

WICKED



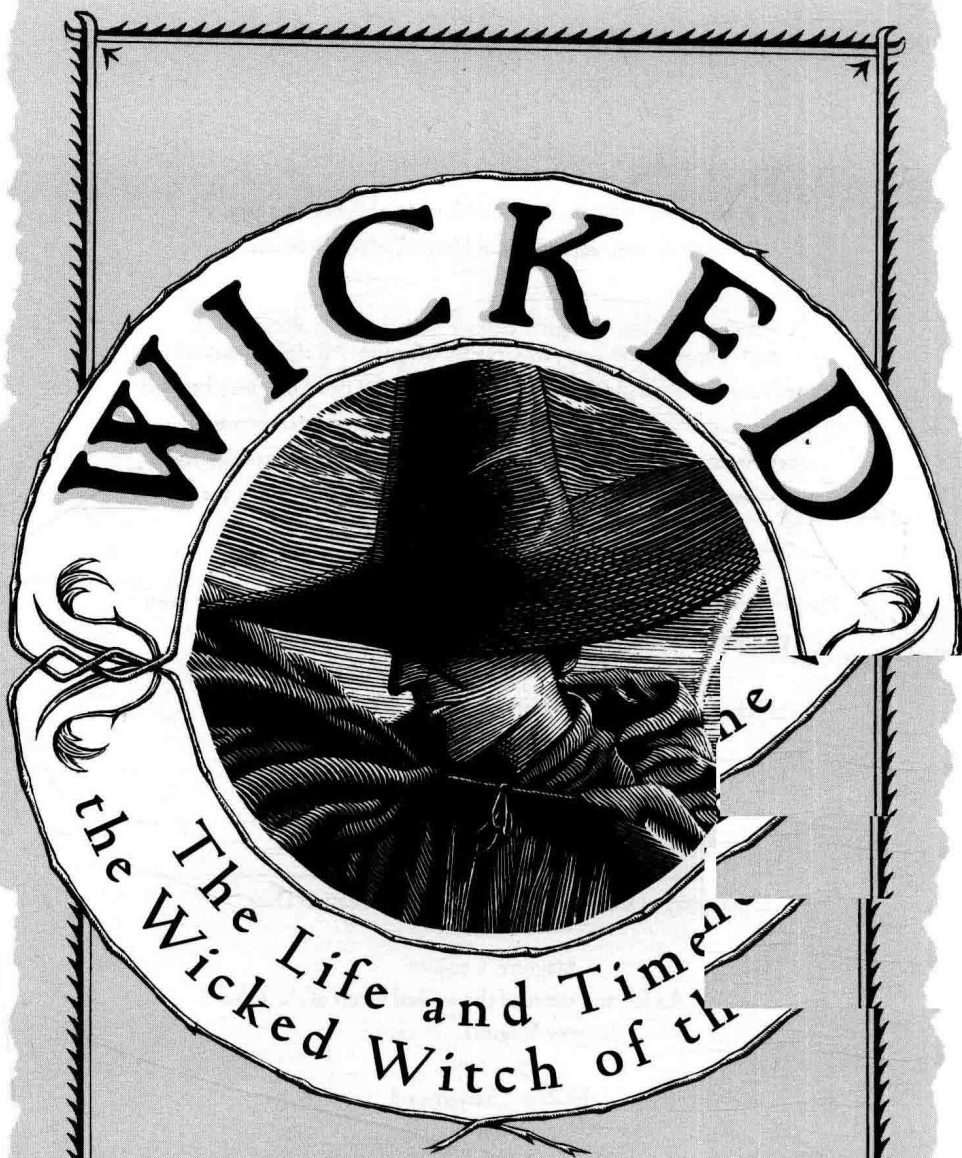
The Life and Times of
the Wicked Witch of the West

"Amazing novel."

—John Updike, in *The New Yorker*

GREGORY MAGUIRE

Author of *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister*



A NOVEL

GREGORY MAGUIRE

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DOUGLAS SMITH



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Praise for

WICKED

The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West

"Very close to being an instant classic. . . . Maguire has hit a home run his first time at bat."

—*Memphis Commercial Appeal*

"*Wicked* is a punchy allegory that alludes to everything from Nazi Germany to Nixon's America. It's delightfully over the top at times, mixing serious metafiction with subtle humor and even (gasp) witch sex."

—*Boston Phoenix*

"A fantasy novel that reads like Graham Greene at his best."

—*San Jose Mercury News*

"Gregory Maguire has taken this figure of childhood fantasy and given her a sensual and powerful nature that will stir adult hearts with fear and longing all over again."

