

Cinderella

There was once a great kingdom, in which lived all manner of people. Royalty, merchants, artisans, performers, chefs, teachers, doctors and scientists and many fine people who hadn't quite figured out what they were yet. One of whom was Ellia.

Ellia's parents had recently passed away while on a perilous journey to a far away land. They had lived noble lives, and so were buried near a steadfast willow tree. Ellia was sad to say goodbye to her parents and her home, but she took a small hazel tree seedling from nearby, and set off to the great kingdom. It was time for her to find purpose in a new place.

Upon arriving in the great kingdom Ellia sought work. At home, she had been excellent at organizing, and kept everything tidy and clean for her folks in their last days. So when she noticed an advertisement in the town square for a house cleaner, she donned her overalls, and a worn jersey that was her beloved father's, featuring his favourite sports team, the Court Jesters, and off she went to the address listed in the advert.

The family, a woman and her two daughters hired her on the spot. Each day, Ellia cleaned floors, dusted surfaces, wiped glass, and tidied steps. The woman and her daughters were terribly demanding. They were always coming up with extra jobs from fixing squeaky doors to assembling furniture, organizing closets to gluing together broken dishes (which Ellia was sure they broke on purpose). It would have maybe been bearable if they paid her a living wage, but when they remembered to pay her which wasn't often, it was just pennies. On top of that they bullied Ellia with cruel names and nasty pranks, throwing soot on the special jersey from her dad and writing mean messages on the mirrors.

"Enough's enough!" shouted Ellia one such an instance. And with that, she handed in her notice.

Ellia didn't want to have another bad employer, so she decided to go in to business for herself. Ellia was careful to only take on clients who paid fairly and offered respectful working conditions. Her hard work paid off and soon her small business of one, grew to include a few employees. Ellia discovered that people who are treated better work better and soon she and her team found

themselves going above and beyond, cleaning up after chimney sweeps. Soon they decided to offer the service themselves. The scheme worked so well that Ellia herself enrolled in courses and become a master chimney technician, and the company became known as Cinder-Ellia's.

Through her classes and her colleagues, Ellia met many wonderful people that worked in homes, gardens, and castles helping the kingdom run smoothly. Her new friends worked in back kitchens and cellars, plodded up steep stairs, hung from tower windows and toiled in hot gardens. They shared their experiences with Ellia, the hardships and the rewards. But Ellia noticed that she and her friends, despite their hard work and long hours, were not making enough to grow their businesses or have homes of their own.

So Ellia began organizing her friends to attend local meetings and share their stories. She created a small business association and wrote letters to the leaders of the land (like MPs), offering a glimpse into the life of those in service, and suggestions for ways to make the kingdom a more just and equal place to live. Ellia was very persistent, and one day she even wrote to the King! She didn't expect to receive a reply.

However, the king had no idea of the plight of those who toiled in the kingdom, and was surprised and shaken by Ellia's cause. He announced he would hold a Benefit Ball to support efforts to make their lives better.

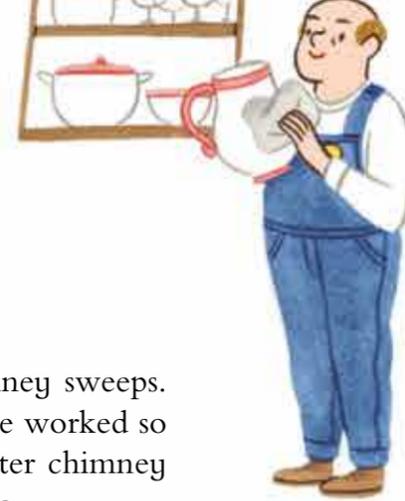
Ellia was thrilled, the King was going to be an advocate! And she was excited to attend at a royal ball.

There was just one hitch: Ellia's wardrobe consisted of only work clothes. Tattered overalls, grimy shirts, work boots. These weren't really Ball options. All the money Ellia made at work went into the business, she had nothing extra to spend on party attire or hiring a carriage. She was in a real pickle. And when Ellia found herself in a pickle, she often found her way to the small Hazel tree she had brought with her. Sitting beneath it, she wondered aloud "How am I ever going to get to this ball? I've nothing to wear, no carriage to take me..."

As if to answer her query, a brisk breeze swept through the garden, and blew the leaves about, setting a magical moment in motion. For as the leaves blew around, a most unusual lady was revealed beside them. She had a wild head of hair, several pairs of spectacles here, there and everywhere, and a glittering wand in her hand.

"Do I know you?" said Ellia, amazed.

"Oh I'm your Fairy Godmother of course," said the mysterious guest.



