

THE WOZY OF OZ

The Oz Book for 1954
By March Laumer

Founded on and Continuing
the Stories by March Laumer



1999



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This book
is
Dedicated
to
Mr. WALLY HUBBARD

Gentleman
and
Scholar

C H A P T E R

O N E

Kwik, cwich, kuick, quick. That's the sound the Woolzy's leg-bottoms (you couldn't really call them 'paws' or scarcely 'feet') made on the green marble tessellations of a hallway in the Palace of Magic, Emerald City, Oz. It was pretty early in the morning and the Woolze was on his way to the Informal Reception Chamber of Her Majesty, the Queen of Oz.

Leg bottoms. Yes, you see, the stumps the Woolzy walks on are just the seemingly sawed-off ends of the square post-like limbs that are his legs. He's got nothing like toes or claws. Lucky he also doesn't have fleas! He's got a tongue; well, he could scarcely talk without that, could he? But he doesn't seem to get any satisfaction, the way a cat does, out of licking his leg-ends. There's nothing there to get intimate with or groom or lubricate. Just four leathery square surfaces.

However, he wasn't thinking about his leg-ends as he woozed along. 'To woolzy' is, of four-footed creatures, to proceed with the two left limbs moving forward at once, then the two right, and so on, which produces the lurching gait so typical of a woolzy. It was the only way he knew how to move and so it didn't bother him, despite the ungainly 'bumpy' appearance, any more than it bothers a bird to jerk its head at every step it takes, though it looks to us as if it would give it a permanent head- or neck-ache.

The Woozy was going to see how his Sovereign was getting along since her historic act of the night before. He didn't know what to expect but he had half an idea that something so epoch-making might quite early produce some effect able to be noticed generally. So far *he* hadn't noticed anything except, perhaps, that it was seemed unusually quiet in the marble halls.

"Sawks," he'd said to his stable-mate Lignum (but nobody ever used his formal name), "I'm going to go see how our ruler is taking it. Wanna come along?"

"It's all right for *you*," replied the Sawhorse hard-bittenly (he affected a rather hard-bitten manner). "You're well accepted, trotting about the palace rooms. But what about me? I'm associated in the public mind with that damn Red Wagon. Ergo, I'm a draft animal, in most people's conception, and draft animals stay out in the garage among the carriages and harness and scalawagons and aren't welcomed indoors." (This was a phenomenally long speech for the Sawhorse—but his grievance had heaped itself up.)

"I believe it's all in your mind," said the Woozy for the somanieth time. "I'm sure if you went in to dinner and sat on Princess Ozma's right hand, she'd just think it was neat."

"So you've said," acknowledged the Sawhorse disgruntledly. "Never mind. I'll risk its not being all right and stay here. You go ahead."

So the Woozy went. He woozed along jauntily and came to the modest morning-room they officially designated the Informal Reception Chamber and faced it open.

I'd have said 'nosed' but the unusual Woozy hasn't got any protruding nose. Just a flat square face with no projections. In now opening the I.R.C.'s door (which luckily was ajar) he just pressed the straight leathery side angle of his face against the door edge and gave a tug. It fell silently open.

Egbert lolloped in. You didn't know the Woozy's name was Egbert, did you? He didn't either, for a very long time. Then one day it came to him, as in a dream. He only revealed the nomenclature to a few most intimate friends and then it was only used

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in cases of emergency — not as here.

He lolloped to the chair that served as throne but there was no one or nothing there. (Wherever the Queen customarily seated herself was designated a ‘throne’, however modest the meuble might be.) Actually it wasn’t likely that there would be anyone on a throne at six o’clock in the morning. Yet the Woozy hesitated about going to Princess Ozma’s actual bedroom. He wasn’t *that* free of the palace. But he did go up and flop down outside the sleeping-chamber door and he lay there gruzzing for quite a long time.

He woke with a start at eight o’clock. He heard a palace clock chiming somewhere. Where *was* everybody? This was most peculiar. Ozma’s personal maid Jellia Jamb should have been along ages ago to get her mistress ready for the day.

The Wooze scrambled to his ‘feet’ and trotted off along the corridor, came to the servants’ stairway, and mounted to the top floor of the Palace of Magic where he knew Jellia had her room. Funny how royal, or even middle-class, households in earlier times always consigned their attendants to quarters with the most imposing views out over the surroundings.

The Woozy had been in Jel’s room — what? say, twice in his life, but he remembered quite clearly what it looked like inside. That was just as well, because he wasn’t going to get a look inside this time. He clumped against the door and waited. Presently he clumped again and called in his squeaky voice, “Jellia Jamb! Are you there?”

Answer came there none. When Egbert got tired of standing there with his tongue hanging out he clattered downstairs again, where at last, in the big central hall, he ran into somebody. It was General Wantowin G. (Omby Amby) Battles, himself looking a bit anxious.

“General!” squeaked the Woozy. “I’m glad to see you. I’m glad to see anybody. Where are they all?”

“That’s what I was beginning to wonder,” confessed the Soldier with the Green Whiskers. “I was just coming on duty — and so far I haven’t come across a soul. Where could they have

got to? There ought to be maids and footmen running about delivering breakfasts in bed — or, by now, collecting the remains.”

“But they aren’t, are they?” constated the Woozy. “I’ve just been at Jellia’s room. She’s not doing anything either — at least, that you can hear.. *nor* the dear Queen.”

“Gosh,” marveled the soldier. “Those two are always the earliest-stirring of anybody. Maybe we ought to go check again...?”

“Sure.” The Woozy was always amenable to friendly suggestions.

Back up on top in the palace Omby didn’t diffidently wait outside as the Woozy had done but rapped peremptorily on the palacemaids’ door, called her name, then tried the (unlocked) door. It opened without a squeak.

Then the Soldier and the Woozy did get a surprise. Jellia Jamb had crystalized!

She wasn’t jammed behind the door this time nor preserved in an attitude of horror.[§] She was in bed, seemingly suffering no pain, but undoubtedly, to look at her, considerably dismayed.

But she was all turned to sugar just the same.

§ See *The Vegetable Man of Oz*. (Editor’s note)

C H A P T E R

T W O

“Good heavens!” Gayelette the gorgeous raised her head with a jerk. It was one:thirty in the morning and at that hour she shouldn’t have felt what she had just felt. She peered hard, but couldn’t see anything. There was no moon, and besides they were reposing, for modesty’s sake, well in under broad mud-lily leaves. She felt again, almost afraid.

Yes! No doubt about it. Hair!

Now frogs do not have hair. Maybe baby dolphins do: a bit about the muzzle, vestigially and phylogenetically, but frogs never.

“Fritz! wake up!” cried the great mauve frog almost distractingly, without daring to feel further.

“Mmmh,” murmured her companion. “Hunh! What is it?”

Horrors: that wasn’t the resonant bass voice of Fred (Fritz) Fruakx, the Frogman, as she knew it. The voice was if anything a lightish tenor. But it *was* familiar.

“Fritz!” panicked Gayelette, “what’s happened to you?! Oh, I can’t see a thing. If only there was a bit of light..!”

“Well, take the flashlight,” proposed Fritz reasonably, if sleepily. (It *was* Fritz Frogman, after all, no matter how much hair had got into the act.)

§ See *The Frogman of Oz*. Editor’s note.

His mate obeyed, and in just a moment the violet ray played over the (partially) curly head of a not bad-looking blond man looking to be somewhere in his early forties.

Abruptly, Gayelette dropped the torch, which continued to shine over a portion of her own gorgeous frogly form. She raised her flipper foot-hands and pressed them to her face and eyes in approved Victorian stage manner. "You have switched to your human mode," she informed her husband tersely.

"Have I indeed?!" exclaimed Fred, now fully awake and startled. He put his hands (yes, hands, not even somewhat flipper-like) to his head. "Great groaks!" he cried. "Curls." Then, "Even a moustache yet!" (Can someone decide to grow—or *not* to grow—a moustache while in a state of enchantment-abeyance?!)

"Exactly." Gayelette recovered quickly. "Just like that other time. You remember!" It was a statement, almost a command, not a question.

"Indeed," agreed her mate. "It was unforgettable—even if so brief..." §

"Long enough for *me* not ever to forget it," concurred the frogess, now almost smiling in reminiscence, "though we did put a stop to it pretty fast."

"Yes, after a day or two. First we had to consider all the pros and cons."

Now over her first fright and realizing they were faced merely with a problem in logistics, not a tragedy, Gayelette relaxed, and recalled. "I've wondered sometimes if readers of your book—"

"Our book, love," corrected the (once and hopably future) frogman.

"Our', then... if they fully caught on to what happened right there at the end—"

"It was the apotheosis of our devotion to each other," cried Fritz fervently. "Each of us, you and I, so very fond, arranged with each his enchantress that upon the signal of a loving kiss we, each of us, would take the native form of the other. How they all laughed! and what egg we had on our faces. But it

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showed there was no doubt about the genuineness of our love: each ready and willing to give up the native form in order to be united with the other in his/her own form.!" The still-devoted swain sighed.

"I think we made the right decision in the end, don't you?" ventured Gayelette. "As a human I had lost both my principal-ity and my beloved former husband. What was there left for me in that gestalt?"

"Indeed, my dear. And, after all, you had had forty years of experience of being a frog, while I was totally new to human guise and would have had to learn from scratch, just like an infant. A bore for you."

"Though one I'd cheerfully have put up with. But why bother? We both knew the joys of froghood and could share it forever. A word to those 'enchantresses', Ozma and Glinda, and one more kiss solved the dilemma. Your unwonted and unwanted manhood was resolved back into frogitude."

