vista sicklied over and turned green and at the same time there was a greening of the west. In half an hour the transformation was complete, Munchkinland was in the east—and they could all read again! They understood that the enchanted tea-tray had flown on ahead out of range of reflection of Oz.

"It's pretty awful, isn't it?" asked Ozma rhetorically. Everyone in Oz was well aware, by now, how awful it was; not to be able to read a newspaper or find your way home—since all orientation was haywire. "It wouldn't be nearly so bad if it just *stayed* reversed," the ruler went on. "In time we could all adapt to that. What matter if directions are backwards in the eyes of the outside world? Our dealings with that outside world are almost non-existent anyway. But it's this awful switching every time the glass passes over Oz and exerts its influence...

"Wizard, is it quite certain the thing has gone into orbit around the earth?" "I'm afraid so, my dear. It appears to do about three revolutions of the earth in twenty-four Hours, so we get the reversals once each morning and afternoon and once in the middle of the night. It's not exact, of course. It's a *little* faster than three times a day, so the reversals creep a little forward, so we get them a few minutes earlier each time than on the day before—"

"Thanks for small mercies!" laughed Ozma.

"At least the satellite turned out to be going *faster* than the earth turns. The Lords of Light will probably be able to cope with that. Glinda's long since alerted them. Actually I'm surprised the magnets haven't begun to take effect before this. But then I've no idea how they operate or how difficult it may be to slow down a speeding 'heavenly body'. But imagine if the tea-tray had been going *slower* than the earth...!"

"It would eventually have fallen *to* earth," asserted the Wizard.

"Yes, but after how many years? and with this directionsreversal meanwhile happening thrice daily. We'd all have gone mad before it had time to fall. No, it's better this way. The Lords will 'fix' the satellite just over Oz, where it will go into orbit round the earth at exactly the speed of the earth's rotation. Like the moon, you know; always turning its same face to the earth, although both planets are revolving in several different directions at once."

"Too bad the tray couldn't be fixed over Timbuctoo," commented the Historian, "or the South Pole, where it wouldn't have any effect."

"But then we couldn't have any effect on it when the magic control mirror turns up—as it's sure to do eventually. No, the temporary—but at least not oscillatory!—directions reversal will be a trial, but with the magic mirror—eventually - we can direct the reflector mirror out of the sky once and for all."

"A long-range anti-aircraft battery might come in useful now," suggested Frank, who remembered reports of such devices during the World War.

"Oh, gracious!" exclaimed the fairy princess, "you shock me, R.H. How terribly alien any such thing, would be to a fairyland like Oz."

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

The Lords of Light did their work, and well. The magicmarked reflector mirror took up its position in the heavens, hanging forever just over the Emerald City though invisible to all except those who happened to have access to either of the city's two observatory telescopes on a cloudless night.

The reversal of the magic country's directions, and everything being its own mirror image, disturbed people frightfully for a time. Then they got used to it and forgot about it, to the extent that they even failed to mention it in private writings or historical chronicles or even when strangers came to visit from the great world outside. People like young "Speedy" or Handy Mandy, the seven-armed girl or Bennie, the statue of the Public Benefactor, when arriving from the United States or elsewhere, did a double take when they saw folks reading, like Arabs, from right to left. But they too soon grew accustomed and felt, besides, that the backwardsness added an extra dimension of enchanted differentness to life in the magic land.

Peter, the boy from Philadelphia, felt it too. For him there was one curiosity more in Oz. He was, you see, not the only "boy from Philadelphia" who had visited the fairyland and the exploits of his neighbor, Master Bright, a generation before were still celebrated in that quarter of the City of Brotherly Love. When

Peter came to Oz they could give him no news of Button Bright and that was disappointing.

"Oh, Button's always disappearing," explained Princess Dorothy airily in 1927. Then she grew thoughtful. "But it HAS been rather a time now. Ozma," she called to her sovereign, who was deciding, cases on the other side of the courtyard, "when was Button Bright here last?"

"Three years ago, dear," returned the little judge. Then, when she had handed down a verdict in the last case and adjourned the court, she joined her young friends. "We've always assumed he went back to the States again," she informed Peter.

"Well, if he did he didn't go to Philadelphia. If he had I'd have known about it."

"That is a little odd," admitted Ozma.

"I tell you: shall we have a look in the Magic Picture'?"

That was always a treat and the troop of young people moved indoors gladly and made their way to the Room With a View. "Scraps?" spoke Ozma in what had become almost a tradition when consulting the work of art.

The Patchwork Girl was just fifteen and well to be counted among ' the young people'. She took her place before the picture and pronounced;

"Our Button Bright's been long away.

We wonder where he is.

Great Magic Picture on the wall:

We pray you; show his phiz."

The green scene faded and became—black. There was a shocked silence. Then, "Or else a very very very dark brown," quoted the Patchwork Girl solemnly, remembering. Quickly Ozma caused the picture to erase the sable spectacle. She didn't want anyone picking out, after all, any details in the apparently undifferentiated darkness of the scene.

"Oh, my dears," she breathed in deep distress. "I'm terribly much afraid... our Button Bright's... dead—and buried."

The girls all burst into tears and even Peter felt like crying, realizing now just how much he'd looked forward to compar-

ing notes with his older colleague. It seemed clear that the other Philadelphian had, after all, left Oz, then met with some accident before regaining home ground. He had apparently gained *some* ground, but where it might be was anyone's guess.

Ozma declared a week of national mourning and the incident cast a pall over the whole wind-up of young Peter's adventures with the Gnome King. Sorceress Glinda when she got the news declared a *month* of mourning for the pink palace, the Ruby City and the whole land of the Quadlings. She herself almost went into a decline.

'That poor, silly—utterly charming boy, she thought. Then she knew that she had long nursed a wish that Button Bright might live to grow up, and be a fitting intellectual companion for her who was often, despite—or, more likely, because of—her lofty position, alone. She and Button Bright had just simply *liked* each other so much, indeed *admired* and if their mental—and apparent—ages had ever drawn closer together, what good companions they might have been.

