



# All the Ever Afters: The Untold Story of Cinderella's Stepmother

*Danielle Teller*

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# From Reader Review **All the Ever Afters: The Untold Story of Cinderella's Stepmother** for online ebook

**Mogsy (MMOGC) says**

4 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <https://bibliosanctum.com/2018/05/22/...>

I've never been able to say no to a good fairy tale retelling. They are my absolute weakness, and I've been especially tempted as of late by the recent crop of novels touting the point-of-view of the "villain". It ultimately led me to pick up *All the Ever Afters*, which boldly bears the tagline describing itself as the untold story of Cinderella's stepmother, the notoriously cruel and wicked antagonist from the classic fairy tale we all know and love.

However, the author Danielle Teller's approach to this novel is one that I've seldom seen in most fairy tale retellings I've read, in that she has completely eschewed all aspects of fantasy and magic, choosing instead to ground her story in history. Opening on the French countryside sometime during the mid-fourteenth or early fifteenth century, the tale introduces readers to Agnes, a young girl born into poverty. Her family could not afford to raise her, so she was sent at the tender age of ten to a nearby lord's manor to become a laundress's assistant. Worked to the bone and unfairly treated, Agnes had no choice but to use all her wits and wiles to finagle a better position for herself, eventually managing to escape the manor for a less punishing job at the local abbey.

All goes well for several years until Agnes is seduced by the Abbess's ward and messenger, and their relationship results in a pregnancy. Ejected from the abbey, our protagonist is set up in a village where she becomes the proprietor of a brewery and alehouse, mostly raising her daughters on her own. But soon, tragedy strikes, and Agnes is forced into a situation where she must work her way up from nothing once more. A twist of fate lands her back in the manor where she worked as a child, but the lord is now married with an infant daughter. And thus, Agnes finds herself hired on to be a nursemaid to little Ella, the awkward but radiantly beautiful girl who will one day marry the handsome prince she meets at a fateful ball.

Now Agnes and her two daughters live at the palace, where she tells her tale in the hopes of showing how accounts of her wickedness have either been greatly exaggerated or are outright lies. In fact, she was a victim of forced labor herself, and *All the Ever Afters* is her own rags to riches story. It is a heart-wrenching novel about growing up with nothing to your name, of having to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps to make your own success. While there have been times where she had to use her cunning or resort to deception to get what she wants, Agnes is no villain. And if on occasion she was tough on Ella or punished her too harshly as a child, we learn that it is only because Agnes has been independent and hardworking her whole life, and as a result, she cannot bear idleness or watching her stepdaughter grow up helpless and spoiled.

In a way, *All the Ever Afters* is also the untold story of Cinderella's stepsisters, called Charlotte and Matilda in this version of the retelling. Like their mother, they aren't the awful people from the many popular versions of Cinderella either, and they've gone through their own share of hard times. Now that I've read Teller's portrayal, I also doubt that I'll ever think about the "ugly stepsisters" epithet the same way again, not after reading about a mother's hurt and pain from Agnes's perspective.

As I said before, this is also a purely non-magical story; there will be no fairy godmothers, pumpkin carriages, or singing animals here (though, I was amused to see, the author had managed to work in a tongue-in-cheek jibe at the popular depiction of Cinderella and her affinity for mice, except in this book,

Ella's friendship with her rat Henrietta is nowhere near as adorable...or hygienic). A lot of fairy tale retellings tend to give the mundane things of the world a fantastical twist, but it seems *All the Ever Afters* set out to do almost the exact opposite, downplaying the magical elements and addressing all that we know about the Cinderella story with realistic explanations.

I also found it interesting how the novel mirrored many of the original fairy tale's lessons—that is, to always work hard and never let setbacks or difficult people get you down. However, while the classic version also taught that beauty is esteemed, but that having a good heart is the most important, things are not so idealized in Agnes's more realistic world. Her stepdaughter Ella—who is naïve, spoiled, and rather soft and vapid—manages to snag a prince and is loved by all in the kingdom for no other reason because she is beautiful. Meanwhile, Charlotte and Matilda, who have endured so much more, will never have anywhere close to the same opportunities simply because they are homely. Agnes's lesson for her daughters? Life is not fair, but you still do what you must to keep moving forward.

