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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Gnome King of Oz: Ozwold And His Friends Rush On (14/20)

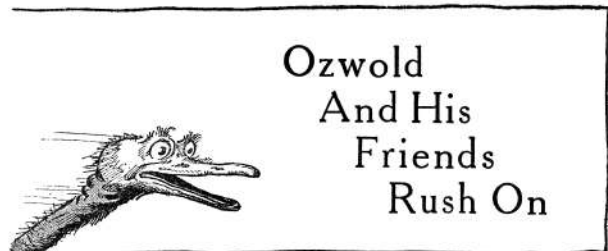
"That was a fine place for you, Scraps," chuckled Peter as the oztrich thudded good humoredly along the sunny road. "You'd rather sing than talk anyway. But singing and dancing all your life, whew! How would you play base ball to music, I wonder. Imagine singing out signals and trying to make a home run to a waltz."

"The dinners were the saddest," sighed Grumpy, licking his chops hungrily. "Do you see any biscuit bushes or carrot trees around here?"

"There's some kind of a tree in that field,"

answered Peter, "but the fruit is up so high we couldn't reach it, anyway."

"I could," grunted the little bear eagerly. "Let's stop and try." The oztrich had spied some especially appetizing rocks by the roadside and was quite willing to stop. So Peter placed his egg child beside him and, while they ran off to investigate the fruit tree, Ozwold lunched quite contentedly on a couple of cobblestones. The tree was about as tall as a cocoanut palm and clustered at the top were large green fruits about the size of watermelons.



Requiring no luncheon, Scraps danced off to amuse herself and, as Peter and Grumpy blinked hungrily upward, two of the melons detached themselves from the branch of the tree and came sailing gracefully downward.

"Why, they've umbrellas over them," gasped Peter.

"Of course," said the little bear calmly. "Have you never seen an umbrella melon?" Peter never had and said so quite frankly.



"Well," explained Grumpy, placing himself in a position to catch the larger of the two. "If they didn't have these umbrella attachments they'd smash to

pieces when they fell. As it is, when the fruit is ripe the umbrella leaves open and float them safely down. Ah-hh!" Holding out both arms, Grumpy neatly caught his melon and, hugging it blissfully, sat down to enjoy his first meal since leaving Patch. Peter had to chase his luncheon all around the field, for the breeze was brisk and the umbrella attachment larger than the melon itself. But finally he did manage to overtake it and bringing the melon back, settled down beside Grumpy. Cutting off the umbrella leaves with his pen knife, Peter split the melon in two. It was something like a cantaloupe, only much larger and much sweeter and to the tired, hungry, dusty little traveller, it tasted perfectly delicious. But, hungry as he was, half the melon was all he could eat and he looked in admiring

astonishment as Grumpy burrowed his nose deeper and deeper into his. The entire center was gone and he was nibbling at the rind when Scraps came hurrying back across the field.

"Are you boys going to eat all day?
Glad I don't waste my time that way!"

"You don't know what you miss, Miss." Licking his nose, Grumpy grinned up at the Patchwork Girl, but Scraps, sticking out her tongue, merely turned a cartwheel, jumped over a fence, and landed neatly on the back of Ozwold. Peter and Grumpy were not slow to follow, for they were all anxious to reach the capital before nightfall.

"Is my child safe?" mumbled Ozwold as well as he could with the two cobblestones still sticking in his throat.

"Whatever you do, don't drop my child. He is my wife's favorite egg. I do hope he doesn't hatch out before we reach the Emerald City!"

"So do I," breathed Peter, looking quite nervously at the huge egg in his lap. "Have you ever been in the Emerald City?" he asked politely.

"No," answered the oztrich slowly. "Have you?" Peter shook his head and as Ozwold jogged along the lane, Scraps told him all about the capital of Oz and the delightful people who live there, ending up with the story of Ruggedo's escape and his wicked plan to steal all the Oz magic and make himself ruler of the realm.

