

Spring 2019

## TALES AS OLD AS TIME: THE PROGRESSION OF CLASSIC STORY THEMES FROM FAIRY TALES TO DISNEY FILMS

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TALES AS OLD AS TIME: THE PROGRESSION OF CLASSIC STORY THEMES  
FROM FAIRY TALES TO DISNEY FILMS

by

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Submitted to the School of Honors Committee

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

Southeastern University

2019

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2019

## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the original purpose of the most familiar fairy tales based on the state of society at the time of their conception, including the stories of the Brothers Grimm, Charles Perrault, and Hans Christian Andersen. The thesis will then compare these original themes to the themes of the Disney films they inspired, taking into account the cultural and historical factors that produced the final film. In addition, the thesis will take note of the modern interpretations of both the fairy tales and the films based on the viewpoint of our current society. In addition, this thesis will include a chapter on my capstone film *Fairytale*, which was created in conjunction with the thesis, as a practical application of the principles discovered in my research. The thesis focuses primarily on the themes of family relationships and the roles of women as defined by each time period.

KEY WORDS: FAIRY TALES, STORIES, FILMS, DISNEY



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Tales as Old as Time: The Progression of Classic Story Themes  
from Fairy Tales to Disney Films

### **Introduction**

Few stories are as well-known as the fairy tales of our childhood—*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *The Little Mermaid*. Disney's animated films of these classic fairy tales are the images that we retain, until it seems as though the original fairy tales are all but forgotten. As times continue to change, the films of Walt Disney are in the process of vanishing into the vaults of history themselves, to be observed from an outside perspective. Modern audiences and critics watch these films with the eye of our time, seeking themes of responses to the current questions of our culture. For example, *Cinderella* is frequently criticized by the feminist movement of modern times, as she is seen to be weak, staying with the harsh situation dealt to her without putting up any form of resistance or defending herself. Yet publicity interviews with Walt Disney at the time of the film's release reveal his thoughts on the character as a progressive woman: "She believed in dreams, all right, but she also believed in doing something about them. When Prince Charming didn't come along, she went over to the palace and got him" (Disney, 1950). This shift in point of view demonstrates what could be when one contemplates the original meaning behind these classic stories, and how it can evolve over time.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the original intent of the most familiar fairy tales based on the state of society at the time of their conception, and to compare this to the themes of the Disney animated films they inspired, taking into account the cultural and historical factors that produced the final film, in addition to taking note of the modern interpretations of both the

fairy tales and the films based on our current society's viewpoint. The research questions that will be asked include:

1. What was the original theme of the classic fairy tales?
2. How did the backgrounds of the authors affect the messages of their stories?
3. How were the original meanings of the fairy tales changed when they were translated into film?
4. What effect did the social questions of the time period have on the theme of the films?
5. How do we as a society view these films now with our modern perspective?

In order to answer these questions, a considerable amount of research must be undertaken. Such topics under review would include the origins and variations of classic fairy tales and beloved stories, the personal backgrounds of the authors behind the tales, the developmental process of the films' production, and analysis of the themes pointed out by critics and scholars in response to these films both at the time of their release and currently in hindsight. As a conclusion to this analysis of the fairy tale themes of Disney films, this thesis will also include a chapter on the short film *Fairytale* that I wrote and directed in conjunction with this thesis.



### **The Walt Disney Era**

As the Walt Disney Company increases in its all-encompassing impact on American society, critics such as Justyna Deszcz (2002) question the importance of fairy tales to our culture. Her theory for the repeated use of fairy tales by Disney is the economic benefit, and she claims these stories are used as illusions by the Disney company to spread their false messages of naïve hope in order to further their own sales as the stories increase in popularity ((Deszcz, 2002, p. 83). The one fact that is without question is that Disney's films and the fairy tales claimed by them have a deep impact on American society and bear responsibility for shaping the culture their themes imitate.

Scholarly author Juliette Wood (2006) delves deeper into the idea of fairy tales and folklore as an impression of society (p. 297). She points out the popularity of fairy tales in modern society and cites the advent of home media and the opportunity for repeated viewings and analysis as the driving force behind this revival and focus on the classic stories in popular culture today. It is interesting to note that the primary method for sharing these tales when they first were conceived was through oral tradition, as families and towns shared stories important to their culture, making changes without much ceremony or analytical purpose, as there was no record of what it had previously been. This changed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Brothers Grimm began collecting the stories into written form so that they could be preserved and circulated to others, which then began the worldwide spread of these fairy tales. As we now enter into a society where the world seems smaller than ever before, as we have the ability to instantly share our knowledge with one another, these stories are resurfacing but with a far more critical view. The author discusses how much of the meaning behind fairy tales depends not

only on the writer but also on the reader or audience member who perceives the theme based on their own experiences and worldview (Wood, 2006, p. 282).

### *Silly Symphonies*

Walt Disney's *Silly Symphonies*, a series of short films that predated his more famous feature films, were among the first expressions of fairy tales in animated short format. The first of these was *Babes in the Woods* (1932), a Grimm Brothers fairy tale with several similarities to *Hansel and Gretel*. This short is an excellent example of how the themes of these fairy tales shifted greatly when they were transferred into film form. *Babes in the Woods* as told by the Brothers Grimm consists mostly of a conflict that involves food or nourishment, or the lack thereof. When Walt Disney began producing his *Silly Symphonies*, food was not a common struggle or uncertainty for his American audiences, and so he changed the central fear of the main characters to transformation or aging, as seen by the woods and creatures within that change into terrifying forms. Many of the other *Silly Symphonies* followed this same principle of seeking other plot devices beside the need for food. The only notable exception to this is in *The Golden Touch* (1935), the short film based on the tale of King Midas, the greedy king who gained the ability to turn everything he touched into solid gold. In some versions of the written story, the king repented after touching his beloved daughter and seeing her turn to gold. However, in Walt Disney's short, his daughter is absent, and he regrets his greed after he finds himself unable to eat when everything that touches his mouth becomes gold. The conflict is resolved when he offers up his kingdom for a hamburger (Merritt, 2005, p. 8). It could be said that this short film was intended as a look into American commercialism and greed despite the overall wealth of the nation.

The *Silly Symphonies* proved that short films and fairy tales could be used to shape the ideas of society as well as be influenced by them. *Three Little Pigs* was released in 1933, during the height of the Great Depression. The third pig, who built his house out of bricks and worked hard while his brothers sang and played, faced the Big Bad Wolf with complete absence of fear, singing even as the wolf was at his doorstep, “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?”

Communications professor Tracey Mollet (2013) describes this as the first instance of fantasy escapism that would later become synonymous with Disney Animation (p.113).

