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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Magic of Oz: Conspirators (4/23)

Kiki Aru didn't know much about Oz and didn't know much about the beasts who lived there, but the old Nome's plan seemed to him to be quite reasonable. He had a faint suspicion that Ruggedo meant to get the best of him in some way, and he resolved to keep a close watch on his fellow-conspirator. As long as he kept to himself the secret word of the transformations, Ruggedo would not dare to harm him, and he promised himself that as soon as they had conquered Oz, he would transform the old Nome into a marble statue and keep him in that form forever.

Ruggedo, on his part, decided that he could, by careful watching and listening, surprise the boy's secret, and when he had learned the magic word he would transform Kiki Aru into a bundle of faggots and burn him up and so be rid of him.

This is always the way with wicked people. They cannot be trusted even by one another. Ruggedo thought he was fooling Kiki, and Kiki thought he was fooling Ruggedo; so both were pleased.

"It's a long way across the Desert," remarked the boy, "and the sands are hot and send up poisonous vapors. Let us wait until evening and then fly across in the night when it will be cooler."

The former Nome King agreed to this, and the two spent the rest of that day in talking over their plans. When evening came they paid the inn-keeper and walked out to a little grove of trees that stood near by. "Remain here for a few minutes and I'll soon be back," said Kiki, and walking swiftly away, he left the Nome standing in the grove. Ruggedo wondered where he had gone, but stood quietly in his place until, all of a sudden, his form changed to that of a great eagle, and he uttered a piercing cry of astonishment and flapped his wings in a sort of panic. At once his eagle cry was answered from beyond the grove, and another eagle, even larger and more powerful than the transformed Ruggedo, came sailing through the trees and alighted beside him.

"Now we are ready for the start," said the voice of Kiki, coming from the eagle.

Ruggedo realized that this time he had been outwitted. He had thought Kiki would utter the magic word in his presence, and so he would learn what it was, but the boy had been too shrewd for that.

As the two eagles mounted high into the air and began their flight across the great Desert that separates the Land of Oz from all the rest of the world, the Nome said:

"When I was king of the Nomes I had a magic way of working transformations that I thought was good, but it could not compare with your secret word. I had to have certain tools and make passes and say a lot of mystic words before I could transform anybody."

"What became of your magic tools?" inquired Kiki.

“The Oz people took them all away from me—that horrid girl, Dorothy, and that terrible fairy, Ozma, the Ruler of Oz—at the time they took away my underground kingdom and kicked me upstairs into the cold, heartless world.”

“Why did you let them do that?” asked the boy.

“Well,” said Ruggedo, “I couldn’t help it. They rolled eggs at me—eggs—dreadful eggs!—and if an egg even touches a Nome, he is ruined for life.”

“Is any kind of an egg dangerous to a Nome?”

“Any kind and every kind. An egg is the only thing I’m afraid of.”

