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Opening extract from

Ursula of the Boughs

Written by

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The Royal Party

King Caspar – *the King*

Queen Mab – *the Queen*

Chancellor Godwin Goodfellow – *the Kingdom's Chancellor*

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*



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*



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



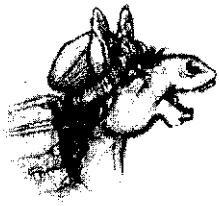
Ursula of the Boughs – *Ballerina from the eastern Forest*



Dorothea – *Ursula's pet bear*



Valentina de la Frou – *Ballerina from the City*



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*

Who's Who in the Kingdom of the Frosty Mountains

The girls and their pets



Jessica Juniper – *Ballerina from the western Rocks*



Prologue

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

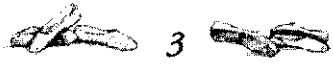
It was only a frosted-glass perfume bottle, filled with a sweet scent of lemon and orange. But my admirer told me that



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.

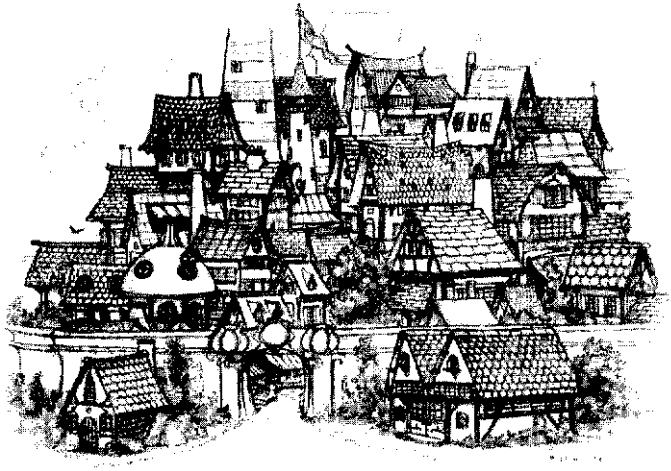
And from that day onwards, I never danced so beautifully again.

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.

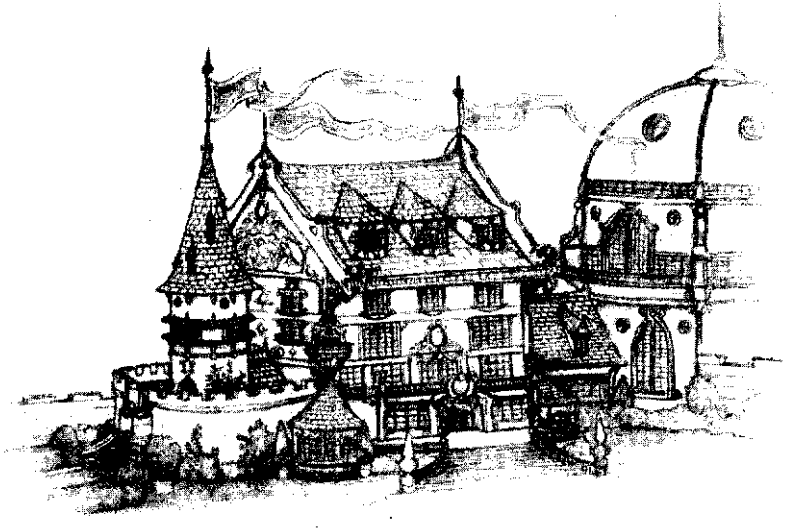
And the City. How could I forget the City? Silverberg, the capital, rising from the



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

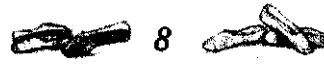
From a distance, the houses seem to be piled on top of each other. Their brightly painted wooden roofs look as if they hold up the floors of the dwellings above as they wind around and around ever-more-narrow streets. And at the very top of the teetering pile is the biggest building of all: the Royal 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
The Story of the Missing Princess

It was the summer term at the Royal Ballet School, and close to the end of the school year. The days were longer and the nights were lighter. The sun shone so brightly that even the hardest frost on the

city's roofs began to soften and almost melt.

