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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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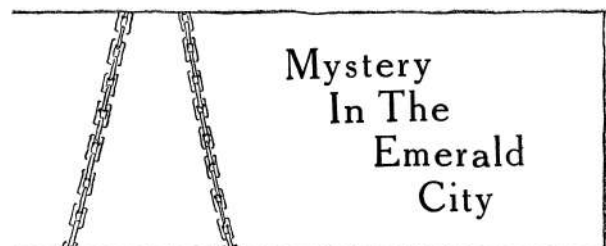
The Gnome King of Oz: Mystery In The Emerald City (17/20)

"Of course," said Dorothy, leaning down to tie her gold slipper, "of course, Ozma has only been gone since yesterday, but even so, I think it would be fun to have a party to welcome her home."

"So do I! I love parties!" Clapping his knee with his clumsy, stuffed hand, the Scarecrow smiled down at the little girl. He had just walked over from his corn-ear residence and they were sitting cozily in a big swing on the front porch of the palace.

"Where did Ozma go?" asked the Scarecrow, taking off his hat and smoothing back the few wisps of straw that served him for hair.

"Just to spend the night with Glinda," said Dorothy, picking up a book of party games and beginning to flip over the pages. "Ozma has her magic belt with her and is going to wish herself back at three o'clock. Why, what are you laughing at?" Putting down the book, Dorothy stared reproachfully at her companion.



"I'm not laughing," said the Scarecrow solemnly, "but why pinch me that way? Of course, I have no feeling, but it's not very polite."

"I didn't pinch you at all," exclaimed Dorothy, sitting up very straight. The Scarecrow eyed the deep dent in his stuffed arm, looked suspiciously all round and then, seeing no one but Dorothy, moved quickly to the opposite end of the swing.

"What's the matter?" rumbled a deep voice and, coming out from behind a gold pillar, the Cowardly Lion paused before the royal swing. The Cowardly Lion had come to the Emerald City with Dorothy on her very first adventure and is the biggest pet in the palace. He was a bit out of breath, for he had just been running a race with his friend the Hungry Tiger. "What's the matter?" he panted anxiously, for Dorothy was frowning crossly and the Scarecrow, in spite of his painted smile, looked extremely sulky.

"While I was telling him about Ozma's party, he laughed at me," pouted the little girl, moving as far as she could from the straw man.

"But she pinched me," explained the Scarecrow in an injured voice, "for no reason whatever!" It was so unusual for these two—or for anyone in the Emerald City—to quarrel, that the Cowardly Lion could scarcely believe his lion ears and, when Dorothy began to protest angrily that she had not pinched the Scarecrow, he held up his paw pleadingly.

"Oh, let's talk about the party," begged the lion in a shocked roar. "What were you planning, my dear?"

"Well," said Dorothy, flashing an angry glance at the Scarecrow, "first I was going to have a speech of welcome, then games and dancing and, after that, Ozcream and—"

"Ouch!" coughed the lion, interrupting Dorothy with an angry growl. "Who pulled my tail?" Rolling his eyes from one to the other he rose to his feet, trembling in every knee. "I've known you nearly all my life," roared the Cowardly Lion, shaking his mane furiously, "but no one can pull my tail. Not even you, Dorothy."

"Oh dear! Oh dear! I think you're both perfectly horrid!" Throwing down her book, Dorothy jumped out of the swing, and dashed around the side porch, where she bumped violently into Sir Hokus, who was taking his morning turn on the veranda.

"Odds daggers!" ejaculated the Knight, straightening his shield and buckler. "What's wrong, maiden?"

"Everything!" wailed Dorothy, throwing her arms round his neck. "Just because I'm trying to plan a party everybody is fighting with me."

"Fighting?" puffed Sir Hokus, brightening up at the mere sound of the word, for he did dearly love a battle.

