

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: Immense City (12/20)

When the Vegetable Man returned with his new corn ears, nicely adjusted, everyone felt more cheerful. "Can you hear?" asked the Hungry Tiger curiously.

Carter nodded. "I think they're even better than the last pair," he confided happily. "It isn't everyone who can pick a new

ear when his old one pops or wears out. Not so bad being a Vegetable Man, eh, Betsy, my dear?"

"No," agreed the little girl thoughtfully, "and you haven't taken root for a long time, have you Carter?"

The Vegetable Man grinned. "Haven't had a chance," he chuckled merrily. "We haven't stayed in one place long enough for that. I hope the next country we come to is calm and quiet and that I can pick up a cart and some fresh vegetables."

"I hope we can pick up a square meal," roared the Hungry Tiger, licking his whiskers hungrily.

"I hope there's some magic!" Claspng her hands, Betsy looked around expectantly. "Then we could cross the Deadly Desert and go home. I kinda miss Dorothy and



Ozma," she acknowledged wistfully. "And I'd like to see Hank."

"Well, I hope we find the last ruby," exclaimed Prince Evered. "The one Kaliko had must have been the ruby that protected one from danger by water. You said he bought it from a fisherman, Carter?"

"Yes," mused the Vegetable Man. "It must be the one Irashi flung into the river, while the one I found was the ruby that protects from danger on the earth and under the earth. Look how it saved us from the pick-axes and the fire-fall!"

"Then the only one left to find is the ruby that protects you from danger in the air," reflected Betsy

thoughtfully. "Do you s'pose we'll have to fly up in the air to find it?"



"Not if I have anything to say about it," growled the Hungry Tiger, shaking his handsome head. "Falling is bad enough;

flying would turn my whiskers perfectly white. We'll stay on the earth if we can, and travel back to Oz by the fastest route we can find. Then Ozma can settle affairs in Rash, discover the whereabouts of the last ruby and restore Reddy to his throne."

"Can Ozma do all that?" marveled the little Prince wonderingly.

"Ozma can do anything," Betsy answered proudly. "Just wait till you see the Emerald City and Scraps and the Scarecrow."

"Tell me about them," begged the little Prince eagerly, and as the Hungry Tiger padded comfortably down the long sunlit lanes, Betsy told Reddy all about the jolly inhabitants of Oz. The Vegetable Man listened attentively, too, his new ears a bit forward and a dreamy expression in his kindly blue eyes. But right in the middle of a description of Tik Tok, the metal man, he gave a bounce of surprise.

"Spinach!" spluttered Carter Green explosively.

"Where?" inquired the Hungry Tiger, coming to an abrupt stop and blinking around longingly. He was not very fond of spinach, but even spinach would taste better than nothing.

"I didn't mean spinach exactly," mumbled the Vegetable Man hurriedly. "But look!" Pointing his twig-like finger to a bend in the road, Carter directed their attention to a weather-beaten sign.

"Beware the Ants!" advised the sign mysteriously.

"Oh, I hope they're not red ants," murmured Betsy, anxiously. "Red ants bite!"

"Who's afraid of ants?" cried Reddy disdainfully. "All you have to do is tread on 'em."

"That's right," agreed the Hungry Tiger. "I'm surprised at you, Carter, stopping us for a little thing like that."

"But suppose there were millions of them," shuddered the Vegetable Man uneasily. "I'd be a feast for ants."

Betsy looked troubled, but the Prince of Rash, slapping his pocket suddenly, reminded her of the Rash rubies. "The rubies will protect us no matter what happens," declared Reddy, confidently.

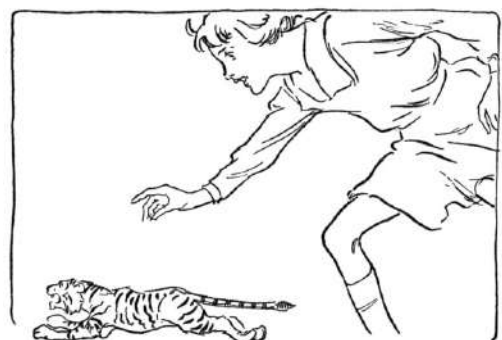
"As soon as you see an ant, jump on my back," advised the Hungry Tiger calmly. "Then we'll all stick together and I'll run like sixty."

Carter shook his head and muttered unhappily to himself. He could not help remembering the sad accident to his ears. They all kept their eyes glued to the road for the first sign of the ants, the Hungry Tiger tip-toeing along almost as if he were walking on eggs. They were all so intent upon the road beneath their feet that they never thought of the road ahead at all. Then Betsy, suddenly looking up to see whether any towns or villages were visible, gave a shrill scream and clasped her arms round the tiger's neck.

"Ants?" quavered Carter, leaping upon the Hungry Tiger and fastening both hands in Reddy's belt. Betsy was too shocked for speech, and it was the Hungry Tiger, himself, who answered Carter's query.

