

Chapter Fourteen - The Escape

"Our fault," said Rinkitink, "is that we conquer only one of these twin islands at a time. When we conquered Regos, our foes all came to Coregos, and now that we have conquered Coregos, the Queen has fled to Regos. And each time they removed the bridge of boats, so that we could not follow them."

"What has become of our own boat, in which we came from Pingaree?" asked Bilbil.

"We left it on the shore of Regos," replied the Prince, "but I wonder if we could not get it again."

"Why don't you ask the White Pearl?" suggested Rinkitink.

"That is a good idea," returned the boy, and at once he drew the White Pearl from its silken bag and held it to his ear. Then he asked: "How may I regain our boat?"

The Voice of the Pearl replied: "Go to the south end of the Island of Coregos, and clap your hands three times and the boat will come to you."

"Very good!" cried Inga, and then he turned to his companions and said: "We shall be able to get our boat whenever we please; but what then shall we do?"

"Take me home in it!" pleaded Zella.

"Come with me to my City of Gilgad," said the King, "where you will be very welcome to remain forever."

"No," answered Inga, "I must rescue my father and mother, as well as my people. Already I have the women and children of Pingaree, but the men are with my father in the mines of Regos, and my dear mother has been taken away by Queen Cor. Not until all are rescued will I consent to leave these islands."

"Quite right!" exclaimed Bilbil.

"On second thought," said Rinkitink, "I agree with you. If you are careful to sleep in your shoes, and never take them off again, I believe you will be able to perform the task you have undertaken."

They counseled together for a long time as to their mode of action and it was finally considered best to make the attempt to liberate King Kitticut first of all, and with him the men from Pingaree. This would give them an army to assist them and afterward they could march to Regos and compel Queen Cor to give up the Queen of Pingaree. Zella told them that they could go in their boat along the shore of Regos to a point opposite the mines, thus avoiding any conflict with the warriors of King Gos.

This being considered the best course to pursue, they resolved to start on the following morning, as night was even now approaching. The servants being all busy in caring for the women and children, Zella undertook to get a dinner for Inga and Rinkitink and herself and soon prepared a fine meal in the palace kitchen, for she was a good little cook and had often helped her mother. The dinner was served in a small room overlooking the gardens and Rinkitink thought the best part of it was the sweet honey, which he spread upon the biscuits that Zella had made. As for Bilbil, he wandered through the palace grounds and found some grass that made him a good dinner.

During the evening Inga talked with the women and cheered them, promising soon to reunite them with their husbands who were working in the mines and to send them back to their own island of Pingaree.

Next morning the boy rose bright and early and found that Zella had already prepared a nice breakfast. And after the meal they went to the most southern point of the island, which was not very far away, Rinkitink riding upon Bilbil's back and Inga and Zella following behind them, hand in hand.

When they reached the water's edge the boy advanced and clapped his hands together three times, as the White Pearl had told him to do. And in a few moments they saw in the distance the black boat with the silver lining, coming swiftly toward them from the sea. Presently it grounded on the beach and they all got into it.

Zella was delighted with the boat, which was the most beautiful she had ever seen, and the marvel of its coming to them through the water without anyone to row it, made her a little afraid of the fairy craft. But Inga picked up the oars and began to row and at once the boat shot swiftly in the direction of Regos. They rounded the point of that island where the city was built and noticed that the shore was lined with warriors who had discovered their boat but seemed undecided whether to pursue it or not. This was probably because they had received no commands what to do, or perhaps they had learned to

fear the magic powers of these adventurers from Pingaree and were unwilling to attack them unless their King ordered them to.

The coast on the western side of the Island of Regos was very uneven and Zella, who knew fairly well the location of the mines from the inland forest path, was puzzled to decide which mountain they now viewed from the sea was the one where the entrance to the underground caverns was located. First she thought it was this peak, and then she guessed it was that; so considerable time was lost through her uncertainty.

They finally decided to land and explore the country, to see where they were, so Inga ran the boat into a little rocky cove where they all disembarked. For an hour they searched for the path without finding any trace of it and now Zella believed they had gone too far to the north and must return to another mountain that was nearer to the city.

