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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Road to Oz: The Musicker (8/24)

About the middle of the forenoon they began to go up a long hill. By-and-by this hill suddenly dropped down into a pretty valley, where the travelers saw to their surprise, a small house standing by the roadside. It was the first house they had seen, and they hastened into the valley to discover who lived there. No one was in sight as they approached, but when they began to get nearer the house they heard queer sounds coming from it. They could not make these out at first, but as they became louder our friends thought they heard a sort of music like that made by a wheezy hand-organ; the music fell upon their ears in this way:
Tiddle-widdle-iddle, oom pom-pom!

Oom, pom-pom! oom, pom-pom!

Tiddle-tiddle-
tiddle, oom
pom-pom!

Oom, pom-pom
—pah!

"What is it, a
band or a
mouth-organ?"
asked Dorothy.



"Don't know," said Button-Bright.

"Sounds to me like a played-out phonograph," said the shaggy man, lifting his enormous ears to listen.

"Oh, there just couldn't be a funnygraf in Fairyland!" cried Dorothy.

"It's rather pretty, isn't it?" asked Polychrome, trying to dance to the strains.

Tiddle-widdle-iddle, oom pom-pom,

Oom pom-pom; oom pom-pom!

came the music to their ears, more distinctly as they drew nearer the house. Presently they saw a little fat man sitting on a bench before the door. He wore a red, braided jacket that reached to his waist, a blue waistcoat, and white trousers with gold stripes down the sides. On his bald head was perched a little, round, red cap held in place by a rubber elastic underneath his chin. His face was round, his eyes a faded blue, and he wore white cotton gloves. The man leaned on a stout gold-headed cane, bending forward on his seat to watch his visitors approach.

Singularly enough, the musical sounds they had heard seemed to come from the inside of the fat man himself; for



he was playing no instrument nor was any to be seen near him.

They came up and stood in a row, staring at him, and he stared back while the queer sounds came from him as before:

Tiddle-iddle-iddle, oom pom-pom,

Oom, pom-pom; oom pom-pom!

Tiddle-widdle-iddle, oom pom-pom,

Oom, pom-pom—pah!

"Why, he's a reg'lar musicker!" said Button-Bright.

"What's a musicker?" asked Dorothy.

"Him!" said the boy.

Hearing this the fat man sat up a little stiffer than before, as if he had received a compliment, and still came the sounds:

Tiddle-widdle-iddle, oom pom-pom,

Oom pom-pom, oom—

"Stop it!" cried the shaggy man, earnestly. "Stop that dreadful noise!"

The fat man looked at him sadly and began his reply.

When he spoke the music changed and the words seemed to accompany the notes. He said—or rather sang:

It isn't a noise that you hear,

But Music, harmonic and clear.

My breath makes me play

Like an organ, all day—

That bass note is in my left ear.

"How funny!" exclaimed Dorothy; "he says his breath makes the music."

"That's all nonsense," declared the shaggy man; but now the music began again, and they all listened carefully.

My lungs are full of reeds like those
In organs, therefore I suppose,
If I breathe in or out my nose,
The reeds
are bound to
play.

So, as I
breathe to
live, you
know,
I squeeze
out music as
I go;
I'm very
sorry this is
so—

Forgive my piping, pray!



"Poor man," said Polychrome; "he can't help it. What a great misfortune it is!"

"Yes," replied the shaggy man; "we are only obliged to hear this music a short time, until we leave him and go away; but the poor fellow must listen to himself as long as he lives, and that is enough to drive him crazy. Don't you think so?"

"Don't know," said Button-Bright. Toto said "Bow-wow!" and the others laughed.

"Perhaps that's why he lives all alone," suggested Dorothy.

"Yes; if he had neighbors they might do him an injury," responded the shaggy man.

All this while the little fat musicker was breathing the notes:

Tiddle-tiddle-iddle, oom, pom-pom,
and they had to speak loud in order to hear themselves.

