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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Hungry Tiger of Oz: Reddy and the Giants (16/20)

While Carter and Betsy waited so impatiently outside the walls, the little Prince of Rash was having an amazing day with the Giants. After a dizzy flight through the air, the great pigeon, attracted by a bit of stale cake on the ledge of a high window, had dropped him carelessly on the sill. Fortunately for Reddy, the window was open and, squirming through, he lay panting and pale, waiting for the bird to snap him up again. But the space was too narrow, and after a few angry pecks at the pane, the pigeon flew away.



With a gulp of relief, the Prince rolled over and sat up. A delicious smell of coffee, bacon and rolls came floating upward and, glancing over the edge of the sill, Reddy saw that he was in an enormous dining hall. Far below the window stood the giant sideboard, covered with serving dishes the size of bath tubs, and seated at a huge table in the center of the room, two Giants were eating porridge with spoons as large as snow shovels. They had golden crowns upon their heads, and from the richness of their robes and

the elegance of the whole apartment, Reddy guessed, and quite rightly, that he was in the castle of Immense City itself.

Waiting upon their Majesties, were four monstrous footmen, and all of the Giants wore huge white wigs, the curls of which bounced and bobbed when they walked in a truly comical fashion. Crouching in a corner of the sill, and trusting that none of the Giants would notice him, the hungry little boy watched the King and Queen toss off huge basins of coffee, devour biscuits as big as boulders and pan cakes broad enough to cover an ordinary sized table. In these immense surroundings, Reddy felt so little, lost and lonely that all thought of finding and rescuing the Hungry Tiger seemed hopeless. How was he even to reach the floor, without breaking himself to bits? Therefore he listened listlessly to the booming voices of the Big Wigs, and fervently wished himself back with the Vegetable Man and Betsy Bobbin. But a cross remark of the Giant King suddenly caught his attention and made him prick up his ears.

"That kitten," growled the Big Wig in a fierce voice, frowning across the table at the Queen, "that kitten must go! It kept me awake the entire night with its miserable meowing."

"But what will Elma do," murmured the Queen gently.

"Our daughter dotes on the little creature."

"Let her find something else to dote on," puffed his Majesty indignantly. "My castle is no place for stray cats. If it's here to-morrow," continued the Giant, blowing his cheeks in and out threateningly, "I'll throw

it in the pond!" Snatching up his paper, the King strode from the room, every curl in his wig expressing wrath and determination.

"Stray kitten!" gasped Reddy in relief, remembering the little Giant girl's words. "Why, that must be the Hungry Tiger!" The knowledge that his old friend was still safe and close at hand was so encouraging, the little Prince cheered up at once, for after all Reddy was a Prince and naturally brave and resourceful. If the Hungry Tiger were still in the castle, he should certainly be able to find him, and together they would devise some way of escape. The Queen, still arguing about her daughter's kitten, had waddled after her husband, and while the Big Wig footmen cleared away the breakfast dishes, Reddy tried to think of some plan to reach the floor in safety. He put his hands in his pockets, stared nervously over the edge of the sill, then gave an exclamation of glee. For his fingers had closed over the Rash rubies. The rubies! Why had he not thought of them before? If one of them had carried him safely down the furious fire-fall, why would it not help him now?

Without disturbing the dishes on the side table, the footmen had gone to the kitchen. So, closing both eyes and gritting his teeth, Reddy jumped boldly off the window ledge. He landed with a crash, splash and splutter and, opening his eyes, found himself looking through the glass sides of the Giant's water pitcher. The water was over his head, but he felt no discomfort,

except a slight chill from the ice, for in his pocket was the ruby protecting him from all danger by water. Disturbed because he had not looked more carefully before he jumped, but elated over the way the rubies were working, the little Prince rose to the top of the pitcher. Luckily for him the water reached almost to the brim, and seizing the pitcher's edge he pulled himself up and dropped easily over the side. This time he landed beside a flat plate of sizzling hot cakes and bacon, and we cannot blame him for stopping long enough to hack off a few slices of each with his sword. This, with several crumbs from the giant biscuits, made an excellent breakfast, and stuffing a large piece of pancake in his pocket for lunch, the little boy jumped gaily off the sideboard. Thanks to the other ruby, he floated lightly as a feather down to the floor and then began his long walk to the kitchen.

