

Rex and Zendah in



WHEN THE GATES of the Archer had completely closed, Rex and Zendah looked around for the next entrance but not a trace of one could they see!

“How can you try to open a gate that does not seem to be there?” said Rex. “Perhaps Hermes will come and help us.”

To pass the time they sat down on the ground and began to look at the scroll of passwords that Hermes had given them. While they were unrolling it, Zendah noticed some curious shining bits of stone that seemed to move themselves toward each other as she shuffled her feet about.

She sat still and looked—no, they did not move, it must have been her imagination. Just then Rex dropped his knife out of his pocket; how it happened to be there he never knew, and much to their astonishment, the queer bits of stone moved toward the knife and arranged themselves around it.

“Why,” she said, “they look like parts of a puzzle.”

So they started picking up some of them. “Do you think they might be a puzzle, Rex?” queried Zendah. “Let’s try and find enough to make a word.” They collected a heap of the queer, dark, shining stones, and soon found they were able to make several words. At last they made the word “Secret.”

Just then a curious noise behind them made them look round. It was a sort or gurgling, swishing noise, and they saw what looked like water running swiftly over stones in a river bed, when there had been much rain.

They then saw a movement, where before there had seemed to be nothing. At the bottom of the

river bed was a number of twisting lines like water, gradually rising higher and higher, moving from side to side, and swiftly up and down, until it made a great funnel, a whirlpool of water, nearly as high as a house and about eight feet across the top.

At the bottom it was such a deep purple as to be nearly black, but the moving lines became lighter in colour and more and more reddish, until it was a glorious crimson. Then a bubble formed at the bottom of the funnel and gradually rising to the top, burst without a sound.

Seven more bubbles rose, one by one and each larger than the other, and as the eighth and last broke, the whole of the water disappeared and they beheld the gate. It was made of beautifully shaped and twisted iron, with a figure of an enormous eagle right across the top.

No voice demanded entrance—the gates swung open suddenly with a clang, and as suddenly closed behind them after they had stepped inside.

The way before them was blocked with great rocks towering in front of them and extending at the sides to where the gates had been, but which were again invisible.

There was no way forward, and no way back, and yet, it seemed as if there might be an entrance, for a stream of dark water flowed under the rock near their feet.

“Let’s try the Password,” said Zendah. “This might be like the entrance to Ali Baba’s cave.”

So they whispered, “Power.”

Eight times it echoed back from the rocks, sounding like a chorus of invisible people mocking them. Then suddenly there was an opening just in

front of them and a boat lay on the water inside the opening.

They stepped into the boat, and without any warning, off it shot at a great speed as if the stream were constantly running down hill. Through caverns almost pitch black, they went over little rapids where the boat rocked so much they thought they must be thrown out! Sometimes it was icy cold and they saw great blocks of ice, all shapes and sizes, towering into the air on each side of them like pillars of a cathedral. Further on they passed a place that was just as hot as the place they had left was cold. Fountains of boiling water rushed up to the roof of the cavern, and they could hardly breathe.

They wanted badly to stop the boat in one place, for the walls of the cavern were alive with specks of many colored lights that looked like the jewels which mother had in her necklace, but they were unable to do so.

At last the boat rushed out into the open country, and stopped beside a bank on which elder and alder trees were growing. On the bank stood a figure they recognized and they jumped out and ran to him, for it was Mars.

“It did not take you long to find the secret of the entrance cave,” he said, “and I am very much pleased that the underground journey did not frighten you. In the Land of the Scorpion-Eagle you will have to find out most things for yourselves. Now choose, will you go east or west?”

“West,” said Zendah, speaking first, before Rex could make up his mind. As she spoke, a flying chariot drew up drawn by four eagles.

Off they flew, over ice fields, passing waterfalls, miles and miles high, until the air became warmer and there came to them a perfume like that of a garden. Getting out of the chariot, they found themselves in a stretch of flat country, all arranged with beds of herbs; some they knew because they grew them in their garden at home, but a great many they had never seen before.

