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

<<1952>>

The travelers by horse and ass had come to the fabulous orchard. Here, after gorging themselves on the fruit, they made camp for the night. Since the booby traps along the old road.through Mo had been deactivated the marvelous grove was allowed to be just an ordinary marvelous grove. Admittedly, not all the fruit were (or appeared to be) at the height of perfection all the time. They got ripe in their proper season and just now, in August, the picnickers found plump plums, early apples, and good gooseberries perfect for plucking.

At one side of the orchard, not noticed by the young man on his previous passages that way, was a little farm cottage, seemingly that of the tenders of the fruit plantation. The sorceress went ahead and had a word with the householders, returning to say Yes, the travelers could get a shakedown there for the night. The animals were turned loose to graze in the grove over night and ate more apples than was perhaps good for them.

Curiously, the old couple in residence kept out of sight. The witch herself performed as virtual hostess and showed the princely couple where to doss down. But Y.M., in going to the privy, caught a glimpse of the old wife tenant and was startled

to realize it was the same old woman who, sitting on a large rock, had given him travel directions years before.

<<1949>>

Back in bed, he discussed it with the princess but they were unable to come to any conclusion as to what it meant.

The following day the party had sense enough to take the trail that led around the mountain rather than over it. It took longer but they were in no great hurry.

There was, however, no avoiding the river. There it spread, broad and white. The three riders came up to its brink and halted.

"That's strange," said the young man, deep in thought and recollection. "I never knew the river was white. It looks like milk!"

"It is milk, silly," said Jrumm, speaking more familiarly than was at all warranted. "That's the Milk River."

Horse Hræ stevrod put in a word. "It was night, Master Y.M., the time we passed this way before, and the river was on the rampage. You wouldn't have observed its true nature."

"But coming back?" objected Y.M. "But that's right," he recalled, "it was late evening then too. But even so, how odd."

While they sat their mounts and marveled the well-traveled witch gave a little introductory lecture. "If you had been readers—" she began, when the young man broke in to say with some indignation:

"I am! I love reading."

His wife, however, in the interest, o£ candidness, put in: "Just newspapers, darling. Not geography books or history."

"I'd sure read them if there *were* any at the palace," Y.M. defended himself, yet he could not gainsay the fact of his general ignorance.

The witch went on: "The Milk River is one of the sights of Mo. Unlike in much of the country it rains milk in the Moo Mountains, nor are heavy deluges unknown. It must have been one of those you felt the effects of at the time of which you speak.

A milk cloudburst would have swelled the river greatly."

Nobody contested her word. Jrumm mused on. "I recall passing this way—" Here she twirled her umbrella reminiscently. "—with a young fellow years ago. It was the time I was teaching you bird calls, my dear." She turned to 'he Princess.

"I have not forgotten," said the young woman in what, if she hadn't been so good, might have struck one as an ominous tone.

"It was a boy calling himself 'Button-Bright'. I wonder what ever happened to him. I left him in charge at the former dragon castle but when I came back he was gone. I dare say you might tell..."; the witch turned again to the princess.

'In any case I wouldn't tell *you*,' thought the princess. Aloud she said, "That boy was good to me—in his limited way. I too would like to know what became of him."

Then they got to the other side of the river, which they swam, mounted—and assisted significantly by witch magic—they got their wish.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

<<1952>>

As diligent readers will know, the difficulties of Button-Bright were not over when he was "rescued" from the popcorn drift by Cap'n Bill and Trot. He tagged along to Oz with them and got lost again.

He stayed that way intermittently for three years. Besides himself he'd lost his magic umbrella, which seemed to be good and sufficient reason for him not to go back to Philadelphia. Princess Ozma could have strapped on the Magic Belt and wished him there in an instant but he never indicated any interest in going. Maybe the disaffection between the boy and his uncle was greater than anyone (except the principals) suspected. It would seem that Button-Bright's mother, from whom he got his vagueness and tendency not to know where he was, was no drawing card to impel him home; he is never known to have mentioned her. Poor lady, she just didn't make much impression.

Then, in 1917, Button-Bright surfaced again and came to play quite a role in the adventure of the Magic Mirror of Oz. Admittedly, for his pains he ended up, like the Young Man, down a well. Alas, no farmer, or anyone else, came along to rescue him,

at least until it was almost too late and he had ceased forever to be button-bright and had become treacle-dark (or "d'Arc").

