

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 Hungry Tiger of Oz: Betsy's Birthday (2/20)

"Well!" signed Betsy Bobbin, dropping into one of the royal hammocks and swinging her heels contentedly, "It was the best party I ever had."

"I'm so full of birthday cake, I feel like a sponge," groaned the Cowardly Lion, and sinking down on the grass he began to lick the frosting off his paws.



"No wonder! You had ten pieces," grumbled the Hungry Tiger, settling down sulkily beside him.

"Now I call that more than your share, old chap."

"Why shouldn't I have the lion's share," chuckled the great beast, winking at Betsy. "I notice you ate three roast ducks and all the plum pudding."

"And still I am hungry," complained the tiger, rolling his eyes sadly from side to side. He looked so comical Betsy burst out laughing and the Cowardly Lion fairly roared. Scraps, the Patchwork Girl came running over to see what was the matter. All the celebrities had been invited to Betsy's party and now, in the pleasant dusk, were walking about under the trees in the Palace garden.

Of all gardens in and out of the world, there is none so lovely as Ozma's, and of all fairy cities there is none to compare with the Emerald City of Oz. Its sparkling buildings and shining streets, inlaid with emeralds, its quaint domed cottages and shimmering palace, make it a fitting capitol for this enchanting fairyland. Where but in Oz can animals talk as sensibly as men? Where but in Oz can one live forever, without growing old? Where but in Oz are there Wish Ways and Truth Ponds, Book Mines and Fire Falls and where but in Oz can one find such delightful companions as the Scarecrow and Scraps?

Is it any wonder, then, that Dorothy Gale, who blew to Oz in a cyclone, that Trot and Betsy Bobbin, who arrived in this strange country by way of a ship-wreck, have never returned to the real world? Who would? Indeed, these three little mortals live in the Royal Palace itself, with Ozma, the young fairy who rules over the four countries of Oz, and this small sovereign has gathered at her court all the most interesting and unusual people and animals in the realm. And every single one had been invited to Betsy's birthday, so that it took two rooms to hold all the presents, twenty-seven tables to seat the guests and sixty-nine footmen to pass the plates.

"You sit there and tell me you're hungry!" gasped Scraps, snapping her suspender button eyes at the Hungry Tiger. "Why you ate more than anyone. I counted." Scraps, being well stuffed with cotton, never

ate at all and had amused herself by keeping strict watch over the others.

"Why Scraps," murmured Ozma reprovingly. She had come up behind the Patchwork Girl and now gently tried to change the subject. No one ever knew what Scraps would say next. Made from a gay patchwork quilt and magically brought to life, this saucy maiden was one of the most surprising people in the castle. But the Hungry Tiger had lived in the Emerald City too long to mind her teasing.

"Of course I'm hungry," he yawned, rolling over on his side. "This party stuff fills me up, but does not satisfy me. What I need is something alive. But don't worry my dear," he added hastily, at Ozma's rather anxious expression. "I will never devour anyone, for my

conscience would not permit it, so I shall be hungry to the end of my days."



"Why don't you have yourself stuffed?" asked the Scarecrow, sitting down in the hammock beside Betsy Bobbin.

"Then you would lose this frightful appetite and never be hungry at all. Mighty convenient, being stuffed, old boy. Saves no end of bother and expense." The Scarecrow spoke from experience, for he was himself a stuffed person, having been made by a Munchkin farmer and stuck on a pole to scare away the crows. He had been lifted down and brought to the Emerald

City by Dorothy, on her first adventure, and since then has been restuffed and laundered many times. Of all Ozma's advisers, he is the wittiest and most lovable. "Have yourself stuffed," he advised cheerfully, "and use straw like I do."

"He stuffs himself from morning till night," snickered Scraps turning a handspring.

