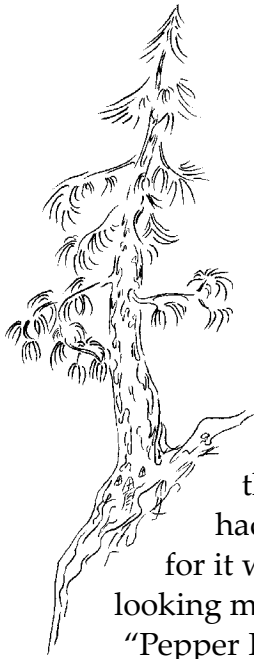


# The Festival of Stones

Chapter 9 of *The Festival of Stones: Autumn and Winter Tales of Tiptoes Lightly*  
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The Old Pine Tree where Pine Cone and Pepper Pot live grows in the forest not far from Running River. It is tall, and sways back and forth when the wind blows—and the wind blew often these days, for winter had just arrived. Many forest creatures were already sleeping—but not the earth folk, for the inner earth had begun to awaken after its long summer’s sleep. How the earth loved to dream in summer time, but even better was to wake up when winter came! Then the winter festivals began, and all her earth folk, especially the gnomes, were alert and busy preparing.

Pine Cone and Pepper Pot had also been working hard. They are crystal makers, and every year they grow a special crystal for the first winter festival, the Festival of Stones. This time they made an extra large white crystal, and had struggled to carry it up from their crystal garden deep beneath the earth, for it was much bigger than normal. Now it sat in the middle of their living room, looking most festive and shining with a gentle white light.

“Pepper Pot! Pepper Pot! Light the candles!” called Pine Cone from the kitchen. “It’s getting dark!”

“I am already!” Pepper Pot called back, and finished lighting the candles set in every nook and cranny all over the room.

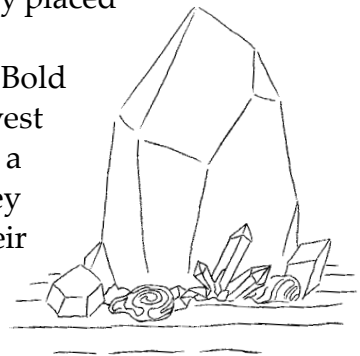
Pine Cone came out of the kitchen brushing flour from his beard. He had been cooking pancakes all day: acorn pancakes, mushroom pancakes, pine nut pancakes, and best of all, maple syrup pancakes. “All done,” he said, and sat down to wait for the guests to arrive.

“Knock! Knock!” went the door. It was Blue Shoes and Amethyst, gnome friends who lived close by in the forest.

“Happy Festival!” they cried as they came inside.

Blue Shoes and Amethyst carried tiny crystals in their hands. These were their Gifting Stones—everybody had to bring one to the festival—and they placed them next to the large white crystal.

“Knock! Knock!” went the door again. It was Silver Beard and Bold Buckle. They were gnomes too. Silver Beard had the longest, silveryest beard you ever saw. It was the color of moonlight. Bold Buckle was a wandering gnome, and he had a big, brassy, buckle on his belt. They both brought round river rocks with glittering streaks of quartz as their Gifting Stones. They also placed them next to the white crystal.





“Knock! Knock!” went the door again. This time it was Tiptoes and Jeremy Mouse. Tiptoes carried a pretty blue pebble in her hand, and Jeremy Mouse had brought a crystal the color of gold. He found it in a field that Farmer John had just plowed. It was perfectly square on all sides, just like a little golden box.

“That’s pyrite,” said Pine Cone, looking at it carefully. “It’s called fool’s gold. Silly people think it’s gold, but it’s not.”

“It’s still special,” said Pepper Pot. “It’s made of iron and sulfur—that’s where St. Michael meets the Dragon.”

“Hmm,” thought Jeremy Mouse to himself, “this sounds like gnome talk.” To him the crystal just looked

pretty, and so he had brought it as his Gifting Stone.