### ***Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs***

The first animated film to be produced as a feature was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Released in 1937, this film is filled with references intended as messages of hope for people struggling through the Great Depression. As Mollet (2013) notes, Snow White’s state as a princess and thus her wealth is stripped from her by her jealous Stepmother, who treats her like a servant in her own palace. Yet despite all of this, the princess greets her life with the utmost cheer, not accepting her situation in resignation, but keeping hope alive for the better future of which she dreams.

It is significant to note that in the original version of the tale by the Brothers Grimm, Snow White was never enslaved by the Queen, nor forced to wear rags in an effort to conceal her beauty. Mollet (2013) describes this change as a deliberate attempt by Walt Disney to connect the American people with a literal rags-to-riches story by giving them a character to whom they could relate (p. 114). This continues as Snow White is sent into exile by the Huntsman in an effort to save her life, leaving her without a home and dependent upon the kindness of others, the Dwarfs who make their living by working daily just for the sake of working; as stated in their introductory song, “Heigh Ho,” they dig scores of diamonds and other gems, but “we don’t know

what we dig them for.” This was intended as a depiction of FDR’s New Deal and the jobs that were provided as a result (Mollet, 2013, p. 115).

Snow White is also considered to be a commentary on the ideals of feminine beauty of her time. Author Rebecca-Anne Do Rozario (2004), approaching the Disney princess stories from a feminist perspective, describes *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* as a picture of the relationship between women and aging. The title character is seen to fear trees that take on the image of old and gnarled hands, escaping into a clearing surrounded by young animals and new life (Do Razario, 2004, p. 38). In addition, the central conflict takes place between the young princess and her older stepmother, who punishes Snow White for her youth and beauty out of jealousy and is desperate to prove herself the most beautiful woman in the land. It is interesting to note that in order to achieve her goal of killing Snow White, the Queen takes an aging potion to disguise herself, sacrificing her own youth and beauty, yet she barely mourns this, as she is so pleased with herself and the thought of finally being rid of her rival.

This relationship between the princess and the queen is another area where Walt Disney’s version differs greatly from that of the Brothers Grimm; their story concluded with Snow White inviting her stepmother to her wedding and giving the Queen a pair of enchanted shoes which forced her to dance until she died. Disney’s Snow White contrasted the Queen with her ever-present mercy and grace. This kindness is what enables the witch to enter the Dwarf’s cottage in the first place, as Snow White sought to help what she believed to be a frightened elderly woman. The original story brought the witch into Snow White’s home with promises of gifts to make her more beautiful—lace bodices which the queen tightened until she passed out and an enchanted comb which turned out to be poisoned when touched to her head. Attracted to

beautiful and appealing items, Snow White was tempted by the witch for a third time with a poisoned apple, perhaps a play on the Adam and Eve story of forbidden fruit.

Disney's *Snow White* is described as a story of motherhood, as she grows up without a real mother, replaced with the twisted dark version of the role given by the Evil Queen. When she finds herself on her own, she takes on the role of a mother to the dwarfs, immediately seeing their need as soon as she first enters their home (Bryne & McQuillan, 1999, p. 61). In the original Grimm fairy tale, Snow White's mother is the first character to be introduced, the young queen who longed for a child. In poetic form, she describes a daughter with lips red as blood, hair black as ebony, and skin as white as snow, and so the title character received her name. This scene is absent from the Disney version, as is the apparent influence of a true motherly character in Snow White's life. Upon entering the Dwarfs' cottage and seeing the state of disarray in which they live, she immediately presumes they, like her, lack a mother figure, and resolves to fulfill that need for them.

The ultimate goal of the main character, to be reunited with her prince and be married, is a dramatic need frowned upon by the standards of our current society. However, it is important to note that in 1933, there were 15 percent fewer children per household than in 1929 (Kennedy, n.d., 165). The Depression pushed young adults to wait for more stable times before starting families, and as such, a main character with a goal of marrying the love of her life was a worthy symbol for the American public at the time.

### ***Cinderella***

Notre Dame film professor Susan Ohmer (1993) points out similar themes in the 1941 film *Cinderella*. Once again, the title character reaches her dream of a better life by obediently serving in her current life situation, but never losing the hope that gives her inner strength and

brings light to everyone around her. As this was the first film to focus on major fairy tales since *Snow White*, it could be said that *Cinderella* was responsible for determining the “Disney” style that is so well-known today.

Authors Karlyn Crowley and John Pennington (2010) unpack the concept of viewing Cinderella stories through our modern lens (p. 297). These authors discuss how fairy tales serve as a view of society, constantly changing in theme and focus, as the very idea of the genre exists with the intent of the stories being alive and making these changes. For this reason, Cinderella, as perhaps the most well-known fairy tale worldwide, is of the utmost importance to this study. Feminism finds an outlet in Cinderella retellings to redefine the classic tale to include modern society’s questions (Crowley & Pennington, 2010, p. 300).

There have been over 700 different versions of the Cinderella fairy tale found across different cultures, the oldest of these having originated in China. It was here that the famous plot device of the lost slipper was created, tying the Chinese practice of binding the feet of young women in order to make them smaller, which was considered more desirable, into the narrative (Ohmer, 1993, pp. 231-232). Another factor in the selection of a shoe as the method of finding the maiden was the fact that in China, slippers were worn by the women who made them, and so the specific design would reveal Cinderella’s identity.

Walt Disney’s version shares the most in common with Charles Perrault’s story, as he was the one who introduced several of the more well-known elements, including the slipper of glass and the pumpkin coach. Perrault wrote in 17<sup>th</sup> century France, during the reign of Louis XIV, the Sun King. His audience of courtiers and the French people who were entranced by the ideals of life at court led him to make changes to the traditional tellings of the tale with more of an emphasis on magic. In nearly all previous versions, Cinderella’s mother had in some way

been responsible for the transformation of her daughter's rags, whether by an enchanted tree that grew from her grave or the appearance of an animal that represented her. Perrault replaced this aspect with a fairy godmother, and was notably also the first writer of Cinderella stories to specify that the party Cinderella was to attend was a royal ball at the palace, and that her suitor was the prince himself, indicative of his audience's fascination with the lives of royalty.

Perhaps the most drastic change that Perrault made from tradition was the lack of a violent comeuppance for the wicked stepsisters. While the original story from China had the stepsisters burned to death in boiling water and the Brothers Grimm had birds peck out their eyes at Cinderella's wedding, Perrault chose for Cinderella to be marked by kindness to her persecutors, a commentary on the morality-focused society in which he lived (Ohmer 1993, p. 235). Like Walt Disney's Snow White, the princess bore no ill will towards her wicked stepfamily, and so it is little wonder that Disney relied most heavily on Perrault's story as he produced his *Cinderella*.