"Well, I'm on your side. Who dares to fight with Princess Dot?" thundered the Knight in his deep voice and, seizing her hand, stepped quickly around the corner of the porch. But when he saw the Cowardly Lion and the Scarecrow simply glaring at one another, he paused in dismay. They were his oldest friends and never, since his arrival in the Emerald City, had he had a disagreement with either of them. Feeling that there

must be some mistake, he strode hastily between the two celebrities and held up his hand. As he did, he received a staggering blow on the head that pushed his helmet well down over his ears.

"Odds dragons and flagons!" blustered the Knight, sputtering like a red hot coal. "Have at you, villains! Varlets! Rascals and rogues!" Drawing his sword, he began slashing in every direction, but as his helmet was over his eyes, he fortunately did no harm.



Crouching behind the swing, Ruggedo, in his invisible cloak, rocked to and fro with silent merriment, holding his sides and shaking all over with malicious glee. Arriving at the

palace early that morning, the Gnome King had immediately ordered the cloak to carry him to the royal apartment. But Ozma, to his great disgust and disappointment, was not there. Neither was his belt, nor any of the little Queen's magic appliances, for she had taken them all with her to Glinda's castle. Until he had the belt, Ruggedo was perfectly powerless and, after his first disappointment had worn off, he determined to wait for Ozma's return, seize the belt as soon as she appeared and at once destroy the Emerald City and all of its inhabitants.

While he waited, Ruggedo had run here and there about the palace, amusing himself in his own spiteful

fashion. Now that he had learned from Dorothy the exact time of Ozma's return, he fluttered off to the kitchen to steal some breakfast and plague the cook. Meanwhile Sir Hokus had tripped over a flower pot and fallen flat, while the Cowardly Lion and the Scarecrow had retreated behind two porch pillars. Dorothy, terribly alarmed at the serious turn the quarrel had taken, rushed hurriedly forward. Now that Ruggedo had gone, the whole thing seemed silly and ridiculous.

"Let's make up," begged Dorothy, helping Sir Hokus to his feet. "I'm sure it's all a mistake."

"Well, it was a great mistake to pull my tail," rumbled the Cowardly Lion, coming out very slowly and majestically, "but I'll overlook it this once." He blinked suspiciously at the Scarecrow, but the Scarecrow was helping Sir Hokus with his helmet and did not even notice.

"Who thumpst me again—" panted the Knight, pointing his fore finger furiously downward—"who thumpst me again—d—dies!"

"But nobody will!" Dorothy hastened to assure him. She looked pleadingly at the Scarecrow, who she felt must be responsible. "Let's forget all about it and think about the party," she proposed brightly. "Now, who'll make the speech of welcome?"

"Let Scraps do it," muttered the Cowardly Lion, licking his paws sulkily. "She's clever at speeches and makes short ones, too. I'll go find her," he offered in a little more cheerful voice. "Haven't seen her since yesterday, but I s'pose she's around somewhere."

"All right," smiled Dorothy, as the Cowardly Lion thudded across the porch. "Now, who'll help me decorate the banquet hall?" Sir Hokus had taken off his helmet and was rubbing his head wrathfully. At Dorothy's words he glanced across at the Scarecrow, but the straw man's painted eyes met his so frankly and innocently that he impulsively put out his hand. Certainly the Scarecrow's flimsy arm could never have dealt him such a blow.

"We'll help you," said the Knight, taking the Scarecrow's arm. "Twas that villain lion who thumped me," he whispered as they started for the banquet hall.

"Here come Betsy and Trot," cried Dorothy, forgetting all about the quarrel. "Maybe they will pick some flowers for the table!"

Betsy and Trot, as many of you already know, are two little mortals like Dorothy, who have been invited by Ozma to live in the royal palace. Both reached Oz after ship-wrecks and many trying adventures and they found life in the capital so exciting and gay that they have never wished to return to the United States. They were delighted at the prospect of a party, and so was the Hungry Tiger, who had come up just behind them. Putting a huge flower basket on his back, the two little girls ran gaily down the palace steps.

"I'll have a strawberry sandwich," purred the tiger, looking over his shoulder at Dorothy. "Be sure to have strawberry sandwiches!"

"I never heard of a strawberry sandwich," laughed the little girl, shaking her head dubiously.

