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

<<1952 three months later>>

The guys all talked at once.

“Yeah, terrible thing!”

“Feared kidnapped.”

“Maybe even—but no! nobody dared to think *that*.”

“Couple of years back now.”

“But we only got word of it at the Emerald City last year.”

“There seemed no sense in telling you. It wasn’t as if you could do anything.”

“People weren’t sure you were even that interested any more. It *has* been about twenty years—”

Speedy Rapidan groaned and would have buried his head in his arms if there hadn’t been a lot of his compeers around.

Instead, fire flashed from his eyes. “Let’s have it! straight. No mealy-mouthed crap now. Tell me what happened!”

It fell to Wantowin Battles to relate. He’d been on the spot at Ozma’s palace as the various items of intelligence came in. Now he hauled his umbrella into view from between his legs. He had refused to be parted from it at the checkroom. He’d lost his prized adjunct to storied adventures once. He didn’t want to be responsible for losing it again. Like the key from Notori-

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ous or the crown of thorns at the Democratic National Convention in 1896, Battles' umbrella was the ideal illustrative symbol to highlight a speech-making occasion.

"Umbrella," he said and shook the broolly, "Island has suffered a national emergency. Well, by now it has gone over into a period of national mourning.

We at the Emerald City knew nothing about it for quite a while, a couple of years in fact. Then one day the island anchored above town and three former guests of our Princess Ozma came down on their bumbershoots and made their way to the gates of the Palace of Magic.

"It was I who conducted to the royal presence King Sizzeroo and his advisers Naddy and Bamboula. But who would have known them? In former times all three had been grossly fat. Apparently the court on Umbrella Island have nothing to do but sit around and eat. But now we learned a different occupation had them all in thrall. It was mourning and grieving! The three were thin as rails—and all the better to look at for that," added the Soldier with the Green Whiskers, who had always been noted for his gauntness. (The one time he'd grown stocky he hadn't been at all himself.)

"I noted that their braids were all in disarray. You remember that braided hair had been one of the characteristic mannerisms of the Umbrella Islanders. But with what was worrying them who had a thought for sitting before a looking glass and knotting and combining his locks? The king's side braids had fallen loose and his whiskers hung to his breast. The wizard Waddy's dark beard had grown almost as long as my own. I must say, he had become a rather striking figure of a man. But his air of solemn sadness spoiled the satisfaction one could take in the sight.

"Our puissant Princess had them all in to the Council Chamber and there we heard the grim tale. It seemed that after your own visit to the Island, Mr. Speedy, things had gone along for many years in their accustomed way. I remember indeed on two occasions the island halted over the Palace and some of the

islanders came down to pay an informal call on the Girl Ruler.” The soldier paused. “I do believe your friend Princess Reeda was among them once. Yes, I remember now—but she was no longer the young girl we recalled you describing. Quite a young lady, very charming, and always with a book under her arm.

“Then for years we heard nothing—until last autumn when, as I say, the three from the Umbrella court turned up. They related how they had come to stop once, in their continual sky-cruising, over the land of Mo and made one of their descents. Nothing unusual in that. They picked up supplies: items available at the Magical Monarch’s capital but not on the Island Itself.

“They made a night of it. The monarch even gave an impromptu ball in their honor. Everyone came in costume. The young Princess was remarked particularly in her pert outfit of a humble dairy maid. The merriment was intense. Everyone danced ‘til three in the morning. There were champagne and streamers and funny hats and a most tasty buffet, they say, served at midnight, which of course the chubby Umbrellians especially enjoyed.

“But alas, woeful and abiding grief. When it came time for the visitors to ascend to their home in the sky the Princess was nowhere to be found! She had vanished, as simply as that. No one had seen her go. The last ANYone had seen was the young lady standing by the balustrade of a terrace, fanning herself and apparently catching a breath of moonlight. The servant who had noticed her was tortured but had nothing further to reveal.

“That is all. Princess Reeda—Gureeda, as she was most often called—had gone, and she has never been seen since. Umbrella Island hung over the Mo monarch’s capital for a year, vainly waiting for news from the various search parties that scoured the land. When nothing was heard the Umbrellians at one time even threatened war and planned to drop bombs from their aerial location, but fortunately nothing came of it.

“In time someone suggested seeking help of the Oz adepts of magic. Queen Ozma, Sorceress Glinda, the Wizard Oz, and

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others were referred to, but nothing was ever learned. Or at least: something negative was discovered. That is, the Magic Picture and Glinda's Book of Records, when consulted, had virtually nothing to impart, which simply meant that any kidnapping or imprisonment of the Umbrella princess had happened outside Oz, which of course was not a surprise to anyone. What to do or where to look, beyond the confines of their own magic land, was all unknown to the Oz practitioners of magic.

"Thus does the matter stand today," concluded Omby Amby sorrowfully.

You can imagine that that year's gathering of the Old Boys of Oz broke up in sadness and confusion. The customary formal little "business meeting" was not even held; strictly speaking there was nothing very urgent about such a conference. Sneedy Rapidan continued to let his raspberry sherbet melt. He reached over and laid his hand on the crook of Sples Smith's umbrella where it hung on the back of his chair. Neither had Sples wanted to surrender his priceless broly to the wardrobe woman.

"Sples, my friend," spoke Rapidan solemnly, "would you consider lending me this fabulous instrument for something I have to do?"

Smith looked around in wonderment. "I'd do practically anything for you, Speedy, old pal. What have you got in mind?!"

"You heard him." The two men looked in the direction of the Soldier with the Green Whiskers. He still grasped *his* umbrella and looked on in bewilderment.

"My girl's gone lost. Your flying umbrella would take me to where she is."

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - F O U R

<<1952 – earlier than chapter 33 >>

They were all going off once more. Just a one-night stand at the castle of the Purple Dragon. That was par for the two men. As for the girl, she'd already spent more than three decades in that topmost room so she'd had the castle up to there.

The wicked-kindly witch Jrumm, whose motivations were always unfathomable, was for some reason sticking like a limpet to the princely pair. If they were going love-seeking in the Hills of Tweet she was going with them, and where she went the former Button-Bright was sure to go. Jrumm grabbed her umbrella from the stand and off they set. All the dragons crowded to the drawbridge to see them go.

The way led steeply up-hill. No one thought of mounting. They led their animals by the bridles and very soon the castle of the purple dragon was screened from view by millions of leaves of many colors. "How pretty," said the princess, bending to pick up a fallen pale blue leaf shaped much like that of an oak, and she pinned it to her collar.

The asses were nibbling grass still juicy, though summer was so far advanced. Among the grass lay some lavender pandanus-looking leaves which they bit accidentally. When the

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animals realized how marvelous they tasted they quickly gobbled up all that lay about and looked around for more. By straining, the young man could just pull down some from high overhanging boughs and he indulgently held the leaves so the beasts could browse on.

Hræ stevrod was tall enough that he could reach branches on his own and he soon discovered that certain fire-engine-red elm-ish leaves were the grandest thing he'd ever tasted. He went almost hog-wild guffing down great healing stomachfuls of the delicacy. Unavoidably the progress of the party slackened.



Jrumm was laughing up her sleeve. Presently she explained why. “Ever notice that there are few or no people in western Mo?” she queried rhetorically. “It’s partly because they can’t keep any livestock! All the animals of Mo long ago learned that they could get a delicious living year round in the forests of Tweet, so they’ve all moved here—and the people after them.”

“Hmm,” interrupted Mr. Smith. “*Animals* can get a living most anywhere—where there’s grass.”

“Oh, grass!” dismissed Jrumm. “That’s boring. Would *you* stay anywhere on an exclusive diet of spinach if you learned that down the road hamburgers and hot fudge sundaes, or things that tasted as good, literally grew on trees? Sure not. Rabbits scorn grass when they can get at lettuces. Horses forget about grass when there’s oats or apples on the menu. And so on. They’ve all flocked here.”

And indeed, once the party had got out of the proximity of the after all somewhat alarming dragons, they found the woods teeming with people and animals in one merry mix-up. There didn’t seem to be much order to their coming and going. People, *and* animals, lay here and there, strumming stringed instruments or chewing the cud. There were no villages or corrals to be seen, indeed scarcely houses, just, the odd shanty or lean-to, and they not noticeably occupied.

Jrumm explained. “Besides being colorful, good-tasting, and nourishing to man and beast, the leaves contain a mild euphoric. People and animals eat them and then can’t be bothered to do much else. So, by the way, if you’re intent upon your quests I’d advise not consuming any leaves or berries or whatever. You might decide to drop your expedition and just sit around playing on a dulcimer and fleeting the time carelessly, as they did in the golden age.”

Actually, doing as folks did in the golden age didn’t sound like too bad a plan to one or two of the travelers. However, they hitched up their pants and convinced themselves that they really were serious about finding lost umbrellas or dickey birds or girl friends and made a vow not to sample the vegetation.

"You know dope-sticks?" said Jrumm suddenly.

