

GOOD STORES FOR CHILDREN—By WALT McDOUGALL

A Story of Gnomes and an Enchanted Moonstone, Which Took a Boy on a Strange Journey

The Encounter of Harry Wetherill With Mysterious Little Men Who Told Secrets About Gems

HAVE you ever seen a moonstone? It has a soft, pale lustre that suggests moonlight, perhaps moonlight on water, and the stones are usually cut in the shape of a round face that helps the suggestion. The stones are not very expensive; in fact, they are quite common as compared with diamonds or rubies or precious stones of any sort, but they make nice gems for rings and brooches.

They were called moonstones ages ago because of their pale light, and it was supposed by the ancients that the stones fell from the moon and would confer invisibility on the wearer, besides being a charm against the evil effects of the full moon. Those long-forgotten races of men who used to worship the sun claimed that the rays of the moon, which was worshiped by another sect, were very baneful and pernicious, causing all sorts of disorders in the human system and affecting cattle and other animals. But all that sort of nonsense has passed away, and we now know that the moon is quite harmless and is not regarded with suspicion by anybody but puppy dogs and babies.

One September day nearly every pupil in the little schoolhouse at St. Thomas came in after recess with fragments of strange, whitish stone which they had found in the schoolyard. The teacher at once recognized the pieces as moonstones and went out with the scholars to find more. A number were gathered, all seemingly from the same stone, and as if they had been split off with a hammer from some larger mass, but a long, careful search failed to reveal this larger piece, although many small fragments were found some distance from the schoolhouse. Mr. Seese, the teacher, told the children all about moonstones, and advised them to preserve the pieces they had found until they were old enough to have them cut by a jeweler and made into gems.

Harry Wetherill, the largest of the nineteen scholars in the school, was so interested that when he went home he read in the encyclopedia all about the stones, and he spent several days searching for the source of the mysterious fragments, for nobody had ever seen any such stones in St. Thomas before. He found several other pieces right near his own home, which was the next house to the school, but none larger than his thumb-nail.

In this search, he, as well as others, passed and repassed a flat boulder, about two feet broad and four or five inches thick, that lay in the grass near the fence, all covered with dried mud, but none noticed it, so intent were they all on the small pieces gleaming in the sand or among the grass.

Three nights after the discovery Harry awoke and found that the moonlight was pouring down upon him in a broad sheet through the window. Remembering that ancient superstition which he had read, that moonlight affects the muscles of the face, he rose to draw his curtain and looked out over the fields bathed in a flood of light that made even the smallest objects visible. As he gazed his eye fell upon the flat boulder near the fence, and suddenly it moved several inches with a sort of jerking slide. Scarcely believing that he had seen aright, he slipped down stairs and into the garden.

Something warned him to be silent and cautious, and he crept toward the stone softly. Once in the shadow of the fence he was hidden, and then he heard low, small voices shouting. Nearer and nearer he stole, and then he saw, to his amazement, numbers of tiny forms surrounding the flat boulder, all busily toiling, some prying with crowbars, others lifting, while others slipped perfectly round pebbles beneath the stone.

The gnomes, for that's what they were, had already lifted the stone again, and when the boy's voice broke the silence of the night it startled them and they fled from their hold and the boulder fell to the ground. Harry ran at once in affright, vanishing like a shadow in the shadows. The poor gnomes raised their voices in terror, calling to him, but Harry ran at once and hid. He lifted the tiny mannikin, who had been lifted and who gazed at him appealingly, and he would an injured man in a low voice:

"Why, you are all right. I guess no bones are broken. See if you can move your leg."

The gnomes timidly moved his leg, felt it, looked at Harry fearfully and said:

"It is not broken."

"Hurts like everything, I s'pose!" added the boy; "but that will be all gone in the morning. I'll give you some salve to rub on it and that will take the pain away."

The gnome was sitting in the palm of Harry's hand as he asked:

"You will not kill me? What are you going to do with me?"