The shaggy man said:

"Who are you, sir?"

The reply came in the shape of this sing-song:

I'm Allegro da Capo, a very famous man;

Just find another, high or low, to match me if you can.

Some people try, but can't, to play

And have to practice every day;

But I've been musical alway, since first my life began.

"Why, I b'lieve he's proud of it," exclaimed Dorothy, "and seems to me I've heard worse music than he makes."

"Where?" asked Button-Bright.

"I've forgotten, just now. But Mr. Da Capo is certainly a strange person—isn't he?—and p'r'aps he's the only one of his kind in all the world."

This praise seemed to please the little fat musicker, for he swelled out his chest, looked important and sang as follows:

I wear no band around me,

And yet I am a band!

I do not strain to make my strains

But, on the other hand,

My toot is always destitute

Of flats or other errors;

To see sharp and be natural are
For me but minor terrors.

"I don't quite understand that," said Polychrome, with a puzzled look; "but perhaps it's because I'm accustomed only to the music of the spheres."

"What's that?" asked Button-Bright.

"Oh, Polly means the atmosphere and hemisphere, I s'pose," explained Dorothy.

"Oh," said Button-Bright.

"Bow-wow!" said Toto.

But the musicker was still breathing his constant
Oom, pom-pom; oom, pom-pom—
and it seemed to jar on the shaggy man's nerves.

"Stop it, can't you?" he cried, angrily; "or breathe in a whisper; or put a clothes-pin on your nose. Do something, anyhow!"

But the fat one, with a sad look, sang this answer:

"Music hath charms, and it may
Soothe even the savage, they say;
So if savage you feel

Just list to my reel,

For sooth to say that's the real way."

The shaggy man had to laugh at this, and when he laughed he stretched his donkey mouth wide open. Said Dorothy:

"I don't know how good his poetry is, but it seems to fit the notes, so that's all that can be 'xpected."

"I like it," said Button-Bright, who was staring hard at the musicker, his little legs spread wide apart. To the

surprise of his companions, the boy asked this long question:

"If I swallowed a mouth-organ, what would I be?"

"An organette," said the shaggy man. "But come, my dears; I think the best thing we can do is to continue on our journey before Button-Bright swallows anything. We must try to find that Land of Oz, you know."

Hearing this speech the musicker sang, quickly:

If you go to the hand of Oz

Please take me along, because

On Ozma's birthday

I'm anxious to play

The loveliest song ever was.

"No, thank you," said Dorothy; "we prefer to travel alone. But if I see Ozma I'll tell her you want to come to her birthday party."

"Let's be going," urged the shaggy man, anxiously.

Polly was already dancing along the road, far in advance, and the others turned to follow her. Toto did not like the fat musicker and made a grab for his chubby leg. Dorothy quickly caught up the growling little dog and hurried after her companions, who were walking faster than usual in order to get out of hearing. They had to climb a hill, and until they got to the top they could not escape the musicker's monotonous piping:

"Oom, pom-pom; oom, pom-pom;

Tiddle-iddle-widdle, oom, pom-pom;

Oom, pom-pom—pah!"

As they passed the brow of the hill, however, and descended on the other side, the sounds gradually died

away, whereat they all felt much relieved.

"I'm glad I don't have to live with the organ-man; aren't you, Polly?" said Dorothy.

"Yes, indeed," answered the Rainbow's Daughter.

"He's nice," declared Button-Bright, soberly.

"I hope your Princess Ozma won't invite him to her birthday celebration," remarked the shaggy man; "for the fellow's music would drive her guests all crazy. You've given me an idea, Button-Bright; I believe the musicker must have swallowed an accordeon in his youth."

"What's 'cordeon?" asked the boy.

"It's a kind of pleating," explained Dorothy, putting down the dog.

"Bow-wow!" said Toto, and ran away at a mad gallop to chase a bumble-bee.

