

12 April 1976
Finished 16 April.

Dear Erik in Maine! (And Sarah and Hannah,
if you think they'll enjoy it.)

This is your Happy Birthday Doctor Chalmers Letter.

When last we left Doctor Chalmers, he had gotten two silver bars from a wizard whose name he did not even know, under circumstances that were difficult to remember clearly. He had almost forgotten about them until one day when he moved a ~~box~~ box in the greenhouse and the two silver bars fell from where they had been behind some pots. One bar fell on the other, and they rang with a fine long clang.

~~What~~ "A silvery ring!" said Doctor Chalmers to himself.

From somewhere a great deep voice said, "A SILVERY RING..." and there was a tinkle as a silver finger-ring appeared in mid-air and fell tinkling on the silver bars.

Doctor Chalmers looked about him nervously. "How strange," he murmured. "A ring just..." and he trailed off. Then he said, "... rose in the air."

Again came the deep voice. "Rose in the air," it said.

Dr. Chalmers watched as his favorite dwarf rosebush slowly floated into the ~~air~~ air. It hung in its flowerpot, moving gently in the air currents of the room but staying in one place.

"Flying flower!" exclaimed Dr. Chalmers.

And then the room was full of white flour, whirling around ~~in~~ in a blizzard of dust.

Dr. Chalmers took a deep breath and put his hand over his mouth. Not because of the flour, but to keep from saying anything more.

The flour gradually settled onto the floor, onto the flowers and bushes, onto the tables, onto his shoes. Doctor Chalmers ~~said~~ said hoarsely, "Oh, wizard? Oh wizard?"

Nothing happened.

After calling out several times Dr. Chalmers had an idea. He picked up one of the silver bars and struck it on the other. "Wizard, come here, I want you!"

There was a small popping noise and the very short wizard was standing there.

"You rang," said the wizard.

"Hi," said Dr. Chalmers.

"What's up?" asked the wizard.

"You gave me these silver bars^s as a fee for solving the case of your missing bats," said Dr. Chalmers. "Now it turns out they have dangerous magic. Can you take that away?"

"Certainly," said the wizard. "Sorry about that."

"Zippity zow,
Ziggety muck;
Get the unwanted
Magic unstuck."

The wizard handed the bars back to Chalmers. "No problem," he said.

Dr. Chalmers let them rest on his hands. "Hmm. Thank you."

"While I'm here," said the wizard, "you might help me solve another problem."

"Oh?" asked Dr. Chalmers. Somehow the ~~bars~~ bars seemed lighter in his hands.

"George Gorgon has lost his leftmost head," said the small wizard.

"Oh dear," said Dr. Chalmers, both at the new assignment and at the fact that the silver bars had slowly risen from his hands and were floating gently through the air.

"Gorgon heads can be difficult to keep track of," said the wizard.

"These silver bars are hard to keep track of," said Dr. Chalmers. "I thought you took the magic out of them."

"Oh, um, yes," said the wizard. "I guess I also took out a little too much weight."

"Oh for goodness sake," said Dr. Chalmers.

"No problem," said the wizard. "All you have to do is melt it together with some regular silver."

"I don't have any regular silver," said Dr. Chalmers.

"Pity," said the wizard.

"I'm afraid finding gorgon heads is not a task I have particular aptitudes for," said Dr. Chalmers. "I don't know how I'd do it."

"As I recall, you take your fee in silver bars," said the wizard. Then you could melt them down and mix the silver ~~with~~ that has no weight with the regular silver."

"Well, yes, but..." said Dr. Chalmers.

"Let's see, would five thousand silver bars be sufficient?" asked the wizard. He poured some tea out of his sleeve and into a flowerpot.

Dr. Chalmers gulped.

~~George's head is~~
"I'm sure ~~it's~~ around the ~~to~~ tower ~~someplace~~ someplace," said the wizard.

"Er..." said Dr. Chalmers.

"Oh, come now," said the wizard. "I'm sure you can find it easily. It's just that I'm ~~am~~ very absentminded."

"What if I can't?" asked Dr. Chalmers.

"Then I'll bring you back, and you'll only get, say, one thousand silver bars as a retainer."

Dr. Chalmers liked the idea of getting a thousand silver bars even if he didn't succeed.

Dear Nonesuch: I am finishing this story late on the 15th of April, or rather actually ~~am~~ in the wee small hours of your TWELFTH BIRTHDAY. Happy birthday ^{ay!}

"Ah, barumph," said the wizard, draining the tea from his ~~coffee~~ cup and then spitting out the dirt that had been at the bottom. "How I hate grounds at the bottom of a cup." Are you ready?"