As a result of his long ordeal the molasses had entered into his soul. He resolved to quit Oz, return to America, get an education, and try to be somebody. In the end he succeeded rather well, if having become the (by now grown-up) consort of the great and good sorceress Glinda of Oz was any sign of achievement.

They had been together now for several years: years rich in satisfaction for both the partners and in further maturation and deepening of his personality for one who had been so gormless as a youth. He had become even a pensive person, going off by himself for extended periods just to think about things.

One time he returned from such a meditative retreat to say to his wife across a tired grapefruit: "I've been remembering my old faithful magic umbrella. I wonder what ever happened to it."

"That could he ascertained, my dear," assured Glinda, who was mistress of endless magical devices including the Great Book of Records, which (in abbreviated, sometimes even cryptical, form) told everything that happened in the land of Oz. She mentioned this latter adjunct to her learning.

"A nice try, darling," said Mr. 'Sples' Smith (to give him his true name). "But don't forget I lost the bumbershoot in MO."

Glinda colored attractively. It wasn't often she was caught out. "So you did. And the other methods I might try, to get on its trail, are slower. What you really ought to do, I think, is ask Ozma to look at the Magic Picture. That would soon show you where to head on your quest. I can see you do intend a quest," the sorceress ended with a small trill of laughter. It was hard. Her husband had just been away for a week meditating and now she was faced with his absence again, if her hunch was right—and they always were.

But Mr. Smith was a good husband and full of consideration for his jewel of a spouse. He was not going to go bolting off this very day, or even week. He'd do a little thoughtful. planning

first. But Glinda's suggestion had given him food for cogitation.

"No," he said, "I don't think I want it made too easy. That's the trouble with up-to-date magic. You just make a wish and everything comes true. I don't doubt, Glinda, that after a few hours at your alembics and retorts you could produce the lost umbrella right here in your laboratory. Where would be the fun of that?"

The good sorceress was saddened at this seeming denigration of her craft but she knew how the husbands of queens regnant and other driving women must feel and she made allowances. The boy (she still always thought of him that way) was a good and true one and she would allow him his attitudes of manhood. Let him go a-questing.

Smith continued, "There*is* something I'd like to check with at the Emerald City before going, though. Or rather some*body*."

"Who might that be, dear?"

"My old comrade of the road, Omby Amby Battles. He's traveled more than I have in the land of Mo and might have some tips for me. In fact, I wouldn't mind having him along. It'd be like old times."

"Right you are!" agreed the fond witch. "By swan chariot? I could give word to have the birds harnessed at once." So much for waiting 'til next week to be parted again.

"Will you go to E.C. with me, darling?" invited the intending voyager.

"I'd love to. I was hoping you'd ask."

The contented couple flew off that very afternoon and got to Queen Ozma's Palace of Magic in time for tea.

Now that green spectacles for use in the capital had gone out of style the Guardian of the Gate had little to do. Nowadays everything worth noticing in the Emerald City really *was* green. The disemployed Guardian found himself spending much of his time in the Russian variant of Oz, where they gave him plenty to do[§].

Meanwhile such gate-guarding as needed doing, mostly of

§ See *The Wooden Soldiers of Oz, Syem Podzyemnich Koroli*, et al... Editor's note.

a ceremonial nature, was performed by Private-General Battles. The soldier was of old a favorite celebrity in Oz but he was also still Ozma's standing army and as such he spent his time standing, not sitting down at tea parties.

Today, however, when the Girl Ruler heard the burden of the errand of her visitors from the south, she sent for the good guardsman and bade him join them at the festive if modest board.

"Oh, help!" gulped Omby Amby when Ozma's call cane through to his sentry box. "May I have half an hour to brush and perfume my beard?"

"Don't bother," said Ozma unfeelingly. To tell the truth the Princess had never been greatly keen on beards. She thought of them as an antiquated hangover from the 1870s and rather unsavory to boot. Ozma had a thing about physical daintiness[§]. "Just come as you are," she said. "We'll all be pleased to see you."

"Oh, but—er," said the sentryman, cast down by the disallowance of a brush-up, "Your Highness, may I bring my wife? She'd be so thrilled to take tea with Your Grace and Your Grace's guests."

"Bring her, do," urged the young(-looking) regent genially. Ozma was no snob, whatever other faults she might, though unlikely, have.

