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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Hungry Tiger of Oz: The Scarlet Prince (6/20)

"Would you mind not using my drinking cup for a bath," observed the Hungry Tiger mildly, as Carter continued to gurgle and splash about in the tub. Laughing with relief, Betsy seized the Vegetable Man's hands and pulled him out of the water.

"Don't be scared," whispered Betsy comfortably. "This tiger's a friend of mine and he wouldn't hurt anybody!"



"Then what's he doing here?" asked Carter accusingly. "Is this parsnippy Pasha his friend, too?" The Hungry Tiger winced guiltily at Betsy's kind little speech, but resolved that she should never know he had willingly come to Rash.

"I'm his prisoner," he explained in a hollow voice. (And, indeed, he was terribly hollow by this time.) "I'm a prisoner like yourselves." In a husky roar, he told of his trip by hurry-cane to Irashi's Kingdom and of his imprisonment in the Rash courtyard.

"So this light fingered Ippty brought you here," mused Carter wonderingly. "But why?"

"To eat the Rash Prisoners," answered the Hungry Tiger faintly.

"And have you eaten any?" Betsy regarded her old friend anxiously.

"Well, not yet," admitted the Hungry Tiger, rolling his eyes mournfully at the little girl. "Not yet!"

"Have a cabbage," quavered Carter, waving toward the overturned vegetable cart. "Have a cauliflower or a nice bunch of beets." The Hungry Tiger was a perfect stranger to him, and Carter could not feel the same confidence in the beast that Betsy seemed to feel.

"More vegetables," groaned the tiger, sniffing the air sadly. "Well, I suppose they are better than nothing. But tell me Betsy, how in Oz did you ever get here and who," he blinked rapidly at the strange figure of Carter Green, "who is this person?"

With a little chuckle, Betsy introduced the Vegetable Man, then as quickly as she could told of their amazing adventures with the winding road and quick sandals and of Carter's unfortunate experience in the Pasha's garden.

"Isn't there some way out of here?" asked the little girl, looking around nervously. "Oh! What's that?" A dismal wail, issuing from the stones beneath her feet, made Betsy leap into the air.

"It's that singer again," growled the Hungry Tiger and, lashing his tail a little, he put his nose close to the

crevice in the blocks. "Less noise down there," he roared warningly.

"I always sing when I'm hungry," answered the singer.

"Oh, I'm so hungry!"

"Hand me a tomato or something," rumbled the Hungry Tiger. "Quick!" The Vegetable Man made haste to obey, bringing several tomatoes and a dozen apples as well.

Looking up at the wall to see that he was not observed, the Hungry Tiger pushed them hurriedly through the crevice. As the last apple disappeared, a moist song, punctuated with sobs, came sighing upward.

"Oh beautiful Tiger, I love you so,

To you, sniff snuffle, my life I owe.

And I'll devote it to songs of praise

And sing, sniff, sniff, to you, all of my days!"

"Mercy!" gasped Betsy Bobbin. The Hungry Tiger was so embarrassed by the sad singer's ditty that, for a few minutes, he couldn't roar a word. Then, as Carter and Betsy continued to look at him inquiringly, he explained how he had hidden the Rash Singer instead of eating him.

"See!" cried Betsy, turning proudly to the Vegetable Man. "I told you he wouldn't hurt anyone! I think you're just the dearest splendidest tiger I ever—."

"Sh!" cautioned the Hungry Tiger. "Here comes another prisoner. Quick, now, pretend you're afraid of me!" Betsy and the Vegetable Man had just time to crouch back against the wall, when the guards dropped another Rasher into the courtyard.

"It's a barber," whispered Betsy, in an interested voice, and she was right, for clutched in one hand the prisoner had a mug full of suds and in the other a gleaming razor.

"What frightful luck," moaned the Hungry Tiger. "If it had only been a bandit or a robber I could have eaten him without a qualm, but a barber, ugh, he smells of bay rum. Stop that racket, fellow, and let me think!" And certainly, the poor tiger had plenty to occupy his thoughts, for if things went on in this fashion the underground cavern would soon be full and then what would happen? And how ever was he to get little Betsy Bobbin safely back to Oz? Paying no attention to the terrified squeals of the barber, the Hungry Tiger began to pace restlessly up and down the courtyard, till Betsy, feeling sorry for the frightened little man, ran out and assured him he was in no danger of being eaten.

It was a long time before the barber stopped shivering, but at last, thoroughly convinced, he hurried impetuously after the tiger. "Let me trim your beautiful whiskers," he begged tremulously.

"Trim mine," invited Carter, as the Hungry Tiger impatiently shook his head. The Vegetable Man's rootlike beard had sprouted a foot since morning, so, trembling with relief and gratitude, the Rash barber stood upon the edge of the tub and trimmed it most skillfully, trying at the same time to bring Carter's celery top hair into some kind of order. When the Vegetable Man, in answer to the barber's questions, had told a bit

about himself and Betsy, the barber related how he had accidentally cut the cheek of Irashi, while shaving him.

