

## Prince Charming

Prince Charming urged his horse into a canter guiding it carefully through the heavily timbered woods. The morning mist clutched at his tunic. The air was damp and cold and his horse's breath steamed. The Prince was in a hurry. He had heard that a very suitable young lady was specifically seeking a Prince, for a long-term commitment. This was exciting news as Princes had become less desirable in recent times due to their unpopular views regarding people of non-monarchist backgrounds, formerly called serfs, and women in general. It had been widely accepted that an individual's place in the kingdom was pre-ordained via divine providence and royal friendships, however this view was being progressively replaced by a belief in luck. A notion which was clearly laughable. In particular, Prince Charming was somewhat "on the nose" due to an inappropriate fancy dress costume he had worn at the Royal Ball, which he and the Earl of Black Marsh had thought would be hilarious. They were wrong. Towards the end of the same evening he had drunkenly wrestled a shoe from a young lady hastening to leave the ball so that he could do a "shoey" to end the evening. Unfortunately, he had smashed the shoe on the terrazzo tiles in the foyer and he and the Earl had fallen to the floor in fits of laughter. The well publicized encounter, and the resulting furore, completely overlooked the obvious unsuitability of glass for shoe making.

He slowed his horse at a shallow river crossing coaxing it to wade slowly through the water, as he pondered the complications ahead. Generally, these endeavors had complex histories and a number of onerous pre-conditions which needed to be met. They were often tricky and dangerous, commonly involving spells or amphibians. Only the previous week, he had narrowly missed out on a suitable bride when the hay bale he was standing on caught alight whilst he was dueling with a rather angry dragon. Prince Charming had narrowly escaped with his life, but the young lady had been less lucky. He still had nightmares regarding that encounter and his good fortune.

This scenario seemed very promising. The young lady in question was a genuine Princess, which was bound to make mother happy, which was a rarity after father had taken his fifth wife claiming God was OK with it. His father had been a major factor in the population's growing negative sentiment towards the monarchy. Whilst he had continued with the much loved public executions, which formed part of the rich and vibrant arts and culture initiative he had fostered, the masses had become less positive after the beheading of his third wife and sensed a certain amount of convenience in the resulting spectacle. Misreading the situation, father had added new initiatives such as drawing and quartering, but ultimately audiences continued to decline.

She was reputedly gorgeous, and whilst that sounded good, experience had shown that there was often a chasm between reputation and reality. The task ahead seemed simple enough. She had been imprisoned in a tall tower by an evil sorcerous, which was clearly a less risky proposition than a dragon. All potential suitors needed to do was coax the young lady to drop her long hair down so they could climb it and free her. He had wondered how this would work in reality, a concept he rarely had to contemplate. He felt that he was likely to weigh more than the Princess, unless reputation was proved wrong, and surely this would cause her excruciating pain or she would plummet to her death or potentially both.

Rapunzel was not really a Princess, that was a minor embellishment added to make her more attractive to suitors. Her mother, during her pregnancy, had developed a craving for rapunzel, a herb which grew in the garden of their next door neighbour who happened to be an evil sorceress. At this time evil sorceresses were quite common and very active, as were evil step-mothers and there was definitely a glut of both Princes and Princesses. In order to satisfy her mother's cravings Rapunzel's father crept in each night and stole some of the herb. The evil sorceress lay in wait one evening and

caught Rapunzel's father red-handed and in retribution she would take Rapunzel once she was born. Retribution was an extremely important legal concept enforced throughout the kingdom. Whilst there was much discussion in the village, it was generally acknowledged that given the evil sorceress had caught Rapunzel's father in the act it could have been much worse than taking his first born child, although no one was able to articulate how. Rapunzel's parents accepted their position and resettled and presumably lived happily ever after. As Rapunzel grew into a beautiful woman the evil sorceress, being a little worse for wear herself, became very jealous and decided to imprison Rapunzel in a walled tower. She was able to visit Rapunzel by getting her to "let down" her hair which had grown very long over the years.

The situation was exactly as described and the Prince had an extremely positive feeling as he asked Rapunzel to let down her golden hair, which she did. It was fine and soft and very glossy. He proceeded to climb.

As Prince Charming hurtled, most probably, to his death, Rapunzel began to query whether she had asked the right questions during her last hair appointment. Sure the hair extensions had required a lot less brushing to retain their lustre and they were very fine and soft, but she had not asked Chanel about their strength.