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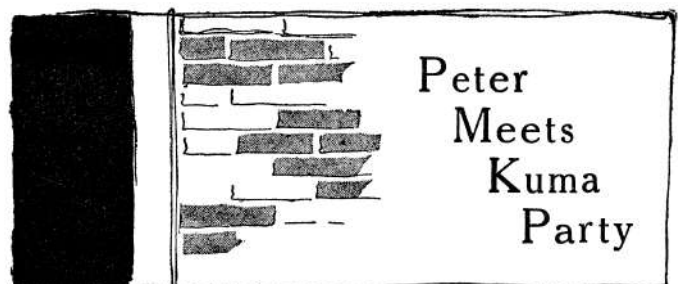
IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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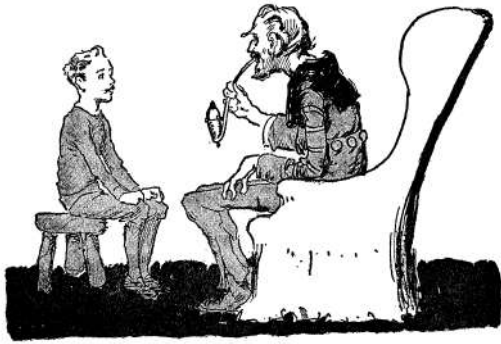
The Gnome King of Oz: Peter Meets Kuma Party (8/20)

As they walked up the neat pebble path to the little yellow house, Peter tried to remember all he had read about Oz and its curious inhabitants. But nothing he had read prepared him for the next happening. In answer to their knock, the door simply burst open and out came a hand and foot without any body at all. The hand seized Peter's hand, shook it warmly and drew him into the house. The foot gave Ruggedo such a kick, he went flying into a gooseberry bush. Drawn by the hand into a cozy sitting room, Peter stood trembling with uneasiness. In a comfortable chair, smoking a pipe, sat the owner of the cottage, also the owner of the hand and foot, and Peter gave a gasp as they immediately snapped back to their proper places.

"Don't be alarmed," said the stranger in a soft voice and, taking the pipe out of his mouth, he smiled kindly at the little boy. Peter was not alarmed—he was perfectly petrified and, as the old gentleman's head flew off his body and looked out the window, he dropped into a chair and began to fan himself with his



cap. "I thought he'd go away," sighed the head regretfully, "but he's coming into the house. Why do you travel with a bad little creature like that?"



"Because I'm lost," explained Peter, in a slightly shaky voice, turning around to address himself to the head.

"Well, you may find yourself in a heap of trouble, travelling with a gnome. Never trust a gnome," advised the head, coming back to settle on the old gentleman's shoulders. "Ah! Here he comes!"

"Who kicked me?" demanded Ruggedo, glaring all around in a perfect fury. The owner of the cottage made no reply, but as he needed more tobacco for his pipe just then flung out his hand toward the mantel. The hand sailed through the air like a bird and, seizing the tobacco pouch, set it on the table and then quietly attached itself to the man's wrist. At this odd occurrence, Ruggedo's eyes rolled wildly. Cringing against the wall, he began to move stealthily toward the door.

"Don't go," begged the owner of the cottage blandly.

"I'm not especially fond of gnomes, but as you are with this honest lad you may stay. Sit down on that bench there and if I catch you stealing anything, I'll throw my head at you." Pale with terror, Ruggedo did as he was told, while the man's hand, flying off again, closed and locked the door.

"There!" he sighed, leaning back contentedly, "now we can talk without being disturbed and let us start at once with names. My name," he confided proudly, "is Kuma Party, and I have had the curious gift which seems so to astonish you since early childhood. My father was a wizard, practicing magic in the Zamagoochie Country, before the practice of magic was forbidden in Oz, and it is to my father that I attribute my strange come-apartishness." He paused and waited politely for Peter to make some remark, but Peter by this time was simply speechless, so Kuma, with an indulgent smile, went quietly on with his story.

