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opening extract from

Magic Factory (Cold Spell)

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STORY ONE
Prince Icicle

'AHHHH-CHOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!'

The stone gargoyle sitting on the windowsill at the top of the Tallest Tower of Starling Castle gave the most enormous sneeze.

'AHHH-CHOOO!' The gargoyle sneezed again.

A big gobbet of slimy stuff shot out of his nose and splatted onto one of the turrets opposite.

'Yech!' said Midden the messy little witch. She looked out of the window at the runny green goo trickling down the castle wall. 'That's *disgusting*! What's the matter with you today, Growl?'

'Sorry about that.' Growl the Gargoyle wiped his nose on the tissue Midden handed him. 'Got a shiver there.'

'Gargoyles are made of stone,' said Midden. 'You're not supposed to feel the cold.'

'Wind must have changed round suddenly,' said Growl.

'Oh-oh,' said Midden. 'It's not blowing from the north now, is it?'

'Fraid so,' said Growl. He gave another gigantic sneeze causing the flag on the castle flagpole to blow loose and land on the head of Jamie the Drawbridge Keeper who was standing twenty metres below in the courtyard.

'Oi!' shouted Jamie, looking up. 'What's going on?'

'Excuse me,' snuffled Growl. 'Had a bit of a sneeze.'

'The wind has changed round,' Midden called down to Jamie. 'It's coming from the north. And you know what that means.'

'Only too well,' said Jamie. 'Only too well. Within the next few days there will be a commotion in this Castle.'

Midden pulled her head back inside.

'Keep a good lookout,' she told Growl. 'As soon as you see anything let me know.'

'Will do,' growled Growl.

Growl the Gargoyle was one of the members of

Midden's team of helpers in the Magic Factory in Starling Castle. Growl's main job was to sit on the windowsill of the Tallest Tower and report back on anything that was happening outside. Now he swung his head round to face north, opened his eyes wide, and settled down to watch.

Midden hurried across the room calling to the rest of her team.

'The wind is coming from the north,' she said, 'so you know what we must expect very soon.'

The big hairy beastie known as the Bogle clapped his four hands together and sang:

'*If the north wind does blow,*
Then we will have snow!'

'I love snow,' he said. 'Making snowmen and throwing snowballs. Then there's snow boarding, skiing, sledging, and skating. Snow is Magical Fantastical!'

'Yes, but who brings the snow?' asked Corbie the Clever Crow. He put his head on one side. 'Two people

come to visit us every year at this time, can you recall who they are?'



The Bogle scratched his hairy head with one of his hands. 'Nope,' he said.

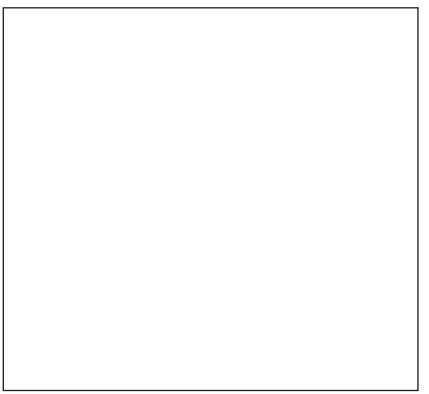
It had been a whole year since snow had fallen on Starling Castle and the Bogle did not have a very good memory.

'The King and Queen of Winter,' said Semolina the Shape Shifter. She was a very useful member of the Magic Factory team, being able to change her shape at a moment's notice. She was also kind and helpful, and now gave the Bogle the answer to Corbie's question. 'Every year, with the cold weather, the King and Queen come in their great sleigh and bring the snow. And they will ice over the pond below the castle so that the children can skate.'

'Me too,' said the Bogle. 'I love skating.'

'I am *so* looking forward to their visit,' purred Cat-Astro-Phe, who was the last member of Midden's team. She was a cat from Ancient Egypt and was used

to being with kings and queens, having once been worshipped as a queen goddess herself. 'It is nice for a cat like me to be among royalty.' Cat lifted a paw and blew daintily on her claws.



While the others had been talking Midden had been busy bringing out brushes and cloths.

'We need to tidy up the Magic Factory,' she said. 'You know how white and clean and shining the King and Queen are. Our workshop will look very grubby beside them when they arrive. Let's get started.'

'Why can't we use magic to do the cleaning?' grumbled the Bogle as Midden handed him a broom. 'I've got some magic dust in my Bogle bag tucked down inside my left Bogle boot.'

'No,' said Midden firmly. 'That would be a waste of good magic. The rules decided at the Magicians' Management Meetings say that we shouldn't use magic as an excuse to be lazy. Tidying up is something that doesn't need magic.' She thrust the broom into one of

the Bogle's four hands. 'Off you go, Bogle. The sooner we begin, the sooner we'll finish. Then, when the King and Queen of Winter bring the snow, we can go and play.'

'I love playing,' said the Bogle. 'It will be great fun throwing snowballs and making snowmen. Won't it, Midden?'

'It's all right for you, Bogle,' said Midden. 'You have your fur to keep you warm. When winter comes my fingers and toes will be freezing.'

