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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Hungry Tiger of Oz: Reddy Restored to the Throne (19/20)

The time passed most merrily for the travellers. Carter and Atmos were so interested in each other, and Betsy and Ozma were so busy exchanging their strange experiences, they scarcely noticed the country through which they were passing. But after an hour's march Reddy, who was still ahead of the others, gave a loud cry of surprise, for he had caught a glimpse of the pink towers of Rash.

"We've travelled in a circle," panted the little boy excitedly, "and here we are back where we started from."



"Well, shall we stop and conquer Irashi or go on back to Oz?" queried Betsy. "The Deadly Desert is on the other side of the city, and we could easily march around it."

"March round by all means," roared the Hungry Tiger, who had his own reasons for avoiding Rash. "In the Emerald City Ozma can do the whole conquering by magic, and then if Reddy still wants to return to his

measly little Kingdom, she can transport him with the Magic Belt."

The little fairy looked inquiringly at Reddy, but Reddy lifted his chin and fingering his sword lovingly, shook his head.

"A Prince should conquer his own enemies," declared the little boy bravely, "and after the way Irashi treated us, I really ought to conquer him."

"But can six people conquer a city?" gasped the airman rolling his eyes a bit wildly. "In the sky it takes an army."

"I've seen one person conquer a city in Oz," boasted Betsy proudly. "Come on Red, I'll help you."

"So will I!" cried Carter Green, picking up a stout stick, "And we have the Rash rubies, remember!"

"I don't know much about earth battles, but I can tread on a few toes," offered Atmos, clumping up to the little Prince and tapping his boots significantly.

"And if you are set upon it, I'll bite off a few heads," roared the Hungry Tiger. "On to Rash!" Bidding the little girls hold tight, he went charging full speed over the hill, Reddy, Atmos and Carter racing breathless after him.

Now it happened that Irashi and his Chief Scribe were having luncheon in the castle gardens. They had long since dismissed the Hungry Tiger and the little Prince from their evil minds. You can therefore imagine their astonishment and dismay when Reddy and his companions came hurtling through the trees. The little army had rushed impetuously past the guards at the

gate and, after one glimpse of the Hungry Tiger, the Rashers they encountered in the city had fled like leaves before the wind, so that they had reached the castle without interference.

At sight of the huge airman, Ippty, who had been about to pour himself a cup of coffee, gave a frightful scream and scrambled nimbly into a tree, while Irashi, seizing a silver whistle, that hung round his neck, blew three shrill blasts and, drawing his scimiter, made a savage slash at Reddy. But the scimiter slid harmlessly down the little boy's cheek, and the coffee pot, which Ippty hurled from the tree, bounced like a rubber ball, off his head.

"It's the rubies, the Rash rubies!" exulted Betsy Bobbin. Betsy and Ozma had jumped off the tiger, and the great beast, crouched at the foot of Ippty's tree, was glaring upward with a look so terrible that the Scribe of Rash trembled till the very branches shook.

"See what's coming," coughed Carter, with a warning wave toward the castle. In answer to Irashi's whistle, the entire army of Rash was advancing upon the invaders.

"Spinach! Gamin and spinach!" spluttered the Vegetable Man wildly.

"Is that what you call 'em?" panted Atmos, and putting the little girls firmly behind him, he made ready to tread upon the army's toes. Swinging his stick like a flail, Carter took his place at Reddy's right and, roaring like a dozen cannons, the Hungry Tiger placed himself at the little boy's left. Reddy, himself, giving no

attention to the frantic slashes of the scimitar, nor the furious advance of the Rash army, was pushing Irashi steadily backwards.

And as the old rascal, breathless from his pummelings, turned to see whether his army were coming, Reddy snatched off Irashi's crown and tossed it back to Betsy Bobbin.

"Keep it for me Betsy," puffed the little Prince, "I can't use it now." Clinging anxiously together, both little girls began to wish they had persuaded Reddy not to conquer Irashi. How was one small boy, even though he was helped out by three magic rubies and five loyal friends, to conquer the entire army of Rash?

But Reddy's plans were all made. As the Rashers rushed upon him, as the airman got in one splendid kick and Carter one tremendous whack, the little boy clapped on the giant's wig.

You have never seen a more terrified and bewildered company. The screams of Irashi and his Guardsmen, as Reddy shot skyward, nearly deafened Betsy and Ozma. And as he began to pick up one and then another of the soldiers and take away their swords, their terror was pitiful. They crawled, ran, leaped, and tumbled in a wild scramble to get away, the Hungry Tiger snapping viciously at their heels and the airman helping them most efficiently with his iron boots. In one moment more, not a Rasher was to be seen anywhere.

"And that," grunted the airman, rubbing his hands together with great glee, "that is the end of the gamin and spinach."

Irashi would have fled too, had not Atmos seized him by the pantaloons and swung him up in the tree beside Ippty. By this time word of the frightful battle had reached the castle and Fizzenpop, his turban standing straight on end, came flying out to see what had happened. But even Fizzenpop's knees smote together when he saw the great Giant striding up and down the garden, and when the Giant actually lifted him into the air, the Grand Vizier gave himself up for lost.

