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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Hungry Tiger of Oz: In Down Town (8/20)

When Betsy awakened next morning, she saw the Hungry Tiger and Carter staring curiously at a huge sign in the corner of the field.

"Down!" ordered the sign sternly, "No Uppers Allowed!" "That means us, I suppose," said Carter, scratching his corn ear reflectively. "I wonder what kind of people live down here?"

"Geese!" spluttered the Hungry Tiger, looking cross-eyed at a fluff of feathers that had lighted on the end of his nose. "Wish I could catch a couple, I'm so hungry!"

"So am I," agreed Betsy, "and I don't see a thing to eat, do you?"

"Nothing but sun-beams," mused Carter, "and they'd make a pretty light breakfast, but we ought to be glad there's a sun so far underground."

"Why, shouldn't there be?" snapped the Hungry Tiger. Being hungry made him a bit irritable. "Doesn't the sun go down every day?" Betsy and Carter exchanged startled glances, for neither of them had thought of



this; and the little girl, gazing dreamily across the soft fields, began to wonder what exciting adventures and strange experiences lay ahead of them. But the Hungry Tiger was more interested in food. "Maybe there'll be something to eat in the city," he wheezed in a weak voice. "Let's waken the others." Prince Evered and the sad singer were already up and after a few shakes and thumps on the back, the Rash Barber lifted his head. "What's up?" he inquired sleepily.

"Nothing," giggled Betsy. "Don't you remember we all fell down?"

"Don't remember a thing since I hit the feathers," yawned the barber, plucking a tuft of down from his beard.

"Well, this is Down," laughed Betsy, pointing to the sign.

"And time to get up," added the Hungry Tiger gruffly.

"We're going off to that city over there to see if we can find some breakfast. Jump on my back Betsy, and you, too." The Hungry Tiger nodded at the ragged little Prince. "What do they call you?" he asked kindly.

"The Scarlet Prince, the Son of Asha, Prince Evered of Rash, the Pasha!"

Droned the sad singer with a deep salaam toward the youthful ruler.

"All that?" gasped the Hungry Tiger, putting back his ears.

"Oh, call me 'Reddy'," exclaimed the little boy, hopping up behind Betsy. "I haven't been Prince for a year, you

know, and that's what Fizzenpop called me even when I was."

"Well, I wish Fizzenpop were here now," sighed the Hungry Tiger regretfully, "too bad the trap door closed before he found it." The tiger had a great admiration for the Grand Vizier of Rash and determined to do all in his power to restore Reddy to his throne.

"Tell us more about the magic rubies," begged Betsy, as the tiger started briskly across the fields of Down.

"Yes, do," urged the Vegetable Man, "we dropped out right in the middle of the story and most of it was knocked out of my head." Carter was trudging along beside the Hungry Tiger, but the barber and the singer, thinking it presumptuous to walk so close to the Prince, had dropped respectfully behind. So while the strange little procession moved toward the unknown city, Prince Evered told again how Irashi had stolen the precious rubies and made himself Pasha of Rash.

"Well, I don't see how you'll ever find them," murmured Betsy, when he had finished the story and told a little of his life with the cobbler's children.

"Nothing's impossible," Carter reminded her gaily. "Look at me!" Betsy and the little Prince both had to grin, for the Vegetable Man did look impossible, and yet, there he was.

"But how would you know the rubies if you did find them?" asked Betsy, after a little pause.

"There is an 'R' cut in each one," explained Reddy gravely, "and they are square."

"R!" shouted Carter, snatching out a stalk of his celery.

"R? Parsnips and peonies! Radishes and rhubarb!"

Seizing the leather pouch from about his neck, the Vegetable Man dumped its whole contents into Betsy's lap. "Stop!" begged Carter grasping the Hungry Tiger by the tail. "Stop, I think I've discovered something."

"To eat?" questioned the Hungry Tiger, looking round eagerly. Without answering, Carter picked up the ruby he had already showed to Betsy Bobbin.

"Square!" puffed Carter triumphantly, "and it has an R cut on the side!"

"Why, it's one of the Rash Rubies," screamed the Prince, nearly tumbling off the tiger. "Where did you find that?" Passing the beautiful gem from one to the other, Carter explained how he had found it in a potato he had bought from a gypsy.

"But which ruby is it?" panted the barber, pressing forward. "It might be the one Irashi flung from the castle window, or it might be the one he buried in the garden. Let me give your Highness a tiny cut with my razor," he suggested brightly. "Then, if it does not hurt, we will know that it is the ruby that protects you from danger on the earth or under the earth."

Evered looked a little doubtful, and the Hungry Tiger shook his head impatiently. "Too risky," growled the tiger.

"Let his Highness climb yonder tree," proposed the singer, waving toward a feather fan tree that stood not far away. "Then let him fall out. If he breaks no bones

we will know it is the ruby that protects him from danger in the air."

"Don't you do it!" cried Betsy indignantly. "It might be the ruby that protects you from danger in the water. Then where'd you be?"

"Let Reddy keep his ruby till danger threatens," advised the Hungry Tiger sternly. "I'm not going to have him sliced and broken if I can help it." And he flashed his yellow eyes so threateningly that the barber and singer fell back in confusion.

"But wasn't it lucky we met Carter!" exclaimed Betsy, as the Vegetable Man slipped the ruby into Evered's pocket. "And if the King of Down lives in this city, and can just show us the way up, maybe we can find the other rubies and—"

"Something to eat," roared the Hungry Tiger, breaking into a quick step.

