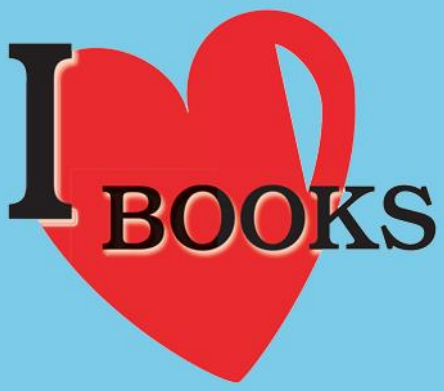


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Opening extract from

The Cherry Pie Princess

Written by

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Published by

Walker Books Ltd

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First published 2017 by Walker Books Ltd
87 Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5HJ

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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This book has been typeset in Berkeley Oldstyle Book

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:
a catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4063-6897-0

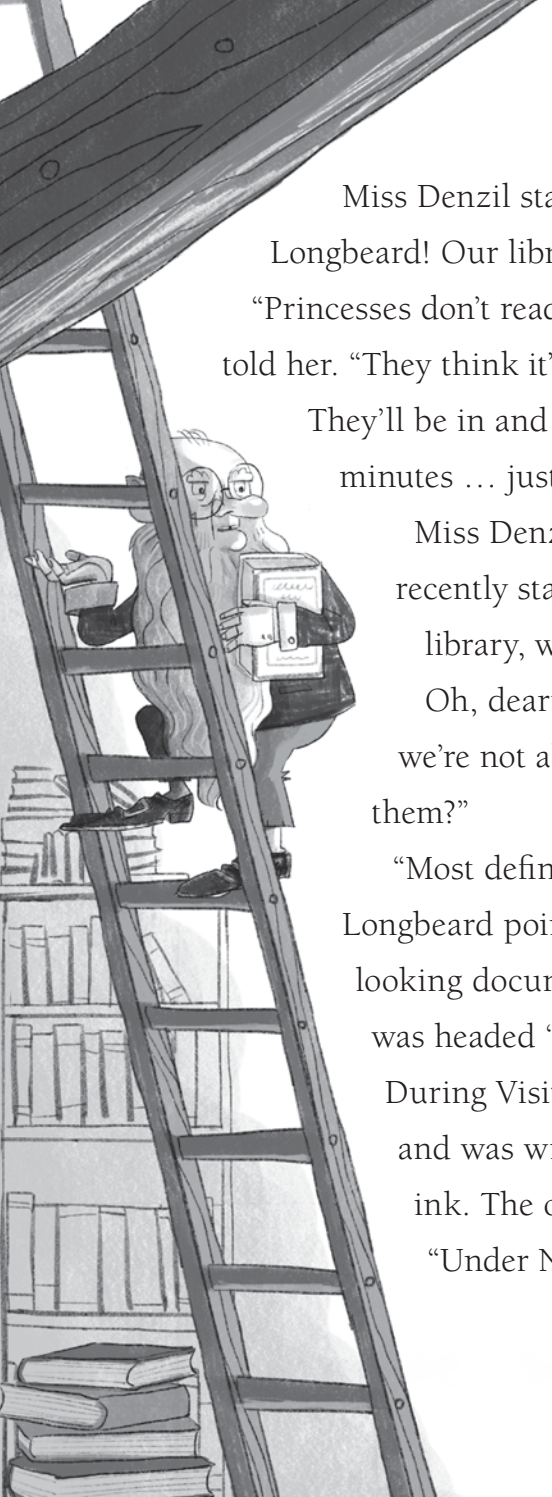
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Chapter One

BONG! BONG! BONG! Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong! The clock in Grating Public Library struck nine, and Miss Denzil clapped her hands. "At last! Today's the day!" She smiled at the date on the calendar. Not only was it underlined, it was also ringed in red, and had a wobbly gold star attached by a pin. "Today the princesses are coming to OUR library."

Lionel Longbeard, an elderly dwarf and the head librarian, shook his head. "Don't get your hopes up, Miss Denzil. They're only coming because their governess thinks it's a good idea."



Miss Denzil stared at him. "But Mr Longbeard! Our library is wonderful!"

"Princesses don't read," Lionel Longbeard told her. "They think it's beneath them. They'll be in and out in a couple of minutes … just you wait and see!"

