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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Hungry Tiger of Oz: The Pasha of Rash (1/20)

"Burnt again!" roared the Pasha of Rash, flinging his bowl of pudding across the table. "Vassals! Varlets! Villains! Fetch forth the cook!" At the Pasha's furious words the two Rash Footmen who stood behind his chair, took a running slide down the long dining hall and leaped through the door into the pantry. Several cups crashed against the door as it closed, so it is just as well that they hurried.



As the Pasha reached for a large sauce dish, Ippty, the Chief Scribe of the realm, slipped quietly under the table, where he began jotting down in a little note book each shocking remark about the pudding, making a huge blot whenever a plate broke or a cup splintered to fragments. He had to write pretty fast to keep up with the peppery little Pasha and covered three pages with notes and blots by the time the footmen returned with Hasha, the cook, shivering between them.

"So!" wheezed the Ruler of all the Rashes, puffing out his cheeks and glaring at the frightened little man, "Here you are!"

"Am!" choked the poor cook, falling upon his knees. "And may your Excellency live forever!"

"Live forever!" sputtered the Pasha, thumping the table with his fist, "On burnt puddings and raw roasts? It's a wonder I'm alive at all. Do you take me for an ostrich that you serve me lumps of charcoal and call it pudding? Are you a cook or a donkey?"

At this, Ippty lifted a corner of the table cloth and peered out to see what Hasha would say. Then, as the cook made no remark he calmly wrote "donkey," closed the little book and crept cautiously out from his hiding place. There were only three spoons left on the table and he felt pretty sure that these would be flung at Hasha and not at him. He was perfectly right about this and as the last one clattered down upon the head of the luckless cook, Hasha rose, and extending both arms began tremulously:

"I did not burn the pudding, Excellency, it was the fire."

"The fire?" raged the Pasha, his eyes fairly popping with indignation. "Do you hear that Ippty, he blames it on the fire. And who tends the fire, pray? Put him out! Fire him! Fizzenpop! Fizzenpop, you old rascal, where are you?"

"The fire shall be put out and the cook shall be fired," muttered Ippty, flipping his book open and scribbling away industriously. This, he could readily do, for the first finger of the Scribe's right hand was a fountain

pen, his second finger a long yellow pencil, his third finger an eraser, his little finger a stick of sealing wax and his thumb a fat candle. Ippty's left hand was quite usual, except for the pen knife that served him for a thumb. Blotting the last entry in the book with his cuff, which was neatly cut from blotting paper, he turned expectantly toward the door, just as Fizzenpop, the Grand Vizier, came hurtling through. Being Grand Vizier of Rash was no easy task and Fizzenpop had grown thin and bald in the service of his country.



"What now?" he gasped, pulling on his slipper and looking anxiously from one to the other.

"Punish this pudding burner!" commanded the Pasha angrily. "Put him —"

"In jail!" chuckled Ippty. "In other words you are to incarcerate the cook." The Chief Scribe loved long words and knew almost as many as the crossword puzzle makers.

"But your Highness," objected the Grand Vizier, pointing his long finger, "the prison is already overcrowded. Could we not, could we not cut off his—" Hasha looked imploringly at Fizzenpop, and the Grand Vizier, clearing his throat, finished hastily, "cut off his allowance instead?"



"No!" thundered Irasha furiously, "I'll be peppered if I will. Prison is the place for him! Out of my sight, scullion!" He waved contemptuously at the cook.

"All right," sighed Fizzenpop, "I'll put him in the cell with your grand uncle." (The Pasha's grand uncle had been flung into prison for beating the Rash sovereign at chess.) "But remember," warned the Grand Vizier, as Hasha was led disconsolately away by the guards, "remember there is not room for another person. Your Highness will have to find some other way to dispose of prisoners."

"What can I do?" mumbled the Pasha, leaning sulkily on his elbow.