Like all villain/princess relationships of Walt Disney's lifetime, jealousy of physical beauty is the defining feature of the film's villain. It is implied that if Cinderella were not as beautiful, or if her own daughters were more attractive, her stepmother would not have had the need to be as cruel to her. Cinderella's stepmother takes whatever measures she can to keep Cinderella from happiness in order to make a way for her own daughters to achieve high societal standing. This relationship received more emphasis in the 2015 Disney remake. In the rewrite of their own brand of *Cinderella*, the Disney Studios focused the theme of the story on Cinderella's courage and kindness, and gave her more direct confrontation from her stepmother. This enabled her to have a moment of grace and forgiveness towards the villain at the film's ending. This version places less emphasis on her physical appearance as being the reasoning

behind the hatred she receives from her stepmother. Towards the climax of the film, Cinderella openly asks her stepmother why she is so cruel to her. The stepmother replies by saying that Cinderella is so young and innocent and good, reflecting less jealousy on the part of her social success through catching the prince as a result of her outward beauty. Rather, their dialogue implies the stepmother's own regrets, as she has just revealed her tragic backstory, and now being left with two daughters who are also physically attractive, but still not as desirable as Cinderella, the bitter stepmother is left jealous of Cinderella's unbreakable spirit. The 2015 film was also significant for giving Cinderella and the Prince more time to get to know one another, introducing them to each other before the ball, allowing their relationship to build and grow rather than proposing marriage upon love at first sight.

### *Sleeping Beauty*

Themes of darkness and the ideas associated with the concept changed as Walt Disney's films progressed. It is interesting to note that all of the earliest animated features had a decidedly darker tone than those that would follow them. *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, and *Fantasia* involved themes of darkness that related to a personal inner conflict for the protagonists, and this idea of darkness that could exist within everyone slowly faded away as America entered World War II and the villains of film became more clearly pronounced (Nelson, 1978, pp. 96–99).

This emphasis on the characterization of good and evil, particularly evil, is clearly seen in Walt Disney's last fairy tale adaptation, *Sleeping Beauty*. The title character only appears in 18 minutes of the 76 minute runtime, and the most heavily featured character is the villain, Maleficent, and her battle with the most active characters of the film, the three good fairies. Walt Disney again used Charles Perrault as his foremost source, however in the case of *Sleeping Beauty*, many more changes were made from prose to film. The character Maleficent was based



upon was merely a jilted fairy in Perrault's story, and she remained absent after her initial cursing of the young princess, in contrast to Maleficent's active attempts to ensure that her curse remained in place.

It is of interest to note that one of the most critical elements of both *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White* as told by Walt Disney, the revival of the sleeping maidens through true love's kiss, is absent from all previous iterations of both fairy tales. While Snow White had choked on an apple and had the fruit dislodged from her throat when the prince and dwarfs moved her coffin through the woods, the Sleeping Beauty was cursed to sleep for a hundred years, at which time it was foretold that a prince would come and awaken her. He did so merely by his presence, and in Charles Perrault's version, the two conversed for four hours before revealing themselves to the rest of the awakening court. This conversation began a series of meetings between the princess and the prince from a neighboring kingdom, lasting for a period of two years, after which time the prince's father died, and having become king, he took his Sleeping Beauty back to his kingdom to be his bride. This reveals that the rapid engagement and love at first sight that modern critics bring Disney under fire for is purely his creation, as the original Sleeping Beauty story involved a much more realistic courting period for the lovers.

Sleeping Beauty herself is seen as the embodiment of a teenage American girl in the 60's—barefoot, carefree, with blond hair and blue eyes at the time when the Barbie doll began to reach popularity (Do Rozario, 2004, p. 38). She fulfilled the ideals of a teenage flower child as the 60's began; she protested the destiny that had been set before her, wishing to be with the one she loved as a simple girl in the forest rather than live a life of lonely luxury as a princess. Through it all, Sleeping Beauty remained an image of noble heart and grace, in keeping with the princesses that came in Disney's films before her.

These clear distinctions between good and evil were subverted as the Disney studios adapted their own story for a modern audience in the 2014 film *Maleficent*. Maleficent was once again the most memorable character, although in this version she was given a far more sympathetic story, as her origin as a woman of pure heart betrayed by a greedy king was explored. The three “good” fairies who were responsible for progressing the plot of the 1959 film were shown to be negligent in their care for the young princess, leaving Maleficent to step into a role of motherhood (Üner, 2017, p. 381). This also brought a twist to the most well-known part of Walt Disney’s story, that of true love’s kiss breaking the spell. Prince Phillip’s attempt to kiss the princess awake after having only known her for a day was unsuccessful, but it was the gentle forehead kiss of the redeemed antagonist that brought Sleeping Beauty back to life. The Disney studio used this film and this character to tackle some of the more challenging topics for audiences, including the only symbolism of rape ever to be portrayed in a Disney feature film. Considering that previous iterations of the story were influenced most heavily by the desires of writers and animators to explore new techniques in their fields, perhaps the largest milestone of *Maleficent* was that it was the first version of the *Sleeping Beauty* story to have been based in the idea of making a statement through storytelling.

### **Disney Renaissance Era**

Following Walt Disney's death, the studio spent decades moving away from fairy tales. As America rewrote its identity moving through the 70's and 80's, so did the studio break from tradition and created films experimenting with distinctly darker tones, such as *The Rescuers*, *The Great Mouse Detective*, and *The Black Cauldron*. After experiencing considerably less critical success with these ventures than the films of Walt Disney's day, the new studio heads began to look back on the stories he had intended to adapt next.

Hans Christian Andersen was a favorite author of Walt Disney, who had already adapted one of his works, *The Ugly Duckling*, into a short film, and had been working on an adaptation of another, *The Little Mermaid*. The success of this film would begin a new era of commercial and critical success for the Disney Animation Studios known as the "Disney Renaissance." The fairy tale films that came out of this time period were characterized by female characters who fought actively to be with the one they loved, struggling against the dominant opposing male characters in their lives to achieve their own destiny.

It was also during this time period that ideals for young girls based upon the princesses they came to see as role models ranged beyond physical appearance and into the ideals of their relationships, their ultimate goal consistently involving marriage. However, a deeper analysis of the films reveals that the female characters are more likely to express the challenges involved with relationships, whereas it is the male characters who are more likely to express the ideals involved with their search for relationships. As society enjoys criticism of Disney's impact on young women, it is imperative to approach the debate from all perspectives and understand other points of view (Hefner, Firchau, Norton, & Shevel, 2017, p. 528).

