

Snow White Gets Her Say

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CAST:

The King's Daughter (child)
Catherine (young woman)
Snow White (young woman)
Cinderella's sister (young woman)
Greystands (old woman)
Sleeping Beauty (middle-aged woman)
The Youngest Princess (child)
Gretel (middle-aged woman)
Woman (middle-aged woman)
Alice (middle-aged woman)

BOUNCING BALL.

THE KING'S DAUGHTER: You want to know what part of my story seems to get forgotten? I mean, besides my name. I'm just "The King's Daughter". As if my identity is all about, only about, my relationship to a man. (GAGS.)

And besides the fact that I was blackmailed. In return for getting back my ball, the frog asked to be my friend, to sit beside me at dinner, to eat off my plate, to drink out of my cup, *and* to sleep with me. All for a tiny little ball.

Besides all that. You want to know what gets forgotten?

The fact that I whipped him against the wall. I did! Go read it and see for yourself!

Well, he went splat. And that was that.

LONG BEAT.

CATHERINE: That you don't know my name is, as well, but the first of my complaints. You know *me*. I'm the main character—in a tale titled with the name of one of the men in the story. But what's in a name?

A great deal. Especially if it's a man's name. This man's name is the answer to the question upon which rests the fate of myself and my newborn child. So his name is very powerful; it is very important. My name apparently is not.

Nor is my life. For whether it is to be filled with joy and delight from being with my newborn, or empty with grief and loss from separation is *to be decided by a mere guessing game*.

Nor are my words important. I denied my father's boast. I told the King I could not spin gold out of straw. But he didn't believe me. When do men *ever* believe what a woman says? He chose instead to believe the words of an immature, egotistic, vain *man*. And I suffer the consequences.

The consequences. To pay for my father's lie, I lose my sanity, my freedom, and my dignity for three nights—and almost my child, forever. And one sentence—*one sentence* in the whole tale is devoted to that 'choice', that decision to give up my child in return for my life.

Because I 'succeeded' on the third night, I was 'rewarded' with marriage to the King. Thus, for all intents and purposes, I also lost my life. Can you imagine what it is like to be married—legally bound to honour and obey until death, and economically bound with little option but to stay and make the best of it—to a man who didn't believe me, a man who locked me in a room for three nights, a man so greedy that he said three nights in a row he'd kill me unless I did as he wanted? And that was *before* he owned me.

But as the tale says, I am shrewd. I am clever. And I have learned the force of threat, and the importance of a name—especially if it is male. Proud fathers want very much to pass it on. But *royal* fathers— Dear husband, aging Highness, what would happen to your precious lineage if my, your, only son were to suddenly—

SOUND OF A BODY BEING SLAMMED INTO SOMETHING.

SNOW WHITE: What, you think tossing dwarfs is politically incorrect?

SOUND OF A BODY BEING SLAMMED INTO SOMETHING.

I'll tell you what's politically incorrect.

SOUND OF A BODY BEING SLAMMED INTO SOMETHING.

The patriarchy is politically incorrect.

SOUND OF A BODY BEING SLAMMED INTO SOMETHING.

Thinking women exist to service men is politically incorrect.

SOUND OF A BODY BEING SLAMMED INTO SOMETHING.

I was maid, mother, and mistress! Everything every man wants in a woman. They *all* want someone to clean their house, make their dinner, and wash their underwear; look after their health, and take care of their hearts; and then suck this, stroke that, and open up there. Nothing but pick up, pat away, and put out.

But smile while you're doing it, honey, oh yeah, we *gotta* have that service with a smile. Otherwise they might get the idea that you don't like what you're doing, that just maybe they're 'forcing' you. And why that might ruin their sleep at night, y'know?

Let me tell you, *every* man's a dwarf expecting us to make him a giant. That's what we *do*. How's that for a job description? Kind of fits *every* woman, doesn't it? And I'm not just talking physical. Sure, there *is* that, why do you think there's so many stories about young girls having to kiss ugly things—Beauty and the Beast, The Frog Prince, The Enchanted Pig—it's great 'career training'.

