



**T
H
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**U
MBRELLAS**

**OF
OZ**



This Book
is dedicated to
MICHAEL J. MICHANCZYK
Obliging
and
Dependable
Collaborator

THE
UMBRELLAS
of
OZ

THE OZ BOOK FOR 1953

By March Laumer
with a seminal chapter by Irene Schneyder

Founded on and Continuing the
Stories by March Laumer

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First Provisional Edition: 1991
Second Provisional Edition: 2006

Opium Books Series number 34

C H A P T E R O N E

<<1952 – three months later>>

The annual meeting of the O.B.O. was being held, as most often, in New York that year and William “Speedy” Rapidan came over from Rent Rock. He was in a funny mood; not the kind that made you laugh either. The tool and die works were ticking over nicely. Nothing to complain of there. His health was okay. There were no affairs of the heart to unsettle him. Why then was he in a melancholy taking like this?

Speedy’s uncle Bill had died in the year between. Was that the reason? It was always a treat to have lunch with Uncle at Giovanni’s or the Four Seasons whenever the younger man came to town. Sometimes he stayed over with him for a night or even two. Uncle had taken an interest in Speedy’s Oz interest, had even met Peter and Sples on a couple of occasions. Now he wouldn’t be around any longer. New York seemed empty.

Looking out the train window at the yellow leaves he hummed a little under his breath. He did that—when on his own—and it didn’t necessarily mean merry-and-bright. Music meant mood. “Autumn in New York.” He hummed that surprisingly genuinely mood-rich song.

That’s how he felt: ‘dreamers with empty hands may sigh

THE UMBRELLAS OF OZ

for exotic lands.' He didn't know if he was exactly sighing for exotic lands but he had the empty hands to do it with. Rent Rock Tool & Die was going too well. There weren't any challenges left in it.

Oh, he could put on a sales campaign and probably bring in plenty of extra cash. What would he want more cash for? He couldn't, and wouldn't, eat any more than he did already. What was the point of several extra zeros in the bank book? That was all that having more money than you needed boiled down to. You didn't actually have a bedroom drawer full of greenbacks that you gloated over. As for blowing all the cash to buy a lot of goods and services: he had all the goods and services he wanted. Rainy-day requirements? Speedy had always thought that keeping your health, and your smarts, was all you needed to guard against a rainy day. And if you lost those, who wanted to live anyway?

'Autumn in New York is often mingled with pain.' Yeah. Not positive pain. Speedy had nothing substantive to complain of. But negative pain: emptiness: the absence of the carrot dangling before your nose to keep you at whatever it was you 'ought' to be kept at. For anything to matter you had to be looking forward to some kind of a goal. Just now he couldn't think of any kind of goal he had.

'It spells the thrill of first-nighting.' That was an idea. Maybe he'd take in a show. He didn't know if the guys would be staying over night. He would, maybe even a couple, now that he would be there anyway. Then they could all go together. Otherwise, just him on his own; Uncle wasn't there.

'Glittering crowds, and shivering clouds, in canyons of steel.' Well, those didn't exactly match. Others might sparkle in evening attire and jewels but his plain dark suit, still slightly Norfolk in style, was not going to set anything alight. As for the clouds, for the moment that was all wrong. It was a glorious fall morning and the fiery beauty of the trees inexpressible. He peered out of the train window and got lost in the glamor of gold, yellow, brown, orange, and red.

Speedy hadn't traveled all that much—though his two big ventures abroad had been as exotic as anybody could wish for—but he had an idea that the autumn coloring that, centered on east-central North America was something unique in the world. Nowhere else were there sugar-maple trees—that he ever heard of—and they were the ones that went brilliant, scarlet when the frost got them.

Autumn in New York: it brings the promise of new love. Hmm. He wasn't so sure about that. Of course New York always had on offer plenty of what some people called love, but William Rapidan had never confused sharp but fleeting physical needs with "love." Love was when you thought somebody was so marvelous that simply to sit and look at her was as great a happiness as anything else at all you might do in her company.

He hadn't loved all that much, not if love (by a different definition) was when you cared so deeply and lastingly that you had to know she was still getting along all right even after you weren't "in love" any more. How many did he know like that? He'd had a deep and lasting regard for his uncle, but that was different. Anybody else? Well, one person.

