

## **Chapter Eighteen - Inga Parts with his Pink Pearl**

The White Pearl guided Inga truly in his pursuit of the boat of King Gos, but the boy had been so delayed in sending his people home to Pingaree that it was a full day after Gos and Cor landed on the shore of the Wheeler Country that Inga's boat arrived at the same place.

There he found the forty rowers guarding the barge of Queen Cor, and although they would not or could not tell the boy where the King and Queen had taken his father and mother, the White Pearl advised him to follow the path to the country and the caverns of the nomes.

Rinkitink didn't like to undertake the rocky and mountainous journey, even with Bilbil to carry him, but he would not desert Inga, even though his own kingdom lay just beyond a range of mountains which could be seen towering southwest of them. So the King bravely mounted the goat, who always grumbled but always obeyed his master, and the three set off at once for the caverns of the nomes.

They traveled just as slowly as Queen Cor and King Gos had done, so when they were about halfway they discovered the King and Queen coming back to their boat. The fact that Gos and Cor were now alone proved that they had left Inga's father and mother behind them; so, at the suggestion of Rinkitink, the three hid behind a high rock until the King of Regos and the Queen of Coregos, who had not observed them, had passed them by. Then they continued their journey, glad that they had not again been forced to fight or quarrel with their wicked enemies.

"We might have asked them, however, what they had done with your poor parents," said Rinkitink.

"Never mind," answered Inga. "I am sure the White Pearl will guide us aright."

For a time they proceeded in silence and then Rinkitink began to chuckle with laughter in the pleasant way he was wont to do before his misfortunes came upon him.

"What amuses Your Majesty?" inquired the boy.

"The thought of how surprised my dear subjects would be if they realized how near to them I am, and yet how far away. I have always wanted to visit the Nome Country, which is full of mystery and magic and all sorts of adventures,

but my devoted subjects forbade me to think of such a thing, fearing I would get hurt or enchanted."

"Are you afraid, now that you are here?" asked Inga.

"A little, but not much, for they say the new Nome King is not as wicked as the old King used to be. Still, we are undertaking a dangerous journey and I think you ought to protect me by lending me one of your pearls."

Inga thought this over and it seemed a reasonable request.

"Which pearl would you like to have?" asked the boy.

"Well, let us see," returned Rinkitink; "you may need strength to liberate your captive parents, so you must keep the Blue Pearl. And you will need the advice of the White Pearl, so you had best keep that also. But in case we should be separated I would have nothing to protect me from harm, so you ought to lend me the Pink Pearl."

"Very well," agreed Inga, and sitting down upon a rock he removed his right shoe and after withdrawing the cloth from the pointed toe took out the Pink Pearl--the one which protected from any harm the person who carried it.

"Where can you put it, to keep it safely?" he asked.

"In my vest pocket," replied the King. "The pocket has a flap to it and I can pin it down in such a way that the pearl cannot get out and become lost. As for robbery, no one with evil intent can touch my person while I have the pearl."

So Inga gave Rinkitink the Pink Pearl and the little King placed it in the pocket of his red-and-green brocaded velvet vest, pinning the flap of the pocket down tightly.

They now resumed their journey and finally reached the entrance to the Nome King's caverns. Placing the White Pearl to his ear, Inga asked: "What shall I do now?" and the Voice of the Pearl replied: "Clap your hands together four times and call aloud the word 'Klik.' Then allow yourselves to be conducted to the Nome King, who is now holding your father and mother captive."

Inga followed these instructions and when Klik appeared in answer to his summons the boy requested an audience of the Nome King. So Klik led them into the presence of King Kaliko, who was suffering from a severe headache, due to his revelry the night before, and therefore was unusually cross and grumpy.

"I know what you've come for," said he, before Inga could speak. "You want to get the captives from Regos away from me; but you can't do it, so you'd best go away again."

"The captives are my father and mother, and I intend to liberate them," said the boy firmly.

The King stared hard at Inga, wondering at his audacity. Then he turned to look at King Rinkitink and said:

"I suppose you are the King of Gilgad, which is in the Kingdom of Rinkitink."

"You've guessed it the first time," replied Rinkitink.

"How round and fat you are!" exclaimed Kaliko.

