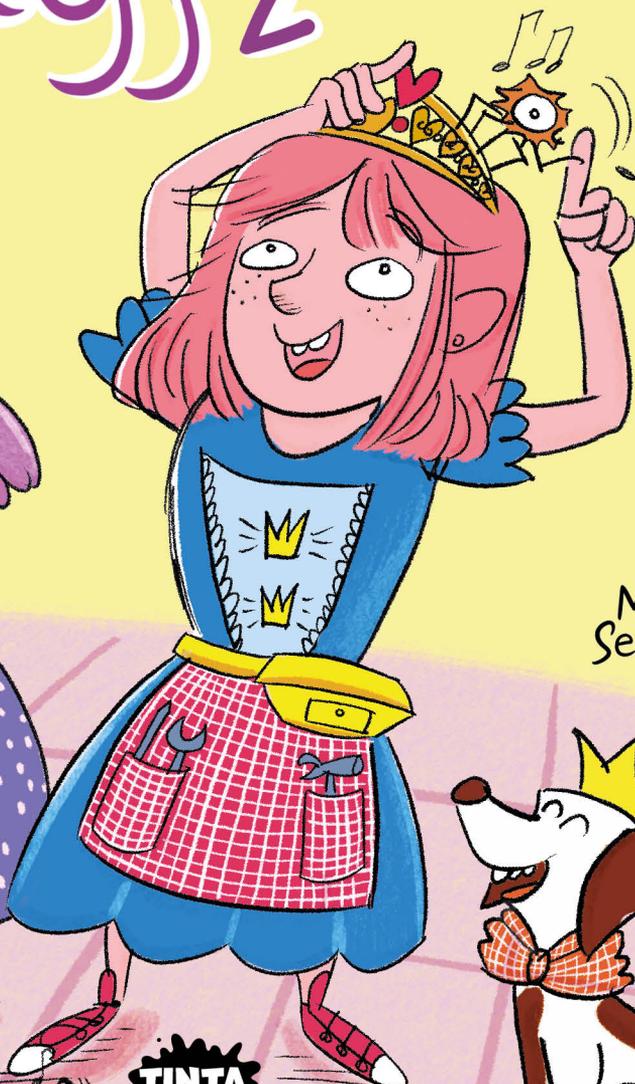
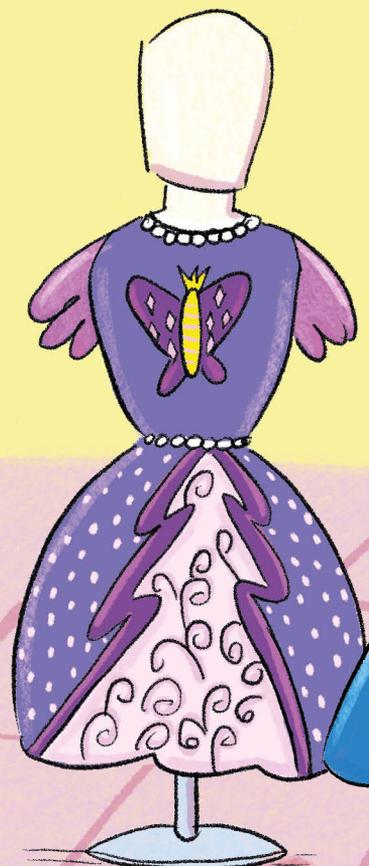


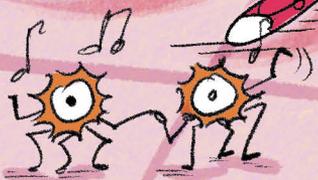
Fer Alcalá  
Geòrgia Costa

# Ness <sup>The</sup> Princess 2

A peculiar ball



María Serrano



**TINTA**









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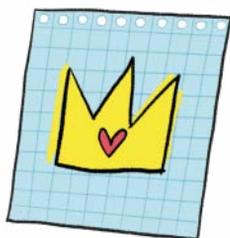
 A peculiar  
ball  
The  
Ness  
Princess 2

  
María  
Serrano



**TINTA**  
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1

## THE LAST TIME

Being a princess is really tough. Even being a princess of a kingdom as tiny as Botonia. Not to mention the classes at the International Academy of Princes and Princesses. On top of that, they only went and made us organise a ball...

