

Chapter 1

Once upon a time (either a good long time ago, or a good long time in the future), there was a kingdom called the Seven Kingdoms and it was ruled by a king and a queen. They had a daughter who was a princess. Her name was Florizella.

Fair enough. You're thinking that this is going to be an ordinary fairy story. Actually, it isn't. *I* should be perfectly happy to write such a story, but Florizella could not be the hero. For Florizella was not an ordinary fairy story princess. Oh dear me, no. Not at all!

For a start, Florizella was not a pretty princess. No, she was not. You may think that rather a shame but Florizella did not. To tell you the truth she didn't care a bit what she looked like. The things she really cared about were riding her horse Jellybean every day, learning to swim underwater with her eyes open, and trying to persuade her father and her mother to let her have a tame eagle for a pet.

She didn't have a devoted old nurse – not Florizella! She went just about everywhere on her own – on her horse. And it would have to have been a jolly quick devoted old nurse who could have kept up with Florizella and Jellybean when the two of them were galloping over the hills on a sunny morning!

But there *is* a handsome prince in this story! His name was Prince Bennett, and he lived in the next door kingdom. Florizella's parents had hoped that the two of them would marry some day. But Florizella was pretty sure that she didn't want that.

“you have your own kingdom,” she once told him. “And I have mine. How can we be good friends unless we both have places of our own? If you owned everything we would start to think that you were the most important. I want things to be fair between us.”

So Florizella lived in the Seven Kingdoms, and Bennett lived next door in the Kingdom of the Blue Hills only a couple of hours' ride away, if your pony was fast and you were feeling happy. They were the best of friends. Hardly a week went by without their going for a swim together, or hunting, or riding, or tree-climbing or hide-and-seeking. Pretty soon everyone forgot all the old nonsense they had learned about princesses having to get married.

“It was different in *my* day,” said the king, as though his days had been the best.

“It was indeed,” said the queen as if she were not so sure.

