

Marie Štumpfová & Radek Malý

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The First Snow

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Albatros



The background is a watercolor illustration of a snowy landscape. In the center, a large number of small, dark birds are flying in a circular path. The ground is covered in snow, with various plants and flowers scattered throughout. The colors are soft and muted, with a palette of blues, greens, and browns. The overall style is delicate and artistic.

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Illustrations © Marie Štumpfová, 2021
Text © Radek Malý, Marie Štumpfová, 2021
Translated by Mark Worthington
Edited by Rhena Curran

Suddenly, in the morning, it was there.
Light and fluffy, quiet as a lamb.
And the very first of the year. White and pristine.
Covering the hills and the trees, the fields and the roofs.
Good for hiding in.

Snow covered the village where Stefan and Agnes lived with their mom.
The village was quite ordinary yesterday.
Now, as if by magic, it's been transformed. There's snow everywhere!
It's as if someone cast a spell overnight.





It suddenly seems brighter in the room. Even Kitty is looking out curiously. The light wakes up Stefan and Agnes earlier than usual. Even though it's Saturday, and they could sleep in if they wanted to, they run to the window in their pajamas. Everything is different. Everything is covered with a white blanket. "Isn't it beautiful, Stefan?" "Oh, yes! It's like magic."



"Yay! Mommy, it's been snowing! Can we go and play outside?"

"Of course you can, right after breakfast. Make sure you put on your coats."

Stefan asks: "Are you coming with us, Mommy?" Mom shakes her head.

"I have to cook and sweep the snow off the path."



"Here, take some seed with you."

"Seed in winter?" wonders Agnes.

Perhaps it will come in handy.

Agnes's mother helps her put on her boots.

The children put on their hats and gloves and run outside.



Where the lawn was,
there is now a white plain as far as the eye can see.
It's like being in another world.
"Agnes, can you see that pool? Where did it come from?"
Agnes laughs. "That's the sandbox, silly!"



"And what's that molehill?"
"That's probably the ball," guesses Stefan. "You just can't see it.
Look how deep the snow is!" he calls.
He makes a little path with his footprints. Everything is white.
But the white has lots of other colors in it, thinks Agnes.



"We're like nomadic reindeer herders!" Stefan calls out. He's pulling a sled, perhaps he thinks he's a reindeer. "Or we can be angels," suggests Agnes. She's making wings in the snow with her arms. "Stefan, come and make one too!"

Stefan makes a little angel of his own. "The snow's falling in my eyes," says Agnes joyfully. "And in my mouth!" shouts Stefan. It feels pleasantly cold. Like winter-flavored ice cream.

Here and there in the snow, there are prints.
A skilled tracker can read them like a message.
Here you can see where a squirrel jumped from the tree into the snow.
And a bird walked this way.
Maybe a crow or a raven.

“Whose are these prints? Do you think it’s a hare?” asks Stefan.
“Look where they lead!” Agnes replies.
A short way off sits Kitty, licking her paws. The tracks are hers.



Stefan takes a shovel and scoops snow off the path.
So much snow in one pile. Mom'll be happy.
Perhaps she'll come and play with us later.



Then the work begins. Snow is good for building.
They get nice and warm while they're doing it.
Agnes rolls a ball of snow around the frozen larch trees and roses.
She leaves a zig-zagging trail behind her.



“Let’s ride it to the north—hop on!”

“Hold on, Stefan. We have to say the magic words to make it come alive.”

Agnes starts: “When the first snow starts to fall . . .”

Her brother finishes “. . . it’s like a fairy tale for all!”

A pile of snow is full of secrets.

It’s like clouds—it always reminds you of something.

“Look, here’s a snout!” calls Agnes.

“And I can see ears and a paw,” says Stefan gleefully.

“It’s a whole bear. White as snow.”

“The garden is our Snowland,” says Agnes.

“I’ll check the map!” calls out Stefan the adventurer.

“Through the valley, then across the frozen lake,” says Stefan looking at the map.

“It’s this way. This is the way we get there.” He points to the mountain peaks.

They ride on the bear’s back and the brightness is everywhere.

Towering around them are huge cliffs and glistening icefalls.

Stefan leads the expedition, while Agnes looks around with joy.



The bear carries the children to where the ocean freezes.
Huge pieces of ice are floating on the water. "Those are ice floes!" calls Stefan.
The bear starts to run and the children hold their breath. And then it jumps!
It leaps from floe to floe, while the wind whistles around Agnes's ears.

"Look, walruses! Or are they seals? They're not afraid of us."
Suddenly, a large sheet of ice on the surface starts to rock.
A huge tail fin rises out of the water.
It's a whale, waving them on their way.






After jumping between the ice sheets, they're back on dry land. They continue on their way and arrive at the edge of a forest.

