Francesca

Rapunzel's Revenge

Look, I'm not dumb. I have eyes. I can see. I realize that I am 17 years old, and do not have a single suitor. It's ridiculous! I'm the youngest of four princesses, the other three all happily married and either ruling or going to rule other kingdoms. I'm the only one left. Whoever marries me, becomes king. So why can't I get a date?

It's beginning to get to me. At first, I thought it was my fault, you know. I went through that whole "What's wrong with me?" faze after my oldest sister Snow got married. I went through the "I want to be cursed too!" phase, and tried to piss off fairies after my middle sister Aurora got married. I went through the "Kissing everything that moves" phase after my sister Ruth married a prince who had been turned into a frog. And now, after a common peasant girl named Ella married a prince after she showed up at his party in a pretty dress, I'm going through the "Don't get mad, get even" phase. And this one is here to stay.

I know why I can't get a date. I know what kind of girls the princes go for these days. It's the beauties, isn't it? I mean, let's think about this seriously. Who did Prince Phillip marry? My sister, Aurora. What did the people of the kingdom call her? Sleeping Beauty! What about the Beast Prince? Who did he marry? A peasant girl named Belle! What did they call her? Beauty! Beauty and the Beast! So, what does a princess do when she isn't exactly beautiful?

So, that's number one in the Reasons Why Princess Rapunzel Can't Get a Date. She's not beautiful.

Number two: I can take care of myself.

I'm actually quite smart. Really I am. I've gotten into my share of trouble as a kid, even now, and I can always find my way out of it. And what kind of girls do the princes go for? The Damsels In Distress. I mean, my sister, Snow White, she had it hard for a while. My mother, her stepmother, totally hated her, then tried to kill her, then she got kidnapped by dwarves. Then she eats a poisoned apple. But can she get out any of these messes on her own? No, she's gotta wait for the prince to wake her up! Stupid girl, but she's happily married now, with a baby on the way. So, what's a smart-not-beautiful girl to do?

Number three: I'm not in any danger.

I wasn't cursed at birth. I don't live on top of a glass hill. There's no ogre after me. No evil wizard is trying to make me his bride. So, even if I needed a prince to get me out of a dangerous situation, I don't have a dangerous situation to need rescuing from.

Number 4: I'm not the prize in any life-or-death contest.
That always brings in the boys, doesn't it? To be fair, the hot princes never exactly win those competitions, it's always the innocent stable boy, but a man's a man, isn't it?

Well, I've been thinking, and I've devised a way to combine all of these things, that will result in a guy for me. Everything's set. All I need now is a little luck.

Tonight, there's going to be a huge banquet in the grand hall to celebrate my 17th birthday. As princess, I sit on the left hand of the king, my father. My mother sits on his right hand. All the nobles and other royals sit on tables on either end of the banquet hall. All the royals will be attending, and all the servants will be busy serving us. So I think it's safe to assume the entire castle will be empty.

I sneak into the banquet hall at two in the afternoon. It's empty. Thank God. I lock the door behind me and put my plan into action.

I stack chairs on top of tables, and push the tables into the center of the room. I tie up my dress around my waste, and carefully, carefully, climb to the top of this pile. I take out about fifty yards of invisible twine and hang it -- carefully, carefully -- down the length of the banquet hall. When I reach the end, I open the door, and continue hanging the twine down the hallway, until I reach the broom closet at the end of the hall. I tie off the twine, and cut the excess.

Now, working quickly, I take out a piece of candle wax, and jam it at the foot of the door, so it can't close all the way; it's imperative this door stay open. I run back to my room and, making sure none of my maids or ladies-in-waiting are around, and take out the dummy I've been hiding in the back of my closet. It took me nearly a month to make. Basically, it's a scarecrow, dressed in a long black dress. I painted a face on it and attached more twine to the mouth and arms so I could move them. It is a giant puppet.

I sneak the puppet back into the broom closet where I hang her up on the twine. I push her way in the back so if, on the off chance, someone should open the door, they won't see her. I run the twine attached to her arms and mouth down the hall, on the ceiling again, into the banquet hall, around the edges of the wall, and behind the canopy that is hung over the royal table, which I have made sure will be covered with a table cloth. There are six pieces of twine sticking out from under the canopy. One to move the puppet forward, one to move her back, one for the mouth, one for each arm, and one to destroy her after it's all over.