The royal couple didn't even grasp the question but Smith replied, "Yes, you mean those little tubes people suck on and get a glow? My wife uses them now and then." (And this despite the protests of readers) who reacted Pavlovianly to the word "dope" and never bothered to ask what the sticks actually contained.)

"They're flavored with essences from these leaves," explained Jrumm. "They're non-habit-form-ing and just make users of them feel marvelous."

"So Glinda says," confirmed Smith. "I never bothered to try them. But they don't make her sit around strumming stringed instruments. She says they give her that boost she wants every day to keep her keen about her work."

"That's right. In the mild form of the dope-sticks they're just an inspirer and stimulant. It's only when you actually chew or even swallow the leaves that you go overboard and feel the important work's already been done and there's nothing left but to sit and be blissful."

The party moved slowly on all day through the marvelous forest, their animals (who *had* swallowed the narcotic leaves) going slower than the slowest and sometimes stopping to ask themselves why they were going on at all. A heel-kick on the rump reminded them.

They stopped once along about noon for a picnic (put up by the kitchen staff at the Castle. Nowadays the dragons stocked more than just oil cake and fireseed.) It was so pleasant in that cool color-spangled woods on a summer day.

The princess was making a collection of leaves, one of each different color, and she already had aqua, brown, cerise, dun, ebony, fawn, green, heliotrope, indigo, jonquil, khaki, lavender, magenta, nasturtium, ochre, pink, quince, reseda, silver, terracotta, umber, violet, white, xanthin, yellow, and zaffer, but she felt she was just beginning. Her husband pointed out that her handbag was already filled to bursting. "You don't want them to get crushed, do you?"

No, she didn't, the Princess concurred and hummed a little tune as was her wont.

Having once laboriously learned to sing so many songs, the princess had kept up her interest. As a human she also enjoyed the possession of a fine voice. As we have seen, she was often sent across the street by her dotting husband to carol in the park. Now in the midst of a great wood there was no stopping her and she small-sang all day long.

The others didn't greatly object. As they made their meandering way onward through groves and glades they listened patiently to Stella by Starlight, Street of Dreams, the soprano part of the Belleville duet from "Il Tabarro", the Derry Air, the doll's song from "Tales of Hoffmann", Heaven Drops Her Curtain Down, Autumn in New York, songs of the Auvergne, She is Far from the Land, Falling in Love with Love, Im Chambre Separée from "Der Opernbal", and Elmer's Tune.

Late that afternoon as the group still plodded euphorically onward and were reaching a high highland region where the trees, and consequently the animals and people, thinned out, the princess was nostalgically trilling a little lay she'd made up herself:

"Whatcha doin'?"

Can I help ya?

Things done double

Are more fun.

Need a buddy?

I need one too.

One two three four!

Come on.! Run!

Whatcha betcha?

You can't catch me!

Can ya really?

Well, okay.

Mind if I perch

On your shoulder?

If ya don't mind

Here I'll stay."

Suddenly they all heard a squeak and a squawk, and a little blue-green bird dashed out of an orange-leaved thicket and plumped down on the princess' tallyho hat.

"Whatcha doin'?" it asked.

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - F I V E

<<1952; the three months later >>

They were in Speedy's hotel room. Most of the gang had made the sign of Oz on the sidewalk outside Keen's and gone back to the Emerald City, agog with the news they had now to relate there. Three men took a taxi with Zeb Hugson to Penn Station and saw him aboard his Pullman for California. Then they walked on to the Chesterfield.

Those three were William Rapidan, Saladin von Smith, and General Wantowin Battles. Somehow discussion hadn't been necessary. If Speedy was going into danger and the unknown, umbrella-borne, the two whose destinies had been so woven in and out of the saga of the umbrellas would go with him. The others would tell Ozma why two of her argonants of the Magic Belt had not made the expected return to the Palace of Magic.

They sat for a long time in silence and then talked again of Reeda as they remembered her, girlish and gifted and full of charm, and of the years that had altered her, and of so many mysteries of time and age and of the mind. "Do you think you will ever find her?" they asked.

"I've got to die trying," said Speedy solemnly, "if that's what it takes. Life wouldn't mean anything if I made no effort, left the

little girl to her fate. That's how I feel it."

"Right," said Sples Smith. "And three are better at that than one. My umbrella carries that number." Once more there was reminiscence: of an umbrella wafting high off the California coast and its handle giving strong support to rope-slung slat seats on which cruised, carefree, a sturdy old peg-legged sailor and two children, bound for stirring times on an island in the sky.

Speedy too remembered adventures on a sky island and was prepared to do whatever he could to restore the life and times that made such adventures possible. "Off to bed now, you guys. We'll talk more on the early train. A look-in at Uncle's old workshop at Rent Rock and the broolly'll be in better shape for travel than it ever was. While we're at it, you want the elephant head restored? Nothing simpler."

Smith looked grave. Making good his 'crime' in the attic of thirty-eight years ago would be sweet achievement. "It won't affect the magic?" he queried doubtfully.

"There wouldn't be anything taken away from the substance of the device," assured Speedy. "It'll make just a few more ounces the umbrella has to carry. It ought to be okay."

Three grown men in a midtown Manhattan hotel room talking of a planned excursion over land and sea by magic umbrella. Were they crazy? No, you see, they'd been that route before and knew that magic was real.

Next morning saw them on the train and by noon they were in Rapidan's workshop. The two visitors attended with interest as Speedy lathe-turned a new handle-end for the umbrella, then dexterously chiseled it into the shape of a flap-eared elephant's head. They took turns doing small umbrella lifts about the grounds, just to be sure they had the knack, while Speedy contrived a sturdy arrangement of ropes and seat-boards.

When the device was ready to go the various angles of the support ropes were weighted with dependent bags of equipment. This was to be no lightsome excursion to a visible offshore island on a summer day but an expedition of unknown duration, in all likelihood out across a notoriously capricious

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ocean. It was best to be prepared for eventualities, so small inflatable floats, flares, tools, and concentrated provisions were packed.

The morning of October eighteenth looked as good as they were going to get. It was late in the season, of course, and days were shorter, weather colder, and winds unpredictable. But a girl was to be rescued now, not at some future balmy season when meteorological conditions were nearer an optimum. The men left the rambling studio house, Speedy checked all padlocks, and on the back lawn near the row of sycamores, safe from observation by incredulous eyes, they gathered round—oh, that after all so fragile-looking apparatus! The Magic Umbrella. Would it bear them. They had to try.

Instead of two broad seats where a couple of children could sit abreast, or an equivalently broad-beamed old sailor, such as Capt. Bill Weedles had rigged up forty-one years before on the other side of the continent, the men had opted for three super-lightweight narrow plywood perches that would dangle like a grapefruit cluster, back to back to back, providing constant outlook in every direction as they flew. Now they took up positions, each with his seat slat held against his rear, and Sples Smith, as owner, spoke the fateful words:

“Carry us to the presence of Princess Reeda of Umbrella Island!”

Now leave it to the incalculable wisdom of the after all incredible mechanism to know where to go. As far as they knew, nothing could stay the broolly from the swift completion of its appointed round. They need only grit their teeth and hold on. Soon or late, near or far—alive or dead!—the umbrella would deposit them where reposed the lost princess of the aerial island. Unless...

C H A P T E R T H I R T Y - S I X

<<1952; before the last chapter >>

The emotion of the good and beautiful princess was touching to see. She sat right down on a fallen log and wept. "Oh, Dick, my darling duck)" ("Duck"?! thought Dick, that is: Bert) "I feared I'd lost you forever. Can it really be true I've found you again)?"

Now Bert the Bird was flattered at all this attention and said, "Looks like you *have* found me, ma'am." But he was also puzzled and he went on, "'Again'? Have we met before?"

The princess stared, and stopped her weeping. "Don't you recognize me?" she cried. "But you came straight *to* me!"

"Oh, that's because I heard someone singing. You have a beautiful voice. It reminded me of someone—though of course that someone was a bird..." Bert paused, still mystified.

"Of course it was! but it was also me!" chortled the princess, happy at last. "Don't you remember?: all those awful, wonderful, years at Dragon Dump, as we called it. I told you many times I was really this frightfully good and beautiful princess. But maybe you never believed me? Still, it turned out to be true. You can't have forgotten that terrible day when I was rescued and we were torn from each other? Don't you remember the Young

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Man here? I remember shrieking Farewell! when he ran off with me and my cage—”

“Oh, ‘Princess’! My dear!! Is it really you?” Bert the bird was all overcome. His emotion now was as great as the Princess’.

Yet mixed up with the delight was another feeling he could not fathom right at first. Even feeling *S*. What was it? What were they? Because great as was his happiness to find again, well and happy, rich and famous, the dear companion of those thirty and more lost years in the topmost room, he could tell he was not *all* happy. Mixed with the loving was... disillusion. That was what those strange emotions boiled down to.