Wantowin shed like green lightning to his house, formerly his wife's and, in fact, in her capacity as town jailoress, still so. While he had a nervous breakdown out of sheer excitement Tollydigle put on her hat and calmly waited for him at the door.

They proceeded to the palace and took tea. "Try these asparagus sandwiches,'' urged Ozma.

Wantowin was quite agog at seeing the former Button-Bright again. "I once lost you in a drift of popcorn," he recalled affably.

"Yes," Smith remembered too. "Those were the days. Does it still snow popcorn in Mo, I wonder?"

"I'm not sure, your honor," said Battles. "But last I knew it

§ See *In Other Lands Than Oz*: The Woozy's Sticky End. Editor's note.

certainly rained lemonade." Spiritedly he described the flood he'd taken part in, now thirty-eight years before. Once started, he went on to touch lightly also upon the highlights of his brief call in the castle of the Purple Dragon.

"I'm glad you mentioned that," said Sples. "I've got around to thinking it was pretty dumb of me to drop my prized Magic Umbrella in Mo and never go back for it. I have a mind to now."

"How interesting, your honor," admired Omby Amby, little guessing whither the talk was tending.

"Yes, and I thought maybe you could put me on the track. You see, on mature reflection I now think it must have been that witch woman, Jrumm, your former wife, who pinched it from me. In those days I was too clueless to suspect her. I know I had the old bumbershoot with me when I fell down to sleep, exhausted, by the roadside. When I woke up, Jrumm was there but the umbrella wasn't. She let me think some previous passer-by must have made off with it. It was only later that I came to know there just *weren't* passers-by in Mo. It's such a deserted country, in most parts. It could only have been Jrumm.

"So I have to find her. Will you go with me?" Smith dumped his little bombshell. Omby Amby turned seven shades of purple (with the green beard, a beautiful combination). He started up from the table and gasped, "Oh, Mr. Smith, please excuse me! I'd rather go *any*where than to meet my ex-wife again. I wouldn't put any vengefulness past her. It's a dog—not to use another word—I'd prefer to let lie. I'm surprised she never sought me out here in the Emerald City to exact revenge for escaping her clutches."

Smith was amused—and bemused. He recalled the nine days' wonder of the old soldier's return to the Palace of Magic in 'fourteen, not too long after his own arrival there. As chance would have it, he'd been among the group before the Magic Picture when Princess Ozma tuned in to the scene on the Mo frontier whence Battles was to make his return to Oz on completion of his 'antihoneymoon.'

The by-then sturdy-looking soldier had gasped, "Oh, what

a narrow escape, Your Highness!" Then he had hastily let his blue beard grow into green "whiskers" again. He had been confirmed in his preference for timidity. Putting on a bold front had nearly landed him in the embrace of his awful wife again.

Ozma had smiled soothingly and said, "I seem to recall your wife. Her name was Jrumm, was it not? Wasn't it just about the time of the state visit of that rather daunting King Scowleyow that she disappeared? Well, never mind. All has now ended propitiously."

"And may I be excused, your majesty, to hasten to my dear Tollydiggle and pop the question?"

"Do that, by all means," encouraged the fairy ruler. "It will be a quiet civil ceremony, I suppose, you having been married before."

"Well, actually, my dear one has sometimes spoken wistfully of orange blossoms..."

"Orange blossoms then, certainly, affirmed Ozma, being rather daring for 1914. "The wedding shall be celebrated right here in the palace."

Indeed, the marriage of Miss Tolydiggle and Private-General Battles proved to be one of the brightest social highlights of that season in the Emerald City.

You couldn't blame the old soldier, thought Mr. Smith. And so now he'd be doing !he expedition on his own then. No, you couldn't fault good old cowardly Omby Amby for not wanting to stir up a hornet, as the tricky, light-fingered (and, to hear him talk, vengeful) Jrumm woman might well prove to be.

Still, the remeeting with the old guardsman was not lost motion. Over more tea. the dedicated venturer amassed a wealth of small data on the topic of travel in Mo. "If you can arrange it, miss Fruitcake Island!" advised Battles as they got up from table. "A colorful locale but, on balance, better given a miss."

Before leaving Glinda's Pink Palace Sples had got together his kit for the journey. That included a rubber diving suit, in case he wanted to essay the frogman gambit during his travels. Now that he'd had his Mo briefing there was really

nothing to wait for.

