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SPECTACULAR

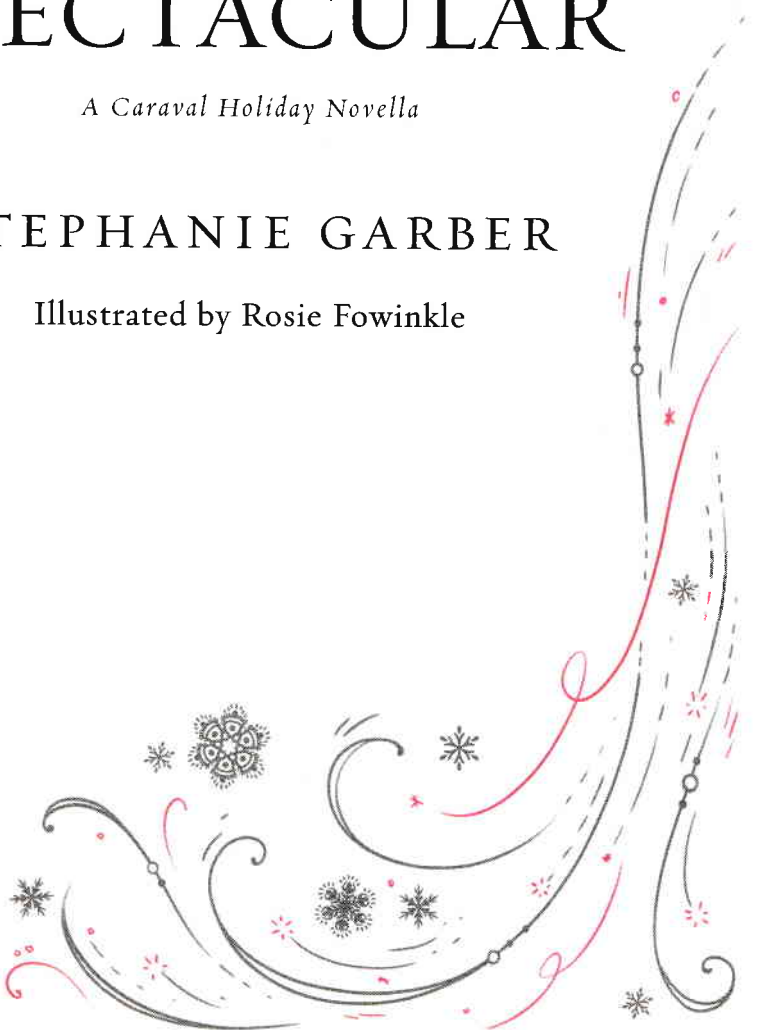
A Caraval Holiday Novella

STEPHANIE GARBER

Illustrated by Rosie Fowinkle



FLATIRON
BOOKS
NEW YORK





The invitations arrive in boxes. They appear at the stroke of twelve—noon, not midnight. It would be tragic for these invitations to get lost in the dark or stolen by the greedy stars.

The boxes are a perfect snow-white wood and the width of one page.

Oohs fill the air as the boxes are found on doorsteps and windowsills across the city. Snowflakes are carved

into the top of each one, and people's names are burned into the sides.

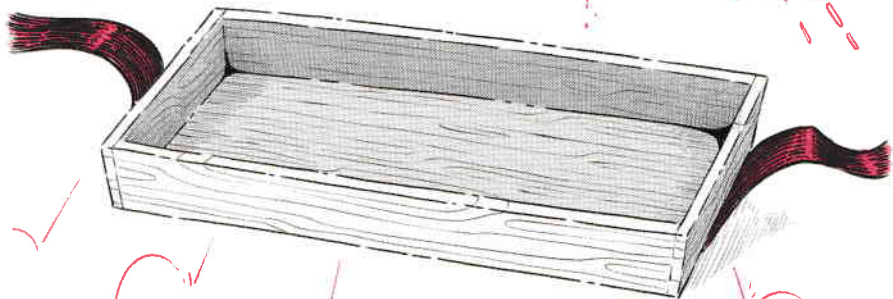
Before, the air was filled with cold and fog, but now it's filled with the magic of *what could be*.

