

Cinderella

Charles Perrault

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By Charles Perrault

ONCE there was a gentleman who married, for his second wife, the proudest and most haughty woman that was ever seen. She had been married before, and already had two daughters who were exactly like her in all things. He had likewise, by his first wife, a young daughter, but of unequalled goodness and sweetness of temper, which she took from her mother, who was the best creature in the world. This sweet little girl missed her mother, who had died, terribly much

No sooner was the wedding ceremony over, than the new wife began to show herself in her true colors. She could not bear the goodness of the gentleman's pretty girl, and especially as she made her own daughters appear the more horrid. She made her do the meanest jobs in the house. The girl scoured the dishes and tables, and scrubbed the stepmother's bathroom, and those of her daughters. She slept in a little attic, upon a wretched straw bed, while her sisters lay upon beds with the softest pillows, in fine rooms, with floors covered with beautiful carpets, and walls on which hung looking-glasses so large that they might see themselves at their full length from head to foot.

The poor girl bore all patiently, and dared not tell her father, who would have been angry with her; for his new wife ruled him entirely. When the little girl had done her work, she used to go into the chimney corner, and sit down among cinders and ashes, which led her to be called Cinderwench; but the youngest stepdaughter, who was not quite so rude and unkind as the eldest, called her Cinderella. However, Cinderella, dressed in rags was a hundred times prettier than her sisters, though they were always dressed very richly.

It happened that the king's son gave a ball, and invited all the finest gentlemen and ladies of the city. Our young misses' were also invited, for they were always to be seen at fashionable parties. They were truly delighted at this invitation, and wonderfully busy in choosing such gowns, petticoats, and headdresses as might suit them. This was a new trouble to Cinderella, for it was she who washed and ironed her sisters' clothes and got all their things ready. Meanwhile, the sisters talked all day long of nothing but what they should wear to the ball.

"For my part," said the eldest, "I will wear my red velvet suit with French trimming."

"And I," said the youngest, "shall have my usual petticoat; but then, to make amends for that, I will put on my gold-flowered gown, and my diamond belt, which is far from being the most ordinary one in the world."

But in truth, they were still not absolutely sure what would be best to wear to the ball, so they sent for the best fashion designer they could find to advise on their evening dresses, and they had their nails manicured at Mademoiselle de la Poche.

Cinderella was likewise called up to them for advice, for she had excellent judgement, and advised them always for the best, indeed, and offered her services to make up their hair, which they were very willing she should do. As she was doing this, they said to her: "Cinderella, would you not be glad to go to the ball?"

"Alas!" Said she. "You only jeer me. It is not for a poor girl like me to go there."

"You're quite right," replied they, "it would make the people laugh to see a Cinderwench at a ball."

Anyone but Cinderella would have dressed their heads all wrong, but she was very good, and dressed them perfectly well.

The stepsisters were almost two days without eating, so much were they thrilled and excited. They broke above a dozen corsets in trying to be laced up tightly, so that they might have a fine slender shape, and they were continually at their looking-glass. At last the happy day came. They went to court, and Cinderella followed them with her eyes as long as she could, and when she had lost sight of them, she fell a-crying.

Just then, her fairy godmother, who used to watch over her secretly, saw her all in tears, and appeared at her side and asked her what was the matter.

“I wish I could – I wish I could...” She was not able to speak the rest, being interrupted by her tears and sobbing.

This fairy godmother of hers said to her: “You wish you could go to the ball; is it not so?”

“Y-es,” cried Cinderella, with a great sigh.

“Well,” said her godmother, “be but a good girl, and I will see that you shall go to the ball.” Then she took her into her secret room, and said to her: “Run into the garden, and bring me a pumpkin.”

Cinderella went immediately to gather the finest she could get, and brought it to her godmother, not being able to imagine how this pumpkin could make her go to the ball. Her godmother scooped out all the inside of the big vegetable, leaving nothing but the rind; which done, she struck it with her wand, and the pumpkin was instantly turned into a fine coach, gilded all over with gold.

She then went to look into her mousetrap, where she found six mice, all alive, and ordered Cinderella to lift up a little the trapdoor. As each mouse went out, she gave it a little tap with her wand, and the mouse was that moment turned into a fine horse, which altogether made a very fine set of six horses of a beautiful mouse-coloured dapple-grey. But they still needed a coachman.

“I will go and see,” said Cinderella, “if there is a rat in the rattrap – we may make a coachman of him.”

“You’re a smart one,” replied her godmother, “go and look.”

Cinderella brought the trap to her, and in it there were three huge rats. The fairy made choice of one of the three which had the largest beard, and having touched him with her wand, was turned into a fat, jolly coachman, who had the smartest whiskers eyes ever beheld.

After that, she said to her: “Go again into the garden, and you will find six lizards behind the watering can, bring them to me.”

She had no sooner done so but her godmother turned them into six footmen, who skipped up immediately behind the coach, with their uniforms all bedaubed with gold and silver, and clung as close behind each other as if they had done nothing else their whole lives. The fairy then said to Cinderella: “Well, you have here transport fit to take you to the ball. Are you not pleased with it?”

“Oh yes,” cried she, “but must I go there as I am, in these nasty rags?”

Her godmother only just touched her with her wand, and at the same instant, her clothes were turned into cloth of gold and silver, all beset with jewels. This done, she gave her a pair of glass slippers, the prettiest in the whole world. Being thus decked out, she got up into her coach; but her godmother, above all things, commanded her not to stay until after midnight, telling her at the same time that if she stayed one moment longer, the coach would be a pumpkin again, her horses mice, her coachman a rat, her footmen lizards, and her clothes become just as they were before.