—*New Orleans Times-Picayune*

"Maguire combines puckish humor and bracing pessimism in this fantastical meditation on good and evil, God and free will, which should . . . captivate devotees of fantasy."

—*Publishers Weekly*

"Maguire's adult fable examines some of literature's major themes: moral ambiguity, the nature of evil, the bittersweet dividends of power, the high costs of love. Elphaba—the Wicked Witch of the West—is as scary as ever, but this time in a different way: She's undeniably human. She's us."

—Wally Lamb, author of *She's Come Undone* and
I Know This Much Is True

“Starting with the *Wizard of Oz* material, Gregory Maguire has added greater depths and different facets, creating something altogether different and unique. It’s a magnificent work, a genuine tour de force.”

—Lloyd Alexander, author of *The Chronicles of Prydain*

“Gregory Maguire’s donnés in *Wicked* are from Baum’s land of Oz; but everything here has been recut to sparkle fresh and new, with illuminations shining in unexpected directions. Funny and serious, pulsing with imaginative energy, encompassing political thriller and moral reflection, this is truly a fabulous novel.”

—Jill Paton Walsh, author of *Knowledge of Angels*

“Here is a story that is at once a page-turner and a powerful stimulus to thought.”

—John Rowe Townsend, author of *The Islanders*

“This book is a glorious frolic, a feast of language, a study of good and evil, and a massive history of the fabulous land of Oz.”

—Jane Langton, author of *The Diamond in the Window*

Praise for Gregory Maguire's

Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister

"An arresting hybrid of mystery, fairy tale, and historical novel . . . *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* isn't easy to classify or forget."

—*Detroit Free Press*

"A tale so movingly told that you will say at the end of the first reading, 'It's been a long time since I read a book this good.' . . . Few writers match Gregory Maguire."

—*Nashville Tennessean*

"[A] brilliantly plotted fantasy. . . . Maguire is rapidly becoming one of contemporary fiction's most assured myth-makers."

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred)

"Captivating and beautifully written . . . *Confessions of an Ugly Stepsister* is a rich canvas of colorful characters and fantastic events rendered by an artist attentive to every surface and texture."

—*Book magazine*

"Bewitching."

—*Chicago Tribune*

WICKED

The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West

*This book is for Betty Levin and for all those who
taught me to love and fear goodness.*

