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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Hungry Tiger of Oz: Beside the Wall (13/20)

The bright sun awakened Betsy and Reddy next morning. Betsy had been dreaming of the Emerald City and was but half awake. Rubbing her eyes, she stared in bewilderment at the high walls of Immense City.

"Oh, dear!" mused the little girl, heaving a sigh of disappointment, "We're still here, aren't we?"



"I should say we are," answered Carter, "and when you think of all we've been through it's quite a miracle, Betsy my child, to even be here." Carter had brushed back his celery tops, perked up his ears, washed his red cheeks in the brook and looked fresh as only a Vegetable Man may.

"I wonder if the Big Wigs ever use that door," yawned the little Prince of Rash, rolling over sleepily.

"Just what I was wondering," murmured Carter. "Now my plan is this. Let us watch the door carefully. Then, when it opens, we will slip in unnoticed and look around for the Hungry Tiger. But we must be mighty careful not to get run over or trodden upon by the Giants."

Betsy turned a trifle pale at mention of the Giants, but Reddy hastened to reassure her. "I'll take care of you, Betsy," promised the little Prince boldly, "and the rubies will help even if the Giants do catch us."

Somewhat comforted, but not absolutely convinced, Betsy ran over to the brook, and after she and Reddy splashed their hands and faces with the cool water and took a long drink from a nearby spring, they both felt quite adventurous and cheerful.

"We'll not bother about breakfast," decided Carter, "for I've a notion there'll be plenty inside."

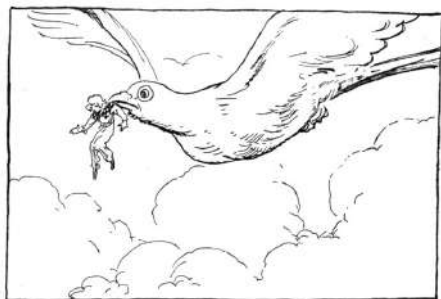
"Do you really s'pose they'll open the gate?" asked Betsy, quite excited at the prospect of entering a giant city.

"Well, the four Big Wigs we met on the road must have come out that way," observed Carter, blinking up at the enormous tulip trees surrounding the Big Wig Town. Each leaf was large as a person and Carter was about to pick one up from the ground and fashion it into a hat for Betsy, when a perfect shower of rocks came flying over the wall. While none actually hit the three travellers they were so startled by the suddenness of the attack that they stood frozen to the spot. Then Carter, seizing Betsy, darted behind a tree. Before Reddy could join them, a flock of monstrous pigeons swooped down from the wall and began pecking greedily at the rocks.

"Why they're giant crumbs," cried Betsy, peering around the tree in astonishment. "Did you ever see such big birds? Why, they're big as ostriches!"

"Bigger!" gulped Carter, anxiously motioning for Reddy to hide himself. But just then one of the pigeons, taking the little boy for a crumb or a tempting little bug, snapped him up in its bill and soared over the wall of the city.

"Stop! Come back! Help! Help!" shouted Carter Green, while Betsy jumped up and down with terror and astonishment. But the pigeons on the ground continued to peck at the crumbs and the pigeon that had carried off the little Prince was as gone as yesterday.



"Will it eat him?" cried Betsy tearfully. "Oh Carter, what shall we do now?" And with Reddy and the Hungry Tiger both gone, things

looked dark, indeed. The Vegetable Man had no idea what to do nor how to do it but, determined to comfort Betsy, he began talking so confidently and cheerfully that she soon dried her tears.

"No harm can come to Reddy, for he still has the Rash rubies," he reminded her gaily. "And all we have to do is wait here till someone opens the door in the wall. Then we'll find the Hungry Tiger and Reddy and continue our journey to Oz."

After the pigeons had flown away, Carter rolled one of the giant crumbs over to the little girl. Breaking off the crust, which was a bit stale, they found the inside soft and fresh and, while it was not exactly the breakfast she would have chosen, Betsy managed to satisfy her

hunger. Then, sitting down on the twisted roots of a tulip tree, they waited impatiently for the doors of Immense City to open.

But nothing of the kind happened, and as the morning wore away Carter grew terribly uneasy. He was more anxious about Reddy and the Hungry Tiger than he cared to admit. Afraid to leave the spot for fear the door would open while they were away, the two stared anxiously at the wall. But it was a weary business and more and more Betsy began to wonder why Ozma did not come to her assistance. There were plenty of crumbs for Betsy's lunch and supper, but as night drew on and still no one came to open the door, Carter decided to take matters into his own hands. Slowly a plan was forming in the Vegetable Man's mind, and as the moon rose up over the tulip trees, he explained it carefully to Betsy Bobbin.

"To-night," announced Carter in a firm voice, "I will plant my feet close to the walls of the city. In giant soil I ought to grow very rapidly and by morning should reach the top of the wall. Then I will bend over and grow downward till I touch the ground on the other side."

"But what will become of me?" cried Betsy, looking at Carter with frightened eyes.

"You will grow with me," said the Vegetable Man calmly.

"I will take you in my arms and we will grow up together."

"Then what?" asked the little girl doubtfully. "How will you grow down again?"

"I won't!" answered the Vegetable Man resignedly, "but I'm not important, Betsy dear, and shall doubtless make some sort of useful vine or tree."

"I don't want you to be a vine," wailed the little girl in dismay. "Please don't be a vine and leave me all alone."

"But we must think of the others," Carter pointed out gently. "Once inside the city, you will find the Hungry Tiger and Reddy and with the help of the Rash rubies manage to escape. When you reach Oz perhaps Ozma will find a way to have me transported and transplanted in the Emerald City. I'd like to be near you, Betsy," sighed the Vegetable Man wistfully.

In vain Betsy reasoned, argued and coaxed, Carter's mind was fully made up. It grew darker and darker as they talked, and just as the lanterns flashed out from the Big Wig wall the Vegetable Man picked her up in his arms and ran over to the great barred door. Standing as close to the wall as he could squeeze, Carter set Betsy on his shoulder and resolutely planted his feet in the soft earth and gazed up into the darkness.

"Now then," chuckled Carter, assuming a jaunty and care-free air to reassure the little girl, "I'm rooting for you, Betsy dear, and to-morrow we'll grow over the top."

But at that instant there was a loud thump on the other side of the wall. With a screech, the door crunched open and a giant foot was thrust through.



"Betsy! Betsy!" bellowed a terrible Big Wig voice.

"Where are you, Betsy?"

Betsy Bobbin stared at the Vegetable Man, and he stared at the giant foot. There was something familiar about that foot—but what was it?