The sorceress thought she'd like to send a wreath and she did a minutely careful check back over all Great Book entries for the previous three years to try to determine where the boy's grave might be. There was nothing but the maddeningly terse notice, "Button Bright has gone to earth" —which might mean anything. She was, however, astonished at how early the report appeared; seemingly a scant fortnight after he had last been seen, on the occasion of the failed mission to ascertain where the magic mirror might be.

Glinda tried to picture what might have happened. The unpredictable youth, having no good news—or, really, any news at all—to bring back to his eager associates at, or near, the pink palace, had—well, not in shame, surely—wandered away as he was very wont to do. But what then. Nothing all that bad could happen to him in Oz. Ergo, he must have left Oz. But how?

Then the witch had a brilliant inspiration: the magic umbrella. Button Bright's travel-worthy talisman had been missing since his abortive journey to Mo in 1915. There had not been the faintest clue as to what might have happened to it. The feckless lad had indeed never given a proper account of where he was heading when the umbrella slipped his grip; otherwise one might have looked for it at or near the planned destination. Had it fallen down, like the boy himself, in Mo, beyond the belt of deserts? Or, if not, where?

This was where Glinda had her bright idea. The boy himself had known where he was going with the umbrella. Now, footloose and with no plans, might it not have occurred to him to go to that old one-time destination (presumably within Oz, a country Button Bright knew and liked) and look for the lost bumbershoot? He had done so! and been successful! Then gormlessly he had flown off with the umbrella to some more lethal land and there met with a dire fate.

The explanation satisfied the sorceress' meticulous mind—but not her heart.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Time sped away. Enchanted and enchanting things kept happening in Oz. Jack Pumpkinhead had some rousing adventures among robber barons. Knighthood flowered! A series of young boys, from in and out of Oz, drew attention to themselves by means of the unlikely events they took part in. Some of the most neglected of the yearly chronicles of Oz got written in the period. Horses proliferated; Oz being short on those splendid animals, stock was brought in from beyond the deserts and even from beyond the stars. Then, when Ozites attempted to go beyond the stars themselves, people got restive.

If the Wizard of Oz and others were going to rocket off—heaven knew where in heaven!—and while they were at it not even bother to pick off that pesky 'tea-tray' in the sky, that continued to play such hob, then people would much prefer that such people confine .their activities to earth and, more specifically, to Oz.

Incredible things began to happen. the very houses in the Emerald City became alive and staged pitched battles. Modern technology swept over the land, bringing with it a fleet of quasi-automobiles. Finally, when a whale decided to visit Oz, whose largest body of water would fill a bath-tub to overflowing, belief was at last suspended and no more was heard of the magic

land for a time.

Things continued to take place there, however. Frederick Fruakx went on traveling with his old-time road show. His erst-while companion Cayke the cookie cook moved in with the Orangespiegels but declined to become Mrs. Orangespiegel because, as she reminded her ardent admirer, he "knew where her heart was". By the same token Levimeyerabloch and Mistress Fill did not wed though the warmest of friends, for, as *she* pointed out, she might one day be obligated to resume duties as housekeeper to her brother—if Cayke should at last decide to go where her heart was. Meanwhile the two couples enjoyed all the amenities of a ménage

à quatre at the orange spherodome, and the brothers-in-spirit (if not -law) quite forgot their ancient and passing enmity.

As for the Woozy and his pal the Sawhorse!: one day in early 1943 the Woozy said to his stable-mate, "Aw, come on, Lignum, let's go off for an adventure somewhere, just the two of us. We haven't been anywhere together in eighteen years!"

To his surprise the Sawhorse replied, "What did you have in mind?"

In eighteen—or twenty-five—years the Woozy hadn't learned to predict the unpredictable Sawhorse. He didn't see that answer to his oft-repeated suggestion coming and he was caught off base. He stammered, "Well—er." Then the memory of the last time he had stammered that, in a similar situation, a quarter of a century before, came to him and he said, "Let's recreate our walking tour to Witch Glinda's! Remember what fun we had then?!"

"Okay," followed through the Sawhorse. "We'll just let the Girl Ruler know."

"That'll be Princess Ozma," affirmed the Woozy.

"That's the one. Come on!" and away dashed the two animals to Ozma's salon where the fairy was sharing a cold collation with her girl friends.

"Well, Lignum," said she, "I did vow once I'd never let you out of my sight again. But after all I mustn't be too strict. All

right. Off you go—and have fun, you two!"

They did. The Woozy browsed on buttercups and thistles and talked to the Sawhorse. Getting no reply, on the second day of their outing he talked to himself. On the third day there was no talk. Still, they were enjoying their togetherness and seeing a lot of pleasant landscape and getting a lot of fresh air.

On the fourth day, somewhat to the Woozy's relief, they fell in with Fred Fruakx's traveling carney. "Oh, delight!" cried the square animal when he recognized at the reins of the lead wagon the famed and familiar Frogman. "Someone to talk to! This will be fun."

And it was. Besides the frog, with whom the strolling travelers exchanged happy greetings, they renewed acquaintance with the celebrated and very capable clown Mr. Notta Bit More and his young friend, Bob Up, who had long been traveling with the mini-circus. The carney crowd declared a holiday and though they put up the tents (to sleep in) they didn't bark (or croak) to attract customers but just spent the rest of the day reminiscing with the arrivals from the Emerald City.

They talked of everything under the sun—except just one thing; that was too painful. Then as evening drew on Mr. Fruakx said, "Why don't you two mosey on with us for a while? You're not going anywhere in particular, are you?"

The four-footed pair said "Yes!" and "No" with considerable enthusiasm. So it was done. Now the Woozy and the Sawhorse had more fun than ever. The former could converse as much as he liked and the latter could omit to converse, as much as *he* liked.

