



The Star-Studded Slippers

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Magic

Once upon a time, as the saying goes, there lived a Queen. A very loathsome and rotten Queen if there ever was one. She was the type of Queen who started wars over pear trees, sent cooks to the dungeon if her soup wasn't hot enough, and scowled at puppies. Worse than all these things, however, was that she bankrupted her entire Queendom to indulge her vain obsession in footwear.

Her Majesty loved shoes. And she never wore the same shoe twice. If her shoes weren't gold-plated, inlaid with gemstones, lined in the loveliest of furs, or adorned in any other altogether decadent way, she scorned them with a vengeance and refused to wear them. You can see what a problem this posed.

Every year the Queen needed 365 pairs of shoes made—and not just any shoes—wildly expensive and one-of-a-kind shoes. She monopolized the entire industry of cobblers. Cobblers far and wide worked day and night to keep her in fresh supply of fancy footwear. She sent her courtiers around the world to gather the most rare materials and the most precious jewels. She was so wicked and vain that she didn't care one bit if her subjects roamed the streets barefoot. When extra gold coins found their way into her treasury, instead of paying for modest leather to shoe her people, she took the money and built an addition onto her already gargantuan shoe closet.

But the people never complained. They could not fault the Queen on her taste in finery. And they considered her kind to let them even lay eyes upon the extravagant shoes she wore. Every day the Queen's knights rolled out a red carpet in the town square, and the Queen showed off elaborate heels, boots, stilettos, slippers, and

wedges. The townspeople considered themselves quite fortunate. Who were they to ever own such elegance? Who were they to ever travel the world and see exotic sights? They found solace in their Queen's shoes because it provided a glimpse into the wide and beautiful world out there. They beheld the soft leather of Yakamammoth skin, the black pearls from the caves in the Straits of Muruba, the rainbow threads of the Ishokoan silkworms. Such splendor! Such riches! And right in their town! Who were they to complain? So they ate their crusts of bread and drank their salt soups and never said a word against the vain, vain Queen.

Until one day.

It happened that the men had just brought their morning washing down to the community fountain when they saw them—a pair of slippers that out dazzled the Queen's entire shoe collection. They sat poised and resplendent upon a stone platform, in the middle of the square, commonly used for royal announcements and heated debates.

The slippers were studded in stars and they twinkled with a fury. If you looked closely, you could see galaxies and nebulae swirling in between the starry constellations. The men gasped. They had never seen anything so beautiful in their entire lives. Where did these star-studded slippers come from? It seemed they fell from heaven, a gift from the Zodiac.

"A trick!" cried one man.

"Riches!" whispered another.

"Hope!" spoke the wise man among them, for he knew magic when he saw it.

"These slippers will not follow the whim of just any foot," he continued. "They will only journey with the feet of one worthy to wear them."

"Certainly, no one is more worthy to wear these slippers than our Queen!" responded one of the men. "She is the only one fit to wear such finery. Look at our women. They are all dressed in rags. It would be outlandish—indeed, preposterous—to think any one of them could fit these slippers!

"Truly absurd," reasoned the town blacksmith. "Only rich people are worthy of rich things."

“Perhaps,” said the wise man, “But I tell you, to dare tread on stardust one must certainly have a soul of moon drops and sun beams.”

News of the star-studded slippers reached the Queen’s ears by breakfast. She was just about to take an unbecomingly large bite out of her buttered crumpet when the Page girl whispered in her royal ear.

“Slippers of starshine!?” the Queen gasped; she dropped the crumpet with a splash. There goes the Earl Grey.

“Bring them to me!” the Queen demanded.

“W-w-we cannot!” stuttered the Page.

The Queen reddened at those words. “To the dungeon! How dare you say ‘not!’ to your Queen,” ordered her Royal Wickedness.

Before the guards could drag the page girl to the dark and dingy dungeon, she cried out, “The slippers won’t budge! It is said they can only be taken by one worthy to wear them.”

The Queen raised her hand to stop the guards. “Well in that case, assemble my carriage. Clearly, I am the one worthy of them. I will go.”

