

22. Ozma's Birthday Party

It seems odd that a fairy should have a birthday, for fairies, they say, were born at the beginning of time and live forever. Yet, on the other hand, it would be a shame to deprive a fairy, who has so many other good things, of the delights of a birthday. So we need not wonder that the fairies keep their birthdays just as other folks do, and consider them occasions for feasting and rejoicing.

Ozma, the beautiful girl Ruler of the Fairyland of Oz, was a real fairy, and so sweet and gentle in caring for her people that she was greatly beloved by them all. She lived in the most magnificent palace in the most magnificent city in the world, but that did not prevent her from being the friend of the most humble person in her dominions. She would mount her Wooden Sawhorse, and ride out to a farm house and sit in the kitchen to talk with the good wife of the farmer while she did her family baking; or she would play with the children and give them rides on her famous wooden steed; or she would stop in a forest to speak to a charcoal burner and ask if he was happy or desired anything to make him more content; or she would teach young girls how to sew and plan pretty dresses, or enter the shops where the jewelers and craftsmen were busy and watch them at their work, giving to each and all a cheering word or sunny smile.

And then Ozma would sit in her jeweled throne, with her chosen courtiers all about her, and listen patiently to any complaint brought to her by her subjects, striving to accord equal justice to all. Knowing she was fair in her decisions, the Oz people never murmured at her judgments, but agreed, if Ozma decided against them, she was right and they wrong.

When Dorothy and Trot and Betsy Bobbin and Ozma were together, one would think they were all about of an age, and the fairy Ruler no older and no more "grown up" than the other three. She would laugh and romp with them in regular girlish fashion, yet there was an air of quiet dignity about Ozma, even in her merriest moods, that, in a manner, distinguished her from the others. The three girls loved her devotedly, but they were never able to quite forget that Ozma was the Royal Ruler of the wonderful Fairyland of Oz, and by birth belonged to a powerful race.

Ozma's palace stood in the center of a delightful and extensive garden, where splendid trees and flowering shrubs and statuary and fountains abounded.

One could walk for hours in this fascinating park and see something interesting at every step. In one place was an aquarium, where strange and beautiful fish swam; at another spot all the birds of the air gathered daily to a great feast which Ozma's servants provided for them, and were so fearless of harm that they would alight upon one's shoulders and eat from one's hand. There was also the Fountain of the Water of Oblivion, but it was dangerous to drink of this water, because it made one forget everything he had ever before known, even to his own name, and therefore Ozma had placed a sign of warning upon the fountain. But there were also fountains that were delightfully perfumed, and fountains of delicious nectar, cool and richly flavored, where all were welcome to refresh themselves.

Around the palace grounds was a great wall, thickly encrusted with glittering emeralds, but the gates stood open and no one was forbidden entrance. On holidays the people of the Emerald City often took their children to see the wonders of Ozma's gardens, and even entered the Royal Palace, if they felt so inclined, for they knew that they and their Ruler were friends, and that Ozma delighted to give them pleasure.

When all this is considered, you will not be surprised that the people throughout the Land of Oz, as well as Ozma's most intimate friends and her royal courtiers, were eager to celebrate her birthday, and made preparations for the festival weeks in advance. All the brass bands practiced their nicest tunes, for they were to march in the numerous processions to be made in the Winkie Country, the Gillikin Country, the Munchkin Country and the Quadling Country, as well as in the Emerald City. Not all the people could go to congratulate their Ruler, but all could celebrate her birthday, in one way or another, however far distant from her palace they might be. Every home and building throughout the Land of Oz was to be decorated with banners and bunting, and there were to be games, and plays, and a general good time for every one.

It was Ozma's custom on her birthday to give a grand feast at the palace, to which all her closest friends were invited. It was a queerly assorted company, indeed, for there are more quaint and unusual characters in Oz than in all the rest of the world, and Ozma was more interested in unusual people than in ordinary ones--just as you and I are.

On this especial birthday of the lovely girl Ruler, a long table was set in the royal Banquet Hall of the palace, at which were place-cards for the invited guests, and at one end of the great room was a smaller table, not so high, for

Ozma's animal friends, whom she never forgot, and at the other end was a big table where all of the birthday gifts were to be arranged.

When the guests arrived, they placed their gifts on this table and then found their places at the banquet table. And, after the guests were all placed, the animals entered in a solemn procession and were placed at their table by Jellia Jamb. Then, while an orchestra hidden by a bank of roses and ferns played a march composed for the occasion, the Royal Ozma entered the Banquet Hall, attended by her Maids of Honor, and took her seat at the head of the table.

She was greeted by a cheer from all the assembled company, the animals adding their roars and growls and barks and mewing and cackling to swell the glad tumult, and then all seated themselves at their tables.

At Ozma's right sat the famous Scarecrow of Oz, whose straw-stuffed body was not beautiful, but whose happy nature and shrewd wit had made him a general favorite. On the left of the Ruler was placed the Tin Woodman, whose metal body had been brightly polished for this event. The Tin Woodman was the Emperor of the Winkie Country and one of the most important persons in Oz.