The two had been on the way eight days when the caravan came over a rise one noonday and spied the treacle well where the animals had had a small adventure in olden times.

"Oh, dear," said the Woozy and had a pang. "Remember poor Button Bright?"

This was the sad topic they had all been carefully avoiding. Everyone knew Bob Up and Button Bright had been best friends.

Bob had grieved the longest and strongest of anyone in Oz

when the Philadelphian's final fate had been ascertained. He wouldn't believe it. It was at his urging that he and Notta had left their comfortable little house on the outskirts of the Emerald City and joined the traveling show when the invitation came. Still now, so many years later, Bob Up never rose in the morning without hoping that *this* would be the day they would arrive somewhere where he would get news of his friend and what had happened to him.

"Yes, I remember," he said and wiped away a furtive tear. "I wonder why you mention him now."

Then the Woozy told the story of their encounter at the well on a happier day.

As he spoke, the whole party had drawn solemnly nearer the well-head and now they took off their hats, if they had any, and gazed gravely down into the darkness, thinking elegiac thoughts.

Suddenly, "I thought I saw something move!" grasped Notta Bit More.

"Impossible," snorted the Frogman. "What could move—or live—in the bottom of a well of molasses?"

"Just the same," insisted the clown. "Bob! Don't you see something? Like a faint reflection of light on a slick dark surface...?"

"Gosh, Notta, I can't be sure."

The upshot was that they lowered the well bucket just to see if it brought a reaction from anything living, and moving, amidst the molasses. They all stared down with tense attention, but they couldn't see a thing. But! they heard something.

A terribly hoarse voice, scarcely able to articulate, growled, "H-e-' p-m-e-e..." — and died away.

"Oh, horrors!" cried the Woozy. "It's a person."

Then they all got feverishly busy. The Frogman leapt away to the tent wagon after ropes and the slim athletic clown grasped the frayed well rope and began shinnying down - while all the rest lent enormous moral support. He didn't get very far, though. In a moment Notta's syrup-daubed face reappeared and he

grunted, "The rope breaks off! Get me outta here."

But now arrive the roustabouts, trundling a traveling capstan which they prop against the well's brick-work, and then Notta goes down again.

Soon his voice was heard: "I think it's a man! Yes, a negro—What?..." Some form of converse seemed to be going on in the very very dark brown depths. "No, not a negro! But definitely a man... Can you get hold of this loop? Here, I've got your wrist... What about another rope up there?! Make a draw-noose in it if you can..."

In a moment the noose, well anchored above, was thrown down and Notta juggled it into position under the man's arms. Then he hung onto his own rope and, now more black than white himself, watched the well-grown male form rise slowly, painfully, out of the sable ooze.

Gracious, what a pitiful sight it was. They all got sticky helping to haul the man over the coping. Then as he sank down against the brick-work they got a good look at him.

The fellow seemed to be dressed in some rags of old clothes obviously far too tiny for him. The whole form was, however, decently covered in a thick layer of black brown tar. It was impossible to make out anything of his features or natural coloring but he was clearly a well-developed but gaunt man of thirty or thirty-five. The travelers all stared in awe and nobody spoke.

It was the winsome Woozy who first put out a square but smooth warm tongue and licked the fellow's knee. At that the rescuee uttered a gurgle which - amazingly enough—they all interpreted as a sound of pleasure. 'That'snice," he slowly uttered. "Doitsomemore. .. It'slikeoldtimes."

"'Old times'?" echoed a voice or so in astonishment, and then the Frogman vouchsafed to ask; "Who—who are you, good man?"

A moment's silence and then a voice full of regret and nostalgia, as well as molasses, said, "Theyusedtocallme... ButtonBright."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

When they succeeded in getting the long-lost boy/man detreaclefied, clothed, and in his right mind, and themselves over their utter astonishment, this was the tale they heard;

Button Bright had set out from the Emerald City in 1924 with the vague intention of making his way back to the palace of 'his "Queen" in Quadlinga. Even a feckless free and easy youth like him could occasionally be blue and Button was so now because his all-out race to the capital had produced nothing useful to his friends. Princess Ozma's need of her steed had even deprived him of a conveyance and a companion.

It was not Button Bright's custom to make much stir when he arrived or departed from anywhere. In fact some people might say it was downright rude the way he got up from the dinner table one evening at the Palace of Magic and wandered out into the night without saying a word to anybody. He followed some dancing fireflies until they got near a gate in the garden wall. A gate suggested going through it. When he did, a dark lane rich with the scent of overripe lilacs suggested going along it, so he did that too.

By morning he was miles from the Emerald City and he dived into a straw stack and slept there all day. A week later he had regained (by no means walking as fast as he could all the time)

the place where he had parted from his friends. There was of course no trace of them to be seen on the lawn before the cottage of Nut Meg, the ex-corporal of the palace guard. Nor was there much sense in asking; Meg which way they had gone.

Still, some quixotic notion of courtesy, or else just a pang of loneliness and/or hunger, made him knock at her door. He remembered Nut Meg's seed cakes.

"Hello, there," said the corporal. "Come on in. I was expecting you."

This was news to the boy. He was not to know that the remark was one of the gambits used by the woman, who was well aware of her missing memory, to conceal her lack thereof.

"Now let's see," said Meg as she set before her visitor lemonade and popcorn (some things she still had an unerring sense about), "where did we meet last?" (Another gambit.)

Button Bright fell into her little social trap willingly. "Why, right here! You remember:" (this cleverly flattered his hostess, who of all things in the world was least capable of that act) "we were searching for an old mattress."

"What fun!" remarked the grey-haired woman brightly. "And how did that quest turn out'?"

Button had to reveal that the turning-out had been zilch. "The tragic Picture didn't show a thing—It was just black... or else a very very very dark brown."

"How unfortunate," commiserated the corporal. "And that's all? No further clues turned up?"

"None. So I left there. And then I came here."

