



The Princess Lesson



A Princess Fritzi Story

by Christine Marciniak



I leaned on the super-sized scissors and waited for my father, Prince Frederick, to finish his speech. When he did I would cut the ribbon and then I'd get to be first to ride the zip line in the new park. The park, a few blocks from the palace, had climbing walls and pirate ships and secret tunnels, and of course the big zip line over the whole thing. Last summer, we'd vacationed in the Alps and there had been a huge zip line but Mam said I was too young to ride it. I was ten now, and this was in a playground right here in Colsteinburg. No one could stop me from riding this one. I couldn't wait.

Pap loved giving speeches. I wasn't so keen on listening to them. I tried not to sigh or fidget. It was important, as a princess of Colsteinburg, that I always represent what is best in the country, and always am above reproach in my behavior. I was pretty good at that in public. Mam pointed out, frequently, that my behavior in private needed a bit of work. But Grandmam assured me that Mam was just like me when she was little, and to have patience. That made me feel a little better about not being as perfect as my big sister Georgie, yet.

"And now Princess Fredericka will cut the ribbon and the park will be officially open," Pap said. "Are you ready, Fritzi?"

I held up the giant scissors. "Ready."

This was all about the pictures, not about actually opening the park, so I made sure that the cameras were ready and everything was positioned correctly before I



sliced through the red ribbon. As the pieces of ribbon fell to the ground the crowd cheered. I handed the scissors to an aide and Pap took my hand and led me into the newly opened playground.

"What do you want to do first, Fritz?" Pap asked. As if he had to wonder.

"The zip line."

"Well, go on then," he said and let go of my hand so I could run ahead. A crowd followed me. None of them would dare pass the princess, they knew I got to do things first. It was one part of being a princess that I really liked.

I started climbing the stairs to the top of the zip line tower, the other children close at my heels. "I'm glad I'm right behind the princess," one boy said. "The people at the end may have to wait hours and still won't get to go."

I glanced at the crowd. The boy was right. It was already afternoon and the ride took a little while. Some of these children would have to wait a long time for their turn and some might not even get a turn.

Good thing I was at the front of the line. I didn't have to worry about that.

"Yeah," another boy said. "We live out in the country, we hardly ever get into Colburg. If I didn't get to ride this today I might never get a chance."

I slowed slightly as I climbed the steps. This might be the only chance some of these children got to try this? I could see the palace through the trees. I could come here whenever I liked.

But I was only one person, even if I didn't take my turn, how many would that really help? Not enough, that was for sure.

Then I heard my grandmother's voice in my head, as clearly as if she were standing right next to me. "Just because you can only help one person doesn't mean you shouldn't help at all."

It was true. Mam would take families who were struggling shopping for clothes or food, and I once asked how much it mattered, since she couldn't help everyone all the time and she said as long as she was helping one person that counted for something.

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Then I remembered something else. My grandfather would tell us that just because a King wasn't solely responsible for his subjects like he might have been back when Colsteinburg was founded, he still had to take care of them whenever he could, it was part of being King.

I got to the top of the zip line tower. I was first in line, of course, but when I turned I saw that nearly all the other children were lined up behind me. It would only take a few minutes for me to get strapped in and take the ride across the park. Only a few minutes. How much difference could that make to this long line? It might not make a big difference to some of the people at the very end of the line, but if I didn't take my turn right now, there might be someone who would get a chance they wouldn't have otherwise. And I could always come back tomorrow.

"I'll do this later," I said and climbed back down the stairs.

"See," one boy said to his little sister as I walked back past the line, "Even Princess Fredericka is too scared to do the zip line."

Scared? Me? I wasn't scared of anything, but the little girl was practically trembling and maybe she would feel better if she thought the princess was scared too.

"It's pretty high up." I bent down slightly so I could look the little girl in the eye. "Do you want to climb the pirate ship with me?"

Her eyes lit up. "Yes, please, Princess!"

"Come on," I said and took her by the hand. When we got to the pirate ship, I turned and saw that we'd been followed by a whole crowd of kids. There were still plenty on line for the zip line, but maybe they were the ones who really wanted to do it, and maybe they would all get a chance.

I helped the little girl to the top of the rigging and declared her the Pirate Queen.

"Tomorrow I won't be afraid to try the zip line," the little girl said. "Because Pirate Queens aren't afraid, right?"

"That's right," I said. "Maybe tomorrow I won't be afraid either," I said.

"Right," she said solemnly, "because princesses shouldn't be afraid."

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But princesses did sometimes have to do things to make other people feel better, and the funny thing was, I didn't mind at all not getting to go first on the zip line.

I'd have to talk it over with Grandmam later, but I suspected I learned an important lesson in being a princess today.