“How sweet they smell,” said Rex, running from bed to bed and picking a leaf here and there, as they wandered up and down the paths. “But why are they all needed?”

“They have many uses, as you shall see,” replied Mars, leading them further on. In the middle of the

herb garden was a long, low building, and passing inside they saw many women putting the herbs on trays to dry, then rubbing them through sieves, and lastly putting them into bottles. They saw the herbs, in another part of the building, being boiled in great vats to make medicines for the doctors to use when curing sick people.

“There is an herb for every illness, if people would only take the trouble to find it out,” said Mars.

These are magical glasses—everyone has a pair, so Mars told them, but very few people know how to use them, or are even aware that they have them.

In the centre of the building was a room with glass windows through which the children looked at eight old men gathered round a table on which was a glass vase with a stopper at the top. To their astonishment they saw that this was full of a beautiful liquid which moved and leaped by itself, as if it were trying to escape. It was a glorious crimson, like wine, with hundreds of golden bubbles in it.

It was so beautiful that they begged to take some home, but were told it was not quite finished yet, though when perfected it would cure all illness.

“It is the Elixir of Life that the wise old alchemists were always trying to make, and they come to this land from Earth to find out how to make it,” said Mars.

The next interesting thing they saw was a number of people making spectacles. The queer thing was that no two pairs were alike in shape and every one had a different colored glass.

They begged to look through a pair. Everyone started laughing and chorused, “Why you have a pair of your own.” Where these spectacles suddenly came from they had no idea, but Rex had pink glasses and Zendah’s were blue.

What wonders they saw through them! They could see right down into the ground, just as if it were transparent, trace where the oil wells lay, and see hidden streams of underground water. The rivers, as they looked, were now full of water

nymphs, playing games with each other, up and down the waterfalls.

In the air were thousands of tiny figures not visible to them before, and they noticed some of these buzzing round the flowers with brushes and paint pots, placing the colors on the opening buds and on the fruit. These are magical glasses—everyone has a pair, so Mars told them, but very few people know how to use them, or are even aware that they have them.

Outside the spectacle factory, in a courtyard nearby, they looked down a deep well covered with a great stone slab. Mars moved this, and they saw the well was dry. In the sand at the bottom of the well were crawling some scaly objects that looked rather like small lobsters, only they had nasty spikes in their tails that they carried curved over their backs.

“These ought not to be here,” said Mars. “They were all beautiful eagles once, but every time a child belonging to this land says a sharp, unkind word, one of our eagles turns into a scorpion.”

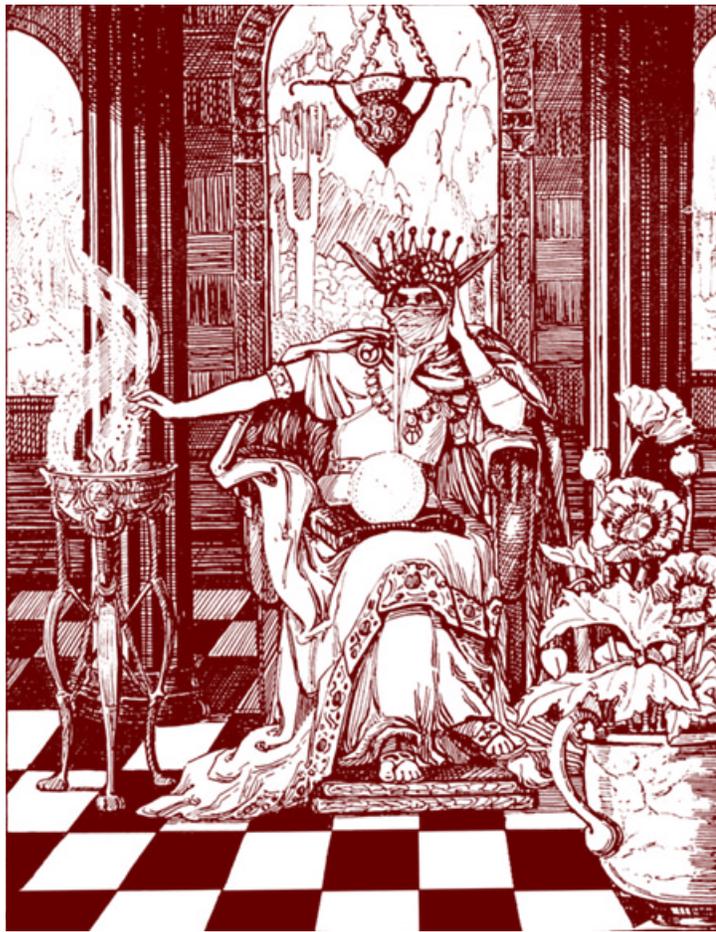
“Don’t they ever turn back into eagles?” asked Zendah, feeling very sorry for the poor eagles condemned to crawl instead of being able to fly.

