

## Fabulous Frozen Fantasma Happiness

It was Selene's first Christmas in Dreamhaven. Yet somehow, she fit into the circle of friends as if she had always belonged with, and to them. She and Mark sat beside Guardian Clavier, who was in her human form, and the three cats – Nick, Rose and Smoke. Shift, Dreamhaven's own magic pangolin lay tucked in among everyone and the thick folds of Clavier's cape. He could not decide on an animal for his upper body tonight. So far, he had tried a muskrat, a swan and a brown bear cub. But he was still thinking.

They all fit comfortably atop the stone pedestal, stars ablaze above a windless, snow-softened night. Selene chatted happily with the cats, and once again, Mark was pleased that, in Dreamhaven, he and his friends – human, feline, pangolin and Guardian – all spoke the same language. He suspected that was Clavier's work, but he still didn't know for sure.

"You won't believe your eyes," Nick assured Selene, his tail coming to life. "The Fabulous Frozen Fantasma is a dessert served only in Dreamhaven, and only ever on Christmas Eve. It's ten feet tall – and made of my favorite food...well, wait. Is it my favorite? I mean the *ravioli* I ate with Pietro in Venice was *benissimo*; and Adele makes a scrumptious trout; and– "

"If you're not going to tell her, I will," cut in Mark.

"No, I've decided. Ice cream definitely is my favorite food."

Rose and Smoke rolled their eyes at Nick, but, in truth, they were glad to see him chatty. Over the summer, each of them had been singled out and wounded by the moonwitch, Impolara. And they had lost a courageous friend. Since their return to Dreamhaven, every happy moment was welcome.

Selene smiled. "You know, I'd heard that." The part about the Fabulous Frozen Fantasma being ten feet tall and made of ice cream. It's a very famous dessert, and I still can't believe I'll be here on Christmas Eve to see and–"

"TASTE IT," Nick finished.

"And TASTE IT most of all," Selene agreed, stroking his rare Russian Blue fur.

"Nick, Smoke and I had never heard of the Fabulous Frozen Fantasma until we arrived in the village last Christmas" said Rose, "but I will never, ever forget my first sight of it."

“Was it that beautiful?” asked Selene.

“Yes, it was. Because my very own brother” – Rose rubbed a furry cheek against Smoke’s – “was all ten feet of the Fabulous Frozen Fantasma’s glory. Eva saw him in a Christmas Vision and Monsieur Marvellieux ice cream sculpted him.”

Despite his modesty, Smoke began to purr, orange-eyes bright against gray fur.

“But did he let his best friend in on the secret?” Nick broke in. “Nooooo! I had to find out with the rest of Dreamhaven. I was so shocked I almost couldn’t finish my third bowl of FFF.”

Nick successfully dodged Smoke’s swift reply, a teasing tail swipe to the face.

“I wish I could have seen that Fabulous Frozen Fantasmic you,” Selene said, stroking Smoke’s winter-thick fur.

“I’ve a drawing I can show you,” said Mark. “Actually, I’ve got one for every Christmas since I could draw at all. Some sketches are, well, stick figures and dreadfully wrong, but the real Fabulous Frozen Fantasma is always incredible. My dad’s seen it every year of his life, and he says the first sight still drops his jaw. My favorites include “Mr. Fancy Frog,” followed by the “Regal Rooster.” But the ice cream...” Mark closed his eyes with a dreamy smile, the others lost in their own delicious memories.

“The Fabulous Frozen Fantasma was not always made of ice cream,” Clavier said casually.

“It wasn’t? What was what it made of?” Mark asked, at the same moment Smoke asked, “Why not?”

“Well, ice cream did not yet exist back then,” Clavier answered.

“No ice cream! That sounds like a terrible time to live.” Nick’s horror was real.

“Oh, it was not so bad. Would you like to hear the story of how the Fabulous Frozen Fantasma tradition began?” asked Clavier.

“I’d love to,” said Selene, and all heads nodded in unison.

“Nearly three hundred years ago, when I first came to live in my bronze statue above Dreamhaven, the village was only a dozen or so cabins scattered along one side of the river. There was no bridge, no Dreamhaven Inn and no Dreamhaven Dessert Shop. But as I’d

promised, in exchange for their kindness to each other and any visitors, everyone in Dreamhaven had wonderful dreams. Night after night, year after year. Even so, exceptionally memorable dreams can come to people at the exact moment they need a little hope and happiness to hold on to.

That winter in Dreamhaven was especially harsh. Food was scarce in the village, and, despite their good dreams, animals and people alike were thin and weighted down with worry. Christmas was only a week away, but there wasn't much joy, and few gifts to share that year.

A young forester named Griffin – actually, he was your Great, Great, oh-so-many-Greats Grandfather, Mark..." Eyes swiveled from Clavier to Mark's shocked face, and back to Clavier as she continued.