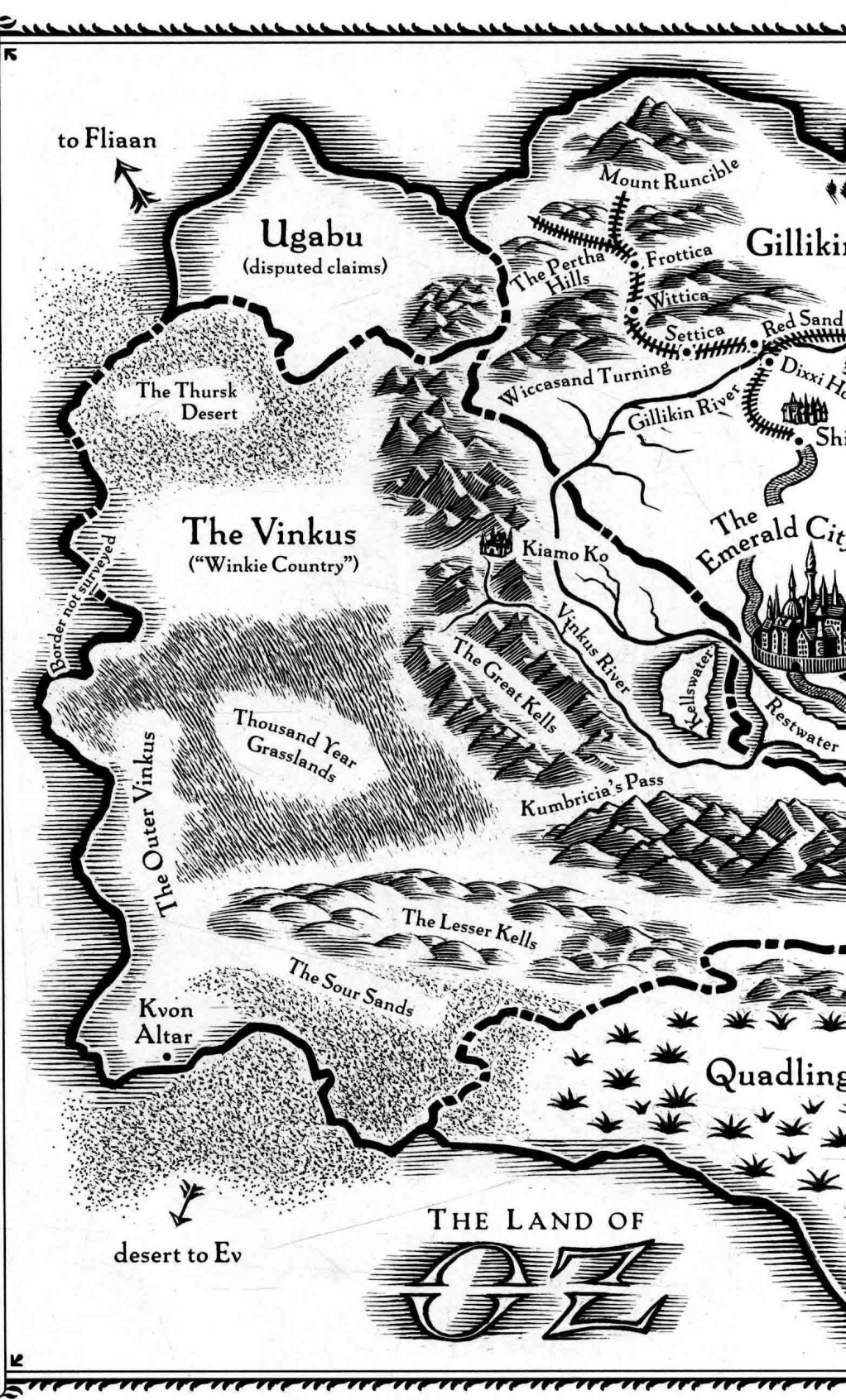


Thanks to those who read this book early:
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Any imperfections that remain in the book are mine.

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their enthusiastic reception of *Wicked*.

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nattered on about evil over the past couple of years: They are
too numerous to be named in their entirety, but
they include Linda Cavanagh, Debbie Kirsch, Roger and
Martha Mock, Katie O'Brien, and Maureen Vecchione; the
gang in Edgartown, Massachusetts; and my brother,
Joseph Maguire, a few of whose ideas I have borrowed.
Please don't sue me.





to Fliaan
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Ugabu
(disputed claims)

The Thursk
Desert

The Vinkus
("Winkie Country")

Border not surveyed

The Outer Vinkus

Thousand Year
Grasslands

Kvon
Altar

desert to Ev
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Mount Runcible

Gillikin

The Perth Hills

Frottica

Wittica

Settica

Red Sand

Wiccasand Turning

Gillikin River

Dixxi House

Shiz

Kiamo Ko

The Emerald City

Vinkus River

The Great Kells

Tellswater

Restwater

Kumbricia's Pass

The Lesser Kells

The Sour Sands

Quadling

THE LAND OF

GZ



*'Tis very strange Men should be so fond
of being thought wickeder than they are.*

—DANIEL DEFOE, *A SYSTEM OF MAGICK*



In historical events great men—so called—are but the labels that serve to give a name to an event, and like labels, they have the last possible connection with the event itself. Every action of theirs, that seems to them an act of their own free will, is in an historical sense not free at all, but in bondage to the whole course of previous history, and predestined from all eternity.

—LEO NIKOLAEVICH TOLSTOI, *WAR AND PEACE*



“Well,” said the Head, “I will give you my answer. You have no right to expect me to send you back to Kansas unless you do something for me in return. In this country everyone must pay for everything he gets. If you wish me to use my magic power to send you home again you must do something for me first.

Help me and I will help you.”

“What must I do?” asked the girl.

“Kill the wicked Witch of the West,” answered Oz.

—L. FRANK BAUM, *THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ*

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PROLOGUE

On the Yellow Brick Road

A mile above Oz, the Witch balanced on the wind's forward edge, as if she were a green fleck of the land itself, flung up and sent wheeling away by the turbulent air. White and purple summer thunderheads mounded around her. Below, the Yellow Brick Road looped back on itself, like a relaxed noose. Though winter storms and the crowbars of agitators had torn up the road, still it led, relentlessly, to the Emerald City. The Witch could see the companions trudging along, maneuvering around the buckled sections, skirting trenches, skipping when the way was clear. They seemed oblivious of their fate. But it was not up to the Witch to enlighten them.

She used the broom as a sort of balustrade, stepping down from the sky like one of her flying monkeys. She finished up on the topmost bough of a black willow tree. Beneath, hidden by the fronds, her prey had paused to take their rest. The Witch tucked her broom under her arm. Crablike and quiet, she scuttled down a little at a time, until she was a mere twenty feet above them. Wind moved the dangling tendrils of the tree. The Witch stared and listened.

