

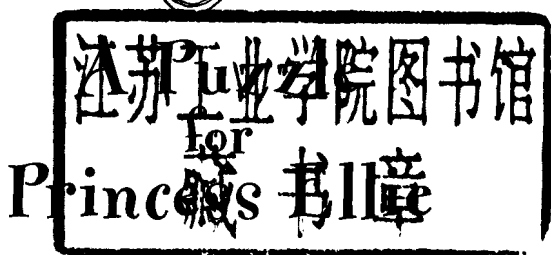
# The Pony-Mad Princess

A Puzzle  
for  
Princess Ellie



Diana Kimpton

# The Pony-Mad Princess



*As Ellie ran up the stairs to her very pink bedroom, she couldn't stop thinking about the mystery in the wood. Was it really a ghostly gardener, or could it be something more menacing? It was a real puzzle and Ellie was determined to solve it.*

Look out for more sparkly adventures of

# ***The Pony-Mad Princess!***



**Princess Ellie to the Rescue**

**Princess Ellie's Secret**

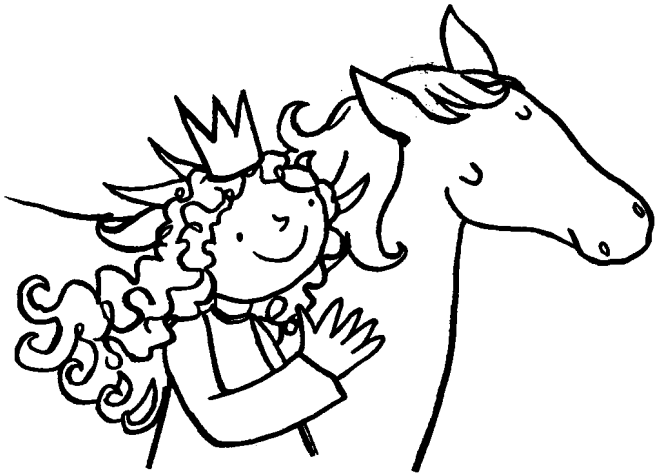
**Princess Ellie's Starlight Adventure**

**Princess Ellie's Moonlight Mystery**

**A Surprise for Princess Ellie**

# The Pony-Mad Princess

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Diana Kimpton

Illustrated by Lizzie Finlay



## For Liam



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# Chapter 1



"Let's explore," said Princess Ellie, as she stopped Rainbow at the entrance to the wood. The path through it was like a long, dark tunnel. On one side was a high brick wall. On the other were trees growing so close together that their branches arched overhead and shut out the sun.

"Are you sure?" said her best friend,



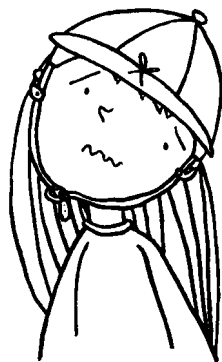
## The Pony-Mad Princess

Kate. The palomino she was riding fidgeted from foot to foot, her golden coat gleaming in the sunshine. Moonbeam was the most nervous of Ellie's four ponies.

"Yes," said Ellie, firmly. She wasn't ready to go back to the palace yet. When she was there, she had to be Aurelia, not Ellie. She had to follow rules and behave like a proper princess. Out here she was free to do as she liked.

Ellie squeezed with her legs and Rainbow stepped forward obediently with her ears pricked. Kate followed close behind on Moonbeam.

"It's spooky in here," said Kate nervously, as they rode into the shade of the trees.



## A Puzzle for Princess Ellie

"Don't be silly," laughed Ellie. "Surely you don't believe in ghosts." Riding Rainbow gave her confidence. The grey pony was so brave and reliable.



It was very quiet in the wood. There were no birds singing, and the path was covered with a thick, springy layer of rotting leaves that deadened the sound of the ponies' hooves.

As they rode deeper and deeper into the wood, Ellie looked round at the moss-covered wall and the damp tree trunks. "Kate's right," she thought. "It is a bit spooky in here." She pushed the grey pony into a trot, eager to reach the sunshine on



# The Pony-Mad Princess

the other side as quickly as possible.

Rainbow seemed uneasy too. She tucked in her head and blew down her nose nervously.

Suddenly, Rainbow stopped. Ellie was taken completely by surprise and shot forward out of the saddle. Rainbow didn't give Ellie time to recover her balance. Instead, the grey pony whirled around on the spot, trying to head back the way they had come.

Ellie swung sideways. She felt herself falling and tried to grab hold of the saddle. But she had already gone too far. With a sickening thud, she landed flat on her back on the ground, clutching the reins tightly in one hand.

"Are you all right?" asked Kate, anxiously.



## A Puzzle for Princess Ellie

Ellie wasn't sure. She lay motionless for a moment, shocked by the force of her landing. Then, she warily moved her arms and legs a little. To her relief, there was no pain. Nothing was broken. Only her pride was damaged. "I think so," Ellie finally replied, as she climbed slowly to her feet. She brushed the dirt from

her pale pink jodhpurs and straightened the pink and gold silk cover on her hard hat.

