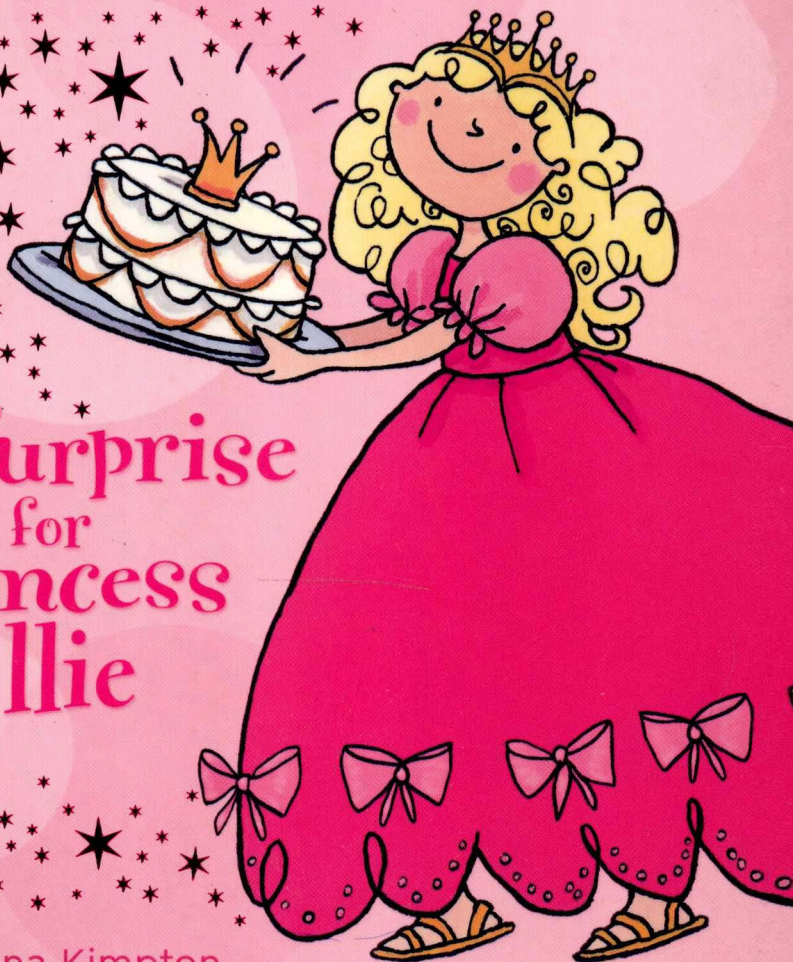




The Pony-Mad Princess



A Surprise
for
Princess
Ellie

Diana Kimpton

The Pony-Mad Princess



江苏工业学院图书馆
Princess Ellie

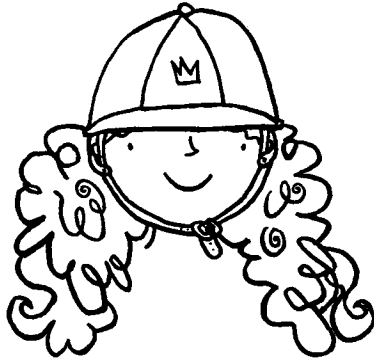
"Let's go for a picnic ride," suggested Ellie. "I'll take Starlight." She knew she'd be less likely to worry about the bay mare if she could see her all the time.

"That's not a good idea," said Meg.

Ellie looked at Meg in surprise. What was the matter with Starlight? she wondered. And why was Meg being so secretive about it?

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The Pony-Mad Princess!



Princess Ellie to the Rescue

Princess Ellie's Secret

A Puzzle for Princess Ellie

Princess Ellie's Starlight Adventure

Princess Ellie's Moonlight Mystery

Coming soon...

Princess Ellie's Holiday Adventure

Princess Ellie and the Palace Plot

The Pony-Mad Princess

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Diana Kimpton

Illustrated by Lizzie Finlay



For Caitlin



First published in 2004 by Usborne Publishing Ltd., Usborne House,
83-85 Saffron Hill, London EC1N 8RT, England. www.usborne.com



Based on an original concept by Anne Finnis.

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

JFMAMJJASO D/04
ISBN 0 7460 6023 8

Printed in Great Britain.

