

STARDUST IN THE MOLE'S DEN

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The entire land is blanketed in a fluffy snow cover. Inside mole Gabriel's den, a delightful aroma fills the air. Gabriel dances merrily around the kitchen, singing and baking cookies. Preparations for Christmas are in full swing; all that's missing is the Christmas tree. While Gabriel is in the midst of a nap, something tickles his nose quite vigorously. Suddenly, the entire den is covered in stardust. Where did it come from? In the moment the mystery is solved, all of Mole's plans are turned upside down, and his life takes an unexpected turn. A heartwarming tale of the irreplaceable closeness of friends and family.

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Reading Sample

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"We wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas, we wish you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year," sang Frank joyfully. The little mole danced around the kitchen, keeping an eye on the oven where his cookies were turning a delightful golden brown. "Oh, how I adore Christmas time," he exclaimed as he cut out sheep, trees, stars and cars from the dough. "There, that should do. That's all the cookies I can manage to eat during these holidays," he thought contentedly. Frank placed the last tray in the oven, removed his apron, and savoured a cinnamon star. "Mmm, delicious!" When all the cookies were baked, he donned his nightcap and nestled into his warm bed.

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On his nightstand awaited a mug of hot cocoa, which he sipped with delight as he delved into his book of knightly tales. Sleep quickly overtook him, and soon he found himself in the land of dreams. There, mounted on horseback and clad in armour, he endeavoured to rescue Princess Daisy from the clutches of a dragon. Suddenly, a loud clatter jolted him awake. The sleeping mole's hairs stood on end. The dragon vanished, leaving Frank bewildered and staring at the ceiling. A cold gust of air and a dreadful howl filled the room, prompting the mole to investigate.

He was feeling quite uneasy. The howling was growing louder and louder, and the closer he got to the hallway window, the louder it became. No wonder, the window was broken. The only window in the den. Thick snowflakes were falling on his face and soon he was completely covered in snow. "Oh no, a terrible snowstorm in the middle of the night, only four days before Christmas Eve! I don't even have a Christmas tree yet, and now this!" grumbled Frank and went to look for some wooden boards, a hammer and nails to stop the wild dance of the snowflakes. He climbed back in bed, rubbed his snout and pulled the blanket over his head.

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After a more peaceful end to the night, Frank sneezed himself awake. "Aah-choo!" His snout was irritating him, so he grabbed a tissue and blew. He stared in amazement at the piece of soft paper, which was glistening like a magic charm. "Hm, since when do I have golden dust in my snout?" wondered the mole, smiled to himself and shuffled to the broken window.

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The ground was completely wet from snow. What is this? The mole rubbed his sleepy eyes to

see better. The place was full of glitter. It probably had something to do with last night's storm. Frank was very curious, the matter demanded immediate inspection. He put on his cap, scarf and winter boots and trudged determinedly towards the door. But oh no, it wouldn't budge. Frank threw all his weight against the door, but it was no use. It was probably buried under a deep layer of snow. He pondered. He dashed to the window, pulled the nails out so that the boards came loose, revealing a layer of half-frozen snow. With his strong paws and sharp claws, he managed to dig out a tunnel.

He found himself in a wild winter landscape: broken branches, fallen trees and a thick coat of snow as far as the eye could see. The sunrays tickled his snout, and when he turned his head away to make it stop, he noticed the familiar sparkly dust he had previously found at home. Like a detective, he followed the glistening tracks past the snowed-in doors, through the bushes, crossing a frozen stream on all fours into the nearby pine forest. The ground was covered in cones and needles that the storm had blown off the trees. Inside the forest, the blanket of snow was thinner and was easier to walk through. But which way? The golden trail had ended in the first clearing. He lied down in the snow, staring thoughtfully at the winter sky.

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Sitting high up in the branches of the tallest and the most beautiful pine tree was a little bird. Strange, it was completely still. "Holy moly, if that isn't a worm with sparkling wings!" mumbled the mole. Swift as a weasel, he ran to the tree and climbed the branches. High up in the tree, he froze for a moment. Before him lay the most beautiful being he had ever seen. It wasn't a worm; lying on the snowy branch was a tiny fairy.

As he came closer, he saw that her wing was broken and her dress was torn. "Hello," Frank whispered cautiously. "Miss fairy... fairyyyy!" As she didn't respond, he nudged her pale nose gently, but her eyes remained closed. "Poor thing, she probably got caught in last night's storm. She took a bad hit. I can't leave her here," he said resolutely.

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He untied his boots and took them off. Carefully lifting the fairy, he put her on his soft black back and tied her on using his laces and scarf. Then he climbed down the tree trunk, digging his claws in the wood. He moved slowly, holding tightly to the rugged tree, giving his abdominal muscles a real workout. When he reached the ground, he lifted the fairy in his arms and trudged through the snow out of the pine forest, over the icy creek, through the bushes, all the way to his den.