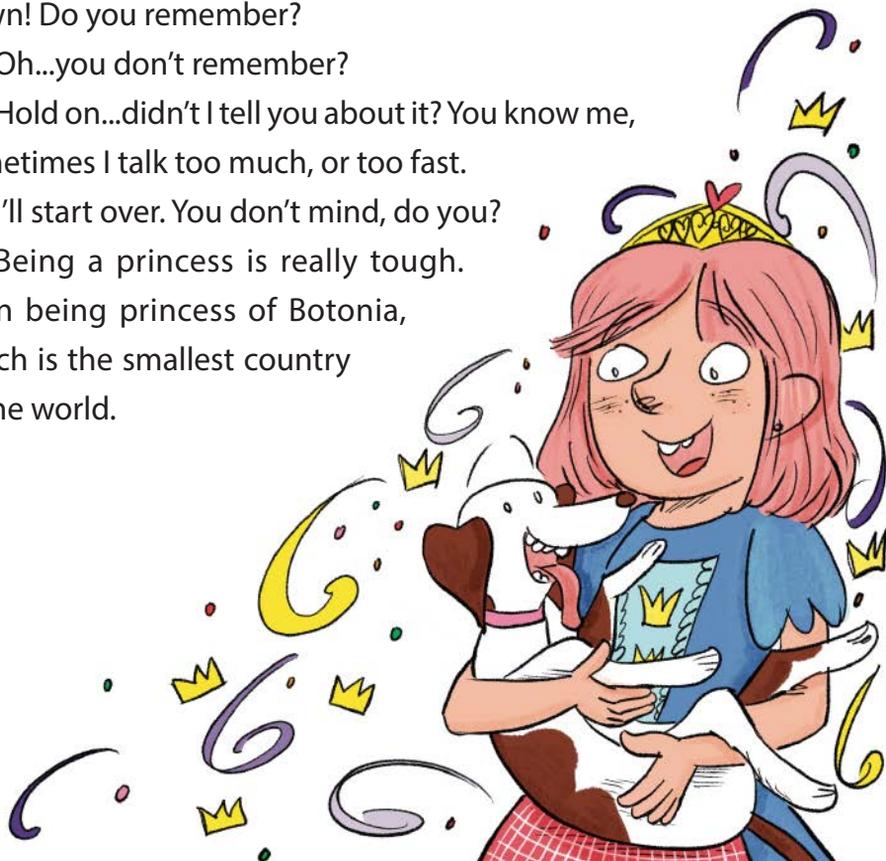
A ball that turned out to be a complete disaster. Countess Susan Crush-Down had a complete meltdown! Do you remember?

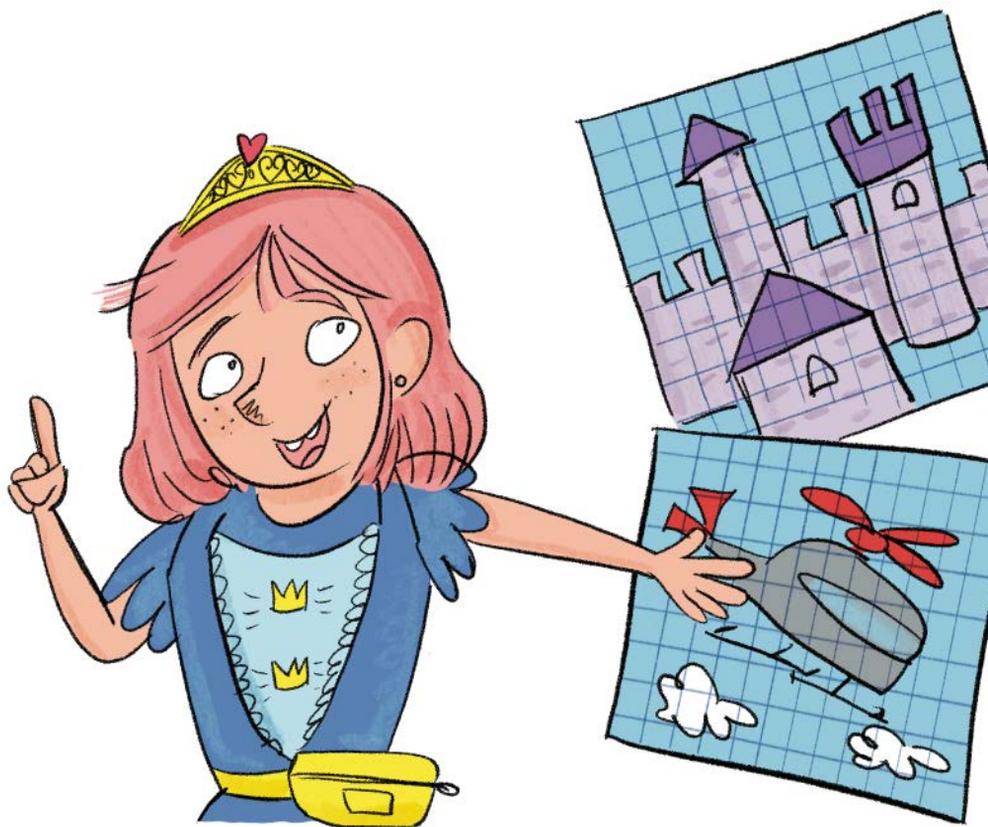
Oh...you don't remember?

Hold on...didn't I tell you about it? You know me, sometimes I talk too much, or too fast.

I'll start over. You don't mind, do you?

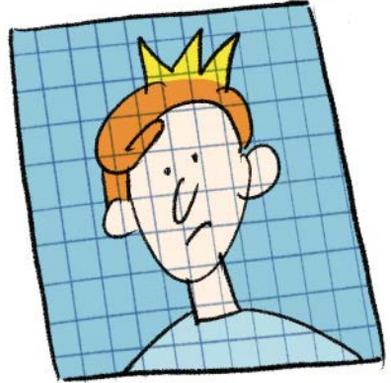
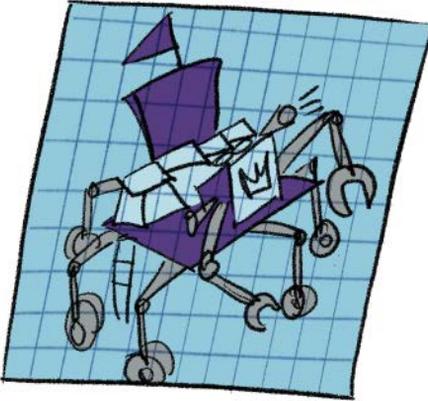
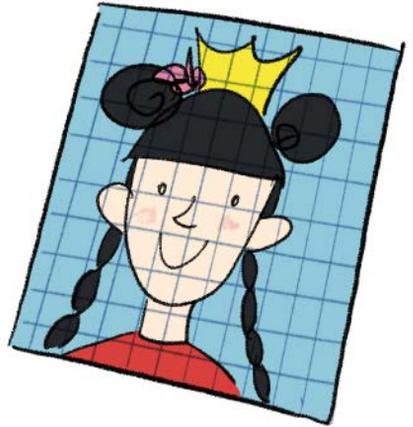
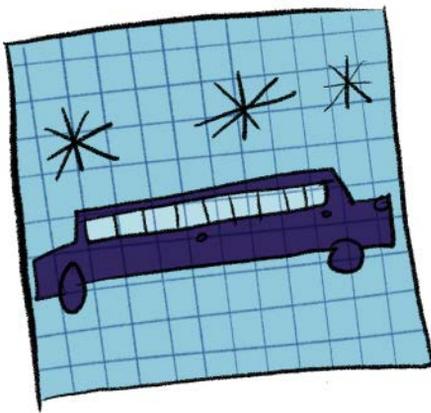
Being a princess is really tough. Even being princess of Botonia, which is the smallest country in the world.