*Griffin awoke to his wife humming as she lit the fire for their morning porridge.*

*"You're a bright song this morning, my love," Griffin said, kissing her.*

*"I had the most beautiful dream last night, and I feel like laughing, dancing and singing all at once," Orelia told him. "I wish the whole village could feel my happiness and cheer up in time for Christmas. At the very least, I hope I'll always remember it." And she described her dream to Griffin in perfect detail.*

*After breakfast, Griffin left to work in the forest, and, as he removed a broken branch here and cut firewood there, he thought about Orelia's dream, her wish to always remember it and her desire to share her happiness. By the time he arrived home that night, he had a plan. The next day, and every one right up to Christmas Eve, he left their cottage early to return only at nightfall.*

*As always in Dreamhaven, Christmas Eve was clear, crisp and alight with a riot of stars. Griffin and Orelia sat at the wooden table, their simple meal over too soon.*

*"Griffin, you were out all day again, and now, you're like a cat that smells a mouse. You're atwitch from whisker to tail. What are you up to?"*

*"You'll just have to come see for yourself."*

*"Come where?"*

*"Down to the river."*

*“The river? Now?”*

*“Come on. You never know what you’ll find on a night as beautiful as this.”*

*“I’d be a fool to resist such a pretty invitation from my charming husband. What’s keeping you? Let’s go!”*

*They were still some distance from the river when Orelia touched Griffin’s arm. “Look, there’re candles and lanterns. And it seems like all our neighbors and friends are there. I wonder what’s brought them out?” Excited eyes on the lights and figures, Orelia pulled ahead, tugging Griffin’s arm. When they reached the riverbank, they could see the cluster of villagers had formed a circle, their backs to the center. Griffin and Orelia were greeted with cheers and hugs all around, and finally Griffin spoke, his voice rising into the night.*

*“It’s time,” he said.*

*The human circle parted to let Griffin lead his wife inside, as the villagers turned to face them. Orelia smiled back, giving Griffin and their friends a puzzled look – until her eyes fell on the object they had been hiding.*

*The ice sculpture stood three feet tall, a five-pointed star gleaming in a circle of candlelight. Cut like a faceted diamond, every surface danced and flashed.*

*Orelia knew only Griffin could have made this gift for her. “It’s the star from my dream. Oh, Griffin it’s beautiful.”*

*She stepped forward to look more closely at the opening between the star’s two delicate feet. She gasped, raising both mittened hands to her mouth. An intricately carved and painted scene nestled there. Each figure was only a few inches tall, but each was exquisite and lifelike. She placed the carving on her palm and brought it to eye-level.*

*Father Christmas looked back at her, his lean figure straight and strong, his burlap sack over one shoulder, bulging with red apples, green pears, and stalks of holly. In his right hand he held the end of a wide red ribbon. The other end of the ribbon looped around the neck of a white tiger with bright blue eyes. On the ribbon, the tiger’s name gleamed in hand-stamped gold letters: “SAMSON.” And from a tiny basket atop the tiger’s back, a delicate and perfect baby girl reached up to Orelia, her painted eyes alight with laughter.*

*Orelia broke into a beaming smile that was instantly echoed on the watching faces. She raised her eyes to meet Griffin's. Running to him, she threw her arms around his neck and kissed his lips. The villagers whooped and clapped their approval, and the children ran around the adults, calling like flocked birds at sunset.*

*"If you're givin' out kisses for chipped ice, I'll go get my axe," called Mr. Bridle.*

*"So romantic," sighed Mrs. Wells to Mr. Wells, and he pulled her close in agreement.*

*"Just what the village needed tonight, a little hope and happiness," thought Mr. Draper*

*"You've given me the most wonderful gift imaginable," Orelia whispered to Griffin.*

*"Now I will never forget my dream. And neither will anyone else here tonight. Thank you."*

*"The best gift of all is your happiness, my love," whispered Griffin.*

"The next Christmas Eve," Clavier continued, "Mr. Draper served berry-flavored shaved ice to the whole village, right there beside the river. Each serving came in a carved wooden cup complete with legs and fanciful shoes. Even Griffin and Orelia's newborn daughter, Eve, cooed with delight. Mr. Draper called his treat..."

"The Fabulous Frozen Fantasma!" chanted Mark, Nick, Rose, Smoke and Selene, as Shift pounded his scaled tail in perfect rhythm.

"That is exactly what he called it," laughed Clavier. "Do you remember Samson, Shift?"

"Wait, Shift was THERE? Then?" asked Nick.

"Shift?" asked Clavier.

Shift, who often whistled, but never spoke in waking life, nodded once. And the next instant, he wore the head and forelegs of a stunning (if pangolin-sized) white tiger.