"Only now! Something's gone terribly wrong," reminded Fred.

"Yes! What could have happened? do you suppose," marveled the frog wife.

"In the middle of the night too, right while we were squatting here at home, asleep, and harming nobody."

"Let's put on our thinking caps," proposed Gayelette. She was as wise a frog as she had been a woman, and Fritz was no dumbie. Thinking might actually do some good. "For one thing," pursued the female, "I don't think any wandering conjuror has suddenly turned up here in the middle of the night, casting spells at random... Anyway, spell-casting is illegal—"

"No, there's where you're wrong," countered her mate, but gave her a kiss. The Frogman hopped, you see, the mile's distance each day to the Ranidian Reading Room to spend a leisurely hour or two among the books and papers. He kept himself au courant with events both in and out of Oz. "The ban on magic-working in Oz," he went on, "was officially lifted at midnight by her majesty Queen Ozma. But it *doesn't* seem very

likely that some magician would come rushing, first shot out of the gun, to the Purple Pond to cast a spell on me. I have no enemies."

"Till Orangespiegel?" suggested Gayelette. "Till and I were mildly rivals once, never outright enemies. Besides, he could hardly have got from the diametrically opposite end of Oz in Unnikegwick this soon to work a spell."

"You know well," countered Gayelette, "that one doesn't have to be on the spot to work an enchantment. A potent spell can be worked across half a world from the enchanter."[§]

"Gosh, yes, too true," admitted the un-frogged man. "So somebody's spellbound me from afar? But who?, why?"

"Your guess is as good as mine," stated his wife ruefully.

"I don't *have* any guesses. Have no idea even where to begin to try to find out, or even more to the point: what to do about it. But... I don't want to be a human!" (You could scarcely blame him for that, seeing what a world we homo sapiens have made.)

"The only thing I can think of is to go to Queen Ozma and see if she can explain what gives," suggested Gayelette.

"A trip to the Emerald City." Fred Fruakx mused. "It's true: we haven't been there in a while. So the journey would not be out of place in any case. But what about the children?"

"Oh, I wouldn't go," declared his spouse. "So I'll be here to look out for them."

"Wouldn't go? I don't want to make the trip without you," protested Fred.

"Look at it this way, love;" returned the wife, "we'd scarcely be 'together' in any case: I leaping, you walking. I'd be a drag on you—or vice versa. He travels fastest who travels alone."

They talked about it 'til daylight. Then the ex-Frogman did set off on his own. He took a fond farewell of his life's companion where she squatted by the pool, within reach of Fawgy, Fwoggie, Froggy, and Adolph, as the current brood were known—at least during their babyhood. The tadpoles were *just* beginning to sprout legs.

§ See *Beenie in Oz* for a later example. (Editor's note)

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One kiss and then... one kiss. No magical (re)transformation took place. Then Fred Fritz started out—in the wrong direction.

C H A P T E R

T H R E E

In another part of Oz, not many miles distant, further consternation was being felt. The little county of Gillequin, population forty, give or take a few, was just across one range of hills to the east of the Purple Pond. There it was not until breakfast time that the noble family became aware that things were not as they were wont to be.

It was Sunday and on that day of the week another couple, as contented as the Fruakxes, were accustomed to be served breakfast in bed. As yet, however, they were still in Dreamland. Thence they were abruptly fetched by the roaring of a dragon.

Man and wife sat up in bed with a start. There were no dragons in Gillequin! How could one roar close by? Nay, by the sound of it, within the very chateau itself. They looked at each other in amazement. On one face, however, the look changed instantly to one of horror.

“My dearest!” gasped *Sieur Robert*, Count of Gillequin, “what has happened to you!!?”

“Darling..?” stammered the *Lady Orin-Diane*. “‘‘Happened’?..” Her glance fell from her husband’s contorted face to her own arms and hands. In a trice she knew the worst. The shock broke her down. Into her rubber hands she wept rubber tears—or whatever effluvium living rubber gives off.

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Sieur Robert was moved, but remained horrified. He did not undertake to hold the sobbing woman in his arms. "What's... happened?" he still wanted to know.

Countess (Tattypoo Orin) Diane was of half fairy blood and an eminently skilled witch in her own right. She was also brilliantly intelligent. She knew in an instant that she had somehow contrived to take on again the shape of one of her previous transmogrifications, though in what manner this had taken place was all unknown to her.

She thought fast while Sieur Robert waited for an answer. "Darling," she named him again in a moment, without considering to what extent a good-looking and *proud* youngish man would care to be so termed by a middle-aged-looking and decidedly plain, grey-green, rubber woman.

The countess looked a plea and spoke again: "Perhaps I have not been utterly candid with you always, Robert. You knew me as a lady novelist, you know me—by now—as an ex-queen of the Ozure Isles—"

"Yes!" concurred the man, impatient to know facts of more substance.

"But there have been other phases in my life. Forgive me! I haven't spoken of things you might not like to hear. You must know that I once suffered an enchantment—" Here Diane was still not being one hundred per cent candid; she should have said 'enchantments'.) "For a space of years I lived as a woman made out of rubber..."

"Ugh!"; the count could not keep from choking. Indeed, the room was filled—had been for how long?—with a reek of Firestone or Dunlop, heavy-duty.

"Oh, my dearest! I'm as horrified as you are! I don't *know* what's happened, or *how* it happened..."

Further the discussion was not allowed to proceed, for the dragon roars had not ceased. Far from it. They were getting louder, getting nearer, and now there could also be heard a clacking and scratching upon parquet flooring. There came a frantic thumping on the bedroom door. No one had a moment to say

yea or nay, 'come' or 'stay', before the door handle was grasped and the violet-and-silver panel pulled ajar. A terrifying red-and-silver dragon crouched on the threshold.

"Agnes!" shrieked the despairing countess. She flung herself from the bed and across and upon the creature, whose roars now sounded much more like sobs. "Do you realize what's happened?!"

Dragon Agnes was not slow on the uptake. "My dear mistress! Seeing you, I can understand that we have reverted to former incarnations," the dragon blurted. "But... but how?!" She blubbered and was still.

When the two females had succeeded in shushing the expostulations of the furious and bewildered count, the family still foregathered at breakfast, though in the breakfast nook, not in bed. Nor did the rubber form of the countess essay to swallow anything. (The handmaid Agnes had consumed the kitchen fire rather than cooking over it.)

The rubber lady explained as best she could: "My Robert," she stated, "to spare your sensibilities I in past time elided mention of certain chapters in my history. Now that this awful blow has struck you had best know all. That way at least you may go free of future shocks through lack of information.

"Not only was I for a time a rubber woman, I also spent six or eight months as an amethyst gem and a couple of decades as a little old witch. There! Now you know the worst. Deal with me as you will."

Well! Such news might go far to upset anyone and, more than most, a gentleman who had trained himself to be a connoisseur, a dilettante of certain arts, almost-an-exquisite. And yet his heart was basically kind and his love for his wife has been passionate for decades—and up to an hour ago.

"I don't think I want to know details," he spoke solemnly. "The question is: what do we do about it? That is, if there is anything can be done about it. A witch, you say? Can *you* undo what surely must be some sort of spell?"

"Actually, you know, I think I might," admitted the count-

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ess. "I was considered an accomplished adept in my day."

"Well then, make haste," urged the man. "I have a feeling I'm not going to be able, with the proper *savoir faire*, to cope with rubber ladies and fire-breathing dragons."

"Alas, no," agreed his wife. "We remember well, do we not, Agnes?, our first meeting with my lord."^s

That was back in 1930 and *Sieur Robert* had *not* shone on that occasion. He too recalled being down and almost out under the claws of *Ag the Drag*. He did not wish to go on being reminded of it. Therefore he urged again: "Undo this dreadful spell, love... if you can, I mean."

"As I say" — *Lady Diane* was thoughtful — "I might bring it off. However, the parameters of this present enchantment are all unknown to me. It may not be a simple matter of erasing a spell. There may be more to it. What if I 'disrubbered' myself — and disendragoned *Agnes* here — only to find that we had become, for example, non-existent?"

"All powers forbend!" cried *Robert* distractedly — and *medievally*. But after a pause he still wondered, "What *will* you do then? Frankly, my *Diane*, I can't face... things as they are."

The countess, who had perhaps looked for more unquestioning devotion in whatever disasters might sometime strike her marriage, spoke with some pique. "We're not quite 'things' yet, are we, *Agnes*? But if you can't face me, darling, I must go away, must I not?"

Agnes looked on, heart-broken. The count didn't look merry but his look was not simply sad, it was also vexed. "Go away? Where to?" he asked with a frown.

"Oh, I would think it was obvious," said his wife. "Where but to my sister, and sister-witch, *Glinda the Good*, there to take counsel with — and advice from — the great *Sorceress of the South*. If anybody can offer an explanation of the occurred, it will be she."

"I see," murmured the count. "And will your — attendant go with you?"

^s See *The Good Witch of Oz*. Editor's note)

There was instant notice taken by all that Sieur Robert did not speak of his own setting out.

“I’m sure she’ll want to,” vouchsafed his lady coolly.



But, you know?: after his assiduous course of study and many years of daily practice, the Sieur Robert of Gillequin did know how to behave. Three hours after Diane and Agnes had left the chateau, the count himself, accompanied by one faithful retainer, set forth, mounted, to guard his lady from a distance while she quested.

He just didn’t want to have to look at her.

