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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Gnome King of Oz: Queen Scraps Meets Peter (9/20)

It is hard to say who was more astonished, when Scrapper opened the door of the sitting room and ushered in Peter and Ruggedo. The Patchwork Girl, who had been expecting a rescue party headed by the Scarecrow or some of her other old friends, stared in disbelief and horror at the King of the Gnomes.

Ruggedo was so surprised to see Scraps outside of the Emerald City, and so disconcerted to know that she was the Queen on whom he must depend for favor, that he nearly ran out of the room. Scraps knew all about the wicked little gnome, and had even been present when he was banished to Runaway Island. Peter thought of all the curious people he had met so far, and this Queen was the most curious and comical. But as they all kept their thoughts to themselves, Scrapper noticed nothing amiss.

“Kindly entertain this customer until I return,”

ordered Scrapper and, with a curt nod at the Queen, went out and locked the door behind him. For a second longer Scraps and the Gnome King stared fixedly at one



another. Then the Patchwork Girl, snatching off her steel-rimmed spectacles, groaned:

"Ruggedo, as I live, Oh my land!
How'd he get off of that island?"

"That's my affair," answered the Gnome King in a surly voice. "How do you happen to be Queen of Patch, I should like to know?"

"That's my affair," sniffed Scraps haughtily. "But I know you are up to some mischief. Boy," she demanded, turning severely to Peter, "where did you meet this robber and what is he planning to do?"

Peter shuffled his feet uncomfortably, hardly knowing what to say. He was anxious for the magic cloak to be mended, for how else was he to reach the Emerald City and warn Ozma of her danger. If he told the whole truth they might both be thrown into prison, or so thought Peter then. Ruggedo was waiting nervously for his reply, and as the little boy mumbled out a few words about being lost and trying to find his way back home, the Gnome King sighed with relief.

"Why get so excited?" wheezed Ruggedo in a conciliatory voice. "I merely want to have my cloak mended and was told it could be done here better than anywhere else. What's wrong about that?"

"It's wrong for you to be off the island," insisted Scraps. "You know perfectly well you were banished forever. Oh, for an egg! For a dozen eggs!" At the mention of eggs, Ruggedo turned quite pale under his wrinkled grey skin and, as Peter looked at the two in perplexity,

Scrapper returned bringing an old Quilty grandame with him. She was angry to be summoned at so late an hour and, grumbling crossly, snatched the cloak from Ruggedo's hand. Seating herself in a low chair by the candle, she opened her sewing box and began to stitch so rapidly that her needle fairly flashed through the air.

"Now then," murmured Scrapper, smiling in satisfaction, "as to the price?"

"I command you to arrest this creature," interrupted the Patchwork Girl, rushing up to the Chief Scrapper.

"Don't you realize that he is the former King of the Gnomes and that he has tried to capture Oz at least a dozen times?"

"A king?" exclaimed Scrapper, clasping his hands rapturously. "Why, how we are honored! Have a chair, your Majesty! Have a cushion! Have—"

"Oh, have some sense!" screamed Scraps, while Ruggedo sidled closer to the old woman who was mending his cloak. "If you let him go he'll try to capture the Emerald City. He always does.

"He's mean, he's cruel, he's dangerous, He'll ruin Oz and all of us!"

"Nonsense!" sniffed Scrapper, giving the Patchwork Girl a push. "He is our honored customer, and you may be the Queen here, but remember, I'm the boss. Keep quiet or I'll send for the Scissor Bird."

"Wouldn't this make your ear ache?" Peter jumped at the new voice and, peering around in the direction it

had come from, saw a little bear peeking out of a chest. It was Grumpy, of course, and, as Peter continued to stare at him, he retired into the chest and closed the lid. But the Gnome King, encouraged by Scrapper's treatment of the Patchwork Girl, puffed out his cheeks quite cheerfully.

"You are a man of judgment," he observed in a flattering tone. "Be assured that I will remember this kindness, but what can I do to repay you for mending the cloak?" Scrapper looked thoughtful for a moment while the Patchwork Girl continued to mutter and scold under her breath.

"Is this your slave?" he inquired at last, turning inquisitively to Peter. Ruggedo seemed a little surprised, but to Peter's disgust and astonishment immediately nodded briskly.

"Well, then," said Scrapper, "suppose you give us the boy in payment for mending the cloak. Our Queen is not quick enough to do all the work here and he looks strong and willing."

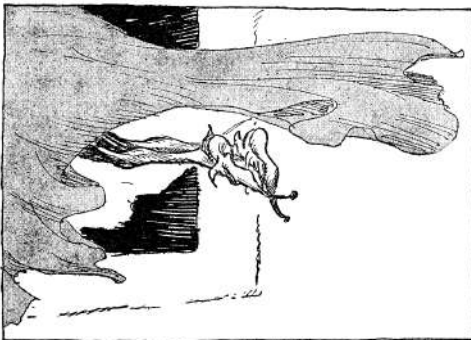
"I'm not his slave!" burst out Peter wrathfully. "I'll not stay here, you old simpleton." But the more he shouted the more Ruggedo nodded and smiled at Scrapper.

