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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Hungry Tiger of Oz: The Hungry Tiger in Rash (3/20)

It was night time when Ippty and the Hungry Tiger arrived at the pink palace. Travelling by hurry-cane is a hair-raising experience, let me tell you. Showing the breathless beast to a luxurious apartment, the Chief Scribe hurried off to the Pasha, and until long after midnight the two whispered and conferred together. Of course it was about the Hungry Tiger that they talked. "A saucy, but serviceable brute," finished Ippty, blowing out his thumb, "and he will require watching, Your Highness, for would not a tiger fed on criminals grow dangerous?"



"We'll lock him up in the prison courtyard," declared Irashi, rubbing his hands gleefully together, "then there'll be no chance of his running away or chewing off our heads. Good work, old Butter-tub, I'll raise your wages for this." And clapping his Chief Scribe on the back, Irashi tumbled into bed and was soon snoring loudly.

The Hungry Tiger did not find falling asleep so easy. Already he regretted his rash action in coming with Ippty. Padding up and down the big bedroom, he began

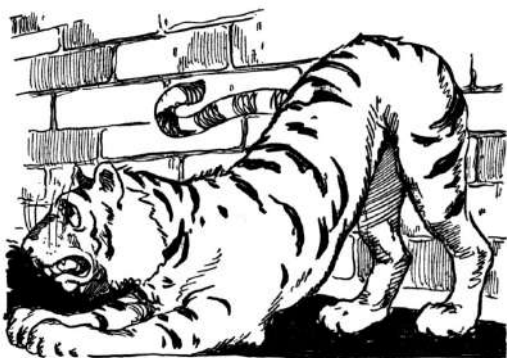
anxiously to reflect upon the duties of his new office. Was it right or wrong to eat the Rash criminals? What would Ozma think if she knew? The gentle face of the little fairy kept rising reproachfully between him and the thought of the fat and tempting prisoners. "I'll stay just a few days," groaned the poor tiger at last, trying to put Ozma out of his mind, "and only eat the very worst and wickedest ones. I hope they'll not taste too bad," he yawned, sinking down wearily on the soft pink rug, "nor have too many knives and swords in their pockets. Hah, hoh, hum!" With a great yawn, the tired tiger rolled over and fell into a troubled sleep.

A shrill blast of trumpets wakened him next morning and a few moments later Ippty came to conduct him to the Pasha. Irashi had craftily arranged to receive the Hungry Tiger in the prison courtyard, and surrounded by the Rash Guardsmen, with Fizzenpop standing anxiously at his side, he waited for the tiger to appear. The walk from the palace to the prison was not long, but it gave the Hungry Tiger quite a glimpse of the country and the people. The palace and all of the cottages and stores were of pink stone. Pink trees lined the pink marble walks and even the sky had a rosy glow. The Rashers, themselves, hurrying to and fro in their tremendous flapping turbans, oddly quilted robes and soft pink slippers, seemed pleasant enough fellows and again the Hungry Tiger's conscience began to trouble him. But it was too late to turn back now, so he stalked uncomfortably after Ippty. The prison itself looked quite like a wing of the pink palace and

unsuspectingly the Hungry Tiger passed through the great golden gates and into a high walled court.

"Ah hah!" exclaimed Irashi, as he advanced majestically to the center of the courtyard. "So here he is at last, the famous and famished tiger of Oz. And in uniform, too. Is it not splendid that the future jailer of Rash should wear stripes," chuckled the Pasha, poking Fizzenpop playfully in the ribs. "Even now our prisoners will go behind the bars—after they are eaten," he whispered hoarsely, fearing Fizzenpop might not get the joke. Ippty burst into a loud roar, but the Grand Vizier, after one look at the huge figure of the tiger,

began to tremble from top to toe. The Hungry Tiger, himself, was not at all pleased with his reception.



"Are you laughing at me?" he growled, lashing his tail and showing so many teeth the

Rash Guardsmen took to their pink heels. "Are you laughing at ME?"