But there's *more* to it than that. We also flatter the man, we listen to him, we obey him—those are the other 'essential job skills'. And we learn this real quick, because we get in shit every time we listen to a *woman*, because god knows most of them are witches or wicked stepmothers—my own story shows that plain enough!

What is it you're whining about now? The moral of the story's all changed? Well, that depends on what you look at. The way I see it, Snow White is all about resurrection. Always was. Make no mistake, the phoenix is female! Three times I rose against the odds of death. The corset and comb sure enough was going to kill us, but we lived through it. And we learned. What we found out with each bite of that apple was surely enough to make us lie down and die. And maybe for a while some of us did. But hell, I'm here, aren't I? And honey, let me tell you, I will live ever after!

LONG BEAT.

CINDERELLA'S SISTER: First off, Cinderella did *not* have to do all the hardest work in the house. Our stepfather was a man of rank, remember, and my mother no peasant. We had fine rooms and beautiful clothes, and status enough to be invited to the King's ball. So we certainly had maids and servants to scrub the floors and wash the dishes. Cinderella *offered* to help with the work. Probably because she had nothing else to do. She didn't seem interested in much besides pleasing people. Drove me crazy.

And she did *not* have to sleep "in a straw bed in a poor room at the top of the house". Think her father would put up with that? Certainly not. She had a perfectly good bedroom just like the rest of us.

The story goes that my sister and I were proud. And that's true enough. What's wrong with that? What's wrong with being proud of what you can do, of what you've worked hard to learn well? All those gorgeous clothes people kept talking about were of my sister's making—she was into fashion design. As for me, I could ride a horse to win most competitions in the land. So sure we were proud.

But vain? Yes, we spent a lot of time in front of that full-length mirror: my sister had to see the effect of her creations—and so I suppose she's as vain as one gets in that line of work—and as a favour, especially on days too wet or too cold for the horses to be out, I often modeled her half-finished pieces for her. But that's it. I wasn't even good-looking, by contemporary standards, no peaches and cream in my complexion!

It's true, Cinderella wasn't invited to the ball. But only because the King thought she was too young. And we certainly didn't snub her like you think. We called her into our rooms and asked her for advice on our clothes, to make her feel part of the excitement. She liked that, you know how younger sisters are, she wanted to iron this and mend that—we even let her do our hair.

But we *never* called her Cinder-wench, or even Cinderella. Her nickname was Kinderella, which means 'little child', and somehow the 'K' must have gotten changed to a 'C'.

As for what happened at the ball, that's true too. She was very beautiful, our new little stepsister, we never denied that. And when beauty and wealth come together, most people fall over themselves like asses. Those at the ball were no different: to them, appearance is everything. My sister was stunned by Cinderella's gown, and she gawked, it's true. But out of professional interest, not jealousy as most people think. I wasn't jealous either—I just wanted to ride one of those impressive silver stallions she came with.

And as for that bit about the yellow dress, the story goes that Cinderella asked my sister if she could borrow it to wear at the next ball, and my sister said no way. Well, I don't know, that might've happened, I wasn't there. That yellow dress is one of her favourites; it's one of the first dresses she made. But I think that if my sister *had* said no, she would've offered another instead. Then again, Cinderella's tone can be so sweet and self-effacing sometimes, I can imagine my sister saying no out of sheer irritation and leaving it at that.

The rest of the story is pretty much accurate. All three of us went to the second ball, Cinderella forgot about her curfew, lost her slipper on the way out, and—there is one thing I want to set straight: I did *not* try on the glass slipper. Quite apart from the fact that I didn't want to marry that prince—or any prince, or anyone at all, actually—a glass slipper? You've got to be kidding, that'd be worse than wearing high heels! Not only would it make walking difficult, but with the obvious risk of broken glass, cutting, embedding, it would discourage movement altogether. No thank you!