What's also really tough is attending the International Academy for Princes and Princesses, which is located at my family's old castle, on the outskirts of the town of Botonia. A few weeks ago, I started classes there and it was AWFUL, because everyone turned up in limousines, private jets and helicopters, while I rocked up on my bike. In the end, with the help of Lin, who is a princess from a super technologically-advanced country, I built a mega-carriage to go to school, but it turned out a little...well, if I'm honest with you, a bit iffy.

The good thing is I made friends with Lin. And we met Armando, who is another prince in our class.



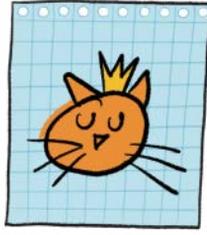
Armando also became friends with Lin and I, but...  
Look, I don't want to talk about Armando.

Anyway, now that the academic year has formally begun, the teachers couldn't think of anything better to do than organise a ball.

You'd think a dance would be something cool, right? But we're talking about a formal, elegant ball. And let me tell you something: those kinds of balls are SO BORING.

Although the ball we held in my primary school, now that...actually, I'd better tell you everything from the beginning.





## 2 A BALL

Everything began a few days ago. We were in Protocol class, where Professor Sacrebleu teaches us how to act in any situation, no matter how bizarre. For example, did you know that in the kingdom of Basin, which is almost as small as Botonia, when a member of the royal family sneezes, everyone else has to applaud like mad? And did you know that in the kingdom of Kitaipon, which is the country my friend Lin is from, it is forbidden to wake up a cat that has fallen asleep on your lap?

Protocol classes are certainly interesting and, besides, Professor Sacrebleu is very nice. However, that day, he was acting very strange.



'Now then...' mumbled Professor Sacrebleu while he leafed through a textbook. 'There are just a few minutes left of class. We can talk about...about...we can...'

'What's up with him?' I whispered to Lin. Lin and I, since the carriage incident, had become inseparable.

My friend shrugged her shoulders.

As I was saying, Professor Sacrebleu was acting very strange. Usually, he came into class smiling from ear to ear and, when he told us things, he did it passionately. However, he had spent the whole hour jumping from one topic to another, as if he couldn't focus on anything, until...



*'Mon dieu!* Enough! I can't hold it in anymore! Oh, no, no!'

The teacher snapped the textbook shut. His moustache quivered so much it looked like he had a scared little mouse underneath his nose.

'Professor Sacrebleu? Are you feeling okay?' said a voice from just behind us.

It was Armando. Do you remember him? Lin and I saved him from falling head first into the castle's moat. Yep! The moat full of crocodiles! And then he became our friend.



