

REIMAGINED



NEW TALES FROM THE EMERALD CITY AND BEYOND

Edited by
John Joseph Adams & Douglas Cohen

02
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47NORTH

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Published by 47North
P.O. Box 400818
Las Vegas, NV 89140

ISBN-13: 9781611099041

ISBN-10: 1611099048

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012953172

Dedication

For that wonderful wizard,
L. Frank Baum

A NOTE ON THE CONTENT

L. Frank Baum's original Oz books were works of children's fiction—albeit ones that have been known and loved by “children of all ages” throughout their existence. Though many of the stories contained in this anthology are also suitable for the aforementioned children of all ages, *Oz Reimagined* is intended for ages thirteen and up, and as such, some of the stories deal with mature themes, so parental guidance is suggested.

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FOREWORD: OZ AND OURSELVES

BY GREGORY MAGUIRE

When I try to settle upon some approach to the notion of Oz that might suit many different readers and not just myself, I stumble upon a problem. The unit of measure that works for me might not work for you. Standards and definitions vary from person to person. Oz is nonsense; Oz is musical; Oz is satire; Oz is fantasy; Oz is brilliant; Oz is vaudeville; Oz is obvious. Oz is secret.

Look: imagine waiting at a bus stop with a friend. We're both trying to convey something to each other about childhood. When you say *childhood*, do you mean "childhood as the species lives it?" Do I mean "my childhood upstate in the mid-twentieth century, my house on the north edge of town, my grouchy father, my lost duckie with the red wheels"?

Oz comes to us early in our lives, I think—maybe even in our dreams. It has no name way back then, just "the other place." It's the unspecified site of adventures of the fledgling hero, the battleground for the working out of early dilemmas, and the garden of future delights yet unnamed.

Foreign and familiar at the same time.

Dream space.

Lewis Carroll called it Wonderland, Shakespeare called it the Forest of Arden, the Breton troubadours called it Broceliande, and the Freudians called it Traum. The Greeks called it Theater, except for Plato, who called it Reality. Before we study history, though, before we learn ideas, we know childhood through our living of it. And for a century or so, we Americans have called that zone of mystery by the name of Oz.

Your little clutch of postcards from the beyond is a different set than mine, of course. Nobody collects the same souvenirs from any trip, from any life. Yours might be the set derived from those hardcovers in your grandmother's attic, the ones with the John R. Neill line drawings someone colored over in oily Crayola markings. (Crayons were invented at just about the same time as Oz, early in the twentieth century.) Or your souvenir cards might be the popular MGM set starring Margaret Hamilton and Bert Lahr and some child star—I forget her name. Or your souvenirs might be more like mine: memories of being a kid and reenacting (and expanding upon) the adventures of Dorothy using the terrain at hand, which in my case was a filthy alleyway between close-set houses in the early 1960s. Dorothy in her blue-checked gingham and her pigtails is my baby sister in her brother's T-shirt, hair all unbrushed and eyes bright with play.

What, I wonder, did we Americans do to conjure up a universal land of childhood before Frank Baum introduced us to Oz? Did the Bavarian forests of Grimm or the English fairylands (sprites and elves beckoning from stands of foxgloves, deep hedgerows) ever quite work for American kids? Or maybe that's a silly question. Perhaps before 1900—when *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was first published and the United States was still essentially rural and therefore by definition hardscrabble—there was no time to identify the signposts of childhood. Children's rooms in public libraries hadn't yet been established. Reading for pleasure wasn't for everyone, just for those who could afford their own private books. Few nineteenth-century Americans could relish childhood as a space of play and freedom; instead, childhood was merely the first decade in a life of hard toil on the farm or the

factory.

—Maybe Oz arose and took hold because urban life began to win out over rural life. Maybe our horizons became more built up and our childhoods—for some middle-class American kids anyway—a little more free, the Oz that came to us first on the page and later on the screen had a better chance of standing in for childhood. That merry old Land of Oz certainly did, and does, signify childhood for me; I mean this not as the author of *Wicked* and a few other books in that series, but as a man nearing sixty who recognized in Oz, more than half a century ago, a picture of home.

I don't mean to be sentimental. There's a lot to mistrust about home. It's one of the best reasons for growing up: to get away, to make your own bargain with life, and then to look back upon what terms you accepted because you knew no better, and to assess their value. Travel is broadening precisely because it is *away from* as well as *toward*.

As a young man, on my first trip abroad, I went to visit relatives in northern Greece, where my mother's family originates. In the great Balkan upheavals of the last century, the boundaries of political borders had shifted a dozen times, and the family village that had once been part of Greece in the early twentieth century, lay now in Yugoslavia—still a Communist country in the late 1970s when I first saw it. Stony, poor, oppressed. My ancient, distant relatives, all peasant widows in black coats and neat headscarves, told me how their mother had spent her married life imprisoned in Thessaloniki, Greece, on the top edge of the Aegean; but, of a fine Sunday afternoon, she would direct her husband to drive her north, to a hillside just this side of the border of Yugoslavia. There she would sit by the side of the road and weep. The village of her childhood was on the other side of the border crossing. From this height she could see it, like Moses examining the Promised Land, but she was not allowed back. She could never go back. She never did, or not in this life, anyway. She never sent me postcards once she finally crossed over.