“Does that ring a bell?” “I’ve been watching you for a while now dear Ellia, and you’ve been doing so incredibly well for yourself. I was beginning to wonder if you’d ever need me. There’s really nothing you can’t do my dear,” she continued. “Except perhaps fix your closet crisis. Would you like my help?”

“A real Fairy Godmother eh? Well, I’m stunned to be honest,” Ellis said, collecting herself. “But if your offer really stands, then yes. I would love your help with something to wear to the Ball. I think this could be a big night for me, and I want to feel great. You know what I mean?”

“I think I do.” Said her Fairy Godmother with a twinkle in her eye. “First a carriage!” she announced. And with a wave of her wand an antique coach rolled gently before them.

“oh my!” said Cinderella.

“And for you to wear, my dear,” her Fairy Godmother said putting her arm around Ellia, “I’ve something special in store.”

As Ellia’s Fairy Godmother withdrew her arm from her shoulder, lovely leaves and aromatic hazelnuts whirred around them both and came to a stop in the shape of a green crown, that landed gently on Ellia’s head. Meanwhile, a spring green outfit of Ellia’s dream length and cut draped her with the softest and lightest of fit.

“Oh, this is amazing!” Ellia cried. “And I know just what to pair this with.”

“You mean you don’t want any fancy shoes?” invited her Fairy Godmother.

“Oh, no I’ve just the thing.” Ellia called back as she darted towards her house.

Ellia raced to her closet and topped the whole look off with her favourite emerald green shoes. They were perfect for all occasions, plus she’d never seen anyone else in them ever.

“Now zip along, you’ve a ball to enjoy.” said her Fairy Godmother, hurrying her into the carriage. “And please return everything you borrowed back here to the hazel tree at the end of the night. The tree will be missing its leaves.”

Ellia arrived at the ball looking brilliant. The music was amazing, everything smelled delicious and there was dancing! While her friends set off to mingle, Ellia sought out the king to confer about the benefit, and to discuss her cause. There turned out to be quite a cue for the king, and as Ellia waited she felt a tap on her shoulder.

“Amazing shoes, princess,” said an unfamiliar voice.

Ellia spun around to come face to face with someone new, a prince in fact, but Ellia didn’t notice. She was too distracted by that fact that he was wearing her exact same, one of a kind (or so she thought), shoes in the never-before seen colour of: blue!

“Amazing shoes yourself,” Ellia finally stammered.

“I’m Prens,” said the young prince. “I see we have similar tastes. How’d you like to try on the blue version?” Prens slipped out of one of his shoes and handed it to Ellia.

“Are you serious? Absolutely!” Ellia accepted as she slipped out of one of her green



“Oh, this is amazing!” Ellia cried.

shoes and reached for Prens' blue version, which looked simply super.

Prens and Ellia chatted the night away in line for the king. They sung along to the popular songs of the day, conferred one another's shared interests, tastes and style points. They even spoke about matters bigger than themselves, that touched whole kingdoms.

Prens explained. "I'm visiting from a small far off land, and I'm very interested in your kingdom's commitment to care for its workers." Prens picked up Ellia's shoe from the floor as he continued. "I heard it all started with a letter from a local. Can you believe it? I'd love to pick that person's brain."

"Oh well I can tell you some neat facts about that if ya like," Ellia said excitedly. But at just that moment her name was called for her audience with the king, and she was pulled from the line in haste.

"We'll catch up after!" she called to her new friend as she raced off.

"Wait, I didn't get your name?" Prens called after her. "And I have your shoe."

But Ellia was long gone into the depths of the castle. After a successful conversation with the king, she had just left his chamber when she heard the clock strike midnight.

"Oh no!" she thought to herself. "The hazel tree will be missing its leaves."

With a last look for her shoe doppelganger, she left the ball. "What a shame," she lamented as she was in the carriage. "It's so rare I meet someone with whom I'm so in sync."

The days passed, and time marched on. The success of the King's Benefit Ball was felt throughout the kingdom. Small businesses flourished, working conditions improved and new houses were built.

However, Ellia felt lonely for someone to celebrate these great milestones with. She wished she knew how to reach Prens. Her new friend and sole mate.

Meanwhile, Prens in his kingdom was feeling the same. He was on the cusp of making positive change in his small corner of the world, yet was missing a partner he could learn from and share the success with. He thought he might have gotten a glimpse of such a person when he met his amazing shoe twin at the Benefit Ball. But sadly, didn't know her name nor where to find her.

Rather than sit around and pout, Prens saddled up his horse and started to ask around. The good news was he still had Ellia's unique green shoe to help guide the way.