But as I said to Cinderella, if the shoe fits, wear it.

And we *all* will live happily ever after.

BEAT.

GREYSTRANDS: But the shoe doesn't fit.

Especially when you're old.

Once upon a time I had pretty little golden locks. Now all I have are grey strands.

And as I was walking along one day with my cart full of all of my things—if you don't take it with you, somebody will steal it—and I have a lot of things people would—well, they'd *kill* for my plastic bags, great big green ones with no tears at all, just a little one in the corner of one, still keeps you dry though, and I've got a big long stick with a nail stuck in the end, one of the city workers fell asleep on the bench next to me one afternoon, you know how they put the old ones ready to retire on the Parks Sanitation Crew, well that stick is really good at sticking things, I can't reach down anymore, my back is falling apart, and you miss a lot of good stuff at the bottom of the bins if you can't just reach down and grab it—now I just poke in my stick, a few times, 'cause my eyes aren't so good these days, and there, I've got it.

But do you know what people most want to grab off me? My little black book. That's why I keep it on my person. I have a list, all written down of all the places that give away their leftovers—*good* leftovers—and I've got a star beside the ones that do it without making you feel like a beggar.

What was I saying? Oh yes, I was walking along, feeling right smart in my new rubber boots—yesterday’s find—a bit big but if I wear all of my socks—and suddenly I smelled this delicious porridge. Now you have to understand that hot food is a real treat for most of us. How are we ever going to make ourselves a hot meal on the streets in our corners—plug in a hot plate to the nearest parking meter?

So I checked my list quick to see if this address was on it. I forget easy, that’s why I’ve got them written down—it does no good to go the same place three times to ask when they said no the first time, they’ll think you’re being a pest. They don’t realize how easy it is to just forget day to day where you’ve been. Why I hardly remember where I *am* sometimes, it all looks the same some days...

But no, these people weren’t on the list, under the yes’s or the no’s. So I knocked on the door, politely, to ask if they could spare some of their nice hot porridge. No answer. Well, the door was open a bit, so I peeked in. No one there. But I saw the porridge steaming in bowls on the table. Brown sugar in a little dish even. Well I was hungry and so I confess I went straight to it. Serves me right, I burnt the whole roof of my mouth! Ooh, I yelled! Then I laughed! I haven’t burnt my mouth since, well since I was a lot younger... but—eating pizza! Yes, that’s it, the first slice from a box when it was just delivered... I tried the next bowl—too hot too, darn! But the smallest bowl was cool enough, so I ate it all without another thought.

Then I felt awfully sleepy. Again when was the last time I ate so much I got tired? Well I headed for a comfy chair, but then I saw a bedroom—sure enough, there were beds! I mean—oh, this one is too hard—I knew they’d have beds, it’s just I haven’t slept—this one’s too soft—in a bed—but this one is just right—since...

Delivered pizza! Can you believe I was once rich enough—can you believe I once had an address they could deliver it too? So what happened? How did I get from a little apartment on King and Third with flower pots on the balcony and a cat that knew its name and a cup of tea in the afternoons with “Cheers” reruns and Gus snoring in the lazyboy, his pipe fallen into his lap—Gus died. Gus, who loved my golden locks, I used to keep my bangs all curled, Gus, my prince charming for fifty-five years,—died.

So his pension stopped. And of course, as a homemaker for most of my life, and a part-time this and that, here and there, I had no pension of my own. The government—well, the government pension is based on how much you earned and how long you worked, so in my case it didn't come to much. The OAS and the GIS together came to about \$450 a month. Well, what do you think my rent was? \$400. That leaves \$50 a month for food and—and some of the pills I was on weren't covered, and there's extra billing every time I— Sure, we had savings, but that was running out. Of course I looked for a cheaper apartment, the shared accommodations column had some pretty good possibilities, but no one wants to live with— There were a couple months I couldn't make rent— Boots got sick once and that cost, and I dropped my glasses and they broke and I had to buy another pair—I can't see at all without them—and I splurged, God knows why, and went to the dentist after all about that pain in my tooth, and, well I was evicted: I found myself out on the street with all of my things. Well, what I had left—by that time it wasn't much, I had sold my good set of dishes, the tv, things I didn't really need. And then I soon found out that if you have no fixed address, you get no fixed income. The OAS and GIS stopped. I woke up.