"I was just thinking how fat and round you are," said Rinkitink. "Really, King Kaliko, we ought to be friends, we're so much alike in everything but disposition and intelligence."

Then he began to chuckle, while Kaliko stared hard at him, not knowing whether to accept his speech as a compliment or not. And now the nome's eyes wandered to Bilbil, and he asked:

"Is that your talking goat?"

Bilbil met the Nome King's glowering look with a gaze equally surly and defiant, while Rinkitink answered: "It is, Your Majesty."

"Can he really talk?" asked Kaliko, curiously.

"He can. But the best thing he does is to scold. Talk to His Majesty, Bilbil."

But Bilbil remained silent and would not speak.

"Do you always ride upon his back?" continued Kaliko, questioning Rinkitink.

"Yes," was the answer, "because it is difficult for a fat man to walk far, as perhaps you know from experience."

"That is true," said Kaliko. "Get off the goat's back and let me ride him a while, to see how I like it. Perhaps I'll take him away from you, to ride through my caverns."

Rinkitink chuckled softly as he heard this, but at once got off Bilbil's back and let Kaliko get on. The Nome King was a little awkward, but when he was firmly astride the saddle he called in a loud voice: "Giddap!"

When Bilbil paid no attention to the command and refused to stir, Kaliko kicked his heels viciously against the goat's body, and then Bilbil made a sudden start. He ran swiftly across the great cavern, until he had almost reached the opposite wall, when he stopped so abruptly that King Kaliko sailed over his head and bumped against the jeweled wall. He bumped so hard that the points of his crown were all mashed out of shape and his head was driven far into the diamond-studded band of the crown, so that it covered one eye and a part of his nose. Perhaps this saved Kaliko's head from being cracked against the rock wall, but it was hard on the crown.

Bilbil was highly pleased at the success of his feat and Rinkitink laughed merrily at the Nome King's comical appearance; but Kaliko was muttering and growling as he picked himself up and struggled to pull the battered crown from his head, and it was evident that he was not in the least amused. Indeed, Inga could see that the King was very angry, and the boy knew that the incident was likely to turn Kaliko against the entire party.

The Nome King sent Klik for another crown and ordered his workmen to repair the one that was damaged. While he waited for the new crown he sat regarding his visitors with a scowling face, and this made Inga more uneasy than ever. Finally, when the new crown was placed upon his head, King Kaliko said: "Follow me, strangers!" and led the way to a small door at one end of the cavern.

Inga and Rinkitink followed him through the doorway and found themselves standing on a balcony that overlooked an enormous domed cave--so extensive that it seemed miles to the other side of it. All around this circular cave, which was brilliantly lighted from an unknown source, were arches connected with other caverns.

Kaliko took a gold whistle from his pocket and blew a shrill note that echoed through every part of the cave. Instantly nomes began to pour in through the side arches in great numbers, until the immense space was packed with them as far as the eye could reach. All were armed with glittering weapons of polished silver and gold, and Inga was amazed that any King could command so great an army.

They began marching and countermarching in very orderly array until another blast of the gold whistle sent them scurrying away as quickly as they had appeared. And as soon as the great cave was again empty Kaliko returned with his visitors to his own royal chamber, where he once more seated himself upon his ivory throne.

"I have shown you," said he to Inga, "a part of my bodyguard. The royal armies, of which this is only a part, are as numerous as the sands of the ocean, and live in many thousands of my underground caverns. You have come here thinking to force me to give up the captives of King Gos and Queen Cor, and I wanted to convince you that my power is too mighty for anyone to oppose. I am told that you are a wizard, and depend upon magic to aid you; but you must know that the nomes are not mortals, and understand magic pretty well themselves, so if we are obliged to fight magic with magic the chances are that we are a hundred times more powerful than you can be. Think this over carefully, my boy, and try to realize that you are in my power. I do not believe you can force me to liberate King Kitticut and Queen Garee, and I know that you cannot coax me to do so, for I have given my promise to King Gos. Therefore, as I do not wish to hurt you, I ask you to go away peaceably and let me alone."

"Forgive me if I do not agree with you, King Kaliko," answered the boy. "However difficult and dangerous my task may be, I cannot leave your dominions until every effort to release my parents has failed and left me completely discouraged."