Oz lives contiguously with us. The Yellow Brick Road, the Emerald City, and the great Witch's castle to the west—these haunts are more than tourist traps and hamburger stands. They are the century's Pilgrim's Progress and Via Dolorosa and Valhalla. Oz is myriad as the Mediterranean with its spotted Homeric islands; Oz is vast as Middle-earth and moral as Camelot. This is to say, of course, that Oz is a mirror. Turn it about and, in the mirror, *OZ* nearly says *ZOE*, the Greek word for life.

Of course we recognize Oz when we see it. Of course we find ourselves there. If we can't find ourselves *there*, well, we don't have much chance of recognizing ourselves *here*. As some farmhand or other might have said to Dorothy, or she to the Wizard.

I will utter a word of caution, though. Perhaps my souvenirs of Oz are darker than yours. I can't help that; life gives what it will. As a young reader, I learned about Oz the way I would later learn about Life on the Mississippi or life sailing to the lighthouse of the Hebrides or life lived on the verges of The Waste Land. And I found the insularity and even parochialism of Oz's separate populations puzzling and, maybe, worrying. Racist even, though I hadn't a word for it yet. Troublingly myopic, exceptionalist. Certainly lacking in intellectual curiosity. When Dorothy first arrived in the land of Munchkins, the kindly Munchkin farmers told her what they'd been told about the Emerald City and about the Wizard. But none of them had had the gumption of Dorothy to pick themselves up and go see for themselves. No firsthand experience. Few of them could predict what kind of population lived over the horizon. None of them cared.

Or maybe I'm being unkind. Maybe those Munchkins all just had to stay on the farm to bring in the crops. But they didn't signal lust for adventure in their remarks about the Emerald City; you'll grant me that.

Well, they had not read any chronicles of Oz to whet their appetites for the adventure, I suppose. Kindly, good, solid working people, they were lacking in vision. They'd never gone for

enough away from the villages of their own childhoods to be able to look back down the slope and see
childhood for what it is: a paradise from which, if we are to survive, we must escape.

I write this in a small walled garden in what used to be called the Languedoc region of France
where for the past decade I have spent part of every summer. My French is close to execrable; even
the birds chirp with a better accent than I do. The plane trees with their coats of mottling bark, and the
stiff, brushlike sound of their leaves in the dawn wind—it's all ineffably foreign to me a decade on
and if I can be forgiven an Anglicism, it's ineffably dear to me, too. I like spending time every year in
a place I only barely comprehend. It reminds me of childhood, when I was most alive because the
world was so new. Being abroad, struggling to understand, reminds me of Oz.

There is more to say, but here comes the bus. It says *OZ* above the front window. Welcome
aboard. Welcome home.

Gregory Maguire
Cavillargue
Bastille Day, 2001

INTRODUCTION: THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE OZ

BY JOHN JOSEPH ADAMS & DOUGLAS COHEN

There's no place like home.

The phrase has become one of the most famous in the English language, if not all of Western culture. Although first popularized by John Howard Payne (as a lyric in the song “Home! Sweet Home!” for his opera *Clari, Maid of Milan*), it's safe to say that when most people hear it, they think not of the opera or the song but of L. Frank Baum's most magical creation: Oz. It is to Dorothy Gale that most of us unconsciously attribute these words—perhaps because her innocent longing for home while being surrounded by such wondrous magic makes the words all the more poignant. Whatever the reason, there is no denying the resonance of the message. Yet while the words may indeed evoke thoughts of home for some, it is somewhat ironic that those words now transport most of us to that magical Land of Oz.

But if this unassuming phrase should take our thoughts someplace vastly different than Baum intended, it's hardly surprising, because while there's no place like home, it's equally true that there is no place like Oz. It has not only transcended the ranks of fantasy readers; thanks to the beloved MGM film classic *The Wizard of Oz*, it has also transcended the ranks of readers, period. Indeed, Oz has woven itself into the very fabric of our culture.

While the Land of Oz has achieved a level of fame that few fantasies ever manage, and which various political allegorical meanings have been attributed to these works, at its heart Oz remains a series of fairy tales—tales written by a man who continued writing them long after he expected to because he received so many letters from children imploring him to write more Oz adventures. For many of those children—and for many of us even now—Oz became another home.

Of course, sometimes the home you remember can change. You'll find that is the case with these stories. For this project we asked our authors to not only *revisit* Oz—we asked them to *reimagine* it.

And the results were everything we could have hoped for. Some authors chose to fill in the cracks of the existing mythology with their own unique vision. Others revised the original stories, making it branch out in wildly unexpected directions. Still others took the bones of Oz and rebuilt it from the ground up, one magical limb at a time.

