

The Gender Ninja of Oz

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The Gender Ninja of Oz

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Summary

"I might try it for awhile,—just to see how it seems, you know. But if I don't like being a girl you must promise to change me into a boy again."

"Really," said the Sorceress, "that is beyond my magic. I never deal in transformations, for they are not honest, and no respectable sorceress likes to make things appear to be what they are not."

—*The Marvelous Land of Oz*

Notes

For LGBTfest 2010: "Ozma's gender identity is complicated - zie wasn't fully satisfied as a boy when zie was Tip, but isn't fully satisfied as a girl when zie is Ozma. On top of that zie is in love with Dorothy. Is there any resolution to this?"

Ozma/Tip's pronouns will be going all over the place; sometimes they match hir physical body at the time, sometimes not. Most of this sticks to Baum's canon, though I have pulled one detail from Ruth Plumly Thompson: rather than staying at the same age forever, characters can choose on their birthdays whether to grow that year. Title [nabbed from Genderfork](#). Full-size versions of the illustrations will be showing up with [my other Oz fanart](#). And, as always, other trans!fics are [here](#).

The diplomatic delegation isn't a political necessity, or even a political this-would-be-nice-ity. Ozma pretends that it is for about five minutes, long enough to give the Winkie Army an official thanks for their services, with enough time left over to blow girlish kisses to the citizens who have gathered in the courtyard of their Emperor's magnificent tin castle. Then she retreats to change for dinner: not a grand affair of state, but a long-overdue talk with two old friends.

These rooms are always waiting in case she visits, the tin furniture adorned with emeralds to make her feel at home. She browses idly through the wardrobe, half a dozen long floating dresses with empire waists and skirts like gossamer tents, and finds herself pushing them all aside as if expecting something else to be behind them.

All she gets is the blank wall of tin at the back of the cabinet, too deep in shadow even to reflect the pastels of the cascade of fabric she's holding back.

Ozma tries to shake off the sense of discomfort. She isn't quite sure what's missing, but once she figures it out, Nick will be glad to provide.

~ * ~ * ~

"How did you know you were a man?"

The question bursts out before she knows it's there, over lemon tart and butterscotch ice cream. The Scarecrow cocks his head, painted features furrowing. "I think you'd better ask Nick that one. I may have brains, but he's the one who had a body like yours, once upon a time."

The Tin Man creaks nervously. "It really was a long time ago," he protests. "I feel for you, Ozma, but hadn't you better be asking Glinda about this sort of thing?"

"That's not what I meant!" exclaims Ozma. She had *that* talk with Glinda a couple of decades ago, when she had aged her immortal body to the point where it got to be a question. (Left to her own devices she might have just stayed in the form of a child, but Dorothy wanted to at least grow past puberty, and Ozma couldn't bring herself to be left behind.) "Scarecrow, it's you I want to hear from. How could you have known what it meant to be a man or a woman, when you had first been brought to life? How did you choose?"

"What a curious question," says the Scarecrow, frowning. "I don't know that I *did* choose. One of the first things I ever heard was the farmer who made me, declaring 'He looks just like a man.' To which his companion replied, 'Why, he is a man,' and I never disagreed. It's much the same with Scraps, from what she's told me. She was made to be a lady — of sorts — and she recognized that in herself just as soon as she was brought to life...."

He might have gone on like this for quite some time if Nick hadn't interrupted. "Is this the sort of thing you wanted to know, Ozma? You still look troubled."

"So it was easy, then?" presses Ozma, still not entirely sure what she's looking for. "You are what you were made to be?"

The Scarecrow leans across the table to take one of her hands, pressing it between his straw-stuffed ones. "Are you afraid you might be...less of a girl, somehow...because of all those years you were made to be a boy? Because that's entirely different, you know."

"Just so," agrees Nick. "If the tinsmith who crafted my body had by some chance given me female limbs instead of male ones, I would have still been a Woodman. Although perhaps a rather unorthodox one."

"Was I an unorthodox boy, then?" asks Ozma uneasily.

"At the time, I thought you were a very fine boy," admits the Scarecrow. "But I see no reason why you can't also be a fine girl."

~ * ~ * ~

"And wouldn't you know," laughs Dorothy, just back from a visit to Quadling and bursting with stories, "Glinda turned right around and asked *me* if I had any advice!"

