



The true story of Cinderella

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Retold Fairy Tales

Once upon a time I was living my happy ever after, when my husband died and I was left, a fine gentlewoman, but unfortunately with no means of bringing up my two daughters. Fortunately I was resourceful and still in the prime of my beauty and charms and I soon found a suitable new husband in Lord Tremain.

He was a quiet and uninspiring man and he also had a daughter, a pale and distracted little thing, so it was a kindness on my part to take them on. I hoped to make something more of our household, to properly reflect our title and status.

I worked hard to raise our family's standing in the town, dressing myself and my two girls in the finest clothes and my efforts were rewarded, we were soon setting the fashions. Young Ella would hardly have made a showing in fine society, but I did the best I could with her, giving her jobs to do around the house, so that she could learn to be useful and perhaps even capable of running a home of her own some day.

She was thin, small for her age and given to daydreaming and chattering to the birds and even the mice, instead of trapping and killing them as she ought. She would sit and warm herself by the kitchen fireside whenever she could get away with it, so we started calling her Cinderella.

My own daughters were a handful in their own ways: Anastasia would eat too much, no matter how much I told her that she must lose weight to look presentable. Drizella didn't have that problem, but she was far too much of a tomboy, which didn't help her plain looks at all. A mother of teenage girls has one constant worry in mind: to find them suitable husbands before they get ideas of their own and fall for someone poor, or even worse, get themselves in trouble.

You can imagine how delighted I was when the King announced that he was going to hold a Ball so that young Prince Charming could meet eligible young ladies and choose himself a bride. Now at last, a suitably fine prospect for one of my girls, and the other one could surely use the occasion to find herself a Duke to marry.

My Drizella showed no interest in young men at all and her younger sister was always more interested in food, so I had my work cut out to shape them up for the occasion. The Ball was the perfect opportunity to introduce them officially into society and ensure that they were presented properly to the royal family. I couldn't be paying attention to the droopy wallflower as well.

Cinderella still moped and wanted to go too; but quite honestly, the dress she produced looked as if it had been made by the mice she liked to befriend: all bits and pieces. My girls were perhaps a little naughty taking it off her and tearing it apart, but it was a kindness really, as she would only have embarrassed herself if she had gone.

The ball started out quite a success; the Prince danced with each of my girls, and although he was courteously dancing with all the young ladies, I felt sure that he would return to one of mine later in the evening.

Then all my hopes were shattered with the arrival of a strange princess. She was, literally, a shining vision, in a dress that somehow sparkled and shimmered as she moved. She was a mere slip of a thing, tiny really, but the prince seemed to be immediately besotted. He went to meet her as she came down the stairs into the ballroom and led her on to the dance floor, quite forgetting whoever he'd been going to dance with next. Thank goodness it wasn't one of my girls who was passed over!

Drizella hardly seemed to mind, as she seemed to have befriended one of the other young girls and had ceased to pay proper attention. Poor Anastasia, on the other hand, was quite downcast for the rest of the evening, and was eating away her sorrows at the buffet table. The only time she brightened was when a kindred spirit, who was tucking into the profiteroles, started talking to her. I enquired about him and was a little cheered to find

that the rather plump and unexceptional looking young man was the son of a Duke.

I hoped that something might yet come of the evening.

Then we were all disrupted again by the strange princess, who, having arrived late now took it into her head to dash away early. Just as the clock was striking twelve she simply ran, in a quite unladylike manner, from the building. All designed for dramatic effect, no doubt; however the prince seemed to have fallen for all this nonsense and dashed out after her.

It was still early, only twelve, after all, but the prince was quite distracted when he came back having been unable to find her and the evening fizzled to an unsatisfactory close. Drizella was walking about outside, deep in conversation with some girl and Anastasia was still absorbed in the food trough with portly Perry. Neither one was on hand or making any effort to captivate the prince with their charms. I tried to talk to him myself, to suggest a walk in the night air, in the hopes that he would spot Drizella, but he was wittering on about a glass slipper which the unknown princess had dropped. I gave up, gathered my girls despite their protestations and we went home.

Things sometimes look better after a night's sleep and fortunately the very next day I saw a way to improve my girls' prospects. A decree from the palace announced that the prince was seeking the owner of the slipper and intended to marry her. Since the prince did not know the girl's name, or anything else about her, he was sending his emissary to every household to find whoever the slipper fit. I'd seen the tiny glass slipper last night and my girls both wear quite a large shoe size, but I had a plan to ensure that the prince would find his bride in our house.

Assembling soap, candle wax and grease, I felt confident that we'd find a way to make the shoe fit one of them. Eventually the emissary from the palace arrived, carrying the glass slipper on a cushion. I urged him to warm himself by the kitchen fireside, and I would myself try the slipper on my daughters' feet.

Having obtained the glass slipper I tried everything I could think of to squeeze my daughters' feet into it, but to no avail. In the end I suggested we cut off just a little toe or so to make it fit, but my unappreciative girls refused.

Anastasia admitted that she'd lost her heart to Perry, and since he was a duke's son, I was content to be assured that he had honourable intentions towards her. Drizella, however, shocked me utterly, claiming that she

preferred women to men and had fallen for someone called Isobel at the ball. I hardly knew what to say about this, when the prince's emissary came looking for us and I reluctantly had to admit defeat and return the slipper.

Before I could stop him, he offered it to Cinderella to try and to our utter astonishment it fit perfectly! How could this be possible, when she hadn't gone to the Ball? However – the devious and secretive little minx – she now brought out the matching glass slipper and it turned out that somehow or other she was that strange princess who had captivated the prince's heart.

Naturally I was hurt at her deceptiveness, but somehow I gathered myself sufficiently to accompany Cinderella and the prince's emissary to the palace. No matter how hurt one is, one must remember one's position and mine was, at least, to be the stepmother of a princess and future queen. I just hoped that she would remember all my kindness and good intentions for her wellbeing and see her stepsisters suitably settled in good marriages too.

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