Chapter 1



"Good girl," said Princess Ellie, as she cantered Moonbeam towards the last jump. The palomino pony eyed the wooden poles warily and tried to swerve away. But Ellie was ready for her. She kept a firm hold on the reins and pushed the pony on with her legs. Moonbeam did as she was told. She leaped forward and cleared the jump easily.



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Ellie galloped between the finishing posts and pulled her pony to a halt. Then she turned round to see how the others were getting on.



She was just in time to watch her best friend soar over the wooden poles on Rainbow. Kate's jumping had improved enormously since she came to live with her gran, the palace cook. Perhaps that was because of all the practice she had on Ellie's ponies.

Prince John was further back, riding Sundance. The chestnut pony jumped over a fallen tree trunk and cantered down the hill towards the last obstacle. Then he pricked his ears forward, lifted his front legs



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and bounded over it. Prince John grinned broadly. It was hard to tell which of them was enjoying themselves most, as they galloped through the finishing line.

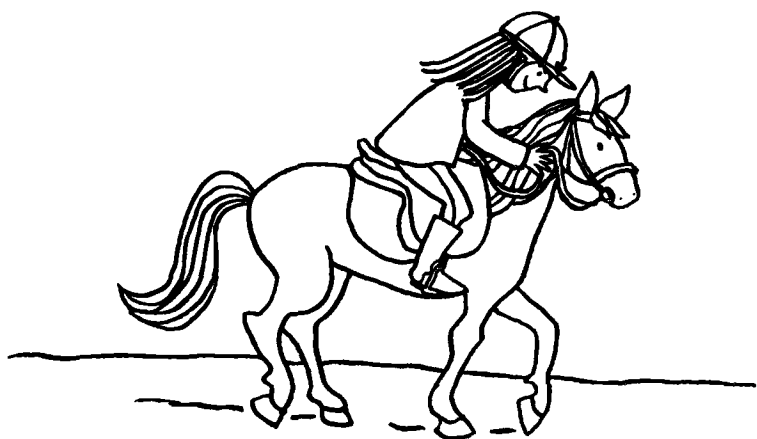
"That was brilliant," said John, as they rode slowly back towards the stables. "I'm going to ask my father to build a cross-country course in the grounds of *our* palace – but I'm sure mine will be longer."



"Of course it will," sighed Ellie. She really liked John. He was the only royal person she knew who shared her love of ponies. But he did have an annoying habit of insisting everything was bigger and better at his home in Andirovia.

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Kate leaned forward and patted Rainbow's grey neck. "I'm not surprised you want one," she said. "Cross-country's much more exciting than jumping in the paddock."



"But even that's not as exciting as a real adventure," said John. "Do you remember how we went hunting for ghosts last time I came to stay?"

"I was really scared," said Ellie.

"So was I," agreed Kate.



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"But it was still fun," laughed John.

"What are we going to look for this time?"

The girls stared at him blankly. "Well, aren't there any mysterious legends about your palace? What about tales of hidden treasure?"

"I've never heard any," said Ellie.

"Dragon's eggs?" asked John.

"Now you're being silly," giggled Kate.

"How about a secret passage, then?" suggested John. "All the best palaces have one of those. Our one at home is brilliant."

"But that's not secret," Ellie declared with delight. "It can't be if you know about it."

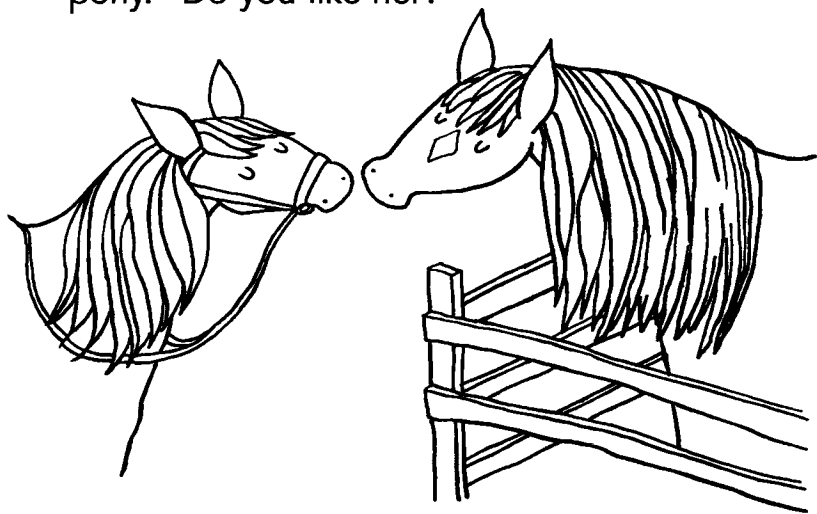
At that moment, they reached the lane that led to the palace stables. A bay pony