At times, they think they catch a glimpse of an arctic fox or an alpine hare. The bear slows its pace and the children become alert, looking ahead. Stefan calls out: "I see signs of civilization!" "That's our bird feeder," points out Agnes happily. "And our apple trees! We're back in our garden again."



A winter scene with a snow-covered tree, a bird feeder, and two children. A dog is also present in the foreground. The scene is set in a snowy landscape with a large tree in the foreground and a small house in the background. The children are wearing winter clothing, and the dog is looking up at the bird feeder.

But the feeder is completely empty.
The birds must be hungry.
“Is there anything we can give them?” Agnes asks.
“You can’t feed birds just anything. They only eat certain things.”

“Seed would be best,” thinks Agnes.
That’s when they remember what their mom gave them.
“Mommy’s clever,” says Stefan.
They pour sunflower and pumpkin seeds into the feeder
until it’s full.



Stefan and Agnes run away and hide. They keep quiet.
In no time at all, they're here. Birds of all kinds and colors.
They peck at the seeds, twittering all the while.
"How lovely," think the children.

"See that great tit? And that pretty one with the colorful feathers?"
At that moment, Kitty appears and the birds vanish.
They fly off somewhere, and the cat disappears with them.

Agnes is afraid that Kitty wants to eat one of the birds.
Stefan looks around. Those are her tracks.
“Let’s run after her!”



The paw prints lead all over the garden.
Even over the water pump with the icicle hanging from it.
Under a blanket of snow, everything is different and new.
Something is glinting over there.
The tracks lead in that direction!

They finally catch up with Kitty. She looks like a tiger guarding a palace.
“A palace? Where did that come from?” the children wonder.
It used to be a greenhouse for growing cucumbers.
Now it’s a beautiful palace, made entirely of ice.
On its surface, white light is refracted into many colors.

For a moment, Stefan and Agnes are speechless.
They’ve never seen such a beautiful sight.
“When the first snow starts to fall, it’s like a fairy tale for all!”
whispers Agnes in amazement.



The birds are here as well. They perch on the frosty branches of bushes. Fortunately, Kitty the tiger doesn't notice them. She's guarding the entrance. Stefan and Agnes breathe on the glass.


They make dark circles in the ice flowers. Peeking curiously inside, they see a bucket and a small rake in the corner. Or could it be the snow queen's crown and scepter?



The palace is beautiful not only inside,
but also from the outside.
The children admire it from all angles.
“Agnes, what’s that sparkling over there? Can you see it too?”



“Yes, I can see it. It looks like an icicle.”
“It’s not. It’s snowflakes on a string.”
“It’s a necklace. Where on earth
did it come from?”



Agnes and Stefan run to their mother.
“Mommy, look what we found outside!
It’s treasure from the ice palace!”

Mom calls from the window: “What kind of treasure?”
“The snow queen’s necklace!” they reply.
“Well, what a surprise! It’s mine,” exclaims mom.
“I got it as a gift for my first school report.
I lost it many years ago, when I was a little girl.
It’s like magic, finding it again.”



“When the first snow starts to fall, it’s like a fairy tale for all,” laughs mom. She looks like a little girl again. Her eyes are sparkling. “You’ve cleared it away beautifully,” she says happily. “There’s so much of it!”

“Mommy, come with us. We want to show you our bear.”
“And the ice palace, and everything!”
They all go outside to play.
They’re happy. They’re all together.



THE FIRST SNOW

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Translated by Mark Worthington

Edited by Rhena Curran

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Marie Štumpfová is a visual artist, illustrator, and author who loves crossing over into other disciplines and graphic techniques. In recent years, her primary focus has shifted towards her freelance work, which encompasses drawing, painting, and printmaking, and she has transitioned away from creating content for children and now concentrates on exploring feminine themes. As a member of the Association of Czech Graphic Artists, Marie has earned numerous prestigious book awards in the Czech Republic, where she lives.

Radek Malý is a Czech writer, poet, translator, and university teacher. He has achieved international success through his young adult book *Franz Kafka: A Man of His Time and Our Own* (2017) and his picture book *Our Cat's Day* (2023). His non-fiction books *Atlas of Extinct Animals* (2021), *Atlas of Endangered Animals* (2021), and *Atlas of Prehistoric Animals* (2024) have been translated into several languages, and his poetry collection for children *Postman Wind* (2011) was entered on the IBBY Honour List.



“When the first snow starts to fall, it’s like a fairy tale for all.”

Stefan and Agnes can’t wait for it to snow. Finally, one morning, they see the brightness through the window and run outside happily into the garden. Where lawn was, there is a white plain as far as the eye can see. They ride through the snowy countryside on a bear’s back. What’s that, sparkling over there? Is it really true that the first snow is magical?



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