

The Search for the Crystal Necklace

by Thomas Downing

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Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, there lived a small people called the Tilari. The Tilari were very, very tiny people, the tallest being only about four inches tall or about the size of a 5 year old child's hand. Their voices were very high so when they spoke it was almost as if they were singing. Also the Tilari had learned the way to fly. On their backs grew little tiny wings like the wings of butterflies. You could tell who was who by the markings on their wings. They flew around as much as possible, some of the children playing a game called Tag, and the adults flying from place to place, back and forth to work or just visiting a friend.

One of the friends that all Tilari visited was the oldest Tilari in the world, Biblio. He was the one Tilari that knew the history of all things. Children came to him all the time to ask questions and left him knowing a lot more than when they first came. He told a lot of stories, stories of adventures, love, happiness, and growing up in the land of the Tilari. Sometimes when the children closed their eyes they could easily see in their heads the places that Biblio talked about. It seemed like the more he talked the more it felt like you were there, doing the things he spoke of or just watching the story in your head. He always told the children, "Imagine that it is you in my story. Imagine that you are the prince or princess, the little girl or little boy". And by listening to his advice the children began to see beautiful stories in their heads and once he was through they would fly home and tell their mommies and daddies about the whole story. Biblio told sad stories and he told happy stories but there was always a lesson to learn. After the story was over he would look around at the children and ask them what they thought the story meant. According to Biblio, no one ever gave a wrong answer because each answer was what each child saw in the story herself and what she or he learned from the story was right.

Each night, after the sun had gone down and everyone had eaten their dinner, all the grownups would let the children fly to Biblio's house. The children would find him sitting on a stool in his yard, smiling and flapping his wings. Every time he was about to start a story, his wings would start to glow and all the children would quiet down, lying on their stomachs and looking up at him, or closing their eyes and seeing the stories in their heads. One of the stories the children loved was about the Crystal Necklace. All the children were looking at Biblio when his wings started to glow and he started to tell his story called The Search for the Crystal Necklace.

"When I was child, just like you are now, after our studies all the children would fly up to a very high mountain we call Crystal Mountain. It was called that because all over the mountain were these rocks called crystals, shiny rocks that you could see through.

At the top of the mountain was the Crystal Tree. It was the most beautiful tree in the world. Instead of leaves on the tree, there were crystals, some long, some round, all kinds of shapes and sizes. When the sun rose up behind the Crystal Tree, the light from the sun would shine through the crystals and rainbows would burst out into the sky. So many colors would explode around us as we flew around the tree. And if the wind blew, the crystal leaves would cling together, making beautiful music, music so pretty you would sometimes cry, sometimes laugh, for no real reason except that the colors and the music made you feel so good.

Also from the tree would flow a golden liquid we called Goo-Gooney! It was real thick and real sweet. Our mothers and fathers would fly up with buckets and bring the Goo-Gooney back home to mix in our food or drinks. But when we were up by the tree we would just stick our fingers in and scoop up a handful and just lick our fingers all day. UUUUUMMMMMM, Goo-Gooney sure was good.

Well one day, the king of the Tilari, Eric, said he was proclaiming a World Rest Day. It was to be a day that no one would work; no one would have to go to school. Everyone could just play all day or just lay around under the sun. Everyone was looking forward to it. It was also to be Princess Alexandra's birthday so preparations were being made to make her a beautiful birthday present.

Can you guess what it was? That's right, a crystal necklace.

All the daddies went up to Crystal Mountain and gathered up all the most beautiful, round crystals they could find. Some they pulled off the tree, some they got out of the ground. When they had the best, they brought them back down to all the mummies who took the crystals and shined and polished them until they sparkled like diamonds. They gave them all to Old Woman Mabel and we were told we would have to wait until Rest Day to see them again.

While we waited all the mummies and daddies were cooking, making foods, building toys, cleaning and preparing. All the children were still going to school and back and forth to Crystal Mountain but we were all anxious and excited waiting for the day.

Finally, the World Rest Day came and was it a day to remember. We played games; we flew, sang songs and rested. Food was laid out on long tables so whenever someone got hungry they just flew over and got it. Later on the Princess Alexandra came down to the garden and we all sang Happy Birthday to her. But the big surprise was when Old Woman Mabel brought the present to the princess. All we saw at first was a beautiful, flat, wooden jewelry case, with beautiful wings sculpted into it. She laid the case on a table beside the princess and said "For you, Princess, we wanted to give something special, something as beautiful as you are!" And with that, she opened the case.

