

Emily curtsied. She instantly liked the small man with twinkly eyes. She hoped all the other kings and queens were as friendly as he was.

The purpose of the Mistberg Grand Ball was for young princes and princesses, age nine or older, to present themselves to the twenty royal families from around the world.

Emily had never been there before because her parents had been so busy with their royal duties at home in the kingdom of Middlingland. But this year was different; Emily was old enough now to take part in the ceremony.

In three days she would have to curtsy in front of each and every king and queen, and she was already a little nervous.

“Come this way, Your Majesties,” said King Gudland. He led them through an



enormous hallway full of people hurrying around with suitcases.

They climbed up five spiraling staircases, watched by the solemn pictures of King Gudland's ancestors. When they reached the top, the king waved his hand toward three wooden doors.

"This is the West Tower, with my most comfortable rooms," he said. "The banquet begins at six o'clock. Don't be late!" He gave Emily another twinkly smile before stepping back down the staircase.

"That's your room, Emily," said her mom, pointing to the first door. "Meet me in the dressmaking suite in half an hour. It's two staircases down and then on the right. You can't miss it."

Emily nodded, pushed her door open, and took her first look at her room. A four-poster bed filled one corner, and a

