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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Gnome King of Oz: Friend Oztrich Offers To Help (12/20)

They were half way across the sudsy lake before any of the Suds themselves appeared. Then a whole company of them rushed down to the shore. Peter waved his cap cheerfully and, redoubling his efforts with the soap bar, pushed their raft toward the opposite bank.

"I'm afraid we've wasted a lot of time," puffed Peter, as the raft slid in toward the beach.

"Never mind," grinned Scraps, "we've something new to talk about. I'm glad we met the Suds, Peter."

"Humph!" sniffed Grumpy, balancing himself carefully. "I'm glad they met us. Now they'll have something new to talk about, something worth while." Peter chuckled a little at this and, seizing Scraps' hands, helped her to rise, for little waves were rippling aboard and he did not want the Patchwork Girl to fade or shrink. But without any accidents or spills the raft washed up on the beach and they all jumped off.

"Do you think you still know which direction to take?" asked Peter anxiously.



"Which direction to take, which direction to take, I lost my direction out there in the lake! We'll have to start on and just trust to good luck; What kind of a desert is this we have struck?"

Throwing up her arms, Scraps looked around in dismay. "A wilderness!" quavered the little bear, sitting down resignedly on a tree stump. Shading his eyes, Peter stared off in the distance. As far as he could see, there was nothing but a barren stretch of desert, with here and there a tree or jagged rock.

"Let's start toward that tall pine," suggested Peter, pulling his cap down hard over his left eye and waving

toward a pine tree just visible on the sky line. "If we keep walking we're bound to come out somewhere, but I'm afraid we'll never catch up with Ruggedo now."

"Maybe he's lost, too," said Grumpy, ambling along beside Scraps on all fours.



"Yes, but he has a magic cloak to help him," sighed Peter, "and all we have is an emerald we

don't know how to work."

"Which tree are we walking toward?" asked Scraps, blinking her suspender button eyes rapidly. "I don't see any pine tree now, Peter."

"Neither do I," growled Grumpy, rising up on his hind legs, and neither did Peter when he looked again. As he strained his eyes for a glimpse of the missing tree, all the stumps and stones around them began to change places as naturally as if it were quite the usual thing to do, while the sand beneath their feet began to slip and slide uncomfortably.

"Wouldn't this make your hair curl?" Breathing hard, Grumpy edged close to Scraps. As he did, a whole cluster of bushes jumped up and, seizing branches, danced madly about the three travellers.

"Here we go 'round the mulberry bush—mulberry bush—mulberry bush!" chanted Scraps, putting her hands up to her eyes.

"You mean, here they go 'round us!" mumbled Peter dizzily. "Stop! Stop! Go away, I never saw anything so silly."

The bushes, however, went gaily on with their dance, but when they had circled around the travellers at least a hundred times, they seemed to tire of the sport and all of them skipped off together.

"This makes me cross," growled Grumpy, scowling terribly.

"Well, it makes me cross-eyed," acknowledged Scraps, starting forward uncertainly. "Look out for that tree, Peter, it's going to trip you if it can. I'll tell you, let's shut our eyes and run!" Trying to walk straight ahead with trees, rocks and bushes jumping about like colts was certainly a problem and, closing their eyes, they did begin to run. But a young tree, dropping across their

path, soon put a stop to that and they all fell sprawling together. Rubbing his knees, Peter sat up.

“Wish we had Kuma’s hand to guide us through this place,” muttered the little boy, brushing his hand wearily across his forehead.

“What we need is blinkers,” sniffed Grumpy. “Hello, I see something that hasn’t moved for a whole minute.”

“Where?” Peter and Scraps spoke in the same breath.

Swallowing hard, Grumpy waved his paw toward a great feathery bush, with three main branches. Without a word they kept their eyes fixed upon it for several minutes. Then Peter, jumping up determinedly and giving no heed to the skipping stones and slipping sands, ran straight for the bush. As fast as they could, Grumpy and the Patchwork Girl followed him. It was quite a distance and Scraps was tripped up several times on the way, but at last they stood before the only stationary object in that whole whirling wilderness.

“Feathers!” gasped Peter, pushing back his cap.

“And it’s alive,” cautioned Grumpy, moving back a few steps. “See, it has feet.”

“It looks like—it may be—why, it is!” Rushing forward, Scraps tapped the strange creature smartly on the leg. Peter had supposed it had three legs and no head, but at the Patchwork Girl’s tap, a head burst through the sandy soil and, rearing its long neck, an Oztrich looked at them inquiringly. Now an Oztrich, I don’t mind telling you, is quite like an ostrich, except that it has green feathers and blue eyes.

"Well?" hissed the oztrich, looking sadly from one to the other. "Where do you think you're going?"

"That's what we want to know," cried Scraps, for Peter was too surprised to speak. "Where are we going, how do we get there and what is your name?"