"Very well," said the King, evidently displeased. "I have warned you, and now if evil overtakes you it is your own fault. I've a headache to-day, so I cannot entertain you properly, according to your rank; but Klik will attend you to my guest chambers and to-morrow I will talk with you again."

This seemed a fair and courteous way to treat one's declared enemies, so they politely expressed the wish that Kaliko's headache would be better, and followed their guide, Klik, down a well-lighted passage and through several archways until they finally reached three nicely furnished bedchambers which were cut from solid gray rock and well lighted and aired by some mysterious method known to the nomes.

The first of these rooms was given King Rinkitink, the second was Inga's and the third was assigned to Bilbil the goat. There was a swinging rock door between the third and second rooms and another between the second and first, which also had a door that opened upon the passage. Rinkitink's room

was the largest, so it was here that an excellent dinner was spread by some of the nome servants, who, in spite of their crooked shapes, proved to be well trained and competent.

"You are not prisoners, you know," said Klik; "neither are you welcome guests, having declared your purpose to oppose our mighty King and all his hosts. But we bear you no ill will, and you are to be well fed and cared for as long as you remain in our caverns. Eat hearty, sleep tight, and pleasant dreams to you."

Saying this, he left them alone and at once Rinkitink and Inga began to counsel together as to the best means to liberate King Kitticut and Queen Garee. The White Pearl's advice was rather unsatisfactory to the boy, just now, for all that the Voice said in answer to his questions was: "Be patient, brave and determined."

Rinkitink suggested that they try to discover in what part of the series of underground caverns Inga's parents had been confined, as that knowledge was necessary before they could take any action; so together they started out, leaving Bilbil asleep in his room, and made their way unopposed through many corridors and caverns. In some places were great furnaces, where gold dust was being melted into bricks. In other rooms workmen were fashioning the gold into various articles and ornaments. In one cavern immense wheels revolved which polished precious gems, and they found many caverns used as storerooms, where treasure of every sort was piled high. Also they came to the barracks of the army and the great kitchens.

There were nomes everywhere--countless thousands of them--but none paid the slightest heed to the visitors from the earth's surface. Yet, although Inga and Rinkitink walked until they were weary, they were unable to locate the place where the boy's father and mother had been confined, and when they tried to return to their own rooms they found that they had hopelessly lost themselves amid the labyrinth of passages. However, Klik presently came to them, laughing at their discomfiture, and led them back to their bedchambers.

Before they went to sleep they carefully barred the door from Rinkitink's room to the corridor, but the doors that connected the three rooms one with another were left wide open.

In the night Inga was awakened by a soft grating sound that filled him with anxiety because he could not account for it. It was dark in his room, the light having disappeared as soon as he got into bed, but he managed to feel his way

to the door that led to Rinkitink's room and found it tightly closed and immovable. Then he made his way to the opposite door, leading to Bilbil's room, to discover that also had been closed and fastened.

The boy had a curious sensation that all of his room--the walls, floor and ceiling--was slowly whirling as if on a pivot, and it was such an uncomfortable feeling that he got into bed again, not knowing what else to do. And as the grating noise had ceased and the room now seemed stationary, he soon fell asleep again.

When the boy awakened, after many hours, he found the room again light. So he dressed himself and discovered that a small table, containing a breakfast that was smoking hot, had suddenly appeared in the center of his room. He tried the two doors, but finding that he could not open them he ate some breakfast, thoughtfully wondering who had locked him in and why he had been made a prisoner. Then he again went to the door which he thought led to Rinkitink's chamber and to his surprise the latch lifted easily and the door swung open.

Before him was a rude corridor hewn in the rock and dimly lighted. It did not look inviting, so Inga closed the door, puzzled to know what had become of Rinkitink's room and the King, and went to the opposite door. Opening this, he found a solid wall of rock confronting him, which effectually prevented his escape in that direction.

The boy now realized that King Kaliko had tricked him, and while professing to receive him as a guest had plotted to separate him from his comrades. One way had been left, however, by which he might escape and he decided to see where it led to.

So, going to the first door, he opened it and ventured slowly into the dimly lighted corridor. When he had advanced a few steps he heard the door of his room slam shut behind him. He ran back at once, but the door of rock fitted so closely into the wall that he found it impossible to open it again. That did not matter so much, however, for the room was a prison and the only way of escape seemed ahead of him.