"The best thing you could have done, really."

Meg was not unperceptive; she was merely near-amnesial. She had noticed the straw stems and grass stains here and there about the lad. Now she said, "I'll bet you'd enjoy a night in a real bed for a change...?"

Button Bright agreed that he would. They passed a pleasant evening together and he had the comfortable night. Next morning he rose refreshed and lively. Life looked not so blue any longer but rather (as a glance out the window confirmed) rosecolored.

He was, you know, in the red land of the Quadlings.

The company and kindness had done the trick. When he took his leave of Nut Meg and went on his way whistling, he was more or less the old casual careless curious Button Bright again.

Half a mile further on he came past the treacle well and a gust of recognition and nostalgia seized him. How amusing it had been the last time he was there! Like most boys he had a bit of a sweet tooth and he'd always enjoyed a dollop of syrup with his scrapple. But how unfortunate! As he had leaned over and reached down to get a lick his hat had fallen off. Good thing his friends the Sawhorse and the Woozy had happened along just then!

But, goodness! how black it had been down in that well. Black—or else a very very very dark brown!...

A sudden flash of intuition struck the youth. He left the path and ran across to the well head to peer down. He even remembered to take off his hat and lay it on the grass. A bitter wind blew it away the next November.

He had to know for sure. It was so very dark in the well and nothing whatever could be seen down there. But what a triumph if he were to be able to haul up mattress and magic mirror and all! and arrive a hero at the palace of his queen.

Expertly he lowered the bucket rope to its fullest extent, then making sure that the winch was solid and secure, he grasped the cord and began to lower himself down. No blithe sailing down head foremost this time. Too much was at stake.

But, alas, after so many years—and after all who ever tended the well?— the rotten old rope broke and the boy was pitched into the viscous mass at the bottom.

Now the feckless fellow knew terror. Not of smothering in syrup. That would have been sharp pain and passion—and then nothing.

No, worse luck, this was Oz and he could know the pain and the fear but not the nothing. He would live on forever in the bottom of a well, hideously uncomfortable but not in the slight-

est physical danger. Even: molasses were reputed by some to be the perfect hundred per-cent food, so he shouldn't even need to feel hunger pangs. Just terrible boredom and discomfort.

The first week in the well Button Bright thought he would lose his mind. Hope was still there and the waiting for someone to come to the well and find him. After a week he knew no one would ever come, and that despite the fact that the well was not so very far off a public, though admittedly little used, footpath. You did have to be looking for the well to notice it.

When he knew that, he took stock of himself and his situation. His friend Glinda was not there to see it but that day Button Bright grew up. He fought a silent unmoving battle in the dark. And he won. He set his mind into a neutral gear, as it were, and his body to hibernate, also as it were, and he became as a bear or a badger in its winter den. But his winter lasted for many years.

Unconscious thus, Button Bright had no opportunity to perform the tiny daily ritual for preventing aging, hence he grew up, also physically, in the well. The treacle-logged sailor suit he wore split at every seam and became a meaningless rag.

The situation knew no change for more than eighteen years. The stars—and also a single 'tea-tray'—moved across the heavens in their unchanging courses and no one ever knew.

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

They got him to the Emerald City. The Frogman took charge. He it was who directed the traveling midway's roustabouts and got a hook lowered on the windlass to draw up out of the treacle well the decomposed remains of the orange-ticked (but you couldn't see that!) mattress that Corporal Nutt had flung there in a moment of irresponsible aberration a quarter of a century before.

Young Bob Up volunteered for the dreadful task of probing the syrup-logged mattress for the magic mirror which one Till Orangespiegel had stuffed through a hole in the ticking in a coconut grove on a long-past afternoon. There was every chance that the mirror would be broken, nay, cracked in a hundred shivers, after all the chops and changes the mattress had been through. But so what? They'd already had their seven years' bad luck - and more than three times that.

Still, the glass was forged-silver-backed—and no doubt case-hardened—after the magicizing ordeal by fire it had undergone. It would appear that that was how it was, for on the fourth plunge of Bob's arm into the grisly substance of the former mattress he drew out the round mirror, no bigger than a man's hand, intact. They brought water and scrubbed the glass and the it gleamed again as of old.

The mattress was given decent burial and then they set out for the capital. The travelers took turns sitting with the rescued one in a swaying house-wagon. They all had a feeling he should be reintroduced to lived life gently. Bob Up was touching in his devotion although the boy he had known and loved was gone and in his place a total stranger. Notta the clown was Saladin von Smith's contemporary in outward appearance of age now and indeed they spoke together cordially. But it was Fred Fruakx the Frogman who, with their shared recollections of ancient adventures, seemed closest to the revived man.

"Mr. Fruakx—" said von Smith one morning as they were crossing into the Emerald country, "Fred..."

"Call me 'Fritz' if you like," said the Frogman heartily. "That's the name Orangespiegel took to using for me—in his Low-German way. It's German for 'Fred'."

"'Fritz'," said von Smith thoughtfully. "I like it."

"I do too."

Then, "Fritz—I want to leave Oz." The man announced it calmly and without omsweep.

"Ah-hh." The frog let out a long low croak of disappointment—and understanding.

"Oz is for children," went on von Smith. "I'm not a child any more."

"No more am I," contributed Fruakx.

"Ah, but you're from—and of—Oz. I'm not. Oh, it's all right for childlike foreigners, like the Shaggy Man—"

"What about Oz Diggs, the Wizard?" suggested the Frogman.

"He's got his magic, that makes him belong. I haven't got a thing. I want to go home—and acquire something: an education for starters."

The Frogman came with other objections and alternatives. But it was no good. The man brought back from a syrupy grave had his reasons and his intentions and they were fixed. And Fritz Fruakx did understand.

When they got to the royal green palace and before the scenes

of frantic—but melancholy—rejoicing at the prodigal's return were fairly past, they told Queen Ozma.

