

How Taylor Swift's fairy tale came true



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Once upon a time, on a Pennsylvania Christmas tree farm, there lived a gangly little girl who liked to write songs. Bullied a bit at school, she danced around in front of the mirror in her bedroom, dreaming she'd be a superstar one day, wearing gorgeous clothes, her name on everyone's lips.

Obviously, this particular little girl's fairy godmother was listening.

Regardless of music preference, the name on a staggering number of lips these days is [Taylor Swift](#) -- even if it's uttered with an exaggerated eye roll. Even for those who dislike her songs, there's no denying the effect she's having not only in the country (music) she calls home, but on the pop culture globe as well. As of March, Swift's worldwide album sales topped 20 million, and that's in addition to four Grammys, six CMAs and 70-plus other glamorous paperweights she's collected in the past few years.

So what is it about this poised and pretty 21-year-old with the OK voice that's captured the world's hearts and dollars? Part of it is that she is indeed preternaturally poised and pretty, but there's also that Swift is a talented songwriter, stage performer and, most importantly, a gifted confessionalist. There have been very few artists who manage to reveal themselves so excessively without becoming overexposed and eventually pathetic.

But that's the genius at work here: Swift tells you nearly everything about what she's feeling not only through her songs, but in copious video blogs and chatty interviews with Ellen DeGeneres. Yet, we know few factual details about the genesis of those emotions, especially now that she's older

and dating famous men instead of schoolboys. Not that it's any of our business, but hey -- if your business is selling art that's primarily about your personal life, well ... you can't blame us for being interested.

At the risk of incurring the high-pitched flaming wrath of her passionate, largely pubescent fan base, there's a reasonable amount of evidence to show that Swift's greatest gift isn't her voice; it's her intelligence. It's the thing that's enabled her to thrive after being hit with the kind of nuclear stardom that would level the average human in a mushroom cloud of fame, wealth, and paparazzi.

Those smarts are also the backbone of her songwriting: "Our song is a slamming screen door/Sneakin' out late/Tappin' on your window/When we're on the phone and you talk real slow/'Cause it's late and your mama don't know." It's not Dylan, but it is the perfect snapshot of teen romance with a great melody that Swift penned, by the way, when she was in ninth grade.

From all accounts, Swift's "Speak Now" show is a ball gown and ballerina spectacle, with multiple costume changes and elaborate sets, just like that young girl in Pennsylvania dreamed about only a few years ago. It's enough to make a feminist mother cringe (as one did prominently via the Huffington Post recently) until she realizes that it took one very smart, hard-working cookie to turn this frothy fantasy into reality.

If you were lucky enough to score tickets to Swift's sold-out show Tuesday at the [Rose Garden](#), make sure the school-age female going with you knows that, too.