

LOOKING FOR CINDERELLA

Once upon a time, before you really knew what hurt was, you believed in fairy tales. You believed that beautiful people lived in ideal situations. Even when troubles arose in the form of evil, good would always triumph in the end. Safe in the arms of your mother or father, your imagination could wander, your laughter would ring out, and you were free to dream.

You also believed in love. You were sure that your Prince Charming not only lived, but would someday come to take you away. You would live with him forever, loved and cherished. Everything you desired would be yours. No dream was too great or out of reach. Truth, contentedness, peace, and nobility existed, if only in the world of your mind. Yes, you were young and the only thing that stood between you and the stars for which you reached were a few more years to grow. Perhaps, you were too young.

Those few years have come and gone now, along with too many more. Some of the dreams have fled with them. Life has pressed down upon you just a little too hard. You have been hurt so many times, so badly, that the safest thing you can do is just not care any more. Love has turned out to be a mockery. In a parody of your dream, you see people come together only to use one another. The goals you had, the changes you thought you could make, the beauty you thought you could create, were but vanity. Your desires come in much smaller packages now. Mostly, you just want to make it through the day. You do your best to shut out the taunts of those who have power over you as they work to destroy your spirit. You sit in the rubble of your life, sifting the ashes of your dreams through your hands. Only when you find yourself alone, and your vulnerability need no longer be hidden, do you weep.

Then you hear about an invitation that has been issued by the King. There is to be a royal celebration and you are invited. Whosoever will, may come. Although it seems impossible, hope is born anew. It is a chance to once again enter a world of beauty. A world where your past can fade away and you can enjoy the pleasures of life as an honored guest of royalty. You work hard to make yourself beautiful in the eyes of the King. You adorn yourself with the best of what is left of your life. Then, just before you are ready to enter His presence, you are once again accosted by your tormentors. Pulling and tearing at your self esteem, they point out in painful detail how pathetic your efforts really are. How torn and ragged and unfit you are to enter the throne room of majesty. This time, when they leave you, you weep openly.

Suddenly, for the first time in forever, you feel the presence of love in the touch of a hand upon your shoulder. You have a supernatural visitor who seems to be willing to accept you, even with every fault exposed. Through no power of your own, you are transformed in His presence. A dazzling gown of pure white covers you. Beauty crowns you from head to toe. Radiant as any bride, you are then transported by supernatural means into the home of the King. And there you meet His Son, face to face.

It is love at first sight. He is the one you have been yearning for. You know the empty spot in your heart was made for Him to fill. The night seems to last forever. He holds you in His arms and you gaze into His eyes. You feel His peculiar scarred hands in yours. If only you could dance with Him forever.

Inescapably though, the world you left draws you back. You have to go home. Already you feel the loneliness of separation from Him as you turn to enter your world once more. The same world that

drove you to despair awaits you. The same disappointments, the same failures, even the same tormentors to remind you of how worthless you really are. This time though, your response is only a smile. This time, you know something they do not. You know beyond the shadow of a doubt, that you have been touched by love. And you know...

The King's son will be coming any day now. He will come looking for you because He loves you. He will visit every home and test everyone, looking for His bride to be. Some will claim to love Him, but words will not be what He is seeking. He will be looking for a familiar touch. For the hand that was touching His when your hearts were beating in unison and virtue flowed out from Him. For the arms that reached out to Him in love. Because you have dreamed this dream before, you know the end of this story. When He finds you, He will take you home to be His bride. And you will live happily ever after.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever had a dream you once cherished, but no longer feel can come true?
2. Can you find yourself anywhere in this story?
3. Before you came to serve God, how well did you like your life? If you are like most, you came hoping that He would give you a better life. Were you disappointed?
4. How did your heart respond when you felt the invitation from God to come to Him?
5. Were you suddenly tormented by thoughts of how unfit and filthy your life really was? Like most people, did you feel unclean in the presence of the holy? Did you walk away?
6. When the Holy Spirit first entered you and you felt so clean and new, did you notice that loving the Son of God and being with Him felt completely natural?
7. Have you ever noticed that while in the presence of God, you feel complete? Why would this happen?
8. After you have been in His presence, how long does it take away from Him before the pressures of your earthly life begin to bother you again?
9. What do you know for sure about yourself that those around you will never know, except by experiencing what you have?
10. Does the hope of going home and living happily ever after, change anything in the way you live your life now?