

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: Escape from Rash (7/20)

After the Hungry Tiger had pushed back the pink block, Betsy and her two companions settled themselves as comfortably as they could in the little cavern. It was too dark to see, but they could hear the sad singer crooning drearily to himself. Carter immediately ran his fingers along the floor. Fortunately it was stone.

"No danger of taking root here," he whispered in a relieved voice to Betsy. "Hello, what's that racket?" That racket, as we already know, was Irashi and the pink Guardsmen, and as the noise continued, the Vegetable Man, who was tallest, stuck his ears through the crevice between the blocks. What Carter heard through his corn ears was simply amazing, and as he immediately repeated it to the little company below, they soon forgot their discomfort in their interest. When Fizzenpop explained who the last prisoner was, the barber threw his shaving mug joyfully into the air and began to prance wildly up and down upon the shins of the sad singer.



"Three cheers for the Scarlet Prince!" roared the barber, thumping on the wall with his razor. "Three cheers for Prince Evered of Rash!"

"Be quiet," begged Betsy anxiously, "they'll hear you. Oh, hush!" But the barber refused to be restrained and continued to thump enthusiastically upon the wall.

Withdrawing his ears from the crevice, Carter groped about in the dark in an effort to stop the reckless fellow, but at the third snatch, the whole side of the cavern fell away and pitched the entire company into a dark damp tunnel. Carter managed to slip his arm round Betsy Bobbin, as he fell past her, and they could hear the sputter and groans of the Rash barber and the singer far below. "Anyway!" gasped Betsy, as they skidded down the slippery passageway together, "anyway we're out of Rash!"

"Is this anyway," groaned the Vegetable Man, trying to keep himself and Betsy right side up. "Well, if this is anyway, I prefer some other way. Whew!"

Betsy was about to reply when the floor of the tunnel dropped out and they fell straight downward, then, striking a rubbery incline, shot straight upward. The rest of the trip was more like a rush through a scenic railway tunnel than anything Betsy ever had experienced. Up slides, down slides, round loops, bends and curves, swooped the Rash prisoners till there was no breath left in any one of them. And when, after a half hour of it, they shot out into the open, they lay for nearly five minutes, perfectly motionless, where they

had fallen. Then the Rash singer sat up and in a strangled voice quavered:

"We're down! We're down and out of Rash,
And everything has gone to smash!
Snif! Snif! A trip like this upsets me,
But how we got here is what gets me!"

Probably he would have continued his song indefinitely, but at that minute all of Carter's vegetables, which had slid more slowly down the tunnel, sprayed out of the opening and simply overwhelmed him. Betsy had not breath enough to laugh, but Carter, not being so easily winded, sprang up and ran to the singer's assistance.

"They always throw things when I sing," sobbed the poor fellow, as Carter helped him to his feet, and a little defiantly he repeated his last stanza:

"Snif! Snif! A trip like this upsets me,
But how we got here is what gets me!"

"It gets me, too," mumbled the barber, rolling over and looking around for his razor. "One minute there we are and next minute there we ain't! Strikes me this ground is pretty soft. Why, it's down," he puffed, blowing a ball of fuzz from the end of his nose.

Betsy, pulling up a handful of what she supposed to be grass, found her fingers full of feathers, for they had landed in the very center of a field of down. "Well, this probably saved us from breaking our heads, but how did it all happen?" repeated the barber, looking over at Carter in perfect bewilderment.

"It was your fault," answered the Vegetable Man gravely. "You must have touched some secret spring when you pounded on the wall. I don't know whether to thank you or not," sighed Carter rubbing his thin ankles doubtfully.

"I hope you didn't bark your shins on the tunnel," murmured the barber solicitously.

"No," answered Carter frankly, "I didn't bark my shins for they are bark already, but you've ruined my business." He looked ruefully at his scattered vegetables. They had not stood the trip at all well and were lying about in squashed heaps.

"Never mind, Buddy!" The barber clapped Carter comfortably on the back. "Maybe you can pick up some more down here. But where is here, I wonder?"

"Well, any place is better than Rash," exclaimed Betsy, looking about curiously. "The last time I fell through a tunnel I went clear to the other side of the world. Do you s'pose this is the other side of the world? Look, there's the moon!"

"It's square!" whispered the sad singer in a frightened voice. "And it's green!" he added dismally.

"The moon, the moon, the moon is there,
But never trust a moon that's square!

It's shining squarely on our heads;
We'll all be slaughtered in our beds!"

"You don't know what you're singing about," declared the barber gruffly. "A square moon is better than no moon and there aren't any beds that I can see, but

there's a town over yonder. Look!" Not far away, shadowy and mysterious in the green light of the square moon, rose the towers and spires of a strange city.

"Well, I wish the Hungry Tiger were here," cried Betsy Bobbin. "And the little Prince. I wonder if the cave wall closed up after it slid us down here?"

Whiz! Whirr! Bang! As if in answer to Betsy's question, the two came sailing out of the tunnel, circled through the air and landed close beside Betsy. And while the Hungry Tiger was still puffing and panting with indignation and surprise, the little girl flung her arms about his neck and told him the whole story of their flight through the mysterious passageway. Slowly the big beast got his breath back and as he blew the downy feathers from his nose, the Rash Barber, with great ceremony, introduced the little Prince to Betsy Bobbin. In the green moonlight she saw a pleasant,



freckle-faced little boy of about her own age. His nose turned up, his collar turned down, and in spite of his ragged clothes he had a most kingly bearing. Betsy knew at once that they would be friends. Prince Evered, himself, liked the little girl

immediately and after they had compared notes on their terrible fall, he begged her to tell him more about the Vegetable Man.

"Is he really real?" asked the little Prince, scarcely taking his eyes from Carter's curious figure. Betsy nodded and told him all about her meeting with the Vegetable Man, her trip across the Deadly Desert and of their arrival in Rash. She was going on to tell him a little about Ozma and the Emerald City, but the sad singer had started such a sleepy song of welcome to honor the little Prince that she could not keep her eyes open. Evered, too, soon began to nod and as the Hungry Tiger had wisely determined not to investigate the strange city till morning, they all curled up in the fields of down and were soon fast asleep. All but Carter Green. Since turning to a vegetable he did not require rest and all night long he paced up and down the white feathery field, thinking his own queer thoughts and keeping a loving watch over his new and interesting friends.