"Being constructed as I am is extremely convenient," he explained earnestly. "I am never tired or rushed about as ordinary Oz folk are. If I wish to pick the peaches in my orchard, I send my hands to attend to the matter and while they are busily at work I rest myself comfortably at home. If my body is tired and I desire to be amused, I send my head to the nearest village for news and I can often help my less fortunate neighbors by lending them a hand or foot when they are in trouble. Perhaps I can help you?" he suggested, leaning amiably toward Peter. "May I lend you a hand?" he finished graciously.

Now Kuma, in spite of his come-apartishness, seemed so pleasant and jolly that Peter wanted to tell him the whole history of his adventures, but Ruggedo frowned and shook his head, so for the present Peter decided to fall in with the gnome's plans and merely told Kuma his name and asked him the way to Patch.

"Patch?" mused the Winkie thoughtfully. "Why, that's not far from here. It is just below the Kingdom of Queen Ann of Oogaboo, but why not wait till morning? It's growing dark now and besides it's raining." Looking out in surprise, Peter saw that it was raining. He had been so interested in Kuma's story that he had not even heard the patter of raindrops on the roof.

"Better stay," urged Kuma hospitably. "While my hands are preparing the supper, you can tell me some more about your own self and why you are going to Patch." All during Kuma's conversation, Ruggedo had been wiggling with impatience and now, bouncing to his feet, he motioned for Peter to come along.

"I guess we will have to go," sighed Peter. "Which direction do we take from here, Mr. Party?" The old Winkie looked disapprovingly at the little gnome, then shaking his head and evidently concluding that it was no affair of his, threw out his right arm. It immediately whizzed up stairs, but was back in a moment, a large umbrella hanging in the crook of the elbow and a lantern grasped in the hand.

"Since you must go," said Kuma, rising slowly to his feet, "at least let me point out the way for you and loan you an umbrella."

"It's very kind of you," faltered Peter, ducking in spite of himself as the arm passed over his head on its way to open the door. "Are you sure you can spare it?"

"Oh, yes!" Kuma nodded cheerfully. "I still have one left, you know, and as I'm only going to play checkers this evening, one will be plenty. Goodbye." He smiled, patting

Peter kindly on the shoulder. "Remember what I told you about gnomes." He stared sternly down at Ruggedo, and Ruggedo, not daring to meet his eye, scuttled nervously into the garden.

"Maybe I'll see you again," said Peter, and shaking Kuma's remaining hand stepped reluctantly after the Gnome King.

"I hope so," called Kuma and, with a farewell wave and nod he went in and shut the door. Peter had to run to catch up with Ruggedo. He was already out of the gate and halfway down the road. As he reached the gnome's side, Kuma's arm, holding the umbrella carefully, took its position over their heads.

"Why didn't you stay?" grumbled Peter crossly. "There were lots of things I wanted to ask that man." Really he felt quite provoked with the old gnome.

"Sh-h!" warned Ruggedo, pointing warningly up at the arm over their heads. "Shh-hh!"

"Well, you don't suppose he can hear through his fingers, do you?" teased Peter, and then, because everything did seem so comical and ridiculous, he burst into a loud laugh. "I wish grandfather could see this," gasped the Captain of the A. P. Baseball Team, reaching in his pocket for his handkerchief. "Jimminy, wouldn't it be fine to have an extra arm in a scrap with the fellows!"

Ruggedo was too busy with his own thoughts to pay any attention to Peter's, so for quite a while they walked along in silence. It was pouring steadily, but Kuma's umbrella was so large and his hand held it so

carefully, not a drop fell upon the travelers. It was too gloomy to see much of the country but, from the tidy farms and orchards they did glimpse through the curtain of rain, Peter concluded that the Winkie Country must be a very prosperous and delightful place to live in. They had to walk briskly to keep pace with the umbrella, but after an hour or so the rain stopped. The arm stopped also, and after standing about uncertainly and wondering what to do, Peter reached up and closed the umbrella. Then taking a match, which he noticed in the rim of the lantern that swung from Kuma's wrist, he lifted the chimney and lit the wick within. This was evidently what the arm had been waiting for and now it moved confidently a few paces ahead, the forefinger of its hand pointing stiffly in the direction they were to follow. It was quite late by now and the lantern shed a cheery light over the fast darkening road.

Nibbling at the supper Kaliko had packed up for them, Peter and Ruggedo hastened after Kuma's guiding hand. "I wonder if it will fly back when we come to Patch," mused Peter as they turned off the main road and into a small wood.

