

## A Prince Story –The Story of the Three Mountains

Once upon a time there was a Prince, and he had traveled everywhere he knew of, doing all the good deeds he could think of, in the hope of winning the Princess' hand from her father, the King.

He had done many things, but was worried that they were all too small, and so had now directed his horse to a far, new area, toward the distant mountains looking for a truly great kind deed to do. He didn't know what was ahead, but he was hopeful.

After another long day of riding, and being deep in the mountains, it was almost dark when he came upon a cabin. He could see a light shining from the inside, and heard an voice feebly answer at his knock. As he entered the little one room cabin, he saw a very old man lying in his bed, with a barely raised head and an arm almost unable to reach the nearby candle. He looked very weak, but had reading glasses far down on his nose and was holding a map.

After a pleasant, but short introduction of who he was and why he was traveling, the old man got rather animated, if you could call it that, and called the Prince closer to himself. In almost a whisper, and with pauses between shallow breaths, he told him the greatest good he could ever do was to save the Crystal Mountains. The Prince was surprised at this, rather quickly muttering to himself that he was looking for people to help, not mountains, but he politely spoke up in a louder voice that he simply didn't know anything about saving Crystal Mountains, or even what they were, but would be happy to help him with something around the cabin while he was there. But the old man just half-motioned half-slid the map toward the Prince.

“These are all my mines,” the Prince barely heard, “take it, and go see.” “But how do I get there?” said the Prince, protesting a little more at the old man's presumption. The whispering voice came again, “Go in the morning” and laid down—and it was only by removing the man's glasses and holding them in front of his mouth that he could tell the old man was breathing at all.

After watching for a while with no other words, or even a slight motion, from the old man, the Prince went outside and took care of his horse. When he came back in he looked for while at the strange map, then shook his head, laid out his bedroll on the floor, put out the candle, and waited for morning.

He never saw such a sunrise! The curtains were almost invisible and the wall on the far side of the window was positively glowing. Light reflected off the few knick-knacks on the wall and made the inside of the whole cabin shimmer. How could it have looked so dark last night? Last night? Oh yes, the old man! A quick check showed him still asleep, and in the same position as he laid down last night.

Well, better look for these mountains, the Prince told himself. I wonder where they are? And with that he stepped outside and around the cabin to get his horse.

He could feel the glow on his face, but it was cool—it wasn't the sun, although that was shining; the brightness came from a gap between some nearby peaks. It lit up the whole land around him, and the cabin window had faced directly at it. By squinting he could see a mountain road aimed right down the middle of the gap. He went back in the cabin, grabbed the map, looked one more time at the old man who still hadn't moved, then closed the cabin door, muttered something else under his breath, then mounted his horse to go look for some Crystal Mountains.

It was a short passage down the mountain road, for the most part straight, but one final steep drop and a wide turn, and he found himself staring at three sheer cliffs of mountain peaks, clear as glass, with a glow inside that seemed even brighter than the sunshine surrounding them. They must have been above the gap when he looked from the cabin, but it was so bright he didn't even recognize there was anything there.

He quickly brought out the map, oriented himself to his position, and found the nearest entrance. It was to the peak on the left. He came in and instantly had his attention drawn to the ceiling of the cavern. He suddenly understood why it was so bright, and was so important about the mountains, and why he couldn't see it from the cabin. He knew that he wasn't the most important thing in there.

After a short time which seemed like a touch of eternity, he went back out the way he came, and followed the map to the second peak's entrance. He entered and felt a refreshing coolness and rest, almost as if the glowing walls were running fountains of water. He felt encouraged! He was okay! He suddenly knew old man was okay! He even knew the Princess was okay. He even saw new great works to do in his own kingdom, not just by himself, but by people he hadn't even notice before. He knew that he wasn't the most important thing in there.

After another short time that seemed like a rest of ages, he went back out the way he came and, following the map, came to the third peak's entrance. He entered and almost couldn't stop going around in circles. Every wall he looked at he saw shapes and memories of people and places and times and things, some that he knew, and some he knew didn't but that he would. Every time he turned around, the walls were different. And he loved them all, even when the shapes and memories were not very lovable at all, like a shimmer that somehow reminded him of his first answer to the man in the cabin. "I'll be happy to help you with something around the cabin while I'm here" he almost heard echoed, then he winced, but realized how much he now loved the old man, and loved the fact that he now did. He knew that he wasn't the most important thing there.

After this last short stay, which seemed to have more value even than the other two, he retraced his steps again, and came back out to the open flatland between the three cliffs just as the sun was setting. The glow was subdued inside the mountains, but was still there, and he rode back up the path toward the cabin.

It was after dark when he entered, but the old man was leaning up on one elbow with an excited look on his face. "Did you find them?" he asked, not really needing an answer. Then, with a new found strength, he shared that the mountains grow the more they are mined. The more people take away, the brighter and bigger they become. And when no one cares, when no one else comes, then those who have mined them, who have dug them, who have searched them and explored them and made their own maps, become weaker and weaker, as if they have become part of the mountain.

The Prince slept well after that long night talk with old man. In the morning he went back to the mines. And the next morning. And the next. Some day he'll come back to try his prize for the Princess, but in the meantime he's trying to save the mountains, and to help with that he sent a gift up ahead, a necklace with three stones, something mined from each of the three peaks, and named after them. Their names? Faith, ...and Hope, ... and Love!