Thoughts of that person kept Speedy occupied until the train slid into Grand Central. Soon he was out on Park Avenue. Wine in the air! (not yet too tinctured with carbon monoxide). Why did it seem so inviting?

Autumn in New York. It was good to live it again.

C H A P T E R T W O

<<1914>>

But to go back aways: thirty-eight years, to be more or less exact.

Button-Bright was being naughty. He was a little old for being “naughty” but that’s what it amounted to. We aren’t told what year he was born but he was already old enough to get lost on his own in 1907^s. Now it was 1914, so at the utmost youngest he must have been eleven. His family had told him and told him not to take the heirloom umbrella. He took it anyway. Wasn’t that being naughty? Or was eleven old enough that what he did against orders was outright delinquency? if not exactly criminal.

Eleven was old enough to monkey with explosives. Old enough too to hide some fireworks after their supervised use on the fourth of July. You never knew when they might come in handy. You could hit firing caps with a mallet any time and induce an amusing terror in tiresome old aunts or great-aunts who came to tea and were not expecting an explosion in the passage outside the parlor. The cheerful red cherry bombs he kept for more serious occasions.

§ See *The Road to Oz*. Editor’s note.

Now was one of them. It was summer and he was bored. His tutor had just gone, leaving him a weekend's worth of homework to do. "Homework". It was *all* homework. He never went off to school like other kids but had his lessons in the old "nursery" upstairs. After the tutor left Button Bright just sat there. He was supposed to memorize the names of some geographical features of his home state but he didn't feel like it.

It was time to get lost again. He sensed it quite distinctly. It was three years now since his extensive adventures with that girl and her old pal from California[§]. In the interval there had been only small unimportant lost-gettings. Just around Philadelphia. There wasn't any way to get lost farther afield, darn it. Not since they'd taken away the umbrella.

The latter move was the work of Dr. Bright, Button's courtesy "father". The boy had never known his real father, who died at his birth. He had lived all his life with his mother's brother and accorded that gentleman all the fear and trembling due to a natural father. The warmth and comradeship one might also expect in the case of a father and son were absent. Though the boy in the ordinary way called himself "Button Bright" he knew his name was really Saladin Paracelsus Lambertine Evagne von Smith and that his father-figure was actually his uncle.

He was a stern uncle. It was just like him to lock up the beloved bumbershoot. Even favorite Uncle Bob Bright out at Germantown shared in the family sternness. The first time Button Bright made use of the magic umbrella Uncle Bob looked sharp and said he ought to leave it alone. He must have gone and tattled to his brother too because when the boy returned from Sky Island, though he had been as circumspect as could be, everyone in the house knew the old umbrella had been missing and had a pretty shrewd idea in whose company. Button Bright was put to bed without his supper and never saw the umbrella again.

Until right now.

He took no leave of anybody: his officious uncles or his quiet

§ See *Sky Island*. Editor's note.

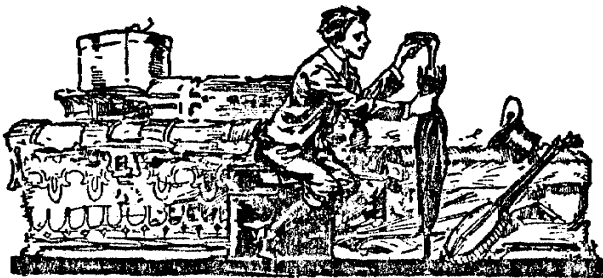
THE UMBRELLAS OF OZ

shrinking shadowy mother (the only one in the family who didn't share the trait of throwing his/her weight about; it was of course from his mother that the youth had his touch of feyness and tendency to fade out of sight). He just took his cherry bombs and a supply of matches to the attic. He knew very well which big strong chest (there was only one) in the attic contained the desired umbrella.

He placed two round red fireworks the size of crab apples under two corners of the chest and blew the side of it to smithereens. Before anybody in the house had time to react to the sound of the explosion the boy had groped inside the smoky shredded interior of the trunk and hauled out the sought flying gear. Oh, dear, the elephant-headed crook had been shattered. But lucky, thought Button Bright on maturer consideration, that the damage was no worse.

