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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Hungry Tiger of Oz: The Magic Spectacles (10/20)

Kaliko, King of all the gnomes, and metal monarch besides, sat gloomily on the jewelled rock throne in his underground cavern.

"Nothing ever happens here," complained Kaliko, frowning at his Royal Chamberlain.

"Let's have a war," proposed Guph, looking up from the ruby scepter he was polishing. "We haven't had a war since Ruggedo left."



"Ruggedo!" shrieked Kaliko, stamping his foot furiously. "How dare you mention that name in my presence. Begone! Begone and never speak to me again."

"Then I'll write," mumbled Guph, and picking up his bottle of ruby polish unconcernedly he left the throne room. Ruggedo was the former King and had ruled over the gnomes for many years. He had been deposed for his wickedness by a powerful Jinn and Kaliko was made monarch in his place. Later Ruggedo had tried to capture Oz, itself, and had been banished by Ozma to a lonely isle in the Nonestic Ocean.

But wicked as Ruggedo had been, the gnomes often sighed for his return. Things had been more interesting during Ruggedo's reign and though Kaliko was a good King, he was not half so interesting. Kaliko knew this and any mention of the old gnome king always irritated him intensely. For several moments after Guph's departure, he continued to mutter and mumble with displeasure. Then, suddenly bethinking himself of a new invention of the chief wizard, he reached into his pocket and brought out a green case. In the case was a pair of pink spectacles, not merely spectacles, mind you, but exspectacles, and the gnome wizard had assured the King that with them he could see events before they occurred.

Kaliko had not yet tried this new contrivance, and still grumbling a little he set the exspectacles upon his nose and stared drearily at the rock wall in front of him. He really did not expect anything to happen. Therefore, when four figures appeared suddenly upon the wall, he gave a start of astonishment. Reflected upon the rock surface as clearly as if it were a moving picture, he could see four people making their way through the Lost Labyrinth at the Southern end of his dominions. "Guph! Guph!" shrieked the Gnome King, pounding vigorously on the gong at his side. "Come back here at once." And when Guph, rather sulkily, appeared, he pointed excitedly at the wall.

"Look! Look!" commanded Kaliko. "It's Betsy Bobbin, the Hungry Tiger of Oz and two others. What in mud is that fellow made of anyway?"

Rubbing his eyes, Guph stared at the wall and then at his master. Then, taking a scrap of paper from a rock desk beside the throne, he scribbled two words on the paper and handed it to the King.

"You're crazy," stated the paper, quite saucily.

"How dare you write to me like that!" fumed Kaliko, tearing the paper in two. "Are you dumb, can't you speak? Are you blind, can't you see?" He waved again at the great rock. Then, suddenly realizing that Guph had not the exspectacles to help him, tore them off and

clapped them upon the Chief Chamberlain's nose. Immediately Guph was as excited as Kaliko.



"Hurrah!" exulted the little gnome, forgetting his determination not to speak to the King again. "Hurrah! Now we

can have a war. Shall I call out the Guard and have the red hot dungeons heated? Hah, Hah, Hah!"

"What are you laughing at?" exclaimed Kaliko, as Guph doubled up with mirth.

"That animated truck garden," panted Guph. "He's fallen on his corn ear and the Hungry Tiger just slipped into a mud hole!"

"Let me see," cried the King, snatching the exspectacles back again. And for the next five minutes Kaliko and his Chief Chamberlain fought bitterly for possession of the magic glasses. As soon as Kaliko had them, Guph wanted

to see how the travellers were progressing, and as soon as Guph had them Kaliko insisted on having them back. "Well, shall we have a war?" grumbled Guph, as Kaliko seized the specs for the seventeenth time.

"Certainly not," answered the King. "Betsy's a good friend of mine. Don't you remember, she was here when Ruggedo was deposed? And I see no harm in these others."

"I thought it would be like this," muttered Guph in disgust. "You're such a goody-goody, you never let us have any fun at all. I suppose you'll end by inviting them all to lunch," he finished bitterly.

"Just what I was thinking of," admitted Kaliko cheerfully. "Pray go and conduct them the rest of the way and don't slam the door when you go out, either." Settling back on his throne with a little chuckle of anticipation, Kaliko continued to watch the progress of Betsy and her friends through the winding corridors of the Lost Labyrinth.