C H A P T E R

F O U R

Doctor Pipt waited for the clock to strike twelve. There was a great day coming, mañana, and he didn't want to miss a minute of it. For decades he had campaigned for that which was now about to take place. Indeed, his house in the blue Munchkin woods was perhaps more than any other locality the center of agitation and propaganda for the revocation of the national laws forbidding the practice of magic.

Certainly no one in Oz worked harder than the crooked magician at speaking, writing, broadcasting (yes, radio had gained a foothold even in Oz by this date) in support of the hoped-for new law-giving. In anticipation of the day, the doctor had striven for forty years to make his home the state-of-the-art laboratory for professional thaumaturgy that would be needed, ready, and waiting to go into production in high gear the moment the ban was lifted.

"House"?, "home"?. Actually it was a whole little town that now spread through the surrounding forest and fields of his native place. Dr. Pipt had gone so far as to designate the community a "city." And what was this 'city' called? It was "Magicia" and all the people in it were, by definition, "Magicians".

There, in modest huts and lean-tos, all the malcontent would-be wonder-workers of the land of Oz (some even from abroad)

had gathered for misery-sharing company the while they all were unemployed anyway, and yet always in hopes that one day they would be vindicated. If they might not work magic, at least they could talk about it twenty-four hours a day. Nor was there any law saying they could not rehearse their spells and review their old magic formulae, just as long as they didn't invoke any of them.

Pretend 'magic' was permissible, of course, so persons, even animals, who in former better times had been great conjurors now also became adept stage magicians. They could pull rabbits from hats, make silken scarves disappear, and saw ladies in half with the best of them, and they spent much of their time doing so.

Not Dr. Pipt. He didn't necessarily stir cauldrons night and day with all four extremities^s but he did spend every waking hour in study of the old texts. His 'disciples', as they arrived from all parts of Oz, brought with them their learned books, over which the doctor fell voluptuously, finding indeed that many of the writings were new to him. Combining what he knew already with the fresh lore the volumes contained, he perfected—in theory—an incredible battery of new transformations, enchantments, and incantations guaranteed, if—no, *when!*—permitted, to be wholly efficacious.

Examples of the last-named (it's hard to put down on paper the physical gymnastics required to enchant and transform, but the *words* can be recorded) ran as follows:

If human (sort of) agents fail

Let four-foot friends try to prevail.

The incantations were sometimes a bit cryptic, you see.

Another:

In cases where witches are out of commission

And sources of sorc'resses found to be few

And every girl fairy is being contrary

Empower the gents to see what they can do.

The good doctor, sometimes in a garden, beguiled by

§ See *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*. (Editor's note)

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patchouli, would compose egocentrically:

*All honor to brave Doctor Pipt
Who never yet, by terror gripped,
Not even if his clothes were ripped—
Or even if completely stripped!—
Has from a looming danger skipped.
When he by unkind fate was gypped
So when he walked he always tripped
And on him raindrops ever dripped—
With every aspiration clipped—
His intellect still never flipped.
He'll go undaunted to his crypt.
He can't do else. It's in the script!*

There was one spell wording that the self-satisfied savant had worked on for seven weeks, summoning every aptitude he had, while collating the knowledge contained in thirty-one thaumaturgical source-books. It was for him a test case. If there was any application of theoretical magic that, given a chance to function in reality, would work, it must be the one embodied, he fondly believed, in the following charm:

*Let all dechantments pass away
That have occurred in Ozma's day,
And let each one resume that state
That he (or she) was in of late.*

That was his favorite, he must say. But what?: it was all just theory and airy make-believe... so far. When—no, if—the performing of magic should again be allowed he might, however, one day try it out.

C H A P T E R

F I V E

King Vergrodius of the Green Mountain disappeared in the dark of the night. Queen Lorna couldn't find him anywhere—really she couldn't—even though he was right there in the bed with her.

It was her own fault, of course. She had once in her selfish mood turned him into a teeny-weeny frog. Later, she got her character totally done over and now for many years had been a really nice person. But the past could not be undone, and now, through not the least present failing of her own, it caught up with her.

That's the trouble with living, you see. We have to be so terribly careful, right from the day we are born, never to put a foot wrong, since any awful faux pas can never be undone. If you're a little boy named Stephen and fascinated by your own bodily wastes and smearing them on walls around the house: well, people may forgive but they can never forget, and your name, for them, is sullied for the rest of your life. Or say, you forget your travel poncho, leaving it in the trunk of a lift-giver's automobile, the loss will recur to you and you'll grieve for it as long as you live. If you forget your lines in the school play and stand there gaping while four hundred parents' and neighbors' eyes are fixed straight upon *you*, you won't ever live it down.

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With such chances of going dreadfully wrong lurking at every corner, it's no wonder no one dares to live.

That was Lorna's fix now. She sat there in the dark bed-chamber and shuddered. Grody hadn't gone to the toilet or the ice-box. He'd just gone. Since he had no magic at all—she knew it was magic.

The age-old grief came back to her. She felt around in the dark for a dope-stick (harmless; non-habit-forming; she'd never retreated to nasty tobacco, not once, since her husband had hauled her from the mire); she cowered on the chaise longue and 'horrored'.

What could she do? *She* knew nothing of spells, even though she had once been a tree sprite—supposed she still was, technically, for that matter. Nor was magic ever spoken of, let alone dabbled in, at the law-abiding court of Vergrodius the Fourth.

Magic there must needs be, however, or at least advice from somebody who knew about magic. But such were not thick on the ground. Who could she turn to to try to get help? Let's see. There was Glinda, that Good Witch of the South people had talked of a lot in the old days. But goodness, the Ruby City was far away, and she, lone Lorna, to try to make her way there all on her own? (There wasn't even any intimate court friend she wanted to be reminded, per happenstance, of how greedy and cruel she had once been.

The forlorn Queen waited just 'til faintest daybreak when she was able to see (without drawing attention by lit lamps) to gather up a few things she mustn't leave home without.

First she took a small (lady's model) rucksack from the closet. It was always ready to hand, for she and Vergrodius loved the outdoors: she trees and he mountains—or at least *a* mountain—and they would hike together, just the two of them, most weekends. She flung it, in the half-light, on the unmade bed, spread open the top, and returned to the closet.

From the shelf she reached down a wide-awake hat and veil and from a drawer a pullover. It was early spring and you didn't know how chilly it might be. She might very well be benighted

before she got to her destination, although it was only round the other side of the mountain and down the long slope, then there you were almost in the suburbs. From the wardrobe came a linen duster and a serviceable, no-nonsense canvas walking skirt.

Cosmetics? Who was she going to try to impress? At home with Grody she hadn't often bothered to try to tart herself up. Let's face it: she'd lost her looks that time the molten gold had seared her to the core.[§]

She packed her complete vanity case. And that reminded her. Impatiently she snatched from her head the silk scarf she always wore to bed. (Too dreadful, she knew, to reach out in amorous mood—and touch your partner's bald scalp. From the wig-stand she took the oak-colored page-boy model her husband preferred and tucked it snugly in place.

She was ready now, she supposed. In stout boots she tiptoed down the service stairway and out the back exit. If anyone saw her go, at least no alarm was raised.

§ See *Uncle Henry & Aunt Em in Oz*. (Editor's note)

C H A P T E R

S I X

Disaster struck also in Seebania. Seebania is an immense but little known tract of wild forest land bounded on the north by the Munchkin River and on the south by the Quadling country. Here, within the borders of their own kingdom, two 'brothers' ruled contentedly and peacefully. 'Brothers'? you may ask, and, having read *Uncle Henry & Aunt Em in Oz* and *Ojo of Oz*, you do well to be confused. I'd better explain.

Disaster had struck once before in Seebania. You'd have to read a further two books, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* and *A China Dog in Oz*, to know all about it, but the gist is as follows.

The King of Seebania had a brother. They were very close. They exercised an almost dual kingship, deferring to each other in virtually all matters of statecraft. But the older sibling *was* the king and brother Stephen his co-regent by courtesy.

That arrangement was all blown away when the wicked magician Mooj made his appearance. The king was disposed of so definitively that to this day his whereabouts have, alas, not been discovered.[§] The co-prince somehow managed to escape, carrying the brother's grandson in his arms.

Memory was Prince Stephen's problem. His was poor, or, if not so from nature's hand, he rather nurtured the forgetfulness.

§ But see *Unk Nunkie of Oz*. (Editor's note)

As his royal great-nephew grew up in the middle of a Munchkin forest, his relative forgot to tell him what their true relation was. Ojo thought the man was his uncle, rather than a great-uncle. In time the old fellow himself grew dim about it. He even forgot to tell the boy his name. Can you imagine it? It was Ojo himself who invented the appellative 'Nunkie' out of the word 'uncle'.

In fact, this eliding of his own name was not strictly a memory lapse. It was willed, not inadvertent.

Finally, Unc Nunkie almost forgot how to talk. It's a wonder the young prince ever learned to do so.

This state of affairs continued until about 1913, when accidents thrust the two relatives upon the national stage for a season. The eventual upshot was that uncle and nephew were officially offered a home in the suburbs of the Emerald City. They spurned it—politely, of course. Ojo had been thrown in jail by good Queen Ozma, while his great-uncle was by fate jostled out of his customary mental doldrums and came to rebel at the role he'd been led over the years to adopt. He smartened himself up and even took a new name.

Stephen's fugue from memory he couldn't—or wouldn't—kick, however. We can excuse his not wanting to be known by the former, to him unsavory, name. He refashioned Ojo's nickname for him into "Nunculas P. Gennet".

But it was pure invention when he told the boy that he, Nunkie, was his father's brother and that they had been exiled by "witches". They went back home to the forest and the uncle bestirred himself to give the royal youth an education.