Characters you know and love might look different. They might *act* different. Their choices might shock you. They may make you laugh. They may make you cry. They may guide you down a gaily colored road to see a great and powerful wizard, but then again you might not even find yourself in Oz. (Though in spirit, all these stories take place in Oz, regardless of their actual location.)

If it seems like we're being vague regarding how our authors have reimagined Oz...guilty as charged. We want you to experience that same delight we did the first time we read these stories, discovering what is familiar versus what is different, seeing how it all fits together. We want you to wander into old, warm dreams only to find they've taken a delightful right turn.

Even so, we do want to mention one important bit of information before you begin your trip to Oz. If you're only familiar with the classic movie, you might notice that certain details in some of the

stories are different from what you remember. The reason for this is simple: our authors were tasked with reimagining L. Frank Baum's books rather than the famous film based on them. (Though quite faithful, the movie version does take some liberties with the source material.) As a result, some of the little details you remember may be slightly different here—and not just because the stories have been reimagined. For example, in the movie version, Dorothy famously comes to possess a pair of magical ruby slippers; in the book, the shoes are silver instead. Another difference: thanks to the film, the Wicked Witch's soldiers have come to be known as Flying Monkeys rather than Winged Monkeys, as they were originally. And in the book Glinda is the Witch of the South rather than the North, and so on. So when you encounter these details in the anthology—things that may seem to be changed for no particular reason—rest assured there is a method to our madness. But if the movie is all you know, have no fear: the movie and the book are similar enough that you'll have no trouble following the stories and falling into these new versions of Oz.

Reimagining a creation as enduring and seminal as Oz is no small feat—we all have our memories of it, and for many these memories are dearly cherished. Perhaps this explains why our authors embraced this project with so much enthusiasm. Oz is as special to them as it is to you; it is a land of deep imagination, part of that dreaming landscape they delve into each time they create a new work of fantasy. Most of them discovered Oz in one form or another before they even realized they wanted to write fantasy stories of their own, and so it could be said that L. Frank Baum planted some of the earliest seeds that brought them to where they find themselves today. For those of whom this is true, perhaps this anthology is their chance to say thank you...a chance to celebrate one of the great fantasies of our time...a chance to go back to Oz.

We all change as we pass out of childhood and become adults. Our perceptions of Oz may change as well. So follow the road of yellow brick when you're ready, but prepare for a detour or two along the way. And remember: whatever version of Oz you find yourself in, there's no place like it.



THE GREAT ZEPPELIN HEIST OF OZ

BY RAE CARSON & C.C. FINLAY

STRANGE IN A STRANGER LAND

Scraps, the Patchwork Girl, witnessed the Wizard's arrival.

She sat beneath a tree watching the most spectacular show ever performed by a summer sky. White clouds swirled above an emerald-colored sky, like whipped marshmallow topping on a glass bowl full of lime jello, spinning round and round and round on a potter's wheel.

She didn't think it could get any more amazing when the clouds cracked open and sunlight burst through, so blinding that she lifted one patchwork arm to shade her button eyes.

That's when she saw the balloon.

It was a big bubble made of brightly colored fabric, with a basket hanging underneath and a man inside the basket, clinging to its rim. And it was coming toward her tree.

She jumped up and shouted. "Turn away!"

"I am rudderless in the maelstrom!" yelled the man in the basket. His small voice was getting louder and closer. "Reinless in my carriage!"

The man was making no sense. Scraps waved her hands to shoo the odd vessel aside. "All right, but steer your picnic basket that way!"

"I can't steer it because—"

The balloon crashed into the branches of the venerable tree, which shook and shook and shook like a dog shaking off a bath. The balloon deflated, becoming hopelessly entangled, but all the tree's effort did manage one thing, which was to spill the passenger out of the basket.

He hit the ground with a loud thump, and Scraps ran toward him. She reached down to help, but he jumped to his feet like a cat—not all lithe and athletic like a cat making a spectacular leap but rather all arrogant and full of himself like a cat too embarrassed to admit that he'd taken a bad tumble.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

He stared at her uncomprehendingly, so she spoke in a way that he might understand.

"ARE. YOU. ALL. RIGHT?"

"I must have knocked my noggin," he said, feeling his head for lumps. "I've shaken the contents of my purse, rattled the old dice cup."

"I don't know about that," Scraps said. "But I think you bumped your head—you're not making a lick of sense."

He startled when she spoke again, as if hearing her for the first time. "Merciful blessings," he said. "You're a talking ragdoll! And a filthy one at that."

Scraps, who was very proud of her shiny button eyes, orange yarn hair, and striped knickerbockers, opened her mouth to say something likely to land her in a tussle with the strange man, even though she stood no higher than his knee. But the tree spoke first.

"And you're a blithering idiot," boomed the good-natured old oak.

He was bending over as he said it, and the man from the balloon jumped so high that he hit his head on a branch and accomplished what falling from the sky could not: he knocked himself out cold.