"And did you?" prompts Ozma, reaching for a strawberry. Mombi would have scolded Tip for eating on the furniture, brought out the switch if he had left a spot; now Ozma owns the furniture, and has a treasury vast enough to replace the lot of it if there comes a stain she truly can't abide.

Ozma's hesitant to admit it now (never mind that nearly all her citizens feel the same way — there are different rules for leaders — and anyway Dorothy would only tell her to stop being silly), but she's always been a little bit in awe of the Kansas girl. Faraway wizards can only be so imposing before you start to notice that they've never made any measurable difference in your everyday life. It wasn't until Tip started hearing stories about a girl, an ordinary girl who had nevertheless killed not one but two wicked Witches, that he started to take notice.

He remembers that story, the sparks of courage that it lit in him, and lets the juice run down his chin.

"Well, only what I 'spect you've figured out already," says Dorothy modestly, licking a trail of juice from her own fingers. Her lips are stained bright red. "Told her she ought to introduce the gentleman to the Woozy. He's gone through the same problems, so they'd get along frightfully well, I think."

"Maybe Glinda would have figured that out eventually," admits Ozma. "But I don't think anyone could come up with it as fast as you."

"I s'pose."

Dorothy has a knack for making friends of people. Ozma hasn't felt that much herself (half of her closest companions are the people Tip built himself, and the other half met him while Dorothy was far away in Kansas), but she's seen it over and over with others. All of which leaves her own heart in a constant struggle between sending Dorothy on every diplomatic mission imaginable and ordering the girl never to leave her side again.

Not that it would make a difference. Kansas girls may admire royalty, but they don't bow down to it. When Dorothy stays with Ozma, it's of her own accord.

"Your hair is lovely tonight," stammers Ozma. She didn't mean to, but the firelight is flickering gently over Dorothy's silky locks, and it was either that or her lips. "Like the corn-fields at sunset. Has anyone ever told you that?"

Dorothy's smile is radiant enough to stand next to Polychrome's. "Uncle Henry used to say he was sure I'd get lost in the wheat-fields one day. On the years when the crops didn't fail, I mean."

It's not quite the last person Ozma wants to remind her of, but it's awfully close.

Her face must have fallen, because Dorothy exclaims, "Oh, Ozma, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to bring up the sad times. That's all behind us now, anyway, now that we live here, and I'm ever so grateful for it. Don't worry!"

"It's not that!" exclaims Ozma, almost laughing in relief as Dorothy's earnestness warms her soul, deeper and truer than any fire. "I grew up on a farm too, remember? I know how they are."

One of Dorothy's hands, strong and a little rough in spite of the polished gloss she's put on the nails, flies to her mouth. "You never told me that!"

"I didn't?"

"You never talk about your life before they let you be Princess again," says Dorothy crossly. "I s'pose being a farm girl isn't very exciting next to being ruler of all of Oz...but I'd like to hear about it some time, all the same."

Ozma tries not to wince too visibly. "It wasn't very interesting, I promise," she insists. "Pass me another strawberry?"



~ * ~ * ~

Pants.

Ozma can't believe she never noticed. A thousand dainty dresses fill her closets, but nobody has ever given her pants, and somehow she never asked, even after all those years when Mombi dressed her in nothing else.

Not that she bothered to question it then, either. You can't climb trees to raid nests or hop along the rocks to cross the brook when you're wearing a skirt, or at least not very efficiently. Now, standing in front of a mirror in a crisp blue outfit she stole from Ojo's rooms (he's off leading a humanitarian mission, teaching the Cuttenclips origami), she wonders why she's spent all these years acting like you can't rule just as efficiently in trousers.

Maybe it's the legs? She has fantastic legs, it turns out, once you unbury them from all the gauze. They might be distracting.

Ozma twists, twirls, then settles into what she fancies a jaunty swagger. It doesn't look half as silly as she had expected.

On a whim, she pulls off Ojo's sky-blue shirt, breasts bouncing in the warm air as she tugs the fabric over her unbound mass of walnut-brown curls. There's a sash the color of spring leaves tossed over the corner of the wardrobe, and she yanks this down and winds it around her chest, pulling it tight. The ends leave a huge awkward knot hanging at her shoulder blades; no matter, it's not like anyone else is going to see.

She runs both hands roughly through her hair, wresting the lot of it to the back of her head, and checks herself in the mirror again. It's a joke, a game, an idle fancy: what would Tip have looked like, if he had grown up?