To kid Princess Ozma along, Uncle would once a year let his beard grow and he and great-nephew would go and stay in the house in suburbia. It was during one such sojourn that the events were set in train which led to the pair's restoral to their ancient rights in Seebania.

The missing link: the dashing bandit Ree A11a Bad, father to Ojo and putative 'brother' to Stephen, claimed the throne and all was back at square one again. It soon proved that the king was more successful as a charming rogue than as a ruler. He

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was away in the forest more than he was home. There he hunted and fished and lived the life of the great outdoors that he was meant for.

Hence, the restoration of the 'dual' kingship. Nunculas (as he persisted in calling himself) had, while teaching Ojo (using textbooks borrowed from their rustic neighbor Dr. Pipt), taught himself. Now he found he loved the protocol of the chancellery life. Though he had no yen for glory or power he did like handing down wise laws that kept the citizenry content and conformable.

And then, when he least expected it, Stephen/Nunc found himself—that is to say, others found him—turned into a stone statue.

C H A P T E R

S E V E N

Carter Green, the well known truck-garden entrepreneur, made a trip once a month to the Emerald City to collect garbage.

That sounds a bit raw, doesn't it? Let's call the garbage "compost", and there, by the magic of a word, you've turned something nasty into a thing that can be talked about in the genteelest drawing room. Same as with "p—" and 'urinate'. Or "f—" and 'sleep with'. (See? Some words are so unnameable we daren't spell them out.)

It's not in fact the thing itself but our attitude to it, as conveyed by certain words, that is censorable.

Compost then. The Emerald Citizens, already way back in 1954, had been trained by their wise and forward-seeing resident ruler (Princess Ozma; remember her?) to separate out kitchen waste and deposit all carefully segregated plant scraps (they hardly ate any animals in Oz) in descreet back-garden bins. These Green duly emptied once a month.

He usually set out the evening before and traveled through the night so as to start on his rounds in E.C. bright and early, be done by noon or shortly after, and ready to undertake the haul home to his yellow Winkie fields before dark. With him traveled his assistant, Whistlebreeches. This was in the days before

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the likely youth had gone on to glory as Chamberlain to King Scarecrow when he for a time ruled over the Munchkins.[§]

The two farmers would chat as they sat together on the seat of the lead wagon. Other hired hands drove the other three or four wagons of the train. Then as dark came on they would spell each other at the reins while one snoozed.

Oh, yes, Carter Green snoozed. The Vegetable Man of Oz? He didn't use to, or even be able to! But, you see, in the end Carter did choose to assume his natural, from-birth, human form* rather than stay in the gestalt of an overgrown walking vegetable. That way he could be a true companion or even (shall we say?) 'fiancé' to his dear friend Betsy Bobbin. (Betsy didn't get much kick, love him though she did, out of patting a head of lettuce.)

When Carter made his decision, the kind and capable trio of Adepts (Fairy Ozma, Wizard Oz, Sorceress Glinda) provided the vegetable man with the capacity of reverting to his vegetable form at will, for of course when tourists from the Great World visited Oz they wanted to see the familiar fantastic *Vegetable Man*, not some ordinary human hick with mud on his boots.

The two fellows drove on through the night. When it came Carter's turn at the reins he just let Whistlebreeches continue to sleep on till morning. Why disturb the boy's slumbers when, in Green's vegetable mode, he was tireless and 'unsleepable'? His only care was to stop and get down from the seat every hour or two lest he take root there.

But this morning they were running late; it ended up being drastically late. Carter was still driving when the dawn's earliest light revealed something shocking. Where the green towers of the capital should by now be clearly visible on the horizon all was still richest yellow around them, and getting yellower by the minute. But what really made the landman flip was that he could clearly see his own entrance gates coming up ahead of them. "Whoa!" he cried to the startled horses.

§ See *The Good Witch of Oz*.

* See *The Vegetable Man of Oz*. (Editor's notes)

"Whistlebreeches!" he jostled the boy awake. "Some'n pretty bad's happened. Look!"

Whisby took one look and twigged. "We're going east; there's the rising sun straight ahead. But we're going *toward* your gates, not away from them. Did you turn the wagons around in the night?"

"Course not. Ask the others." The drivers following had stopped, equally puzzled, and were climbing down to come confer.

"Anyway," said Green, "I'd have had to have turned them around *twice*, have passed the farm and be doubling back on it—in order to get it between us and the rising sun!"

"That's right," agreed Whistlebreeches.

"Gee, it's like back in the thirties, isn't it? I can just barely remember. All the directions were turned around—and the Winkies to be found in the east—"

"Gosh all hemlock!" swore Carter in bucolic fashion. "Do you think it could be that?"

"Be what?" Wisby was suddenly untwiggling.

"That somebody *has* re-reversed east and west in Oz: us Winkies now live in the east again..?"

"There's one way to find out," said the boy, now on the ball once more.

"What's that?" asked Green, and fell *off* the ball in his turn.

"Turn around and drive west and see if we fetch up at the Emerald City."

"Maybe you're right. We're clearly not getting nearer E.C. as we are. Grab the reins! Now that we're here I'll just run in and let Betsy know. She'll be feeding the chickens about now. Maybe she hasn't noticed -"

"Oh, she'll notice the chicken run's on the east side of the house now instead of the west. That is, if our theory's right. Maybe you could check, dad," suggested Whistlebreeches jocularly.

• • •

"It was," constated Carter Green solemnly. He took the reins

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and turned the wagon through his gates onto the west forty, where he led the train around in a big loop, out through the gate again, and onto the road west. "Hosses, make tracks!" he said.

The vegetable man's farm lay somewhat to the southwest, that is to say: the southeast, of the capital city. Where the road crossed the District of Oz border it joined a road coming up from the south (that compass point hadn't changed, at least). As the fast-rumbling wagon train reached this junction, Whistlebreeches hauled on the lines and brought the equipage to a stop. Carter Green, lying down in the back, sat up and looked around. "What's up?"

"That lady." Whisby pointed with the whip. "Shall we offer her a lift?"

"Of course." Carter clambered nimbly over the sideboard and hopped to the ground. Queen Lorna *was* getting a little winded. She'd been striding along womanfully for many hours now. She'd passed walkers on the road but this was the first vehicle going, seemingly, in her direction that she had come across. She put on a little burst of speed to meet it at the intersection.

She wasn't too much taken aback to see stepping toward her a fellow (she guessed it was a 'fellow') with a body like a huge overgrown potato or beetroot, with ears of corn, cypress knees, and feet of clay. She'd never met him but of course she'd heard of the famous Vegetable Man of Oz.

"Can I bum a lift with you?"

"The very thing I was going to propose."

Carter Green helped her up on the seat, motioned Whistlebreeches to jump in back, and himself took the reins. Away they rushed at high speed, still trying to catch up for lost time.

"I guess you've noticed?" Green made conversation.

"What's that?" Lorna would have liked to suck a dope-stick at this point but she was too taken up with holding on with both hands.

“We think the compass points have been reversed again. You know: the way they were in the old days.” Green’s eyes were sharp enough to know that the traveling lady should well be able to remember how things were in the early 1920s.

“Oh?” said Lorna. “No, I hadn’t realized... North still seems to be north.”

“That’s right. The world’s not turned upside down; it’s just gone back-to-front—we think. We’ll have to ask when we get to the Palace—”

“You’re heading for the Palace of Magic? Oh, that’s good. That’s just where I’m going. I have to report a disappearance.”

“Oh-h?” The monosyllable clearly asked for details.

“Yes.” Lorna fetched a sigh. “I’ve lost my husband. Really I have. I can’t find him anywhere; really I can’t.”

C H A P T E R

E I G H T

By ten o'clock an irate crowd had gathered outside the Palace grounds, held back by the high spiked fence and ornamental gates. The Emerald Citizens had not been slow to find that something was amiss. They'd all become lefthanded, for one thing, a few, right-

General Battles was there, reasoning with them through the bars. The Woozy backed him up. "We don't know *where* Princess Ozma is! We're much more worried about it than you are, I can assure you. Her bed was slept in but she never made an appearance this morning. A conference is being held at this very moment to decide what to do. Bulletins will be issued. Be patient—please!"

With that the soldier turned smartly on his heel and marched back to the palace. The Wooze lolloped after. "That conference—" he protested, blushing purple. Omby Amby didn't exactly blush but he looked uncomfortable.

The conference, if such it could be termed, consisted of the Sawhorse, who didn't say much, sitting with Jellia Jamb, who spoke not at all. The girl seemed shattered by her experience and the others deemed it best to leave the pieces where they were: in/on her bed. At least there they wouldn't get lost, until the great day when—surely?—the sweet girl would be restored

to her accustomed self, all in one piece.

Meanwhile, who was going to do her work?

Well, that would be the genial Woozy, mostly. While Omby Amby took it upon himself to tidy around on the ground floor, the Woozy grabbed a duster and did the bedrooms. Can a woozy make beds? Sure; if with his square foreleg-ends he can wash dishes (there's a picture of him doing it in *The Lost Princess of Oz*). I guess he can smoothe out sheets, pull up the counterpane, and plump out pillows okay.

He plied the duster, emptied the wastebaskets, and would have washed the dishes except that of course the kitchen staff had done that before closing down last night, and nobody had thought of eating anything this morning. Well, Egbert did take a spoon to the honey crock just for a minute, but that hardly counted.

That was how it happened that the Woozy was in the kitchen when Carter Green appeared at the back door. The vegetable man had his own key for approaching the dustbins by the service entrance but of course he never paid his monthly visit without coming in through the scullery and saying hello.

