

Numberella and the Charming Prints

A Modern Day Fairytale

"Ooooooh, look at you, working through lunch! Someone's angling for a promotion!" Ella smiled thinly and looked up into the sneering faces of her colleagues Grizelda and Drusilla.

"No," she said evenly, "I just want to finish this before I take a break."
"Good," snapped Drusilla, "because if anyone's getting a promotion around here, it's going to be me!"

"Or me," Grizelda elbowed her, and they pushed and shoved each other for a minute.

"A-n-y-w-a-y," purred Drusilla, "I know you won't mind doing a *leeetle* bit of data entry for me..." whereupon she dumped a stack of folders a foot high on Ella's desk ... "because I've got an appointment at the beautician at four and I absolutely *can't* miss it if I'm to look my best for the office party tonight..." she paused to scowl at Grizelda who was mumbling about a silk purse and a sow's ear... "...and these have to be done today."

Ella opened the topmost folder.
"But ... these are dated last week!" she exclaimed in dismay.

"Oh my. Are they really? I must have overlooked them. Be a dear and update them for me? Tooodles." Drusilla sent her a lazy finger wave and tottered out arm in arm with Grizelda.

Ella sighed. There was at least six hours' work here. And if she didn't do it, she knew Drusilla would find a way to make her take the blame. *Again*. It looked like she wouldn't be going to the party after all. And she'd really wanted to, because the business had recently been taken under new management and they were supposed to formally meet their new owners tonight. Oh well. She set the first folder next to her keyboard and turned the page ...

"Well I declare! What in the *world* are you still doin' here, child?"

Ella bolted awake and skidded sideways in her chair, which tipped and deposited her on the carpet. She blinked up at the woman who stood by her desk.

"Who are you? How did you get in?" she babbled.

The woman waved a bejewelled hand dismissively and continued in an accent Ella hadn't heard since she'd last watched Scarlett O'Hara pout her way round Atlanta.

"Oh my stars, child. I go wherever I want." She picked up a cardboard sign from Ella's desk and held it distastefully between finger and thumb.

"Numberella? Well bless you, what is that s'posed to mean?"

Ella sighed and, from long practice, recited in a sing-song voice. "My name's Ella

and I work long hours in a poky cubicle plugging numbers into a computer, hence ... Numberella. It's meant to be a joke."

"Well I think it's just mean," said the woman, depositing the sign firmly in the bin. Ella didn't have the heart to tell her she was wasting her time. Over the years, she'd tried everything. Binned it, burned it, shredded it. It always came back.

"*You*," said the woman, poking Ella in the shoulder with a long, thin stick, "are s'posed to be gettin' ready for a party. But child, you look plumb tuckered out."

Ella hauled herself tiredly to her feet and waved a hand at the pile of folders she still hadn't even touched.

"I still have all this work to do, so I'm going to have to give it a miss. And why do you care anyway?"

The woman drew herself up to her full height (about four foot six) and responded indignantly, "Why? *Why?* Lands' sakes child, I'm your fairy godmother! It's my *job*! I'm Loretta, by the way." (She pronounced it Low-retta). She glared at the pile of folders for a moment, then waved the stick at them. There was a tinkling sound, and they vanished. She turned back to Ella and beamed at her triumphantly.

"There! All taken care of. *You shall go to the party!*"

"They're all on the spreadsheets? *All of them?*" Ella was amazed.

"What's a spreadsheet?" Loretta asked brightly. "I just sent 'em all for filin'." She looked Ella up and down with a frown. "Now, we really need to fix y'all up, child, because I am truly sorry to say it, but you look like ten miles of bad road."

Ella collapsed into her chair and put her head in her hands.

"Can you bring them all back *out* of the files, please?"

"Now why in the world would I want to do that?"

"Because they're not ready for filing!" snapped Ella. "I still have to put all the data into spreadsheets."

"What's a spreadsheet?" repeated Loretta.

"*Aaaargh!* I have to read everything in those files and type all the numbers into the computer!" Ella wanted to weep.

"Well pooh! That don't sound like any way to spend a Friday night," declared Loretta. She tapped her lower lip with the wand for a second and then threw her arms up and waved the wand as though conducting an orchestra. The drawers in the filing cabinets flew open, folders burst out of them and flapped through the air. There was a chorus of *Ba-bing! Ba-bing!* as all the PCs in the office booted up, and a couple of folders swooped in to land gracefully by each keyboard. Excel loaded up on all the

screens, and pencils jumped up to start hitting the keys, while the papers in the folders stood to attention for them.

Ella only realised her jaw had dropped open when Loretta gently closed it with the tip of the wand.

"Don't want to be catchin' flies, child. Well I reckon we can leave these boys to get on with things, don't you?"

Ella nodded dumbly.
"Then let's get this show on the road! I'll need four white mice! Come now, quickly!" Loretta clapped her hands.

Ella looked around the office dubiously. "Uhhh, I think they're all black."

"Black mice? Really? Oh my," Loretta pursed her lips, "well, I s'pose they'll have to do. Fetch me four."

"Does it matter if they're USB or wireless?"

