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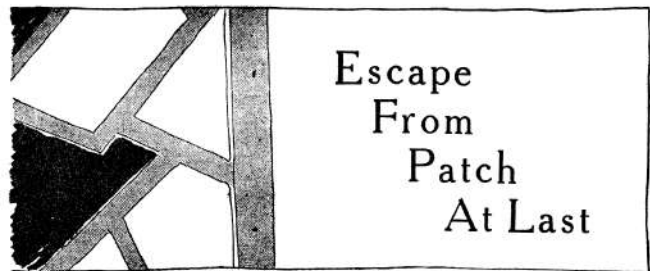
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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Gnome King of Oz: Escape From Patch At Last (10/20)

When Peter awakened next morning, he thought for a few moments he was still aboard ship. But he soon realized that the up and down motion he was experiencing was merely the deep breathing of the little bear. Without disturbing Grumpy, he straightened up and rubbed his eyes. Scraps was over by the window turning Soob's emerald over and over in her cotton fingers. Reminded of the letter he had been about to read when the candle went out, Peter felt around till he found Kuma's note. Hurrying over to the Patchwork Girl, he spread it open and quickly read its contents.



"If you ever need a helping hand, send for mine," said the note.

"Write directions on this paper and toss into the air."

"Well, hurrah!" exclaimed Peter, showing the note to Scraps. "Kuma will lend us a hand any time we need it."

"Three cheers! Four laughs!

Five grins—a bow!

Send for it quick, I need it now,"

cried the Patchwork Girl. "In a minute I'll have to cook,

sweep, dust, scrub and make beds. Why, an extra hand will be wonderful. Send for it, Peter. Send for it right way. You're a slave too, remember."

"I was thinking it might unlock the doors and help us escape," mused the little boy, wrinkling up his brows.

"Could you read the markings on the emerald?"

"No," admitted Scraps, handing back the stone, "but keep it safely, Peter. You never know when or where magic will work in this country and we need all the magic we can find to get to the Emerald City before Ruggedo."

"I wonder where he is now?" worried Peter.

"Zamagoochie was the country Kuma's father came from, but I wonder where it is and whether Rug is still there or whether he has reached the Emerald City and turned Ozma to a canary?"

"Stop! Stop!" begged Scraps. "Let's stop worrying and try to think. If we send for Kuma's hand now, when all the Quilties are working in the fields, we will soon be captured, even if we escape from the castle. We'll have to wait till night," sighed the Patchwork Girl, "though how I'm going to stand another day here I don't see!"

"Never mind," said Peter sympathetically, "I'll help."

"I'll help, too!" volunteered Grumpy, rolling over on his side and yawning tremendously. "It won't be as bad as growling all the time and that's how I helped Cross Patch!"

"Sh-hh!" warned Scraps, "Here they come! Look out for the Scissor Bird, Peter, he's dreadfully careless with his bill." Thrusting Kuma's note into his pocket and assuming as defiant an attitude as he well could, Peter waited

for the door to open, which it presently did. In came Scrapper, the Scissor Bird on his shoulder and Piecer staggering under a great pile of coats and other garments that had been sent in to be mended.

"Good morning, Slave!" Scrapper bowed stiffly to Peter and then to Scraps. "Kindly prepare breakfast, at once!"

"Oh scrapple!" scolded the Patchwork Girl.

"Not scrapple, eggs," said Piecer, setting down his pile of garments. "And when you have finished with breakfast, please sort these."



"Why don't you sort them yourself," suggested Peter boldly, but as the Scissor Bird made a dash in his

direction he hastily sprang behind Scraps.

"It's an outrage to expect a Queen to do all the work," began Scraps, settling her spectacles severely. "Ozma never does a stroke of work. Ozma—"

"Ozma?" shrilled the Scissor Bird. "Well, every time you think you're Ozma, look in the glass. Come along, you lazy creature!" Circling over the Patchwork Girl's head and making playful snips at her yarn, the Scissor Bird drove her ahead of him toward the castle kitchen. Peter and Grumpy followed cautiously, conversing in indignant whispers.