I mean these people came back into their house and found this smelly old lady asleep in one of their beds and they woke me up. As soon as I remembered where I was, I got all embarrassed. And then I felt the bed, oh my God, I didn't—I stumbled up, hoping they wouldn't notice, but they'd seen my cart and of course they'd called the hospital already. They apologized, I apologized, I tried just to be on my way, bundling up my big coat trying to hide the holes under the arms, thank you, I'm sorry, I—I couldn't get away, the attendants were there already— Is this a happy ending?

LONG BEAT.

SLEEPING BEAUTY: 'Is it you, my prince? I have waited for you a long time.' Give me a break! My hundred years were up! It wasn't his kiss at all.

That was just coincidence, an illusion of timing. Isn't it always? Men rescuing women—it merely looks that way! More often than not, the damsel works through her distress long before the guy even arrives. But not surprisingly, they get—and take—all the credit. The whole idea of men bringing women to consciousness is ludicrous. Who initiated consciousness-raising groups? It's more like *our* kiss brings *them* to life. Just ask Snow White. It's womb envy, that's all, desire and greed for power and control, over birth itself—it's a creation myth. Waiting for my prince? Sorry. I was

just waiting for the effects of whatever was on the spindle to wear off. And actually, that's how I got into this line of work. I started in Toxicology...

Restlessly waiting, I might add. It was boring just lying there. Oh I know, that's what women are supposed to do. We're supposed to be quiet, we're supposed to be patient. We're supposed to be gentle, humble, meek, submissive, docile, good-tempered, self-sacrificing, dependent. We're supposed to be good little girls: perfectly passive.

And, of course, we're supposed to be beautiful—another 'passive'. Try as we may to improve our looks, generally either you are or you aren't 'beautiful', there's nothing you can do about it. There's nothing you can do, period. Well except sing, and dance, and play an instrument—my 'gifts'.

What really bothers me is after a while—a hundred years?—you believe it. See, that's what struck me most about the prince. He started through the impenetrable thicket “*not doubting* that he would succeed.” I envy that.

And yet, if you read on, you see that “strangely enough a way seemed to open before him.” Strangely, my ass. Paths are always opening for men. Women not only have to wrangle our way through, we have to do it with our bare hands. My christening gifts did not include a machete.

And to make sure we *are* what we're supposed to be, only good little girls get rewarded.

Sort of. Good little girls get attention. They don't get ignored, they get taken seriously. That's what the wedding's all about.

But, you know, that's the only part we ever see. The marriage? That's a reward? A husband? The status of being a 'Mrs.'? Frankly, I never could figure out whether Cinderella *got* the booby prize or *was* the booby prize.

Listen, I'll tell you what the real reward is for being perfectly passive.

“The Girl Without Hands”. She died when she let her father hack off her hands to save himself. The sister of “The Twelve Brothers”. She offered to kill herself so her brothers would regain their kingly rights. The story says they save her, before she burns

to death, but— Rapunzel, Rosette, Maid Maleen—none of them actually made it out of the towers they were locked in.

No, being a good little girl does not a happy ending make. Just look at what happened to me!

You mean you thought— No! He was an undercover cop. He arrested me for soliciting! Said I was being provocative, lying there like that, all beautiful, just waiting, teasing, seducing, inviting.... Yes, I explained to him.

But, well, seems if you're a woman, you don't have to *do* anything to be guilty.

THE YOUNGEST PRINCESS: My story's pretty much the way it's been told. Except—remember how every night the pig turned into a man?

Well they got that backwards.

BEAT.

GRETEL: Even when they tell it right, they get it wrong.