In the Beginners' dormitory one night, the girls' pink-and-gold quilts were too warm to sleep under, so Jessica Juniper and her friends crept out of their beds after lights-out, and went to sit beside the open window. They told stories until they were shivering in their pyjamas, and longing to crawl under their quilts again. At first they took it in turns to tell stories about their homes.

Jessica spun a wonderful fairy tale about a magical Rock Dweller. Crys told a scary story about a ghost at the Lake. Laura-Bella made them all laugh with a silly story about her home in the Valley. Valentina talked mostly about the wonderful shops near her house in the smartest part of the City. And Ursula . . .

Well, Ursula did not want to tell a story at all.

'Come on, Ursula! There are some

amazing fairy tales from the Forest,' said Jessica, trying to encourage her quiet friend.

'I'd really rather not,' Ursula begged, hiding behind her long dark fringe, and



looking even more nervous than usual. 'I much prefer to listen.'

'Let Ursula do what she wants!' said Sinbad, Jessica's donkey, who had seen an opportunity. 'If she'd rather listen, well, she can listen to me! I've got a *brilliant* story.'

Everyone sighed, apart from Olympia, Valentina's eagle, who loved Sinbad's long, exciting stories.

'Settle down, everyone,' commanded Sinbad, 'and listen to the story of The

Missing Princess.'

'But Sinbad, *everybody* at school knows that story,' said Jessica.

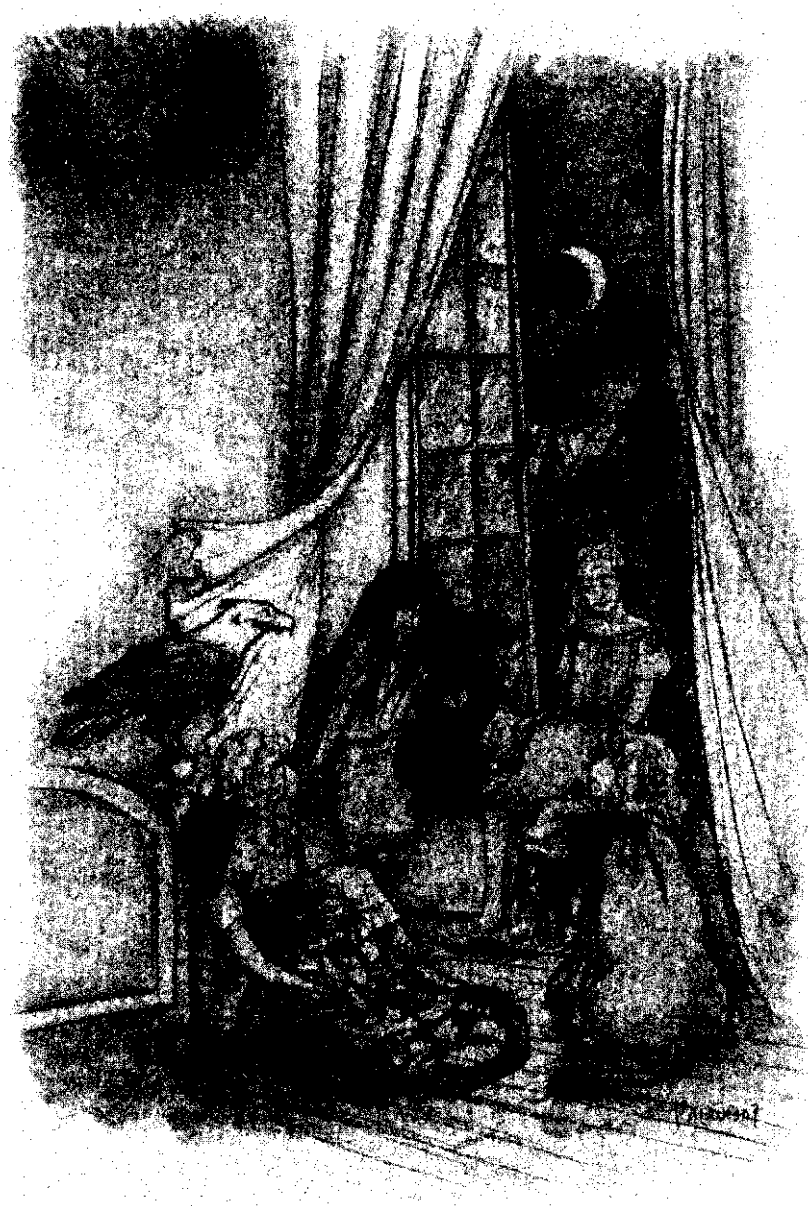
'*I* don't,' said Crys, who never kept up to date with the Palace gossip.