“What a strange man,” the tree said, his knotholes frowning. “What do we do with him now?”

“I’ll run to the Emerald City and get the Guardian of the Gates,” Scraps replied. “He’ll know what to do.”

PROGRESS!

The Guardian of the Gates had no idea what to do.

The strange man had not stopped talking once since he’d been carried to the guardhouse. He called himself Oz, which was short for Oscar, because he had so many other things to say; there was no time to use a two-syllable name when one syllable was available. His talk was equal parts questions and opinions, although the latter seldom seemed related to the answers he received to the former, until he said, quite out of the blue:

“I’ll tell you what’s not right about this country.”

The statement startled Gigi, which is what the Guardian of the Gates was called by his friends, even though his proper name—George—was only one syllable long. But who in the world used one syllable when two perfectly good syllables were at hand?

“What’s wrong with this country?” asked Gigi, who already knew what was wrong with the guardhouse—half his bread and all his butter had been eaten by the stranger.

“Now don’t go putting words into my mouth,” Oz said. “*Not right* is not the same as *wrong*. There’s *right* and *not right*, and there’s *right* and *wrong*, and there’s *wrong* and *not wrong*. But to insist that *not right* is the same as *wrong* is to infer a transitive property of equivalence that is not supported by the evidence, for we do not yet know the qualities that individually compose *not right* and *wrong*. Am I not right?”

“I think you’re wrong,” Gigi said, trying desperately to follow.

“You haven’t been paying attention at all,” Oz snapped. “Have you never studied the mathematical approach to language known as *logic*?”

“I can’t say that I have.”

“Which is not the same as saying that you haven’t,” Oz replied. “But I digress. To return to the original—in fact, the essential—point that I was about to make: what’s not logical, what’s distinct, and preeminently *not right* about this country, as you have described it to me, is that there are four kingdoms.”

“No, that’s right,” Gigi said. “There are definitely four kingdoms.”

“There are four kingdoms, *but not one king*. Every kingdom in this land is ruled by a woman. Why, in the land I come from, there is a great city called Omaha, not much different than your first metropolis, in which my father served as a city councilman for two score years, give or take a annum. In all that time, he did not once serve under or even with a woman. And yet here you are ruled by four of them. Glinda, Bastinda, Locasta, and...Canasta?”

He waved his hand in the air, as if it were a matter of no consequence to forget a witch’s name.

“Her name is—” Gigi started to say.

“Why, it’s poppycock!”

“No, it’s...what’s poppycock?”

“Poppycock? It’s a species of flower. You usually find it planted in gardens along with

balderdash and humbug and ample beds of bunkum. Does she have an army?"

"The Witch?" Gigi said. "She has a few soldiers, I suppose. But mostly she has the Winged Monkeys."

"Monkey business, is it?" Oz murmured to himself.

"And she's very capable with magic."

"I can do a bit of magic myself!"

Oz pushed up his sleeves to his elbows and showed Gigi his hands, palms up, then palms down. Then his right hand darted to Gigi's ear, and when he pulled it back, a tiny silver-colored disc was pinched between his thumb and forefinger.

Gigi snatched the disc away and examined it.

On one side was a portrait of a severe-looking man with feathers tucked in the back of his hair. On the other side was a picture of a large, hairy beast with a larger, hairier hump. "What is this?" Gigi asked.

"This is what you call progress," Oz said. "In the land where I come from, which is known as Nebraska, there were once great tribes of Indians and endless herds of buffalo. Then men like me came along, and we achieved progress, which we memorialize by stamping it on a nickel."

"What happened to the Indians and the buffalos?"

"The same thing that is going to happen to your witches now that I'm here," Oz said, snatching the coin away. "Progress!"

"That doesn't make any sense," Gigi said.

"I believe it makes five of them." Oz flipped the coin in the air with his thumb and caught it in his fist, which he held in front of Gigi's nose. Then he opened one finger at a time to reveal an empty hand.

"Hrm," Gigi said skeptically.

But Oz just wiggled his fingers and grinned. "Now *that's* magic."

"Yes," Gigi said. "I'm certain that it is."

He wasn't certain at all, but he would help this Oz fellow anyway, just in case. There was no need to risk getting *progressed*.

THE QUEEN OF THE FIELD MICE

"Your Majesty, it is a pleasure of immeasurable proportions, a satisfaction both sublime and profound, an honor far beyond a man of my own humble origins, to make your most regal and diminutive acquaintance," said the whiskered stranger who had come from the Emerald City with the Guardian of the Gates.

"Delighted to meet you, too, I'm sure," the Queen said, glancing up at the Guardian of the Gates, who was deliberately avoiding her gaze. She brushed her whiskers with her paw, in case they held any crumbs. "Who did you say you were again?"

"I am Oscar Diggs, from the wide and narrow land known as Nebraska, which lies across the hills and over the rainbow, where I am a modest purveyor of marvels, an itinerant educator of the masses, and the possessor of great and powerful devices of extraordinary merit. But you may call me Oz."