I survey my creation proudly. In theory, it should work. I've been practicing manipulating the puppet in my room for months beforehand, where there's a similar network of wires rigged up. I think I've figured out everything that could go wrong, and taken steps to make sure it doesn't. There's nothing to do now but wait.
That night, the banquet is in full swing. Everyone is the castle seems to be assembled either here, or in the kitchens. I am resplendent in a fine dress of blue silk. From a distance, I am the perfect princess.

Of course, no one notices the wires threaded from behind the canopy, up my skirt and down my sleeves, hidden in the lace at the wrists of my gown, but that's beside the point. I eat demurely and applaud politely at the entertainment. I talk to my father and the other nobles, and try and still my shaking hands. It takes every ounce of willpower I have to sit still, act weird, and wait until midnight.

At midnight exactly when the clock begins to chime, I pull on the wire that move the puppet forward. I encounter no resistance, luckily. The door of the closet is still open. Through the door of the banquet hall, I can see the puppet moving forward. I pull the string slowly, smoothly. In the dim candlelight, it looks like she's floating. She floats towards the banquet hall.

Just before she enters, a countess stands up and screams pointing at my puppet. "Look!" she shouts. The entire banquet hall turns to stare. I look up, and look properly frightened. Actually, I don't have to act much. She really looks scary, floating there like that.

The king stands up. "What specter dares to enter here?" he shouts. I let out a little yelp, and bury my face in his side.

"I am the sorceress Morgan," says the puppet. Of course, it's really me who said it. Did I mention I've learn ventriloquism? "I am here to claim what is my right."

"What do you want?" asks my father. I pull on the string that operates the puppets right arm, and make her point to me.

"Your daughter," the puppet says. I scream. Father holds me tighter.

"And what makes you think you have a right to her?" he bellows. I pull the strings that operate her arms, to make her fold them.

"In the past, when the Queen was with child, she developed quite the unusual craving, didn't she?" My mother's eyes have gone wide. She tries to push the carrots off her plate. "And what did she crave?" continues the puppet. "Vegetables! Green vegetables! It was all she wanted! It was all she ever wanted! To this day, all she eats is vegetables!" It was true. I've heard the cooks complaining many times about how difficult it is to provide for the Queen's vegetable habit.

"So what did her valiant prince do at midnight one night, when there were no vegetables left in the entire castle?" This is true as well. "He sneaks over the wall of a neighboring castle, and steals my vegetables!" My father did do that, but that house was abandoned by then. I heard another maid tell me this part of the story. "But little did he know then, that
I lived in that castle, and my vegetables are enchanted." The queen gasps. I pull the string to make the puppet turn to her.

"Don't worry for yourself, Highness, the vegetables had no effect on you. No, they only affected your unborn child, Princess Rapunzel."

"Oh no!" I shout. Father holds me even tighter.

"Do not fear, child, I will deal with the witch." He says to me. He then turns on the witch.

"What did you do to my daughter?" he thunders. This is going remarkably well.

" Nothing! Absolutely nothing!" she says. I'm particularly proud of this part. It took me a while to make up, but I think it's pretty good. "Those vegetables were a prototype for a cure for consumption that I was working on! They were the only ones I had! If you had waited one more day, I would have known if they worked or not, and perhaps your kingdom would not be beset by this plague!" My mother put her head in her hands. Her sister died of consumption. I know this is affecting her worse than it is affecting anyone else, and I feel bad for her, but a princess has gotta do what a princess has gotta do.

"I have been observing the princess for 17 years, and I have noticed one thing; she is immune to nearly every disease." This too is true. I have had no sicknesses worse than stomachaches in 17 years. "I can conclude my vegetables worked, can't it? But I want to make sure. So in return for stealing my vegetables, and ruining my spell, and exposing your kingdom to the horrors of disease, I want your daughter." My mother is crying now.

"No! No! You cannot have her! Take me instead!" I make the puppet shake her head.  

"You are useless to me. I want the princess so I can study her, experiment on her. Since she is immune to most diseases, I can test my spells on her without worrying about killing her. She will be perfectly safe with me."

"It will not happen!" says my father.

"I think it will. If the princess is not delivered to me by noon tomorrow, I will infect the entire kingdom with a disease, which I have just created. Perhaps a cure will be found, perhaps not. Will you take that risk?" Now it is my turn to talk.