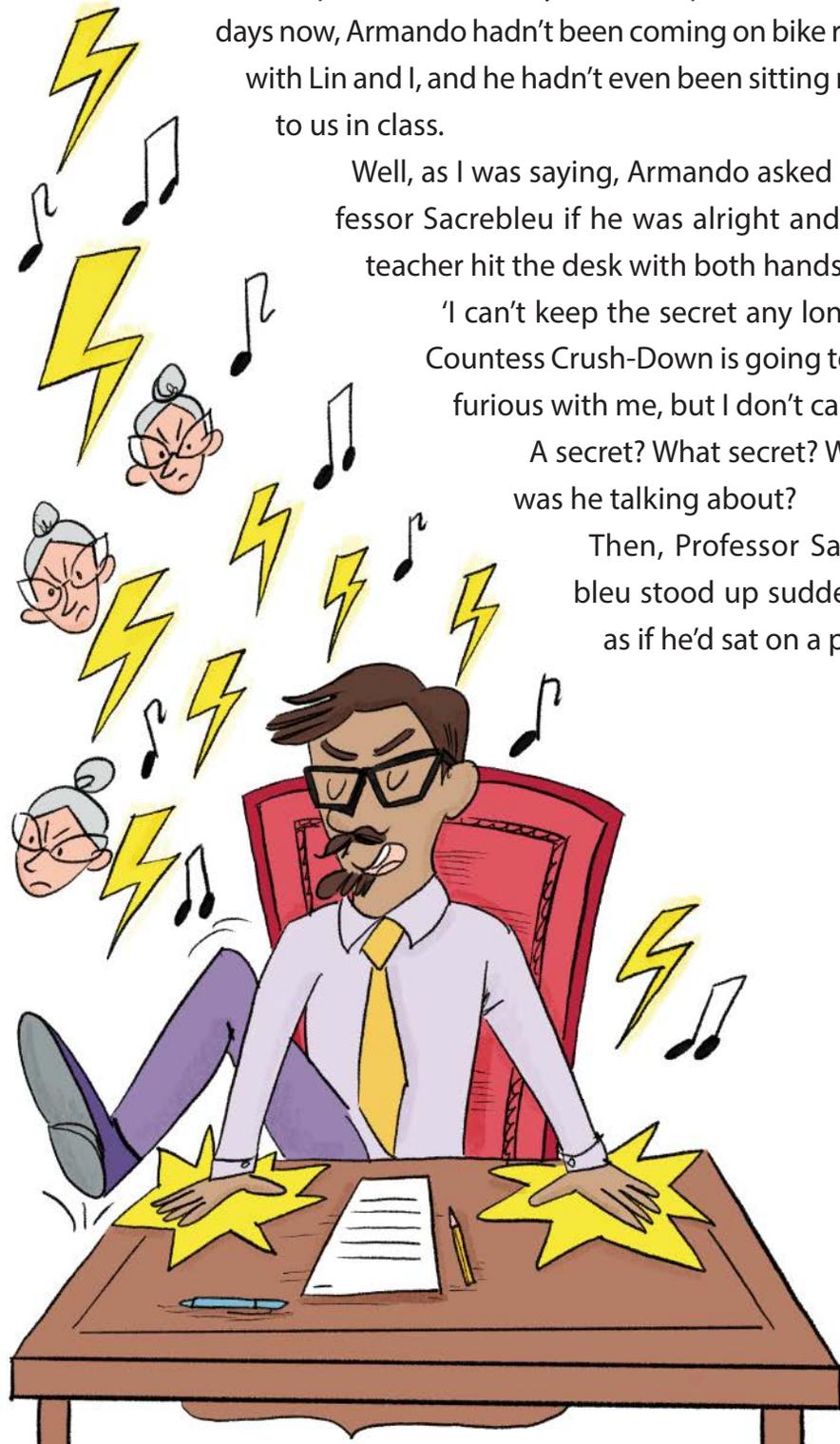
Except that...not exactly. Let me explain: for several days now, Armando hadn't been coming on bike rides with Lin and I, and he hadn't even been sitting next to us in class.

Well, as I was saying, Armando asked Professor Sacrebleu if he was alright and the teacher hit the desk with both hands.

'I can't keep the secret any longer! Countess Crush-Down is going to be furious with me, but I don't care!'

A secret? What secret? What was he talking about?

Then, Professor Sacrebleu stood up suddenly, as if he'd sat on a pin.





'We're going to throw a ball to mark the beginning of the new term!'

So that was the big secret! In Botonia, once a year, we hold a big dance on Otón Botón Day, which celebrates the kingdom's founder. We erect a huge stage in Otón Botón Square for the day and we decorate it with star-shaped lanterns. Everyone eats, drinks and has a great time. So, when I heard this news, I also jumped to my feet and shouted:

'Yipeeee! A dance!'



Do you know what the strangest thing was? I was the only person who seemed excited. Everyone else sat still at their desks. I wanted to ask Lin why she was so sombre, but then the bell rang to let us know it was time to go to the next class.

I didn't manage to ask her the whole day. We were super busy with classes and homework. In the end, it slipped my mind.

I only remembered about the ball when Lin and I said goodbye at the castle gates when classes were finished. As Kitaipon is very far from Botionia, she sleeps at the Academy, just like most of our classmates.

'Hey, Lin,' I was finally able to ask her, 'what's the deal with the ball? It seems like no one cares about it..'

Lin looked at me rather strangely. Niko, her cat bodyguard, did likewise.

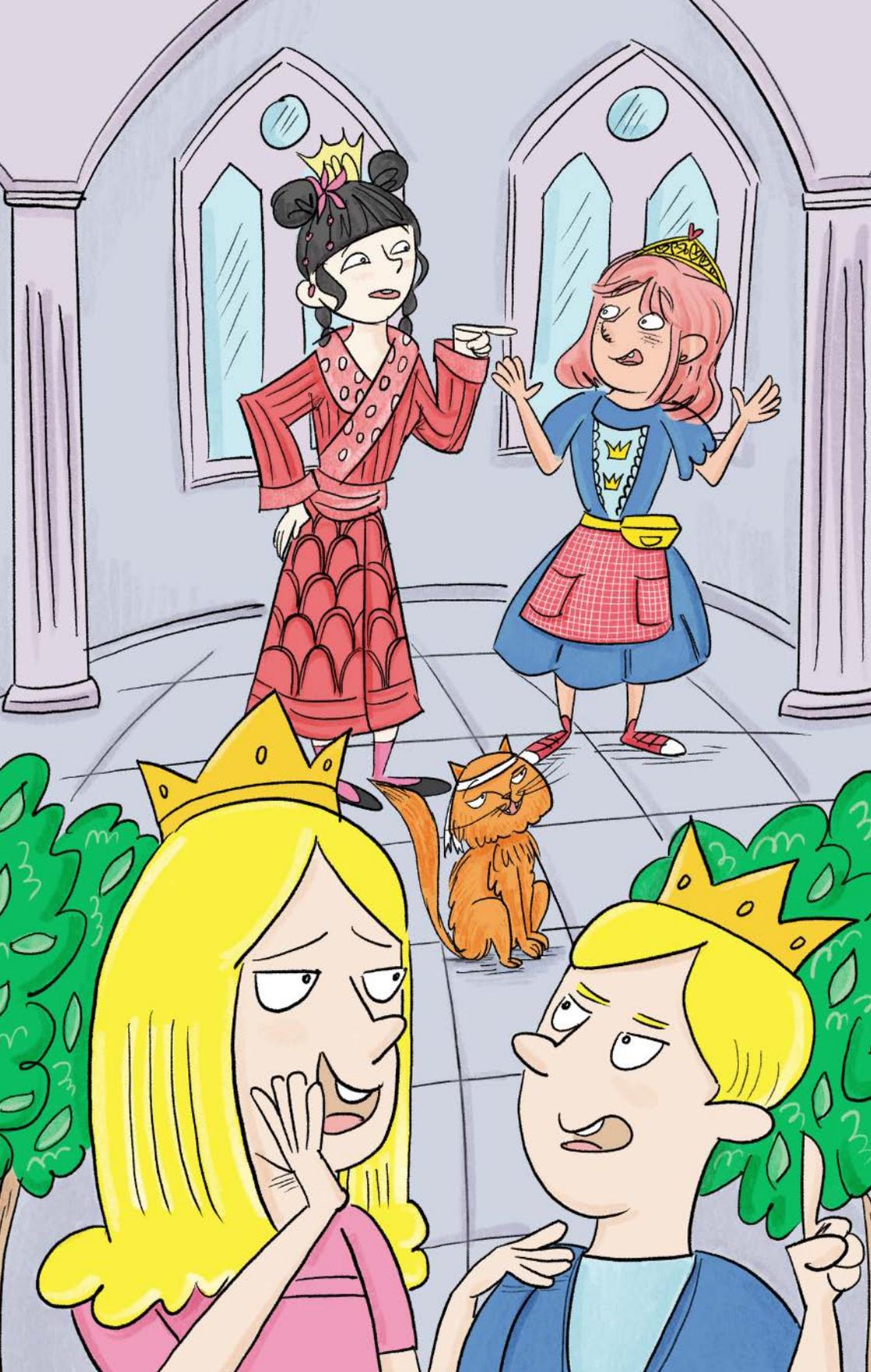
'Have you ever been to a formal ball?'