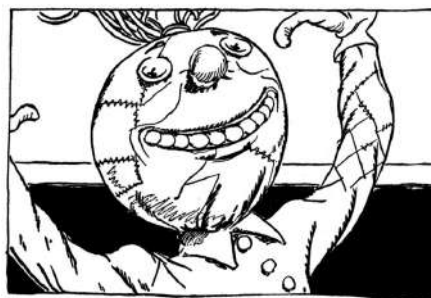
"If he were not so ugly—so yellow and so big I'd say he warn't a tiger, but a greedy weedy—"

"Scraps!" Ozma raised her scepter warningly, and the Patchwork Girl dove into a button bush. But almost immediately her mischievous face reappeared.

"Pig!" shouted Scraps defiantly, and looked so funny, peering out of the button bush, that even the Hungry Tiger had to grin.

"I say, though, why don't you have yourself stuffed?" asked the little Wizard of Oz, who had just come up.

"I've been experimenting with some new wishing powders and might easily wish you out of your jacket and stuff you with sawdust."



"Sawdust!" coughed the Hungry Tiger, sitting up and lashing his tail at the very thought of such a thing, "I should say not. I prefer my own stuffing, thank you."

"So do I," said Betsy, running over to give him a little hug. "You're so soft and comfortable to ride this way."

"But sawdust is very serviceable," urged the Wizard, who was anxious to try his new powders, "and I could stuff you in an hour." The Wizard, by the way, is a mortal like Dorothy and Betsy. Long ago he had been engaged by a circus in Omaha to make balloon flights. But one afternoon, his balloon becoming unmanageable, had flown off—up and away and never stopped till it dropped down in Oz. It was the Wizard who had built the Emerald City and for many years he practiced the trick magic he had learned in the circus. But later, Glinda the good Sorceress of the South, had taught him real magic and he is now one of the most accomplished magicians in all fairy history.

"Better let me stuff you," repeated the Wizard coaxingly.

"No! No! No!" roared the Hungry Tiger, becoming really alarmed at the little man's persistence. "No, I tell you!" "Well," the Wizard rose regretfully and began to move off, "if you ever change your mind, let me have first chance, will you?"

"I'm going to change my mind to-morrow." Sitting down stiffly on a bench opposite the hammock, Jack Pumpkinhead beamed upon the company. "It's almost too soft to use," mused Jack, touching the top of his pumpkin gently, "so, if you don't mind, I'll not talk any more."

"We don't mind at all," laughed Betsy, while Dorothy and Trot, who had just joined the group, exchanged merry winks. Jack was so amusing that no one could help chuckling when he was around. He had been made

by Ozma, when she was a little boy, and was almost as unusual as the Scarecrow. To those not familiar with Oz history, this may seem a bit strange, but Ozma once was a little boy, having been transformed by old Mombi, the witch. And while she was a little boy she had carved Jack neatly from wood and set an old pumpkin on his peg neck for a head. Later he had been brought to life by mistake and has been living merrily ever since. Every month or so Jack has to pick a pumpkin and hollow out a new head for himself, so that he is constantly changing his mind, but Ozma has a deep affection for the queer fellow, and Jack is so odd and jolly that he is a great favorite in the Emerald City. "Let's finish off the party with a game of hide and seek," suggested the Cowardly Lion, as Jack continued to stare solemnly straight in front of him. "You're it Betsy!" Giving the little girl a playful poke, he dashed down an arbored path, followed helter skelter by all the others. Even Jack, holding fast to his pumpkin head, ran and hid himself behind a balloon vine. But the Hungry Tiger ran fastest of all, never stopping till he reached the remotest corner of the garden. All this talk of stuffing had made him exceedingly nervous and, with a troubled sigh, he sank down beside a lovely fairy fountain. Here, blinking up at the bright lanterns hung everywhere in honor of Betsy's birthday, he began to think of the good old days when he had roamed the wild jungles of Oz and eaten—well we had best not say what he had eaten!

It was the Cowardly Lion who had coaxed the Hungry Tiger to the capitol. The Cowardly Lion, himself, had come there with Dorothy and the Scarecrow and grown so fond of the place and its people that he had returned to the jungle for his old friend, the Hungry Tiger. And like the Cowardly Lion, the Hungry Tiger had never been able to tear himself away from this dear and delightful city. Indeed life without the love of Dorothy, Betsy and Trot, the trust and affection of little Ozma, and the companionship of all the merry dwellers in the castle, would not be worth a soup bone. So the Hungry Tiger had never gone back, but at times the longing for real tiger food almost overcame him.