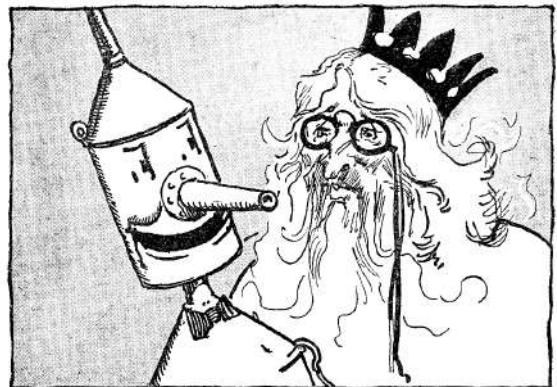
“Well, there always has to be a first,” chuckled the tiger, trotting after Betsy.

Dorothy, looking a little puzzled, waved after him and, well pleased with her plans, ran into the castle to ask the Wizard of Oz to think up some new tricks to entertain the guests, and to confer with the cook about refreshments. Soon the palace began to hum with activity. The banquet hall, under the skillful hands of the Scarecrow and Sir Hokus took on a truly festive air. Messengers and pages ran hither and thither with invitations, while the Royal band, tuning up on the castle lawn, added its strains to the general gaiety. Indeed, from the preparations for her return, one would have thought Ozma had been gone a year instead of a day, and Ruggedo, fluttering here and there in his invisible robe, chuckled with amusement and malice.

“Work away,” muttered the Gnome King darkly. “At three o’clock I shall send you all to the bottom of the Nonestic Ocean, transport my gnomes here and enjoy this party my own self.” At first, Ruggedo had continued his pinching and punching and hair pullings but, at last, fearing detection, he had stopped his mischievous teasing and seated himself calmly in Ozma’s chair at the head of the banquet table. In this position it would be a simple matter to unclasp his magic belt as soon as the little fairy made ready to take her place. The patch, which was the only visible thing about Ruggedo, was now on the seat of the chair, so did not show and, quite unconscious of their dreadful peril, Dorothy and her

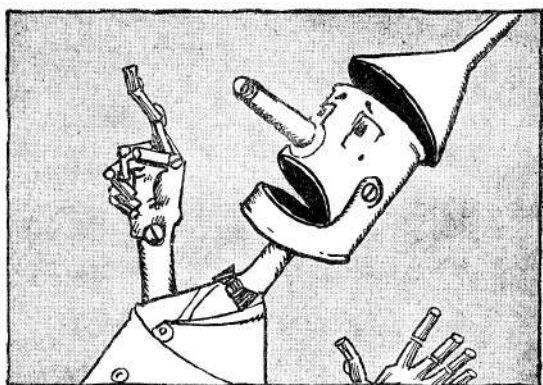
friends went on with their preparations for the party, while Ruggedo, fidgeting with impatience, kept his eyes fastened upon the emerald clock.

Twenty minutes of three! Twenty minutes, and then—! The little gnome fairly hugged himself with wicked anticipation. Ten minutes of three and now everything was in readiness. Dorothy and Betsy, giggling together, were putting the finishing touches to the table. The Scarecrow and Sir Hokus, between them, were composing a speech of welcome, for, of course, the Cowardly Lion had not been able to find the Patchwork Girl. Ranged about the walls in pleasant anticipation stood the courtiers and dear old celebrities of Oz. Nick Chopper, the Tin Woodman, summoned from his palace by the Wizard's magic, stood conversing in a low tone with Pastoria, Ozma's Royal Father, about his crop of tin cans, which were larger this year than ever before. The little Wizard of Oz, himself, was whispering to Tik Tok, the machine man, some of the tricks he was planning for the company's amusement and the metal man was chuckling with mechanical mirth. Hank, Betsy's mule, Toto, Dorothy's little dog, the Saw Horse, Ozma's Royal Steed, and all of the other palace pets were sitting expectantly at their own special table.