"What if I shot on off from here, my girl?" he asked Glinda after they had parted company with General and Mrs. Battles. "Get it over with?"

The good witch herself thought that what sounded like a not very fun operation would be as well accomplished now as later. Accordingly they went with Ozma to the Throne Room, where the dainty princess kept the Magic Belt in a special gold-and-glass case. There it was but the work of. a trice for the fairy to slip on the cincture and wish her good friend Sples Smith into the presence of the daunting-sounding witchwoman Jrumm (cognomen-less but formerly "Battles").

That presence proved to be on the west bank of the Milk River in the Land of Mo, a spot where the two individuals had also been in each other's company for a moment thirty-eight years earlier.

It was as well this new reunion didn't take place five minutes sooner. Then Mr. Smith might have wished he'd put on his wet-suit in advance, for the meeting would have been in mid-stream, where witch Jrumm was up to her ass in milk, and it up to its neck.

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

<<1952>>

The Land of Mo was in important ways more like Shangri-La than Oz. As we have seen, it did not suffer from over-population. No more did Oz, of course, at this period, but later...![§] More significantly, death was in Mo not an unknown quantity as it had become in the fairyland across the desert.

In its opportunities for death Mo resembles more the Tibetan paradise: extinction is rare and selective. But what was common for all three lands was the infinite slowness of aging.

We have observed that the fairy tale Princess was a child in 1914 and yet, in 1952, still in appearance no more than a charming young woman. No one thought anything of that. King Scowleyow was in his lusty crusty years at the earlier period and also at the later. Witch Jrumm, translated from Oz, saw nothing strange in appearing thirty-five in the one country and almost half a century later the same age in the other.

Thus it was that when Sples Smith appeared on the river bank and looked at the travelers who were scrambling up it, shaking the whiteness off them, he had no trouble at all in picking out his old acquaintance.

§ See *The Ten Woodmen of Oz*. Editor's note.

"Allow me!" he cried, dropped his hit of gear, and ran to grab the clutched umbrella which was obviously getting in the older woman's way as she sought to descend from her mount.

"Oh, thank you," said the witch, making only a feeble attempt to hold onto her brolly. Drenched skirts were impeding her and she *must* get down. The poor ass was slipping and sliding deplorably, trying to mount the muddy bank with a passenger aboard. And now the polite stranger was running to seize the bridle of the Princess, who murmured her name and rank, and even finding a moment to extend a hand to the Young Man as he jumped off his horse. "How lucky!" cried the newcomer, "that I happened to be passing," he misrepresented genially. "There ought to be a bridge here!"

"I've said the same thing to his Magicality every time I've been at court," grunted the witch half- cryptically as she bent to wring out her skirts. Smith twirled the umbrella, as it were to fling off pretended drops of milk, then, as if playfully, expanded it and muttered rapidly, "Take me to the Emerald City!"

Destiny held its breath for five seconds. Then it could exhale.

Darn. Just as he'd been fearing. To get possession of his very own (well, maybe not quite "very") Magic Umbrella in the first five minutes of setting out on his quest had seemed to Smith to be a little too marvelous good luck. Something was wrung.

He collapsed the brolly and prepared to hand it back. No one had noticed. The ladies were grappling inexpertly with their asses' reins and the young man and his horse were stamping about shaking off milk. Sples stared at the umbrella as he held it out to Jrumm.

At first glance he'd thought it *was* his: the same rusty yellowish blackish greenish color of aged cloth. But the handle was different. Well, of course he'd blown off the elephant head. A substitute would have been supplied in the years between. As he transferred the umbrella from one hand to the other he briefly studied the crook and saw a plain knurled surface.

Whatever the explanation this clearly was not his umbrella.

No use in hanging onto it. He handed it over, feeling sure the witch had remarked nothing.

Then after all it *was* thirty-eight years, and he didn't absolutely *know* she was the purloiner of his brolly. But now where was his quest?!

People were staring. The coming ashore had been accomplished. Now the equestrian party clearly meant to continue their journey. First though, their would-be Samaritan should be thanked, but he was standing as if lost in thought.

"What is troubling you?" asked the pretty Princess puzzledly.

"Oh, nothing, thank you, your grace," said the court-trained Smith on cue. He was still pondering rapidly. What was he to do? On impulse he blurted, "I was wondering: perhaps I right join your party? I am only on a walking tour, with no particular goal. It might be that I could be useful on your journey."