"I won't let you endanger our people like that, Father. I will go with the witch." Father takes my head in his hands.  
"Are you sure, Rapunzel?"

"Yes, Father." I say, like a good little daddy's girl. "It is my royal duty."

"Then we are agreed?" asks the witch. I see tears running down Father's face.
"Then we are agreed. The princess is yours."

"You will put her in your finest carriage and deliver her to my castle at noon tomorrow."
I pull the other string and the witch sails out backwards into the broom closet. I pull the last string, the string tied to the stick that keeps her together, and the witch-puppet collapses.

Phase 1 is complete.

The next day, I dress in my finest gown and sit in the kitchen gardens, looking sad, as I wait for noon. At eleven o'clock, I leave the garden, and say goodbye to my mother and father.

"This is all my fault," says father. "I should not let you go. My men can handle this witch."

"No, Father," I say, "I am not afraid. It is my royal duty. Perhaps I will be rescued."

My father is crying again. "You are such a clever girl, Rapunzel. Be good."

"Thank you, Father." I say. You have no idea just how clever I can be.

When the carriage leaves me behind at the abandoned castle, the driver turns to me. "Highness, may I say I admire your sacrifice greatly. If there's anything I can do to help you in any way, let me know."

"Thank you, good sir. But there is nothing that can be done. I must go on alone from here on." I take my bags and enter the castle of the "witch."

This place has been abandoned for 20 years. It looks haunted though, and it's the perfect place for a witch. Inside, however, instead of the abandoned dust-covered rooms you'd expect to find, is a comfortable and livable suite of rooms.

Rapunzel the Genius strikes again. Every night I've been sneaking away, and cleaned this place up, bringing plenty of comforts and necessities. I've cleaned the place up and repaired it, so it's actually quite nice. I can live here quite comfortably for some time. Which reminds me, I've gotta take care of the tower room.

See, this castle isn't much to look at, really. It's not more than an extremely large house. Its one distinguishing feature is the tower at its north side. The tower is about ten stories high, and is made up of one room, which I've also fixed up quite nicely. This is where the poor princess is being confined at the mercy of the witch.

I have a lot of work to do.
First, the dummy. I've made another with dummy; this one is more of a marionette, which I've locked in a closet in my tower room. I carefully hide the dummy in the bushes by the tower, ready for me at any time. You never know when the witch will have to make an appearance.

I thought about it a long time, and I realized I have to be confined, as if I'm a prisoner, so the princes will come faster. And I can't have them going through the castle, because what will they do when the witch is nowhere to be found? So, I thought about the tower. After all, what do princes love more than a tower? With the princess confined in the tower, the only way to get to her is by climbing it. And boy, how princes love climbing high towers.

I go out into the garden, and take careful attendance of the vegetables in the garden. Lots of corn, lots of lettuce, lots of carrots. They grow pretty well; I of course have been taking good care of them. I have to eat somehow.

I pick an ear of corn and take it into the kitchen. I shuck it, boil it and eat my first meal in my new home. I notice the silk that spurts out of the end. It's soft, almost like hair. Subconsciously, my fingers braid it into a thick rope. Now there's nothing to do but wait.

Two weeks later, I'm waiting in my tower room, keeping on the lookout for princes. None have showed up so far, but I don't have anymore work to do, and there's nothing better to do. I've been eating vegetables more than my mother has. I think I overlooked one thing about this plan. It's boring in here. Besides cooking and cleaning, there's nothing to do. I've made 67 corn husk dolls, 36 potato prints, seven sachets of potpourri, 12 pomander balls and a rope of corn silk about 50 feet long.

Over the hills I spot a brown horse.

I can't believe it, my first prince! My first prince.

I stick my head out of the tower and start to sing. I sing as loudly and as sweetly as I can. The horse stops in front of my tower. It's not a prince after all. It's the driver from the carriage.

"Hello!" he whispers, "Your Highness? Is that you singing?" Oh, great.

"Who is that down there?"

"It's me, Roland. I drove you here two weeks ago. I thought perhaps you could use a bit of help, so I borrowed a horse and rode over, and brought you some food. Are you all right up there? Has the witch been very cruel to you?"
"The witch has imprisoned me in this tower, except when she does her experiments on me!"

"Poor princess! How am I to help you?" I pretend to think.

"What's in the basket?"

"Some food," he says. "I brought enough to last you for another week. In case, you know, the witch was only feeding you gruel." Oh God, thank you! I'm so sick of vegetables!

