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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Gnome King of Oz: Scraps Meets Sultan Of Suds (11/20)

Walking slowly at first, and then more briskly, Peter and his companions hurried on in the direction Scraps had pointed out. Grumpy was very helpful, for whenever they were in doubt, the little bear would climb a tree and, after looking all around, would guide them to the best and widest of the roads that ran hither and thither through the pleasant land of the Winkies. After his last climb, Grumpy had reported a village ahead and, quite cheerfully, they trudged along under the banana trees that edged the roadway.



"Even if Ruggedo has reached the Emerald City," remarked Scraps, waving to a Winkie farmer at work in the fields, "we'll find some way to capture him. Our wizard is very clever, boys. Perhaps he has captured him already!"

"But with the magic cloak, Ruggedo will be invisible," answered Peter gravely, "all but the patch, and no one will know that he is there. I hope he's still in Zamagoochie. Do you think Ozma will be able to send me back to Philadelphia, Scraps?"

"Of course!" chuckled the Patchwork Girl, skipping at the mere mention of the little Queen. "Ozma can do anything."

"Well, I hope she sends me back in time for the game," sighed Peter. "It's only three days off and I'm pitcher. And I wish I could take Grumpy back for a mascot. Would you like to be our mascot, Grumpy?"

"It doesn't sound safe," mumbled Grumpy, wiggling his nose very fast. "What is a mascot, Peter?"

"Oh, a kind of pet to bring one luck," explained the little boy. "You could come to all the games and have all the cake and peanuts you wanted." Grumpy considered the matter for a few moments, then, dropping on all fours, shook his head.

"I belong to Scraps," he announced, looking up admiringly at the Patchwork Girl. "I'm her pet. Besides, I'll never leave Oz."

"Why not?" asked Peter in surprise.

"Oh, because—" Rearing up on his hind legs, Grumpy waved his paw solemnly. "In your country, Peter, I could only be a bear, but in Oz, I'm a bear and a person, too. That's why it's more fun to be an animal in Oz than a person. Look at me," he exclaimed complacently. "I can do everything a boy can do and everything a bear can do, so, of course, I have twice as much fun! Can you do this, for instance?" Drawing himself up into a ball, Grumpy started rolling down a grassy slope at the side of the road.

"Ho! Ho!" laughed Scraps, running after Grumpy, "he has you there, Peter."

"Yes, but we shouldn't have turned off the road," objected Peter, hurrying after the Patchwork Girl.

"Stop! Scraps, stop!"

From a gentle slope, the hillside dropped suddenly downward and now none of them could stop. Faster and faster rolled Grumpy, faster and faster ran Scraps and Peter, catching at trees and bushes to keep from falling. Instead of grass, the ground beneath their feet grew smooth and slippery as ice and from an incline the hill turned to a regular mountain side. It reminded Peter of the time he had tried skiing and, after several frantic attempts to keep his balance, he fell flat on his face and finished the slide on his stomach. Scraps, too, after a few wild spins and flourishes, sat down hard and, in a state of breathless surprise, they reached the foot of the mountain. Grumpy had travelled most of the way on his ear and was growling terribly in his own language. He was covered with a fine yellow powder and, as Scraps and Peter slid past, he began to lick his fur furiously. But one taste was enough.

"Soap!" coughed the little bear, wrinkling up his nose.

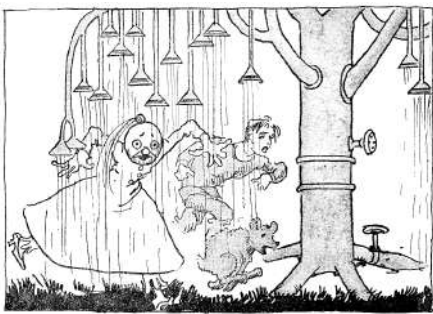
"Yellow soap, too!"

"No wonder it was so slippery," said Peter slowly. "Now how are we going to climb up again?"

"We're not!" announced Scraps, rising to her feet with great difficulty. "Might as well try to walk up a looking glass. Why, what funny trees!"

"They're rubber," announced Grumpy, giving himself a shake, "and every branch is a spray."

"A bath spray," marveled Peter, staring up at the snakelike mass of tubes overhead. They had landed directly under one of the rubber trees and, as Peter spoke, from every spray a perfect shower of warm water sprinkled down upon them. Covered with soap from their slide down the mountain, they were soon in a fine lather, especially the little bear. When they tried to dash out from under the rubber tree, they immediately slipped and fell, for the ground was green soap and even more slippery than Soap Mountain. Spluttering with surprise and shock, they finally crawled on their hands and knees out of the tree's range.



