



Cross The Shifting Sands

PREVIEW COPY

by

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FOR IVOR

Character description: A very kindly man - never angry - pleasant to everyone. Cheerful, fun-loving; he loved people, children and flowers. Everyone who knew him loved him for his gentleness, his whimsical humour, and his spontaneous puns which were quite often ludicrous and far fetched. Quizzical smile, twinkly eyes.

1. HEADS

Baum: [Starts on the floor as if waking from one of his turns. Suddenly, he wakes, startled. Awkwardly, slowly, with his left arm incapacitated he lifts himself into his arm chair. He takes a sip of water next to him on a small table. He lifts up two indicators, one of mum the other of dad and places one on each arm of the chair.]

L. Frank Baum, [batting away the Lyman, he hates it] Lyman Frank Baum born May 15, 1856 to Father Benjamin Baum and Mother Cynthia Ann Baum. Lives in Pennsylvania. [a memory - what it was like - only a small moment] One of nine. Wealthy. Quiet. Reasonable... sometimes and opinionated, *[he pauses]* often.

Life is like a long, winding road, [showing how clever he is] a yellow brick road, [story teller mode - paint the pictures] stretching for miles and miles and step by step, we walk down it and as we do so, we make discoveries about ourselves and **the world in which we live** [title it]. All the while not knowing what is around the next bend. In fact, the only thing we can be certain of is that at some time the road will come to an end and we will **arrive** at our **final destination**. [a pause. a beat. The weight breaks]

A cheery thought, huh! But that is just it, so often we think about where we are going, where we are headed, but in doing so, we don't take the time to pause to observe the journey which is often just as interesting.

[telling the story as if to a single child. Don't let it become simple exposition] The supreme ruler of the Land of Oz lived in a great town of her own, called the Emerald City, which was in the exact centre of the four kingdoms of the Land of Oz. The

Munchkin King entertained them at his palace that night, and in the morning they set out for the Emerald City, travelling over a road of... yellow brick that led straight to the jewel-studded gates.

While **on** our journey, while making **new** discoveries - we evolve, we change who we are.

[STAMP OF DOROTHY GALE TURNED OVER]

I have always been intimately fascinated with the way in which we **choose** to define ourselves. How we present ourselves to the world. How we say to people... this is who I am? It's a curious business.

From an early age, I would read fairy tales and I became conscious of the different heads we wear in life. The evil queen in the tale of Snow White could swap a head of terror for one of generosity and kindness at a moments notice - if only to get her own way but we are all guilty of this.

We reinvent ourselves constantly, as if we were an indecisive sculptor working with wax on a hot day, fluidly moving from this to that but nothing ever comes to fruition. Nothing ever sticks. Nothing ever becomes concrete. So we cheat. At best we are all chameleons and at worst... at worst we are compulsive liars.

Some heads I wear proudly and often. I parade them - put on a show for the world.

While others I try to hide away and keep in the shadows. My imagination created a place where I could see my different heads. [SNAP TO IMAGINATION - As if in a nightmare, which he is said to have had often] Displayed in the most curious way down a long,

perhaps infinite corridor, of off white, yellowish marble stone. *[Sinking/dropping]* Cold and uninviting. I never felt welcome there... though I would visit often and always at night.

As if in a nightmare, I would watch myself journey down the corridor.

Against the walls stood tall, glass cabinets perfectly and purposefully placed. Within each cabinet rested a head on a small, intricately carved wooden plinth. In front of which stood a burning candle *[Lighting a candle in front of a not so elegant wooden plinth, perhaps laying on the floor and resting his own head on the plinth]* which produced just enough light to illuminate the features on each of the faces. Some heads were alive, while others were deceased; rotting and decomposing. Some just housed a skull, a white shell of a head that had long-since passed away.

The piecing, glaring, curious eyes of each of the living heads followed me with unflinching and meticulous precision, reflecting the light back towards me, producing this eery glow.

