

A PREQUEL NOVELLA TO  
**DOROTHY MUST DIE**

**NO PLACE LIKE**



DANIELLE PAIGE

# NO PLACE LIKE



DANIELLE PAIGE

**HARPER**

*An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers*

# **Dedication**

Thanks to Angela and Darren Croucher for all their  
help

# Contents

Dedication

One

Two

Three

Four

Five

Six

Seven

Eight

Nine

Ten

Eleven

Twelve

Thirteen

Fourteen

Fifteen

Sixteen

Seventeen

Eighteen

Nineteen

Excerpt from *Dorothy Must Die*

About the Author

Copyright

About the Publisher

# One

They say you can't go home again. I'm not entirely sure *who* said that, but it's something they say. I know it because my aunt Em has it embroidered on a throw pillow in the sitting room.

*You can't go home again.* Well, even if they put it on a pillow, whoever said it was wrong. I'm proof alone that it's not true.

Because, you see, I left home. And I came back. Lickety-split, knock your heels together, and there you are. Oh, it wasn't quite so simple, of course, but look at me now: I'm still here, same as before, and it's just as if I was never gone in the first place.

So every time I see that little pillow on Aunt Em's good sofa, with its pretty pink piping around the edges and colorful bouquets of daisies and wildflowers stitched alongside those cheerful words (but *are* they even cheerful? I sometimes

wonder), I'm halfway tempted to laugh. When I consider everything that's happened! A certain sort of person might say that it's ironic.

Not that I'm that sort of person. This is Kansas and we Kansans don't put much truck in anything as foolish as *irony*.

Things we do put truck in:

Hard work.

Practicality.

Gumption.

Crop yields and healthy livestock and mild winters. Things you can touch and feel and see with your own two eyes. Things that do you at least two licks of good.

Because this is the prairie, and the prairie is no place for daydreaming. All that matters out here is what gets you through the winter. A Kansas winter will grind a dreamer right up and feed it to the pigs.

As my uncle Henry always says: *You can't trade a boatload of wishes for a bucket of slop.* (Maybe I should embroider that on a pillow for

Aunt Em, too. I wonder if it would make her laugh.)

I don't know about wishes, but a bucket of slop was exactly what I had in my hand on the afternoon of my sixteenth birthday, a day in September with a chill already in the air, as I made my way across the field, away from the shed and the farmhouse toward the pigpen.

It was feeding time, and the pigs knew it. Even from fifty feet away, I could already hear them—Jeannie and Ezekiel and Bertha—squealing and snorting in anticipation of their next meal.

“Well, really!” I said to myself. “Who in the world could get so excited about a bit of slop!?”

As I said it, my old friend Miss Millicent poked her little red face out from a gap of wire in the chicken coop and squawked in greeting. “And hello to you, too, Miss Millicent,” I said cheerily. “Don't you worry. You'll be getting your own food soon enough.”

But Miss Millicent was looking for companionship, not food, and she squeezed herself



out of her coop and began to follow on my heels as I kept on my way. I had been ignoring her lately, and the old red hen was starting to be cross about it, a feeling she expressed today by squawking loudly and shadowing my every step, fluttering her wings and fussing underfoot.

She meant well enough, surely, but when I felt her hard beak nipping at my ankle, I finally snapped at her. “Miss Millie! You get out of here. I have chores to do! We’ll have a nice, long heart-to-heart later, I promise.”

The chicken clucked reproachfully and darted ahead, stopping in her tracks just in the spot where I was about to set my foot down. It was like she wanted me to know that I couldn’t get away from her that easily—that I was going to pay her some mind whether I liked it or not.

Sometimes that chicken could be impossible. And without even really meaning to, I kicked at her. “Shoo!”

Miss Millie jumped aside just before my foot connected, and I felt myself lose my balance as I

missed her, stumbling backward with a yelp and landing on my rear end in the grass.

I looked down at myself in horror and saw my dress covered in pig slop. My knee was scraped, I had dirt all over my hands, and my slop bucket was upturned at my side.

“Millie!” I screeched. “See what you’ve done? You’ve ruined everything!” I swatted at her again, this time even more angrily than when I’d kicked her, but she just stepped nimbly aside and stood there, looking at me like she just didn’t know what to do with me anymore.

“Oh dear,” I said, sighing. “I didn’t mean to yell at you. Come here, you silly hen.”

Millie bobbed her head up and down like she was considering the proposition before she hopped right into my lap, where she burrowed in and clucked softly as I ruffled her feathers. This was all she had wanted in the first place. To be my friend.

It used to be that it was all I wanted, too. It used to be that Miss Millicent and even Jeannie the pig

were some of my favorite people in the world. Back then, I didn't care a bit that a pig and a chicken hardly qualified as people at all.

They were there for me when I was sad, or when something was funny, or when I just needed company, and that was what mattered. Even though Millie couldn't talk, it always felt like she understood everything I said. Sometimes it even almost seemed like she *was* talking to me, giving me her sensible, no-nonsense advice in a raspy cackle. "Don't you worry, dearie," she'd say. "There's no problem in this whole world that can't be fixed with a little spit and elbow grease."

But lately, things hadn't been quite the same between me and my chicken. Lately, I had found myself becoming more impatient with her infuriating cackling, with the way she was always pecking and worrying after me.

"I'm sorry, Miss Millicent," I said. "I know I haven't been myself lately. I promise I'll be back to normal soon."

She fluffed her wings and puffed her chest out,

and I looked around: at the dusty, gray-green fields merging on the horizon with the almost-matching gray-blue sky, and all of it stretching out so far into nothing that it seemed like it would be possible to travel and travel and travel—just set off in a straight line heading east or west, north or south, it didn't matter—and never get anywhere at all.

“Sometimes I wonder if this is what the rest of life's going to be like,” I said. “Gray fields and gray skies and buckets of slop. The world's a big place, Miss Millicent—just look at that sky. So why does it feel so small from where we're sitting? I'll tell you one thing. If I ever get the chance to go somewhere else again, I'm going to stay there.”

I felt a bit ashamed of myself. I knew how I sounded.

“Get yourself together and stop moping, Little Miss Fancy,” I responded to myself, now in my raspy, stern, Miss Millicent voice, imagining that the words were coming out of her mouth instead of my own. “A prairie girl doesn't worry her pretty

little head about places she'll never go and things she'll never see. A prairie girl worries about the here and now."

This is what a place like this does to you. It makes you put words in the beaks of chickens.

I sighed and shrugged anyway. Miss Millie didn't know there was anything else out there. She just knew her coop, her feed, and *me*.

These days, I envied her for that. Because I was a girl, not a chicken, and I knew what was out there.

Past the prairie, where I sat with my old chicken in my lap, there were oceans and more oceans. Beyond those were deserts and pyramids and jungles and mountains and glittering palaces. I had heard about all those places and all those things from newsreels and newspapers.

And even if I was the only one who knew it, I'd seen with my own eyes that there were more directions to move in than just north and south and east and west, places more incredible than Paris and Los Angeles, more exotic than Kathmandu and

Shanghai, even. There were whole worlds out there that weren't on any map, and things that you would never believe.

I didn't need to believe. *I knew*. I just sometimes wished I didn't.

I thought of Jeannie and Ezekiel and Bertha, all of them in their pen beside themselves in excitement for the same slop they'd had yesterday and would have again tomorrow. The slop I'd have to refill into the bucket and haul back out to them.

"It must be nice not to know any better," I said to Miss Millicent.

In the end, a chicken is a good thing to hold in your lap for a few minutes. It's a good thing to pretend to talk to when there's no one else around. But in the end, if you want the honest-to-goodness truth, it's possible that a chicken doesn't make the greatest friend.

Setting Miss Millicent aside, I dusted myself off and headed back toward the farmhouse to clean myself up, change my dress, and get myself ready for my big party. Bertha and Jeannie and Ezekiel

would have to wait until tomorrow for their slop.

It wasn't like me to let them go hungry. At least, it wasn't like the *old* me.

But the old me was getting older by the second. It had been two years since the tornado. Two years since I'd gone away. Since I had met Glinda the Good Witch, and the Lion, the Tin Woodman, and the Scarecrow. Since I had traveled the Road of Yellow Brick and defeated the Wicked Witch of the West. In Oz, I had been a hero. I could have stayed. But I hadn't. Aunt Em and Uncle Henry were in Kansas. Home was in Kansas. It had been my decision and mine alone.

Well, I had made my choice, and like any good Kansas girl, I would live with it. I would pick up my chin, put on a smile, and be on my way.

The animals could just go hungry for now. It was my birthday, after all.

## Two

“Happy Swoot Sixtoon,” the cake said, the letters spelled out in smudged icing. I beamed up at my aunt Em with my brightest smile.

“It’s beautiful,” I said. I’d already changed into my party dress—which wasn’t that much different from the dress I’d just gotten all dirty in the field—and had cleaned myself up as best as I could, scrubbing the dirt from my hands and the blood from my knee until you could hardly tell I’d fallen.

Uncle Henry hovered off to the side, looking as proud and hopeful as if he’d baked it himself. He’d certainly helped, gathering the ingredients from around the farm: coaxing the eggs from Miss Millicent (who never seemed in the mood to lay any), milking the cow, and making sure Aunt Em had everything she needed.

“Sometimes I wonder if I didn’t marry a master chef!” Henry said, putting his arm around her



waist.

Even Toto was excited. He was hopping around on the floor yipping at us eagerly.

“You really like it?” Aunt Em asked, a note of doubt in her voice. “I know the writing isn’t perfect, but penmanship has never been my strong suit.”

“It’s wonderful!” I exclaimed, pushing down the tiny feeling of disappointment that was bubbling in my chest. A little white lie never hurt anyone, and I didn’t doubt the cake would be delicious. Aunt Em’s food might not usually come out looking fancy, but it always *tastes* better than anything else.

Oh, I know that it’s how a cake *tastes* that matters. I know there’s no point in concerning yourself with what it looks like on the outside when you’ll be eating it in just a few minutes.

But as it sat lopsided on the table with its brown icing and the words “Happy Sweet Sixteen” written out so the *e*’s looked more like blobby *o*’s, I found myself wishing for something more.

I just couldn't let Aunt Em know that. I couldn't let her have even the smallest hint that anything was wrong. So I wrapped her up in a hug to let her know that it didn't matter: that even if the cake wasn't perfect, it was good enough for me. But then something else occurred to me.

"Are you sure it's big enough?" I asked. "A lot of people are coming." I had invited everyone from school, not that that was so many people, and everyone from all the neighboring farms, plus the store owners at every shop I'd been to on my last trip into town. I'd invited my best friend, Mitzi Blair, and even awful Suzanna Hellman and *her* best friend, Marian Stiles, not to mention a reporter from the *Carrier* who had taken a special interest in my life since the tornado. Plus, Suzanna would be dragging her horrible little sister, Jill, along.

Aunt Em glanced down nervously. "There was going to be another layer, dear, but we were running low on eggs . . . ," she said, trailing off, her weathered face suddenly rosy with

embarrassment.

Uncle Henry came quickly to the rescue. "I just won't have a second helping," he said, rubbing his belly, which is not small. "It wouldn't hurt me to skip a first helping, come to think of it."

My aunt swatted his arm and chuckled, her worry momentarily gone. All those years of hard Kansas life had taken their toll on her, but when she was around my uncle, her eyes still lit up; when he made a joke, she still laughed a laugh that sounded like it belonged to a girl my age. "You'd eat the whole thing if I let you!" He swiped a bit of frosting with his finger and grinned.

Seeing them together like that, happy and playful and still as much in love as they'd ever been, I felt a swell of affection for them, followed immediately by sadness. I knew that, once upon a time, they had been as young as I was. Aunt Er had wanted to travel the world; Uncle Henry had wanted to set off to California and strike gold. They just hadn't had the chance to do any of those things.

Instead, they had stayed here, and when I asked them about those days now, they waved away my questions like they were ashamed to admit that they'd ever had dreams at all. To them, our farm was all there was.

*Will I be like them, someday?* I wondered. Happy with crooked cakes and gray skies and cleaning out the pig trough?

"I'm going to go hang the lanterns outside," Henry said, walking to the door and reaching for his toolbox. "People expect this place to look nice. After all, they helped build it."

"Only after you got it started," Aunt Em reminded him.

After the tornado had swept our house away—with me in it—everyone had figured I was dead. Aunt Em and Uncle Henry had been heartbroken. They'd even started planning my memorial service.

Imagine that! My funeral! Well, sometimes I did imagine it. I imagined my teachers from school all standing up one by one to say what a wonderful student I was, that there was something *truly*

special about me.

I imagined Aunt Em all in black, weeping silently into her handkerchief and Uncle Henry the very picture of stoic grief, only a single tear rolling down his stony face as he helped lower my coffin into an open grave. Yes, I know that without a body there could be no coffin, but this was a fantasy. And it was at that moment in my fantasy that Aunt Em would bolt up, wailing, and would race forward to fling herself in after my corpse, stopped only at the last minute by Tom Furnish and Benjamin Slocombe, two handsome farmhands from the Shiffletts' farm. Tom and Benjamin would be crying, too, because of course, they both harbored a secret admiration for me.

Well, if one's going to daydream, one might just as well make it a good one, don't you suppose?

Of course, I know it's vain, and petty, and downright spoiled of me to do such a thing as daydream about my own funeral. I know it's downright wicked to take even the slightest pleasure in imagining the misery of others,

especially my poor aunt and uncle, who have so little happiness in their lives as it is.

I try not to be vain and petty and spoiled. I *certainly* try not to be wicked (after my experiences with Wickedness). But we all have our bad points, don't we? I might as well admit that those happen to be mine, and I can only hope to make up for them with the good ones.

There was no funeral anyway, so no harm was done. Just the opposite, in fact! When I showed up again a few days after the cyclone—without so much as a scratch on me, sitting by the chicken coop, which had somehow remained undisturbed through everything—people had assumed that my survival was some kind of miracle.

They were wrong. Miracles are not the same as magic.

But whether you want to call it a miracle or something else, every paper from Wichita to Topeka put me on the front page. They threw a parade for me that year, and a few months later I was asked to be the head judge at the annual

blueberry pie contest at the Kansas State Fair. Best of all, because I came back from my adventures *minus* one house, everyone in town pitched in to build us a new one.

That was how we got this new house, to replace the old one that was still back in you-know-where. It was quite a spectacle to behold: it was bigger than any other for miles around, with a second story and a separate bedroom just for me, and even an indoor commode and a jaunty coat of blue paint, though that was just as gray as everything else in Kansas soon enough.

Henry and Em didn't seem particularly happy about any of it. They were humbled, naturally, that our neighbors had done all this for us, especially seeing as how they had all suffered their losses in the cyclone, some of them bigger than ours. Of course we were grateful.

But when the neighbors had done their work and gone home, my aunt and uncle had examined all the unfamiliar extravagances and had concluded that the old house had suited them just fine.

“An indoor commode!” Aunt Em exclaimed. “It just doesn’t seem decent!”

How silly they were being. Grumbling about the gift that had been so kindly given to us.

On the other hand, I had to admit that even *I* felt that the new house left a few things to be desired. Nothing could compare to what I had seen while I had been gone. How do you go back to a two-bedroom farmhouse in Kansas when you’ve been in a palace made of emeralds?

Once you’ve seen castles and Munchkins and roads of yellow brick, once you’ve faced down monsters and witches and come face-to-face with true magic, well then, no matter how much you might have missed it while you were gone, the prairie can seem somewhat dull and—truly—downright dreary.

All I wanted to do upon my return was tell my aunt and uncle everything about what I’d seen. The whole time I’d been in Oz, I’d imagined Aunt Em’s amazed face when I told her about the fields of giant poppies that put you right to sleep, and I’d



thought about how Uncle Henry would sputter and spit his coffee back into his cup when he heard about the town where all the people were made of china.

They hadn't given me quite the reaction I'd been hoping for. In fact, they'd hardly reacted at all. Instead, they'd just exchanged a worried glance and told me that it must have been some fanciful dream I'd had when I hit my head during the cyclone. They warned me not to repeat the story, and to get some rest. They said nobody liked a tale-teller.

Never mind that a bump on the head didn't explain where the house was now, or why no one had ever found it. And it didn't explain how I'd gotten home. When I told them about the magical Silver Shoes that had carried me back across the Deadly Desert, they seemed even less convinced than ever. After all, the shoes had slipped from my feet somewhere along the way.

I can see why some people might have thought I was crazy, or a liar, or had made the whole thing

up. Around here, they don't believe in anything they can't see with their own two eyes.

Aunt Em and I brought the cake into the living room and set it on the table by the modest spread of food she'd already laid out. As I looked at the room, all spruced up and decorated with a careful, loving hand, I reminded myself of how much they were doing.

The birthday party had been my aunt and uncle's idea—I'd overheard them talking just a few weeks ago about how blue they thought I'd seemed lately, and how a big birthday party might be just the thing to cheer me up.

I'd asked them not to do it, of course. I knew we didn't really have the money to spare.

Even so, I must admit that I was secretly pleased when they insisted on doing it anyway. As my "wild ride"—as so many people called it—had begun to recede further into memory, I was growing eager for something to break the monotony of the farm and school and then the farm again.

"Dorothy, what is your scrapbook doing out?"

Aunt Em asked, noticing the book with all my newspaper clippings sitting on the table next to the buffet. “Your guests will be here any moment.”

I quickly picked the book up and moved it aside so that it didn’t fall victim to any smudges of icing or stray crumbs. “Oh,” I said. “I thought someone might like to look through it at the party. A lot of people who are coming were quoted in the articles about me, after all. It might be fun for them to see their names in print.”

Aunt Em didn’t appear to think that was a very good idea, but she didn’t try to dissuade me. She just shook her head and started humming one of her old songs again as she scurried around, busying herself with last-minute tasks.

I sat down and began to flip through the pages of my scrapbook myself. Toto hopped up into my lap and read along with me. At least I had him. *He* knew it was all real. He’d been there, too. I wondered if he missed it the same way I did.

THE GIRL WHO RODE THE CYCLONE.

That headline, from the *Star*, was my favorite. I

liked the way it made me seem powerful, as if I'd been in control rather than just some little kid swept up by forces of nature.

In Oz, I hadn't been just some little kid either. I'd been a hero. I had killed two witches and freed their subjects from tyranny; I'd exposed the humbug Wizard and restored order to the kingdom by helping my friend the Scarecrow, the smartest creature I've ever met, claim the throne.

If only *those* things were in my scrapbook!

Here, I knew that I would never, ever make as much of myself as I did in my short time in Oz. It just wasn't possible. Here, it wasn't even considered proper to think about such things.

And yet I had wanted to come back here. All those brave things I'd done: I wasn't trying to be a hero. I was just trying to get home.

It would have been too cruel to leave Uncle Henry and Aunt Em all alone here, thinking that I was dead. It wasn't all to spare *their* grief either. I would have missed them terribly if I had stayed. All the magic in the world—all the palaces and

beautiful gowns and fields full of magical flowers—all the friends I'd found—could never have replaced the people who had taken me and raised me as their own after my parents had died. I would never have been able to be happy with them here and me there.

But sometimes I still wondered. Could there have been another way? Was this really home at all?

“Oh, Toto,” I said, closing the cover of the scrapbook harder than I intended to and tossing it aside onto the couch, where it landed just next to Aunt Em's embroidered throw pillow. Maybe the words on that pillow were more right than I knew. Maybe you *couldn't* go home again.

Either way, it would have been a nice consolation if I'd gotten to keep those shoes.

## Three

“Here,” Mitzi Blair said, thrusting a small gift into my arms as soon as I opened the front door and found her standing on the stoop. “Happy birthday. Is Suzanna here yet?”

I eyed Mitzi uncertainly and she gave me the same look right back, but with a hint of a question, like *Well?*

I don’t know what had come over me. Mitzi was my best friend and here I was treating her like a stranger at my birthday party. Luckily, I caught myself in my momentary rudeness, smiled brightly, and ushered her inside.

“Thank you!” I exclaimed, placing her present on the little table that Aunt Em had set aside for that purpose. “Suzanna and Jill are by the—”

I didn’t get a chance to finish my sentence. “My mom says happy birthday, too,” Mitzi said over her shoulder, already making a beeline for the corner,

where snobby Suzanna Hellman was slumped against the wall, looking straight out of a magazine ad in her brand-new dress with a fashionable wide collar and a bright pink sash while her sister, Jill, helped herself to Aunt Em's signature potato puff balls from the snack table.

"Thank goodness you're here," Suzanna said, her face cheering in relief when she saw Mitzi approaching. "I was beginning to wonder if Jill and I would be the only people under a hundred. Not counting Dorothy, of course."

I giggled at the barb—probably more enthusiastically than I should have—and tried to pretend that it wasn't at my expense.

It would have been easier to let it roll right off me if Suzanna didn't seem so *right*. The sparse crowd milling around the living room was almost entirely made up of Uncle Henry's friends from neighboring farms, and none of whom were a day under forty, if that. I had been hoping for a few of the handsome farmhands, at least, but I guess they'd all been left behind to keep an eye on the

livestock.

“So, Dorothy,” Suzanna said, turning her gimlet-eyed gaze in my direction. “Been in any good parades lately?”

This time, there was no sense in pretending she wasn’t poking fun at me. Suzanna couldn’t bear to see anyone else getting more attention than her, and was always acting like the one little parade they’d thrown for me after I’d survived the tornado made me some sort of spotlight-hogging monster. It had been years ago, but she would never let me forget it.

Frankly, I hadn’t wanted snobby, mean-spirited Suzanna Hellman at my party in the first place, but Mitzi had insisted that there was no point in throwing a party if you weren’t going to invite the richest girl at school—the *only* rich girl at school, actually—and so I’d relented.

Now I looked over at my friend, expecting to see her indignant, but she just averted her eyes to the floor, her face flushing. If I hadn’t known better, I almost would have thought she was stifling



a laugh.

Fine. I might as well admit it. When I say that Mitzi Blair is my best friend, what I mean to say is that she *used* to be my best friend. For most of my life, the two of us had been inseparable, but that had all changed after I'd ridden the cyclone.

Mitzi was the only one—other than my aunt and uncle—who I'd told the truth about my adventures in Oz after I'd come back. It hadn't gone well. Instead of marveling at everything I'd been through, Mitzi had called me a liar and a show-off.

We'd made up a few weeks later, but that didn't mean things had gone back to normal. These days she was spending more and more time hanging around with awful Suzanna Hellman, not to mention with Marian Stiles and Marjory Mumford. As for me—I was spending more and more time by myself.

Oh, I didn't care. This was my birthday, and Aunt Em had put so much effort into it, not to mention money that we couldn't well afford, with the farm doing the way it was. If she and Uncle

Henry were kind enough to throw me a party then I was going to enjoy it whether Suzanna Hellman wanted me to or not.

If only there were a few more people to talk to.

Of course, Uncle Henry had already warned me that not everyone I'd invited would be able to make it. It was harvesting season, after all, the busiest time for anyone on a farm, and anyway, most of my classmates lived too far away to easily make the trip all the way out here. Still, I had been hoping that a *few* more girls my own age would be able to make it.

So, even though I'm not exactly their biggest fan, I breathed a sigh of relief when Marian Stiles and Marjory Mumford walked through the door. I was happily greeting them when Mitzi tapped my shoulder. Suzanna's little sister was at her side, hopping impatiently from one foot to another.

"Excuse me, Dorothy?" Jill asked innocently. "When do you suppose the cake will be?"

"After the presents, I think," I replied. "It's one of Aunt Em's best."

“Well, when are presents, then? Mother said we had to stay till the cake.”

Suzanna snorted back a laugh and *shhh*-ed her.

I sighed. The truth is, I had been planning on waiting for the reporter from the *Carrier* to arrive before opening the presents. He'd told me that my Sweet Sixteen would make the perfect story for the Sunday edition. People were still interested in my doings, even if they weren't throwing me any more parades.

But the reporter was nowhere to be seen and people were starting to seem bored. Maybe one gift wouldn't hurt. It would make it feel more like a party. Plus—I had a feeling I knew exactly what my gift from Aunt Em would be. “I guess I could do a little preview,” I said.

“Aunt Em,” I said, wandering over to where she was sitting alone on the couch. (Aunt Em has never had Uncle Henry's gift for chatter.) “I think I should open *your* present. So everyone can see it.”

“Of course, dear—if you say so. But . . . don't you think you should open some of the others first,

though?"

"I'll get to them," I said. "I just can't *wait* for yours."

"Okay, dear. I'll ask Henry to bring it down." My aunt set her tea down and went to fetch Henry.

I'd been dropping hints for weeks that I wanted a new dress more than anything, and from the way my aunt's eyebrows had shot up into an arch every time I mentioned it, I had a feeling I'd be getting my wish. I didn't know how she was going to manage it—they'd already spent more money than they could really afford on the party itself—but if anyone could pull it off, it was Aunt Em.

Suzanna Hellman wouldn't be so smug once she saw me descending the stairs in a dress that was sure to put hers to shame. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed like just the thing to turn the party around.

A few minutes later, Toto was wagging his tail excitedly and racing around the room as Uncle Henry came out of the kitchen carrying a large,

floppy package wrapped in tissue paper. There was no box and the paper was crinkled and creased in all the wrong places, but I didn't mind.

It's what's on the *inside* that counts. And it certainly looked like what was on the inside was exactly what I thought it was.

Henry placed the present with the rest of the gifts, and everyone began to gather around. I picked it up and held it to my chest, and as I did, my eyes met Aunt Em's. She looked away with an expression that almost seemed worried.

"*Well?*" Suzanna urged me. "Are you going to open it or not?"

I peeled away the wrapping as Suzanna leaned in close, eager to get a good look. I heard her stifle a snort as heavy twill fabric came into view. My heart stopped.

The rest of the paper crumpled to the floor and the dress swung loose.

It was long and brownish green. Not sparkling green, or forest green or even blue green like the ocean. It certainly wasn't Emerald City green. No

It was green like . . . well, it was green like Aunt Em's old dress.

That's because it *was* Aunt Em's old dress. She'd tailored it to my size, fixed it up to make it look new by cinching the waist, giving it a fuller skirt, and adding poufy ruffles to the shoulders.

There was no getting around it. The dress was hideous.

The whole room knew it. Even Mr. Shifflet from the next farm over had a look of shocked horror on his face, and I'd never seen him wear anything fancier than a pair of clean coveralls.

My cheeks burned in embarrassment. The only sound in the room was coming from Suzanna, who was fighting to conceal outright laughter.

Toto snarled loudly at her, ever faithful, but that only made her suppressed giggles louder.

The worst, though, was the look on Aunt Em's face—a crushed mixture of hopefulness and humiliation that broke my heart.

She had tried—there was no question about that. Just like she'd tried with the cake. But I could

see what she had done: the color of the dress was faded and the edges of the fabric were worn. The red embroidery on the sleeves looked out of place, and I knew it was there to hide the tear from when she'd caught it on the chicken coop.

Suzanna gave up all attempts to cover her snickering once the dress was fully unfurled. "Oh, how nice," she said. "It'll be sure to keep you warm when you're working out in the fields. And you won't need to worry about getting it dirty!" At that, her sister burst out laughing and buried her face in her hands.

If I'd had a bucket of dirty water to throw in Suzanna's face, I would have. If I had, I'm curious whether Suzanna, like many a witch before her, would have melted right before the eyes of me and all my guests. I for one would not have been astonished. It wouldn't have been anything I hadn't seen before.

But I was empty-handed, and I knew the only way to stave off the angry, hot tears that were prickling at the corners of my eyes was to maintain

my dignity. “My, what a dress!” I exclaimed jubilantly to no one in particular, least of all Suzanna.

“You *have* to try it on,” she singsonged mockingly. “Go ahead. Show it off.”

At that, Marian Stiles began to giggle into her hands, too, and then Marjory Mumford. When Mitzi began laughing along with them—like the Benedict Arnold that she was—I realized the sad, final truth: I had no friends.

None of these people belonged at my birthday party. The people who belonged here were the ones who really cared about me: the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman and the Lion and Glinda and all the other people I’d met in Oz. *They* were my true friends.

“Well,” Suzanna prodded me again. “When’s the fashion show?”

I had had more than enough. I was Dorothy Gale. I was *The Girl Who Rode the Cyclone*. Not to mention the girl who went to Oz, and defeated two *real* witches on my own pluck alone. She was



nothing compared to them.

And now I was angry. It was one thing to be cruel to me. I could take it. But I didn't understand why anyone would want to hurt my aunt.

"I don't think you know who you're talking to," I said to Suzanna with every ounce of imperiousness I could muster. Which happened to be quite a lot.

Suzanna just hooted, and Marian looked as if she was about to burst.

"Oh, I know," Suzanna managed to reply through her giggles. "You're the Fairy Princess Dorothy. I wonder, though: why aren't your fairy friends here? Is it because you made them all up? It's too bad—a straw man and a big tiger at your birthday would probably fetch you another newspaper article for your precious scrapbook, now wouldn't they?"