In her private sitting room, where only the Wizard besides was present, the queen said, "I see... We'll be so sorry to see you go. Oz has been your home for so long now."

"Oh, what a home," said the man wrily, "—at least in the last few years. But that's nobody's fault but my own. Now I have a craving to go back—and see if I can do something right for once."

"Can we arrange it, Wizard?" The princess turned to her chief counselor.

"Oh, yes, I think so," said the savant. "The same procedure as when Peter used to go back to Philadelphia—"

"You'll be going back to Philadelphia, I expect?" said the fairy ruler.

"Yes," agreed von Smith. "That will be one of the treats—I guess—seeing the old place again."

"Be prepared for changes," warned the Wizard. "I understand the city is—darker than it was."

"As who is not?!" jested the treacled traveler.

Indeed, it was so. The molasses seemed to have entered into Button Bright's soul—or anyway into his pigmentation. Where the child Button Bright had been the lightest blond, the man was swarthy of skin and his hair exactly the color of sorghum syrup. "'Button *Bright*'," said the fellow with a scoff. "That name will have to go."

And so did the man himself.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Then the orchestra struck up in a major key; a merry climbing rondo, and people rubbed their hands and prepared to get things done.

"So it's back to the Governor of your Orange Province, your grace?" asked the Wizard of Oz next morning at breakfast.

"The Ruler of the Unnikegs, you mean?" riposted Ozma with a smile. The uncouth name was one she had made up herself and she was rather proud of it.

That enormously long, enormously thin sliver of orange lying along the former border between the Winkie and Quadling countries had in a quarter century actually become a little country of its own. Admittedly the inhabitants had not formerly been a homogeneous tribe nor did they now have anything but their unrequested orangeness to bind them together. Yet bind them it did. There was nothing painful about the condition; only, when one orange man ran into an other he would say, "You too?"—as survivors of an earthquake or tidal wave might sense a springing fellowship as a result of what they had been through together.

The feeling grew generally until one day a deputation of orangemen arrived at Princess Ozma's palace and lodged a request. "We're orangemen," said their leader, who was also something of a wit and a history buff. "We don't actually care less about William or James," he said arcanely, "but we do feel like we belong together in the never-land. We'd like to have something to call ourselves besides 'orangemen'. Then we could go ahead and be a nation."

"I'll take it under consideration," promised the gracious queen.

That same evening she got busy with a pencil and a sheet of paper. What name could you give to a people who had nothing in common but the fact of sharing in the effects of an accidental visitation of magic? The word "orangemen" which had sprung up in the folk mouth was the only *natural* thing you could call them. But that was so un-Ozian and at the same time reminiscent of bygone and meaningless strifes out in the great world that Ozma decided against perpetuating it.

No, a name that exactly shared constituents of existing tribal names of Oz was what was wanted. Then nobody could say it was eccentric or didn't belong. It should be of the average length of, and composed of a choice of the same letters as, the four names familiar in Oz. Experimentally she wrote down:

WINKIE MUNCHKIN GILLIKIN QUADLING

'Hm,' thought the princess, 'this is going to be fun.'

One six-letter name and three eight-. To arrive at anything like a synthesis as far as length was concerned, the new word ought only to consist of seven letters. Right: drop initial M, G, and Q, for anyway one wouldn't want to favor one region over another by reusing its initial.

Then, from what was left, select a letter from each column, spread as fairly as might be among the four names, to produce a word that was at least pronounceable. In half an hour Ozma had come up with "Unnikeg"—and thought it was the best she was likely to get.

The deputation, when she told them next day, were well

satisfied. They took their new name and carried it home, happy. Now they had achieved nationhood. Ozma was amused on the occasion of her next royal progress through the Orange Slice to be shown the national coat of arms with its symbol of a barrel of honey (orange-blossom, of course) and to be told with all reverence that the totem of the Unnikegs was most ancient.

"Yes," said the Wizard. "I assume it must be Orangespiegel, its creator, who is to manipulate the magic mirror..?"

"As ably as he did the first time'?" spoke the princess ironically. "He should be present, of course. But no, I think we'd better not take any chances. We'll have all the Adepts of Magic in Oz who will come: ourselves, Glinda, Diane—the Witch of the North that was, the wizard Wam, and everyone else credited as an Adept. Oh, and the Lords of Light standing by, though they aren't, strictly speaking, magicians. Among us we ought to get the thing done somehow.

"And yet..."

"Yes, your grace?" The Wizard raised his eyebrows.

"I'm actually quite sorry it has to happen," said the Girl Ruler: "the deactivating of the enchanted glass that turns us all to our mirror images. It's been a good time for Oz, these 'years of the enchantment': —the twenties and thirties, as they are known out in the world. They haven't been a *result*, naturally, of the image reversal but the two phenomena have coincided and Oz has had a fresh youthful light-hearted air this quarter-century. Don't breathe a word of this to Frank but there was a slight atmosphere of emptiness and gloom about Oz in the first years of the century. All those threatening armies! of gnomes and fanfasms and even Ozites, including young ladies. All those evil witches and Kalidahs and devouring wolves...

"That's all gone now. Our worst threats lately have been from single ill-natured individuals, who, however, never succeeded in depressing the entire country. But now I fear," said the fairy, who sometimes had mild seizures of second-sight, "the old bad times may return—with truly evil enchanters putting a hex on Oz. Perhaps even grand-scale air wars or attacks from outer

space. When you've got a nice system ticking over peacefully and everyone content, there'll always be somebody come along, keen to destroy it all..." A little frown of foreboding was on her brow.

"Still, I suppose it's our duty...?"

"Well," said the Wizard, "there have been those irate letters from the F.L.O.P."

'The Federated League of Oz Purists," translated Ozma. "Yes, they've been up in arms for twenty years. I can't say I sympathize all that much with them. If they had their way Oz would be frozen in amber the way it was at the end of Dorothy's first adventure here. Even I would never have been invented," laughed the fairy ruefully. "I must take a dim view of that."