"No! No, certainly not," grunted Irashi, moving hurriedly toward the gates. "I hope you will be most comfortable and happy here." At each word, Irashi took a great leap, followed closely by Ippty and Fizzenpop. By the time he finished his sentence and before the Hungry Tiger realized what was happening, all three were on the other side of the gates and the tiger, himself, was locked fast in the courtyard.

"Stay there, you saucy monster," puffed Irashi, shaking his scepter playfully, and taking Fizzenpop by one arm and Ippty by the other, he waddled off, leaving the Hungry Tiger to reflect upon his folly. First he hurled himself again and again at the golden gates, then he ran round and round the prison yard examining every inch of the high walls. But it was useless. There was not so much as a chink in the marble blocks. Raging with anger at Irashi and disgusted with himself for being so easily caught, he crouched down in a gloomy corner of the yard to think. All choice in the matter of eating the Rash prisoners was now removed, for, as he sadly reflected, there would probably be nothing else to eat. But eating prisoners, when you are free and happy, and eating prisoners because there is nothing else are entirely different matters and already half the pleasure was gone from the experiment. How was he to escape from this miserable little monarch? Would Dorothy and Betsy miss him? Why, oh why, had he not listened to the voice of his conscience or even had himself stuffed, as the Wizard suggested?

Blinking his eyes mournfully, the Hungry Tiger began to feel sorry not only for the Rash prisoners, but dreadfully sorry for himself, for was he not a prisoner, too? He had plenty of time to feel sorry, for not a soul came near him all day—not even a Rash mouse. There was a tub of water in the corner of the yard, but nothing to eat, and as the shadows grew longer and longer the poor tiger grew hungrier and hungrier. Betsy's party seemed years ago and when, toward

evening, shrill screams from the wall announced the approach of Irashi and the guards, he looked up almost hopefully to see whether they were bringing a prisoner. They were. Propped up between two guards, and advancing most unwillingly, was a tall turbaned figure. "Here!" shouted Irashi, leaning far over the wall, "here is your supper. Eat this rogue at once. He has wakened me from my sacred nap with his horrible howling." "I suppose I'll have to," mumbled the Hungry Tiger uncomfortably to himself, and growling to keep his courage up and his conscience down, he advanced toward the wall just as the guardsmen dropped the luckless Rasher over. He landed lightly on the balls of his feet and after one look at the Hungry Tiger pulled his turban over his eyes and began to screech with terror.



"Eat him up! Shut him up! What's the matter, have you no teeth?" bawled Irashi covering his ears.

"I never dine till ten o'clock," answered the Hungry Tiger stiffly. He was not going to be bullied by the wretched little sovereign of Rash. "And I never eat until I am alone," he growled raising his roar above the wails of the prisoner.

"Suit yourself," grumbled Irashi. But secretly he was disappointed. To watch the Hungry Tiger devour the prisoner would have been a real treat for the wicked

little Pasha. Covering both ears to drown the poor fellow's doleful yells, he scrambled down the steps on the other side of the wall. "We'll return later to see if he is eaten," puffed the little Pasha, turning back toward the castle, and the guardsmen, exchanging uneasy glances, clanked after him. As soon as they were alone, the Hungry Tiger approached the prisoner.

"Would you mind stopping that noise?" he begged earnestly. "You're really spoiling my supper."

"Your supper?" gulped the Rasher, trembling violently,

"Do you expect me to submit to eating without a sound?"

"Well, I wish that you would," sighed the tiger hopefully. "I never cared for music with my meals. Now don't be frightened, I won't hurt you—much. If you were not so tall, I'd swallow you whole."

"Oh!" groaned the prisoner falling upon his knees, "Have you no heart? No conscience? Are you really cruel enough to devour a poor fellow like me?" At each word, the Hungry Tiger recoiled a bit further.

"But what can I do? I've nothing else to eat and it is the Rash law that you should perish. By the way, what was your crime?" he asked sadly. Now that the time for eating a live man was at hand, he found himself curiously disturbed.

