

Books of The Times

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By HARRISON E. SALISBURY

LAND OF THE HIGH FLAGS. By Rosanne Klass. 319 pages. Random House, \$5.95.

BY what sorcery is a girl wafted from the fat corn-and-hog lands of Iowa, over the very roofs of the world into Kabul, capital of the land of the high flags, there by a species of alchemy to transmute her fresh, fragile sensations into poetic prose that captures the very essence of the brave, proud people of Afghanistan? It is the magic of modern technology that made it possible for an Iowa-born, New York-trained school teacher to circumnavigate the globe and penetrate the inner recesses of the Asian heartland. But it is more ancient magic that enables Rosanne Klass to bring to us the rare gift of the "Land of the High Flags." The book is called a "travel memoir," and so it is in the same sense that Rebecca West's "Black Lamb and Grey Falcon" was a "travel memoir" of Yugoslavia. The "Land of the High Flags" may not be so deep as Miss West's classic, but it soars higher. That Miss Klass is a poet; that she had a hand in the Balanchine ballet "The Figure in the Carpet," comes as no surprise to the reader of her Afghan memoir.

The art of gentle understanding is not necessarily a feminine one, but perhaps women by temperament are better able to surrender to a foreign land or foreign city; to breathe deeply the alien atmosphere; to refine and distill its emotion; and, having done so, to touch the chords that evoke response in other hearts.

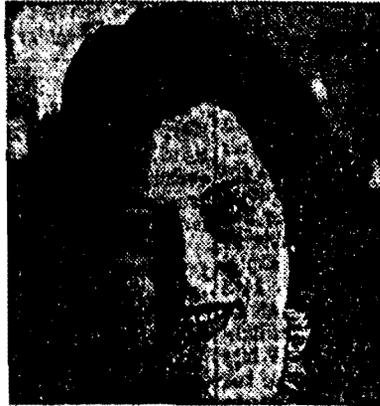
This, at any rate, is the talent of Miss West with the Coast of Dalmatia; with Freya Stark and Arabia; with Rose Macaulay and Trebizond. And with Miss Klass and Afghanistan.

It was 1951 when Rosanne Klass made her way through the Khyber Pass (it was so flat and unimpressive she did not know she had entered it until someone told her). She spent three or four years in Afghanistan, learning to know the land and its people with a mixture of wry humor and tender warmth. She grew to love their unshakable pride, their clear-eyed courage, their unmatched hospitality, their simple poverty, their generosity, their humor, their ambition, their patriotism, their genius. She laughs with—not at—their foibles, their cunning, their wisdom in adapting their skills to the harsh life of the high plateaus, the frequent hunger, the terrible cold of winter and the burning summer storms of the desert.

When Rosanne Klass arrived in Kabul, women were still swathed in the shapeless *chadri* (a premature attempt to end the veiling had resulted in bloodshed and the overthrow of the Afghan king only a few years earlier). No woman had ever taught in an Afghan school before Miss Klass. It was not easy for the students, for her fellow teachers, for the mullahs—or for her.

Perhaps Miss Klass's greatest triumph occurred when she screwed up her courage to invite the 50 male colleagues of her school to tea. All came, even the mullahs. All were frightened—especially Miss Klass. But all enjoyed themselves.

Afghanistan is almost the most remote



Martin J. Dale

Rosanne Klass

land of Asia. Only Mongolia and Tibet are less accessible. Yet it has been a crossroads for most of the great conquerors of the past—Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, Alexander, Akbar.

Its mountains are breathless in beauty (Miss Klass includes some fine photographs in her book). The deserts are endless. Behind the city walls grow roses and fruits that are the envy of the world.

Tucked into a mountainous corner of Central Asia, Afghans have need of all their traditional bravery. Their borders lie against Russia and China. To the south is hostile Pakistan. American aid is distant and scanty. Yet they maintain a proud independence.

Afghanistan is still too remote for many of us to visit. Miss Klass makes a trip almost unnecessary. She brings the Land of the High Flags as close as our nearest bookshelf.

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chairman of the brand-new S.E.C. and a deplorable Ambassador to the Court of St. James's. Whalen also makes it clear that if Kennedy's greatest success has been fatherhood, this is no accident; to be a patriarch was always his plan.

LAND OF THE HIGH FLAGS, by Rosanne Klass (Random House). The author, who comes from Cedar Rapids, worked at a boarding school for boys in Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, from 1951 to 1954, and this book is an account—a travel memoir, in her phrase—of that experience. It is an unusual piece of work. Miss Klass is an interesting woman, and an American abroad of whom we can be wholeheartedly proud—intelligent, observant, receptive, cosmopolitan. She is also an interesting writer, gifted with insight ("There are times when to explain everything is to leave it all diminished. It is not always wise to tamper with other people's dreams—nor, sometimes, with their nightmares, either") and a vivid graphic sense ("They [the students] looked at the book as a dog looks at a bone, their eyes unwaveringly focused on it; the sightlines were almost visible, as in a diagram of perspective"), and every experience she offers us—of people or place or weather—is received and fully shared. Photographs and a map.