

The Revenge and Reward of Neglected Daughters

There are thousands of oral and literary versions of "Cinderella," one of the most popular fairy tales in the world. Motifs of the Cinderella tale-type can be found in Greek and Roman mythology. There is also a Sanskrit version of the fifth century C.E. underlying Kalidasa's drama *Sakuntala*. There are indications that the tale may have originated in ancient China or Egypt. The shoe or slipper test may have been connected to a marriage custom in which the bridegroom takes off the bride's old shoes and replaces them with new ones. But this thesis has never been completely verified, and depending on the society and customs, shoes are used in many different ways in marriage celebrations. In the various literary versions, the shoes are leather, gold, silver, and glass. Perrault invented the glass slippers most likely as an ironic joke since a glass slipper was likely to break if it were to fall off a foot. What most of the tales, oral and literary, have in common is the conflict between a young girl and her stepmother and siblings about her legacy. Cinderella must prove that she is the rightful successor in a house in which she has been deprived of her rights. She receives help from her dead mother in the guise of doves, fairies, and godmothers. Belief in the regeneration of the dead who can help the living in the form of plants or animals underlies one of the key motifs of the fairy tale. In the European literary tradition, which first began with Bonaventure des Périers's *Les nouvelles récréations et joyeux devis* (*New Recreations and Joyous Games*, 1558), it is clear that Basile played a role in influencing Perrault and d'Aulnoy, who, in turn, had some effect on the Grimms' tale. Significant in Basile's tale is the active role that Cinderella plays in determining her future: she kills her stepmother and stops her father's ship from returning from Sardinia. Some of this activism, in contrast to Perrault's narrative, can be seen in the Grimms' version. Since there were so many different versions by the time the Grimms composed their "Cinderella"—for instance, they may have also been influenced by the Bohemian version "Laskopal und Miliwaka" in *Sagen der Böhmischen Vorzeit aus einigen Gegenden alter Schlösser und Dörfer* (*Legends of the Bohemian Early Period from some Regions of old Castles and Villages*, 1808)—it is difficult to establish one source for their work in particular. Clearly, many different literary and oral tales fostered a huge Cinderella cycle in the East and the West. Alan Dundes's *Cinderella: A Folklore Casebook* (1982) provides valuable background information and discussions about the cycle and different interpretations. The early literary work of Basile, Mme d'Aulnoy, and the Grimms certainly played a role in the creation of nineteenth-century plays and musical adaptations such as Nicolas Isouard's popular fairy opera *Cendrillon* (1810), as well as in the equally successful opera *La cenerentola* (1817) by Gioacchino Antonio Rossini.

The Cat Cinderella†

Once upon a time there was a prince who was a widower, and he had a daughter who was so dear to him that he saw the world through only her eyes. At one point he hired a sewing teacher who taught her small chain work, open sewing, hem stitching, and fringes and showed her more affection than words can describe. But the father soon remarried, and he took a rambunctious, evil, and diabolical woman as his wife, and this wicked lady was so repulsed by her stepdaughter that she began throwing her sour glances, making wry faces, and scowling at her. As a result, Zezolla, for that was the daughter's name, became frightened and kept complaining to her teacher about how badly her stepmother was treating her and said, "Oh God, if only you could be my dear little mama since you are so affectionate and fond of me!"

Since Zezolla continued to sing this little song, she succeeded in putting a bug in her teacher's ear until the woman was spurred by the devil and said, "If you want to pursue this crazy idea, I shall become your mother, and you'll become so dear to me that you'll be the apple of my eye."

She wanted to continue talking, but Zezolla said, "Excuse me if I interrupt you. I know you love me very much. There's no need to say anymore. Just teach me what I have to do because I'm new at this. You write the orders, and I'll carry them out."

"Well, then," her teacher said, "listen carefully. Pay attention, and you'll succeed in baking bread as white as flowers. As soon as your father leaves the house, tell your stepmother that you want one of those old dresses from the large chest in the closet so you won't spoil the one that you are wearing now. Since she prefers to see you in rags and tatters, she will open the chest and say, 'Hold the lid.' And you're to hold it while she searches inside. Then you must let it fall right away, and it will break her neck. Once she's gone, you know that your father would even forge money to please you. So when he is being affectionate with you, ask him to take me as his wife. Then your fortune will be made, for you'll be the mistress of my life."