In the hours that followed he would have time to sort out the feelings. Just now everything was happening at once. The other humans were crowding round and everybody was talking and nobody was listening and Bert was straining to recognize his bird friend’s “rescuer” in one or other of the two men here present and not succeeding but recognizing all too well the wicked witch who had clapped him in a silver cage all those years ago and wanting to peck her eyes out, while she, bold thing, dared to put out a friendly finger and say, “*There* you are! Anyway you’ve got to thank me for setting you free again,” and Bert being damned if he was going to do *that*, as the titular “Young Man” stared at him and muttered, “Is *that* what the Princess prefers to me?” and looking much put out, while the other, stranger fellow just looked amused, and rather likable, and a big horse whinnied and stamped and looked the most likable of all, while a couple of docile asses took not the slightest notice but continued to graze among the trees and the grass at Kensington.

Well, not Kensington perhaps, but the lotus (and other leaf) eating inhabitants of the region had given it no other name and if not “Arcadia” then “Kensington” might do very well. When a pause in the riot of emotions and impressions came at last, somebody said, “It’s getting on for evening. What are our plans?”

With that the princess seemed to wake from her dream of

fond friendship restored and she turned to her old comrade Richard, as she had called him, or Berbir as an old soldier had once named him, or Bert as he called himself. "Is there shelter anywhere near, my dear?"

"Of course, beloved—no, I mean 'Your Royal Grace' —" stut-tered the bird.

The Princess looked dashed and she exclaimed passionately, "Of course 'belovéd'! I hope I will always be belovéd of you! Nothing must change!"

"No—er, no! Certainly nothing must change." But all the same something, *had* changed. But Bert went on: "Shelter for the night? Yes, yes indeed! Yes, just follow me. I'll take you to my mistress."

Oh, dear. The princess realized her darling companion of weary caged years had become the house pet of another and she was heartbroken. But Bert flitted and darted so sprightly on before that she could not bear to voice her jealousy.

"It's not far," twittered the bird. "Just beyond the last of the forest, and then up a bit of an incline. From the other side it's quite a mountain but from this direction it won't be bad going for you... But maybe the ladies would like to mount? It might make it a bit quicker."

No amount of mounting by the others was going to provide anything for Sples Smith to ride on though and the party found themselves limited to the speed of his sturdy foot-pace. For Hrae stevrod, with his rider, the young man, that was poky going and before long the pair had disappeared ahead.

Soon the great palomino returned at a run. "There's a house on the heights ahead," announced Y.M. "Is that where we're going, Mr. Bird?"

"That's the place! Go on if you like. We'll catch you up."

Horse and rider turned and swept away in a swirl of violet scent.

Smith sniffed. "Violet," he said. "Reminds me of something..."

"That's right: smell is the most nostalgic sense," commented

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the knowledgeable witch Jrumm. "And what does it remind you of?"

"Of when I was—!" exclaimed Sples and then shut up. He had suddenly realized just where they were. No wonder things had begun to seem familiar, and that despite the fact that everything was not shrouded in drifts of popcorn. And the wind was from the south. He was still not going to let Jrumm know he knew all he knew but he did essay to say to flitting Bert, the Bird: "Are we going to the house of the Bumpy Man?:"

"That's right," chirped the little guide, now perched again for a moment on the shoulder of the princess. "It's my mistress' master."

The relationships were getting convoluted but everybody supposed there'd be a clarification in a few minutes.

Now they came out on a little ridge-top and could look across a clear space two hundred yards to where an attractive stone cottage crowned what looked like the landward side of a cliff. The sight was gratifying. What was perhaps not unanimously admired was seeing in the distance the Young Man throw himself off his horse's back and run to fling his arms about someone in a maid's cap and apron.

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

<<1952 three months later, October 18 & following >>

There were unlessees—though better not dwelt upon. For instance, the Magic Umbrella could clearly not go underground, just in case young Gureeda lay enchained in some dungeon. The aeronauts dare not let it ascend to any sky island that lay above the limit of breathable air. And it would be troublesome trying to navigate through crowded cities where the curious might try to interfere with the umbrella's progress.

There was just a little excitement of the latter sort when, as they wafted briskly over Long Beach, playful boys with air rifles, as with the Hindenburg at Lakehurst in 1937, took pot shots at them. Luckily the marksboys missed, and the umbrella party were soon out over the heaving Atlantic.

Conversation, sitting as they were, not facing anyone, was inhibited and each man was left to his own thoughts.

Omby Amby Battles, the better not to tremble at the presence of himself in the sky with a thousand feet of empty space between him and a depthless ocean, kept his eyes closed most of the time and thought of the comfort and contentment, of his home with the soft sweet compliant Tollydiggle. Would he ever see her again? What had he got himself into! And why?

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He recalled the evening when the reunionants were breaking up. Maxwell had taken their pipes and solemnly restored them to the rack depending from a ceiling beam. His gratuity had been received and he held the general's umbrella while he put on his hunter's-green greatcoat. He glanced ever so faintly disdainfully at the unfashionable old bundle in grey-green-yellow and Mr. Rapidan had intercepted the glance.

"Don't scorn it, Maxwell:" he had said joking-gravely. "That umbrella is unsinkable." Then, reminded of that quality, Speedy's eyes had gone to Omby Amby's for a meaningful instant.

So of course later, when Sples Smith was taking it as obvious that where his broolly went there he went too, the gallant (or would-be) soldier had had to throw his also potent bumbershoot into the relief 'pot'. Now it dangled, firmly secured, from Battles' seat-side support. He felt to touch it and felt himself a little comforted.

Meanwhile Saladin von Smith had thoughts for his lady too: witch/Queen Glinda. She had not accompanied him to the Palace of Magic when the group of Old Boys gathered in the presence of the little Girl Ruler and her magic belt for what was thought to be going to be a jaunt, though distant, of only a few hours. Would word of what he and his companions were doing have reached the sorceress? The Great Book of Records would have chronicled their fate. Would Glinda have thought it advisable to make her way to the Emerald City and 'tune in' with Ozma to the Magic Picture? Never mind. Sples trusted to his great wife's wisdom and powers.

He trusted also to those of his fabulous umbrella and to his own resourcefulness. That's why he'd said to the fellows who were returning to E.C.: "Don't let any of them do any rescuing untimely, okay? We want to bring this off on our own, if we can. That's important to Speedy. So Ozma doesn't make any use of the Belt unless we're going down for the third time!..?"

Funny he'd used a metaphor from the vocabulary of drowning! Smith glanced down speculatively at the midnight blue expanse far below them. That was a threat you could see, con-

stantly, at least for the nonce. But disaster might just as predictably come in the shape of fire, accident, attack by man or beast. You simply didn't know.

The longest thoughts were William Rapidan's. He was off on his third Oz adventure (for there was no doubt but that any ultimate remnant of this expedition would end up in Oz) and this was far the most vital of them all. Also it was the only one that was planned. The previous visits had been the unpremeditated results of departures from home by rocket and by geyser eruption. Then he had traveled without motivation, even if with a good deal of propulsion. This time his motivation was very great—and his propulsion of the skimpiest. He looked up at the bellied-out skin of Sples's umbrella above him and wondered.

No matter. Better to die trying than to live preferring to die for not having tried.

He thought about (Gu)Reeda. Pretty girl. Or rather, since she was said to have so much resembled himself, 'pretty'? He, butch he-man, didn't like to think he at any stage had been pretty. Good-looking though? Yes, he'd admit that. She wore her hair in braids, like all the Umbrellians—or now, not 'braids', was it? but A braid or "shining plait". Queer; he couldn't quite remember. It, or they, hung down her back, and her hair was golden. No, that wasn't right. Again, she resembled himself and his hair had always been brown. In the book that had been published about his journey to Umbrella Island^s and to which he had often had reference over the years, it said that "the Umbrellians were dark-haired"; specifically, that "the dark hair of the women and girls was braided." Yet all the pictures showed Gireeda as a blonde, and the artist must certainly at least once have seen his models. By now Speedy couldn't be sure what he did remember.

Strange: when he tried to picture Gureeda the image that came into his mind was the faintly wistful one of Pat, the street-walker.

§ See *Speedy in Oz*. Editor's note.

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

<<1952; before the last chapter >>

“Yes,” said Fanciulla: always a safe word to begin with. The traveling party were sitting around the old deal table in the house of the Bumpy Man, the “Ear of the Mountain”, as their host served hot toffee and lemonade. The refreshments were not much to the visitors’ taste but they felt they couldn’t choose.

“Please continue, dear,” said the Young Man indulgently and looked at his lost and regained love with a doted’s eye. The girl doted right back.

“I just can’t get over it,” she sighed and for a bit she practically gave up trying to relate her story. “I never thought I’d see you again! When the dragons all came piling back to the castle and told us the enchantment and exile and imprisonment and all the rest of it were over with and that the noble knight errant—” here she gazed yet again at the Young Man “—had married the fifty-tongued bird” —and now she glanced askance at the mildly smiling Princess—“I thought, ‘Oh, sorrow!’, and pretty soon I refugeed west. I mean, who wanted to stay around and wait on a lot of dragons? They told us there was no need. If they wanted servants they’d hire fresh ones and needn’t keep anybody who’d been pressed into service against their will. I

didn't know if that applied to me or not. I couldn't remember a time when I hadn't been in service as a housemaid. But at least it was as a maid to people: I mean, humans.