All in all, I enjoyed *All the Ever Afters* very much. With Cinderella only playing a bit part, this tale truly belongs to her stepmother, who has been given new life by Danielle Teller. In this heartfelt novel, there are no magical spells or fairy godmothers, for Agnes is a woman who relies on nothing but herself to change her life and make a better future for her children. If you prefer fantasy in your fairy tale retellings, you may wish to reconsider this one, but if you don't mind a narrative that's more rooted in realism, then I really can't recommend this highly enough.

Audiobook Comments: I was very impressed by Jane Copland's narration. From her voice, I imagined Agnes to be a proud, sharp-witted and dignified woman, which is exactly the way her character is written. The audiobook experience brought a whole new level of emotion to the story, which I would not have gotten if I had just read the book. A fantastic listen.

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### **Sara Saif says**

A soulful, gut-wrenching, dark and disturbing retelling of Cinderella. It reminded me of *Fairest* by Marissa Meyer, another step-mother origin story. Like *Fairest* it was morbid and oft times sickening but I was entranced and couldn't stop. Unlike *Fairest*, it was more real, mature and grounded and thus hit much harder due to the absence of fantasy or sci-fi elements.

The book proceeds with agonizing slowness, painstakingly describing each and every detail of the stepmother, Agnes's life. The Cinderella part doesn't begin until the last quarter of the book. I understand that this was about Agnes and what kind of a life she lived before she came to be Ella's step mother so each and every aspect of her life was dissected and described in fullest, *but*, I will say that there is much in the first half that could have been shortened. It's the type of book that if you don't get invested in real quick, is a chore to finish.

The book is bursting with sadness and struggle and lead by a strong, admirable woman, the step-mother, who is lovable to her core. Cinderella on the other hand possesses more vices than virtues and is tolerable at best and detestable at worst.

The prose is absolutely beautiful and apart from the incredible characterization is the thing that makes this

book so worth your time and investment. It's definitely one of the most meticulous and exquisitely crafted books I have had the pleasure to read.

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### **Carrie says**

All the Ever Afters: The Untold Story of Cinderella's Stepmother by Danielle Teller is a fantasy retelling. Taking on the idea that every story has different sides readers get to know Cinderella's stepmother from her point of view from childhood until after Cinderella's wedding. I would warn of the sexual content within this one making it for mature readers.

Agnes was born a peasant and while her family found a husband for her sister Agnes was turned over to work as a servant at the age of ten. She spent the next several years working until she met a young man in which she thought she'd fallen in love. With him being above her station though Agnes had little hope of marriage until she fell pregnant with his child.

Over the years Agnes had her children and made a life for herself but it all fell apart for her once again sending her back to working as a servant yet again. It was then Agnes came into Ella's life and eventually married her father becoming her stepmother but things weren't the way for the family that we've all thought.

I'm always a sucker for a great retelling that breaths new life into the classics that we all know and love. All the Ever Afters was not a disappointment at all when it came to twisting the story into something new. As it's said with there being different sides in this one we've known Cinderella's and now we learn Agnes'.

As Agnes goes back in time telling her own story the book reads a lot like historical fiction taking the reader back to a time of Kings, peasants, arranged marriages and all that of the era. There are breaks every few chapters with journal entries updating the current situation as the story spans through the decades of Agnes' life. Looking at things from this angle it would make one wonder what was the truth to the story and did we have it wrong all this time?

I received an advance copy from the publisher via Edelweiss.

For more reviews please visit <https://carriesbookreviews.com/>

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### **Kira says**

2.5 stars

This wasn't the book for me. The only reason I'm giving it 3 stars is because of the quality of the writing. The story itself bored me to death. I wanted to read this because I love fairy tale retellings. The story of Cinderella's stepmother seemed interesting. I thought I would see her in a different light and understand why she became the evil stepmother. Somehow her story never made me sympathetic to her plight. A fair amount of the bad things that happened to her were the result of bad decisions she made. In the end I understood her but didn't care.

Despite being a fairy tale retelling, it was a realistic historical fiction. It was only loosely based on Cinderella. That part only tied in towards the end. Most of the book was focused on her work. There was not much action or dialogue. A lot of time was spent describing things. I think some people will really like this book. This style and genre are not ones I care for.

I received this from Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review.

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## Deanna says

My reviews can also be seen at: [https://deesradreadsandreviews.wordpress...](https://deesradreadsandreviews.wordpress.com)

3.5 Stars

***“We all know the story of Cinderella. Or do we?”***

I’ve never been big of fairy tales, but the description of this novel had me intrigued. **“All the Ever Afters”** is the story of Princess Cinderella told from the point of view of her stepmother, Agnes.