This time he had someone with him besides just his assistant Whistlebreeches and the other drivers. "I don't know," said Carter. "Did you ever meet Her Grace, the Queen of the Green Mountain?" he asked the Woozy. "May I present you to her?" Country Carter still knew the forms and ceremonies of royal protocol.

But Lorna was impatient with formality. She gave the Woozy her hand briefly and said, "Will you take me to see the Princess? I—we—have to consult her."

"Oh, gosh, I can't," stammered the embarrassed animal. "You see, she's—like—disappeared!"

"What!" ejaculated the wood nymph. "You mean you can't find her anywhere?.. Really you can't?"

"No, we can't. Not really." The Woozy paused. "But that's nothing—in comparison. We can't find Glinda the Good, the Wizard of Oz, Princesses Trot and Dorothy, Dorothy's aunt and

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uncle, Trot's Cap'n Bill, the Emperor Nick Chopper, the Scarecrow, the Patchwork Girl, the Yellow Knight and Prince Randy of Regalia or their respective spouses, the Elegant Elephant, the Courageous Lion, or the Hungry Tiger, either. *Or* Tik-Tok, the marvelous mechanical man." He paused again, to let that sink in.

"You mean they've all disappeared? Have they really?" The Vegetable Man had nicked up the locution. Katherine Hepburn, from whom it was borrowed, didn't mind—if she was ever told.

"What about Jenny Jump?" put in Whisby with sudden alarm. Jenny had always been a favorite of his and he knew she was staying at the Palace. "Is she lost too?"

"Yes, really she is," confirmed the Woozy. "In fact, all the guests who were here last night for the ceremony. Their beds haven't been slept in."

"What ceremony was that?" Green asked.

"Don't you know?: when the Edict against the working of magic in the land of Oz was revoked. It happened at midnight before the Royal Throne. Everybody drank a toast—in vintage ozade. At the same moment—so it was planned, anyway—jails all across the country were thrown open and all the prisoners, convicted of the practice of illegal necromancy, streamed out to the open air."

"Edifying," agreed the Wooze's hearers. "But what happened then? what happened after?"

"Well, Queen Ozma retired. She announced that she had to be the first, of course, to work a spell now that it was in good taste again to do so. For that she meant to be in her Private Closet, that is to say, her bedroom."

"And then?"

"I didn't wait around, myself, to see what happened next. I'd promised I'd get back to Sawks—Lignum—the Sawhorse, you know, in the stables, to let him know how the ceremony had gone off. When I left, the others were moving toward the Informal Reception Chamber—"

There was a clatter at the kitchen door and General Battles

in full military regalia strode in. He bristled with sabres, pikes, and rifles: clearly on full-alert in view of the threatening nature of the mob outside the grounds.

"Ah," said the Woozy while greetings were being exchanged, "the very man. General, you tidied up this morning in the I.R.C. Did you find any indications of what could have become of the noble party who, I understand, were last seen there?"

"They'd been playing chess," informed the soldier.

"Chess!?" everyone cried. "How inappropriate. Whyever would they have been playing games in the middle of the night?"

Omby Amby freed one arm to scratch his head. "It is a puzzler, isn't it? Maybe to pass the time?" he offered, "—while they waited..."

"Waited for what?" put in Whistlebreeches. "Why didn't they go to bed?"

"Search me," said the soldier, a little aggrieved. It was as if he were being made responsible for the awkwardly vanished guests. He'd been at home in his own bed at the time. "All I know is: the chess pieces were scattered all over the floor when I went in just now to straighten up. Somebody's obviously been interrupted in a game—"

"Strange," put in Carter Green thoughtfully. "Interrupted pretty drastically, I'd say: to all go off and leave the chessmen on the floor? It must have been some kind of emergency."

All of the little party could agree to that and they all looked pensive. Then the feckless Soldier with the Green Whiskers said, "Incidentally, how about a game? While we wait, you know. Do you play, your highness?" He turned to Queen Lorna.

"No," she murmured. "Not really."

But the vegetable man said, "Whisby'll give you a game. He's a whiz... As for myself, I've got to be heading back. Betsy will be worried. "The pick-up's all been loaded, Whistlebreeches?"

"All loaded."

C H A P T E R

N I N E

Dr. Pipt stood straight and tall. He was a good six feet, muscular, strapping—and handsome to boot. Let's see: whom did he look like? Kinda like Robert Redford—without the moles.

The doctor was aghast. This was horrible. Whatever in the world had happened?

He'd been standing at his dissection table, just about to bring to life a patchwork mouse[§]: merely a small experiment to see whether in fact the Revocation of the Edict of Chants had gone through as planned and magic-working was permissible again.

He was just about to sprinkle the vivifying powder and intone:

“Mousie, mousie, made of scraps:

You would like to live, perhaps?

Now's your chance. When I say 'Go!'

Thrill with life from head to toe.”

But he never said 'go'. Instead, he shot up a foot and his clothes began to burst at the seams.

The horrified magician sped to a looking-glass. Horrors! it was worse than he feared. Such beauty! He almost imagined that he could spy in the depths of the reflection agents waiting

§ See *The Patchwork Mouse* (though not 'of Oz'), Joseph Hixson, Garden City, 1976. (Editor's note)

to sign him to a movie contract. In fact he looked precisely as he had done at the end of *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* when Wizard Diggs, in collusion with the Fairy Ruler of Oz, had straightened out every limb of the Crooked Magician and made it perfect.

“How could it have happened?” Pipt shrieked—to himself. “I haven’t reinvoked any old spells yet. There’s dirty work involved somewhere.”

Frantically he began to hex in every direction. Alembics, retorts, Bunsen burners, Mason jars: everything the faintest bit magic-instrumental in his shop was brought into play, while a stream of chants, charms, formulae, and incantations flowed from his lips unbrokenly. Practically everything in the room came to life, including a Little Pink Bear and a Big Lavender one which O.Z. Diggs had once given him as a consolation prize.

Distractedly the magician wished everything back to lifelessness again. Oh, he let the Bears live.

It was no use. Nothing did any good. Try as he might, Pipt remained straight, tall, and handsome.

As a last resort he went to seek comfort from Margolotte, his wife. More horrors: she lay asleep like a marble statue. In fact, she *was* a marble statue. At that the wonder-worker knew the worst.

“I’m powerless,” he said to himself—or perhaps to the bears. “I’ve got to get help. It’s obvious ancient charms have been reinvoked. But not by me! How in Oz did it happen? and who’s responsible?”

Thus muttering, he went outdoors and made his way to the nearest hut. In *all* the huts and lean-tos lights were on. All the re-enfranchized Magicians (by adoption) were agog to see how the breaking of the magic-ban was going to work out, and to start pulling off magic tricks of their own.

The list of refugee wonder-workers in the village included Soob the Sorcerer, Magician Extraordinary Chinda (a former Grand Bozzywoz), Ugu the shoemaker (a dove again, just in the last few minutes), Krizzle-Kroo the bee wizard, the Wizard Wam (and family), Wumbo the Wonder Worker, and dozens of others

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drawn from every part of the fairy kingdom. And this comprised only those who had sworn on the altar of servitude never to practise magic again. All those who had not so sworn were expiating their crimes in jail.

In a central glade Pipt called a meeting. Luckily it was a balmy dry night in early April. In fact, it was proving an unseasonably mild season. The daffodils that came before the swallow dared had already taken the winds with beauty in *February*. It was germinating and sprouting and springing time with a vengeance.

"Friends!" shouted the straight one, standing on a tree stump though he was so tall that he scarcely needed it. "It's catastrophe! Something appears to have reactivated some ancient spells. At least, I was never straight nor my wife marble until we each came under a fell spell back in 1913, nor have we ever been so grossly transformed since, until now. I can only conclude that those earlier transformations have been reinstated—"

Half a dozen voices were raised in corroboration. The speakers had also noticed signs of old, deactivated enchantments being again in force. Some of the transformees were even able to speak for themselves.

"That's rights" called the Little Pink Bear, who had followed Dr. Pipt outside. "We used to be magically alive—" Here he indicated his sidekick, the Big Lavender Bear. "Then the Wizard of Oz—" He spat. "—cut off our juice. For our own protection, he said. It seemed we knew too much. As a result we didn't know anything—until tonight."

"Lordee," chimed in the lavender bear, "it's good to be alive again. But shall we wear these glories for a day?"

"I," said Dr. Pipt, "shall do nothing to curtail them. Still live they and forever let them last," he capped the quote.

But dreadful howls and roars at this point almost threatened to break up the meeting. "The Kalidahs!" yelled many. "They've come back to life!"

The doctor didn't lose his cool. "Stop!" he shouted. "No! The Kalidahs used to be alive *naturally*. Their enchantment was to be turned to stone. If old spells are in force again, they ought still

to be stone.”

Here he jumped from his stump, strode into the shrubbery, and kicked a stone image. “See?

“But in fact,” he continued, “I don’t quite see where the noise is coming from.”

“Your house,” stated the small pink bear nonchalantly and pointed across the clearing. Pipt had left the side door open on coming out and now all recognized that the racket was coming from there.

The puzzle was soon solved. At the lighted doorway appeared Victor Columbia Edison, the antiquated gramophone, now jitterbugging to break its neck—if it had one—to the accompaniment of heavy rock.

Pipt laughed in relief—while moving out of the line of advance of the approaching victrola. “That old thing! When its old ragtime record went out of fashion, it came home to us,” he recalled, “its handle hanging between its legs. I demagicified it, and for years it played old seventy-eights to general enjoyment. I remember Skinnay Ennis on *Got a Date with an Angel* and Joan Stafford singing *You Grow Sweeter as the Years Go By*. Oh, and then there was Doris with *It’s Magic*. That was always a favorite.

