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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

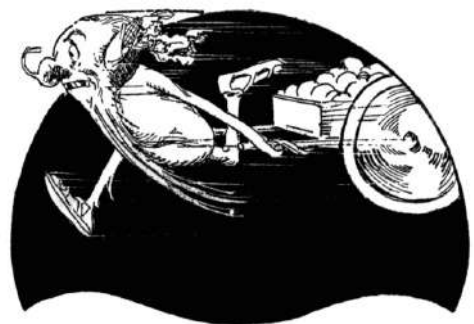
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The Hungry Tiger of Oz: Prisoners in Rash (5/20)

Betsy never had been destroyed in her life, so she was not at all sure how it would feel. A hot dry wind whistled through her hair, and above the rumble of the wheels she could hear the sharp gasps of Carter Green. Then everything stopped at once, the cart, the burning wind and the hoarse breathing of the Vegetable Man. "He's destroyed," cried Betsy despairingly, "and now it's my turn." Closing her eyes and trying hard to be brave, Betsy waited for destruction. But nothing at all happened, and after a few terrible moments, she sat up and peered timidly around her. On a pink mile stone, beside the cart, sat the Vegetable Man, staring across the Deadly Desert. Following his startled gaze, Betsy saw two white objects, skipping merrily toward the sky line. It was the sandals. Just as she had made sure of it, they disappeared in a final spurt of speed and sand.

"Why, how did they get off?" stammered Betsy, blinking with astonishment.

"Took themselves," groaned the Vegetable Man, rubbing his shins, "and glad I am that they did. But they've



brought us safely across the quick sand and Deadly Desert and here we are!"

"Yes," agreed Betsy resignedly, "here we are, but where are we? I didn't know they were quick sandals. Did they really run away with you?" Carter nodded and rose stiffly to his feet.

"I must say Betsy," grunted the Vegetable Man, "I prefer to run myself and not be carried off by a frisky pair of shoes. After this I'll do my own kicking, my own stopping and my own starting, thank you! And we'd better start right away or everything will be spoiled." He looked anxiously into the cart and, jumping out, Betsy began to help him dust and rearrange the vegetables. They had been sadly jolted about by the trip.

As it was impossible to go back across the desert without the quick sandals, they sensibly decided to go forward. There were two roads, stretching invitingly ahead and after a short debate they took the left one. "This reminds me a little of the Rose Kingdom," mused Betsy, as they walked along under the flowering trees. "Everything is pink, Carter, have you noticed, even the clouds."

"Why there's a pink castle!" cried Carter, with an excited wave. "Maybe we can sell the King of this country some cabbages and maybe he can tell us the way back to the Emerald City."

"Perhaps we'd better try some of the cottages first," suggested Betsy uneasily. In her many adventures she

had discovered that kings were not always safe nor agreeable persons to deal with.

"No! No!" insisted Carter, "Kings make the best customers, Betsy. Compliment and flatter 'em and sell 'em the whole cart load, that's my way. Jump in and I'll run you right up to the castle."

Lifting her gaily into the cart, he started briskly down the pink lane calling, "Cabbages! fresh cabbages!" at the top of his vegetable voice. The lane led straight into a bright pink city and Betsy soon grew so interested in its tall turbaned citizens and queer cottages and shops that she forgot to worry about the King. She remembered afterward the scared glances of some of the townsmen, as they went rattling by, but at the time neither she nor Carter noticed anything amiss and the Vegetable Man never stopped till he reached the pink palace itself. As Carter paused under a balcony and began lustily calling his wares, a window just below was flung up violently and a turbaned head wagged warningly over the sill.

"Go away! Go away!" quavered an old man, in a frightened voice. "The Pasha is in a terrible temper. Go away! Go away, rash mortals, I beg of you!"

But the Vegetable Man only laughed. "Wait till he's seen my cabbages," called Carter, holding one up proudly.

"Wait—" And they did not have long to wait, let me tell you, for at that precise moment the Pasha of Rash rushed out upon the balcony—the Pasha, himself, and Ipty, Chief Scribe of the Realm, for Betsy and the

Vegetable Man had, as you have probably guessed already, run straight into that peppery country.

"Good morning!" cried Carter, pleasantly, in no wise alarmed by the fearful frown of the Rash Ruler.

"Permit me to observe that your Highness is beautiful as a banana and fragrant as an onion. And I am here to serve you. Let me serve your Majesty with a fresh young cauliflower, a bunch of beets or this handsome cabbage!" Carter held up the cabbage coaxingly.

"A cabbage! A cabbage!" choked Irashi, turning perfectly pink with passion. "How dare you offer me a cabbage?" So angry that further speech was impossible, he turned furiously to Ippty, waving his arms and sputtering like a motor cycle.

"Begone, pernicious peddlers," ordered the Chief Scribe, pointing his fountain pen finger sternly at the two travellers. "Begone at once from Rash."