When she brought out the present, there was a loud exclamation of surprise. "Ahhhhhhh!" was whispered all around. The crystal necklace was so beautiful. It was set in circles, one big circle, then smaller circles to the middle until just the hole

for the necklace to fit around the princess' neck. Old Woman Mabel held it up and the princess bowed her head. When it was put on, it laid across the princess' chest, over her shoulders and across her back. And as she turned it looked like a rainbow just curled around her neck

Princess Alexandra smiled to us with tears in her eyes. "Thank you, Tilari" she said. "Thank you ever so much for the most gorgeous present in the world. I will always treasure this." We all started clapping and singing because the princess was so happy and we were happy too. Then it was back to playing and flying, sometimes flying close to the princess just to see the necklace up close. It turned out to be a wonderful day.

Well many years after the World Rest Day, a terrible thing happened. I had grown up to be a strong young man, so early mornings I would go out to work like the other men. On one particular morning I got up earlier than usual and flew up to the Crystal Tree. Imagine my shock when I saw the crystals just dropping to the ground and shattering. The tree looked real old and all the Goo-Gooey looked real nasty. I tasted a bit of it, and then spit it out because it was horrible. The limbs on the tree were all bent downward and there was no rainbow shining around it at all. The crystals falling from it looked like tears, as if the tree was crying. I was so hurt and angry, wondering what could be destroying the Crystal Tree that I cried out "What's wrong, Crystal Tree? Why are you dying?"

'Someone has stolen the crystal necklace from Princess Alexandra!'

At first I was shocked that the tree had talked to me, for as long as I could remember the tree had never spoken to anyone. But I calmed down quickly because of the bad news I had heard.

'How do you know the necklace has been stolen?' I asked the tree.

'I saw him fly away last night when everyone was sleeping. The crystals called out for help no one heard and he flew away with them toward Dark Mountain.'

When the tree said 'Dark Mountain' I shivered because no one went to Dark Mountain. In it lived a mean, old lady named Sweezil who didn't like the Tilari. But she always stayed on Dark Mountain.

'But why are you dying?'

'I am the last crystal tree left in the world. There used to be one on Dark Mountain but Sweezil chopped it down a long, long time ago. She doesn't like the light of the crystals or the pretty music they sing. If the crystals are taken away from the vicinity of Crystal Mountain, I will slowly die. We love Princess Alexandra too, and the crystal necklace was a present from us as well as from you. If the crystals are not brought back all the light on Crystal Mountain will go away and it will be dark here like it is on

Dark Mountain . You must help us, Biblio, before all is lost forever!’

I was crying but I rushed down to the city telling everyone to wake up. When I got to the home of the princess she was already out on the balcony, crying ‘My necklace is gone!’ As the people gathered around I told them what the tree had said and we all flew up to the top of Crystal Mountain.

The king spoke hesitantly to the tree. ‘How can we stop you from dying, Crystal Tree?’

‘You must bring back the necklace and place it over one of my limbs. The princess must get it back from Sweezil and bring it back to Crystal Mountain.’

The people looked on in sadness as one of the last crystals slowly fell from the tree, shattering.

‘You must hurry, King Eric, for when the last crystal falls you will only have three days to bring the necklace back or no other crystal will ever be able to grow again. The princess can only take one companion but you must hurry or all will be lost. There will only be darkness left on Crystal Mountain.’

And we all started to cry as the last crystal dropped from the tree and the tree slowly shriveled up before us.

‘Please hurry!’ said the tree. ‘Please hurry!’ Then it spoke no more.

Well, as I’m sure all you smart children know, Princess Alexandra chose me to go with her to search for the crystal necklace. It was a very sad day when we left. No crystals to sing a song for our farewell, no light from the Crystal Tree. All the crystals on Crystal Mountain were shattered, shards of glass with no life. The princess and I said goodbye to the people and started on our journey.

It took us most of the day to get to Dark Mountain. It was very frightening when we arrived. Sweezil’s castle was huge atop Dark Mountain and there didn’t appear to be one light in the whole place. I flew to the door and lifted the heavy door knocker and let it drop. A loud BONG echoed around us and all of sudden a loud, angry voice shouted, ‘What do you want?’

I couldn’t see anyone but I answered, ‘We’ve come to ask Sweezil to return the crystal necklace to Princess Alexandra and to Crystal Mountain .’

‘And if it is not returned?’ shouted the voice.

‘But it must be returned’ cried the princess ‘or the Crystal Tree will die and there will be no light ever again on Crystal Mountain!’

Then we heard laughter come from the castle and the voice said, ‘Good. Then the

darkness will cover the world and Sweezil will be happy!