Along the corridor he crept until, turning a corner, he found himself in a large domed cavern that was empty and deserted. Here also was a dim light that permitted him to see another corridor at the opposite side; so he crossed the rocky floor of the cavern and entered a second corridor. This one twisted and turned in every direction but was not very long, so soon the boy reached a

second cavern, not so large as the first. This he found vacant also, but it had another corridor leading out of it, so Inga entered that. It was straight and short and beyond was a third cavern, which differed little from the others except that it had a strong iron grating at one side of it.

All three of these caverns had been roughly hewn from the rock and it seemed they had never been put to use, as had all the other caverns of the nomes he had visited. Standing in the third cavern, Inga saw what he thought was still another corridor at its farther side, so he walked toward it. This opening was dark, and that fact, and the solemn silence all around him, made him hesitate for a while to enter it. Upon reflection, however, he realized that unless he explored the place to the very end he could not hope to escape from it, so he boldly entered the dark corridor and felt his way cautiously as he moved forward.

Scarcely had he taken two paces when a crash resounded back of him and a heavy sheet of steel closed the opening into the cavern from which he had just come. He paused a moment, but it still seemed best to proceed, and as Inga advanced in the dark, holding his hands outstretched before him to feel his way, handcuffs fell upon his wrists and locked themselves with a sharp click, and an instant later he found he was chained to a stout iron post set firmly in the rock floor.

The chains were long enough to permit him to move a yard or so in any direction and by feeling the walls he found he was in a small circular room that had no outlet except the passage by which he had entered, and that was now closed by the door of steel. This was the end of the series of caverns and corridors.

It was now that the horror of his situation occurred to the boy with full force. But he resolved not to submit to his fate without a struggle, and realizing that he possessed the Blue Pearl, which gave him marvelous strength, he quickly broke the chains and set himself free of the handcuffs. Next he twisted the steel door from its hinges, and creeping along the short passage, found himself in the third cave.

But now the dim light, which had before guided him, had vanished; yet on peering into the gloom of the cave he saw what appeared to be two round disks of flame, which cast a subdued glow over the floor and walls. By this dull glow he made out the form of an enormous man, seated in the center of the cave, and he saw that the iron grating had been removed, permitting the man to enter.



The giant was unclothed and its limbs were thickly covered with coarse red hair. The round disks of flame were its two eyes and when it opened its mouth to yawn Inga saw that its jaws were wide enough to crush a dozen men between the great rows of teeth.

Presently the giant looked up and perceived the boy crouching at the other side of the cavern, so he called out in a hoarse, rude voice:

"Come hither, my pretty one. We will wrestle together, you and I, and if you succeed in throwing me I will let you pass through my cave."

The boy made no reply to the challenge. He realized he was in dire peril and regretted that he had lent the Pink Pearl to King Rinkitink. But it was now too late for vain regrets, although he feared that even his great strength would avail him little against this hairy monster. For his arms were not long enough to span a fourth of the giant's huge body, while the monster's powerful limbs would be likely to crush out Inga's life before he could gain the mastery.

Therefore the Prince resolved to employ other means to combat this foe, who had doubtless been placed there to bar his return. Retreating through the passage he reached the room where he had been chained and wrenched the iron post from its socket. It was a foot thick and four feet long, and being of solid iron was so heavy that three ordinary men would have found it hard to lift.

Returning to the cavern, the boy swung the great bar above his head and dashed it with mighty force full at the giant. The end of the bar struck the monster upon its forehead, and with a single groan it fell full length upon the floor and lay still.

When the giant fell, the glow from its eyes faded away, and all was dark. Cautiously, for Inga was not sure the giant was dead, the boy felt his way toward the opening that led to the middle cavern. The entrance was narrow and the darkness was intense, but, feeling braver now, the boy stepped boldly forward. Instantly the floor began to sink beneath him and in great alarm he turned and made a leap that enabled him to grasp the rocky sides of the wall and regain a footing in the passage through which he had just come.

Scarcely had he obtained this place of refuge when a mighty crash resounded throughout the cavern and the sound of a rushing torrent came from far below. Inga felt in his pocket and found several matches, one of which he lighted and held before him. While it flickered he saw that the entire floor of

the cavern had fallen away, and knew that had he not instantly regained his footing in the passage he would have plunged into the abyss that lay beneath him.