I opened my mouth, about to reply, but someone did it for me.

'I doubt it!'

I furrowed my brow. Before I told you that Armando was ignoring us. What I didn't tell you is that Armando was spending all day with two of our classmates, Princess Prim and Prince Ascanius.

I don't like saying mean things about people, but...I'm not very fond of Prim and Ascanius.



They were a brother and sister who went round the Academy looking at everyone else as if they were a piece of gum stuck on the sole of their shoe. It's true that their kingdom, Yukei, is ginormous and super-powerful, but that doesn't make them superior to anyone else.

'Of course I've been to a ball! Loads of them!' I retorted angrily.

'Then why do you ask, princess of Botonia?' said Ascanius, Prim's brother. Ascanius never called me Ness, always *princess of Botonia*. As if being princess of Botonia were a bad thing!

I opened my mouth. Then I closed it again. Although I hated to admit it, Ascanius had got me there. Before I could think of a good reply, Prim and her brother were walking away, laughing. Armando followed them, but he didn't say anything.



### 3

## VOLUNTEERS REQUIRED

I barely slept that night. The whole time I was dreaming about the dance, the music, the food, and all the fun we were going to have. Despite that, I ended up getting up super super super early.

'Dad! Mum! Dad! Mum!'

I burst into my parents' room. There was only one problem: it was so early that mum and dad were still asleep.

'Mum! Dad!' I insisted a while longer until, finally, my dad opened an eye and yawned. Mum continued to snore.

'Mmmmm...Nessa? What's up?'

'Where are the photos from the dance?'

'What dance?' mumbled my dad.



'The Otón Botón dance from last year!'