I turned on Mitzi, whose face, redder than Glinda's ruby castle, betrayed her guilt. She had told them.

That was enough. Without another look at

anyone, I whirled on my heels.

“Never mind. I’ll go try it on right now.”

It was the last thing in the world that I wanted to do. But what other choice did I have? Give in to them? Let them get the best of me? I wouldn’t give them the satisfaction.

When I reached the stairs, though, each step seemed more hopeless and daunting than the last as I made my way to my bedroom, the awful gown draped heavily over my arm and Toto following right behind me.

In my room, I stood in front of the mirror and held the dress up to my chest.

It was a perfectly respectable dress. It really was. I could see how Aunt Em would have been pleased at her ingenious scheme to refurbish it, could see her happily sewing and cutting, congratulating herself for her thriftiness and creativity and pioneer spirit.

That was when all my anger and resolve fell away, leaving only a sense of sad, empty hopelessness.

Because of course it didn't matter at all. Even the finest dress money could buy—a dress befitting Her Majesty Suzanna Hellman herself!—wouldn't have been the dress I'd been dreaming of.

The dress I'd been dreaming of would have been magical. It would have come from Oz.

"I know you're disappointed," Aunt Em's soft voice said from the doorway. "I'm sorry those girls were mean to you. I *surely* don't know what's come over Mitzi Blair. But we did tell you not to share your tales. . . ."

I looked up at her.

*This* was the moral of the story, to her? This was *my* fault, for telling my friend the truth about what had happened to me?

"They're not *tales*," I snapped. "And I'm not disappointed. I just . . ."

I trailed off. I didn't know how to end the sentence without hurting her feelings more.

"You know that things have been tough," Aunt Em said. "We just have to get through this rough patch. I promise, there will be a new dress

someday soon. A dress and a bigger cake, and—”

“How?” I asked before I could stop myself. “How will we get any of those things? What’s going to be different about tomorrow or the next day? Every day is the same!”

Aunt Em’s face fell even further than it already had, further than even seemed possible.

“Our luck will turn,” she said. “Maybe next year will be a good crop, and we’ll be able to go into town and buy you whatever dress you want.”

It all came rushing out. “It’s not about a dress or a cake, Aunt Em. It’s about this whole place. Nothing ever changes around here, and everyone likes it just the way it is. But I’m sixteen now, and I can’t imagine spending the rest of my life here. Doing the same thing every single day, never wanting more.”

I was starting to cry now. “I just wish you could see what it’s like,” I said. “Then you’d understand, and Uncle Henry would, too. There’s magic out there in the world, Aunt Em. There’re things so wonderful that you could spend your whole life

trying to think them up and you'd never come close."

The tears in Aunt Em's eyes evaporated in an instant. Her gaze went steely. It's a trick my aunt has. She's not as much of a pushover as she first appears. I had to get it from somewhere, didn't I?

"Dorothy Gale," she said. "You are indeed sixteen now, and it's time you put your tall tales aside. There is no such thing as magic."

There was just no arguing with her like this. "I'm not feeling well," I said, turning away from her. "Could you give my apologies to my guests? I need to lie down."

She just shook her head in frustration as she closed the door behind her.

I didn't need to say anything to Toto as I pulled him up into my arms and collapsed into bed. He understood. His big, wet eyes said as much. They said he missed it as much as I did.

As angry as I was—at Mitzi and Marian and Suzanna and even at Aunt Em and Uncle Henry—knew that Aunt Em was right about one thing.

It didn't matter that it had been real. I was never going back there.

Kansas may not have felt like home anymore, but it was where I lived, and it was where I was going to live. I knew I had to put everything else in the past where it belonged.

I knew all those things, and yet there was a part of me that couldn't let go.

"There's no place like Oz," I mumbled, pulling Toto even closer to my chest. I barely knew I was saying it. I might have already been asleep.

## Four

When I woke up, the sky outside my window was black. I didn't know how long I'd slept for or what time it was, and Toto was licking my face.

"Oh, Toto," I said sleepily. "I was having the nicest dream—let me go back to sleep."

My dog wasn't listening. He was spinning in circles on the old quilt that Aunt Em had made for me right after I'd come to live with her and Uncle Henry after my parents died, when I was just a baby.

He was trying to get my attention.

"What is it?" I sat up sluggishly and dropped my legs to the floor as Toto jumped down in excitement and scampered under the bed. When he came back out a few seconds later, he was huffing and puffing and dragging something in his mouth. It was a box.

It was wrapped in glittering, red paper that

looked thick and expensive, with every corner perfectly creased. The package was tied with a bright green bow. “What in the world?” I gasped.

I took the box from him and carefully ripped through the paper to the box beneath. It was pink, the color of a perfect sunset.

Where had it come from? Was Uncle Henry trying to cheer me up? Had he snuck in here and hidden the box under my bed while I’d been asleep?

No. I knew instinctively that this was something else. The shade of pink looked so familiar. But there was no way . . . was there?

Or maybe there was.

I pulled the lid off and found myself looking at a pair of shoes. That was when I was certain.

Because they weren’t just any shoes. They were the most beautiful shoes I’d ever seen. They were red to match the wrapping paper and had sharp, pointy heels—the highest I’d ever seen, high enough that they would scandalize all of Kansas if I ever tried wearing them out of my bedroom.



They were lacquered and shinier than the glossiest patent leather, glowing with a warm radiance that seemed to come from within. No—not from within. It seemed to come from somewhere else. From another world.

I knew in my heart that that was *exactly* where it came from.

I reached down and ran my fingers over the heels. The shoes were smooth and strangely warm to the touch. These were the heels of a young woman who had never set foot inside a chicken coop. These were shoes fit for a princess. A *fairy* princess, if it would make Mitzi Blair happy to hear me say it.

I could barely breathe as I pulled them out of the box and set them on the floor, slipping off my worn, brown flats.

I heard a knocking at my door, but it sounded like it was coming from very far away.

I sat there, paralyzed, afraid that if I reached out to touch them again they would disappear, like food you try to eat in a dream. All I could do was

stare at them in awe.

The spell was only broken when Toto barked one more time and dove into the box, emerging a few seconds later with a pink slip of paper in his mouth. He dropped it in my lap. It was a note written in fastidious cursive handwriting, the ink red and sparkly.

*Dear Dorothy,*

*Happy birthday! I hope you like these. I thought about silver to match the ones you lost, but in the end I decided that red was more your color. I think you know what to do with them.*

*G*

*P.S. If anyone happens to ask, let's keep this just between us girls.*

When another knock came at the door, louder

this time, I ignored it again.

Trembling, I lifted my feet and, one by one, slid them into the red heels. They fit perfectly. The warmth I'd felt when I'd touched them before now coursed through my body, rising up through my toes, into my legs, and beyond. A smile spread across my face. I felt like my heart was expanding by the second.

The knocking on the door got louder. "Dorothy? Everyone's gone now." It was Uncle Henry's voice, anxious and urgent. "Can you open up the door, please?"

I rose to my feet. "Come in," I said, my voice strong and commanding, reverberating through the room. The sound of it surprised even me.

Uncle Henry opened the door and stepped into the room with Aunt Em right behind him. At first, he opened his arms to give me a hug, but then he gasped when he saw my feet. A split second later, Aunt Em gasped, too.

Aunt Em's hand flew to her bosom. "Oh my word," she said.

“Where . . . ,” Uncle Henry trailed off.

Toto yapped and sprung into the air. Without even thinking about it, I scooped him into my arms and drew him to my chest.

“You were wrong, Aunt Em,” I said softly. “You both were. It *is* real.”

I knew what I had to do. I knew how I could get back. And I knew I *wanted* to go back. Before either of them could reply, I knocked the heels together. Once. Twice.

Three times.

The shoes constricted around my feet like they wanted to be part of me. A red glow began to snake through the room like smoke. The shoes took three steps forward. Aunt Em and Uncle Henry both grabbed my arms, trying to stop me, but I wouldn’t let them. I *couldn’t* let them.

“Dorothy!” Uncle Henry yelled. “What in the world . . . ?”

“There’s no place like *Oz*,” I whispered. The room exploded in a crimson flash.

## Five

Everything around me blurred and folded in on itself, twisting into a hazy whirlpool of brilliant light and color. Aunt Em was screaming. Toto was barking madly, squirming in my arms. Somewhere, I heard Uncle Henry's voice. "Dorothy!" he bellowed.

I couldn't see any of them. All I saw was red and blue and green and purple and yellow as I plunged headlong into a liquid rainbow with no idea which way was up and which was down.

And then the colors stopped swirling and a new world constructed itself below me as I fell. I was just opening my mouth to scream when I hit the ground with a crash. Toto went flying out of my grip.

When I sat up a moment later, in the middle of a field, my head was still spinning but everything else was finally still again. I rubbed my eyes,

trying to piece it all together.

Toto, though, had recovered himself more quickly, and was already bounding through the grass toward me. He jumped right up, barking wildly, and licked my face in excitement.

The grass underneath us was bluish green. The sky above was even bluer. Not gray. Not white. Not whitish gray. But blue. The sun was warm on my face, and a light breeze ruffled the tall grass around me.

It wasn't a dream or a fantasy. I knew it as well as I'd ever known anything. I could feel magic in every blade of grass.

A few feet away a grove of trees bore strange and luscious-looking fruit that cycled steadily through a rainbow of colors. Farther off was a gurgling brook that I could have sworn was singing to me, saying, "Welcome home." On the banks of the stream, enormous flowers swayed in the wind, their giant blue blossoms—some as big as beach balls—opening and closing hypnotically, as if they were breathing.

Their scent wafted toward me on the breeze. I took a deep breath. It smelled like the ocean and fresh-baked blueberry pie and like the aftershave Uncle Henry wore for special occasions. It smelled like all those things at once, in a good way.

As if all that wasn't enough to tell me I was back in Munchkin Country, the only *real* proof I needed was staring right at me. Not ten paces from the stream, a little old farmhouse was situated crookedly in a patch of dirt.

Just where I had left it.

The wood was rotting, the roof was beginning to cave in, and huge tangles of twisting vines crawled out from every crevice. The windows were broken, the porch was near collapse, and the whole place appeared to be well on its way to sinking into the ground.

It had only been two years since I'd landed here, but the house looked like it had been sitting here for a century.

Still, there was no mistaking it. And I wasn't

the only one who recognized it.

I heard a high-pitched gasp, and I turned around to see Aunt Em sprawled out in a bank of wildflowers, her eyes wide in astonishment, one hand covering her mouth and the other pointing at the crumbling shack.

“Henry! Look!”

At her side, Uncle Henry rubbed his forehead as he sat up creakily. “Now see here, Dorothy,” he said irritably. Then he saw it, too.

“Well I’ll be,” he muttered. He squeezed his eyes shut and opened them again, like he was expecting to get a different picture this time. When nothing had changed, he jerked his head back and let out a wheezing noise that was a little like a burp. “Oh my,” he said. “I knew I shouldn’t have had that drink at your party. . . . I never did have a taste for the strong stuff.”

I laughed. “Don’t you see?” I exclaimed. “We’re here! We’re *all* here.”

After the disastrous start my birthday had gotten off to, I was now sure I’d never been so happy in



my life. I was back in Oz and this time my family had come with me. Now that Aunt Em and Uncle Henry were here, we could finally all be happy together. We would never need to go home, because home had come *with* me.

Aunt Em stood up, carefully dusting off her gray smocked dress.

She looked unsteady, and began to fan herself with her hand. For a second I worried that she was about to faint, but Uncle Henry stood, too, and put an arm around her waist. “There, there, Emily,” he said. “Take a minute. Breathe.” He gave me a strange look. “What have you gotten us into?” he asked. His gaze dropped to my feet accusingly. “And where on earth did you get those preposterous shoes?”

Aunt Em didn’t seem to care about the how or the why of any of this, though. Once she managed to catch her breath, she pulled herself from his grip, suddenly back in perfect form, and marched straight for the old house.

“Just *look*,” she marveled. “Henry, can you

even believe it?"

Henry hurried after, her but he wasn't as easy on his feet as she was, and he stumbled a few times as he tried to catch up.

"No, I can't believe it," he said, wheezing breathlessly.

Aunt Em pressed her palm to the weathered shingles in awe.

"Remember when you painted the window frames?"

"Yes, dear," he replied. "But I don't think you're in your right mind at the moment. We have more important things to worry about. Like where we are and how we got here."

She brushed him off with a wave of her hand.

I furrowed my brow and raced over to join them. "Excuse me," I said. "I know it's a wonderful house and everything. But haven't you noticed that we're not exactly in Kansas anymore?"

Henry jerked his face toward me sharply. "I did indeed notice, young lady. And we're going to

have a talk about that in a bit. But as you can see, your aunt isn't well. Let's just let her get her bearings."

"I *do* have my bearings," Aunt Em said. "Look! I'd forgotten all about this door knocker! The one you bought in Topeka just after you came home from the Great War!"

Henry's face spread into an involuntary grin at the mention of the knocker. "Yes," he replied softly. "I sure do remember that."

It was just like Aunt Em and Uncle Henry to be so wrapped up in fond feelings toward our old house that they didn't even notice where we were. You had to give it to them—my aunt and uncle had *heart*.

Still, I wanted them to understand the gravity of the situation. I wanted them to be as happy as I was.

"Look over here," I said, trying to shift their attention to a bush that had sprung up next to what used to be the kitchen window. "This shrub is growing little puffballs with eyes instead of fruit."

One of the puffballs sneezed right in my face. I jumped back in surprise, but my aunt and uncle went on ignoring me. Uncle Henry rubbed Aunt Em's back as she examined the molding around the door frame, remarking admiringly on the craftsmanship.

Then, before I could say anything else, something happened that not even they could ignore. On the little ramshackle porch, the air began to shimmer with energy. It was pink and glittery, like a little pink fish was swimming through the air, twisting and looping in little spirals, growing brighter and stronger and pinker by the second until Aunt Em was moved to shield her eyes.

Henry clenched his fists at his sides as if preparing for a fight. I wasn't worried. I'd already seen such strange things in this land that I just watched in excited curiosity as the energy crackled and glittered and grew until, slowly, it began to resolve itself into something resembling a form. Into something resembling a person.

Her face appeared first, pushing its way through the light as though emerging from a pool of water. Next came her golden crown, then finally the rest of her. She was standing right there on the porch, regal and glowing, just as beautiful as I remembered her. Her face was porcelain-white, punctuated with piercing blue eyes and a perfectly red, perfectly tiny little mouth. She was sheathed in a sleek pink evening gown that looked almost liquid and hugged her body scandalously.

“My oh my,” Henry said under his breath.

I knew exactly who it was. And I can’t say I was very surprised to see her. “Glinda!” I exclaimed joyfully, running to hug her.

I stopped in my tracks when I saw that she wasn’t responding. She wasn’t even looking at me. It was like she hadn’t heard me at all.

Then I noticed that her image was flickering and translucent. I could even see the faint impression of Henry’s prized door knocker shining through her image from somewhere behind her rib cage. She was fading in and out, getting clearer but

then more indistinct, like she wasn't entirely here yet.

“Dorothy,” she said, still not turning her face to meet mine. “Help me.” Her voice was a hoarse, urgent whisper.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, moving instinctively toward her. “What do you need from me? How do I help?”

Now I was standing right in front of her, but her eyes remained unfocused. She still didn’t hear me. “Help,” she repeated. “Help.” Her image came fully into focus for a last, brief moment. I lunged forward and reached for her, trying to grab her hand.

“Glinda!” I screamed.

But before I reached her, there was a bright flash of pink light, and with that, she was gone.

## Six

“Well,” Aunt Em said shakily, as if it had just dawned on her that something funny was going on. “That was unusual. Was that woman some kind of actress?”

“Of course not,” I said. I do try not to lose my patience with them, but sometimes it’s an effort. “She’s a *sorceress*. I’ve told you all about Glinda, remember?”

She and Henry both stared back at me with a look of blank confusion.

“A . . . sorceress?” Aunt Em seemed hesitant. “I suppose it did *seem* magical. . . .”

“It seems magical because we’re in *Oz*. You may have noticed the sneezing flower and the fruit that changes colors?”

My aunt and uncle exchanged a look. “Now see here, young lady,” Henry said. “I don’t care if this is Oz or Shangri-la or Timbuktu. You can’t just go

spiriting people away like that with not so much as a how-do-you-do. It's the busiest time of year and I have work to do tomorrow. I need to get a good night's sleep if I'm going to be up before dawn to milk the cows."

Aunt Em was nodding along with him as he spoke. "I'm not quite sure what's going on here," she said slowly. "But it's all very strange and, well, I would feel a lot better if I could sleep in my own bed tonight. Wouldn't you, dear? It's been a long day for you."

I'm the first one to admit that Oz is a lot to wrap your head around all at once, especially for two people who had always been perfectly content to spend their lives on the farm. At the same time, I had told them about this place so many times. You would think that would have given them at least a bit of a head start.

I tried again, this time speaking slowly and simply and trying to keep the creeping frustration out of my voice. "We have been transported to Oz," I said. "My friend Glinda the Sorceress mus



have brought me here. She's in trouble. I need to help her."

Toto barked one sharp *yip* of approval.

Neither of them looked very convinced, but before they could protest any more, Toto and I were already on the move, charging across the clearing, away from the house and the stream, in the direction of the Munchkin village I knew to be close by. I guess Aunt Em and Uncle Henry didn't want to be left alone in this strange place that might as well be Timbuktu because they began to follow.

I had imagined my triumphant return to Oz a thousand times. Probably more. This had not been exactly how I'd pictured it. I thought that I'd cleared up every last bit of trouble last time I was here. This time, I'd assumed my family and I would get to enjoy all the luxuries a magical kingdom had to offer without me having to go to the trouble of battling evil and saving the land.

I should have known better than that. Of course the very reason I'd been brought back would be because they needed my help. I'd saved Oz before.

If Glinda was in trouble, that meant Oz needed rescuing. Again.

I have to say—it was nice to feel special, but I would have preferred to be able to just relax and see the sights with my family. You know, like a vacation.

But it occurred to me that maybe a quest is the price of admission into a magical kingdom, and if that was the case I wasn't going to complain. I just hoped I could get it over with quickly. And the only way to do *that* was to keep moving.

It didn't take long for us to spot the Munchkin town in the distance, and as we got closer, I remembered that it was hardly a village at all—it was just a circle of squat, domed houses ringed around a cobblestone plaza with a statue in the center of it.

A statue. I didn't remember that part. And when I stepped onto the cobblestone plaza I suddenly understood why.

Towering over the square, looking every bit the hero, was a girl in a familiar checked gingham

dress, her hair pulled into two long braids. She had her hands on her hips and was staring triumphantly into the distance. The statue had been cast in marble and was entirely colorless except for one important feature: the shoes on its feet were silver, and they were sparkling in the afternoon sun.

This was Oz, where the unexpected wasn't unexpected at all. A hippopotamus in a tutu, a fat man walking on his hands, a pack of wild polar bears dancing the cha-cha—you could have put almost anything in the center of that square and I wouldn't have been surprised.

The statue, though, surprised me.

It was me. They had built a statue of *me*. I would have loved to see the look on Mitzi Blair's face if only she were here. I would have loved to see the look on my *own* face for that matter.

"Is that . . .," Aunt Em asked.

"It can't be," Uncle Henry said. "Can it?"

I stepped over to the base and gazed up at myself, awestruck.

"'HERE STANDS DOROTHY GALE,'" I re

aloud from the placard at the base, my voice wavering a little as I spoke the words. “‘SHE WHO ARRIVED ON THE WIND, SLAYED THE WICKED, AND FREED THE MUNCHKINS.’” I turned around to face my aunt and uncle.

They just stared at me, dumbfounded. A wave of triumph washed over me.

“Can’t you see now? Everything I told you was true. It’s written right here. Written in *stone*.”

Uncle Henry was rubbing his head. “Maybe *I’m* the one who’s not in his right mind,” he muttered to himself. “I did take quite a tumble.”

Aunt Em, though, was still staring at the statue. Her face rippling with emotions. It was all sinking in for her. She turned to me.

“I never—well, I suppose I just didn’t want to believe it,” Aunt Em said, her voice still unsteady but decisive now, too. “I *still* don’t want to believe it. It’s all too strange, you understand. Your uncle and I—we’re not like you. We’ve always been ordinary people. Something like *magic* . . .” She paused, marveling at the very

word. "Magic! Well, that doesn't come easily to people like us. But this is all too real. It doesn't matter whether I want to believe it. I can *feel* it."

Uncle Henry was still rubbing his head, but he was listening. And Uncle Henry never, ever doubts my aunt when she sets her mind to something. He swiveled his head toward her, then to the statue, and finally back over to me.

"In all the generations of Gales, there's never been a liar," he mused, trying the idea out.

"Or a crazy person," I pointed out.

"Never had one of those either," he agreed.

Now Aunt Em was getting excited. "Oh, Dorothy," she said. "I'm so sorry we didn't believe you. I've always known you were something special, ever since the day you came to live with us. And now!" She gestured at the statue. "To think you did something so brave and important that they put up a monument to you! I just wish your poor father and mother were here to see it. They'd be so proud of you."

With that, she wrapped her thin, strong arms

around me and hugged me tight. I hugged her back, too overwhelmed to say anything at all.

“I’m so proud of you,” she said.

“Yes, we’re very proud,” Uncle Henry said gruffly. “Of course,” he added, “that doesn’t mean we don’t need to get home . . .”

For a tiny woman, Aunt Em has a strong grip, and I was trying to peel myself out of her embrace when I began to hear excited chatter and whispering coming from all around us. “Hello?” I called. “Munchkins?”

They began to reveal themselves, a few at a time, their little faces slowly popping out of bushes and shadows and doorways and everywhere else you could imagine, like frogs after a rainstorm. Soon, we were surrounded by at least two dozen of the little people, none of whom were more than three feet high and *all* of whom were wearing little blue breeches and gold-embroidered bolero jackets, and funny pointy hats with bells around the brim.

“Declare yourself!” a voice shouted out from

the crowd.

“It’s me!” I replied, not sure who I was supposed to be addressing. “I’ve returned. I’m so happy to be back—I’ve missed you all so much.”

A Munchkin man stepped forward, looking up at me quizzically. He glanced at my outstretched hand, but made no move to return my shake. “Excuse me, young lady,” he said. “I am Cos, the alderman of this Munchkin village. And who are you?”

I cocked my head in surprise, and looked around.

“Well it’s me of course. Dorothy Gale.” I gestured up at the statue. “See?”

Cos looked up, back and forth between the figure and me, comparing the resemblance.

For a second there was silence. Next, a murmur spread through the crowd. Then, as one, they began to roar, “Dorothy!”

Cos took off his hat, twisting the brim in his hand like he was embarrassed to have forgotten me. There still seemed to be some uncertainty in

his eyes, though, as he examined me intently. “Dorothy? The Witchslayer? Is it really you?”

*Witchslayer?* I liked that. “It’s me,” I said happily.

“It’s been a very long time,” Cos said slowly. “We never thought we’d see you again.”

“I’ve been trying and trying to get back,” I said, kneeling so that we were face-to-face. “It’s not so easy, you know. A good, strong wind only comes around once every so often.”

I rose back up to my feet and looked around at the growing throng surrounding us, all of them gazing up at me in awed admiration.

I wanted to stay and talk, to hear about everything that had happened in Oz since I’d been gone. But there wasn’t time for that. There were more pressing things to worry about now. Like finding Glinda.

I wasn’t sure how much I should say about what I’d seen back at the old farmhouse. It was possible that no one knew, yet, that anything was wrong with Glinda. If that was the case, it was probably a



wiser idea not to let the cat out of the bag in front of an entire village of Munchkins, who, truthfully, are known for being an anxious and high-strung people.

Instead, I decided it was better just to try to get as much information as I could before I decided what to do next. “How has everything been lately?” I asked.

“What do you mean?” Cos seemed befuddled by my question, and the Munchkins began to chatter amongst themselves.

“I mean, how has Oz been, since I’ve been gone? There haven’t been any more witches causing trouble, or anything like that, have there?”

“Oh no, Miss Dorothy,” Cos replied, bobbing his red, cheerful face up and down. “We Munchkins have never been happier, since you slayed the witches all those many moons ago. The crops grow, the sun shines, and there is good magic everywhere. Praise Ozma!”

Hmm. So whatever had happened to Glinda, the Munchkins *didn’t* seem to know about it.

But what was Ozma?

“Miss Dorothy, would you and your family like to stay for a feast?” A murmur of approval rippled through the crowd at Cos’s invitation. “We would like to celebrate your visit.”

It sounded tempting. A big Munchkin feast—all in celebration of *me*!—would certainly be a good way to make up for the disaster that had been my Sweet Sixteen. And Munchkins are known to be magicians in the kitchen—literally. But . . .

“I’m sorry,” I said, kneeling down again. “But it’s very important that I see the king right away.”

“Now, Dorothy . . .,” Uncle Henry interjected.

“The king?” Cos asked. “What king?”

“Why, the King of Oz, of course,” I said in surprise.

When I first came to Oz, before the humbug Wizard had packed up his balloon to head back to America, he had chosen to appoint my friend the Scarecrow as the new king, and the people of Oz had immediately embraced him as their ruler. My friend the Tin Woodman had been made the

governor of Winkie Country, and the Lion the King of Beasts. When I'd gone back to Kansas, I'd done it knowing that I was leaving Oz in good hands.

But now it seemed that the Munchkins didn't know who I was talking about.

"We don't have a king," Cos said. The rest of them all nodded their agreement.

"But I was there when they put the crown on his head," I said.

They all began to mutter confusedly amongst themselves. "Oz has only one true monarch," Cos said. "Princess Ozma. The rightful and just ruler of our land."

"Princess *what*?" I had never heard of any *princess* before.

They all began talking over each other, trying to explain how great this Ozma person was. "Princess Ozma is beautiful and kind! Princess Ozma is our one true ruler! Long live Ozma!"

"What about the Scarecrow?" I asked.

Cos's face brightened. "Oh," he said. "The *Scarecrow*. I'd forgotten all about him. Well, I

suppose he *was* king. But that was for a very short time indeed, and it was ages ago.”

“It was only two years ago!”

“Two years?” Cos frowned. “No . . . it seems to me that it was much longer than that. Perhaps your calendar in the outside world is different from ours.” He fixed me with a serious look. “Dorothy, much time has passed since the days of the witches.”

Uncle Henry cleared his throat. “Dorothy,” he said. “This is all very interesting, but we need to be getting home. Mr. Munchkin, can you advise us on the best way back to Kansas?”

Cos looked at my uncle and blinked. “Where’s that?”

I didn’t have time to worry about Uncle Henry’s grumbling. Between Glinda’s plea for help and the news that the Scarecrow was no longer the king, it was becoming more and more clear that Oz had changed since I’d been gone. And I had an uneasy feeling that it wasn’t for the better.

If I was going to put it right, I had to find my old

friend.

“Never mind Kansas, Cos. It’s very important that we see the Scarecrow right away. Does he still live in the Emerald City?”

“Oh no,” Cos said. “He lives quite near here, as a matter-of-fact, in a mansion made of corncobs just off the Road of Yellow Brick. It’s less than a day’s walk.” He pointed into the distance. “You’ll find the road that way. Just be wary—the trees are restless today.”

“The trees?” I heard Aunt Em whisper to Uncle Henry.

“Thank you, Munchkins,” I announced. “Next time I see you, I hope I’ll be able to feast with you.” Then, confident in my path but nervous about what other surprises Oz had in store for me, I gave my most dignified good-bye wave.

As the people of Munchkin Country began to cheer my name, I knew that no matter what Oz had in store for me this time, one thing was clear:

I was home.

## Seven

“Couldn’t we have at least stayed for the banquet?” Aunt Em asked as we made our way from the Munchkin village, toward where Cos had told us the Road of Yellow Brick began. “I’m getting a touch hungry.”

“I’m not sure I’d want to see the food those strange little folks serve,” Uncle Henry said, raising his eyebrow skeptically. “Back in the war, they forced us to eat monkey brains and lizard tongues for breakfast, you know, and I didn’t care for that one bit.”

Uncle Henry was always talking about his days in the war, but sometimes it seemed hard to believe that he’d ever left Kansas at all. Some of his stories seemed much more bizarre than anything Oz could dream up.

Then again there had never been a Gale who was a liar, so who was I to doubt him?

“Henry Gale,” Aunt Em admonished him. “They did no such thing. Anyway, I’m sure the food here is just fine.”

“They could serve me Lobster Newburg and Baked Alaska and it would still be time to get on home,” he replied.

“Oh, don’t you see?” I exclaimed, trying to make him understand. “Don’t you see? We’re in Oz now! You don’t need to worry about the cows, or the crops, or the pigs, or anything like that anymore. Life here is so much better—can’t you see already how beautiful it is? In Oz, you won’t need to wake up at dawn to milk the cows ever again!”