*The Little Mermaid*

Now one of the most acclaimed films to come out of Disney Animation, the original 1989 story had considerably darker origins, not unlike the source material the Disney writers were using in that day. Andersen wrote of a young maiden who had to sacrifice her voice in order to have a chance at love with a man from another world. This core is just about the only aspect of the story that Disney chose to retain from Andersen's story. Andersen focused his story on morality, and gave the title character a goal for the most important thing that humans had that merfolk lacked—an immortal soul. The sea witch was able to give the mermaid legs, but in order to be truly human and have a soul that would live on after her death, she would have to cause the prince she had previously rescued to fall in love with her so deeply that he would completely forget about his parents and the life he had and would marry her. In the Disney version, the opposite is true, as Ariel is told by the Sea Witch that in order to be with the prince, she would never be able to see her father or sisters again. In addition to giving up the world she had known and risking a life belonging to Ursula should she fail to win over the prince, Ariel is asked to give up her voice, what she was most praised for by her father and the other inhabitants of the sea. The sacrifice of her voice has been compared to the experiences of Andersen himself, who was known for his beautiful singing voice that deteriorated as he aged.

Without a voice to aid the little mermaid, the prince, while certainly fond of her, chose to marry a woman from his kingdom who claimed to have been the one who rescued him. At this point, the mermaid was given the choice to kill the prince with an enchanted dagger that would return her to the sea, or she would turn into sea foam at the moment of his marriage. The little mermaid was unable to bring herself to kill the prince, and so she dissolved from the tangible world when he kissed his bride. However, as a reward for her pure heart, the little mermaid

became a daughter of the air, and would wander the earth until she had witnessed enough good deeds done by children, with years added on to her time out of heaven every time she saw a child misbehave. In this way, Andersen involved his audience of younger readers in the morality of the mermaid's tale, encouraging them to exhibit good behavior to save her.

The goal of Disney's mermaid differed greatly from Andersen's; however, they both shared a desire to live a full life in the world of the humans. Ariel would spark a new era for Disney women, as the princesses who came before her had a common characteristic of their kind spirit and belief in a better future to carry them through their struggles. This was not enough for Ariel, who chose to deliberately defy her father to achieve her goal in her own time, making a deal with the film's villain. The other princesses of the Renaissance era would embark on a similar journey; whereas Walt Disney's fairy tales gave the princesses a harsh or impoverished living situation they traded in for a life as royalty, Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine lived relatively happy lives and were well cared for (interestingly, each raised by a single father) but each felt imprisoned by their lack of freedom and actively sought to feel understood.

Ariel's life of comfort and fascination with human treasures is said to be a commentary on American consumerism during the 1980's (Bryne & McQuillan, 1999, p. 28). While the privileges she enjoys as the daughter of the Sea King matter little to her, those privileges are what draws Ursula to enter into a deal with her, as the witch is determined to take power from Ariel's father, knowing that he will choose his love for his daughter over his own soul. As was the case with *Sleeping Beauty*, the filmmakers gave the witch, who had a slightly neutral stance in both fairy tales, a far more villainous plot and an active role that carried on throughout the film. The exaggeration of every character into distinct personalities and animation styles is what Disney is well known for, and in making a clear antagonist for the heroes to fight, the

quintessential Disney message of good triumphing over evil can be literally played out at the film's climax.

### ***Beauty and the Beast***

The most critically acclaimed Disney animated film, a classic that has withstood the test of time, the first animated film ever to receive an Academy Award nomination for Best Picture, *Beauty and the Beast* ensured the future success of Disney animation following the studio revival sparked by *The Little Mermaid*. Belle is shown in this film to have a major difference from the Disney women who came before her; while they are beloved by all who know them (with the exception of the jealous villains who seek their downfall) Belle is shown to be an outcast in the town in which she lives, admired for her beauty, but admonished for her fascination with reading. This is meant to parallel the Beast, who considers himself incapable of being loved due to his appearance, an outcast by choice.

The original fairy tale, written in 1740 by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, did not have the same emphasis on beauty going beyond appearances. Like the French version of *Sleeping Beauty*, the magic spells of the story are set in motion by the whims of aging fairies, who cast their curses on young royalty as they please. Writing slightly after the time of Perrault, Villeneuve also had the distinction of being a female writer seeking to reach a predominately female audience (Smith, 2018, p. 115). Many of her fairy tale elements, including a more pronounced role for the enchantress and detailed explanation of the curse, were omitted by her publisher, who ultimately had the final say of the novel, but her impact on the world of women's literature should still be noted as deeply significant.

Villeneuve's fairy tale seems to present the Beast and the Prince as separate characters, with the Prince appearing to Beauty in her dreams. She enjoys a peaceful relationship with both

characters, but falls in love with the handsome Prince of her dreams. Beauty has to make a choice between the two when in one of her dreams, the Prince tries to kill the Beast out of jealousy, and when the Beast does not resist, Beauty pleads for his life. This is mirrored in the 1994 film, where the handsome Gaston tries to kill the Beast in a fit of jealousy, and the heartbroken Beast makes no attempt to fight back until Belle appears.

The villains of the original fairy tale were Beauty's jealous sisters, who found out about the lifestyle afforded to her by the Beast, and sought to persuade her to return home to them. These characters are entirely absent from the Disney film, replaced by the suitor Gaston, who serves to symbolize the town's view of what a woman's role should be. This further emphasizes Belle's place as a misfit of society, and creates a beautiful dynamic between her and the Beast as their relationship begins to blossom. The very thing that Belle loves the most, reading and finding new worlds in her books, is what Gaston ridicules her for, and the gift of an enormous library sparks the love between Belle and the Beast, as he sees her inward beauty in a way that her town never could.

In 2017, Disney released their own retelling of *Beauty and the Beast* with undertones for their updated audience. Several aspects of this story remained more faithful to the original French tale, including the theft of a rose by Belle's father at the Beast's castle and the discussion of the parenting of the Prince pre-transformation. In the original story, it was the young Prince's mother who insulted the fairy, resulting in the transformation of her son into a Beast, and in the 2017 film, Mrs. Potts implies that it was the cruel father of the Prince that led to his inner transformation into a beastly character. Villeneuve's Beast acted consistently like a prince, gentle and kind to Beauty, Belle's character. The only instance in which he acted with any sort of intimidation of Beauty or her father was whenever the rose was involved, as a part of his curse

was to protect the rose the fairy had given him. This was in sharp contrast to the films wherein he truly acted like a beast, ill-tempered and harsh until he began to change under Belle's influence.

The novel featured Beauty as the main character, with the primary goal of the story for her to happily marry the Beast. In this time in France, arranged marriages were a common occurrence, and Villeneuve wrote in the hopes of encouraging young women who found themselves in this situation. After several rewrites, the Disney version changed the main character to the Beast, and gave him the dramatic goal of rediscovering his humanity.

The 2017 film returned Beauty to the role of the main character. Updated to be told from a distinctly feminist point of view, this retelling of the story kept the emphasis on Belle and the shift in how she was viewed by the characters around her and ultimately how she viewed herself. Belle's intelligence is her defining characteristic according to the marketing strategies of the Disney Princess franchise; however, in the original film, it is her kindness that defines her. Emma Watson's Belle is defined by one word, one thing that she asks her father to tell her about her mother—that she was fearless. The most noticeable difference between the 1994 and 2017 versions of the same character is in the scene in which her father is being taken to the asylum. In the 1994 film, this scene took place following Belle's rescue of her sick father from the woods, and she is seen nursing him back to health. The 2017 film has Belle rush in, still in her golden ballgown, and immediately leap to her father's defense. This shift in the defining characteristic of this character reflects her place as a role model for young girls, as more of an emphasis on fearlessness and independence is being found.



