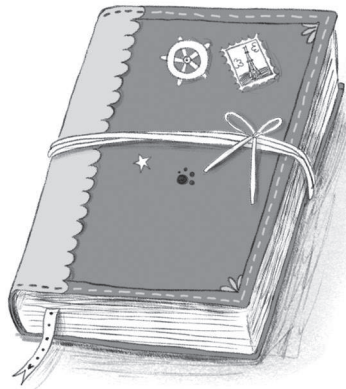


# The Travels of **ERMINE** (who is very determined)

Trouble in  
New York





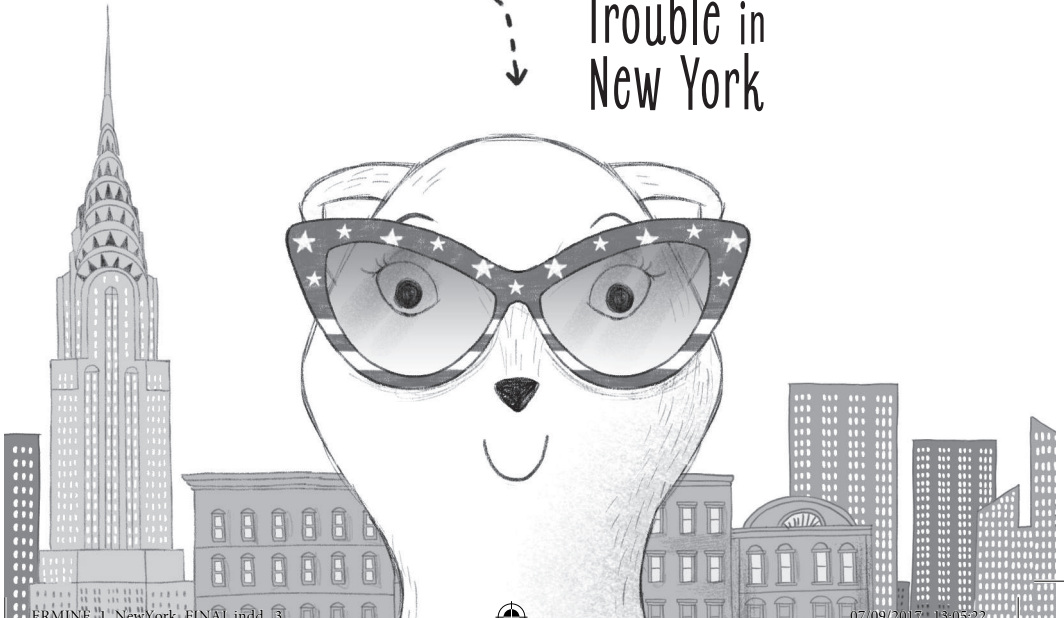
By Jennifer Gray ★ Illustrated by Elisa Paganelli

