

The Festival of Light

Chapter 16 of The Festival of Stones: Autumn and Winter Tales of Tiptoes Lightly

Reg Down

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The Festival of Light

Pine Cone and Pepper Pot were working hard. They were dragging fir boughs and cedar branches over the frosty ground to build a spiral for the Festival of Light.

"I wish it would snow again," said Pepper Pot. "The spiral looks so pretty on snow."

"Tiptoes gets the wind to blow," Pine Cone replied. "Perhaps she knows how to make it snow."

"Let's call her now," said Pepper Pot, and held out his hands. Pine Cone took them and they put their heads together. They sent Tiptoes a Calling Thought:

*"Tiptoes Lightly,
Small as can be—
Won't you come over
From your Great Oak Tree?"*



"She'll come soon," said Pine Cone, and they went back to hauling branches.

"Here I am," said Tiptoes. "What do you want?"

"We want snow," said Pine Cone. "The evergreen spiral looks so pretty on a blanket of white. Can you make it snow?"

"I can't," said Tiptoes, "but I can ask the Snow Queen. I'll invite her to the festival. It always snows when she's around," and off she flew.

"I hope the Snow Queen is in a good mood," said Pepper Pot. "We want gently falling snow—not a blizzard."

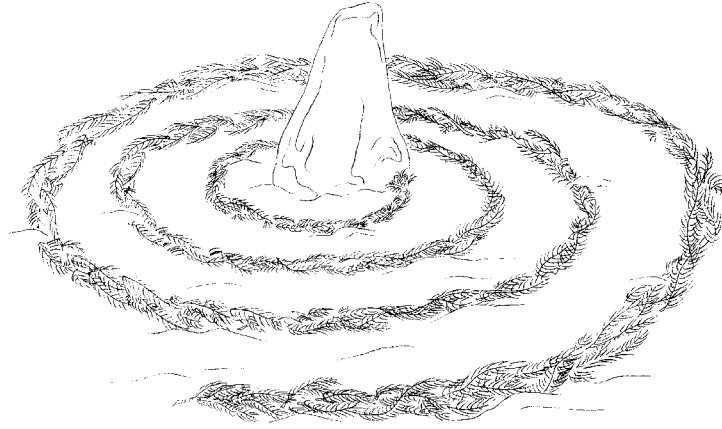
The Snow Queen was in a good mood. She came and sat in the branches of an alder tree and watched the gnomes working. She was so majestic that Pine Cone and Pepper Pot were in awe of her. Gentle snowflakes fell from her dress and coated everything with a blanket of white.

At last they finished and stood back to admire their work. On the snowy ground lay an evergreen spiral winding inwards towards a center stone. To get to the center stone you had to spiral around three times.

"Do you know that seven is the spiral's secret?" asked Pepper Pot.

"I do," replied Pine Cone, and recited the verse:

*"Three times in,
Three times out,
Once to light
Your candle stout!"*



Evening came, and darkness settled into the forest. The gnomes waited patiently. It was quiet; all they heard was the sound of snow falling.

Then, winding in and out between the trees, voices came singing:

*"Though the winter's night is dark'ning,
Deep within our heart there shines
Grace and love so warmly glowing,
Treading paths that inward winds.*

*See how strong it shines within us,
O how joy and peace delight,
Gentle light go now before us,
Keep us safe in the darkest night."*

It was Tiptoes, and with her came forest folk and fairy folk. All were singing, and the fairy folk carried white candlesticks. Tiptoes had the biggest candle. She walked into the spiral holding it in her hands. She placed it on the center stone and lit it with her wand.

She said:

*"Bless this candle
Burning bright,
Bless its shining
In the night.*



*Bless the boughs
Upon the ground,
Bless the path
That spirals round.*

*Bless our step,
So strong and stout,
Bless our winding
In and out."*

Then, one by one, every animal and fairy walked the spiral. Those with hands carried a candle, and those who couldn't carry a candle brought along a fairy friend to carry it for them. They lit their candle from the center flame, and, as they walked out, placed it on the evergreen boughs. One by one, candle by candle, the spiral path became a path of light reaching out into the world.

Jeremy Mouse watched as the spiral grew bright in the gently falling snow.

"This is strange," he thought. "Not one candle has been put out by a snowflake. How can that be?"

Suddenly he knew the answer and looked around. He saw the Snow Queen sitting in the alder tree. She was gazing straight at Jeremy Mouse with her dark eyes. Jeremy Mouse had never seen eyes like that before. They were beautiful and terrible at the same time. Now he knew why snowflakes were so beautiful, and why a blizzard was so wild and fierce.

When everyone had walked the spiral Tiptoes went to the center stone. She picked up the candle, held it high above her head, and said:

*"A light shines in the darkness—
The Christmas Child is on his way"*

"Hurray!" cried all the animals.

"Hurray!" cried all the wee folk. "The Christmas Child is coming! The Christmas Child is on his way!"

Then all the fairy folk picked up a candle and ran out into the world to tell the good news: "The Christmas Child is coming! The Christmas Child is coming!"

Jeremy Mouse watched as the candles flickered through the forest. They looked like winter fireflies weaving in and out amongst the trees—and not a single snowflake put a candle out.

