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Opening extract from

The Rescue Princesses – The Snow Jewel

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Published by

Nosy Crow

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Chapter One

Sledging at the Castle

Princess Freya sped across the crisp snow in her thick furry boots. Her blonde plaits bounced on her shoulders and her blue eyes shone brightly.

She ran through the gate at the end of the castle garden and closed it behind her. Then she stopped for a moment to gaze down the hill at the newly made ice rink at the bottom. Fresh snow had fallen in the night and the sunshine was making everywhere sparkle.

A group of princes raced out of the grey stone castle behind her and began throwing snowballs at each other. Freya swung round to watch them. It was strange seeing her castle so busy and noisy when it was usually so quiet.

Her dad, King Eric, had invited all the royal families from around the world to come and spend the winter holidays here in the Kingdom of Northernland. The ice rink had been dug out and smoothed over especially for everyone to skate on. The guests had arrived yesterday and now the castle was crammed with kings, queens, princes and princesses.

Freya took a few steps down the hill, thinking about the other princesses. She had been longing to meet some girls her own age for what seemed like forever. She'd seen four princesses slip out of the door after breakfast. They had

run off laughing together and she had desperately wanted to join in. But where had they gone?

The sound of giggling floated over to her on the frosty air. Freya hurried down the slope and through a cluster of fir trees, trying to see where the noise was coming from. When she reached the other side of the trees she saw the girls straightaway.

Four princesses, wearing thick coats, woollen scarves and gloves, were pulling a wooden sledge up the hill. When they reached the top, a girl with wavy black hair sat down on the sledge and the others gave her a huge push.

The princess on the sledge zoomed away with a shout of delight. Halfway down the hill, she jumped on top of the sledge and glided the rest of the way standing on one leg. Freya's eyes

widened. She'd never seen somebody do such a daring trick before!

The black-haired princess jumped off at the bottom of the slope and the others ran down to help her pull the sledge back up. The princess with the red curls noticed Freya and waved.

"Hello!" called the red-haired princess. "Would you like to come and have a go?"

Freya blushed and ran over. "Thanks! That's really nice of you!"

"It's not really *that* nice!" laughed the princess. "We borrowed this sledge from the castle. So it's really yours anyway! I'm Princess Emily, by the way."

"And I'm Lulu," said the black-haired princess. "This is Jaminta." She pointed at the girl with smooth dark hair. "And that's Clarabel." She pointed at the girl with golden hair.

"Hello," said Jaminta and Clarabel,

smiling widely.

"I'm Freya," said Freya shyly. "I'm so pleased that you've all come to stay. I've wanted to meet some other princesses for ages."

"Didn't you come along to the Mistberg Grand Ball last year?" asked Lulu, looking at Freya curiously.

Freya shook her head. "My dad likes to stay here at home in Northernland."

"Well, I think it's lovely here in the snow." Emily smiled at her. "Would you like the next go on the sledge?"

Freya beamed back. "Yes please!"

The five princesses took hold of the rope and pulled the sledge up to the top of the hill. Then Freya got the sledge into position and climbed on.

"Try going down backwards," cried Lulu, jumping up and down. "It's really good fun!"

"All right, then! Here I go!" said Freya, turning round on the sledge so that she was facing the wrong way.

"Are you ready?" asked Jaminta.

Freya glanced over her shoulder at the steep slope below. "Ready!" she said firmly.

Jaminta and Emily gave the sledge a huge push to start her off. Freya whizzed down the slope at high speed, her blonde plaits flying outwards in the wind.

"Woo-hoo!" she shouted, as she went faster and faster.

Suddenly, one corner of the sledge tilted downwards, making the whole thing wobble. Freya slid forward. She grabbed hold of the sides; desperately trying to keep her balance. But the sledge tipped over, sending her flying.

She landed with a gasp in the middle of a deep snowdrift. The sledge landed

beside her and she lay still, feeling the snow seeping down her neck.

"Oh no! Are you OK?" Clarabel ran towards her.

Freya sat up and rubbed the snow away from her mouth. She felt a little dizzy, but not really hurt. "Yes, I'm all right," she said. "It was quite funny really. For a second I felt like I was flying!"

Lulu pulled the sledge upright and looked underneath. Then she scooped some snow out of a hollow. "There's a hole here. It's probably a rabbit's burrow. The sledge runner must have got caught in it and that's why the sledge tipped over."

"The poor rabbits!" Freya got up and peered into the hollow. "I hope I didn't frighten them by sledging into their hole like that!"

Emily laughed. "I'm sure you didn't."

Lulu looked at Freya, who was covered in snow from head to foot. "I bet the rabbits are safe, deep down in their burrow. You look like you need the Rescue Princesses' help more than they do!" Then she stopped suddenly and clapped her hand over her mouth.

Emily and Clarabel glanced at each other, as if they didn't know what to do.

"Lulu! You weren't supposed to say that!" exclaimed Jaminta.

"Oops! I forgot!" Lulu's eyes grew wider.

"What's the matter?" said Freya, seeing their startled looks. "And who *are* the Rescue Princesses?"