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Opening extract from

Laura-Bella

Written by

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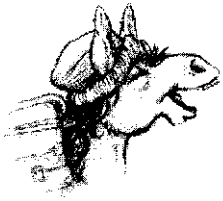
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Who's Who in the Kingdom of the Frosty Mountains

The girls and their pets



Jessica Juniper – *Ballerina from the western Rocks*



Sinbad – *Jessica's pet donkey*



Crystal Coldwater – *Ballerina from the northern Lake*



Pollux – *Crystal's pet white fox*



Laura-Bella Bergamotta – *Ballerina from the southern Valley*



Mr Melchior – *Laura-Bella's pet tiger*



Ursula of the Boughs – *Ballerina from the eastern Forest*



Dorothea – *Ursula's pet bear*



Valentina de la Frou – *Ballerina from the City*



Olympia – *Valentina's pet eagle*

Some other Ballerinas

Rubellina Goodfellow – *Ballerina from the City, and the Chancellor's daughter*

Jo-Jo Marshall – *Another Ballerina from the City, and Rubellina's best friend*

The Teachers

Mistress Odette – *the Headmistress*

Mistress Camomile – *a Ballet teacher*

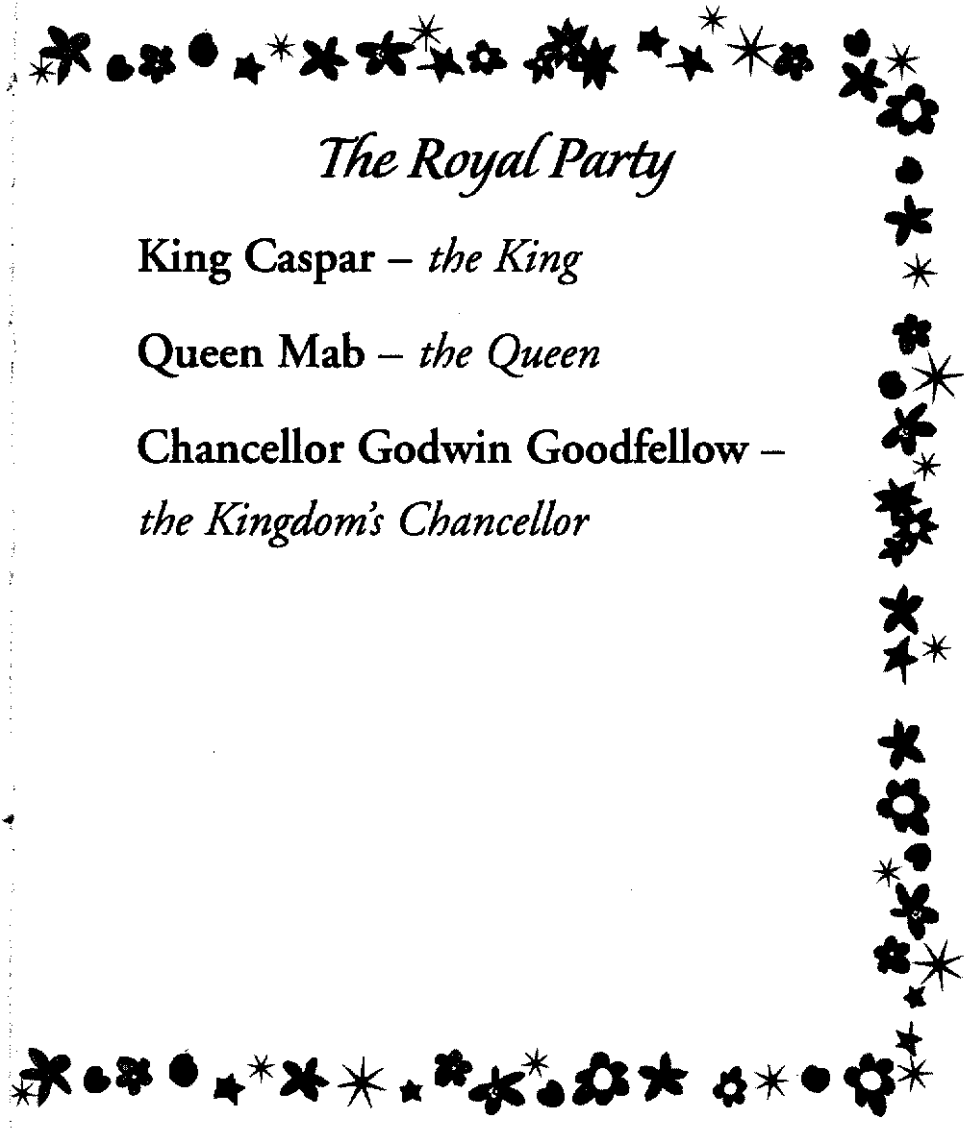
Master Lysander – *another Ballet teacher, also known as Mustard Stockings*