Stumbling over disused bird cages and rolls of carpeting, he made his way quickly to the round dormer window at the end of the long garret room. Even as he got the hasp open he heard loud steps on the stair. He thrust his legs out the window, sat on the curving casement, expanded the bumbershoot—and only now bethought him of where he was going.

Help! He hadn't a clue. In a panic he recalled the geography lesson ("the rivers of Pennsylvania") just ended. He was torn between Susquehanna and Monongahela and then he heard the attic door thrown open with a bang and had no time to say more than "Take me to Mo—" before hurling himself out into the air—which was promptly taken from him before he could complete his word.



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

<<1914>>

Despite his name Button Bright was not the brightest. Or let us say, since in fact there was nothing really wrong with his intelligence, that he was unmotivated to learn. Still now, and especially as a younger child, his favorite phrase was “Don’t know”, which rather gave the lie to the story usually retailed by the family circle: that he had been called “Button Bright” because he was “as bright as a button^s”.

Indeed there was a lot he didn’t know. He could tell left from right and up from down but it was stickier with east from west. Hence, it was not easy for him now (shortly after noon) to tell you, had you been there, whether he was going north, east, south, or west. At first he could see Philadelphia spread out below, and then a river, but, his lesson unlearned, he couldn’t have said which one. After that there was plain land for a very long time.

Curious as it may seem, the boy felt quite composed, aside from a few hunger pangs, as long as there was ground underneath, although an unsupported fall down upon it would have been deflating, to say the least. But when the elephant-headless umbrella moved out over ocean, Button Bright trembled. He took

§ For the true explanation, see *The Magic Mirror of Oz*. Editor’s note.]

THE UMBRELLAS OF OZ

a firmer grasp of the stump of the handle and hung on with *both* hands.

He wished there were some way to make the magic vehicle speed up. Besides being scary it was boring flying over indistinguishable waves. Wherever he was going must be on the other side of what even Button Bright could tell was an ocean. He knew this because he had, in the course of time, absorbed *something* from his geography lessons and knew that there were oceans to left and right of North America. The sole 'sea' that abutted on the United States was a very large one and wasn't even called that, but rather "gulf".

Where was he going? "Mo—" ? He recalled vividly enough that he had got that much out before the umbrella had taken off. As soon as he had got his breath he had said, "—nongahela", but he knew it was no good. From prior experience he was aware that the device never altered its destination once it had received its initial instructions.

So there must be a place called "Mo". As a matter of fact there was, but American Button Bright hadn't pronounced as "moo" (as one ought) the name of the seaport town in northern Norway, Mo i Rana (home of deluges, as high mountain ranges rising from the sea scrape water-laden clouds and dump their contents on the defenceless town). The umbrella 'heard' "moh" and to Mo(h) it headed.

A whole night of hanging on passed. You can be sure it was a desperate thing to try to keep from falling asleep and ineluctably letting go. Like Lindbergh later, Saladin von Smith just barely managed it. What a relief it was to see land ahead in the early morning light. The umbrella, maltreated as it had been at Button Bright's hands, now did its best for him. It came in for a light landing at the first spot that could technically be called "Mo". This was at a slight protrusion of the mountain frontier of that land, opposite the dominions of King Scowleyow. Button Bright put his foot to the ground one foot inside the border.

Two or three more feet inside, and that far within only so as to avoid actually lying on the pathway, the boy from Philadel-



THE UMBRELLAS OF OZ

phia (L. Frank Baum version) fell down in a myrtleberry patch and slept for twenty hours.

He was young. He could take it. His phlegmatic nature allowed him to put up with physical discomforts, such as long periods of near-immobility in awkward circumstances, in a way that was going to stand him in good stead in days to come.

Even as long as he slept he only awoke due to a poke.

If he'd had time to think about it he might have thought the poke felt like that of an umbrella ferrule, but when he groggily opened his eyes in the early grey of dawn he saw no umbrella. No umbrella?'. Abruptly Button Bright sat up and stared about him. Besides the hand-high myrtle shrubs he saw nothing but a woman in a voluminous crystal-colored cloak, who was looking at him quizzically.

"You're a fine young man," said the woman

"Am I?" said Button Bright. Up to now he had been in the habit of thinking of himself merely as a boy.