"Let's hold on to it," whispered the Gnome King craftily.

"We can tie it up somehow and then when I get my magic belt, I'll make it work for me."

"That's a nice way to repay a man for helping us," said Peter angrily. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Well, I'm not," grunted the Gnome King, pausing to light his pipe, "and if you are going to be general of my

armies, you'd better get over these nice ideas and notions. Didn't I hear you say a while ago that you'd like to have an extra arm yourself?"

"I said I'd like to have one, but I never said I'd steal one," answered Peter indignantly.

"Take anything you need," advised Ruggedo, puffing away at his pipe. "That's my motto." Realizing it was useless to argue with so bad a little gnome, Peter kept his own counsel and, fixing his eyes on the bobbing lantern ahead, wondered when they would reach Patch and what it would be like when they did reach it. He hoped there would be no wild animals or bandits upon the road and peered anxiously from side to side as they made their way through the tangled woodland. But without any worse mishap than a tumble over a fallen tree trunk, they came to the end of the wood and struck out across a broad field.

"Tomatoes!" muttered Peter, treading carefully between the plants. Leaning down he picked an especially tempting one and sank his teeth deep into the side.

"Ugh!" choked Peter, shuddering with distaste. "It's cotton! What kind of a silly country is this anyway?"

"A cotton country, I s'pose," grinned Ruggedo, greatly amused at Peter's wry face. "Cotton? Why, maybe it's Patch itself!" By the light of Kuma's lantern, they could now see some cottages ahead and the dim outline of a castle.

"Rocks and Rookies!" exulted the Gnome King, waving the cloak over his head. "It won't be long now before I'm ruler of the realm, boy!"

"I thought you just wanted your magic belt," puffed Peter, running anxiously after Ruggedo.

"Oh, grow up!" called the gnome scornfully over his shoulder. "Grow up and don't be so soft. You're a regular Wooshmacushion!" Shooting ahead like an arrow, Kuma's arm now flew so swiftly that it was all they could do to keep up with it. By the time they had reached the castle they had barely enough breath to mount the steps. As they did, the arm, in a business-like manner, set down the lantern and, taking the umbrella in its hand, thumped hard upon the castle door.

"Good!" panted Ruggedo, sinking down on the top step. "That ought to rouse them." When no response came, he jumped up himself and began to kick and pound on the panels. Peter, naturally more polite, had at once put his finger on the bell and they were thus engaged when Piecer and Scrapper, returning from town, turned in at the gate.

"Customers," murmured Scrapper, rubbing his hands in anticipation.

"Wizards!" faltered Piecer, pointing with a trembling finger to the detached arm of Kuma, still beating on the door with the umbrella.

"So much the better! So much the better! Wizards always pay well." Running up the palace steps, the Chief Scrapper of Patch tapped Ruggedo respectfully on the shoulder. "What can we do for you?" asked Scrapper, pulling the castle key from his pocket.

Ruggedo had been expecting attention from the other side of the door and was so startled that he made no

answer, but the hand of Kuma immediately dropped the umbrella and shook hands with the Quilty statesman. It then moved quickly on toward Piecer, but Piecer, with a muffled scream, dodged behind a pillar. Snapping its fingers to show that it did not care one way or the other, the hand approached Peter and, after patting him approvingly on the shoulder, slipped a small note into his pocket. Then it shook its finger sternly under Ruggedo's nose, picked up the lantern and umbrella and vanished from view.

Even Scrapper was somewhat dashed at this and, in a slightly choky voice, repeated his question to Ruggedo.

Ruggedo was terribly provoked to have the arm escape but, recovering himself quickly, bowed civilly to the two Quilties.



"I have a cloak to be mended," he announced grandly, "and will

pay you handsomely for the trouble."

"Certainly! Certainly!" Unlocking the door, Scrapper waved them into the shabby hallway then, lighting a candle, bade them follow him.

"I'll take you to the Queen," said Scrapper importantly, "and while she is entertaining you I will fetch our most skillful needlewoman."



As for Peter, he was so excited over the adventure with Kuma's hand, he could think of nothing else.