"Oh, thank God! Leave the food basket and ride off!"

"But princess, how will you get it? You said the witch always confines you to the tower."

Great. I didn't think of that. I pace around the tower room, trying to get an idea. "I can sneak in!" he says. No, he can't do that!

"No, that I'm afraid is impossible." I say. "The witch has sealed up the only entrances to the tower from inside the castle. There is no way of getting in or out of the tower."

"Has she sealed the door with magic?"

"Um…yes. Only she can open it." I pace around. Suddenly I see the rope of corn silk I've compulsively braided. It will just about reach the bottom of the tower. "Put the basket under the tower." The driver stares up at me quizzically, but he puts the basket under the tower. I lower my rope of corn silk.

"Tie the basket to this." He grabs the rope and runs his hands up and down it.

"Princess!" he says. "What has happened to your hair?" My hair? Oh, jeez, he thinks the rope is my hair!

I have to control my laughter. How ridiculous is that? It's obviously corn silk. But then again, what do royals know from corn silk, even royal drivers. And my hair is practically the same color as the corn silk. It IS the same color, as a matter of fact.

Then again, maybe this is a good idea. I mean, how did I expect to explain that I just happen to have a rope made of corn silk in my tower, and I haven't tried to use it to escape? Perhaps hair was the best thing to say it was. After all, I am living in a house with a witch. Perhaps I could work this to my advantage.

"The witch fed me a drug," I adlib. "It accidentally made my hair grow. Now just tie the basket to my hair." Wow, that sounds stupid. However, the driver isn't too bright, and ties the basket to my "hair." I hold the corn silk to my head and pull it up. The rope holds! I haul of the basket of food and open it. Inside is a chicken. Oh, sweet chicken!
"Thank you so much!" I say, I throw down my gold ring to him. "Take this as thanks!" I pull off a chicken leg and sink my teeth into it. It hits me then that I cannot exist on vegetables until a prince rescues me. "Oh, sir driver!"

"My name's Roland," he says.

"Roland. Do you think you could come back next week? Only…at night. The witch goes off to do…whatever it is witches do at night, and I am alone. You took a great risk coming here during the day. I am surprised the witch didn't see you."

"Of course, Highness. And may I inform your father you are well?"

"Yeah, sure. Tell him whatever you want. Thanks," I say, my mouth full of succulent strawberries.

"Goodbye, Highness."

A week later and not a single prince. They should have been here by now. At least Roland's coming today. More food is a distraction at least from the long hours of doing nothing.

Of course, I haven't been completely idle. I've reinforced my corn silk rope so it's even stronger, and actually braided it into my hair. Under close scrutiny, you'd notice it wasn't really hair, but at night, if you don't suspect anything, it looks exactly like my own.

Roland rides up on his brown horse. HE stops under my tower waving the basket of food.

"Hey! Princess! Let down you hair again!"

"Hello, Roland!" I unpin the rope from my head, and lower it slowly to the ground. Roland ties the basket to it, and I haul it up.

"Princess, I have news from the castle!"

"Oh, brilliant, thanks, what's the news?" I say, stuffing my mouth full of chocolate cake.

"Your father has offered your hand in marriage to any man who can rescue you from the tower." Finally!

"When has he issued this degree?" I say, trying to sound bored.

"Just yesterday."

"Good," I whisper to myself, "the princes will start coming soon. Thanks, Roland, I'm very grateful. If you hear any more news, you'll tell me, right?"
"Sure."

"And make sure all the princes know to come at night, because I'm alone then, all right? Tell my father that. It's very important."

"Sure."

"And make sure they know not to try and go through the castle doors. The witch has them all magically trapped. They've got to get me out of this tower. Tell him that too."

"Sure." He says. He turns to get on his horse, but then turns back to me "Um, Princess?"

"Yes?" I say. He opens his mouth like he wants to say something, but shakes his head dejectedly.

"Never mind." Roland gets back on his horse and rides away.

Three more weeks pass. Every Sunday, Roland delivers my food. We talk a little and he brings me any news, but besides that, I've had nothing to do. My corn silk rope has grown to nearly a hundred feet. I've washed it and rewashed it. I picked some flowers from the garden and braided those into the rope as well. Staring at myself in the mirror, I realize that I look quite convincing. I look better than ever with my newfound long hair. Rapunzel, princess with the golden hair. That's what they'll call me, when I'm married. Rapunzel, the beauty in the tower. Rapunzel, the princess who should open a dating service if this works out!