"I suppose you could just keep the retrieval of the mirror a secret, said the Wizard doubtfully.

"No, that's just what we couldn't—now. The discovery was made—perhaps unfortunately—too publicly. The Frogman and his bunch have already left and they'll spread the story wherever they appear. I can't ask the people here at the palace to conceal the news from their pen-pals. And Glinda has already been informed..."

No, as happens more than one would think: those concerned went ahead and co-operated in their own downfall. Perhaps it had nothing to do with the restoration of the ancient orientation of directions in Oz but it is a curious fact that from this time no more news of the magic land reached the outside world for many years. And when it did, somehow it wasn't the old Oz.

"How will you travel?" enquired the Royal Historian when the final decision to act had been made.

"Might as well use these Scalawagons, now that they've been invented," said Princess Ozma with resignation. She and her advisers were up in the dome of the Wimugiqua Hotel to watch the sun rise for the last time over the golden East. "The others will be arriving from the north during the morning and then we'll set out. We can be there in just three hours by Scalawagon."

There was silence for a while as they observed the midnight

blue lightening to ultramarine and then azure. The sun slid up like a great gold coin and the fields of mustard they were growing that year, by crop rotation, in the nearer reaches of the Winkie country gleamed out most yellowly.

"Isn't it magnificent?!" exclaimed Ozma, enthralled, and hummed a little tune in her delight.

"What's that you're humming, your grace?" asked the Wizard of Oz.

"Why...I don't know," said the girl. "Some popular love song, I suppose. Let's see..." She tried to recapture the words: "'I love you... the golden dawn agrees—' There, you see? it's psychological! The land of morning *should* be gold. It seems like the obvious thing.

"By the way, speaking of pop songs: I learn that at this moment out in the great world a song at the top of the charts is called 'In the Blue of Evening'! For the west *is* every bit as blue as the east is yellow. But now, alas..."

They had no time to listen to more of the fairy's foolishness. The Wizard and Queen Ozma took leave of the Historian and went to the garages to see that all was in readiness for the early afternoon departure.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

"Take that! and that!" Cayke slapped her house-mate's face, then threw a pot at his noodle and began to chase him all around the room. But he was not such a dumbbell so he ran like mad, but stumbled on a broom, and that really was his doom. She started swinging; left! right!

After all, they had been together for more than eighteen years and it was enough to get on anyone's nerves. Orangespiegel would enter her kitchen and tell her how to cook and if there was one thing the cookie cook didn't support it was that. 'Anyone would think we were married, the way he tries to rule the roost,' she thought in annoyance as she flopped herself down at the kitchen table after the flare-up and gulped at a cup of Skim.

She was crying when Mistress Pill stepped in from the garden. "What's the matter, dear? May I know?"

"Oh, it's your brother again! I suppose the poor man hasn't got enough to occupy him. After all, bossing these Unnikegs isn't a full-time occupation. He will come in here and try to rationalize my housekeeping. It makes me see red. And of course that starts *him* off—because he only wants me to see orange.. We've been having another of our quarrels."

"I'm so sorry to hear it." Pill herself never had a quarrel. Maybe the fact that *her* boy-friend was away for a month at a

time had something to do with it. Or perhaps her character and that of Mr. Levimeyerabloch were just that little amount sweeter than in the combination Cayke/Till and that made the difference. Till always had been a driving man and the cookie cook too had shown traces of adamantine in her nature.

"That's the worst of being married," analyzed the cook. "Or rather: of not being married, though constantly together. You get on each other's nerves. I suppose there's never been, since the dawn of time, two people living always together who didn't bicker. It's human nature."

"And yet you love each other," soothed Pill.

"That's the odd part of it. We don't. At least: I made no secret from the start. I had a great love—once—but it wasn't granted me to keep. I thought if I couldn't be in love I could anyway be kind. But you know, I've found out; it's no good being altruistic and going with somebody out of kindness or pity—or gratitude for their devotion—or whatever. Their pride will never allow them to believe that. They'll think you chose them because you wanted to—and then they make you pay."

Pill Orangespiegel was shocked at the depth of disillusion revealed iii her quasi-sister-in-law. But just then Till came bustling back into the kitchen as if nothing had happened.

"Excitement, girls!" he cried. "The Queen of Oz is coming to stay! Her and the once Witch of the North and Diggs -the Wizard and I don't know how many more. I can't think where we'll put them all!"

"Never mind that brother," said Pill, who read all the women's magazines. "The Princess—or the Wizard—always puts up a royal tent by magic if they're benighted anywhere. But why are they coming here?"

"Would you believe it?: my magic mirror has come to light-after all these years. And they're all coming down to confer with about putting to rights that pesky directions-switch that got started way back when—you remember the story—"

They did, all too well.

"Actually, I've been expecting the Queen to send for me any

time this past twenty years," went on the vainglorious former Owl Practitioner. "but this is even better. She's coming to me. I expect I'll have to have a medal or two pinned on my lapel—"

"What for?" said the disenchanted Cayke.

"Why! for..." The O.P. paused to consider. "For mucking about with magic and *caus*ing the 'pesky directions-switch'? Or for highhandedly turning part of the country orange? Or for being allowed, heaven knows why, to be governor of the area thus oranged over?!" Poor Cayke could not control her temper and her scorn for the meddler she had been with too long.

Where Orangespiegel had been able to overlook and forget a forthright pitched battle where both parties had been up in arms, he was wounded by this unkind reaction to a gambit he had meant only to thrill and please the women by. He took his sister under the arm and they went away to inspect the orange chamber and see about doing it out as a proper abode for the fairy Princess of Oz.

Cayke sat on at the table sombrely and remembered when she had been an easy-going young woman who could make people fall profoundly in love with her for her goodness. Nobody likely to do that today!