### *Aladdin*

For the next fairy tale adaptation, Disney sought out a different source in the Middle Eastern-based collection of stories called *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. While certainly differing greatly from the fairy tales of German and French descent, these stories still fit the definition of a fairy tale, being based in folklore and local legend and containing some sort of magical intervention in the lives of the main characters. Each of the stories in *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* had some sort of basis in oral traditions and folklore, not at all unlike the collection of the Brothers Grimm. The greatest common factor in the stories of *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights* is that each of the main characters eventually have to come to terms with the fact that their own destinies are out of their control, usually due to the intervention of good or evil genies or jinn (Peterson, 2007, p. 97).

This film featured one of the most direct references to contemporary entertainment at the time of its release in the character of the Genie. Voiced by Robin Williams, the Genie is known for making several references to pop culture of the 1990s. Some critics of this film assert that this character and his innocently exuberant personality, in sharp contrast to the frightening nature of the genies most commonly seen in folklore and fairy tales, was intended as an attempt to make the intervention of the United States in the Middle East appear innocuous to American audiences (Phillips & Wojcik-Andrews, 1996, p. 82). As *Aladdin* was released the year following the Gulf War, its Middle Eastern origin is certainly of significance. In a commentary of the film, directors Ron Clements and John Musker (1994) discuss the symbolism in response to the conflict throughout the film. The most obvious of these references is in the relationship between Aladdin, an Arab character, and the Genie, a Jewish character in his speech and some aspects of his otherwise otherworldly appearance (Goldberg, 2004). These two characters of incredibly

different backgrounds served to symbolize a Jew and an Arab in friendship and peace with each other.

While not the main character, Princess Jasmine would become one of the most iconic characters of this film, significant for being the first member of the Disney Princess franchise not to be Caucasian. Lacroix (2004) takes note of the costuming of these characters, from the modest gowns of the earlier Caucasian princesses in contrast to the intentionally revealing apparel of the later prominent female characters of different ethnicities, i.e. Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Esmeralda (Lacroix, 2004, pp. 218–222). The three fairy tale Disney princesses of the Renaissance feature increasingly weak father figures, culminating in Jasmine's father the Sultan, who has only one conviction about which he remains firm, that being the marriage of his daughter to a prince by her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday in fulfillment of an age-old law. Father-daughter relationships are addressed in each of these films due to the shifting roles of women from Walt Disney's time into the last decades of the 1900s.

The original tale *Aladdin and the Magic Lamp* included a character of great significance that was absent from Disney's film adaptation: Aladdin's mother. In the original story, Aladdin's mother was the inciting factor for him using his first wish, his wishes being of an unlimited amount in the original story as opposed to the cinematic device of lowering the number of wishes to three. While originally fearful of the powers of the genie, he finally used a wish in order to save his mother from starvation. After the first wish, he was far less resistant to the use of the power, and began using the genie to achieve all of his heart's desires, including a far less romantic pursuit of the princess' hand than Disney's magical carpet ride. The character of Aladdin's mother served as a conscience for the power-hungry boy, both in the original story and in the first draft of Disney's screenplay. Ultimately her character was cut from the film for

purposes of simplifying the story and increasing the Genie's role by allowing him to act as a conscience during the film's second and third acts.

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fairy Tales

As Disney Animation moved into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, their style of storytelling reached a drastically different point. The studio sought to reach a more “modern” audience, and with a series of several films with distinctly different tones, such as *Chicken Little* and *Home on the Range*. The Disney studio executives made a change in leadership by incorporating the talents of John Lasseter, the creative mind behind the success of Pixar, Disney’s sister studio. In 2009, he was the executive producer of the final traditionally animated film to come out of Disney Animation to date, *The Princess and the Frog*. This was the first in a series of films sometimes referred to as the “Disney Revival.” The fairy tales of this time featured very progressively minded princess characters, and the real development of a romantic relationship between them and their counterparts—or lacked such a love interest at all.

#### *The Princess and the Frog*

The first fairy tale published in the first volume of the Brothers Grimm’s fairy tales, *The Frog Prince* has found numerous retellings and interpretations since its conception. This original story featured no kiss between the princess and the frog; the princess was a young and spoiled character who refused to keep her promise to give the frog a place to stay after he retrieved her golden ball from a lake. The Brothers Grimm wrote of a young girl who had no interest in sexual maturity, seeing it as unseemly or disturbing, like a frog. However, after the princess threw the frog against the wall of her castle in refusal of his advances, he was transformed into a prince, symbolizing the transformation of a young woman’s view of sexuality into something desirable when the right time came. Modern-day scientists have questioned the significance of frogs in this and other fairy tales as creatures of transformation and magic. Interestingly, it has been discovered that the skin of certain frogs contains hallucinogenic properties, perhaps adding

to their mythical depiction in folklore (Siegel & McDaniel, 1991, p. 561). When the story left Germany and was introduced to England, the element of the princess kissing the frog to return him to his true form was added.

The screenwriters at Disney credited not the Brothers Grimm in their film adaptation, but rather E.D. Baker's *The Frog Princess*, written in 2002. This novel featured very little similarity to either the story of the Brothers Grimm or the Disney film, with the exception of one key plot twist—upon kissing the frog, the princess turned into a frog herself. The most notable aspect of the Disney version was that it was the first film to feature an African-American Disney princess. This was the first Disney Princess film to be released after the creation of the Disney Princess franchise, marketing Disney's most famous royal heroines together for the purpose of mass merchandising. As such, the writers at the studio were well aware of the cultural significance of the characters they were creating for young girls, and so created Tiana as the first of a line of more modern-minded and diverse princesses. However, the studio ended up facing backlash for the choice to make this particular version of a fairy tale the first to feature an African-American protagonist, as she spends the majority of the film with green skin as an anthropomorphic frog.

The marketing of *The Princess and the Frog* brought the film under intense criticism, as this was being presented as the first African-American Disney Princess film, but the tone of the film was certainly not intended for young girls as the primary target audience. This film differed greatly from the other films to feature princesses in that the predominant source of humor was found in slapstick physical comedy and lowbrow jokes. Critics were also left to question the decision to root Tiana's journey in the use of voodoo and dark magic in place of the traditional fairytale world that her royal predecessors had lived in. Executive producer John Lasseter

described her as “the girl next door,” a modern character with goals and motivations for a modern audience.

