

## Excerpt 1

But as soon as the prophecy was spelled for Prince Calaf, a menacing figure in a cloak and a red jockey cap flashed through the air...

The Princess vanished and, in case your memory failed to keep it... that caused the stonemasons' hearts to palpitate.

Yet the King was clapping delightedly and started to grieve the abducted Princess only much later. When he became aware of what happened, he had ordered the Royal Guard to immediately launch an investigation.

The investigation lasted twenty-four days. After all, the castle was protected by twenty-four walls of solid ice.

The morning of the twenty-fifth day His Majesty received a report. "The ice walls suffered an irreparable damage. Each wall bore a hole at the height of two feet and five inches from the ground."

"That's it! I recognize the evil dwarf's tricks," the King said in a weak voice, and leaned back in exhaustion.

It is hard to say how long did His Majesty lay motionless. But as soon as He began to show signs of life and even dropped down his feet, like all Kings do when they come out of depression, the Royal Vizier was summoned to appear at the throne room.

And now it is time to remember the true hero of our tale, the stone boy. He was called Spark or, to be exact... Spark was the name to which he responded.

You might ask: what's the use of names to which no one responds?

Well, besides the *twittering* names, to which all Granite Mountain folk responded, there were also *secret* names, the meanings of which could be revealed in their deeds - that is, in their heroic pursuits.

When a stonemason accomplished a heroic deed, he was permitted to modify his *twittering* name by adding a letter from his *secret* one. And only the old King of Granite Mountain had a twittering name that coincided with his secret one.

He was called Pepper-Salt-Spark-Ley. That's how many glorious deeds he performed in the course of his life!

But Spark's own accomplishment took a less trammled range. All he could boast of was a knack for chiseling toys out of precious minerals – silly droplets, cubes and pyramids, which he arranged on a stone ledge, making them look as festive as a Christmas tree.

But what can we say? That hardly measured to a glorious deed. After all, before count could be kept of his bravery, he had to grow up a bit.

But again, there was a fly in the ointment, so to speak.

How could Spark grow up in a place, where absolutely nothing germinated, save for a crooked maple tree, its roots drawing what life they could from the barren cliff face?

A tree growing from a cliff? Hard to believe, yes, but true.

Moreover, the sapling was rooted as far as in the dwarves' dungeon. But as soon as it made its way up to Granite Mountain, it started to produce sticky maple sap, that the stonemasons collected to sweeten their tea.

Next to that crooked maple tree there was a huge coral colored slab. And as he leaned against it, Spark would immerse, as if by magic, in phantasmagorical dreams that he called *Coral Dreams*.

*“But how could a dream be coral?”* You will ask, believing that dreams can either be real or virtual. But Spark’s dreams were coral indeed. They were as dissimilar as corals. And they, at the same time, were at variance with corals in that the corals were seen from water, and coral dreams hovered in the air and returned to you as songs.

Here is one of them:

## **Excerpt 2.**

### **Tale Two. “Secrets of the Three”**

Spark woke up as he felt someone was covering him with an eiderdown blanket.

"I am very grateful to you, dear eider," he said and extended his lips for a kiss.

But the eider did not hurry to respond to Spark’s kiss. That is, perhaps, he was in a hurry, but his body was sheltered with an eiderdown blanket, which slipped to his feet all the time. And the eider’s feet were unstable, like the feet of a gosling. So the eider walked, swaying, and produced an impression, a false impression, as Spark believed, to be in no rush. But if he were in no rush to visit Spark, the eider would not have sat down on the stump near Spark's bed and did not sing such a song to him. as this:

I hunt for flies in darkness of the night.  
They are equipped with armors like the knights.  
Their wings fluoresce. And to my palate  
They have a taste of a flea–and–spider salad.

“The spiders housed in the fog

Are drawn by the mist with frogs.  
Together they fit well for spread  
On Sunday nights," that's what I read...

Spark liked the song. But he did not finish listening to it, as he suddenly felt freezing cold. He held out his hand to pull on the eiderdown blanket. But as the blanket was no longer there, he realized that he had just parted ways with his dream.

"If I dreamed of the eider," Spark thought. "did the eider dream of me?"

Of course he dreamed of me," Spark decided immediately. "We dreamed of each other." Together with me, the eider saw flies with spiders in his dream. And I also saw flies with spiders in my dream.

But his sleep was gone. And that was pitiful.

"I did not finish listening to the song," Spark said to himself. But as soon as he said it, the music began to sound again.

Spark rose on his bed and listened very attentively. The music was the same, but the eider did not sing anymore. Even two eiders didn't sing. Yet still this was not the case. Singing were His Majesty, King of the Granite Mountain, and His Royal Vizier:

King:

"Oh, Granite Mountain, to you with no delay  
Both sun and moon come on the scene to play  
Their yellow, inky and indigo shades  
Turn rocks into a colorful cascade.

A maple tree is gazing with its crown  
Point blank at heavens, spreading to the ground,  
To goblins' caves, its clasping, gripping roots,  
And stabs the valley with its trunk en-route."

Vizier:

“This tree is spurious, I recognize, my Lord:  
Strong roots, but crown is a little out of ord.”

King:

"I am the humble ruler of that peak  
I watch it from a matchbox, so to speak,  
That is, from my bone–chilling *schloss*,  
That blossoms while I’m coming to a close.

Between the mountain and the caves, right in the midst,  
And open to all breezes and cross-winds  
Lies blossoming and splendid paradise,  
Domain of wizards, dullards’ lucky dice.”

Vizier:

"Yes, yes, my Lord, that’s Heaven. But the Hell,  
Its rival image, on its doorstep dwells!”

King:

“I’m old, my days continue to decline.  
But where will I find the next-in-line,  
Who will support three worlds’ select alliance,  
Not baffling their bonds for misalliance?

