

Cutting The Strings

By: Georgia Gardner

ONCE UPON A TIME...

I have decided that who I was is no longer who I want to be. As I tied my blonde hair tighter and tighter into a round bun, my hair gripping the ribbon firmly, my world felt as if it were closing in, as well. I think back to that day when I carefully stepped into my blue dress, in awe at its newness, almost as though it had just transformed from my old, tattered rags. I thought about how I had changed and was now unrecognizable. I remember stepping into the blue material slowly, as mice helped to move it up my body and tie it shut, so as to not wrinkle the shimmering masterpiece and tarnish the vision that everybody expected me to be. I'll never forget slipping on my white gloves and delicately pulling them up my arms. The gloves enveloped my ringed finger, the band that was to hold me captive in my own fantasy. I think about sliding into those glass slippers: how can something that fits so perfectly, at the same time, be so uncomfortable?

Until now, I have been a puppet, controlled by strings held by others. I spent my childhood as a servant to my stepmother and sisters, obeying their every order and meeting their wants. You see, my family told me that what *I* wanted didn't matter, and of course, I believed them. When I was a teenager, I was lucky enough to meet a fairy godmother who immersed me in her magic, allowing me to be *someone* for once in my life. Only, I did not earn it. My life's fortunes were not given out of any personal grit of my own, but rather, out of pity for the life that I was living. With these unearned gifts, I was made the bride of a prince and promised a "happy ending." A happy ending for whom? Thus far, I have been constrained by the strings tying my limbs to the "happy ending" storyline. Today, I'm cutting the strings.

The word “divorce” finally sunk in and sat like an anchor in my gut. It has now been a month since my divorce with the prince was finalized, and I have decided that it is time to take life by the reigns and create my own happiness. Relieved by the absence of my life’s training-wheels, I traded my blue ball gown for a pair of “mom jeans.” I got rid of my glass slippers and found a very nice married couple on Kijiji who happily bought them from me. I let my hair down and decided that I needed to find a *real* prince charming. So, I did the only logical thing that I could think to do: speed dating.

The room felt desolate, and the air reeked of desperation-- or was it just me? I walked up to the front desk, from which a large banner hung reading, “*Welcome to Happily Ever After Inc.*” Butterflies began to swarm in my stomach, as I was greeted by two young, freckle-faced, red-headed girls who looked exactly the same.

“Hey there,” spoke the girl on the left, “I’m Halle, and this is my twin sister Annie.”

“Good day,” voiced the girl on the right in a very posh British accent, “I hope our speed-dating service helps you find your true love, and that you two live happily ever after.”

I looked at the two tweens with confusion, noticing as their legs did not even touch the ground. “Aren’t you girls a little bit young to run your own dating service?”

“*Too young?*” Halle mimicked.

“I’ll have you know that we successfully got our divorced parents back together. If we could make that happen, we can set up anybody.” Annie added, “What kind of chap are you looking for, anyway?”

This question stumped me. For my entire life, I had just been exposed to cookie-cutter princes, with perfect little lives. One thing was for sure, men with foot-fetishes were out of the question.

“I don’t know yet,” I answered honestly.

I moved past the front desk and was sucked into a busy crowd of familiar faces. In the center of the room were two circles of chairs facing each other. Those looking for a male partner were asked to sit on a chair in the outer-circle, and those seeking

female companions were told to sit on the inside. Instructions were as follows: we would have one minute to converse with the person sitting across from us. When the minute ended, the circle would move, and we would meet a new partner. The idea was to allow us to be exposed to many people in a short amount of time. I liked it: no games, no tricks, no locking anybody away in a tower to prevent them from participating; I could finally have my shot at a happy ending.

“Your first minute starts now.” In front of me, sat a seemingly confident young man with dirty blonde hair and an infectious smile.

“I only have a minute, and I don’t intend on wasting it,” spoke the boyish man. “The name’s Dawson. Jack Dawson. I’m not like most guys--I’m a survivor.” Jack pulled out two cigarettes, slid one behind his left ear, lit the other one and took a puff, “just the other day, I was sleeping next to some dwarfs under a bridge, and today, I’m sitting here, chatting with you. I take life as it comes.”

I looked at Jack in awe. As somebody who had lived their entire life following somebody else’s agenda, his free-spirited nature excited me. “What are your long-term goals?” I asked.

Jack took another puff of his cigarette, sat back in his chair and smiled, “I got ten bucks in my pocket; I have nothing. I love living life not knowing where I’m going to end up, or who I’m going to meet. You can either sink or swim, you know?”

“NEXT,” yelled Annie. The minute was up.

Jack moved one seat to the left, and in his place, sat a much bigger and more dazed-looking man in a black tank top, which, by the way, didn’t do a bad job of showing off his built physique. Just before he sat down, a trumpet theme-song began to sound, and I knew right away that I was sitting across from **cue announcer voice** the man himself, the Italian Stallion, the Heavyweight Champion of the World, Rocky Balboa.

“Hey, how you doin?” asked this mountain of a man. His face looked tired. “You like turtles?” he asked. The words slipped out of his mouth like drool. “I got two of em, they’re really cute, you know?”

Rocky continued to profess his admiration for his turtles, and I lost interest; I had abandoned my animal friends and was not interested in gaining more.

“NEXT,” Halle hollered.

I glanced at my watch to see how many more of these “meetings” I had to endure when a little boy sat in front of me. He had bright blonde hair and wide eyes.

“Who let you in here?” I questioned out of deep concern. Little boys should not be at adult-dating mixers.

“Nice to meet you, *too*,” snipped the boy, “My name’s Kevin McCallister. Some might say that I have a knack of getting myself into adult situations.”

“Do your parents know you’re here?”

“My parents never know where I am. They don’t care about me. One minute, they’re shoving me in the attic, and the next thing you know, they’re on a flight to who-knows-where?”

I was at a loss for words.

“Listen, sweetheart, here’s how things work for me. I’m the *man* of the house. I’m a protector, a provider, and not to mention, a good chef--you like mac and cheese?” Kevin raised his eyebrows up and down in an alluring fashion.

“I’m sorry, you’re a little too young for me,” I admitted. “And I could really do without your chauvinistic attitude.”

That put little Kevin in a bad mood. His face grew red and he promptly got his out of his seat.

“Good luck, ya filthy animal,” he barked.

With that, I left, “*Happily Ever After Inc.*” and decided that instead of finding a man, I should spend some time being alone, because marriage does not necessarily lead to a

HAPPILY EVER AFTER.