

Reading Beauty

By Cressida Wainwright

2nd Place in the Under 11 Age Category

Valentina looked radiant at her christening, in her delicate lace gown... right up until the moment she ripped the gown in two and wrapped one half around her forehead. She threw the other half to the floor with a frown of utter disgust on her brow.

The ceremony started with a much-anticipated speech from the vicar, which thankfully was cut short by an opening of the doors. Marching in came the one uninvited fairy. As she bent over the cot, Valentina let out an almighty fart, which may or may not have contributed to the fairy's decision to curse Valentina with eternal sleep brought on by a spinning wheel!

From then on, Valentina was not allowed to leave the castle grounds and certainly not allowed to operate any machinery more complex than a rubber duck. The poor girl's life was bathed in boredom and, to add to the terrible situation, she found that reading was a kind of magic which only others could harness. Try as she might, she simply couldn't decode written words.

One day, her parents went out for the day and Valentina was left alone. She took her chance and went off to explore. In the attic she found a machine much more complicated than the rubber duck. It was a spinning wheel!

She reached her hand out to touch it. Her fingers stretched closer and closer to the sharp spindle that glinted in the candlelight. Just as the fingertip of her right index finger was about to meet the point of the spindle, she thought, as any sensible girl would:

Huh. I should probably read the instructions first.

But oh no! Alas, alack.

"I can't read," she said out loud to the dusty air. "Why can't someone just teach me?!"

"You can't read?" said the uninvited fairy who had appeared in the shadows of the attic.

"The words jump like crickets in the grass," said Valentina.

"It sounds like dyslexia. I know a few things that can help."

The fairy helped her to read the instructions. The fairy waved her magic wand once and an array of coloured overlays appeared that made the writing clearer. The fairy waved her magic wand a second time and a rhyme to remember the patterns wafted out from the end of the wand. The fairy waved her magic wand a third time and out poofed some rainbow cupcakes, which were absolutely nothing to do with reading but certainly made the whole process a lot more enjoyable. Together, they learned how to make thread.

Ten years on, little Valentina is little no longer. She has her own factory with a warehouse full of spinning wheels. She is famous throughout the land. She has bought the most beautiful mansion in the countryside where she now lives alongside the uninvited fairy who is uninvited no longer.