

The Festival of Plants

Chapter 11 from The Festival of Stones: Autumn and Winter Tales of Tiptoes Lightly

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Tiptoes was gathering berries from a fire-bush. The berries were so red that the bushes they grew on looked like they were on fire.

"Tiptoes, why are you gathering berries?" asked a thrush who happened to be sitting close by. "Are you going to eat them like I do?"

"Oh, no," replied Tiptoes, "tomorrow is a special day. It's the Festival of Plants and all my friends are celebrating. We're hanging berries on the Great Oak Tree."

"Tiptoes! Tiptoes!" called Jeremy Mouse. "Where are you?"

"Coming," Tiptoes replied, and she flew to the Great Oak Tree with an armfull of berries. "Here you are, Jeremy Mouse," she said, "hang some more in the branches." She also gave berries to Pins and Needles who had come to help.

"I've never seen the Oak Tree look so gorgeous," said Pins.

"Me neither," echoed Needles.

"Our tree looks like the King of Fire Bushes," said Jeremy Mouse. "All we need now is snow."

That night it snowed. The Snow Queen came and sat in the branches of the Oak Tree. Her cheeks were as red as the fire berries, and her cloak was as white as snow.

But Jeremy Mouse was fast asleep and did not see her. In the morning he called out: "Tiptoes! Tiptoes! Look—it snowed! It snowed! Just like I wished."

"Yes," said Tiptoes, "and the Snow Queen came too."

"She did!" said Jeremy Mouse in amazement. "Was she beautiful?"

"She was last night," replied Tiptoes. "She's beautiful when she snows gently."

All day long they prepared for the Festival of Plants. When they were done they stood back and looked at the tree. The sun was low in the sky and clouds glowed pink and gold. The Oak Tree sat on its knoll, covered with red berries, and a blanket of white snow lay all around.

"O, what a festive tree!" they cried together.

Tiptoes flew into the air and rang her Calling Bell. It was made of silver and shaped like an acorn cap. Inside was a crystal clapper hanging from a golden chain. She rang it, and sang:



*"Ding, dong,
Ding-dong bell—*

*Come you fairies
Small and tall,
Come you all
When I call—*

*Ding, dong,
Ding-dong bell."*

From out of the forest and over the meadows fairies came bearing twigs and leaves, winter flowers and sprigs of lavender, rosemary and thyme. Pine Cone and Pepper Pot came too, bearing boughs of pine and spruce. Air fairies brought thistle-down and mistletoe, and they all laid their gifts at the base of the Great Oak Tree.

How fine the fairies looked, dressed in their best festival clothes and standing in a circle in the snow.

Tiptoes rang the bell again, and said the Plant Blessing:

*"Bless the root,
And the stem,
Bless the bud
That says 'Amen'.*

*Bless the seed,
And the fruit,
Bless the flower
That looks so cute.*

*Bless the fig,
And the plum,
Bless the willow
That looks so glum.*

*Bless the bean,
And the beet,
Bless the berry
That tastes so sweet.*

*Bless them big
And bless them small,
Bless the plants
That bless us all."*

Tiptoes rang her bell for the third time. It tinkled lightly and clearly in the evening air.

Now was the time for the planting of the Year Tree. Pine Cone carried a small box into an open space. He opened the box and took out a seed. He dug a shallow hole with a planting stick, placed the seed into the earth and covered it over.

Every year the fairy folk planted a Year Tree. The seed always sprouted because they knew how to choose the right one. For them it was a special tree, and they protected it all year round.

"This is our Year Tree," said Tiptoes; "may it flourish and grow strong. May we remember it all its life long."

"Hurray!" cried the gnomes and the fairies.

"Hurray!" cried Jeremy Mouse.

Then they danced the Weaving Dance. They wove the life of the Year Tree into all the plants on Farmer John's farm, so that they would grow sturdy and strong in the coming spring. In and out, round and round they danced, weaving patterns in the snow, as the dark night filled with stars.