"Oh my," said the Queen, who thought she could smell a cow patty before she stepped in. "Well, how can I help you, Mr. Oz?"

“Your Majesty,” Oz said. “I’m not here to ask for your help like some beggar far from home. No, indeed! Rather I hope you will allow me to describe the manner in which *I* can help *you*.”—

“You help me?”

“Your Majesty, this field that you occupy is part of a much bigger land—in fact, a kingdom! A kingdom is a structure of government that I trust you, as a fellow monarch, albeit of a more limited domain, approve of and even support. But right now this kingdom has no king, a situation that confounds sense and boggles the cerebrum. Instead you are ruled by a witch, a woman who, instead of a scepter, carries a broom. Do I need to paint a picture for you?”

“Oh, please,” said the Queen. “I love paintings.”

Oz began to stomp around in a circle. “A broom is the bane of every mouse. It’s cold outside and there is no food, but—look!—over here is a cottage. A simple home. You peer inside the door, and what do you see? A fire on the hearth, providing warmth and safety. You see that there are crumbs upon the floor, so small they’ve been cast off by the giants who live here—but these tasty, savory crumbs will fill your belly and feed your numerous brood of starving children. Do you follow me so far?”

“I do,” said the Queen, but in a tone intended to indicate *not at all*.

But this Oscar person seemed pleased. He thrust his hands dramatically at her. “And then here comes the broom! It slams you against the wall. It pursues you into the corner. No matter where you turn, there waits the broom, relentless and unforgiving, until it has chased you back out into the cold, bruised and battered. Until it has swept up all the crumbs—food that could feed your loyal, hungry subjects—and tossed them into the flames where they can feed no one at all. And is this fair?”

“It’s horrifying,” said the Queen, her whiskers twitching.

“Exactly,” said Oz. “But here you are—you live in a kingdom ruled by a witch with a broom, and what will she do with that broom? She will chase you, and slap you, and destroy the food supplies of your people, and leave you all with nowhere to turn and nowhere to live. Horrifying! But fortunately you have me.”

“We do?”

“You do! And Your Majesty,” Oz said, bowing low. “If you will just do as I ask, I can put an end to the Witch’s broom and guarantee peace and prosperity for the foreseeable future.”

The Queen looked at Gigi, who was twirling his toe in the grass and still avoiding eye contact. “I don’t know...”

Slam! Oz stomped his boot on the ground, making her jump.

“That’s not me,” Oz said. “That’s what the Witch wants to do to you this very minute.”

“What can we do about it?” the Queen said, ready to agree with almost anything the stranger asked if he would just leave her alone.

“I have brought with me, from the land of Nebraska, an element called helium and several things called balloons...”

A CLEAN SWEEP

It was hard for Bobbin, one of the smallest of the field mice, to predict which thing would be most terrifying that day.

Would it be getting tied to a string that was tied to a balloon that was then sent floating aloft to drift over the Witch’s castle?

Or maybe while he dangled hundreds of feet in the air, it would be climbing up the string and ~~chewing a tiny hole in the balloon—a hole not so big that the balloon would pop and drop him to his death,~~ but just big enough to allow the balloon to descend slowly into the castle.

Or maybe it would be searching the castle, memorizing everything he saw, never knowing when the Witch's Broom of Doom, as it was now being called among the field mice, would slam down on his tiny body.

As it turned out, the most terrifying thing was none of these.

They started on an observation platform that stood above the trees on a high hill overlooking the valley and the distant Witch's castle. Socks were tied to poles at each corner of the platform. Winds were filled them, indicating which direction it was blowing. Only when Oz was satisfied with the wind did he fill the first balloon and set it adrift. They watched it until it floated over the castle and away.

"We'll call that test a success," Oz said as he filled the second balloon from the metal tank. "Now's for the real adventure. Are you ready, my lad?"

"Ready," Bobbin squeaked. He wanted very much to be brave and do a good thing for his fellow mice.

"Your valor and fortitude are deserving of the highest recognition," Oz said. And he tied the string around Bobbin's waist and set him adrift over the forest.

Bobbin kept his eyes mostly closed and drifted over trees that looked at him with puzzled faces. Whispers ran through the leaves, branching out in every direction. Poor Bobbin began to twitch nervously. This was hardly the surreptitious entry that Oz had promised him.

The balloon was barely over the castle wall when other faces appeared in the windows and along the battlements—the Witch's Winged Monkeys, furry little men with leathery wings and sparkling golden vests.

Then there were Monkeys on the roof of the castle.

Then there were Monkeys in the air above the castle.

Bobbin paddled his tiny legs furiously, like a swimmer desperate to make it to shore, even though his intention was only to turn around and climb up the string. The activity made him swing like a pendulum and soon he was all tangled up, which cut off his circulation and made his toes go numb.

The Monkeys flew up in waves, spinning round and round Bobbin's balloon until it was twisting like a leaf in a whirlwind. The more daring Monkeys flew in and poked at the balloon, or worse!—at Bobbin.