Aunt Em touched my shoulder gently, calming me down. I hadn’t even realized how worked up I’d gotten. “Now, Dorothy,” she said. “It *is* lovely here. And we’re so proud of your statue and all we’ve learned about you today. But your uncle is right. We can’t stay here. This is no place for us.”

“Anyway, I *like* milking the cows,” Uncle Henry said.

I stopped dead in my tracks, right there on the yellow bricks. For all of Henry's griping and Aunt Em's nervousness, it had never occurred to me that they would still want to go home once they got a taste of Oz. How could anyone want to go back to a dry, dusty field and a few irritable pigs when there were fantastic things around every corner here?

"Of course we're going to stay," I said. "Why in the world would we go home?"

My uncle looked downright aghast. "Because it's our *home* and that's where we all belong," Uncle Henry said. "I'm glad the people love you here, but that doesn't change who you are, missy."

"Don't lose your temper, Henry," Aunt Em cautioned him. "But I *do* have sewing circle next week, and the house is still a mess from your party, Dorothy. If we don't go home soon, I'll never have time to clean up all the dishes."

Suddenly I wanted to scream. They had to be joking. I had wished so hard to have a second chance here, never expecting it would actually



happen. And now it *had* happened, and we were walking happily through Munchkin Country on a day more beautiful than Kansas had ever seen or *would* ever see. They wanted to give it all up so that Aunt Em could go do the dishes for her sewing circle?

At least I had one foolproof ace up my sleeve. I didn't even have to lie. Well, not exactly.

"I don't know *how* to get home," I said irritably, fighting back anger. "I don't even know how we got here in the first place! The only one who can send us back to Kansas is Glinda, and she needs our help. Once we find her, we can all talk it over."

As I spoke, I felt my shoes pulsing against my feet with a warm, tingling feeling, as if I'd just dipped them in a whirlpool of warm water. So maybe it was a tiny lie after all—the shoes had brought us here, and it wouldn't surprise me one bit if they could bring us home, too. But Uncle Henry and Aunt Em didn't need to know that.

Neither of them looked too thrilled with my

plan, but it's not like they had a choice. So Toto and I stomped ahead and we all moved on.

The first signs that we were nearing the road were some scattered bricks here and there—they almost looked like they were growing out of the dirt. After a few more minutes of walking, there were more and more of them, and then the road sprung up in the middle of a wide, overgrown field, unfurling itself into the horizon like a golden ribbon.

Aunt Em was so surprised when she saw it that she let out a squeak and jumped back on her heels. Uncle Henry shook his head as if he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

I'd spent my share of time on this road, but even I was taken aback by how radiant it was in the afternoon sunlight, at the dazzling golden contrast against the blue-green of the grass and the cornfields and the sky, at the way it twisted and spiraled through the fields and hills, winding out into the distance like it would lead us anywhere we could possibly imagine, if only we could name

the place.

Toto was already a few paces ahead of us, panting and wagging his tail in excitement. He barked three times, ready to lead the way.

“Well, I suppose it won’t hurt to explore just a bit,” Uncle Henry said. “Now that we’re here anyway.”

Aunt Em didn’t say anything at all. She just stepped forward and set a foot onto the road. She looked back at us with a small, playful smile. “I guess the dishes can wait,” she said. “For now at least.”

The thing about the yellow road is that it’s enchanted. It wants you to follow it—not for any devious reason, but just because it likes to have a purpose. It’s very hard to resist a road with such infectious enthusiasm. I knew from experience.

My feet tingled against the bricks as we eased our way down the road, letting it lead us lazily through the hills and fields and valleys of Munchkin Country. With every step I took, it was like I could feel magic flowing up from the road

and into my body. Surprisingly, even after as long as we'd been walking—even in heels higher than any I'd ever seen before, let alone *worn*—my feet didn't hurt. It was just the opposite actually. It felt like I was getting a very pleasant foot rub.

We strolled for hours without getting tired. Everyone seemed so happy. Uncle Henry was whistling one after another of the old songs he'd learned in the war, and Aunt Em was peppering me with questions, like, "Where was it that you met your friend the Scarecrow?" And, "I still don't understand why this Tin Man of yours wanted a *heart* so very desperately. He sounds like he was perfectly kind and loving and gentle without one, so why bother?"

She often gasped in amazement at a strange plant or animal—she was practically beside herself with glee when we came upon a resting flock of flying piglets, no bigger than sparrows, who were nibbling at some apples that had fallen into the road—but other times, like when we passed by the waterfall that fell up instead of

down, she was simply caught without anything to say.

When we walked through the field of poppies that I remembered so well, I told everyone to hold their noses so we wouldn't be tempted to lie down for an endless nap. We walked right on through, admiring the ruby-red blossoms and the little puffs of pink smoke that shot into the air every so often.

We made it through without our eyelids even fluttering.

"In some ways it's so different from Kansas and in others it's just the same," Aunt Em remarked a bit later as we strolled through a flourishing field of corn that grew over our heads on either side. Clearly she was trying to put a positive spin on things. "I mean, we grow a lot of corn back home, too."

"This corn's different, Aunt Em," I said. "It comes right out of the husk already buttered, and it's like nothing you ever tasted."

"Never had a problem buttering my own corn, thank you very much," Henry sniffed. But I could

tell even he was impressed. Back home, butter was for special occasions only. When I plucked an ear from a stalk and shucked it, the smell wafted up enticingly. Aunt Em took a nervous bite and her eyes widened. As soon as he saw her reaction, Uncle Henry helped himself to his own, and soon all three of us were sitting by the side of the road munching to our hearts' content.

It was so wonderful that I almost forgot anything was wrong. I almost forgot Glinda's desperate plea for help, and the fact that if Glinda was in trouble, Oz was in trouble, too. If wickedness was allowed to run rampant, the lush, magical cornfields would probably be replaced with barbed-wire orchards or bulldozed to make way for pincushion factories or something even more terrible.

I couldn't forget that. I was here with a job to do.

But for now the corn was plentiful, there was nothing wicked in sight, and all seemed right with the world.

That is, until we'd finished our lovely picnic, set off traveling again, and made our way a few more miles down the road.

*That's* when the screaming started.

## Eight

Soon after we left the cornfield, the sky darkened into dusk and the picturesque fields and farmland we had been traveling through began to give way to a barren, burned-out landscape of stunted, sickly trees and shrubs, which made the constant screaming even eerier. The grass thinned out until the ground was mostly just blue-gray dirt dotted with sad and dried-out patches of weeds. Even the road itself was different here, dull and worn down, the bricks cracked or loose or missing entirely. Crows swooped overhead, their dark wings casting long shadows on the pale yellow bricks.

Up ahead, a forest loomed. It was deep and black, thick with vines. It stretched on and on endlessly in either direction.

The screaming was coming from somewhere deep in the forest, a deep guttural wail that shook me to my core.



It was a scream, but it was also something like a song, too. It was like all the pain and sorrow in the world was being dredged up from the bottom of the earth and was twisting itself into a horrible, tortured melody.

We all stopped walking. Even Toto, who was usually brave in the face of any danger, crouched in a ball at my feet, quivering with fear.

“I don’t like the sound of that, Dorothy,” Uncle Henry said with a grave expression.

“No,” Aunt Em agreed. Her face turned pale. “[I] don’t like it one bit.”

I had to give them credit for putting it so mildly. Sometimes people you think you know well can still surprise you. They were being brave. Or, at least, they were trying.

I wasn’t sure if I was capable of the same. Everything in my body was telling me to give up and run away. Back to the cornfield, to the Munchkin village, to the little old farmhouse by the riverbank in the woods. Back to Kansas, even.

But when I turned around, I saw that single path

we had been following now forked out behind us in five unfamiliar directions. Some force wanted us to pick one of those paths in the hope it would lead us back to where we had come from.

I had a feeling none of them would. In my experience, when a dark force you don't understand wants you to do something that badly, it's best to do exactly the opposite.

I looked into the distance. The road plunged straight ahead like a golden knife through the heart of the forest. However horrible that screaming, the only choice was straight ahead.

"Come on," I said.

My aunt and uncle and my dog all looked at me like I had lost my mind. But when I took a step forward to show them it was possible, I saw that my shoes were burning red in the dusky, spooky, evening light, their comforting glow pulsing against the washed-out yellow bricks in time with my heartbeat, and I knew it was the right thing.

"Come on," I repeated, firmer this time. I took another step. Then Toto took one, too, still shaking,

and then Aunt Em did the same. Uncle Henry grabbed her by the elbow and followed. If she was going, he was going, too. You could always count on him for that much.

So we moved slowly toward the woods, together, and as we got closer that moaning yowl shattered and reshaped itself into something else: a scratchy, violent squall so loud that my whole skull vibrated from the force of it.

Aunt Em and Uncle Henry doubled over as it hit them, both screaming and covering their ears in pain.

As unpleasant as it was, though, I wanted to hear it. The only way to understand it was to listen.

It was the sound of ravens screeching and rivers running dry, the sound of milk curdling into blood and children being torn from their mothers' arms.

It was the sound of death. The sound of evil.

I took one more step forward anyway, feeling as if I was being propelled by a force outside myself, and that was when I saw their faces.

Each tree had one, and each face was worse than the last, each formed out of thick, silvery-black bark, gnarled and distorted into tortured grimaces and angry, curled scowls and gape-mouthed expressions of terror.

That's when I understood: the sound wasn't coming from *inside* the woods. It was coming from the woods themselves. The trees were screaming.

And I recognized them. Sort of.

"They're not supposed to be here," I said under my breath. I don't think anyone heard me over the noise.

On my first trip to Oz, after the Wizard had gone home, the Scarecrow, the Lion, the Tin Woodman, and I had all made our way to Quadling Country to see Glinda the Good in the hopes that she would have the key to sending me home. Along the way, we'd had no choice but to travel through the Forest of the Fighting Trees.

That forest had been a lot like this one. The trees there had been mean and cruel, with ugly, hollowed-out faces and branches that bent and

twined around you, tossing you to the ground when you tried to pass underneath them.

But they hadn't screamed like this.

Were the two forests related? And if so, how? This one hadn't been here the last time I'd walked this road. Where had it come from?

It didn't matter. Nothing mattered except getting through it. I forged ahead with Toto at my side and my aunt and uncle only a few steps behind.

The screaming became louder and louder until it hardly seemed like sound at all anymore, and more like a hopelessness so strong I could almost feel it as an aching pain, lodged somewhere in the back of my gut.

It was so loud I wanted to tear my hair from my skull, to scratch at my face until it bled.

And then it was over. Just like that, everything went silent. Deadly silent.

I looked to Aunt Em and Uncle Henry, and they looked back at me, just as shaken and surprised as I was. None of us said anything for fear of upsetting the quiet.

Then we all looked up together, and saw the trees towering over us. We had made it to the edge of the wood.

They were tall and thin, hardly wider around than Aunt Em, and were almost entirely bare of leaves. Their cruel, twisted faces took up almost the entire lengths of their trunks, and their knotty, spindly branches spidered out into sharp claws.

Two trees, taller and older-looking than the rest, stood on either side of the brick road at the spot where it disappeared into the dark tangle of woods. Their faces were frozen into gargoyle masks of torment and despair.

I wondered how they had gotten this way. Had they been people once? Were they being punished for something they had done in another life? Or was it something else entirely?

In the time I'd been back in Kansas, I'd almost let myself forget this part of Oz: the witches and the monsters and the ugly, dangerous things. I'd let myself forget that magic is slippery and unpredictable. It likes to change things. Sometimes

it changes it into something incredible and wonderful—something to take your breath away. Other times it twists it and corrupts it into something you barely recognize.

For everything that's wonderful, there's something wicked, too. That's the price you pay for magic.

*It's worth it*, I thought. Even here, standing at the mouth of a place that radiated the purest evil I'd ever felt, I knew it would always be worth it.

Because without magic, you're just left with Kansas.

Without warning, there was a loud creaking sound, followed by a groan, and then a crack as the large tree to the left side of the road lurched forward and began to uproot itself from the ground, scattering dirt everywhere.

It pulled itself toward us by its roots, dragging itself in our direction. My feet began to tingle.

It was coming right for me. It hissed and snapped its jaws.

The only way out was through. So I began to

run.

I picked up Toto, ducked around the tree, and plunged myself into the forest, knowing from the sound of footsteps that Uncle Henry and Aunt Em were right behind me.

The road through the forest wasn't anything like the road that had taken us through Munchkin Country. The bricks were still yellow, but they were grown over with leaves and brush; they were crumbling and warped where the roots of the trees were moving in on their territory.

I didn't care. I raced down the path as fast as I could, as narrow and obstructed as it was, praying with each stride that my foot found a solid landing.

The forest was dark and overgrown. The trees grasped and clawed; they swiped at me with their sharp branches and bent their trunks to trip me.

Instead of screaming, they were now grunting and hissing and whispering taunts in my ear that I couldn't quite make out.

Behind us, I could hear that sick, scraping, creaking sound as the first tree dragged itself



across the bricks in pursuit of me and my aunt and uncle and my dog. When I heard more snapping and cracking sounds, I knew that it wasn't just one anymore: his brothers and sisters were uprooting themselves to chase after us now, too.

I ran faster, still baffled how easy it was in my five-inch heels.

The whole time, I made sure I was listening for the sound of Aunt Em and Uncle Henry close behind me. They might have been old, but at least they could still outrun a few trees.

And then Aunt Em tripped. She let out a sharp scream and went flying onto the ground in front of me, landing on her chest with a thump.

"Em!" I cried.

"I've got her!" Uncle Henry raced up from behind me. It's a good thing my aunt was so tiny and a good thing Uncle Henry was stronger than he looked, after all those years of working alone in the fields. Without even pausing in his stride, he swept Aunt Em up into his arms, threw her over his shoulder, and kept on running.

It didn't matter. It was too late. The trees had closed in on us, blocking the path forward.

They were behind us as well, their branches weaving tightly into one another, trapping us completely.

One of the trees snarled and lunged for Aunt Em. She cried out in terror as it slashed its wooden claws against her face, leaving three thin lines of blood on the ridge of her cheekbone.

I didn't look at him, but I could feel my uncle trembling next to me. I should have been scared, too, but I wasn't. Just the adrenaline, I guess. Instead, I felt myself go white-hot with rage.

How dare these trees threaten me? How dare they harm the people I cared about? I didn't even think they wanted to *hurt* us. I think they were just trying to humiliate me. Just like Suzanna and Mitzi had done at my birthday party.

Maybe that would work back in Kansas, but here in Oz, I demanded respect.

*"Stop,"* I commanded.

My shoes pulled tight on my feet, like they'd

just gotten a size smaller. A shock of energy sizzled up from where my heels dug against the bricks and spread through my body. It felt strange, but I welcomed it.

It felt like another person had taken hold of me. “*I am Dorothy Gale*,” I said. The words sounded strange and foreign as they came out of my mouth, reverberating through the endless tangle of branches.

The trees were listening. “I am the Witchslayer. Allow us to pass, or suffer the fate of all the others that have stood in my way.”

Just like that, the trees began to relax their branches. They shrank away, stifling their hissing like it had all been one big accident. Slowly, they crawled out of the road and back into the forest, where, one by one, they began to settle their roots back into the dirt.

We were free to go on.

I had done that somehow. All I’d had to do was ask. Were the trees just big pushovers in the end? Or was it something about *me* that had scared

them?

“How—” Aunt Em said. Uncle Henry dropped her out of his arms and placed her upright again.

“What came over you, girl?” my uncle asked. “Not to say I’m not grateful, but . . . you didn’t even sound like yourself.”

“I don’t know how I did it,” I said uncertainly. I had found a power somewhere within myself, and I had used it. Or had *it* used me? It was hard to tell. I wasn’t sure I wanted to know the answer.

“Next time,” Aunt Em suggested, “it might be wise to bring an ax.” She glanced over at me nervously. There was relief in her eyes that we’d made it through the woods alive but I thought I saw something like fear, too. Not fear of the trees either. Fear of *me*.

“There’s not going to be a next time,” Uncle Henry spat. “Because we are going home. I’ll spread my own butter if it means I never have to go through anything like that again as long as I live.”

The four of us carefully made our way through the rest of the forest not saying anything else about

what had happened. The trees were still scowling and making jack-o'-lantern faces at us from the side of the road, but they didn't make a peep. We walked quickly. Toto hopped into my arms, where he stayed, keeping careful watch on our surroundings.

Soon, moonlight began to streak through the gaps in the branches, and then the path opened up. We had made it out of the woods. A silvery vista unfolded before us, the winding path of yellow bricks shimmering like water and dipping down into a huge, breathtaking valley. All along the road, little flowers lit the way, their centers glowing with flickering blue flames.

I collapsed onto the road and caught my breath, finally able to let down my guard. I put a palm against my face and drew back blood from where one of the trees had scratched me. My calves were shooting with pain from running. Or was it from something else?

And yet, I wasn't really tired. Winded, yes, but not tired. Actually, I felt more alive than ever, like

I had energy seeping from every pore on my body.

I followed the road into the valley and then up the crest of the next hill, and I saw that we had finally reached our destination: there on the horizon was the Scarecrow's house, golden and radiant against the night sky, lit from within. Just like the Munchkins had told us, the house was made entirely from enormous corncobs as tall as trees and five times as wide around, each one forming a single, towering turret. It wasn't just a house. It was a castle, really.

I pointed. "That's where we're headed. That's where my friend the Scarecrow lives."

Uncle Henry whistled. "I've heard about the Corn Palace in South Dakota, but I don't think it's anything compared to *that*."

We followed the road down the hill, into the valley. The evening was cool and the breeze felt good against my skin and everything was so pleasant that our frightful experience in the woods was almost forgotten. Almost.

*What had I done back there?* I wondered. Had

the trees' bark simply been worse than their bite? Or had my shoes had something to do with it?

I was still considering the question when a certain feeling of *familiarness* came over me, and then I saw it: at the edge of the field, a wooden post was sticking up out of the ground at a lopsided angle.

Something about seeing it there, like nothing had changed, made me almost want to cry. I knew that post. It was where I had first found the Scarecrow. Without him, I would never have made it to the Emerald City, would never have been able to defeat the Wicked Witch of the West. I would never have learned how brave I could really be.

Seeing it there, for the first time I knew that I was back. I was really, really back. He had been my friend, and I had missed him so much. Now I was going to see him again.

"What is it, Dorothy?" Aunt Em asked, seeing a small smile on my face.

"Nothing," I said. "I'm just happy."

## Nine

Uncle Henry and Aunt Em were still huffing and puffing from the climb up the hill when we finally approached the entrance to the corncob mansion. It was even bigger up close than it had looked from far away, and I felt almost nervous as I reached for the corncob knocker on the door.

What if he was different? What if he didn't remember me? What if he was old and gray? (Could Scarecrows *get* old? There was still so much about Oz that I didn't know.)

There wasn't much time to wonder anything. The door opened before I could knock, and there he was, right before my eyes, just exactly the very same as I'd left him; just the same as I'd remembered him every day since Glinda had sent me home.

"Dorothy!" the Scarecrow exclaimed. I threw myself into his straw arms and he swept me up and



spun me around, whooping with elation. “The Munchkins sent a bluebird to tell me you were on your way, but I was afraid to believe it!”

“You know I’d never leave you for good,” I said, laughing.

I was still grinning from ear to ear when he set me back down again, but the Scarecrow’s face looked more serious. “We missed you, Dorothy,” he said, and his kind, smiling, drawn-on eyes—the ones I’d never forgotten—began to fill with tears. “Oz hasn’t been the same without you. I didn’t think you were ever coming back.”

“I didn’t either,” I said, reaching out to touch his arm. “But I’m back because of Glinda. I know she’s in trouble, and I have to rescue her. Do you know where she is?”

The Scarecrow cocked his stuffed head to the side.

“Glinda?” he asked. “What have you heard about her?”

“I saw her,” I said. He looked even more surprised at that. “She was at my old house by the

Munchkin village. Well—it wasn't her exactly. It was more like some kind of *vision*. Like she was trying to send me a message. She told me she needed my help."

The Scarecrow looked concerned. He was stroking his chin in thought. I knew that if anyone would know what to do, it was him—he was the wisest creature in all of Oz, and probably anywhere else, too.

"We have much to talk about," he said after a spell. "But first, introduce me to your friends."

I laughed. I'd been so excited to see him that I'd forgotten all about my aunt and uncle. They were still standing in the doorway looking like they had absolutely no idea what they'd gotten themselves into.

"They're not my *friends*, silly. They're my *family*—my aunt Em and uncle Henry." As I said their names, Uncle Henry gave a funny little half wave and Aunt Em bowed awkwardly.

The Scarecrow lit up—it's amazing how expressive a painted-on face can be. He clapped

his gloved hands together and he bounded for them, practically tackling them as he wrapped his flimsy arms around their waists. “Of course! I’ve heard so much about both of you! How have your travels in Oz been so far?”

Aunt Em, Uncle Henry, and I all exchanged a glance.

“Oh, it was all just grand until we came to the screaming monster trees that tried to murder us,” Uncle Henry said.

“Oh dear,” the Scarecrow said. “The Forest of Fear? Don’t tell me the Munchkins didn’t warn you.”

“How could we *not* pass through the forest?” I asked. “There’s no way around it, at least as far as I could tell.”

“Of course you have to pass through it but—the Munchkins really didn’t tell you to stuff your ears with Pixie thread?”

I shook my head. “I don’t even know what a Pixie thread is.”

“It keeps you from hearing that infernal racket

the trees love to make. If you can't *hear* them, you won't be afraid. And if you're not afraid, they won't even know you're there. Won't bother you a bit. They'll just look like exceedingly ugly trees. Which, in the end, is really all they are."

They sensed fear. Was *that* how I had managed to get rid of them? Just by showing them that I wasn't scared?

No. Aunt Em and Uncle Henry and Toto had all been frightened. Somehow, I had made the trees afraid of *me*.

The problem was that it wasn't just the trees who had been scared of me. I'd scared myself, too.

"I don't think we'll be traveling back that way anytime soon if we can avoid it," I said. "With or without Pixie thread."

The Scarecrow sighed. "A reasonable response. Those trees are such a nuisance. Bad for tourism, especially when the Munchkins can be so forgetful about reminding passers-through to protect themselves. I keep telling the princess that she should just set a match to the whole forest, but

she won't hear of it. She says they're part of Oz—that destroying them would upset the whole magical balance.”

“If that's balance,” Aunt Em said, shuddering at the memory of the afternoon, “I'd hate to think what it looks like when the scales start to tilt.”

The Scarecrow tipped his hat to her. “A very good question, Mrs. Gale,” he said. “Let's hope you never find out the answer. Now, come, let's eat. You must be starving after what you've been through.”

He turned to a doorway that led deeper into the castle and cupped his hands to his mouth. “Munchkins, prepare a feast for our special guests!”

As we entered a great dining room two Munchkins dressed in yellow and green—with tiny, pointy hats perched atop their bald heads—appeared out of nowhere.

We took our seats at the banquet table—even Toto had been given a place next to me—and before we knew it, our table settings flew in front

of us only to land gently at our places: the napkins perfectly folded, the forks on the left, none of it even a smidgen askew.

Within seconds, our glasses were filled to the top with a delicious-looking beverage I didn't recognize, and it was only five minutes before tray after heaping tray of piping hot food appeared on the table.

"I took the liberty of having food prepared that I thought you'd be familiar with, rather than some of Oz's more . . . *exotic* native dishes," the Scarecrow said, much to the relief of my aunt and uncle, who, despite their experience with the self-buttering corn, still seemed apprehensive at the idea of eating magical food.

"And very kind it was of you! There's enough grub here to feed my old army platoon," Uncle Henry said. He picked up a serving spoon and helped himself to a generous portion of mashed potatoes.

"It sure does look good. I think," Aunt Em said, eyeing a heaping bowl of caviar, which, even

though it wasn't the least bit magical, was probably just as exotic as anything else Oz had to offer as far as she was concerned. At least Uncle Henry had gotten the chance to see a few scattered corners of the world, back in his army days. This was the first time Aunt Em had ever set foot outside of Kansas.

She was taking her maiden voyage in remarkable stride.

I'd never eaten so much in my life and I'm pretty sure Uncle Henry and Aunt Em hadn't either. Yet somehow we managed to finish each course just as another even larger one came. I guess a day of traveling will make a girl hungry.

"Aren't you going to have any food, Mr. Scarecrow?" Aunt Em asked around the time that they brought out the stuffed goose.

"Oh," the Scarecrow said, waving her question aside. "I don't eat. The Wizard may have given me an exceptional set of brains but I'm still shy a working stomach. Now, Dorothy, tell me what brought you here. I've been dying to know!"

I wasn't sure how much to tell him just yet. I'm not sure why, but I didn't want Em and Henry knowing about the shoes, though they *had* to have an inkling.

"Well," I said, smiling brightly. "I made a wish, and before you know it, we were all here!"

"Is that so," the Scarecrow said thoughtfully. I could tell he wasn't buying it.

"We landed right in the same spot as last time—my old house was still there, if you can even imagine."

"Of course it is," he replied with a smile. "That little house is considered one of Oz's most important landmarks."

Uncle Henry looked up from his Waldorf salad. "Mr. Scarecrow," he said. "Dorothy tells us you're the smartest character in all the land."

The Scarecrow nodded modestly, and Uncle Henry continued. "My wife, Emily, and I, we were hoping you'd have some idea of how the three of us might be able to get back—"

"Oh, drop it already!" I snapped. Aunt En



gasped, and I instantly clapped my hand to my mouth. I have to say that I was shocked at myself. Never in my life had I spoken so disrespectfully to my uncle. Or to anyone, really.

But it had been *such* a long day, and my aunt and uncle were being *so* troublesome. Here they were, eating the greatest meal they'd ever dared to dream of, and all they could think of was how to go back to our sad little farmhouse and our dusty pigpens.

*I must try to control my temper,* I chided myself. If I wanted my aunt and uncle to see things my way, it wouldn't do to make them angry.

The Scarecrow shot me a curious sidelong glance but otherwise ignored my outburst. "It's true that I've been blessed with an excess of the finest brains known to man or beast, Munchkin, witch, or wizard," he said, tapping his head with a stuffed glove. "But I'm sad to say that traveling between Oz and the outside world is no simple feat."

"I see," Henry said.

"Dorothy thinks a lady by the name of Glinda

might be able to help,” Aunt Em said. “Do you have any idea of where we might find her?”

Again, the Scarecrow gave me a meaningful look that said, *We’ll discuss this later*. “I do not,” he said. “Glinda’s whereabouts have been unknown for quite some time now.”

“For how long?” I asked, putting my fork down, suddenly interested again in the conversation.

“Oh, it’s hard to say,” the Scarecrow replied. He fiddled with a piece of straw that was poking out of his head. “You know we’re not much for time here in Oz. No one gets older here, and we celebrate the holidays whenever we’re of a mood for it. But it was some time after Ozma took the crown. Glinda let it be known that she had important magical business beyond the Deadly Desert, and that we shouldn’t worry about her—that she would return when the time was right. That must have been, oh, at least ten years ago, if I venture a guess.”

“Ten years!” I exclaimed. “But, how long have I been gone?”

The Scarecrow turned in his seat and fixed his eyes on me seriously. "I don't know, but I daresay there are many people here in Oz who won't remember you at all. I, myself, had almost forgotten what you looked like."

My last adventure here had lasted for what felt like almost a month, but when I'd returned home, only a few days had passed. Still, the idea that I had been gone so long that I'd been forgotten was unimaginable. All of my memories were still so fresh in my head.

I had so much to ask the Scarecrow. Why wasn't he king anymore? Who *was* this Ozma person? Did he have any suspicions about where Glinda had *really* gone? But I had the impression that he didn't want to talk about any of it in front of my aunt and uncle, and so I finished my meal in silence.

But there was so much on my mind that I hardly touched my food. Uncle Henry was a different story. I hadn't even made a dent in my Waldorf salad, and he had already scarfed down a goblet

full of maraschino cherries, a small mincemeat pie, several hunks of lamb slathered with green mint jelly, and—despite the fact that I was unsure where exactly shellfish came from in Oz, where there were no oceans that I knew of—a giant portion of shrimp cocktail served in a crystal goblet brimming with crushed ice.

And then they brought out the ice cream.

“Oh dear,” Aunt Em said when she saw it. “I’m afraid I can’t possibly eat any more. The meal was just perfect, Mr. Scarecrow, but I’m afraid it’s been *quite* a day. Would it be terribly rude of me to excuse myself?”

“Of course not,” the Scarecrow said. He clapped his hands and another Munchkin, this one dressed all in yellow, appeared. “This is BonBon. He’ll show you to your rooms.”

“Thank you, sir,” Uncle Henry said, standing along with Em. “Dorothy, don’t you stay up too late. Tomorrow we’ll need to be up at the crack of dawn to find Miss Glinda so that we can head on home.”

BonBon bowed and led them away.

