

## **Cinderella, The True Story**

Once upon a time a rich man and his wife had three daughters. The oldest daughter Annabelle and the youngest daughter Bettina were beautiful to look at, but they were proud, arrogant, and exhibited nasty dispositions except when they were seeking to win someone's favor. Although the middle daughter Ella was not really ugly, when she was compared with her older and younger sisters, who rated elevens on a scale of ten, she appeared rather drab; however, Ella had a kind heart and sweet disposition, at least, when she didn't have to deal with her sisters or her mother. Had her father not been swayed by his wife's bias, he might have considered Ella a fully adequate daughter, but moved by her he was. All the girls were very intelligent, but the beautiful sisters had little intelligence left over after using theirs mostly in concocting and carrying out their wicked schemes.

The mother, who was a beauty herself and had on many occasions been the belle of the ball in her younger days, favored the beautiful sisters over her plainer daughter because she relived her youthful triumphs through them, and, before proceeding, it should be made perfectly clear that, although many who falsely claimed to have known the family have passed down the tale that she was Ella's evil stepmother and not her true mother, she was definitely mother to all the girls, as the birth certificates would attest, if examined.

Lack of beauty was not such a hindrance to Ella until the girls approached the stage where they would soon pupate into women; however, when they reached that certain age where boys ready to turn into men came to court them, Ella was shunted aside into the dark corner by the hearth while, night after night, Annabelle and Bettina compared the plumage and mating dance of one suitor against the plumage and mating dance of another from a previous night or even, sometimes, earlier that same night. Ella in her corner came to be called Cinder Ella and, finally, because it rolled from the tongue more easily, just Cinderella.

Cinderella might have grown to womanhood without ever enjoying the attention of any boy had it not been for Tom, the chimneysweep's son, who discovered her in her corner during one of his periodic visits to their house to assist his father with chimney care and maintenance. Although he had performed his dance for more than a few other girls and young ladies at fine houses and estates where he was supposed to be helping his father, Tom, who was a bright lad in spite of often being darkened with soot, was captivated by Cinderella the first time he found her sitting in her dark corner, and, after that, performed his mating dance for no one but her; however, Cinderella, for her part, often overheard her sisters' tales of dalliances with sons of earls and counts and, although she delighted at Tom's attention to both her mind and her more-corporeal parts, thought that a life at court offered some trivial advantages over a life with a chimneysweep.

As is wont to happen in tales such as this, the king threw a ball to which everyone in the kingdom was invited, rich and poor alike, but, of course, the poor had no fine clothes to wear and, so, did not attend; thus, the king continued the blanket invitation year after year without having to worry about the wrong sort at the annual ball. As was to be expected, Cinderella's evil sisters were excited about attending the ball in their finest new gowns, designed and made specially for the

occasion, because they had their eyes set on a couple of counts, who should have more-properly been called no-'counts but, being of noble birth, had little more required of them than being of noble birth. Plans for going to the ball were made not only by Annabelle and Bettina but also by Cinderella's father and mother; however, no one thought to plan for Cinderella to be at the ball, and no one purchased a fine gown for her. And, so, she pined away in her corner, except for brief moments of joy when her corner and her life were brightened by the presence of Tom.

On the day of the ball, the family was off early, all except Cinderella, who was left behind, whereupon she wished so fervently to go to the ball, that her fairy godmother appeared before her to grant her wish. Of course Cinderella, being of scientific bent, not to mention being very intelligent, didn't believe in fairy godmothers, but, unlike Tinkerbell, fairy godmothers appear not to let belief or disbelief affect their existence, and once on the scene, she set about preparing Cinderella for the ball.

There was no new gown for Cinderella, but she was close enough to her older sister's size that a bit of magic on a gown that Annabelle had worn only once produced a creation that would be copied for years by the kingdom's fashion designers. Silk was foreign to Cinderella's wardrobe, but silk underwear borrowed from Bettina's excessive supply served adequately, and every female, even very intelligent females including Cinderella, had more shoes than anyone needed, and a slight touch of magic on a pair of them was enough to make her well shod. Although Cinderella asked about petticoats to wear under the gown to make it stand out prettily, her fairy godmother, being both a romantic and a practical woman, told her that petticoats sometimes got in the way of fun at royal balls because many noble sons were too stupid to negotiate a path through them. Instead, she put a charm on the borrowed gown to cause its skirt to billow.