"Just a tiny scratch," explained the barber, "and for that I was condemned to die."

"But why do you have such a bad King?" exclaimed Betsy, impatiently. "Why don't you put him out and elect another?"

"We've tried," sighed the barber dolefully, "but Irashi has the army in his power, and with Ippty's help has outwitted us every time."

"Is Ippty the fellow with the fountain pen finger?" asked Betsy curiously.

The barber nodded. "He has a handful of odd fingers," he continued despondently, "a pencil, a sealing wax finger, an eraser, a candle thumb and a pen-knife besides. Oh, he's a handy rogue for a fellow like Irashi, but the real ruler of Rash is Asha, the brother of the present Pasha. Weary of the cares of state, he retired to an unknown country to study radio, leaving his small son and Fizzenpop to govern the Kingdom. No sooner had he gone than Irashi seized the throne and hid the little Prince away. Until we find the lost Prince, nothing can be done," finished the Rash Barber sorrowfully.

"Well, I'll tell Ozma on him," declared Betsy determinedly, "just as soon as I get back to the Emerald City."

"Do you think we ever will get back?" The Hungry Tiger paused in his restless walk and regarded the little group mournfully. "I've been here two days and there's not a chink anywhere in this wall."

"Let's all look," proposed Betsy, jumping up, and encouraged by her cheerfulness, the four prisoners made a careful tour of the pink courtyard. But after several hours had been spent in an unsuccessful search, even Betsy grew down-hearted.

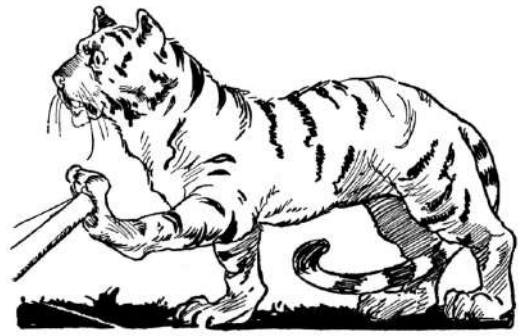
"Shall we have something to eat?" asked the little girl, as they all dropped down wearily beside the Hungry Tiger's water tub. "It's a good thing they threw that cart over. At least, we won't starve!" Insisting that this was his part of the performance, Carter passed round tomatoes and apples, till everyone felt refreshed. Even the Hungry Tiger, after swallowing several dozen of each, admitted that he felt a little less hollow.

"Make the most of the day time," advised the Hungry Tiger gloomily, "for to-night you are supposed to be eaten and will have to hide down below till we find some way out of Rash!" It was not a pleasant prospect, and though Carter did what he could to keep things cheerful, Betsy and the barber grew quieter and quieter as the afternoon advanced.

No more prisoners were flung over the wall, and as the first stars twinkled out, the three slipped silently into the underground cave. The Hungry Tiger had just pushed the pink paving stone back, when Irashi and Ippty, preceded by the pink Guards bearing torches, stepped out upon the wall.

"Good evening, furious feline!" called Ippty shrilly. "How do you do and how do you do it? He's eaten the entire lot," he explained in a breathless whisper to Irashi.

"We've brought you some dessert," announced the Pasha, who seemed to be in a high good humor. "A tempting little waif. Throw the little waif over," he called playfully to the



Guards. The Hungry Tiger had immediately turned his back upon these Rash rascals, but as a crumpled little bundle came tumbling down beside him, he swung around. What he saw made him roar so ferociously that Irashi, Ippty and the pink Guards covered their ears and fled from the wall.

"What's he saying?" gasped the Pasha, sinking down on a pink settee and clapping his fat hands to his quivering middle.

"He's talking tiger, your Highness," stuttered Ippty, with a slight shudder, "and tiger is a language I never studied. But never mind, from now on, we are the sole rulers of Rash!" Thumping the Pasha upon the back, Ippty led him into the throne room. As soon as they had gone, the Hungry Tiger stopped roaring and gently approached the small prisoner.

"Don't cry," begged the Hungry Tiger miserably. It was dreadful to have everyone afraid of him, especially a helpless little boy. "Why, he's no older than Betsy," thought the Hungry Tiger, bristling with anger at Irashi's wickedness. "If you stop crying, I'll take you for a ride all round the courtyard," he promised breathlessly. This offer so astonished the little fellow that he took his arm from before his face and blinked

through his tears at the huge beast. There was no mistaking the kindly expression in the Hungry Tiger's eyes, and with a gasp of relief he jumped up and was about to mount the great beast, when a thin figure



leapt from the top of the wall and came hurtling down between them.

"Spare him! Spare him, cruel monster!" wheezed the newcomer hoarsely. "I am old and thin, but eat me instead."

Placing himself between the Hungry Tiger and the boy, the old Rasher extended his arms pleadingly. It was Fizzenpop, and as the Hungry Tiger drew back with embarrassment and surprise, the Grand Vizier of Rash flung himself at his feet.