There were four of them. She could see a huge Cat of some sort—a Lion, was it?—and a shiny woodman. The Tin Woodman was picking nits out of the Lion's mane, and the Lion was muttering and squirming from the aggravation. An animated Scarecrow lolled nearby, blowing dandelion heads into the wind. The girl was out of sight behind shifting curtains of the willow.

"Of course, to hear them tell it, it is the surviving sister who is the crazy one," said the Lion. "What a Witch. Psychologically warped; possessed by demons. Insane. Not a pretty picture."

"She was castrated at birth," replied the Tin Woodman calmly. "She was born hermaphroditic, or maybe entirely male."

"Oh you, you see castration everywhere you look," said the Lion.

"I'm only repeating what folks say," said the Tin Woodman.



"Everyone is entitled to an opinion," said the Lion airily. "She was deprived of a mother's love, is how I've heard it. She was an abused child. She was addicted to medicine for her skin condition."

"She has been unlucky in love," said the Tin Woodman, "like the rest of us." The Tin Woodman paused and placed his hand on the center of his chest, as if in grief.

"She's a woman who prefers the company of other women," said the Scarecrow, sitting up.

"She's the spurned lover of a married man."

"She is a married man."

The Witch was so stunned that she nearly lost her grip on the branch. The last thing she ever cared for was gossip. Yet she had been out of touch for so long that she was astonished at the vigorous opinions of these random nobodies.

"She's a despot. A dangerous tyrant," said the Lion with conviction.

The Tin Woodman pulled harder than was necessary on a lock of mane. "Everything's dangerous to you, you craven thing. I hear she's a champion of home rule for the so-called Winkies."

"Whoever she is, she must surely be grieving the death of her sister," said the child, in a somber voice too rich, too sincere for one so young. The Witch's skin crawled.

"Don't go feeling sympathetic now. *I* certainly can't." The Tin Woodman sniffed, a bit cynically.

"But Dorothy's right," said the Scarecrow. "No one is exempt from grief."

The Witch was deeply irked by their patronizing speculations. She moved around the trunk of the tree, stretching to catch a glimpse of the child. The wind was picking up, and the Scarecrow shivered. While the Tin Woodman continued fussing over the Lion's tresses, he leaned against the Lion, who held him tenderly. "Storm on the horizon," said the Scarecrow.

Miles off, thunder echoed. "There—is—a—Witch on the horizon," said the Tin Woodman, tickling the Lion. The Lion got spooked and rolled on top of the Scarecrow, whimpering, and the Tin Woodman collapsed on top of them both.

"Good friends, should we be wary of that storm?" said the girl.



The rising winds moved the curtain of greenery at last, and the Witch caught sight of the girl. She was sitting with her feet tucked underneath her and her arms wrapped around her knees. She was not a dainty thing but a good-size farm girl, dressed in blue-and-white checks and a pinafore. In her lap, a vile little dog cowered and whined.

"The storm makes you skittish. It's natural after what you've been through," said the Tin Woodman. "Relax."

The Witch's fingers dug into the bark of the tree. She still could not see the girl's face, just her strong forearms and the crown of her head where her dark hair was pulled back into pigtails. Was she to be taken seriously, or was she merely a blow-away dandelion seed, caught on the wrong side of the wind? If she could see the girl's face, the Witch felt she might know.

But as the Witch craned outward from the trunk, the girl at the same time twisted her face, turning away. "That storm is coming closer, and in a hurry." The feeling in her voice rose as the wind rose. She had a throaty vehemence, like someone arguing through the threat of impending tears. "I know storms, I know how they come upon you!"

"We're safer here," said the Tin Woodman.

"Certainly we are not," answered the girl, "because this tree is the highest point around, and if lightning is to strike, it will strike here." She clutched her dog. "Didn't we see a shed farther up the road? Come, come; Scarecrow, if there's lightning, you'll burn the fastest! Come on!"

She was up and running in an ungainly way, and her companions followed in a mounting panic. As the first hard drops of rain fell, the Witch caught sight, not of the girl's face, but of the shoes. Her sister's shoes. They sparkled even in the darkening afternoon. They sparkled like yellow diamonds, and embers of blood, and thorny stars.

If she had seen the shoes first, the Witch would never have been able to listen to the girl or her friends. But the girl's legs had been tucked beneath her skirt. Now the Witch was reminded of her need. The shoes should be hers!—hadn't she endured enough, hadn't she *earned* them? The Witch would fall on the girl from the sky, and wrestle those shoes off her impertinent feet, if only she could.

But the storm from which the companions raced, farther and faster along the Yellow Brick Road, troubled the Witch more than it did the girl