Agnes has heard all of the rumors...how cruel she apparently was to Elfilda (Ella), that Ella’s step-sisters vied for Prince Henry’s attention, and so much more.

***“Compelling fiction often obscures the humble truth.”***

Princess Elfilda (Ella) is now the most celebrated woman in the kingdom. Commoners will wait for hours in hopes of catching a glimpse of her face. Any time she changes her hairstyle or tries out a new accessory...every female, even the peasant girls will do what they can to imitate her appearance. Agnes knows more about Princess Elfilda’s history than anyone. But it’s not as much of a fantasy as everyone might believe.

***“Nobody is interested in the story of a flesh-and-blood nobleman’s daughter, one who wet her bed, complained of boredom, fought with her kin, and turned up her nose at winter greens just like any mortal child.”***

However, Agnes is not going to write the princess’s story, she’s going to write her own.

Agnes was only ten when she was sent to work as a servant at The Manor House, leaving her family behind. She thinks the Manor is beautiful but she doesn’t yet know the evilness that goes on behind closed doors. Agnes yearns for home. All she has is a little clothing and her treasured collection of stones. Although her future is bleak, Agnes is creative and clever and finds ways to make herself indispensable wherever she is sent. She makes her way in a world that is built to keep her down.

***“To the abbess, I was a pack-horse, an animal that has value as long as it can work, nothing else”***

Then she meets someone who changes the course of her life completely. Agnes feels that she may have finally found a place where she can be happy.

But happiness is never guaranteed to last *forever after*...

This was an interesting read and the prose was often poetic. I don't think I will ever look at any fairytale in the same way...especially Cinderella. I liked the short chapters and enjoyed reading Agnes's journal which was interspersed throughout the novel. We are given insight into both the past and the present. I did have a bit of a hard time in the beginning. There were lots of names and titles to try to keep straight. It was a slow burn but it did pick up and I found it to be quite an entertaining story.

A creative and unique story that gives a deeper perspective on good and evil, complicated relationships, and the many different kinds of love. It also shows that everything is not always what it seems.

I look forward to reading more from this talented author.

I'd like to thank William Morrow for giving me the opportunity to read this book in exchange for my honest review.

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## **Hannah Greendale says**

[Click here](#) to watch a video review of this book on my channel, *From Beginning to Bookend*.

Beautiful inside and out; *All the Ever Afters* is a sorrowful tale woven from lyrical prose, words as lovely and lush as the book's alluring cover. Cinderella's "evil" stepmother, Agnes, tells her side of the story, in which she's born a peasant and must claw her way to a better life. The little cinder girl arrives late in the story, a mere trifle compared to the hardship and heartbreak Agnes endures.

The languid pacing will not appeal to everyone, but Teller compensates with a stunning linguistic style.

*Spring breezes caused the snowdrifts to round and slump, wearing them thinner until yellow grass and mud showed through. The longer days tempted me back to the rose garden, where buds were beginning to form. Bright green haloes softened the skeletal angles of branches, and then one day, the trees burst into full leaf. Swallows darted and swooped in the fresh-scrubbed spring air.*

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## **Darque Dreamer says**

*All the Ever Afters* is realistically refreshing! It is captivating and emotional. With a unique twist on a classic faerie tale villain, this one is sure to impress!

When I saw the synopsis for this one, I was immediately drawn in. Heartless by Marissa Meyer went to my mind, and I was expecting a whimsical tale about why Cinderella's stepmother was evil. What I got was a more realistic story about Agnes and her upbringing, and a twist on Cinderella's character.

This one read like a historical fiction novel. There was no magic, no faerie god mother. It had logical explanations for the unexplainable aspects of past Cinderella tales.

It was an emotionally trying road for Agnes. I enjoyed learning about her background and her struggles. The story had more of a slow pace to it, but it was well developed in terms of showing us the difficult journey Agnes faced on her way to becoming Cinderella's stepmother.

I enjoyed the twist of character personalities. The stepsisters were the ones who were teased and ridiculed, due to prejudice, and Agnes was the one forced in to hard manual labor for most of her life. Cinderella was actually more on the spoiled brat side and never really had to work for anything.