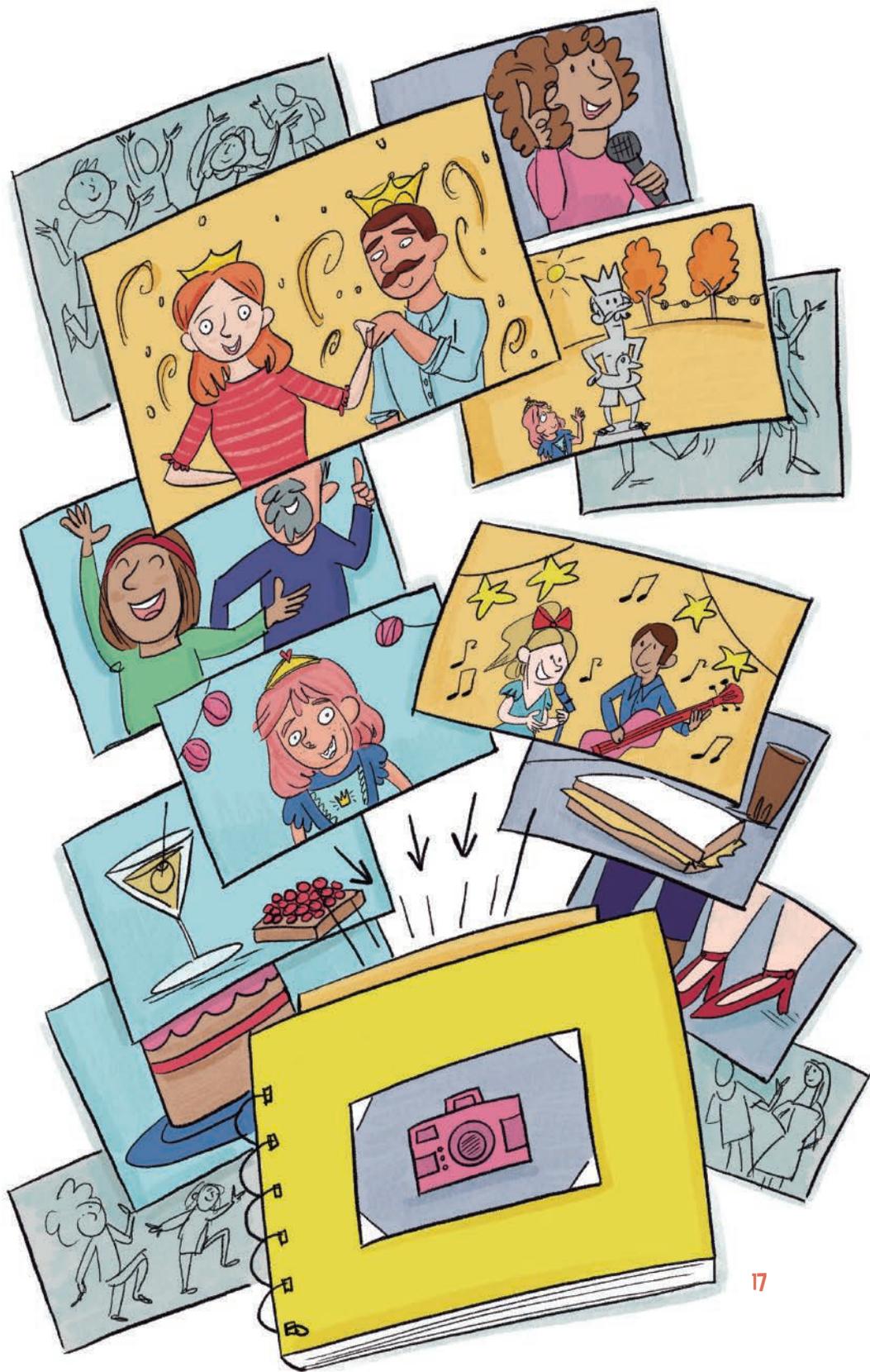
'What do you want them for?' began my dad, but, I think because he saw my face, he quickly added: 'They're in a box in the garage. But there are loads! And it's all a mess!'

'It doesn't matter!' I replied as I shot out of there and towards the garage. My dad loves taking photos, especially of Botonia's festivities and celebrations, but then there's no way of making him arrange them. He's so unorganised!

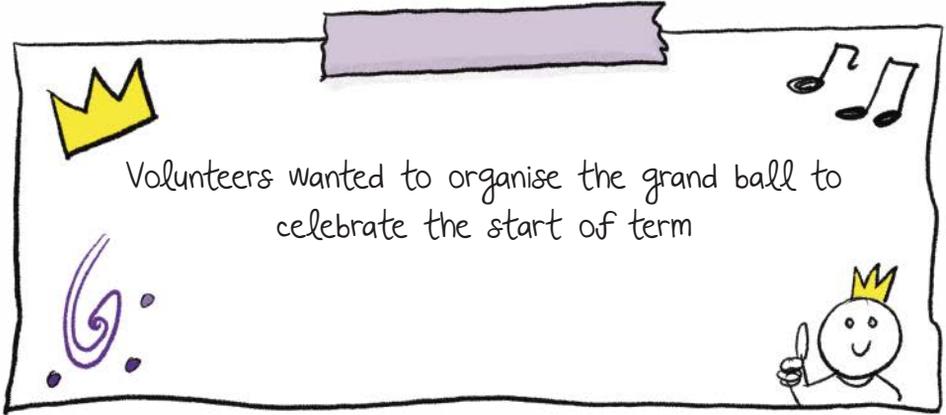
Luckily, I had the solution for the random piles of photos: my automated photo album! With that invention, I only had to put the photos inside the album and it arranged them as if it were a book of photos. Perfect!

I slipped in all the photos of the Otón Botón dance I could find. Then, I got on my purple bike and began to pedal towards the International Academy for Princesses and Princesses. If you recall, Botonia is a kingdom so small that hardly anybody has a car. Instead, we go everywhere on foot or by bike (or on roller skates, like my dad). I was so excited that I forgot to have breakfast, but luckily in the basket on my bike I had a bag of muffins that Eclair, Botonia's pastry chef, had given me.

When I reached the castle, I found Lin and a handful of other classmates in the entrance hall looking at an enormous



poster hanging next to the grand staircase that led to the first floor of the castle.



Right below there was a blank space where volunteers could add their names. I was surprised to see there were already three names written there.

*Prince Ascanius Frederickingson XVII of Yukei*

*Princess Prim Frederickingson III of Yukei*

*Armando I Barullo of Gresca*

My stomach was filled with the strangest tingling sensation, as if there were an avalanche inside it. I was quite annoyed that they were the first to sign up.

'We're going to put our names down too, right? Come on...it'll be great,' I said with a faint voice.

Lin tilted her head to one side. Then she opened her eyes very wide, as if she had just solved a really difficult maths problem.

‘What exactly are balls like in Botonia?’

Aha! I thought she was never going to ask. I took out of the automated photo album from the pocket of my dress. Immediately the album began to buzz and show one photo after another. Photos of people having a great time. Photos of people dancing like crazy and Otón Botón square decorated with paper lanterns. I almost didn’t realise that a crowd of astonished princes and princesses had gathered around us. They eventually began to ask questions:

‘What kind of music do they play at the ball?’ asked a short girl with round cheeks.

‘Does everyone go?’ wondered one of my classmates.

‘Is it fun?’

Hold fire! Can you guess who asked that last question? Armando! He’d been there the whole time!