His clothes were still wet and dripping from the unexpected bath, but his spirits were high and he was beginning to enjoy his strange experiences and to look forward with lively anticipation to his meeting with the Hungry Tiger. A brisk fifteen-minute walk brought him to the kitchen door and, slipping through, he saw the Big Wig servants seated at a large table. Their loud voices made his head thump, and to bring their faces into view he had to lean so far over backwards, he soon had a severe pain in his neck. But he was sure he would learn from them the whereabouts of little Elma and once he knew that, finding the Hungry Tiger would be almost easy. Compared with the Giants, Reddy was

about the size of a small doll and none of the chattering Big Wigs noticed the little boy crouched behind the coal bucket. After listening to a great deal of conversation that did not interest him at all, Reddy was finally rewarded with the information he was seeking.

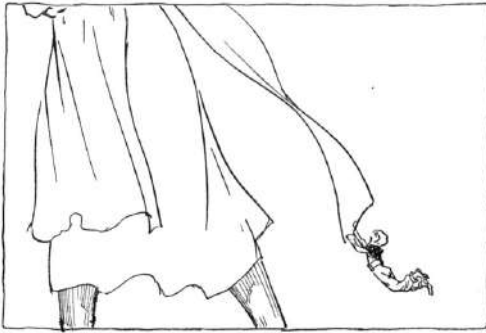
"Where's little Elma's tray?" wheezed a Big Wig maid, suddenly pushing back her chair. "That girl grows lazier every day!"

"There!" grunted the cook, pointing a pudgy finger toward the dresser. "And it's high time you took it up to her, you ill-natured clod."

After exchanging a few more rude remarks, the maid picked up the tray and started toward a back stairway. Frantically, Reddy began to run after her, risking discovery by the others in his anxiety to keep her in view. But it was a hopeless race, and he had just given up in despair when the giantess came hurrying back for the salt, which she had forgotten. Almost treading on the breathless little boy, she snatched a salt shaker from the dresser and started off again, but this time, Reddy went with her.

The strings of the maid's apron reached almost to the floor, and with a mighty spring the little Prince seized one of the fluttering ends and hung on for dear life. Unconscious of her passenger, the Giantess briskly mounted the stair, Reddy swinging round and round at each step and hoping heartily that the apron string would not come untied. After a very bumpy journey, the little boy found himself at the top of the stair and

next instant in the presence of the little Giant Princess herself.



She was seated in a chair in the largest play room you could ever imagine, and looked extremely comical in her great white wig.

Letting go the maid's apron string, Reddy dropped to the

floor and creeping behind a toy block, peered around in amazement. Dolls as big as himself were strewn about the floor. Noah's Arks, toy barns, doll houses and castles as large as our own dwellings were ranged along one side of the wall and here and there were stuffed and wooden animals of just the right size for Reddy to ride. There was a toy train he longed to start and a wooden circus that made his heart thump with excitement.

"I wish Betsy were here," thought the little Prince.

"Couldn't we have fun? I wish she could see these dolls!" Scarcely hearing the clatter of dishes on the tray, as the Princess greedily ate her breakfast, Reddy's eyes roved enviously over the vast collection of toys. A sudden thump, as the little Giantess jumped out of her chair, recalled him to the serious purpose of his visit.

Princess Elma, with a saucer of cream in her hands, was pattering toward him calling at the top of her voice:

"Here Kitty! Kitty! Kitty! Where are you Kitty dear?"

The thought of the Hungry Tiger as a little girl's kitten was so ridiculous that Reddy chuckled in spite of himself, and when little Elma, after several unsuccessful

attempts, dragged the tiger from beneath a low sofa and began dipping his nose in the cream, Reddy laughed outright.

The Hungry Tiger was growling and snarling so ferociously and Elma filling the air with such boisterous terms of endearment that neither of them heard. After a futile struggle with the Giantess, the tiger settled himself on the floor and began to lap up the cream, with an expression of unhappy and hopeless resignation. Squatting on the floor beside him, the Princess continued to shower him with vigorous caresses.