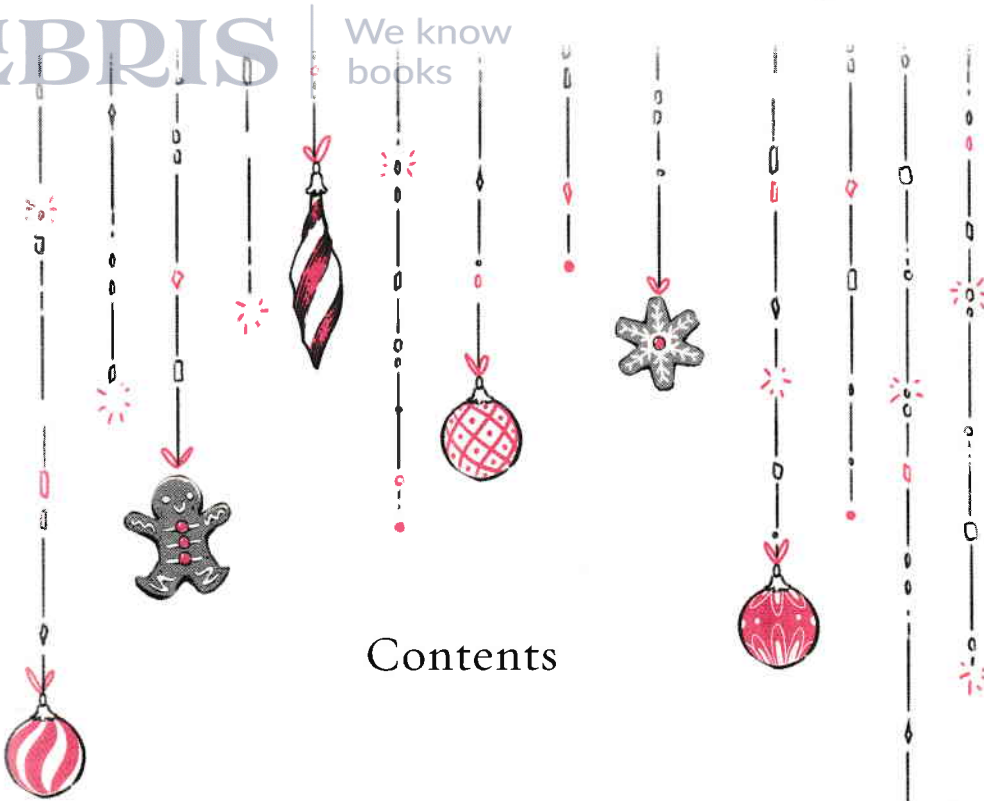
Some people open the boxes right away, quickly untying the red velvet ribbons that seal the wood in place of locks. Others take their time. Boxes like these have never just appeared across Valenda before. Many people wish to savor the moment as they bring their pretty boxes inside cottages and castles and flats overlooking snow-covered streets full of peddlers who now all wish to go home and see if they've received boxes as well.

It's this wishing, this wonder, that seeps into the wood of the box, dropping down to the invitation inside, so that when the lid is lifted, the sheet inside appears blank at first.

Then . . .

The page crackles like a log in a fire about to break. There's a spark, a sizzle, and a tiny pop of light that comes from the center of the sheet. The light spreads like a firework, covering the page in shimmering golden script:





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The Whisper Gazette

Special Holiday Edition

A History of Wonder Makes for a Wonderful History

By **Kutlass Knightlinger**

Some say the Great Holiday is a celebration fabricated by the guild of toymakers. Others say it was the seamstresses and suit-cutters who plotted and schemed to create a day to sell gowns and gloves and silk cravats that would only be worn once. Then, of course, there are those who say it was the confectioners' sugary-sweet idea.

But the truth is, the Great Holiday was brought to the Meridian Empire by Northern Princess Infinity Larkspur, who married Emperor Xavier Xavier IV during the seventh year of the Xavier dynasty.

Upon moving to the Meridian Empire, Princess Infinity was evidently quite disturbed to find how few days there were for her subjects to simply celebrate—to spread cheer, joy, and love.

She believed people needed

to make merry. To anticipate. To wish. To give.

