

Once upon a Time

By Haley Garecht

There were three sisters, Jean, Alice, and Mary. They all lived happily together, until their mother died one night from a bout of scarlet fever. Heartbroken and filled with grief, Jean and Alice became cold and vain. Mary, on the other hand, learned the value of kindness and love in a dark situation, and therefore was hated by her sisters. Filled with envy of their sister's compassion, they exiled her to live outside, no matter the season. As each day went by, Mary battled the heat and snow, rain and drought. She was forced to forage for food, and beg from passing travelers.

One winter day, a messenger from the palace arrived with three invitations to the spring ball, for the Prince was searching for a wife. Jean and Alice took their letters greedily, and cast the third into the garbage heap.

Two weeks went by without Mary knowing she was to come to the dance, and she had absolutely no idea why her sisters seemed to be so excited. On the last day of a cold February, Mary was crouching under an old cloak to keep her warm. As she shivered, a young wretched girl came up to her, dressed in a ragged dress and nothing else. "Excuse me miss... Do you have any spare blankets for an orphan?" The girl asked timidly. "Why...of...of course. Here, take this cloak. It should keep you warm enough." Mary wrapped the girl up in her cloak, and sat back down freezing, her skin covered in goosebumps exposed to the wind. The girl nodded thankfully and went on her way.

That night, as Mary slept shivering with nothing to cover her, she saw in her dream the beggar girl who had come just hours earlier. Mary was surprised to see the girl begin to grow, and grow until she was a beautiful young woman dressed in golden robes and a shimmering silk dress. This woman seemed to Mary to have two wispy golden wings coming out of the back of her robes. The woman came up to Mary and gently touched her shoulder. "Your heart is pure, as silver and gold. Why do you sit here, shivering in the cold?" Mary then told her the story of her unkind sisters, and how they had made her an outcast. The woman then asked her, "My dear poor girl, you have filled me with sorrow. Why do you not prepare for the Prince's ball tomorrow?"

Mary was confused. "What ball?" she asked. "I have not been invited."

The woman looked down at Mary, and spoke softly. "Goodnight Mary, and do not despair. Tomorrow will be new day, fresh and fair." With that, the woman left, and Mary slept peacefully.

As Mary slept, the fairy flew from her home in the forest to the palace of the king. She silently slipped into the Prince's room, where she found him sleeping

contentedly. The beautiful fairy then took out her wand and placed it on the Prince's eyelids, whispering softly:

*You cannot see past beauty and looks,
Nor do you care if your wife is kind.
Tomorrow you shall awake with a shock,
For the rest of your life you shall be blind.*

The wand twinkled and the fairy flew away, happy.

The next day was beautiful and fair, as the woman had promised. The Prince awoke surprised as well because he was unable to see. The ball went on as planned, though, and Mary followed her sisters Jean and Alice to the ball from a distance. When they arrived, each girl was announced and allowed into the ballroom but Mary. When Mary walked up to the door, she was refused entry because she had "the clothes of a beggar and shoes of an old woman," as said by the gatekeeper. Mary was forced to stay outside and watch the other girls go in and dance. She could hear the music and laughter coming from the palace and so she cried. She would never be allowed to leave her sisters, and she would be forced to live outside in the cold for the rest of her life.

While Mary sat crying, the ballroom was filled with activity. There was food, dancing, singing. Even the Prince was enjoying himself. But soon he began to hear something... someone, somewhere, crying. No others heard this, for they were all too busy watching the dances and entertainment. The Prince could not understand where the tears were coming from, so he asked his assistant to take him outside, where they found Mary sitting in the dirt. He heard her stop crying and felt his assistant try to pull him inside, muttering something about beggars and this being not fit for a prince. But the Prince could not see Mary's clothes, or dirty face, so he asked her, "What is wrong, girl? Why are you crying?" Mary was surprised to hear him speak to her, because she was sure he was the prince, but she told him everything. Her father's death, her sister's unkindness, her wishing to be let inside. Mary did not tell him about her fairy for fear he would think she was crazy, but she told him everything else.

"And you never felt angry towards your sisters?" The Prince asked her at the end of her tale. "Oh, no!" Mary replied, "I love Jean and Alice still, because it is not their fault they are angry. They have simply been hurt by my mother's death... I love them still." The Prince was so moved by Mary's kind heart he asked her to be his wife, and they were married the next day, followed by the tears of many other hopeful girls.

At first the Prince wanted Jean and Alice to be exiled to an island in the Unknown Territory, but Mary begged him to forgive them, so they lived with the king and queen until they were old and gray.

The End.