"No no no no no no no no no no no!" he screamed.

The Monkeys laughed and spun him round and round and batted his balloon until he was screaming at them to—

POP!

The balloon disappeared like a wasted wish, and he plummeted toward the rocks below. At the last second, as the rocks loomed large in his vision, a tiny hairy hand thrust out of nowhere and grabbed him.

The Monkey carried Bobbin high into the air, higher than his balloon had been, and then the Monkeys played a game of keep-away, tossing Bobbin back and forth, dropping and catching him over and over again until he was limp and exhausted with terror.

Eventually the Monkeys grew bored, and they took Bobbin to the castle, where he was presented to the Witch of the East.

"Who sent you to spy on my castle?" the Witch asked.

"Oz," Bobbin said, and then, feeling like that wasn't quite enough, like it might be a good idea to have a powerful protector, he added, "Oz, the great and powerful. He's a wizard! He came from Nebraska, and he...he...has progress, which he keeps in his pocket."

While he spoke, his eyes darted back and forth, looking for the terrible, the awful, the frightening Broom of Doom.

The Witch reached down and, with one long fingernail, scratched between Bobbin's ears. Despite his wariness, Bobbin closed his eyes and sighed.

"Tell me everything you remember," the Witch said.

So that's what Bobbin did, even though when he got to the part about the Broom of Doom, she laughed so hard that tears fell from her eyes.

"That's a good boy," the Witch said when the laughter subsided and her breath returned. "Will you take a message to this wizard for me?"

"Y...y...yes," Bobbin said.

"Tell him, if he's smart, he'll go back to Nebraska."

"I can do that," Bobbin said.

"I know you can," the Witch said, giving him a big yellow-toothed smile. "Now...would you like to walk back to the Wizard's base of operations, or would you like my Monkey friends to fly you there?"

"Walk! Walk! Walk!" Bobbin shouted.

He staggered like a drunk all the way back to the far end of the valley.

When the Wizard saw Bobbin, he snatched him off the ground.

"What did you find out?" he demanded.

"That I don't like flying," Bobbin said.

"How many soldiers does she have? What sort of weapons?"

Oz, in his enthusiasm, gripped Bobbin too tightly, more roughly even than the Monkeys had. So it was a reflex, really, that caused Bobbin to use the only weapons he owned—his teeth—which he sank into Oz's thumb.

Oz yelped and dropped Bobbin, who ran off to a safe distance.

"Go back to Nebraska or you'll smart!" he yelled.

Without waiting for a response, he ran away and didn't stop until he reached the meadow.

Even though Bobbin never saw the Witch's Broom, every time the other field mice gathered to hear about his adventure, when he reached the conversation with the Witch, he told his listeners that the Broom moved tirelessly around the castle of its own accord, cleaning every nook and cranny, every crack and hiding place, so that it was the cleanest castle that had ever been lived in by anyone anywhere.

The baby mice shivered when Bobbin told them that part of the story.

Bobbin shivered too.

HOT AIR

Over the years, ever since he ran away from the Peppermint Home for Orphaned and Abandoned Youth, Finagle the Munchkin had been a pickpocket, a highwayman, a mercenary, a Nome wrangler, a goat washer, and once, for two weeks and three Saturdays in the Land of Ev, a wedding cake decorator. Personally, he considered the last two the most dangerous jobs he had ever done.

But then he had never before worked for a wizard.

"So let me get this straight," he said to Oz as they stood on top of his observation platform where they could see the Witch's castle. "The Witch is a danger, so you want me to go up in a hot

air balloon so I can spy on her.”

—“I can tell that you are a gentleman of unusual perspicacity and astounding perception, with mind as sharp as a barber’s razor and as quick to snap as a bear trap,” Oz said. “And if you do this for me, I promise to pay you all the wealth I previously described, but even that will be as nothing compared to the treasure chests full of glory that shall be heaped upon you.”

“I suspect you get paid by the word,” the Munchkin muttered.

“What was that, good sir?”

“I said, I expect you are as good as your word,” Finagle said. He was puffing on a cheroot and blew a smoke ring in Oz’s direction. “But I have three questions I want answered first.”

“And I promise you three full and satisfying answers, answers that will erase the stain of any doubt and introduce in your mind a comprehension and understanding of the situation that will engender your whole-hearted commitment to the greater cause.”

“No matter how long it takes,” the Munchkin muttered.

“I beg your pardon, my dear friend.”

“I said, and that’s exactly what it takes.” He looked at the tiny basket and the large balloon which was being inflated with hot air as they spoke. “Question, the first. Why is it you want me to climb up in this contraption and float over her castle, when you could clearly do it yourself?”

“An excellent question. A very wise and sage question. A wonderful question.”

“And the answer?”

“Why, the answer is obvious, my good friend. You need but consider your size compared with mine. Why, I am twice the man you are—”

“Hold on now!”