She wore a satisfied smile, and dabbed at the corners of her mouth with her napkin. “But all the same—take her to the dungeon!”

“Noo! Please!” But the girl was already gone.

A parade of buglers and jesters and drummers preceded the Royal Carriage; they danced and twirled banners and tooted and rat-a-tatted pompous songs to announced the Queen’s arrival.

Young and old alike stood transfixed upon the slippers in the town square, anxious to see what would happen when the Queen arrived.

The Royal Escorts rolled out the red carpet, which went bumping along right up to the foot of the platform. The carriage door opened with a fine flourish and the Queen stepped out into the light ready to meet the adoring gazes of her people. But they were not gazing at her. They were only looking at the slippers.

“Humph,” she snorted. “Do they not see my fine, new Parisian heels?” The heels were delicate things made of peacock feathers and deep blue sapphires, but when compared to the Star-Studded Slippers. Well. No comparison.

The Queen was about to chastise her people when she caught sight of the Star-Studded Slippers and clutched her breast instead. They were, of course, the most fabulous pair of shoes in all of existence. She knew this and she coveted them. She practically ran to them, the corners of her mouth moist with saliva, and a ravenous look in her eye.

When she reached the slippers, she turned to her subjects and addressed them with a sly smile. “Thank you for coming to witness this moment. For I know as soon as I place my feet in these slippers, I will become the most resplendent ruler of all time immemorial and instantly envied by every nation known to man. How lucky you are to have me as your Queen!”

And with that, she stepped onto the platform and kicked off the Parisian stilettos, which landed in a swampy gutter (never mind it took the finest cobbler in the land two years and all of his sanity to perfect the heels). First, the Queen slipped her left foot into the slipper. It was a perfect fit. Then she slipped her right foot in. They felt marvelous! The Queen felt brilliant. She felt like she owned the entire cosmos and could do anything. She was unstoppable. Except...

Her feet wouldn't budge. The slippers wouldn't move. She stuck like glue to the platform. Every eyebrow raised. Every jaw dropped. Their Queen wasn't worthy.

The Queen attempted to forestall her embarrassment. She coughed. “I'm just, ah, so tired from getting here. I am in no rush to move. I am happy to stand here so you may have the honor of being the first to view your Queen in these interstellar slippers.”

The crowd was all a mumble. “Is she stuck?”

“She can’t move!”

“She can move! She just doesn’t want to yet!”

Then, a young child yelled out, “The Queen’s not worthy of the slippers!”

“I am!” screamed the Queen. “By golly, if these slippers won’t budge, then neither will I! No one else shall ever place their feet inside these slippers!” she roared.

The Queen ordered a chair brought to her. The carpenter brought a plain wooden one and his wife brought a cushion embroidered with tabby cats for the Queen to sit her Royal Bottom on. She sat down, crossed her arms, and said, “Well that’s that.”

“My lady! You cannot stay outside like this! It is indecent! It is embarrassing for the crown!” pleaded her Royal Court Advisor.

The Queen glowered at him, “Did you say ‘can’t’?”

He stuttered. “N-n-no, of course I didn’t say that. You are the Queen. You can do whatever you want— -”

“Right you are,” interrupted the Queen, and then ordered her Scepter, a box of petit fours, and a newspaper be brought to her at once. It was business as usual. Kind of. The townspeople were not sure what to think.

“Well go on then! Do whatever it is you people typically do around here. Peasant things. Peon things. Shoo shoo!”

And so they all scattered and pretended to bustle about their day as they sneaked side long glances at their Beloved Queen sitting on a poor carpenter’s chair instead of a lofty throne. And well, their estimation of her rather started to decline despite her fine footwear. If she wasn’t powerful enough to walk away with the slippers perhaps she wasn’t powerful enough to lead them or protect them? Why exactly were they so loyal to her again exactly? She was fashionable, but fashion didn’t put bacon on the table.

All day the Queen sat. All day she held her head high and crossed her arms and pointed her finger at people,

commanding them to run silly errands for her. They saw in her eyes nothing but disdain for them and it made them shudder. The more she realized she was losing their favor, the more she hated them and bullied them.