Kate looked relieved. "I think

Rainbow would be back at the stables by now if you hadn't kept hold of the reins."



## The Pony-Mad Princess

“Steady, girl,” soothed Ellie, as she walked up to the tense, uneasy pony and stroked her neck. “There’s nothing to be scared of.”

Rainbow relaxed at the sound of her voice and rubbed her head gently on Ellie’s shoulder.

“Shall we go back?” said Kate. “We don’t want another accident.”

“No,” said Ellie. “I think she’s all right now, and all my books say you should never let a pony win.” She put her foot in the stirrup and mounted quickly. As soon as Rainbow felt her weight in the saddle, she started edging back the way they had come.

“It’s not time to go home yet,” said Ellie, firmly. She turned the pony to face the spot where she had fallen off. This time she was ready for trouble.

Rainbow walked forward reluctantly,



## A Puzzle for Princess Ellie

glancing from side to side and snorting through her nose. Then, at exactly the same place as before, she suddenly stopped again.

This time Ellie didn't lose her balance. But she was still shaken. What on earth was wrong with Rainbow? She had never acted like this before. "Go on, girl," Ellie called encouragingly, as she pushed the pony on with her legs. Her voice sounded extra loud in the stillness of the wood.

Rainbow didn't go on. Instead, she whirled around to the left. Ellie wasn't quick enough to stop her so she made Rainbow keep turning until she was back where she had started. Then she tried to make her walk on again.

But Rainbow took a step backwards and then whirled suddenly to the right. Ellie's heart was pounding as she struggled to stay in the saddle.

# The Pony-Mad Princess

"I'll try going in front," said Kate. "Maybe Rainbow will follow us." But Moonbeam refused to go past the grey mare. She just stood still and wouldn't move.

"What's wrong with them?" said Ellie.  
"There's nothing there."

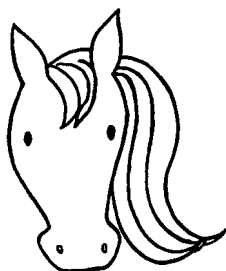
"Nothing we can see anyway," said Kate.  
Ellie felt a thrill of excitement mixed with fear. "I just remembered something," she said. "Some people believe horses can see ghosts."

Kate looked around nervously. "I told you it was spooky."

Ellie peered along the shadowy path ahead. Was there really something there – something only Rainbow could see?



## Chapter 2



"Are you going to try again?" asked Kate.

"I don't know," said Ellie. "Suppose there is something there..." Her voice trailed away. Was she being silly? Was she worrying about nothing?

Kate glanced at her watch. "We should be getting back," she said, hopefully. "Gran will be cross if I'm late."

## The Pony-Mad Princess

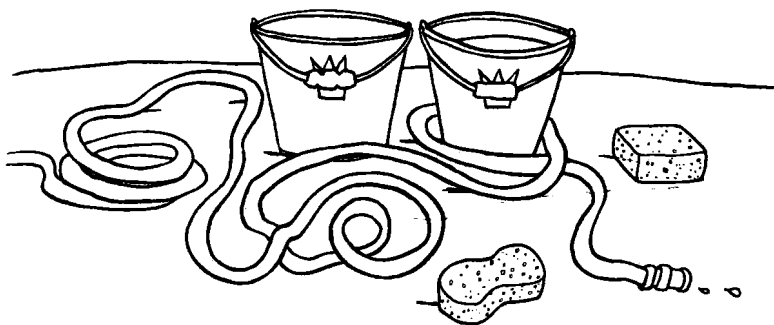
"No, she won't," laughed Ellie. Kate's gran was the palace cook and she was never cross. "But my parents will be." For once Ellie was pleased that the King and Queen were so strict about mealtimes. It gave her and Kate an excuse to leave this spooky wood.

The two girls turned their ponies back the way they had come. It was a relief to canter out into the sunshine. After one last glance at the dark woods, they headed home to the palace.

By the time they were back at the stables, Ellie felt much calmer. From that safe distance, the idea of a haunted wood seemed more exciting than frightening. "Do you think it really was a ghost?" she asked Kate, as they filled the water buckets.



## A Puzzle for Princess Ellie



"It must have been," Kate replied. "It's the only possible explanation."

Ellie bit her lip thoughtfully as she moved the hose from a full bucket to an empty one. "But I thought ghosts prowled corridors and slid through walls. What's one doing in a wood?"

Kate laughed. "Maybe one of your ancestors liked growing trees." She waved her hands above her head and said in a spooky voice, "Ooooh! I'm Archduke Edgar, the ghostly gardener. And I'm coming to get you."



## The Pony-Mad Princess

As Kate ran towards her, Ellie sprayed her with the hose. Kate squealed, grabbed the hose and sprayed her back.



The water fight lasted until it was broken up by Meg, the palace groom. By then, both girls were dripping wet and giggling.

"I don't know what's got into you two today," said Meg. "You'd better go home and get dry."

\*

