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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Gnome King of Oz: Kaliko Falls As King of Gnomes (7/20)

Every wash and slap of the waves sent the battered old hull of the Blunderoo nearer to shore and, at last, with a tired groan, it stuck its nose into the sand and, listing over sideways, came to a creaky stop.

"Have you the cloak?" asked Peter, one leg already over the rail. Ruggedo held up the small gray package, but looked doubtfully at the foaming waves below.

"How are we going to get to the beach?" he frowned uneasily.

"Lived here all your life and can't swim?"

exclaimed Peter. "Great goldfish! Come on, I'll help you," he added impatiently, as the gnome continued to stare uncertainly down at the water. Hurrying down the ladder, Peter dropped easily into the sea, and after a good bit of coaxing, Ruggedo slipped in after him. Taking a firm hold on the gnome's long whiskers and with Ruggedo sputtering and sizzling like a hot coal in a dish pan, Peter struck out for shore. It was soon shallow enough for them to wade and in exactly three minutes from the time the Blunderoo grounded, they stood on the barren shores of Ev.



Forgetting his discomfort, for gnomes like water about as much as cats, the metal monarch began to run as fast as his crooked legs would carry him toward a group of little hills. Looking round without much enthusiasm at the dreary waste of sand and cactus, Peter followed more slowly. His only plan was to keep a sharp watch over Ruggedo and, as soon as the cloak was repaired, to take it away from him and fly to the Emerald City.

"I do hope Ozma can transport the treasure to Philadelphia with me," sighed Peter, quickening his steps as Ruggedo disappeared behind a particularly large rock. He half expected the gnome would try to slip away from him but, to tell the truth, Ruggedo was more kindly disposed toward Peter than toward any mortal he had ever met. He admired Peter's courage and felt that his good fortune was largely due to the boy's enterprise and spirit. Besides, Ruggedo wished to show off his immense dominions and treasure caves, so, as Peter rounded the rock, he took his hand and pressed a hidden spring in the crevice. Instantly a huge door swung inward and they found themselves in a long, dim tunnel.

"I wonder if Kaliko still thinks he is King!" wheezed Ruggedo, pattering along ahead of Peter. Kaliko had been appointed to rule in Ruggedo's place and had been promoted from Royal Chamberlain to King of the Gnomes. "Ha! Ha!" laughed Ruggedo maliciously. "He'll be as pleased as a Gundersnutch when he sees me back!"

Peter answered nothing to this, for he was too interested in the underground world in which he found himself to pay much attention to the old gnome's remarks. As they proceeded, a perfect network of passageways opened from the main tunnel, the sides, walls and ceilings gleaming with sparkling jewels. Thousands of gnomes with pick axes were busily at work digging out the gems and they did not even look up as Peter and Ruggedo passed them. Blazing rubies and emeralds set in tall stands lighted up the strange caverns and Peter's heart began to pound with excitement as the passageway broadened out into a richly carpeted hallway. Presently they found themselves before a grilled golden door with a diamond knob. Without pausing, Ruggedo turned the knob, opened the door and simply rushed into his former throne room. On a huge round ruby, hollowed out to form a seat, a thin, nervous gnome sat reading a silver sheet about as thick as our morning papers. It was the Gnome Man's Daily, and as Peter and Ruggedo burst noisily into the royal chamber, he dropped the silver sheet and looked up with an exclamation of alarm. "You!" gasped Kaliko, as if he could not believe his own senses.

"Who else?" snickered Ruggedo, winking at Peter. "I'll thank you for my crown, you robber. Take it right off your Kalikoko. Quick now! Hand it over!"

"Ozma will never consent to this," stammered Kaliko, holding to the crown with both hands.

"Ozma has nothing to do with me now," announced Ruggedo calmly. "I have magic stronger than Ozma's and if you don't hop off that throne, I'll turn you to a ball and bounce you off!"

Peter listened in amazement to Ruggedo's boasts, but Kaliko seemed to believe every word. With quaking

knees, he descended the steps of the throne and held out the crown to his former master.



"Ha! Ha!" roared Ruggedo, snatching the crown and clapping it jauntily on the back of his head. "You're enough to make an alligator laugh, Kaliko. So brave! So kingly! But don't stand there gibbering like a dunce. If you are no longer King, you are still Royal Chamberlain,

and this is Peter, future general of my armies!" Tripping merrily up the steps of the throne, Ruggedo waved toward the little boy. "We will shortly make a journey to the Emerald City," he announced grandly, "but right now we desire refreshment. Lunch for two," he commanded, putting his finger tips together and leaning back comfortably. "And, by the way," he added as an afterthought, "there is a pirate ship on the beach. Have it unloaded and the treasure stored in the silver grotto. Then order me a dozen new suits and send in the Royal Wizard."

