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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Gnome King of Oz: Queen Cross Patch Flits (1/20)

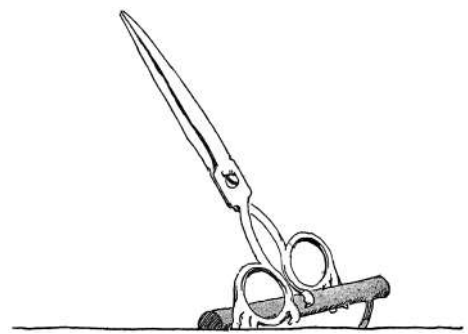
Queen Cross Patch, the Sixth, stood at her castle window staring crossly down at her cross-patch country. From above it looked like a huge patch-work quilt, spread over the rolling hills of the Winkie Country in Oz. Each of her subjects had a separate cotton-patch, and as each patch produced a different color of cotton and each patch-worker dressed himself and his family in the color of his patch and painted his house the same color too, you can imagine the odd appearance of the Kingdom itself. The Quilties, as the people of Patch were pleased to call themselves, did most of the patch-work in Oz and, as the Kingdoms of Oz are nearly all old-fashioned enough to use and appreciate patch-work quilts, there was plenty of work to be done. Not only did the industrious Quilties gather the small cotton-patches from their garden patches and stitch them into gay quilts but they did mending and darning as well.



For miles around people brought their old clothes to Queen Cross Patch for repairs, so that Patch was as busy and prosperous a little Kingdom as you would find anywhere, but by no means a pleasant one. Constant picking of the scraps in their garden patches had made the Quilty men exceedingly scrappy, and constant stitching upon the patch-work quilts had made the Quilty ladies extremely cross and crotchety. Indeed, everything about this little country was cross and patchy. All the roads were cross roads, and the houses as patched and shabby as the clothes of the people who lived in them.

But perhaps, of all the Quilties, the Queen, herself, was the crossiest and patchiest. She even had a patch over her eye. She had strained it from too much fine sewing. Just now she was straining the other one in an effort to see that all of her subjects were hard at work. Finding that they were, she flounced across the room and sat down at her sewing table.

Here, grumbling and scolding to herself, she began sorting patches into separate piles, according to their size and color. Except for her Majesty's mumbles and the occasional snores of a scissor bird, who dozed on a perch by the window, there was not a sound in the great chamber. But suddenly, with a shrill scream, the Queen flung a handful of patches into the air, toppled off her

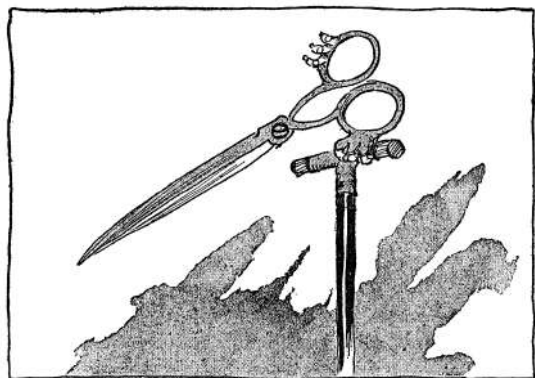


three-legged throne and went entirely to pieces—extremely small pieces, too.

“Help!” shrieked the Scissor Bird, waking with a bounce. “Help! Help! The Queen has gone to pieces!” At the Scissor Bird’s sharp outcries, the Prime Piecer and Chief Scrapper of Patch fairly rushed through the doorway.

“I’ve been expecting this!” groaned the Prime Piecer,

and taking a huge bite from the chunk of beeswax he held in one hand began to chew it gloomily.



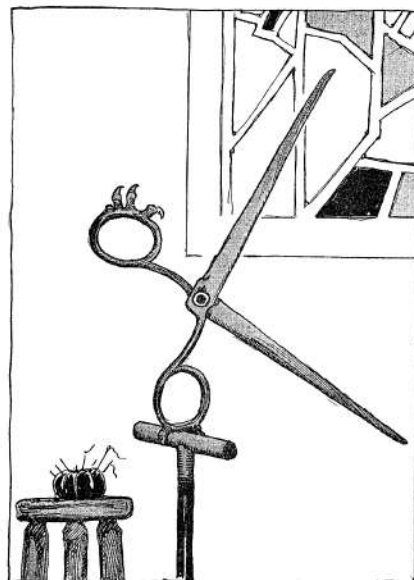
“Well, if you’ve been expecting it you’re not surprised,” sniffed the Chief Scrapper crossly,

“but it’s too bad to have it happen at the busiest season of the year. Now we’ll have to stop everything and find a new ruler. Hold your bill, Nipper!”