Betsy, herself, did not even know she was in the gnome King's dominions. After a terrible tumble through the dark, the four adventurers had plunged into the underground pool of a grim green grotto. While the water had broken their fall and saved them from serious injury, it had not added to their cheerfulness.

"This is not the ruby that protects me from water," sputtered Prince Evered, as Carter dragged him out of the pool. "Ugh! I'm nearly drowned!"

"Have you still got it?" asked Betsy. The Hungry Tiger had already pulled her out and was helping Carter fish

his wheel-barrow from the pool. Feeling in his pocket, the Prince nodded. Then, picking up his sword, he looked around in huge disgust.

"Is this a Cave Inn?" he demanded indignantly.

"I wonder where this passageway leads," murmured Betsy, who had run to an opening in the grotto. "Maybe there's an inn after all." But there was no sign of an inn anywhere—only a maze of rocky corridors branching out in every direction. With Betsy and Reddy on his back, the Hungry Tiger stepped cautiously out of the grotto and started down the widest of the curious corridors. The floors were slippery with moss covered rocks, the ceiling was of glittering green stones, shaped like long, jagged icicles.



Betsy and the Prince of Rash often had to lie flat on the tiger's back to escape their sharp points, while poor Carter Green was forced to bend double, as he walked. Sure-footed as he was, the Hungry Tiger slipped again and again on the treacherous stones and Carter's progress was a succession of spills, slides and tumbles. Through it all the Vegetable Man maintained his cheerfulness, stubbornly refusing to abandon the wheel-barrow, but after an hour of winding in and out of the dreary labyrinth had still brought them nowhere, even the Vegetable Man grew anxious and sad. A thin blue mold was beginning to form on the end of his nose.

"If I don't get out of here soon, I'll spoil," he wheezed nervously. "Do you see any opening ahead?"

The Hungry Tiger was about to reply when he slipped into the mud hole that had so amused Guph. This so discouraged the poor beast he said nothing at all. Indeed, the rest of their journey, while interesting to Kaliko, watching comfortably from his throne, was neither interesting or amusing to the travellers themselves. When they came at last to an impassible rock wall and realized they must retrace their steps, Carter sank dejectedly into the wheel-barrow and the Hungry Tiger lay down and panted with exhaustion. Imagine their astonishment, when a door in the wall



suddenly opened and Guph, bearing a blazing ruby lantern, appeared before them.

"Follow me," commanded Guph disagreeably. "His Majesty has foolishly invited you to lunch."

"It's a gnome!" cried Betsy in surprise. "Why, we must be in the Gnome King's dominions."

"I was here with Dorothy and Billina, when we rescued the Queen of Ev and her ten children," puffed the Hungry Tiger, rising to his feet. "Ruggedo was King then, but he's been put out of the Kingdom, I understand."

"I wonder if Kaliko's still King?" exclaimed Betsy. The little girl had had a whole book of adventures with Ruggedo and had even been present at Kaliko's

coronation. "Oh, I do hope Kaliko's the King," she finished earnestly.

"Well, if you're going to wonder and hope, stay here," grumbled Guph. "If you're coming to lunch, follow me." Without waiting for an answer, the crooked little elf turned on his heel and started rapidly down the narrow passageway. The Hungry Tiger looked questioningly back at Carter and Carter looked uneasily at Betsy.

"Let's go," decided the little girl sensibly. "If Kaliko's still King I know he'll help us."

"If he don't, I'll slice off his nose," declared Reddy, peering over Betsy's shoulder in an endeavor to catch another glimpse of Guph. He had never seen a gnome before, and as they hurried after the King's messenger, Betsy explained a bit about these queer rock-colored elves, who live under the earth's surface and dig for precious metals and stones. They passed hundreds of the busy little men on their way through the rocky tunnels, and when Guph entered the underground castle of the Gnome King, himself, both Carter Green and Prince Evered gasped with astonishment and admiration. Lighted with jeweled lanterns, spread with silken rugs, furnished with taste and even magnificence, the spacious caverns opened in a blaze of splendor before the visitors. The Gnome King's dwelling was an old story to Betsy and the Hungry Tiger. They were more interested in knowing who was King, and when the tiger, hurrying after Guph, burst suddenly into the throne room, Betsy gave a cry of real pleasure.

"Why, hello, Kaliko!" cried the little girl, jumping down and running over to him eagerly.