'The story goes that King Caspar and Queen Mab's only daughter, Princess Coppelia, ran away with a musician ten years ago and never returned,' Jessica explained. 'The King and Queen never spoke of her again. It's more of a rumour than a story.'

'Not the way *I* was going to tell it.' Sinbad's ears drooped. 'I was going to put in goblins, and pirate ships, and everything.'

'Well, I'm bored with fairy stories, goblins and pirate ships and all,' said Valentina, tossing her long, strawberry blonde hair. 'Can't we talk about the end-of-year concert? That's *much* more exciting.'

'It's true,' said Laura-Bella, who was curled up beside her small tiger,



Mr Melchior, for warmth. As a Valley Dweller, she would rather have been in her cosy bed by now. 'It's the first time our families will all come to the school, and see us dance here. I can't wait to show my mum and dad around the whole school –'

She stopped talking at a sudden strange noise from Ursula.

The quiet Forest Dweller had started crying.

'Ursula, what's wrong?' They all

crowded around, but Ursula only hid behind her hair, unable to speak.

'We had a letter from Ursula's dad today,' said Dorothea, Ursula's pet bear, in her soft voice. 'He has far too many orders for violins, and he's so busy that he can't come to the end-of-year concert.'

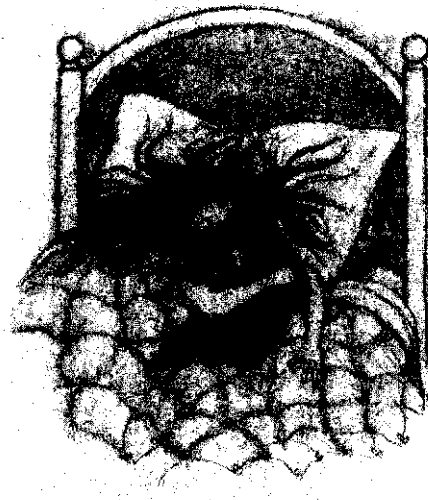
Everyone fell silent. They all knew how much Ursula loved her father, one of the finest musical-instrument makers in the Kingdom. Her mother had died

when Ursula was just a little baby, so her dad was all she had. And now he was not even going to be able to come and watch her dance in the concert!

'Don't worry, Ursula,' said Jessica, trying to comfort her friend. 'You can help show *my* family around the school . . .'

'It won't be the same,' wept Ursula. 'I just wanted my dad to come and see me dance in the concert, that's all.'

Later that night, after Ursula had



finally gone to sleep, clutching Dorothea, her friends gathered around Jessica's bed to talk.

'How *dare* Ursula's dad be so thoughtless!' said Laura-Bella.

'He can't help it if he has to work very hard,' said Crys, repeating the wise words her pet white fox, Pollux, had just whispered in her ear. 'I'm sure he'd love to be here.'

But Laura-Bella was having none of it. 'I've a good mind to tell him just what I think of him and his violin orders!'

'That's it!' said Jessica. 'We can write her dad a letter.'

'Brilliant!' Sinbad waggled his ears so wildly that his hat fell off. 'Oooh, we'll

write the rudest, stinkiest letter he's ever seen.'

'No,' said Jessica firmly. 'We'll write a nice, polite letter, but we'll tell him that everybody else will have their families here and that poor Ursula would like that, too.'

They found a pencil and a notebook, and sat up late into the night writing the letter.

It went off in the post-carriage first thing the next morning.