Stamping his foot at the Scissor Bird, the Chief Scrapper of Patch marched stiffly from the room.

Neither the Prime Piecer nor the Chief Scrapper seemed to think it queer for the Queen to go to pieces. And no doubt this is because, sooner or later, all of the Quilties do this very thing. Living in a fairy country and being magically constructed they cannot die, so when they wear out, they simply go to pieces. When a Quilty goes to pieces, his relatives or friends sweep up the scraps and put them away in a tidy scrap-bag and in

ten years or so he comes out of the bag as good as ever. This does seem a curious custom, but curious or not, that is exactly what happens, and while Scrapper went to fetch the Royal scrap-bag and Piecer the Royal dust-pan, the Scissor Bird flew out of the window to break the news to the patchworking populace.



In a huge sewing circle, the Quilty Dames were stitching upon a quilt and in their separate garden patches, the Quilty men were busily picking cotton-patches. But as the Scissor Bird flew screaming overhead and they realized that Queen Cross Patch had gone to pieces at last, they all stopped working and looked fearfully at one another. Who would be the next ruler of Patch? Whenever a ruler went to pieces another was immediately chosen by the method laid down in the Imperial Scrap Book and always one of the Quilties had been chosen.



Now, curiously enough, no one wanted to be King or Queen, for the ruler of this cross little country had to work six times as hard as anyone else and consequently went to pieces six times faster. Therefore, dropping their thimbles and scissors, the Quilties started to run in every direction, pelting into houses and down cellars, creeping into barrels and hiding themselves behind trees,—so that when Piecer and Scrapper issued from the palace not a person was in sight. They had carefully swept up Queen Cross Patch and hung her in a closet, and now, grumbling a little—for choosing a new sovereign was always a troublesome matter—they stepped sternly toward the cotton-wood to the left of the palace. In this wood grew hundreds of spool cotton-trees—enough, in fact, to furnish all the thread used in the Kingdom. There were pink spool cotton-trees, red spool cotton-trees, green spool cotton-trees, orange spool cotton-trees, and every other color you could imagine. In the center of the little cotton-wood grew a somewhat taller tree, bearing always one golden spool. It was to this tree that the Prime Ministers of Patch hurried, for this golden spool was the royal spool of succession, and when cut from the tree led directly to the next ruler of the Kingdom.

Piecer had a large rag-bag over his shoulder, for it was usually necessary to capture a ruler by force; Scrapper had a



pair of gold shears and now, standing on tiptoe, he snipped the golden spool from the golden branch and held it expectantly in his hand. There was a regular speech written out in the Royal Scrap Book, and as Scrapper had already chosen three rulers, he knew it by heart.

“Unwind, Oh, Royal Spool of Succession,” commanded the little Quilty importantly, “Unwind and lead us to the Imperial Potentate of Patch!” As he came to the word “patch,” Scrapper set the spool on the ground and, keeping hold of the golden thread, waited solemnly for something to happen. For a moment the spool lay quietly where he had placed it—then with a little bounce it began to unwind. Letting the gold thread slip through his fingers, Scrapper skipped nimbly after the spool, Piecer following earnestly behind him. Up one cross road and down another rolled the Royal Spool of

Succession, past the patched palace, past a dozen patched cottages, on and on and on.