We read fables in school to teach us a lesson. And we read fairy tales at bedtime to put us asleep. And indeed they do: especially those of us, a full half of the human species, who are lulled lower and lower into a semi-conscious state by their lessons.

Remember "Hansel and Gretel"? The one about a little boy and a little girl. Who was me. Not particularly proud of it, but there you go. I didn't write the story. I didn't intend those lessons.

That, first, women are deceitful. There are two women in the story, the stepmother and the witch. And both of them lie to us. When Hansel and I are taken into the forest to be left there to die, my stepmother says "We'll come back for you." And later, when we meet the witch, she assures us she will "do us no harm". But of course they didn't and she did. Both women used deceit to achieve their goals.

That, second, women aren't very intelligent. It was my stepmother's idea that a good solution to the food shortage was to leave us in the forest. Why not kill and eat the pigeon first? Or even the cat? Why not hunt for squirrels and rabbits? The witch, as well, wasn't too bright when she climbed into the oven to give a little demonstration.

That, third, little boys are competent and resourceful—and therefore can, and do, take care of little girls, like me. The first time we were taken into the forest, it was Hansel who thought to unravel a spool of thread behind us so we could find our way back. The second time, again he planned for our survival, leaving a trail of crumbs to mark our path. Clever though this was, he didn't think about the birds, who ate the crumbs. Even so. I was quite resigned to our fate; it was Hansel who refused to give up so easily. Well, as you know, we found our way to a house, but it belonged to the witch and she locked Hansel in a cage. Still using his head, he held out a bone instead of his finger each time she checked to see if he was fat enough to eat.

However, if you've read the story, you'll know that, notwithstanding this glowing portrait of my brother, *I'm* the real hero: it was *my* cleverness that saved us. You'll remember that the witch told me to creep into the oven to see if it was hot enough to bake the bread. I knew, of course, that she was going to slam the door shut and bake me instead. So, I said, ever so sweetly, "I do not know how I am to do it, how do I get in?" You know the rest, I'm sure: she showed me, I shut the door on her, and then I rescued Hansel and together we escaped.

What bothers me, more than that people forget I'm the hero, is that I had to be clever in that way. To this day, I resent having had to resort to that 'dumb blond' ploy. To begin with, because it's just that—a ploy, a disguise, a deceit; and it teaches us that pretence is our best method of operation. So we pretend to be something we're not to get what we want, be it life, love, whatever.

But more than that, I resent the ploy because it teaches us that for a woman, ignorance is valuable: it is her defence, her weapon, her salvation.

Why is that so dangerous a lesson, since my ignorance really is just a ploy, and not genuine? Because habits of behaviour become habits of thought which become habits of belief. If I spend most of my life acting like I'm stupid, people will think that I am. And then it's just a short step to actually becoming what people already believe I am.

But if we wake up, we all will live ever after.

BEAT.

WOMAN: There was once a fisherman who lived with his wife in a ditch, close by the sea-side.

ALICE: His wife's name was Alice.

WOMAN: The fisherman used to go out all day long a-fishing—

ALICE: Maybe that's why they lived in a ditch.

WOMAN: —and one day, as he sat—

ALICE: —on his ass—

WOMAN: —on the shore with his rod—

ALICE: His rod? Huh. Maybe that explains why he liked fishing so much.

WOMAN: —looking at the shining water and watching his line, all of a sudden his float was dragged away deep under the sea; and in drawing it up he pulled a great fish out of the water.

The fish said to him, "Pray let me live: I am not a real fish; I am an enchanted prince."

ALICE: Of course.

No, wait. 'And now *you*, fisherman, must kiss every one of my slimy scales so that I can turn back into the beautiful princess that I am...'

WOMAN: "And since I am a prince, put me in the water again, and let me go."

"Oh," said the man, "you need not make so many words about the matter; I wish to have nothing to do with a fish that can talk; so swim away as soon as you please."

Then he put him back into the water, and the fish darted straight down to the bottom, leaving a long streak of blood behind him.

