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MODERN

A
CINDERELLA

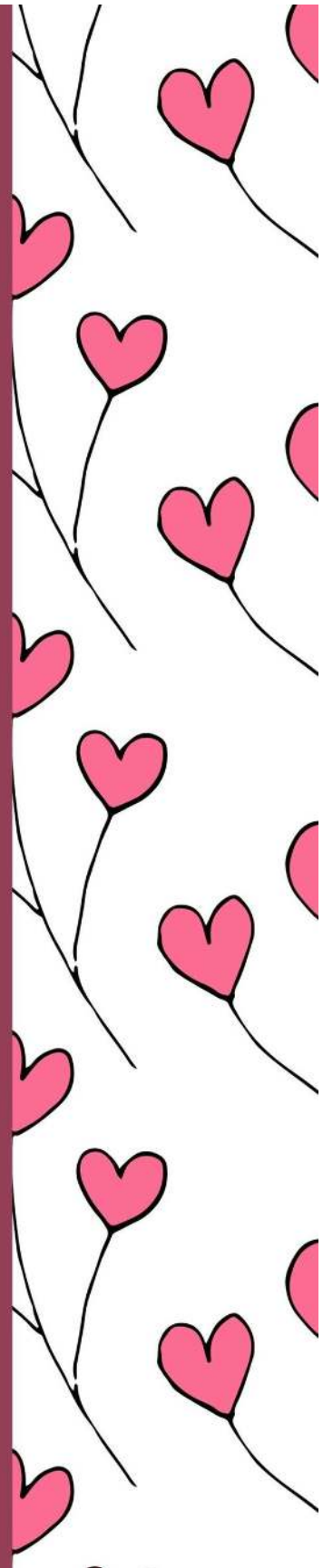
Amanda Minnie Douglas



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AMANDA MINNIE DOUGLAS

A Modern Cinderella

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About the Author

One

At the Palace



“**Y**ou may stay down here until nine o’clock if you like,” said Bridget. “It’s awful cold upstairs. Be sure to wrap yourself good in the old blanket. And put a little coal on the range. If you let my fire go out, I’ll skin you alive.”

When Marilla first heard that threat she shuddered all over. If you scratched a little bit of skin off it hurt dreadfully. But Bridget never did it. Sometimes she hit her a slap on the shoulder. She couldn’t even bear to skin a rabbit. “What do you mean by it?” Marilla gained courage to ask once, when she came to feel at home.

“Oh, I don’t know. My mother used to say it. Sometimes she took a strap to us, but she wasn’t ever real hard.”

Marilla knew about the strap in Bethany Home though she didn’t often get it.

“I’ll remember about the fire.”

“Good night!” Bridget was off.

She always took two or three evenings out in the week and had Sunday afternoon instead of Thursday because they had late dinners during the week. She was very excellent help, so Mrs. Borden let her have her own way.

It was nice and warm in the kitchen; clean, too. Bridget couldn't abide a dirty kitchen. Marilla had wiped the dishes, scoured out the sink and set the chairs straight around. It was a basement kitchen with a dining room above. The front was the furnace cellar, the middle for vegetables and what Bridget called truck.

Marilla sat in the little old rocking chair and put her feet on the oven hearth. It was very nice to rock to and fro and no babies to tend nor Jack to bother with. She sang a few hymns she knew, she said over several, little poems she had learned and spelled a few words. Bridget had turned the gas low, and she couldn't reach it without getting on a chair or she could have read. So she told herself a story that she had read.

It was very comfortable. She was getting a bit sleepy. Suppose she took a teeny nap as she did sometimes when she was waiting for Bridget. So she shook up the old cushion, brought up the stool, sat on that and laid her head in the chair. And now she wasn't a bit sleepy. She thought of the stove and put on some coal, lest she *might* fall asleep.

She hoped it would be warmer tomorrow when she took out the twins. Then she would venture to stop at the book store window and look at the pictures on the magazine covers. There was a baby that looked so like the twins it made her laugh. She didn't think the twins pretty at all. They had round chubby faces and almost round eyes, and mouths that looked as if they were just ready to whistle, and brown fuzzy hair without a bit of curl in it. But they *were* good, "as good as kittens," their mother said. She did so wish she had a kitten. She had brought such a pretty one from the store one day, a real maltese with black whiskers, but Bridget said she couldn't have a cat forever round under her feet and made her take it back.