As it passed each cottage, the Quilties within would give a roar of relief, for they knew that for the present the

danger of being King or Queen had passed the members of their household. Sometimes the golden spool would roll right into the front door of a cottage and Scrapper and Piecer, thinking their search over, would prepare to seize a sovereign but, just as they did,

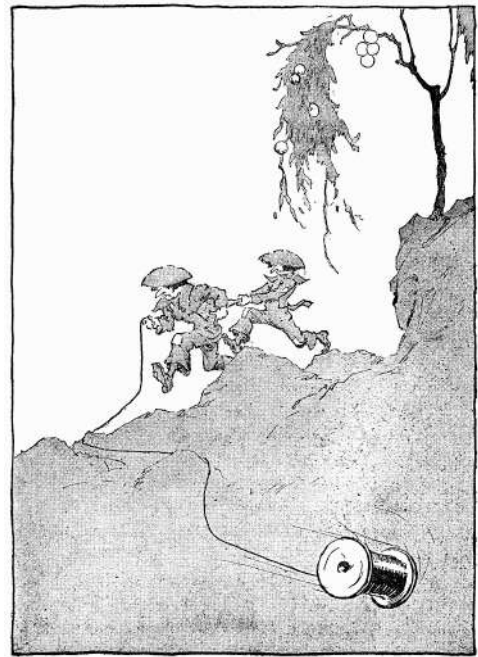
the spool would whirl out the back door and roll on merrily down the road. But never before in the history of Patch had it gone so far nor so fast, so that soon the fat Quilty ministers, panting along after it, were completely out of breath and temper. Now the cotton-patches grew thinner and thinner, the little cottages farther and farther apart, and before they half realized it, the golden spool was rolling briskly down a yellow brick highway and the Kingdom of Patch lay far behind them.

"Stop!" grunted Piecer, letting go Scrapper's coat-tails to which he up to this time had dutifully clung. "Stop! I can go no farther." "Don't leave me," wailed poor Scrapper, rolling his eyes backward in great distress.

Neither of the Quilties had been out of Patch before and the prospect was truly terrifying. Now, whether the magic spool heard the two conversing is hard to tell but, quite suddenly, it stopped and sinking down by the roadway, Piecer and Scrapper began to mop their foreheads with their patched handkerchiefs and fan themselves with their hats.

"Let's go back," quavered Piecer in a low voice.

"But we cannot go back without a ruler," objected Scrapper, who was the bolder of the two. "If we do not find a ruler in four days you very well know that Patch



and all of the Quilties will go to pieces. Do you want to go to pieces?" he asked severely.

"No!" said Piecer mournfully, "I don't, but we'll go to pieces anyway, running on at this rate. Something is wrong," puffed the Prime Piecer dolefully. "The spool never took us out of the Kingdom before. It's twisted, I tell you, and dear knows where it will take us."

"It will take us to the next ruler," declared Scrapper, who had recovered some of his breath and most of his courage. "It is our duty to follow. Come!"

"Oh, very well," sighed Piecer, rising to his feet with a great groan, "but don't blame me if it leads us into a forest and we are torn to bits by bears."

As Piecer finished this cheering speech the thread in Scrapper's hand gave a little pull. The golden spool had started off again. This time, however, it rolled along more slowly and, in spite of their uneasiness, the two Quilties cast interested glances to the right and left. It was all so different from their own patched and shabby little Kingdom. Pleasant yellow cottages and farms dotted the landscape, and the fields and meadows, full of buttercups and daisies, did not look a bit dangerous. On the hill a splendid tin castle shone and glittered in the sun, and though Scrapper and Piecer were quite unaware of it, this was the residence of the Tin Woodman, who ruled over The Land of the East.

Nowhere in Oz is there a more cheerful land than the Country of the Winkies. But just as the two travellers were beginning to enjoy themselves, the spool turned sharply off the highway and plunged down a steep hill.

The first jerk flung Scrapper on his face, and as Piecer had hold of his coat-tails he lost his balance too, and over and over they rolled to the bottom.

"Now for the next ruler!" gasped Scrapper. Scrambling to his feet, and without pausing to brush off the dust, he bounded after the spool. It was fairly whistling ahead now, bouncing over rocks and tree stumps, so that the two Patchy Statesmen, in their endeavor to keep up with it, looked like a couple of boys playing leap frog. When it did stop Piecer was too giddy to see, but Scrapper gave a loud roar of anger.

"I don't care what it says," shouted the little Quilty angrily, "I refuse to take orders from a cow. Is this our future sovereign?" he demanded indignantly. The spool had stopped indeed, and under the very horns of a cross brown cow.

"Moo!" bellowed the cow, lowering her head threateningly.