“But then Victor seemed to lose interest, if a non-living machine can be said to do so. So for Christmas Margolotte gave it a rock-and-roll record. This must be it.”

The Magicians didn’t like to break up the poor thing’s fun. After all, it was merely enjoying its refund magical capabilities, as they themselves were looking forward to doing.

They managed to shoo it off into the woods, and the meeting proceeded.

C H A P T E R

T E N

Actually he didn't travel fastest who traveled alone. The two parties of Gillikinland truth seekers seemed to make about the same mileage per hour. The two (more or less) human travelers set the pace and dragon Agnes tempered her fire-driven potential to her mistress' pace.

What the Manfrog did that contributed to his eventual speed toward his goal was to twig, later than the others, to the fact that he was going in the wrong direction. Signposts are perhaps a little thicker on the ground on the Gillikin plains than farther up in the border mountains where lies the County of Gillequin. But at least they are all purple. The first direction marker the traveling ladies took note of was purplish *blue*.

"Stop!" cried Lady Diane. (She wasn't calling herself 'Tattypoo' just because she was wearing Witch T's last-known physical integument.) "This can't be right. There's nothing blue in the land of the Gillikins except the sky overhead, and even that's a bit mauve at times."

"Has something transferred the Munchkins into the west?" posited the quick-reasoning Agnes. "Stranger transfer-mations have been known."

"You know, you're right," declared Diane, walking on again—but then stopping again. "We're both unaccountably back in

shapes we once occupied. We don't know how or why. Perhaps other entities are suffering a similar switchback. You do remember how Oz geography was reversed for a couple of decades. Maybe that's rehappened."

"Yes, ma'am, and that signpost did say 'Keretaria'. We know that's in Munckinland for sure."

"We'll take our 'soundings' from the sign," announced the countess. "If we walk *away* from Keretaria we'll be progressing *toward* witch Glinda's palace. Come on!"

The lady turned in her tracks and started walking back the way they'd come. Agnes meekly followed.

It wasn't long at all, of course before they ran up against the skulking mounted count. *He* hadn't been cagey enough on his own to spot the directions shift and thus was caught with his plans down.

"Robert!" cried Lady Diane. "What are you doing here?!" —like Kathie Lee, amazed to spot dopey Regis on a luxury cruise.

The Sieur de Gillequin had the presence of mind to blush—and then bluster. "You didn't really think I was going to let two unguarded females go off on a quest... unguarded, did you?"

"Oh, darling, you sweet thing," gushed the lady, touched. She ran to kiss the Count's knee, the highest part she could reach, where he sat horse-borne. "Well, no, I didn't—not really." (She seemed to have picked up the buzz-phrase at a distance. "But how lucky that Agnes and I got turned back. Now we can travel on together—"

"'Turned back'? Who dared?!" bristled the count.

"No, it's all right. We just happened to notice—we think—that everything's gone back-to-front. East is west and west is east and ever the twain shall meet. You know: like it was years ago. Didn't you notice you're left-handed?"

"I did," dared to insert Roland, the modest equerry.

"Well, I did too," claimed Sieur Robert. "I just thought I had a cramp in the right, so my sword rested more easily in my left hand."

There was no point now in the nobleman's trailing at a

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distance. He turned his steed—but remained mounted. In his seventeenth-century armor he had more need of the assist than the never tiring rubber woman. Nor would Diane even agree to take the young squire's horse-borne place. They proceeded southeast.

Nor was it long, of course, before they encountered the frogMan (or Manfrog?). They didn't know who he was, naturally. During the short period when Fred Fruakx had once earlier assumed human form, the ways of Fruakxes and Gillequins had not happened to cross. Now the quartet just saw a balding, blondish, slightly pop-eyed fellow, not too bad-looking, coming along looking rather preoccupied.

The man addressed them: "Your pardon, lord and ladies" (how did he know Agnes was a female?). "I wonder if I've lost my way. I'm sadly disoriented. I meant to be heading in the general direction of Uptown but I've just seen a fingerpost indicating that place is in the direction from which I've just come—"

"You're quite right," assured the lady Diane (as being clearly the best-informed of her group). "We've just come to the same conclusion. Points of the compass seem to have become reversed—for no easily assignable reason. What used to be west now appears to be east.

"But may we introduce ourselves?" Here the countess did the courtesies.

Fritz was delighted.

Who could fault him that he had failed to recognize his sometime acquaintances muffled up in armor or looking like an old witch—of rubber, yet!—? As for himself, he practised a light pleasantry. "Your graces: can you guess who I am?"

Well, no, they couldn't. Fred/Fritz at present looked like no one on earth—though not to say that he looked outlandish. When he told them, the clueless Count said, "But, being no longer the famous Frogman of Oz—to look at who *are* you? As a human, I mean."

"A mere nobody!" came back Fruakx smartly. "Nobody iden-

tifiable, that is to say.

“There was the same confusion among readers of the volume concerning me^s—” The man buffed his nails on his lapel modestly. “They wanted to know ‘Who did he turn into?’ Well, obviously not into anybody already known: That would be two persons within one skin: a clearly untenable situation.

“No. If a fairy tale relates: ‘The prince turned into, as it might be, a frog,’ we don’t ask ‘*which* frog?’ Simply, *a* frog.

“Similarly; I for the moment (I hope) am merely *a* man: not any particular one but one who never existed before, one without any previously known characteristics. Except, of course, that I can recall the entire life history of one Frederick Fruakx, esquire.”

The other party agreed that this all seemed quite logical.

Then the united five traveled on together. They related and compared their recent untoward experiences as they proceeded.

§ See *The Frogman of Oz*: final page. (Editor’s note)

C H A P T E R

E L E V E N

General Battles and young Whistlebreeches were having their game, as Queen Lorna and the Sawhorse looked on. The good Woozy was spelling Sawks on duty at Jellia's bedside. The poor girl mustn't be let think that she was abandoned. Though in a thousand pieces, she was still conscious in some fashion, they assumed.

"What amusing pieces," commented the queen, feeling possibly just the least bit bored as she watched the Soldier decide what move to make. She held in her fingers a little red figure of a page-boy. It was a pawn.

"Mmm," agreed Omby abstractedly. "I noticed that when I was tidying up. They're carved to resemble celebrities here at the Court. See the snood on my queen? It's meant to be Glinda the Good Sorceress—"

"Yeah," chimed in Whisby. "See my king? It's Emperor Nick, wearing a crown instead of an oil can. And notice this pawn. It's my dear Jenny Jump. I'm going to queen her." The boy seemed to entertain no doubts.

"Is your queen Princess Ozma?" Lorna wanted to know.

"No, it's Queen Hyacinth—of the Uplanders, you know. It's funny: Ozma doesn't seem to be represented. She's an obvious Queen, if anybody is."

“That’s the trouble,” put in General Omby sagely, looking up from his study of the board. “Ozma is the Queen of Queens. She’d have to come out winner in any game—and that would upset the odds.”

“Could be!” agreed the others and there was silence for a time as the game went one broken only by the dainty snores of the wood nymph in her deep armchair. Her long-drawn-out exercise of the morning had tired the adventuress.

It was about lunch-time when the Woozy came off duty and joined them. “I think Jellia’s asleep,” he reported. To the extent that a pile of rook candy may be said to be asleep—as I suppose he meant. “I was asleep myself. I dreamed of honey comb. Is it lunch time yet?”

The question alerted all to the fact that it had once been breakfast time and nothing had happened. By now they were going on for ravenous.

“But none of us cook!” constated the soldier with the green whiskers. That is to say: he himself could whip up a mean Tripes à la Gasconnade—and Whistlebreeches was an expert at popping corn. But neither of those dishes seemed indicated now. Would there likely be any tripe *in* Chef Etam Upp’s cold-room?

“I can cook—a little,” revealed Lorna. Sure, she had once—or more than once—prepared fried (or roasted) squirrels and no doubt many another dish, the time she lived on her own in the hollow oak.

That was all right then, and the group repaired to the palace kitchen.

Later, as the lunchers sat over their toothpicks (they had eaten Supreme of Aubergines and chitterlings, with apple pandowdy to follow), the Woozy said uneasily, “I think we ought to be *doing* something.”

“Like what, for instance?” asked Whisby, who had been doing some cogitations of his own but not come up with much of anything.

“Well, go on a quest... maybe.” Egbert wasn’t quite decided.

“To where? Looking for what?” put in Omby Amby.

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"Princess Ozma, of course! Though where exactly I couldn't say. Not really."

"That's because she disappeared right here," supplied Whistlebreeches. "There's no reason to think she might be in any other particular place more than another."

"Oh! I know!" exclaimed the Wooze. "Let's look at the Magic Picture!"

It's a wonder none of these brilliant thinkers had come up with that idea long ago.

In fact, one had. "I looked," stated Whisby. "At least, I looked for the picture. Didn't it hang in a special room all to itself?"

"That's right," the others confirmed.

"Well, it's not there now."

This was disturbing news. The party left the breakfast room abruptly and hurried to the Chamber of the Magic Picture on the floor above. A glance confirmed that the hall's walls' single hook hung empty.

"It's gone," said the Sawhorse. He never said much and when he did it was otiose.

This additional alarming discovery was at last enough to set the 'besieged' party in motion to "do something". First they considered going to the Shaggy Man's little telegraph office near the Council Chamber. There they would be able to send a message. Shaggy had once, in a leisure hour, shown the Soldier how to do dots and dashes. The only thing was: they couldn't decide whom to send a message *to*. They were in need, rather, of a message *from* someone: someone clever who could advise them.