"Even so, I stayed and helped out while all the expensive bird cages from the topmost room were hauled away, and the birds too, most of them. But a lot of the birds were just shoved out over the drawbridge and told to get lost in the forest or wherever. That was when Bert and I teamed up. He'd got his walking papers too and was out of a friend now that the fifty-tongued bird had been carried off. We've been together ever since.

"In the Forest of Tweet it wasn't long before people told us about chewing what they called the rainbow leaves. Of course it was old stuff to Bert. We did it too. We lived there in the woods for a year or two and it wasn't a bad life. I read the bag of books I'd snagged from the castle library but even rationing them to myself they only lasted 'til just before we came here. When the Mountain Ear told us he could use a servant I thought it was something to do, at least. As I say, I'd always been a housemaid."

It seemed a drab little tale enough. Lots worse things had happened in times past to lovelorn maidens when they lost their true loves. In comparison, passing a few extra years as a serving maid didn't seem too bad a fate.

Now everything had ended happily and everybody had his proper friend: everybody who'd been looking for such. There'd been no need to slay dragons or rescue maidens (or even maids) or do any derring. Fanciulla just courteously told the Bumpy Man that she'd like indefinite, if not permanent, leave of absence. That was all right and she was free to go.

"Won't father be vexed!" crowed the pretty Princess, who knew her parent for an awful old curmudgeon who could only be happy if others were not. He'd been pleased as Punch when he learned that the princess and her consort were not on Cloud Nine in their marriage. It would be dreadful for him now when it transpired that each of the partners had (re)found someone he liked better.

“Shall we be trotting home again?” she went on, as she stroked the feathers of her feathered friend, who now hopped between the two young women and seemed quite pleased. He wasn’t going to have to be parted from Fanciulla, a possibility that had preoccupied him. They could all live together in what his erstwhile fellow captive had described as a “Palace on the Park”. He dared say that in time he’d get used to the restored form of the Princess, who certainly gave every sign of being as good and as beautiful as she’d always claimed to be. It was just that *he* loved the little grey mockingbird with her fifty glorious songs that he had known of old. It was all very well being humans’ pet and companion but what he really delighted in (don’t we all?) was the devoted company of his own kind. And now he knew that his bird love had gone forever.

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

<< follows chapter 37 >>

The Magic Umbrella did its job and the travelers had nothing to complain of for many hours. Blue October over the blue Atlantic and the winds coming from the west as was the custom. When the air was wind-still the umbrella could go at will in any direction. So it had done on its first employment by the boy Button-Bright. It had had no trouble in navigating westward from Philadelphia to Buffalo and on to Chicago, Denver, and the environs of far-western San Diego, all in contravention of prevailing breezes. But that had been in balmy springtime.

Same sequence the next time. Summer haze and winds indifferent. The boy passenger had never known which way the umbrella headed but, as far as he could tell it had gone straight to Mo with no detours.

But this time was different. The westerly was strong and the umbrella had the 'sense' not to complicate its task by bucking a headwind. It chose to take the great-circle route to reach the presence of the girl it sought. That might take longer but would hopably be more secure.

It was Speedy who saw the cloud no bigger than a man's hand, late that afternoon.

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Provisions had been sparingly passed round a couple of times but for the best of reasons no one wanted to have an overloaded stomach. But the high blue cool, despite the protection of dense windbreakers, gloves, and ski caps, made necessary eventually a different private office which here, however, could not be performed privately. But they were all men together and Sples made a joke of it, quoting the immortal dictum of Richard Halliburton's companion on the extreme peak of an Alp. The fall here, however, was not as much as "a mile"... Other excitements there had been none.

Speedy saw the cloud and said so. He said, "That's a black one." All other clouds had been white and trifling today, albeit fast-scudding.

The others twisted to look and did not smile. By now the cloud was as big as a giant's hand and behind it came grey cohorts. A cloud became a cloudbank. There failed to be a sunset. No sunlight could penetrate the darkest vastness of the formation.

Sples shortened sail. He knew they could not rise high enough—and breathe!—to let the storm work itself out underneath them. All he could attempt was to get them low so that at any rate a crashing umbrella would not kill them on impact.

They didn't bother to panic. Each man had known this might happen, even that in latter October it was quite likely that it would happen. They took a tight hold, secured all flaps, and waited.

It hit like the side of a barn falling over. The umbrella, though magic, was 'mortal': not proof against seventy-mile-an-hour gale winds. At the very least it was constrained to blow inside out. A "blown" umbrella has no wing with which to fly. The broolly fell, its passengers with it, and though they did not lose contact with the instrument, having bound their legs fast to their roped seats, they suffered from the collision with the vastly roaring sea. But only for an instant. Private-General Battles had his finest moment when he expanded *his* umbrella in the teeth of the hurricane. Its magic was released and though gale forces

might blow it to tatters its powers were supreme. No water could touch the device nor anything which was in touch with the device.

Now followed the strangest interlude any of the men were ever to experience. All night they hurtled over the bounding main. Whirled were they, tossed, dizzy, nauseated unto death, and wretched in the drenched garments the storm had soaked before Battles had thrown up his protective wall of bumbershoot magic. But they got no wetter, they did not sink, neither did anything fall on them from above, and in time, in the weird dryness of their air cocoon, their wet clothes went to dry, and they could even sleep in sheer exhaustion.

There was room for only one of the men within the impermeable shell of the waterproof umbrella but he had a hand to strap to one of each of his companions and that kept them floating in a weird half-world, neither in nor out of the water. It went on so to dawn and through an endless seasick day. At its inception the umbrellists feared they would die and by its end, in the words of the old jest, they feared that they would not. Yet in fact they were far from death. Princess Ozma could see that, gazing unbrokenly at the Magic Picture, though there had been an instant, just before Wantowin Battles invoked the mysteries of his broolly, when she had been perilously close to pushing the panic button. Such a moment did not come again.

In the early morning of the third day of the disaster journey their incredible craft scraped ashore on the flat shale terraces of a particularly desolate bit of coast on the Isle of Purbeck, southern England.

They were in a bay backed by grey and black shale cliffs. Rounded-edged flat greasy-looking boulders encumbered the foreshore which was a scene of the wildest chaos. Fantastic seaweeds and heaps of wreckage lay among the stones of all sizes and forms that some giant seemed to have hurled and scattered over the smooth platform of the shale. But when the sun's light gleamed, flashing pools bewildered the sight and the low cliffs shone steely blue, crusted with clots of emerald-green moss.

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The men gazed and marveled. I think one or two may even have breathed a prayer of thanksgiving.

A three-day crossing of the Atlantic by umbrellas was something of a record, but the men had scant time to go on thinking of that. Now other aptitudes were going to be tested.

Speedy Rapidan sat right down on the rock beach, with a shale shelf for a workbench, assembled before him his tools, and essayed repairs. He was successful insofar as he was able to give the Sples Smith bumbershoot the appearance of a properly spread apparatus, no longer turned inside out. But the struts now possessed no strength. It was illusionary to think the umbrella could possibly rise again, at least with a load of passengers. Outside help was needed.

But what to do? This coast, never profitably employed since the great days of the smugglers two centuries before, afforded no apparent home or occupation to anyone. There was no one to apply to, no fisherman's cottage under the cliffs, no sign of any sort of life.

Only when they gained the top of the bluffs could the explorers see any evidence that people ever ventured this way. On the flanks of a sizeable small mountain to the east they could just make out, among protecting trees, the chimneys of what would seem to be a stately home. It was Smedmore House, had they but known it. But they never got that far.

The bedraggled adventurers had warned each other to look for roads, which would in due course lead to *something* they could use. Now, a few yards past where they had sighted the mansion they came on the end of a grassy lane. Following that to the north they reached a gravel track and now they might even begin to hope to see people.

An army lorry came slowly but with a roar out of a joining lane and stopped in a skip of gravel when its driver saw the strangely burdened trio of weatherbeaten men making desperate signals. He leaned out, nothing dismayed. He was a tough sergeant, who could hold his own against any trio of blokes, at least if unarmed, and these three didn't seem to be carrying any-

thing but duffle bags, boards, and umbrellas.

"Can you give us a lift?" cried Speedy. "Our boat broke up on the beach," he did not *exactly* lie. That their boat was a waterproof umbrella and that it was that umbrella's mate which had broken up were data not necessary to expound just at the moment.

"Climb in back," instructed the sergeant. "Where you making for?"

"A—" said the American. Too great ignorance of the locality did not seem expedient here. He'd been going to say "a town": *any* town, where they might find an umbrella mechanic. That sounded too weird. Instead, he blurted "London", without any assurance that they were even in England except that the man had answered in English.

"I can put you well on your way," stated the soldier, with a curious stare at another who looked a little like a soldier—but out of comic opera. He shifted gears as the men dashed for the tailgate and hoisted each other aboard.