Peter had often been camping and, seeing how terribly unhandy Scraps was with the cooking utensils, he

prepared the breakfast himself. Then he set the table and carried the eggs, nicely fried, to the two Quilties, who sat at ease in the shabby dining room. The Scissor Bird ate a saucer of calico scraps and Grumpy a loaf of bread and an apple. After being assured that the Patchwork Girl herself would eat nothing, Peter fried himself an egg and sat down at the kitchen table to enjoy himself. The Scissor Bird was too busy eating to bother them for a moment and, availing himself of this opportunity, Peter began to talk in a low voice to Scraps.

"Why did you wish for a dozen eggs when you first saw Ruggedo?" he asked curiously.

"Because eggs are poison to gnomes," whispered Scraps.

"They are more afraid of eggs than of bombshells and they cannot even stay in the same room with one."

"Hm-m!" mused Peter thoughtfully, "I'll remember that. How is it," he asked presently, "that Grumpy can talk?"

"All the animals in Oz talk," explained Scraps in a matter of fact voice. "Just wait till you hear the Cowardly Lion and the Hungry Tiger!"

"Do they live in the Emerald City?" Peter's eyes grew round with interest. Scraps nodded enthusiastically, then noticing that the Scissor Bird had finished, she sprang up and began to clear away the dishes. But Grumpy kindly offered to wash them, so hurrying back into the sitting room, Scraps and Peter fell to sorting old clothes. In one pile they put coats, in another dresses, in a third, trousers, and in a fourth, all the shirts needing new cuffs or collars. Conversation was

impossible, for the Scissor Bird was never quiet for a moment and soon Peter's head began to ache from its continuous screeching. Once when he dropped an old cloak, it snipped a lock of his hair and when he struck out at it angrily, it nearly nipped a piece off his ear. To Scrapper and Piecer, sitting in the doorway, this proved highly amusing and, glaring at the old Quilties, Peter resolved to send for Kuma's hand at the first opportunity. Grumpy had finished the dishes and, with a gingham apron tied round his waist, was energetically sweeping the floor.

"Don't you care," he whispered comfortingly as he passed Peter. "To-day won't last forever!" It seemed like forever to



Peter and Scraps, but as they came to the bottom of the pile the Patchwork Girl made a startling discovery. Between a faded vest and a quilted dressing gown lay an old grey sack. As Scraps held it up, she saw a note sticking out of the pocket. The Scissor Bird happened at that moment to be swinging on the chandelier so, snatching out the note, Scraps read it quickly herself and then passed it on to Peter.

"The Sandman's Nap Sack. Will put wearer to sleep at once," read Peter. Then, as Scraps put her finger warningly to her lips, he tucked the Nap Sack beneath his coat.

"We'll put 'em all to sleep," whispered Peter out of the corner of his mouth. "We'll send for Kuma's hand and get away from here!" They soon had a chance to try the Nap Sack, for Piecer and Scrapper, having some work to attend to in the garden, went out and locked the door in their usual manner.

Immediately Scraps threw down a pile of coats and stood up defiantly.

"I refuse to work any longer," she shouted, stamping her foot emphatically.

"Hah!" snapped the Scissor Bird, falling off the chandelier and stopping directly in front of Scraps' nose.

"Every time you open your mouth you say something."

"Yes!" answered Scraps saucily, "and every time you say something you open your mouth." As the furious creature rushed at the Patchwork Girl, Peter threw the Nap Sack over his head. No sooner had he done so than its shrill voice grew lower and lower, until, with a tired flop, it fell to the floor and lay snoring like a zazagooch, which is the loudest snoring animal in Oz.

"We won't wait till night. We'll send the note now, Scraps," cried Peter triumphantly.

"What's up? What's up. Don't leave me," begged the little bear, crowding close to Peter. "I'm tired of being cross. I want to go some place where I can be pleasant without losing my position."

"All right! All right!" promised Peter. "But you'll have to help us, Grumpy. Now keep quiet while I write to Kuma." Pulling out the crumpled letter, Peter found a pencil and scribbled on the bottom of the page: "We are

prisoners in the palace of Patch. Please send us your hand to unlock the doors and help us to escape." Signing his name hurriedly, Peter tossed the note into the air. It disappeared almost at once and in high excitement the three sat down to await developments. "I believe we could take that Nap Sack off and use it again," observed Peter after a little silence.