The story had a bit more sexual content than I had expected. It wasn't very graphic in nature, but certainly was not anticipated. The story also highlighted issues of rape and abuse from the time period that the tale would have originally taken place in, so it was interesting to have the realism thrown in to the story. It gave dimension to the struggle of women, in general, instead of making everything seem fanciful and alluring.

The story had a Grimm's feel to it. It seemed to teach some moral lessons while highlighting the ugliness of the period, and of human nature. It was a refreshing take on an "untold story" that had several unpredictable twists. So, it wasn't really a "faerie tale," but it was a unique twist on a classic faerie tale that provoked some deep thoughts about true villains and the ugliness of humanity through history. I'd rate this one 3.5 stars.

Thank you to the Edelweiss and William Morrow (Harper Collins) for providing me with this free e-copy in exchange for my honest review.

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## **Under the Covers Book Blog says**

I received this book for free from Publisher in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

I don't usually seek out fairytale retellings, but *All the Ever Afters* attracted me for two reasons:

The cover. I admit I judge by a cover far too frequently, but this one is particularly gorgeous. It was told from the evil stepmother's point of view. Although we have books that retell a tale from a different point of view, I was intrigued by it being told by the heavily maligned evil stepmother. Now that I have finished *All the Ever Afters* I am pleased that I picked it up. It told the Cinderella story in the style of historical fiction set in a medieval time period. Grounding this magical tale in a semblance of reality gave a completely different perspective on all the familiar characters, from the "evil" stepmother, "ugly" stepsisters to Cinderella herself.

Agnes' character completely captivated me in this book. We watch as Agnes grows into a pragmatic and ambitious woman, with times of heartbreak (I shed more than a few tears) and times of joy. Teller paints a very clear picture of a woman, who although isn't perfect has done the best with her limited circumstances. I especially enjoyed Agnes short journal entries that regularly intersperse the book.



I can't state enough how much I loved this book, it was written very eloquently and had a very compelling story. I couldn't put it down. Teller framing this retelling as if it was historical fiction was a brilliant decision. It brought the whole story to life in a way that telling it as a magical fantasy with pumpkins turning into carriages wouldn't have.

I highly recommend give All the Ever Afters a try. It's a beautifully written book which will have you completely rethinking the Cinderella story.

\*ARC provided by publisher

Reviewed by Suzanne♥ ? Don't want to miss any of our posts? Subscribe to our blog by email! ? ♥

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### **Kim says**

I absolutely love fairytale retellings especially when they're told from the perspective of a villain, so I was quite excited to read this. I was expecting a fantastical tale filled with magic, but instead the author chose to tell this more as a historical fiction and it worked quite well. Instead of fairy godmothers and feats of magic it had realistic explanations for what happened in this often retold tale.

I found that I had much more sympathy for Agnes, Cinderella's stepmother and her two daughters by the end of the book. It was a difficult time period for women and this is reflected in Agnes's journey. The story highlights ugly social issues like rape and abuse which added a sense of realism.

While I thought the pace a little slow, overall I thought this was a well written, and original take on this classic fairy tale and it's a book I'd recommend to older teens and adults.

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### **Isabella Conti says**

When I reached the end and closed this book, I felt fulfilled, and at so many levels. The language captured me first. What a complete command of expressions! A pleasure to watch its secure stroke, its expert unfolding; a painting that becomes sculpture and walks you all around an image, a scene, a character, a plot. An exquisite mastery of the written word that reminds of Umberto Eco. I even found a few words I had to look up, yet so expertly placed in the context that, from the way they fitted, I could surmise their meaning. In essence, a perfectly honed tool to tell a very good story.

The tale is an old and cherished one, that of Cinderella. But wait, it's not at all what you would expect. It is the other side of the story, a visit to the dark side of the moon. This doesn't mean the content is dark, because it is full of hope and love. But it is also steeped in very real human experiences and events. It clearly comes from a writer who has lived a meaningful life and has developed a deep understanding. I will not spoil your pleasure by saying more about the plot. Let me add that the ambient details are carefully researched and deftly described so that you find yourself immersed in a time and place different from your own, yet familiar, because the description makes it so.

Finally, a warning. You won't be able to put the book down. I started reading it and could not stop even though I wasn't supposed to strain my eyes after a minor surgery. I read through, fatigued eyes notwithstanding, until I reached the very last word.

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## The Serendipity Aegis ~ ?Misericordia? ?????? ✨\*♥️ says

? Oh, dear! This is the mind-blowing tale, fairy or not, that I've always wanted to get my hands on.