The instant he catches the eyes of the boy in the mirror, he reconsiders.

It's no game. It's nothing less than a yawning chasm in the middle of his life, a gap that he thought he had jumped, only to find that he still has a toe on the other side. There's still a boy here, even though he has dainty features and slender arms and none of the muscle that a childhood spent shucking corn and hauling wood should have bequeathed him, and all the pants in the world won't make any of that better.

A Belt, on the other hand....

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"Excuse me! Princess Dorothy?"

On her way in from the gardens, Dorothy turns, Toto in her arms, to see who's calling. The figure coming up the path is a stranger (which is no surprise: nearly everyone in Oz knows Dorothy, and of course she can hardly know all of them in return), a tall boy about her age with close-combed black hair. He's dressed smartly in Gillikin purple, from his deep violet boots to the iris in his lapel.

"Do you have a bit of time to spare?" he asks. "I've just arrived in the Emerald City, and Her Highness said you might be able to show me around. She would do it herself, only she's busy. Matters of state and such, you know."

"All too well, I'm afraid," laughs Dorothy. She tries to help where she can, but there are far too many things that only Ozma has the authority to do. "Toto, you won't mind if I leave you alone for the afternoon, will you?"

The dog in her arms twists his head upwards and gives her a Look, which means *It's your decision, but I'm not happy about it.*

"Now, Toto, don't sulk," warns Dorothy. "What's your name, sir?"

"T-Tip," says the boy, turning a bit pink. Perhaps he's embarrassed about being in the presence of royalty, as people often are before they get to know Dorothy. She isn't ready to give up her title, but she much prefers to meet people before they've found it out. "It's short for Tippetarius, but, well, better stick with Tip, I think."

"Woof!" says Toto, and that means *We will do no such thing.*

"Toto!" exclaims Dorothy, tapping him reproachfully on the nose. "Don't be rude! Please don't mind him, Tip — I'd be happy to show you around. We ought to both fit on the Saw-

horse without much trouble...."

"No!" yelps Tip, then goes even pinker. "I mean, uh — I'd rather see what I can on foot, if it's all the same to you."

Could he be intimidated by the Saw-horse as well? Perhaps it's best not to overwhelm her visitor with too many palace celebrities at once. "In that case, I'll run and fetch my bonnet and traveling shoes, and we'll be off. Wait here, all right? Keep an eye on him," adds Dorothy to Toto, letting the dog jump to the ground. "I'll be back in two shakes."

Once she's out of earshot, Toto huffs disapprovingly at the boy. Tip can't interpret the dog's language half as well as Dorothy does, but that part is easy enough to decipher.

"I'm not playing a joke on her, I swear," he says shyly, scuffing the toe of one of his boots in the dust of the path. (How long has it been since he's worn anything that could be scuffed? Moreover, why did he ever stop?) "Please don't tell her."

The little dog cocks his head. "You could order me not to. You're not the Ruler of Oz for nothing."

"As if you would obey any order that brought hurt to your mistress," counters Tip. "But I'm not going to hurt her. There's something I want to find out, that's all. If it doesn't work out, well, it'll be just as if her visitor had gone back to his own country, and she'll never give it a thought."

Looking skeptical, Toto flops down on the path. "I hope you know what you're doing."



~ * ~ * ~

In Kansas, fairy stories are nothing more than idle whimsies; in fairy countries, they're life lessons, and taken to heart. No citizen of Oz would be caught running from the room mere seconds before the spell was set to break. It's two solid hours before midnight when Tip, alone, knocks on Jack's door.

"Come in, come in!" enthuses Jack, opening the door to the massive pumpkin's meticulously carved interior. "It's awfully late to be traveling, isn't it? Have you eaten? I don't, but some of my friends who do tell me I'm a fine cook. Although it does rather depend on you liking pumpkin."

"Jack!" exclaims Tip frantically. "Don't you recognize me?"

The Pumpkinhead stops in his tracks, then bends over (one of his joints creaks on the way down) to peer at his guest more closely. "My goodness!" he exclaims. "Dear father, is that you?"

"Yes," says Tip. "No. In a manner of speaking. I don't know! I don't know."

"I don't think I understood that at all," admits Jack. "Perhaps this head is getting soft faster than I expected."

