

This story is brought to you by Ririro.com for free. Our mission is to give all children in the world free access to a variety of stories. The stories can be read, downloaded and printed online and cover a wide range of topics, including animals, fantasy, science, history, diverse cultures and much more.

Support our mission by sharing our website. We wish you a lot of fun reading!



# Ririro

IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

Ririro

## The Gnome King of Oz: Sea Tips Upside Down In Quake (5/20)

Flung flat upon their faces by the terrific shock, it was some time before either Ruggedo or Peter had the courage to look up. Then Peter, rubbing the sand and dust from his eyes, raised his head and stared fearfully out to sea. What he saw made him blink with astonishment. The sea had turned itself upside down and on top of the waves, and almost touching Ruggedo's island, lay a long gleaming stretch of sea bottom.

Crystal caverns and sea grottos, coral walls and castles glittered and shimmered in the last rays

of the setting sun and, rushing toward the edges of the strange morass was every sort of sea creature Peter ever had imagined. Giant fish wallowed desperately toward the sides and hurled themselves back into the water. Peter rubbed his eyes again to be sure he was not dreaming and, as a golden haired mermaid plunged boldly from the window of a coral castle, he made a grab for Ruggedo. But Ruggedo was already on his crooked little legs.



"Come on! Come on!" wheezed the old Gnome King frantically. "Can't you see it's a way off the island?" In a daze, Peter ran after him and jumped across the small stretch of water separating their island from the mysterious sea country. It extended as far ahead as they could see.

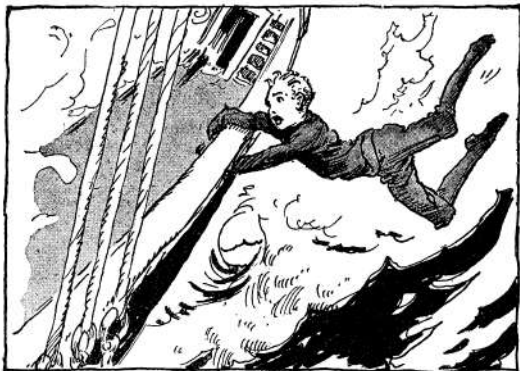
"Hurry! Hurry!" urged Ruggedo, stumbling over slippery rocks and pausing every few moments to disentangle himself from the oozy arms of some clutching sea plant. "It may go straight to the shores of Ev!" panted the gnome, giving no attention to the frightful sea monsters who were rushing past him in an effort to fling themselves back into the water. "Come on! Come on!" Shuddering a little, as he collided with an octopus, Peter came. Now they were wading knee deep in green slime, with lobsters, crabs, turtles, jiggers and jelly fish squirming and wiggling uncomfortably against their legs. Peter wanted to stop at the first coral castle, but Ruggedo ran scornfully past. An old Merman, sitting sadly on the top step, reminded Peter of his grandfather. He wanted to stop and sympathize with the old gentleman, but fearing to be left alone in so scaresome and strange a country, he hurried after the Gnome King. Then Peter saw that which made all else fade from his mind. It was the battered hulk of an old ship, resting against the side of a green sea cavern. It was overgrown with sea moss and barnacles, but the name, in raised letters of pure gold, was still visible. "Blunderoo!" breathed Peter softly. Then snatching at Ruggedo's coat-tails forced him to stop.

"Let's go aboard!" puffed Peter. "I'll bet we'll find all sorts of useful things. Oh Jimminee! Look! It's a pirate ship!"

Peter pointed to the gold skull and cross bones below the ship's name, his voice trembling with eagerness. Even Ruggedo's eyes began to snap and sparkle with excitement.

"That would mean treasure chests," muttered the old gnome greedily. There was a rusty chain ladder hanging over the ship's side and, seizing the lowest rung, Peter swung himself up and in less than no time had reached the ship's deck. How long it had lain at the bottom of the sea was hard to say, but the planks were water soaked and rotten and everything was crumbling with rust and decay. As the Gnome King dropped down

beside Peter, a thunderous explosion shook the boards beneath their feet.



"Another one!" roared Ruggedo, clapping his hands over his ears.

"Another what?" shouted Peter, who was not quite sure what had happened in the first place.

"Sea quake!" quavered the gnome, cowering back against the ship's cabin. And Ruggedo was right. For a moment longer the strange stretch of sea bed quivered on the surface of the waves. Then, with a splash, grind and rumble, it went crashing back to the bottom and

the hungry waves of the Nonestic Ocean tossed and tumbled over the place where it had been.

Now the same terrific shock that hurled the sea land back to the depths of the ocean dislodged the crumbling old pirate wreck and hurled it high into the air. With a shattering smack it smote the churning waters, rocked violently backward and forward, finally righting itself.

"Well, I'll be scuppered!" Letting go of the ring in the cabin door to which he had clung during the whole excitement, Ruggedo slid down to a sitting position on the deck. Peter, with one arm hooked about the ship's railing, was so surprised to find himself alive that he did not speak for several moments.

"Well!" he coughed finally, "at least we have a boat!"

"If we hadn't come aboard we'd have been at the bottom of the sea by this time," shuddered Ruggedo, as Peter sank down beside him. "I believe you've brought me good luck, boy, and when I reach my kingdom I'll make you general of all my armies."

