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To James, thanks for
understanding 





Chapter One

The Island of Ampali

Princess Clarabel scattered the last crumbs of her breakfast for the brightly coloured birds that fluttered down to the veranda.

One small blue parrot sat on the wooden railing, eyeing her beadily.

"Go on then, or there'll be none left," laughed Clarabel, and the little parrot hopped down to peck at the pieces of apricot bread as if he knew exactly what she was saying.



After one last sip of peach juice Clarabel stepped off the veranda of the white palace on to a lawn that swept down to a clear, turquoise ocean.

Her golden hair flew out behind her in the sea breeze and the sapphire ring on her finger sparkled in the sunshine.

She loved staying here on the tropical island of Ampali. It was so much warmer than her home in the Kingdom of Winteria, where snow lay on the ground for most of the year.

The little blue parrot flew up to perch on her shoulder.

"Finished breakfast already?" said Clarabel.

"Squawk!" went the parrot.

Clarabel laughed and turned her eyes back to the ocean. In the distance, a row of small ships with snowy sails were practising for the Royal Regatta in

two days' time.

The regatta was a sailing-boat race and all twenty royal families from around the world had been invited to take part. Clarabel knew her father, the King of Winteria, was down at the harbour right now watching his crew sail.

Quick footsteps sounded behind her. Three princesses came racing out of the white-walled palace, laughing as they ran. Their light summer dresses seemed to float around them.

Princess Emily had red hair and a ruby ring, Jaminta had smooth dark hair and an emerald ring, and Lulu's hair was wavy and black and she wore a ring of yellow topaz.

Clarabel's heart lifted as they came closer. She'd met them all at a Grand Ball in the springtime. They had worked as a team to save the deer of Mistberg



Forest and become great friends at the same time. The best thing about coming to Ampali Island was seeing each other again.

"Run, Clarabel, run!" cried Lulu, her eyes sparkling.

The little blue parrot squawked and flew off Clarabel's shoulder in alarm.

Emily grabbed Clarabel's hand and whirled her away to hide behind a row of palm trees that lined the edge of the garden.

"What's going on?" asked Clarabel, trying to catch her breath.

Emily covered her mouth to stop her giggles, her red curls falling around her face.

"We're making sure Prince Samuel doesn't see us," said Jaminta. "Queen Trudy's decided that we should knit some kind of teapot covers for the Royal

Regatta, so she's sent him to find us and tell us to come inside."

"Teapot covers?" said Clarabel, astonished. "You must mean tea cosies. We're supposed to be making the flower garlands, aren't we?"

"I think Queen Trudy just wants to stop us having fun," whispered Emily. "I don't mind making the flower garlands because those will look great on the marquee, but there's no way I'm knitting those teapot things."

"I bet she wants to make us sit still all day. That's what she thinks princesses should do," said Lulu.

"Shh! Here comes Samuel," hissed Jaminta. "Remember your ninja moves, everyone."

The four princesses ducked down. Clarabel silently went through her ninja training in her mind. Blend in with your

surroundings. Wait for the right time to move. The princesses had practised a few ninja moves in the springtime but there was so much more to learn.

A scrawny boy with a sulky mouth stepped down off the veranda. "I can't see them, Mother," he called back. "They've gone."

Slyly, he looked around him before taking a piece of paper out of his pocket. He unfolded it and held it up to the sunlight. Even from a distance the paper looked old and frayed at the edges.

With a loud rustling of feathers and leaves, the little blue parrot landed on the palm tree right above Clarabel's head and looked down at her.

"Don't parrots know any ninja moves?" whispered Emily, making Clarabel giggle.

Prince Samuel put the paper back in his pocket and stared hard in their direction.

The princesses froze as he came closer, peering behind red-flowered bushes. Any minute he would reach the path that led to the palm trees and the princesses' hiding place.

"We have to get to the garden gate," murmured Clarabel.

The others nodded. With slow, silent steps they crept past the palm trees and down the slope to the end of the garden. When Prince Samuel's back was turned, they opened the gate and slipped through. Ahead of them lay the rolling sand dunes and then the wide, blue ocean.

Clarabel clicked the gate shut softly and glanced back. Samuel was walking round the palm trees where they'd been hiding. He was bending down to look into the bushes.

Suddenly the little blue parrot swooped







down from the tree above, squawked loudly in Samuel's ear and flew away again.

Prince Samuel clutched his head and bolted for the palace as if a gigantic animal was after him.

"Maybe that parrot does know some ninja moves after all," said Clarabel, and they dashed across the sand dunes, filling the air with laughter.