"He might wake up," objected Scraps.

"But we can easily put him to sleep again." Tiptoeing over to the Scissor Bird, he took off the Nap Sack. As he did there was a crash outside and, hurrying to the window, they saw Kuma's right arm and hand smashing its way through the glass in the castle door.

"Hurry! Hurry!" cried Scraps. Tearing the work basket from her head she threw it into a corner and flung the crown jewels of Patch after it. "I abdicate!" chuckled

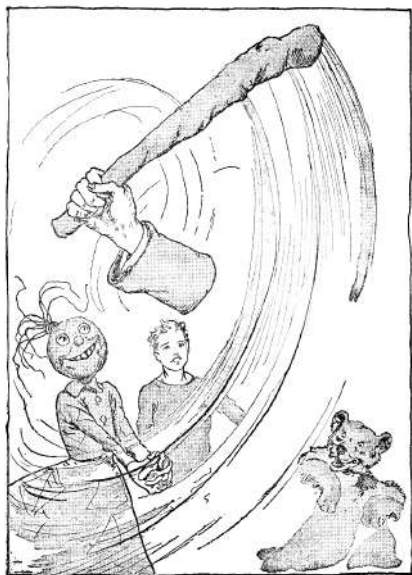
the Patchwork Girl, turning expectantly toward the door.

"Now then," breathed Peter, "let's all stand together and run like sixty."

"If we stand, how can we run?"

mumbled Grumpy, but no one answered the little bear, for at that instant the key turned in the lock, the door opened and in swept the arm of Kuma, a stout club grasped in its hand. Motioning for them to

follow, it whizzed down the hallway. Scrapper, running in from the garden to see what was happening, received a smart blow on the head. Piecer, panting up the steps



from the kitchen, was picked up bodily and dropped out of the window.

Through the castle door, down the steps and out of the garden rushed the three adventurers. As they started down the road, a crowd of Quilty men, on their way to the palace with a fresh load of patches, stared at them in astonishment. Then, suddenly realizing that the Queen was escaping, they rushed after her with yells and shouts of disapproval. But the arm of Kuma laid about with the club, seeming to be everywhere at once, and with groans and screams the Quilties fell back. Only three of the bolder ones continued the chase. Over the most persistent of their pursuers Peter flung the Nap Sack and, as he fell snoring by the roadside, Grumpy sent the second flying into a ditch. Kuma's club soon disposed of the third and without further interruption they pelted down the crossroads of Patch.

Always Kuma's hand flashed on ahead, making the way easy, taking down fence bars, opening gates, thrusting aside the branches of trees. Many of the Quilties saw them from the cottage windows, but before they could get down to their doors the strange procession had passed by. Scraps, being magically made and stuffed with cotton, did not tire, but Grumpy and Peter were soon panting with exhaustion. There was a remedy for even this, however. Throwing down the club, Kuma's arm jerked first one and then the other into the air, carrying them by turns to the very edge of the little Kingdom.

In a small maple grove, several miles from Patch, they stopped to rest. Peter still had hold of Kuma's hand and would have liked to keep it longer, but gently disengaging itself, it patted him kindly on the shoulder, shook hands with Scraps and was gone. This time it left no note and regretfully they watched it soar over the tree tops and disappear from view.

"Well," gasped Peter, leaning back against a tree, "we're out of Patch and where do we go now, Scraps?"

"South by east, and if I'm right, We'll reach the capital to-night!"

answered the Patchwork Girl cheerfully.

"Oh, I hope we do," puffed Peter, taking a long breath.

"Come on, let's start, I'm rested."

"Do you realize that the Kingdom of Patch will go to pieces in four days without you?" grunted the little bear, pattering along beside Scraps.

"Let it!" cried Scraps, recklessly turning a cartwheel.

"I'll not be Queen and work all day, I'm the Patchwork Girl of Oz, hurray!"

