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|  | **A Children's Day Story****By Martin Janowitz**In a place as far away as the sky and as close as the tip of your nose, there is a beautiful crystal palace, made all of clearest glass, shining brightly in the sun and surrounded by distant snow mountains. It sits on the top of a snow-covered hill, right in the centre of the magical city called Kalapa, which is the capital of the Kingdom of Shambhala. From the tallest towers and spires of the palace, colourful pennants and flags wave in a cold strong breeze, orange ones with tigers, white with powerful looking snow lions, red with soaring garudas and blue with fire-breathing flying dragons. Icicles hang from the palace roofs, looking like part of the glass walls. The air is crisp, with just a wisp of sweet incense to tickle the nose. The tinkle of bells and wind chimes is carried with the wind and everyone hears the slow booming beat of the great drum and the piercing call of the giant horn, which echoes across the entire wide valley of the city. The drum and horn are calling the people of Shambhala, for today there is a great feast in the palace to celebrate the change of seasons and the coming of winter. Winter is a special time in Shambhala, because the people have worked hard in spring, summer and fall, planting, caring for the crops, harvesting, preparing the foods and all the other projects that need to be done while the days are warm. In winter, people mostly work inside and families will spend much time around their fires, telling stories, reading aloud, playing games, and enjoying the warmth and surprises of each other's company. Everyone has been invited to the winter feast in the King's palace, known as Fortress of Confidence, by their Majesties the great and brilliant Rigden King and his wise and beautiful Queen. Especially the children are invited, because at this festival the children are the special guests, and there will be games, treats and surprises specially arranged for them. This is Children's Day, the day the Rigdens have set aside for parents to give their children a special hug and an extra kiss to remind them that they are their special joy and their biggest smile. The King especially enjoys this children's feast since he always gets a chance to plan a trick or two to amaze and surprise the children of the Kingdom. Everyone remembers the time he had the whole palace painted blue so that the children thought they were in the sky, the time the mirrors were placed all around the crystal palace so that the sun seemed to be everywhere at once, or the time the Ministers' hats were made to smoke just as they entered in procession. On this day the families enter the great courtyard, carrying baskets of fruit and nuts, specially selected goodies and presents carefully crafted by the children to share with others. As they enter through the outer gate, many are surprised to see a bit of a smile or a wink from the tall Kasung guards in their red, white and black plaid kilts, black shortcoats and epaulets of meteoric iron. As they enter the inner courtyard gateway, with its urns of smoking juniper, into the great hall, many children jump just a bit when they feel a quick tickle or a tiny pinch. By the time the children look around, the Kusung, in their gold uniforms with red shoulder braids, are always back at attention, as if they had never moved. In the great hall there is lots of bustle and happy chatter. There will be games and extra tasty foods today and music by the royal band and pipers. At last the horns and pipes play the Shambhala anthem. Many people can't help but hum along as the Rigden King and Queen enter the hall in procession with their flags and special guards and attendants. Soon, they approach their thrones-his made of diamonds and jewels and hers of pink conch, and both with cushions of rainbow light on top. Many sounds of ooh and aah are heard as everyone admires the rainbow-coloured brocade gown of the Queen with its gold chrysanthemum pattern. She is wearing a large and brightly flashing orange sapphire necklace, and her tiara of diamonds and rubies sparkles so brightly. Best of all is her smile, which warms the whole room! The King is also quite a sight. He wears shining gold armour that flashes in the sunlight streaming right through the crystal glass walls, a large helmet of gold with small white silk pennants at the top and a great crystal sword. He holds his gold sceptre with a large diamond tip in the shape of flaming jewels, and whenever he catches the eye of another child he twirls his long black moustache and smiles. His eyes seem to reflect the sun right back at you.halifax_centre (82K)Children's Eve candlelight ceremony, Halifax, 2005.All day the festivities go on, until the musicians are almost too tired to play another jig, waltz, or march. The people have eaten many delicious foods, sung many songs, made up poems and told many tales of the glories and wisdom of their Shambhala history. Some are too tired to join the king in the Qualities Game for the hundred and eighth time, even though they wink and know he had picked White Deer to be the answer again. But when the Queen sings a special song of winter love, everyone shares both a tear and smile. Suddenly, the King has the great gong struck three times to get everyone's attention. As the gong rings, the hall falls silent. In his deep voice that sounds like a great bell, the King says, "I am so glad you have shared in our feast, so that goodness and cheerfulness can become even stronger in our hearts and in our Kingdom. Please continue to be perky and enjoy this day. But my Queen and I must go now. Don't be sad. This is great news! An extraordinary thing has happened. I'll ask my Queen to tell you." The Queen rises from her throne and