"Now then!" exclaimed the Scarecrow, having finished the speech of welcome to his own and the Knight's satisfaction, "as soon as I have finished this address, I shall extend a hand of welcome to our little ruler, lead her triumphantly to the head of the table and—"

"Look!" rasped the Tin Woodman, who stood nearest the door. "Look! Look up! Look out!" Following the direction of Nick Chopper's tin finger everyone did look and, next



minute, in fright and bewilderment, huddled together for protection, for over their heads flashed the hand of Kuma Party.

"The welcoming hand!" gasped the Scarecrow, clutching Sir Hokus. "But

whose? Everybody count his hands," mumbled the Scarecrow, looking anxiously at his own.

"The hand that smote me," roared the Knight, making a lunge at the hand with his sword. Everyone else ducked, dodged and shuddered as the arm sailed hither and thither over their heads.

"It's a trick of the Wizard's," faltered Dorothy, looking hopefully at the little man. But



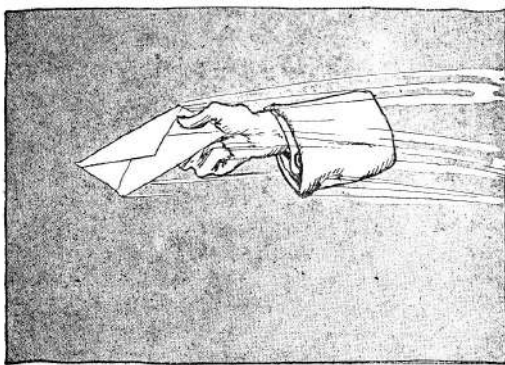
the Wizard, peering palely from behind a huge green chair, shook his head positively.

"I had no hand in this," muttered the Wizard, mopping his bald head with his best hanky. Now, Kuma's hand could unfortunately carry out only the instructions given it by its owner. The note of warning for Ozma was tightly clasped in its fingers, but as Ozma was not present, it presumed she was to be found in another part of the palace and immediately flashed up the golden stairway in search of her and the invisible gnome. But Ruggedo was now more invisible than ever, having crawled under the table at the first sight of the flying arm. As the arm disappeared, everyone heaved a high of relief.

"Come! Come!" wheezed the Wizard, stepping out nervously from behind the green chair, "we must not let a little thing like this spoil the party."

"Why, it's three o'clock now!"

"And here's Ozma!" cried Dorothy. And there, indeed, was Ozma, standing with a quiet smile in the doorway. At once the Scarecrow burst into his speech:



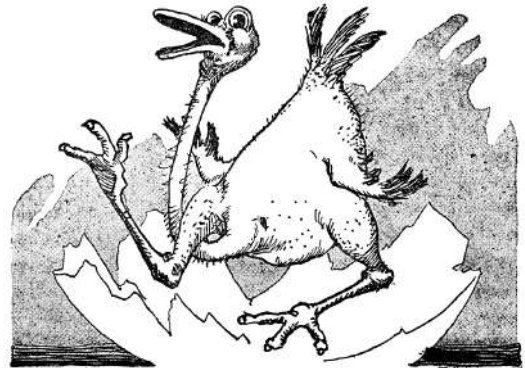
"Welcome Ozma, beauteous Queen
Sovereign of this City Green,
Illustrious ruler—"

Thump! Ban—g! CRASH! With hand still upraised, the Scarecrow swung to the long

French windows. So did everyone for that matter.

"A menagerie!" shrieked Nick Chopper, falling back against the wall.

"Why, it's Scraps!" burst out the Scarecrow, as the oztrich, with his three dusty riders, plunged giddily into the room.



"Beware!" roared the oztrich in a terrible voice, and when an oztrich roars it is four times louder than a lion.

"Beware!"

Knocking over Tik Tok and three footmen, bearing trays of lemonade, the great green bird rushed impetuously

toward the queen. "Beware!" it roared again so lustily that Ozma's curls blew straight out behind.



"Beware," coughed the Scarecrow irritably.

"Well, I ought to be where you are. Out of my place, you rude monster."

"Beware the Gnome King!" finished the oztrich, bowing his head so low and so suddenly that the Patchwork Girl fell off one side and Peter and Grumpy off the other.