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Tip burns off some of her frustration in carving a new smiling face onto one of Jack's freshest pumpkins, then sets to the more patient work of whittling a new joint. The knife nearly slips and cuts her thumb when she changes back, when the violet trousers morph into a pale gown gathered over newly flared hips, and her nose is abruptly overwhelmed with the scent of half-baked pumpkin pie.

"It wasn't the head after all," resolves Jack, once she has explained as much as she knows how. He looks philosophically down at the stove. "At least it went to good use."

"But you seem to know what to say better than anyone, even if you might not know why," protests Ozma. "Like when Mombi first changed me back — you said I was the same, only different. Which is as good a way of putting it as any. And probably better than most."

"That may be," says Jack, retrieving the pie and setting it on the stovetop to cool, "but I also said you wouldn't be my dear father after you changed."

Ozma's fingers have settled back into the rhythm of the whittling; they don't even flinch as she whispers, "How can I be?"

The Pumpkinhead joins her on the bench (wood; cushions would stain, and he doesn't need a comfortable place to sleep when he never does it in the first place) and puts a creaky wooden hand on her knee, giving the knife a careful berth. "When I first called you 'dear father'," he reflects, "I suppose what I meant was 'dear person who created me, who happens to look like a boy just at this moment'. I wasn't very bright then, you remember."

Ozma smiles in spite of herself. "I do."

"Then you understand how I could mistake the looking-like-a-boy part for something important. When really, you'll always be dear to me, no matter what we call it. And you'll be dear to Dorothy, too, no matter what body you have."

It's not that simple, as Jack would know if Ozma had gotten up the courage to give him the birds-and-the-bees talk (or, more likely, co-opt Nick or the Scarecrow to do it). Of course Dorothy will love her, or him, if he's Tip; but he wants Dorothy to *want* him, and what if Dorothy doesn't feel that way about boys? Or girls? What if the body he decides on is the one she can't see that way?

"I don't even know which one I *want*!" she exclaims, burying her face in her hands. "I thought everything would fall into place when I spent the day as Tip, but — well, it *didn't*, you see?"

Jack's new face, except for a scar at the corner of his mouth where the knife slipped, is pleasant but solemn. It doesn't look quite so absurd when he's clearly thinking very hard.

At last he says, "If you're unhappy in your form a girl, and you're unhappy when you've told the Magic Belt to turn you into a boy, then it seems to me that what you ought to do is ask the Belt to give you a body that isn't either."

Ozma scrubs away a few tears with the heel of her hand. "Jack," she declares, "you're a wonder."

"Am I?" asks Jack curiously. "I suppose that must be what comes of wondering so much."

~ * ~ * ~

Dorothy has searched all of Ozma's rooms except the bedchamber, or she never would have gone in.

Not that she hasn't been there before, during girlhood explorations of the endless wardrobes or later retreats when they would hole up there together, spending afternoons poring over ancient books that sometimes ended up lasting until morning, when Toto's cold nose would wake her up to find herself lying awkwardly on the floor with a pillow filched from Ozma's bed around three in the morning. But they've always been together, and even though Dorothy

can't imagine her dearest friend complaining about her presence, something doesn't feel right about creeping in uninvited.

"Ozma?" she calls, scanning the jewel-studded portraits and gauzy spring-green curtains. "Are you in here? Are you asleep? I don't want to be a bother, only you've been sleeping an awful long time, if you are, and it's past time you woke up...."

The bedcovers are tossed and unmade, with no lumps large enough to conceal a person. Dorothy approaches anyway, just in case, because the longer she searches, the longer she doesn't have to bear the thought that Ozma may have been kidnapped, or worse.

A few steps from the mattress, she screams.

It's worse.

Dorothy leaps for the bed, bouncing onto the mattress in a flurry of skirts and sheets. The Magic Belt is nowhere to be seen — if somebody's made off with it! — but that comes second, everything else comes second, as she wraps her fingers around the exquisitely carved emerald grasshopper and exclaims, "Oz!"

The shadows of neverending sunless caverns fly from her mind as quickly as they arose: Ozma, dainty and graceful and solid and real as ever, is sitting beside her. Dorothy already has a hand on her waist, so it's no stretch to fling the other arm around her, getting a faceful of her long dark curls. "Oh, Ozma, you're all right, I'm so glad...."

"Of course I'm all right," says Ozma, closer to irritated than Dorothy has ever heard her, though she doesn't push the Kansas girl away. "Why are you here?"