As soon as they were gone, I pulled Toto into my lap and turned my chair to face the Scarecrow.

“Now tell me what is going on here,” I said. “I know there must be more to the story than you were telling me.”

He sighed. “You first,” he said. “I don’t for a moment believe that you wished your way here. It doesn’t work that way.”

So I told him the story: of my terrible birthday party, of the shoes, and the note that had come with them.

“They *must* have come from Glinda,” I finished. “Who else could have sent them?”

“It certainly sounds like her doing,” the Scarecrow mused. “But until now, I believed that Glinda was dead—or gone for good.”

“No,” I said, so emphatically that it came out as something approaching a shout. “No. Someone’s done something to her. She’s still in Oz, and she’s in trouble. That’s why she brought me here. To save her.”

“You may be right,” he said. “We’ll go to see Ozma tomorrow. She needs to be apprised of the situation.”

Every time anyone said the name *Ozma*, a terrible feeling came over me. I’d never met her and I barely knew who she was, but I didn’t like the sound of her. “Who *is* this Ozma?” I finally was able to ask. “And why aren’t you the king anymore?”

A look of something like regret passed across the Scarecrow’s face. He glanced down at his plate.

“Ozma is Oz’s true monarch,” he said. “She’s a direct descendant of Oz’s founder, the fairy Lurline. She was just a baby when the Wizard rose to power, and unable to inherit her throne. Still, the Wizard worried about the power she would eventually be able to wield. It’s hard to seize control of a kingdom when you have the True Princess swanning about in her prime. So he sent her to the North—to Gillikin Country. What happened to her there is a mystery. Only a few

people are privy to all the details, and I am not one of them. What I do know is that she eventually managed to grow up, and made her way back to the Emerald City to reclaim her crown. Unfortunately for me, that was just a few months after I'd been made king. I ceded the crown to her immediately, of course." He sighed and shrugged. "It was nice while it lasted."

It sounded like a bunch of hooey to me. "So this Ozma can just march in and kick you out on your rear end? That's not fair!"

"I had no choice. It is the way of Oz that Lurline's heirs should rule. The people were happy with me as their king, but I must admit that Ozma has been a good ruler, too. The kingdom has never been more peaceful, or more prosperous." He sounded cheerful, but it was obvious he was putting on a brave face.

I scowled. "I don't care," I said, outraged by the injustice. "You would have been better. You deserved that crown! What did *she* do to earn it, except show up when it was convenient for her?"

“Oh, it’s not so bad,” he said with a wave of his hand. “I like it here amidst my corncocks. There’s plenty of time to think, here. And Ozma made me one of her top advisers—she always calls me into the palace when she needs someone with real brains.”

“What about the Tin Woodman? What’d she do with him? Send him off to be sold for scrap?”

The Scarecrow chuckled. “Now, now, Dorothy. There’s no need for that. The Tin Woodman is still where you last saw him. He still lives in the Wicked Witch’s old castle, if you can believe it. He’s spruced it up quite nicely; it’s nothing like it was before.”

“And the Lion?”

“Still ruling over the beasts, just as ever. He lives deep in the Forbidden Forest, in Gillikir Country.” The Scarecrow sighed. “He’s become a bit of a recluse, though. The three of us haven’t been in the same room since I left the castle.”

It broke my heart to think about. Glinda missing; the Scarecrow deposed; my friends scattered



across Oz. I had expected to come back to Oz to find it just as I'd left it. But nothing was the same.

"Now let's take a look at these shoes of yours," he said, after BonBon had served me an after-dinner root beer float.

I stood, extending my foot proudly, and the Scarecrow studied the mysterious shoes.

"Have you tried removing them?" he asked after examining them for a bit.

"Why no," I said, surprised that it hadn't even occurred to me. But as hard as I tugged at the heels, they wouldn't so much as budge.

"Just as I suspected," he mused.

"How strange," I said. "How will I bathe?"

The Scarecrow chuckled. "I'm sure you'll find a way. At any rate, they're magical, that much is evident. And they seem to have fused themselves to you. The *red* is certainly Glinda's signature. But she . . ."

"It has to have been Glinda," I said. "I've never been so certain of anything. Especially after she appeared to me and asked for help earlier today.

We *have* to help her.”

“We’ll get to the bottom of it,” he said. “Tomorrow, we will travel to the palace. Ozma will have heard of your arrival and will be expecting you. She’s very interested in you, you know. The princess is an avid student of history, and she’s always been fascinated by your story.”

“I’m not so sure I care to see *her*,” I sniffed. “She doesn’t sound very pleasant in my opinion.”

The truth was that I didn’t trust the sound of her. Was it just coincidence that Glinda had disappeared just after this new princess had seized the palace?

The Scarecrow brushed aside my protests. “Oh, she’s nothing if not pleasant. I think you two will be great friends. She’s about your age, after all.”

“But . . .” I hesitated, not sure whether to voice my concerns, and then decided that if I couldn’t trust the Scarecrow, my oldest friend, all was lost anyway. “What if Ozma’s the one who did something to Glinda?”

I was of half a mind that the Scarecrow would

dismiss the notion as ridiculous. But he didn't.

"The princess is very powerful," he said, lowering his voice. "She is very shrewd. But she is also very lonely, and in need of companionship. I urge you, go to the palace and befriend her. She will never be defeated by force, but I've always found force to be overrated anyway. If Ozma knows *anything* about Glinda's whereabouts, you will be the one who can learn about it. Become close with her. Give her no reason to doubt your intentions."

I nodded. I understood. I didn't like it, but I understood.

At that, the Scarecrow summoned for BonBon who appeared out of nowhere as if he'd squeezed himself up out of a gap in the floorboards.

"Follow me to your quarters, Miss Gale," he said, extending a gentlemanly hand.

"One more thing," the Scarecrow said as I scooped a now-dozing Toto into my arms. "For now, I think it's better that you don't tell the princess that you've seen Glinda at all."

“Okay.” I nodded.

“And Dorothy: don’t mention the shoes.”

## Ten

The next morning, the Scarecrow and I stepped out of his mansion into a bright and breezy day. Every ear of corn and every wildflower glistened and sparkled in the sun, and I took a deep breath, inhaling dewy morning air. It smelled like just-baked cookies.

When I looked closely, I saw that the air was filled with thousands of specks floating on the breeze like dandelion fuzz. The difference was that these specks were silvery and slippery, flying through the air like tiny beads of mercury from a broken thermometer.

One of them landed gently on my face. When I crossed my eyes to get a look at it, I was shocked to see a dainty little person with butterfly wings and a wild tuft of silver hair sitting right on the tip of my nose. And without so much as a hello.

“Oh, don’t mind them,” the Scarecrow said.

“It’s Pixie season. They can be quite irritating, but they’re harmless.”

Just as he said it, the creature sank its sharp little teeth into my nose. I was more surprised than actually hurt, but I screamed, swatting at it and spinning around in a circle trying to get it off me.

The Pixie jumped from my face and buzzed around my head, letting out a high-pitched staccato squeal. She was laughing at me.

“Er, *mostly* harmless,” the Scarecrow said.

“I don’t remember *those* things from last time,” I said, rubbing at my injury to check for blood.

“They stayed in their hives back in those days,” he explained. “They were afraid of the witches. But Ozma believes in letting them run wild, and they’ve been getting bolder and bolder. You should see what they do to my cornfields.”

“I’m all for Pixies having their freedom,” I sniffed. “I’m an American, after all. But they might be a little more grateful to the girl who *gave* it to them, don’t you suppose?”

“All the magic in the world couldn’t give a

Pixie manners,” the Scarecrow said ruefully. “If I were king, I’d do away with all of them. But Ozma is of the opinion that even Oz’s lowest creatures deserve their freedom. Pixies, Screaming Trees, even Nomes, for heaven’s sake—they’ve all flourished under the princess’s rule.”

They might have been rude, but I couldn’t help being charmed as I watched the little things flitting through the air. “I hope they at least do pretty little spells or something,” I said. “To make up for the nastiness and biting.”

“They certainly do. If you catch one, they’ll grant you exactly one wish,” the Scarecrow said.

“Oh!” I exclaimed. “Then what are we waiting for?” I was about to go chasing after the Pixie who had bit me—it would serve her right!—but the Scarecrow caught me by the elbow.

“Don’t bother,” he said. “You can only wish for three things and none of them are very interesting. A dried cod, a hunk of coal, or a darning kit.”

“Aunt Em might like a darning kit,” I said, but I quickly dropped my chase.

That's when I saw our carriage sitting by the Road of Yellow Brick—a vehicle that would put Henry Ford's finest automobile to shame. It was a jeweled green sphere of glass etched with delicate swirling patterns, about as big as Uncle Henry's toolshed, and rather than having wheels it was hovering in the air a few feet off the ground. It was hitched to a crude wooden horse composed of a log sitting on top of four sturdy sticks. It had two knots for eyes, a notch for a mouth, and a twig for a tail.

“Hello there,” the log said.

By now I knew not to be surprised by anything around here, especially not a talking log in the shape of a horse. “Well, hello there,” I greeted him—if you could call a log a *him*. “I'm Dorothy Gale. Pleased to meet you.”

He turned toward me and whinnied. “I'm the Saw-Horse,” he said. “The fastest horse in all of Oz, of course, and the captain of Ozma's Royal Guard. I'll get you to the Emerald City in no time at all.”



Just then, Toto came racing out of the house, followed by Aunt Em and Uncle Henry, who were looking around in a daze, like they hadn't really expected any of this to still be here. Toto began barking and leaping into the air, trying to catch the Pixies, who dipped and dove around him, taunting him with their squeaky giggles. I hoped he liked dried cod.

"Aunt Em!" I called. "Uncle Henry! The Scarecrow is going to take us to the Emerald City. Isn't the carriage marvelous?"

"It looks like a big Fabergé egg," Aunt Em said. "I always found them a bit gaudy myself." But I could tell from the way she was staring that she was more impressed than she cared to admit.

"The Emerald City?" Uncle Henry asked. "I thought we were going to find your friend Glinda?"

"We're going to meet with *Ozma*," I said, trying to reassure them. "She's the princess of Oz. She'll help us find Glinda. Besides, don't you want to see the magnificent Emerald City?"

The Scarecrow was extremely diplomatic about

the whole thing. “You can’t come all the way to Oz and miss out on the Emerald City,” he said. When my aunt and uncle looked at him dubiously, he added: “The princess is a formidable magic user in her own right. If she can’t send you home herself, she will no doubt be eager to help you find the Sorceress.”

It took a little convincing, but eventually they gave in, and soon Uncle Henry was helping Aunt Em up into the carriage. At least we had a ride this time. I think after yesterday’s ordeals, we were all more than happy to be traveling in comfort.

The inside of the carriage was lined with plush velvet cushions, and the Scarecrow and I sat on one side with my aunt and uncle on the other. A tea service floated on a tray between us.

“Tea?” the Scarecrow asked Aunt Em, handing her a little pink cup.

She looked like she wanted to say no, but Aunt Em can never resist a good cup of tea.

“Do you have Earl Grey?” she asked.

“I have whatever you’d like,” he replied. He pointed at the kettle on the tray.

“How do I brew it?” she asked curiously.

“Just pour it and imagine the best cup of tea you can think of.”

Aunt Em looked dubious, but she gingerly poured herself a serving, and when she took a sip, her eyes lit up. “That’s Earl Grey, all right!” she said in delight. And then, curiously: “Did you cast a spell on it?”

The Scarecrow chortled. “A spell! I should think not. I’m a man of science. In fact, it’s the milk of the rare Chimera. While it remains inside the kettle, it exists in infinite liquid forms—it’s not until you pour it that it takes on the qualities you desire of it.”

“Does it serve up scotch, too?” Uncle Henry joked.

“I don’t see why not,” the Scarecrow said.

Soon my uncle was contentedly tipping his favorite Glenlivet vintage and I had poured myself a cup of rich, dark hot chocolate, and then we were

off. The carriage shot forward down the road like a bolt of lightning. The scenery was whipping past us in a green and gold blur, but we were perfectly comfortable inside our cozy little bubble. Every time we curved into a hairpin turn or went speeding down a hill, our vehicle would adjust itself so that we didn't even shift in our seats.

"Henry Ford could take a lesson from whoever built this," Uncle Henry marveled, gazing out the window.

Outside the carriage, forests, villages, and rivers all appeared and disappeared as quickly as they'd popped into sight while the Saw-Horse sped ahead, moving with such speed that his wooden feet didn't even make a sound against the brick road.

"He really is fast," I said to the Scarecrow.

"He is indeed. He claims to be the fastest horse in the land, and I don't doubt him. He's also Ozma's closest confidant, you know. He's been with her longer than anyone. He's the one who brought her back to the city after her exile, and he's

been her most loyal servant ever since.”

It almost made me sorry for this Ozma, to think that her only friend was a wooden horse that looked more like a piece of scrap lumber than an animal. Even Miss Millicent had to make a better friend than a talking log jammed together with a few twigs.

When he was certain that Aunt Em and Uncle Henry weren't paying attention, wrapped up as they were in their own conversation and in watching the scenery, the Scarecrow put his arm around me casually and leaned in close, whispering, “Be careful what you say in the Saw-Horse's presence. Rest assured that anything you tell him will find its way to the princess's ear.”

I nodded slowly, not sure what to make of any of it.

After a bit, the Saw-Horse began to slow his pace, and I saw that we had come to a wide river.

“Oh dear,” the Scarecrow said. “Isn't this always the way. It's the Wandering Water.”

“What's that?” Aunt Em asked nervously.

“Just another of Munchkin Country’s many nuisances,” the Scarecrow explained with a wave of his stuffed hand.

“If it’s anything like the Forest of Fear, I’m turning back now,” Henry said firmly. “And Emily is coming with me.”

I didn’t speak up, but I had to agree that, after yesterday, we had all had more than our fill of Oz’s alliterative annoyances.

“Not to worry,” the Scarecrow said. “The Wandering Water isn’t unpleasant—just inconvenient. It’s a river with a mind of its own, you see. You can never tell where you’re going to find it. In a few hours it will have moved on to somewhere else entirely. Never fear, though, the road isn’t without its own personality. It will get us across with as little delay as possible.”

As we galloped toward the water, I saw what the Scarecrow meant. The river was actually moving, shifting and undulating, snaking its way across the landscape, paying no attention to the fact that it cut right through the middle of the road,

leaving no way to cross.

But as we approached, the Road of Yellow Brick began reconfiguring itself, too. As if it sensed us coming, golden bricks began to float into the air, one by one, constructing themselves into a curving bridge that led high up into the sky where it took a meandering, curlicued route across the water.

The only problem was, it didn't look very stable.

"We're not going over that, are we?" Aunt Em asked, craning her neck out the window and turning a shade of pale green.

"Oh yes," the Scarecrow said. "Not to worry, though. The Saw-Horse has never lost a passenger."

Soon we were trotting upward into the clouds, the river hundreds of feet below us. The bridge of yellow bricks continued building itself as we made our way across it, fluttering in the breeze like a ribbon.

Aunt Em's eyes were squeezed shut, and her

knuckles were white, her hands clasped together in her lap. Uncle Henry gripped her arm tight, not looking much braver than she did.

Back in Kansas I'd never been much for heights myself, but now that I was in Oz, I discovered that I didn't care. It was all part of the adventure. Why come to a place like this and then turn away the secret things it has to offer you?

So as we climbed higher and higher into the sky, I forced myself to keep my eyes open.

All of Oz was spread out below us like a patchwork quilt. When I squinted, I almost thought I could see the red towns of Quadling Country to the south and the yellow hills of Winkie territory to the west. The purple Gillikin mountain range stretched north as far as the eye could see. That is, until I saw the Emerald City glowing on the horizon, and I forgot everything else.

I would never forget that glittering skyline.

From high above the Wandering Water, the city appeared first as a green glimmer against the blue sky and then popped into focus, rippling like a



mirage beyond a massive glass wall that rose over the trees. The curved rooftops of the skyline blended into each other in a series of sloping, gentle waves, all surrounded by a halo of light.

In the center of it all, the pointed spires of the palace rose straight up into the air, scraping the clouds. I wondered what it would be like to stand at the top of one of those towers and look out over all of Oz. I wondered how far you could see from up there; I wondered what it would be like to know that all this magic was yours. Did Ozma appreciate what she'd been given?

I hoped she did. If I had all that, I would never let myself lose sight of how lucky I was. Not for a moment.

## Eleven

We all breathed sighs of relief as the flying road began to make its descent back to the riverbank, and before we knew it, we were on land again. After that, it was only a matter of minutes before we were approaching the majestic emerald walls of the city.

Everyone was silent as we pulled up to the gates, which were intricately carved with twisting vines, gilded and studded with jewels. I noticed with some curiosity, though, that the gates were solid all the way through, and there was no obvious place for them to swing open, or even a mechanism for them to rise up. How were we going to get through?

The Saw-Horse answered my question by thumping his hoof, three times, loudly against the ground. As he did it, the entranceway rippled, and it began to melt away until it was just a smooth

puddle on the ground, leaving an opening where it had just stood.

“What happened to the Guardian of the Gates?” I asked. “That funny little man who used to hand out the glasses?”

“Ozma reassigned him,” the Scarecrow explained. “That was just one of the Wizard’s many idiosyncrasies. Now that he’s gone, people are allowed to see clearly again. The city’s green enough without the glasses anyway. Ozma installed quite a bit more emerald once she took over, and anyway, she doesn’t believe in guarding the gates at all.” He sniffed at what he obviously considered to be a preposterous flight of girlish fancy. “‘It’s everyone’s city,’ she says. ‘Why would I want to keep anyone out of it?’ The former guardian works as an optometrist now, and I’m told he’s quite happy. Most people in Oz have perfect vision, so he leads a very relaxed lifestyle.”

I looked over my shoulder as the Saw-Horse trotted us into the city, and as soon as we had cleared the opening in the wall, the gate sprung

right back up and re-formed itself, closing behind us.

As we made our way through the city streets, I took in the sights. Little round houses were arranged in clusters around open plazas with burbling fountains and vibrant gardens where townspeople chattered amongst themselves. The smell of baking pies and fresh flowers filled my nose.

It was strange to be back in this city that I had so many memories of. It was both the same and different. For one thing, it really *was* green now, just like the Scarecrow said. From the funny little domed buildings whose roofs were reinforced with giant, smooth-polished emeralds the size of dinner plates to the towering skyscrapers that somehow seemed to be formed entirely of huge, seamless jewels, every surface in sight managed to incorporate the city's signature gemstone in one way or another. Even the yellow bricks of the road weren't immune to the treatment: the road hadn't ended at the gates, but instead continued on into the

city, toward the palace, and each and every individual brick was inlaid with a single emerald at the center.

I think I liked them better when they were just plain yellow. Ironically, it was only now that the Guardian of the Gates was gone that I actually could have *used* some glasses—not to create the illusion of opulence but to shield my eyes from the glare.

At an open market, Munchkins and Winkies peddled produce and clothes and trinkets to laughing townspeople. There was a snake charmer, like in storybooks I'd read, and a sword swallower and a team of acrobats who flipped and twirled in the air as if they were propelled by an unseen force.

Everyone was smiling and laughing, milling around without a care in the world. A sense of liveliness permeated everything and everyone.

And yet I couldn't help feeling uneasy.

It was all too happy. Nothing was this perfect, not even Oz.

My shoes sent a now-familiar pulse of energy up my legs, and as I looked back out at the bustling city, the cheerful scene suddenly seemed sinister: the smiles of the people turned to leers and the candy-bright colors took on a garish, desperate tint.

Glinda was gone, I reminded myself, off somewhere no one seemed to know about.

Something wasn't right here.

Our carriage finally ground to a halt where the yellow brick opened up into a large, circular courtyard outside the palace entrance. Toto was the first out, followed by the Scarecrow. I clambered out after him, then helped Aunt Em and Uncle Henry down. The air was still and there was a lovely sound of water burbling in fountains. In the distance, I could hear singing.

The plaza was an explosion of azaleas that blossomed in a rainbow of colors: they were pink and purple and blue, but also striped and polka-dotted and paisley-patterned. A large marble

fountain shot a waterfall of what looked like liquid diamonds high into the air.

Aunt Em trailed her fingers through the pool, then held them up in front of her and watched them glitter in the sun.

“I don’t suppose your friend Ozma would mind if we took a few of her jewels back to Kansas, would she?” my aunt asked me with a twinkle in her eye. “They have so many of them here and just one of the big ones would pay for a year’s worth of chicken feed and pig slop.”

I groaned. “First of all,” I snapped, “Ozma isn’t my friend. I’ve never even met her before. Secondly, I don’t want to hear another word of Kansas talk. Not while we’re standing outside the royal palace in the most beautiful city in the universe.”

Aunt Em crossed her arms at her chest. She clucked her tongue and shook her head. “My word, Dorothy. You’ve certainly lost your sense of humor lately. Of course I’m not going to steal from our hosts. And if I *was* going to, it wouldn’t be to buy

pig slop. I'd make myself a beautiful necklace with diamonds so big it would scandalize all of Topeka."

Only then did I realize she had been teasing me. "Sorry," I said sheepishly. "I just—"

"See here, Dorothy," she said. "I know your uncle doesn't approve of staying here just as well as I know that you don't want to ever go home if you can help it. Myself, I can see both sides of it. This *is* a lovely country—not counting those terrible trees—but our whole life is back on the farm."

"We could have a new life *here*. A better life."

"We *could*," she agreed. "But would it really be so much better? What would we do all day, with no cows to milk or fences to mend? We'd go stir-crazy before long."

I shook my head emphatically. "There's so much to do here," I said. "You've hardly seen any of it."

"Maybe," Aunt Em said with a shrug. "And maybe it wouldn't matter. At any rate, I say we're



here now, and we might as well enjoy ourselves.”

“I *am* enjoying myself,” I said.

“It seems to me that you’re awfully sour for someone who’s having the time of her life,” Aunt Em said.

I was trying to decide how to respond to that when the enormous doors of the palace swung open and a small, delicate figure came hurtling down the grand, emerald-studded steps. She raced toward me, her diaphanous white dress and dark, wavy hair flowing behind her, all tangled together in a whirling cloud.

“Dorothy!” she shouted. “It’s really you! I’ve been waiting for this day forever!”

She bounded across the courtyard and threw her arms around my neck, pulling me against her in a tight embrace before stepping back and giving me a warm, searching smile.

It wasn’t the greeting I’d been expecting. When I’d sought out an audience with the Wizard, in this very palace, it had been an arduous, hours-long process of being patted down by guards, standing

in endless lines, and waiting in antechamber after antechamber before finally being allowed ten minutes alone with Oz's supposed ruler.

Ozma, apparently, was less formal than all that.

Her eyes were a vivid, haunting green, lined with kohl and shadowed with gold, and they had a kindness behind them that took me by surprise. Her mouth was a ruby-red exclamation point in the center of her round, pale face. She was tiny, too: the top of her head barely reached my shoulders.

She wore a tall, golden crown with the word *Oz* inscribed on it, and had two big red poppies tied into her hair, one on either side of her face, fastened with long green ribbons. She had a golden scepter tucked under her arm as casually as a normal person would carry an umbrella.

"I can't believe I'm finally meeting you," she said. "I was so excited when I heard from the Munchkins that you had come back. The famous Dorothy Gale. The Witchslayer! I suppose I owe you a thank-you for saving my kingdom."

"Anyone would have done the same," I said,

waving the praise away. I stole a quick glance over at my aunt and uncle and saw that Uncle Henry had his arm around Aunt Em and was pointing out various buildings in the distance.

“Are these your parents?” the princess asked, gesturing at them with her scepter, which I now saw was topped with the same insignia that was on her crown: a gold *O* the size of my palm that enclosed a smaller, stylized *Z*.

“Oh no,” I said. “This is my aunt Em and uncle Henry. I live with them, back in . . .”

Her eyes lit up. “Oh yes! Kansas! It sounds like such a fantastic place. They say the roads there are made of dust! Or was it dirt?”

“Well . . . ,” I said, “both?” I couldn’t imagine being excited by dirt roads considering the opulence that was all around us here, but Ozma was already rushing over to Aunt Em and Uncle Henry. For their part, they seemed to be adjusting to the idea of meeting royalty. They wore the same friendly expressions that they used for greeting a neighbor’s out-of-town cousin at the church

breakfast.

Ozma leaned down and patted Toto on the head. He was so happy to be back that he was running in circles. “And this is little Tutu?”

He snarled at her. Toto didn’t like it when people got his name wrong.

“Toto,” I corrected quickly.

“Of course!” she said. “How silly of me. I guess I owe him my thanks as well.” She knelt down and scruffed his fur, and while he bristled at first, soon he was happily licking her hand.

The princess turned her attention back to Aunt Em and Uncle Henry.

“We have rooms for all of you, and the finest clothes in the city,” she said. “I want you to know that, for as long as you’re here, you can make full use of everything in the palace. My servants are yours to command.”

“That won’t be necessary,” Uncle Henry said hesitantly. “We’re not planning on staying long.”

Ozma tilted her head in concern. “Oh?”

“Uncle Henry . . . ,” I started. “We only just got

here.”

“We need to get home,” Aunt Em explained apologetically to Ozma. “You have a beautiful kingdom, but we’re not the magical types. We have a farm back home, you see, and responsibilities.”

Ozma waved her scepter with an air of dismissal. “Of course! I’ve heard such things about Kansas; I don’t doubt that you’re eager to get back there. But I’ve waited so long to meet Dorothy; surely you can stay for a *bit*.”

Ozma called out: “Jellia! Show the Gales to their quarters, please. And please make sure their every need is attended to.”

Before they could protest, a round, cheery-faced maid with blonde hair and a green uniform emerged from the main building and led Aunt Em and Uncle Henry up the stairs inside. They glanced back at me over their shoulders as they stepped through the entrance, a look of trepidation on their faces. “Toto,” I said, feeling almost guilty when I saw how out of their element they looked. “Why don’t you keep them company?” With a sharp bark,

he went bounding after them.

Ozma moved her attention to the Scarecrow, who hadn't said a word since we'd arrived. "I'm so pleased you came today," she said. "There's a delegation here from Gillikin Country and I could really use someone with brains in the room when it comes to dealing with them."

She looked at me with an air of wry conspiracy. "Keeping everyone in Oz happy is no small feat," she said. "Every day there's a new visitor with a new list of requests. Easily met, most of them, but you have no idea how dull it can be, sitting in those meetings."

The Scarecrow bowed. "I am at your service, Princess."

"Oh, stop that," she said, rolling her eyes. "You know bowing makes me uncomfortable."

"Of course," he said.

"The delegation is in the reception room," Ozma said. "They shouldn't give you too much trouble, but you know how the Gillikins are—always bickering amongst themselves and

forgetting what they even want in the first place. It could take some time.”

“Well, then it’s a good thing I don’t require sleep.” The Scarecrow leaned in to give me a peck on the cheek, and as he did, he whispered: “Remember. Be careful. And not a word about the shoes.”

As I watched him go, Ozma grabbed me by the elbow. “Come inside the castle. Let me show you what I’ve done.”

The main hall of the palace was magnificent, but there was a surprising coziness to it, too—you could tell someone actually lived here. Ozma had lined the walls with damask wallpaper, and filled the space with plush velvet couches overflowing with throw pillows and ornate end tables and carved oak chairs upholstered in leather. From the diamond-shaped black-and-white tiles on the floor to the crystal chandeliers to the lush, exotic-looking plants sprouting from every corner of the room, it felt stately and elegant but warm and welcoming, too.

“What do you think?” Ozma asked, almost nervously, as we walked past a dramatic, sweeping staircase. It almost felt like she wanted me to be impressed.

I was a bit surprised that she seemed to care so much about my opinion—she was the princess after all, a descendant of the fairy Lurline, supposedly, and the heir to the greatest kingdom in the world. I was just an ordinary farm girl from dusty, gray Kansas. What did I know about interior decoration?

“It’s very nice,” I said, as if I saw beautiful, grand things all the time and this was just another one of them. “You’ve made it so much nicer than when the Wizard lived here.”

“Yes, well, he did have a bachelor’s taste, didn’t he? Anyway, all this is thanks to you, Dorothy. You saved my kingdom when I was”—she paused—“you know. Indisposed. If it wasn’t for you, the witches would probably be living here now.” She shuddered. “Can you imagine what they would have done with the place? You have no idea



how much I owe you.”

I looked around at this dream palace full of treasure and beauty and luxury, and suddenly I had a pretty good notion of what she owed me, actually. Maybe I was just the teeniest bit jealous that she got to live like this, all thanks to me. There was a part of me that wondered if *I* would have been the princess if I’d stayed.

“Of course,” I said, forcing a smile. “Oz was in danger. I only did what any decent person would have.”

“No, Dorothy. Not everyone would have done it. *You* did it. You’re more special than you know.”

How could I argue with that? “Okay,” I admitted modestly. “Maybe I’m a *little* special.”