I've never been one for the Cinderella story. It just never felt absolutely right. **So, she becomes the future queen, what's she gonna do next?**

This is rehashing the original, in a very expectedly unexpected way. Here goes the purr-fect illustration of the principle: **no matter how you raise your kids (step- or otherwise), they will always have what to discuss with their psychoanalyst (or their courtiers!).**

PS. Dear cover art, I'm in love with you! I rarely, if ever, judge books by their covers but this one is absolutely gorgeous. I just want to eat it or something!

Q:

I sat alone at supper and listened to my heart thunder as I lay awake each night. (c)

Q:

... I no longer believe that people are born without virtue. It gets beaten out. Misfortune threshes our souls as a flail threshes wheat, and the lightest parts of ourselves are scattered to the wind. (c)

Q:

God had opened a window for me, and I flew forth like an arrow, growing dizzy with my rise. (c)

Q:

"You might consider embellishing your story just a trifle for the sake of the listener."

"I don't like embellishment. (c)

Q:

I imagined that we were a pair of wolves slinking over the dappled grass. (c)

Q:

I was a mouse trapped in a corner, looking for a crack to flee through but despairing of finding one. (c)

Q:

It bothers me to this day that I did not have the means to repay him for his kindness. (c)

Q:

Children's thoughts incline toward magic and superstition, and mine were no exception. (c)

Q:

I was tempted to walk out the door, through the orchards, meadow, and woods, and keep walking all the way home. I was old enough to know, however, that my family could not keep me, and I had nowhere else to go.

(c)

Q:

Apart from her collections of baubles and kennel of favorite dogs, she appears to have no passions or vices, and when she attends royal functions, her gaze drifts to invisible spectacles that only she can apprehend. Her elusive character is a blank parchment upon which any story may be written, and every girl who dreams of becoming a princess can imagine herself in Princess Elfilda's famously tiny shoes. (c)

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**Kelly (and the Book Boar) says**

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

See my mediocre book pics here

3.5 Stars

***“Everyone knows the story about Prince Henry’s hunt for the beautiful girl he met at the ball, how he searched from house to house, asking every unmarried woman in five parishes to try on the glass slippers. That is a pretty tale. As usual, the truth is more mundane.”***

Is there anyone out there who **wouldn’t** want to be like this rather than one of those mealy-mouthed princesses?????

Or even like this (who so happens to be the focus of this particular story)??????

Wait. I think I might already be her. I’m even attempting to adopt a new kitteh who looks kinda like hers rather than the all black which I generally gravitate toward . . . . .

No wonder I wanted to read her story, right?

My picture from the ol’ Instagram this morning shows that I’m kind of a hoarder fan of retellings (I tried to put the Lunar Chronicles in there too, but they were being a-holes and wouldn’t stand up so they got chucked) . . . . .

*All the Ever Afters* was an absolute must read for me. The story here is of Cinderella’s stepmother . . . .

***“I do not set out to write the princess’s history, but my own, the only tale I have the authority to tell . . . . As for fables about good and evil and songs about glass slippers, I shall leave those to the minstrels. They can invent their own tales about Cinderella.”***

So, there you have it. This is the life story of the woman who would one day become known simply as a “Wicked Stepmother.” It tells of her childhood where she was born into a family so poor they sent her to become a laundry maid for the nearest royal house - to her pulling a bit of a con in order for a chance to serve the local abbey instead - to falling in love and out of favor with the abbess via an unplanned pregnancy - to learning how to become an alewife - all the way to her return to the royal house. It even explains how her daughters came to be known as the “Ugly Stepsisters.” It is up to the reader to decide if she (and her children) were truly awful, or if Cinderella was simply a coddled brat.

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## **Ellie (faerieontheshelf) says**

4.5 stars! RTC

A really impressive historically-grounded novel that really surprised me with how much I enjoyed it; I loved the presentation of gender and social roles. I also love Agnes, my clever Slytherin child.

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## **Faith says**

*I received this ARC from William Morrow on LibraryThing in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of this book in any way.*

"Being strong does not disqualify you from being beautiful."

Wow this book is amazing!

### **The Writing**

For a debut, this is absolutely astounding! This is one of the most well written books I have ever read! As an example, here's a bunch of quotes I particularly loved:

"Compelling fiction often obscures the humble truth."

I wonder sometimes if the thoughts that flock my nightmares are abandoned memories coming home to roost.