### *Tangled*

The story of Rapunzel also found its origin with the Brothers Grimm. The Disney adaptation was the first retelling of the classic story to retain one of the most important plot devices of the original fairy tale—the healing power of Rapunzel’s tears. Disney gave her enchanted hair that had healing properties, the first story to do so, as there was no supernatural explanation for the length of her hair previously. The original story featured the witch throwing the prince from the tower into thorns waiting below, which pierced his eyes, causing him to lose his sight. After then being banished to the desert, Rapunzel was reunited with her prince, who found her by her singing voice that brought him to her tower in the first place. She wept over his lost vision, which was then restored by the power of her tears. The Disney version concluded with a double sacrifice for love on the part of the two primary characters. Rapunzel sacrificed her freedom to save Eugene by agreeing to stay with Gothel for the rest of her life if she would allow her to heal him from his mortal wound. However, unwilling to let her die for him, Eugene cut off her hair before she could save him, freeing her from Gothel.

In every aspect of its marketing, *Tangled* sought to steer away from the traditional “princess” branding that *The Princess and the Frog* had embraced. The name change from the classic *Rapunzel*, which kept the focus on the film’s female royal protagonist, to the modern, more edgy-sounding *Tangled* hoped to expand the target audience beyond young girls. This effort was also made in the advertising for the film, as all of the primary trailers focused almost entirely on the character of Flynn Rider, with very little imagery pertaining to the protagonist.

Like many of the Grimm fairytale adaptations that came before, *Tangled* unpacks the different roles of women, from maiden to mother to crone. Author Delrosso (2015) discusses how this film took on ideas of adoption and the role of true motherhood as well (520). Gothel is seen throughout the film as a manipulative parent, constantly reminding Rapunzel of her own shortcomings in a masked attempt to keep her in the tower and under her control. Even in the moments in which Gothel shows motherly love and affection, she is never seen to directly give these endearments to Rapunzel as a person, always kissing the hair on the top of her head and calling her “flower,” further emphasizing Rapunzel’s role as an object by which Gothel retains her youth (Delrosso, 2015, pp. 523–524).

Gothel herself is shown to be in a unique societal position—an elderly woman with no children or ties to anyone but herself at the film’s opening when she discovers the life-giving flower. But the void she fills with Rapunzel is not a desire for human interaction or relational comfort; it is entirely because of her ability to maintain Gothel’s youth and beauty that Rapunzel is of importance to her. The idea of a true mother as a relationship that Rapunzel craves is reinforced at the conclusion when she is reunited with her parents. While both parents have been shown to miss their daughter deeply, and more focus was placed on the father in earlier scenes, upon their reunion, the moment is first shared only with her mother, with her father then joining in, and finally bringing Eugene into their circle as a welcome member of the family.

Rapunzel herself is shown as another approach to the progressive 21<sup>st</sup> century Disney princesses. In her opening “I want” song that has become a staple for Disney films, she is seen partaking in traditional womanly activities, such as cooking and cleaning, as well as her many quirky hobbies, including paper mache, puzzles, and ventriloquy. Rapunzel is able to rescue herself and her male companion from a variety of mishaps, each time through her empathy and

compassion, whether it be leading the pub thugs that threatened them in a song about their dreams or literally healing Eugene of his injuries through her enchanted hair while also healing him of the hurts of his past by being the first person to appreciate him as he truly is. Perhaps even more so than the independent-minded Tiana, Rapunzel serves as the link between the Disney women of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as she embodies characteristics of both time periods.

### ***Frozen***

The biggest cultural phenomenon to come out of Disney Animation in recent years, *Frozen* was based on elements of not one, but two short stories by the same author as *The Little Mermaid*, Hans Christian Andersen. The most obvious influence on *Frozen* is *The Snow Queen*, from which the writers drew inspiration for the characters of Anna, Kristoff, and Elsa. The protagonist, Gerda, shares Anna's endless optimism and ability to see the best in the people around her. The Snow Queen, Elsa, was originally intended as a villain, as is the case in the original story, but as the story changed and the two girls were made sisters, a song by the married team of Robert and Kristen Anderson-Lopez made Elsa a more sympathetic character. "Let It Go" became an anthem for a variety of people who felt oppressed or misunderstood, including the disabled and LGBTQ communities.

As much as Elsa became a symbol of culture, it is important to note that Anna, or Gerda, was always intended as the primary character, and the explanation of the story's theme. The original story featured enchanted mirror fragments that, when in contact with a person's eyes, caused them to see only the worst in everything and everyone around them. It fell to Gerda to break the curse when her friend Kai was affected and became a prisoner of the formidable Snow Queen. Like Anna, the protagonist of *The Snow Queen* is known for her relentless and fearless love for the ones she cares about. While Elsa's embrace of her true self is commendable, it is of



the utmost importance to keep in mind that this is only half of her story arc. Elsa cannot remain on the mountain top, isolated for the rest of her life, but by the strength of her sister's selfless love, she returns to her kingdom, now becoming open to the people around her. The danger in the worldwide embrace of "Let It Go" is that too many people have taken it to be the true message of the film, rather than the power of truly selfless love to restore relationships and overcome fear.

This true theme of the film is most exemplified in the character of Olaf, who differed from the other characters of *Frozen* in that he was based on a separate Hans Christian Andersen story. *The Snowman* told the sad tale of a snowman who saw an oven through a window, and fell in love, longing for the warmth inside. Unrequited love was a common theme throughout Andersen's tales, and while Olaf's story does not have as much of a tragic dilemma, the idea of a snowman who loved the heat he could never experience became the basis for a character who exemplified selfless love. He states the theme of the film as Anna lies heartbroken and betrayed by the prince she had hoped for love from, as he puts himself in harm's way by building a fire to keep Anna warm, proclaiming that "some people are worth melting for."

### **Writing a *Fairytale***

In conjunction with this thesis, I have created a short film entitled *Fairytale*. My research of the structure and similarities between these fairy tales from across the ages guided me in the process of writing my own fairy tale for a modern-day audience. *Fairytale* is centered around a young woman named Alyssa Winters, an elementary school teacher. The film is narrated by a mother and daughter who describe the characters, seen in modern-day situations, in fairy tale terms. These characters include the Princess, Alyssa; the fairies, the second graders who make up her classroom; and the Knight, the school guidance counselor and friend of Alyssa's.

In each of the traditional fairy tales that I have studied, I have found a common thread in the theme of the societal roles of women, particularly in regards to motherhood. A large part of Alyssa's character arc is that she was married before the events of the film, but her husband, the "Duke," left her when they discovered she was unable to have children. As so many of these stories placed an emphasis on the role of women as mothers first and foremost, I wanted to explore the story of a woman who could not be a traditional mother, and how that affected the way she viewed herself. She was married at a young age, her husband more in love with an idealized "happily ever after" that came with a family than he was with her. Alyssa looked to him for support and to reassure her when she discovered that she would never be able to have children of her own, and when he responded by leaving her, she became closed off to the idea of sharing her life with anyone, finding refuge in her complete independence.

