

The Land of the Sea-Goat



THE NEXT GATE was very still—not a movement of any kind. It looked heavy and solid, and its central ornament was a mountain with a tiny building at the highest point. The pillars were carved with goats' heads and at their bases a border of fishes' tails.

Rex was uncertain as to how to gain admittance, as he could not see a knocker nor a bell, nor even a rod with which to strike the gate.

Zendah suddenly said, "There is a very, very tiny keyhole, quite high up in the gate, Rex, but I don't think we can reach it, and then even if we could, we have no key. However, you might climb on to my shoulder and see if you can reach the keyhole."

Rex did so, but still it was out of reach. He jumped down again and the children stood looking at each other in dismay.

"This is tiresome," said Rex, glancing up at the gate. "Look at those letters, Zendah, I did not see them at first."

They were surprised to see right across the gate the words, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again."

Suddenly Zendah noticed a huge stone close by the gate. There was a streak of light coming from under it, so she said, "Let's try and move this stone and then perhaps we shall find the way in." They pushed together at it for some minutes and when it

moved they found beneath it a white stone box.

Inside was a tiny key made of a dull, heavy-looking metal, and it really was heavy, for together they could hardly lift it. After tugging for some minutes they dropped it to get their breath. Then Zendah took hold of the key with both hands and as she did so Rex cried out, "Zendah, Zendah, you are growing taller and taller!" He watched her shoot up like a bean stalk and put the key in the lock. As she did this she suddenly found herself to be her natural size. Then they heard a voice.

"Who has found the secret of the entrance into the Land of the Sea-Goat?"

They replied, "Rex and Zendah."

"The Password?"

"Perseverance," they answered.

"Enter Rex and Zendah by perseverance."

Very, very slowly this gate rolled back, and a cold wind made them shiver as they stood on the threshold.

What a sight met their eyes! Range after range of mountains, some snow-clad, and some all gray rocks. The Sun was just rising and as they looked the mountains changed from gray to beautiful shades of blue and purple, and as he rose higher in the heavens, they gradually became pink and orange, just as their own hill did in winter.

"I think it is rather cold here," said Zendah,

stamping her feet, “but I do like climbing mountains.”

They turned round as they heard footsteps, and found that an elderly woman with gray hair had come to meet them.

She carried a staff in her hand and wore a short mountaineering dress of greenish material, belted with a dark brown, leather belt.

“You will not find this land easy,” she said, bowing gravely to the children, “but I will give you the goat’s feet power and you will be able to climb.” So saying, she touched their feet with her staff, and much to their surprise, they found that this made some difference, for afterwards they could climb the mountain sides quite easily.

“What would have happened if you had not touched our feet with your staff?” asked Zendah.

“You would have found your knees bending, and you would always have been falling down, and so might never have reached the top of the mountain,” she said.

Up and up they climbed, passing on their way huge beech trees; here and there were men cutting down some of them, ready to be taken to workshops lower down on the mountain.

Near the top they entered a beautiful garden set out with ordered rows of poplar and yew trees that Rex thought were just like a lot of soldiers drilling. In the centre was a black palace that shone like polished marble, but they were told that it was made of jet.

In the Jet Palace they found King Saturn, who smiled as they entered his great hall, and who told them that this was his house where he was most often to be found.

“I am afraid you will not find the Sea-Goat’s Land so interesting until you are grown up,” he said, and turning to a young man who was sitting at his side, and whose hair was like that of Rex, he

added, “You will have all our wonders explained to you by my son Mars, who is young and will be glad of an excuse to be doing something instead of sitting still beside me all day!”

Mars jumped up with a smile, and off they went, peeping as they passed into several rooms of the palace where they saw men and women talking, and talking, and talking, until you would have thought they must be tired of so much chattering.

In another room they saw people surrounded by books and rolls of papers with hundreds of red and green seals hanging to them; there were books on the shelves, books on the tables, books on the floors in heaps; you could hardly see the people themselves for books!

“This is the book in which all the knowledge of the world is written in every language,” said Mars. “It is locked with seven locks But until you have visited all the lands of the Zodiac, you will not be able to read any of its pages.”

“Some of these people are learning all about laws so that they may be able to show their kings how to rule their countries,” explained Mars, “and the others are writing them down, to be stored for many people to read, if ever they want to, in museums and libraries.” The children thought this seemed a little dull so Mars took them outside the palace where they saw hun-

dreds of goats, big goats and little goats, gray goats, white goats, and piebald goats, running up and down the mountain and never slipping nor falling as they jumped from crag to crag.

“Are there no other animals here?” asked Zendah.

Mars showed them some deep pools near the foot of one of the mountains, and there they saw hundreds of crocodiles.