Cinderella thought to use some of Annabelle's makeup to hide her plain face, but the fairy godmother forbade this and, instead, used a wee charm to put a glow in her cheeks, another iota of charm to produce a smile seldom seen by anyone except Tom, and a final wee bit of magic to improve her lenses and let her see clearly without squinting. After a moment's reflection, the fairy godmother decided this last charm would not damage the weave and warp of reality and made it permanent. Anyone would have called her beautiful. Although the fairy godmother told Cinderella any lad she would meet at the ball could find no smell more wonderful than that of a clean, healthy young lass anticipating an evening of delights, she added a sprinkling of sorcerer's dust to ensure that the young woman retained scent throughout the evening.

Although the royal palace was close enough that Cinderella could have walked, the image she and her fairy godmother wanted for her demanded that she arrive in a coach with a driver and a footman. Now, some folk will swear by the old king's beard that Cinderella's coach was a transformed pumpkin and that creatures from the garden were ensorceled to form the horses, driver, and footman, but that is nothing but fabrication because, even in magic, the law of mass-energy conservation cannot be violated without serious consequences, even though Cinderella's fairy godmother, along with a few other enchantresses and enchanters, have been known to cheat a bit on the law, much as many wealthy people in the kingdom sometimes fail to pay the king's tax fully. No, it was much easier for the fairy godmother to produce magically the money that no

one could tell from that produced by the king's mint, and this money could be used to hire a coach for the night from one of the several coach-rental agencies in the capital. So, Cinderella arrived at the king's ball in a fine carriage that was drawn by four white horses whose reins were held by a coachman, with a footman riding along to open the door and assist her in her exit from the carriage. The carriage, horses, driver, and footman awaited her outside the palace to convey her on her homeward journey, which had to end before half-past midnight when the coach rental expired.

What Cinderella didn't know, because she didn't recognize him in his fine uniform and without a bit of soot, was that the driver of her rented coach was Tom, who often moonlighted with the rental company as coachman or footman to earn extra money. During his service to wealthy clients hiring the coaches, he sometimes managed to overhear them discuss ways to dispose of money they had earned in a not-completely honest manner or money on which they didn't wish to pay the king's tax, and it should be admitted that he had, on occasion, used his superior intelligence to guide small amounts of that wayward money to his account. On this occasion, he knew that all he had to look forward to was the wait while the woman he loved danced and dallied with sons of noblemen and wealthy businessmen at the ball, and, although he wished, with all the passion of Cinderella's wish to attend the ball, that he could stop her attendance, apparently he had no fairy godmother or fairy godfather to intervene for him.

Inside the palace, Cinderella was determined to enjoy herself and joined in the festivities by dancing and flirting with every man and boy who asked and by having a private dance with an earl's son, who proved to be a total bore in every respect. She was considering leaving when, late in the evening, the king's son, the prince of the kingdom, asked her to dance and later honored her with a private dance, all to her great joy; however, when she attempted to discuss several interesting topics with the prince, she discovered that he didn't even understand the unwritten social contract between a ruler and the people governed and that he couldn't talk about the simple basic points of the special theory of relativity. Still, he was more than adequate as a dancer, both on the ballroom floor and in private, because, indeed, one of the few rules most princes are able to understand is that there must be princes in the next generation. By this time, Cinderella had decided that life with a chimneysweep, at least with an intelligent one, would be preferable to life with a stupid earl or even a stupid prince; however, when the prince, who was smitten with her because of some special dance move she had been taught by Tom, asked for another dance, she consented because one doesn't turn down a prince, certainly not if what one is doing with the prince provides joy to both. The dance was fun, but it was barely finished when the chimes struck for midnight, causing Cinderella to leap from the prince's arms, resulting in a slight wound to her earlobe from a bite by his teeth. She excused herself and rushed from the palace and to the waiting coach, where the footman helped her enter, after which Tom drove her to her home and her lonely, dark chimney corner.