I no longer believe that people are born without virtue. It gets beaten out. Misfortune threshes our souls as a flail threshes wheat, and the lightest parts of ourselves are scattered to the wind.

I was a mouse trapped in a corner, looking for a crack to flee through but despairing of finding one.

"Imagine what ideas are locked up in the hearts and minds of women who simply lack the tools to express them."

I was a candle that had never known a flame, and now that the flame was lit, I softened and

glowed in a way I had not known was possible.

Our fascination with feminine beauty is elemental. It is said that men wish to possess the princess and women wish to be the princess, but I believe that is only part of the truth. We are drawn to extraordinary beauty mindlessly and purposelessly; we flutter on dusty moth wings toward the effulgence with no understanding of why we do it. Perhaps when we see a woman with the aspect of an angel, our souls are tricked into following her, mistaking her for a guide to paradise.

The opposite, of course, is also true.

The stories we tell ourselves have great power.

Because misfortune does not wait idly by until we are prepared for it.

"Rich only matters if he marries you," I said grimly. "Handsome matters not at all."

"You speak of *love*? Love is a sickness that causes men and women to do stupid things, the sorts of things that leave them sad and broken when the fever passes."

Whew, that's a long list. Well, that's because **THIS BOOK IS AMAZING** and everyone needs to read it. All the characters were so real and multi-dimensional. The world (though a bit difficult to place the time period at first) was really great, and I loved how religion was mixed in without being preachy.

My only gripe was the fact that it's a Cinderella retelling, and only because I feel like that dragged down the potential of the story. It became predictable (because who doesn't know Cinderella's story?) and I found myself tiring of those parts of the story. The prologue, for instance, was not really necessary and only served to give reason for the journal entries scattered about. Which opening line would you rather have? This:

Suppers at the royal court have become entirely too oppressive.

Or this:

I hardly remember my own mother.

I think you'll all agree with me that the latter is far superior and engaging.

I absolutely loved the theme of motherhood in this. It was so well done and, though I am not a mother, I'm an

aunt and my love and adoration for my nephew pales in comparison to Agnes' love for her daughters. And the themes of beauty and love were equally well done.

### **The Characters**

Agnes: She was such an interesting and relatable protagonist. She's so complex and flawed, and she grows so much while staying fundamentally the same.

Fernan: I really found him to be a complex person, especially as Agnes realizes and learns more about him. I was so conflicted as to whether I loved him or hated him, but I never felt indifferent towards him.

Charlotte and Matilda: As someone who has a ton of sisters, they totally got the sister-dynamic down. They also really reminded me (even in appearance, strangely enough--Danielle Teller, have you been watching me??) of my oldest sisters, so reading about them was a huge, super sweet, cavity inducing treat.

Ella: She was really interesting too, and really humanized.

Emont: Man, I feel somewhat similar him as I do Fernan, but honestly, I pity him more anything. He's a pretty pitiful person.

Lady Alba: She gave me some serious Jane Eyre vibes. This whole book gave me Jane Eyre vibes, man.

### **Conclusion**

I love this book so much. It might have even topped 1984 for my favorite book this month and possibly all time. It is amazingly well written, and I went through the whole gamut of emotions reading this. I shed some tears, I laughed and chuckled and giggled like a fool. I love this book and everyone really needs to read it.

Danielle Teller, I applaud you on your fabulous debut. You done good.

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### **Cait • A Page with a View says**

This is easily one of the cleverest fairy tale retellings I've ever found! The author put so much thought & care into every aspect of the story that it almost feels like *this* is the original story that Cinderella should naturally be based on.

The story is told from the POV of Agnes, a young lady who eventually becomes the stepmother in the traditional story. There are "journal entries" from her at a later date when Cinderella is married to the prince in order to bring everything full circle.

I loved how neither the stepmother nor Cinderella were "evil" or even against each other, really... They just came from very different lives. Agnes had a hard life, but her strength, practical approach and determination to keep going made it less depressing than it could've been. The events from the original story came about in the most creative & surprising ways so that this felt familiar, yet was totally unique. Someone who doesn't love fairy tale retellings as much as I do could still get into this (which definitely isn't the case with all retellings).

I thought the writing was really strong & the book flowed well. There was just the right amount of description to build a really vivid, realistic setting without losing the reader in the process. This whole book was a really insightful, wonderful surprise!

*Thank you to the publisher for sending me a finished copy.*

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