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Summary:

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Word Count 463

“A hard-working, educated girl—homeschooled by her father—[Danielle] wants more than anything to restore the just order of her ‘economy’ (in the ancient Greek sense of ‘managing the home’).”

Freedom in Film: *Ever After* (1998)

By Kathryn Hickok

If you are looking for an uplifting summer movie for the teenage girls in your life, [*Ever After: A Cinderella Story* \(1998\)](#) provides a thought-provoking twist on the classic fairytale. While director Andy Tennant's plot follows the traditional story, *Ever After* also explores themes of family loyalty, economic interdependence, social justice, and the rewards of hard work.

In a refreshing departure from predictable Hollywood storylines, Drew Barrymore's tough and brave Cinderella (“Danielle”) combines a loving respect for her family's heritage with a can-do approach to solving problems. A hard-working, educated girl—homeschooled by her father—she wants more than anything to restore the just order of her “economy” (in the ancient Greek sense of “managing the home”).

Orphaned young, Danielle does not dream of escaping work. Rather, she defines “happily ever after” as the restoration of her family's estate to the prosperity it enjoyed under her parents. Like them, she takes pride in the farm and regrets it can't reach its potential under her stepmother (Anjelica Huston), who has no interest in running what is essentially the family business. Danielle tries to be a good steward of the patrimony she should have inherited, even though her freedom to act independently is limited.

In Danielle's world, the feudal agrarian society of the Middle Ages begins to meet the mercantile economy of the Renaissance. Forward-thinking Danielle masters the business acumen needed to keep the estate financially afloat; but her primary motivations are rooted in the medieval values of family loyalty, mutual obligation to others, and fulfilling one's duty. Danielle considers “family” to include servants with multigenerational ties to the household. She wants to succeed for the sake of those whose livelihoods depend on her, as well as for herself.

An admirer of the English humanist Sir Thomas More, Danielle's father bequeathed to her an inquiring mind and a social conscience. While Danielle's [*Utopia*](#)-inspired prescriptions for the improvement of society have a fairytale simplicity, her instincts are basically good. She lives the Golden Rule with humility and charm. Her interactions with others show she believes in behaving with dignity and respect toward all whose various roles in society together make the world go 'round.

(over)



Of course, *Ever After* is a fairytale, so while it's set in 16th-century France, the film isn't without anachronisms and fictionalized historical events. (Obviously, the son of King Francis I didn't marry a girl named Danielle, sorry to say.) But if you are looking for a delightful story about filial love, the blessing of honest work, and the ability of virtue to attract the right man, *Ever After* offers positive lessons, while entertaining the whole family.

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