She promised her godmother she would not fail to leave the ball before midnight; and then away she went, scarce able to contain herself for joy. The king’s son who was told that a great princess, whom nobody knew, was to come, ran out to receive her. He gave her his hand as she alighted out of the coach, and led her into the ball, among all the company. There was immediately a profound silence, they left off dancing, and the violins ceased to play, so attentive was everyone to contemplate the singular beauty of the unknown newcomer.

Nothing was then heard but a confused noise of: “Ah! How lovely she is! Ah! How lovely she is!”

The king himself, old as he was, could not help watching her, and telling the queen softly that it was a long time since he had seen so beautiful and lovely a creature.

All the ladies were busied in considering her clothes and headdress, that they might have some made the next day after the same pattern, provided they could meet with such fine material and as able hands to make them.

The king’s son led her to the most honourable seat, and afterward took her out to dance with him. She danced so very gracefully that they all more and more admired her. A fine banquet was served up, of which the young prince ate not a morsel, so intently was he busied in gazing on her.

She went and sat down by her sisters, showing them a thousand polite gestures, giving them part of the oranges and lemon blossoms which the prince had presented her with, which very much surprised them, for they did not recognise her. While Cinderella was thus amusing her sisters, she heard the clock strike eleven and three quarters, whereupon she immediately made a curtsy to the company and hasted away as fast as she could.

When she got home she ran to seek out her godmother, and after having thanked her, she said she could not but heartily wish she might go next day to the ball, because the king’s son had desired her.

As she was eagerly telling her godmother whatever had passed at the ball, her two sisters knocked at the door, which Cinderella ran and opened.

“How long you have stayed!” Cried she, gaping, rubbing her eyes and stretching herself as if she had been just woken out of her sleep. She had not, however, any manner of inclination to sleep since they went from home.

“If you had been at the ball,” said one of her sisters, “you would not have been tired. There came there the finest princess, the most beautiful ever was seen with mortal eyes. She was a thousand times nicer to us, and gave us orange and lemon blossoms.”

Cinderella seemed very indifferent in the matter, indeed, she asked them the name of that princess, but they told her they did not know it, and that the king’s son was very uneasy on her account and would give all the world to know who she was.

At this Cinderella, smiling, replied: “She must then be very beautiful indeed. How happy you have been! Could not I see her? Ah! Dear Miss Charlotte, do lend me your yellow suit of clothes which you wear everyday.”

“Aye, to be sure!” Cried Miss Charlotte. “Lend my clothes to such a dirty Cinderwench as you! I should be a fool.”

Cinderella indeed expected well such answer, and was very glad of the refusal; for she would have been sadly put to it if her sister had lent her what she asked for jokingly.

The next day the two sisters were at the ball, and so was Cinderella, but dressed more magnificently than before. The king’s son was always by her, and never ceased his compliments and kind speeches to her; to whom all this was so far from being tiresome that she quite forgot what her godmother had recommended to her; so that she, at last, counted the clock striking twelve when she took it to be no more than eleven. She then rose up and fled, as nimble as a deer. The prince followed, but could not overtake her. She left behind one of her glass slippers, which the prince took up most carefully. She got home but quite out of breath, and in her nasty old clothes, having nothing left of all her finery but one of the little slippers, fellow to that she dropped. The guards at the palace gate were asked if they had not seen a princess go out. They replied that they had seen nobody go out but a young girl, very meanly dressed, and who had more the air of a poor country wench than a gentlewoman.

When the two sisters returned from the ball, Cinderella asked them if they had been well diverted, and if the fine lady had been there.

They told her yes, but that she hurried away immediately when it struck twelve, and with so much haste that she dropped one of her little glass slippers, the prettiest in the world, which the king's son had taken up; that he had done nothing but look at her all the time at the ball, and that most certainly he was very much in love with the beautiful person who owned the glass slipper.

What they said was very true, for a few days after the king's son commanded it to be proclaimed, by sound of trumpet, that he would marry the young woman whose foot would perfectly fit the slipper. He sent out his most trusted advisers from the palace, who began to try it upon the princesses, then the duchesses and all the court, but in vain. It was then brought to the two sisters, who each did all that she possibly could to thrust her foot into the slipper, but neither sister could manage to do so. Cinderella, who saw all this, and knew her slipper, said to them, laughing: "Let me see if it will not fit me."

Her sisters burst out a-laughing, and began to tease her. The gentleman who was sent to try the slipper looked earnestly at Cinderella, and finding her very handsome, said it was only right that she should try, and that he had orders to let every girl try.

He asked Cinderella to sit down, and putting the slipper to her foot, found it went on very easily, and fitted her as if it had been made of wax. The astonishment her two sisters were in was excessively great, but still abundantly greater when Cinderella pulled out of her pocket the other slipper, and put it on her foot. Thereupon, in came her godmother, who having touched with her wand Cinderella's clothes, made them richer and more magnificent than any of those she had before.

Now her two sisters found her to be that fine, beautiful lady whom they had seen at the ball. They threw themselves at her feet to beg pardon for all the ill treatment they had dished out to her. Cinderella took them up, and as she embraced them, cried that she forgave them with all her heart, and desired them always to love her.

She was brought by carriage to the young prince, dressed as she was. He thought her more charming than ever, and a few days after, married her. Cinderella, who was no less good than beautiful, gave her two sisters rooms in the palace, and that very same day matched them with two great lords of the court.