"Why, what a question!" cried the boy. "Why should I hurt you? You never did me any harm."

"Do not you humans slay the gnomes whenever you catch them?" asked the elf in a surprised tone.

"Certainly not. Good gracious, what a notion! I am sure we would be very glad for a chance to be kind to you, for who wouldn't I'd just like to have a lot of gnome friends, I tell you."

Harry placed him carefully on the ground, and he stepped to and fro, hopped and jumped and then said gleefully:

"It's all right. Sound as ever and it's stopped hurting. Then suddenly he called out:

"Here! Hi, there! Hippy! Come here, Pixey! To me, all ye gnome brothers! This is a friend and he will not harm us!"

Then there stole out, one by one, any number of gnomes, all somewhat timid, to be sure, as this was the first time in ages that elves or gnomes had come in contact with a human being. There were so many of them that Harry was amazed, some with long gray beards that fell to the ground, others young and smart-looking, all dressed in leather of a brown hue, their little eyes glancing sharply at him like so many birds, watchful and cautious still, but the rescued gnome had made them a little speech in which he assured them that Harry had released him without harming him, and assuring them that he believed the lad was kind and good. They gathered around Harry, who set down by the flat stone to hear them better.



"THIS IS MY AIRSHIP," SAID HARRY, AS HE MOUNTED THE MOONSTONE

"Be careful," cried the rescued gnome. Do not hold your breath while you sit upon that moonstone!"

Harry examined the boulder, scraped off some of the mud, and to his surprise found that it was gleaming with a light similar to that of each of the small fragments which the children had found.

"Is this a moonstone?" he gasped. "Is it possible?"

"Yes," said the gnome. "It fell the other night from the moon, and we chipped off many a goodly piece that night. We have covered it with mud in order to hide it from other eyes than ours, as well as to keep it from being attracted by the moonlight and perhaps flying off."

"But why must I not hold my breath when I am sitting on it?" asked Harry.

"Because if you do it will rise with you and carry you up, perhaps back to the moon, for it is said that pieces of this stone return to the moon when its light shines upon it. I do not know if that be true, but we were careful to avoid chancing it."

Harry held his breath for a long time just to see if it would have any effect upon the stone, but nothing happened, and he decided that this was but another superstition regarding moonstones. The elves watched him in suspense, expecting to see him go into the air, but they also, while much surprised, admitted that nothing really was known about this supposed power of returning to the moon which the stone possessed.

"See, Hokey!" cried Pixey. "The stone remains. I think we must try a charm upon it."

"Yes, that's true," said Hokey, who was the gnome that was held down under the boulder. "I shall think of the charms my father taught me and see if any of them will operate upon it."

"I wish you would," exclaimed Harry.

"Well, if you will take care of the stone for us I will see what can be done," said the gnome. "I fear that some one will carry it away. As for me, I am quite well satisfied to remain on the earth and do not yearn to sail above the clouds!"

"I will carry it into the house, where nobody will ever see it, except papa and perhaps my school teacher, and it will be safe enough. I wish you would all come and call on us and meet papa and sister Agnes, as well as our teacher, who is a fine man even if he is cross-eyed."

"Are you as friendly as you are?" asked Hokey.

"Dear me, yes!" replied Harry. "I assure you that nobody has any feelings against gnomes at all. In fact, people do not believe that there are any gnomes nowadays, and no one will be more surprised than my father, unless it's Mr. Seese, to see you."

"All right! To-morrow we will come and I'll tell you what I have learned about spells."

Harry went back to bed, but it was a long time before he went to sleep and when he awoke he got his wagon and carted the boulder, which was not a very heavy stone, to the woodshed and covered it with kindling wood, after which he told his father what had happened during the night.

Mr. Wetherill laughed heartily and said:

"That was a queer dream, laddie, but not a bit more queer than some I have had. Once I dreamed that I was an elephant and was eating custard pies as big as cartwheels!"