“Hear me out, please—simply by way of physical proportions. Why, look at me! I’m bigger than you in every dimension. Taller, wider, and thicker.”

“I’m beginning to think you’re thick enough.”

“See, there you have it. So, with me aboard, this hot air balloon would founder like a boat loaded with rocks, and that would do no good at all, not for anyone. And yet, with you aboard, a man whose size is, I daresay, in inverse proportion to his value, whose courage is worth his weight in gold, why the craft will certainly most positively and absolutely soar like a bird in the wind.”

“So, say I soar,” Finagle said, looking out over the valley filled with trees to the sharp edges of the Witch’s castle perched on a distant crag. “What should I see that a bird can’t see—why not just send a bird? I know a crow or two, even a mockingbird, who’ll do for you in a pinch.”

“That’s an excellent question. A very keen and perceptive question—”

“Go on with the answer.”

“Why, isn’t it obvious? I came to you for your reputation as the most courageous man among your people. Is a bird ever as brave as a man? No! Can a bird hold a weapon in his hands? No! Will a bird count the grains of sand—”

“I get the idea,” Finagle said. “So when the Witch’s Monkeys come flying up at me, just like they did for that mousy fellow, you want me to fight them off and then count what’s inside the castle walls—the soldiers and such.”

“Fight them off only long enough to release your ballast and man the hot air pump. Let the balloon rise directly upward until it’s beyond the limited flight of these heavy creatures, and then when you are clear of the castle, release the air from the balloon just as I showed you and float safely back to land, where I will come and meet you. Can you do that?”

“Yeah, I can do that,” Finagle said, but it didn’t add up with what he’d told that field mouse to do—what was this Oz fellow up to?

“Drop the ballast and pump the hot air,” Oz repeated.

“Hot air—I’ve got it. It seems easier than fighting off a few dozen Monkeys.”

—“I knew you were the man for the job,” Oz said. “Never has a recommendation more recommended itself. Nor commended its recommender, who deserves a commendation...”

He blinked and regarded Finagle with a fixed smile and a blank stare.

“Lost your flow of words there?” Finagle asked.

“Not at all,” Oz said. “Not at all. I was simply trying to say that you came highly recommended, and with good and self-evident reason.”

“Third and final question then,” Finagle said, staring hard at the castle, which protected the valley of the Munchkins from the wild creatures beyond. “What have you got against the Witch?”

Oz paused thoughtfully. He pulled a brass tube from his trouser pocket, held it up to his eye and stared across the valley to the castle. Finagle was about to repeat his question when the Wizard finally spoke.

“In the land where I come from, we have wonderful institutions of learning, where a man can discover all the secrets of the universe, and that’s why these institutions are called universities,” Oz said. “And in these universities, there are wise men called philosophers, who ponder the fundamental questions of life. Being in the business of questions, they employ a tool named for their most distinguished predecessor, a philosopher named Socrates, and this tool is called the Socratic Method, and those who use this tool answer questions with more questions in order to reach a more enlightened perspective.”

“What?” Finagle said.

“That’s precisely how you do it,” Oz said. “So permit me to answer your question about the Witch with a question of my own.”

“Go ahead,” Finagle said.

“Do you know what sort of man the Witch might be interested in?”

Finagle narrowed his eyes. “Where are you going with this?”

“Yes, by Jug! That’s how you do it. Socrates would be so proud—OWW!”

Oz hopped on one foot, holding his opposite shin—the one that Finagle had just kicked.

“That’s for sending me up in a balloon with a bunch of flying Monkeys chasing me,” the Munchkin said. “And I want twice what you offered to pay me.”

MONKEY BUSINESS

Wisdom from Omaha: you only have one chance to make a first impression.

Oscar Diggs was not about to waste that chance. He stared at himself in the full-length mirror and admired the work done by the tailors in the Emerald City.

A double-breasted vest in emerald silk with silver buttons. A tailcoat in a complementary green, trimmed in black velvet. Fall front trousers in a lovely shade of fawn. He had never looked so good.

To be fair, the effect was marred somewhat by the straps holding the canister of oxygen to his back, and by the bug-like mask, connected to the tank by a breathing tube, that at the present moment hung loose about his neck where a less inventive and more ill-prepared man would tie an ordinary cravat.

He was, he assured himself, most inventive and well prepared and wholly extraordinary, even without a cravat.

More importantly, he had a plan.

~~A plan, which, so far, had worked to perfection.~~

The first part had involved simple helium balloons and an even simpler field mouse. The balloons revealed the direction and speed of the valley's winds while the mouse served up misinformation by relaying his false concerns about soldiers to the Witch.

The second part of the plan employed a hot air balloon, which permitted him to measure the speed and maximum ascent of the Winged Monkeys, who were his real target all along.

Now the third part of his plan—involving a hydrogen balloon, of the type popularly called zeppelin—was about to be set into motion.

He climbed into the large gondola of the craft, which was moored to the top of the tower that the Emerald Citizens had built for him, and he untied the ropes that held him down.