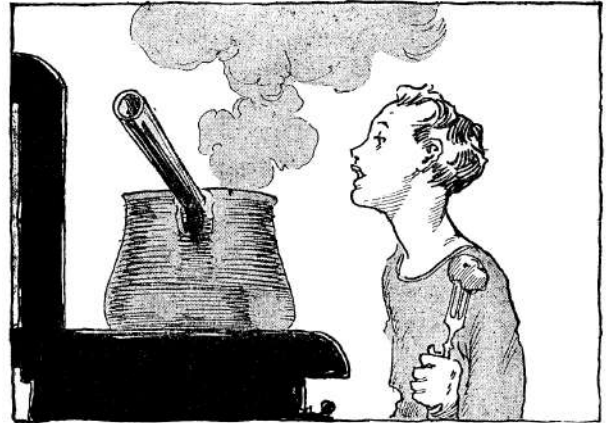
"Thanks," murmured Peter, smiling faintly, "but I'll have to be getting back to Philadelphia. My grandfather will be worried, besides I'm captain of our baseball team and there's a big game on soon."

"Would you rather be captain of a baseball team than an army?" asked Ruggedo, staring at the little boy in real amazement. He didn't know just what a baseball team was, but felt that it could not compare with his army of gnomes.

"Of course," answered Peter, in a matter of fact voice, "but if we're going to get anywhere we'll have to steer the ship." The sun had sunk down into the sea by this time and it was growing darker and darker. Stepping carefully along the rail, for the ship was still plunging and pitching terribly, Peter made a careful survey. But the rudder was gone, the masts crumbled to mere stumps and not a vestige of the sails remained.

"We'll have to drift," called Peter resignedly. Scarcely hearing him, the old gnome nodded. Already a hundred plans were skimming through his wicked little head—plans to reinstate himself as Metal Monarch, revenge himself upon Ozma and Dorothy and destroy once and for all the Emerald City of Oz. The tides of the Nonestic Ocean were very strong, and he felt that sooner or later they would be carried to the shores of Ev, under the surface of which lay his own vast dominions. Directly across the Deadly Desert from Ev, lay Oz, and when he reached his own kingdom some means of crossing the desert would have to be devised. While Ruggedo was planning all this, Peter was busily exploring the ship. He would have liked to descend into the hold of the pirate vessel, but it was already too dark to venture down, and as he was very hungry, he began to look around for something to eat. Fortunately the decks were still full of wiggling sea creatures that had failed to get back in the water after the sea quake. Peter threw most of them overboard, keeping only three tiny fish for his dinner. These he killed, cleaned and scaled with his pocket knife and, borrowing

Ruggedo's pipe which quite miraculously had stayed lit, kindled a small fire in an iron pot and broiled them most satisfactorily.



Ruggedo refused to share Peter's dinner, crunching up instead a handful of pebbles he had in his pocket. As the moon rose the sea grew calmer and, riding up and down the silvered waves, the strange ship mates sat conversing together. Delighted to be off the lonely island, impressed by Peter's enterprise and spirit, Ruggedo had grown almost friendly. He listened quite pleasantly, while Peter told how the balloon bird had carried him off and then in his turn related a bit of his own history. He first explained to the little boy how Dorothy had captured his magic belt, which seemed to be his most treasured possession, and how she had given it to Ozma. Pulling away at his pipe, he spoke of his many efforts to recover his property, but always, it seemed, through no fault of his own, he had been defeated. After his last attempt he related how Ozma had banished him to the lonely island where Peter had found him.

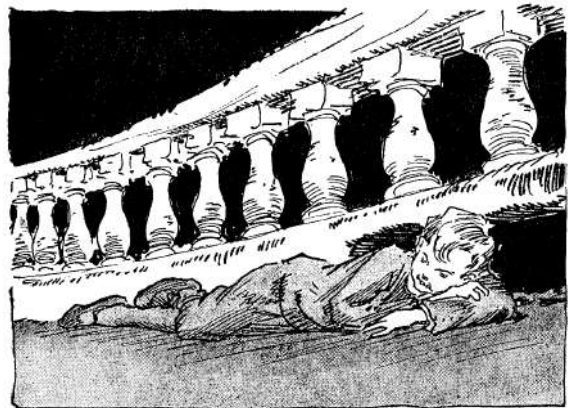


"Well, why bother with the belt?" asked Peter, a little sleepily, as the

gnome paused to knock the ashes from his pipe. "If you have all the riches you say you have, and are ruler over five hundred thousand gnomes, why do you need this belt?"

"Because it is my most magic possession," explained Ruggedo impatiently. "With the magic belt one can change people into any shape or form whatsoever and transport them where one desires. And don't you see that so long as Ozma has this belt, I am in her power?"

"I suppose so," yawned Peter, but he couldn't help reflecting, from what he had read of Ozma and what he already knew of Ruggedo, that the magic belt was far safer with the little fairy ruler of Oz.



"Why did Dorothy take it from you in the first place?" he inquired drowsily.

"Just because I wanted to transform her and a few of those useless Oz people into ornaments for my palace," complained Ruggedo in a grieved voice.

"Oh!" murmured Peter and, chuckling a little to himself, curled into a more comfortable position. The deck was hard and wet, but Peter, thinking over the strange events of the day, did not even notice. Up to now, he had believed in the usual things of life, like grandfathers, school, baseball, circuses, vacations in summer, plenty of friends and fun. To suddenly be



confronted by balloon birds, gnomes, fairy kingdoms and sea quakes was terribly confusing. Peter tried his best to figure it all out but, lulled by the motion of the ship and the monotonous drone of Ruggedo's voice, he finally fell into a deep slumber.

