



CHAPTER ONE

The Living House

MORNING IN THE Living House was very complex, especially in Buddy's bedroom. The first rays of sun to come through the window hit Buddy's dresser—who was, therefore, the first to wake. Despite Buddy's frequent admonishments to the contrary, the dresser was not able to wake in silence. As the first light came through the window, one of its drawers would open in a wide yawn. Suddenly the dresser would freeze, remembering that Buddy had asked it to please, please wait until he was awake before it made any noise. So the dresser would hold out as long as it could—which tended to be about five minutes. Then,

The Living House of Oz

forgetting itself, it would call out a cheerful “Good morning,” which would send the rest of Buddy’s room into a frenzy. The closet door would give a startled flap open and close, the picture of a sailing ship would fall off its nail with a yelp, the books would start tumbling off the bookshelf, and Buddy’s bed would start squeaking furiously. Finally Buddy would open his eyes, half annoyed, half amused by this daily ritual.

“Quiet!” he would yell. “I’m trying to sleep!”

At which point the room would settle into a brief, but doomed, silence. For, about a minute later, the hat stand (or the Earl of Haberdashery, as it insisted on being called), who was always a minute behind everyone else, would let out a “What’s all this commotion about?” which of course would set everything else going again. And the alarm clock, which had stopped running correctly years ago, would start ringing furiously, taking its cue from the Earl. By the time Buddy had silenced them all again, he would be fully awake, and then it was time for good mornings all around, at least a ten minute process, for Buddy had to remember to include everyone in his greeting. Once he had forgotten to include his blanket, and it had sulked for a week, climbing off of him at night and hiding in the corner.

Then it would be time to shower, and of course the shower just *had* to sing some song about a river or an

Chapter One

ocean at the top of its burbling voice. The soap and the scrubbing brush would gang up to turn Buddy's skin pink with their rubbing, and then the towel would wrap itself around Buddy tight. The towel was one of Buddy's favorites, and he was happy to let the warm, fuzzy cloth rub him dry for as long as it wished.

By the time he was back in his bedroom, Buddy's clothes had been assembled, after much argument, into his outfit for the day. And then off he went to breakfast, where the accommodating kitchen had already prepared eggs and hot buttered toast for him. Next to the eggs and toast would be a balumaberry muffin. Buddy's mother made the muffin for him herself every day, because it was Buddy's favorite food in the world. Buddy was never quite sure what balumaberries were or where they came from, but he did know that he had never tasted anything as good as those muffins.

In the next room, Buddy's mother would already be at work. Buddy's mother was almost always at work, as far as he could tell. She was at work when he awoke in the morning and still at work when he went to sleep at night. She only came out to check up on him every hour or so, or to occasionally play with him at some game she had usually invented herself, or to make a muffin, or to read to him before he went to

The Living House of Oz

bed. He was old enough to read to himself, being thirteen years old, but it was a nightly ritual that they still liked to practice.

Buddy was never quite sure what his mother was working at. He would smell noxious fumes coming out of what she called her laboratory, and the few times he was able to peek inside, he saw a giant cauldron and rows of spell books, herbs, and potions. They were all neatly arranged and labeled on the shelves that lined the room. The only untidy thing about the room was that it was filled with cobwebs.



Although they never discussed it, Buddy knew that his mother was not only responsible for creating the Living House, but also all sorts of other wonders that Buddy had learned to take for granted. It was not unusual for him to see his mother's pet newt, Gunk, flying around the house, nor was he surprised when his mother made beautiful music play, as she often did, from out of nowhere.

Chapter One

However, the practice of magic was forbidden in Oz to all except Glinda, the Wizard, and Ozma, the ruler of Oz, and so Buddy's mother was not allowed to be a sorceress. But sorceress she was, nonetheless, as Buddy secretly knew. And day in and day out she would practice her sorcery in private, so that no one but Buddy ever knew of her doings.