Ozma threw her head back and let out a lilting, musical giggle. “I think we’re going to be great friends,” she said, wrapping an arm around my waist and tipping her head against my shoulder. She led me through the great entrance hall to a series of French doors that looked out onto a lush, expansive garden dotted with fountains and topiary

sculptures.

“So do I,” I said, remembering what the Scarecrow had told me. If I was going to find Glinda, it appeared that I had to make Ozma trust me. I had to become her friend. Truthfully, it didn’t seem like it would be very difficult.

“It’s a beautiful day,” Ozma said. “Well, it’s always a beautiful day here, but still. Let’s take a walk in the gardens. I’ve got so much to ask you. Starting with how in the world you got here!”

## Twelve

In Ozma's gardens, the hedges were tall and greener than green, and were sculpted into strange, looming figures that were three times as tall as either of us. Some of them were covered in strange little blossoms, others were grown over with vines and fragrant honeysuckle and jacaranda and flowers that I didn't recognize.

Some of the flowers had tiny little eyes like the funny little puffballs that were growing all over the old farmhouse back in Munchkin Country. They all twisted in my direction to stare at me.

If you've never had fifty plants with human eyeballs stare at you, you have no idea how disconcerting a feeling it is.

A path wound its way through the grounds, forking off into other trails that led into little grassy valleys, groves of orange trees, little sitting areas with wrought-iron benches. Back home what

passed for a garden was usually a couple of tomato plants and maybe some scraggly old petunias. This was something else.

Ozma wandered down the main path idly, her scepter slung casually over her shoulder and the train of her dress trailing on the ground behind her.

“Don’t keep me in suspense,” she said. “So what was it? Another cyclone? I know it’s not easy to get here from your world, believe me. I’ve looked into bringing you here myself, actually—we’ve had some political trouble, and since you were so good at handling it the first time—well, but that kind of magic is very complicated. There are few in Oz who can manage it.”

A part of me didn’t want to lie to her. I’ve always believed that honesty will get you farthest. And it was hard to believe that someone as seemingly sweet and guileless as the princess could possibly have had anything to do with Glinda’s disappearance. But the Scarecrow was my oldest friend in this world, not to mention the smartest person I’d ever met. If he thought it was

best to keep a few things secret from her, I knew that I should trust him.

“Well,” I explained, remembering that it’s always best to base a lie in some version of the truth. “It was my birthday, and you see, in Kansas, on your birthday, you get one wish. I wished I was back here, and next thing I knew, poof! We were all crash-landing in the middle of Munchkin Country.”

Ozma looked skeptical.

“That’s it?”

“I wished very hard,” I clarified.

“But it’s so odd,” she said, touching a finger to her red lips. “I thought magic didn’t exist in your world. It seems that something would have had to *bring* you here.”

“It was my *sixteenth* birthday,” I scrambled to elaborate. “That’s kind of a big deal over there. So that’s probably why it worked. Besides, I always felt like being in Oz the first time changed me somehow. Maybe I brought a little bit of magic back with me.”

She *hmmm*-ed. Her tone was still unconvinced, but her eyes were open and trusting. It wasn't that she didn't believe me. She just thought there was more to the story.

I decided to change the subject. "But I want to know all about *you*," I said. "Are you really a fairy?"

The path we'd been following had ended at a wall of tall, thick hedges, no more than twenty feet wide, right smack-dab in the middle of the courtyard.

"Hold on," Ozma said, suddenly distracted. "I want to show you something."

She waved her scepter in a wide arc, and as she did it, the hedges parted, revealing a small opening. Ozma slipped right through it. After a moment's hesitation I followed, and as the opening grew shut behind us, I found myself in a hedge maze. To my left and right, narrow grassy paths were bounded by impenetrable shrubbery that rose high over our heads. In front of us was another opening, and on the other side of that more paths

and another hedge wall.

Something about being in here made me nervous. The maze had looked small from the outside, but now that we were in it, I could see that it was much bigger than I had realized, the paths leading far into the distance in either direction.

The atmosphere crackled with energy. I didn't like the feeling of this place. Even though the sun was as big and bright as ever when I looked up, its light somehow wasn't reaching us in here.

I could feel magic everywhere. The leaves on the hedges nearly vibrated with it. But it was a different kind of magic than the magic that ran through the fields of Munchkin Country like a babbling brook. It was different from the dark, threatening magic in the Forest of Fear, too.

This magic was old and ancient. It was gnarled and weathered and fossilized. I don't know how I knew it. I just did. And I knew that if you stood still for too long in here it could swallow you.

For the first time, my shoes hurt.

"Which way do we go?" I asked.

“It’s all the same,” Ozma said. She was different in here, too. In the garden, she had been girlish and sunny. In here, though, her spine had straightened and her chin was raised. Her dark hair was suddenly wild and tangled; her delicate, girlish beauty was now fierce and fiery. She seemed older. She seemed less like a princess and more like a queen.

“All the paths lead to the same place,” she said. I wanted to ask where, exactly, that place was, but the words wouldn’t come out of my mouth.

So we walked aimlessly, the bushes growing thornier and more overgrown and the leafy corridors narrower as we went. The air was still and quiet, and although the spires of the palace were just barely visible over the tops of the hedges if you craned your neck to see them, the city seemed very far away.

We took one corner and then another and another. Were we walking in a circle? My shoes burned on my feet, and I found myself wondering, again, what kind of magic exactly was pulsing



through them. Were they communicating somehow with the magic in the hedge maze?

Ozma kept on walking. She had said it didn't matter which way we went, but I started to suspect, from the way she carefully considered each gap in the maze before deciding which one to turn down, that there was more to it than she was letting on.

I had so many questions to ask, but it was like the maze had cast a spell over me that kept me from speaking at all. It was a creepy feeling, but I felt oddly calm about it. It was hard not to when it was so peaceful in here. Ozma was the one who finally broke the silence.

"Oz is bordered on all four sides by the Deadly Desert," she said out of nowhere when we had rounded a corner into a twisty section of the maze where the hedges were overgrown with thick, brown vines. They were dotted with tiny blossoms, deep purple and smaller than my thumbnail, and they stretched over our heads in a canopy that hid the sky. "A desert so dry that you touch just a grain of its sand and it will suck all the life right out of

you. One touch and *poof*, you're dust."

"Oh," I said, not knowing what else to say.

"But, you know, when Queen Lurline and her band of fairies first came to this place, ages ago, Oz was nothing *but* desert. It wasn't quite so deadly back then—Oz had no magic to speak of in those days—but it was still dry and hot and dusty and flat and it went on and on and on. There was no Emerald City. There wasn't even a tree. It was no place for life."

"Sounds like Kansas," I said. "Though, at least we have trees there."

The princess gave me a curious look. "I've always thought Kansas sounded very nice," she said. "Anyway, the fairies were passing through the desert on their way to somewhere else, and they had been traveling for a long time. A *very* long time. They were hungry and tired and thirsty. They had used the last of their magic."

"Where were they trying to go?" I asked.

"No one knows," Ozma said. She plucked a blossom from a vine overhead and tucked it into

her hair. “Pieces of the story get lost over time, you know. All we know is that they were coming from somewhere and they were going somewhere else, and wherever it was, they had to cross Oz on foot to get there. But Oz is a big place. You probably know that better than I do. I have a carriage, after all, and you’ve walked so much of Oz. Can you imagine doing that without anything to drink or eat? Fairies are powerful, but even they have their limits. After a while, Lurline and her people were too exhausted to go any farther. She knew that resting really meant *dying*, but what else could she do?”

“So they stopped. They just sat down and stopped, right there in the sand. Their travels had finally come to an end. Well, they thought they had, at any rate. But just when she had given up hope, Lurline put her hand down and felt a dampness in the dirt. When she scratched at it a bit, she could hardly believe her eyes—it was water, the first she’d seen in weeks. It was a cool, fresh spring. It was mostly covered over by the sand, but it only

took a minute of digging for it all to come bubbling up.”

“Someone put it there by magic,” I said. “To help her.”

“No. It was just good luck. Lurline was the magic one. And as she drank from the pool, she felt her magic coming back to her. With the little bit of energy the water from the spring gave her, she was able to conjure a pomegranate tree, and she and the rest of the fairies ate. The food made her stronger, and so Lurline summoned another tree, and then another and another until a whole orchard had sprung up.”

The path began to curl into a spiral. Ozma’s voice was dreamy and far away, and I wondered if she was talking to herself more than to me.

“They rested there for eight days, eating and drinking and dancing, regaining their strength after all the hardship they had been through, and on the eighth day, Lurline was so grateful and happy that she pricked her thumb with her knife and let a drop of her blood fall into the pool. I don’t know why

she did it, really. Just to say *thank you*, I guess. But whatever the reason, she gave Oz a piece of herself, and as soon as her blood hit the spring, the land began to change around them. Just like that. Lush, green grass grew where there had only been dirt and sand. Rivers sprung up, and they wandered wherever they wanted to wander. Hills and mountains burst out of the flatness. On the path that the fairies had walked, yellow bricks began to sprout like flowers. Lurline's blood had blessed the spring with magic, and that magic began to flow through everything."

The spiral we were walking in grew tighter and tighter as it looped in on itself toward a center. The path grew narrower and narrower until my shoulder touched Ozma's. Then it was narrower still, and I felt my nervousness mounting. I dropped behind her as she continued with her story. She didn't bother looking back at me.

"What had once been a barren desert had become a magical, untamed wilderness. It became Oz. But the queen knew that she and her band had

already stopped for too long. It was time for them to keep going where they were going. And yet—it was so beautiful. She couldn't just abandon it. So she left her favorite daughter behind, a girl not much older than me, and the smallest of the group. She was small but tough. It was left to her to look after the land in Lurline's absence. To take care of it and nurture its magic the way you tend to a garden.

“That daughter stayed behind, alone, to become Oz's first true princess. That daughter was my grandmother. Or was it my great-grandmother? Or my great-great-grandmother?” Ozma shrugged, finally stepping forward through an arbor into a clearing where the sun was warm and bright again. Birds were chirping.

We had come to the center of the maze.

And as soon as the sunlight hit her green eyes, the laughing, girlish Ozma who had greeted me at the gate returned in a flash. She giggled a little to herself, putting a hand to her mouth. “Great-great-great-grandmother? Well, who knows! At any rate

she was the first princess—whatever her name was. I honestly have no idea! Me, I'm the last. At least for now until the next one comes. Sometimes I wish she would hurry up." She gave a theatrical sigh.

The center of the maze was a circular area paved with flagstones. It was about fifteen feet across, with a ring of squat little trees inside the larger ring of tall hedges.

In the very center of it all was a single wooden bench that had obviously seen better days: it was silver and weathered and close to rotting. At the foot of the bench was a muddy, mossy puddle. All of it had a burned-out, sun-bleached look to it, as colorless as one of the old sepia photographs Aunt Em kept of herself as a child.

"So," Ozma said. "I suppose that's a very long way of answering your question. Yes, I'm a fairy. The truth is, it's really not as exciting as you might think. It's actually not so much different from being a regular girl."

She was so matter-of-fact about the way she

said it—the same way I would say that my aunt and uncle were farmers, or that I was from Kansas. I couldn't imagine being a fairy princess and not even *caring*. And how could she think it was the same as being a regular girl?

"I know it's stupid," I asked. "But do you have wings? Fairies do usually, right?"

Ozma didn't mind. She laughed and flipped her palms up as if to say, *You caught me*. She tossed her black hair and shook it out, and as she did, two huge butterfly wings unfurled from her back and fluttered a few times.

The wings were golden and translucent, lined with veins, and so delicate that they barely looked like they were there at all. They looked like nothing more than the impressions that burn into your eyes when you look at the light for too long.

"They don't do me much good," she admitted, flapping them a bit to demonstrate. She hovered a few inches from the ground and then let herself down again. "They work, but flying makes my stomach queasy, and anyway, I have the Saw-



Horse to take me wherever I want to go. I hardly use them at all.”

The oddest feeling came over me. I wanted to reach out and touch those shining, beautiful wings so badly. If I had just asked, she probably would have let me, but I didn't want to ask. It wasn't like me at all, but I wanted to reach out and grab one of them and hold it in my fist. I wanted to know what it would feel like for it to be mine and not hers.

But I didn't do it. I held my hand back, and Ozma drew the golden wings in. Rather than folding them up neatly like a bug's wings, or a bird's, her body just seemed to absorb them back into itself. If she noticed my reaction, it didn't seem to bother her.

The princess walked to the bench and sat, letting her scepter clatter to the ground. She tucked her legs under her body and stretched her arms lazily to the sky. “This is my favorite place in the whole Emerald City. Maybe in all of Oz,” Ozma said. “I'd spend days here, if they let me.”

With an entire palace, an amazing garden filled

with magical plants, and a whole Emerald City as a personal playground on top of it, I found it hard to believe that *this* drab little sitting area, with its broken bench and its muddy puddle, and its stunted, gray little trees—all surrounded by an enchanted hedge maze with obviously sinister intentions—was the best place the fairy princess could think to spend her free time.

“Really?” I carefully sat down on the bench next to her. “Why?”

She pressed a lock of her perfect hair behind her ear sheepishly. “Oh, who can say? It’s quiet, for one thing. No one bothers me in here—I don’t even think anyone else knows how to get in. In here, I don’t have to be a princess. The strange thing is that in here I’m more alone than anywhere else, and yet it’s the one place I don’t feel quite so lonely.”

“Oh,” I said. I didn’t know how else to answer that. Who wouldn’t want to be the ruler of your very own magical kingdom? I could think of at least ten girls back home who would gladly claw

each other's eyes out for the privilege.

"Maybe it's because of what happened here," Ozma said. "Maybe that's why I like it."

I gave her a blank stare. I didn't know what she was talking about.

"Can't you tell? This is the place where Oz began."

I looked at the ring of squat little trees, branches heavy with round, red fruit. Pomegranate.

I looked at the puddle, and saw that it wasn't a puddle at all, but a pool that bubbled up from deep within the earth. Floating in the center, so tiny that I'd missed it at first, was a brilliant green lily pad with a vibrant red flower at the center, its petals as red and glittering as rubies.

This was the spring that Lurline had found. This was where all of Oz's magic came from. I was at the source of all of it.

My shoes burned.

## Thirteen

The peculiar sight of Aunt Em and Uncle Henry dressed in some of the finest clothes in Oz greeted me in the great drawing room of the palace. They were draped in colorful silks and satins and their collars were so high that they couldn't turn their heads.

It wasn't just their clothes that had been gussied up either—apparently someone had seen fit to style their hairdos according to the latest Oz fashions. Uncle Henry's hair had been swept up into a funny little triangle and his beard was trimmed into a sharp point. Aunt Em's hair, freshly coiffed into a gigantic updo, had been dyed a ridiculous lime shade with emerald combs holding it tightly in place.

Even poor Toto hadn't been spared. He looked like a giant black puffball, his fur blown out so that he was twice his normal size. The greatest

indignity of all was that they had tied a bright green ribbon around his neck.

I couldn't help but giggle at the sight. They looked wonderful by Oz standards of course, but I wasn't used to seeing Uncle Henry out of his coveralls, or Aunt Em out of her gray muslin frock.

They all glared at me. Toto snarled.

Ozma entered the sitting room a moment after me. "My, don't you look wonderful!" she exclaimed at the sight of them. "Like real members of the court." They glared at her, too. This was as mad as I'd seen them since the time that the Shifletts down the way had let the cows loose and they'd trampled Aunt Em's prize petunias.

I clasped my hands together, quickly changing the subject. "I have something wonderful to tell you!" I gushed, hoping to sweep them up in my excitement.

"You brought me a pair of coveralls and some old work boots?" Uncle Henry asked.

I shook my head, grinning from ear to ear. "Better! Princess Ozma has invited the Lion and

the Tin Man to come visit us in the palace tomorrow.”

Ozma had informed me of the plan after we’d left the maze when we were heading back to the castle. She’d sent word to the Lion and the Tin Woodman that I was back as soon as she’d heard herself, and the Saw-Horse was already on his way to fetch them. Tomorrow, they would be here. We would all be together again, just like before.

It was all more perfect than I could have imagined. It was so perfect that, for a minute, I let myself forget that Glinda was missing. There was no use fretting about it now anyway—when my friends arrived, we’d be able to put our heads together and try to figure out what had happened to her. In the meantime, I didn’t see the harm in enjoying myself.

I may have shoved the thought of home conveniently from my mind for now, but Uncle Henry and Aunt Em weren’t going to let me forget it.

They struggled to look at each other over the

folds of their enormous clothes.

“That’s a very lovely offer from Miss Ozma,” Uncle Henry said carefully. “But this has gone on long enough. It’s time we find your friend Glinda and head on home.”

At the name *Glinda*, Ozma turned sharply toward me.

“Glinda?” she asked. For the briefest of instants, I thought I saw a fire behind her green eyes.

“Well,” I said, thinking fast. “Uncle Henry and Aunt Em do so want to go home. And Glinda was the one who sent me home last time . . . so . . .”

“So it’s high time that we go back to the farm!” Uncle Henry said, nearly shouting. Aunt Em put a calming hand on his shoulder, but it only got him more worked up. He tugged at his collar. “Enough of this royal bull-pucky!” he barked. Then, noticing that Ozma was still standing right there, he got even more flustered. “I mean, begging your pardon, your royal Ozma.”

The princess shook her head kindly as if she

would never think of being offended.

As usual, Aunt Em was slightly more diplomatic than Henry. Grasping my hands, she said, "I'm just not so sure this is the right place for us, Dorothy. We're not cut out for palaces and fancy frocks like these. The only princess I ever knew before this was the Sunflower Princess at the state fair, and she's not really a real princess at all, if you think about it."

No, I thought. She most certainly was not. "I know it all seems silly to you, Dorothy," she went on. "But the farm is all your uncle and I have. What do you suppose the poor animals are eating?"

Ozma stepped in. "Time moves differently here in Oz than it does back in your world," she explained to my aunt and uncle patiently, even though it had already been explained to them. "It's more than likely your animals haven't even noticed you've been gone."

"I don't . . . ,” Uncle Henry started. But he's old-fashioned enough that when a princess talks to him, he listens. And at this moment, Ozma was



acting every bit a princess. I was starting to see that she could turn it on and off, just like that.

“You certainly wouldn’t want Dorothy to miss seeing her old companions, would you? And I know that the Tin Woodman and the Lion have been so looking forward to meeting you, too. Please, just stay for tomorrow’s dinner.”

“And then?” Uncle Henry asked.

Ozma smiled kindly. “Well,” she said. “I’m afraid Glinda can’t help you. She’s been missing for some time now, and I’ve already searched the kingdom high and low for her.” She glanced at me. “I’m sure she’s safe—nothing could possibly harm a witch as powerful as she is—but wherever she is, she’s hidden herself well.”

Ozma had been so funny and open and warm—nothing like what I’d imagined. I’d heeded the Scarecrow’s warnings not to tell her about the shoes, or to ask directly about Glinda, but I’d started to mostly dismiss the idea that she could have done anything to her.

Now I was unsure again. I had the strongest

feeling she was lying to me.

“I’m not experienced with the type of magic it would take to send you all back to Kansasland,” Ozma continued. Her warm, smooth voice had just enough of a tone of authority to silence my aunt and uncle into submission, for now. “But after tomorrow, I’ll begin looking into ways to send all of you back. I’m sure I can find something.”

Uncle Henry and Aunt Em were nodding in resigned agreement, but I was surprised to feel my entire body shaking with anger, my fists clenched so tightly they hurt.

“No!” I shouted. The marble floors magnified the sound of my voice several times over, but I didn’t care. “No, no, no!”

Aunt Em and Uncle Henry’s jaws both dropped in astonishment. They’d seen me lose my temper before, of course, but never like this. Even Ozma turned and looked at me like she was seeing me for the first time.

I was surprised at myself, even. It wasn’t like me to behave this way. I just didn’t care.

“I’m not going back there,” I said. “Not now, not tomorrow, and not *ever*. I belong here. *We* belong here. I’m not making the same mistake twice—you can go home without me if you want, but I’m not leaving.”

Aunt Em’s eyes welled with tears and even Uncle Henry was speechless.

Ozma took me by the hand. “It’s been a long day for all of you,” she said. “We’ll talk about this again tomorrow. I’m sure we can work something out when our heads are cooler.”

Uncle Henry and Aunt Em stared as Ozma led me out of the parlor. Toto hesitated for a second like he was unsure whose side he was supposed to be on, but by the time Ozma and I were climbing the grand staircase toward her private chambers, he was nipping at my heels.

The princess looked at me in concern. “Dorothy,” she said. “What was that about?”

Although I was still surprised at how strong my reaction had been, it didn’t change what I had said. “I’m not going back there,” I said, summoning

every bit of Kansas grit I had. “They can’t make me.”

“But I thought you loved Kansas,” she said, furrowing her brow in confusion. “You know, your story is famous here in Oz. We tell it all the time. And in the story we tell, the important part is that you wanted to go home. You could have stayed here, but you wanted to go back to Kansas. You would have done anything to get back there. Is that story wrong?”

My face flushed in shame. “It’s just . . . ,” I started. “No. The story isn’t wrong. I did want to go home. I missed it. But once I was there, nothing was the way I remembered it. Once you’ve seen a place like Oz, nowhere else is the same again. How could it be?”

“Your aunt and uncle will come around,” Ozma said with quiet confidence as we reached the top of the steps and turned down a long, dim hall that was carpeted in green velvet. She clasped my hand tightly in hers. “I’m sure of it. But for now, I think I have just the thing to cheer you up.”

The room was full of lights. Chandeliers sparkled from the ceiling, and little luminescent orbs drifted around the room. The space was stuffed with plush velvet pillows and chairs and brocade lounges, and, against the far wall, several floor-to-ceiling mirrors set in elaborate gilt frames. The air was fragrant with Ozma's perfume—bergamot and sandalwood and something else I couldn't place.

"Is this your bedroom?" I asked in awe, looking around the room in search of a bed. Did she sleep on a divan? Or maybe fairies didn't need to sleep at all.

Ozma giggled. "No, silly," she said. "It's my closet."

My closet back home could barely fit a coat hanger, much less all this furniture.

But if it *was* a closet, there was something strange about it. Even stranger than a bedroom with no bed. "Where are the clothes?"

Ozma smiled mischievously. Then she closed her eyes and moved her hands in the air like she

was playing an invisible harp. The lights dimmed, and the air grew heavier, like we were standing in a pool of warm water. Goose bumps crept over my skin.

It was magic. Real magic.

As she moved her hands through the air, plucking unseen strings, I felt a rush of energy coursing through my body. A feeling that reminded me of the shoes. Catching a glimpse of myself in the mirror, I saw that she was working magic on *me*. On *us*.

Our hair changed first: mine began weaving itself into a complex series of braids while hers whirled itself up into an elegantly messy chignon. Next, my clothes tingled against my skin. I felt buzzy all over as my dress became shorter and more fitted, glistening with silver embroidery across the chest. Sparkling bracelets appeared on my wrists, and a glittering necklace materialized around my neck.

I stared at myself in the mirror. "It's beautiful," I said, truly shocked. I'd never believed I could

look this *alive* before. I didn't think I ever could back in Kansas—the gray sky and gray plains washed out everything, eventually. “I look beautiful.”

“Something funny happened when I was doing the spell, though. I tried to give you new shoes. It didn't work.”

I looked down at my feet. The red heels I'd gotten for my birthday were still there. They looked more beautiful than ever with the stunning dress. I shrugged. “I guess it's because they're already perfect,” I said guiltily, hoping Ozma would buy it.

She smiled. “They*are* beautiful,” she said. “Where did you get them?”

“Birthday present.” I twirled, admiring my reflection. I couldn't believe it was even me. Was it really just yesterday morning that I had been hauling pig slop across the field? I felt like someone brand-new. Someone better than I had been before; someone who belonged here, not there.

Ozma was still looking at my shoes. “Who gave them to you?” she asked.

“My friend Mitzi,” I said quickly.

“I see,” Ozma said with a tight smile. “Well, your friend Mitzi has wonderful taste.”

She knew something in my story wasn’t right.

But I couldn’t tell exactly what she *did* know. Could she tell that the shoes had come from Glinda? What would happen if she figured out I was lying? And, finally, why had the Scarecrow asked me to hide the truth in the first place?

I thought about telling her everything right there. She had been so nice so far, and I found it hard to believe that she was anything other than what she was presenting herself as. But my shoes were burning on my feet and their heat spread through my whole body. *No*, they seemed to be saying. So I followed the Scarecrow’s advice and kept my mouth shut.

“Can you teach me?” I asked instead.

“Teach you?” Ozma asked.

“To do *this*.” I gestured at my new clothes. “To



do magic.”

Ozma looked at me long and hard, searching me like I was a puzzle to be worked out. Finally, she shook her head. “No,” she said softly. “I can’t. Magic is dangerous. Even for those of us who are native to Oz, it’s dangerous. For people who aren’t from here, it can be too much to handle. It can do . . . strange things to you.”

“Strange things like what?” I was annoyed. How did Ozma know what I could handle? How did she know anything about people from my world, when I was the first that she had ever met?

“It can twist you,” Ozma said. And then, as if she was reading my thoughts, “You know, Dorothy, you’re not the first visitor to come here from the outside world. The Wizard wasn’t the first either. There have been others, over the years.”

“Who?” I asked.

She just shook her head, like the story was too sad to tell. And then she brightened and flung herself onto one of her lounges. She threw her feet up, took off her crown, and dropped it carelessly

to the floor. “It gets heavy,” she explained. “It *all* gets heavy. The crown, the scepter, this big empty palace. It’s so much responsibility. It’s so *lonely*. I’m just happy you’re here.”

“I’m happy I’m here, too,” I said. But I didn’t like the way she had changed the subject so quickly. Who were the others who had come here before me? What had happened to them? What had happened to *Glinda*? And what was Ozma keeping from me?

“I’ve *tried*,” Ozma said. “Really, I have. At first, I thought Jellia and I could be the greatest of friends. But she’s so focused on the fact that I’m the princess, and that she’s my servant. I told her to stop calling me *miss* and *Your Highness* and that I didn’t even care if she brushed my hair and brought me my breakfast in the mornings. She wouldn’t listen. After that I invited the Patchwork Girl to come stay with me for a while. She’s so much fun—she’s stuffed, like the Scarecrow, but with cotton instead of straw, you know, which might be one reason for the lack of common sense and

conversational skills. You can only keep up with someone like her for so long before it wears you down. But now that you're here, Dorothy, it's like I've finally found someone who I have something in common with. I just wish you didn't have to go home."

"I'm not going home," I said firmly.

Ozma twisted her lips in thought. "You really don't want to, do you?" she said.

"I don't want to and I'm not going to," I said. My mind was made up. I was staying here. In Oz. In the palace. No matter what.

"Well," the princess said after a bit. "We'll just have to make your aunt and uncle understand, then, won't we?" She stood up and faced me. She took my hands in hers.

I wanted to trust her. I wanted to be her friend. But as I looked back into her big, glittering eyes, she averted her gaze for just the briefest moment, and I knew that she was hiding something from me. She'd said we were friends and I believed her but something gnawed at me—and it wasn't just

Glinda, or the Scarecrow's warnings.

The bedroom that Jellia escorted me to after dinner was everything I had dreamed. It was three times as big as my room back in Kansas, with a panoramic window that looked out over the shimmering Emerald City skyline.

There was a huge vanity and a jewelry box overflowing with earrings and bracelets and necklaces, any one of which I was sure would have cost more than Uncle Henry earned in a year back in Kansas. The ebony wardrobe in the corner was stuffed with any kind of gown I could imagine, not to mention more than a few that I never would have been able to dream up on my own.

This was what I had wanted. Sitting alone in the field back in Kansas, covered in pig slop, with Miss Millicent in my lap, I had made a wish without even realizing it, and the wish had come true.

It was *too* good to be true, though. As I stood in front of the open wardrobe, wondering which

dress to try on first, I had an itchy feeling in the back of my head that was telling me Ozma knew me too well. Like she was giving me all this because she knew it was what I wanted, and that she thought that if she kept me happy, I wouldn't question her.

She had seemed so adamant when I'd asked her to teach me magic. Adamant, and a little sad, like it was exactly what she'd been afraid of. And she'd certainly been interested in my shoes.

Of course, the shoes were magic. I'd already figured out they were more than just a key that had unlocked the door to Oz for me. The way they'd been impossible to take off my feet for the Scarecrow, the strange feelings that had come from them all along my journey: all of that had suggested they could do more than I knew. And, of course, there was the way they had seemed to help me fight off the Screaming Trees in the forest.

Maybe I was a little afraid of them.

But Glinda had sent them to me to bring me here, I was *certain* of it.

And really—it seemed ridiculous that Ozma should be so against me doing magic. This was the Land of Oz. There was magic in the earth, in the *air*.

At the same time, it seemed obvious that she had figured out there was more to the shoes than I was telling. I was fairly certain she knew at least part of the truth. If she really didn't want me doing magic, why hadn't she taken them away from me?