"Ruler of Oz!" screamed the oztrich, stopping in consternation. "Great grandmothers, why didn't you tell

me this before? Why, if that old gnome has a flying cloak, he's probably reached the Emerald City and captured everybody by this time. A gnome on the throne of Oz, how perfectly impos! Ruggedo ruler of Oz, how simply ridick!" At each word Ozwold grew more indignant, and finally, with a screech like an engine whistle, he hurled himself forward, running along at such speed that trees, fences, farms and hills whirled by in a blur of dust and Peter and the others had all they could do to keep their places. Hugging the oztrich egg with one arm and Scraps with the other, Peter blinked and bounced and tried to catch a glimpse of the country they were passing or the country they were coming to. But between the speed and the dust, he could see nothing.

"If he's just going in the right direction," thought the little boy, closing his eyes and gritting his teeth to keep them from chattering, "we'll get there in no time. If he isn't—"

"Whoa! Whoa!" roared Grumpy, as long as he had breath enough to roar. Even Scraps tried to check the mad plunge of their excited steed. But finally they all stopped shouting and devoted all their energies to hanging on. Peter rather expected they would run into something and so was not greatly surprised to find himself sitting



in the middle of the road. Scraps sprawled beside him and Grumpy, rubbing his head, limped crossly out of a ditch. Ozwold himself was leaning up against a tree with both eyes closed, while across the roadway lay an extremely upset and odd looking traveller.

"I told you to whoa," growled Grumpy, shaking his paw angrily. "Now see what you've done!"

"Never say whoa to an oztrich," muttered the green bird, opening one eye. "Say whum!"

"But we've run over somebody," exclaimed Peter.

"Is my child broken?" asked the oztrich, opening the other eye and peering wildly in every direction.

Fortunately the egg had fallen on a heap of soft sand and while Ozwold hurried over to assure himself it was not cracked, Scraps and Peter ran to help the stranger.

"Are you broken, stunned or killed, Wrecked or sprained or simply spilled?"

quavered the Patchwork Girl, leaning over him.

"It's all right," sighed the stranger, sitting up slowly. "I'm used to being slammed. Just so my back's not broken, I don't care!"

"Why, it's a book!" burst out Peter, coming closer to make sure.

"Not a book, a bookman!" corrected the traveller, rising with Scrap's help to his feet. "Books are old fashioned, but a bookman is right up to date. I don't wait to be advertised, I speak for myself, I don't lie around waiting to be read, I run after people and make them read me. I can carry myself and turn over a new leaf every day

in the year. I'm very interesting!" finished the bookman, with a wide smile at Peter. Peter smiled back and how could he help it? Above his big book body the fellow had a round jolly face with floppy dog ears. His legs and arms were quite thin and he was about as tall as Scraps.

"Are you sure you're not hurt?" asked the little boy, as the bookman began to run briskly up and down thumping the covers of his book body to knock out the dust.

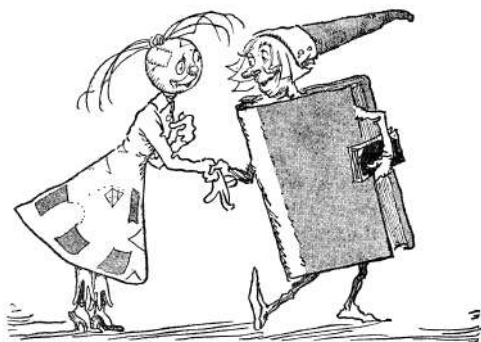
"What are you about?" asked Grumpy, looking curiously at the traveller and still rubbing his head with his paw.

"Have you any animal tales?"

"Or verse?" cried the Patchwork Girl eagerly.

"Or baseball stories?"

questioned Peter, coming closer and closer. In their interest they had almost forgotten the oztrich.



"I've all kinds of stories," boasted the bookman and,

unclasping his middle, spread wide the pages of his book. "Which will you have first?"

"A bear story," said Grumpy, sitting down on his haunches and waving both paws. "Bear stories are the most exciting!"