And guide the way to did. For everywhere Prens visited, he was told "no one here has a shoe quite like that, but I've heard of a great woman doing the work you speak of in a kingdom not far from here."

Slowly but surely, Prens made his way to the great kingdom where Ellia was busy leading the business affairs council, unifying workers and seeking fairness wherever she saw things unjust. And of course, wearing amazing mismatched shoes.

One day after a particularly prickly town meeting (things don't always go smoothly even in fairy tale kingdoms) Ellia walked home exhausted. As she turned in her gate something under the Hazel tree caught her eye. It was her shoe!

"Prens?! Is that you?" Ellia Called out.

"It is indeed," he said as he rose from behind the tree. "Our shoes are finally reunited!"

"Is that why you came to find me?" asked Ellia.

"Well, it's not the only reason," Prens said. "I think we have much more to talk about, more songs to sing along to, more parties to enjoy, I had to find you."

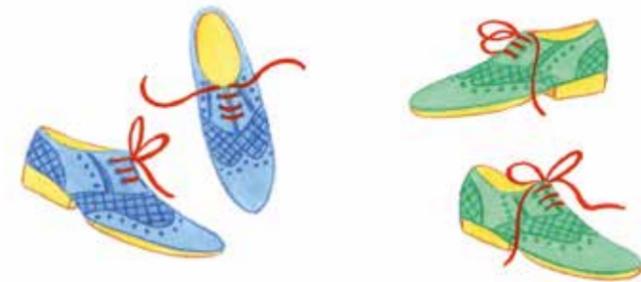
"I'm so glad you did." Ellia cheered.

"It would have been a lot easier if I'd known your name," Prens laughed.

"Its Ellia." She said. "my friends call me Cinder-Ellie. There's a story."

Prens and Ellia spent every day together after that. Working together, getting to know one another's (names) friends and kingdoms, sitting under the Hazel tree together and, of course, sharing shoes.

When Prens and Ellia eventually married, they moved to a new kingdom where a leader such as Ellia was so needed. There, she became prime minister and worked tirelessly to raise the minimum wage so that all members of the kingdom could prosper. Her constituents too called her Cinder-ellie to honour her first business. It had been the start of a life in leadership, service and seeking justice for all.





Belle the Brave

Once upon a time, in a sunny French province, there lived a girl called Belle. Belle the Brave to be precise, because Belle was fearless.

What is fearless? Fearless is breathing deeply when you must get a shot at the doctor. Fearless is walking proudly through a tangle of spider webs. Fearless is jumping from high rocks into cold water. And in Belle's case, fearless meant venturing into a scary forest, when no one else would even consider it. It was called the Forbidden Forest, after all.

It all started one bright and cheery day, when Belle's father had to go on a trip. Each of his daughters had a special request.

"Can you bring me back a set of paper and paints?" asked one.

"Winter is coming. I'll have a warm hat if you spot one," asked the other.

"Belle what can I bring you?" her father asked. But Belle was busy, studying her map of the Forbidden Forest.

"Oh, you know me, nothing special. Maybe a flower."

The sisters happily waved their father on his way. But after a few days passed, and their father hadn't returned, they began to worry. Days turned to a week, and finally Belle realized she alone would need to go in search of him. For among her sisters, she was the best tree-climber, cobweb walker and rocky-ledge jumper. Plus, she had been working on her Forbidden Forest map and this was just the opportunity to try it out.

"Are you sure you should be doing this?" fretted Belle's sisters. "It's nearly dark and what about the . . . you know... monsters?"

"Monsters bonsters," said Belle. "I'll be perfectly fine." She gave her sisters a big kiss and squeeze and set off – just as brave as you please – into the night. Soon the call of owls welcomed her as she ventured into the Forbidden Forest.

The trail grew thick and brambly, and Belle drew out her trusty map for guidance. An expert tracker and navigator, Belle was quick to identify a route. But as luck would have it, a flash of lightning felled a tree right in her path!

"Ugh" Belle moaned, because the tree was too big to climb over, even for her. However, the forest heard her sigh, and the next flash of lightening illuminated another path, leading away from the main one. "Alright!" thought Belle. She'd always suspected the Forbidden Forest had some good hidden secrets.

Belle followed this new path and was soon brought to the foot of a great and mysterious castle. It was shrouded in fog, veiled by glistening snow, and circled by an immense rose garden. It nearly took Belle's breath away, but she did manage one word of marvel:

"Wow."

Belle climbed nearly a hundred stairs to reach the door. As she leaned against it to catch her breath, the mighty latch gave way, and the door swung open to reveal a great hall. It was dark and freezing cold, with not a soul in sight. Belle stepped in