"Pardon?"

"The mice. USB or wireless? We've got both." Ella held up a wireless mouse. "See?"

Loretta looked blankly at the mouse. "What in the world is that?"

"It's a mouse."

"Oh it is *not*," laughed Loretta, giving Ella a playful tap with the wand.

"Yes," said Ella emphatically. "It *is*." Loretta switched tack.

"Well but ... but I need *bibbidi-bobbidi-boo* mice," she explained, as if that clarified anything.

"Bibbydee bobbydee ... *boo*?" Loretta rolled her eyes.

"Lord love you, child! Don't they teach you *anythin'?*" Punctuating each word with a prod from her wand, Loretta trilled:

"*♫ Salagadoola, mechicka boola, bibbidi-bobbidi-boo ... ♫ put 'em together and what have you go-o-oo-ot ... ♫*" She looked at Ella expectantly.

"Are you drunk?"

Loretta sighed loudly.

"You've got *bibbidi-bobbidi-boo*! Mercy, I thought my last godchild was a trial, and Lord knows that boy was so dumb, he could throw hisself on the ground and miss, but you are somethin' else, child."

"How'm I s'posed to rustle up a coach and horses now?"

"Well since the party is *upstairs*," said Ella peevishly, "I thought I'd *walk*."

Loretta smacked her with the wand.

"Do not be takin' that tone with me, child. I'm already busier'n a one-legged cat in a sandbox, and I can do without your snark."

She took a deep breath. "All right, fine, we'll skip the coach and horses, but" and here Loretta pinned Ella with a glare, "we are *not* givin' up on the frock!"

She waved her wand and a tinkling noise surrounded Ella. Looking down, she saw she was now clad in a beautiful deep purple gown. It was absolutely perfect, except ...

"It's a bit on the long side," she said, hitching it up uncertainly.

"Well that's on account of y'all're wearin' those butt-ugly flat shoes. Y'all need heels." Loretta waved the wand towards Ella's feet, but nothing happened. She frowned, smacked it against her hip a couple of times and waved it again. Nothing.

"Well don't that just beat all? Darn thing's empty! Musta been settin' up all that spreadsheetin'." She flopped into Ella's chair and sighed. "No coach, no horses, no *shoes* ...? I declare, I know this story oughtta be Grimm, but it is just plain *ruined*."

Ella lifted the hem of her beautiful dress again and examined her mud- and grass-stained trainers. She *could* go barefoot, except it was cold, plus she'd trip over her hem all night. But if you didn't have magic, what did you have? ... Oh.

"Well we could always ... Oh but I don't know," Ella mumbled, "... it's really against the rules ... ummm. but it'd probably work ..."

"Lord have mercy, you are slower than molasses. Spit it out, child."

"We have a 3D printer."

Loretta was still looking at her expectantly, so Ella tried to explain.

"It'll print anything. In three dimensions." Still a blank look. "We could print off some shoes for me."

Loretta's eyes nearly bugged out of her head.

"Y'all can print *shoes*?! Well butter my butt and call me a biscuit! Lead the way!!"

The 3D printer room was so completely out of bounds, Ella was amazed when she tried the door and it swung right open. It made more sense when she realised all the materials had been locked away in the store cupboard in the corner. There was nothing to print with. Or was there? Ella found a solitary box that had been left on a shelf, and lifted it down. The lid said "Transparent Resin". But that would mean...

"It's not going to work," she sighed.

"Well why ever not?" demanded Loretta. She tapped the box. "What's wrong with this?"

"It's transparent resin."

"Yes, child, I've been able to read since I was three, thank you. What's the problem?"

"Anything it prints will be transparent too. I'll have see-through shoes!"

Loretta brightened. "Well finally! I was despairin' of *anythin'* goin' right in this sorry mess of a tale." She clapped her hands. "Time's a wastin'. Let's get this thing fired up."

"3D printing takes a while, you know."

"Well now and why would I know that? Can't you make it print any quicker?"

"Only if I don't care that my half-baked shoes will disintegrate by midnight!"

Loretta's grin got wider.

"Child, we are on a roll!!"

An hour later, Ella stared down at her feet, now encased in clear plastic shoes.

"Well aren't those just *darlin'?*!" declared Loretta. "They have got to be *the* most charmin' prints I have .. ever.. seen....." She frowned. There was something not quite right about that sentence but she couldn't put her finger on it... She shrugged.

"They pinch a bit," grumbled Ella.

"Oh now quit your whinin', child, and let's get y'all gussied up."

After fifteen minutes of largely unwanted attention, Ella was declared "fetchin'" and Loretta ran through the final instructions again.

"Now you make sure you hitch up those skirts 'n' skedaddle by midnight, y'hear?"

"Before my shoes dissolve, yes, I know." Ella shifted uncomfortably in her 3D shoes. There had better be some seating at this party, or her blisters would have blisters.

Loretta watched her fidgeting and blew out an exasperated breath.

"Yes, well, the *plan* was s'posed to be that you'd lose a shoe and then our hero would scour the *entire* town to find the one person that the shoe fits."

"But they *don't* fit!" wailed Ella.