Who will refuse the cloying taste of fortune,  
Who will protect the valley from misfortunes,  
Befriend the wizard, won’t indulge in bliss,  
And push Volchaks into a dark abyss?”

Vizier:

“My Lord, I’ll spurn the cloying taste of fortune  
And will protect the valley from misfortunes”!

The melody went on when Spark saw the Royal castle right in front of him. And to make sure his vision did not play tricks on him, Spark made a step toward the castle and began to breathe against its glossy corner and to

knead it with his finger. It wasn't long before he melted a little hole in it.

Of course, by making a hole in the Royal window, he broke the law protecting the sanctity of His Majesty's Ice Palace. And that was bad. Yet instead of being punished, he benefited from it. That was certainly not to say that he received a reward of any sort. It meant, simply, that he discovered a mystery so grand that it made his wildest fantasies seem mundane by comparison.

*"From what misfortunes will you guard the valley, dear Vizier? Is not it time to get puzzled by the fact that evil Zhabrey remains at large, and my child is still enchanted,"* said His Majesty.

*"Of course, it is time. The most convenient time to get puzzled with this thought just as well,"* the Vizier replied hastily.

Yet he didn't look anything puzzled. On the contrary, he reclined in an armchair, having already savored a good half of a bagel from the Royal snack table. Then he made a melancholy face, and intoned:

VIZIER:

Yes, I am puzzled with your musings,  
Lost sleep at noon and what's amusing  
Or, rather awful that at night  
I almost missed my appetite.

HIS MAJESTY:

He who is pampered by such thoughts  
Can only grasp what brains have got.  
But if you rule to promptly catch  
Zhabrey in a contenders' match,

You'll need to bring yourself in motion  
And with no fear, no caution  
To his new trail obtain a lead

And promptly tie up his eyelids.

VIZIER:

Oh, I am puzzled with your musings,  
Lost sleep at noon, and what's amusing,  
Or rather awful that at night  
I almost missed my appetite.

HIS MAJESTY:

By tying up his eyelids fast,  
With no hoo-ha, no fuss  
One can the evil dwarf compel  
From Stella to remove the spell,  
And I will spare no expense  
The valiant knight to recompense.  
I'll grant my throne, my Royal gown  
And, at long last, my golden crown.

I am elated! As your double  
To Royal throne I have been tumbled.  
And Royal robe of purple tint  
I found fitting to the hilt.

Excerpts 3.

Spark was delighted and immediately admitted that he never caroled before.

- "Really?" Klot was astonished. "And what about the song about a cat and an elephant?"

And Klot solemnly recited:

Frolic, frolic, little cat.  
Are you sitting on the mat  
Still, with fire in your eye  
Pet an elephant at fly?

Spark was taken aback.

"I must have misunderstood something," he said not wanting to admit that he understood absolutely nothing.

"Of course, you have misunderstood something," Klot replied. "You must have never pet an elephant in his flight."

"I have not," Spark said woefully."

"Then what are you doing in Lemon Drop Valley?"

"I'm looking for a Princess. Did you happen to come across one?"

"Someone had asked me about a Princess," said the giant.

"It could have been me. I am desperately looking for a Princess. Ciao!"  
Spark hurried to bid goodbye.

"I sent him to the promenade," the Giant hollered after him.

Excerpt 4

#### **Tale Four. On the Promenade**

*"Promenade must come from the words 'pro' and 'maenad,' meaning 'in favor of maenads',"* Spark thought even though he was not quite certain who the maenads really were.

"Good guess, but correct only in part," a thin voice squeaked to Spark's ear. *"Promenade is a place for those who promenade. And then, you see, the whole thing is in the numbers. Long ago, a ritual called Eleven Steps per Minute or, as our ancestors said, Elf Schritte pro Minute was brought to Lemon Drop Valley. And from this PRO MINUTE the word 'Promenade' originated. As you can see, to promenade means to walk at a leisurely pace."*

"But only turtles can walk at a leisurely pace, and that's because they

carry a heavy shell on their backs," Spark argued.

"Our ancestors promenaded to a musical score, you know, and music has a property of dictating its tempo. But now promenade is called a place where Yushkias dance prom with Pyzhiks. And so it happened that the Pyzhiks called Yushkas by the word maenads. And here you were absolutely right."

Spark was pleased with this gloss, and wanted to check whether he could walk at the rate of "Eleven steps per minute," that is, as he calculated, keeping his foot in the air five minutes and 9 seconds. But when he raised his foot to make his first step, he saw his interlocutor sitting on the toe of Spark's boot, and crossing his paws on his chest.

"I am delighted to get to know you," said Spark's interlocutor, who turned out to be a crane-fly, or a mosquito-eater.

"The delight is mutual," Spark replied, and observed that the crane-fly did not at all squeak, as it seemed to him before, but spoke in a normal, crane-fly voice.

"Watch out, don't stumble," the crane-fly admonished. "There's an aquatic space behind, you know."

Spark certainly knew nothing about the "aquatic space." But he nevertheless showed caution and thus avoided falling into the pool, which might end as a disaster for him.

"Tell me, crane-fly, is it true that you eat mosquitoes?" Spark asked.

"In truth, I do not eat much at all, for I do not live long, you know, and most likely, will die today," the crane-fly responded with her normal crane-fly voice.

"How sad that is. Then I cannot even bury you. After all, I am here on

the disposition of the King and must promptly depart.

"Ciao," the crane-fly said and bowed.

Spark bowed in response and hurried towards the prom–dancing crowd. As it happened, he showed up there quite on time. For the first person he noticed there, was the Royal Vizier who was leaving the Promenade, apparently, realizing that his search for the Princess came to naught.