Master Silas – *the History of Ballet teacher*

Mistress Hawthorne – *the Gym teacher*

Mistress Babette – *the Costume, Hair and Make-up teacher*

Master Jacques – *the Mime teacher*



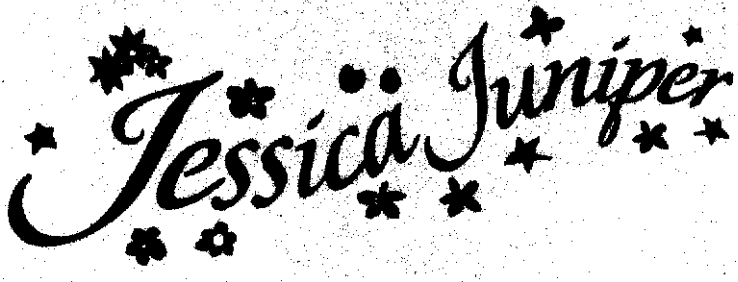
The Royal Party

King Caspar – *the King*

Queen Mab – *the Queen*

Chancellor Godwin Goodfellow – *the Kingdom's Chancellor*

Don't miss the first book in the series



It's Jessica's first day at Ballet School and she wants to make a good impression. So when the teachers think she has played a practical joke on the High Minister's daughter, Jessica and Sinbad the donkey have to try extra hard. But things keep going wrong. Can Jessica prove her innocence?

Twinkle your toes with the Ballerinas and their talking pets!

Prologue

When I was a young Ballerina, an admirer gave me a gift.

It was only a frosted-glass perfume bottle, filled with a sweet scent of lemon and orange. But my admirer told me that



the bottle was the most precious thing he could give, because there was a magical Kingdom inside.

I didn't believe him at first.

But that night, I had a very special dream. I dreamed of a magical Kingdom, the most beautiful land I'd ever seen, filled with delightful people and their very special animals. And the next time I danced, I thought of the Kingdom, and suddenly I danced as I had never danced before. Every night that I wore the perfume, I danced

better than ever, until I was the most famous Ballerina in the world.

But one day, the old frosted-glass bottle was accidentally thrown away.

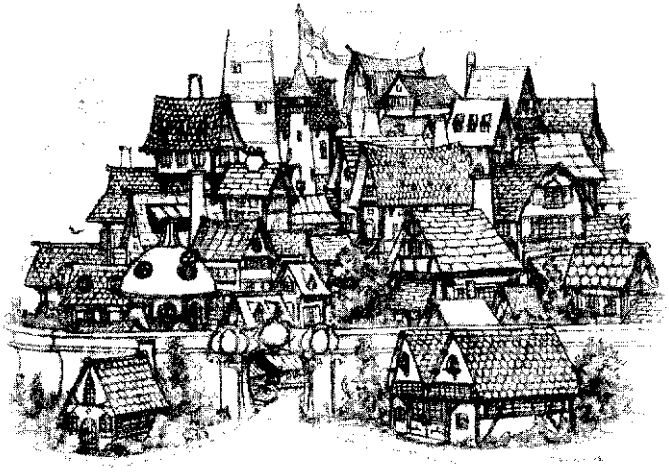
And from that day onwards, I never danced so beautifully again.

I searched for the bottle high and low, but I never found it. I have since had many years to write down what I learned about the Kingdom inside . . .

Inside the bottle, behind snow-capped Frosty Mountains, the Kingdom is divided

into five parts. There are frozen Lakes in the north, warmer meadows in the southern Valley, stark grey Rocks in the west, and to the east, a deep, dark Forest.