After Zezolla had heard this, every hour seemed a thousand years, and then she carried out her teacher's plans exactly as she had advised. When the mourning period for her stepmother's death had ended, she began to sound out her father about marrying the teacher. At first, the prince thought she was joking, but his daughter kept pricking him with the flat end of the pin until she stuck him with the point and he yielded to Zezolla's words. So he wed Carmosina, the teacher, and arranged for a great celebration.

Now, while the newlyweds were involved with one another, Zezolla

JACOB AND WILHELM GRIMM

Cinderella†

The wife of a rich man fell ill, and when she felt her end approaching, she called her only daughter to her bedside and said, "Dear child, be good and pious. Then the dear Lord will always assist you, and I shall look down from heaven and take care of you." She then closed her eyes and departed.

After her mother's death, the maiden went every day to visit her grave and weep, and she remained good and pious. When winter came, snow covered the grave like a little white blanket, and by the time the sun had taken it off again in the spring, the rich man had a second wife who brought two daughters with her. They had beautiful and fair features but nasty and wicked hearts. As a result, a difficult time was ahead for the poor stepsister.

"Why should the stupid goose be allowed to sit in the parlor with us?" they said. "Whoever wants to eat bread must earn it. Out with this kitchen maid!"

They took away her beautiful clothes, dressed her in an old gray smock, and gave her wooden shoes.

"Just look at the proud princess and how decked out she is!" they exclaimed with laughter, and led her into the kitchen.

They expected her to work hard there from morning till night. As a result, she had to get up before dawn, carry the water into the house, make the fire, cook, and wash. Besides this, her sisters did everything imaginable to cause her grief and make her look ridiculous. For instance, they poured peas and lentils into the hearth ashes so she had to sit there and pick them out. In the evening, when she was exhausted from working, they took away her bed, and she had to lie next to the hearth in ashes. This is why she always looked so dusty and dirty and why they all called her Cinderella.

One day it happened that her father was going to the fair and asked his two stepdaughters what he could bring them.

"Beautiful dresses," said one.

"Pearls and jewels," said the other.

"And you, Cinderella?" he asked. "What do you want?"

"Father," she said, "just break off the first twig that brushes against your hat on your way home and bring it to me."

So he bought beautiful dresses, pearls, and jewels for the two stepsisters, and as he was riding through some green bushes on his return journey, a hazel twig brushed against him and knocked off his hat. So he broke off that twig and took it with him. When he arrived home, he gave his stepdaughters what they had requested, and Cinderella received the twig from the hazel bush. She thanked him, went to her mother's grave, planted the twig on it, and wept so hard that the tears fell on the twig and watered it.

Soon the twig grew and quickly became a beautiful tree. Three times every day Cinderella would go and sit beneath it and weep and pray, and each time a little white bird would also come to the tree. Whenever Cinderella expressed a wish, the bird would throw her whatever she had requested.

In the meantime, the king had decided to sponsor a three-day festival, and all the beautiful young girls in the country were invited so that his son could choose a bride. When the two stepsisters learned that they too had been summoned to make an appearance, they were in good spirits and called Cinderella.

"Comb out our hair, brush our shoes, and fasten our buckles!" they said. "We're going to the wedding at the king's castle."

Cinderella obeyed but wept because she, too, would have liked to go to the ball with them, and so she asked her stepmother for permission to go.

"You, Cinderella!" she said. "You're all dusty and dirty, and yet you want to go to the wedding? How can you go dancing when you've got no clothes or shoes?"

When Cinderella kept pleading, her stepmother finally said, "I've emptied a bowlful of lentils into the ashes. If you can pick out all the lentils in two hours, you may have my permission to go."

The maiden went through the back door into the garden and cried out, "Oh, you tame pigeons, you turtledoves, and all you birds under heaven, come and help me pick

the good ones for the little pot,
the bad ones for your little crop."

