



CINDERELLA RETOLD

Once upon a time, in a land far away and long forgotten, there lived a maiden with her wicked stepmother and two wicked stepsisters. The maiden distinguished herself neither in beauty, intelligence, nor talent, but nonetheless was virtuous and good; more so in that she was cruelly treated by her wicked stepmother and stepsisters.

Daily they would hurl insults at the poor girl and missed no opportunity of humiliating her. What little food they gave her she was made to eat apart from the family, being deemed unworthy to sit with them. She was forced to wear clothes that were little more than rags. In the winter, she was given no coat and would shiver violently as she walked through the marketplace, warmed only by the shame she felt in her poverty.

Her stepmother, being of a base and corrupt nature, was exceedingly harsh and delighted in forcing the girl to undertake countless tasks of the most menial sort. One of the worst was her daily chore of scrubbing the fireplace, in which she became, in the course of the task, covered from head to toe with soot and cinders. It was thus that they began to call her Cinderella.

SHATTERING THE GLASS SLIPPER

All the while Cinderella bravely endured the hardship, thinking that one day her life would change—that one day something magical would happen to rescue her from this dismal existence. She longed for a different life, one of respect and fulfillment; to wear nice clothes, to eat good food, to not be ashamed to be seen in public. She also longed for love. She dreamed of one day finding Mr. Right, a Prince Charming who, perhaps, might one day recognize her worth and rescue her from all the unpleasantness in her life.

But Cinderella was not without hope. For, just before her real mother died, she told Cinderella that if she were only good, she would one day be rewarded. And so it was that day after day Cinderella courageously suffered in silence while continuing to harbor a vague hope that one day, maybe one day soon, her ship would come in.

Then one day an envelope with gold lettering arrived at the cottage. Cinderella's stepmother and stepsisters squealed with delight as they tore open the envelope which contained an invitation to the royal ball to be held at the palace in honor of the prince. The prince had recently come of age and it was rumored that he would soon take a bride. Perhaps, thought the stepmother, that bride might be one of her very own daughters, and she envisioned herself living in opulence and grandeur at the royal palace.

Immediately the house began to bustle with excitement as the preparations were made for the ball. Cinderella spent many hours sewing the dresses of her stepsisters and then sewing them again after her stepsisters tore them to pieces, finding the most minuscule fault with them.

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Cinderella had asked if she might also attend the royal ball but was roundly and flatly refused. How could she, they asked—a mere servant-girl with no means, no dress, and no conveyance—attend a ball? No, no, they laughed. Her time would be far better spent helping her stepsisters instead.

But deep in her heart Cinderella still hoped. Maybe something magical would happen. Maybe somehow, some way, something would happen so that all her dreams would come true. Perhaps she would go to the ball. Perhaps the prince would fall in love with her. Perhaps he would insist on marrying her and punish all those who had been so cruel to her.

Finally the night of the ball arrived. After seeing her stepmother and stepsisters get into the carriage and leave for the ball, Cinderella went up to her attic bedroom and cried. She wondered why good things never seemed to happen to her. Why was it always the other people, even the wicked people, that got all the luck?

But still she had hope. She felt deeply in her heart that if she were good enough and suffered bravely, she would one day be rewarded. Perhaps, she thought, she had not suffered enough. Maybe to truly deserve the good things in life she must suffer more. But no, her stepfamily had suffered very little, yet they had so much.

And so she waited. The evening is young, she reasoned. Anything might still happen. There might still be time to attend the ball at the royal palace, she thought. And so she waited some more. She lay on her bed and dreamed of the wonderful night she might have at the prince's ball. She envisioned herself in a beautiful gown and sparkling jewels.

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She awoke in the dark to the sound of the front door closing and the loud laughter of her stepfamily. Why had they come back so early? Did they forget something? But no. The candle had burned completely out and the moon had risen high in the sky. Was it possible? Had she fallen asleep and missed the ball?

That was exactly what had happened! She sat in stunned silence as she heard her stepfamily recount their favorite parts of the evening. Both girls had actually danced with the prince and had received an invitation to return to the castle!

The next day, everything was much the same for Cinderella. She did the same chores, wore the same clothes, and ate the same sort of food. She endured the same insults from her stepmother and stepsisters as before, yet now it was even more bitter because of the knowledge that they had attended the ball and lived the dream—yes, her dream.

For the first time in her life, she began to realize that it was possible, even probable, that she would live in the manner in which she now suffered for the rest of her life.