"Join us, by all means," said the young man.

Though not, royal, as a male he considered himself the decision-making head of his party.

''Just one thing," put in Jrumm: "what will you ride on? We're all mounted, you see."

"Oh," said Smith with a smile, "I can walk as fast as an ass" — only, being American, he called it "donkey," of course. Americans are famous euphemists: "rooster" for cock, "bathroom" for toilet, and they would never say "die", at least of anyone they felt respectful about.

So they set out together. The presence of the stranger was a diversion for the others and Smith was active in leading the conversation. If he were ever to learn of the whereabouts of his enchanted umbrella thirty-eight years on, it could only be by means of congenial talk. No one was likely to reveal much in response to blunt questions, and even less to outright accusations.

He had an advantage that occurred to him early. Unlike others he himself had changed vastly in the intervening years. He had grown up, gone from blond to deep tan (hair and all), and gathered many gorms along the way. He was certain Jrumm

would never recognize him. Perhaps he could play on that.

Trey crossed the wide plain of north-central Mo. As they grew more confidential details of past personal history were revealed. Sples, for example, related that he had been an American navy frogman. Then he had to tell what a frogman was and in illustration unrolled his black wetsuit, to the amusement and amazement of the others. "Now that might, have been useful at the Milk River!" commented the pensive-seeming princess.

"I thought of that," said Smith. Vibrations early made clear to him that he was more on a wavelength with the young woman than with the others.

The party in turn told more of who they were. More importantly, they disclosed that their travel group comprised not three but four (at least crypto-)humans. "Yes, you may as well know," said Jrumm. "That great beast there" —she pointed her umbrella at the strapping twenty-hand palomino— "is my son. He's under an enchantment."

The American marveled when he, heard that news.

Not for the reason you might expect. He had a lifetime behind him of acquaintance with magic. It was no problem for him to admit of a transformation. But he knew that the older woman in their party was a powerful witch and he at once joined the other three travelers in being unable to fathom why that witch did not disenchant her own magic-struck son. Of his knowledge he could say nothing. The others' ignorance was a weapon in his hands, as long as he could maintain it.

That proved to be no time at all.

In reply to Jrumm's revelation Smith dared utter only polite condolence. Then he walked up beside the fine stallion and in lieu of a handshake clapped his shoulder, murmuring, "How're ya doin'?"

The princess was riding beside her husband. As it happened, her ears were closer to Smith's question than were the young man's. She turned her head sharply. The words had reminded her of a little question she had been fond of long ago.

Presently she fell back a few paces. So did Sples. Freshly

reminded, nostalgic, melancholy, she came to tell. more of her history. The American received new surprises. “We’re on our way to an old castle,” the lady confided. “I used to live there long ago. Well, ‘live’. I was kept. a prisoner there for years and years—”

Smith expressed polite, if not quite candid, wonder. He knew very well about unagingness in Mo but he said, “Your grace doesn’t seem old enough to have lived anywhere ‘years and years ago’.”

“Oh, yes,” said the princess with a disclaiming, sad little laugh. “Thirty-eight, to be exact.”

That gave the American a recollective start. Perhaps it also prepared him in some small measure for what came next.

“Like Hræ stevrod there, I was under an enchantment,” the princess revealed. “I’d been turned into a ‘fifty-tongued bird’—”

“Good heavens!” exclaimed the former Button-Bright, thrown off balance after all by his astonishment. “You were the little grey bird in the mildewed cage?!”

Now it was the princess’ turn to be amazed. “That describes me very well.But how could *you* know...?” Too late now. Still, Sples had felt for some little time that the lady was his ally in the present connexus. He dared frankness: “I used to give Your Grace your birdseed!.. Is *that* the castle where you’re going?!”

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

<<1952>>

It had been four years since last time but Maxwell, maitre d' at Keen's, claimed to remember the group. At any rate their churchwarden pipes were duly hanging up on the serried racks. That was partly why they'd come here this evening. Sentimentally they didn't want the statute of limitations to go into effect and arrive to find their pipes had been broken up and disposed of.

Most of the fellows didn't smoke, but heck, at Keen's you wanted to play along with the traditions, so they all had a few puffs. Of course Omby Amby had to be initiated and ceremonially receive his own yard-long narrow-bowled white clay pipe. As a matter of fact the soldier did smoke, so he may have ended as the one most enjoying the little ritual.