That left, as options, just the tower of the Wizard of Oz to case, in case there might be anything to be found there to assist their case. None of the 'survivors' in the Palace of Magic had any magical know-how to invoke but they thought they might just come across a wishing wand or such, which anyone might use.

They didn't. They found the Wizard's magic soap bubble pipe and even the jar of iridescent bubble soap, and Whistlebreeches

and the Woozy had fun for half an hour blowing big bubbles around their companions. If they thought the bubbles might transport them somewhere they got a rude surprise. As one perspicacious reader had pointed out—or would, in the future, rather^s—bubbles made of (as stated) soap film couldn't lift any weight whatsoever without bursting. The homeward trip via bubble described in an early Oz chronicle* must have been illusion.

They turned out every cupboard (but replaced everything neatly) before quitting the room. There were instruments there that could have helped them but nobody knew how to use them. A dejected quintet returned to the I.R.C. and the two male humans to the chessboard.

Queen Lorna browsed in a copy of the *Gideon Oz Guide to Required Adventure Activities* she found on an end-table and had her fill of dopedsticks (butterscotch ones that filled a humidior. They weren't habit-forming but the insecure lady treated them as if they were).

The Woozy snoozed and the Sawhorse retreated to the stables, which, for him, were as fun a venue as the silent reception room. Jellia Jamb seemed forgotten.

All at once the wood nymph let out a little cry which woke the Woozy and caused Whistlebreeches to pause in castling his king. The woman sat up, placing her finger on a passage.

"It says here," she reported, to general attention: "'In any properly constituted Oz adventure, when the characters are faced by unconstruable problems or the most adverse outlooks, they don't just sit there. They *do* something—'"

"There," said the Woozy, now up on all fours—and justified. "Just what I've been saying: we ought to *do* something."

"That's right," confirmed Lorna. "It says right here: 'Most often this will take the form of a quest. The boy and girl—'"

"What boy and girl?" demanded Whisby, putting down his rook altogether.

§ See *A Farewell to Oz*.

• See *The Road to Oz*. (Editor's notes) 45/

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"I don't know," Lorna excused herself. "The ones having the adventure, I guess.

"You'd do for a boy but I could hardly pass as a 'girl'. But wait: it says here in the very beginning: 'Normally the protagonists of an Oz adventure will be a young girl and a young boy, old enough to be out without a nurse but too young to go to school—' and then there's a footnote. Let's see: 'At least Oz heroes are never mentioned as going to school'—"

"That's crazy," stated Whisby, turning from the board entirely. "Dorothy in book one," he reminded, "was on her own—well, she had Toto—until she started collecting secondary companions; and Tip, a boy, in the second book, likewise. In *Ozma of Oz*" (it was beginning to look like W.B. had read all the Oz books, and without going to school either) "Princess Ozma was sort of 'out in front' but the actual protagonist was Dorothy again, with, for companion, a yellow hen—who incidentally turned out to be the actual heroine of the tale..."

The soldier with the green whiskers got into the act. He'd read—or lived!—Oz history himself. "In *Dorothy and the Wizard*," he declared, "it was Dorothy and the Wizard: not exactly a girl and boy, you wouldn't say."

"No, I'd say 'old man'," said Lorna who had met O.Z. Diggs.

"Girl and old man again in *Road*," came back Whistlebreeches. "The Shaggy Man. But that's right: there was a boy in there too: Button Bright."

"In *The Emerald City of Oz* it was Dorothy and her aunt and uncle," recalled the Soldier.

"Same thing in *Uncle Henry and Aunt Em in Oz*," reminded Whisby, "only without Dorothy most of the time."

"In *The Careless Kangaroo of Oz* it was a careless kangaroo, for gosh' sakes—along with assorted other creatures."

"What about *Patchwork Girl* though?" cried Lorna vindicatedly. Even she had read an Oz book. "That was about a boy and a girl: a Patchwork Girl!"

"*China Dog in Oz* had animals for heroes," reminded the Woolzy. He remembered that adventure very well; he had played

a leading role in it. "About time too," he murmured sotto voce.

"About all you can say is that the Oz-story heroes are at any rate 'often' a male and a female," pontificated Gen. Battles. "In *Tik-Tok* it was Miss Betsy and a mechanical man—"

"And a mule, don't forget," put in the Wooze, still asserting the importance of animals.

"Yes," agreed the General. "Where *is* Hank these days?"

Whistlebreeches could answer that, of course. "He's still with Betsy, natch. On the farm. Mr. Green keeps him occupied when the west forty needs ploughing."

"Oh." Ombly digested that information. Then he went back to the game that had replaced their chess. "*The Scarecrow of Oz* had Trot and Cap'n Bill: female and male, you see."

"But *Rinkitink* just males."

"Cayke and Fred Fruakx," countered the Soldier, "in *Lost Princess of Oz*. Female and male."

"I wonder how the ol' Frogman is getting along," mused W.B.

Meanwhile he had stood up from the chess table and approached Lorna's chair. "May I look?" he asked politely.

The boy flipped to the copyright page. "Just what I thought," said he with an air of triumph. "1953. It's the latest edition, and with all the latest political corrections. Since Women's Lib got going there has to be a female representative in any group. That's where they got that obligatory girl-and-boy idea."

The Woozy settled things. "Girl, schmirl," he said. "Okay. The indication is clear. Somebody has to go on a quest."

"But where to?" the others all demanded.

"We'll decide that when we get there," determined the Woozy.

C H A P T E R

T W E L V E

Was nobody worried that Regent Nunculas had become a stone statue?

Sure. When the magistrate failed to appear at breakfast that lovely April morning, his nephew and great-nephew, as well as representatives of the serving staff, went to seek him in his chamber.

As with a number of others, disaster appeared to have struck him as he slept, if with a variation on the theme. The weight of marble abruptly to be found upon it had caused the hallowed old royal fourposter bedstead to collapse. This was a startling sight that caused the discoverers dismay. However, once it was determined that the worthy gentleman was marblized, his kin-folk understood that nothing much could affect him further. He was not going to be smothered in the enveloping bedclothes nor injured by the baldaquin supports that lay across him.

But what to do in face of this calamity? “Marble, did you say, Dad?” asked Prince Ojo, looking solemn.

“Looks like it to me,” confirmed King Ree. (His name was a tautology, but the king, having no Italian, was not to know that.) “The extreme hardness; much more than in rigor mortis; the grey veining,” he said learnedly. “But you should be a better judge of that than I, my boy. You’ve seen your — our — uncle like

this before, if I'm right. Isn't it the same?"

"Yes," whispered the boy. "Oh, poor Unc Nunkie."

"He's feeling no pain," consoled King Ree. "And what luck that I—we—should have been at home when it happened. We can take steps."

"What steps would those be?" asked Ojo, too distressed for the time being to have much thought for the future.

"It's an enchantment, pretty obviously! We've got to take steps to get it undone... Only, how?" The dashing ex-bandit rubbed his Vandyked chin. "I've never had any luck with magic."

"I have," reminded his son. "I hated it. When we got back to Seebania I hoped I'd never have to get involved with it again."

"Sorry 'bout that," rued the king. "Looks like one of us pretty much has to, though."

"I'll go," spoke a modest voice. It was Queen Isomere. (In her honor grateful scientists had named a recondite concept in chemistry and physics.) She was looking on, and looking lovelier than ever since she had stopped wearing the hideous hair style popular in 1933.[§]

Everyone stared at her. Dainty Queen Isomere, who'd scarcely ever set foot out of the palace? To go on a quest? She had to be kidding.

"Not at all," said the begum. "I've hardly ever set foot outside of the palace, while you others, at least in former times, were having adventures all over the place. Don't you think a person could get envious?"

Her relatives were shocked—but then interested. Just think: Mom—Wifie—had been nourishing an unlikely longing for perhaps donkey's years and no one had known!

"I think it's called 'quietism'," she explained. "I read a lot: philosophy, too, while you're away in the woods." She looked at Ree with a roguish glint in her eye. "One day I came across a word that exactly characterized what I felt. It said a quietist is one who, if he can't get what he wants, makes it his business to

§ See *Ojo of Oz*. (Editor's note)

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want what he can get. That's what I've always done.

"Sat on a pillow;

Sewed a fine seam;

And never looked out of the window to dream.

But that wasn't the real me.

"Did you never suspect?"

This was the second severe shock of the day for King Ree Alla Bad and Prince Ojo. They didn't look exactly pleased. People never do when other people pop out of the pigeonholes they've been assigned to.

"Mom," cried the prince.

"Yes, darling?" But when her son said nothing, Isomere went on. "When you set out on your quest, someone has to go with you. Daddy can't do it. With Uncle Stephen out of commission someone has to attend to running the country. That leaves just you and me free to go adventuring."

"But the dangers!" protested Ojo.

"Dangers, dear? Where? In Oz? Did you ever hear of an Oz adventure where the good fellows came to any actual harm?"

"Well, no." Ojo was truthful. "But you could end up in jail—or be horribly shamed in front of queen Ozma and that bunch." Though it had been forty years ago, the boy could remember such travails very well. "I couldn't bear for you to be exposed to the like, dear Mum." He went to her and hugged her arm.

"But we'll be in it together, don't you see? A danger shared is a danger halved. Besides, it is a joy too sweet for words to die for the one you love." Queen Isomere read Maugham as well.

"But where would we go?" wondered the boy. "I don't like asking favors in the Emerald City," he declared.