I can't resist laughing at this. Imagine if all the maidens in the land shut themselves up in towers to attract men. How ridiculous would that be? Rapunzel's dating service: Single and sick of it? For the low, low price of 20 gold pieces, rent out my tower, grow your hair, and watch the princes flock in! If you don't score an earl or better, your money back! I laugh. I must tell Roland next time he comes; he'd think that was funny.

Oh, wait; Roland doesn't know the extent of my genius.

I stare at my face in the mirror. Perhaps I shouldn't have done this. For the first time I feel a little guilty worrying my parents like this. I mean, they really think that I was --

In the mirror, I can see the reflection of a white horse coming over a hill.

This time, it's really my first prince.

I run to the window, and let some of my hair fall out, and I sing as sweetly as I can. The horse is quite close now. I can't see the rider's face yet, but he's dress finely. It must be a prince this time.
The white horse stops outside of my window. I sing even louder.

"Who is that singing atop the tower?" asks the rider of the horse. I clear my throat and put on my best regal voice.

"Tis I, the Princess Rapunzel, confined here by an evil witch, who abuses me terribly."

"Prithee, how did you get up there, fair Princess? For verily, maidens do not go about in towers." Did I mention I hate the way princes talk?

"Because an evil witch confined me here." I say. I think I said that already.

"And you are the famed Princess Rapunzel then?"

"Yes! I said that already!"

The prince draws his sword. "I shall rescue you then!" he cries.

"Thank you, good sir! I shall be eternally grateful!" The prince bows, and poses with his sword out. He stands like that for about a minute.

"Um… maiden?"

"Yes?"

"How am I to do that?" Well, let's see, you can get a ladder and climb the tower, you can get a grappling hook and climb the tower, or you can get a rope and climb the tower. But if I tell him how to do it, it won't count for being rescued. And after devising this ingenious man trap, I demand to be actually rescued. I can get down whenever I want.

"Surely, prince I don't know that," I say in my most sickly-sweet voice. "But you can't go through the castle for the witch has it magically booby-trapped."

The prince looks excited. "That's it! I'll storm the castle!" Moron! Didn't I just tell you not to do that?

"No, good sire." I say, controlling my anger. "You can't do that. It's magically booby-trapped." I pretend to think. Then I snap my finger triumphantly. "I know! You can climb the tower!" He gets excited again.

"Yes! That's it! I'll climb the tower!" It sounds like he just thought of that. He pauses for another minute, then puts down his sword and looks up at me. "But I can't do that now!" He tends to speak with these implied exclamation marks. "I know! I shall return home, and I shall…." Bring a ladder, bring a ladder. "Consult my astrologers!" He jumps back on his horse. I put my head in my hands. He's obviously going to need a little help at this. "Fear not, Princess I shall return."
The prince rides off.

Another week passes, and no sign of the thick prince. Perhaps this trap is too ingenious. Perhaps there isn't a way to get me out. I shouldn't judge the prince yet. Maybe I made this trap too impenetrable.

I can see Roland riding up on his horse. Funny how I've started to look forward to his visits.

"Roland?" I ask as he ties the basket to my hair, "any news from the castle?"

"Not really." He says. "What about you? What is the witch doing?"

"Oh, not much. She leaves me alone basically, though she does come to see me now and then." There is a silence.

"Oh, OK. Well, I'll see you next week, princess." He turns to get on his horse.

"Roland, wait!" I call. He turns. "You don't have to go, just yet." I say, "I mean, if you're not busy or anything, you can stay and talk to me for a while. It's lonely atop this tower." Roland smiles and sits down under the tower. He's very handsome, in a common sort of way.

"You know, Roland, my first prince showed up last week," I say.

"That's great," he says, though it sounds like he thinks it isn't. "What happened to him?"

"Well, he couldn't figure out how to get me down, so he went to consult his astrologers." Roland laughs. "What's so funny?" I say, surprised that I'm insulted.

"He couldn't figure out how to get you down! I should think it's rather obvious."

"Well, frankly, I think so too, but maybe he thought that was too easy. He could have over thought things. Princes are famous for always doing things the complicated way. It sounds better in the history books." Roland laughs again. "What's funny about that?"