[Looking/going around the audience as if they are the heads] As I walked down the corridor I would greet the heads I liked the most. But occasionally, I would come across a head I did not want to acknowledge, I would blow out the candle *[Blow - Snap Black out]* but after a few moments *[lights slowly fade back up]* it would re-ignite.

My blowing out of the candles displeased the heads, they did not want to be forgotten. Slowly, in fear I may try to blow *their* candle out, the heads become unified in their anger...their pure, unrelenting hatred. Their eyes red, blood-shot, teeth **th** clenched, saliva

oozing **with an insatiable hunger for a body onto which it could attach itself and thrive.**

[TURN OVER STAMP OF LANGWIDERE]

Sorry about that.

Buried within the pages of my prose are echoes of the different heads I have gathered in my life. My words give them life. [recognising a need to explain further] My reference point for writing is nothing more than my own subjective experience; through my fingers, through my words, just heads no longer, but living, breathing characters in my stories. The lives of my heads and my characters are inextricably linked - fact and fiction walk tentatively, hand in hand down the same road; yellow brick or otherwise.

[collapse]

I have always spent a great deal of my time in my imagination. As a child I found it difficult to connect to to my contemporaries - my parents kept me hidden from the dark and dangerous world that surrounded our idyllic home and this meant I spent a lot of time by myself, often dreaming of the mysteries waiting for me beyond the walls of the garden. I believe that dreams - day dreams you know - with your eyes wide open and your brain machinery whizzing - are likely to lead to the betterment of the world.

[getting frustrated that we don't appreciate it - again linking to his being punished for the use of imagination]

The imagination is beautiful, as far as we know it is exclusive to human beings and yet we take it for granted. Every word I speak and every word I write paints a picture in your head: you can't help yourself, it's automatic, autonomous, it is part of who we are [coming out to give audience more].

[bring back in to make the point] Your imagination is unique, one-of-a-kind. No one else in the world has the same imagination. We have to exercise it regularly if it is to flourish, no one can do it for us, we are the soul custodian of this gift and we must seek out new opportunities to explore it fully. In a disorderly and entropic world, we can create new order, new logic, or new chaos and new dissension.

2. MONO-CHROME

Baum: Happiness is the best thing in the world and I found much of it at my family home in Pennsylvania. My father grew rich in the oil business and the family naturally benefited. Our estate was a place of marvellous beauty as perfect as anything man made can be. Patches of green sward as far as the eye could see surrounded a majestic brick mansion house. Stately trees were peppered on the landscape. Mother grew the most gorgeous flowers and the Rose garden was my single favourite patch she ever curated. Each rose was perfectly and purposefully placed. It was quiet and secluded - the perfect places for a day dreamer such as me. All concept of time dissipated while I was in the garden. I would lay on the grass for hours at a time, staring up into the blue abyss, dreaming of the most fantastical places. I would lay for so long that my skin would mould itself around the blades grass, leaving behind a patchwork imprint, lines like bits

of straw that textured my under arms, calves and back. The Rose garden was so loved by all the family that our Estate was named 'Rose Lawn' in its honour.

One of my favourite pastimes was to read fairy stories by the likes of the Brother's Grimm. I read their stories copiously but I was regularly disturbed by their dark nature, I liked to reinvent the parts that scared me:

Young Frank: (Reading from out of a book)... when the wedding with the prince was to be held, the two false sisters came, wanting to gain favour with Cinderella and to share her good fortune. When the bridal couple walked into the church, the older sister walked on their right side and the younger on their left side, and the pigeons pecked out one eye from each of them. [Disturbed. Tears out the offending page, sits and writes]

The pigeons pecked out a single hair from each of the sisters noses which made them sneeze and cough for a while... but not so long as to make them feel uncomfortable... just enough so they needed a handkerchief.

[BACK TO REALITY]

From an early age I was conscious that I appeared different and to be different from your fellow creature is always a misfortune. My parents often made this clear. They were concerned I spent too much of my time dreaming and not enough time absorbing the real world around me. I heard them arguing one evening, with my ear pressed against the wood door of the kitchen I over-heard their conversation...