An hour of thorough jouncing and then brakes were slammed on and the khaki-green lorry came to a declarative halt. The passengers in back were on the qui-vive. Sples Smith flung himself out to run to the driver's door and parley.

"Turnin' off for Salisbury here," grunted the surly-kindly sergeant. "London straight on."

"Great! We really thank you," yelped the (other) American. "You saved our bacon." Then he wondered briefly if that was a British idiom too.

It was strange to be in the midst of pulsing life again. Traffic pounded around the circle. (They called them "roundabouts" in England, the travelers learned later.)

But traffic was only of interest to them now as something to be avoided, escaped, without their getting run over. What they wanted was the town that presumably lay beyond the houses they could see to the south.

The men crossed the busy road and trailed along its opposite edge, looking for some lane or path that would cut through

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the spacious grounds of a row of old-fashioned residences. Most had signs up indicating that the desirable properties were for sale. But the sign of one was somewhat different. "B.B", it said.

"'Button-Bright'!" Speedy poked fun. His friend was not fond, as people rarely are, of his baby nickname.

"No," Sples corrected with a grimace. "That dot is a little tiny cross. 'B plus B'. Bed and breakfast."

"The local equivalent of a 'tourist home'?"

"That'd be my guess."

The soldier with the green whiskers, usually relatively taciturn in the company of the two American 'boy heroes', now essayed a word. "A bed and breakfast sound highly desirable, gentlemen."

It was the freeing word they were all secretly aching for. Without another word they walked up the path and rang the bell.

The door to the tiny porch opened and the face of Pat of Eighth Avenue looked out.

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

<<1952; follows, as you'd expect, chapter 38 >>

Sples Smith and witch Jrumm and the big palomino Hrae stevrod were still tagging along. They hadn't found anybody to make it all worthwhile, but then they hadn't expected to, so they were no worse off, and Jrumm at least was highly amused by all that had happened.

She had always quite approved of the Young Man and she didn't mind his claiming his (belatedly looked-up) love of loves, nor, certainly, did she have any reason to have anything against Fanciulla. The Princess was a slightly different case. Jrumm had been grossly unfair to her for the space of a generation. Of course injustice constantly practised against an individual makes you hate that individual later or (usually) sooner. Jrumm reminded herself, however, that she had first been mean to the princess only in order to annoy her father. Now that she had signed the non-aggression pact with the latter it would make sense to call off any imagined antagonisms toward the former.

She being the most knowledgeable about Mo geography, the party asked her which road they ought to follow home. They supposed she would want. to make an early return to her store, while the quasi-royal trio would of course make for the capital

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of King Scowleyow to tell him how they now planned to live in a *ménage à trois* (or *quatre*, if you counted Bert the Bird, and the princess surely did). They all looked at the map of the region that Ozma of Oz had providently provided her errant subject, Saladin von Smith.

“Well,” said the Young Man judicially, still assuming the man’s prerogative of making decisions for the common good, “what about formal calls on Duchess Bredenbutta and the great Monarch of Mo, since they lie exactly on the most direct route home?”

The wily witch had ideas about that. Her own particular wish was NOT to go anywhere near the Magical Monarch of Mo just on this occasion. She produced disingenuous reasons why they should go another way. “Let me see,” she said, fingers to cheek and looking so considerate of others while she contemplated her own best interests, “didn’t you say your royal father and his court would be going to the mountains now, my dear?”

The princess, suspecting no duplicity, replied, “That’s right. They always spend August at Vinte. It’s the coolest part of the country. It’s true: it would be a little silly just to return home to the capital while no one is in town. Besides, the hunting lodge is nearer.”

Thus Jrumm had the princess producing all the logical reasons for traveling in a direction remote from the Mo ruler’s seat. They had another look at the map and planned a route that would lead more toward Fruitcake Island.

While they ambled along a road that Sples Smith recalled from thirty-eight years before, Bert the bird regaled the company with an account of the horrors of life on the isle of Fruitcake: recollections dating from the same epoch.

“I wonder how the Soldier is getting along,” said Bert in nostalgic mood. “‘Berbir’ he always called me.”

Having been in the company of the Soldier with the Green Whiskers immediately prior to his coming hither to Mo, Smith could give some details of that individual’s recent doings and non-doings. Did it slip his mind that his fellow traveler Jrumm

was Omby Amby's former wife? The fact had certainly been emphasized in the conversation just before they parted. Or did he just assume Jrumm would feel nothing one way or the other about a husband officially though, by her, not willingly divorced a generation before? Or was he thoughtlessly in a don't-care mood?

However it was, the effect on the witch was drastic, though concealed. "That wretch!" she fumed inwardly. "To have changed and become so attractive, and in the very same breath to inform me I'd lost him! I'll have his hide for that yet!"

Of this small storm of emotions she let the others suspect nothing. Instead, as a practised dissembler and also as an habitual traveler in Mo, she began to point out sights new to some of her companions or forgotten by others. "Mo is a land of enchantment," she declared. She had said so several times in the week just passed.

"How enchanting?" said Y.M., just to prove he was listening.

"For instance, anything can happen in this country. That's quite a charming characteristic."

"Hm," put in Sples Smith, "Just like in that other enchantment land, Oz."

"The inhabitants don't grow old."

"Interesting," said Sples. "The same as in Oz."

"They don't die."

"Convenient! Same thing in Oz, though we've only had that feature since about the turn of the century."

"Wild beasts, however, can be killed."

"Oh, well, that's good," said Smith, beginning to sound ironical if not outright sarcastic. "It's practical for humans in case some animal gets in their way and isn't wanted as a permanent antagonist."

"Some animals can talk, although that doesn't apply to all of them."

"Thanks for telling us. I was wondering. Your son Hræstevrod talks. I thought it was perhaps because he was born

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human and just hadn't given up the speech habit when he changed his nature. But the Purple Dragon also talked, and he was never a person, was he?

"Oh, no," Jrumm assured. "He almost wasn't even a dragon. The one now ruling at the castle isn't the one celebrated in literature, of course. When *that* Purple Dragon was put to death it was only by a fluke that he left offspring. At the time of his execution he said nothing about having a family. Otherwise the thoughtful Monarch of Mo might have sought them out as well and exterminated them root and branch." It could sound like the witch was being a little satirical on her own.

"'Executed'?" said the princess, a little shocked. "'Exterminated'?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so. Dragons mostly exist in order to be killed by heroes, and just then the Monarch was wanting to appear in the guise of hero. You see, he had to do something or be discredited."

"Why?" asked the witch's listeners with a show of interest. They were passing over a wasteland of gumdrop pebbles just at the moment and there was nothing specially to preoccupy the attention.

"As you'll all have observed there are many post-prandial features in Mo topography—"

"'Postprandial'?" asked the princess.

"Well, 'dessertial', if you like. In other words, 'concerned with the end of a meal': the traditional occasion for serving sweets. There's really no other generic term I know of for 'having to do with sweet foods'.

"Mo enjoys a superfluity of sweets built right into the geology. Beside ordinary meadows will run a river of root beer (we're coming to one shortly). Near a rock-candy mountain may lie a lake of regular fresh water. In the middle of a plain plain will be a custard pond or a slough of jelly mud. Confusing—but amusing.

"Of course in the long run humans cannot manage in such a landscape. Dear to the heart of a child though a praline prairie

or a fudge forest might be, usual persons leading normal lives (as after all most of us try to do) cannot thrive in a setting like that. Hence one of the reasons for the relative depopulatedness of the Mo countryside.

“But other fauna of Mo delight in the dextrosity of the landscape, and the worst offenders have been the dragons. Over the centuries the fire-breathing but candy-consuming monsters wrought such havoc on gumdrop groves, fondant farms, and syrup streams that the rulers of the land were forced to declare them outlaws. Rewards were posted for every dragon head, dripping with raspberry juice blood, that citizens would turn in. By the end of last century no dragon remained in the Land of Mo save Paul the Purple Dragon—but he was the most fearsome of them all.

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“Long had Paul’s depredations caused the stoutest heart to tremble. No sweetmeat was safe from his aggression. No comfit could be comfortable, no sugarplum secure. Caramels quavered, chocolates choked, and peanut brittle broke up at mention of his name. Lollipops lolloped off at word of his approach. The protection of peppermints proved impractical and the defense of nougat nugatory. Terrified toffee, battered butterscotch, and brutalized bonbons prayed in vain to the Monarch of Mo for succor (or suckers). The terrorization of the land’s confectionery was total.

“Then the appalling Paul made his last best attack. He advanced from his castle (now familiar to you) in all his slithery slithiness, determined to have for his own the Monarch’s most prized patch of plum pudding from right in the royal palace gardens at Motown.

“You who have only seen the current generation of dragons (vitiating in nature and texture by their foreign blood) have no conception of how frightening Paul the purple really was. He was big and strong and fierce and clever, with eyes of burning glass and a very long scaly tail. He seemed ferocious and invincible and yet withal a lover of life, his own life, which he was not prepared to lose easily.