All evening the door went “Knock! Knock!” Many fairy folk came: Greenleaf the Sailor who lives beside the willows overhanging Running River; Two Buttons the Tailor; Hammer Jack the Miner from the gold mine, and his pretty wife, Opal Eyes; Apple Cheeks the orchard fairy from Farmer John’s; Crackle Tooth the icicle fairy; Twiglets and Spriglets the garden fairies; Pins and Needles the house fairies, and many, many more. They all put their Gifting Stones next to the big white crystal in the middle of the living room.

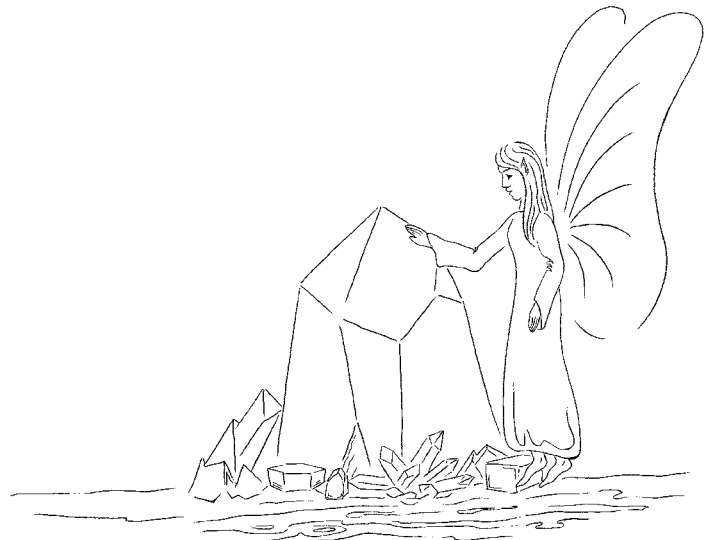
At last the door stopped knocking; every-body had arrived. Pine Cone blew out the candles, and the Festival of Stones began.

They all sat around the white crystal glowing in the darkness. Pine Cone took a small gold hammer from his pocket and tapped the crystal gently. It rang out with a beautiful, clear tone.

“*Dingggggggggg...*” went the stone, and everyone sang the same note.

Pine Cone tapped the crystal in a different place, and “*dongggggggggg ...*” a new note rang out. They all listened and sang that note too. Seven times Pine Cone tapped the crystal, and seven different notes rang out. The crystal was singing the Stone Song.

Then the gnomes and fairies sang the Stone Song over and over again—sometimes together, sometimes in a round, and sometimes only one of them sang and the rest listened. This was the Winter Waking Song. Every year the song was new, because every year Pine Cone and Pepper Pot grew a fresh crystal for the festival. That way each crystal sang the right song for the coming year. The Winter Waking Song woke the earth stones up for the coming winter, and the more the gnomes and fairies sang, the brighter the white crystal shone until its light rayed out into the whole winter earth.



Then the fairy folk started to dance. It was a serious dance, but very beautiful. Round and round, in and out, weaving and twining they danced. This was the dance of the winter stars and was called the Binding Dance. It bound the starlight to the earth so she can grow crystals in wonderful shapes and colors.

When they finished dancing it was very, very late. Tiptoes placed her hand on the white crystal and said the Stone Blessing:

*“Bless this stone  
And all it brings,  
Bless its hardness  
And how it sings,  
Bless its beauty  
And its light,  
Bless its shining  
Through the winter’s night.”*



“Hurray!” cried all the gnomes.

“Hurray!” cried all the fairies.

“I’m hungry,” said Jeremy Mouse. “Can we eat now?”

Everybody laughed. Jeremy Mouse was *always* hungry. He was still a growing mouse.

“Yes,” said Pepper Pot. “Now we can have our feast.”

“Hurray!” cried the gnomes and fairies again.

“Goody!” mumbled Jeremy Mouse, nibbling on a piece of poppy seed cake.