They all had mutton chops of course. Even now in the fifties the idea of eating mutton was an antiquated concept for Americans. Naturally everyone knew that the Bordon family had eaten mutton soup on that fatal day in Fall River but that was in 1892, an era where everyone might eat that meat as an accepted thing. In fact, plenty of it was eaten *now* but never without the appellation "lamb". Only at Keen's did they baldly confess "mutton".

The entire membership of the O.B.O., as well as everyone else who experienced it, agreed that a Keen's mutton chop, medium, was the best piece of meat they had ever tasted.

The ale was poured, the chops were chewed, the crisp salad enjoyed. In those days you could still get the salad *with* the meal and were not obliged to guff it all down while the waiter, with hands on hips, waited, determined never to bring the main course until those salad plates had been carried away.

The great Tale of the Year was told at last. Smith and Battles took turns. They harked back first to the original happenstance encounter that ended in a popcorn storm, each giving his version of what happened before and after. Then the former Button-Bright moved on to recenter times and his vow to seek his former true agent and companion of thrilling adventures by air, the Magic Umbrella. He described the trek to the Castle of the Purple Dragon and the Midsummer-Night's-Dream-ish encounters in the forest of Tweet. Finally Omby Amby rounded off with his account of seeing off the group on the anticlimactic visit to the Charmed Garden of Oz.

"Well!" and "Wow" said everybody and was much edified. Only Speedy, hearing of journeys ending in lovers' meeting, was melancholy.

"Everybody nicely paired off at the end," he constated. "Makes a guy kind of miss it."

"What, *you*, Speedy?!"

"Confirmed old bachelor!"

"I always understood life was perfect at Rent Rock as it was—"

Rapidan held up an abashed silencing hand. "Yeah, but you know it was always on the books"—and, certainly, printed *in* at least one book—"that some day I would return, marry the Princess, and become King of Umbrella Island." He displayed, a wistful smile and drew on his long pipe. It had gone out but that didn't spoil the bit of business.

There was an appalled silence.

Surprise, combined with shamefast sorrow, rendered all the

fellows around the table literally speechless.

Speedy was no dummy and caught on immediately. He dropped his pipe-holding hand and barked: "What's up? What's the matter:"

It was Omby Amby Battles, perhaps as being near adjutant to her majesty, Queen Ozma of Oz, repository of all important knowledge in the fairylands, who first essayed to make an answer. "I'm awful sorry, Mr. Speedy. The Princess of Umbrella Island is lost... !"

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

<<1952 still 3 months before O.B.O. meeting>>

The dragons roared and blew volleys of flame.

But after all, if you're a dragon, how else are you going to express satisfaction and welcome? You can't purr or whinny and if you wag your tail you knock over houses.

The dragons, as many as could crowd on, were crouched on the drawbridge, watching the equestrian party approach. Each monster did his distinct thing in token of welcome: one was puffing magically, another was gnashing his candy-cane teeth, and a third flashed her thousand-watt-lantern eyes on and off.

Mistress Jrumm nodded in appreciation. "One has to keep one's dragons happy you know. Otherwise they might turn on one. I've tried to be good to these."

A way was cleared and the riding party clattered over the resounding boards. Menservants gathered round. They took the place of what had been guards and halbardiers in an earlier age. The dragons could do their own guarding! and the men served as grooms and flunkeys. They led away the horse and asses to stabling, while the riders went within.

How tame. Now unspectacularly the questers returned to that ancient scene of triumphs and defeats. Yet one heart beat

fast. Not the princess'; she mourned for her little lost friend. No longer did glamorous capes and exotic birds fill the top-floor room. As for the former Button-Bright, he felt only passing curiosity to see again the marble halls where he'd once spent a single night. But the Young Man! At any moment he might catch a glimpse of that brown-haired charmer he had loved without knowing it until it was too late.

But now the witch Jrumm was giving orders and some wondered why she was, this being "the castle of the Purple Dragon". It was a story that would come out in time. Certainly the Purple Dragon exercised at least matching authority with the enchantress on the premises. That was why he was not down at the portcullis bidding welcome. He was ceremonially in the Room of State and that is where Jrumm led the way.

Smith and the princess gave themselves to the study of the company about them. Never had either of them beheld a dragon before—and now to see so many! The American realized that his long experience of magic phenomena had after all been lacking in an important respect. Never to have known dragons! No life could be complete without it.