‘It’s more than fun,’ I replied smiling from ear to ear. ‘It’s...it’s...PHENOMONAL!’

I was happy. All my classmates were interested in Botonia’s dances. Some of them even put their names down to be volunteers to organise the ball at the academy, but then...

‘Hey, Nessa,’ said Lin. ‘Is it normal for smoke to come out of the album?’

I think Lin knew it wasn’t normal, but she didn’t want to hurt my feelings. Lin is a great friend.



'Watch out! It's going to explode!' shouted the same round-cheeked girl from before.

'Come on, that's not true!' I replied indignantly.

'Meeeeaaaooowww!' cried Niko, the cat bodyguard, as he leapt towards Lin to protect her.

'My inventions don't explode!' I tried to convince them. Maybe they sometimes do unexpected things, but they don't...

**BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO MMM!**

The album exploded. Luckily, it was only a very small explosion that sent the dozens of photos from



the party flying into the air. While I tried to catch the photos that started to descend above our heads, like huge bits of confetti, Prim and Ascanius, the princess and prince of Yukei, came down the corridor and burst out laughing.

And you think that's the worst of it? Not even close. The worst was when, on top of that, the Countess Crush-Down arrived.

'What is going on here? What is all this scandal...? Oh!'

At that very moment a photo fell on her head. And not just any photo! It was of the statue of Otón Botón that stands in the middle of the square of the same name. Yes! The statue



that shows my ancestor  
in flowery swimming shorts  
and about to dive into a pool!

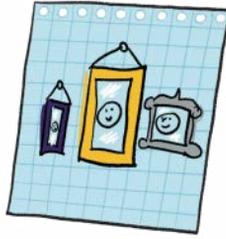
The countess went pale and  
then very, very red.

I closed my eyes. I feared an  
awful scolding, but, luckily, the  
countess just sighed slowly through  
her nose and pulled that face she  
always did that looked like she could  
smell dog poo.

'Let's not waste any more time.  
All volunteers for organising the ball,  
follow me, please. There are many  
things to organise. We must make  
sure the ball is perfect.'

The countess began to walk. Fol-  
lowing her were Armando, Prim and  
Ascanius. Then, Lin gave me a shove  
for me to start walking too.

'Go! I'll sign us up as volunteers.  
You're right, it could be fun...'



## 4

# THE GRAND HALL

The countess led Lin, Armando and his friends, and me to a part of the castle we never went to: the Grand Hall!

It was a huge room. The ceiling was very high and it was full of paintings, sculptures and dozens of mirrors which made the hall appear even bigger. It was a spectacular room. Incredible. It was...

'Ah...ah...achoo!' Armando sneezed as soon as he walked in. 'Achoo, achoo, achoo!'

The hall was full of dust and cobwebs! As it was so large and elegant, it was hardly every used.



Then, the Countess handed us a load of brushes, mops and brooms.

'Right, my dear volunteers, I want all this clean by the end of the day,' she said. And with that, she left.

I was left open-mouthed, but I was so excited to begin organising the ball that I grabbed the first broom to hand and got to work.

A minute later, I turned around. It seemed I was the only one who was sweeping!

'What are you doing?'

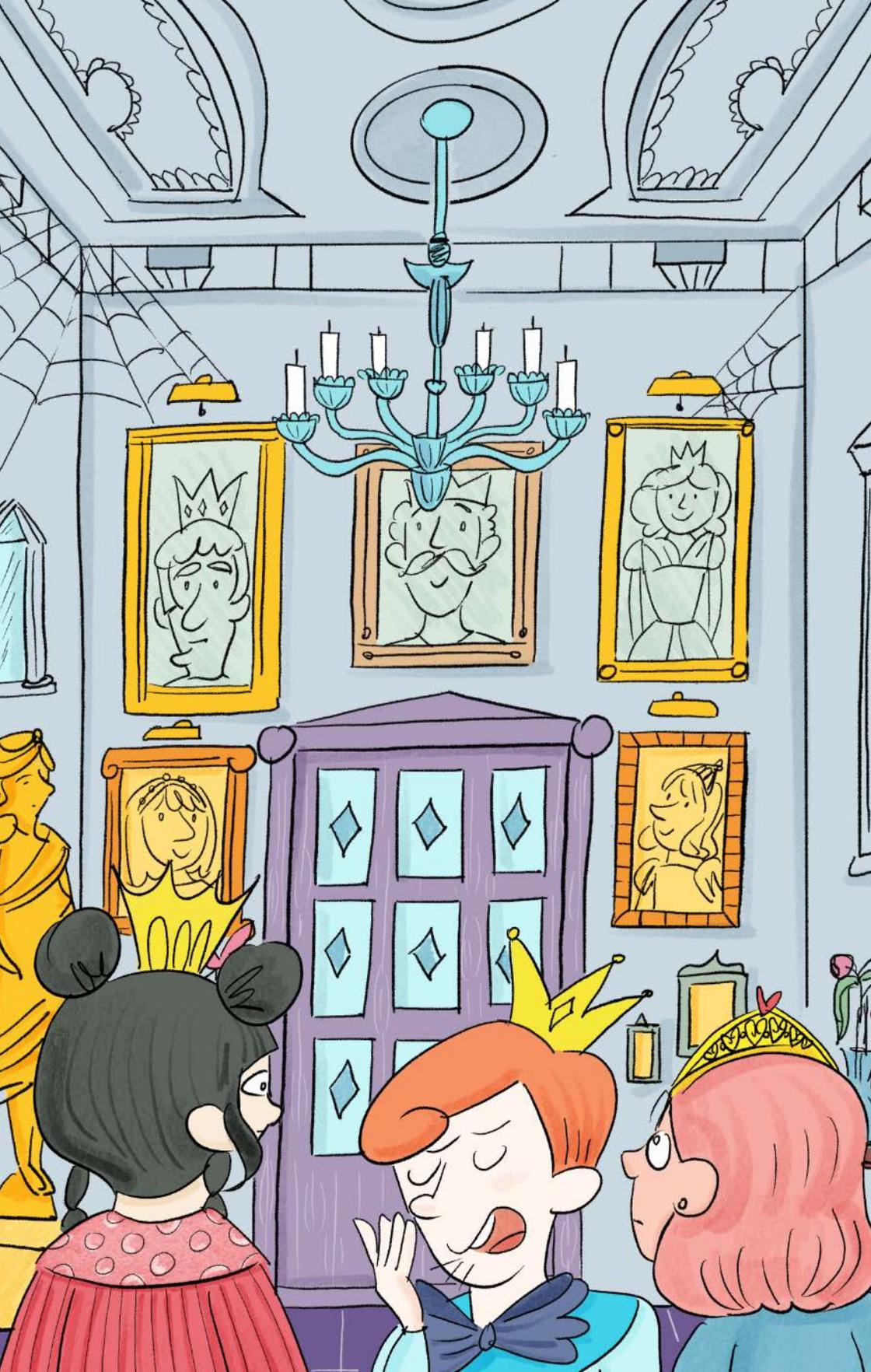
'You don't expect us to clean, do you?' said Prim, wrinkling her nose.

