

A Crutch in Time

A long time ago in a far off kingdom a woodcutter's wife gave birth to a baby girl named Elinor. She was exceedingly fair in aspect with large hazel eyes, lustrous chestnut hair and skin like fine porcelain. But sadly her perfection was marred. She had one leg much shorter than the other.

The woodcutter was heartbroken. He told his wife he feared he was to blame for his precious daughter's deformity. The previous winter in a ferocious blizzard his axe had mistakenly felled a tree sacred to the local villagers. He and his wife had to flee to a distant part of the shire with the imprecations of the villagers resounding in their ears. The last chilling words they heard as they ran were, "A curse on all your children," from the mouth of the feared high priestess.

The woodcutter could not afford to buy Elinor a special built-up shoe. Instead, he fashioned a wooden block to go under her foot which he wrapped in place with strips of cloth. He made her a rough-hewn crutch which stabilised her gait. Elinor was a model child with a kind heart and gentle, loving demeanour. After the sudden death of her mother she looked after her father with an uncomplaining diligence which brought tears to his eyes. Life would have been tolerable but for the cruelty of the local children.

Whenever she walked to the nearest settlement they mocked her lopsided walk. "Here comes limpy, gimpny girl," was a familiar cry. She was often ambushed and held down whilst the bandage was ripped from her foot and her support was thrown from hand to hand. They taunted her as she vainly hobbled in circles trying to retrieve her wooden block. During her teenage years she became a virtual recluse to avoid her tormentors.

As the years went by, Elinor grew into a staggeringly beautiful young woman. One day as she sat on the grassy bank of a fast-flowing river a young man riding by was so bewitched by her luminous beauty that he swooned and fell into the swollen stream. Quick as a flash, Elinor held out her crutch which he caught and hauled himself gasping onto the bank at her feet. Their eyes met and as they later admitted it was as if they had known each other all their lives.

Edmund, for that was his name, was the Crown Prince who was on a tour to familiarise himself with the land he would one day rule. He was totally unconcerned about Elinor's disability but he knew it caused her great distress.

Just before their wedding he presented her with an exquisitely crafted shoe which gave her perfect equilibrium.

On the big day, in her flowing bridal gown she floated serenely down the aisle on the arm of her proud father. The citizens were entranced by her poise and loveliness.

But sadly Edmund and Elinor didn't live happily ever after. He drank and she ran off with the Court Jester.