At each command, Kaliko bowed meekly, and as Ruggedo picked up the ruby scepter lying on the arm of the throne, he ducked and ran out the door, for Ruggedo, as a mere matter of habit, had flung the scepter after him.

"A blockhead!" sniffed Ruggedo contemptuously, "but didn't I manage him well?"

"He's not very brave," admitted Peter, sitting on the edge of the crystal rocking chair, "but how are you going to get along without any magic? Suppose the gnomes don't want you back again?"

"One thing at a time! One thing at a time!" beamed Ruggedo, in such a fine humor at his unexpected turn of luck, he felt almost pleasant. "Let's not worry till we have to, General." Peter couldn't help smiling at his new title and, surveying himself in the long mirror, wondered how he would look in a gnome uniform. But at this juncture they were interrupted by the entrance of the Royal Wizard. He looked frightened and anxious, and Peter could see from his manner that the old Gnome King was no great favorite with his former subjects.

"Well, Potaroo!" grinned Ruggedo, taking up the pipe Kaliko had been smoking, "what have you been inventing in my absence?"

"Flying dishes," croaked the magician, looking curiously at Peter. "They do away with extra servants, fly backward and forward with the food and wash and dry themselves as well."

"Very good!" puffed Ruggedo, complacently. "Well, here's another little job for you." Drawing out the cloak, he

handed it down to the wizened old gnome. "Just mend this," ordered Ruggedo carelessly, "and have it back by three o'clock." Spreading the cloak across his knees, Potaroo examined it carefully all over. Then backing away from the throne he shook his head.



"That, your Majesty, is impossible," he muttered uneasily. "This cloak cannot be mended by gnome magic."

"No magic at all?" gasped Peter, disappointed beyond words, while Ruggedo glared angrily.

"I command you to mend it!" screamed the hot-tempered little King, looking angrily around for something to throw at the wizard.

"That makes no difference," quavered Potaroo, backing still farther. "This cloak cannot be mended properly anywhere but in the Kingdom of Patch."

"And where is Patch?" demanded Ruggedo, emitting a perfect cloud of pipe smoke.

"In the Winkie Country of Oz, just below the Kingdom of Ann of Oogaboo," exclaimed Potaroo, looking longingly over his shoulder at the door.

"Very well," snapped Ruggedo disagreeably, "you may go, but next time your magic fails to work you'll be turned to a door mat. A door mat, do you understand? Hah! Hah! A door mat to stand under my feet. See!" Ruggedo

laughed wickedly, and the poor wizard, mumbling his sorrow, rushed from the throne room.

"Rubyation!" blustered Ruggedo, as the door closed on Potaroo. "Now we'll have to go to Patch."

"Well, isn't that on the way to the Emerald City?" inquired Peter, very much amused by all that had happened.

"Yes," acknowledged Ruggedo, "I suppose it is, but here comes lunch! Ah! I'm hungry enough to eat a billy goat stuffed with soldier buttons!"

Preceded by two gnomes carrying a huge golden tray, Kaliko came stepping timidly into the room. Ruggedo had the usual gnome fare of ground rocks, pebble pie and muddy coffee; but for Peter, Kaliko had brought a small steak, fried potatoes and ice cream. After the hard sea biscuit, this tasted perfectly delicious, and Peter, not knowing what strange adventures lay ahead, ate every scrap. Ruggedo, too, enjoyed his luncheon and amused himself by throwing the dishes at Kaliko as he finished with them. Peter wondered why the flying dishes were not in use, but feeling sorry for the old wizard decided not to ask.

"You may now pack us up a lunch," announced Ruggedo, as he swallowed the last of his coffee. "We're starting for the Emerald City almost at once."

"How are you going to cross the desert?" inquired Kaliko. Angry as he was at the old Gnome King, he could not help feeling curious about his plans.

"Magic! Old Cauliflower! Magic! How do you suppose I got off the island?" wheezed Ruggedo haughtily. "Don't

stand there stuttering. Fetch me a new suit and hurry along with the lunch."

Shrugging his thin shoulders, and turning up his eyes, Kaliko did as he was told, and in less than an hour Peter and the Gnome King were wending their way



over the rocky hills of Ev.

Ruggedo had the magic cloak tucked carefully under his arm and Peter carried a small basket of provisions.

"How are we going to cross this desert?" asked Peter, looking with interest down

toward the beach where the gnomes were busily at work unloading the treasure from the Blunderoo.

"I don't know," confessed Ruggedo quite frankly, "but if Kaliko had discovered I had not magic enough to cross the desert, he would have roused the gnomes and kicked us out of the kingdom."