And so, the Great Holiday came into being.

Other new holidays were born after that. Princess Infinity turned old myths and stories into holidays in the same effortless way that other royals turned indiscretions into scandalous stories.

It is true, the seamstresses and toymakers and confectioners all benefited a great deal from the creation of this holiday.

But can't the same be said for all of us?

I might have outgrown toys, but I hope never to outgrow joy and dressing up and giving gifts.

This year, I confess, I do not have a beloved special someone to give a gift to. But I have a gift ready, just in case my eye is caught at Empress Scarlett's party.

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IN NEED OF A LAST-MINUTE HOLIDAY GIFT?
SOME HOLIDAY FUN?
OR HOLIDAY MAGIC?

HEAD OVER TO

GARLAND STREET

THE GREATEST STREET IN ALL OF HOLIDAYLAND!

WE HAVE SWEETS, WE HAVE TREATS,
and we might even have a few tricks up our
PUFFED HOLIDAY SLEEVES!

BUT HURRY!

GARLAND STREET IS OPEN FOR ONE DAY ONLY!

DOORS OPEN AT DAWN ON
GREAT HOLIDAY
EVE EVE!

SUGARPLUMS
FREE
FOR CHILDREN!

I

Snow Globes and
Granny's Cookies

Later, it would be obvious that uncanny things were afoot in the city of Valenda. **M**ost people inside the famed city couldn't see what was happening. But, as with many things in life, those watching from the outside could see it all perfectly.

After the Great Holiday was over, ship captains who had been at sea would say, "It looked as if a great glass cloche had been placed over the whole of the

city, turning it into an enormous swirling snow globe. I swear it on my grandpappy's teeth!"

The swearing wouldn't be necessary.

Even before the Great Holiday began, ships had already stopped arriving at Valenda's port. Although few people noticed this amid all the holiday fuss and merriment.

There was only one young sailor at the docks who thought himself too sensible for holiday cheer. He was only seventeen, but he wore a smart navy hat that made him a full two inches taller.

Unlike the rest in the city, who all seemed to have their heads stuck in candy cane clouds, this sensible sailor had noticed the missing ships, and he'd gone off to find another levelheaded person to tell. He'd marched importantly through the disturbingly festive port with a list of ships that had failed to arrive.

He wasn't going to be distracted by all the larger-than-life candy canes that now lined the streets, the spiced cider carts that seemed to be everywhere, or the people spontaneously breaking into song.

But then he saw it. Sitting in the middle of the street was an enormous gingerbread house piping cinnamon smoke out of a chimney covered in delicate curves of intricate white icing.

The sailor stopped in his tracks.

It was just like the cookie houses his granny used to make—though his granny’s didn’t have the magical cinnamon smoke, and her gingerbread houses were always far too small to step inside of. But every other detail was there. The pastel gumdrops covering the gigantic roof, the sparkling silver sugar sprinkles dusting the large windows, the swirling red-and-white peppermint candies lining the oversize door.

For a full minute, he couldn’t move.

It had been two Holidays ago that his granny had passed. And it was easier to pretend that the Great Holiday wasn’t happening than to celebrate without her.

The sailor finally shook himself. He reminded himself of what he needed to do. He needed to report the missing ships. But then the gingerbread door cracked open and he swore he heard his granny’s voice: “Come in out of



the snow, Pierre. I've made some fresh hot chocolate and your favorite cookies."

The scent of butterspice stars with nutmeg icing wafted through the air.

Could she really be here? thought Pierre. It was not a sensible thing to think. But Pierre was starting to think that being sensible during the Great Holiday was actually quite foolish.

"Come inside, sweet boy," Granny called.

What else was there for Pierre to do?

He couldn't resist seeing Granny once more. And he



really didn't want to say no to
his favorite cookies.