"Yes," assured the woman. "But what I wonder is: why are you sleeping in the myrtle patch?"

The Philadelphian told her. The information she asked for was such as he actually possessed, and when he knew something—which wasn't so often—he didn't mind imparting it. What he did not know was where his magic umbrella was. Now you won't believe this but Button Bright actually had sense enough not to reveal anything about the magicality of the bumbershoot. He finished his speech by merely saying, "I don't know where my umbrella is," in a plaintive voice.

"Oh, did you have an umbrella?" said the woman.

"Yes, and it looks like it's going to rain. I need it." The boy was not being quite ingenuous. "Have you seen it?"

"Why, no, I haven't," replied the stranger. She wasn't either. "As you say, it would be useful now." The gentle rain began.

"But I can spare you a flard of my cape. That is, if you're going somewhere. Maybe you're staying here?"

"Don't know." Then, as the rain went on to pelt, he knew. "No, I'm not," declared the youth and scrambled up and under

a trailing edge of the big colorless mantle.

He even remembered to say “Thanks”, which was going some. He actually added, “That’s pretty nice of you.”

“Oh, I am pretty nice,” admitted the woman, “—a lot of the time. At least, if I’m not crossed—or bored. Then I can be quite shrewish. People say I have a terrible temper.”

“Oh.” Then as the two moved off Button Bright added, to make conversation, “Can you give me some examples?”

The woman, who said her name was “Jrumm”, complied, with a crooked smile. She told it as a story. It passed the time as they went on their ambling way along the valley path, just stopping occasionally to listen to a bird.

“Once upon a time I had a son. He too was a fine young man. Rather like yourself actually, though a good bit younger—at the time we parted.”

Button Bright murmured. “Yes,” assented the traveling woman, “we parted. Not through any wish of mine, or even fault, unless you call rubbing the local petty tyrant the wrong way a ‘fault’. It’s not my *fault* that I suffer—oh, to just a very mild degree—from kleptomania. I assure you I never take things for any *good* they might be to me. I just get this feeling that they ought to be taken. So it happened that I got reported quite a few times to this local tyrant. Finally he sent his minions to arrest me.

“I was dragged with scant ceremony before the despot’s judgment seat. I freely admitted that stealing was not my fault: I just couldn’t help it.

“‘Ah,’ said the cruel tyrant, ‘so you admit that you have stolen?’

“I looked down at my hands, of a bright cerise color, and shrugged. How could I deny it?

“‘If we practise clemency, will you drop the habit?’ demanded the ruler.

“‘How can I do that?’ I wanted to know. ‘My mania might come over me again at any moment, and it’s irresistible, you know.’

THE UMBRELLAS OF OZ

“Perhaps this will teach you to control the urge,” said the harsh judge. ‘Guards, seize the youth!’ And they did, wrestling to the ground my dear young son, who of course accompanied me.

“Well, that’s when I flew into a rage, lost my calm completely—and at once stole whatever I could lay my hands on. I wrapped around me my cloak of invisibility and left town.”

“Gosh,” said Button Bright, impressed. He was not to know that the tale was mostly make-believe, though with certain cardinal points of verisimilitude.

“Here, I’ll show you.” The woman drew aside a part of her cloak that Button Bright wasn’t under and showed him a small

bird cage she carried sheltered in the crook of her arm.

“Oh, that’s a baby bird,” said the boy. “Right the first time. But what kind?”

“Don’t know,” said Button Bright, surprising no one.

“It’s a mocking-bird,” informed the woman. “But just a young one, as you point out. It hasn’t learned any songs yet—well, only a few—and I’m at present traveling about the countryside, letting it acquire those of any birds we run up against.”

“Which ones has it learned?” Button Bright wanted to know, without guaranteeing to be much the wiser if told.

“Let’s see. So far the agami, the albatross, the bittern, the blackbird, the bullfinch, and the bunting. We’re doing them alphabetically. That was a bunting we listened to just now.”

Button Bright requested a demonstration. The tiny green-grey birdlet obliged with a capable warbling and twittering that was for all the world like the song of the blackbird. The boy was delighted. “Isn’t it clever!” he said.

“Yes,” agreed the bird-owner, “she can imitate any musical sound she hears... Do you know a tune?”