His heart beat faster as the craft rose majestically into the air.

The Valley of the Witch was long and narrow, split by a gleaming blue ribbon of river cushioned by thick green orchards on either side, and framed by rugged peaks of bare stone that reached straight up to the sky. At the upper end of the valley, a picturesque castle occupied a bluff overlooking the river.

“The question,” Oscar Diggs mused, “is why a witch needs a castle at all. Either she has great wealth, which her army of Winged Monkeys guards for her, or she has great enemies, which her army of Winged Monkeys protects her from. Either way, it's the business with the Monkeys that is key.”

His palms grew sweaty as the great airship approached the Witch's castle. He wiped his hands on his trousers and peered through the telescope. The Monkeys were already perched along the battlements and on the rooftops, eyeing his approach.

“The question,” Oscar Diggs asked himself, “is, How much is she willing to trade to get the Winged Monkeys back.”

Of course the bigger issue was going to be stealing them in the first place. It was too late to double-check his calculations. He had made his plan and—

Here came the Monkeys!

It was much more terrifying to see in person than it was to watch from the safety of his viewing platform. He pulled his mask over his face, turned on the flow of oxygen, and braced for the impact.

The gondola rocked as the first Monkeys landed on the sides and swarmed aboard. They ran around the rim and rigging, curiously exploring the craft just as he'd seen them do during the previous tests. Then they began creeping down the rigging toward him, eyeing him warily, ready to pounce.

“Not yet, not yet,” he muttered to himself, his hands shaking.

More Monkeys jumped on. Then more and more. The moment they were all aboard, he yanked the rope he had prepared, releasing thousands of pounds of ballast.

Straight up the zeppelin went, fast enough to press them all to the floor of the gondola. In four seconds they reached a height where the air was too thin to support the Monkeys' flight. In eight seconds they reached a height where the air was too thin for them to stay awake. The Monkeys in the rigging lost their grip and tumbled into the gondola at his feet.

Oscar shivered in the cold, but the dazed or entirely unconscious Monkeys were now at his mercy. He moved quickly around the gondola, binding them hand and foot and wing with ropes he had brought specifically for that purpose.

When he was certain that all his prisoners were secure, he changed the course of the zeppelin and reduced his altitude, bringing it back toward the Witch's castle. All the way he gave thought to the encomium this daring would win him and the epithets that would cling like laurels to his name forever after.

Oz the Wise!

Oz the Wonderful!

~~Oz the Triumphant!~~

He moored to the peak of the Witch's highest tower and descended a rope ladder to the castle courtyard, where the Witch was waiting for him.

She was older than he expected but certainly not much more so than an old maid or two he had courted briefly back in Omaha. She was taller than he was, but some of that was the tall pointed hat she wore. If he could only convince her to ditch the hat and put her hair up in a more practical bun.

"Very bold, coming here," the Witch said to him when his feet touched ground. "Bold... foolhardy."

"Merely the logical thing to do..." Oscar started. He swallowed hard. Though he considered himself an accomplished practitioner of the elocutionary arts, this one would require every bit of his skill. He finished, "since I wanted to prove myself worthy of you."

"Worthy?" she said, surprised.

"Worthy!" he said confidently. *Witches love confidence.* "The man who could capture your Winged Monkeys and return them to you is the man who can outsmart your enemies just as easily. Who better to be your ally than the man who could outsmart you...but didn't?"

"What are you getting at?" she said.

He bowed low to her, and when he raised his head again, he smiled. "You have a kingdom without a king. I could be that man. You have a castle without a lord. I could be that man. You have a heart without a helpmeet...I could be that man."

"Are you suggesting that I need you?"

"I'm suggesting that we need each other. Why, we could be like John Smith and Pocahontas opening up virgin lands for settlement. We could be like Sacajawea and Lewis—or possibly Clark—expanding territories westward. Isn't it manifest? Isn't it destiny?"

She stared at him up and down, and he tried not to pose or preen too much, although he wanted her to notice what a figure he cut. Her glance slipped past his shoulder to the impressive airship moored behind him. A wicked grin played across her lips.

"So is that progress in your pocket," she said, "or are you just happy to see me?"

The conversation went downhill quickly from there.

HIS NEW DIGS

The two witches shared a cup of tea in the gazebo situated in Locasta's summer garden. Locasta held her cup of tea to her lips and breathed in the minty aroma while her sister from the East retrieved a small hat from her pocket and set it on the table.

"Here's the Golden Cap," she said. "Whoever possesses it can command the Winged Monkeys three times. I've used my three commands, so now I pass it on to you. You may need them next if he chooses to come after you."

"Thank you," Locasta said. "But I don't think I need to fear him much, not after what you've described."

"He'll fool some with his tricks and bluster, like he has the folks in the Emerald City."

"What else did he say to you, then? After he proposed, I mean. That was a proposal for marriage, wasn't it?"

"Oh yes, it most definitely was." She chuckled and tapped her silver shoes in delight. "So the

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