“Well I must not tire you with detail,” analogized the witch and then went on to describe minutely the course of events^s. “Suffice it to say that the battle was joined and, incredibly, in view of the odds, Paul the Appalling was bested. The self-clinchingness of jaws and the flexibility of flesh combined in him in a fatal concatenation to permit of the creature’s being stretched out enormously thin under the united pulling of fifty strong men. Once thus attenuated the dragon was easily snipped into a lifetime supply of fiddle-strings of, incidentally, a most excellent resonance. Thus ended the reign of dragon. terror in Mo.

“The present crop of dragons is trivial as a threat to life and property. They enjoy sweets but in moderation and spend their

§ See *The Magical Monarch of Mo*. Editor’s note.

time in artistic pursuits, an interest in which they inherit from their mother's side of the family. Paul had told no one of his latter-day espousal of a dragon of mixed ancestry who dwelt far away underground. It was only after the Purple Dragon's death that his family was born and later still that they returned[§] to claim their patrimony in this and other countries."

The witch's historical musings kept the party idly entertained until they came to a point on the Root Beer River midway between the Duchy of West Credia and the Fruitcake Island. Jrumm found it expedient that they cross there, although the location lacked a bridge.

The pairs of reunited best-friends had been fleeting the time pleasurably in renewed acquaintance-making. Witch Jrumm was sufficiently entertained in choosing the words in which to present the saga of the Purple Dragon and glimpses of Mo history. But Sples Smith was frankly getting a little bored.

All was going on very amiably and he hadn't so far weakened his position for bargaining for the return of his umbrella by making an enemy of anybody, more especially the witch. But was all the chumminess going to pay off? He didn't see what ploy he could adopt to gain any useful parapluvius knowledge. The only possibility seemed to be to remain so friendly with Jrumm that he might get invited to her home. Once there he could raid her clothes closets and outdoor-gear depots. It wasn't the sort of betrayal of hospitality he cared for. Still he was determined to repossess his long-neglected Magic Umbrella if he possibly could. Stealing back the stolen was a thing he was not going to allow himself to think of as bad.

Now the following chain of events took place:

The horse, asses, and single foot-passenger (light Fanciulla shared Hræ stevrod's back) drew up to the bank of the smooth-flowing brown river. Here such banks were not high and the animals could lower their heads and quaff of the running root beer, should they be so inclined. The witch descended from her steed and said, The river can be crossed in a number of ways.

§ See *Dragons in Oz*. Editor's note.

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Simplest is merely to ride in, animal-borne, and have ourselves swum across. Rut that leaves one or two of us to fend on their own—”

“Don’t worry about me, ma’am,” put in Sples Smith for his part. “I’ve got my diving suit in my kit.” He gestured at his duffel bag.

“A useful and convenient arrangement,” agreed the witch, “as you indicated earlier. However, this is even more convenient—and quick!” Here with a flourish Jrumm unclicked her umbrella latch and flung up the bumbershoot hood.

Sples Smith watched wonderingly. He saw the witch upend the instrument and set it on the surface of the eddying stream. Then she stepped daintily aboard the vessel and sat down, clutching at some bankside reeds to hold herself from floating away.

The scene reminded Sples vividly of’ something—and yet, of what? Not, it seemed, something he had experienced himself. Nevertheless an image was vivid in his imagination.

Suddenly, he had it!

He knew, absolutely as a fact, without need for further verification, that this was the umbrella of Omby Amby Battles, the umbrella in which the soldier had navigated this very Root Beer River many years before. The exploit had been related in vivid detail just days ago in the salon of Her Graciousness, Ozma of Oz, as the Smiths and the Battles’ sat over a convivial cup of tea. Of course! Now he recalled clearly that Battles had remarked on finding on his return home from Mo that he had somehow lost his own now-loved umbrella. Some mix-up at the castle of the purple dragon and he, Battles, returning to the Emerald City with a perfectly strange broolly in his hand.

Great Oz!

The sixty-four-thousand-dollar question was answered, or at least, a very strong suspicion of the solution to the puzzle had now come safely home to Smith.

What was he to do?! For the moment at least, he must play it cool. Not appear too eager. Not show any surprise. Not even

too much interest.

"Hmm," he said aloud. "I see. Convenient indeed. And is it your suggestion that I save time by crossing the beer that way, Madam Jrumm? Well, okay."

He stepped to the edge of the river and put out a hand as if to assist.

"No, that's all right," disclaimed the witch, though apparently suspecting nothing. "I'll stay here. Miss Fanciulla can mount my ass. You have your wetsuit. Maybe somebody can stick out a hand, or I'll hold on to Hrae stevrod's tail, and thus be drawn across."

In fact Sples was glad to have the time to think, as he withdrew behind a screen of weeds to change. Bathing trunks were really all that this splash required but he was glad of the business of hauling on the diving suit to plan furiously and to make certain extravagant gestures in the air. None around him could know but these were intended, by prior agreement, to alert whoever might be on duty at the Magic Picture. Far away across the lands and sands, in Ozma's palace in the Emerald City, someone would know to summon in all haste the powerful fairy princess. Now Smith was going to have to act fast, and dexterously.

The beer river crossing was nothing for a swimmer of his skill. He was first to scramble ashore on the opposing bank. Sples was at the river edge when Jrumm let herself be hauled forward to within reach of his hand. There must be an instant when she let go of the umbrella's up-thrusting center stem to step on land. When her foot left the tough 'hull' of the water-borne device and her hand was in Sples Smith's, he used his other to reach out and grasp iron-hard the handle of the storied umbrella. Then when the witch's hand left his hand, that latter hand made the "sign of Oz" with thumb and three fingers).

Sples Smith vanished, from the river bark and from Mo. The umbrella went with him.

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

<<1952; October in England >>

"I don't get it, W.G.," said William Rapidan for the eleventh time. "No two people could look that much alike and not be the same person."

The two were walking off the one's restlessness and preoccupation while Saladin von Smith remained at the umbrella repair shop, tolerated by the mechanic and carefully keeping an eye on the refurbishing of the two appliances. The walkers struck off on a gravel track along a mill stream.

"I like her singing," replied Wantowin G. Battles non-committally. He'd heard all these arguments before and was hard pressed for something new to offer.

"Same here, though that's neither here nor there. But that's funny too. I swear I heard her humming 'Autumn in New York'. How could —"

"Popular tunes become known worldwide these days, do they not?"

"Yeah, I guess so. That's right: we had 'A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square' and 'The Lambeth Walk' and 'The White Cliffs of Dover'. But just the same..."

"Didn't you say the hair of the young lady in New York was

brown? while our landlady is blonde.”

“That could be fetched out of a bottle— though admittedly it doesn’t look like it.”

“And Miss Jane is a Welshwoman. Her speech has a special lilt. Was Miss Pat—”

“No, of course not. But somebody could put on an accent, too. I just don’t get it.”

“You haven’t—er, asked?” said Battles hesitantly.

“Of course not that either. You don’t ask an obviously long-established English—well, Welsh—lodging-house keeper if she was picking up tricks six days ago on the sidewalks of New York.”

“I suppose it is just one of those strange things...”

“It’s strange all right.” Rapidan went on chewing the matter over in his mind as they walked along the new row of cottages a-building but he didn’t speak of it again. ‘Reeda’, he murmured, trying to distract himself from disturbing preoccupation. It was not as if the landlady showed any marked preference for himself. She was charming to them all, apologizing for entertaining them through the thickness of three walls as she practised in a sparkling voice the ‘Bachiana number five’.

Omby Amby pointed to a wooden signpost with the distinctive yellow arrow on its arm. They had begun to realize they were doing a standard “Waymarked walk”. As long as they kept seeing yellow they were in no danger of seeing the grey and drab of housing estates or roadside industries.

They crossed in quick succession the “mill” stream (though they had seen no mill; a passerby had given the designation when they asked if the brook had a name) and the Dorchester railway line.

Once over the tracks they passed through a hedge and bore right, making for a plank causeway in the distance. Good job that was there. After yesterday’s heavy rain the ground was a bog, but it firmed up on the other side of a stile. A broad plain stretched before them, bounded on the west and south by the invisible Avon. All rivers were called “avon” in this part of the

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world. Not to be wondered at, perhaps, when Miss Jane had told them that “avon” was the Celtic word for ‘river’.

Near at hand was a weed-choked barbed-wire fence that ran beside them for a hundred yards to intersect with a low brown stick-like-looking hedge. The two men strode along unspeaking, each with his own thoughts, then froze.

A dappled bright brown roe deer had scampered into view beside the hedge barrier, then out into the open. It sighted them at the instant they sighted it. All stood transfixed, gazing with all their eyes in fascination.

The roe danced on a few paces, then stooped to stand facing the men foursquare. It gazed and gazed, unblinking. They gazed and gazed, unblinking.