Betsy and Ozma, delighted at the splendid victory, now came hurrying over and while the Hungry Tiger guarded the two rascals in the tree, Reddy took off his wig, and told Fizzenpop the story of their adventures, proudly displaying the three magic rubies of Rash.

At sight of the rubies, the delight and astonishment of the Grand Vizier knew no bounds, and after embracing Reddy a dozen times and prostrating himself twice before each of the others, the old statesman rushed back to the palace.



Next instant the tower bells were tolling out a joyful welcome to the Rightful Ruler of Rash, and Fizzenpop, himself, in his best turban and tunic was reading a proclamation from the pink

balcony stating that Evered, the Scarlet Prince had returned and the rule of Irashi the Rough was over forever.

"How about a little lunch?" proposed the Hungry Tiger, putting his paws over his ears to drown out the roars and cheers of the populace.

Overjoyed at Irashi's downfall, the citizens of Rash were celebrating the victory as noisily as possible. "And what are we going to do with these two handsome rogues? I've a notion to eat them up!" the Hungry Tiger roared, glaring ferociously at the trembling pair in the tree.

"Well, they certainly deserve it," exclaimed Betsy, looking severely at Irashi and Ippty. "Don't you think so Carter?"

The kind-hearted Vegetable Man pulled his corn ear in embarrassment. "Let Ozma and Reddy decide," murmured Carter in a low voice. "They're not an earthly bit of use to anyone, but perhaps they'll reform," he finished uncomfortably. At Carter's words, the airman gave a sudden bounce, and a gleam of purpose came into his round eye.

"Tie them up," advised Atmos, "especially that prickly fingered one. Then, after lunch we can decide what is to be done."

"All right," agreed Reddy, and to be sure that they would not escape, he put on his big wig. Then, picking the two Rashers out of the tree as if they had been toy soldiers, he wound them round and round with rope that Carter obligingly fetched from the castle. Ippty's pen and pencil fingers he bound up securely in strips of his handkerchief, which, grown to giant size, was

large as a sheet. Then, with the two culprits tramping gloomily before them, the conquerors marched gaily to the pink palace where a splendid repast already awaited them.

The Hungry Tiger's eyes shone with joy as he looked down the long table. One entire end had been reserved for him.

"Isn't this better than Rash prisoners?" whispered Fizzenpop, leading him kindly to his place and waving to the rare steaks and roasts he had provided.

With a troubled glance at Ozma, the Hungry Tiger nodded. He hoped that Fizzenpop would not tell the others why he had come to Rash. But Betsy and Ozma were talking so busily, they never even heard the Grand Vizier's remark. "And if Ippty and Irashi are disposed of, I have nothing to fear," thought the tiger uneasily.

Reddy, still in his shabby clothes, but wearing the splendid ruby crown of Rash, seated himself at the head of the table and, with Ozma on his right and Betsy on his left, presided in a truly royal manner. Carter and Atmos did not eat at all, but their jokes and questions kept the whole company in a roar of merriment.

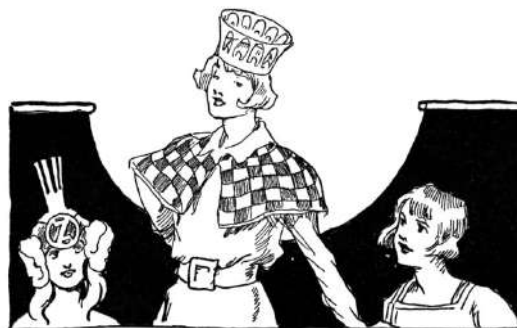
"It is seldom," observed old Fizzenpop, gazing fondly at the little Prince, "it is seldom that a city is captured without one broken bone."

"I am glad I did not break mine," said the airman, patting his chest proudly.

"Yours?" gasped Betsy, "Why Atmos, have you any bones?"

"One," admitted the airman, feeling his side experimentally. "It's a floating rib, and I never know just where it will be. Every airman has a floating rib," confided Atmos blandly. "It helps them to float."

"Well, I think you are one of the most interesting persons I have ever met," cried Reddy, jumping to his feet. "And Carter's the other. Oh I do wish you would all stay in Rash. Won't you please stay? Betsy and Ozma can take turns being Queen, Carter can be royal gardener and the Hungry Tiger and Atmos can be anything they want."



"Thanks," murmured the airman, "but what about my lecture? Besides," he looked bashfully from one to the other, "I'm engaged to an Heiress and must return to the sky. But someday, when you have a few years to spare, I hope you'll all visit me and we'll go on a regular sky-lark."

"Oh, I'd love to," cried Betsy Bobbin.

"You talk as if you were leaving us," objected the Hungry Tiger, raising himself with an effort. He had eaten a tremendous luncheon and could scarcely keep his eyes open.

"I am," declared the airman solemnly, pushing back his chair. And before the others half realized what he was about, the huge fellow had seized Ippty and Irashi and vanished through the doorway.