Once again they entered the boat and followed the winding coast south until they thought they had reached the right place. By this time, however, it was growing dark, for the entire day had been spent in the search for the entrance to the mines, and Zella warned them that it would be safer to spend the night in the boat than on the land, where wild beasts were sure to disturb them. None of them realized at this time how fatal this day of search had been to their plans and perhaps if Inga had realized what was going on he would have landed and fought all the wild beasts in the forest rather than quietly remain in the boat until morning.

However, knowing nothing of the cunning plans of Queen Cor and King Gos, they anchored their boat in a little bay and cheerfully ate their dinner, finding plenty of food and drink in the boat's lockers. In the evening the stars came out in the sky and tipped the waves around their boat with silver. All around them was delightfully still save for the occasional snarl of a beast on the neighboring shore.

They talked together quietly of their adventures and their future plans and Zella told them her simple history and how hard her poor father was obliged to work, burning charcoal to sell for enough money to support his wife and child. Nikobob might be the humblest man in all Regos, but Zella declared he was a good man, and honest, and it was not his fault that his country was ruled by so wicked a King.

Then Rinkitink, to amuse them, offered to sing a song, and although Bilbil protested in his gruff way, claiming that his master's voice was cracked and

disagreeable, the little King was encouraged by the others to sing his song, which he did.

"A red-headed man named Ned was dead; Sing fiddle-cum-faddle-cum-fi-do!
In battle he had lost his head; Sing fiddle-cum-faddl-cum-fi-do! 'Alas, poor Ned,' to him I said, 'How did you lose your head so red?' Sing fiddle-cum-faddle-cum-fi-do!

"Said Ned: 'I for my country bled,' Sing fiddle-cum-faddle-cum-fi-do!
'Instead of dying safe in bed', Sing fiddle-cum-faddle-cum-fi-do! 'If I had only fled, instead, I then had been a head ahead.' Sing fiddle-cum-faddle-cum-fi-do!

"I said to Ned--"

"Do stop, Your Majesty!" pleaded Bilbil. "You're making my head ache."

"But the song isn't finished," replied Rinkitink, "and as for your head aching, think of poor Ned, who hadn't any head at all!"

"I can think of nothing but your dismal singing," retorted Bilbil. "Why didn't you choose a cheerful subject, instead of telling how a man who was dead lost his red head? Really, Rinkitink, I'm surprised at you."

"I know a splendid song about a live man," said the King.

"Then don't sing it," begged Bilbil.

Zella was both astonished and grieved by the disrespectful words of the goat, for she had quite enjoyed Rinkitink's singing and had been taught a proper respect for Kings and those high in authority. But as it was now getting late they decided to go to sleep, that they might rise early the following morning, so they all reclined upon the bottom of the big boat and covered themselves with blankets which they found stored underneath the seats for just such occasions. They were not long in falling asleep and did not waken until daybreak.

After a hurried breakfast, for Inga was eager to liberate his father, the boy rowed the boat ashore and they all landed and began searching for the path. Zella found it within the next half hour and declared they must be very close to the entrance to the mines; so they followed the path toward the north, Inga going first, and then Zella following him, while Rinkitink brought up the rear riding upon Bilbil's back.

Before long they saw a great wall of rock towering before them, in which was a low arched entrance, and on either side of this entrance stood a guard, armed with a sword and a spear. The guards of the mines were not so fierce as the warriors of King Gos, their duty being to make the slaves work at their tasks and guard them from escaping; but they were as cruel as their cruel master wished them to be, and as cowardly as they were cruel.

Inga walked up to the two men at the entrance and said:

"Does this opening lead to the mines of King Gos?"

"It does," replied one of the guards, "but no one is allowed to pass out who once goes in."

"Nevertheless," said the boy, "we intend to go in and we shall come out whenever it pleases us to do so. I am the Prince of Pingaree, and I have come to liberate my people, whom King Gos has enslaved."

Now when the two guards heard this speech they looked at one another and laughed, and one of them said: "The King was right, for he said the boy was likely to come here and that he would try to set his people free. Also the King commanded that we must keep the little Prince in the mines, and set him to work, together with his companions."

"Then let us obey the King," replied the other man.

Inga was surprised at hearing this, and asked:

"When did King Gos give you this order?"

"His Majesty was here in person last night," replied the man, "and went away again but an hour ago. He suspected you were coming here and told us to capture you if we could."