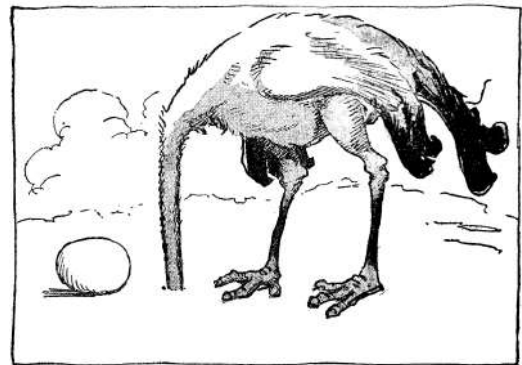
"My name is Ozwold," answered the great bird gently.

"How do you feel?"

"Dizzy!" groaned Grumpy weakly.

"Bewildered," sighed Scraps, jumping aside to let three rocks roll by.

"I thought so." The Oztrich shook its head in a satisfied manner. "This is a Bewilderness, you know. Bury your heads like I do," he advised calmly.



"But we want to go to the Emerald City," put in Peter, "and if we bury our heads we'd smother. Couldn't you carry us to the Emerald City on your back?" he asked daringly.

"Oh, Ozzy, if you only would!" Claspng her hands, Scraps rolled her suspender button eyes pleadingly at the huge bird.

"Who'd take care of my child?" objected the Oztrich, blinking its eyes very fast and indicating with its bill an enormous egg lying beside it in the sand.

"Haven't you a wife?" asked Peter in surprise.

"She's gone home to visit her mother," explained the Oztrich in an embarrassed tone. "I must stay here till the egg hatches."

"Couldn't we take it with us?" proposed Peter eagerly. "Think how proud you'd be to have your child hatch out in the capital!"

"Ozma would give it a hatchday present, too," added Scraps coaxingly.

"If you stay here, a rock will probably rush by and break it to pieces. It's a wonder to me it hasn't been broken long ago," sniffed Grumpy, leaning over to touch the egg with his paw.

"Great moguls! I never thought of that!" Shifting from one foot to the other, the oztrich looked nervously down at his child. "If you carry my egg I will go away from here," he murmured in a troubled voice. "Might as well go to the Emerald City. I've always wanted to see the Capital. Just wait though, till I get my bearings!" Burying his head in the sand again, the oztrich stood perfectly motionless for nearly ten minutes. Fidgeting with impatience and dodging trees and rocks as best they could, Peter and his companions waited anxiously for the head to re-appear. It came up so suddenly, when it did come, that Grumpy fell over backward.

"Don't speak," warned Ozwold in a tense voice. "Don't speak or I'm lost. Climb up and we'll start at once!"

Scraps, taking a running jump, landed safely on the oztrich's back. Then Peter carefully handed up the egg and, boosted by the little bear, took his place behind Scraps. Grumpy himself climbed aloft with no difficulty and before they were fairly settled the oztrich began pounding across the Bewilderness. It missed all the trees and rocks very cleverly and, as it travelled nearly

a mile a minute, conversation was out of the question. Scraps, for greater security, wound her long arms about its neck, Peter had his arms round Scrap's waist, the egg balanced carefully in his lap and Grumpy, blinking and gasping, bounced up and down behind Peter.

"I hope it knows where it's going," thought Peter, as the wind whistled through his hair and the desert sand stung his cheeks and eyelids. For almost a half hour the oztrich rushed along like an express, then changing its gait began to travel more slowly. They had come to the end of the Bewilderness by now and Peter was relieved to see again the yellow farms and fields of the Winkies. "I've thought of something!" exclaimed Peter, leaning forward to whisper in the Patchwork Girl's ear. "If Ruggedo is afraid of hen's eggs wouldn't an oztrich egg frighten him much more?"

"Hurrah! hurray, well I should say!" Squirming round, Scraps looked delightedly at the huge egg in Peter's lap. "As soon as you see Ruggedo, throw it at his head," advised Scraps, in an excited whisper.

"But I promised to keep it safe for the oztrich," objected Peter uneasily, "and I can't break my promise, can I?"

"You'd be breaking the egg, not your promise," said Scraps earnestly. "Besides, Ozma's more important than an oztrich egg."

"I'll threaten to throw it," decided Peter. "Anyway, we'll wait till we come to the Emerald City. Hello, what's this?" Looming up ahead was a high yellow wall. With a snort of displeasure, the oztrich came to a halt.

"Do you see any gate?" he wheezed, curling his long neck around at Peter.



"I see something over there to the right," answered the little boy, "but are you sure this is a safe place to go through?" "No," admitted the Oztrich hoarsely, "but unless we go through, how are we to go on to the

Emerald City?" "I'll open the gate," volunteered Scrops, slipping easily to the ground. Running over to the right, Scrops soon found the hollowed out space Peter had noticed, but instead of a gate, an upright piano was wedged into the opening. Scrops tried to see over the top, but it was too tall. Then she tried to shove it aside, but it was too heavy. So shrugging her shoulders and tossing back her yarn, Scrops sat down at the piano and started to play the Grand March of Oz, which she had been practicing faithfully on Dorothy's piano back at the palace. At the first chord, the piano, as if moved on an invisible hinge, fell backwards and Scrops, taken entirely by surprise, jumped over the top. The oztrich was not slow to follow and he had barely jumped over the fallen piano before it snapped back into its upright position, shutting them into the queerest city Peter had yet seen.