"Ready as I'll ever be," said Doctor Chalmers, with some dejection.

"Ziggety zip,
Zippity ~~am~~ zow:
Instantly to
the other place, now!" said the wizard.

What happened next is rather hard to describe. There was a noise that went "BOOP ~~am~~ BOOP boop boop boop boop." The building seemed to come apart: it looked as if the walls were all separately swinging open. As the sides of the building seemed to come apart, there was blackness outside, and planets, ~~am~~

and 2

sense of great heights. To his alarm Dr. Chalmers saw the floor fall away below his feet, and all the flowers and plants drop away and become tiny. Great blue lights, and then red lights, played over the wizard and got in Dr. Chalmers' eyes. He looked at his suit and it seemed green rather than grey. He closed his eyes.

"BOOP BOOP BOOP," finished the booping noise, and stopped abruptly. Dr. Chalmers opened his eyes. He was in the same tower he remembered from his previous adventure with the wizard. Beyond the balconies, outside the tower, was the same strange landscape he had noticed before. The tower room was hung with tapestries and had several globes; one globe was of the earth, others were of planets he did not know about.

"Harumph," said the wizard politely from behind him.

Dr. Chalmers turned.

The wizard stood with George Gorgon. George only had three heads this time, instead of four. The first head looked very sad. The second head was chewing gum expressing ~~no~~ ^{very} ~~less~~ ^{less}. The third head had a small grin. Then there was an empty neck.

"George is very sad," said the wizard.

"Yes, I am," said the first head. "I miss my fourth head."

"Actually, I don't care very much," said the second head, between gum-chews.

"I can see that you wouldn't necessarily recognize the difference," said the first head. "The heads on the ends are the best."

"They are not," said the second head, and spit out its gum into the hair of the first head.

"Heh heh," said the third head. Actually, I like being on the end."

"Now, boys, let's not squabble," said the wizard. "It doesn't matter where you are, just so you are. With this he lifted the second head right off, and set it down on the empty fourth neck. "Now how do you like that?"

All the heads turned, looking at each other in surprise. The third head, who was now ~~in the middle~~ ^{the second and}, turned from left to right. No longer was it happy.

"Hey, I liked being on the end," it said.

"Huh huh huh," ~~said~~ the one that was now on the right, laughed stupidly. "I like it on the end too."

"Now, you must help us find the missing one," said the wizard to Dr. Chalmers.

"I don't know where to begin," said Dr. Chalmers.

"Why, obviously you must begin right where you are," said the wizard. "You can't begin on the ceiling because you aren't on the ceiling."

"Mmm, true enough," said Dr. Chalmers in some annoyance.

George Gorgon got to arguing among his remaining heads, and Dr. Chalmers felt edgy. He walked out on a balcony. It was night, and a beautiful ~~fx~~ landscape spread out in all directions from the balcony. But the ground was very far down, for the balcony~~x~~ was very high up.

"Good evening," said a voice near Dr. Chalmers. With a ~~start~~ Dr. Chalmers noticed a small figure, about two feet high, standing near him. The small figure had a green head, pointy ears, a large nose and fangs. But he looked friendly. ~~E~~

"Good, yikes," said Dr. Chalmers, for as he looked the other personage seemed to tilt, leaning further and further. Then he tilted the other way. "My name is Chalmers. Who are you?"

"I am the Wobblin' Goblin," said the creature. "Nice night, isn't it?" Lightly the goblin hopped onto the balcony railing and began to tip.

"LOOK OUT!" cried Dr. Chalmers, but apparently too late, for the small figure had just disappeared over the edge.

"Oh, it's all right," ^{the voice of} said/the Wobblin' Goblin from just over the edge. "I have very sticky feet," he ~~said~~ said, reappearing.

"Phew," said Dr. Chalmers, beginning to feel more nervous out on the balcony than he had inside.

"Oh, Dr. Chalmers!" said an unfamiliar ~~f~~ voice sweetly. Dr. Chalmers turned and saw a large pink elephant coming onto ~~the balcony from inside~~ the tower. "This is ~~is~~ for you." The elephant held out, in its trunk, a long brass tube with a conical opening at one end.

"What is it?" asked Dr. Chalmers.

"It's a hunting horn," said the pink elephant.

"What for?" asked Dr. Chalmers.