"This was no dream, for there's the stone in the woodshed to prove it!" cried Harry earnestly.

Mr. Wetherill went with his son to the woodshed, and when he saw the enormous moonstone gleaming where the mud had been scraped away he was so surprised that his jaw fell.

"I declare, it is a moonstone, sure enough," he cried as he scraped away some mud and examined the great stone. "What a wonderful thing!"

"This is my friend Hokey," replied Harry. "A very nice gnome, although you don't believe in them. He and some of his brothers are come to visit us."

Mr. Wetherill looked a little frightened when he realized that he saw a live gnome, and then he pinched his leg to see if he were awake, but finding that such was the case, he stared hard at Hokey. The gnome laughed, for it tickled him to perceive that a man, a great, big man, at least five feet nine inches high, was afraid of him, and he said:

"Don't be afraid! I will not do you any harm! I am calling upon Harry with some of my comrades and they are all harmless."

Harry introduced them to his father, and the oldest gnome made a little speech, after which he presented a large diamond to the lad, the sight of which made Mr. Wetherill's eyes stick out like those of a lobster, for it was as big as a hickory nut. Harry scarcely had words to thank the old gnome, but they all seemed to consider his remarks as very fitting and appropriate.

Mr. Wetherill now had recovered from his amazement sufficiently to invite them all to enter his house, where they met Mrs. Wetherill, who had believed in gnomes all her life, and said so, after which she prepared some lunch for her novel company.

Meanwhile, the gnome told Harry that he had thought and thought all night over the subject of charms, but remembered none until his old nurse had inquired what was bothering him.

"She's very, very old," said he, "for she was also my mother's nurse, most as old, I suppose, as our oldest man. I am a fairly aged fellow myself, as I am two thousand years old, but, bless me, she makes me seem like a baby."

"Two thousand years old!" cried Mr. Wetherill. "Is it possible?"

"What did your nurse say?" asked Harry, seeing that Hokey had gone off the track, so to speak.

Harry followed Hokey outdoors, and there the gnome said:

"She told me that if one sits on a moonstone, or even holds it, and says 'UMPAH,' it will rise with him and fly upward. Then you say 'BAZIPP' and it comes down. See?"

"Yes, but suppose you want to go sidewise?" asked Harry.

"Then you say 'KOOMAH,' and when you want to stop anywhere you say 'GISH'; but all these will work only when the moon shines on the stone, she tells me."

"I will write them down," said Harry, taking out his note-book. "Please repeat them for me."

Hokey repeated them, and added:

"Now we have talked it all over and we have concluded," said all of the gnomes together without one dissenting voice, "that if you wish to take the moonstone and travel on it you are welcome, for, after all, of what use is it to us?"

"That's what I'd like to do," replied Harry, eagerly, "if you have no objection."

"Use it all you please. Smash it up into bits if you like. We don't care," said Hokey. "Now, let's hurry back and see what your mother's got for us. That'll be better than moonstones."

They returned to the house, but Harry was too impatient to remain with the gnomes while they feasted on the rare and wonderful things Mrs. Wetherill provided, for they had not often tasted dishes cooked by human beings. They were busy over their food while Harry slipped away to the woodshed and there examined the great stone, rubbing off the mud until it shone like another moon. He sat on it just to see how it would feel, and although the old gnome had said the spell was useless in the daylight or in the dark, he repeated the magic word "UMPAH!" softly. The next moment his head bumped the roof of the shed with some violence, almost knocking him off the stone. It had risen and seemed to be endeavoring to push through the roof.

"Huh!" cried Harry. "That old gnome was wrong. Lots of things seem to be remembered entirely wrong by people, or else twisted out of shape. They told us there were no gnomes, and then up

turns a lot of them, and even they can't remember their own spells right." He whispered "BAZIPP" softly, and instantly the moonstone descended to the floor.