What if she knew she couldn't? What if she was *afraid* of them, too?

What if my shoes were the key to finding Glinda?

It all made a certain upside-down sense. Last time I'd been to Oz, I'd had the power in my Silver Shoes all along, and I hadn't even realized it. It would be incredibly stupid to make the same mistake twice.

So I sat down on the edge of my bed and tried to call for the Sorceress. I knocked my heels together. I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to conjure her kind, motherly spirit. I pictured her

smiling, impossibly beautiful face.

Something was happening. I could feel the red shoes trying as hard as I was. They constricted on my feet; they burned and tingled, glowing with energy. A few times, I even felt like I was getting somewhere: I could feel the Good Witch's presence filling the room. Once, I even thought I smelled her perfume. But, no matter what I did, she didn't appear.

I could feel the magic inside myself. I could practically *see* it sparking from my fingertips as I waved them through the air trying to bring her forth. Still nothing.

Maybe it was just that I needed to start with something smaller.

I walked to the vanity, sat down, and looked at myself. I examined my face closely. I thought about what Ozma had done earlier that day—about the way she had woven her fingers through the air and changed my hair and my clothes, and I wondered if I could do the same. So I closed my eyes.

And I know it sounds strange of me. I don't

even know where it came from. I know, but I imagined myself as a giant tree standing in the center of the Road of Yellow Brick, with roots that spread out from my feet and pushed deep into the core of Oz, drawing up magic like it was water. I imagined that Oz was feeding me. That was sort of what my shoes had felt like on the Road of Yellow Brick—like the roots of a tree that connected me to Oz.

I could feel it working. I could feel the power filling my body, and the more it did, the hungrier it made me. I felt more alive than I ever had before. I felt like I could do anything.

But I was going to start small. I squeezed my eyes, touched my hair, and imagined the magic working on it. I imagined it changing colors, flipping through all the different possibilities the rainbow had to offer until I landed on the most beautiful color I could: pink. The pink of a sunset. The pink of Glinda's dress.

And when I saw myself staring back from the mirror, a lock of hair tumbled across my forehead,



and it was even pinker than I had hoped.

I had *done* it. I had performed real magic. If I could change the color of my hair, what else could I do?

Well, I had the whole night to find out, didn't I?

Once I started, I almost couldn't stop. Some things were beyond me—I spent close to an hour trying to make myself fly, and the closest I could manage was something along the lines of a little bunny hop that probably wasn't magic at all. I tried to make myself invisible, but all I accomplished was a distressing pallor in my complexion. And try as I might, I just couldn't bring back Glinda.

However, there was *plenty* that I could do. Oh, just little things—useless things, really—but little is relative when you're a girl from the prairie.

I transformed a crumpled-up stocking into a little mouse that Toto chased furiously around the room before reacting with utter shock when it turned right back into a sock. He turned to glare reproachfully at me when he saw that I was doubled over with laughter in bed. I gave myself a

lovely manicure; I made a fountain pen float across the room. I made a pair of earrings disappear from my jewelry box and reappear underneath my pillow. I didn't *have* to knock my heels to do any of it, but I found that if something was proving difficult, it did help.

I turned the pink stripe in my hair green, then purple, and finally gold before I decided that I liked my hair just fine the way it was before, and I waved it all away with a thought.

Once I started, it seemed like there was almost no end to it. All I had to do was think of something, and if I thought hard enough, I could at least nudge it toward reality. With a little practice—and a bit more imagination—I was certain I would be able to manage much more.

I fell asleep, still in my clothes, just as the sun was coming up, filled with happiness. I was in Oz, and in just a few hours I would be reunited with my old friends the Lion and the Tin Woodman. I was in my own beautiful room in the Emerald palace, and, for now, no one—not even Aunt Em

and Uncle Henry—could make me leave.

Best of all, I had magic. It was mine, and Ozma herself couldn't take it away from me.

## Fourteen

I hadn't even stepped all the way into the great hall the next morning when I was tackled. A ball of golden fur came flying right for me, knocking me backward onto the carpeted floor of the hallway. A big, wet tongue licked my face.

It only took me a short moment to figure out what was going on. "Lion!" I squealed, wrapping my arms around him. Or, at least as far around as they would go. "Is it really you?"

"Who else would it be?" he asked in a low rumble, drawing back onto his haunches and licking his lips, gazing down on me kindly.

The Lion looked different than I remembered—he was bigger and wilder now, his yellow-brown mane tangled and matted, his arms and legs more powerful. When I'd first met him, the Lion had been timid and frightened, startling at the slightest sound. Even after the Wizard had given him his

courage, he'd seemed as if he didn't quite know *how* to be brave. Now, I could see, he'd grown into it.

"I can't believe it's really you," I said breathlessly, sitting up and blinking.

"And not just me either," the Lion replied. "Look who else is here to see you."

At the long banquet table inside the great hall, another familiar face rose to his feet, grinning from ear to ear. The Tin Woodman stood and held out a rose. "My dear," he said, presenting the flower almost shyly. "I didn't think it was possible for my heart to get any bigger, but seeing you again, it feels about to burst."

I just ran to him. I didn't bother taking the flower; I just flung myself against him, planting a kiss on his cheek. And if you didn't think tin could blush then, well, you should have seen his face at that moment.

Aunt Em and Uncle Henry were seated at the table, looking on at the scene politely. I was embarrassed to see that they were back in their

tatty old clothes and, though Em's hair was still green, she and Henry both had combed their new 'dos back into as close to their normal styles as they would go. They just wouldn't accept *any* changes.

Ozma had said we'd get them to come around, but I didn't see how we ever would.

While Toto and the Lion wrestled playfully on the marble floor, I joined everyone else at the table.

"It's so nice to see old friends reunited," Ozma said, raising a champagne glass, filled with something purple, in a toast. "Here's to Dorothy—beloved by all who meet her."

"I think a certain Wicked Witch would disagree with you there," I said, but I clinked with everyone—even Em and Henry.

The table was covered in everything you could want for breakfast—and a lot of things I'd never thought to want.

There were fantastical fruits that sang witchy, enchanting little songs when you weren't looking at

them and fresh eggs with bright yellow speckles that cooked themselves however you wanted as soon as you cracked them open onto your plate. There were oddly shaped pastries and a rainbow of juices in little crystal pitchers. Some of the food seemed like a bit of a nuisance, really—like the sticky buns that wouldn't let go of the plate and the flapjacks that flipped out of your way when you tried to take one—but it was definitely the most exciting breakfast I'd seen in all my life.

I helped myself to a little bit of everything, chattering in excitement as I heaped food onto my plate.

“You have to tell me everything!” I said. “Everything that's happened since I've been gone. The Scarecrow told me a bit, but, Lion, have you really been living up in the mountains with all the beasts? And—oh!”

I let out a scream as a piece of toast that I had just dropped onto my plate burst into flames.

Everyone laughed—even Aunt Em and Uncle Henry.

“Same thing happened to me,” Henry said, as the flame grew. “I venture to say my scream was even higher pitched than yours. Just wait.”

I waited, and when the flame burned out, a piping-hot glazed doughnut was sitting on my plate. It practically melted in my mouth as I bit into it.

“Tin Woodman,” I asked, still chewing. “How is Winkie Country now that the Wicked Witch of the West is gone? Are the Winged Monkeys happy these days? I hope that you’ve found yourself a lady to keep you company, now that you have your new heart and all.”

The Tin Woodman’s metal cheeks flushed with a glow even rosier than before. “I can’t say I have,” he said. “But I’ve been very happy anyway.”

“Happier now that *you’re* here, Dorothy,” the Scarecrow said. “We all miss you.”

“We’ve all missed you,” the Lion said, finally turning his attention to those of us at the table. He picked Toto up in his jaws and carried him by the scruff of his neck over to me, dropping my panting



dog into my lap.

“And there’s so much for you to see and do,” the Tin Woodman said. “Oz has changed so much since you went away. With the witches killed and the Wizard gone, it’s a much happier place now. You won’t believe your eyes when we visit Polychrome at the Rainbow Falls. And your aunt and uncle are going to love Sky Island.”

“Oh, I don’t think so,” Henry interrupted. I knew what was coming before the words were out. “We’re not going to have time for sightseeing. We have to get back to Kansas just as soon as we’re able to.”

I rolled my eyes openly and took a blueberry scone from a tray in the center of the table. As soon as it was in my hand, another one appeared on the tray to take its place.

“Don’t you and Em have anything better to do than bother us with more boring Kansas talk?” I asked with every bit of fake-sweetness I could muster. “Maybe there are some slop buckets in the garden that you can haul around all day. Or a field

to plow?”

Henry's jaw dropped in surprise at my sudden rudeness. I have to admit, I was surprised at myself, too, but I really didn't see why he had to keep picking at me like this when he could see perfectly well how much it upset me. Still, I didn't want to embarrass everyone with another nasty argument.

I decided to try something. I looked him square in the eye and focused on my shoes, feeling them grow warm.

Using magic to control another human being wasn't anything that had even occurred to me when I had been practicing back in my room. Of course, I knew it wasn't right, and I promised myself I wouldn't make a habit of it. But if I could use the power I had to make my aunt and uncle see that staying in Oz was the only sensible choice for us, well wasn't that a case where we *all* got what we wanted?

With every bit of confidence that I was doing the thing that was more than justified, I invited the

magic in. With just a thought, I pulled it up through my body and then directed it out at my uncle, imagining him saying the words I wanted to hear.

“I think your aunt and I are going to go take a walk,” he muttered stiffly, just as if I had scripted it myself. Well, I *had*, hadn’t I? “After all, there’s so much to see in this beautiful land, and I want to take in every single bit of it if it takes me all year.”

Aunt Em looked too surprised to question him when Henry pulled himself away from the banquet table and took her hand to get up. Without even saying good-bye, they walked mechanically out of the room.

The Scarecrow and the Lion and the Tin Woodman were all staring at their backs, confused at what had just happened. “Lovely to meet you!” the Tin Woodman called after them, but they were already gone.

Ozma was the only one not watching my aunt and uncle go. She was looking at *me*. “Dorothy . . . ,” she said.

I cut her off. “Thank *goodness*,” I sighed.

“Finally, we can have a real conversation without all their bothersome complaining.”

Ozma nodded slowly, her brow furrowing in concern. Frustration started to boil beneath my skin. She was just as bad as they were, in her own way. But she let the issue drop, for now at least, and silently took another dainty sip of her fizzy purple drink.

I wasn't going to let her ruin my reunion with my best friends—my *only* friends, really. Actually, I wanted to jump for joy. I had just done magic. Real, live, actual *magic*! It hadn't even been that difficult. I'd just imagined what I wanted Henry to do, and he'd done it, like he was a marionette and I was standing over him pulling the strings. If that was all it took, they would *never* be able to make me go back to Kansas. And imagine what else I could do.

I knew, suddenly, that the shoes weren't just meant to get me back to Oz. They were meant to teach me things. To show me what Ozma—the spoilsport!—wouldn't.

Now the Tin Woodman was waxing on about the beauty of Sky Island with its rivers of lemonade and its cloud mountains, and how he *so* wished we could all visit it together. The Scarecrow was listening closely, interrupting from time to time with a detail the Tin Woodman had forgotten, and the Lion roamed around the room restlessly, with Toto following after him like—well, like a puppy, actually.

Through it all, Ozma was cheerful and bright-eyed, happy to be part of the conversation, but every now and then she'd glance over at me searchingly, like she was looking for something.

I kept wishing that she would just leave. I had to talk to my friends. *Alone*. The Scarecrow knew it, too. He kept suggesting things to her—things like, “Oh, it’s getting late, isn’t it time for you to go find Jellia and discuss your schedule for the day?” But Ozma didn’t take the bait. I wondered if she was just having a good time or if there was more to it—if maybe she didn’t trust us to be alone together.

It was risky to try using magic on her. Doing a little spell on my uncle was bound to be different than doing it on a fairy who already knew a thing or two about spells herself. Then again, my shoes were powerful. When she'd given me my makeover yesterday, her own magic hadn't even been able to touch them. If they were powerful, it meant that *I* was powerful, too. Maybe even more powerful than she was.

So I gave it a spin. I changed her mind. This time, I tried to be more precise about what I was doing, so she wouldn't be able to detect it and fight back.

I envisioned the magic as a tendril of ruby-red smoke, as thin and delicate as the smoke rings that Henry sometimes blew to make me laugh when he was smoking his pipe. I pulled it up from my shoes and sent it drifting invisibly across the table to burrow itself into Ozma's ear.

A distant, distracted look made its way across her face. She looked as though she was trying to remember something. "I . . .," she said.

*Go*, I commanded silently. As soon as I thought the word, Ozma's expression resolved itself into one of surprised realization.

"Please excuse me," she said. "I think I left something in my chambers. Give me just a few minutes." With that, she stood up, set her napkin down, and hurried out.

He didn't say anything, but I was pretty sure I saw the Scarecrow smirk approvingly in my direction.

It wasn't right. I do realize that. People aren't little marionettes to be pulled this way and that without their say-so in the matter. On the other hand, just because it wasn't right didn't mean it wasn't fun.

As soon as Her Royal Highness was out of earshot, he turned to me.

"Did you learn anything?" he asked. "Do you know where Glinda is?"

Everyone looked at me eagerly. Apparently the Scarecrow had filled them all in on his suspicions. *Our* suspicions, now.

“We’ve been waiting to hear,” the Lion rumbled. “We’ve all had our doubts about the princess from the very get-go. The way she just marched in here and acted like she owned the place. As if the Scarecrow here hadn’t been ruling perfectly well in her absence.”

The Tin Woodman set his fork down. “And where did she come from? How do we even know she’s the real princess? Just because she says so? She’ll offer up no explanation for where she’d been. I’m the governor of Winkie Country and the gentlest soul in all the land—you would think she would feel that she owed at least *me* an explanation. With my heart, I would be sure to understand.”

I leaned in and whispered. “I’m almost certain the princess is keeping something from me,” I confessed. “I don’t know what, but . . .”

“Oh dear,” the Tin Woodman said, a grave expression on his face.

“My brains almost never fail me,” the Scarecrow said. “And I truly think Ozma has



something to do with Glinda's disappearance. She's never showed more than the most cursory concern for the Sorceress's whereabouts. Dorothy, you're back here for a reason. You have to find our friend. But keep your wits about you. Ozma may seem sweet. But everything I know tells me she's dangerous."

"I have to agree," the Tin Woodman said. "I can feel it in the bottom of my heart."

The Lion just growled softly.

I knew they were all right. But . . .

I wasn't afraid of her. Suddenly I wasn't afraid of *anything*. There was real power in my shoes. I could feel it. Every time I used them to cast a spell, I could feel myself getting better, stronger. And I wanted more.

Why should I be afraid? She was the one who should be afraid of *me*.

## Fifteen

We spent hours sitting around the breakfast table. Long after the plates had cleared themselves and the morning had passed into afternoon, we'd laughed and commiserated, retelling stories of our old adventures and some new stories, too.

The Lion told me all about his adventures in the Northern lands—exotic by even Oz standards—and the Tin Woodman told me all about his experiences governing the unruly Winkie folk.

I told the story of my sixteenth birthday party, and I saw that it had moved my tin friend so greatly that a tear was trickling down his metal face.

“Oh dear,” he said, when he saw that I had caught him in his tenderheartedness. He dabbed at his face with a napkin. “This heart of mine is a wonderful gift, but it does make rust a significant concern.”

Soon after, he and the Scarecrow decided it

was time to go tidy themselves up. The Lion ventured off to the forest just outside the city for his afternoon jog. I was still trying to decide what I was going to do with what was left of my day when Jellia Jamb, Ozma's handmaid, appeared, summoning me to meet the princess in the garden.

The day was sunny and warm, and I found her sitting on a wrought-iron bench next to a tinkling fountain. She was looking fondly at a tiny little Pixie who was perched on her extended finger. They seemed to be deep in conversation.

"Oh!" Ozma exclaimed when she saw me approaching. The Pixie went fluttering away. "The little thing was just telling me the silliest joke. Everyone else thinks these Pixies are so irritating, but I think they're amusing. Anyway, they're part of Oz, aren't they? And everything here has its place in the order of things."

*Is she kidding?* I wondered. This Little Miss Sunshine act would make Shirley Temple herself want to tap-dance right off a cliff.

"Anyway," she said brightly. "I wanted to talk

to you about something.”

I folded my arms and prepared myself for the haughty lecture she was about to give me. About how I’d lied to her about the shoes, about how she had warned me not to do magic, and how I’d had the *nerve* to disobey her. About how reckless she thought I was being.

Maybe she didn’t know it, but even if I was in Oz, I was still a citizen of the United States, and where I came from we didn’t put much stock in self-appointed *monarchs*—no matter whether their blood was blue or purple or sprinkled with fairy dust.

Sometimes even a princess can surprise you, though. “I think I’d like to throw you a big party,” Ozma said. “What do you think about that?”

She had caught me off guard. “What kind of party?” I asked, suspicious. A party? I was *sure* she’d seen what I’d done at the breakfast table. Even if she hadn’t felt me magicking *her*, she had to have noticed me casting a spell on Henry. I’d seen the expression on her face. Now she wanted

to throw me a party? There had to be some sort of catch.

Ozma stood up and did a playful little pirouette across the grass, and I remembered suddenly that, fairy princess or not, she was really just a girl. A girl who was lonely—a girl who had been waiting and waiting for someone like me to keep her company. She *needed* me. Maybe she was willing to let a spell here and there slide. What's a little magic between girlfriends, right?

“Oh, a *wonderful* party,” she said dreamily. “I don't suppose you're sick of your birthday already, are you?”

“Sixteen *is* a big one,” I allowed hesitantly.

“Perfect!” she exclaimed. “It's been too long since I threw a ball. We so rarely have an occasion. I don't even know when my own birthday *is*—isn't that terrible? But all of Oz loves a party, and the whole city's already abuzz with your return. A celebration is in order!”

I had to admit I liked the sound of it. “The party Aunt Em threw for me was . . . well, it wasn't

quite what either of us hoped,” I said. “Maybe this can be a do-over. I’m sure it would make her happy, too, to get it right this time.”

Ozma clapped her hands. “Of course! A do-over!” She said the word as if she had never heard it before, as if she was savoring each syllable as it rolled off her tongue. “We’ll invite everyone,” she said. “The Munchkins, the Winkies, even the Nomes and the Pixies and the Winged Monkeys and all of Oz’s most important personalities. Polychrome will come from the Rainbow Falls; and I hope the Wogglebug can tear himself away from his classes at the university. We’ll even invite General Jinjur—though I’m sure she won’t make it. She’s not much for dances.” Ozma rolled her eyes. “I have to tell you about Jinjur and her all-girl army sometime.”

I sat on the bench and studied her as she drifted into a party-planning reverie. To think I’d almost sympathized with her when she’d complained about the burdens of royalty. If this was the extent of her duties, it didn’t seem so bad at all.

Still . . . a party. For *me*. What better way for me to announce my return to Oz for good?

Ozma slid back down onto the bench beside me and draped a slender arm over my shoulder. Her wrist of bangles glinted in the sunlight.

“And,” she said, raising her eyebrows in conspiracy, “it will be the perfect way to show your aunt and uncle what *fun* it is here. Once they’ve seen a royal ball, they’ll never think of going home. You won’t even need to use those special shoes of yours to convince them.”

The words hung in the air. So there it was. I’d almost let her trick me into buying her act.

“I don’t know what you mean,” I sniffed. I wasn’t fooling anyone, naturally—she knew, and I knew she knew, and she knew I knew she knew—but I didn’t want to give her the satisfaction of hearing me come clean.

“Oh, Dorothy,” she said. “You don’t need to hide it. I knew those shoes were enchanted from the moment I laid eyes on them. And I don’t blame you for experimenting with them. Magic can be

quite intoxicating.” Her eyes darkened. “*Too* intoxicating,” she said, the singsong of her voice giving way to sternness. “So let’s just get them off, okay? That way you won’t be tempted.”

She twirled a finger and pointed it at my feet, at my beautiful, shiny shoes. A green spark sizzled from her fingertip, zigzagged through the air, and bounced right off my heel. The shoes glowed in response to the insult, but they didn’t budge.

Ozma frowned, seeing that her spell hadn’t worked. I was already on my feet. I spun around and faced her in a rage.

“They’re *mine*,” I said. “She gave them to me, and you can’t do anything about it.”

Ozma’s mild smile didn’t flicker. She was one cool cucumber when she set her mind to it, I had to give her that much. “She?” the princess asked, cocking her head to the side.

“Don’t play innocent,” I hissed. “Neither of us was born yesterday. You know who *she* is. Glinda. What, were you jealous of her? Did you want her out of the way so you could keep all the power for



yourself?”

Ozma put a hand to her cheek like she'd just been slapped. She shook her head. “You're not in your right mind. Those shoes. The magic is already beginning to twist you. The way it did with . . .”

I didn't care to let her finish. I was too upset. Rightfully so, I should say! Glinda had been the one who had watched over Oz while she'd been off wherever she was, and Ozma had gone and done away with her without so much as a how-do-you-do. She had some nerve playing innocent with me now—as if it was anything other than a power grab worthy of a true tyrant. “A Scarecrow's one thing,” I said, sneering openly. “You surely got him out of the palace fast enough. A Sorceress, though, that's another story, isn't it? Couldn't have her mucking things up for you, now could you?”

Ozma bit her lip and looked away like she couldn't believe what she was hearing. “Glinda didn't have Oz's best interests at heart,” she murmured. “Trust me, Dorothy. I know that she was kind to you, but the Sorceress is not everything

that she appears at first. I had no choice. It's my duty to keep Oz safe."

"*Naturally*," I said. "After all, *you're* the one true ruler, and everyone else can just fall in line. Why, you call yourself a fairy, but you're no better than a wicked witch. And you know my history with them."

Ozma's gaze turned steely at my threat, and I knew that she was through with arguing. She rose to her feet.

"I need the shoes. Now." Ozma reached for her scepter on the bench. "It's for your own good."

I didn't give her a chance to get to it.

It was easy-peasy this time. I barely even had to think about what I was doing. With every spell I cast, I was becoming more powerful. It was like my shoes were doing the work *for* me.

This time, I could actually *see* the magic with my own two eyes as it unspooled from my palm as a gauzy scarlet thread and curled toward her. Ozma could see it, too: her eyes widened in dismay and she took an unsteady step back. I guess she hadn't

expected this.

That would teach her to underestimate me, Dorothy Gale, the Witchslayer herself. There was nothing she could do. My magic was already twisting its way into her skull like a corkscrew.

Her gaze turned to mush. The side of her mouth drooped a bit.

I felt a sick joy in my chest as I used the magical filament like a piece of dental floss, pulling back and forth with my mind, carefully scraping Ozma's memory clean of our conversation.

When I'd changed Uncle Henry's mind just a few hours ago, I'd sworn to myself that I wouldn't do it again. But then I had, just a few minutes later. And now I was *literally* changing Ozma's mind. Sprucing it up and making it presentable the way one would change the sheets on the bed.

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I had the vaguest notion that *I* was the one being wicked. But I found that I didn't care. In fact, I almost enjoyed it.

I made her forget the shoes, and our talk of Glinda, and the incident with Uncle Henry at the breakfast table. When I was done, I was just Dorothy Gale, her dear friend and confidante, a spunky, headstrong girl from Kansas to whom the people of Oz—her loyal subjects—owed a debt of gratitude. Or three. A girl with an unusually lovely pair of red high heels.

I let her keep the party idea, though. No point in throwing the baby out with the bathwater, is there?

## Sixteen

Over the next week, Ozma put all thoughts of ruling the kingdom aside as she made plans for what she promised me would be the grandest event Oz had seen in most people's lifetimes. Every day, chefs, bakers, dressmakers, and party planners visited the palace, each one of them bursting with wild ideas and begging for the princess's favor.

I was pleased to notice that they also took a special interest in me. Every new visitor who passed through the palace stopped to shake my hand, or to give me a kiss on the cheek and to marvel at what a wonder it was to have the famous Dorothy Gale back in Oz.

I half expected Ozma to be jealous of all the attention I was getting. But she masked it well, and never failed to appear delighted when yet another one of her subjects treated me as if *I* was just as important as she—maybe even more important.

One day, when a little furry Nome peddling jeweled goblets thanked me for ridding the land of the witches, I almost wanted to wink at him and whisper in his ear, “Just you wait. My work isn’t done quite yet.”

Except for one thing: ever since I’d flossed Ozma’s brain, I was having a hard time hating her. In fact, when I set aside the unfortunate fact that she had imprisoned Glinda and tried to steal my shoes, we were getting on well.

We spent our days planning the menu and picking out decorations: bright, blooming flowers that changed colors every time you looked away; handfuls of stardust sprinkled over everything—we even coaxed the Wandering Water to form a babbling brook around the outside of the ballroom. I have to say, it put to shame the streamers and tea candles that passed for lavish back in Kansas. We spent countless hours lying on the grass in the garden, threading flowers through our hair, speculating about who was coming to the party and daydreaming about the possibility that there might

be a few suitable princes in attendance.

My spell had done the trick—she had no recollection of our fight by the fountain, or of the controversy over my magic shoes. As far as she knew, we were just *friends*.

In fact, Ozma was starting to feel like the closest I had to a best friend. It had been so long since I'd had a friend like that. Of course, the Lior and the Tin Woodman and the Scarecrow were my loyal friends and the most wonderful companions anyone could hope to have, but they were different. It wasn't like having a girlfriend my own age.

All the Scarecrow ever wanted to talk about was his magnificent brains, which made me wonder what good was it to be the greatest mind in all the kingdom if you never actually *thought* about anything except your own intelligence.

The Tin Woodman spent most of his time in the palace's musty old library with his nose in boring old books of love poetry. When I agreed to let him read one aloud to me, I was so mortified at how romantic it was that I could barely stand to look at

him afterward.

As for the Lion—well, he was usually off in the woods, hunting or whatever it is lions do in their alone time. When he did deign to set foot on the palace grounds, he could barely go ten minutes before his newfound courage got the best of him and he tried to pick a fight with the first palace servant who crossed his path.

With the three of them as my only other choices for company, who could blame me for preferring to spend my days dreaming and party planning with Oz's sweet little despot? At least she was capable of carrying on a real conversation. And she seemed to actually *want* to spend time with me. I just had to be careful not to do any magic around her.

I knew now that I could subdue her, if necessary—just wash her brain clear of any tension between us. But to be honest, I felt a little uneasy about having to do it again. Why go to the trouble?

“Can I ask you a question?” Ozma asked one



afternoon, just a few days before my ball when we were in her closet trying on party outfits for the umpteenth time. I nodded absently, trying to decide between slinky silk or dramatic tulle and chiffon—I was leaning toward slinky.

I must admit, it felt like such a sweet victory to think that I'd be celebrating my sixteenth birthday again, like *this*, after the disaster of the first party.

Ozma turned and fixed me with a penetrating look. "Why do you live with your aunt and uncle?" she asked, out of nowhere. "What happened to your mother and father?"

I paused in surprise. "Oh," I said quietly. It wasn't the kind of question I was expecting.

"I'm sorry—I shouldn't have . . . it must be such a sad story. You don't have to talk about it."

I shrugged. "No," I said. "It's all right. I don't even remember them. My mother died when she gave birth to me, and my father was killed just a few months later. There was an accident with a plow. I know I should miss them, but it's hard to be sad about people you never even knew."

Ozma smiled in sympathy.

“What about you?” I asked. “You’ve never mentioned your parents at all, I don’t think. Just Lur-whoozit.”

Ozma passed her hand down the length of her body and her emerald-green dress turned to bloodred.

“Maybe add a train?” I suggested.

“Perhaps. No, they’re so easy to trip over. Think of how embarrassing *that* would be.”

“You can have a team of Munchkins on hand just to hold it up,” I said, and we both laughed over the absurdity of the idea.

“The truth is,” Ozma said, when we had recovered. “I don’t *have* parents. I never did.”

“You must have at *some* point. Everyone has parents.”

“Everyone except fairies,” she said. “I was born from the pool in the center of the maze. Remember that little red flower, floating in the pool?”

“Yes,” I said, vaguely remembering.

“That’s where I came from. The next princess is somewhere in there, biding her time. When the flower is big and full and about to shed its petals, it means she’s close to being born, and I’ll know that it’s time for me to go rejoin Lurline and my people. I’ll go off to find them, and my successor will rise up out of that flower to take my place. Of course, it takes a very long time, and after she’s born she’ll be a baby for a bit—that’s when Oz is most vulnerable. That’s how the Wizard managed to do away with me the first time.”

“How strange,” I said. “But where did he send you? I’ve been wondering.”

“Does it matter?” Ozma asked.

“Why wouldn’t it?”

“Does it matter that you’re from Kansas? You’re here now. The past is gone. Especially in Oz—that’s the way time works. In Oz, it’s always right now.”