Next to the Scarecrow, Dorothy was seated, and next to her was Tik-Tok, the Clockwork Man, who had been wound up as tightly as his clockwork would permit, so he wouldn't interrupt the festivities by running down. Then came Aunt Em and Uncle Henry, Dorothy's own relations, two kindly old people who had a cozy home in the Emerald City and were very happy and contented there. Then Betsy Bobbin was seated, and next to her the droll and delightful Shaggy Man, who was a favorite wherever he went.

On the other side of the table, opposite the Tin Woodman was placed Trot, and next to her, Cap'n Bill. Then was seated Button-Bright and Ojo the Lucky, and Dr. Pipt and his good wife Margalot, and the astonishing Frogman, who had come from the Yip country to be present at Ozma's birthday feast.

At the foot of the table, facing Ozma, was seated the queenly Glinda, the good Sorceress of Oz, for this was really the place of honor next to the head of the table where Ozma herself sat. On Glinda's right was the Little Wizard of Oz, who owed to Glinda all of the magical arts he knew. Then came Jinjur, a pretty girl farmer of whom Ozma and Dorothy were quite fond. The adjoining seat was occupied by the Tin Soldier, and next to him was Professor H. M. Wogglebug, T.E., of the Royal Athletic College.

On Glinda's left was placed the jolly Patchwork Girl, who was a little afraid of the Sorceress and so was likely to behave herself pretty well. The Shaggy Man's brother was beside the Patchwork Girl, and then came that interesting personage, Jack Pumpkinhead, who had grown a splendid big pumpkin for a new head to be worn on Ozma's birthday, and had carved a face on it that was even jollier in expression than the one he had last worn. New heads were not unusual with Jack, for the pumpkins did not keep long, and when the seeds--which served him as brains--began to get soft and mushy, he realized his head would soon spoil, and so he procured a new one from his great field of pumpkins--grown by him so that he need never lack a head.

You will have noticed that the company at Ozma's banquet table was somewhat mixed, but every one invited was a tried and trusted friend of the girl Ruler, and their presence made her quite happy.

No sooner had Ozma seated herself, with her back to the birthday table, than she noticed that all present were eyeing with curiosity and pleasure something behind her, for the gorgeous Magic Flower was blooming gloriously and the mammoth blossoms that quickly succeeded one another on the plant were beautiful to view and filled the entire room with their delicate fragrance. Ozma wanted to look, too, to see what all were staring at, but she controlled her curiosity because it was not proper that she should yet view her birthday gifts.

So the sweet and lovely Ruler devoted herself to her guests, several of whom, such as the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, the Patchwork Girl, Tik-Tok, Jack Pumpkinhead and the Tin Soldier, never ate anything but sat very politely in their places and tried to entertain those of the guests who did eat.

And, at the animal table, there was another interesting group, consisting of the Cowardly Lion, the Hungry Tiger, Toto--Dorothy's little shaggy black dog--Hank the Mule, the Pink Kitten, the Wooden Sawhorse, the Yellow Hen, and the Glass Cat. All of these had good appetites except the Sawhorse and the Glass Cat, and each was given a plentiful supply of the food it liked best.

Finally, when the banquet was nearly over and the ice-cream was to be served, four servants entered bearing a huge cake, all frosted and decorated with candy flowers. Around the edge of the cake was a row of lighted candles, and in the center were raised candy letters that spelled the words:

OZMA'S Birthday Cake from Dorothy and the Wizard

"Oh, how beautiful!" cried Ozma, greatly delighted, and Dorothy said eagerly: "Now you must cut the cake, Ozma, and each of us will eat a piece with our ice-cream."

Jellia Jamb brought a large golden knife with a jeweled handle, and Ozma stood up in her place and attempted to cut the cake. But as soon as the frosting in the center broke under the pressure of the knife there leaped from the cake a tiny monkey three inches high, and he was followed by another and another, until twelve monkeys stood on the tablecloth and bowed low to Ozma.

"Congratulations to our gracious Ruler!" they exclaimed in a chorus, and then they began a dance, so droll and amusing that all the company roared with laughter and even Ozma joined in the merriment. But after the dance the monkeys performed some wonderful acrobatic feats, and then they ran to the hollow of the cake and took out some band instruments of burnished gold--cornets, horns, drums, and the like--and forming into a procession the monkeys marched up and down the table playing a jolly tune with the ease of skilled musicians.

Dorothy was delighted with the success of her "Surprise Cake," and after the monkeys had finished their performance, the banquet came to an end.

Now was the time for Ozma to see her other presents, so Glinda the Good rose and, taking the girl Ruler by her hand, led her to the table where all her gifts were placed in magnificent array. The Magic Flower of course attracted her attention first, and Trot had to tell her the whole story of their adventures in getting it. The little girl did not forget to give due credit to the Glass Cat and the little Wizard, but it was really Cap'n Bill who had bravely carried the golden flower-pot away from the enchanted Isle.

Ozma thanked them all, and said she would place the Magic Flower in her boudoir where she might enjoy its beauty and fragrance continually. But now she discovered the marvelous gown woven by Glinda and her maidens from strands drawn from pure emeralds, and being a girl who loved pretty clothes, Ozma's ecstasy at being presented with this exquisite gown may well be imagined. She could hardly wait to put it on, but the table was loaded with other pretty gifts and the night was far spent before the happy girl Ruler had examined all her presents and thanked those who had lovingly donated them.