"It is the Scarlet Prince!" panted Fizzenpop, beating his head up and down upon the stones, "Prince Evered of Rash!"

"Sh—!" warned the Hungry Tiger, looking about uneasily. Then as Fizzenpop continued his entreaties, he held up his paw for silence. "You're a nice old bone," sighed the Hungry Tiger. "But even so, I have no desire to eat you. It's my conscience," he continued heavily. "I've lived among people too long to hold a position like this." The Grand Vizier could scarcely believe his ears.



"But the other prisoners?" he demanded wildly. "You have eaten them?" The Hungry Tiger, with a tired shake of his head, waved toward the loosened paving stone. The two corn ears of the Vegetable Man were sticking up through the crevice and he was carefully repeating to those below everything as it happened.

"How can I ever thank you!" exclaimed Fizzenpop, prostrating himself again at the Hungry Tiger's feet.

"Don't thank me, help me," begged the Hungry Tiger uncomfortably. "And tell me more about this little chap. Perhaps together we can plan a way to escape."

Fizzenpop's brave action in offering himself in place of the little Prince made the Hungry Tiger feel terribly ashamed. More and more he was coming to realize that he would never be able to devour a live man. It was a long story, and sitting down beside the water tub with Prince Evered in his lap, the Grand Vizier told how Irashi had stolen the throne of the Kingdom and made himself Pasha of Rash.

"There are three magic rubies to protect the rightful rulers of Rash," explained Fizzenpop in a low voice.

"One protects him from all danger by water, one protects him from all injury in the air and the other from all harm on the earth or under the earth. The rubies are embedded among other gems in the Rash scepter. No sooner had Evered's father retired than Irashi began to scheme and plan to make himself king. Knowing he could do nothing while the Rash rubies were in our possession, he managed, with Ippty's help, to steal the royal scepter. Next he had the little Prince

seized and hidden away. After searching in vain for many months, I chanced yesterday into a Rash Cobbler's shop and found Evered playing with the cobbler's children. Hoping to get him safely out of the country I hurried him back to the palace, but Irashi soon discovered him and the rest," Fizzenpop groaned heavily, "the rest, you know!"

"But what became of the rubies?" asked the Hungry Tiger, as Fizzenpop continued to stroke the head of the little Prince. So much had happened in the last few hours that even Fizzenpop's story could not keep the Prince awake.

"One he hurled from the highest turret of the palace, another he flung into the Rash River and the last he buried somewhere in the garden," answered the Grand Vizier sadly. "Until we recover the three magic rubies the Prince's very life is in danger and Rash must remain under the wicked rule of Irashi, the Rough. Every evening, when I am unobserved, I have searched most diligently for these precious gems, but without any success."

"Well, Irashi won't rule long if I can find a way out of here," growled the Hungry Tiger. "Think, man! Is there no way out?" Fizzenpop shook his head dejectedly and then, as it was growing late, they thought it best to conceal the little Prince with the rest of the prisoners. "Betsy," called the Hungry Tiger softly. There was no answer and, pulling aside the pink paving block, he peered down into the cavern. "They must be asleep," muttered the Hungry Tiger in surprise. "Here, Mr.

Fizzenpop, you keep watch while I lower the boy." It was too dark to see, and after the Hungry Tiger had eased the ragged little Prince into the cave, he decided to step in himself and see how everything was going. So he slipped gently down into the darkness.

For nearly ten minutes Fizzenpop kept an anxious eye upon the wall. Then, feeling he had given the Hungry Tiger ample time to replace the block, he turned round. There was no one in the courtyard.

"Merciful mustard!" gasped the Grand Vizier, dashing over to the opening. Hanging down by his heels, he glared into the damp little chamber. But it was perfectly empty. No tiger! No Prince! No barber! No anything! Falling in, head first, Fizzenpop began feeling all over the walls and floors. Then, as his search yielded nothing, he raised his voice in a long dismal wail.

"What's wrong?" Three Rash Guards appeared sleepily on the wall and presently Irashi, himself, wrapped in a pink bath robe, rushed out to see what was the matter. "The Tiger!" gulped Fizzenpop wildly, "the Hungry Tiger has escaped!" Fizzenpop was already in great disfavor, owing to his discovery of the lost Prince, and realizing instantly that it would never do to tell Irashi the whole truth he resolved to save himself for his country and Evered by a clever story. So, while Irashi listened breathlessly from the wall, he told how he had come out to observe the great creature from Oz, how he had seen him prying up a paving stone and had sprung into the courtyard to prevent him from escaping. "But I was too late!" lamented Fizzenpop shaking his head

mournfully. "The Hungry Tiger has disappeared by some miracle of magic!"

"And such a useful beast," sniffed Irashi. "But you shall be rewarded Fizzenpop, for this brave action," and ordering the Guards to let down ropes to the Grand Vizier, the Pasha of Rash went regretfully back to bed. "Oh, well," he yawned as he dropped into a doze, "he's eaten that pest of a Prince and that is something."