A common theme of the more recent Disney princess films is independence for women, and while this is a positive message for young girls, it is also important that they learn that relying on someone else is the furthest thing from being weak. Alyssa has two people in her life that care deeply about her—her friend Gavin, and her favorite student Lily. Gavin obviously

cares about her in a way that goes beyond friendship, and the feelings are present on her part as well, but she keeps her fear as a barrier between them. Lily is an orphan in foster care in need of a family that cares for her, and Alyssa is in the process of trying to adopt her, but she finds herself unable to go through with the adoption. This is due to her consistent choice to hold on to the fears of her past, literally in the form of her old ring from her failed marriage, after the hopes for her future were shown to no longer be a possibility. The film's climax occurs when Gavin confronts Alyssa about this mindset, telling her that even if she thinks she doesn't need anyone, that doesn't mean that no one needs her.

The film concludes with a literal "happily ever after," as it is revealed that the mother/daughter narrators are Alyssa and her newly adopted daughter Lily. Lily reads the ending of the book as Gavin enters the room, having completed the family. It was important to me, having undergone this research of the fairy tales and themes of motherhood and femininity within them, that the story end with the three characters resolved as a family. As much as I respect the push towards stronger role models for young girls by way of the new Disney princesses, it is my opinion that this could be taken too far, and it has nearly become the belief that having a family and a husband makes a woman weaker somehow, and it was this ideology that I wrote my story as a response to. As women are first and foremost givers of life, I wanted to create a film that emphasized that role, but it was essential to me that the main character, in being unable to literally give birth, would learn her value in bringing life to the people around her simply by her existence.

From a filmmaking point of view, while live-action was the medium by which this story was told, the animation of Disney was definitely an influence, as well as the storybook feel of films like *Mary Poppins*. Symbolism abounds in everything from the color details to the camera

moves. This is the case in several of the Disney animated films, such as *Beauty and the Beast*, in which Belle is the only character in her village to wear blue, emphasizing her being set apart. Alyssa wears a shade of pink in every scene; as the princess, she symbolizes roles of womanhood, and the feminine connotations of the color pink serve this purpose. Lily wears white and yellow, referencing her joyful innocence and pure spirit. In the flashback scenes before Alyssa's husband left her, she wears white herself, showing her own innocent frame of mind before she experienced tragedy. If my research of these stories has shown me anything, it is that the symbolism in the details, while perhaps not directly referenced, is what the audiences feel, and what makes them connect to the stories. To read the full script for *Fairytale*, see the appendix.

### Conclusion

As the ideas of the Disney Princess franchise and what these fairy tales mean to the young girls who look up to them continue to infiltrate more and more of our culture, Disney is in the process of redefining the roles of women in fairy tales. At the time of the publication of this thesis, Disney's most recently released animated feature film is *Ralph Breaks the Internet*, a groundbreaking film for the studio as they included every member of the Disney princess franchise in a charming sequence of pointing out their many clichés and stereotypes. In their introduction, the princesses question Vanellope, a “princess” of her video game kingdom, Sugar Rush, and try to determine what makes her a princess. The characteristics that they question her about include talking to animals, having some form of magical power, being kidnapped, cursed, poisoned, and ultimately having everyone assume that their problems were solved when a “big, strong man” entered their lives. This final determining factor in what makes one a princess is referred back to at the film's climax, when Rapunzel sees Ralph falling from a great height and calls out to her fellow princesses that there is a big, strong man in need of saving. In response to this, each of the princesses, using their own unique skills, engage in a humorous rescue scene. This marks the defining movement of the new wave of Disney films in which the very idea of being a classical Disney princess is presented as something undesirable to emulate. As the target audience of the films from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to *Aladdin* was never intended to be the target audience of the Disney princess franchise that these characters now comprise, the Disney Animation studio is currently in the process of rebranding the very foundation of these characters in order to make them more acceptable role models.

While this thesis delved into the origins and backgrounds of many of the most familiar fairy tales and folk legends that inspired Disney films, there still remains a plethora of

undiscussed fairy tales and Disney films that were not covered. From the perspective of the Disney princess franchise, more analysis could be done, particularly in the areas of *Pocahontas* and *Mulan*, both of which were based on real people that later became icons of folklore, and *Moana*, which was very loosely based on aspects of Polynesian legends. In addition, it will be interesting to see how the more recent Disney films are received in the decades to come, once they are no longer representations of the ideals of their current culture.

While there remains much more discussion to be had of the themes of the fairy tales that have been a part of cultures for hundreds of years and are now being reborn in the form of modern filmmaking, this thesis serves to describe the most familiar and widespread of these tales in the hopes of shifting our perspective on these stories and avoid viewing them exclusively through the lens of our current culture's interpretation. Stories serve as a mark of how the people of a certain time period define themselves and interact with their values through their worldview. As time continues to progress forwards, may we remember the stories that have led us to where we are and continue to tell stories that shape the generations to come, from once upon another time to happily ever after.

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**Appendix**

Fairytale

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FADE IN:

INT. DUKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Two figures sit on the side of a bed, their silhouettes seen against the darkened room as lightning flashes outside their window.

WOMAN

(voiceover)

Once upon a time...

It's a couple, husband and wife. The woman is sobbing hard; the man sits rigidly with his back straight, completely stoic.

She's clutching on to his hand, a shiny RING on her finger.

The lightning storm rages on outside the window.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Cut to a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classroom, kept neat and decorated colorfully.

ALYSSA, 31, a sweet motherly figure with a youthful beauty in her smile, is the teacher, looking over her class with love in her eyes.

LITTLE GIRL

(voiceover)

There lived a beautiful princess who ruled over the land of the fairies.

It's early in the morning; light gently pours in from the window beside her desk at the front of the classroom.

Alyssa sits behind her desk, putting papers together for the day's lesson plan.

LILY, 8, a warmth in her soul that emanates through her adorable smile, stands at the back of the room, putting books together.

Alyssa smiles at the girl, her happy expression fading as her gaze shifts to Lily's shabby sneakers, near to falling apart.

An ADOPTION FORM lies beside the lesson plans on her desk, partially filled out.

Alyssa looks from Lily to the form and back again.

She takes it out and raises her pen over it as if to continue filling it out, but she hesitates.

Her gaze travels down to her desk drawer, where among pencils and papers, a RING lays inside.

INT. DUKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Alyssa's tear-streaked face stares out the window at the lightning storm.

Her husband has risen from his seat; he's yelling at her.

As he gestures, she tries desperately to cling to his hands.

On the table beside the window lies a FOLDER with a piece of paper sticking out.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - CONT'D

Alyssa looks up from her drawer to see Lily smiling at her from across the room.