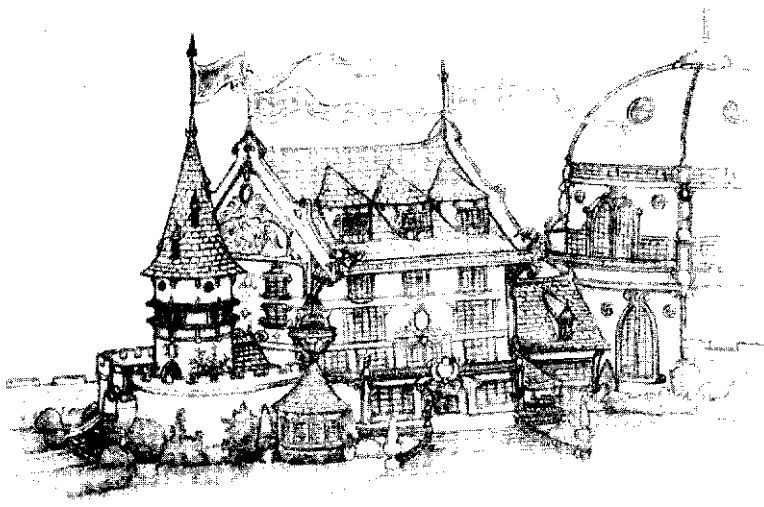
And the City. How could I forget the City? Silverberg, the capital, rising from the



Drosselmeyer Plains like a beautiful new jewel on an old ring.

From a distance, the houses seem to be piled on top of each other. Their brightly painted wooden roofs look as if they hold up the floors of the dwellings above as they wind around and around ever-more-narrow streets. And at the very top of the teetering pile is the biggest building of all: the Royal Palace. It is made from snow-white marble taken from the Frosty Mountains themselves, which glows in the

early morning sun and sparkles in the cold night.



The Royal Palace is the home of the King and Queen. But it is here too, within

the marble walls of the Palace, that you can find the Kingdom's famous Royal Ballet School. This is where the most talented young Ballerinas in the land become proper Ballerinas-in-Training, and really learn to dance. They travel from far and wide. Pale blonde Lake girls journey from the north, dark-haired Valley Dwellers come from the south. Grey-eyed Ballerinas travel from the western Rocks, and green-eyed Forest girls make their way from the east. The City girls have no need to come quite so far.

Of course, they all bring their pets. Each Kingdom Dweller has their own animal companion. And these animals can talk – talk just like you and me. Lake Dwellers keep Arctic foxes or snow leopards, while Valley Dwellers keep small tigers, monkeys or exotic birds. Strong, sturdy Rock Dwellers enjoy the company of sheep, goats and donkeys, while Forest Dwellers keep black bears and leopards. Every City Dweller keeps an eagle.

Out there, somewhere, is my old

frosted-glass perfume bottle.

Out there, somewhere, are the Ballerinas-in-Training who inspired me – Jessica Juniper, Crystal Coldwater, Laura-Bella Bergamotta, Valentina de la Frou and Ursula of the Boughs.

And they will wait for you, until the day that you find them.

Emerald Everhart



CHAPTER ONE
Bad News

In the Kingdom of the Frosty Mountains, the Royal Ballet School was starting its spring term.

In Silverberg, the Kingdom's capital city, the Crocodils and the Daffodaisies

were in bloom and the trees were bursting into pink and white blossom. SpringSprung Day, the official start of spring, was just around the corner, and the whole Kingdom was waiting to celebrate at the SpringSprung Festival.

Travellers would come to Silverberg from the northern Lake, the southern Valley, the eastern Forest and the western Rocks to join in the Festival. There would be street stalls, and entertainers, and a big Masked Ball for lots of

important grown-ups at the Royal Palace. Everyone was very excited.

But Jessica Juniper and her four best friends were even more excited than most. They would be performing a special dance for the SpringSprung Concert, at the start of the Masked Ball. They had all worked hard on their steps over the holiday, and now that the new term was starting, the concert was only a week away.

'Has anyone seen Laura-Bella?'

Jessica asked her friends Crys, Valentina and Ursula, as they all unpacked their things in the Beginners' dormitory. 'She must be so excited about SpringSprung.'



Laura-Bella was a Valley Dweller, from the warm South of the Kingdom. She had told her friends how much she longed for the warmer days of spring.

'No, but you know Laura-Bella's always late for everything,' smiled Crys. 'Unless Mr Melchior gets his way.'

Mr Melchior was Laura-Bella's small and very bossy pet tiger. All the Ballerinas-in-Training kept special pets, who were rather scared of Mr Melchior.

But suppertime came and went and

neither Laura-Bella nor Mr Melchior were anywhere to be seen.

'Lost your little pal?' sneered Rubellina Goodfellow, the Chancellor's daughter, as she and her friend Jo-Jo passed by on the way out of the Dining Hall.

'None of your business, Rubellina,' said Jessica.

'My daddy's the most important man in the Kingdom,' said Rubellina, 'so *everything's* my business.' She waved her hands in the air. 'Don't you think my

hands would look nice with beautiful silver rings?' she asked Jo-Jo. 'And silver bangles on my wrists?'