"If you'd take my advice, you'd set them all free," said Fizzenpop calmly. "With half the population in prison, how do you expect to get any work done?"

"Well, why don't they behave themselves then?" demanded the Pasha fretfully. Fizzenpop sighed again, but made no further answer. What use to ask this wicked little ruler why he did not behave himself? Half the arrests in Rash were for no reason at all, and as you are probably puzzling about the location of this singular country, I must tell you that Rash is a small pink Kingdom, in the southwestern country of Ev and directly across the Deadly Desert from the Fairyland of Oz. The Rashas, it is true, are a hasty and hot-tempered race and always breaking out in spots, but they are warm-hearted and generous as well, and with just treatment and proper handling, as loyal subjects as a sovereign could ask for. But Irasha, the present

Pasha, was neither just nor wise. He had seized the throne by treachery and was feared and hated by the entire Rash nation, so that one revolution followed another and the realm was in a constant state of uproar. Again and again poor old Fizzenpop would make up his mind to retire, but feeling that he could serve his countrymen better by remaining, had stayed on, enduring the terrible tempers of the Pasha and living for the day when the rightful ruler should be restored to the throne.

"Well, why don't you say something?" growled Irasha, growing irritable at the long silence. "What do other countries do with their prisoners?"

"Why not destroy them?" proposed Ippty cheerfully, before Fizzenpop had a chance to answer. The Chief Scribe was as cruel and merciless as his Master. Irasha had discovered him in a Rash book shop, where he was employed as clerk, and fascinated by his strange hands had raised him to his present important position. "In ancient countries," continued Ippty, sharpening the second finger of his right hand with the thumb of his left, "in ancient countries prisoners were thrown to the wild beasts. Now I call that very neat. No fuss or worry, and practically no expense." Ippty closed his thumb with a pleased smile and looked brightly at the Pasha.

"What!" shrieked Fizzenpop, stamping his foot furiously at the Scribe, "Who ever would think of such a thing?" "I would," answered the Pasha calmly. "I think it's a very good plan Ippty. But the trouble is," he paused

and pushed back his spotted turban, "the trouble is, we have no wild animals. I wish I had a wild animal," sighed Irasha gloomily. With the exception of a few speckled bears, there are no animals of any kind in Rash, and Fizzenpop had just drawn a long breath of relief when Ippty began again.

"But there are plenty of wild animals in Oz, your Highness!" suggested Ippty. "Why not send across the Deadly Desert and get a wild animal from Oz?"

"Why not?" The Pasha straightened up in his chair and looked almost pleasant. "I believe I will," he mused thoughtfully. "An excellent notion, Ippty, for in that case we should not need a prison at all and the expense of feeding the monster would be practically nothing."

"And what's to prevent it from eating us?" demanded Fizzenpop explosively. Up to now he had been able to soften the lot of the Rash prisoners very considerably. He shuddered to think what would happen if Ippty's dreadful plan really were carried out. But Fizzenpop was too wise to openly oppose this rash pair, so he merely shrugged his shoulders. "Well," he sighed folding his arms resignedly, "I hope it works out. I, myself, am too thin to worry, but this beast will probably consider you and Ippty choice morsels!" He rolled his eyes sideways at the fat little Pasha and the still fatter Scribe. "How will a wild animal know the difference between Pashas and prisoners?" he inquired sarcastically. Irasha looked rather uncomfortable.

"We'll have to get a civilized wild animal," he muttered uneasily, "an educated fellow who will eat whom we tell him to and obey the laws of the country."



"And who ever heard of a civilized wild animal?" sniffed the Grand Vizier, with a sour smile.

"I have," declared Ippty, elevating his nose disagreeably. "There are any number of educated wild animals in the Emerald City of Oz.

There's the Cowardly Lion, for instance, there's the Comfortable Camel and the Doubtful Dromedary, and there's the Hungry Tiger. How about the Hungry Tiger?" asked Ippty triumphantly.