"When I'm the Pasha, you shall have anything you wish," promised the little Prince, smiling sideways at Carter Green. "You can be Keeper of Kites and Marbles if you want, Betsy shall be Queen, and the Hungry Tiger all the rest of the nobility."

"Thanks," muttered the Hungry Tiger, grinning behind his whiskers. He knew that if he ever reached Oz in safety, nothing could tempt him away from the Emerald city again, not even his terrible appetite.

"But what do the three R's stand for?" asked Carter. He had been turning the matter over in his mind for some time.

"Readin', ritin', and rithmetic," guessed Betsy Bobbin.

"Rightful Ruler of Rash," corrected Reddy, with a cheerful bounce. Now that one of the magic rubies was in his possession anything seemed possible. "Hurry up!" he called over his shoulder to the Rash barber and singer. "We're almost there." And they almost were, for beyond a thin fringe of feather brush rose the high buildings and towers of the city they had seen in the moonlight. The trip across the fields of Down had been rather tiresome. The feet of the travellers sank at each step into the soft feathers, so that even the Hungry Tiger was panting a little when they reached the city itself. Over the gates, creaking backward and forward in the brisk morning breeze, was a large silver sign.

"Down Town," read Betsy, squinting a little in the bright sunshine. "Why, it looks just like down town at home, Carter."



"Home in Oz?" queried the Vegetable Man, pressing his nose against the bars.

"No, in Oklahoma!" laughed Betsy hastily. "But let's go in. I see stores and hotels and everything!"

"Hotels?" gulped the Hungry Tiger, pricking up his ears. "Hotels! B-r-r-r!" And before Betsy or anyone else could stop him, he had hurled himself headlong at the gates of Down Town. With a creak and bang, they burst open and the whole Rash company fell through.

"Food!" roared the Hungry Tiger, charging at full speed down the main street. "Give us food!" At the tiger's

roars, such citizens as were in the streets stopped in horror and astonishment. Then, right and left like startled hares, they darted, huddling into doorways, scurrying into side alleys, tumbling over one another in their frenzy to get away. In fact they were as amazed and terrified to see a tiger in their Down Town, as we would be to see one in ours, and when they glimpsed Carter Green, they ran faster than ever.

"Stop!" shouted Betsy, flinging both arms around the tiger's neck to keep from falling off. "You're scaring everyone away. Stop! Here's a restaurant!"

But the Hungry Tiger had already seen the tempting display of pies and roast turkey in the window. Turning so sharply that the Prince of Rash tumbled off backward, he rushed through the swinging doors and next minute they had the establishment to themselves. One look at the Hungry Tiger had been enough for the early morning customers. Grabbing their hats, and without waiting for their change, they pelted out the rear door of the shop, followed by three waiters and the screaming proprietor.

"Oh, well," sighed Betsy, helping herself capably to a spring chicken that was turning slowly on a spit, "if they won't stay to wait on us, we must just help ourselves."

"What fun!" chuckled Reddy, burying his nose in a cherry tart, while the barber and sad singer divided a huge sausage between them. The Vegetable Man, not requiring food, busied himself with counting the oranges

and apples in the window and wondered wistfully whether he could not find a cart somewhere and stir up some trade.

But it was the Hungry Tiger who enjoyed himself most of all. At one side of the room a dozen roasts were waiting their turn at the ovens. These, the famished tiger snapped up in so many bites. After his long fast in Rash, they tasted perfectly delicious and, while Reddy looked at him in astonishment and admiration, he swallowed three roast turkeys, a bowl of potato salad and a tray full of biscuits. He was just starting on a huge ham, when a commotion in the doorway made them all spin round. It was the proprietor, and with him were twenty tall officers.

They had a great net, and as the Hungry Tiger gave a convulsive swallow, they flung it over him and dragged the huge beast, the singer, the barber, Betsy, the Vegetable Man, and the little Prince of Rash out into the street.

"Robbers!" screamed the proprietor savagely, as they were hustled away. "Wait till Dad hears of this."

"Why don't you bite them?" wailed Betsy, trying to wriggle out of the grasp of the officer who had her by the arm.

"Too full," mumbled the Hungry Tiger in a stuffy voice.

"Couldn't eat another bite, not even a policeman. But it was worth it and who's afraid of Dad? We've been arrested before and gotten away. We'll get off somehow, trust me."

"Maybe the ruby will help," said the little Prince, squirming about so he could see Betsy. Carter, on the other side, gave her such an encouraging wink that the little girl stopped worrying and began to look around with real interest. Down Town, as Betsy had said in the first place, was quite like other down towns, except that there were no motors nor wagons and the men who crowded the streets were gaily costumed in green and yellow bills. Four of the Down Officers had hold of the net entangling the Hungry Tiger, one officer had hold of each of the others and the rest tramped importantly ahead of the procession.

"Who's Dad?" asked Betsy, as they were propelled through the swinging doors of a large white bank.

"The King," answered the officer haughtily.

"Is he a kind King?" sniffed the sad singer nervously.

"What kind of a King is Dad. Will he make us happy or make us sad?"

"You'll soon see," grunted the officer, pushing him roughly into an elevator. The others were thrust as unceremoniously after him, the car shot upward and the next minute they were all marched out upon the roof. In a swivel chair on top of the bank, sat Dad. He was reading a paper and beside him on a high stool sat the most curious lady Betsy had ever seen.

"Their Majesties the King and Queen of Down Town!" boomed the officer, who had hold of Betsy Bobbin.

"Robbers, your Highness!" he announced with a low bow.