Returning her smile, she discreetly covers the adoption form with the lesson plans.

A HOT CHOCOLATE is placed on the desk in front of Alyssa by GAVIN, 33, tall, with a definitive air of confidence and kind eyes.

LITTLE GIRL

(voiceover)

The kingdom also had a very handsome  
knight who pur-purs?

WOMAN

(voiceover)

That's pursued.

LITTLE GIRL

(voiceover)

Pursued the heart of the princess!

Alyssa acknowledges Gavin's offering with the tiniest of polite smiles, then hesitantly, she reaches for the mug.

Her grip isn't firm enough, and the drink sloshes out from the top, burning her hand.

Annoyed and in pain, Alyssa sets the drink down on her desk and begins to clean up the spill.

After an awkward moment's hesitation, Gavin leaves, frustrated with himself.

Alyssa beckons Lily over to her desk and hands the hot chocolate to her.

Lily returns to her seat, stepping carefully so as not to spill her drink.

As she takes her seat, she stares thoughtfully at Alyssa.

INT. CLASSROOM - FOLLOWING DAY

Early the next morning, Alyssa enters the classroom to discover a BOUQUET of flowers and a NOTE on her desk.

Alyssa opens the note, and instantly her face lights up as she recognizes the child's handwriting.

LILY

(voiceover)

Dear Miss Winters--no, wait, he should  
call her Alyssa.

On the paper, "Miss Winters" is crossed out, and "Alyssa" scrawled above it.

LILY

(voiceover)

Dear Alyssa, you have a smile like the  
sunshine and eyes like the pretty blue  
sky. It would warm my heart if you would  
please go out on a date with me, thank  
you and goodbye, from Mister Arwell--I  
mean Gavin!

As Alyssa looks over the note, Gavin comes into view, reading over her shoulder.

The moment is cut short when he turns her shoulder gently to face him, smiling in spite of himself.

Alyssa's reflex action is to smile back at him.

As he takes a step closer to her, her eyes dart downwards shyly.

She catches sight of a RING inside her desk drawer.

Alyssa takes a sharp breath inwards.

She looks back up at him; the moment lost, she starts to panic.

When he steps closer, she abruptly steps back, her hand catching on the flowers and sending them to the floor with a CRASH.

Avoiding his eyes as he leaves her alone in the empty classroom, Alyssa's gaze travels back down to her desk drawer, and the RING inside.

INT. DUKE'S HOUSE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Cut to Alyssa's hands, the RING on her finger, clutching the hands of RICHARD, 35, his features obscured by the shadows of the room.

LITTLE GIRL

(voiceover)

The princess had been married before,  
to a very handsome duke.

Boxes are scattered all around the room, alongside a well decorated bedside table with a definitive woman's touch, the other table empty except for the FOLDER with a piece of paper slightly sticking out.

WOMAN

(voiceover)

The two had been very happy together, and  
were so excited for the birth of their child,  
the heir to the kingdom they were  
building together.

Alyssa is weeping uncontrollably now.

On the table, the folder comes into focus; the letterhead at the top is from a fertility clinic.

Close up of the couple's hands as Richard lets go, leaving Alyssa alone.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY - CONT'D

Close up of the RING in the drawer.

Alyssa looks down at it again, then slams the drawer shut and slumps into her chair, her hand on her head and her eyes closed.

Lily stands in the doorway, gently rocking back and forth on her heels, the picture of innocence.

She is about to come up to Alyssa's desk, but as she walks forward, she catches sight of the flowers strewn about on the floor.

Confused and upset, she runs back out of the room before Alyssa has a chance to say anything.

INT. CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

As the bell SOUNDS the end of the day and the students file out, Alyssa looks across the room at Lily's desk.

It sits empty; she wasn't there today.

Gavin enters the classroom.

He pauses and sighs deeply before approaching Alyssa's desk.

LITTLE GIRL

(voiceover)

The knight brought sad news that day: the  
flower fairy had left her kingdom.

The two teachers discuss indistinctly.

Gavin holds a NOTICE OF TRANSFER, detailing Lily's removal from the school to be placed with a new foster family.

INT. CLASSROOM - FOLLOWING DAY

Lily appears in the doorway the following morning, weighed down by her backpack and with a tiny duffel bag by her side.

LITTLE GIRL

(voiceover)

She returned only one more time, and

LITTLE GIRL (CONT'D)  
(voiceover)  
that was to say goodbye to her  
beloved princess.

Alyssa remains seated at her desk.

She begins to rise to greet her, but Lily is across the room and hugging her tightly before she can leave her seat.

Alyssa looks over the girl's shoulder at the incomplete ADOPTION FORM on her desk. She holds her tighter.

VOICE  
(off-screen)  
Lily, it's time to go!

Lily looks back to the direction of the door, then back at her teacher.

She slowly turns her back and heads out.

Alyssa watches her leave helplessly.

She begins to rise out of her chair, then looks around at her desk, back down at the half-finished ADOPTION FORM.

INT. CLASSROOM - NEXT DAY

Gavin enters with a HOT CHOCOLATE and finds Alyssa at her desk, still staring at the FORM, utterly exhausted.

GAVIN  
Hey.

He places the mug on her desk, gently sliding the papers over to make room.

Alyssa nods and smiles at him, leaning on the arm of her chair as she reaches for the mug.

Her gaze falls downward—at the RING in her drawer.

Gavin follows her eyes and looks down at the RING.

He stares back at her sadly and sympathetically.



GAVIN

You know, you may think you don't need anyone, but that doesn't mean that no one needs you.

With that, he leaves her alone in the darkened classroom.

She looks down at her desk, where there lies the ADOPTION FORM.

She looks past it into her desk drawer, and after a moment's consideration, reaches for the RING.

Standing swiftly, she tosses the RING into the trash can by her desk, picks up the FORM, and walks out of the room with a newfound sense of purpose.

INT. CHILD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - PRESENT

We see the face of Alyssa's daughter as she looks up at her with love--it's Lily.

Alyssa returns her smile as she turns the page to the end.

ALYSSA

And so the flower fairy saved the princess by bringing light back into her kingdom.

LILY

(mischievously)

Mom, you forgot, it wasn't just the princess she saved. What about the knight?

As if on cue, the door swings open, and there standing in the light is Gavin, balancing three mugs of HOT CHOCOLATE.

GAVIN

There's my girls!

Giving the first mug to Lily, he kisses Alyssa's forehead, and laying on the bed beside them, pulls Lily in close for a hug.

GAVIN

Just in time for my favorite part.

LILY

They all lived happily ever after!

Alyssa closes the book, resting her hand on the cover.

Lily reaches for Alyssa's hand, smiling at her family. Close up of their hands as Gavin reaches to join, Alyssa's hand with her NEW RING holding tightly to theirs.

FADE OUT.