"No, a verse," shrilled the Patchwork Girl quickly. Peter was about to call for a baseball story when he suddenly remembered his manners.

"Ladies first," said Peter, looking reprovably at the little bear. "Just show us one of your verses," he remarked carelessly.

"Funny or sad?" asked the bookman, running his finger down his table of contents.

"Funny, of course," chuckled Scraps, tossing her head impatiently. Turning his pages rapidly the bookman stepped off a few paces and, leaning forward, the three travellers read:

"Do fishes use the liquid tones
The world so highly praises?
Could they speak dryly, and do bees
Converse in honeyed phrases?"

"Ho! Ho!" laughed Peter merrily, "if they do they'd soon get stuck. That's a good one—almost as good as your verses, Scraps."

"There's a much funnier one on page seventy-six," said the bookman gaily. "Wait!"

"What for?" Coming up behind them, Ozwold looked severely at their new friend. "What are we waiting for?" he repeated sternly.

"This is the man you ran over," explained Peter quickly, "and he's letting us read his book."

"And you stand here reading with the whole Kingdom in danger?" hissed the oztrich, thrusting his long neck forward angrily. "A nice way to save the Queen, I must say."

"I've a chapter on saving, somewhere, but I'm afraid it's on saving money," mumbled the bookman, thumbing his

pages over hurriedly. Peter and Scraps looked rather crest-fallen and, while they walked slowly toward the oztrich, he again addressed the bookman.

"If you know so much, perhaps you can tell us the way to the Emerald City," he wheezed disagreeably.

"I'm not a guide book," answered the bookman stiffly.

"Then shut up," advised the oztrich so sharply that without intending to at all the bookman did shut up.

"Are you coming, or do I have to save the Kingdom myself?" asked the oztrich, turning impatiently to Peter.

"I'll come, too, and entertain you as you go along. Read as you run," said the bookman brightly.

"Not as I run," sniffed Ozwold, who seemed determined to snub this new acquaintance. "Better keep out of my way or you'll be run over again."

"I'm afraid you will," sighed Peter, patting the bookman kindly on the back, for he seemed quite crushed by Ozwold's rude speeches.

Scraps had already mounted the oztrich and now, leaning far out to the side, shook hands with the bookman, singing:

"Bookman! Bookman, don't you care,
We'll see you some day somewhere,
Come to the Emerald City, do
And then I'll read you through and through!"

"So will I," promised Grumpy earnestly. "You'll find us in the palace. Just ask for the Queen of the Quilties and her pet," finished the little bear grandly.

“There won’t be any palace if you stand here much longer,” fumed the oztrich, kicking up the dust angrily. “Come on!”

Realizing that there was some truth in the oztrich’s remarks, Peter picked up the huge egg and climbed aboard. Grumpy, growling under his breath, took his seat behind Peter.

“This is no time for improving literature,” hissed the oztrich, starting off at a two legged trot. Peter did not bother to answer, but waved his cap cheerily to the bookman, who still stood uncertainly in the middle of the road. He kept on waving till the bookman became a mere speck in the distance, then, turning about, devoted all his attention to holding on. For nearly an hour Ozwold pelted down the endless road. Then suddenly Scraps clutched him excitedly about the neck.

“Stop!” shouted the Patchwork Girl. “Stop! Stop!”

“What’s the matter?” coughed the oztrich, slackening his speed a trifle.

“Turn out between those pear trees quick, I see the road of yellow brick,”

cried Scraps, waving one arm joyfully over her head.

“Where does that take us?” inquired Peter, leaning curiously over Scraps’ shoulder.

“To the Emerald City’s golden gate;
Home! Home at last, I can hardly wait!”

sang Scraps, nearly choking the oztrich in her excitement. “Hurry, Ozzy, hurry! Hurry!”

“Don’t forget to whum when you come to the Emerald City,” grumbled Grumpy, as the great green bird gathered itself together for another burst of speed. “The Emerald City may be destroyed for all we know,” wheezed Ozwold gloomily. “But hold tight, everybody. Here we go!”