The animal seemed to want to approach and made an abortive surge forward. but it was as if some inborn sense plucked it by the shoulder and said “Don’t!” The deer sprang another few yards aside and stopped to turn and stare. It never looked side-long with just one eye. It had to turn and face due on so both eyes could see.

Only the heads of the men swiveled. The deer would perhaps not catch the tiny movement; it thought of them as stock-still figures, and somehow such appealing ones. It wanted to come nearer but that something inside would not allow it. It leapt on, stopped, turned, gazed, leapt on.

They watched ‘til it turned a final time—to glance farewell? Anthropomorphic notion: Then it sprang over a clump of weeds and vanished past the edge of a spinney they had just skirted. In its fascination the roe had described an arc of a hundred and eighty degrees about them.

The hikers felt as if they had been through a cool curing shower of unspoiled beauty. Niggling preoccupations of quotidian life were as if wiped away by a healing hand. The two philosophized.

“It’s uplifting, isn’t, it?” offered W.G. Battles.

“Yeah,” said Speedy. “It reminds you how inferior man is. Creatures in the wild are free, untrammled, pure in ways we

can never be. It makes us feel our place and I guess that's why the standard human reaction is 'Let's kill it if we can!' We don't like to see all that superiority flaunted before us, so unattainable."

"But man is superior in respect to his intelligence," reminded the general..

"And what does he use it for? In relation to other animals, only to do them harm.

"No, animals are free—where we are constrained by society and conventions. They are beautiful, where men in a wild state are dirty, squalid, and unkempt, and as often as not grotesque as well."

"Grotesque?" wondered Omby Amby. That wasn't how he thought of HIMself in his natural condition.

"Yes. Of all animal races only man seems to have an inborn urge to 'decorate' himself. All primitive tribes without exception do it, painting their bodies in garish colors, attaching feathers and plant fronds and shell jewelry, doing weird things with their body hair—oh, sorry—"

Speedy broke off, blushing. The soldier, on this fresh new day, had borrowed the landlady's curling iron and created wonders with his sideburns.

Omby Amby took the stab stoutly. "I wonder," he essayed, "if it is not a sign of man's superior intellect that he does so. Perhaps the other species would like to beautify themselves, if only they could reason, and think how to do it."

"But don't you see? they don't need to do it." Speedy returned to his philosophizing. "They have built-in beauty, whereas man, it would seem, cannot believe in the beauty of his natural self. He has to bedizen it."

"Hmh," said the general. He'd have to get used to that idea. But his whiskers drooped a little. Speedy preached on about the wonders of animaldom. "The animals are naked. We humans are trapped in clumsy-making clothes. The animals can live off the land. Human beings would scarcely live to maturity if they had to subsist on what they could digest, uncooked, from among wild foodstuffs. And then the eyesight, the bearing, the incred-

ible olfactory powers of many races of creatures. Finally, some animals can fly. Think of that! The ultimate capability, the one faculty that can enable a species to survive the crash of planets—and man will never have it.

“Can we wonder that man can only groan in envy and seek to decimate all races that can do what he cannot?”

Speedy surprised himself as well as his companion by his unwonted burst of eloquence. He was more or less silent as they skirted another broad meadow. The walkers followed another barbed-wire fence, rounded a row of trees, crossed a second stile, and came out briefly beside the Avon, visible at last. Summer verdure had lingered long but now there was more brown in the landscape than green.

They followed a hedged track between banks of brambles that just weeks ago had been loaded with blackberries. A few half-dried ones remained and the men sampled them but they hardly tasted of anything. Autumn melancholy was hard to avoid. Speedy found the tune that hummed in his mind (almost always did) was ‘Autumn in New York’. Of course that brought his thoughts back where they oughtn’t to be.

Speedy and Omby Amby were back in High Town Lane again by a little after three, when Stiles Smith could report that his mission was accomplished. The umbrella (as well as leather, china, and clock) repairman had done his job capably. No bits of possibly essential magic substances had been removed from either of the umbrellas. Their fabric, both cloth and metal, had been merely stiffened and strengthened; neither bumbershoot had ever ‘objected’ to anything being added to its content.

The three returned in modest triumph to the B and B. Speedy had paid a visit to a branch of the National Westminster and changed greenbacks for pounds for paying their room and board. As farewells were said he held the hand of Jane the landlady a second longer than an ordinary handshake would entail, but she made no sign. She was pleasant, even cordial, but nothing more than courtesy called for in relation to strange but amiable paying guests.

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

<<1952; follows chapter 40 >>

“Omby Amby?” said Queen Ozma, startled. “Yes, certainly, if that is your wish.” She touched a button bell beside the Magic Picture.

On the supposition that her husband’s sally into Mo would not take a very long time, the good sorceress of the South had remained in the Emerald City as the pleased guest of the pleased Queen of Oz. By an agreeable turn of coincidence it had been she who was on an hour’s interested attendance at the all-showing Picture when Saladin von Smith’s hand signals were observed indicating his wish to be immediately ‘retrieved’ to Oz. She had run to the little Girl Ruler in the council chamber and summoned her thence in haste. The other councilors: the famous Wizard O.Z. Diggs, the Royal Historian of Oz himself, Prof. Wogglebug, and Tik-Tok the Clockwork Man, trailed interestedly after into the Salon of the Magic Picture.

Smith appeared, snatched from within the Picture’s painted scene to stand before that scene and stare with as much fascination as everyone else at the reactions of the companions he had left behind an instant before. In his wet wetsuit he only reached to squeeze the tendered (and tender) hand of Glinda, his wife,

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as they all looked on to see the Young Man and his Princess, Miss Fanciulla and Bert the Bird, stallion Hrae stevrod and even the two asses gaze around them in total mystification. But the cynosure of most eyes was the wildly capering and (though unheard, clearly) screaming enchantress Jrumm, who attracted as much attention among her own company as among the viewers gathered before the fabulous painting in the Palace of Magic.

“What’s she saying?” Ozma asked. The learned Glinda, who as mistress of all knowledge also of course knew the elements of lip reading, concentrated for a moment and then said:

“I think I caught the words ‘Foiled again! Find somebody attractive and then he waltzes off with your best umbrella!’—but I wouldn’t care to relay some of the epithets she’s using.”

That was when Sples Smith spoke, virtually for the first time since his sudden arrival in the Picture Salon. He said, “Omby Amby! That’s who she’s referring to—in addition to myself. Great! It confirms my guess. Would Your Highness send for him? Wantowin Battles: Omby Amby?”

Then they all talked at once while they waited for the Soldier with the green Whiskers to turn over duty at the palace gates to the Woozy and Sawhorse, who happened to be playing in the vicinity at the moment. The soldier appeared in the hall, arriving in time to get a glimpse of his ex-wife jumping on her ass and galloping off in a fury. He shivered.

Ozma switched off the picture, to everyone’s, and perhaps the Picture itself’s, relief, and the crowd trooped back to the Council Chamber. There they took seats around the board to sort matters out.

By tacit agreement the present ‘star’ of proceedings, Saladin Paracelsus de Lambertine Evagne von Smith, took the word and the, to him, all-important word was this: “General Battles,” he spoke, “is it the case that when you returned from your legendary mission to Mo in the year 1914 you brought home the wrong umbrella?”

“Why, y-yes, sir,” stammered the bewildered soldier. “I thought everyone knew that—everyone who might be kind

enough to take an interest in the doings of mere me."

"So we did," agreed Smith. "At least I know I did. You spoke of it not a week ago here in the palace when we held conference before my own jaunt to that country. I knew that you had lost in Mo, and missed, your valuable travel adjunct, the waterproof umbrella that had served you so well there against threats from both above and below. It was a grievous loss," said the American, sneaking formally, even a little archaically. "By the way, here it is."

Smith handed across the council table to the startled, then suddenly delighted, General of the Guard the instrument he had until then been holding unobtrusively under an arm. Omby Amby could scarcely get out his amazed thanks.

"I recognized it, you see," Sples explained, "though very late in the day!

"But for the moment my greater interest is in the umbrella you did bring home from Mo—"

"Yes, sir!" Omby Amby cut in. "It was a stupidity on my part. I've always confessed that freely. It was because of the dark, or my anxiety, or sheer carelessness. As I fled from the castle of the Purple Dragon I seized from the stand the wrong umbrella. It's the only way I can account for it."

"It's all right! The point is: what other umbrella was that? More important, where is it now?"

"Why, er—uh—" The general had to think, yet in the tension of the present crucial moment he hardly could. He didn't, for just a second, know what he knew. But he knew what he didn't know: "What other umbrella? Why, I don't know. I mean, it wasn't any special umbrella. It was just an umbrella... One that belonged to my ex-wife, I suppose. Dragons rarely go about with umbrellas so I can't think it was one of theirs, left behind. It could, I dare say, have belonged to one of the staff of castle servants, but they would hardly—"

"They wouldn't," Smith cut him off. "It was undoubtedly witch Jrumm's. That is to say: Jrumm's? It WASN'T hers, though she had temporary possession. It was mine! That was my Magic

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Umbrella I've been without for thirty-eight years and went all the way to Mo just now to find.