Jack was past five and very pretty, but bad as he could be. Bridget said he was a “holy terror,” but she thought holiness was goodness and didn’t see the connection. He was a terror, that any one could see.

There was a queer shady look in the corners. She wasn’t a bit afraid. The children at Bethany Home weren’t allowed to be. She liked this a great deal better. She wasn’t compelled to eat her whole breakfast off of oatmeal, and always had such lovely desserts for dinner. And sometimes Mrs. Borden gave her and Jack a banana or a bit of candy. Oh, yes, she would much rather live here even if Jack was bad and pinched her occasionally though his mother slapped him for it, or pinched him back real hard.

What made this lovely, rosy, golden light in the room? It was like a soft sunset. She had been saying over a lot of Mother Goose rhymes; of course she was too old for such nonsense and Jack didn’t like them. And in “One, two, buckle my shoe,” she wondered which she liked best: “Nineteen, twenty, my stomach’s empty,” or “nineteen, twenty, I’ve got a plenty.” That was Bethany Home where you only had so much for supper and one little cracker. And here there was plenty. It made her laugh.

And then suddenly there was a pretty little woman in the room dressed in something soft and shining and in her hand she held a stick with a bunch of gay bows at the end. She was so sweet and smiling that Marilla couldn’t feel afraid.

“You don’t know me, Cinderella?” she began, looking at the child.

“Oh, that isn’t my name.”

“You don’t sit in the ashes any more but I dare say you brush up and carry them out in the morning. But I don’t find Cinderellas often at this time of night.”

“I wish I was Cinderella. I have a little foot though, only it don’t look so in these big brogans. I put some soles inside of them, bits of velvet carpet and they keep my feet nice and warm. I do think if the glass slipper wasn’t too teeny weeny I could wear it.”

“You’re a cute one. About the soles, now. Most children haven’t any useful ideas,” and she laughed. “I knew who you were; now can you guess who I am?”

“Why if I was Cinderella you’d be a fairy godmother. But there ain’t any such things; nor Santa Claus. I like the stories about ‘em and I’m awful sorry. I’m only Mrs. Borden’s bound-out girl, but I like it here.”

“You think so?” She gave the most curious, delightful laugh. “You are Cinderella and I am the fairy godmother.”

Marilla sprang up and studied her. She was so pretty and her gown looked as if it was sprinkled with diamond dust. She had never seen any one like her, but at twelve her range of observation had been rather limited.

“Well, what do you think of me?”

Marilla stood wide eyed and speechless.

“Why—you are very beautiful. Oh, I wish you were a fairy godmother! I’d like to go to fairy land. I don’t think any one would mind much, but I do believe the twins would care. Bridget says there isn’t any such thing and then she tells about a little girl who was toted away and had to stay seven years.”

“You couldn’t stay that long, and times have changed, and you have no envious sisters. You’re a rather lonely little body with no father or mother.”

“Oh, how did you know that?”

She laughed, the softest, merriest laugh.

Marilla looked and looked, the little body was so sweet and mysterious.

“Oh, fairy godmothers know a great many things. They keep watch over the Cinderellas and then when they find one to their liking they appear to her,

and then strange things happen.”

“Yes they are strange,” said the little girl.

“Would you like to go to the ball?”

“Oh! Why I’m afraid I wouldn’t know what to do,” hesitatingly, “I’ve never seen a ball.”

“You can dance. I saw you dancing with an organ grinder.”

“Oh, yes, I can dance that way, but——”

“Would you like to go?”

“Oh, wouldn’t I!” Marilla’s eyes shone with delight. “If you were a fairy godmother you could put me in some clothes.”

Marilla didn’t believe in it at all, but it was very funny.

“Then just step out here.”

She did with the strangest sort of feeling. The fairy touched her with the wand. Her clothes fell in a heap. The big shoes dropped off. There was a shimmery pink silk frock with lace and ribbons and the daintiest pink kid slippers with diamond buckles and pink silk stockings with lovely clocks. She went dancing around the kitchen light as a feather, her eyes shining, her cheeks like roses, her lips full of smiles. She was fairly bewitched.

“You’ll do,” exclaimed godmother, and she threw a beautiful white cloak about her.