And yet; she *looked* no different from what she had done eighteen years earlier. The years in the desert had aged her only slightly, given her perhaps even a more fascinating depth to her glance or charming wryness to her smile. If someone could fall in love with her then, another someone might still do so—if he didn't know what a shrew she had become. And she hated being a shrew. Oh, if only she could start over! But the spring: did that ever come a second time? And she thought of a pair of bright eyes.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

"Yes, I think just here. Don't you, Glinda?" It was the girlish Ruler of Oz proposing, then gracefully leaving it to her older colleagues to dispose.

"Perfect, dear. What do you say, Lady Diane? Or would it be more in keeping to call you Tattypoo in this situation?"

The Countess (sometimes she styled herself 'Duchess') of Gillequin rested her chin in her hand and tapped her foot.

"'Tod' will do," she said abstractedly, "that's my portmanteau name. It includes, symbolically, all the others. No, somehow I think right in the exact center of the ground mirror would be more effective."

The others made no demur and all trailed after as Tod stepped some rods further north. There were seventeen of the more celebrated wonder-workers of Oz present, plus the measly little Till Orangespiegel who was only a dabbler in magic, though a remarkably effective one in view of the fact that a charm of his was the ultimate cause of this congress of necromancers. They formed a circle upon the great 'ground glass' that still lay in its place on the near-desert floor, gaudily reflecting the setting sun whose light was cast through the tall orange-glass standard.

"It's not Michaelmass," reminded the Wizard Oz Diggs. "The

reflection doesn't fall exactly athwart the glass. I wonder..."

"I think it's all right, Oz," reassured the Sorceress of the South. "It's not properly the orangeness which is at stake here—and there's *enough* of the orange that it will prevent the color's being inadvertently wiped off the landscape. But the big mirror is vital in making up the magic triangle."

Really they were all just reassuring themselves and each other that everything was going to go as wished. None of them had any experience of what they were about to attempt and even the one who had brought off the original enchantment was vague on procedures. His coup had been to all intents and purposes a fluke.

Ozma held a stop watch and when the optimum moment of maximum coloration of the ground mirror was at hand she said, "Go!" Till Orangespiegel, the center of the ring, unveiled the hand glass and the Wizards Oz and Wam held each an arm of him as he directed the mirror toward the sky, zeroing in on a point in the zenith where Glinda, employing an astrolabe, informed him that the reflecting 'tea-tray' hung invisible. The wizards knew by report how difficult the magic mirror was to control—or even to hang onto. The outer circle of witches, fairies, and enchanters plied their wands or forked twigs or whatever other magic gear they'd brought to the ceremony.

Sure enough, the little hand glass pulled and tugged and seemed to want to fly away to its glass-mate in the sky. There was no danger it was not keyed in to its counterpart! But was it going to have the desired effect and fetch its troublesome partner down from the heavens? Or might it not merely exacerbate what the tea-tray was doing already? perhaps turn Oz upside down as well as backwards? Nobody knew.

They waited for twelve minutes, while the three male magic-workers struggled to control the hand mirror and all the others incanted furiously. Some even took to wishing: those who controlled the power of making wishes come true. Then Tod, who had particularly keen eyesight, cried, "I think—yes, I *think* I see something!"

It was the tea-tray mirror!

It wobbled, it shifted from side to side, seemingly fighting strenuously to resist the call to earth but every moment growing darker and bigger against the peerless evening-blue firmament. Vermillion flashed from it now, as its revolving mirror face caught the setting sun.

Soon even those whose eyesight was not perfect could see that an Oz-shaped oblong was tumbling fast and tumbling faster down the stairway from the stars. The orange flashes were every moment larger, sharper, and of shorter duration. The speeding bolt was gathering more speed. It was going to hit somewhere with a frightful 'ping'!

"Somewhere"?! Suddenly all the Adepts to a man (or woman) knew *where* it was going to hit. Glinda screamed, an event startling enough in itself coming from the usually calm sorceress: "You men!! drop that! Run for your lives!"

All the female Adepts in the outer ring had already rushed away to all sides and flung themselves cowering on the sands, anticipating Alamogordo. Now the three wizards scattered and took nose-dives. They had perhaps taken the red witch's injunction too literally, for the little magic hand mirror was left behind, lying somewhere on the surface of its great brother glass. It landed face up and continued to exercise its ineluctable pull on that vagrant member of the trio in the sky.

Two minutes and twenty-nine seconds of painful anticipation and then the magic-workers were stunned by a silver-tinkling smash as if all the chandeliers in the world had crashed at once. 'Cracked in a *million* shivers' the glass flew out in a vast cloud to all sides, each tiny facet reflecting the last rays of the dying sun in a great scintillating scarlet ball.

When the frightened sorcerers raised their heads they found themselves covered in orange sand. All trace of the three enchanted mirrors had disappeared, unless an increase in the amount of the desert's silica sand could be called a "trace".

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

"Well, that's that." Till Orangespiegel brushed his hands concludingly, then threw a last wave to Sorceress Glinda disappearing to the (yes, definitely) east in her swan chariot. "Went off very nicely," He smirked in satisfaction.

"Glad you think so, I'm sure," said the cookie cook with ill grace, dumping out a pan of dish-water, actually her old original jeweled dishpan which she had sent for early in her sojourn at the spherodome.

"And you do not, my pet?" Orangespiegel moved to the garden door leading to the kitchen.

"Oh, they were most kind and most condescending," Cayke had to admit. "But I wasn't charmed that Pill and I had to stay bent over a hot stove instead of taking part in the main event."

"But that was only for us Adepts of Magic," reminded her house-mate smugly. "Any layman's intrusion might have spoiled the spell."

"Hmfp." Cayke remembered a time when her adeptness with a magic rope had kept this strutting upstart in check. She still retained the rope—and her all-weather serape—in a trunk in the attic. Maybe She ought to have had them out, and impressed their guests with a display of magic lassoing while time was.