Two white pigeons came flying to the kitchen window, followed by the turtledoves. Eventually, all the birds under heaven swooped down, swarmed into the kitchen, and settled around the ashes. The pigeons bobbed their heads and began to peck, peck, peck, peck, and all the other birds also began to peck, peck, peck, peck, and they put all the good lentils into the bowl. It did not take longer than an hour for the birds to finish the work, whereupon they flew away. Happy because she thought she would now be allowed to go to the wedding, the maiden brought the bowl to her stepmother. But her stepmother said, "No, Cinderella. You don't have any clothes, nor do you know how to dance. Everyone would only laugh at you."

When Cinderella started crying, the stepmother said, "If you can pick two bowlfuls of lentils out of the ashes in one hour, I'll let you come along." But she thought, "She'll never be able to do it."

Then the stepmother dumped two bowlfuls of lentils into the ashes, and the maiden went through the back door into the garden and cried out, "Oh, you tame pigeons, you turtledoves, and all you birds under heaven come and help me pick

the good ones for the little pot,
the bad ones for your little crop."

Two white pigeons came flying into the kitchen window, followed by the turtledoves. Eventually, all the birds under heaven swooped down,

† Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Cinderella" - "Aschenputtel" (1857), No. 21 in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1857).

swarmed into the kitchen, and settled around the ashes. The pigeons bobbed their heads and began to peck, peck, peck, and all the other birds also began to peck, peck, peck, and they put all the good lentils into the bowl. Before half an hour had passed, they finished their work and flew away. Happy because she thought she would now be allowed to go to the wedding, the maiden carried the bowls to her stepmother. But the stepmother said, "Nothing can help you. I can't let you come with us because you don't have any clothes to wear and you don't know how to dance. We'd only be ashamed of you!"

Then she turned her back on Cinderella and hurried off with her two haughty daughters. When they had all departed, Cinderella went to her mother's grave beneath the hazel tree and cried out:

"Shake and wobble, little tree!
Let gold and silver fall all over me."

The bird responded by throwing her a gold and silver dress and silk slippers embroidered with silver. She hastily slipped into the dress and went to the wedding. She looked so beautiful in her golden dress that her sisters and stepmother did not recognize her and thought she must be a foreign princess. They never imagined it could be Cinderella; they thought she was sitting at home in the dirt picking lentils out of the ashes.

Now, the prince approached Cinderella, took her by the hand, and danced with her. Indeed, he would not dance with anyone else and would not let go of her hand. Whenever someone came and asked her to dance, he said, "She's my partner."

She danced well into the night, and when she wanted to go home, the prince said, "I'll go along and escort you," for he wanted to see whose daughter the beautiful maiden was. But she managed to slip away from him and got into her father's dovecote. Now the prince waited until her father came, and he told him that the unknown maiden had escaped into his dovecote. The old man thought, "Could that be Cinderella?" And he ordered a servant to bring him an ax and pick so he could chop it down. However, no one was inside, and when they went into the house, Cinderella was lying in the ashes in her dirty clothes, and a dim little oil lamp was burning on the mantel of the chimney. Cinderella had swiftly jumped out of the back of the dovecote and had run to the hazel tree. There she had taken off the beautiful clothes and laid them on the grave. After the bird had taken them away, she had made her way into the kitchen, where she had seated herself in the gray ashes wearing her gray smock.

The next day, when the festival had begun again and her parents and sisters had departed, Cinderella went to the hazel tree and cried out:

"Shake and wobble, little tree!
Let gold and silver fall all over me."

The bird responded by throwing her a dress that was even more splendid than the one before. And when she appeared at the wedding in this dress, everyone was amazed by her beauty. The prince had been waiting for her, and when she came, he took her hand right away and danced with no

one but her. When others went up to her and asked her to dance, he said, "She's my partner."

When evening came and she wished to leave, the prince followed her, wanting to see which house she went into, but she ran away from him and disappeared into the garden behind the house. There she went to a beautiful tall tree covered with the most wonderful pears, and she climbed up into the branches as nimbly as a squirrel. The prince did not know where she had gone, so he waited until the father came and said, "The unknown maiden has slipped away from me, and I think she climbed the pear tree."

The father thought, "Can that be Cinderella?" And he ordered a servant to bring him an ax and chopped the tree down, but there was no one in it. When they went into the kitchen, Cinderella was lying in the ashes as usual, for she had jumped down on the other side of the tree, brought the beautiful clothes back to the bird, and put on her gray smock.