"That's just what we will do," sniffed Scrapper, "move on!" At Scrapper's words, the Spool of Succession, as if it had been waiting for a signal, zipped under the cow, dragging both ministers along, and from the way it behaved in the next half hour, I am convinced that some mighty bad magic had gone into its making. It rushed furiously under fences, over which the breathless Quilties were forced to climb, 'round and 'round trees, till they were almost too dizzy to stand, up hills and down hills, through stickery bushes and over sharp stones. It even dragged them head first into a muddy river.

"Let's go home," blubbered Piecer, shaking himself like a big dog. Fortunately the Quilties could swim, but swimming in quilted trousers and coats was no fun at all and, dripping water and mud, the two sovereign seekers felt more depressed than ever.

"It's bewitched," insisted Piecer, tugging at Scrapper's coat-tails. "Let's go back!"

But Scrapper stubbornly shook his head and trudged stubbornly after the mischievous Spool of Succession. It was unwinding quite deliberately now, but leading them deep into a dangerous looking forest.

"I wish Cross Patch had never gone to pieces," moaned Piecer dismally. "I don't care who's Imperial Potentate. I wish someone else had my position. I wish—"

"There's a sign," interrupted Scrapper. "Look! It says 'Emerald City, thirty-five miles'."

"Emerald City!" panted Piecer, forgetting his weariness for a moment. "Why, that's the capital of Oz. Patches and pincushions! Why, I never expected to see the Emerald City! Maybe our next Queen's in the capital, old fellow!"

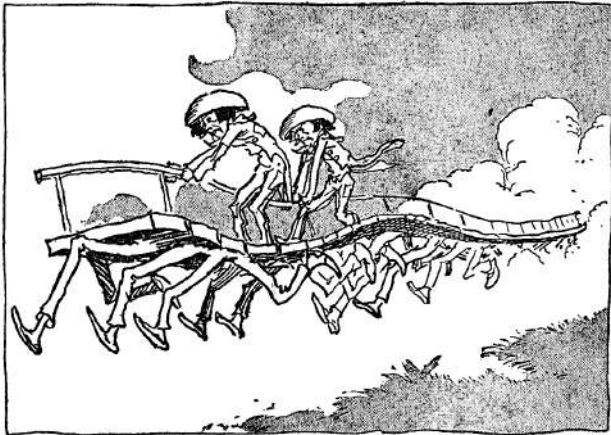
"Well, then she ought to make a capital Queen," sighed Scrapper, leaning over to untwine a bramble from his left shin, "but who wants to walk thirty-five miles?"

As he straightened up, the gold spool whirled between two tall trees and came to a complete standstill on a short foot-path. A rustic railing ran along the edge of the path and, taking hold of the railing, Scrapper began looking anxiously around for the future ruler of Patch.

"Do you see anything?" he queried, looking over his shoulder.

"No, but I feel something," grunted Piecer, peering anxiously down at his feet. "Beeswax and basting threads!"

Next instant both Quilties leapt into the air. Then, taking a firmer hold upon the railing and on each other, they clung desperately together, for the foot-path, rising up on its hundred broad feet, was rushing like the wind through the gloomy forest.



~~"Are we going to pieces?"~~ shouted the Prime Piecer, not daring to open his eyes.

Cautiously Scrapper opened one eye and the first thing that met his gaze was a neat notice tacked on the rustic railing.

It was only a blur, so fast were they travelling, but opening the other eye he managed to decipher it.

"This foot-path runs straight to the Emerald City. Hold tight. No stamping or kicking allowed.

"Private Property of the Wizard of Oz."

"Well, hurrah!" exclaimed Scrapper, thumping his companion on the chest. "We're



not going to pieces, we're going to the Emerald City! Going! Going! Why, here we are!"

And they were too. Right at the gates of the loveliest city in Oz. The foot-path, having accomplished its journey in less than a minute, now tilted its passengers rudely off and, coiling up like a serpent, went to sleep under a lime drop tree. Too overcome to do anything but blink at the gleaming spires and turrets of the capital, the two simple Quilties stood stunned and still. But a business-like tug from the gold thread brought them out of their trance.

The Spool of Succession had slid off the path with them and was now rolling gaily through the gates of the city. Holding fast to one another, and scarcely daring to breathe, the fat little ministers of Patch went tiptoeing after the golden spool.