"Why—?" exclaims Dorothy, pulling back herself. "I was worried! What happened? Was it the Nome King? Did you see?"

"See what?" Ozma rubs Dorothy's shoulders in a way that she probably means to be soothing; it doesn't work when her hands are still gemstone-cold. "Dear Dorothy, what should you be worried about? You saw me at dinner not half an hour ago, and I told you I would be retiring for the evening."

"Ozma, it's been *two days*!"

The other princess goes still, her eyes blank and uncomprehending.

"You must not remember," whispered Dorothy. "Because you've been a grasshopper this whole time, and grasshoppers don't remember things, not even in Oz, leastaways not when they're made of emerald. And we didn't even realize it. Someone attacked you, probably got the Belt in the meantime, and everyone thought you were with someone else, nobody noticed...!"

Ozma checks her waist with a start. "I thought — no, no, it's here. You see, Dorothy? I have the Belt right here. Everything's all right. Oh, Dorothy, there's nothing to cry about."

Sure enough, when Dorothy blinks back her tears and looks, the jeweled links of the Magic Belt are right there under her hands. Her memory of it is huge and bulky, and she doesn't think they've grown *that* much, but now it sits on Ozma's hips as naturally as if it were tailored for them.

"But if you're still wearing it," she murmurs, confusion rising over the tangle of lingering panic and wild relief, "then how could Ruggedo have...?"

She trails off, the fear rising once more.

Ozma is crying.

Her brave, noble, ever-graceful Ozma has tears rolling down those perfect alabaster cheeks. It's slow enough for Dorothy to daub them away with her sleeve, but there's no telling how long that will last.

"Ozma, it's all right," she soothes, feeling herself slip into the caretaker role that half of Oz has leaned on at some point or another. "If it was the Nome King, we'll get him. We'll stop him. No matter what it takes. Everyone here loves you, Ozma, and I 'spect we'd do just about anything to keep you safe."

"It wasn't the Nome King." Ozma chokes on the words. "Or anyone else. It was me. Oh, Dorothy, I did it to myself — it isn't what I meant to do, I didn't know it would come out that way, but — I just wanted — I *needed*—"

A sob overtakes her, and a moment later she's bawling into the white silk folds gathered over Dorothy's chest, while Dorothy hugs Ozma just as tight as she can and murmurs every comfort she knows. *It'll be okay. I don't understand, but I'm here. I'll listen. Whatever you need, we'll get it. We love you. I love you.*

~ * ~ * ~

Dorothy has always been the best at using the Belt.

The form she draws from it is a glorious medley of flat chest and flared hips, muscled arms and great legs, strong features framed by a mountain of curls. There's a bit of her old fairy-princess glamour here, a bit of his even older wiry toughness there — and it all comes out fitting together natural as you please, never mind that it's been sculpted from scratch out of magic and wish.

It also comes out without a stitch of clothing, but when Ozma takes a few experimental steps and finds that not an inch of it feels wrong or disorienting or vaguely like somebody ought to sandpaper it off, he thinks for a second that he might never get dressed again.

There's even a tinge of rose in Dorothy's cheeks that suggests that she might not object, though she thrusts a sheet into Ozma's hands. "You know, I 'spect there are other folks in Oz

who feel like you did," she stammers, sneaking glances at Ozma that he pretends not to notice while he drapes it loosely around himself, reveling in the way the cloth hangs across his planes and curves. "Only they might not have such good friends to help them figure it out. But I bet we could ask the Magic Picture to find them, and offer to use the Belt to set them to rights."

"My Dorothy," breathes Ozma, adoring her all over again. "It's a wonderful idea. Of course we shall. Only — would you mind very much if we didn't start right away?"

"Of course not!" exclaims Dorothy. "You'll want to test this body this for a while — just to see how it seems, you know. I might've made any number of mistakes, and it'll take a while to be sure everything's in good working order...or perhaps you'll decide you'd rather just go back, or..."

She's fairly glowing now, a blush on her face and sparks in her eyes, and it's all the prompting Ozma needs to step forward. "It feels wonderful," she declares. "But I do think there are a few things I rather ought to test. Won't you stay and help?"

"Oh, Ozma." In spite of everything it's still Dorothy who reaches out first, warm hands sliding around Ozma's hips. "You know I'd stay with you forever if you asked."



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