"There! That proves she was all wrong. I guess the spell will work at any time," he cried, delightedly. "This afternoon I'll just test it, anyhow."

He returned to the house, where he found Hokey wondering at his absence, and he told the gnome what he had discovered regarding the spell.

"That's just like a gnome," cried Hokey, "always getting everything wrong. Still, as I do not suppose she has thought about that charm for something like four thousand years, it's not much wonder she was a little mixed, is it?"

After lunch, without letting anybody into his confidence, Harry took the stone from the woodshed and laid it upon the grass. Looking carefully about and seeing no one near, he seated himself upon it and whispered "UMPAH," with the result that it rose suddenly and shot upward like a skyrocket. When he had risen to the height of the church steeple he became alarmed, for he was not used to being at a great height like city boys who go up in elevators to the twenty-first story of a building and think nothing of it, and he hastily shouted "BAZIPP" whereupon he immediately descended and alighted in the very same spot he started from, somewhat out of breath but otherwise undisturbed. He tried again. This time he was less alarmed and managed to utter the word "KOOMAH" as he looked to the left, and the moonstone stopped, shot off sideways at great speed, almost depriving Harry of breath, and continued thus until at last he said "GISH," whereupon it slanted down quickly to the ground.

He found himself in a great garden filled with rare plants, statuary and fountains, where the trees were all trimmed in the shape of animals. He looked about him cautiously, fearing that he would be treated as a trespasser by the owner of the splendid place, but as no one was visible he ventured to walk about, being careful not to go far from his precious stone. After exploring as much as he could without being out of sight of the moonstone, he went back, moved it a few feet before he remembered that it would move itself, and then he directed it to carry him about the garden.

It seemed to comprehend his wishes, and he found that by merely wishing it to move in any direction it followed his directions at once. Thus he searched the whole garden, and at last came to a small but wonderful house set among trees, a house built of amber, carnelian, ivory and jasper, all beautifully carved, a perfect gem of a house that seemed as if it must be a king's lodge. All was silent within, and Harry finally summoned courage to enter.

Suddenly realizing that the owner might be much offended if he caught a strange boy in his house, Harry hurried to the door, where he halted at sight of an old man, who stood there staring with amazement at the great moonstone in the grass beside the walk. The old man, hearing Harry's footstep, turned and looked more amazed at seeing him.

"How came you here?" he inquired. "Who showed you how to get here?"

"I merely happened to land in your garden—I suppose it's yours, and was looking around admiring things," said Harry, stepping to his moonstone, for although he did not fear the old man he was not sure that he had not some burly servants to assist him.

"How did you get over the wall? Tell me at once!" cried the man.

"Why, I simply sailed over."

"What! Have you an airship? Have you at last succeeded in flying?" demanded the aged man. "Show it to me."

Harry seated himself on his moonstone and whispered "UMPAH," and when it had risen to a few feet above the old man's head he stopped it and answered his question.

"This is my airship. What do you think of it?" As he spoke he observed for the first time a wall

forty feet high all about this marvelous garden, and then he understood the old man's surprise, for nothing but an airship could surmount such an obstacle.

The old man shouted: "By Zamiel! It is a moonstone. You are a sorcerer! Come down, come down, oh, wizard of the air, I pray you, come down and remain with me for a space!"

"Why, are you not a sorcerer yourself?" asked Harry, for that's what he took this strange old person to be almost as soon as he saw him.

"Alas! Alas! Would that I were. Then all these years of sorrow had passed me by. No, I am but a humble student of Astrology and Alchemy, and aged though I be, I know almost nothing after all my study. I pray you be kind and visit me in my loneliness."

