ALADDIN CLASSICS

L. FRANK BAUM

The WIZARD of OZ

INCLUDES READING GROUP GUIDE

With a foreword by Newbery author Eloise McGraw

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Foreword

I am not *quite* old enough to claim that I read Baum's tales of Oz as they came out. I was only four when he died. But I tend to forget that; he and his magic land were so large a part of my childhood that the two seem contemporaneous.

My first Oz discovery—in a friend's bookcase—happened to be *Ozma of Oz* (I believe the third in the series) and I found it enchanting. But once I located *The Wizard of Oz* I was more than enchanted; the book seemed to be speaking directly to me. I was not merely reading about Dorothy, I *was* Dorothy. I, too, lived in cyclone country—not Kansas, but Oklahoma. Cyclone cellars with their big weather-roughened doors, tilted just off the horizontal, were to me a familiar part of life and backyards, including ours. I, too, owned a dog—larger than Toto but just as beloved—whom I was sure I would have rescued first in any crisis. And while our house never was lifted off its foundation to go sailing

through the air (it couldn't have, it was brick) I had heard that special wind howling many a time.

Moreover, I had an imagination sturdy enough to boggle at nothing. It had been well-trained by my father, who all my life had made up stories to tell me, entered into my early games of let's-pretend, and held carefully in a cupped hand any fairy I discovered in a violet. When I began to read, it was no trouble at all for me to travel to Oz and live there for considerable periods, entirely at home in my surroundings. I continued to do so, via Baum's books and later Thompson's (which I *did* read fresh off the press each year) until I reached my teens and went on—reluctantly—to more adult fare. This is not to say I did not go back sometimes, reread, revisit, reminisce. But reminders were unnecessary. No child once captured by Baum's Oz could ever forget the magical landscape, the surprising inhabitants, the hovering sense of dangers safely escaped this time, the unwinding road, the final triumph. Above all, the friends made along the way.

For years it was the fashion among children's book people to patronize Baum and his Wizard and his imaginary land—to point out defects in his writing, make unfavorable comparisons with the classics, or

try to ignore him altogether. Only in recent years has even *The Wizard of Oz* been admitted to most libraries; the other books are still hard to find. (I'm told this is likely to change in the next half dozen years, as new editions of old titles come out.)

Child readers had no part in this judgmental view of Baum. They took the Oz stories to their hearts, bought the books or borrowed from each other, and in *The Wizard of Oz*, established a classic of their own.

It is certainly true that there have been better writers than L. Frank Baum. The point seems irrelevant when there has seldom been a more appealing creation than this country where animals talk, scarecrows walk, lions quiver with fright, and careless woodmen can end up made all of tin—and the mouse queen, wearing a tiny crown, can call thousands of tiny subjects to Dorothy's aid.

The fact is, *The Wizard of Oz* is not so much *written* as *told*—and that is one of its enduring charms. Baum was primarily a storyteller. According to his biographer, he regularly entertained his own boys and the neighbor children with tales he made up as he went along—and you can almost hear his voice as you turn the pages of this book. One of the story's literary flaws is that its impetus really ends when the

Wizard's balloon sails out of sight—though several anticlimactic chapters follow. A writer would have fixed that; Baum, no doubt besieged by his listeners' demands for "More! More!" simply settled back and added on. The very name of the magic country was a spur-of-the-moment happening, according to an anecdote attributed to Baum himself. When one of his enthralled audience broke in to ask "What was that country called?" the storyteller glanced about his living room in search of inspiration and saw a row of encyclopedias, the last volume of which was lettered "O-Z." "Why, it was called Oz," Baum answered. "The land of Oz."

The Wizard of Oz was one of the first stories Baum ever wrote down. The *very* first was *The New Wonderland* (later re-titled *The Magical Monarch of Mo*). Later, in 1900, it too saw print; apparently the manuscript had been gathering dust somewhere for several years, and with *The Wizard of Oz*'s acceptance Baum was emboldened to send it out. Before that, in 1896, he had published a collection of tales titled *Mother Goose in Prose*, illustrated by Maxfield Parrish.

Ozophiles find two interesting foreshadowings in *Mother Goose in Prose*. The first is that the heroine of the final tale of the book was named Dorothy. (Baum

changed it to Doris in later editions.) The second is an illustration showing the Wondrous Wise Man gazing at a bookcase in which can be seen a volume lettered "A-N." Maybe Baum was not-quite-remembering where that "O-Z" idea came from?

Rereading *The Wizard of Oz* yesterday, for the first time in maybe a half century, I came to a passage containing the first hints of the book's theme. The Tin Woodman has inadvertently stepped on a beetle and crushed it; though he lacks a heart, and is on his way to the great Wizard to get one, he sheds so many tears over the beetle that they rust his jaw hinge. Neither Dorothy nor the Cowardly Lion can understand why he suddenly cannot talk. But the Scarecrow—who has no brains and is on his way to the Wizard to get some—seizes the oilcan from Dorothy's basket and solves the problem. Soon after, the three travelers encounter the ferocious Kalidahs, and the Cowardly Lion, who is on his way to the Wizard to get some courage, turns with a roar to face them, ready to fight so long as he lives.

Reading these scenes, I was struck by the almost palpable presence of child listeners, by the teasing, straight-faced humor of the storyteller, by the certainty that he had paused—just here—and waited

with private amusement for his audience to get the point.

