

ABNEY KELLY & THE YULETIDE SHENANIGANS

Chapter 6: The Story of Nicholas Kringle

Excerpt

A thick, stew-like fog encircled Oberon House. The Pucas were supposed to be taking them to see the enormous Christmas tree in the square, but there was no way to go out safely. If you stuck your hand into the mist, it disappeared before your eyes, and in general, had a strange-uneasy feel to it. Everyone was very content to stay in and help decorate the house Christmas tree in the Ocean Room.

The decorations were colorful and random; Agatha didn't do themes for her tree like Abney's family did, but it was still fun, and everyone chipped in. Blythe taught them to string popcorn, and Wilbur and Snozbert were taking colored glass beads and morphing them into different shapes and figures by request. It was like watching master glassblowers at work, but they never heated the marbles. They were able to manipulate them with their bare hands.

"I love Christmas trees," Abney said as she looked transfixed at the glowing masterpiece.

"It's a Yule tree," Feo said as she came in with a tray of sweet orange tea and began pouring cups.

"Is there a difference?" Abney asked curiously.

"Oh, most definitely. Christmas trees are a pagan tradition you know, taught to Fleetlings by the Fae," Feo said carefully. "Anyway, the most important difference is that a Yule tree is always a live tree. Fleetlings use fake trees and all sorts of nonsense these days. They've forgotten the traditions of old, but a Yule tree must be alive."

"I think it's time for a story," Agatha said from her armchair by the fire. She took a deep drag from her hookah pipe through the black hole in her neck. "Come closer, sugars, closer," she bid them, and they all sat on the floor near her feet. "You are all aware of the legend of The Santa Claus?"

"Everyone knows that one," Zoey replied.

"Ya, ya," Domino agreed. "The dude who knows if you're naughty or nice. We all know how it goes." Abney wasn't sure why but she suddenly felt edgy, and goosebumps rose on her arms.

"That's the one, honey," Agatha agreed. "I suppose you know him as a fat, jolly, man who passes out gifts?"

“Every December the 25th,” Domino smiled.

“That’s the version known to most Fleetlings,” Agatha continued.

“But I’m going to tell you the real story. Heed my words. They are much more paramount now than they have been in many years.” The teenagers and Pucas moved closer to the fire, unconsciously wanting to chase away the dark and its accompanying shadows.

“This story starts out as all good tales do. Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there lived a lonely king. Not just any king though, The Winter King, Jack Frost, himself. Blythe, a little help please?” Agatha breathed out. Blythe whispered a few words and blew them into Agatha’s smoke. A sad man appeared in the escaping vapor, and the story took to life as Agatha started to speak again, “He longed for a child to love and fill his days with joy, but no maid could carry the child of the frozen monarch. Frustrated and grief-stricken, he sought out the great witch, Baba Yaga.

“‘Grandmother,’ he begged. ‘I am alone and childless. Is there anything you can do to help me? Is there a way for me to have a child?’ Baba Yaga thought for a moment, looked deep into his heart, and knew he was sincere. She decided to help The Winter King, but he must bring her three things: Snow, from the coldest peak, coal from the deepest mine, and a feather from the brightest Phoenix.

“So The Winter King scoured the Earth until he had everything the witch had asked for. First, Baba Yaga took the snow and patted it into the shape of a girl, then she picked up the coal and wrapped the phoenix feather around it, the coal ignited melting the feather into it. Finally, she forced the coal into the snow girl where her heart would have been. The winds picked up and whirled violently around them, but The Winter King and Baba Yaga stood fast, and when the snow settled again, a small pale girl stood before them. Her skin was blue, like a frozen glacier, and her hair white as snow, with a hint of the Northern Lights about it. The King loved her instantly, but as he reached for her, Baba Yaga stepped between them.

“‘Nothing is free, Winter King,’ she said. ‘A time will come when I will ask you for a favor, and you must agree to do as I ask.’ The King, being so close to his heart’s desire could do nothing but agree. Baba Yaga released the girl to him with a warning.

“‘She is snow and ice, but her heart is fire. She must never lose control of her emotions. You must teach her to remain calm in even the worst of storms. If she loses control, your daughter will melt and return to the water from whence she came.’