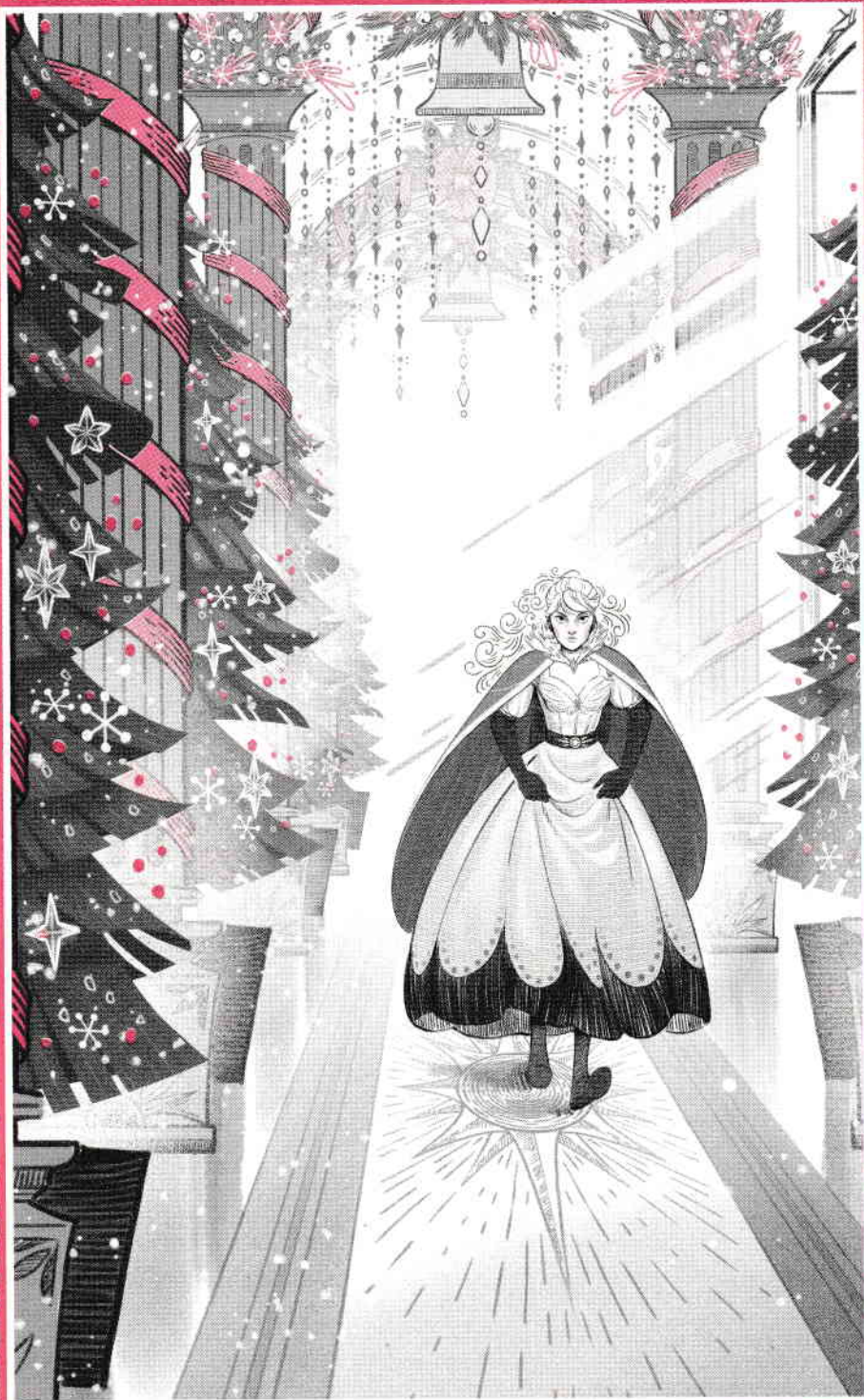
He also might have been just a little bit bewitched.

Pierre's was one of many peculiar stories that would
spread after the Great Holiday ended.

But the most popular story, of course, would be that
of Princess Donatella Dragna.

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2

Great Holiday Eve Eve

A large, stylized red initial letter 'D' with a decorative flourish at the bottom left.

Donatella Dragna was unaware that she was living underneath the dome of a giant snow globe.

All Tella knew was that it was Great Holiday Eve Eve and . . .

It was snowing inside her sister's palace?

Tella briefly stopped walking. Her frost-blue skirts swished around the toes of her shoes as the air