"Is there no other way to Oz?" sighed Peter. He was growing a little anxious about ever reaching Philadelphia in time for the baseball game.

"Nope!" puffed the Gnome King, trudging along sturdily.

"The Deadly Desert surrounds the whole country. It's supposed to keep people out of Oz," he finished with a malicious wink. "But it has been crossed before and can be crossed again, though I'm sure I don't know how."

The entrance of the Gnome King's caverns was quite near the edge of the Deadly Desert, so it was not long

before they reached this dangerous expanse of burning sand and sat down on a boulder to try and devise some means of crossing over.

"Can't you think of anything?" snapped Ruggedo, as Peter sat kicking his heels against the boulder. "If this silly old cloak weren't torn, I'd skim across in no time. A skudge on those pesky pirates anyway! Sa—ay?"

Opening his eyes very wide, Ruggedo thrust his face close to Peter's. "What else was in that casket?"

"Only a couple of onions and an emerald," answered Peter listlessly.

"Let's see 'em!" Bounding off the boulder, the Gnome King held out his hand. Peter produced the strangely marked stone first.

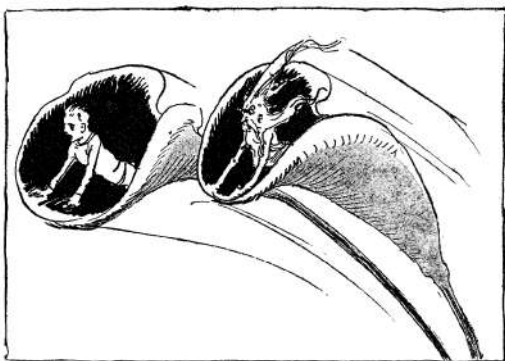
"Command it to carry us across the desert," advised the Gnome King, after trying unsuccessfully to decipher the markings on the sorcerer's stone. So Peter closed his eyes and commanded the emerald to carry them across the desert. They waited for several minutes, then, when nothing happened, Peter opened the ivory box and showed Ruggedo the two magic bulbs.

"In case of extreme danger, plant these." Ruggedo read these directions with a puzzled frown, then snapping his fingers began to skip with excitement. "Why don't you plant 'em?" he squealed impatiently. "Plant 'em, General! Plant 'em!"



"But we're not in extreme danger," objected Peter reasonably enough.

"We're not!" yelled Ruggedo, tugging at his beard. "Why, boy, you don't know what extreme danger is. We have to cross that desert, don't we? Well, just put one foot on that sand and you'll go up like a puff of smoke. Don't you call that extreme danger?" Peter argued a while longer, then, as Ruggedo insisted and there really seemed nothing else to do, he scooped out two holes in the ground at his feet, dropped in the magic roots and covered them with mud and sand. Stepping back a few paces, they waited eagerly for what would happen. First came a sharp explosion. Then two great green plants burst through the surface of the earth. They were about three times the size of Peter and, as he watched, the outer leaves opened downward, disclosing round plush seats within. Peter looked questioningly over at Ruggedo, but the gnome, being more experienced than Peter in magic, had jumped into one



plant and seated himself on the plush cushion. A little doubtfully, Peter jumped into the other.

"Just like an elevator," thought Peter, as the bulb grew rapidly upward, shooting higher and higher on its long, pliant stem. "But I don't see what good growing up will do," he muttered, peering giddily

out between the green leaves. Whether he saw or not, the stem of the bulb continued to grow. Clouds flew by with dazzling swiftness. Peter was all prepared to bump his head on the ceiling of the sky when the long stem began to arch downward. Suppose it broke and dropped him on the burning sands of the deadly desert! With a violent shudder, Peter closed his eyes, and as he did, the stem with a final spurt turned the strange elevator in which Peter was riding completely upside down, and out fell the little boy, heels over eyebrows.

Ruggedo had been served in the same manner but, none the worse for their tumble, they picked themselves up and began looking around.

They had fallen in a sunny peach orchard. In the distance they could see the shimmering sand of the dangerous desert, while not far away stood a small, yellow, dome-shaped cottage.

"We'll go there," declared Ruggedo, tucking the magic cloak more carefully under his arm. "We'll go there, General, and inquire the way to the Kingdom of Patch. But remember to say nothing of the plans to capture my belt. We're in the enemy's country now!"

Still dazed from the surprising way in which they had crossed the desert, Peter looked around him with delight. It did not look like the enemy's country to Peter



and, picking up a large, luscious peach, he decided then and there that he was going to like the Marvelous Land of Oz.

Peter thought that even the Wizard of Oz, himself, would be interested in the wonderful elevator plants, and decided to tell him all about them when he got to the Emerald City.