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whinnied loudly and cantered across the nearby field to meet them. She was larger than the ponies they were riding, and the long hair that nearly hid her hooves made her look like a miniature carthorse. She skidded to a halt beside the fence and put her head over the top rail.

"This is Starlight," explained Ellie, as Moonbeam sniffed noses with the bay pony. "Do you like her?"



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"She's lovely," said John. It was the first time he had come to stay since Starlight arrived, so he hadn't met her before. "She looks much better than she did in that photo you e-mailed to me."

Ellie smiled proudly. "I'd only just found her then. She'd been living wild for so long that she looked really neglected."

"She doesn't any more," said John. He twisted a finger thoughtfully in Sundance's chestnut mane and added, "She's quite fat now."

"No, she's not," said Ellie, indignantly. "She's just well built. Ponies like her have big bones." She turned Moonbeam firmly away from the fence and led the way towards the stables. "You don't have to be thin to be beautiful."



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There was a long, awkward pause. Then Kate broke the silence by saying, "Wasn't Ellie clever to catch Starlight?" She looked wistful for a moment and added, "I wish I could find a pony."

"So do I," said John. "I'd like a palomino, like Moonbeam."

"Copycat!" cried Ellie.

"No, I'm not," said John. "My palomino would be bigger than yours."

"Then it wouldn't be like Moonbeam, would it," Ellie declared. "Anyway, you don't need another pony. You've got two already." She'd seen plenty of pictures of the beautiful, chestnut mares he'd left behind in Andirovia.

"Why shouldn't I have three?" argued John. "You already had Sundance,

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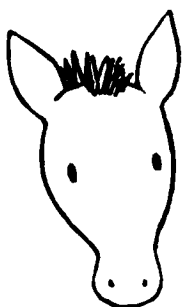
Moonbeam, Rainbow *and* Shadow when you got Starlight. That's five." He sighed and shrugged his shoulders. "Anyway, there's no point arguing about it. My father already thinks I spend too much time riding. There's no way he'd buy me another pony."

"My dad won't get me a pony at all," added Kate, very quietly.

The sadness in her voice made Ellie feel guilty. It was mean of her to argue with John about how many ponies they had, when Kate didn't even have one. Ellie was happy to share her ponies with her best friend, but she knew that wasn't the same. Kate desperately wanted a pony of her own. If only there was something Ellie could do to help.



Chapter 2



The stable yard was deserted when Ellie, John and Kate rode in. There was no sign of Meg, the palace groom, but she had left the ponies' stables ready for them. Each one had a thick bed of sweet-smelling straw, a bulging haynet and a bucket of clean water. They led the ponies inside, took off their saddles and bridles, and brushed their

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backs carefully. Then they left them to have a well-earned rest.

Ellie was just rinsing Moonbeam's bit under the tap when Shadow, her black Shetland, trotted into the yard. He was pulling his carriage with Great Aunt Edwina in the driving seat, and he looked very proud of himself. He carried his head high as his tiny hooves clattered on the cobbles.



Great Aunt Edwina pulled him to a halt and announced, "That was a wonderful drive. We went right round the deer park, just as I used to when I was a girl."

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She waited while Kate ran over and took hold of Shadow's bridle. Then she climbed slowly to the ground, her long skirt rustling as she moved. "I expect you children are looking forward to the party tomorrow."

"That's why my family has come to stay," said John. "We didn't want to miss it. Although, I'm sure it won't be as grand as our parties in Andirovia."

"Yes it will!" declared Ellie. "It's going to be great. There'll be music and dancing and jugglers and conjurers and everything."

"And I'm going too," cried Kate, her voice bouncing with enthusiasm. She wasn't usually allowed to attend royal events.

"Fancy your parents having their crystal jubilee," sighed Great Aunt Edwina. "I can't believe it's fifteen years since they became

