

## Wonderella, Ninja Princess



That morning, a melodious chime sounded at the usual time and birds trilled a wake up song. Below a canopy topped with hundreds of cooing doves, Wonderella, princess of Dazzle World, threw aside the covers, stretched out her arms, and smiled. A noise like three notes of a harp broke with her deepened dimples, and she tumbled out of bed. At that moment, the doves streamed through the window and into the bright, sunny day.

A flurry of hummingbirds lifted Wonderella's ivory dressing gown over her head and another group replaced it with a green satin dress lined with velvet and lace. From outside the castle, a louder version of the chime signified the opening of the front gate, and, while the hummingbirds combed their beaks through her curls, Wonderella watched as the children poured

through the entrance. They boarded the cars of a ferris wheel that arched to the clouds and dove deep into a subterranean world of glittering lights and warm smells of fruit and cinnamon. They filled small boats that twisted through narrow rivers and slipped off waterfalls leaving the children drenched with laughter. They gathered around familiar characters for autographs and photographs—Betty the Mermaid, Arthur the Merman and their daughter, Guppy. Gloriana the Faery Queen. Dwayne the Ogre. And Adironda, the superteacher.

“Is today egg day?” Wonderella asked of her trusted assistant, Constantina, holding a golden notebook.

“It is.”

“I thought so.” Wonderella smiled because the egg children were some of the most gleeful of all the children who visited Dazzle World. Throughout the park, they scurried about from place to place, their eyes wide, their strawberry blond curls blowing about their faces.

“And where are they staying, Constantina?”

Constantina checked her notes. “Most are from right here in Dazzle Town, but those who are not have rooms with their parents in the Warm Springs Inn.”

“Do this for me, Constantina. Send each of the egg children at the inn a box of my special chocolate-covered kiwis.”

Constantina nodded as she jotted down a note in her golden book. “Of course, your majestic-ness. Is there anything else that you’d like me to do?”

Wonderella glanced at the ornate clock by her bed. “That’s all for now. It’s about time for me to make an appearance, isn’t it?” While Constantina helped her put on her train, Wonderella took one more look out the window at the children gathered before the castle, waiting for her to emerge.

“Oh, my,” Constantina said. “Look at that one at the back.”

Wonderella’s eyes scanned the crowd of exuberant children watching Mario juggle eight fishbowls of fish. “Which one?”

“That.” Constantina pointed over Wonderella’s shoulder. “The hard-boiled one.”

Wonderella dreaded finding out exactly at whom Constantina was pointing. She knew what that meant. “Please tell me he’s behaving.”

“It’s a she. And she’s standing too close to the girl in front of her.”

Wonderella let out a sigh just at the moment that someone knocked a liquid lollipop from one girl’s hand, spilling a bright blue liquid all over the glittery sidewalk. Lines formed on the little girl’s forehead and her eyes widened in disbelief. “Now, I see her.” You can always tell a hard-boiled by the one-sided smile.

While grounds people cleaned up the mess, Wonderella hurried to finish dressing. She didn’t take the elevator but went immediately to descend the stairs. She arrived so abruptly that the bubble managers almost didn’t have enough time to release the hundreds of multi-colored bubbles from the pond just as Wonderella stepped up onto the stage.

Wonderella never grew tired of the cheers that rose from the crowds of children once they saw her, and she clapped at them, as well, to let them know they were welcome. “What a beautiful day you’ve chosen to come, boys and girls! A wondrous sky above us, not too hot or cold. You’re all surrounded by so many friends.” The children looked around, sometimes appearing as if they weren’t really friends with any person nearby.

“As the sovereign ruler of Dazzle World, I am so glad to have you here with me.” She daintily cleared her throat. “I want to make sure that you all respect each other as you spend the day here. Remember what I always say...”

The children did not hesitate to finish her thoughts. “Make sure to smile! Make sure to be nice! Make sure to make everyone happy you’re near! We’re glad that you’re here!” They finished off with an eruption of applause.

“I so love your spirit. Now go and enjoy your...”

One of the egg children fell forward, then popped back up, then forward again, then almost back on his feet... And behind him, another wore a crooked smile.

“Hmmm,” Wonderella grumbled softly.

By the time the Dazzle World peacekeepers reached the area and were able to set the boy right again, the boiled egg had disappeared.

Throughout the day, at least once an hour, the problems continued: stolen pretzels, cotton candy wrapped around strawberry braids, and a close call when an egg child found herself tied to a myriad of multi-colored balloons. She was retrieved in the air with a net from a castle turret.

At the end of the day, Wonderella was beside herself with annoyance. She knew what she had to do.

After the gates closed, and night began to fall, and the twinkling stars above the park dimmed to reawaken at dusk the following day, a group of hummingbirds carried a black outfit and laid it across the bed while a second group lifted off Wonderella’s green dress. In only a few moments, Wonderella, dressed all in black, had transformed herself.

The castle was completely dark and empty, just as Constantina had arranged, when Wonderella stealthily made her way down the stairs, moving like a cat on two legs and sometimes balancing on only one. When she reached the bottom floor of the castle, she went to the secret door and slipped outside.