"Never mind," whispered the Patchwork Girl, as Peter, on his way to the door, bumped into her, "never mind, I'll help you." And with this assurance he was forced to be satisfied. Realizing that Ruggedo meant to keep none of his promises, Peter tried to plan a way to get hold of the cloak first. But the Gnome King, pressing close to the old Quilty seamstress, waved him jealously

away, and Scrapper, jerking him roughly by the arm, whirled him off into a corner.

And now the cloak was mended. Shaking the threads from its folds the old grandame held it out to Ruggedo. As she did so, Peter rushed forward impetuously, but the gnome was too quick for him. Flinging on the magic garment, Ruggedo vanished from view, only the blue patch on the back of the cloak showing he was still in the room. Scrapper and the others screamed out in alarm, but Peter, throwing up his arm, cried out loudly, "Take him to Zamagoochie!" In a flash the Gnome King was gone, at least the blue patch was gone, and Peter, stamping his foot angrily, turned to the foolish old

Quilty. "Now you've done it!" panted the little boy.



"I told you not to help him," cried Scraps, coming over to stand beside Peter. "You'll be sorry for this."

"Oh, keep quiet!" mumbled Scrapper, mopping his forehead with his patched hanky. To tell the truth, the sudden disappearance of the Gnome King had upset him terribly. "I don't see what you're fussing about," he finished fretfully. "Here you have a nice new slave to work for you. Out of my way there!"

Taking the old Quilty woman by the arm, he brushed rudely past Peter, unlocked the door and went out. As the key clicked in the lock, Peter sank down on the floor, the picture of discouragement.

"Why did you say that about Zamagoochie?" asked Scraps, dropping down beside the little boy and regarding him curiously.

"Because it was the first place that came into my head," explained Peter. "Jimminy, but I hope it's a long way from the Emerald City, and I hope something happens to keep him there."

"Will the cloak take him anywhere he wants to go?" demanded Scraps. Peter nodded gloomily.

"Then good-bye to the Emerald City and Ozma!" moaned Scraps. "Good-bye to all of us."

"Yes, but what's to be done with the slave?" Grumpy had lifted the lid of the chest again and was regarding Peter with great interest.

"He's not a slave!" exclaimed Scraps scornfully. "I can tell by his looks, he's a mortal child like Dorothy and Betsy. How did you find your way to Oz, boy?" Peter was anxious to escape from the castle, but when Scraps assured him that there was no present hope of such a thing, he told her all that had happened since the balloon bird carried him off from Philadelphia. As the story progressed, Grumpy climbed out of the chest and sat as close to Peter as he could possibly squeeze.

"Tell him about us!" urged the little bear, as Peter wound up his story with a description of Kuma Party and his guiding hand. Scraps shook her head impatiently, but when Peter added his voice to Grumpy's she introduced the pet of the former Queen and gave a brief description of herself and her happy life at the capital. When Peter heard how she had been kidnapped

and forced to do all the castle work, he shook his head sympathetically.

"We'll both run away," declared Peter, resolutely, "and as you know more about Oz than I do, perhaps we'll reach the Emerald City ahead of Ruggedo."

"But first you must escape from the castle," the little bear reminded them sagely. "How will you do that?"



"I wish there had been a little more magic in that casket," sighed Scraps. "All you have left is the emerald. Let me see the emerald, Peter." Peter pulled out the sorcerer's stone and handed it over to Scraps and, as he did, felt the note that Kuma's hand had thrust into his pocket. Opening it eagerly, Peter followed the Patchwork Girl to the light. But as they reached the center table, the candle which had been burning lower and lower gave a

final sputter and went out, leaving them in total darkness.



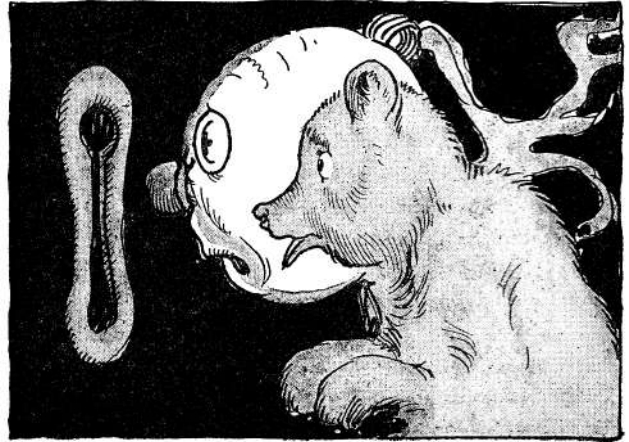
"Botheration!" cried Peter in exasperation. "Now what shall we do?"

"Go to sleep," yawned the little bear. "Whenever you don't know what to do, go to

sleep. That's my advice. Here, lean on me."

"Why don't you?" suggested Scraps, feeling her way carefully back to the rocker. "Mortal folk need rest, but as I do not, I'll sit and plan our escape."

Grumpy's advice did seem sensible and, as Peter was very tired, he curled down beside the little bear and soon did go to sleep, his head resting comfortably



on Grumpy's soft shoulder. In his hand he grasped Kuma's note, and in his dreams imagined himself already in the Emerald City, fighting to defend the little Queen of all Oz.