I thought about it for a moment. It *did* matter. I didn’t necessarily like to think about where I was from, and I certainly didn’t want to go back there,

but it had made me who I was, just as much as my trip to Oz had made me who I was.

Wherever Ozma had been had made her who she was, too. How could it not have?

And who was she, really? Was she the sweet, charming new friend I'd made—a girl who wanted nothing more than to try on dresses and plan parties—or was she the regal, majestic, fairy princess I'd seen that day in the hedge maze?

Was she the girl who would do anything to be a good ruler to a kingdom she didn't even really want, or was she so desperate for power that she had banished Glinda to some terrible, faraway place to get her out of the way, just the same way the Wizard, once upon a time, had done to Ozma herself?

It didn't occur to me that maybe she could be both. All I knew was that I had to find out the truth.

So even though I knew it was risky, I cast a spell. I knew I couldn't be too obvious this time. Ozma may have looked sweet and innocent, but she was dangerous, too. She was a fairy. If she had

done something to Glinda, she might be able to do it to me, too, if I wasn't careful.

I gave her just the tiniest little nudge. I had been practicing at night, in my room alone, and I was getting better at using the magic. I didn't have to knock my shoes together anymore; I didn't even need to feel the tingling in my feet. The magic wasn't just in the shoes. It was in every bit of my body, and all I had to do was take a tiny little piece of it and send it out into the world to bring me back what I wanted.

There in Ozma's dressing room, I looked down at my fingertip and saw a little red butterfly sitting on it, glowing and pulsing its jeweled little wings.

*Tell me*, I told it, without speaking the words aloud. And the butterfly took flight. It fluttered into the air and circled around Ozma's head in a scattered halo.

"Dorothy?" Ozma said. "Are you okay? You have the strangest look on your face."

The butterfly landed on her forehead. She didn't react. She didn't seem to notice it.

“What are you thinking about?” Ozma asked, looking deep into my eyes. “You look like you’re a million miles away.”

*Tell me, I thought. Tell me where Glinda is.*

The butterfly crawled across her brow, like it was looking for a way into her mind, and then it disappeared—just evaporated in a tiny puff of red dust. I had lost it.

Ozma didn’t seem to know what had just happened, I don’t think. But her mind was still her own. Her magic was more powerful than she let on.

I knew then, without a doubt, that she *was* the one who had done something to Glinda. You don’t guard secrets that you don’t have in the first place. And there was definitely something in her mind that she was guarding closely.

“Yes,” I said. “I was thinking of my mother.”

It was a lie, and it wasn’t. I had been thinking of Glinda, who was as close to a mother as I’d ever had. Closer than my own mother had ever been, that’s for sure. Closer than Aunt Em was,

even.

Glinda had brought me here. She had helped me get home to Kansas, once upon a time, when it was all I wanted in the world. I had to find her. I had to help her. Even Ozma—as lovely a friend as she could be—wasn't going to stand in my way.

The night before the ball, I walked into my bedchambers. I knew that it was important to get a good night's sleep, but there was so much on my mind that it was impossible to quiet it.

Toto was curled in the corner, asleep, dreaming about whatever it is that dogs dream about.

Without even having to think about it, I used my magic to strip my dress off; to untie the ribbons that held my hair into plaits. I sent them drifting off to the corner of the room, where I let them drop into a messy pile. I let an ethereal nightgown slip over my head. The shoes, of course, stayed on. I never took them off. I couldn't even if I tried.

I levitated myself off the floor and floated myself to my bed, letting myself drop gently onto

the cloud-soft mattress. I drifted off to sleep, not bothering to pull the sheets over my body. Instead, I wrapped myself in magic like it was a heavy down quilt.

As it enveloped me, I felt both happy and content—and emptier than ever.

Tomorrow was the party. I was in Oz, and there was a party being thrown for *me*. I had gotten exactly what I had wanted, and still it wasn't enough. I had wanted. And now I wanted *more*.

That was who I was, I realized, as I drifted off to sleep. This wanting itself was a kind of magic—one that I'd had since I was just a little girl. Since even before I'd been to Oz. Even before I'd had a pair of magic shoes, silver or red. I had always wanted more.

It was what had brought the tornado to me. It was what had brought me to Oz in the first place. It was what had sent me home, too, and it was what had allowed Glinda to find me again, to reach out through the walls that separated Oz from the rest of the world and bring me back. Now that I was here



—now that I had my shoes, my magic, my party—the wanting was still with me. It always would be.

I wanted more. I wanted what Ozma had. I wanted everything.

## Seventeen

Ozma sent Jellia Jamb for me in the morning, so that we could get ready together, but I sent the plain little servant away. This was my big day, and I wanted to be alone—I wanted to take the time to think about everything that had brought me to this place, and about what the future held for me.

For *me*. Not for Aunt Em and Uncle Henry. Not for Ozma, or for Oz, or the Scarecrow or the Tin Woodman or the Lion or even poor, missing Glinda, but for me alone.

So I spent the day in my room. I magicked up a light breakfast of those wonderful Anything Eggs and some Chimera's milk, and, later, for lunch, ambrosia and Emeraldfruit.

I stood in front of the mirror, trying to decide how I should look for the party. Toto sat in the corner, just watching me, understanding, I guess, that I was in a world of my own.

I tried on every gown in my closet, but none of them felt special. I summoned Jellia and requested more, but I still knew that none of them would be good enough. The right dress would come from magic—not Ozma's magic, but the magic of the shoes. The magic that belonged to me.

An hour before the party, Jellia delivered one more dress to my door. This one was from Ozma.

The skirt was green and flowing, made from the finest chiffon, with a bodice studded with a rainbow of jewels.

*My Dearest Dorothy*, the note read. *My new friend. I am so happy to have you at my side.*

I set the note on my vanity and took one look at the dress Ozma had given me before I tossed it aside, into the corner where my pile of castoffs was turning into a mountain.

The dress from Ozma was beautiful, but it wasn't the dress I was supposed to wear on my sixteenth birthday, the day I announced my official return to Oz. It was what she wanted for me, not what I wanted for myself. I didn't want to be at her

side while she ruled Oz. I was no one's lady-in-waiting. And suddenly I knew *exactly* what I wanted.

I no longer cared about hiding my magic from her. Why should I have to hide what belonged to me? This was Oz. Everything else was magic. Why shouldn't I be magic, too?

So I called it forth. Using it was second nature to me now. All I needed to do was *want* and it was mine.

The room was twitching with energy as I stood in front of the mirror. Atoms rewrote themselves around me. I felt the world twisting and turning at my silent command. Fabric wove itself against my body; my hair grew even longer, twisting, taking the shape I wanted from it until it fell around my face in two perfect auburn braids with curls that scraped my shoulders. I felt my skin becoming smoother and softer. My eyes brightened; my lips reddened. My cheeks flushed with the perfect rosy glow.

My dress took form.

When I was done, Toto barked in approval. I looked just how I wanted to look. I looked both like myself and like something greater.

There was a knock on my door. I opened it to find that Aunt Em and Uncle Henry were waiting for me outside. They gasped when they saw me.

“Why, Dorothy . . . ,” Uncle Henry started. I saw him blush, and he squeezed his eyes shut.

“You look . . . ,” Aunt Em began to say. She was at a loss for words, too. A look of scandal crested her face. She put her hand nervously to her mouth.

“I look like a princess,” I said. I knew that it was what they meant. “And not just like any princess. I look like Princess Dorothy. The Witchslayer. The Girl Who Rode the Cyclone. The *One True Princess of Oz*.”

They both looked away. They didn’t say anything. They didn’t have to. It was what they were thinking.

“Now let’s go to my party,” I said.

“Dorothy?” Ozma asked in surprise when I entered the ballroom, where the gala was just getting underway. “That’s not the dress I sent you.” Her face looked hurt and suspicious as she surveyed me.

My dress was blue gingham, just like the blue gingham I’d worn on the day I’d first landed in Oz. But it was different, too. Rather than being made from that scratchy, cheap fabric, it was made from the finest silk. The blue checks were stitched with glittering gold thread so subtle that you barely could see it until you looked closely.

It was short—shorter than anything I’d ever worn before. It was shorter than any dress I’d ever *seen* before, revealing my long, bare legs.

All of it did nothing more than draw attention to the shoes on my feet. They shone brighter than anything else in the room: brighter than Ozma’s crown, or her scepter, or the tiny jewels that were braided through her dark hair.

“Your dress was lovely,” I said, breezily. “But it wasn’t what I envisioned. Today is *my* day.”

“But where . . . ,” she asked.

Before she could finish the question, I stepped past her, into the ball, where everyone was waiting. They were waiting for *me*.

It barely looked like a ballroom at all. The sky was a brilliant galaxy of stars studded with giant, red poppies that opened and closed in time with the music, emitting a shimmering, heavenly light. The dance floor was a deep purple sunset.

Swarms of Pixies flew throughout the room, carrying trays of drinks and hors d’oeuvres.

The whole place was filled with Oz’s strange and notable personalities. Some of them I recognized from hearing Ozma talk about them: there was Polychrome, the Daughter of the Rainbow, wrapped in a diaphanous gown that looked like it was woven out of the sky itself. There was Scraps, the Patchwork Girl cartwheeling across the floor like a whirling dervish, whooping with laughter as she went. There was a giant, dignified frog in a three-piece suit, and a man with a jack-o’-lantern in place of a

head.

There were Nomes and Munchkins and Winkies and a man and woman made entirely of china, dancing carefully apart from the rest of the crowd so as not to risk breaking into pieces.

I whirled joyfully through the room, gliding from one citizen of Oz to the next, smiling and kissing each one on the cheek in greeting before spinning on to the next one. Each one of them looked up at me with love and gratitude. I meant so much to them. I had done so much for them—so much more than Ozma could ever think of doing. And they all wanted to meet *me*. I was famous. I was their hero.

When I got to the Scarecrow, he was ready for me. He took me up into his stuffed arms and spun me around and I laughed, kicking my feet up as the crowd parted to make way for us. The orchestra was playing a happy, energetic ragtime number and the trumpets blasted as the Scarecrow tossed me over his head as if I was light as a feather. He caught me, laughing, in his arms as I came back



down before twirling me across the floor to where the Tin Woodman was waiting for me.

My metal friend grabbed my hand, and his metal palm felt softer and warmer than I would have imagined was possible. He pulled me close against his chest, and the orchestra slowed up its tempo into something tender and sentimental. We waltzed across the dance floor. Everyone else had paused in their own dancing to watch us. They surrounded us in a circle, transfixed.

I was so happy that I was dancing on air. Literally: when I looked down, I saw that my feet were hovering a few inches above the ground, my magical shoes enveloped in a red mist, holding me aloft. No one noticed. They were too distracted by how happy they were.

The Lion was sitting on his haunches, ready to take me up in the next dance. He extended a huge paw, cutting in, and I was about to reach out for it when something bumped against my shoulder, hard. Cold, fizzy liquid splashed against my back, and then I heard the sound of glass crashing against the

ballroom floor.

When I turned around, I saw Aunt Em standing there with a guilty look on her face, a shattered crystal goblet lying in a puddle of purple liquid on the floor.

I came back down to earth.

“Oh, Dorothy, I’m sorry,” Aunt Em said. “I wasn’t paying attention to where I was going, and I just bumped right into—”

I put a hand up to interrupt her. “Stop,” I said. “You were thoughtless. You were careless. I was dancing, and you weren’t even watching. Everyone *else* was watching me.” I reached back and felt the dampness of my gown. “You could have ruined my dress.”

“I’m sure . . . ,” Aunt Em began. Her lips began to quiver. Tears came to her eyes.

I’d always hated seeing Aunt Em cry, and now I hated it even more. It was like she was doing it to spite me. Like she was trying to make me feel guilty on a day when I should have felt nothing but happiness.

“Clean it up,” I said.

She looked at me in surprised horror, her tears still streaming down her cheeks. “Well—I’m sure Miss Ozma can ask someone else . . .”

“No,” I said. “I want *you* to clean it up. Immediately.”

Uncle Henry was at her side now. “Now see here, Dorothy,” he said, taking my aunt’s arm. “This has gone too far.” For a moment, it seemed that he was going to be angry, but then he saw the look in my eyes and the expression on his face turned quickly to one of fright. He went silent.

“Clean. It. Up,” I instructed Aunt Em again. When she made no move to do as she was told, I took the choice out of her hands. Things had changed, and the two of them needed to learn that. I was their niece, and they had raised me, but we were in Oz now. Here in Oz, I wasn’t just another prairie girl. I commanded respect.

My shoes were urging me on. I could hear them whispering in my ear in a voice that was almost Glinda’s but not quite. It was low and urgent and

sweet. It was the voice of Oz; the voice of magic. It was the voice of my mother.

*Do it, it was saying. Teach them a lesson or they'll never learn. Show her who you are. Show them that this is where you belong. Show them that you are the one with power here.*

My whole body was burning; not just my feet. Every bit of me was singing with the power the shoes spoke of, and the music from the orchestra faded into just a distant hum as the song of my true self took its place. This was what I had been born for. Everything that had happened before had been preparing me for this moment, preparing me for my destiny. For who I really was.

I tugged at the strings that controlled my aunt, and she bent to the floor, onto her hands and knees, and began to wipe up the mess she'd created with a wet rag that had materialized for her.

"I'm so sorry, Dorothy," she said. "You are so wise and beautiful. I'm lucky to know you. To be able to have kept you safe all these years. Please, I beg your forgiveness."

“And now the dress,” I said, and Aunt Em stood, and began to dab at my back with the rag. I could have cleaned it myself, with just a thought, but I didn’t want to.

“It’s such an honor,” Aunt Em was saying. “To be able to serve you like this.”

Then Ozma was standing in front of me. I hadn’t seen her approach.

She looked different than I’d ever seen her. This was so much more than the Ozma who I’d seen in the maze, the day I’d met her. It was like she had been hiding part of herself from me. She no longer looked like the girl I knew. She no longer looked like a girl at all.

Her skin was fiery and glowing like the sun; her green eyes were huge and iridescent. Her hair haloed her face in oily-black tendrils that coiled and twisted like snakes.

The wings she’d showed me in the garden that day had revealed themselves again, but they were bigger now, twice as big as her body, and they sizzled with magical energy.

She looked like a fairy, and not even a fairy princess. She looked like a queen.

“*Dorothy*,” she said. Her voice reverberated throughout the ballroom. “It’s time for you to leave.”

“No,” I started to say. But the words wouldn’t come out.

I knocked my heels together, trying desperately to use my magic against her. It didn’t work. Nothing happened at all. My feet felt cold. Too cold. Like the magic had been drained from them.

And then, with everyone in the ballroom staring, I felt myself turning and walking away. I had lost it. I had lost my magic, lost everything I had worked so hard for. I couldn’t fight back—Ozma was controlling me.

“Wait!” the Scarecrow called. I found I couldn’t answer him.

Before I knew what had happened, I was back in my bedroom, where I settled into a black and dreamless sleep.

## Eighteen

I woke up to find Aunt Em sitting on the edge of my bed. She'd opened the windows, and the light was streaming through, casting her in a silhouette. The breeze hit my face. It smelled like grass and dirt and rain. It smelled like home.

For a second, I thought we were back in Kansas, and that it had all been a dream. I always hated it when stories ended that way.

“Dorothy,” Aunt Em said. I rubbed my eyes, still disoriented, and tried to think back to last night. It was foggy in my memory. There had been some kind of party, and I'd been dancing with the Lion and—

Oh.

I pulled the pillow over my face and groaned, trying to block it all out. If only I could go back to sleep, maybe everything would be okay.

“Dorothy,” Aunt Em said again. She pulled the

pillow away. I grabbed for it, but she held it at arm's length. "It's nearly afternoon."

"I need to sleep," I said. "I think I ate something I shouldn't have last night. I don't feel so good."

She pushed a lock of hair behind my ear and looked down at me. I expected her to be mad, but there was something tender in her expression. "I know, dear," she said. "You know, you're not in trouble."

I sat up slowly and slumped against the silk-upholstered headboard. "I'm not?" I asked cautiously.

"Of course not. We all know that you didn't mean to do any of that."

"You do?"

"Yes, dear. Your uncle and I have had a long talk about it with Ozma, and we all agree that you're not to blame. It's those shoes. They've been doing something to you. Something terrible."

"It's not—"

"We just think it's time for all of us to go home. We've stayed here too long already."



“No!” I jumped out of bed and threw on the brocade robe that was draped over the armchair by the window. “Don’t you see?” I asked angrily. “It’s *her*. Ozma. She’s making you think that there’s something wrong with me, when really it’s just that she’s afraid I’m more powerful than she is, and now she wants to get rid of me, just like she got rid of Glinda. Well, the princess can’t always have her way. I’m not going anywhere.”

When I turned around, Ozma was standing in the doorway. In the late morning light, wearing a simple white shift, she looked more like a little girl than ever.

“You’re right,” she said sadly. “About one thing, at least. I *was* afraid of Glinda. She’s used to getting her way around here, you know. She was trying to manipulate me. I had to send her away. Oz has seen too many cruel rulers already. If Glinda had gotten what she wanted, I would have been another. I couldn’t let that happen.”

“Spare me,” I said. “I don’t believe anything you say. You’ve been tricking me all this time.

Trying to make me think you're this kind, innocent, little girl, when really you're just like the witches—you just want Oz for yourself."

Ozma shook her head sadly. "Don't you see? When she couldn't control me, she thought she might be able to control *you*. So she sent you those shoes, and brought you here to do her work for her. And it's working."

"You're lying! Glinda sent me the shoes because she knew I was the only one who could save her. Which is exactly what I'm going to do."

I didn't know why I was even bothering talking to her. This could all be solved with a simple knock of my heels.

All I had to do was wipe Ozma's mind clean. I'd done it once before, and I could do it again.

I tried to summon a spell, but where my magic had once been, all I found was a deep, aching emptiness. A hunger. I had gotten so used to having it—even if I couldn't always use it, it was always *there*. Comforting me, protecting me. Feeding me.

Now it wasn't.

I looked down in a panic. My shoes were still on my feet. They were as red and shiny and beautiful as ever. But where they had once felt alive—like a part of my body, as important as my arms or legs—they now just felt heavy and separate. Just two ordinary shoes with extra-high heels.

Ozma gave a half shrug and looked away when she saw the distraught expression on my face. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I can’t take the shoes away from you. Whatever spell binds them to you is already complete, and magic like that is irreversible, even for me. But I can block your access to the power they possess. And I have. I didn’t want to—I thought maybe you would be able to handle it, that maybe you were strong enough to resist the corruption. You *are* Dorothy, after all. If anyone could fight off Glinda’s manipulations, it’s you. But the Sorceress is powerful and ruthless. She didn’t outlast the other witches by playing fair, you know.”

“No one could have resisted,” Aunt Em said.

She had risen from my bed and walked over to me, placing a hand on the small of my back. I suppose it was meant to be comforting, but I slapped it away. “It’s too tempting,” she said. “It’s not your fault, Dorothy. You’ll see, someday. This is for your own good. It’s time to go back to Kansas.”

“No!” I screamed, whirling around in a rage, looking for something—anything—that I could use against the princess. But it was too late. Ozma waved her scepter and my palace bedchambers faded to white.

When the world re-formed, I found myself standing in the middle of an endless field of waving green grass. I felt dizzy and nauseated, and I struggled to stay on my feet. Was this Kansas? Had it been that easy to undo it all?

No. We were still in Oz—the Emerald City was still visible in the distance, and Ozma was still standing in front of me. Aunt Em was here, too, stumbling around a bit from the transition, and Uncle Henry was a few paces away, holding Toto

in his arms. As soon as my little terrier saw me, he wriggled out of my uncle's grip and raced over to where I was struggling to stay on my feet. Toto circled my ankles, sniffing my shoes in confused concern. He could see that something was missing.

"I sure feel terrible," Uncle Henry was saying. "You won't believe me, but I know how much you wanted to be here. I hope you can understand, someday."

"Sending you home isn't simple," said Ozma. "I really didn't know how to do it for a while—so little is known about the walls that separate your world from ours. I needed to find something that already knows the way."

I didn't know what she was talking about, and I didn't care. All I wanted was to find a way to stop her.

"When you arrive home in Kansas, none of you will remember any of this. I think it's better that way. It will just seem like a pleasant, faraway dream. Something that happened to someone else in a story."

“No!” I screamed one more time, lunging for her. She might have cut me off from my magic, but I still had two hands, and I would use them to strangle her if that’s what I needed to do to stay here.

But before I could reach her, she raised her scepter, and I hit a wall. I punched and clawed at it, but my fists bounced uselessly against the invisible barrier.

“I’ll always be grateful to you, Dorothy,” Ozma said, ignoring my screams. “You saved Oz. And I’ll always think of you as a friend.”

With that, Ozma threw her head back and lifted her scepter to the sky. Her wings materialized, and she rose up into the air as a column of blinding light shot down from the clouds and surged through her. She began to shine so brightly that she was barely even visible anymore—she was just a vague, burning ball of radiance.

Even in my fury, I couldn’t help being impressed. I had met witches and sorceresses and wizards, but I had never met anyone who could

turn themselves into a star.

Uncle Henry put his arm around Aunt Em. Ever Toto sat back on his hind legs and stared up in amazement.

As Ozma cast her spell, wind whipped through the treetops. Dark clouds swirled overhead. It looked like a storm was coming. The light changed; the sky around us was now a sick, pale, greenish shade.

In that moment, I felt something happening to me. My feet began to tingle, and then the rest of my body was tingling, too, until it was almost vibrating with power.

No one noticed what was happening.

Ozma must have been too consumed with her own spell to realize that whatever barriers she'd placed on my shoes were falling away. She must not have been able to manage both spells at once.

My magic was coming back.

In the distance, I saw it approaching. The old house—the shack that had brought me to Oz—was flying across the sky, spinning like a top as it drew

nearer, getting bigger and closer by the second. That was what Ozma had meant by *something that already knows the way*. She was going to put us all back in that awful, ramshackle old house and she was going to make it take us back to Kansas.

I wouldn't stand for it. My shoes gripped my feet so hard it hurt.

It all happened so fast. Important things always seem to, don't they?

The house was careening through the sky, traveling faster than I thought possible, and then it was right over our heads and it began to hover in place as it made its descent.

My hair was whipping past my face; my whole body was twitching with fear and rage and power. More power than I'd ever felt before. More of *anything* than I'd ever felt before.

I didn't know how long it would last. I only had one shot.

And I didn't really even think about what I was doing. I just knew I had to do something. So I reached out in fury and desperation. I summoned



every ounce of magic I could find, and I grabbed it. That's really what it felt like. It felt like I was reaching out with giant hands and pulling the house from Ozma's magical clutches. It was easy.

I just plucked it up and I threw it at her—sent the house hurtling for the princess like I was tossing a handful of chicken feed onto the ground for Miss Millicent.

Ozma saw it coming a second too late. Just before it was about to hit her, the column of light that held her suspended dissipated, and her body returned to her. She screamed, her black hair swirling around her as her wings flapped furiously. Acting on instinct, she flung her arms out in front of her to protect herself. A glowing green shield materialized in front of her.

Like I say, it happened fast. Too fast for me to react.

The house crashed into Ozma's force field. But it didn't shatter. Instead, the farmhouse ricocheted off of it with a thunderous crash and went sailing gracefully through the air, straight toward where

my aunt and uncle were standing, frozen in place.

“*Dorothy!*” Aunt Em screamed, seeing it coming toward her.

“*Do som—*” Uncle Henry shouted.

Toto let out a howl, and I put my hand up, summoning another spell to stop it, but even as I did I knew I was a second too slow.

When the dust settled, the house had come crashing to the earth, still in one piece, and all that was visible of my poor aunt Em were her two feet sticking out from under our old front porch.

# Nineteen

Silence.

Terrible, awful, horrible silence.

It was only broken by the sound of my voice cracking. “Aunt Em!” I screamed. “Uncle Henry!”

There was no response. I knew there wouldn’t be.

I fell to the ground in front of the house, sobs racking my body.

*What have I done?* She was dead. Uncle Henry was dead. Tears rolled down my face. My throat closed up. It hurt so much. They were my only family. They had loved me, despite everything.

I choked on my tears. Why had I ever brought them here? I should have left them in Kansas, where they would have been safe. And happy. They hadn’t asked to come. All they’d wanted was to go home and I wouldn’t let them.

No. It wasn’t my fault. It was hers. *She* had

done this to them.

I shook with rage as I saw Ozma, back on the ground, crawling to her feet from where she'd made her own crash-landing.

The clouds thickened, growing darker above me. My shoes hugged my feet like a vise, glowing like they were made of red lightning. Ozma stared up at me in shock.

"*You* did this," I shrieked. "*You* killed them!"

I walked toward her, the rage burning me alive. It felt *good* to hate her this much. Natural.

Small forks of lightning flickered off the shoes as they throbbed with a magical pulse. But the heels weren't alive. *I was*. The pulse was my heartbeat. Their magic was part of me now.

A scream ripped out of me as another magical surge punched through my body. I felt like I was about to explode into flames as I walked steadily toward Ozma, screaming louder and with more anguish than the Screaming Trees in the Forest of Fear.

She staggered backward as I rushed at her. Her

face contorted in fear. “No, Dorothy! Please! Don’t let it control you! Don’t give in to it!”

“Too late for that, *Princess*,” I screamed. As I said it, I felt all of Oz screaming along with me.

“Please, calm down. You’ve no idea what you’re doing. You can still save yourself. Think about this.”

With a roar louder than the Lion’s I unleashed every last bit of magic that had been building unstoppably inside me since I got to Oz.

It was wondrous.

It surged through my body, flowing like a thousand rivers cascading violently and crashing on the shore.

It drained from the land and the sky, up through me and right at her.

She screamed as I hit her with pure energy, streams of purple and green and red lightning shocking and sparking as it struck the ground around us over and over and over again.

She didn’t fight back. Maybe she couldn’t—maybe she’d used up everything she had

summoning my house. Or maybe she didn't want to. Maybe she was too scared. I didn't know and I didn't care. I just wanted her dead. I wanted it to hurt.

But she didn't die. When I'd used up everything I thought I had, I was sure that I'd see her lying on the ground in a mangled, bloody heap. But Ozma rose to her feet. Easily, steadily, as if it was nothing.

She was more powerful than I'd realized. She had changed. I hadn't hurt her a bit. I might have even made her stronger.

Ozma's entire body turned the color of midnight and shadows. It looked alive—like there was black smoke churning just beneath her skin. Her eyes were hollow, golden caverns; her scepter was a lightning bolt that stretched into the thick clouds overhead.

"You have no idea what I am," she screamed with a hundred voices. "I am the blood of Lurline and the daughter of the Ancient Flower. I am the first and the last and the in-between. I am *Oz*."

She slammed her scepter into the earth, and a swarm of black moths came bursting forth out of it. They flew for me, knocking me backward, clinging to my skin, trying to suck the life out of me.

But the shoes protected me. Without me even trying, they wrapped me with red light, and the moths burned away as if I was a candle whose flame they'd been drawn to in the dark.

I regained my composure. Ozma had taken everything away from me. Everything I cared about or would ever care about. She had taken away Glinda, and my aunt and uncle, and my magic. She had tried to take away my kingdom.

"I am *Dorothy*," I screamed back at her.

I closed my eyes and knocked my heels three times, begging the Land of Oz to fill me with darkness and power and all the enchantments it possessed.

It did.

It all came bursting out of me. This time, it was more than magic. It wasn't just the shoes at work. It was me. It was the reason I had been brought here

in the first place. It was the reason I had been brought back again.

It was that *wanting* I'd known my whole life. All that hope that there was something better out there, something that could be mine and mine alone.

Ozma was no match for it. She'd never felt anything like it, I don't think. She had all this, and she didn't even care about it.

But I cared. I wanted. I wanted *more*. My desire was a tornado that twisted out of my body and danced toward the princess, catching her up in its funnel, lifting her into the air as easily as if she was a feather. She screamed and struggled against it, but there was nothing she could do.

It was no use. She was powerless against me. She may have been the One True Princess, the delicate peach blossom and the blood of whatever-her-name-was, but I was the girl who rode the cyclone, the girl who had slayed the witches. I had been brought here against all odds—not once, but *twice*. I wouldn't be denied.



Within the cone of the maelstrom, I watched calmly as Ozma's dark form began to tear itself apart in a gruesome explosion of black and gold. It was like she was unraveling. Like she was *melting*.

And then she was gone.

For the third time, Oz had chosen *me*.

The sky had returned to normal. Everything was quiet. The storm I had summoned faded away into the distance. It was like none of it happened, except that my head was throbbing and all of my limbs were aching in exhaustion.

And the old farmhouse was still standing there, invincible and mostly undisturbed, with my poor aunt's feet still sticking out from underneath it. I looked away. I couldn't bear the sight of it.

Then my eyes caught sight of *her*.