"Ants!" coughed the Hungry Tiger, trembling like a leaf, "Giants!" And swinging about like

a pivot, the terrified beast raced off in the opposite direction. But the Giants had already seen them. There were four of the huge creatures, and Betsy, glancing fearfully over her shoulder saw the smallest—a



perfectly tremendous little girl Giant—beginning to gain on them. The Hungry Tiger did his best, but who could hope to outdistance a creature whose every step covered a city block?

"Father! Father!" shrilled the little Giant, in a voice that shook the hills, "see that darling little kitten!" Before the luckless travellers had time to plan, think, or act, a great hand came snatching downward and seized the Hungry Tiger by the scruff of the neck. Up went the tiger, off went the three riders and, turning seven somersaults, landed together in a hay field. By the time they had picked themselves up, the Giants were a mile down the road.

"They're worse than gnomes," sputtered Carter indignantly. "Called the Hungry Tiger, a kitten! Did you hear that? It's a wonder that great girl didn't break us to bits."

"She would have if we had not had the rubies," panted Evered, picking up his sword. "We must have fallen a quarter of a mile. Weren't you scared, Betsy?"

Betsy shivered, but recovering herself quickly ran out into the road and tried to catch a last glimpse of the Hungry Tiger. "We'll have to go after them," she cried.

"That girl needn't think she can have the Hungry Tiger for a kitten. Why, he must be furious."

"I'm glad she didn't pick me for a pet," exclaimed Carter, walking briskly up and down to keep from taking root. "Let's go on, Betsy. Maybe the Giants live around

here somewhere and maybe we can help the Hungry Tiger to escape."

"I'm not afraid of Giants," asserted Reddy, in a slightly shaky voice. "Come on, we've the Rash rubies to protect us." Trying to keep up their courage and assuming a bravery they were very far from feeling, the three adventurers started off in the direction the Giants had taken.

"Well, I hope we don't meet any more," sighed Betsy, pressing closer to the Vegetable Man, "and I hope we find the Hungry Tiger before night time."

The sun had set, and in the gray twilight the trees and bushes took on fearsome shapes and forms. Keeping close together, and conversing in scared whispers, they hurried anxiously along. Soon large and disturbing signs began to appear on both sides of the road.



"This country belongs to the Big Wigs. Keep Out!" advised the signs.

"Big Wigs!" breathed Betsy nervously, "Why, they must be the Giants."

"See how high the fences are, and the trees are so tall I cannot even see the tops," gasped Reddy. Feeling smaller than ever, the two children and Carter tip-toed down the long dark lanes and presently came to the Giant City, itself. All they could see was a grim gray wall, stretching up toward the sky. Hanging in niches of the wall at regular

distances were great yellow lanterns and traced on the wall itself in flaming letters stood the town's name.

"Immense City," quavered the Vegetable Man, in a choked voice. "Well, I should say it was!"

"If there were only a gate," mourned Betsy, "we might peek through. Oh, dear, I do hope the Hungry Tiger is safe."

"He's safe enough," groaned Carter, looking sadly at the great wall, "but how are we ever to get in to him?" The only entrance to Immense City seemed to be a huge stone door in the center of the wall, and it was locked and bolted with bars as big as telegraph poles. Over the wall came a confused murmur of voices, the rumble of wheels and a muffled sound of music, while drifting down to the tired, hungry travellers came the delicious smell of a hundred giant dinners cooking.

"Just one giant biscuit would be enough for us," sighed Betsy, sniffing the air wistfully. "I'll bet it would be as big as you are Reddy."

"What's the use of wishing," sighed the little Prince gloomily. "We can never climb over the wall and there's nothing to eat on this side. I almost wish we had stayed Down Town!"

Both children looked so down-hearted that Carter saw at once that something must be done. So, bidding them keep close together, the Vegetable Man went off in search of supper. The lanterns from the city wall spread their radiance for miles around and it was not long before Carter came to a great apple orchard. Climbing the trees was impossible, but scattered about on the

ground were apples the size of pumpkins. Taking one of the smallest, the Vegetable Man hurried back to the others. In spite of its size, the apple was of delicious flavor. Reddy cut it into slices with his sword and he and Betsy grew so merry over their strange supper that Carter felt well repaid for his trouble.



"To-morrow," promised the Vegetable Man gaily, "We will find a way into the city and rescue our old friend."

"And to-night?" queried Betsy, uneasily.

"To-night we will rest," answered Carter calmly, as if sleeping under the walls of a giant city were quite a usual affair. Gathering leaves and twigs, he made Betsy and Evered comfortable beds in the shelter of a giant elm. For himself, he collected a pile of rocks. "So I'll not take root," he explained with a wink. The leafy beds were so soft and Betsy and Reddy so weary, they soon fell asleep, but Carter on his rocky couch never closed his eyes.