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As the entrance was still blocked, they had to use the tunnel. Frank lay on his back and climbed

down to the apartment slowly with the fairy in his arms. He set the magical being down on the bed and covered her. He went to fetch some more blankets and started the fireplace to make the den nice and warm. There was nothing more he could do in that moment and the fairy was safe.

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He went out to clear the snow blocking the entrance. He couldn't imagine having to climb up and down through the broken window all the time. And he still needed to find a small tree to put up in the den. A lot of snow had fallen, and the bottom layer was solid ice. The mole shovelled tirelessly, sometimes a little faster, other times a little slower, all the while thinking of the fairy lying in his den. Who is she? And where did she come from? Hours passed and the sun was slowly setting when Frank finally managed to clear out the snow.

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Pleased with his work, he returned to his warm home and tiptoed to the bed. The beautiful fairy was still lying there, completely peaceful and motionless. Only the slight rising and falling of the blanket indicated that she was alive. Frank moved away and went into the kitchen. He was worried. He leaned his back against the wall, thinking: "How can I help her? I don't even know what fairies eat or drink." He rummaged in the cupboards and his medicine cabinet and put everything that he found useful on the table. Bandages, plasters, an ointment, colourful fabric, a needle and a thread for a new dress and various kinds of fruits, herbs and roots. He boiled some water and threw some roots and herbs in the pot. The kitchen was soon filled with the smell of a delicious soup. When it cooled off enough, he took it to the patient and roused her enough to spoon-feed her the soup. Then he brought some water and soap and carefully washed her face with a cloth. He looked at her closely. Her skin was gentle as silk and white as snow, her lips were carnation red and her hair was sparkling with the light of a million stars. Magically beautiful! Then he put some ointment on her wounds and bruises. He made a brace for the fairy's broken wing so that it would grow back faster. He tucked her in, settled down in the big armchair next to the bed, read his stories of knights out loud and eventually fell asleep.

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The next morning, he was awoken by a confused groaning. The fairy was tossing in bed, her eyes closed, saying: "It's too late, oh no: a climbing helmet, marionettes, rainbow boots, a book of songs..."

Frank flinched, jumped up and took her by her hand. She was burning up and drenched in sweat. She was delirious with fever. He immediately got some cold compresses to cool her down and covered her with a fresh blanket. She slowly settled down, her breathing grew

steadier and she fell asleep. Frank built a fire, had breakfast and went to check on the fairy again to make sure she was sound asleep, then left the den.

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The sun was already high when he started looking for an appropriate Christmas tree. He wasn't too picky this time because he didn't want to leave the fairy on her own for too long. He headed to the first appropriately sized tree, raised his axe and swung with all his might. He felled it with a single blow. He grabbed the tree and marched back home. "Sweet mother of beetles!" he suddenly exclaimed, let go of the tree and ran as fast as his paws would carry him. A feverish fairy was lying in the snow. "What on earth are you doing, little fairy? You can't just go walking in the snow with a fever, wearing only your thin silk dress. You'll never get better this way!" The fairy looked at him with her shiny, sky blue eyes and said sadly: "My wing, something is wrong, why can't I move, it's an emergency!" She stood up again and tried to flap her wing but collapsed in the snow, biting her lip from pain. "Come," said the mole, offering her his paw to take her back to the den.

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They made themselves comfortable in the kitchen. He ran to get a blanket and wrapped her in it. Out of nowhere, he conjured up two mugs of hot cocoa and some cookies. They were sipping the milky drink in silence, then the fairy gently said: "I'm Stella. And what is your name, my saviour?"

"Frank Forest," he said. He couldn't hold back his laugh, adding "and I am very honoured to have saved a beautiful being like yourself!" They broke the ice and started a pleasant conversation. They continued by the fireplace, completely losing track of time. The sun had set long ago and the stars had already reported for duty on the night sky.

They truly had a lot to say to each other. Stella was dying to know when, where and how Frank had found her. When he told her that he first mistook her for a worm, she laughed boisterously. "Haha, me, a worm? Well, no one has ever called me that! A Christmas fairy turned worm. Hihi!" "A Christmas fairy?" Frank marvelled. "What does that mean?" "Well, a Christmas fairy. I fly around the world, collecting wishes from those who don't write letters, either because they haven't learned yet or don't want to or for any other reason. Until the 24th of December, 4pm sharp. Then I go back to the North Pole, deliver the wishes to the Christmas elves and later help Santa with last minute preparations for a night of gift-giving around the world." "Ooo," said Frank excitedly. He was sitting by the fireplace with a real-life Christmas fairy. But Stella's gaze grew dark. "It's already the 22nd of December, there must be a lot of children staring at the starry sky, sending their wishes to the stars right now. The empty stars in my hair are tickling me, and I'm sitting here eating cookies and drinking cocoa. I'm completely useless!" You can't even move, your wing has not healed yet. It's not your fault that you got