Ozma was lying on the ground, her crown knocked from her head and her scepter ten feet away. Her dress was streaked with blood and dirt and her face was bruised and swollen. But she was

breathing.

She sat up and looked around. I took a step forward, ready to keep fighting. Ready to do whatever it took. Then I saw that she was smiling. It wasn't a normal smile either. It was dazed and vacant and her eyes were empty, like old, tarnished marbles. She looked at me and cocked her head.

“Who are *you*?” she asked stupidly.

I lowered my arms. “Ozma?”

She giggled an idiotic giggle.

I pointed at her and tried to call up more magic. Just a little bit more, enough to snuff her out once and for all. But all that shot forth from my fingers were a few useless red sparks from my fingertips that faded away as quickly as they had come. I had used it all up, for now, I figured. It would take some time to recharge.

Ozma didn't seem to understand that I wasn't exactly her friend. She clapped her hands. “Oh that's *lovely*!” she cried. “Do it again.”

Before I could try anything, a high-pitched yipping noise filled my ears.

“Toto?” I spun around.

In all the commotion, I had forgotten about my dog, and when I searched for him, I saw Glinda standing there, right next to the farmhouse.

Her pink dress looked like it was made from the sunset itself; her eyes were kind and gentle. She bent down to pet my Toto, who was bouncing up and down happily at her feet, and when she stood up, she caught sight of me and beamed, picking up the skirt of her dress and racing forward through the grass to greet me.

“Dorothy!” she called, her voice strong and sweet and joyful. “My beautiful, powerful, *angry* Dorothy. I knew I could count on you, and I was right. Just look how right I was!”

She gestured toward Ozma, who had her arms outstretched and was whirling around, making herself dizzy as she laughed and tripped over herself, oblivious to everything that was going on.

“What did I *do* to her?” I asked.

“Oh, you did what you had to,” Glinda said with a shrug. “You couldn’t kill her. I don’t think

it's possible to kill her, at least not without destroying Oz. But still, *ding dong*, as they say!"

Glinda threw her head back and let out a long, melodious chortle.

I was a little confused. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"Think of it this way," Glinda said, when she'd stopped laughing. "You've taken Ozma's power and you've given it back to the land. Back to Oz, where it belongs. She was trying to hoard it all for herself, you know—that's been her goal all along. That's why she hated me, and why she wanted your shoes so badly. She just wanted to hoard the magic, like fairies always do."

"I thought the fairies *gave* Oz its magic."

"Oh, she told you that old taradiddle, now did she? I'm sure you didn't believe her. These fairies are *greedy* little creatures. She just couldn't *stand* to see anyone else with even a drop of magic to speak of. You did what you had to. You did what was right. And Oz will thank you for it, someday. For now, you'll have to settle for *my* thanks. You

saved me, Dorothy. You can't think of how horrible it was for me to be locked away like that."

"How did I . . ."

"Once you took care of Ozma, the prison she's been holding me in ceased to exist. Poof! Just like that. Of course I came to find you right away. I've been so worried about you all this time. It's a miracle I was able to get you those shoes at all. But you know—even all chained up, even in the darkest of dungeons—this old girl had a few tricks up her sleeve." She wiggled an eyebrow at me and laughed again, but this time she stretched out her arms as she did it and gestured for me.

"Oh, come here, you foolish, dear thing." As soon as she said it, I fell effortlessly into her embrace and suddenly found myself sobbing as she pulled me tight against her bosom.

"My aunt," I managed to say through my tears. "My uncle . . ."

Glinda held me close. She kissed my head and squeezed me even tighter. Aunt Em had hugged me before, and of course I knew that she had loved

me, but there had always been a certain distance between us. She had never wanted children, and even though she had tried her best with me, I always knew I wasn't quite part of her plan.

Now, as Glinda kissed me and hugged me and stroked my hair, I wondered if I finally knew what it was like to have a mother.

"Darling," she said kindly. "I'm so sorry about what's happened to them. But it just couldn't be helped. And, you know what?"

"What?" I asked, as she let me go and I stepped back. She took my arms, held them at my sides, and looked lovingly into my eyes.

"You'll have a *new* family now. A family who loves you more than you can imagine."

"Who?" I asked.

"Why, *me* of course, you silly goose! And the Scarecrow, and the Lion, and the Tin Woodman, and, oh, just about everyone in Oz, I imagine. You're to be their new princess, you know, and you're sure to be the most beloved girl in the land, before long. If you're not already!"

“I’m to be *princess*?” I asked.

“Who else would be?” Glinda asked. “Her?” She pointed to Ozma, who was kneeling in the grass sniffing curiously at a patch of buttercups. “Well, they’ll still *call* her princess, I guess. All that fairy magic makes it unavoidable. La-di-dah! But as you can see, she won’t be good for much from now on. When we get back to the palace, I’ll see to it that she issues a decree making you Deputy Princess and Protector of the Crown. Won’t be too difficult. We’ll set her up with some dolls and toys and let her run wild in her own quarters while you sit on the throne and do all the important princessing work. With my help and guidance, of course. They’ll forget all about her soon enough; the people of Oz have short memories, bless their hearts. And they absolutely *adore* a new monarch. Oh, the coronation we’ll throw for you!”

I looked over at Ozma, and Glinda, and then over at the farmhouse. I wasn’t sure about any of this. Aunt Em’s feet were pointing away from each

other in odd angles. She was wearing the same ordinary leather boots she'd worn on the farm—for all the fancy new shoes she'd been offered here, she'd refused to give them up.

Glinda saw the doubt in my eyes. She frowned sympathetically. “You poor thing. You always *were* such a sentimental sparrow.”

She waved her hand at the house. “Poof!” she said, and as soon as the word escaped her lips, my old home—along with my aunt and uncle—disappeared in a shower of pink bubbles, like there had never been anything there at all.

I felt a weight lifting from my shoulders. I felt my sobs easing.

“There, doesn't that feel better?”

“It does,” I said. As soon as the reminders were gone, everything that had happened in the past couple of weeks felt very far away.

“It doesn't *matter* where you came from,” Glinda said. “I came from someplace, too, you know. Someplace not that different from Kansas. I'll tell you the story someday, if you can *possibly*



stand the boredom!”

“I’d like that,” I said softly.

Glinda smiled back at me. “Good. *Very good*. Now, why don’t we leave all this useless sadness behind and go back to the palace? We need to pick you out a nice crown.” She put her arm around me. “Doesn’t that sound like a good idea?”

It did. It really did.

Glinda turned to Ozma. “You too, darling,” she said, and the princess scampered toward us, almost tripping over her own feet. “You two can be like wonderful sisters!”

Ozma nodded eagerly and took my hand.

Glinda winked knowingly. “Well, maybe more like distant cousins,” she said to me in a stage whisper. She put her arm around my shoulder, and we began the walk back to the Emerald City.

“Now,” Glinda said, “you must tell me *all* about your adventures. I was able to watch some of them while you were having them, but I have to say it all came in a bit garbled. Like listening to a radio with a broken antenna.”

I looked back over my shoulder. The house was gone. My aunt and uncle were gone. Ozma was flapping her arms as she skipped aimlessly through the fields.

She wouldn't be much company. But Toto was racing behind us. And I had Glinda and all my friends in the palace. I had my kingdom.

My shoes sent a happy wave of magic shooting up through my body, and, on impulse, I grabbed a fistful of it and tossed it into the blue sky, where it burst into a pink and gold firework.

"That's my girl!" Glinda exclaimed proudly. "Oh, I can't wait to show you what you can really do with it. You were *born* to be a sorceress, you know."

It was too good to be true. It was almost like Kansas was just a dream and I was waking up to a wonderful new morning where everything was bright and sunny and full of life.

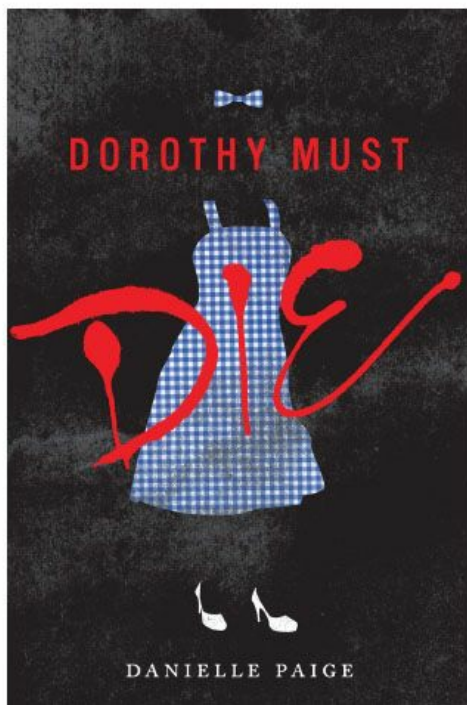
They say you can't go home again. Well, I'm proof that's not true. Home isn't just where you're born—it's where you belong. I found my home and

I let it go. But I came back. Now I was home for good, and I would never, *ever* make the mistake of leaving again. The past was gone forever. There was no place like here.

# Excerpt from *Dorothy Must Die*

SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW . . .  
SOMETHING HAS GONE TERRIBLY WRONG.

DON'T MISS:



I first discovered I was trash three days before my ninth birthday—one year after my father lost his job and moved to Secaucus to live with a woman named Crystal and four years before my mother had the car accident, started taking pills, and began exclusively wearing bedroom slippers instead of normal shoes.

I was informed of my trashiness on the playground by Madison Pendleton, a girl in a pink Target sweat suit who thought she was all that because her house had one and a half bathrooms.

“Salvation Amy’s trailer trash,” she told the other girls on the monkey bars while I was dangling upside down by my knees and minding my own business, my pigtails scraping the sand. “That means she doesn’t have any money and all her clothes are dirty. You shouldn’t go to her birthday party or you’ll be dirty, too.”

When my birthday party rolled around that weekend, it turned out everyone had listened to Madison. My mom and I were sitting at the picnic table in the Dusty Acres Mobile Community

Recreation Area wearing our sad little party hats, our sheet cake gathering dust. It was just the two of us, same as always. After an hour of hoping someone would finally show up, Mom sighed, poured me another big cup of Sprite, and gave me a hug.

She told me that, whatever anyone at school said, a trailer was where I lived, not who I was. She told me that it was the best home in the world because it could go anywhere.

Even as a little kid, I was smart enough to point out that our house was on blocks, not wheels. Its mobility was severely oversold. Mom didn't have much of a comeback for that.

It took her until around Christmas of that year when we were watching *The Wizard of Oz* on the big flat-screen television—the only physical thing that was a leftover from our old life with Dad—to come up with a better answer for me. “See?” she said, pointing at the screen. “You don’t need wheels on your house to get to somewhere better. All you need is something to give you that extra

push.”

I don’t think she believed it even then, but at least in those days she still cared enough to lie. And even though I never believed in a place like Oz, I did believe in her.

That was a long time ago. A lot had changed since then. My mom was hardly the same person at all anymore. Then again, neither was I.

I didn’t bother trying to make Madison like me now, and I wasn’t going to cry over cake. I wasn’t going to cry, period. These days, my mom was too lost in her own little world to bother cheering me up. I was on my own, and crying wasn’t worth the effort.

Tears or no tears, though, Madison Pendleton still found ways of making my life miserable. The day of the tornado—although I didn’t know the tornado was coming yet—she was slouching against her locker after fifth period, rubbing her enormous pregnant belly and whispering with her best friend, Amber Boudreaux.



I'd figured out a long time ago that it was best to just ignore her when I could, but Madison was the type of person it was pretty impossible to ignore even under normal circumstances. Now that she was eight and a half months pregnant, it was really impossible.

Today, Madison was wearing a tiny T-shirt that barely covered her midriff. It read Who's Your Mommy? across her boobs in pink cursive glitter. I did my best not to stare as I slunk by her on my way to Spanish, but somehow I felt my eyes gliding upward, past her belly to her chest and then to her face. Sometimes you just can't help it.

She was already staring at me. Our gazes met for a tiny instant. I froze.

Madison glared. "What are you looking at, Trailer Trash?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Was I staring? I was just wondering if *you* were the teen mom I saw on the cover of *Star* this week?"

It wasn't like I tried to go after Madison, but sometimes my sarcasm took on a life of its own.

The words just came out.

Madison gave me a blank look. She snorted.

“I didn’t know you could afford a copy of *Star*.” She turned to Amber Boudreaux and stopped rubbing her stomach just long enough to give it a tender pat. “Salvation Amy’s jealous. She’s had a crush on Dustin forever. She wishes this was her baby.”

I didn’t have a crush on Dustin, I definitely didn’t want a baby, and I absolutely did not want Dustin’s baby. But that didn’t stop my cheeks from going red.

Amber popped her gum and smirked an evil smirk. “You know, I saw her talking to Dustin in third period,” she said. “She was being all flirty.” Amber puckered her lips and pushed her chest forward. “Oh, Dustin, I’ll help you with your algebra.”

I knew I was blushing, but I wasn’t sure if it was from embarrassment or anger. It was true that I’d let Dustin copy my math homework earlier that day. But as cute as Dustin was, I wasn’t stupid

enough to think I'd ever have a shot with him. I was Salvation Amy, the flat-chested trailer trash girl whose clothes were always a little too big and a lot too thrift store. Who hadn't had a real friend since third grade.

I wasn't the type of girl Dustin would go for, with or without the existence of Madison Pendleton. He had been "borrowing" my algebra almost every day for the entire year. But Dustin would never look at me like that. Even at forty pounds pregnant, Madison sparkled like the words on her oversize chest. There was glitter embedded in her eye shadow, in her lip gloss, in her nail polish, hanging from her ears in shoulder grazing hoops, dangling from her wrists in blingy bracelets. If the lights went out in the hallway, she could light it up like a human disco ball. Like human bling. Meanwhile, the only color I had to offer was in my hair, which I'd dyed pink just a few days ago.

I was all sharp edges and angles—words that came out too fast and at the wrong times. And I

slouched. If Dustin was into shiny things like Madison, he would never be interested in me.

I don't know if I was exactly interested in Dustin, either, but we did have one thing in common: we both wanted out of Mission, Kansas.

For a while, it had almost looked like Dustin was going to make it, too. All you need is a little push sometimes. Sometimes it's a tornado; sometimes it's the kind of right arm that gets you a football scholarship. He had been set to go. Until eight and a half months ago, that is.

I didn't know what was worse: to have your shot and screw it up, or to never have had a shot in the first place.

"I wasn't . . . ," I protested. Before I could finish, Madison was all up in my face.

"Listen, Dumb Gumm," she said. I felt a drop of her spit hit my cheek and resisted the urge to wipe it away. I didn't want to give her the satisfaction. "Dustin's mine. We're getting married as soon as the baby comes and I can fit into my aunt Robin's wedding dress. So you'd better stay away from

him—not that he'd ever be interested in someone like you anyway.”

By this point, everyone in the hallway had stopped looking into their lockers, and they were looking at us instead. Madison was used to eyes on her—but this was new to me.

“Listen,” I mumbled back at her, just wanting this to be over. “It was just homework.” I felt my temper rising. I'd just been trying to help him. Not because I had a crush on him. Just because he deserved a break.

“She thinks Dustin needs her help,” Amber chimed in. “Taffy told me she heard Amy offered to *tutor* him after school. Just a little one-on-one academic counseling.” She cackled loudly. She said “tutor” like I'd done a lap dance for Dustin in front of the whole fourth period.

I hadn't offered anyway. He had asked. Not that it mattered. Madison was already steaming.

“Oh, she did, did she? Well why don't I give this bitch a little tutoring of my own?”

I turned to walk away, but Madison grabbed me

by the wrist and jerked me back around to face her. She was so close to me that her nose was almost touching mine. Her breath smelled like Sour Patch Kids and kiwi-strawberry lip gloss.

“Who the hell do you think you are, trying to steal my boyfriend? Not to mention my baby’s dad?”

“He asked me,” I said quietly so that only Madison could hear.

“What?”

I knew I should shut up. But it wasn’t fair. All I’d tried to do was something good.

“I didn’t talk to him. He asked me for help,” I said louder this time.

“And what could he find so interesting about you?” she snapped back, as if Dustin and I belonged to entirely different species.

It was a good question. The kind that gets you where it hurts. But an answer popped into my head, right on time, not two seconds after Madison wobbled away down the hall. I knew it was mean, but it flew out of my mouth before I had a chance to

even think about it.

“Maybe he just wanted to talk to someone his own size.”

Madison’s mouth opened and closed without anything coming out. I took a step back, ready to walk away with my tiny victory. And then she rolled into her heels, wound up, and—before I could duck—punched me square in the jaw. I felt my head throbbing as I stumbled back and landed on my butt.

It was my turn to be surprised, looking up at her in dazed, fuzzy-headed confusion. Had that just happened? Madison had always been a complete bitch, but—aside from the occasional shoulder check in the girls’ locker room—she wasn’t usually the violent type. Until now.

Maybe it was the pregnancy hormones.

“Take it back,” she demanded as I began to get to my feet.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Amber a second too late. Always one to take a cue from her best friend, she yanked me by the hair and pushed

me back down to the ground.

The chant of “Fight! Fight! Fight!” boomed in my ears. I checked for blood, relieved to find my skull intact. Madison stepped forward and towered over me, ready for the next round. Behind her, I could see that a huge crowd had gathered around us.

“Take it back. I’m not fat,” Madison insisted. But her lip quivered a tiny bit at the f-word. “I may be pregnant, but I’m still a size two.”

“Kick her!” Amber hissed.

I scooted away from her rhinestone-studded sandal and stood up just as the assistant principal, Mr. Strachan, appeared, flanked by a pair of security guards. The crowd began to disperse, grumbling that the show was over.

Madison quickly dropped her punching arm and went back to rubbing her belly and cooing. She scrunched her face up into a pained grimace, like she was fighting back tears. I rolled my eyes. I wondered if she would actually manage to produce tears.



Mr. Strachan looked from me to Madison and back again through his wire rims.

“Mr. Strachan,” Madison said shakily. “She just came at me! At us!” She patted her belly protectively, making it clear that she was speaking for two these days.

He folded his arms across his chest and lowered his glare to where I still crouched. Madison had him at “us.” “Really, Amy? Fighting with a pregnant girl? You’ve always had a hard time keeping your mouth shut when it’s good for you, but this is low, even for you.”

“She threw the first punch!” I yelled. It didn’t matter. Mr. Strachan was already yanking me to my feet to haul me off to the principal’s office.

“I thought you could be the bigger person at a time like this. I guess I overestimated you. As usual.”

As I walked away, I looked over my shoulder. Madison lifted her hand from her belly to give me a smug little wave. Like she knew I wouldn’t be coming back.

When I'd left for school that morning, Mom had been sitting on the couch for three days straight. In those three days, my mother had taken zero showers, had said almost nothing, and—as far as I knew—had consumed only half a carton of cigarettes and a few handfuls of Bugles. Oh, and whatever pills she was on. I'm not even sure when she got up to pee. She'd just been sitting there watching TV.

It used to be that I always tried to figure out what was wrong with her when she got like this. Was it the weather? Was she thinking about my father? Was it just the pills? Or was there something else that had turned her into a human slug?

By now, though, I was used to it enough to know that it wasn't any of that. She just got like this sometimes. It was her version of waking up on the wrong side of the bed, and when it happened, you just had to let her ride it out. Whenever it happened, I wondered if this time she'd be *stuck*

like this.

So when I pushed the door to our trailer open an hour after my meeting with the principal, carrying all the books from my locker in a black Hefty bag—I'd been suspended for the rest of the week—I was surprised to see that the couch was empty except for one of those blankets with the sleeves that Mom had ordered off TV with money we didn't have.

In the bathroom, I could hear her rustling around: the faucet running, the clatter of drugstore makeup on a tiny counter. I guess she'd ridden it out again after all. Not that that was always a good thing.

"Mom?" I asked.

"Shit!" she yelped, followed by the sound of something falling into the sink. She didn't come out of the bathroom, and she didn't ask what I was doing home so early.

I dropped my backpack and my Hefty bag on the floor, slid off my sneakers, and looked over at the screen. Al Roker was pointing to my hometown on

one of those big fake maps. He was frowning.

I didn't think I'd ever seen America's Weatherman frown before. Wasn't he supposed to be reassuring? Wasn't it, like, his job to make us feel like everything, including the weather, would be better soon? If not tomorrow then at some point during the extended ten-day forecast?

I picked up the remote and clicked Al's doom and gloom out of my life.

"Hey," Mom said, finally stepping out of the bathroom. "I was watching that. Did you hear? There's a tornado coming!"

I wasn't too worried about it. They were always predicting disaster around here, but although nearby towns had been hit a few times, Dusty Acres had always been spared. It was like we had cliché to shield us—Tornado Sweeps Through Trailer Park, Leaves Only an Overturned Barbecue. That's something that happens in a movie, not in real life.

My mom emerged from the bathroom, fussing with her hair. I was glad to see her vertical again,

freshly scrubbed with her face all done up, but I had to wince at the length of her skirt. It was shorter than anything I owned. It was shorter than anything Madison Pendleton owned. That could only mean one thing.

“Where are you going?” I asked, even though I knew the answer. “For three days, you’re one step away from a coma and now you’re heading to the bar?”

It was no surprise. In my mother’s world, there were only two pieces of scenery: the couch and the bar. If she wasn’t on one, she was in the other.

She let out an accusatory sigh. “Don’t start. Tawny just broke up with Billy. She needs an ear. I thought you’d be happy that I’m back on my feet again. Would you rather I just lay on the couch? Well, you might be content to mope around the house all day, but *some* of us have a life.” She fluffed up her already teased hair and began looking for her purse.

There were so many things wrong with everything she’d just said that I couldn’t even

begin to process all the ways it was infuriating. Instead, I decided to try the sensible argument. “You’re the one who just told me there’s a tornado on the way. It’s dangerous. You could get hit by a tree or something. Won’t Tawny understand?”

“It’s a *tornado* party, Miss Smarty Pants,” Mom said, as if that explained things. Her bloodshot eyes lit up as she spotted her purse lying on the floor next to the refrigerator and slung it over her shoulder.

I knew there was no point arguing when she got this way. “You need to sign this,” I demanded, holding out the slip of paper Strachan had given me. It was to show that she understood what I’d supposedly done today, and what the consequences were.

“I got suspended,” I told her.

It took her a few seconds to react, but when she did, her face registered not surprise or anger, but pure annoyance. “Suspended? What did you do?” Mom pushed past me again to get to her keys. Like I was just a thing that was in the way of something

she wanted.

If we lived in a regular house, with one and a half bathrooms, I wondered, would she still hate me this much? Was resentment something that grew better in small spaces, like those flowers that Mom used to force to bloom inside in little vases?

“I got in a fight,” I said evenly. Mom kept staring. “With a pregnant girl.”

At that, Mom let out a long, whistling sigh and looked up at the ceiling.

“That’s just great,” Mom said, her voice dripping with something other than motherly concern.

I could have explained it to her. I could have told her exactly what happened; that it wasn’t my fault. That I hadn’t even hit anyone.

But the thing is that, at that moment, I kind of liked having her think I’d done something wrong. If I was the kind of girl who got in fights with pregnant girls, it meant it was on her. And her stellar lack of parenting skills.

“Who was it?” Mom demanded, her plastic

purse slamming into the counter again.

“Madison Pendleton.”

She narrowed her eyes but not at me. She was remembering Madison. “Of course. That little pink bitch who ruined your birthday party.”

Mom paused and bit her lip. “You don’t see it, do you? She’s already getting hers. You don’t need to help it along.”

“What are you talking about? I’m the one who was suspended.”

Mom flung her hand out and gripped the air mimicking a pregnant belly. “I give her a year. Two tops before she’s got a trailer of her own around the corner. That boy she’s with won’t stay. And she’ll be left with a little bundle of karma.”

I shook my head. “She’s walking around like she’s God’s gift. Like she and Dustin are still going to be prom king and queen.”

“Ha!” Mom hooted. “Now. But the second that kid comes, her life is over.” There was a pause I could drive a truck through.

For a split second, I thought of how things used



to be. My *before* Mom. The one who'd dried my tears and challenged me to a cake-eating contest at that fateful birthday party. "More cake for us," she'd said. That was when I was ten. After Dad left, but before the accident and the pills. It was the last time she'd even bothered remembering my birthday.

I didn't know what to do when she acted like this. When we were almost having a normal conversation. When she almost seemed like she cared. When I almost saw some glimmer of who she used to be. I knew better but I leaned into the kitchenette counter anyway.

"One second, you have everything, your whole life ahead of you," she said, fluffing her hair in the reflection from the stove. "And then, boom. They just suck it all out of you like little vampires till there's nothing left of you."

It was clear she wasn't talking about Madison anymore. She was talking about me. I was her little vampire.

Anger pricked in my chest. Leave it to my

mother to turn any situation into another excuse to feel sorry for herself. To blame me.

“Thanks, Mom,” I said. “You’re right. I’m the one who ruined your life. Not you. Not Dad. The fact that I’ve been taking care of you every day since I was thirteen—that was just my evil scheme to ruin everything for you.”

“Don’t be so sensitive, Amy,” she huffed. “It’s not always about you.”

“All about me? How could it be, when it’s always about you?”

Mom glared at me, and then there was a honk from outside. “I don’t have to stand here and listen to this. Tawny’s waiting.” She stormed to the door.

“You’re just going to leave me in the middle of a tornado?”

It wasn’t that I cared about the weather. I wasn’t expecting it to be a big deal. But I wanted her to care; I wanted her to be running around gathering up batteries for flashlights and making sure we had enough water to last through the week. I wanted her to take care of me. Because that’s

what mothers do.

Just because I'd learned how to take care of myself didn't mean I didn't still feel panic setting in every time she left me like this—all alone, with no clue when she'd be back, or if she'd ever be back at all. Even without a tornado on the way, it was always an open question.

"It's better out there than in here," she snapped.

Before I could think of a good enough retort, she was gone.

I opened the door as she slid into the front seat of Tawny's Camaro; I watched as Mom adjusted the mirror to look at herself and saw her catch a glimpse of me instead, just before the car vroomed away.

Before I could have the satisfaction of slamming the door myself, the wind did it for me. So maybe this tornado was coming after all.

I thought of Dustin and his wasted scholarship, and about my father, who'd left me behind just to get out of here. I thought of what this place did to people. Tornado or no tornado, I wasn't Dorothy,

and a stupid little storm wasn't going to change anything for me.

I walked to my dresser, pushed up flush against the kitchen stove, and opened the top drawer, feeling around for the red-and-white gym sock that was fat with cash—the stash of money I'd been saving for an emergency for years: \$347. Once the storm cleared, that could get me bus tickets. That could get me a lot farther than Topeka, which was the farthest I had ever gone. I could let my mother fend for herself. She didn't want me. School didn't want me. What was I waiting for?

My hand hit the back of the drawer. All I found were socks.

I pulled the drawer out and rifled through it. Nothing.

The money was gone. Everything I'd spent my life saving up for. Gone.

It was no mystery who'd taken it. It was less of a mystery what she'd spent it on. With no cash, no car, and no one to wave a magic wand, I was stuck where I was.

It didn't matter anyway. Leaving was just a fantasy.

In the living room, Al Roker was back on TV. His frown was gone, sort of, but even though his face was now plastered with a giant grin, his jaw was quivering and he looked like he might start crying at any second. He kept chattering away, going on and on about isotopes and pressure systems and hiding in the basement.

*Too bad they don't have basements in trailer parks, I thought.*

And then I thought: *Bring it on. There's no place like anywhere but here.*

# About the Author



Photo © Laura Hanfin

Danielle Paige is a graduate of Columbia University and currently lives in New York City. Before turning to young adult literature, she worked in the television industry where she received a Writers Guild of America award and was nominated for several Daytime Emmys. *Dorothy Must Die* is her first novel.

Visit [www.AuthorTracker.com](http://www.AuthorTracker.com) for exclusive information on your favorite HarperCollins authors.

# Copyright

Copyright © 2013 by Full Fathom Five, LLC

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the nonexclusive, nontransferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse-engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of HarperCollins e-books.





EPub Edition © 2013

EPUB Edition OCTOBER 2013 ISBN  
9780062280763

ISBN: 978-0-06-228076-3

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

FIRST EDITION

# About the Publisher

## **Australia**

HarperCollins Publishers (Australia) Pty. Ltd.

Level 13, 201 Elizabeth Street

Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia

<http://www.harpercollins.com.au>

## **Canada**

HarperCollins Canada

2 Bloor Street East - 20th Floor

Toronto, ON, M4W, 1A8, Canada

<http://www.harpercollins.ca>

## **New Zealand**

HarperCollins Publishers (New Zealand) Limited

P.O. Box 1

Auckland, New Zealand

<http://www.harpercollins.co.nz>

## **United Kingdom**

HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

77-85 Fulham Palace Road

London, W6 8JB, UK

<http://www.harpercollins.co.uk>

## **United States**

HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

10 East 53rd Street

New York, NY 10022

<http://www.harpercollins.com>