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Excerpt from The Snow Leopard, by M.D. Zverev, Alma Ata, "Kainar", 1980.

#### THE SILVERY MIRACLE

High in the mountains of the Zailisskiy Alatau, all animal life in the winter moves to the southern slopes where the snow is blown out by the winds and melts during the winter thaws. The herds of mountain goats come here to paw at the snow and get the small shoots of grass. The snow partridges also fly here and swarm like chickens on the ground where the goats graze.

Through binoculars the persistent and patient zoologist is fortunate to see the following scene on the southern slopes at a height of 600 -1500 meters: a large, silvery-grey cat has silently jumped up on a rock and glances backward. Then the animal sprawls out on the rock, absolutely still. His light grey fur and black spots blend into the gray stone. It becomes impossible to see him, almost as though he had covered himself with a story-teller's fabled invisible cap.

Soon the wind carries the scent of the goats. A tremble runs through the body of the hungry animal. Not sensing the danger, the goats approach closer to the predator. With a few sudden leaps, the animal cuts through the distance to the nearest goat, but on the ledge of the cliff near the rock where the animal had waited, a snow partridge takes off, and its cries are an instant warning signal, as it shoots up like a rocket. The mountain goats dash to the side slopes and hide behind an overhanging ledge.

The silvery animal remains on his rock. Then he arises, growling in exasperation, stretches, and effortlessly jumps down, following the goat tracks. All the details of the mountain predator's appearance are barely apparent through the binoculars because his coloring is so camouflaged by the background of cliffs, rocks, and snow.

One day a large, spotted cat was brought to the zoo from the snowy crests of the mountains. Her majestic, regal bearing was brought out by her silvery, thick fur, and her black, contoured spots created the impression of minted silver coins. "Yes, this is a silvery miracle!" exclaimed one of the zoo workers.

The silvery miracle was a snow leopard.