

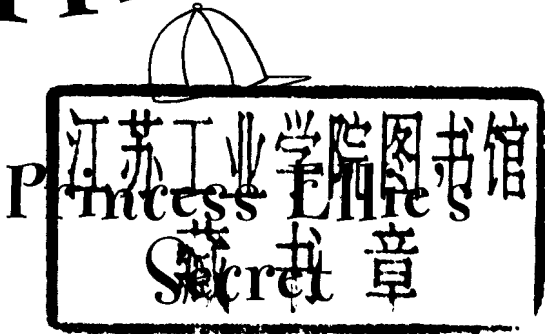
The Pony-Mad Princess



Princess
Ellie's
Secret

Diana Kimpton

The Pony-Mad Princess



Ellie's heart sank. Deep down inside, she knew Miss Stringle was right. Shadow was her very first pony, and she could hardly remember the time when he wasn't there for her to love...what would happen to Shadow if she couldn't ride him any more?

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The Pony-Mad Princess!



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A Puzzle for Princess Ellie

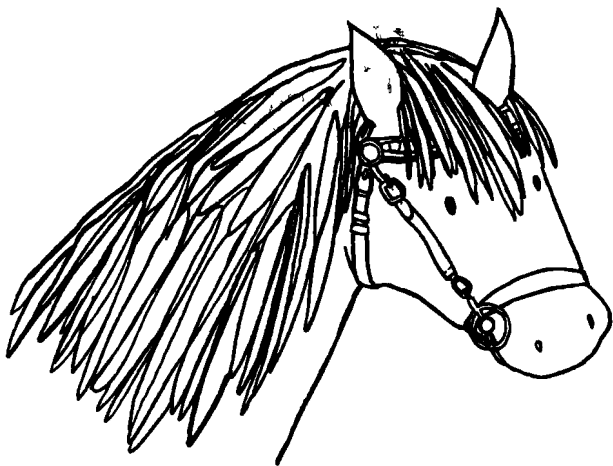
Princess Ellie's Starlight Adventure

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A Surprise for Princess Ellie

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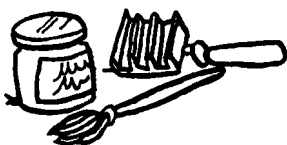


Diana Kimpton

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For Jack



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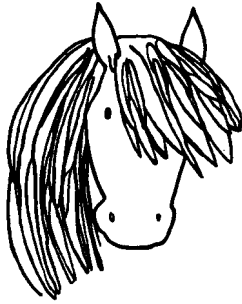
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Chapter 1



"Steady, Shadow," said Princess Ellie. The black Shetland pony she was riding pawed at the ground with a tiny front hoof. He was keen to start the dressing-up race, and couldn't understand the delay.

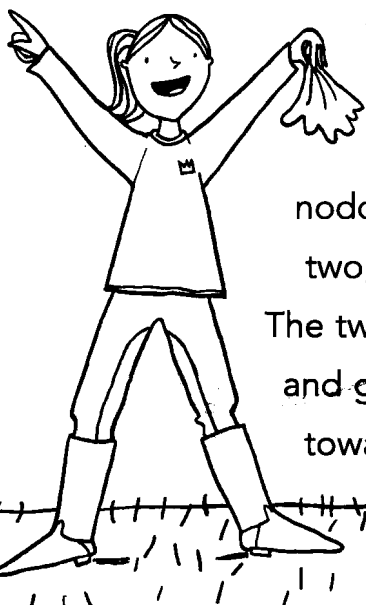
"Are you all right down there?" asked Kate, with a grin. She was riding Sundance, Ellie's chestnut pony, who was



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much taller than Shadow.

Ellie grinned back. "Just you wait," she said. "Sometimes it's good to be small." She was so glad Kate had come to live with her grandparents, who worked at the palace. It was good to have a friend at last, and they had so much fun together with Ellie's four ponies.



"Are you two ready?"

called Meg, the palace groom. When they both nodded, she shouted, "One, two, three, GO."

The two ponies leaped forward and galloped across the field towards two piles of clothes on the other side. Ellie leaned forward, urging

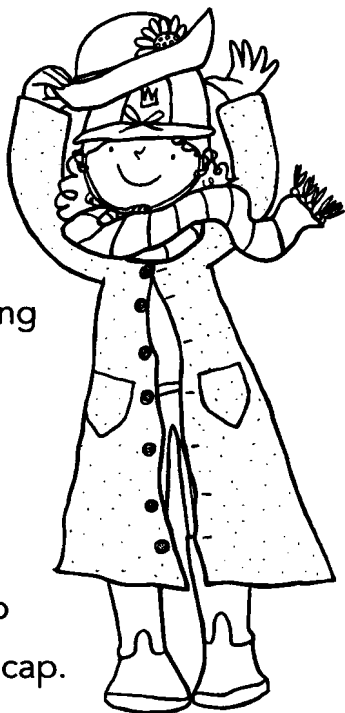


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Shadow on. But the Shetland's short legs were no match for Sundance. Soon, the chestnut pony pulled ahead and reached Kate's pile of clothes first.