gives a twinkling smile. "On earth there are many children who know about us in Shambhala, the Kingdom based on goodness. They know that when people remember their hearts are good, then they are cheerful, helpful and kind to others. These children and their families are also celebrating the coming of winter. In their homes they have built lovely shrines of pretty white and gold satins, decorated with dark green boughs of evergreen. Each child's shrine is a bit different, but each has lights or candies, and on top, dolls to remind them of the King and me. Each shrine has special things selected by the children to remind them to smile and to remind them of their special world. "Even as I speak, I see them placing little baskets of fruit and treats as gifts to us, and on each shrine, placing a small cup of sake to warm our bellies if we should come to visit. Some put little gifts for their parents and brothers and sisters, whom they love so much. The hearts of these children are so tender and sweet, they make me laugh and cry with happiness. We appreciate their goodness so much we can't resist their offerings. We won't disappoint them. The King and I shall pay each child a visit, share their sweet shrines, and let them know we remember them." "Bring our horses!" calls the King. Two enormous white horses-his known as Silver Bird Moon Light and hers called Rainbow Lightning Wind, with long flowing manes, tails braided with ribbons and bells, bright-coloured saddles, and blankets-are led forward, stomping and snorting steam in the cold air. Each horse carries an enormous saddlebag filled with presents for the children, special things that the children will treasure and enjoy all year. As the people cheer, the King and Queen mount and wave to the crowds, and away they fly on these magic horses, to Earth! In the homes on Earth, the children put the final touches on their shrines. Many children put one last extra candy for the King and Queen and perhaps just one in their pockets, then they bow to the shrine hoping that the King and Queen will come. Some children sit quietly in front of their shrine, meditating for a few minutes, if they are old enough to have received instructions. Soon it's time for bed. Some of the children try to stay awake, even hiding perhaps, hoping to catch just a glimpse of the King and Queen. But the Rigdens like to surprise the children with their gifts, so at each home they check to see if the children are asleep. If they're not, the King and Queen wait until the children blink, then in a flash, they alight on the shrine to take a sip of sake and a small nibble of food just to show they were there, and to let the children know they thank them for their kind treats. But most of all, at each shrine, they leave gifts for the children, brightly wrapped in Shambhala colours and carefully placed alongside the gifts left by parents for the children they love so much. Some say this started the tradition of Rigden's Gifts, when children (and even teenagers and grownups) sometimes receive what they most desire or, even better something quite unexpectedly perfect and delightful. At some homes the children hear the hoofs of horses on the roof, a bell tinkling, perhaps the King's deep laugh or the Queen humming a soft song-or was it just the wind or the moving branches of a tree? They'll never know. But in the morning, what a rumpus as the children rush to open the gifts! What laughter and happiness and so many surprises-in one house a doll that squeaks, in the next, a car that roars, or a box with enough blocks to build fantastic castles, or tiny figures with which to play make-believe Shambhala games with play warriors. Older children are excited to find a yumi bow or their first ink and brush. When all is done, or just before the family feast, it is traditional in many homes to pause to hug and thank each other for all their care, and especially to thank the Rigden King and Queen and wish them a safe trip home to Shambhala. " Please come again next year!" they call. Perhaps they think of the King and Queen and wonder if they can grow and practice to become Shambhala Warriors too. " Of course you can," whisper the King and Queen into each child's ear, because they know that in every child's heart is all the magic needed to join the Shambhala Kingdom. And then up the King and Queen fly, through the white snow gate of the Lha snow mountains surrounding the Kingdom of Shambhala. As they pass the mountain peaks, each topped with a long streaming pennant, the King waves back his white banner with eighteen multi-coloured pennants attached, expanding his actions and glory in all directions. Then on to Kalapa and to their crystal palace. As they near the great palace walls, they hear the crowd chanting, KI KI SO SO, and they see the warriors of Shambhala arise to greet and welcome home their glorious King and Queen. When they dismount their horses and sit back on their thrones, the crowd becomes hushed. Then the King and Queen tell all their subjects the story of their adventure on earth and the good news and happy tale of their visit to all their loyal families and, on this day more than any other, to their special children friends. ?1988-2007 Martin Janowitz*Composed in devotion to the boundless wisdom and fearless brilliance of the Dorje Dradul Mukpopa, who saw the needs of his children and the joining of heaven and earth in the Shambhala Kingdom as naturally as water quenches thirst. In these days of uncertainty may this small tale serve to remind us all of the Sun of the Great East which shines without attention to passing clouds and which we can always see in the smiles of our child. By the second Kusung Dapon, Tagtruk Dao, inspired by friends in the Kingdom. 13 December 1988.*  |

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