“Only Faure’s Third piano impromptu,” apologized Button Bright. He whistled that captivating and never-played melody. The little bird gave it right back and the youth clapped his hands. “My governess tried to teach me to play it,” he explained, “but I’m not musical.” (The truth of this statement is attested by Button Bright’s evaluation of Allegro da Capo, the cacophonous “musicker” met on the road to Oz^s during an earlier exploit of the boy’s.)

It seemed the two wayfarers had enough to talk about. They went on their way, under intermittent lemonade rains, one of them having no idea where they were going but the other with a very good idea indeed.

§ See the volume of that name. Editor’s note.

C H A P T E R F O U R

<<1952>>

Speedy checked in at the Chesterfield. It was where he'd stayed once or twice before, when Uncle had been out of town, or he'd arrived late and didn't want to impose with midnight phone calls.

That was funny. They gave him room 317 and for some reason he recalled that it was the number he'd had almost the last time he ever saw Uncle Billy. He had the boy drop the bag and flung himself shoes and all on the bed with a pillow bunched behind his head. How queer. The last time he ever saw Bill sitting down was in *that* chair, right there. Mr. Harmstead died of a stroke and his nephew had seen him *lying* at Mount Zion but not sitting, ever again.

'Oh, gosh, Uncle,' muttered the man. That's all you could say when somebody long familiar and much loved was suddenly gone and you had nothing to repent of but everything to regret and nothing you could do about it.

He remembered Unc at Yellowstone, sucking on his pipe, sketching in his notebook, pulling up pegs from a canvas cover that concealed—Terrybubble!, if they had but known it. Terrybubble, that irrepressible and wholly unlikely monster who

for a season had been the youthful William Rapidan's great friend and companion. Oh, Terrybubble!, the world's only living dinosaur skeleton. Where were you now?

That brought Speedy's thoughts right back to the one girl, of course. For the dinosaur skeleton had remained on the aerial island, together with all that country's overweight and braided court and, chiefly, the one girl.

Speedy's ricocheting memory now settled on a topic even harder to shake than his preoccupation with the personality and absence of his loved uncle. Uncle was gone, forever, and nothing to be done, but Gureeda was not "gone" in that sense, and possibly something could be done.

Gureeda! that was her name. Or actually it wasn't her name. Only a nickname and, so Speedy had always secretly thought, a singularly ugly one. You immediately thought of "Grr-eedy" and the slim and modest young girl wasn't in the least greedy. It appeared she had been jokingly called "Gureeda Book" by some tiresome old wizard at her royal father's court, and "the name had stuck". Mm, like chewing gum and about as delightful. Actually the child's name was "Reeda" and Speedy thought it a pleasant one; in his thoughts he often used it. Perhaps an Umbrellian version of "Rita". He must ask one day. Reedy—and Speedy.'

No! He mustn't think like that. The man jumped up from the bed, went to the window, and peered down on Forty-ninth Street. Gureeda Book: how idiotic. In the first place there was no reason to urge the child to read. Her nose was always buried in a book. It had been written that even during pompful state visits at her palace home "the Princess could not be coaxed to raise her eyes from the printed page". She even (to Speedy, a bit shockingly) "preferred reading about adventures to having them". Indeed, if anything (unlikely) could, it was just that issue of reading versus reality that could represent an incompatibility in their natures. Things being so, why exhort her to read even more, and to the extent of plastering the admonition on her as a name?

THE UMBRELLAS OF OZ

“Gu”-reeda? People didn’t talk like that, except in Brooklyn, where the Umbrella Islanders had never been. If you were urging anyone to read in earnest, you would say “Go read.” Speedy’s acquaintance with the locution was aural. and so he knew that the “Gu” was pronounced “guh” and not “gew”, which wouldn’t have made any sense in the context. But “guh-read-a-book” was of a family with “guh wahn!”, a slurred way of talking connoting over-familiarity, even contempt. Why had the dear little girl put up with it all those years?

Nuts. Speedy grabbed his hat again and left the hotel. He wasn’t meeting the guys ‘til seven. It was only two now. What to do in the time between? The fun only really began when the bunch were together. He didn’t after all feel like catching a matinee and besides it was Thursday.

