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The Cinderella Treatment

BY LAURA HUNT ANGEL

“You think she’s pretty? She has a neck like a goose!”

I was watching Cinderella — the 1970 teleplay starring Leslie Ann Warren — and it was her of whom my father spoke.

Perplexed, I tilted my head and peered closely at the television screen. Try as I might, I just couldn’t figure out how my father came to his conclusion.

“A goose? She does not!” Daddy laughed as I shook my head and declared, “She is pretty!”

Even in her pauper’s dress and that just-so smudge of ash across her cheek, it was obvious that Cinderella was a princess waiting to be discovered. The wicked stepmother and her daughters evoked both anger and fear. The songs, the slipper and the ever present question: would the prince find her again? I was enraptured.

On the whole, the story seemed quite plausible to me, except for the fairy godmother. I figured that with a little imagination, Cinderella could have gotten the prince all on her own. Daddy agreed, in spite of her unfortunate neck problem.

The appeal of Cinderella appears to be a world-wide phenomenon. Literary researcher Marian Roalfe Cox has collected a total of 345 versions, discovering that some elements of the Cinderella story go back a thousand years or more. In one Chinese story, the fairy godmother is actually a fish. An Algonquin version describes a disfigured girl who wins the heart of an invisible being. There are Egyptian, Russian and African versions, too.

Leslie Ann Warren’s portrayal of Cinderella, as well as Disney’s and many others, are more or less based on the medieval characters described by French author Charles Perrault in his 1697 rendition of the tale. If you’ve never heard of Perrault, you most assuredly have heard of his pen name, Mother Goose.

While many of Perrault’s nursery rhymes contain hidden political satire, his versions of old folk tales such as Cinderella were simply written and much more palatable for younger audiences than some of the later versions. His is the version wherein you will find the fairy godmother and the pumpkin coach, however, the coachman and footmen are lizards, not mice. Cinderella’s father is still alive, but inexplicably aloof toward his daughter and practically disowns her in favor of his stepdaughters.

This is also the first time that the glass slipper makes an appearance. In studying Perrault’s tale, etymologists determined that in older versions it was a gray fur stole, more specifically a squirrel fur stole, that Cinderella lost, and not slippers at all. Replacing a smelly squirrel stole with glass shoes was undoubtedly a wise move on Perrault’s part.

At the end, Cinderella tries on the slipper which, of course, fits perfectly. She is very forgiving of her father and step family and ultimately everyone lives happily every after.

IF THE SHOE DOESN’T FIT

In 1812, the Brothers Grimm created a much edgier version of the story and transformed it into a perfect Halloween tale — albeit one clearly geared toward adults. In it, Cinderella becomes Aschenputtel, a moderately talented German witch.

Among Aschenputtel’s gifts are the ability to pick lentils out of a fire. Eventually, she



This isn’t a moldy crystal ball, it’s a very flavorful rutabaga. This gargantuan bulb easily served four adults.

commands some birds to do the picking for her, which comes in very handy since the wicked stepmother and her daughters force Cinderella to perform this task repeatedly.

Although dead, Cinderella’s mother is still looking out for her daughter. When her father goes on a shopping trip, he asks his stepdaughters what they would like and each requests a dress. For some obscure reason, Cinderella requests a tree branch. The father returns with the dresses as well as a branch from a hazelnut tree. Cinderella plants the branch on her mother’s grave, which transforms into a magical tree that takes on the role of the fairy godmother. With the help of Cinderella’s ever present birds, the tree provides several ballgowns for our would-be princess, each one more magnificent than the one before it.

It is as the story comes to an end that it takes an especially gory turn. After several failed attempts at finding her, the prince appears once more at Cinderella’s home. Slipper in hand, he asks each stepsister to try it on. Knowing that her foot is too large, the first stepsister simply cuts off her toe in an effort to fit into the shoe. The second sister follows suit by trimming off a bit of her heel to make her foot fit.

At this point, Cinderella’s magical birds deviate sharply from Disney’s sweetly musical creatures. Each attempt by the stepsisters is thwarted when they sing a rhyme, warning the prince to look down and see the blood filling the slipper. Later, in a horrific finale, Cinderella’s helpful little birds pluck out the stepsister’s eyes while they are seated at her wedding.

My father wasn’t the only one who thought Cinderella resembled a goose. Near the beginning of the Brothers Grimm version, Cinderella’s step family call her goose, too. Of course, my father knew this, but it has taken me over forty years to get the joke.