"King Kaliko, if you don't mind," whispered the gnome looking nervously at Guph, who was making faces at the Hungry Tiger. "How did you happen into these parts, my dear?"

"We caved in," growled the Hungry Tiger, sniffing the air anxiously. "Is lunch nearly ready, old fellow? I'm perishing for a square meal."

"Certainly! Certainly!" Kaliko answered politely. "But first introduce me to your friends. I've been watching you through my exspectacles for an hour."

"Exspectacles!" exclaimed Betsy. "Well, I was wondering how you knew we were here." With a proud smile Kaliko held out the pink glasses and explained how they worked and, while the little Prince and Betsy were still examining his specs, the Gnome King begged them to sit down and tell him the whole story of their adventures.



"For I'm quite sure," surmised Kaliko looking curiously from one to the other, but longest at Carter Green, "I'm quite sure you've been having some amazing adventures."

Betsy nodded vigorously and Carter grinned from ear to ear, which seemed to surprise Kaliko very much. Then, seating herself in a little rock rocking chair, Betsy told

how the Hungry Tiger had been carried to Rash, of her meeting with the Vegetable Man and the strange manner in which they had arrived in the same Kingdom. Then she went on with Prince Evered's story, told how he had been deprived of his throne and robbed of the three Rash rubies.

As Betsy described the magical powers of the stolen gems, the Gnome King leaned forward with sudden interest and as the little girl explained how the Vegetable Man had come into possession of one of the lost rubies, Carter saw a surprised look flash between Kaliko and his Chief Chamberlain. Then he saw the Gnome King slip a small ring from his finger and hide it in a crevice of his throne. None of the others noticed Kaliko's action at all. Reddy was too interested in the Gnome's curious cavern to bother about any possible danger, the Hungry Tiger's eyes had closed in a momentary doze and Betsy, herself, seemed to have the greatest confidence in the King.

"I'll have to watch out for all of us," decided Carter, hurriedly wiping the mold from his nose. And while Betsy continued her story, the Vegetable Man began to examine the King's cavern with great care. "We may have to leave in a hurry," thought Carter nervously. "Lend me those exspectacles," mumbled the Hungry Tiger sleepily, as the little girl told Kaliko their intention of returning to the Emerald City as soon as they could and having Ozma restore Reddy to his throne. "Lend me those exspectacles." When the little Prince of Rash held

them up before the Hungry Tiger's eyes, he gave a roar of delight.

"What do you see?" asked Reddy curiously.

"What do I see?" purred the Hungry Tiger licking his chops. "Why, I see that lunch is ready at last. Come on fellows!"

"He's right," chuckled Kaliko, taking back his glasses.

"For I ordered it an hour ago. This way my dear." Taking Betsy's arm, the Gnome King led the way to his crystal dining hall where one table was set cozily for four, and another, apparently for a dozen. "I haven't forgotten your tremendous appetite, you see," smiled Kaliko, waving toward the low table along which roasts of beef and legs of lamb were ranged in a tempting row. The Hungry Tiger gave a sigh of satisfaction, and without waiting for a knife, fork or napkin, began to munch his way hungrily down the table. For Betsy and the little Prince, Kaliko had prepared an alluring luncheon of fried chicken, sweet potatoes and peach pie. At the Vegetable Man's place stood a sparkling glass of root beer.

"I didn't suppose you'd care to eat," observed Kaliko tactfully, "but I was sure you would enjoy our National drink."

Carter was so touched by the Gnome King's thoughtfulness that he began to reproach himself for his unkind suspicions.

Kaliko, himself, ate sparingly of a hot mud pie and swallowed a cup of scalding black rock coffee and, while ten little nimble gnomes waited on the table, he

and Betsy talked over old Oz times and discussed means of crossing the Deadly Desert.

"I don't know how you feel," yawned the Hungry Tiger, when he had finally worked his way to the end of his long table, "but I feel like a nap."

Betsy and the little Prince admitted that they were tired, too, and immediately Guph showed them to a splendid suite of guest caverns, just off the throne room. The Vegetable Man slammed his door hard, then opened it quite noiselessly. Just as he had expected, the

two gnomes had their heads close together. Now, when it comes to hearing there is nothing so fine as a corn ear and what Carter heard through his made him tremble with indignation.



"If you weren't such a miserable mole," muttered Guph bitterly, "you'd get that other ruby!"