"Hungry Tiger!" Fizzenpop gave a gasp of dismay, for he had never even heard of such a creature.

"Let's get the Hungry Tiger," yawned the Pasha, who was growing rather sleepy. "He'll be just the one for us. But are you sure he's tame and harmless, Ippty, and safe to have about?"

"Oh quite!" Ippty assured him quickly. "Why, he wouldn't hurt a baby, his conscience is so tender. That's why he's hungry you know."

"Then what makes you think he will eat the prisoners?" asked the Grand Vizier nervously.

"Well," observed Ippty, scratching his ear with his fountain pen, "when this tiger realizes that it is perfectly legal and lawful to eat prisoners I daresay he will jump at the chance, for in that way he can satisfy

his appetite and his conscience at the same time. There are no criminals in the Emerald City, for Ozma, the Queen, is a silly, soft hearted little fairy and never arrests anyone, so the Hungry Tiger will be glad enough to come here and eat our prisoners."

"Ippty is right," puffed the Pasha, rising stiffly from his chair. "Just take a hurry-cane from the stand there, and fetch back this Hungry Tiger, old fellow, and if he won't come fetch him anyway."

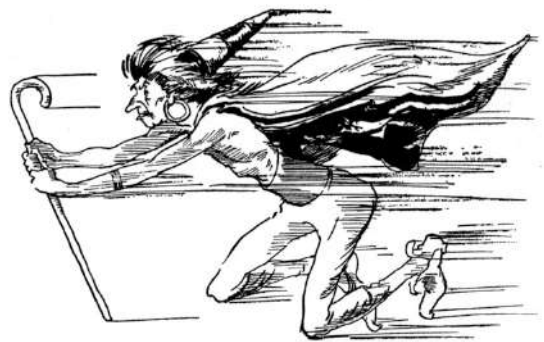
"Certainly your Highness," murmured the Scribe, bowing low. "I will start for Oz at once."

"You'll be sorry for this," panted Fizzenpop as the Pasha's pudgy figure disappeared down the pink passageway, and between anger and anxiety the Grand Vizier of Rash began to hop up and down like a jumping-jack.

"What are you dancing," yawned Ippty, "a pepper jig?" And brushing insolently past Fizzenpop, he lifted a hurry-cane from the stand and prepared to depart. First, he lit his right thumb, for it was growing dark; then he tore a page from his note book and wrote, "Carry me to the Emerald City." Unscrewing the top, he thrust this paper carefully down into the head of the cane and screwed the head on again. He had just time to straighten his turban before the hurry-cane, with a whistle and crash, carried him clear out of the castle. Rushing to the window Fizzenpop saw him straddling like some strange bird over Too Much Mountain. The flight of Ippty was not surprising to Fizzenpop for hurry-canes are one of the chief products of Rash and

are nearly always used for long journeys. No, it was not Ippty's departure that worried the old statesman. It was the thought of Ippty's return with the Hungry Tiger of Oz. How was he to save his poor prisoners from this dreadful beast?

Pale with anxiety, he rushed into the Rash library and after some searching found what he was looking for—Professor Wogglebug's Encyclopedia of Oz. All his life, Fizzenpop had been so busy straightening out affairs in Rash he had had no time to study adjacent Kingdoms at all and knew little or nothing of the great fairyland that lay across the desert. Flipping over the pages of the encyclopedia to the T's the Grand Vizier ran his finger down the list till he came to the Hungry Tiger.



"This great and beautiful beast," stated the book shortly, "came to the Emerald City during the first year of Ozma's reign. He has been in all important processions and adventures since then, and is a great favorite with the celebrities of Oz. Because of his sociable nature he prefers life in the capitol to life in the jungle and because of his tender conscience has never been known to devour a live man, fairy, or person."

"Never been known to devour a live person?" shrieked Fizzenpop, dropping the encyclopedia with a bang.

"Merciful Mustard! What shall I do now?"