



**WINTER
MAGIC**

.....
**CURATED BY
ABI ELPHINSTONE**

.....
FEATURING STORIES BY

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Introduction

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by Abi Elphinstone

Winter is a season that sparkles with magic and transforms our ordinary world into a glittering kingdom: rooftops covered in snow, lakes glazed with ice and windows frosted white. It is a time of year that invites exploration and whispers of adventure. And at the heart of it all there is a sense of longing – for snowflakes, stockings and sledging, of course – but also, for stories.

My childhood winters were filled with snowball fights and wintry walks, but it is perhaps the evenings cuddled up by the fire with a book that I remember most. Because it was there that I discovered a wardrobe leading to a land locked in an eternal winter, a pack of wolves prowling through the snow around Willoughby Chase and a young girl riding an armoured polar bear across the Arctic ice plains. There are few things as enchanting as reading a snowy story during the depths of winter, and it is my absolute pleasure to introduce this collection of *Winter Magic* stories, written by some of the most talented and acclaimed writers in the country.

Let frost fairs enthrall you, husky dogs whisk you away on fur-lined sleds and wishing books answer your heart's desires. Here, fairytales are reimagined, lost legends are remembered and folk tales are re-told as you've never heard them before. There are snow dragons, elf tunnels, winter ballets and frozen rivers, but there are also pied pipers, unlikely time travellers, witches and renegade French teachers. This is winter magic at its best. So, take a seat, wrap up warm and don't forget to send your Christmas list to the Svenland elves – because eleven shiveringly magical stories await you . . .



The Snow Dragon



Abi Elphinstone

THE SNOW DRAGON

The snow was hardening into a shape Phoebe recognized: a long, swishing tail that finished in a cluster of icicles, a huge body sprouting jagged wings and a large, kind face with two shining black eyes and a pair of enormous ears. This, right here in the grounds of the orphanage, was a *dragon* – and its snow-carved body glinted silvery blue in the moonlight.

Phoebe craned her neck to get a better view and the chain attached to her ankle clanked. She froze, her heart thumping against her ribs as the dragon's mighty head swung towards the kennel. It paused, just a few steps away from Phoebe and Herbert, and Phoebe noticed there were white hairs as fine as spider-silk arched over the dragon's eyes – eyebrows, perhaps – and more wisps dangling beneath its chin and fringing its ears. The girl and the sausage dog stayed where they were, breathing in the dragon's smell, of pine trees and wild winds.

And then the dragon spoke – not a roar or a telling-off. His voice was soft and feathery and he simply said: 'Hello.'

Phoebe let the word rumble inside her. It felt wise and good and somehow she didn't feel afraid.

'Hello,' she found herself saying. 'I'm – I'm Phoebe.' Herbert nudged her side with his paw and Phoebe lifted the sausage dog into her lap. 'And this is Herbert, but you can call him Herb.' She glanced at the dragon's enormous limbs and his hooked talons splayed across the ground. 'If you want. Only if you want.'

The dragon smiled through icicled teeth. 'I've never met

a Phoebe or a Herb before.’ Phoebe beamed and the dragon chuckled, a warm laugh that reminded Phoebe of a fire crackling. ‘*B* is one of my favourite letters so I’ll enjoy saying both your names out loud.’

Phoebe was about to say that *B* was also one of *her* favourite letters – especially in the words ‘*goblin*’ and ‘*bubble*’ – but then she remembered she was a Word Murderer and she kept her mouth buttoned up.

The dragon frowned. ‘Oh, I don’t think the suit jacket will do.’

Phoebe glanced at the broken thread where the buttons had been. ‘I’m sorry that it’s all scrappy. I removed the buttons to make my snowman’s mouth.’

The dragon nodded. ‘But of course. Quite a sensible place for buttons, I would have thought. What I meant, though,’ and Phoebe noticed that his eyes were shining, ‘is that I have never known anyone set off on an adventure in a suit jacket. A conference or a meeting perhaps,’ he shuddered, ‘but not an adventure.’

Phoebe’s chest swelled. ‘We’re – we’re going on an adventure?’

The dragon nodded. ‘All over the world, on Christmas Eve, dragons stir.’

Phoebe’s eyes grew large because that was quite simply the best sentence anyone had ever said to her. She glanced at the ridge of spikes on the dragon’s back. ‘Are all dragons like you?’

The creature drew his vast body beneath him so that he

THE SNOW DRAGON

was sitting before the kennel. 'All dragons are a part of the landscape around them,' he said, and Phoebe noticed that as he spoke his breath puffed out into a mist of snowflakes. 'I am a Snow Dragon, but there are Cloud Dragons, Tree Dragons, Rock Dragons, Sea Dragons and even Fire Dragons out there.' His nostrils twitched. 'If you ask me, Fire Dragons are somewhat hot-tempered.'

Phoebe giggled and Herbert couldn't resist a quick moonwalk inside the kennel to show his delight at the conversation.

'I'm glad that we got to meet a Snow Dragon,' Phoebe said. 'I can't imagine Fire Dragons would have ears as glorious as yours.'

The dragon wiggled his ears and as the strands of hair rippled, a trail of snowflakes scattered into the night. 'Fire Dragons do have rather pokey ears.' He smiled and then he looked at Phoebe thoughtfully. 'Dragons only appear to those who need them, Phoebe. They stay for one adventure and then they melt back into the landscape.'

Phoebe thought of the ruined snowman and of how she had shouted to Slobber that she had only wanted *one moment of magic on Christmas Eve*. Then the dragon had appeared, as if he had listened to it all, as if he had heard the sadness rocking in her heart.

The dragon drew himself up. 'So, Phoebe and Herb, I suggest we get going. You can be late for many things in life, but you should *never* keep an adventure waiting.'