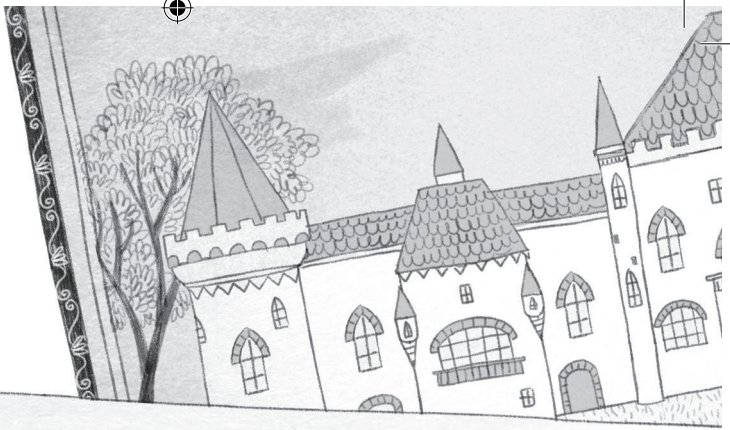


# The Travels of ERMINE

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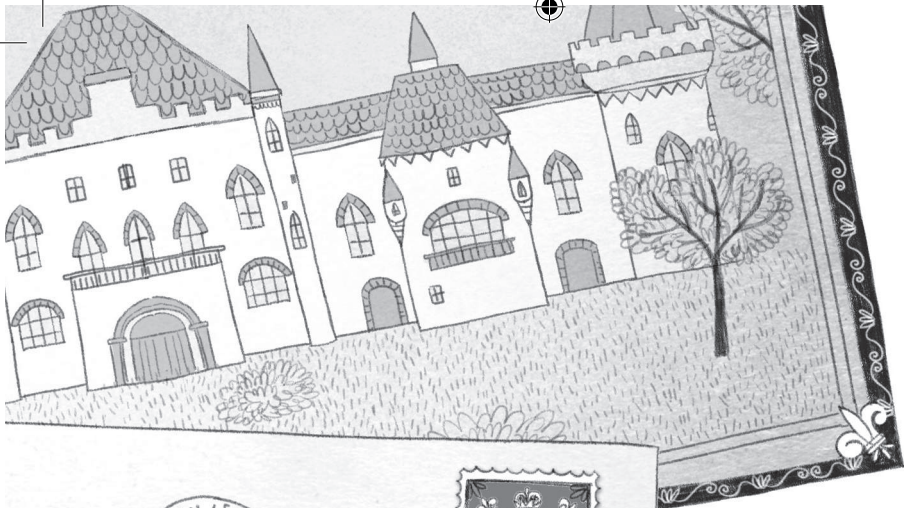
Dear Michael,

I am writing to tell you that I have recently adopted a very determined young lady named Ermine and I am sending her on a trip to see the world. New York City seems like a good place to start, so I have given her your address and told her to look you up. I am sure you will take care of her and show her the sights. She will be arriving next Wednesday afternoon.

Please send my regards to the former Mrs Megabucks and say hello to Mike Junior for me.

With best wishes,

• *Maria* Grand Duchess Maria Von Schnitzel



Michael S Megabucks

Megabucks Bank

Wall Street

Manhattan

New York City

United States of America



# Chapter 1

*Manhattan, NYC...*

**M**ichael S Megabucks sat at his mega-desk in his mega-office drinking a mega-cup of coffee. The office was at the top of a mega-building overlooking the mega-skyline of Manhattan in New York City.

Megabucks House was one of the tallest skyscrapers in the city and the bird's-eye view of the glittering glass buildings was spectacular, especially in the winter sunshine. Michael S Megabucks never tired of it.





He swivelled round and round in his leather chair to take another look.

“Excuse me, Mr Megabucks.” His assistant poked his head round the door.

“Whadisit, Sam?” Michael S Megabucks scowled.

“There’s someone here to see you, Sir.”

“I thought I told ya to keep this afternoon free.” Michael S Megabucks had one son – Mike Junior. Today was Mike Junior’s eighth birthday and he had something special planned.

“I’m real sorry, Sir,” said the assistant, running his fingers through his hair. “I’ve told her to come back tomorrow but she just won’t take no for an answer. She says you’re expecting her.” He raised his eyebrows.





“Something about a postcard...from a duchess?”

“Oh, shoot!” Michael S Megabucks said.

“I’d forgotten all about that. You’d better send the young lady in.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

Michael S Megabucks heard a scampering sound on the corridor’s marble floor. “Hey!” he yelled after the assistant. “Did she bring a dog?”

“No, Sir,” the assistant called. “She’s on her own.”

“What’s that scratching noise then?”

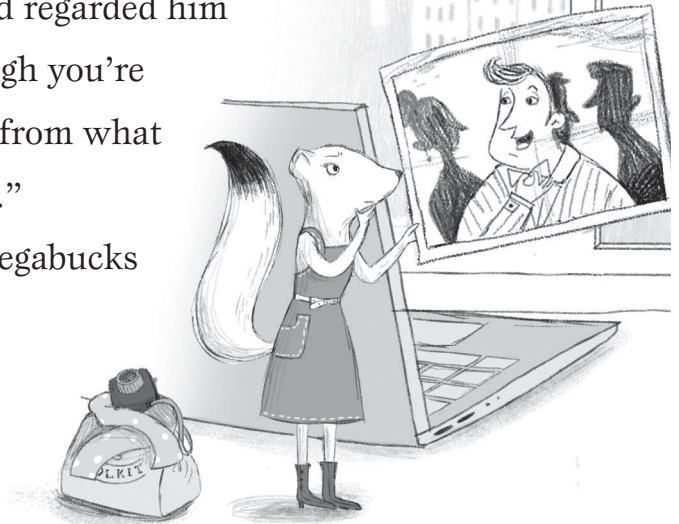
The assistant didn’t reply. Instead he popped his head back round the mega-door and announced, “Miss Ermine, Sir.”

A small, snow-white, furry animal with a long bushy tail, two coal-black eyes, white

whiskers and a pink nose trotted into the room. She was wearing a blue pinafore dress and a woolly scarf, and stood about half as high as his knee. A camera was slung over her shoulder and in one paw she carried a small bag marked **TOOL KIT**. She leaped up onto the desk.