"Bother," thought Ellie, as she saw Kate leap off and start putting on a long floppy coat. Then Shadow finally reached the other pile and she had to concentrate on her own part in the race.

Jumping off was easy – her feet were nearly touching the ground anyway. Then she pulled on a long coat, wrapped a scarf around her neck and crammed a wide-brimmed hat on top of her pink and gold crash cap.



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She glanced over to Kate, expecting to see her on her way back. But she wasn't. She was struggling to mount Sundance. Now she was dressed up, she was finding it hard to lift her foot high enough to reach the stirrup.

"We've still got a chance, Shadow," cried Ellie. She didn't have Kate's problem. Shadow was so small that she managed to jump into the saddle without using the stirrups at all.

She urged the Shetland into a gallop and headed back towards the finishing line. Soon she could hear Sundance's hooves pounding after them, but this time the lead was too great. Shadow raced across the line just ahead of the chestnut pony.

"Ellie's the winner," shouted Meg.

"Well done," said Kate. "Being small was



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definitely useful that time."

Suddenly a voice called, "Princess Aurelia!"

Ellie looked round and saw Miss Stringle standing at the palace end of the field. She always insisted on using Ellie's full name. To Ellie's annoyance, so did nearly everyone else in the royal household, especially the King and Queen. Ellie trotted Shadow across the field to say hello. But as soon as she was close enough to see her governess's face, she realized something was wrong.

"Whatever are you doing, Your Royal Highness?" asked Miss Stringle, giving Ellie one of her disapproving looks.

Ellie ignored the look and cheerfully replied, "We're playing mounted games. I just won. Did you see?"



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"Indeed I did," declared Miss Stringle. "And I'm horrified to see you making such an exhibition of yourself. It is not suitable behaviour for a princess."

Ellie felt confused. Surely there was nothing wrong with winning. Then she remembered the hat, coat and scarf. "I had to wear these," she explained, as she pulled off the hat. "You can't have a dressing-up race without dressing up."

"I am not talking about the clothes," said Miss Stringle, crossly. "It's the pony that's the problem. It's much too small." As she spoke, she waved her hand at Shadow. The greedy Shetland instantly assumed he was being offered food. He stuck out his nose and nuzzled Miss Stringle's outstretched palm. She pulled



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her hand away quickly and dabbed it clean with a lace-trimmed hankie.

Normally, Ellie would have been tempted to laugh. But this time, she was too full of indignation. "Shadow's not too small," she said. "He's exactly the right size for a Shetland."

"But that's not the right size for you," said Miss Stringle. "You look ridiculous. I'll have to tell your parents." Without waiting for Ellie to reply, she marched back to the palace with a determined look on her face.



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Ellie's heart sank. Deep down inside, she knew Miss Stringle was right. Shadow was her very first pony, and she could hardly remember the time when he wasn't there for her to love. He'd been her best birthday present the year she was four and he'd been just the right size for her then. But over the years, she had grown and he hadn't. Now her feet nearly touched the ground when she was riding him. She had hoped no one else would notice. What would happen to Shadow if she couldn't ride him any more?



Chapter 2



Ellie didn't have to wonder for very long. By the time she and Kate had ridden back to the stable yard, the King and Queen were already there. They looked strangely out of place in their royal clothes and everyday crowns. Their long velvet robes trimmed with ermine were definitely not designed with straw and manure in mind.



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Miss Stringle was with them. She pointed at Ellie as she rode Shadow through the arched entrance. "You see what I mean, Your Majesty. The princess looks ridiculous."

The King stifled a laugh. "She's quite right, Aurelia. Shadow's much too small for you now."

"But I love him," said Ellie. "We've been together for ever and ever. And I don't mind what I look like."



"But we do," said the Queen. "Princesses must always look dignified. You really mustn't ride him any more."

"Perhaps Kate could instead," suggested Ellie. "She's not a princess so you can't mind what she looks like." To Ellie's delight,

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Kate agreed with enthusiasm. Perhaps this was the solution.

But the Queen smiled and shook her head. "That's a lovely idea, but Kate's legs are even longer than yours. And this isn't just about appearances. It's about what's right for Shadow."

"The fact of the matter is that you are both too big to ride him," said the King, firmly. Then he turned to Meg and added, "Please arrange for the pony to be sold."

Ellie was too shocked to speak. Not being able to ride Shadow was bad enough. Losing him would be unbearable.

Meg must have spotted her dismay.



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"Don't worry," she said. "We'll find him a really good home."

Ellie jumped down and stood defensively between Shadow and the adults. "He doesn't need a good home," she said, angrily. "He's got a good home already." Shadow nuzzled in her pocket for a peppermint, unaware that his future hung in the balance.

The Queen put her arm round Ellie's shoulders. "I'm sure you'll get used to the idea, Aurelia."