"No! of course not. But isn't it obvious? Who disenchanting Uncle Stephen the last time he was turned to marble?"

"Oh." Ojo reflected. "It was given out that it was Wizard Diggs. But actually it was that rubber-smelling fellow, Rod Litenin, with his demagifying liquids and sprays—"^s

"So we'll go to find Mr. Litenin and beg him to come on an

^s See *The China Dog in Oz*. (Editor's note)

errand of mercy," proposed the Begum.

"To do what?" asked Ojo, playing dense.

"Why, to take the magic off your uncle—with his sprays and liquids."

"Oh, he doesn't have those any more. He gave them all to old Dr. Pipt: the one who turned Unc Nunkie into stone in the first place."

"Then it's quite clear: we'll seek out this Doctor Pipt."

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

After all, the group at the Palace of Magic did choose a destination before setting out, just to know which direction to start going in. They were going south: to consult the wise sorceress, Glinda the Good.

The Red Wagon was loaded. Each one packed a small (borrowed) overnight bag. They couldn't be sure how long they'd be away and Oz adventure or no Oz adventure, certainly nobody was going to eat meals without being able to brush his teeth afterwards. Ergo, toothbrushes, and, as a corollary, something to carry them in.

The Sawhorse was in the traces. Four seats were taken. Jellia Jamb was knotted up in the sheets she had been found lying on and deposited in the hold-all behind. All was in readiness.

They had taken a last decko all round the Palace. As they passed inspectorially through the Informal Reception Chamber Whistlebreeches slipped the little Jenny Jump pawn in his pocket as a souvenir. Just borrowing, you know, until he would be seeing the real Jenny in person. He wasn't trying to steal it.

Silence and (relative) tidiness everywhere. They turned the key in the service entrance door and proceeded to the Carriage Court.

General Battles took the reins. He directed the Sawhorse toward the obscurest of the gateways offering entrance to and egress from the palace grounds. In fact, by now most of the demonstrators had got bored and gone home. Once in the city streets the Sawhorse automatically turned south, but the general had to correct him. "East, if you please, Sawks," he commanded. "I must just say goodbye to Tollydiggle and let her know I shall likely not be home tonight."

A half hour of valuable time was lost as they looked through street after street in the eastern part of town for the soldier's neat round green bungalow. They couldn't find it anywhere. Actually: they couldn't.

Then Whistlebreeches thought a thing, belatedly. "Great Baum!" he cried, slapping his forehead. "Of course! The directions are reversed! I if anybody ought to have remembered that. General, drive west! Naturally your house is over there now..."

This was the first real taste, besides the fact that they'd all gone left-handed, that the others had got of the reversal of directions in Oz. They all sat bemused and disoriented as the wagon rounded the grounds of the Palace of Magic again. The stately edifice, off beyond the trees and shrubbery, didn't look as if it had changed much in the interval.

In the west side of the city the Battles residence was quickly discovered. The Soldier ran in, and in a few minutes kind motherly Tollydiggle came out to the garden gate with him.

"All success on your quest!" she called to, the others. "Where is it you're off to?"

"To see Witch Glinda," informed Whisby jauntily. "In the Ruby City, you know."

Tollydiggle looked puzzled. "Omby," she said, "didn't you tell me this morning that the Good Sorceress was at the party—or ceremony, or whatever it was—at the Palace last night?"

"Quite so, my dear," confirmed her husband. "I remember distinctly opening the Grand Portal when her party arrived."

"Oh, then she returned home after midnight?"

"Are you goofy?" said Mrs. Battles' mate rather rudely. "The

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royal swans never fly anywhere by dark."

"Well, then," returned Tollydiggle. She was logical-minded, if nobody else was: "how are you going to seek her in the Ruby City if she never left the Emerald one?"

Everybody blushed scarlet, except the Woozy. Being blue, he blushed purple. They *had* been caught out. What a lot of dopes! they (rightly) considered themselves.

With scant ceremony the party took their leave of Mistress Tollydiggle and returned to the palace.

As Omby Amby unlocked the service entrance door they heard the phone ringing. Well, not phone exactly; they weren't *that* modern in Oz. What they heard was the next-best thing though. It was a faraway faint crackling sound. The soldier recognized it at once.

"The telegraph!" he cried and set off with long loping strides along the green-tiled corridors.

In minutes he had the earphones on and a pencil in his hand. His companions had followed and were grouped around. Presently they were able to read over the general's shoulder:

"WHAT'S THE STORY? ROYAL MISTRESS DUE HOME TODAY. NO SIGN OF HER. EVERYTHING AT SIXES AND SEVENS. WE'VE ALL GONE LEFTHANDED. PLEASE ADVISE.

(SIGNED) CINNA MUNN, SERGEANT."

"That's Sorceress Glinda's second-in-command," informed Battles. "Madam Glinda has one of the three other telegraph sending stations in Oz."

The general sent Sgt. Munn a pacifying message and then shut down operations.

"So where do we go now?" he wondered.

"Nowhere," directed the authoritative Woozy. "It's getting dark. We all need our sleep. We'll think about it all tomorrow. Tomorrow we'll think of some way to get them back. After all, tomorrow is another day."

C H A P T E R F O U R T E E N

Held up by a sweet spring rain that made the flowers and all green things flourish like mad, the travelers from the North took shelter in a pavilion that appeared opportunely in that big blank space that all Oz maps show between Regalia and the Gillikin Mountains) which they had perforce to cross. The region is not without natural features. They just haven't been described in detail by Oz historians.[§]

Now it was the fate of our heroes (Gillikin division) to penetrate one of the most enchanting of these features.

It began with the keen-nosed dragon, Agnes, saying, just before the day's overcast thickened into mist, "What is that haunting fragrance?"

The others hadn't noticed, but, their attention called, they now did so. "Why, it's cardamom, isn't it?" exclaimed Lady Diane (though how a rubber lady could smell is anyone's guess).

"Not at all. It's cloves," constated her husband, brooking no gainsaying.

"Beggin' your pardon, m'lord:" ventured Squire Roland, "but mightn't it be nutmeg?"

Agnes laughed up her sleeve—if she had any—and the

§ Except for Prof. Wogglebug, of course, who has them all listed in *The Great Map of Oz*, which see. (Editor's note)

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Manfrog said nothing at all. His human-type olfactory sense was so new to him he didn't know *what* he was smelling. Agnes said to herself: 'The goofs. It doesn't smell like any of those spices—and none of them smell like each other.' Despite these strictures even she could not quite put a name to the alluring scent.

They were crossing a broad meadow. The road had almost petered out. There was only the occasional palm or Norway spruce to be seen. As far as the eye could reach grasses and low shrubs covered the ground. And the scents began to be almost overpowering.

In fifteen minutes the mist had thickened into a steady penetrating drizzle. The horses sneezed. Sieur Robert began to complain about the moisture oozing down inside his mail. Thus, the sight of the broad, low, tile-roofed building when it ducked up was very welcome to all. Coming nearer, they saw that the roof jutted out in broad eaves on every side. Even the dear horses were not going to have to stand out in the rain.

There were no doors to the building. What's more, there were no walls. In fact, the structure was nothing but one vast low-pitched roof supported by innumerable pillars.

"It looks like a covered market hall—supersize," commented Agnes, "or else a display pavilion at a county fair." She surprised everyone. But then perhaps she had traveled farther afield than any of her companions guessed, and had seen things.

"Never mind," ordered the Count. "Let's get under it. Your shoulder, sirrah," he required of his orderly. He dismounted.

Once inside—or 'under', as Sieur Robert had expressed it—the travelers soon fell thrall to a rich and growing enchantment.

The purpose of the building was at once evident. It was a herbarium, and not of dried herbs either. The living plants were set out in neat flats on trestle tables up and down the rows to the end of the pavilion far away in the south.

"Herbs!" exclaimed Lady Diane. (She didn't say "'erbs", either. She wasn't a cockney. None of them were.) "How fascinating."

It is to be feared that they all forgot they were on a quest, in

the absorbing interest of looking at and sniffing all the tender-stemmed plants that were ranged in alphabetical order through the vast shed. Truth to tell, some of the visitors took surreptitious bites of leaves to release beguiling flavors to charmed taste buds.

It took them an hour to work their way past alyssum, basil, coriander, dill, eupatoriums, fennel, ginseng, hyssop, indigo, jojoba, kalmia, lavender, musk, nandin, oregano, pimpurnels, quail-brush, rue, sage, thyme, urtica, valerian, wormwood, xerophytes, yarrow, and zamia.

When they emerged at the far end of the building they all smelled, personally, like pots pourris, but they, personally, couldn't smell a thing, their senses were so overpowered. They were staggering just a little as they constated that the rain had stopped. Bemusedly they made their way back to the waiting chargers.

Countess Diane took her husband's hand and pressed a little twig within in. "There's rosemary," she said. "That's for remembrance." The good lady had not been above snitching a few stems on the sly.

The Count was not quite sure what she meant, but he was touched. To make conversation he said, "Isn't it odd there isn't a soul to be seen. I suppose somebody must tend the display boxes."

"Why so?" countered his wife. "Plants don't need people. Just leave them alone. They'll grow all by themselves."

That wasn't the last word on the topic. The travelers talked of their experience all the way to the Munchkin border. One or two were sorry they'd had to leave the herb pavilion, though they scarcely dared to voice this regret to the others. It might have seemed sentimental. But in time to come they might yearn back to that hour in the scented rain and wish themselves there. They never made it.

Moral: linger where your heart is spoken to. You may not pass that way again.