Let us start with the first: the Purple Dragon himself. The Dragon was not alone naughty; it was big and fierce and strong. Raspberry juice ran in its veins. It was most disagreeable to fight with. The teeth of the Dragon went through the jaw and were clinched on the other side. It stretched as easily as if made of India rubber.

It was stretching now as it sprawled in the presence chamber and spewed its welcome all over the callers: lavender firefoam with pink highlights. The display looked impressive but harmed no one. They soon caught on that the Purple Dragon was all bluster with a heart of toffee.

Jrumm and the great dragon held converse. The other newcomers continued to stare about as more and more of the creatures crowded in. Luckily many of these were of different textures from your run-of-the-mill everyday dragons, who have the solidity, size, and general appearance of medium-size

dinosaurs (their spiritual ancestors). There was only room in the Room of State for one of the latter and that was the Very Purple one himself. But many other sorts came congregating: smoke dragons, cloud dragons, vegetable and fruit dragons, gas dragons, ornamental stone dragons, chewing-gum dragons! and even one small dragon draggin' behind him the bottle he ordinarily lived in. These all made conversation and entertained the visitors until it was time for supper.

Sples Smith noticed that the appointments of the castle were a good deal more civilized now than in his own time. No dragon spoor was allowed to defile the passageways. Handsome retiring rooms of all sizes were provided. The guest chambers were nicely furnished. They had had running water laid on!: no more tiresome labor at the pump to get a drink or take a bath.

Let us follow the Young Man in his ardent search for the serving maid of his dreams. He did this after the others had retired to their quarters but naturally before the staff had done likewise. He called at the kitchen, he popped into the pantry, he sought the sewing room. Though he saw pretty maids all in a row (and officiously advised them to stop rowing and go to bed), no one could tell him anything of Fanciulla, as she had called herself.

"Brown hair? Blue eyes? But that could be anyone. Awfully pretty? But most of our girls are that. A charming affectionate manner? We look for it in hiring young persons. You think she was clever at weaving. She sewed on a button for you? She wore her hair in a pigtail? She often had a book in her pocket? She liked tapioca pudding. Significant traits, sir, but still they don't ring a bell—and I've been here for a number of years," quoth the motherly housekeeper whom Y.M. interviewed in her dressing gown in her cosy room.

He wandered away disconsolate.

What was he to do next? *Some*body must remember his love, even if she was just an expendable slavey, and though the turnover of domestic staff at the castle was considerable. No doubt it was a bit much asked of servants to go around

cleaning up after dragons. Yet there was no dearth of hired help that he could see.

He wondered about those dragons. Where did they come from? He searched his memory. Dragons... dragons. There certainly hadn't been any here the time he rescued the fifty-tongued bird. Yet he had a vivid recollection of such at another locale: the stable where he had first made contact with Hræ stevrod the horse.

Funny. There'd been a purple dragon there; also, if his memory didn't play him false, one of chewing gum. He remembered almost netting stuck on it the time he rubbed on that magic liniment and they all went to sleep. Could it be the same one?

By now Y.M.'s noctural prowlings had brought him again to the big room of state. He took a peek in, and was surprised to see by the light of a flickering flamboy (they hadn't gone *completely* modern at the castle) the great purple reptile curled up with a good book. Hat in hand, the young man creft nearer, noted the book title: Poems of Mystery and Imagination, and cleared his throat

"CHRRRMM!" roared the dragon, shrank to the wall with its claws at its throat, and looked around. "Ooh! you startled me," it exhaled in relief. "It's only you. Pleeeze! don't creep around like that in your stocking feet. A person could get a fatal shock."

"A dragon?! But dragons are the fearsomest of all living beings. How could you be frightened?"

"Never mind; I could. But how may I serve Your Grace? I take it you've got a Grace, since you are consort to one I've had pointed out to me as a Princess..?"

"I think I've got grace," said the young man wistfully, "but admittedly it's never been made official. I'm still just 'the husband of the Princess'. Annoying. But, then again..." Y.M. took his chin in hand and pondered. Maybe it was fairly neat that he wasn't too widely known as 'Consort', in case he were now to refind one he knew he'd rather consort with.

