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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Gnome King of Oz: Ruggedo Discovers Pirate's Treasure (6/20)

When Peter awakened, the sun was already high in the heavens and the sea a glittering, dancing expanse of blue. Stretching his arms joyously, Peter bounded to his feet, not even minding the little stiffness he felt from his long sleep on deck. The ship was rolling along comfortably with the current, and Ruggedo was nowhere in sight. Tiptoeing over to the cabin, Peter peered in the window, but he was not there.

"He's gone below, I guess," decided Peter, and started down the broken ladder that led into the ship's hold. The port holes, still overgrown with moss and sea weed, let in only a dim, green light but, even so, Peter could see that the walls were hung with rusty swords and muskets, while

all about the sides stood old iron sea chests and boxes and rotting sacks, spilling out their gleaming contents of gold and silver coins. Before the largest sea chest, crouched the old Gnome King. He was crooning happily



to himself and running his fingers through the sparkling jewels that filled the chest to the very top.

“Well!” exclaimed Peter, pausing with both hands on his hips, “this is a find!”

“I found it first! I found it first!” babbled Ruggedo.

“They’re mine, Peter, all mine! You may have the gold pieces,” he finished jealously. Disgusted with the greedy old gnome, Peter shrugged his shoulders. The gold pieces seemed more desirable any way. Giving no further attention to Ruggedo, he sank down before one of the bulging sacks and began planning what he should do with his treasure. First, he would build a splendid club house for the team, with hot and cold showers, and next he would buy himself and the gang motorcycles, ponies and canoes! His grandfather should have a new automobile and twenty-five pair of specs, so he’d always have one pair handy. After that—

Clasping his knees and fixing his eyes dreamily upon the beamed ceiling, Peter fell into such pleasant reveries that it was nearly 10 o’clock before he so much as thought of breakfast. Then he suddenly realized he was dreadfully thirsty and went hurrying up the ladder in search of water and provisions. “I hope there are some left,” muttered Peter anxiously, “something in tins or bottles that the salt water hasn’t got into.”

The cabin was a mass of wreckage but opening from that was a small narrow pantry that had evidently been the ship’s galley. The shelves had rotted and fallen to the floor. Sand and shells sifted back and forth with

the motion of the boat, but in the darkest corner Peter found a heap of casks and tins. Seizing one of the square boxes and a cask, Peter raced out on deck and after some trouble managed to uncork the strangely shaped vessel.

Ah! Water! Sparkling, cold and clear! Peter almost emptied the cask, then, knocking open a box with a piece of wreckage, he found it full of hard, salty ship's biscuits. Smiling to think how long this breakfast had been waiting for him, Peter ate heartily, for when you are hungry even a stale biscuit tastes delicious. Satisfied at last, he took the biscuits and cask below.

Without even a "thank you," Ruggedo gulped down the water and gobbled up the biscuits, which were hard enough to suit even him. Then, wiping his mouth upon his ragged sleeve, he fell to fingering the pirate's jewels again, bending as lovingly over the sea chest as a mother bends over a cradle. After several unsuccessful attempts to draw Ruggedo into a conversation, Peter gave up and went poking around the great dim interior to see what else he could find. Shreds that were once the pirates' coats clung to the nails on the wall and below one of these nails Peter picked up a small metal bound book. Water had blurred all the first pages but, carrying it up to the light, Peter found the last page quite legible. It was the Pirate Chief's diary and, thrilled to his last bone, Peter pored over the pirate's final entry.

"I, Polacky, the Plunderer," said the thin, angular writing, "did this day capture the Island of Ashangabad,

taking from the islanders ten chests of gold, three bags of silver, the crown and jewels of state, together with the magic casket of Soob, the Sorcerer. The treasure will I divide, but the magic appliances hold for myself in case of mutiny or capture."



As he read, Peter could almost see the swaggering old Pirate Chief and his men swarming over the strangely

named and defenseless little island. There were some further remarks about the winds and tides, but what interested Peter was the magic casket. "I do wonder what he did with it?" mused the little boy. "Maybe there might be some magic in it that would take me back to Philadelphia." Deciding to say nothing of his discovery to Ruggedo, Peter went below and began a systematic search, poking behind the great chests and bags and tapping on the dank walls for secret cupboards or hollow boards. He had completely circled the treasure room without any success, and was standing on the spot where he picked up the diary, before he made any progress at all. Then, looking down, he noticed that the plank beneath his feet was raised up higher than the others. It might easily have been swollen out of place by the action of the water but, bending down, Peter began to pry at the board. At the second tug it came up altogether, revealing a square, box-like enclosure. In

the enclosure lay a small carved casket of jade, a ruby key on top.

Forgetting the necessity for caution, Peter gave a shriek of excitement and, falling upon his knees before the opening, reached eagerly down for the magic box. To fit the key in the lock and open the casket was the work of but a moment. He was a bit disappointed to find what looked like a package of grey gauze, a small uncut emerald and an ivory box with a few directions on the lid. Placing the smaller objects on the floor beside him, Peter unrolled the grey package. It proved to be a long, misty cape, and on the collar was a tiny tag stitched in green.

"The Flying Cloak of Invisibility," announced the tag.

"Renders wearer invisible and takes him wheresoever he desires to go."

With a sharp exclamation of delight, Peter arose and was about to fling the magic cloak around him when it was snatched roughly from behind. It was the old Gnome King, of course. For several minutes he had been peering over Peter's shoulder and had also read the legend on the green tag.