He sauntered west on Forty-ninth and found himself on Eighth Avenue. The back door of Manhattan, he had always felt it. Certainly when you stood on Eighth Avenue you felt that “everything” was east. Were there really buildings and people doing things that mattered on Ninth and Tenth Avenues? Search him; *he’d* never been there and *he’d* been coming to New York all his life.

He came past a Shamrock saloon and on impulse went in. It reminded him *he’d* never had any lunch. The Shamrock did a one-dollar special. *He’d* have that. A lot of it was salady stuff like pickles and cole slaw anyway. It wouldn’t fill him so *he’d* lose the appetite edge for blini and caviar later, or Giovanni’s saltimbocca.

Sneedy sat in the half-dark booth and enjoyed. Why did New Yorkers prefer to eat in the dark? He never did understand that. He understood perfectly why the management preferred it: save on electric bills and too-careful dishwashing. Rut why did the diners go along with it? If they cared at all about what they were eating they’d want to see it.

It was supposed to be glamorous to eat by subdued lighting. A businessmen’s lunch in a dive in the un-chic part of town? Who needed it? or was conscious of any glamor? But in a minute Speedy realized why customers didn’t complain. These half-concealed booth seats were ideal for pick-ups. You had to squint

to recognize anybody seated opposite you and there was no view at all of what patrons might be doing under the table-top. A floozy sat down facing him.

"This place taken?" she whispered confidentially. Rather a charming voice, actually. Like Veronica Lake. Husky, intimate.

"Oh—uh, no!" assured the young man. Thirty-one. I guess that's young, even in 1952.

Speedy ate on in silence. The blonde just sat there. In fact, she wasn't all that blonde. Maybe there was a bit more to her than pure tart.

He got curious. There was no table service in a Shamrock. You fetched your food on a tray, paid at the cash register by the door. What was she waiting for?

"You got a cigarette?" the girl asked.

"No. I kicked the weed," Speedy said, trying to sound sporty. In fact he'd never started. That was Uncle Billy's fault. He'd often said, tamping his briar, "Don't start, Speed. Nasty habit. And unhealthier than nasty." Out of respect for his uncle's opinions, the youth obeyed. By now, only fifteen years later, he was finally glad he had.

"Here's a match though," he said. He'd picked that up from Uncle too: always have useful small items in your pockets: penknife, pencil stub, up-foldable brush, tiny torch, tweezers.

The girl took the match clip, struck one—then blew it out. She *was* different. "I don't want to smoke," she said.

"Oh?" Pretty daring, Rapidan went on: "What do you want to do?"

"For now? Whatever you want to do."

"I want to talk," Speedy came right back at her "You see, I've got this gir—"

"Oh?"

"Yeah. At least I had this girl. That is, I knew a girl. At the time she was only eleven—"

"Wait a minute!" The woman bridled. Even she had *some* standards.

"It's okay. You see, I was twelve. It was like this...."

C H A P T E R F I V E

<<1914 continued>>

"Are you afraid of dragons?" asked Jrumm. "Don't know," said the boy from Philadelphia. "There aren't any, around where I live."

"You'll have a chance to see, in a while," the woman predicted confidently.

The pair had entered a highland forest, a rather gloomy place on the foothills of a range that marked the northern boundary of the land of Mo. Presently a rumbling was heard away at some distance.

"Is that the dragons?" asked the boy.

"You know, it does sound rather like dragons," admitted Jrumm. "But no, at least it's not the ones I meant. I guess I shouldn't have said merely 'a while'. It'll be nightfall, or even later, before we get to *my* dragons."

"I'm hungry," announced Button Bright presently.

"That's lucky," said Jrumm. "As it happens, we're coming to a nice orchard and nut grove, just beyond the forest. You're going to have to eat your way through that."

"Oh, yum-yum," commented the youth placidly. Just where they descended to the level plain there flourished a magnificent

grove of edible-seed-bearing trees of every description. Nature seemed not to care that she had allowed both palm trees and temperate-zone rowans and plums to thrive in the same area. Another peculiar thing was that all of such fruits as there were appeared to be ripe at the same time.