Mother: Just let him be, Benjamin. He is causing no harm

Frank: Mother said in her soft, delicate voice.

Father: He is harming himself, Cynthia. Day dreaming and wandering every waking hour, it's simply not healthy for a boy of his age. His tutor says he drifts off constantly in class

Young Frank: Well I Did.

Father: and to be quite honest it's embarrassing for him and for us. What if I had been a daydreamer, Cynthia? Would we be enjoying our spoils had I been unfocused in my formative years? I think not. I achieved success through hard work and diligence and the same will be true of Lyman. [Reluctantly, but decisively] He will attend the academy after all.

Mother: If you were not a dreamer Ben, what was it you aspired to? What was it that drove you? You never imagined what you might become...?

Father: He is dreaming of talking wolves, hot air balloons, men with wheels in place of their hands.

The decision was made just after my twelfth Birthday in the Summer of 1868 - my dreamy disposition was to be *corrected* by the Peekskill Military Academy where I was to take up residency.

[we see them packing over the following dialogue]

Young Frank: Mother, why are you sending me away? [There is silence] Are you unhappy with me? [*There is silence*]. Is Father unhappy with me? [After a pause.] Is God unhappy with me?

Mother: [short, snappy] Don't be so dramatic.

Young Frank: [Aside.] I knew the mention of God would provoke a reaction.

Mother: It's your daydreaming, Lyman.

Young Frank: What about it?

Young Frank: Mother, please don't make me go. [starting to become teary]. Is that where you sent Edwin, Oliver and Synthia?

It had been careless of me to make such a flippant comment.

My imagination defined me as it does everyone, the places I had discovered in my mind were the only real thing close to answering the question 'who am I'?

It was a long and tiresome journey to the Peekskill Military Academy, as days had felt like hours in my beloved Rose Garden, the opposite was true for this journey.

Strong, sturdy, impenetrable iron gates stretched around the perimeter of the building. Above the front entrance some words were etched onto a large brass plaque. In the mono-chrome, bleak surroundings of the Academy, the plaque stood out like a beacon, shining as if it had been forged just this-morning: it read 'Stand Firm As An Oak [conduct yourself like a man] Quit You Like Men' and it made an impression on me.

[Sitting, he writes and reads aloud]

"... she could see nothing but the great grey 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."

[PAGES REMOVED FOR PREVIEW]

[STAMP OF ROQUAT IS TURNED OVER].

Over the next few years I drifted from this to that, new jobs, different heads. A journalist, a businessman, an undervalued columnist, a salesman. During this time I continued telling stories to whoever would listen. The children seemed to love my stories and poems and puns; it was only through Maud's encouragement that I decided to write them down and subsequently publish them *Mother Goose in Prose* was my first tentative step writing for children. It was well received and it inspired me to write more and tell more.

On a sunny afternoon in the hot American summer, a group of my children's friends had gathered at the house and were sitting in the hallway begging me to tell them a story, of course I did. At first it was just a series of puns, mostly about chickens 'The chicken went on a trip to New York, he didn't have a plan, he thought that he would just wing it'. Then I began to tell a story that started with a great storm, in a barren and sandy land, a dull grey place, where nothing much happened, just a farm but the wind transported a young child to a far off land full of mystical creatures...it took over...a land full of

mystical creatures, the first thing she saw were small, tiny people, in a brightly coloured world of...of...

[Standing slowly, turning to look at the different heads that have been revealed. a moment of stillness then - frantic]

I began to write, and write and scribble and write on anything I could get my hands on, some paper at first, but then envelopes and toilet tissue. [Writing on the back of the stamps - tearing them down to do so]. Oz was born! From that moment on it never left my head, an entire world was thrown into existence and it just kept growing and evolving becoming more turbulent, complicated, detailed, developed.

