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opening extract from

The Stepsisters' Story

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CHAPTER ONE

(LARDINE)

ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY

You know what makes me mad? I'll tell you. It's that everyone's on Cinderella's side. Just because she's pretty and ended up marrying Prince Florian, they all go "Ah! Bless!" and send her fan letters in the post. She gets other stuff as well. Posh dresses. Glass shoes. Flowers. Cake. Invitations to all the best balls.

My name's Lardine. I'm Cinderella's stepsister and my other sister's called Angula. I'm the soft, cuddly sister. Angula's all thin and sharp and bony. Just like a coat-stand.

No one ever sends me and Angula cake. What we get is lots of letters from people who don't like us – and they tell us so to. Hate mail, the postman calls it. We don't get any invitations to balls. Not after what happened at the last one.

I said Cinderella's pretty. She is, in a boring sort of way. Long golden hair. Big blue eyes. Tiny, silly little feet. That sort of thing. Angula and I hated her from the first moment we saw her. We'd have hated her even more if we'd known she had a Fairy Godmother. But we didn't know that, not then. And back then,

she was just plain Ella. It was me that gave her her new name – the one that's stuck – *Cinder*ella.

“Come, darlings,” said Mummy, on the day we moved into Stepdaddy Hardup’s house. "Here we all are - a new happy family. I want you both to meet your new stepsister, Ella. I’m sure you’ll all be good friends.”

Angula and I looked at each other. We don’t even like each other much, but we knew right now we needed to team up.

“Hello,” said Cinderella with a shy smile. She put out her hand. We both looked at it as if she was passing us a dead fish. We did *not* shake hands with her and so she dropped it again.

Round One to us!

“Ella’s bedroom is next to yours,” said Mummy. “Won’t that be nice?”

No. It wouldn’t.

“I’m not sharing with Lardine,” said Angula. “Her feet smell.”

“So do yours,” I snapped. Well, they do. Badly.

“Well, I don’t snore,” said Angula.

“Yes you do,” I said. She does. Very loudly.

“I’ll scream if I don’t get a room of my own,” said Angula.

“And I’ll sulk,” I said. I would too. I really would.

“Don't worry,” said Mummy. “We’ll work something out.”

Round Two!

At that moment, Stepdaddy Hardup came rushing into the room. He was grinning from ear to ear and rubbing his hands together. He still had a flower in his jacket from the wedding. Angula and I were in our dresses from the wedding, our bridesmaid's frocks. My dress was too tight, and that put me in a bad mood. Angula's shoes were too small for her great big feet so she wasn't happy.

"Ah!" said Stepdaddy Hardup. "The girls have met at last. What d'you think, eh, Ella? It'll be fun having two new sisters, won't it, poppet?"

"Yes," said Cinderella. "I'm sure it will, Daddy."

She didn't sound as if it would. I don't think she liked the idea at all. Mummy said Cinderella didn't want her father to get married again. She didn't come to the wedding, anyway. She said she'd stay home and help get tea ready. We think she was jealous because me and Angula were bridesmaids and she wasn't. Stepdaddy Hardup wanted her to be, but Mummy forgot to order her a dress.

"Good, good," Stepdaddy Hardup went babbling on, "Well, let's all go and have tea. Buttons has got a wedding feast ready for us in the front room."

Buttons is Stepdaddy Hardup's servant. I don't like him, and neither does Angula. He didn't help us off with our cloaks when we first came in. So we dropped them on the floor and shoved past him. We heard him tutting and muttering as he picked them up. Servants shouldn't tut. That's why I got a pair of scissors and snipped those stupid buttons off his jacket.

I have to admit the tea was nice. I ate seven sandwiches, three sausage rolls, five jam and cream scones, two helpings of trifle and a large hunk of wedding cake. Angula got stuck in as well. She may look like an ironing board but she can stuff a lot of food in her mouth. Even so, I think I'm just that bit better than her.

Cinderella hardly ate a thing. She just sat there, pushing a lettuce leaf around her plate. She didn't say a word.

“What’s the matter, Ella? Aren’t you hungry?” asked Mummy. She sounded cross.

“Not really,” said Cinderella.

“You must eat, you know. Lardine and Angula have good manners. They always finish everything on their plates. Don't you, girls?”

“Yes, Mummy,” we said both at the same time, our mouths full of cake.

“I do hope you’re not letting her be a picky eater, Fergus,” Mummy said to Stepdaddy Hardup. She gave one of her frowns. “Growing girls need plenty to eat. Have a sandwich, Ella.”

“No thank you,” said our new stepsister. A tear trickled down her cheek and plopped onto the plate.

“She’s crying,” said Angula, with a sneer. She reached across Cinderella and grabbed the last doughnut. I'd had my eye on that. I wanted it. I poked her with a fork.

“Oh dear,” said Stepdaddy Hardup, looking upset. “Are you crying, Ella?”

“Just something in my eye, Daddy,” said Cinderella. She patted her eyes with a napkin.

“I think you should leave the room,” said Mummy. “We don’t want any fuss or drama at the table.”

Cinderella stood up and ran out. Stepdaddy Hardup looked as if he was about to go after her, but then he saw Mummy look at him. He didn’t move.

“Spoiled,” said Mummy. “Spoiled rotten. She needs to be taken in hand.”

“Just give her time,” said Stepdaddy Hardup. “She’ll get used to it, I’m sure.”

“Oh yes,” said Mummy. “She’ll get used to it all right. We’ll make sure of that. Won’t we, girls?”

“Oh *yes,* Mummy,” we sang. Well, we would.