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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Hungry Tiger of Oz: The Third Rash Ruby (18/20)

"It was wicked of Irashi to steal the throne, but I'm almost glad he did," remarked the little Prince of Rash, as he and Betsy walked cheerfully down the road next morning. "Why, if he hadn't, I'd never have known you or Carter and the Hungry Tiger," continued Reddy, slashing at a tall weed with his sword, "and I'd never have seen all these cities and celebrities."

Much refreshed by their night's rest, the four travellers had breakfasted royally on a giant peach and set out once more for the Emerald City of Oz.



"Don't you ever feel homesick?" asked Betsy, a little wistfully. She, herself, was beginning to long for the Emerald City and a glimpse of Ozma and Dorothy and her many friends in Oz.

"Well, I would like to see old Fizzenpop," admitted Reddy with a sigh. "He must be wondering where I am, and it will be fun to be a Prince again. Still, I am glad we had all of these adventures together, aren't you Carter?"

The Vegetable Man nodded, but the Hungry Tiger did not seem at all enthusiastic. His experiences as a kitten still made him angry.

"What makes you think our adventures are over?" he rumbled irritably. "We don't even know where we are. I trust we are going in the right direction," he grunted, looking over his shoulder at Betsy. "And even if we are, how shall we cross the Deadly Desert? We have to cross the desert before we come to Oz, you know."

"Let's wait till we come to it," advised Betsy, sensibly. "And if Reddy puts on his giant wig," she added suddenly, "he can see whether we are going in the right direction and—"

"Whether there's anything to eat," put in the Hungry Tiger, who had not cared much for his breakfast.

"Maybe there's a roast beef bush around somewhere," he finished hopefully.



Reddy really enjoyed nothing better than shooting up into a giant. As he explained to Betsy, it made a chap see

things in a much bigger way. So, quite willingly, he clapped on Elma's wig and, turning slowly, looked in all directions.

As he was now taller than the tallest tree anywhere about, he could see for miles around and it at once became apparent to those on the ground that he had made an astonishing discovery.

"What is it?" roared the Hungry Tiger, rubbing impatiently against his shins. "Something to eat? Take off that wig, you rascal! Come down here and tell us what you see."

But Reddy lifted Betsy into the air and, placing her on his shoulder, pointed excitedly toward the South. From that great height Betsy could not see very distinctly, but even so the little girl gave a cry of surprise and delight. Striding down a road that would soon cross their own came a most curious figure—none other than Atmos, the airman, and pattering along hopefully at his side, the little Princess of all OZ.



"It's Ozma!" cried Betsy, nearly losing her balance. "Oh, Reddy, she's coming to help us. But who is that funny balloon man? Hurry up Reddy! Let's go meet them!"

"Like this?" boomed the Prince of Rash doubtfully.

"No," decided Betsy shaking her head. "It might scare her if you were a Giant. Put me down and take off your wig."

Almost dropping Betsy, in his excitement, Reddy pulled off his wig, and after quickly explaining their startling discovery to the Hungry Tiger, the two children started on a run for the cross-roads.

"I hope she never finds out why I went to Rash," muttered the Hungry Tiger under his breath, as he padded hurriedly after them.

Carter followed more slowly, brushing back his celery tops and perking up his corn ears. The Vegetable Man wished to make as favorable an impression on the little Princess as possible. To Ozma, herself, and to Atmos, plodding wearily along the rough road, nothing could have been more astonishing than the sudden appearance of Betsy Bobbin and her friends.

"Why Betsy!" exclaimed the little fairy, running forward joyfully, "Where have you been?"

"Did you look in the Magic Picture and find us?" asked Betsy, giving Ozma an excited little hug. "Oh, Ozma, we've had such a lot of adventures and now we can all go home!"

Ozma looked doubtful, and even more surprised, for as we know perfectly well, she had not looked in the Magic Picture at all and was as lost as Betsy Bobbin.

"And I thought the earth was inhabited by Princesses," gasped the airman, looking in bewilderment from one to the other. "What odd and interesting specimens. Are you real?" he inquired, earnestly tapping Carter on the chest.

"As real as rhubarb," answered the Vegetable Man, with a grin. "Are you? But let me introduce the famous Hungry Tiger of Oz."

"He has a beautiful mouth—" shuddered Atmos, glancing down sideways at the tiger—"Er—when it is shut? Does he bite, Mr. Er—Rhubarb?"

"Only when I'm hungry," sighed the tiger, rolling his yellow eyes mournfully up at Atmos, "And I'm hungry all the time."

"How extremely dangerous," murmured Atmos, stepping quickly behind the Vegetable Man. "Is this little boy creature with you, too?"

"Of course!" laughed Betsy, smiling up at Atmos. "He's a Prince and we're both helping him find the lost rubies so he can be the Rightful Ruler of Rash."

Betsy had been trying to explain all the happenings of the last three days and now, as prettily as she could, she introduced Carter and Reddy to Ozma, and Carter, Reddy and the Hungry Tiger to the comical airman.

Then, because there was so much to explain and consider, they all sat down under a huge handkerchief tree and talked to their hearts' content.