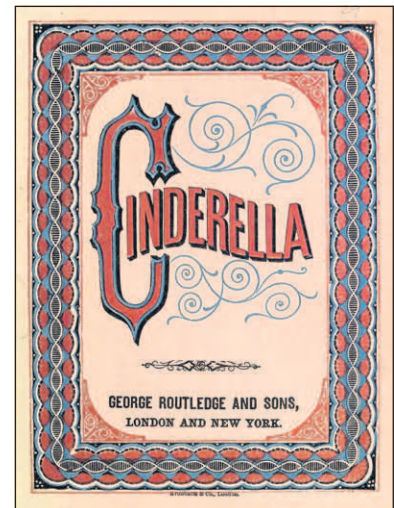
LENTILS, YOU SAY?

Lentils, the unfortunate stepsister of the not particularly fortunate split pea, play a feature roll in the Grimms’ Cinderella. In their uncooked



Left: You may not be able to put lipstick on a pig, but with a little kitchen magic you can easily turn a rutabaga into French fries.

Below: George Routledge and Sons published this version of Cinderella in 1865.



state, lentils seem much more suitable as a stuffing for bean bags than as a food stuff. They come in several colors, most of which are quite drab, except for the red variety. They aren’t actually red but instead, a menacing shade of orange. The brighter colored lentils are generally used for stews and soups, while the brown and green lentils tend to hold their shape a little better and are often used in place of meat or as stuffing bases.

Whichever color you choose, these little disks are surprisingly tasty and satisfying. They can be used in place of meat, but unlike meat they are a shelf stable, easily transportable source of protein, vitamins and minerals. Lentils have been around for millenia, and many believe that their round shape symbolizes the circle of life.

Having said that, one must consider their meaning in the story. It is possible that Cinderella’s stepmother was attempting to instill some sort of philosophical notion concerning the cyclical nature of life into her stepdaughter. By continuously picking the lentils out of the fire, was Cinderella learning the fleeting nature of human existence? Perhaps the stepmother was trying to tell Cinderella in her own psychotic way that there is a time and season for everything.

Or, maybe she was just plain mean.

THE RECIPES

For one reason or another, many late season crops are peculiar looking at best. Here are a couple of recipes to help you magically transform these healthy but unappetizingly plain looking veggies.

LENTIL FILLED WINTER SQUASH

This is a satisfying dish for a chilly evening. Serve it to the home folks or for a fancy fall dinner party. I chose acorn squash to dress up these lentils but any smallish, 1-2 serving size winter squash will do.

2 winter squash, such as acorn, buttercup or delicata
olive oil
salt and pepper to taste
1 medium onion, diced
1 teaspoon minced garlic
1 carrot, grated
1 stalk celery, diced
1 cup green or brown lentils
1 ½ teaspoons dried sage
2 cups chicken or vegetable stock
sour cream or Greek yogurt
chopped parsley

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Cut each squash in half and place on a shallow baking sheet. Season each half with salt, pepper and a drizzle of olive oil. Bake for 30-40 minutes or until tender; remove from oven. While squash are baking, add a bit of olive oil to a medium saucepan and saute the onion, garlic, carrot and celery for 3-4 minutes, just until softened. Rinse the lentils and check for stones, debris, etc. Add the lentils to the vegetables along with the sage and stock. Reduce heat to simmer and cook, loosely covered, until lentils are tender, about 25

minutes. Fill each squash half with lentil filling. Top each with a dollop of sour cream and a sprinkle of parsley. Serves four.

RUTABAGA OVEN FRENCH FRIES

With it’s tough outer skin and dowdy appearance, the rutabaga is the overgrown stepsister of the turnip. Once prepared, rutabaga taste like a mildly sweet potato, and because they are low in carbs they make a truly delicious substitute for regular fries. Cutting them can be a bit of a challenge, so if you are lacking muscle you may want to find your own Prince Charming to do the slicing for you. You really should try this one.

1 large rutabaga
2-3 tablespoons oil
½ teaspoon coarse Kosher or sea salt

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F. I find that it is easier to peel a rutabaga after I have sliced it. Start by slicing a ½ - ¾ inch slab off of the rutabaga to create a flat base. Set it on a cutting board and then slice it into ½ - ¾ inch slabs. Peel each slab and then slice them into French fry spears. Place the fries in a bowl and toss with the oil. Lay them in a single layer on a sheet pan and bake at 425 degrees F for about 25 minutes or until as brown as you like. Turn once or twice during baking so that the fries will brown evenly. Once done, sprinkle the fries with coarse salt. Serve with ketchup, siracha or barbecue sauce. For variety, try sprinkling them with grated Parmesan, Cajun seasoning or fresh herbs. One large rutabaga will make enough fries for two.