"Finish your breakfast, sweet," she cooed in a voice like a ferry-boat whistle, "then mother'll take you for a nice little ride in the doll coach!"

Reddy hoped to have a few words with the Hungry Tiger, and began to creep cautiously toward the strange pair. But just as he came within hailing distance the Hungry Tiger finished the cream, and Elma lifted him joyfully into the air. Torn between mirth and sympathy, Reddy watched the Giantess dress the indignant and struggling tiger in a doll coat and cap, tuck him unceremoniously into a doll coach and wheel him out of the nursery.

"I'll have to wait till they come back," sighed Reddy, as the doll coach went bumping down the entry and the shrill protests of the Hungry Tiger grew fainter and fainter. "And while I wait I might as well look around." This proved so interesting that he was surprised to hear the great clock on the mantle strike twelve. As there was still no sign of the Hungry Tiger, he sensibly

decided to eat his lunch. Choosing the coziest of the doll houses, he walked boldly up the front steps and into the dining room. The chairs and table were exactly the right size, and with a little chuckle of enjoyment Reddy set the table, drew up a chair and ate his piece of pancake in peace and comfort.

The doll house was complete in every detail, and in the kitchen cupboard the little boy found canisters of tea, coffee and sugar. There was a small gas stove that really worked, so Reddy made himself a cup of coffee and finished his lunch with a box of stale cakes he found on the dresser. Then, feeling a little sleepy, he curled up on the doll lounge in the living room and had a fine nap. After this he amused himself trying on the doll hats and coats he found in the entry closet and sliding down the curved banister.

By this time it was four o'clock, and growing a little anxious about the Hungry Tiger, Reddy ran out of the doll house to see if the Princess had returned. But the nursery was still deserted and after trying in vain to wind up the toy engine, and taking a perilous ride on a mechanical donkey, which he did manage to start, the little boy decided to look for his friend in some of the other rooms of the palace. The toy donkey had carried him to a door leading from the play room into Princess Elma's bedroom, and slipping through, Reddy tip-toed around, examining the tall furniture and fittings with deep interest. In the center of the room, he stopped short and gave a sharp cry of astonishment. What do

you think? There, looking like a toy, in these huge surroundings, stood a bed no larger than Reddy's own. "Now what," gasped the little Prince of Rash in extreme perplexity, "is that great girl doing with a little bed like this?" There seemed no answer to the question, but a sudden clump, clump in the hall made him dash for cover. Princess Elma was coming back, and just as Reddy dove headlong into one of her slippers, she ran in, the Hungry Tiger in her arms.

"Now stay here pet!" bellowed Elma tenderly, and dropping the tiger on the floor she skipped noisily out of the room.

For a moment the Hungry Tiger lay motionless where he had fallen. The doll cap was down over his eyes, the doll coat in ribbons and Reddy could see that he had had a hard day. When he did attempt to rise and try to run, the doll coat threw him down at every step, and the little Prince, with a cry of sympathy and relief, ran out to help him.

"Reddy!" roared the Hungry Tiger hoarsely, "How did you get here. Run boy, run, before that dreadful girl gets you, too. Look! Look at me!" he groaned forlornly.

"How shall I ever hold up my head again? Run away, Reddy, I beg of you! Run, before it is too late!"

"Sh—h!" whispered Reddy warningly. "We'll run together." Cutting the cap strings with his sword and tearing off the offensive doll coat, the little boy threw both arms round the tired old tiger and gave him a tremendous hug.

"To think that I, the Hungry Tiger of Oz, should have come to this!" moaned the tiger, two tears running down his nose. "Oh, Oh, Oh! I shall never be the same."



"Sh—h!" begged Reddy again. "Tonight when the Giants are asleep, we'll escape. I still have the Rash rubies, remember." Holding them up, Reddy looked eagerly at the ruffled and doleful tiger. The sight of the rubies seemed to restore him a little.

"We can try it anyway," he mused wearily. "But, take care, here comes that awful girl back again. Hide yourself, quick!"

Reddy had just time to scramble beneath a chintz chair, when Princess Elma came bounding back, a plate of chicken in one hand and a doll bed in the other.