"Just as well they're fixin' to fall apart, then, isn't it?" replied Loretta tartly.

Three hours later, with the spreadsheets all updated, the computers shut down and everything blessedly quiet, Loretta was resting in Ella's chair with her wand on charge when she heard voices.

"I mean, did you *see* her?" snarled the first voice. "When did she have time to get all dressed up?"

"And hogging the boss all to herself!" snapped the second voice. "*Oooh, I have this idea and I have that idea, ooh, aren't I brilliant?*" The nerve of her!!"

"Ha! Let's see how much he likes her when *her terminal* screws up all the company data!" They giggled as they approached Ella's desk.

Loretta twirled around in the chair to face them. Drusilla pulled up short and Grizelda crashed into her.

"Who are you? How did you get in?" snapped Drusilla.

"Oh honey, that's gettin' kinda old." Loretta looked from Drusilla to Grizelda and shuttered. "Bless your hearts, when you fell outta the ugly tree, you musta hit every branch on the way down."

"What do you mean?" growled Grizelda. Loretta hopped out of the chair and looked up at her. She shook her head.

"Mercy, if I'd a dog looked like you, I'd shave its butt and make it walk backwards."

"Well!" declared Grizelda. "I have never been so insulted in all my life!"

"Aww honey, you need to try gettin' out more."

"I'm calling security!" said Drusilla.

"You run along and do that, but just 'fore you do ..." Loretta picked up her wand and pressed the white button on the end. It made a noise like "*sqwizzlesqwutsweeeek*". She pressed it again and held it up.

"... *see how much he likes her when her terminal screws up all the company data!*"

Drusilla and Grizelda exchanged an anxious glance.

"We were only joking, of course," said Drusilla quickly.

"Uh-huh, and I s'pose that's why're you lookin' as nervous as a pair'a long-tail cats in a roomful of rockin' chairs?"

"Well... well, I mean, I can see how it might be misunderstood. By anyone who didn't know we were joking, that is."

"Mmm. Like security," mused Loretta.

"Or your new boss, maybe." At that moment, her wand alarm went *beep!-beep!-beep!* It was midnight. Oh well, things to do, stories to tidy up.

She raised the wand and sketched a circle above Drusilla and Grizelda. "You two are 'bout as much use as a cat-flap in a

canoe, but I guess you got a right to earn a livin', so I'm fixin' to make you forget all about tonight. But there'll be no more mean tricks, and no more mean words. You hearin' me?" Drusilla nodded. Grizelda just stared. "Now I'm bettin' neither of you could carry a tune s'posin' you had a bucket with a lid on it, but you are goin' back upstairs right now and you are gonna karaoke your li'l hearts out, y'hear? Now get along, shoo!"

They tottered away in a fog of confusion. A few minutes later, Ella appeared, to be roundly scolded by Loretta.

"Well what in the world were you doin', child?!" She saw that the purple gown was once again trailing on the floor. "You were s'posed to leave 'fore they fell apart!"

"I know, I know, but I was talking to Mr Buttons about cloud storage and"

"Excuse me?"

"Cloud storage. It's where you store your data on remote servers and ..."

"Oh hush, child, I'm not talkin' 'bout that. Just *what* did you say his name was?"

"Buttons. Lloyd Buttons."

Loretta's hands flew to her cheeks. "*No-oooo!*" she moaned. "You can't end up with *Buttons!* That's not how it's s'posed to go at *all!*"

Ella looked indignant. "Excuse me, I have no intention of 'ending up' with Mr Buttons, thank you very much. I just work for him."

Loretta wrung her hands. "No, no, no, *no!* You can't work for Buttons either."

"Beats working for peanuts," mumbled Ella.

"I declare, this story has just gone to hell in a handbasket." Loretta's lower lip quivered. "You got no proper mice, we can't do the shoe-fittin' thing, you're hookin' up with *Buttons*, for cryin' out sideways..."

"She collapsed into a chair and tossed the wand on Ella's desk. "Stick a fork in me, I'm done."

Ella patted her shoulder. "It's not so bad."

"Not so *bad*?" Loretta sniffled. "How in tarnation am I s'posed to get a happy-ever-after outta this mess?"

"Well I'm getting a promotion," Ella pointed out. "And most of my blisters have gone down again. Grizelda and Drusilla smiled at me on the stairs just now, which I admit is scaring me a bit, but I'm pretty happy, all things considered."

"Well aren't you precious, tryin' to make me feel better." Loretta blew her nose. "But I guess a promotion *is* good, isn't it?"

"It's everything I wanted," smiled Ella.

"So-ooo... we could sing the *Bibbidi-bobbidi-boo* song together now?"

"No thank you."

"Oh... *Zippity-doo-dah* maybe?" Loretta picked up her wand again and twirled it.

"No ..." Several sharp little points dug into Ella's skin and she closed her eyes against the urge to look. "*Tell* me that's not a bluebird on my shoulder."

"We-e-ell"

"Get. It. *Off.*"

"Oh now don't go fright'nin' him, child... oh ... oh mywell, I'm sure that'll wash right out..."

The End

