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Opening extract from

Cloudberry Castle: Ballerina Dreams

Written by

Janey Louise Jones

Published by

Kelpies an imprint of Floris Books

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Cloudberry Castle

Ballerina Dreams

Janey Louise Jones

Kelpies

Kelpies is an imprint of Floris Books

First published in 2012 by Floris Books

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Floris Books, 15 Harrison Gardens, Edinburgh
www.florisbooks.co.uk

British Library CIP data available
ISBN 978-086315-920-6
Printed in Great Britian
by CPI Cox & Wyman

For ballerinas and dreamers
everywhere

1. Christmas



It *is* lovely living in a castle. Especially as it is also a ballet boarding school and ballet is my absolute favourite thing in the whole world. This ballet school is owned by my parents, because the castle was a gift to my family from a lovely old man, Dr Campbell, who used to live here. We took care of him when we lived in cosy Holly Cottage at the bottom of the hill. Christmas time makes me think about Dr Campbell and getting the castle in the first place, because it all happened at that time of year. Getting our own castle felt like being in a dream, except you never wake up, and the dream goes on happening. Finally it sinks in that it's real: the castle is truly your home.

My family lives in a private flat on the first floor of the castle. In the school holidays I live there too, in

my own room. But during term time I sleep in the school part of the castle with my good friends, Tilda, Catriona, Polly, Leo, and lots of others who board with us – up in the girls' dorms. We have great fun up there, and it gives me some privacy from Mum and Dad, and my little brother and sister, Hamish and Sorcha, too. When we first opened as a school, Mum and Dad were stressed and seemed to be on my back the whole time, but everything smoothed out a bit by the end of the first term. Phew! Thank goodness.

I do love my new ballet school friends, but, when the Christmas holidays arrived, I couldn't stop thinking about my oldest and best friend, Mallie Lennox, who has always lived nearby, at Tullyacre Farm. Mallie and I did everything together before Cloudberry Castle School of Ballet opened for business. She was with me every step of the way when I decided to persuade Mum and Dad to open a ballet school. But that was back when we went to Lochvale Primary School together, and to Mrs Miller's ballet classes in the village too, so we saw each other every single day. I don't go to Lochvale School anymore, because Mum and Dad employ school teachers at the castle for all

the ballet students. That means I don't see Mallie. We tried to meet up a couple of times during the first term, but there has been so much pressure here at Cloudberry, it hasn't worked out. When all the ballet school distractions stopped for the holidays, I realised how much I was missing her.

I made her a *Swan Lake* Christmas card and cycled over to the farm to give it to her. It was so nice to see the big grey stone farmhouse with all the Lennox bicycles and footballs sprawled around the front door. But there were no cars there, and when I rang the bell, there was no reply, so I just pushed the card through the letterbox. Before I left, I called "hello" around the farmyard, because sometimes her brothers potter about there – every time you see Rory and Finn they look filthy, and smell of dirt and manure. But there was no answer.

"I'm so out of touch with Mallie now," I thought sadly, "I've got no idea what she's up to these days – I didn't even know they were going away."

However, I did see a gorgeous horse's head poking over the stable door. "Oh, Mallie has a new pony," I thought. He was stunning. A shiny chestnut thoroughbred, from what I could see, with a white blaze down his nose. A plaque on the door read

MICKEY

"Hey, Mickey," I said.

But when I approached the stable door, the pony went crazy, rearing and bucking wildly. Seriously, I thought he was going to bash down the door and come charging around the yard.

"Whoa there!" I said. "It's okay, Mickey. Shh. There, there."

He went to cower at the back of the stable. I could see the white of his eye. The poor pony was obviously terrified. I backed away carefully to cause him as little stress as possible, and headed sadly away to Cloudberry, hoping I might hear from Mallie in the New Year sometime, when she got home.



Our second Christmas in the castle was magical in lots of ways. Okay, it wasn't *quite* as magical as what happens to my heroine, Clara, in *The Nutcracker Suite* ballet – but almost.

The Nutcracker has been my favourite ballet ever since Mum read it to me when I was little, and played the music too. Clara gets to do wonderful dances. In the story, Clara's godfather, the toymaker, gives her a nutcracker for Christmas that is carved as a little man. And he gives other toys as well. When Clara comes downstairs in the middle of the night, she finds that the toys and Christmas decorations have come to life! Clara saves the nutcracker man from the nasty King of the Mice, and he turns into a prince and takes her off to the Land of Sweets. The Sugar Plum Fairy is ruler there and she also does some amazing dances. I would love to dance *The Nutcracker* one day. Mum has promised to take Sorcha and I to see *The Nutcracker* at the Scottish Ballet in Edinburgh for a special New Year treat! Can't wait.

Cloudberry estate looks like a fairy-tale place at Christmas time. The hills around us become completely white with snow; it looks like somewhere the Snow Queen might have her ice palace.

Sorcha and I have been talking about making decorations together, so that our family flat will be really Christmassy. I went into her room and flopped on one of her beanbags, ready for a team chat.

"Is it just me, or is this room even pinker?" I asked.

"I've put away all the non-pink things because they didn't match," she explained.

"I see. Well, if it was more pinkness you were after, it's definitely working!"

"Cool!" she said.

"So, about these ideas for Christmas..."

"Let's put all our thoughts on my whiteboard," suggested Sorcha, fetching her pack of rainbow-coloured wipeable pens. "You brainstorm words and I'll write them down."

"Okay. Ummmm... Angels, snowflakes, toys. Fir trees, sweeties, magic," I started.

A big smile came over Sorcha's face.

"What is it?" I asked.

"You know how Mum is taking us to see *The Nutcracker* in Edinburgh for our New Year treat? Well, everything you've just said is in *that* ballet! That's what we should make: Christmas decorations of all *The Nutcracker* characters for our tree!"

"Brilliant idea, Sorch! That will be perfect. And we can bring them out again every year."

"I know, and it's my favourite ballet ever!" said Sorcha.

"Snap!" I said.