On the third day, when her parents and sisters had departed, Cinderella went to her mother's grave again and cried out to the tree:

"Shake and wobble, little tree!
Let gold and silver fall all over me."

The bird responded by throwing her a dress that was more magnificent and radiant than all the others she had received, and the slippers were pure gold. When she appeared at the wedding in this dress, the people were so astounded they did not know what to say. The prince danced with no one but her, and whenever someone asked her to dance, he said, "She's my partner."

When it was evening and Cinderella wished to leave, the prince wanted to escort her, but she slipped away from him so swiftly that he could not follow her. However, the prince had prepared for this with a trick: he had all the stairs coated with pitch, and when Cinderella went running down the stairs, her left slipper got stuck there. After the prince picked it up, he saw it was small and dainty and made of pure gold.

Next morning he carried it to Cinderella's father and said, "No one else shall be my wife but the maiden whose foot fits this golden shoe."

The two sisters were glad to hear this because they had beautiful feet. The oldest took the shoe into a room to try it on, and her mother stood by her side. However, the shoe was too small for her, and she could not get her big toe into it. So her mother handed her a knife and said, "Cut your toe off. Once you become queen, you won't have to walk anymore."

The maiden cut her toe off, forced her foot into the shoe, swallowed the pain, and went out to the prince. He took her on his horse as his bride and rode off. But they had to pass the grave where the two pigeons were sitting on the hazel tree, and they cried out:

"Looky, look, look
at the shoe that she took.
There's blood all over, and the shoe's too small.
She's not the bride you met at the ball."

He looked down at her foot and saw the blood oozing out. So he turned his horse around, brought the false bride back again, and said that she was definitely not the right one and the other sister should try on the shoe. Then the second sister went into a room and was fortunate enough to get all her toes in, but the heel was too large. So her mother handed her a knife and said, "Cut off a piece of your heel. Once you become queen, you won't have to walk anymore."

The maiden cut off a piece of her heel, forced her foot into the shoe, swallowed the pain, and went out to the prince. He took her on his horse as his bride, and rode off with her. As they passed the hazel tree, the two pigeons were sitting there, and they cried out:

"Looky, look, look
at the shoe that she took.
There's blood all over, and the shoe's too small.
She's not the bride you met at the ball."

He looked down at her foot and saw the blood oozing out of the shoe and staining her white stockings all red. Then he turned his horse around and brought the false bride home again.

"She isn't the right one either," he said. "Don't you have any other daughters?"

"No," said the man. "There's only Cinderella, my dead wife's daughter, who's deformed, but she can't possibly be the bride."

The prince told him to send the girl to him, but the mother responded, "Oh, she's much too dirty and really shouldn't be seen."

However, the prince demanded to see her, and Cinderella had to be called. First she washed her hands and face until they were clean, and then she went and curtsied before the prince, who handed her the golden shoe. She sat down on a stool, took her foot out of the heavy wooden shoe, and put it into the slipper, which fit her perfectly. After she stood up and the prince looked her straight in the face, he recognized the beautiful maiden who had danced with him.

"This is my true bride!" he exclaimed.

The stepmother and the two sisters were horrified and turned pale with rage. However, the prince took Cinderella on his horse and rode away with her. As they passed the hazel tree, the two white pigeons cried out:

"Looky, look, look
at the shoe that she took.
The shoe's just right, and there's no blood at all.
She's truly the bride you met at the ball."

After the pigeons had made this known, they both came flying down and landed on Cinderella's shoulders, one on the right, the other on the left, and there they stayed.

On the day that the wedding with the prince was to take place, the two false sisters came to ingratiate themselves and to share in Cinderella's good fortune. When the bridal couple set out for the church, the oldest sister was on the right, the younger on the left. Suddenly the pigeons appeared



Cinderella. Arthur Rackham, 1911.

and pecked out one eye from each of them. And as they came back from the church later on, the oldest was on the left and the youngest on the right, and the pigeons appeared and pecked out the other eye from each sister. Thus they were punished with blindness for the rest of their lives due to their wickedness and malice.