“Oh yes, but the children have to perform three good deeds before they can become eagles again.”

Many and curious things they saw; all were hidden, and the magic word had to be spoken before they became visible. At last they came to the palace of the King.

The entrance to the grounds was through great fields of poppies of all colors, and their scent made Zendah yawn so much and feel so tired, that to avoid going to sleep on the way, they hurried her on to the steps of the palace.

This palace stood on eight pillars with a moat all round it, so every part was reflected in the water; the bridge to it seemed made of clouds, and every step Rex and Zendah took was like walking on cotton wool. Women wearing dark red cloaks, and with veils on their heads that were kept in place with a snake ornament, stood in the passages and halls to welcome them, and saluted Mars with a raised hand. Page boys with black piercing eyes and shocks of dark curly hair, flung back the cur-



tains to the central hall.

The upper part of the hall was made of black and white marble and the throne itself of a green stone flecked with little red marks. On each side were huge iron vases, in which were growing white poppy plants as large as small trees. A lamp with a red light hung from the roof in front of the throne and braziers on each side sent forth clouds of scented smoke. A figure was seated on a throne, wearing a robe, crimson-rose in colour, bordered with embroidery of many colors and richly set with jewels. They could not see the face, for it was veiled with eight veils, but they could see a crown set with sparkling jewels.

A deep voice bade them welcome, and ordered the attendants to fill the goblet and give the children the drink of remembrance, “For without this you will not be able to recall what you have seen in the Land of the Scorpion-Eagle.”

A tall woman handed them a goblet, beautifully carved, full of a red liquid, while at the same time

she passed her hand across the children's eyes.

It was a strange drink, very sweet as they drank it, but leaving a bitter taste in their mouths afterwards.

Handing back the goblet they looked up, and saw a crimson winged figure behind the throne—a Great Being that reached almost to the roof of the hall, and who wore a blazing star on his head.

This was one of the four Guardians of the Winds, they were told, and one quarter of the world was given to his charge. The green Guardian lived in the Land of the Water Carrier, but until they had drunk of the waters of remembrance they could not see any of the four Guardians.

They stood and gazed at the Angel's wonderful crimson wings and blazing star, until the voice of the king recalled them.

"Bring the Helmet of Invisibility," he cried. A page entered with a crimson satin cushion but they could see nothing on it. This nothing was put

on Zendah's head. It felt just like putting on a hat, only you could not see what it was, and when she had it on, Rex could not see her at all.

Round Rex's neck was hung a red cord with a pendant made of a topaz in the shape of an eagle.

"The Invisible Helmet will help you to see hidden things, and also some day to become invisible on Earth as you are here. Now you have stayed long enough in this land, for you still have much to see," said the King, "and I will send you swiftly to the next land."

He stood up, and raising his hands above his head, he spoke a strange word that they could never remember.

The floor seemed to heave; all went dark, and the next thing they knew they were outside the gate, and as before they entered, now again they could see no sign of it.

"That is the second earthquake," said Zendah. (Continued)



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