Of course, it was finally published and did tremendously well. In the early days of its success, a little girl had seen me in town, her parents, family acquaintances, explained to their daughter who I was. She came running up to me and threw her small, delicate arms around my waist.

Girl: (Think Matilda/Mattie from Mrs D) I think you are fantastic.

- she said -

Mr Oz sir

- I smiled -

- Mr Oz, will you make me a promise?

- Anything my dear... -

Will you write more stories about Dorothy and her friends, please? -

[going down to her imagined height as if looking in her eyes]

My dear Girl, your imagination will tell you its very own stories about Dorothy and her friends if you let it. I tell you what, I will make you this promise, if I receive one thousand requests, [emphasising each word with a tap on her nose] just - like - yours, I will write another book.

Wow, Really? Thanks Mister. You're real... OZZY.

OZZY... [So delighted that the young girl has invented this work for herself. It should be said softly. He smiles to himself as he walks over to the typewriter]

[typing] The Wonderful Wizard of Oz was written solely to delight the children of today."

6. CROSS THE SHIFTING SANDS

oz (on track): I am Oz, the great and terrible. Who are you, and why do you seek me?

Frank: I should like to go home sir.

oz (on track): In good time Lyman, all in good time.

[snap - out of operating theatre, in recovery room]

[We see Frank in a bed (possibly a chair if the set does not allow for anything else) we see him attempt to pour himself a glass of water from the other side of the room, it is slow, he is tired, no longer full of life and energy, he is fading now - behind this the familiar ticking of the clock associated with the films and play/musical].

[He writes slowly and reads aloud, becoming tearful toward the end] Tik-tok knocked down seven of the army, who were sprawling in every direction upon the carpet, when suddenly the machine paused, with the dinner-pail raised for another blow, and remained perfectly motionless. [reflecting - the next line is about himself now crying - silence for a few beats then...]

"My ac-tion has run down," he called to Dorothy. "Wind me up, quick." -

If only it were that simple

[a forced, reflective smile to himself, slowly crumpling up the paper he has just written on].

[TURN OVER STAMP OF TICK-TOC]

[he goes off stage to bring in boxes full of letters from young fans just like the little girl in the street - this is exhausting just as the cases were earlier, perhaps even more so]. That

little girl who had stopped me in the street changed the course of the rest of my life. A promise is something very delicate and precious especially when made to something so pure and innocent. That single promise led me to write a further 13 books about Oz. Letters came in from far and wide - from all over the globe, places I hadn't even heard of. It was truly touching.

You know something? When I was younger I had hoped that my stories would one day bring me fame and fortune and initially they did just that. But having such a beautiful family, I could not help but dote on them and perhaps I spent our money more frivolously than I should have done, despite Maud's protests and best efforts to curb my generosity. By 1911 we were bankrupt. In order to prevent us from disappearing into poverty I sold the royalties for my life's work, Oz was no longer mine. I should have been sad, I should have grieved, but I came to realise this simple fact. Fame, fortune, legal ownership, they are insignificant in comparison to the real purpose of my stories and that is, quite simply, to make children happy.

[a change - dropping - fading]

I am so accustomed to writing my words down on paper, [facial contortion] but I must speak these words to you and I hope they are not clumsy. I grow increasingly tired Maud, my eyes are becoming heavy, the green spectacles have faded and the world looks as grey and washed-out as any ordinary city. I'm going to slip away in the next few hours, I fear this is my last farewell. But you should know that I love you, Maud, [facial contortion] as much as the day I first laid eyes on you, I love you very much, and I shall miss you terribly. My imagination has worked hard to keep you comfortable after I am

gone. Our lives have been more fantastical, more mysterious than anything I could have written - real OZZY.

The yellow brick road we have walked down together has been rough sometimes, non-existent even, but [facial contortion] we persevered, two kindred spirits, companions, walking the road together, keeping each other safe and full of hope, even when it seemed there was nothing left to hope for. [facial contortion] But now, my darling, I can finally pass through the door of death, through the realms of existence. Now we can cross the shifting sands.