With cries of satisfaction the American boy ran among the trees picking up juicy windfalls and stuffing himself with Burgundy cherries and Chinese oranges as well as maple walnuts and butter pecans. The woman too partook. As she did she cheered on her companion: "Eat your fill. You may not pass this way again, or if you do it may not be the same."

Button Bright wondered what she meant. It is true that, when he was well and truly gorged and they were leaving the grove Jrumm halted, drew a stick from under her seemingly all-enveloping cloak, and waved it briefly while uttering unintelligible words and pointing back at the fruit trees in a significant manner. The boy couldn't see any change among the glistening fruits or the glossy leaves or the sturdy tree trunks. Just the same he said, "Say, are you a sorceress?"

"Oh, now you've gone and guessed it," cried the woman mock-ruefully. "Never mind. It won't affect you. But just in case you *should* come here again, be advised: don't eat any of the fruit." She didn't explain why not.

They traveled on and came to a fork in the path. Without thinking Button Bright was about to take the right-hand branch when his companion said, "No. That way leads back into the mountains. We'd fetch up at the same place eventually but this other way is shorter." They went left.

Now they came to a river. Quite an ordinary river, flowing quietly through a mild yellow-green gumdrop landscape. It was only when you got up to it that you saw that the 'water' was white.

"What's that?" asked Button Bright, surprised. The river clearly wasn't flowing fast enough for the color to be the white of churning water and foam.

"Guess," said Jrumm.

THE UMBRELLAS OF OZ

"Well, it looks like milk, but *that* can't be."

"Why not? It's flowing out of the Cows," countered the woman, and she pointed to the distant range of hills to the north. Indeed, the outline of the ridge did look a little like the backbones of a line of unmoving cattle. "Those are the Mountains of Moo" (etymologically related to "Mo").

"Oh," said Button Bright, wiser than before. "Now do we get across the milk—if we do?"

"Close your eyes," commanded Jrumm. "You won't be bothered so much that way."

But if the sorceress thought the American was going to be perturbed by a little inexplicable air transport she was mistaken. Button Bright did as he was told, however. After a moment's application by Jrumm of her magic stick the two found themselves on the western bank of the stream.

It was all right for him to look again, but Button Bright was blasé: he'd had to do with a good deal of magic, on his way to and in Oz and on Sky Island. The present little prestidigitation didn't seem to him anything much. He waited while Jrumm invoked a spell on the Milk River, then he said, "Now where are those dragons?"

"A bit of a hike still," confessed Jrumm.

But by late afternoon the now tiring hikers came in sight of a range of low purple mountains blocking the western horizon. As the sky grew orange behind the sierra and things darkened to prune-color, Button Bright began to see sombre turrets rising from among forest trees.

"That's the castle of the purple Dragon," informed his companion.

"'Dragon' singular?" asked Rutton Bright feeling defrauded. "I thought you said 'dragons'."

"Oh, there are, there are," the sorceress hastened to reassure. "It's just that the purple one is in charge. But the place is crawling with dragons, literally. All colors—and consistencies."

"'Consistencies'?"

"Mn. Now wait—and be surprised."

“What are we going to do there?”

“Deliver this bird.”

The American had almost forgotten the little grey mocking-bird chick. It was hours since it had picked up any new tunes. Just the cries of the buzzard, the canary, the capercaillie, the coot, and the cormorant: creatures encountered by field and stream during the day’s promenade. “It’s still got thirty-six to go,” volunteered its owner. “At the end I want it to be a ‘fifty-tongued’ bird.”

Button Bright was always literal-minded. “Fifty tongues?” he enquired. “Will there be room in its head for that many?”

“Of course I mean,” said Jrumm, spelling it out, “the ability to sing *as if* it had the expert tongues—and larynxes and esophagi, et cetera—of fifty different sorts of fowls.”

“Oh.” Then said the boy, “How are you going to do that?”

“Let it out in the woods and fields, by marsh and mountain. These are the Hills of Tweet we’re coming to. They’re haunted by every kind of bird known to man—and by some that aren’t.”

C H A P T E R S I X

<<1952 continued>>

Speedy didn't mention Terrybubble. He didn't want the girl to think he was completely bonkers. Or, actually, even partly. That's why he also didn't mention Umbrella Island as such. Who in a bar on eighth Avenue, New York City, was going to believe that a small blue-eyed fairy—really true—lived on a perfectly solid rock island that floated around in the sky supported by a vast umbrella?