"You're ~~x~~ hunting, aren't you?" asked the elphant. 'Bye.' The elphant turned and wandered back into the ~~xxx~~ tower.

Dr. Chalmers looked at the hunting horn. Then he held it to his pursed lips and gave a raspberry, as is necessary with brasswind instruments. "Ta ~~dayx~~ dahhh!" went the horn.

"Oh, well," said Dr. Chalmers. putting the horn down.

"What are you looking for?" asked a voice from over his head. Dr. Chalmers looked up, startled. The ~~wobbling~~ Wobblin' Goblin was standing sideways on the side of the tower, over his head, teetering back and forth.

"I am looking for George Gorgon's ~~h~~ missing head," said Dr. Chalmers. "But I'm not quite ~~w~~ sure where to look."

"Oh, I have it," said the goblin.

"WHAT?" asked Dr. Chalmers.

"Yes indeed," said the goblin. "We were just about to have some chocolate cake. Would you care to join us?"

~~"Where?"~~ asked Dr. Chalmers ^{suspiciously}.

"In my lair, up the stair," said the goblin, gesturing. Dr. Chalmers looked, and sure enough, there in the moonlight he saw a stairway. Groaning a little he started up. There was ~~an~~ entrance way to a dark chamber, at the top. The chamber was lit by a candle on the floor. The goblin was already waiting, standing beside a large chocolate cake. On the other side of the cake was George Gorgon's other head, standing on its neck.

"Hi," said the head.

"The wizard wants ^{said} you back," ~~said~~ Dr. Chalmers.

"Oh foo," said the head.

"Let us have our cake first," said the goblin. "Let's all begin."

As Dr. Chalmers watched, the head, standing on its neck, simply began to eat its way into the chocolate cake. The goblin, from the other side, leaned this way and that in his wobbling way, gobbling and wobbling at the same g time.

~~"Push,"~~ said Dr. Chalmers.

"Don't you like cake?" asked the goblin.

"Not right now," said Dr. Chalmers. "Cakes like that don't usually agree with h me."

A smiling face appeared on the side of the cake. "Oh, I agree with you one hundred percent." But that part of the cake was abruptly eaten from both ~~at~~ sides. The head and the goblin burped in unison, and the cake was plainly all gone.

"Well, ^{to the gorgon head,} said Dr. Chalmers, "It's time for me to take you back to the wizard."

"Nertz," said the head.

Dr. Chalmers picked it up by the hair. "I'm afraid you have to." The head tried to bite him but he held it at arm's length

As Dr. Chalmers started to leave the chamber, carrying the head, the Wobblin' Goblin ~~was~~ watched sadly. "It is hard to keep a head," it murmured.

"Thank you for helping me," said Dr. Chalmers.

"Glad to be helpful," said the other.

Dr. Chalmers carried the ^{chocolate-covered} ~~head~~ ^(still picking its lips) down the stairs. The rest of the gorgon was still squabbling among itself as he re-entered the main room of the tower. The wizard was staring intently at the floor. "I can't seem to find the Volksdragon," he murmured.

"I've found the head," said Dr. Chalmers.

"Oh, capital," said the wizard. "Now you want to go home to your bars of silver, I suppose."

"Well, I hate to be rude, but this place makes me nervous," said Dr. Chalmers.

"Au revoir, and Hi Yo Silver."

"Say no more, and thank you," said the wizard. Abruptly everything seemed to swing apart, and ~~was~~ there was the booping noise, and Dr. Chalmers found himself in the greenhouse. Then he heard a crash, and a silver bar came falling through the room. Then another. Dr. Chalmers ducked under a table. Crash after crash occurred, as the glass room was broken to smithereens, Thump, thump went the silver bars upon the dirt. Crash too went the flowerpots, and crunck went the rosebush, and the banyan, and the ~~the~~ lemon tree, and the other plants and flowers. Clang and tinkle went the silver bars on the other silver bars.

"I hoped the silver bars would be a bar to further difficulty, and they sure were," said Dr. Chalmers.

After five minutes it had stopped silvering, and Dr. Chalmers spent several hours picking his way out ~~of~~ of the center of the pile, for he had to move other silver bars into the space ~~next to him in order to get further out.~~ Finally he got free, and saw sadly that half of his greenhouse had been ruined. But it was plain that the value of the silver made up for the damage many times over.

"Thank goodness," said Dr. Chalmers, "It's over, and I'll never see that wizard again."

Let's hope he was right.

P.S. The pink elephant, the hunting horn and the chocolate cake were suggested by you over the phone the other day. All love from