"Sure, it sounds better in the history books, but what does it matter if you're not around to read them?" I never thought of things that way.

"So you're saying it's better to do things the simple way?"

"Of course. There's no point wasting time and energy on an overly complicated scheme that may not work, or can backfire, or can get you into a sticky situation, or even get you killed, when you can do things simply, and get the job done faster." I survey my tower.
According to Roland's standards, I am the perfect example of how not to get the job done. For the first time I begin thinking my man trap will not work.

"So, if you're so smart," I say, turning my anger on Roland, "how would you get me down?" Roland thinks a minute.

"Well, the thing that comes to mind is a rope. I suppose if I tied a stone to the rope, I could throw the rope to the top of the tower, and you could hold it steady while I climbed, but I wouldn't want to risk missing and hitting you, and it would be hard to hit that tiny window." He thinks. "But of course, you have a built-in rope up there, don't you?" I can't control a small amount of shock. How does he know about my corn silk rope?

"I do?" I say, stuttering.

"Of course you do. It's your hair, isn't it? It holds a food basket; it would hold a person, I suppose. If I wanted to reach you way up there, first thing I do is say 'Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your golden hair.' It is fabulous hair, by the way, Princess, yellow as corn. Then I could climb up easily. As long as it wouldn't hurt you, princess."

"No, I don't feel anything."

"Well, personally, I think that's the simplest solutions. And once I got to the top, we could cut your hair off, tie it to something and use it to climb down. You gotta remember, princess, keep it simple."

I can feel the beginnings of an idea already.

Climbing up my hair. Climbing up my hair. This sounds really ridiculous to me. I don't even know how Roland thought of it. I mean, the obvious one is to bring a ladder. But I suppose I forgot about the "witch." She'd see a prince riding up on a white horse with a ladder. And where would you get a ladder that's a hundred feet long? Or a rope one hundred feet long? And even if you got one, how would you throw it up? Maybe the hair is pretty obvious. Anyway, as Roland says, it's the simplest matter. I have a built-in rope right here. I know what I have to do.

I unpin my braid of corn silk. It's pretty strong. I don't think it will hold a person, though. I still think it's amazing it holds Roland's food basket. There's still a lot of corn in the garden, though. I could make the rope thicker.

I go back out into my garden and take the silk from the remainder of the corn, and braid.

And braid.

And braid.
The next night, the prince on the white horse shows up. This time I make sure to dangle all my hair out the window.

"Fair maiden!" he calls.

I wave my handkerchief. "Hello, my prince! Have you figured out how to get me down from this cruel prison?"

"Not exactly," he says. "I have consulted my astrologers, though."

Oh, great. Just what I need. I might as well give up now if astrologers are the best he can do. I would love to introduce this guy to Roland. Keep. It. Simple. I start combing my hair pointedly. "And what did they say?"

"They said that Jupiter is in the seventh house."

"So what does that mean?"

"I don't know. I thought you would." Oh, brilliant.

"Why would I know?"

"Because you live with a witch. I thought maybe she'd tell you something."

"She never tells me anything. She barely even visits anymore." An idea strikes me. "You know, she's beginning to notice that there are many princes coming after me, and has taken extra precautions. She sealed all the entrances to the tower from the inside, just yesterday. There's no way of getting up now." I shake out my hair and dangle it in front of his face. I sigh dramatically. "Oh, what am I to do?"

The prince sits at the base of the tower, and looks like he's really concentrating. "So how does she get up?" I want to just scream: See this rope, pretend it's my hair, and climb it. Climb the rope already!

"I don't know how she intends to get up here, but she intends to come tomorrow. I suppose I will find out then." The prince ponders for another minute. Then he stands up, triumphantly.

"I've got it!" he exclaims. I try and look joyful, though I doubt it matters at this height. "I'll show up tomorrow morning and watch to see how she gets up, then I'll do the same thing." I giggle in pride, while trying not to scream at him.

"Oh, what a clever prince you are! I shall be honored to be your bride! Just make sure to stay far away from the tower so she won't see you, OK?"
"For thee, fair maiden, anything." He takes out a rose and leaves it as the tower base. "Until tomorrow, fair princess!"

The next day, I'm ready. I had to go down and do a little work on my witch puppet. I was trying to think simple, but that plan backfired. Anyway, I think this will work. The prince rides up on his horse. I wave to him and gesture to a clump of trees. He stares at it for a minute in bafflement, then takes the hint and goes and hides. At nightfall, I put my plan into action.