He went right to the point. "Your Saurianty"—he guessed

that was right as an honorific—"when last I had the honor of visiting your castle some years ago, you yourself, and the others of your kind, were not in residence—"

"No!" exclaimed the Purple one, "and that was a very bad thing. We were in captivity!—can you imagine?—and for thirty-five years, no less.

<<1914 + 35 = 1949>>

It was awful, although at the time we knew no better. We did get our three squares a day and all we wanted of what we like best: roaring and breathing fire at strangers to warn them off."

"Mm, I know," admitted the young man. "Only a certain kind of ointment was proof against your ferocity. I once ran up against members of your race at a fortified stable in a forest far from here—"

"The very place!" croaked the dragon. "But how did you..."

"Don't ask," said the young man. "It's a long story." Could it be modesty that so often forebade him to relate the tale of his achievements? or just boredom? "I'd rather hear *your* story."

"About how we got out of durance and restored to our own demesne? Search me—if you'll pardon the colloquialism. It was all due to enchantments above and beyond our frame of reference. One day we noticed a strange reek seeping in through the scissures here. Straightway we all of us lost consciousness, *and* our memories. Next thing we knew we were waking up in the environs of that forest stable you know of. We never did get our memories back while we were there. Only now, when the whole thing's over with, can we recall the sequence of events. Just as well, I suppose. We'd certainly have been discontent all those years we served on guard duty—for horses!—if we had known we had really been reserved for a much more glamorous state."

"Interesting," said Y.M. For just a while he *was* interested, even to the exclusion of his preoccupation as to the whereabouts of his lost love. "And curious. Did you ever find out who, or what, was to blame?"

OZ
WIZARD
DOROTHY
OZMA
GHINDA
MO
META
TUTTLE
TOMMY
MARY
RUTH
MARCH
OZ
OZ
Fritz '91

"We never could make up our minds! We think it might have been a certain King Scowleyow, or else that very enchantress Jrumm who at this moment sleeps within the castle walls. There's evidence in both directions. What we do know is that Jrumm *released* us from the spell. For that we're grateful, so she remains persona grata here. Still, I have my doubts..

"However! I feel sure it was not to hear this tale that so stilly you came stealing..."

Poe! That's right. The Purple Dragon was quoting from his reading.

"Yes," admitted the young man. "May I be frank?" He threw himself on the mercies of what seemed to be after all quite an amiable dragon.

"Be my guest," urged the monster. The young man was so already, but no matter.

"My estimable lady, the Princess, is all that could asked in terms of goodness, beauty, charm, talent, intelligence, learning, kindliness, generosity, sympathy, capability. However, the fact remains that somebody else got in first, and it's her I love. For me the princess was an imagined ideal—but the other girl was real. I could feel her vital palpable affection streaming out to me in a way that was never attempted by my wife, who only married me as part of a package deal. For getting released from captivity and enchantment she had to wed whatever bozo brought it off. Luckily I didn't have two heads or bad b.o. but just the same, who can expect a lady of royal blood *and* so many virtues to love some fellow just because he rescued her on a bet?"

"No one."

"Anyway she didn't. *She*'s in love with a dickey bird. By the way, does Your Saurianty have any dickey birds about the place?"

"Not a one. Sorry."

"And I love a lovely girl—well, anyway an averagely pretty girl, with just what it takes to please me—"

"Quite romantic."

"Exactly. And I would go to the ends of the earth to get but

another glimpse of her."

"Oh, you probably wouldn't have to go that far. What's she like?"

Y.M. gave a minute description of Fanciulla as he remembered her, girlish and gifted (*he* thought) and full of charm.

"'Fanciulla', ey? Those are of the west, aren't they?" The Purple Dragon, thinking of Puccini, was momentarily confused and failed to realize that fanciulle are found at all four points of the compass. "I would advise you then: go west, Young Man."

"She's not around here then?" said Y.M. with heaviness of heart.

"Alas no. All the hired help fled when we arrived back, not long apparently after your own previous visit. You say she was fond of reading? I do recall that one of the workwomen decamped with a bulging valiseful of books to read where it was peaceful, which admittedly it wasn't, around here, once we dragons were back in the saddle."

"Your Saurianty said 'the west'. Were you in earnest?"

"As it happens, yes. We heard later from passing birds that groups of our fleeing servants had been sighted in the hills of Tweet, which lie between here and the Great Desert to the west."

"I'll seek her that way! where'er she be," vowed the young man. "But first let me get a good night's sleep. We've traveled far today."