“But we haven’t a pumpkin in the house and Bridget catches all the mice and burns them up. So you can’t make a carriage——”

“There’s one at the door.” The hall seemed all alight and they went out. Yes, there was a coach with lamps on both sides, two horses and a driver, besides a footman who helped them in with a fine air, and drove off as gay as if it was Christmas night, though it were really March.

The streets were alight, the windows shining in splendor. Marilla had never seen anything like it. Presently they stopped at what seemed to the little girl a great palace with broad white marble steps and tall carved columns lighted by myriads of colored lights and the vestibule was hung with vines. There were statues standing round that looked like real people only they were so white from top to toe. Then they went up another beautiful stairway that led to a gallery where there were numbers of inviting little rooms, and throngs of elegantly dressed people, not any larger than boys and girls. A maid took off their wraps, and brushed Marilla's hair and it fell in golden rings all over her head.

"What beautiful hair," she exclaimed, "just like threads of silk. You must let it grow long. And such lovely eyes; but she's thin."

"Yes, rather," said godmother, "But she has dancing feet. She's a real Cinderella."

"There's so many of them and only one Prince. What a pity!"

"But each has her turn, and they are very happy."

Then Marilla glanced around the gallery. That was well lighted and had a cushioned seat against the wall. Groups were sitting together or rambling about. And a great circular room, down stairs lighted by a magnificent chandelier whose prisms seemed in constant motion and rayed off every imaginable color with a faint musical sound.

"Oh! oh! oh!" and her eyes were full of tears though her lips smiled.

"Now we will go down," said godmother.

That was by another way. But this place was a perfect land of delight. She had never read of anything like it, but the Arabian Nights had not come in her way. Some were dancing about informally, some talking and laughing. There were the most elegantly attired boys in silks and velvets made in all pretty

fashions. Silk stockings and light colored pumps, jackets trimmed with frills of lace, some with satin trousers wide enough for petticoats at the bottom and blue velvet sailor collars. There was no end of fancy attire.

“This is to be your knight, Sir Aldred. And this is the new Cinderella. Take good care of her until the Prince comes.”

He bowed with most enchanting grace.

“There are so many of them!” he said, as he took her hand, “But she is the prettiest of them all.”

The knight gave her hand a little squeeze and she turned rosy red.

“Come this way,” and he led her along. It was odd to be introduced as Cinderella, but everybody was so sweet and cordial that she kept smiling and bowing.

Presently a cluster of bells sounded and everybody fell into line along the outer edge of the beautiful building. It was a grand march and the tapping of the feet seemed like an encore to the music. Then the first couple stepped out on the floor. Everybody dances in fairy land that is presided over by godmothers. Oh, it was just enchanting!

“Are you tired?” Sir Aldred asked presently.

“Oh, no, I never imagined anything so utterly delightful. And the splendid dressing. Are there many Cinderellas here?” a little timidly.

“Oh, yes. They love to come, but the new one always dances with the Prince. He will come in presently for you.”

“Oh, I shall feel afraid.” She really felt tears rushing to her eyes.

“No, you will not, for he is truly most delightful, a regular Prince Charming. You see, it is different in fairy land. You forget for awhile who you have been. That’s the charm of it. And you’re such a lovely dancer.”

“And—and—is there any glass slipper?”

She seemed to remember something about that.

“That’s in the story. The Prince isn’t looking for a wife now. And you couldn’t dance in a stiff glass slipper. It might shiver to pieces. What pretty little feet you have! And such a lovely curly head.”

It seemed quite delightful to be praised and she was glad she pleased him.

Then there was a curious quivering about the place as if every one was drawing a long breath, and the lights were mysterious, while all the little bells twinkled. And there stood the Prince.

He was taller than any of the others and very handsome. As for his attire, I couldn’t begin to describe it, it was so resplendent with silk and velvet and jewels.

Sir Aldred led the little lady up to him and said: “This is Cinderella.”

The Prince bowed and pressed a kiss upon her hand and she was glad it was lily white and not rough and red.

“I am very glad you are here Cinderella, I hope you will have a happy time. You look so.”

“Oh I know I shall.” She blushed and cast her eyes down in such a sweet fashion that he really longed to kiss the lids.

Then the music commenced and they stepped out as if they had danced together all their lives. The others formed a circle and went round them, bowing as they passed. There were such fascinating figures, changing frequently, each one prettier than the last. She wondered how they could remember; how *she* could do it. They all looked so lovely. It certainly was fairy land.

