

Jack Frost's Tale

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From: The Tales of Tiptoes Lightly, complete chapter 26 minus the illustrations. Tiptoes Lightly and the gnomes, Pine Cone and Pepper Pot, are high in the Snowy Mountains and have been waiting for Jack Frost to turn up. They have a question for him.

The sun went down. It colored the snow pink and orange. Then the moon came up. She was still thin and sharp, but her light made the snow shimmer silvery-blue. Tiptoes and the gnomes sat still and listened.

Suddenly they heard a crackling noise.

"It's Jack Frost!" cried Tiptoes, and ran outside.

Pine Cone and Pepper Pot ran after her. Jeremy Mouse only stuck his head out of the snow cave. He didn't want Jack Frost to nip his toes – and certainly not his tail!

"Jack Frost! Jack Frost!" cried Tiptoes. "We've come to pay a visit."

Jack Frost landed next to them. He was pale, icy blue, and his arms and fingers were long and glistening. His eyes were sharp, and his wings crackled like breaking ice whenever he moved. He looked so fierce that Pine Cone and Pepper Pot were afraid to open their mouths. It became so chilly they wrapped their beards round their necks and pulled their hats over their ears.

"Afraid I might nip your noses?" crackled Jack Frost at the gnomes.

Pine Cone and Pepper Pot clamped their hands over their noses and shook their heads. Now they really were scared.

"Jack Frost," asked Tiptoes, in her most polite voice, "are you a giant gnome or a giant fairy? Pepper Pot says you are a gnome because you make crystals, and I say you're a fairy because you fly through the air."

"Well, well," said Jack Frost, "curious are you? I'll tell you my story and then you can tell me what I am."

Jack Frost settled close to the ground. Every time he breathed, clouds of ice crystals flew out of his mouth and settled over them. Tiptoes didn't seem to mind, but Pine Cone and Pepper Pot were soon covered with a layer of frost.

"Once," said Jack Frost, "there lived a Fairy Queen. She was Queen of the Air. When she brushed her hair, breezes blew gently on the earth. When she spoke, gusts of wind snatched people's hats away. When she ran, leaves and branches blew off the trees. And when she flew in the air, her mighty wings tossed forests to the ground and terrible storms raged at sea and sank ships.

One day the King of Ice saw her, and said: 'You shall be my bride.'

But the Queen of the Air refused. 'Why should I marry you?' she asked. 'You stay on the ground, and if the sun shines strongly you melt away!'

The Ice King was angry and tried to grab her. The Queen of the Air whirled away – but not quickly enough! He caught a piece of her dress and tore it free.

'That's all you shall have of me!' shouted the Queen of the Air, and away she flew in a storm.

"And who is that piece of dress caught by the Ice King?" asked Jack Frost.

"You are!" cried Pine Cone and Pepper Pot.

"Then that's your answer," said Jack Frost, crackling like ice. He stretched his wings and leapt into the air. Down the valleys he flew spreading frost wherever he went. The air turned cold as ice when he flapped his wings, and if people did not wrap up warmly, Jack Frost nipped at their fingers and toes.