Now, as Cinderella ran hurriedly out of the palace, she broke a heel on her slipper and kicked it and the other off to continue running barefoot, and many false tales are told of the prince's search throughout the kingdom to find the young woman who had stolen his heart and who fit the slipper. Certainly, he did want to find her; however, such tales are rubbish because even the

prince knew that every woman in the kingdom had so many shoes that there were thousands upon thousands of pairs matching the ones his dream woman had lost, in style, color, and size. The prince was even clever enough, though barely, to realize that he couldn't find her by requiring young women of the kingdom to try on the silk undies she had left behind when she rushed from the palace upon hearing the clock strike midnight. Although he never reached that height of cogitation again, he had the major bright idea of his life, just at the time he needed it most, when he realized that, as prince, he could force any young woman fitting the description of the one who ran from the palace and with tooth-marks on her ear to perform her private dance for him. He decided to begin in the capital city and, after determining that only about ten young women in the city and not more than two dozen in the entire kingdom fit the description very closely, began the task of sorting them out one by one.

Cinderella knew that the prince's quest to locate the woman from the ball would reach her sooner or later, and, when it did, she hoped to mislead him because she didn't want to spend her life with him, never to be able to discuss such exciting things as cosmogeny or the diverging evolution of vowels after one tribe split into two; however, she was unsure exactly which attribute had made the prince so enamored of her, and, without that knowledge, she didn't know how to avoid displaying that attribute again. After thinking it over, Cinderella admitted to Tom that she was the one the prince was seeking and asked his help in determining what she should do when it was her turn for the prince's visit. Tom already knew from her shoeless and disheveled state when she arrived at the coach that she was the woman the prince sought, and he, of course, wanted to help her avoid a life with the prince, but he didn't want her to join with the prince even one more time and hoped to keep it from happening.

He explained his plan, which required him to admit that she had been only the last of several girls and young women he had entertained while he and his father were visiting houses and estates for chimney-sweeping. He knew that one of those young women who was still unwed was about Cinderella's size and fit her description fairly well, and, when the two of them visited the young woman together, they found that she would be happy to practice with the prince what she had learned from Tom and would not even be loathe to have that exercise lead to marriage with the prince. She agreed to the plan, which required mainly that Tom bite her lightly on the ear and that she get placed before Cinderella on the prince's list, the first task taking only a moment and the other accomplished by transferring a few tokens of wealth to a member of the prince's staff. The plan worked, and a gala royal wedding soon made the young lady a princess and, many years later, made her a queen even though she would neither deny nor admit to the prince that she had been the one who captured his soul at the ball. He knew in his heart that she was the one, and, reportedly they lived happily as prince and princess and then as king and queen. Cinderella's mother and more-beautiful sisters thought there must be a mistake when Cinderella received a special invitation to the wedding, while they had only the invitation issued to the masses of people; however, the mother dared not offend the prince by preventing her ugly daughter's attendance to sit in the section devoted to the bride's special friends.

Tom and Cinderella were married, and her father gave them a very large gift for their wedding because of his pleasure that the young man had taken the less-beautiful daughter, and even

Cinderella's mother and sisters were nice to her on her wedding day because they were sorry for her for having to live her life with a chimneysweep. Needless to say, Tom was not a chimneysweep for long because, when he joined his intelligence with that of Cinderella, there were few problems too big for them to solve. They soon owned the rental agency for which he had worked, and they rented coaches throughout the kingdom.

It might be thought strange, but, after Cinderella was away from her two sisters, people would often comment on how beautiful she was, but that was not strange to Tom, who had seen her beauty all along. Did they live happily ever after? Who knows? What can be reported with certainty and accuracy is that they lived long lives and that they often smiled when they looked at each other.