Now and then the Prince bent over and said something charming to her as if she had been a fine lady and the odd thing was that she could answer him

readily. The music began to go slower and died in softest melody. Then he turned and said—

“Now we will go out and have some refreshments. You must be tired after all this dancing, but you don’t look it at all.”

“Oh, I feel as if I could dance all night. I believe I am bewitched.”

He gave her the sweetest smile that any Cinderella ever had.

“I am very glad. Sometimes they think of the ashes and cinders and wonder whether the pleasure will last. Then the lightness goes out of their feet and the smiles from their rosy lips. The thing is to enjoy it while you are here. You are a very delightful Cinderella; I must ask godmother to keep a watch over you. I hope to meet you again.”

The banquet room was beautiful as well; there was a great oval table with a chandelier shedding a thousand lights from the gorgeous prisms. Underneath was a tiny lake full of blooming water lilies. There were mounds of fruit and flowers, nuts from all over the world, piles of cake, candied fruit, ices made in all kinds of shape. The most beautiful plates and dishes, glass and crystal and servants piling up dainties and pouring out fragrant drinks.

At the head sat the Prince and Cinderella. He rose and drank to her health and good fortune with the most exquisite verse and Sir Aldred returned with a charming reply. Certainly there were no envious or jealous sisters. Every one was so merry and talked with his or her neighbor, and every girl had a knight who was devoted to her. Were they all Cinderellas, and had the Prince been as delightful to them? Every face beamed with wondrous satisfaction.

“But I don’t understand it at all,” and she glanced up wonderingly.

“Oh, you don’t have to in fairy land. You just take all the pleasure that comes. You are not thinking of all the tomorrows. There will be something nice and pleasant if you look for it in the right place. For little Cinderella, we

must not be looking for tomorrow's joy. You cannot find them tonight. There are flowers that fold their leaves but will open again tomorrow. You would be short sighted to sit down and cry tonight about it."

Marilla was a good deal puzzled.

"You must be a happy little Cinderella when you have been to fairy land. You must not lose faith in fairy godmothers. They come at unexpected times and in different guise. And that is what keeps the world bright and the heart young, and sometime the real Prince comes."

Her heart beat with a mysterious joy. She was full of gladness.

Then they walked around and all the other Cinderellas seemed so happy when he smiled and spoke to them. The beautiful music went on. Here and there groups were dancing again.

And then it seemed as if a giant caught her and almost shook her to pieces, and the beautiful lights wavered and vanished. She was brought upon her feet with a force that would have shivered any glass slipper.

"You little huzzy! What are you doing up this time of night, instead of asleep in bed? Rouse up! rouse up! Lucky you didn't let my fire go out this cold night! Come, hustle!"

There seemed a sort of crash. Marilla glanced around with half-opened eyes. Yes, this was the old kitchen. There was Bridget with the lighted end of a candle in the tin candlestick.

"Come! get along, sleepy head." She gave her a push up the stairs and through the halls, half scolding her but not cross. "It's a wonder the gobble sirs didn't come after you. If you'd been carried off now! It's awful cold. I'd sleep in my stockings and they'll be good and warm in the morning."

Marilla hustled off her clothes, wrapped herself in an old blanket and tumbled into bed in a little heap. But there was some mysterious music

floating through her brain and a fragrance in the air. The Prince smiled down into her eyes, and the fairy godmother she should always believe in. For she had been to real fairy land; that was the truth.

Two

Jack



The Bordens were nice, ordinary people enjoying life in a commonplace way. There was Mr. Jack Borden, the junior partner in a fairly successful law firm, his wife an averagely nice, sensible body, Miss Florence, her husband's sister, a bright girl of three and twenty, whose lover was in South America on a five years' contract, with one year yet to serve.

After the twins were born they tried a grown nursemaid who bored them by sitting around when she was upstairs and making many excuses to get down to the kitchen, where she disputed with Bridget who declared one or the other of them must go, and they simply could not give up Bridget. The babies slept a good deal of the time and only cried when they were hungry. The mother and aunt thought them the dearest things and their father was as proud of them as a man could well be. If it wasn't for giving them an airing now and then—but when it came pleasant weather they *must* be taken out.

Aunt Hetty Vanderveer who was queer and going on to eighty, who couldn't live with a relative for they always wanted to borrow her money, got tangled up in a house on which she had a mortgage, and called her grandnephew, Mr. John Borden to her rescue. She took the house and