“Hello,” she said, “you must be Mike Senior.” She removed a tatty photograph from her dress pocket and regarded him closely. “Although you’re rather *different* from what I was expecting.”

Michael S Megabucks blushed.



He and the Duchess were old friends. It was some time since he'd seen her, but he didn't think he'd changed *that* much. "You're Ermine?" he said, looking at her doubtfully. "Maria didn't say anything about a *weasel*."

Ermine gave him a frosty look. Her whiskers twitched. "I am NOT a weasel!" she said sternly. "I'm a *stoat*."



“What’s the difference?” Michael S Megabucks said.

“*What’s the difference?*” Ermine spluttered. “I turn white in the winter and brown in the summer, for one. And I have a black tip on the end of my tail –” she waved it in his direction so he could see – “and I’m far cleverer. I live a

lot longer too, so I’ve got lots and lots and *lots* of relatives.”

Michael S Megabucks decided to change the subject.



He didn't want the whole of Ermine's family descending on him from Balaclavia. "How d'ya come to know Maria?" he asked instead.

"The Duke wanted to use me to trim the collar of his robe," Ermine explained. "You know – the one he wore in the old days when he went to see the King."

"Ah," said Michael S Megabucks. He was dimly aware that Balaclavia no longer had a king and as a result the Duke and Duchess had fallen on hard times.

"The Duke still uses it for dressing up," Ermine told him. "He keeps it in a trunk at the castle, only the fur collar went mouldy because the castle roof was leaking. The Duchess told him to replace it with velvet instead but he set a trap to catch me anyway."



It's very precious, you know – my white fur. It's called ermine, like me.” She let out a deep, shuddering sigh. “Can you believe that some people want to sew it onto *clothes*?”

“That sucks,” Michael S Megabucks agreed.

“Luckily the Duchess came to the rescue,” Ermine continued. “She told the Duke that the only place for ermine is on a stoat. Then she adopted me. She's taught me lots of useful things, like how to use a spanner and when to wear a feathered hat. And now she's sent me on a trip around the world to complete my education.”

“Good on her,” said Michael S Megabucks. “That sounds like Maria!” An idea occurred to him. “Say, ya fancy coming to meet my kid?”

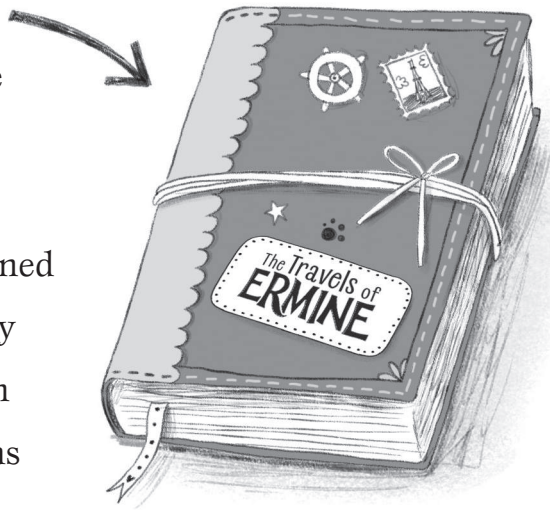
Ermine looked confused. “The Duchess


never mentioned you kept baby goats.”

Michael S Megabucks guffawed. “I mean my son – Mike Junior. It’s his birthday today and I got something planned. You can stay over a couple of days at the apartment if you like. Mike Junior can show ya around the city.”


“Oh, I’m staying much longer than that,” Ermine replied brightly. “The Duchess says I can’t leave until I’ve filled up my scrapbook. That could take weeks.”

Michael S Megabucks opened his mouth to say something, then closed it again as






a thought occurred to him. As well as it being his birthday, Mike Junior had the Christmas vacation coming up and he was due to stay for a while. The kid was always asking if he could have a pet. Sure, what Mike Junior really wanted was an alligator, but a talking stoat wasn't a bad substitute.



“Great!” Michael S Megabucks grabbed his coat. “We’ll be glad to have ya.” He looked at the tool kit. “Is that all the luggage you got?”



Ermine shook with laughter. “Of course it isn’t, silly! I mean would *you* travel the world with just a tool kit?”

“I suppose not,” Michael S Megabucks admitted.

“I always carry it with me, in case there’s an emergency,” Ermine said. “The rest of my



bags are at the airport in Left Luggage.”

“I’ll get Sam to send someone for them straight away,” said Michael S Megabucks.

Ermine jumped onto his shoulder and waved her tool kit in the direction of the door. “What are we waiting for then? Let’s go and meet Mike Junior.”

Ermine’s whiskers twitched in excitement.

**Her TRAVELS had truly begun!**