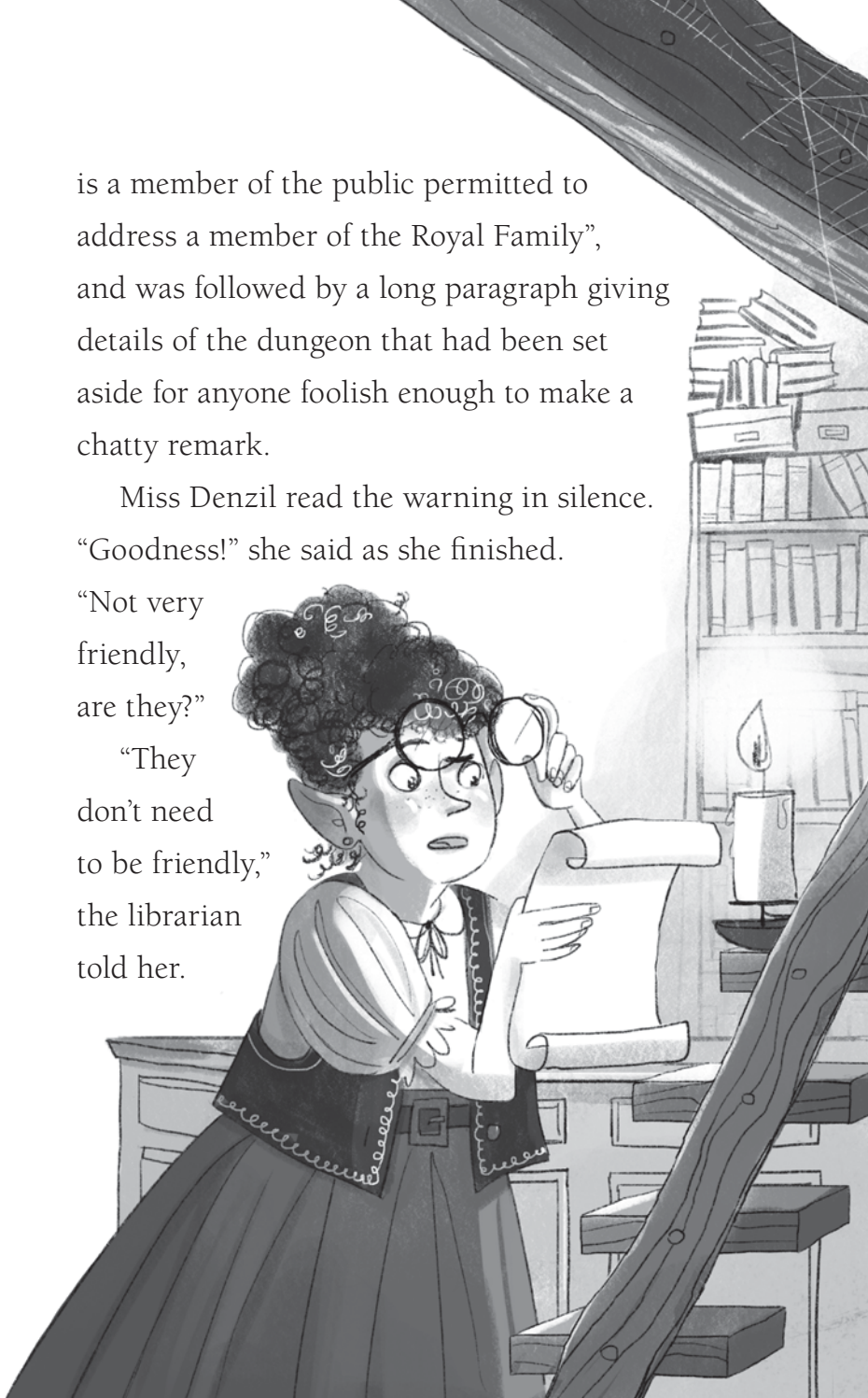
Miss Denzil, who had only recently started working at the library, was shocked. "Really? Oh, dearie, dearie me. And we're not allowed to speak to them?"

"Most definitely not." Lionel Longbeard pointed to an official-looking document on his desk. It was headed "Required Behaviour During Visits From Royalty" and was written in purple ink. The opening line read, "Under NO circumstances

is a member of the public permitted to address a member of the Royal Family", and was followed by a long paragraph giving details of the dungeon that had been set aside for anyone foolish enough to make a chatty remark.

Miss Denzil read the warning in silence. "Goodness!" she said as she finished. "Not very friendly, are they?"

"They don't need to be friendly," the librarian told her.



"They're the Royal Family."

"Well, I must admit I'm disappointed." Miss Denzil removed the gold star from the calendar. "How many princesses are coming?"

Lionel Longbeard inspected a second document. "Seven."

"Are they pretty?" Miss Denzil asked. "Oh, I do hope they are!"

The dwarf shrugged. "They giggle a lot."

The assistant librarian sighed and took herself off to dust a row of books.

When the princesses arrived, they were under the care of a well-upholstered governess. She marched into the library and they followed, sniggering.

"What a lot of books!" The princess who had spoken sounded disapproving. "Couldn't they think of something more interesting to put on the shelves?"

"Like pretty hats," a taller princess suggested.

"Or handbags!"

"Dear girl, you have SUCH sweet ideas!" The governess beamed at her charge.

"This is a dreadfully boring place." A third princess was pouting. "Do let's go, Miss Beef."

There was a chorus of agreement. "Boring! SO boring!"

"Of course, my dears." The governess curtsied and headed for the door. Six of the princesses swept after her, noses in the air.

One princess was left: the youngest. She came hurrying towards Lionel and Miss Denzil. "I'm so sorry about my sisters – I absolutely LOVE your library! Please tell me, where are the storybooks? And what are those big old books over there? Can anyone borrow books?" And then, leaning over the librarian's desk, her eyes wide and hopeful, she whispered, "Are there any books that tell you how to DO things? Like … like cooking?"

"Peony!" The governess was standing in the

doorway, her sharp voice echoing round the room. "Princess Peony? I trust you are NOT asking questions!"

"No, Miss Beef." The princess jumped back, smoothing her dress. "I'm just coming, Miss Beef."

She ran towards the door where the governess was tapping her foot in an irritated manner … and Lionel Longbeard lost his head. Ignoring all the instructions on Required Behaviour, he called after her, "Yes! Yes, Princess – of course there are! LOTS of books!"

The princess's eyes lit up – and she was gone.

The librarian sank back in his chair. His heart was beating fast, and he wondered what on earth could have made him behave in such a very foolish way.

"That was really brave," Miss Denzil said admiringly, before adding, "But, oh! Mr Longbeard! Wasn't it terribly, terribly dangerous?"

* * *

Miss Denzil was right. Miss Beef was only too delighted to report Lionel Longbeard's shocking behaviour to the king. The king was outraged and, unknown to his daughter, gave his orders. The soldiers arrived to arrest the librarian the same afternoon; when a small and trembling pageboy came tiptoeing into the library late that evening and quavered, "Please … Princess Peony wants to borrow a book about cooking," there was only a weeping Miss Denzil to answer his request.

The book, *A Thousand Simple Recipes for Pies, Puddings and Pastries*, was not returned.