This report made the boy very anxious, not for himself but for his father, for he feared the King was up to some mischief. So he hastened to enter the mines and the guards did nothing to oppose him or his companions, their orders being to allow him to go in but not to come out.

The little group of adventurers passed through a long rocky corridor and reached a low, wide cavern where they found a dozen guards and a hundred slaves, the latter being hard at work with picks and shovels digging for gold, while the guards stood over them with long whips.

Inga found many of the men from Pingaree among these slaves, but King Kitticut was not in this cavern; so they passed through it and entered another corridor that led to a second cavern. Here also hundreds of men were working, but the boy did not find his father amongst them, and so went on to a third cavern.

The corridors all slanted downward, so that the farther they went the lower into the earth they descended, and now they found the air hot and close and difficult to breathe. Flaming torches were stuck into the walls to give light to the workers, and these added to the oppressive heat.

The third and lowest cavern was the last in the mines, and here were many scores of slaves and many guards to keep them at work. So far, none of the guards had paid any attention to Inga's party, but allowed them to proceed as they would, and while the slaves cast curious glances at the boy and girl and man and goat, they dared say nothing. But now the boy walked up to some of the men of Pingaree and asked news of his father, telling them not to fear the guards as he would protect them from the whips.

Then he learned that King Kitticut had indeed been working in this very cavern until the evening before, when King Gos had come and taken him away--still loaded with chains.

"Seems to me," said King Rinkitink, when he heard this report, "that Gos has carried your father away to Regos, to prevent us from rescuing him. He may hide poor Kitticut in a dungeon, where we cannot find him."

"Perhaps you are right," answered the boy, "but I am determined to find him, wherever he may be."

Inga spoke firmly and with courage, but he was greatly disappointed to find that King Gos had been before him at the mines and had taken his father away. However, he tried not to feel disheartened, believing he would succeed in the end, in spite of all opposition. Turning to the guards, he said:

"Remove the chains from these slaves and set them free."

The guards laughed at this order, and one of them brought forward a handful of chains, saying: "His Majesty has commanded us to make you, also, a slave, for you are never to leave these caverns again."

Then he attempted to place the chains on Inga, but the boy indignantly seized them and broke them apart as easily as if they had been cotton cords. When a

dozen or more of the guards made a dash to capture him, the Prince swung the end of the chain like a whip and drove them into a corner, where they cowered and begged for mercy.

Stories of the marvelous strength of the boy Prince had already spread to the mines of Regos, and although King Gos had told them that Inga had been deprived of all his magic power, the guards now saw this was not true, so they deemed it wise not to attempt to oppose him.

The chains of the slaves had all been riveted fast to their ankles and wrists, but Inga broke the bonds of steel with his hands and set the poor men free--not only those from Pingaree but all who had been captured in the many wars and raids of King Gos. They were very grateful, as you may suppose, and agreed to support Prince Inga in whatever action he commanded.

He led them to the middle cavern, where all the guards and overseers fled in terror at his approach, and soon he had broken apart the chains of the slaves who had been working in that part of the mines. Then they approached the first cavern and liberated all there.

The slaves had been treated so cruelly by the servants of King Gos that they were eager to pursue and slay them, in revenge; but Inga held them back and formed them into companies, each company having its own leader. Then he called the leaders together and instructed them to march in good order along the path to the City of Regos, where he would meet them and tell them what to do next.

They readily agreed to obey him, and, arming themselves with iron bars and pick-axes which they brought from the mines, the slaves began their march to the city.

Zella at first wished to be left behind, that she might make her way to her home, but neither Rinkitink nor Inga thought it was safe for her to wander alone through the forest, so they induced her to return with them to the city.

The boy beached his boat this time at the same place as when he first landed at Regos, and while many of the warriors stood on the shore and before the walls of the city, not one of them attempted to interfere with the boy in any way. Indeed, they seemed uneasy and anxious, and when Inga met Captain Buzzub the boy asked if anything had happened in his absence.

"A great deal has happened," replied Buzzub. "Our King and Queen have run away and left us, and we don't know what to do."

"Run away!" exclaimed Inga. "Where did they go to?"

"Who knows?" said the man, shaking his head despondently. "They departed together a few hours ago, in a boat with forty rowers, and they took with them the King and Queen of Pingaree!"