"I wonder if stuffing would help," sighed the poor beast, licking his chops hungrily. "I wonder—"

"What?" wheezed an oily voice, almost in his ear. The Hungry Tiger, supposing himself to be alone, had spoken aloud, and springing up found himself face to face with an ugly, red-faced and exceedingly disagreeable looking stranger. He was dressed in robes of pink, gold embroidered slippers and a simply enormous turban, that wagged from side to side as he talked. An oddly twisted cane swung from his left wrist and as he extended his hand in greeting, the Hungry Tiger jumped back in alarm, for the stranger's thumb was blazing away merrily. It was Ippty, Chief Scribe of Rash, for the hurry-cane had brought him straight to the royal gardens of the Emerald City of Oz.

"Am I addressing the Hungry Tiger of Oz?" inquired Ippty. "And are you still hungry?" he asked eagerly.



"What if I am?" growled the Hungry Tiger, blinking suspiciously at Irasha's singular messenger. "What if I am?"



"Come with me," said Ippty, mysteriously. "Come with me, famous and famished member of the feline family, and you will never know hunger more!"

"Who are you?" rumbled the Hungry Tiger, sitting up and beginning to pant a little from astonishment. "Who are you and what are you doing here?"

"I am Ippty, Chief Scribe of Irasha the Rough, and I am here to offer you an important position at the Court of Rash. Come to Rash," begged Ippty, glancing uneasily over his shoulder, for he was not anxious to meet any of the Oz celebrities. "Come, before we are discovered!"

"Rash!" coughed the Hungry Tiger impatiently. "Why should I go to that measly little Kingdom when I am perfectly happy and contented here?"

"Because!" Bending over and splattering the Hungry Tiger with hot candle grease from his thumb, Ippty began whispering earnestly in his ear. At first, the Hungry Tiger's tail lashed and twirled with fury, but as Ippty continued, he grew calmer, and a queer longing crept into his great yellow eyes.

"Stand back fellow," he mumbled crossly, "you will singe off my whiskers, and kindly remove your pencil from my eye."

"But you will come?" Straightening up, Ippty put his bristly hand behind him and regarded the Hungry Tiger expectantly. "Not less than one prisoner a day, sometimes as many as ten," he repeated persuasively. "Humph!" grunted the tiger, half closing his eyes. Already Ippty's wicked plan was beginning to tempt him. Surely eating criminals would not be wrong, or at least, not so very wrong.

"And these prisoners are dangerous fellows, I suppose?" he asked casually, trying to appear careless and unconcerned about the whole queer business.

"Villains, thieves and robbers, rascally fat rogues who are a menace to the country. By eating them you will be doing Rash a real service," Ippty assured him.

"And where is Rash?" asked the Hungry Tiger, waving his tail inquiringly.

"In the southwestern corner of Ev," answered the Scribe, with a wave that nearly put out his thumb. "And if you are ready, dear beast, we will start at once."

"Ev!" spluttered the tiger, "why that's miles away. I was there long ago, when Ozma, Dorothy and Billina rescued Prince Evardo from the Gnome King. Too far!" yawned the Hungry Tiger, rolling over on the dewy grass. "I'm too tired for such a journey."

"No trip at all!" Ippty touched the hurry-cane and in a few words explained its curious mechanism, following it up with such a tempting description of the Rash prisoners that the Hungry Tiger's appetite got the better of his conscience.

"I'll go," he agreed gruffly, "but only for a few days, remember." Ippty said nothing, but smiled wickedly to himself. Then, stuffing the directions for their return into the hurry-cane, he sprang upon the Hungry Tiger's back. Next instant, in a flash of fire and smoke, they had disappeared from the garden.

"What was that?" gasped Dorothy, clutching Ozma by the sleeve. Both little girls, crouched behind a button bush, had seen the strange flash.

"Lightning, I guess!" shuddered Ozma. "Let's run back to the castle, Dorothy. A thunder storm's coming!"