"Incidentally," pursued Till as they stepped inside and he

shut the upper half of the Dutch door, "I suppose you overheard what Glinda said?"

"When? Just now? No, I was scouring the kitchen counters while you were with royalty in the drawing room. What did 'Glinda' have on her mind?"

"She was greatly impressed—well, all the Adepts were—at my 'coolness under fire' during the operation. It never crossed my mind to abandon my post until commanded to by the Good Witch. And I brought—well, we—the performance off with a bang—literally. There won't be any more crossed directions in Oz in future... I do regret my fine mirrors, rather. But then mirror-making is a concluded phase in my career now. I won't have time—"

"Why, what are you going to be doing?" Automatically Cayke was setting out the things for elevenses.

"You didn't hear that?! Why, Glinda thinks I'm so promising an apprentice in the magic arts that she's having me over to her workshops for a sabbatical year! I won't be seeing much of this place, and of course won't be available to tend the glass foundry.

"Oh, what a lark!" said Cayke ironically. "And what about the rest of us?"

"Oh, you'll just stay on here at the spherodome. It will be pleasant to see you again whenever I get back this way. Probably though my headquarters will be at E.C. I dare say Ozma will want me on hand there for consultation most of the time—after I take my degree."

At this moment Pill Orangespiegel came into the kitchen from the south lounge where she had been plumping up the divan cushions and doing a little sweep-out. She caught the last of her brother's words.

"You going to live at the Emerald City?" she asked in wonderment. "What about us?" she demanded as naturally as the cookie cook had done.

"I've just been saying to Cayke," replied the practitioner easily; "there's not a reason in the world why you two can't stay on here indefinitely. It should be a nice leisurely life for you. You

won't have me to do for any more, for one thing."

"There is a reason, brother," stated Pill demurely.

"And what might that be, my pet?"

"Lev and I will be wed, as soon as ever I can get word to him!"

"Indeed?! You surprise me. This is all a bit sudden."

"By no means. He popped the question eighteen years ago. But funnily enough I said no. You see, I couldn't think of abandoning you the moment I got a better offer. With you and Cayke not marrying, I never knew but what my services here would be vital one day."

That left Till Orangespiegel with egg on his face. He took an opportunity suddenly to go to the washroom and remove it. The women were left alone to dunk Cayke's krullers in the Skim.

"Congratulations, dear heart," offered the cook, but whether these were simple felicitations, or three cheers for defiance, she didn't say. "Pity," she went on, "that Levimeyerabloch wasn't here for the recent goings-on. He'd have liked seeing his friend the Wizard Wam. again too."

"Never mind. Lev was never much hipped on magic. I suppose you know how clueless he was about those magic necklaces he had?" enquired Fill.

"It rings a bell. What was the story again?"

"He'd got hold of two—or was it three—pretty necklaces of gold filigree and emerald chips, carried them around for decades, it seems, looking for the suitable customer for them. He finally unloaded them to somebody in Skampavia, I think; that's way across the other side of Oz and beyond the great deserts. Then one day in conversation Wam happened to mention that he himself—he's a great jeweler and precious-stone cutter, you know—had made the necklaces donkey's years before and that they were powerful magic talismans. Poor Lev was so naive he'd had them for twenty years and never guessed."

"Why in the world didn't Wam tell him—years before?"

"Oh, in those days there was a general prohibition in Oz against anyone working with magic except a very few accred-

ited adepts. Now it's much easier. Princess Ozma doesn't mind anybody dabbling in magic, as long as their intentions are good-"

"Or even not so good," interjected Cayke a bit cattily. "From all I gather our Till wasn't up to a great deal of good the time he launched the enchanted mirror."

"I'm afraid you're right. But in this other case Lev had come by the necklaces honorably so Wam felt he had no right to take them away from him. He just omitted to tell him what they were capable of."

Cayke was entertained. Then, "You won't be living here then? I take it, from what you said to Till."

"Oh, no. I've always longed for the romance of posting about in Lev's Scalawagon with him. Do you know I've never budged a foot off the property here since I carne here with Till so long ago I can't even recall clearly when it was?"

"You too then?" mused Cayke. "I didn't know. I've always been—well to put it crudely; a 'sucker for romance'. I thought you were more of a homebody."

"Oh, I enjoy the home comforts all right. But they don't have to be exaggerated.

I'm not sure I'd have been *quite* so keen about traveling in the old buggy but you know this Scalawagon has an enclosed rear, with a bunk *just* big enough for two, and a magic-powered hot-plate, so we can cook out on fair days and do hot water for washing. I think I'm going to love it."

"Good for you, dear. I wish you every happiness... I suppose Lev's cheetah still runs with him?"

"Yes, and still changes his colors! He was black with pale green spots when I saw him last. And if he no longer needs to be draft animal, he's still good protection if one meets anyone unpleasant."

"Oh, that could never happen in Oz! " said Cayke with a twinkle in her eye.

"Of course not!" laughed her friend. "Except sometimes." There was a moon that night and it cheered Cayke the cookie

cook as she left the round house at a tiny hour, wearing her serape and carrying a magic rope and a few things in a shoulder bag.

The Brigand with Bright Eyes would be an old man now. Or maybe not *so* old. Cayke wasn't sure how fast one aged in the desert. She had done so just very slightly in six years. But then an older man might be expected to be that little more attracted by a younger women, as she herself still appeared to be.

She had a mile to go to the great orange glass standard that marked the boundary between Oz and the desert. The glass itself had been shattered in the frightful smash that had taken place day before yesterday but the huge ozinium standard still stood, seemingly indestructible, as a landmark in the wilderness.

When she came level with it she paused for a moment. Then, like Marlene some years earlier, she kicked off her shoes and prepared to seek her man out on the sandy wastes. She had been in his company twice in her life. Perhaps the third time was the charm.

She stumbled only once. Her toe struck a little twist of casehardened silver that had once been the frame of a magic mirror.

> Lund 13 May - 17 June 1985