"Water!" groaned Scraps dolefully.
"Water makes my spirits sink,
It's very bad for me, I think,
I know I'll fade, perhaps I'll
shrink."

"Don't shrink," begged Peter in alarm. "Shake yourself, old girl." Balancing herself with difficulty, the Patchwork Girl began shaking herself vigorously and wringing out her skirts, while Peter, rubbing the soap from his own eyes, saw that they were in a strange and amazing village, where everything was soap. The houses were built of small, square cakes and the walks laid out in large blocks of green soap. Turkish towel trees edged all the avenues and, stepping cautiously to the nearest one, Peter picked a towel and wiped his dripping face.

Grumpy soon followed his example. Then both went to help Scraps, who was feeling both damp and discouraged. They were fanning her briskly with dry towels, when a procession of villagers came skating down the main street.

"So that's how they manage it," whistled Peter, taking a few skating steps himself to see how it was done.

"More soap?" grumbled Grumpy. "Let's run!"

"No, let's wait and see what they have to say," whispered Peter.

The villagers were quite close by this time and Peter was amazed to see that they also were entirely made of soap. They wore turbans and robes of turkish toweling and, with their arms tucked comfortably in their flowing sleeves, came skating toward the travellers. Some of them were pink, some green, some white and others violet, and they were all about the size of ten-year-old children.

"Hello!" said Peter politely, as the first soapman came to an abrupt stop before him. "How do you do?"

"As I please, mostly," retorted the soapman shortly, "but I'm afraid you won't do at all. Who cut you out, anyway?"

"Oh, fall down!" advised Grumpy, picking up his towel and beginning to fan Scraps again. "Fall down, why don't you?"

"Who are you?" sniffed the Patchwork Girl, wringing her hands. They were still full of water.

"We are Suds," answered the villager proudly. "But we will have to take you to the Sultan. Are you hard or soft?" he asked, turning again to Peter.

"Hard!" cried the little boy, stamping his foot defiantly. He regretted this action almost immediately, for his heel, slipping on the soap sidewalk, threw him down on the back of his head. At this the Suds simply bubbled over with amusement and scorn. Then one Sud seized him by the left arm, another by the right, and started skating down the street. Looking over his shoulder, he saw that Scraps and Grumpy were being treated in the same sudden fashion. But soon he grew so interested in his surroundings that he almost forgot his indignation. The cottages of smooth green and pink soap were really charming. The gardens were full of soap-bubble bushes and vines and the bubbles, with their shining colors, sparkled and shimmered in the sunshine. Fountains of perfume filled the air with fragrance and, besides the turkish towel and rubber trees, there were bushes covered with snowy powder puffs. As they reached the stately green soap palace it began to snow and, catching one of the flakes on the back of his hand, Peter discovered it was a soap flake. Hurrying them through the soap stone gates, the Suds pounded upon the castle door. It was immediately opened by a tar soap slave in a yellow robe and turban.

"Take these interlopers to Shampoosle," said the Sud who had first spoken to Peter.

"Whoozle?" gasped the Patchwork Girl, shaking the soap flakes from her hair. No one deigned to answer

her question, but at the Sud's command two more slaves appeared and, bowing out the villagers, closed the castle door.

"Follow me, interlopers," said the slave and, skimming expertly over the polished soap floor, he started down the royal hallway.



"I suppose we might as well," giggled Peter and, taking Grumpy's paw, began sliding after the slave. The two

other slaves slid gravely behind and, as they reached two royal purple soap doors, the first slave threw up his arm and cried impressively:

"Give three salaams for the Sultan of Suds!" and, jerking open the door, he fell flat upon his nose. It was so unexpected that Peter and Grumpy lost their balance and salaamed in spite of themselves, but the Patchwork Girl slid defiantly up to the throne itself.

"I don't give three slams for anyone!" announced Scraps, snapping her fingers under Shampooozle's nose. "Show us the way out of here."

"What!" snorted the Sultan, rising shakily from his throne. "You refuse to salaam? Caka! Bara!" He clapped his hands sharply. "Salaam her!" At his command, the two slaves behind Scraps seized her arms and, forcing her downward, touched her cotton nose to the floor three times.