And she and Jo-Jo, and their pet eagles, burst into giggles.



'What *is* she going on about? Silver rings and bangles?' Crys wondered in a low voice. 'Do you think that's something to do with Laura-Bella?'

'I don't know,' said Jessica, stroking the soft, silky ears of her pet donkey, Sinbad. 'But if Rubellina *does* know something, it can't be very good.'

It was only as the girls were clambering under their pink-and-gold quilts later that night that Laura-Bella and Mr Melchior burst into the

dormitory and hurried along to Laura-Bella's bed.

She threw herself on top of the quilt, and then burst into terrible sobs.

One look at Mr Melchior's face told her friends that something was very wrong. The tiger was not looking as stern as usual. His face wore an expression of terrible worry.

'Laura-Bella, Mr Melchior, what's happened?' asked Jessica, scrambling out of bed and running over.



'It's awful.' Laura-Bella lifted her head from the pillow. 'We had the happiest holiday ever! We played in my family's orange orchard every morning, and picnicked by the waterfall every afternoon, and stayed out watching the stars in the lemon grove every night.'

Her friends stared at each other. Sinbad the donkey spoke for them all. 'What's so awful about that?'

This produced a fresh round of sobbing from Laura-Bella, so Mr

Melchior took up the story.

'We're going to lose the farm.'

Everybody gasped.

'Chancellor Godwin Goodfellow sent Laura-Bella's parents a letter,' Mr Melchior continued. His whiskers were trembling. 'He owns the land their farm is on, and he's just discovered there is silver beneath the earth. Unless Laura-Bella's family can find the money to buy the land from the Chancellor by midnight on SpringSprung Day, he's

going to throw them out!'

'He can't do that!' said Valentina.

'He can,' sighed Mr Melchior. 'And he's going to do even worse. He's going to turn the farm into a huge silver mine.'

Now Jessica understood why Rubellina Goodfellow had been giggling about silver jewellery. She had known her father was trying to take Laura-Bella's farm. 'How much money does the Chancellor want?' she asked.

'One thousand marks!' sobbed Laura-Bella.

'*One thousand marks?*' This was more money than the girls had ever heard of.

'My mum and dad have begged and borrowed but they can only come up with nine hundred marks.' Laura-Bella sat up and stared at her friends. Her eyes were red and swollen with days of crying, and her long dark hair was sticking out like a haystack. 'There's no way of finding the last hundred marks. Mum



and Dad are packing up all our things, and I'll never go back to the farm again!'

Even one hundred marks was a huge amount of money, but a plan was starting to form in Jessica's mind.

'Laura-Bella,' she said, 'maybe we can help you raise the rest of the money.'

'By midnight on SpringSprung Day? But that's only a week away!' cried Valentina. Her eagle, Olympia, squawked in agreement.



'Besides, even Valentina only gets seven marks pocket money each term,' Crys said to Jessica. 'How could we possibly scrape together a hundred marks?'

Now that Jessica had started, she could not stop. 'We'll have to *earn* the money. Each of us is good at different things, aren't we? Well, we can use our talents to raise the cash! Crys, you could give extra ballet coaching to girls in our class, couldn't you?'

Crys nodded. 'Happy to help.'

'We'll do anything,' added Pollux, her pet white fox, in his soft voice. He spoke so seldom that everyone stared at him.

'And Ursula,' Jessica continued, 'you've got such a lovely singing voice, you could sing in the Common Rooms in the evenings, and leave out a hat for coins.'

Ursula, who was dreadfully shy, looked as though she would rather die than do any such thing, but her little

black bear, Dorothea, spoke up for her. 'Of course she will.'



'Oooh!' squealed Valentina. 'And I could do make-overs! You know how good I am at hair and make-up.'

'And I'll write stories, and sell them,' said Jessica, who loved writing stories nearly as much as she loved dancing.

'*We'll* write stories, and sell them,'

corrected Sinbad, who loved telling stories nearly as much as . . . well, Sinbad loved telling stories more than anything in the world.

Now Laura-Bella was drying her tears. 'I've brought bags and bags of my father's lemons and oranges back to school with me,' she said. 'I make the best Lemon-and-Orangeade you've ever tasted.'

'Then you can make Lemon-and-Orangeade, and sell Lemon-and-

Orangeade!' Jessica said. 'We'll raise the hundred marks in no time at all. Then we'll see the look on the Chancellor's face!'

'*And* on Rubellina's,' said Sinbad happily.