The door then opened and Sweezil stood before us. She was a bent over, ugly, old woman with a black piece of wood in her hand that she used to stand up with. The princess looked at her and asked 'Why do you hate the light so much that you would want to keep it away from the people who enjoy it? What have we done to you?'

'Because I have no happiness and I don't want you to be happy' said Sweezil.

'But Sweezil' I said, 'why are you not happy? Tell us and we might be able to help you.'

She looked at me with a lot of pain in her eyes and I thought she might cry when she said 'I have no wings!'

With that she turned around and sure enough, her wings were gone.

'You can't give me wings, can you, Tilari?' Sadly I shook my head no. 'Then go away and leave me alone. You can learn to live in darkness!'

Then she walked away from us and the door slammed in our faces.

We stayed out there all night trying to get Sweezil to open the door and let us talk to her. By the next morning I was ready to break the door down. I was angry because we were going to lose our light all because an old woman had lost her wings. And what of us? Could we survive with all our light, all our crystals, gone?

'Anger at her is not right, Biblio' said the princess. 'Can't you see she is hurt in her heart? She sits in this darkness every day and every night with no companion to ease her pain. That's why she hates the light. She hurts inside and can't find any reason to be happy.'

'But what are we going to do, Princess Alexandra? By tomorrow night we will have no light. We can't let that happen!'

And with that the princess sat down and started to sing.

At first I didn't understand. The crystals were destroyed; darkness would cover our whole world by tomorrow and the princess decides to sing. But then I listened to her, listened to what she sang. The song was about being alone, lonely, without someone to love and having no one to love you, living in darkness, with no light. It was a very sad song, very sad, as if there was no hope left in the world. And as she sang the door opened and Sweezil threw the necklace out, leaning against the door, crying.

'Go on', she said. 'Take the necklace and leave. Just leave me alone!'

I started to get the necklace when the princess said 'Sweezil, we can't just leave you here alone. The necklace is not as important as you. All the light in the world would do me no good if I was to leave and turn my back on you.' She moved closer and wrapped her arms around Sweezil and hugged her. 'Tell me why do you hurt so badly?'

Sweezil sat down on a rock and looked down at the ground. 'When I was a little younger, I flew over to this mountain, when there was a Crystal Tree here. But instead of flying up to the tree, I walked up the mountain. While climbing, I slipped and fell into a hole, getting stuck by my wings. I couldn't get out and stayed there for two days until I was found by my son.

'When he helped me out, he pulled the wrong way and my wings were broken. We tried to heal them but they slowly shriveled, then fell away. I was destroyed. I hated him but he was my son. So instead of hurting him, and being ashamed for feeling that way, I wanted to hurt everyone else. I climbed to the top of the mountain and chopped down the Crystal Tree. Then everyday I came outside and saw the light of your tree shining, and it made me angrier and angrier as I got older, until I told my son to go chop it down. He only went because he still kept the blame for my wings. But he couldn't bring himself to chop it down, so instead he stole your necklace. To take a crystal away from the mountain would cause the tree to die. It wasn't his fault. He only did it for me.'

We were all crying, after hearing such a sad story, and I didn't know what to say. Sweezil's son had come out and wrapped his arms around his mother. 'Mother, I have always loved you' he said, 'even without wings.'

The princess said 'Sweezil, don't you see? It's not your wings that make someone love you. It's your heart. You don't have to be lonely or without light. You can still be loved.'

Sweezil looked up then and I saw a beautiful smile on her face. 'Then you two better hurry back. Take the necklace and revive the tree. Don't let the light be gone forever.'

So then after hugs and kisses and a promise to Sweezil that we would come back to see her, the princess and I started back to Crystal Mountain.

By the third day we were back but there was only a little sunlight left. We thought we were too late. But I laid the necklace on a limb of the tree and we all just stared. Then before our eyes a tiny crystal poked out of the tree, then another, and another until the tree was again covered with gorgeous, beautiful crystals. The tree had straightened up and the crystals grew from the mountain again too. And the light was more radiant and shining than it ever was. The people cheered, cried, and laughed. Everyone happy once again.

That could be the end of the story but I know you children are wondering what happened to Sweezil and her son.

Well it so happened that one day when we looked toward Dark Mountain it wasn't dark there anymore. There was a Crystal Tree shining bright light from the top of the mountain. I don't know how it happened but maybe it was because all the anger, hatred, and pain were gone. Maybe with no more hurt inside of Sweezil, the light was able to once again bring the tree back alive.

Whatever it was, each time we saw her Sweezil was happy again!