caught in a snowstorm,” said Frank, trying to comfort her. “Don’t be sad, everything will be ok! “Tell me again how these stars work.” “There are millions of stars in my golden hair and they start twinkling when someone makes a wish. Christmas wishes are strictly confidential, no one else but me can hear or see them, so I lock them away in the stars,” explained Stella, rubbing her sleepy eyes. “Really? Can I take a look?” asked Frank, grabbing a lock of her hair in his paw. It was true; if he took a good look, he could see the shining and twinkling of the stars. “Beautiful,” said the mole, remembering that he hadn’t made a single wish that year. But there was nothing he wanted at that moment, he was simply happy. He tended the fairy’s wounds and took a look at her wing. “It’s healing very quickly, you can probably make it to the North Pole in time. If you grit your teeth, you can make it.” Stella smiled happily and collapsed on the bed in exhaustion.

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She was soon sound asleep. Frank smiled, glad that the fairy was feeling better. His happiness was keeping him wide awake, so he grabbed a needle, a thread and some red fabric and started sewing. He was going to make a dress, a beautiful dress for Stella. A Christmas fairy can’t do her job in torn rags. He sewed all night, and when the first rays of morning dawn broke, the dress was ready. He hid it away and made breakfast.

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He surprised Stella with some elder tea and toast with raspberry jam. Stella cheerfully joined him in the kitchen. “Aw, raspberry jam. How did you know I love raspberry jam?” she said excitedly, taking a bite of her toast in delight. Her jam-stained mouth chatted happily: “I feel completely reborn. My wounds have almost healed and I can move my wing again, see, Frank?” She flew up and down wildly, then suddenly cried out in pain: “Ouch! I guess I should rest a while longer.” Frank tried to keep her busy. He went to get the sled, suggesting they take a walk in the winter landscape.

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The walk turned into a real adventure. They stopped where Frank found Stella and built a snow mole with a fairy on its back. Throwing themselves in the snow, they merrily counted the drifting snowflakes falling from the sky. They quickly finished the nuts and dried fruit that they had brought with them and went sledding on the nearest hill. It was already getting dark when they were walking back to the mole’s den. They stopped on the way to pick up the tree that Frank had fallen the day before, put it on the sled and brought it to the mole’s kitchen. It stayed there, as the little fairy and mole fell into a peaceful slumber after a bowl of warm porridge.

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The following morning, Stella and Frank were gloomily eating breakfast. It was the 24th of December. They knew it was time to say goodbye. Stella unwrapped Frank's gift, pleasantly surprised. "It fits perfectly! Thank you for everything, dear Frank," said Stella, twirled in her red dress and gave the mole a big hug. Then she reached into her hair, pulled out the most beautiful star and handed it to him. "This one is for you! I know that you will find the perfect place for it." The den glowed with starry dust as Stella disappeared.

Frank stared at the glitter filling up the room for a long time, holding the star tightly. He was alone again. To distract himself, he made himself a bowl of warm milk with honey, put on some Christmas music and started decorating the tree.

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Red balls, nuts, cookies, cones, angels, birds and chocolate hearts filled the tree. A nativity scene underneath... It was magical as always. But something was missing. Frank took a good look at the tree but he didn't know what he forgot. He was singing and dancing around, but his voice sounded raspy and his feet were heavy. The annual reading of Christmas stories was boring, the nice bubble bath was not the least bit relaxing, the sumptuous dinner of earthworms in an herb crust tasted differently, not as tasty as usual. He went to bed sad. He took another look at the gently lit space and his eyes stopped on Stella's star. Stella! He missed Stella! He got up, picked up the star and put it on top of the Christmas tree. Oh, how brightly it shone, as if illuminated by pure gold. He cozied up in bed, staring longingly at the twinkling star, thought of the little fairy and dozed off.

He didn't even notice a wish escaping his thoughts, his deepest wish that made the star jump up wildly.

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"Aah-choo! Choo, choo, aah-choo!" Frank sneezed. He rubbed his nose in irritation and looked for a handkerchief. He blew so hard he ripped the paper. A gold cloud whooshed into the room through the little hole. "What is this?" said the mole angrily and went to look at the mirror. What do you know, his snout was covered in glitter. He rubbed his eyes and looked in the mirror again. The mirror reflected a hairy figure, a black mole that looked like him. With one small difference: its coat was completely covered in tiny stars. Frank could not believe his eyes. He sighed in surprise: "Stella!" The female mole smiled at him and fell into his arms. She whispered in his ear in a familiar fairy voice: "I knew you would find the right spot for the star. Your heart will do the rest!"