Sometimes Buddy would wander out, which his mother would allow as long as he was wearing a protective charm she had provided him with—a small, blue jewel that he hung on a string around his neck. Buddy had seen much of Oz, for every once in a while someone would find their queer little house and suspect what was happening inside. So off the House would go, as far as the feet his mother had built on it would take it, until it could settle into another relatively deserted part of Oz. Just a few days ago the House had moved again, and so Buddy was once more in parts unfamiliar to him. He loved being in parts unfamiliar. It made so much of his life an adventure.

In fact, Buddy liked most of his life. He loved his Living House, despite the way it woke him up each morning, and he loved his mother. He sometimes wished he stayed in one place long enough to have a lasting friendship with another boy, but since everything inside the House was his companion, he never felt lonely.

The Living House of Oz

The only time Buddy missed having a regular friend was on his walks. It was fun to see all the different parts of Oz, but his mother never left the Living House, nor would she allow its inhabitants to leave—she didn't want people to start asking questions that were difficult to answer. So no one got to share Buddy's experiences with him. Occasionally he would make a friend for the brief time the House had settled, but ever since Glinda had almost discovered his mother's magical activities due to Buddy's friendship with Dr. Majestico the previous year, his mother had discouraged Buddy from having much contact with anyone. So Buddy wandered his solitary way through the different countries of Oz, describing his meanderings in detail to the envious residents of his home when he came back.

On this particular day, which is the day when Buddy's latest adventure began, the Living House was located in an obscure corner of the small kingdom of Tonsorina, which was located in the northern half of the Gillikin Country, which itself was in the northern quarter of Oz. From Buddy's window, he could see a river and trees. On the trees grew combs of all sizes and descriptions, including big overripe purple combs with long teeth that looked like they were meant for giants, small black mustache and eyebrow combs, and odd little pink combs with teeth that spiraled round

Chapter One

in a way that was the cause of much speculation in Buddy's bedroom.

"It's for one of them corkscrew heads," ventured the Earl of Haberdashery (or rather, Buddy's hat stand).



"Are they from over the seas?" asked the picture of the sailboat from the floor (for Buddy had neglected to replace it). The sailboat was always trying to steer the conversation to more aquatic subjects.

"There's no such thing as a corkscrew head," declared Buddy's closet.

"Yes, there is. I've seen it in my travels," said the Earl.

"You've never traveled anywhere we haven't," objected the window. "If you could see it out the window, I certainly would have seen it, and I've never seen anything like it."

The Living House of Oz

“These corkscrew heads—” continued the Earl, ignoring them.

“You’re a corkscrew head,” interrupted the rug, to much laughter.

The Earl settled into an annoyed silence. Much more than Buddy’s other furniture, the Earl longed to leave the Living House and see the world. It fancied itself almost like a human being, because it had a hat on its head and Buddy’s (former) coat with gloves attached that gave it arms and hands. It even had three feet on which it rested—actually three curved extensions of its wooden body. And the Earl had insisted that Buddy tie a scarf under its hat, which gave it a semblance of a head, albeit a head that was completely muffled under a covering of wool. It used the crease between two layers of the scarf as a sort of mouth, and sometimes, when it thought no one was looking, it practiced expressions. The rug’s insult was particularly galling to the Earl of Haberdashery, for its head did indeed look something like a corkscrew.

“Well, I’ll know all about it soon enough, for I am going adventuring today,” declared Buddy.

“Take me with you,” the Earl pleaded, as it did every time Buddy went out.

“I wish I could,” said Buddy, meaning it. “But Mother would never allow it.”

The Earl sighed a long-suffering sigh, which

Chapter One

caused more snickers from his bedroom companions. They were not so eager to leave. It seemed to them that they were quite happy where they were.

The window opened itself so that Buddy could climb out, which he did, after slipping his mother's charm around his neck. The front door had become rebellious recently, ever since, it declared, Buddy had slammed it one time too often in his enthusiasm. In any event, Buddy's furniture enjoyed watching him begin his wanderings, although the Earl waved somewhat forlornly as Buddy climbed down the vines underneath his window and strode quickly on his way.

The window closed itself behind Buddy. "Well, that's that, then," it said. "Anyone for cards?"