As in every book for children of its day and age, *The Wizard of Oz* points its morals. Baum comes right out and states them, in the scene where the wonderful Wizard is revealed as merely a humbug. The Wizard tells the Scarecrow he can't give him brains—but "you don't need them. Experience is the only thing that brings knowledge . . . " He tells the Cowardly Lion he has plenty of courage already—all he needs is confidence in himself. He warns the Tin Woodman that having a heart makes most people unhappy. However, since Baum knew that his child readers, along with his characters, would be dissatisfied with anything less, he fabricates humbug brains and courage, and a humbug heart, and the three friends go off happy.

Dorothy's problem is not solved until Glinda the Good Witch tells her the secret of the silver shoes (those "ruby" slippers are pure MGM) that she has been wearing since Chapter Two. An instant later she is back in flat, gray Kansas, with Aunt Em just coming out of the (presumably rebuilt) house to water the cabbage. Though readers might wish to stay in Oz, as they close the book, most will agree with Dorothy (and Baum) that there's just no place like home.

In his introduction to *The Wizard of Oz* Baum says the story was written "solely to please children of today. It aspires to being a modern fairy tale, in which the wonderment and joy are retained and the heartaches and nightmares are left out."

And surely there has never been a fairy tale more full of wonderment, more freshly original—or more American. Nothing in Oz crossed the ocean from the Old Country, or is derived from ancient folk beliefs. Oz fairies are nothing like the traditional pixies, brownies, or leprechauns of Europe and Great Britain. Even the witches seem more akin to Salem than to Baba Yaga, and their vulnerability to a bucket of water is a new invention. The two "good witches" are undiluted Oz. The whole place is one man's creation—as artless, as American as its creator and its readers.

This may be one reason, perhaps the chief one, why *The Wizard of Oz* has attained its status as an American children's classic: there has simply been nothing like it, before or since.

I think there is a deeper reason, linked to the story itself and its readers' reactions to it. The secret is in the characters—specifically the three companions who accompany and support Dorothy on her journey

to the Emerald City to seek the Wizard's help. As the story unrolls, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion, Dorothy's first and most enduring Ozzy friends, gradually become the reader's best friends, too. As they confide in Dorothy, champion and defend her, rush with her in and out of trouble, the reader comes to know them better and better, trust them further and further, and love them more and more. My feelings toward them as a child were not as characters in a book, but as private companions of my own, always there, always to be relied on for warmth and understanding.

That alone would ensure a long, beloved life for any book.

Eloise McGraw

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CHAPTER 1

The Cyclone

Dorothy lived in the midst of the great Kansas prairies, with Uncle Henry, who was a farmer, and Aunt Em, who was the farmer's wife. Their house was small, for the lumber to build it had to be carried by wagon many miles. There were four walls, a floor, and a roof, which made one room; and this room contained a rusty-looking cooking stove, a cupboard for the dishes, a table, three or four chairs, and the beds. Uncle Henry and Aunt Em had a big bed in one corner and Dorothy a little bed in another corner. There was no garret at all, and no cellar—except a small hole, dug in the ground, called a cyclone cellar, where the family could go in case one of those great whirlwinds arose, mighty enough to crush any building in its path. It was reached by a trap door in the

middle of the floor, from which a ladder led down into the small, dark hole.

When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side. Not a tree nor a house broke the broad sweep of flat country that reached to the edge of the sky in all directions. The sun had baked the plowed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. Once the house had been painted, but the sun blistered the paint and the rains washed it away, and now the house was as dull and gray as everything else.

When Aunt Em came there to live she was a young, pretty wife. The sun and wind had changed her, too. They had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober gray; they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were gray also. She was thin and gaunt, and never smiled now. When Dorothy, who was an orphan, first came to her, Aunt Em had been so startled by the child's laughter that she would scream and press her hand upon her heart whenever Dorothy's merry voice reached her ears; and she still looked at the little girl

with wonder that she could find anything to laugh at.

Uncle Henry never laughed. He worked hard from morning till night and did not know what joy was. He was gray also, from his long beard to his rough boots, and he looked stern and solemn, and rarely spoke.

It was Toto that made Dorothy laugh, and saved her from growing as gray as her other surroundings. Toto was not gray; he was a little black dog, with long silky hair and small black eyes that twinkled merrily on either side of his funny, wee nose. Toto played all day long, and Dorothy played with him, and loved him dearly.

Today, however, they were not playing. Uncle Henry sat upon the doorstep and looked anxiously at the sky, which was even grayer than usual. Dorothy stood in the door with Toto in her arms, and looked at the sky too. Aunt Em was washing the dishes.

From the far north they heard a low wail of the wind, and Uncle Henry and Dorothy could see where the long grass bowed in waves before the coming storm. There now came a sharp whistling in the air from the south, and as they turned their eyes that way they saw ripples in the grass coming from that direction also.

Suddenly Uncle Henry stood up.

"There's a cyclone coming, Em," he called to his

wife. "I'll go look after the stock." Then he ran toward the sheds where the cows and horses were kept.

Aunt Em dropped her work and came to the door. One glance told her of the danger close at hand.

"Quick, Dorothy!" she screamed. "Run for the cellar!"

Toto jumped out of Dorothy's arms and hid under the bed, and the girl started to get him. Aunt Em, badly frightened, threw open the trap door in the floor and climbed down the ladder into the small, dark hole. Dorothy caught Toto at last, and started to follow her aunt. When she was halfway across the room there came a great shriek from the wind, and the house shook so hard that she lost her footing and sat down suddenly upon the floor.

Then a strange thing happened.

The house whirled around two or three times and rose slowly through the air. Dorothy felt as if she were going up in a balloon.

The north and south winds met where the house stood, and made it the exact center of the cyclone. In the middle of a cyclone the air is generally still, but the great pressure of the wind on every side of the house raised it up higher and higher, until it was at the very top of the cyclone; and there it remained and