Harry immediately descended, and leaving the stone on the beautiful ivory porch entered the house. The old man pushed a button in the wall and a table rose from an opening that appeared in the rosewood floor, laden with cake, fruit and wine. Harry was surprised, and Mr. Applegate, for that was his name, laughed and said:

"This is not magic, as you may have supposed. It's merely electricity. Although once I had many servants here, I now am served solely by means of this wonderful power. Power! Pshaw! It is merely a slave. Would that I had a real power to serve me, for then my search would have ended. But I must not trouble you with my sorrows. I wish to ask you where and how you obtained this enormous moonstone. Such a marvel has never been seen even in royal treasuries. I had one many years ago that was as large as my hand, and emperors envied me of my possession, but alas! that gem was lost on the very day I lost my daughter."

"A greater loss caused me almost to forget that I owned it, yet I well remember the circumstances. My daughter was playing with the moonstone that very morning, and I have sometimes thought that both the treasures were stolen by the same wretch."

"What became of her?" asked Harry.

"I know not," replied Mr. Applegate. "For seventy-six years I have sought for her. In the remotest mountain ranges, through lonely deserts, on ocean islands, under tropic suns and through Arctic snows have I wandered seeking for her. There is no place on earth that I have not visited, and vast is the sum of money that I have expended in vain; nor have astrologers, nor wizards, nor pundits, nor adepts, nor seers been able to help me. I fear I will never see her again, yet have I always kept her garden in readiness for her return, so that she would find everything as it used to be." The old man was now weeping.

In Harry's mind a great light had shone. Something seemed to tell him the solution of the problem, a solution so wonderful that after he contemplated it for a moment it seemed almost impossible, but when Mr. Applegate declared that he had searched the whole world in vain, Harry asked:

"Did you say that the moonstone was lost at the same time?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Applegate. "It was her favorite plaything, and she rarely allowed it out of her sight."

"Were you studying magic at that time, may I ask?"

"Yes, I have always studied magic since my youth, although I now know that it was a waste of time, for, after all, there is no magic way of doing things, no fairies, elves, goblins or gnomes."

Harry laughed.

"So that is all you found out by studying. However, that has nothing to do with this question. You say your daughter disappeared from this very garden?" he asked.

"From this very place, with this very wall surrounding it, with locks and bars which defy any man's skill, for I had an enemy whose power I feared and thought that he might aim a blow at my heart by harming my child with some enchantment."

"Who was he?" asked Harry.

"He was a wizard named Densmore, who strove against me mightily to obtain the large and valuable moonstone which I had purchased from Ramu Shack el Din, the Hindoo pundit in Thibet, the land of mystery. Densmore envied me the possession of this stone beyond all reason, and he swore a terrible revenge when I refused to part with it, threatening me with all sorts of disasters unless I yielded it up to him, but he went away and I never saw him again."

Harry asked further: "Was he a real wizard, or only an amateur like yourself?"

"He was, as you are, a real magician," replied Mr. Applegate.

"Then he knew the charm of the moonstone?" cried Harry. "That explains it all! He was, as you first supposed, the author of your trouble, no doubt. He it was who spirited her away in spite of your walls, bolts and bars!"

"Then you will seek for her?" cried the old man eagerly. "If you can restore her to me all my wealth shall be yours." He snatched up a small portrait and held it before Harry's face. "See," he cried, "how beautiful she was. She shall be yours, also, if you find her."

Harry glanced at the portrait of the beautiful girl and said with a sigh:

"Dear me, but she is a very old woman by this time, even if she had remained alive all these years!"

"Alas!" cried the old man, "perhaps she is no longer on earth."

"I suspect that she has never been on earth," added Harry, "since the day you lost her."

"She was killed!" cried the old man.

"No, not that; I mean that your daughter was taken from the earth and that now, if she is still alive, she is on the moon."

"Great Zamiel!" cried Mr. Applegate. "Then she is indeed lost."

"No, indeed," exclaimed Harry. "In fact she is found, or soon will be, for I will go to the moon at once and search for her."

How Harry found Anita and where, and what adventures he met with, I will tell you some other time, as I have no more room on this page except to sign my name.

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