Before going any further, Wonderella the ninja paused for just a moment to take in the view of the row of inns just beyond the park's border. One by one, the lights in the windows began to dim, and that's when Wonderella moved forward, slowly and carefully.

When she heard the gurgling of water, Wonderella knew she had reached her destination. She slipped through an open window into the dimly lit lobby, navigating the shadows past the front desk and the night manager who'd predictably nodded off. She scaled the stairs to the 17<sup>th</sup> floor, and went down the hall toward the room that Constantina had told her was where the mischievous hard boiled was staying for the night. But before she could reach it, she heard the low squeal as a door in front of her opened into the dark hallway.

A shadowed figure carrying something long and thick approached her and Wonderella immediately acted.

"Ha ya!" She jumped up and popped her bare foot against the figure with a gentle nudge. As Wonderella's feet returned to the floor, she felt badly when she heard the 'crack.' She twirled her glittery num chucks over the both of them and revealed the hard boiled girl lying on her back, grasping tightly a baguette of bread. "Are you all right?"

"What are you doing here?" the girl asked as she used the baguette to hoist herself up and lean against the wall.

Wonderella reached for the hall night light and flipped it on. "What were you doing leaving your room? Do your parents know that you're out?"

"They're downstairs in the hot tub." The girl took a bite of the bread.

Of course, Wonderella thought to herself. Where else would hard-boiled parents be? "Why do you have that bread? I thought you had a weapon."

“I always carry bread to protect myself in case there are people who want to attack me in my room.” She took a larger bite of the bread without seeming to be afraid of anything that had just happened.

“I’m not interested in attacking you...what’s your name?”

“Ariella. Ariella Pendergast.”

“You do know that dazzlers never talk with their mouth full. Right Ariella?”

The little girl nodded and continued to eat the bread. Wonderella stifled the thought that she was making her own egg salad sandwich, especially when she noticed that Ariella’s shell was cracked just on the side of her head and one small piece stuck out. “Ariella, I’m the Dazzle Land ninja, who talks to children who bully other children. The park’s sovereign, Wonderella, sent me here to let you know that she doesn’t like it when some children don’t treat other children well.”

“Oh. Is that so? Well, I thought this was a place where we could all have fun.”

Without thinking, Wonderella reached out and plucked off the spare piece of eggshell.

“Ow!” Ariella pressed her hand against the side of her head.

“Now it can’t be that painful. It was about to come off on its own.”

Ariella narrowed her eyes. “Does Wonderella know that you’re not very nice to children?”

“Wonderella is...uh, fine with...uh, what I do. Maybe I was a little harsh this time. But I want you to learn, Ariella, that you should treat others more nicely. Don’t spoil it for them. Most other egg children aren’t as resilient as you are. Do you understand?”

Ariella snorted. “I guess.”

Wonderella set aside her annoyance at the girl's tone. "If you promise to be better, I won't banish you from the park. And I won't tell your parents." She pulled a folded piece of paper from her sleeve.

Ariella's eyes surveyed the ceiling as if her gaze were following a flying insect above her head. "You'd tell my parents?"

"I'd have to tell them. Would you rather do what I ask?"

Ariella thought for a moment and then said reluctantly, "Okay."

"And one more thing. Tomorrow you must apologize to and buy snacks for all of those children that you bothered yesterday. Here, I have their names and room numbers." Wonderella stared intently through the slit in her mask. "I will check and make sure you've done what I ask. Do you agree?"

Ariella snorted once again, but she did take the paper. "Okay."

"Good. So if you make everything right for the children you didn't treat well, I...I mean, Wonderella...will invite you to come to the stage and dance the afternoon rumba with her. Would you like that?"

Ariella's face lit up as Wonderella helped her to her feet. "Really? I love dancing!"

"I thought you might. Wonderella will be looking for you tomorrow, then."

Ariella looked over the paper. "I can't wait."

The next day, Wonderella, dressed once again in her usual princess dress, watched over the children and, as she promised, Ariella made good on her commitment to apologize and help those she'd wronged. Constantina verified that she'd done everything that Wonderella asked.

So Wonderella fulfilled her promise, as well. At the stroke of two, she called several children up from the gathered crowds, including Ariella, and as the band played, the children

began to dance. All of the children, except Ariella, were able to stay on the stage, their arms outstretched and their small egg bodies moving from side to side. Unlike the others, Ariella's arms flailed about like agitated serpents and at times she rolled backward and off the stage. She didn't seem to mind, though, because each time she shook herself off, hoisted herself back on the stage, and continued to dance.

“Only a hard boiled could do that,” said Constantina.

“You are so right, Constantina. Only a hardboiled is that tough.” Wonderella smiled and waved and gave a thumbs up to the resilient dancer.

Ariella rolled around the stage one more time, and continued even as the others slowed. The experience did not leave her unscathed though. As she twirled around striking the pillars holding up the stage like a pinball, she wore a web of cracks all through her shell. Even so, she had not a care in the world.