As Betsy insisted on hearing Ozma's story first, the little Princess began it, the airman looking terribly embarrassed as she told how he had fallen from the clouds and then flown off with her. Reddy nodded sympathetically, as Ozma described her flight through the air. Having been carried off by a pigeon himself, he knew just how she felt, and when Ozma told how the days and nights flew past in the sky and how she had punctured the airman and come tumbling to earth, Carter Green was simply rooted to the spot. For the Vegetable Man, in his excitement, had forgotten to keep moving.

"But we are good friends now," put in Atmos hastily, as Reddy tugged the Vegetable Man loose. "Aren't we, little Princess?" Ozma nodded and smiled and went hurriedly on with her story. After being tossed about by the rolling country, it had at last flung them into a

small lake, which was on the whole, rather fortunate, as they were nearly choked with dust. Atmos, in spite of his iron boots, floated nicely, and after they had washed off the mud, he towed the little fairy safely to shore. The sun had soon dried them off and they had taken the first road that stretched ahead.

"And you see," finished Ozma, smiling gaily at Betsy, "it was a lucky road, for it brought us straight to you." Betsy's story, as you can well imagine took much longer, for the time had not flown as fast for the earth travellers as it had for the sky travellers. And as the little girl, helped out by Carter and Reddy and the Hungry Tiger, recounted her strange trip with Carter to Rash, the discovery of the Hungry Tiger, the wickedness of Irashi, the story of the lost rubies and the little Prince, their escape and fall Down Town—Ozma and Atmos listened with simply breathless attention. And as Betsy described their experiences with Kaliko and the tumble down the fire-fall, the airman snatched two handkerchiefs from the tree and began to mop his head with first one and then the other.

"Too strange to believe," sighed the airman weakly.

"They'll never believe this in the Cloud Country."

Ozma smiled to herself at this, and decided that the airman's lecture would last several centuries if he tried to include Betsy's story with his own. Betsy was so out of breath by this time, Reddy took up the tale and told them all about Immense City and the Giants. As he put

on the wig to demonstrate its marvelous power, Ozma looked up at the little Prince in frank admiration.

"You have shown yourself wise and brave and deserve to rule over a Kingdom," said the little Fairy, as Reddy took off the wig and sat down beside her. "I wish I had some of my magic appliances with me, then we could locate the last ruby and restore you to the throne at once. As it is, we'll have to go back to the Emerald City and consult the Wizard of Oz."

"Last ruby," puffed Atmos, who had not paid much attention to the ruby part of the story. "Why, I have a ruby." Reaching in one of his air pockets, the skyman produced a sparkling square gem. Seizing the jewel with a gasp of surprise, Reddy brought out the other two and held them up for all to see.



"Why, it is the last ruby," cried the little Prince, pointing to the R, carved distinctly on the side of the gem. "It is the ruby that protects me from all danger in the air."

"But how did Atmos get it?" exclaimed Betsy, completely bewildered.

"Well, he is an airman," began Reddy, not quite sure himself, but too surprised and delighted to really care, "And I suppose—"

"I got it from a sky-lark," announced the airman, puffing out his cheeks importantly. "One morning, as I

was picking air currents from a large current bush near my air castle, a sky-lark flew by and dropped this ruby into my hand. And as it was bright and shiny, and unlike anything I had ever seen, I kept it."

"Well, good for you!" cried Carter Green, clapping Atmos on the back. "The lark must have caught the ruby as Irashi flung it into the air. Imagine the old scalawag's feelings when he knows that a Vegetable Man found the ruby he buried in the garden, a fisherman the ruby he hurled into the river and an airman, the ruby he tossed into the air! Quite a coincidence, I call it." And taking three skips and a hop to keep from rooting to the spot, Carter perched on a rock he had found himself and began to whistle merrily.



"And now!" exclaimed Betsy, running over to seize Reddy's hands, "Now with all of the rubies you can conquer Irashi and nothing can ever harm you again!"

"Oh, let's go back to Oz," growled the Hungry Tiger, lashing his tail a little at the very thought of Irashi.

"Let's go back to Oz where the meals are regular and a tiger's a tiger. Reddy can live with us and we'll all have fun together. That is, if we can ever find a way to cross the desert."

"I'll carry you across," volunteered the airman, looking down at his boots. "I'm big enough and I'd do anything for little Ozma. I'm her airrend boy," he grinned, winking at Carter Green.

"And I'm Betsy's," declared Carter proudly. Jumping off the stone he began hopping round like a jackrabbit, and Ozma could hardly keep her eyes off the comical little gentleman.

"Let's start, fellows," suggested Carter squinting up at the sun. "Perhaps we are nearer this desert than we think and as we're not sure of the way either to the Emerald City or to Rash, we'll have to go where the next road takes us."

"The desert lies over there," announced Reddy, pointing toward the East. "I saw the gleaming sand when I had on my big wig."

"Then let's go East," sighed Ozma, seating herself contentedly on the Hungry Tiger. In a twinkling Betsy hopped up beside her and with Reddy pacing proudly ahead and Carter and Atmos ambling comfortably behind, the little procession started off.