This thought depressed her greatly. Still, at times she was able to retreat into the blissful world of fantasy in which she and her prince would someday meet and fall madly in love. But now this fantasy seemed thinner and less real than it had before. Now she would shake herself out of her daydreams and disgustedly chide herself for her foolish notions.

Now that she had experienced such a bitter disappointment, suffering bravely no longer seemed attractive and reasonable, since it no longer promised an eventual reward. To the burden of her labor was added the burden of drudgery so that all her days were filled with misery. Why hadn't the

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magic come? Why hadn't she been the one? Didn't she deserve it? Didn't heaven care? Was her life just a meaningless exercise in futility?

One day as she shuffled through the marketplace with her head cast down and shoulders drooping, she caught the eye of a wealthy old merchant. The merchant was dressed in fine clothing, rode in an ornate carriage, and was just returning from the palace, having concluded some very important and profitable trade negotiations.

As he looked out of his carriage, he saw Cinderella and the kindness of his heart bade him order the carriage to stop. He had his servant summon Cinderella to his carriage and she was invited to sit inside.

There, the merchant offered her food and drink such as she could not remember tasting. After she was refreshed, he asked her why a young girl such as herself was so downcast.

At this expression of concern, Cinderella burst into tears, for it had been a very long time since anyone had pitied her and shown her such compassion. At first haltingly, and then in a flood, she poured out her whole tale, omitting no detail, however small.

The old merchant sat listening intently, nodded his head, and every now and then asked a clarifying question. When she finished, Cinderella felt embarrassed at her show of emotion and made to get out of the carriage, but the old merchant begged her to stay and asked leave to relate a bit of his own tale.

He told her he too had once been a slave, and that he also longed for a magical deliverance from his situation, but nothing ever happened. He related how he fell further and

further into despondency and began playing games of chance, losing what little money he then possessed. He began to partake of drink so as to forget his misery by drunkenness. But all of this only made his life more miserable.

Then one day, he happened to meet a wealthy man much in the same way he had met Cinderella.

“Did the rich man give you riches, jewels, and fine clothing?” blurted Cinderella before she had a chance to think.

“No,” said the old merchant. “He gave me something far more valuable—something I am going to give to you now.”

Saying this, the old man reached into his bag. Cinderella leaned forward, her hands clasped and her eyes shining, as she eagerly awaited the magnificent treasure the wealthy merchant was to give her. The smile quickly faded from her face, though, when she saw what it was.

From the bag he had taken an old, thoroughly worn, small brown book. As he looked at it, a faint smile danced upon his lips and he seemed lost in thought as he gently caressed the cover.

“It’s, um, a book?” asked Cinderella.

“No, no, no!” said the wealthy merchant. “It’s not a book. It’s *THE Book of Success*.”

Cinderella took the book from the old man and sat in stunned silence. Was the old man making sport of her? Was this an elaborate practical joke? If so, the old man didn’t seem to know it. He sat there, beaming, as though he had just presented her with his most valuable possession, for indeed it was.

Perhaps the old man has lost his mind, thought Cinderella. She touched his hand, mumbled a few words of gratitude, and once again started to leave the carriage.

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“You mustn’t leave just yet,” said the old man, motioning her to sit again. “I haven’t finished telling you my story.

“After I received the book,” he began again, as Cinderella regained her seat, “I did not read it for a long while. One day, not having anything better to do, I picked it up and began reading. I was skeptical at first, but then, perhaps out of desperation or perhaps from boredom—I do not know which—I began to practice the principles of this book and apply them to my life.

“It would be a long and weary tale indeed for a young woman such as yourself to endure if I were to relate my entire journey, but suffice to say, that after much hardship and many years of toil, I not only gained my independence, but have become very wealthy.

“Not all who have read this book have succeeded as I have, nor will all who read it in the future. But I can say that those who read this book and are careful to apply its principles will assuredly improve their situation and find the road to success.”

After once again thanking the wealthy old merchant, Cinderella left the carriage and walked home. She read the book late into the evening and then reread it the following day. The book was not a magical book, but it seemed as though it were written directly to her. Not just *for* her but *to* Cinderella herself. As she read the book, at times she was angered, as it conflicted with the principles upon which she had hitherto built her life. Other times she was astounded at the simplicity of the concepts. She wept as she read about the Three Deceptions. She felt encouraged and emboldened as she read about the Seven Powers, and she