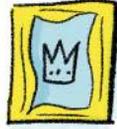
'Why not?'

'What a joke! It's a brush! Anyone can use a brush!'

'It's not something befitting of us,' said Lin slowly. You see, sometimes I forget that the rest of the princes and princesses at the Academy, including Lin, are different to me. Eventually their butlers, maids, servants and assistants arrived and began to mop and dust. I carried on with my broom.

For hours we tidied up and swept away the cobwebs. We polished the mirrors and dusted the furniture until the hall veritably shone. I was exhausted, but my classmates seemed bored. Naturally! They had done nothing all day!

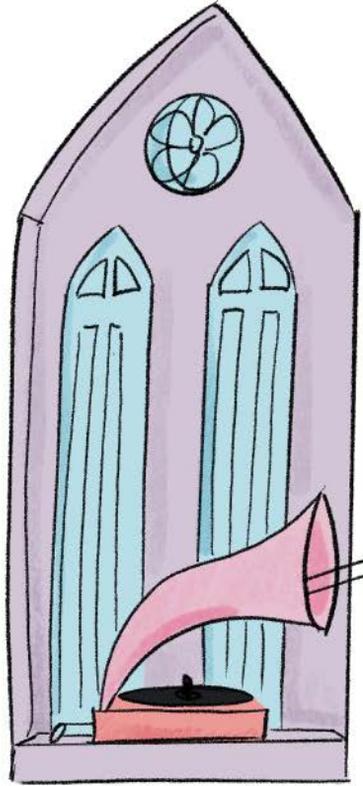




I was angry, but I also felt a little bad. I would much rather be tired from having worked all day than be bored.

Then I remembered something: amongst the old objects we had found in the hall, there was a record player. I went over to look at it. It was very old, but it still had a disc inside. I turned it on and began to dance. Suddenly, all my tiredness faded away.

'Ness! What are you doing?' asked Lin, alarmed. Niko's whiskers were raised in surprise.



'I'm dancing! Come on, try it! It's fun!'

Maybe, just like she had never used a broom, Lin had never *truly* danced before, so I leapt towards her and grabbed her hands.

'I don't know how to dance!'

'So what?' I replied.

My friend and I danced round and round and soon Lin was laughing away.

'I'm doing it all wrong!' insisted Lin, but she didn't stop laughing.

'Dancing badly is just as fun as dancing well!'

I exclaimed happily.

I no longer even felt mad at anyone.



'Come on!' I said to the others. They were looking at us wide-eyed.

'We don't know how to!' replied the round-cheeked princess, who turned out to be called Malia of Luxembargo.

'Well you won't learn by standing still!' I said. Then I turned up the volume on the record player up to the maximum.

Next, Armando took a step forward. He was keeping the beat with his foot. Prim tried to stop him, but Armando took another timid step forward. Now he wasn't just moving his foot, but both legs. He was jumping about and, although he looked very embarrassed, he was dancing!



‘Nice one, Armando!’

After seeing Armando, Princess Malia and her cousin – with whom she went everywhere – joined in, along with the rest of the princes and princesses. Even their butlers and servants started to move. Some merely swayed a little while listening to the music with their eyes shut. Others, like Armando, jumped around.

The only ones not dancing were Prim and Ascarnius. You could tell they were Countess Crush-Down’s favourite students because they had that same face that looked like they were sniffing dog poo.

And talking of the countess...we were so caught up in the moment that no one realised that classes had finished, and so right at that moment she appeared.

‘Hold it there! Stop this madness!’

‘We were just practising a bit for the ball...’ I protested.

The countess raised her hands to her chest. Oh my! She was having a fit!

‘But what kind of balls do you think we throw at this school, young lady?’



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Being a princess is really tough.  
And even more so when you're princess  
of a kingdom as tiny as Botonia. Not to mention  
how hard the classes at the International Academy  
of Princes and Princesses are. And they've only  
gone and decided to make us organise a ball...  
Doesn't that sound like a great idea?  
Well, let me tell you something:  
**fancy balls are so boring.**



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