

If the Shoe Fits

by Maggi McGettigan

Of course the shoe fits. The shoe always fits for girls like my step-sister. Pretty, well-mannered, saves mice from traps and talks to birds. My sister Annie and I learned long ago that if you are too well-mannered, or if you talk to birds, people won't take you seriously. Sweet girls get walked all over. I was bullied once in school for not having the right hairstyle. Mother took me to the bully's house, knocked on the door, and informed both the girl and her mother that their own vapidness and inferiority complex was not our problem, therefore we are not to be bullied for our appearance. So when Ella came to stay with us, all sunshine and rainbows, I knew she was in for it. Mother said we could help her. Make her tough, teach her to stand up for herself. Teach her that looks aren't everything. What we did seemed cruel, but she really did need it. And the world is cruel. She needed to be ready.

But then the shoe fit.

My sister Dresi and I are seriously worried about Ella. No one at the palace will look out for her the way we did. People take advantage of nice, quiet girls like her. And that prince, charming as he is, has the look of a man who likes his women silent and subservient. In that way, I guess we prepared her well. I only wish we had gotten her more ready, before he came along. I wish she had learned to speak up for herself a little more. I wish she had stood up to us, like we wanted her to, before she left. Then I wouldn't worry so much.

But then the shoe fit.

It never ends well for sweet, pretty girls. I should know, I was one once upon a time. The world eats you up when you're sweet and young and pretty and spits you out old and weathered and haggard. That's why I tried. I really did. I made sure my other two never relied on their looks. I taught them to be smart and tough and to take care of themselves. No prince needed here, that's for sure. But Ella, she needed toughening up. She was so sweet, so kind. She put everyone else before herself. How that made me worry. Especially once I caught sight of that prince. I knew the second I laid eyes on him what he was after. True love? Hell, no. A sweet, pretty girl who would keep her mouth shut and do what she was told. Well, I raised a perfect one of those. I hadn't intended to, of course, he just got to her before I was done. I wanted to teach her that if you worry about everyone else and not yourself, you will never find true happiness. I promised her father I'd take care of her, teach her how to be a woman in this world. He was worried about her too. He didn't know how to raise a girl. Girls these days need to be tough, not sweet. I knew I could help her, given some time.

But then the shoe fit. What was I to do? Another charming prince subjugates another sweet girl, and the world loses another strong woman. It's how they've been doing it forever, and will, ever after.