"I'm a singer," began the prisoner, in a choked and frightened voice. "This afternoon, hoping to earn a few Rash pence, I stopped beneath the palace balcony and—" Straightening up and throwing out his chest, the singer burst into tears and song, mingling them so

thoroughly the Hungry Tiger was soon crying like a baby himself. Without the tears, the song went something like this:

"Oh why must lovely roses die?
Oh why, sniff! sniff! Oh why, say why?
Oh why must hay be cut and mown
In its first hey-day? Groan, sniff, groan!
And why must grass be trodden down
And trees cut up to build a town?
Should little lambs grow into chops
And hang around in butcher shops?
No! No! I weep, it is too sad.
Sniff, snuffle, sniff, I feel so sad!"

"So do I!" roared the Hungry Tiger. "Stop! Stop! I am positively ill. What's that?" That was a large bunch of bananas. It came whistling over the wall, followed by three onions, a sausage, a squash pie and a head of cabbage.

"They always throw things when I sing," sobbed the singer, drying his eyes on his pink sleeve.

"Pass me that sausage," gulped the Hungry Tiger in a faint voice.

"Are—are'nt you going to eat me?" stuttered the sad singer, offering the sausage fearfully and jumping back as if he expected the tiger to snap off his arm.

Between bites, and the sausage took only two, the Hungry Tiger shook his head.

"Not now," he answered wearily. "I might have swallowed you, but that song! Never! A man full of music like that would ruin my digestion. How's the pie?"

"Squashed," said the singer, in a depressed whisper.

"Try the onions." He held them out hopefully, but the Hungry Tiger only shuddered.

"Eat them yourself," he advised gloomily, "you seem to enjoy crying." Reaching for a banana, the Hungry Tiger ripped off the skin and swallowed it whole. Three more, he treated in the same reckless fashion. Then licking his whiskers, he regarded the sad singer reproachfully.

"You may go now," he said gruffly. "Your singing is outrageous, but you are neither wicked enough to satisfy my conscience nor fat enough to satisfy my appetite. Go—go—before—"

"But how can I go," moaned the singer, waving despairingly at the high walls. I do not know whether his tears were from grief, gratitude or onions. (He had eaten all three by this time.)

"Well, you can't stay here," rumbled the tiger anxiously "for you're supposed to be eaten."

"I'll hide," muttered the prisoner, glaring around wildly. But there was no place in the whole pink yard where he could conceal himself. Round and round tore the worried Rasher and round and round after him nosed the Hungry Tiger and, just as the moon rose up over the pink turrets of the palace, they discovered a loose block in the stone pavings. Scratching frantically with his powerful claws the Hungry Tiger managed to dig up

the whole block and dragging it aside found a small damp underground chamber.

The sad singer was overjoyed, when he peeped into the dark hole, for he had become very nervous, in his fear that the tiger would soon decide to eat him. To tell the truth, the Hungry Tiger was glad himself. The sad singer did not look very good to eat.

"There!" grunted the Hungry Tiger, thrusting the singer in and throwing some bananas and a head of cabbage after him. "Be quiet and whatever you do, don't sing!"

He had just pushed the block back, leaving a small crevice to give the prisoner air, when Irashi and Ippty appeared upon the wall.



"Ah! He has eaten him!" cried Irashi rapturously, and clapping his hands like a child, he began to address the Hungry Tiger in most affectionate terms, promising him a dozen prisoners upon the morrow. But the Hungry Tiger merely turned his back and gazed solemnly up at the moon, and seeing nothing was to be got out of him, Irashi and his wicked scribe tip-toed off to bed, well pleased with the new jailer of Rash. The Hungry Tiger himself, in spite of a horribly hollow feeling (what is a sausage and four bananas to a tiger?) soon fell asleep. And perhaps because he had done nothing to trouble his kind old conscience, he dreamed that he was safely back in the Emerald City with dear little Ozma of Oz.