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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Gnome King of Oz: The Wizard Makes The Gnome King Visible (19/20)

At Ruggedo's words, the celebrities and courtiers clung shuddering together. Knowing the awful power of the belt and feeling that they were indeed lost, they waited for the Gnome King to speak. But Peter, seizing first a tumbler, then a plate, sent them flying at the blue patch. Ruggedo might be invisible, but he was still there. Shaking his head angrily as the tumbler broke over his crown he cried in a loud voice, "I command you to transport—"

The plate, crashing against his nose, made him pause, and Peter followed this with a vase and water pitcher. But gnomes have hard heads and, with an angry roar, Ruggedo began again, "I command you to transport these people—"

By this time Peter had thrown everything in reach.

Feeling desperately in his pocket he sent a top, a baseball and a box of fish hooks whizzing through the air. Then, as his fingers closed on the sorcerer's stone, he flung that, too, at the invisible gnome. Instantly



there was a complete and utter silence. The patch still fluttered wildly before their eyes and, as the stunned company eyed it in horrified suspense, the hand of Kuma descended and closed roughly on the invisible shoulder of Ruggedo.

"Hold him! Hold him!" panted the Wizard, rushing forward with his black bag. "I remember now the magic to make him visible." The little Wizard of Oz seldom uses chants and, instead of the verse Wumbo had employed, sprinkled a black and white powder over the Gnome King. Even years afterward Peter could remember the distorted and furious face of Ruggedo, as the spell of the magic cloak was broken and he stood revealed to his enemies. Struggling to shake off the clutch of Kuma's hand, he was desperately trying to speak to the magic belt. But, though his mouth moved, not a sound issued from his lips.

"Struck dumb!" cried the Scarecrow, unclasping his arms from the Knight's neck, where he had flung them in his extreme agitation. "But how! And why?"

"I have it! I have it!" exclaimed the Wizard, pouncing upon the emerald that Peter, as a last resort, had hurled at the Gnome King. "This is the famous Silence Stone, used by the ancient Emperors of Oz to keep their wives quiet in times of war. How it came into the possession of Soob I cannot imagine, but see, here written in magic on the emerald itself is the whole story: 'Whom this stone touches on the head shall remain silent for seven years'."

"Yon honest lad hath saved the realm!" boomed Sir Hokus, slapping Peter on the back and beaming joyfully upon the still trembling company.

"I wish I could have read that before," puffed Peter.

"Well, it's lucky you threw it when you did," answered the Wizard. "One more word and we'd have been at the bottom of the sea. As it is—" Calmly the wizard unclasped the belt from the scowling Gnome King and, snatching the box of mixed magic and the wishing pills, handed them back to Ozma—"As it is, Ruggedo is perfectly harmless."

"Three cheers for Peter!" cried the Scarecrow, waving his hat over his head. "His aim and arm have saved the day."

"That's because he's such a good pitcher," mumbled the little bear, and the cheers were given with such a will all the dishes on the table skipped. Ozwold, who had buried his head in a flower pot at the first of the Gnome King's threats, now reared it cautiously and, with mud still sticking to his bill, approached the Queen.

"If Your Highness will excuse me," quavered the oztrich hoarsely, "I must be going. This excitement is very bad for my child."

Plucking a plume from his tail, Ozwold extended it politely. Smiling kindly, Ozma took the plume and sent Jellia, her little maid, to fetch an emerald necklace, for Scraps had, just in time, reminded her of the hatchday present for the baby oztrich.

"This is simply magnif—!" murmured Ozwold and, as Ozma fastened the necklace round his long neck, the

company cheered and cheered again, for they felt that the great green bird was in a large measure responsible for their safety. Ozwold, himself, was anxious to turn his child over to his wife and tell her the story of his amazing adventures, so Dorothy and Peter placed the baby oztrich on his back, fastening it securely with a hair ribbon. Nodding stiffly to the right and left, Ozwold strutted proudly from the banquet hall, and immediately the Ozites surrounded Peter, congratulating and praising him, till the little boy grew quite red with embarrassment and pleasure.

At Ozma's command, Ruggedo was led away to the cellar and, with nothing more to worry them or mar the festivities, the party began again and lasted far into the night. The Emerald Palace is so large and so roomy that none of the guests thought of going home and, after the Wizard had performed the last of his tricks and Scraps had recited the funniest of her verses, they all trooped off to bed, calling cheerily to each



other as they mounted the golden stairs. Peter had a royal suite to himself and, curling down luxuriously in the grand gold bed, wondered if he were not already asleep and dreaming of all this magnificence. A bare little room had been found for Grumpy, and the little bear, well pleased with his new quarters and comrades, was soon asleep and snoring tremendously.