By the light of another match he saw the opening at the other side of the cave and the thought came to him that possibly he might leap across the gulf. Of course, this could never be accomplished without the marvelous strength lent him by the Blue Pearl, but Inga had the feeling that one powerful spring might carry him over the chasm into safety. He could not stay where he was, that was certain, so he resolved to make the attempt.

He took a long run through the first cave and the short corridor; then, exerting all his strength, he launched himself over the black gulf of the second cave. Swiftly he flew and, although his heart stood still with fear, only a few seconds elapsed before his feet touched the ledge of the opposite passageway and he knew he had safely accomplished the wonderful feat.

Only pausing to draw one long breath of relief, Inga quickly traversed the crooked corridor that led to the last cavern of the three. But when he came in sight of it he paused abruptly, his eyes nearly blinded by a glare of strong light which burst upon them. Covering his face with his hands, Inga retreated behind a projecting corner of rock and by gradually getting his eyes used to the light he was finally able to gaze without blinking upon the strange glare that had so quickly changed the condition of the cavern. When he had passed through this vault it had been entirely empty. Now the flat floor of rock was covered everywhere with a bed of glowing coals, which shot up little tongues of red and white flames. Indeed, the entire cave was one monster furnace and the heat that came from it was fearful.

Inga's heart sank within him as he realized the terrible obstacle placed by the cunning Nome King between him and the safety of the other caverns. There was no turning back, for it would be impossible for him again to leap over the gulf of the second cave, the corridor at this side being so crooked that he could get no run before he jumped. Neither could he leap over the glowing coals of the cavern that faced him, for it was much larger than the middle cavern. In this dilemma he feared his great strength would avail him nothing and he bitterly reproached himself for parting with the Pink Pearl, which would have preserved him from injury.

However, it was not in the nature of Prince Inga to despair for long, his past adventures having taught him confidence and courage, sharpened his wits and given him the genius of invention. He sat down and thought earnestly on

the means of escape from his danger and at last a clever idea came to his mind. This is the way to get ideas: never to let adverse circumstances discourage you, but to believe there is a way out of every difficulty, which may be found by earnest thought.

There were many points and projections of rock in the walls of the crooked corridor in which Inga stood and some of these rocks had become cracked and loosened, although still clinging to their places. The boy picked out one large piece, and, exerting all his strength, tore it away from the wall. He then carried it to the cavern and tossed it upon the burning coals, about ten feet away from the end of the passage. Then he returned for another fragment of rock, and wrenching it free from its place, he threw it ten feet beyond the first one, toward the opposite side of the cave. The boy continued this work until he had made a series of stepping-stones reaching straight across the cavern to the dark passageway beyond, which he hoped would lead him back to safety if not to liberty.

When his work had been completed, Inga did not long hesitate to take advantage of his stepping-stones, for he knew his best chance of escape lay in his crossing the bed of coals before the rocks became so heated that they would burn his feet. So he leaped to the first rock and from there began jumping from one to the other in quick succession. A withering wave of heat at once enveloped him, and for a time he feared he would suffocate before he could cross the cavern; but he held his breath, to keep the hot air from his lungs, and maintained his leaps with desperate resolve.

Then, before he realized it, his feet were pressing the cooler rocks of the passage beyond and he rolled helpless upon the floor, gasping for breath. His skin was so red that it resembled the shell of a boiled lobster, but his swift motion had prevented his being burned, and his shoes had thick soles, which saved his feet.

After resting a few minutes, the boy felt strong enough to go on. He went to the end of the passage and found that the rock door by which he had left his room was still closed, so he returned to about the middle of the corridor and was thinking what he should do next, when suddenly the solid rock before him began to move and an opening appeared through which shone a brilliant light. Shielding his eyes, which were somewhat dazzled, Inga sprang through the opening and found himself in one of the Nome King's inhabited caverns, where before him stood King Kaliko, with a broad grin upon his features, and Klik, the King's chamberlain, who looked surprised, and King Rinkitink seated

astride Bilbil the goat, both of whom seemed pleased that Inga had rejoined them.