While Scraps was still choking and spluttering with rage, Peter and Grumpy regained their footing and stared curiously at Shampooozle. He was sitting on an ivory soap throne with red sponge cushions. He seemed to be made of green soap and his towel turban was twice as high as the turbans of the other Suds.

"That will teach you how to treat a Sultan," sniffed Shampooozle, shaking a finger severely at the Patchwork Girl.

"Sultan!" cried Scraps, giving Caka and Bara each a push. "You're not a Sultan, you're an Insultan."



Shampooozle's eyes grew round with displeasure and Peter and Grumpy had some difficulty to conceal their mirth.

"There, there!" said the Sultan testily, "don't be impertinent. Kindly answer my questions, so

I can put you in your proper

places. What kind of soap are you made of, hard or soft, laundry or tub—are you floaters or sinkers?"

"We're not soap at all," declared Peter indignantly. "I should think—"

"Tut! Tut!" interrupted Shampooozle loftily, "I am thinking. Don't talk so fast, we'll soon make good soap of you. Why, we can make soap of anything, even rubbish," he finished proudly. "Caka! Bara! Just see how they lather."

Before Peter or the others had time to object, the two slaves, with three wet sponges, were rubbing vigorously at their cheeks.

"No lather at all," sighed Shampoozle in evident disappointment. "Never mind, I'll use you somehow. That creature," he pointed contemptuously at Grumpy, "that creature, flattened out and rolled down, will make an excellent bath mat. The rag girl can be ripped up into wash cloths and the boy boiled down to soap fat."

"Bath mat!" roared the little bear, putting back his ears. "Why, you can't make a bath mat out of me. Don't you know I'm a pet? You'd better not touch Scraps either, she's a Queen and Peter's a pitcher!"

"Pause!" commanded the Sultan, extending his arm wearily.

"I'll pause and claw you!" threatened Grumpy, doubling up his furry fists. "We're on our way to the Emerald City to save the Queen and you daren't stop us!" While Grumpy was saying, or rather growling all this, Peter had noticed an open

window at the back of the throne room. Signaling to Scraps, he pushed aside the soap slaves and, seizing Grumpy's paw, made a grand slide for freedom. Scraps reached the window first and

recklessly jumped. Then Peter and Grumpy, without one look, jumped down after her. Fortunately, Scraps landed



first so that the little bear and the little boy had something soft to fall upon. The drop from the window was nearly thirty feet and they looked around rather breathlessly.

"Did we hurt you?" asked Peter, hopping up quickly and pulling Grumpy to his feet.

"No!" puffed the Patchwork Girl, raising her head experimentally, "but I feel rather flat. Shake me up, boys, and then we'd better run." So Grumpy took one of her arms and Peter the other and they shook with all their might. Scraps' cotton stuffing was still damp from the rubber tree's shower and her face had a wrinkled and rough-dry look but, quite cheerfully, she patted herself into shape. They had fallen on a flat gray beach and, leaning down to examine the soil, Peter discovered it was sand soap. Without stopping to discover anything more, they started to run along the shore of a deep blue lake. As the waves broke on the shore, they frothed and foamed beautifully and dancing soap bubbles formed and floated over the waves. At any other time Peter would have liked to stop and admire the view but, fearing pursuit, they all ran along as fast as they could. Cliffs of soap stone rose steeply in places and there seemed no way to cross the lake nor to escape from the slippery clutches of the Sultan of Suds. Finally rounding a large cliff, they came to an abandoned soap building. White soap bricks were lying about in orderly piles and stacked against the building itself were several huge slabs of soap, evidently

intended for doors. Picking up one of the soap bricks, Peter hurled it into the lake and, as it floated jauntily off, threw his cap into the air.

"I have it!" cried Peter gaily. "This soap floats. We'll drag one of the big pieces down to the edge of the lake and float across."

It was hard work, for the slab they chose was both thick and heavy, but at last, after much pulling, tugging, grunting and pushing, they managed to launch their queer raft. Peter and Grumpy carried Scraps out so she would not get wet again, then, climbing carefully aboard themselves, sat down on the slippery surface. Peter had sensibly brought along a long bar of green soap and, using this as a pole, he pushed the raft out into the current.

"Good-bye to Suds!" yelled Scraps, as they slipped smoothly over the blue waters of the lake,

"Good-bye to soap and water, too,
Shampooozle, you're a sham—shampooh!"