“I don’t like those at all, nor their smell,” cried Zendah. Mars laughed. “Shut your eyes,” he commanded, and he spoke some magic word. “Now open them.” When she did so all the crocodiles had turned to goats and were scrambling out of the pool as fast as they could.

Further on they came to a crack in the mountain,



Mars petitions while four green angels reverently regard the magic lamp that will grant any wish and the book with seven locks which contains all the knowledge of the world.

and creeping inside they stepped on to a kind of lift—anyway it seemed like a lift for it was a little room with seats on one side. And after they sat down the whole place went suddenly dark and—swish—bump—their breath was nearly taken away, and then they saw a faint light.

“Be very, very quiet, if you wish to see the gnomes at work,” Mars whispered, as they stepped out of the lift and crept along a narrow passage. Soon they were standing on a ledge of rock looking down on a cave below.

There were hundreds of little brown men running about, some looking after great fires, over which were boiling cauldrons of metal. Others were wheeling tanks about, out of which they poured the hot metal into cracks in the rocks.

“What are they doing?” whispered Rex

“They are pouring lead into the veins of the rocks, so that it will run down to Earth, and men will be able to find lead mines if they dig deep enough. The metals in any land have first to be put

there by the gnomes before you can find them. Now come and see what we do with the trees you saw being cut down on the mountain slopes.”

They passed into a large building in which were great circular saws cutting tree trunks into smooth slabs. Some were being polished until they were like mirrors and the children could see their faces in them. Everywhere all kinds of things were being made of wood—tables and toys, boats and boxes. In one corner a man was fitting minute, many-coloured squares and triangles to form a pattern that looked like a carpet.

“What a time it takes him,” sighed Zendah, thinking how she disliked sitting still for very long in the house.

“He has been making that for eighty-four years,” replied Mars. “You see one who needs much patience to do it, and that is one of the things people come here to learn.”

The children were beginning to feel tired with their climbing, for the power of the magic staff was commencing to wear off, so Mars carried them up a very steep mountain whose top seemed to reach right up above the clouds. At last they stood at the door of a crystal building with five sides like a star. Over the door were the words:

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

In the entrance hall sat an old man near a window that stretched from the floor right up to the ceiling. The window was open at the top, and a large telescope pointed to the starry heavens. He was surrounded by tables littered with books and papers inscribed with circles and queer figures. As Mars took the children to him, he looked up from the calculations he was making.

“Birthdays please,” was all he said.

“March 27th, November 26th,” replied Rex and Zendah together.

He laughed. “One at a time please.” He then entered their names in a big book at his side. Wondering why he wanted their birthdays, they stood watching him, but he went back to his writing and they saw Mars waiting at the door for them.

Leaving this antechamber, they arrived at the entrance of the main hall, and were told to follow

him slowly and quietly. In the centre hung a lamp, suspended from thereof by a gold chain that shone as it swung slightly to and fro in the breeze from the door. Underneath it stood a table, on the legs of which were carved snakes, and upon it, lying on a purple cushion, was a large book bound with white velvet. There were several locks and chains attached and on its cover were the words in letters of gold:

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

A green angel knelt at each corner while another stood behind the lamp, watching to see that it never went out.

“This is the book in which all the knowledge of the world is written in every language,” said Mars. “It is locked with seven locks, and the little key you found at the gate unlocks one of them. But until you have visited all the lands of the Zodiac, you will not be able to read any of its pages.”

“The lamp is like Aladdin’s, and is able to give

you all you wish for; before you leave, Father Time will give you a little copy of it, and tell you how to use it.”

Mars carried them back down the mountain side, to the Jet Palace, and Father Time smiled when he saw them. Reading their thoughts, he said, “So you want to be able to read the Book of Wisdom, children? So you shall, some day. Now I give to you, Zendah, a copy of the lamp; you must find out where to rub it, and how many times, and then you must both use it, together with the password. You, Rex, may wear this five-pointed star made of jade, to remind you of this land.”

Mars took them to the palace gates and they waved their hands to him, and ran together down the mountain side, arriving at the entrance much more quickly than they expected. But then it is easier to run down a mountain than up!

They were not certain what they really thought of the Land of the Sea-Goat, for as Zendah said, things were so puzzling there, and also, it was rather cold. (Continued) □

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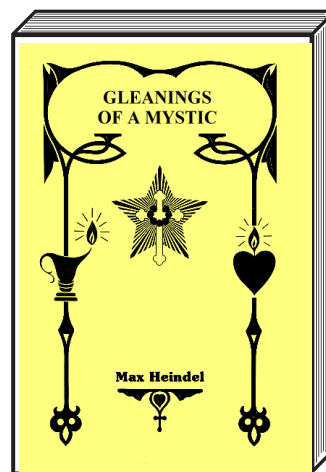
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