“Boy! You there...yes you, go down to that thorny briar patch and pick me a bouquet of roses. I only want the best and biggest blooms. Those in the middle of the patch. Yes, you heard me! Go. Now!”

“You, girl! You in the disgusting little flour sack. How old are you? 10? And are you quite sure you are a girl? Because I’m not so certain! Your nose is mousy and your hair stringy as hay. And those ears! I have never...harumph. Like a bat! Tears? Tish tosh. Be gone from my sight.”

And that is how it went. The Queen clicked her tongue in disapproval at everything. She commanded and demanded from everyone, and she never once smiled or said thank you, even though the people did so try to please her by bringing her tasty tarts and pretty stitching and performing their folk songs and dances for her. The Queen remained implacably rude.

She was not the glorious superstar and devastatingly wonderful fashionista they had always imagined her. She was just, well, obnoxious.

The men went home and kissed their wives, thankful for a warm smile and kind word. And they realized that those things meant ever so much more to them than a wife draped in laces and pearls.

The mothers went home and told their sons they were beautiful and good and their daughters they were strong and smart because they realized: this was very, very true and true things should be spoken over and over, and that a great many untrue things had been said in that town for a very long time. Things like, “You are poor and that means you’re dumb. You are comely, and that means you don’t deserve kindness.” And a whole lot of other bunk like that.

This lack of decency and abominable behavior from her Wickedness went on day after long day. The townspeople began to learn the full extent of their “beloved” Queen’s capacity for cruelty. But to everything there is a season, and the Queen’s was near over. Her bones began to ache from sitting in the chair all day and all night, but despite that she was unmovable. She could not live in a world where slippers made of stars existed, but to which she held no claim. She would not and could not admit such defeat and degradation, and so she sat, and sat, and sat, and sat.

There in the middle of town, in her small Queendom, the wicked ruler met with an untimely end, which she obviously brought upon herself. She withered away from lack of sleep, exercise, and to be honest, sheer miserliness. She grew more bitter by the day and it ate her alive from the inside out. Her vanity was her undoing. It didn’t matter to her if she died, for at least she would die wearing the most spectacular star-studded slippers ever to grace the earth. That was something, was it not? She kept others from enjoying their dazzling splendor until her dying breath! “Ha!” she thought, “Ha ha,” she choked with life’s last cough.

What she failed to notice however, as she sat and sat and sat and sat, was the light slowly leaving the slippers with every passing day. Curiously, while the slippers slowly lost their sparkle, the eyes of the townspeople only grew in brilliance and gleamed with light.

Without a Queen seated on a royal throne to lead them or a Queen to give their respects to, they began to give respect to each other and learned to fend for themselves. They began to see just how clever and capable they really were—why! They knew enough to value life, and that a life lived on two feet—even though bare and dirty—is much nicer than a life lived with feet shod in star shine with no place to go.

When the Queen died, no tears were shed. They gave her a gracious funeral, but even the royal courtiers, advisors, and army didn’t seem all that interested in appointing a new ruler. They had all quite enjoyed their time catching up on reading and music lessons, international peace treaties and politics, while the Queen sat on her silent soap box all those weeks in the town square. Without her ordering them about in search of rare jewels and silks and leathers, they actually got quite a lot accomplished. Monarchies were becoming a thing of the past, they were learning. Democracies and republics! That was the way of the future.

Every family in the town received a pair of the Queen’s shoes as a gift. Each pair of was enough to feed a family

for the rest of their lives. The people flourished, the town became a major cross-roads for trade, and was soon known as one of the liveliest, happiest, wealthiest, and most hospitable towns in the entire country.

And to this day, all the people both young and old go traipsing and dancing about in the most beautiful and barest of feet you'll ever see. For, what is more fashionable than kindness? What more attractive than a pure heart? Shoes are really unnecessary accoutrements when you have starlight shining from within.

And lest we forget this story too soon, we need only turn our eyes skyward on a clear and cloudless night to see a dainty pair of slippers sparkling in the zodiac—a reminder to keep our eyes on heavenly things, and our feet planted firmly on the earth.

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