Then the fisherman went home to his wife—

ALICE: Alice.

WOMAN: —in the ditch.

“Husband,” said the woman—

ALICE: (more loudly) —said Alice—

WOMAN: —“have you caught nothing today?”

ALICE: ‘Again?’

WOMAN: “No,” said the man, “I did catch a flounder, who said he was an enchanted prince, so I let him go again.”

ALICE: (shouting) You what?!

WOMAN: “Did you not ask for anything first?” said the woman.

ALICE: (screaming by now) ALICE!

WOMAN: “No,” said the man, “what should I wish for?”

ALICE: What should you wish for? You don’t know? We’ve been living in a ditch—a *ditch*—for twenty years—and you don’t know what to ask for?!

WOMAN: “Ah,” said the woman—

ALICE: ALICE! Said ALICE!!

WOMAN: —“it is surely hard to have to live in this little ditch; do go back and tell him we want to have a small cottage. He will certainly give us that.”

The fisherman did not much like the business; however, he went to the sea, and when he came there the water looked all yellow and green—

ALICE: That he had just pissed into it may have had something to do with this.

WOMAN: And he stood at the water’s edge, and said:
 “Oh man of the sea!
 Come listen to me,
 For Alice my wife
 The plague of my life,
 Hath sent me to beg a boon of thee!”

Then the fish came swimming to him, and said, “Well, what does she want?”

“Ah,” answered the fisherman, “my wife says that when I had caught you, I ought to have wished for something before I let you go again; she does not like living any longer in the ditch—

ALICE: (very sarcastically) ‘Can’t for the life of me figure out why, suits *me* fine.’

WOMAN: —and she wants a little cottage.”

“Go home, then,” said the fish, “she is in the cottage already.”

So the man went home, and saw Alice—

ALICE: Yes!

WOMAN: —standing at the door of the cottage.

“So what do you think—nice, eh?” she asked her husband.

ALICE: Him.

“It’s alright,” he said, as he grabbed a beer and sat down to watch the game.

And Alice went into her new kitchen and started peeling the potatoes. And as she did so, she began thinking—no, this isn’t the magic part—‘Here I am thirty-nine years old, it’s nice to finally have something to show for it.’

‘When I think back of all the work I’ve done—I’ve *earned* a cottage.’

‘No’—she kept thinking back—‘I’ve earned a *castle*!’

She got a pencil and a pad of paper—forget the potatoes—and began to figure.

I’ve looked after four kids, that’s eight hours a day at—how much does a childcare worker get paid?—and then time-and-a-half and overtime to make 24 hours a day, times 365, times 15.

And I taught them—kids who live in ditches don't go to school—how much does a teacher make?

Okay, let's say six years of that, no, eight, I think they got as far as grade eight. And then job training, I spent at least two years with each of them to get so they could *do* something.

Okay, now what else? Twenty years of housekeeping—how much does a maid charge per household per month?—times 12, times 20.

And cooking, no before that, gardening—or shall I call it farming?—I'll average the two wages—

Now what would a caterer charge to provide three meals a day to five people—and two dogs, three cats, and—no don't count them—times 365, times 20.

And part-time nurse...part-time psychiatrist—that's a big one.

What else? Oh, sexual services— Times, times, oh my god—

“Husband, I should like to have a *very large* castle to live in, with central heating, and plumbing, and electricity, and a hot tub, so go to the fish again...”

And Alice realized just how refreshing it was to have ambitions—realized. Work—paid for. And, well, thirty-nine is still young, the kids were gone, and the husband required little tending—the castle came with a big screen tv. Alice knew what she wanted, and her pencil and pad of paper told her she had the qualifications: experience and expertise in resource management—human and otherwise, communications, health and welfare, education, economics—especially deficit budgeting, defence, and foreign affairs—any interaction with her husband could be counted here—

“Husband, I should like to be King...”

And so it was that Alice became King of the land.

And then the shit really hit the fan.

END