"Take me to the Emerald City!" shouted Ruggedo, wrapping himself in the misty folds of the gray garment.

Too startled to even try to recover his property, Peter stood blinking at the old gnome. But he neither



disappeared nor whirled off in a cloud of silver dust, as Peter had expected him to do. In fact, nothing happened to him at all.

"What kind of a miserable mumpish magician made this?" stormed Ruggedo, dragging off the cloak and holding it up to the light.

"Well, you had no business to take it in the first place," burst out Peter angrily. "I found the magic casket and the cloak is mine! What good would it have done, any way, if it had carried you to the Emerald City?" he continued more calmly. "You would have left all this treasure behind and had no one to help you capture your belt."

"That's so," admitted Ruggedo, sitting down with the cloak in his lap. "If I had gone you would have taken all the jewels for yourself."

"You bet I would." Folding his arms Peter stared sternly down at the mean little gnome. "Why can't you play fair?" he demanded indignantly.

"Well, weren't you going to fly back to Philadelphia and leave me?" asked Ruggedo triumphantly. "Hah! Hah! You're no better than I am. That's why I like you," he finished maliciously.

Peter blushed a little at the Gnome King's shrewd guess. He had been going to wish himself back to Philadelphia, but pretending not to care, he swept up the other treasures from the magic box and put them into his pocket.

"If you keep the cloak, I shall keep these!" he announced firmly, "and I know why the cloak won't work, too!"

"Why?" In spite of himself, Ruggedo's voice trembled with eagerness.

"Oh—because!" Smiling provokingly and whistling a careless tune, Peter climbed up the ladder. Ruggedo was after him in a flash.

"Tell me!" begged the gnome in his most coaxing voice.

"Don't you realize that with the magic cloak I can fly into Ozma's palace and recover my belt without being detected. And when I do," he promised earnestly, "I'll transport you immediately back to Philadelphia—you and all the gold pieces."

"Promise?" Ruggedo nodded so vigorously his hair blew backward and forward seven times.

"All right then," agreed Peter, leaning against the rail of the Blunderoo. "It won't fly because it's torn." Holding the cloak up, Ruggedo saw that Peter was right. There was a large hole in the back and a rent reaching from the collar to the hem.

"Huh, my gnomes can soon mend that," boasted Ruggedo in relief, "and then let Miss Ozma of Oz look to her crown! I'll fly to the Emerald City, steal my belt, and I'll turn her to a canary and clap her into [Pg 106] a gold cage. I'll clap them all into cages!" roared Ruggedo, beginning to bounce up and down like a rubber ball.

"There won't be one emerald left upon the other, when I get through with them. Banish me for five years! Take away my Kingdom! I'll show them!"

Forgetting all about Peter, the old Gnome King stamped, shrieked and threatened till the little boy in disgust retired to the other side of the ship. He could easily have taken the cloak away from Ruggedo, but wisely decided to wait. "If we ever do reach this Kingdom of his and the cloak is properly mended I'll take it myself, fly to the Emerald City and warn Ozma that the Gnome King is free," resolved Peter, staring dreamily at the tumbling blue waves. "And once in the Emerald City, Ozma will surely send me back to Philadelphia with the magic belt." Having settled all this to his satisfaction, the little boy pulled out the other possessions of Soob, the Sorcerer. The emerald was covered with strange markings, but Peter could make nothing of them, so he put it back into his pocket and opened the ivory box. "In case of extreme danger, plant these," advised a pink slip on top of the box. "These" proved to be two onions, or at least they looked like onions. Peter had hoped to find something exciting, like a wishing ring, and putting the onions back, he closed the box with a little sigh. Then, clasping his hands behind his head, he fell to thinking about the pirates and wondering why there were no bones on board.

"They must have taken to the small boats and escaped when the Blunderoo sank," concluded Peter and, having disposed of this question, began wondering what his friends in Philadelphia were doing. He was sorry indeed to have his grandfather worried by his absence, but could not help feeling a little important at the commotion it must be causing. "They've probably called

in the police by now," mused Peter, and he hoped that when his grandfather gave his picture to the reporters he would remember to mention that Peter was Captain of the A. P. Baseball Team. In fancy, he saw the large headlines in the morning papers when the news of his final return did get out.

"'Young Philadelphia Boy Finds Treasure Ship and Saves the Emerald City of Oz!' That wouldn't be bad," thought Peter, and was going over in his mind just how he would describe the sea quake and his other strange adventures when a loud screech from Ruggedo called him to the side of the ship.

"Land!" shouted the Gnome King, with an excited wave toward the west. And it was land. Rolling gently in with the tide, the Blunderoo was approaching a long shallow beach.



"We'll probably go aground," exclaimed Peter, looking anxiously over the side. "It's a good thing the waves are not any larger. What country do you suppose it is, Rug?" Ruggedo had been staring intently ahead and now jumped at least three feet into the air.

"Why, it's Ev!" croaked the Gnome King, hoarse with delight. "Ev! Ev! Ev! The most beautiful country in the world. My country, Peter!"

"Looks like a wilderness to me," puffed the little boy, but even Peter felt strangely elated and gay. He had not really believed the old gnome's story of his vast dominions, but if this was Ev, he must have been telling the truth. "I don't see any castle!" he murmured, leaning far out over the rail.

"Underground!" panted Ruggedo. "Caverns! Caves! Labyrinths and everything. Wait till you see them, Peter. You'll never want to go back to Philadelphia again. Wait!"

