



CHAPTER ONE

Florizella's parents completely fail to open their windows for a passing stork to drop a baby on them

Once upon a time (that means I don't exactly know when, but it wasn't that long ago), in the land called the Seven Kingdoms, the king and queen very much wanted a son. They waited and waited until one day the queen told her husband, 'I have news for you. We are going to have a beautiful baby boy!'

'And when he grows up he will be king,' said the king, very pleased. 'What a lovely surprise.'



But when the baby came, it was not a boy. It was a girl.

This was a big shock for the king and queen, but since they were royal they put on a smile and took the baby through the tall windows to the balcony of the palace and waved at everyone. They pretended that they did not mind that she was a girl when they had been counting on a boy, and after a little while they loved her anyway. ‘Besides,’ the king said, ‘undoubtedly she will marry a handsome rich prince, and they can be king and queen over his kingdom and ours. Undoubtedly!’

‘We’ll call her Florizella,’ said the queen. ‘Princess Florizella.’





 *Princess Florizella* 

Though they started with good intentions, the king and queen were dreadfully careless parents. They messed up the christening by inviting everyone, so that nobody was furiously offended. No angry witches blew in and put a fatal spell on the baby, nobody turned her into a mouse. The king and queen forgot all about locking her in a high tower so that a prince could climb up her hair to rescue her, they did not forbid her from spinning, or ban her from sharp needles. They did remind her not to run with scissors in her hands, but this is of no use to a fairytale princess – it’s just normal. They did not strap her into tight gowns so she had a tiny, tiny waist that a prince could span with one hand. They did not feed her poisoned apples and bury her in a glass coffin. The queen was





particularly neglectful – she completely failed to die and leave her daughter to a cruel stepmother to make her herd geese or sit in the cinders.

They let Florizella do as she liked, and so it was partly their fault that she did not learn the Princess Rules, but grew up into a cheerful, noisy, bossy, happy girl who spent her mornings on her horse called Jellybean, and her afternoons working with them in the royal office. She particularly liked answering letters of complaint about the expense and the unimportance of a royal family. Mostly, she agreed with them. ‘We are dretfully ex-pence-sieve’ she wrote when she was six years old.

‘You’re never going to post it like that!’ said the king.





‘So sweet,’ said the queen, putting it in the bin.



Florizella was friends with some princesses who had studied the Princess Rules, and behaved just as the Rules said they should. Florizella thought their hair was lovely: so golden and so very long! And their clothes were nice: so richly embroidered by devoted peasants. And their shoes were delightful: so tiny and handmade in silk! But their days bored her to death!

In the morning, they got up, washed their faces and put cream on their cheeks and on their hands and on their noses. Then it was time for breakfast. They drank hot water and







sometimes green tea. The Princess Rules were clear about breakfast: ‘Princesses live off air,’ the Rules said. They got dressed, and that took them hours because they wore petticoats and underclothes and beautiful gowns and overgowns and even those tall pointy hats called henins. By the time they got all that on, and did their hair, it was lunchtime.

In the afternoon, they were too tired to do anything but pluck their eyebrows.

In the evening, they said they were bored.

‘What do *you* do all day?’ they asked Florizella, looking in bewilderment at her. She wore trousers and a shirt for riding, and a skirt or a dress for best.

‘I’m learning how to run the Seven Kingdoms





when I'm grown up,' she told them. 'I've got a lot of ideas.'

'Ideas!' They were all quite horrified. 'We don't have ideas! We have the Rules.'

But Florizella thought that everyone should live in the size of house that they needed. So families with lots of children, or who had friends living with them, should have the biggest houses, and small families should have the smaller houses.

'Actually, that sounds rather sensible,' said the queen, who was sick of dusting the 134 royal rooms of the palace.

Florizella thought that everyone should be paid whether they had a job or not. They should be paid to garden or think, to paint or run. Fathers could stay at home and look after





the children, and when mothers went out to interesting jobs they could come home to a clean, tidy house.

‘That would never work,’ said the king, who had no intention of dusting 134 rooms, not even one or two.

Florizella laughed and went out to canoe in the moat. ‘You know, she’s not like a regular princess at all,’ the king complained to the queen. ‘I think you must have gone very badly wrong somewhere.’

‘She’ll find her own way, in her own time,’ the queen said comfortably. ‘And surely, since she’s a princess born and bred, she’ll just naturally come to the Princess Rules in time? Won’t she?’