'I'll knit you a nice warm scarf and a pair of socks and mitts,' said the Bogle.

'I didn't know you could knit,' said Midden to the Bogle.

'I can't,' said the Bogle. 'But I'll learn. It can't be that difficult. Can it?'

After all the cleaning was finished the Bogle went into Starling town to buy some wool. The people in the town were quite used to seeing the members of the Magic Factory team out and about, so Mrs Pattern who owned the wool shop wasn't surprised when her shop door opened and the Bogle came in.

'I'd like five balls of wool,' the Bogle told Mrs Pattern. 'I'm going to knit Midden two socks, two mitts, and one woolly scarf.'

'You are the nineteenth person that has come to buy wool today,' said Mrs Pattern. 'Winter must be on its way.'

'It is,' said the Bogle. 'Growl the Gargoyle felt the north wind begin to blow this morning so we know the King and Queen of Winter will be here very soon.'

'Well, I've not much wool left now,' said Mrs Pattern. 'Only some balls of white wool.' She gave the Bogle the last five balls of wool in her shop.

The Bogle was very disappointed as he trudged back up the road to Starling Castle. He loved bright colours and he had wanted to knit Midden multi-coloured socks and mitts and scarf. Plain white just wouldn't be the same.

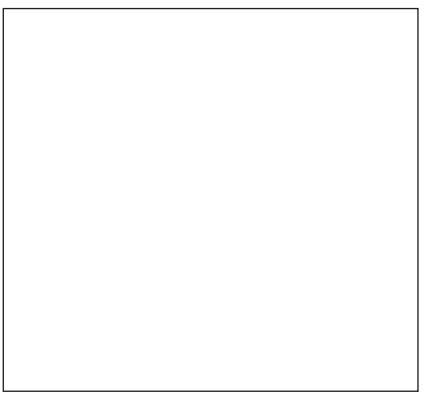
That night in the Tallest Tower of Starling Castle the Magic Factory team sat down in front of a big log fire.

'I think everything is ready for the arrival of the King and Queen of Winter,' said Midden. 'So we can take some time off now.'

Midden liked to relax by reading, and she had found a book in the castle library that she hadn't read. She settled herself into a comfy chair and opened it up.

Corbie the Clever Crow liked reading too. He wasn't so good at holding a book in his claws so he just perched on Midden's shoulder and read her book along with her. He'd gently peck her ear when he'd finished a page and was ready for her to turn over.

On the rug Semolina the Shape Shifter curled herself into one of her favourite shapes of an old cushion. Cat-Astro-Phe, the cat from Ancient Egypt, nestled close beside her to take a catnap.



Growl sat in the window gazing out to the hills in the north. He preferred being outside, but the window was always left open so that he could join in the conversation if he wanted.

So everyone was settled. Apart from the Bogle. When he sat down that night after dinner to begin knitting Midden could see that he was in a grump.

'What's the matter, Bogle?' she asked him.

The Bogle showed Midden his white wool. 'I didn't want a plain colour. I wanted to knit something in lots of different colours.'

'I suppose we could use a tiny drop of magic to colour the wool,' she said.

Midden took the golden key from her desk and unlocked the big cupboard beside the fire. Inside were a pair of Seven League Boots, an Invisibility Cloak, and some other things that were better locked away.

From the top shelf Midden took down the jar of magic dust. She measured some more out into the Bogle's bag that he kept stuffed down the inside of his left boot. Then she put the jar of magic dust back on the top shelf of the cupboard and locked the door.

'Choose five colours,' Midden told the Bogle.

The Bogle closed his eyes and thought for a minute. 'Pink, blue, yellow, red, and green.'

'Now sprinkle some of your magic dust, Bogle,' said Midden, 'and I'll make a spell.'

The Bogle took some magic dust in one of his hands and carefully dusted it over the balls of wool. As he did this Midden whispered:

'This magic trick we want to last
Until cold winter is well past
The five balls of white wool that now are seen
Change to Pink, Blue, Yellow, Red, and Green!'

The five balls of white wool slowly changed colour. One became rose pink, one soft blue, one pale yellow, one dull red, and the last a faded green.

'Happy now?' Midden asked him.

The Bogle looked at his five balls of wool. 'I thought that they would be brighter,' he said truthfully. 'I'll put some more magic dust on them.' He began to open up his Bogle bag.

'No, you can't do that,' said Midden. 'The magic dust would only make the colours more *active*, not brighter. Let me think. Mmmm,' she said after a moment. 'I've got an idea.'

Midden picked up the ball of pink wool. She held it close to her face and screamed.

In an instant the ball of wool turned from rose pink to a screaming shocking pink.

'Oh, I like *that*,' said the Bogle.

'I thought you might,' said Midden. 'There's enough sparkle left in the magic dust to liven the colours up if we give them some energy.'

'Would this do?' Corbie the Crow plucked one of the blue-black feathers from his chest and wafted it over the second ball of wool. The soft blue became a mysterious midnight colour.