Three drops of ink fell upon Betsy's upturned nose and, thoroughly alarmed, the little girl sprang out of the cart and tried to pull Carter away.

"Hurry up! Hurry up!" she begged breathlessly, "Let's run." But already the Vegetable Man had tarried too long and was firmly rooted to the spot. And while he tugged wildly at one foot and then the other and Betsy jumped up and down with fright and impatience, Ippty leaned over the balcony. A closer inspection of the Vegetable Man proved so astonishing to the Chief Scribe that he nearly fell over the railing.

"He has corn ears!" yelled Ippty shrilly, "and a turnip nose. Look! Look at the monstrous creature!" Thus

urged, Irashi, himself, peered over the railing. Perceiving in a moment what had happened to Carter, he began to stamp and shriek with anger.

"How dare you plant your feet in my best flower beds," howled Irashi. "Call out the Guards! Throw them to the tiger. Salt! Vinegar! Mustard! Pepper!" At each shriek a Rash Guardsman dashed out of the palace, and before Carter could jerk himself loose he and Betsy were overpowered.

"He can't help taking root," protested Betsy indignantly. "He's a Vegetable Man."

"Aha! Now we are getting to the root of the matter," snickered Ippty harshly. "And what right has a Vegetable Man in Rash, young lady?"

"Root him up! Throw him to the tiger. Vegetable Man! Vegetable Man, indeed!" roared Irashi, stamping one foot and then the other.

"Tiger!" groaned Carter. "How perfectly carnivorous. Of course," he added turning quickly to Betsy. "It wouldn't hurt me, for I have no feelings, but it will ruin my business. Spare me!" he cried, waving his arms imploringly up at the balcony. "And if you cannot spare me, spare my potatoes, my cabbages and fresh young beets. And spare this lovely little lady from Oz!"

"We'll spare you, all right," wheezed Irashi grimly.

"He'd make excellent soup, your Highness!" suggested Ippty, glancing down sideways at the Vegetable Man, but Irashi shook his head.

"No! No! The tiger shall have him," declared Irashi stubbornly. "It'll be a nice change for him Ippty, a little

green with his dinner." Irashi was so pleased with his joke that he winked down at Betsy. But the little girl stamped her foot angrily.

"You'd better let us go, or Ozma of Oz will capture your whole kingdom. We're important people back in Oz!" shouted Betsy defiantly.

"Perhaps the girl is right," ventured Fizzenpop, who had stolen anxiously out upon the balcony. "What harm have they done? Let them go, I beg!"

"No!" With a determined wag of his turban, Irashi signaled to the Guard and flounced back into the palace.

"Don't cry, Betsy," begged the Vegetable Man. The Guards had at last jerked him loose and were marching the two across the gardens. "This tiger will probably eat me first and I'm so tough he'll choke to death and you can run away."

"Well, I wish I had never found those quick sandals," wailed the little girl. "It was the quick sandals that brought us here, Carter, and I don't believe Ozma knows about this dreadful country at all. Couldn't you please let us go Mr. Pepper?" she begged tearfully of the Guard. The tall Rasher looked down at her doubtfully, but Salt, who had hold of Carter, and was just behind, shook his turban violently.

"If we fail to obey the Pasha, we, ourselves, will be thrown to this tiger," sputtered Salt grimly.

"That's right," chimed in Vinegar and Mustard, who were bringing up the procession with the Vegetable Man's cart. "Let's hurry through with it!" And turning a

deaf ear to the pleas of the prisoners, the Rash Guardsmen rushed them across the lawn, up the steep steps and threw them over the prison wall. Then, without one backward glance, they marched off to the palace.

Too breathless to run, Betsy picked herself up and looked fearfully around for the tiger. Ugh! There he was and growling frightfully, for the vegetable cart and all the vegetables had hit him on the head. Slashing right and left and shaking himself so violently, that potatoes, beets and apples flew in every direction, he rose and started toward her. This, after all the other frightful happenings of the morning, was too much and covering her face, Betsy burst into tears. But if Betsy

was frightened, the Hungry Tiger was perfectly petrified.



"Betsy! Betsy!" panted the astonished beast. "How in Oz did you get here?" And rubbing his soft nose against her cheek, he began to dry her tears with his tongue. At

the first sound of that familiar voice, Betsy's eyes flew open and next instant she had both arms round the Hungry Tiger's neck, hugging him for dear life.

"Carter! Carter!" called the little girl excitedly, "Don't be scared. It's the Hungry Tiger, the Hungry Tiger of Oz!" She fairly sang out the name, in her relief and happiness. The Vegetable Man had dropped head first

into the tiger's tub of water. At Betsy's cries, he made a valiant attempt to rise, but when he saw her actually embracing the tiger he was so startled and horrified that he fell back with a splash.

"Hungry Tiger!" gurgled Carter, bobbing up and down like a cork, "Hungry Tiger! Then so much the worse for us!"