"Where is it?!"

"The—the umbrella I brought back?" stammered Battles. "It was—or at least replaced—a part of the inventory of the royal palace here and her grace, the Queen—"

Ozma spoke now and put a convenient end to the soldier's bumbblings. She said, "The instrument with which our emissary to Mo returned from his journey was placed in the hall closet, where it became available for the same uses as the umbrella which had been... mislaid. It did not, perhaps, serve quite so brilliantly—"

This sounded to Soles Smith like an impugment of the 'genius' of his fabulous bumbershoot and he looked a hard question at the girl ruler. She, quick on the uptake, smoothly continued: "Perhaps no umbrella in the world was quite so adapted to fending off water in any form. It was, after all, the thing that had stood between the Wicked Witch of the West and destruction for many years, indeed probably ever since the first invention of the device known as an umbrella."

"The Witch of the West!?" echoed Smith.

"Why, surely," replied Ozma, surprised in her turn. "Didn't you know? Princess Dorothy brought it here to the palace after her timely destruction of the said witch. It stayed here ever after as an important implement of magic."

Sples found himself sidetracked into a little interest in general history. "It didn't serve the witch too well in the end," he reminded.

"No," agreed Ozma; "I won't say 'alas'. The mechanics of the apparatus were such that it had to be unfurled to be effective. Dorothy's pail of water came so impromptu that the witch had no time to protect herself."

"And the same," put in Omby Amby, "—if I may intrude—in my own case, your grace. The umbrella was rolled up, that time I fell in the Root Beer River, so I got a proper ducking though the instrument was in my very hand."

“Just so. But now, thanks to Mr. Sples, we have it back again, so that’s all right. But the other, mysterious umbrella, my good friend: you believe then that it was your own fabled old Magic Umbrella from the days of your adventure to Sky Island? But that instrument’s appearance was known to us all from long ago. Our Trot and Cap’n Bill had themselves traveled by it and could describe in detail its elephant-head handle—”

“I never told anybody what happened to it,” said Smith, shamefast. Now, thirty-eight years on, he confessed his crime in the attic in Philadelphia. “The elephant head was gone. Someone—the Jrumm woman, I suppose—must have had the piece repaired and the plain handle installed that you say it has now. Thai way the umbrella would look pretty much like any old-fashioned broolly.

“But still I have not found out: what happened to it?”

“Quite right,” said the princess, with a faint flush at the realization of how her faithful subject was being kept on tenterhooks. “Why, it’s been sent to be part of the equipment at the Charmed Garden of Oz!”

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

<<1952; forward to October >>

The day was overcast. Perhaps that was as it should be. As the umbrellanauts ascended into the wind-still sky they passed into a cloud layer and then beyond it and so never saw where they crossed from the 'real' world into the realer one. They only knew that when they came down out of the clouds again the land below was magical.

That was obvious. They were sailing low over a stand of indus-trees that were puffing away and turning out an endless conveyor-beltful of thimbles, tacks, belt buckles, tea cosies, door-knobs, roller skates, fishing lures, and spatulas. The voyagers needed none of those and passed on.

It was the Magic Umbrella that did the passing, of course. It knew that Princess Reeda of Umbrella Island was not there. It flew forward with its clinging passengers until at last it settled down before the door of a shed attached to a farmhouse, a door above whose lintel was the simple inscription (in lavender wooden letters on a pale green background): "Seventh Heaven". There the broolly quietly contracted itself and waited.

Speedy, Sples, and Omby Amby were surprised.

Since nobody knew where the lost Princess Reeda was to be

found they ought not to have been surprised to find out where in fact she *was* to be found. But somehow they had not expected it to be in a farmyard.

Speedy had to press his hand over his heart to smother its poundings. He untied himself from his wooden seat and stood up, walked to the Dutch door of what was really no more than shanty, and looked inside. The door's upper half stood wide open.

"Gureeda?" he spoke softly. "Princess Gureeda?"

In the shadowy interior a figure moved, approached, and his own face looked into Speedy's.

He of course was not wearing braids nor was he forty years ahead of his time in sporting ear-bobs. That was the only difference though. Well, and the fact that his 'other face' clearly never needed shaving.

Both people were gaping foolishly, the woman figure perhaps most. She had not expected a caller during that hour of her morning hut-cleaning, let alone one who appeared to be her double. William Rapidan was more prepared but he too had expected something different: a forlorn princess in vile durance, not a housemaid in a vile shed.

"Princess Gureeda?... of Umbrella Island?" he got out again at last.

"You mean me?" said the woman in a voice that echoed faintly of tones once familiar and dear. "I'm not a princess. I'm just Fanciulla, farmer's wife and former maid of all work. Good morning, sir!"

"Ohh!" Speedy groaned. "'Wife'?! I'm too late! Of course that chance should have occurred to me. Idiot that I am... But I just figured—"

To the man's astonishment, the housewife was blushing to her hairline. In a moment came the stammering and embarrassed explanation. "That is, we are to BE married. But just at present, well, I have to admit it's 'farmer's fiancée At least... I hope to be that."

The situation was as painful as possible. Everybody had

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explaining to do and suddenly nobody wanted to do any. The newcomers wished themselves miles away (but in fact were careful not to articulate any such desire to their umbrella).

By now Fanciulla and Sples Smith had recognized each other. Far from clarifying anything, that made the two more mystified yet. The woman saw no real reason why she should explain to virtual strangers, yet at the same time she somehow felt she ought to. To anybody, in fact, who appeared to question her status.

After an agonized moment, "We'd better explain," muttered Speedy.

"Yea, I think we should," said the farm-wife, assuming a little shred of dignity. She opened the lower half of the double door and came out with a broom in her hand. "I mustn't invite you in. It's too simple for visitors. To be honest, it's too sordid."

"'Sordid'?" Speedy kept finding cause to groan. "Oh, Reeda, have I really come too late?"

"I don't understand you, sir." Fanciulla took a seat on a flat-topped tree stump and indicated for a place for the others the shafts of a parked manure cart. Startled, Sples and Wantowin Battles

sat down without speaking. Speedy stood.

He told his name and those of his companions, not yet fully grasping the fact of the prior acquaintance of Smith and the woman. "And though you seem not to know it, madam, your own name is Reeda and you are the hereditary princess of an aerial island kingdom. It may seem to you marvelous but we were brought here by an instrument that was directed to find that princess and no other, and it cannot make a mistake.

"Besides, I recognize you myself, and I can see that you recognize yourself—in me."

"Yes," said the farm woman. "We are very like. But it is all a mystery to me. I have never seen you before."

"You have, though you may not know it. Tell me, please, have you ever suffered a loss of memory? Specifically, can you remember your childhood?"

Fanciulla went pale. The truth was that she had never been able to remember farther back than the day she found herself jouncing in a rustic wagon along the road to the castle of the purple dragon, where she was put in service. She confessed the failing now, and with awe.

"Now we're getting somewhere," said Speedy with a certain exultation. "You must see, surely, that you were—probably still are—under some kind of enchantment? if not suffering from amnesia. There must be someone who knows about you, about your—er, condition...?"

"No, no one," stated Fanciulla/Reeda definitely. "I am—I must be—an orphan. Who could know anything about me?"

"The people who put you in that wagon that you say is your earliest memory. Who were they?"

"Guardsmen from the dragon castle," stammered the woman, "—I suppose. But they were hirelings, and long since gone from there, I think—yes, I'm sure."

"Hirelings of whom?" demanded the American.

"Why—er, the powerful witch Jrumm, I think. We—the serving staff at the castle—always regarded her as the chatelaine, in absentia, of the so-called castle of the Purple Dragon. There were no dragons there in those days."

"Then we must find this Jrumm! and get an explanation," declared Rapidan. He could hear the soldier with the green whiskers groaning in the background. He turned to his comrade and said, "That wouldn't be—?!"

"Yes, it would!" moaned the general and fell off the dung cart in his extremity.

Sples Smith took him up tenderly and addressed a question to the young farm woman.: "Where is Jrumm, Fanciulla?" He was old acquaintances both with this girl and the witch in question, had partaken of their company as recent as two months past. Now he took quiet control of affairs. He smiled encouragingly and said, "We parted suddenly, I'm afraid. I'm glad to see you again." But he left a great deal unsaid. "We must find Jrumm. Do you know where she is?"

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"No. But Y.M. would know—I think."

"Where is Y.M., my dear?"

"With his wife—with the Princess—at the Palace on the Park. He goes there often. He's trying to arrange about the divorce—so we can be married, you see."

"Yes. Then we must go there. Can you go with us?"

"Well—er, yes, of course! There's nothing to keep me." Fanciulla laid aside her broom.

"Is it far?"

"Oh, no, not at all. Just across the fields—and the park. A moment: I'll just take my shawl."

The farmgirl stepped inside her doorway and plucked the indicated garment from a hook. She paused. From the window sill she caught up a copy of *Gay Bravery* (that neglected masterpiece), to have with her, just in case. Then she left the rustic but forever.