He skipped all that part and just said, "I was on summer vacation when I was twelve and spent time on an island overseas." That sounded better than 'overairs'. "As a matter of fact. I washed up there kind of accidentally and at first I didn't have any way to get off. But I met some people: this girl I mentioned and her old dad, who ran the island, as it turned out, and some of his ... employees.

"I had a pet with me and—"

"'Pet'?" said the woman, curious.

"Yeah, a d—" Rapidan caught himself in time, lied, and turned "dinosaur" into "dog". "It liked to chase the girl's cat." There; that fitted in okay and in fact was more lifelike than the life had been. Who could suppose that dinosaurs, in life—or

after it!—would chase cats? About like the supposititious dog chasing flies The scale was all wrong. They just wouldn't do it.

"While I was there I was able to help the people in charge against some outsiders they had trouble with." The form of words summed up uninformatively the story of Umbrella Island's unlucky and temporary shipwreck between those other and warring islands of Norroway and Roaraway. "That put me in good with the boss man.

"Now, as it happened, this little girl wasn't all that little after all—just in retrospect. In fact, she was the same size I was *and* looked like me. There'd been a kidnap threat against her and some of the k—" On second thought Speedy turned what would have been "king" into "captain". "—aptain's henchmen thought it would be a good idea to substitute me for the p—" Just in time what would have been "princess" became "—oor young kid— when the time came to turn her over as a hostage."

The girl across acted interested but, understandably, puzzled. "How could they substitute a boy for a girl?"

"Oh, I forgot to mention that on that island they had a kind of funny dress code. More or less unisex. By then I was wearing the local costume of T-shirt and slacks for both sexes. Neither one of us had boobs yet—" He put in that little brassy note so the pick-up girl would think he was an all-right guy. "—so we really did look like twins.

"But by now I was in the captain's good graces and he wouldn't hear of such a thing. At the last minute he got help from outside and neither one of us had to go into captivity with the kidnapper. What would have made that a bore was not that the snatcher would hold us for ransom but that he wanted the victim for a servant. You can figure we weren't very keen on that."

"And the girl?"

"Reeda. Yeah ..." Speedy dreamed. "While all this was going on the kid and I were thrown together a lot. I guess we got pretty fond of each other. In fact I know damn well we did. Rut the fun and games—as they seem to be, looking

THE UMBRELLAS OF OZ

back—were over all too soon.

“I had help leaving the island—so I left.”

“Why?” said the floozy.

Speedy looked at her with admiration. She was all right. She grasped the essentials. “That’s what I asked myself right at the time: Why did my thrilling, adventures and friendships have to end” Wouldn’t. it be better to spend the rest of my days on the island instead of returning to a humdrum existence in America?

“But you know what dopes people are. Creatures of routine. Back I came... I guess I’ve been regretting, it ever since.”

“Yeah. Well...” The girl in the booth didn’t seem to know what to say. Maybe she was wondering, if she ought to make a play for him now after all?

But the fellow was going on. “You know what almost the worst part of it was?”

Well, no, she couldn’t guess that, so he told her. “At that time I was living in this country with an uncle of mine who was an inventor. If I’d stayed on the island he and I would sure have missed each other—but we’d get over it. But while I was there I got wind—plans and all—of a new kind of submarine cannon. Based on natural water pressure and the action of the tides. It fired sea waters but lethally. And I knew how it worked.

“Kid that I was, I couldn’t resist getting back to my uncle and bragging about that gun. He was impressed all right. With my specifications of the general principles he went to work to perfect it as a powerful weapon and when the war came along he turned it over to Uncle Sam.”

“Oh, wow,” said the girl. non-committally. Rapiden was glad of that. An uneducated (presumably) girl of the streets, she couldn’t be expected to have other than standard trite attitudes like “Hooray for our side” and “My country, right or wrong”. But just maybe, deep down somewhere, she had essential decency that didn’t make her cheer when she heard about engines of destruction.

“What I picked up by accident on an innocent holiday ended by causing death and destruction for hundreds—what do I

know? thousands?—of people during World War Two. Helped our side win, of course. I've always felt guilty..."