Manipulating the strings from the inside of the tower room, I pull the witch dummy out of the bush. I can't see what I'm doing very well, so I'm a little nervous. I don't think the prince is stupid enough not to notice a witch who crashes into a tower. I didn't have enough time for rehearsals like I did with the first witch puppet, but you don't get any rehearsals in life.

When I feel the wires stop, I pull the cord that operates the witch's jaw. "Rapunzel, Rapunzel," I make her say, not bothering to keep my lips still. "Let down your golden hair!" I walk to the tower window carefully, making sure not to move the cords. I peer out. The witch is in the perfect position. I rigged another set of wires up to the trees in the garden. She'll be able to "climb" up my "hair" with no trouble at all.

I unpin the corn silk from around my head and let it down to the floor. I pull the witch onto it, make her wrap her arms and legs around it, and pull the puppet up. Mission accomplished.

I spend the longest two hours of my life in that tower room, holding a conversation with myself, half in the witch's voice, half in my own. When I deem enough time has passed, I rig the witch up to my hair, and lower her down. When she reaches the bottom, I throw down a lot of dirt and rocks, and pull the string that will dismantle her. Hopefully the prince will not notice and will not come to investigate. I stick my head out the window. Sure enough, I can see the prince on his horse riding away.

Coward. Any self-respecting prince would have come to kill his love's tormentor. Roland would have.

The prince does not return for three days. I hope I haven't scared him off. Perhaps he's at home thinking. I can see him sitting in his armchair in front of a fire, with pages and pages of notes, racking his brains with his astrologers beside him, as they try and figure out how to climb up the princess's hair. I laugh out loud at this.
"Princess!" calls a voice from below the tower. I run to the window. I wasn't expecting anyone. Oh, it's just Roland. Was it a week since he last came? I can't remember. You tend to lose track of time when each day is so uneventful.

"Hello, Roland!"

He drops off his food basket, and I lower my hair down.

"So how did the prince fare? You know, I'm quite surprised you're still up there. Surely he figured out how to get you down by now."

"No, not yet. I made it very clear to him, but he just rode off and hasn't come back."

Roland looks almost glad. "Well, maybe he wants to plan the wedding or something. Did you tell him how to get up there?"

"I practically rammed it down his throat."

"Maybe he can't climb."

"Maybe."

There is a silence.

"Roland." I say, complete with period. "Can you climb?"

"Pretty well. I learned when I was a kid. The town I came from was next to a waterfall, and we kids were always climbing the rocks to jump into the pool."

I laugh. I can almost see that. "I've never climbed a waterfall before. Is it fun?"

"Very." He smiles at me. "Shall I show you?"

"How?" He gets up.

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your golden hair." I unpin my braid, and let it down. He grabs the braid and winds it around his hands. "You are certain this won't hurt you?" No I'm not certain, but why not. Roland holds on tight to the rope of silk and I brace myself, ready to feel my hair being pulled out by the roots, corn silk or no, but surprisingly, all I feel is a little pulling. The pulling is getting closer. I open my eyes. Using nothing but my hair as a rope, Roland is climbing the tower.

He jumps off when he reaches the window, and I pull him through. For the first time, there is someone with me in my tower room. But it's not a prince. It's a royal driver.
"Well," he says, surveying the room with a critic's eye. "The witch sure is keeping you well." I feel a little guilty, for the first time about my witch thing. Perhaps, I should tell someone, just to ease my guilt.

"Roland?"

"Yes, princess?" He sits on my bed and begins playing with my braid. "You know, you're quite incredible. I must say I admire you. You willingly went with an evil witch to an uncertain fate to save your kingdom, you cheerfully bear your captivity which demonstrates your character, and you even manage to demonstrate your intelligence by making a rope of corn flax and passing it off as hair. Yes princess, you certainly are incredible."

My jaw drops. "You knew?"

He laughs. "Of course I knew. Maybe royals can't tell the difference between corn flax and hair, but peasants can."

I pull away from him and stare at the hair-rope in my mirror. "But I was so careful!" I say, tugging at it. "I made sure to clip off any rotting ends, I braided it into my real hair flawlessly, it's the exact texture of real hair; it's even the same color! I styled it, for God's sake! DO you know how long it takes to style this thing each morning? Not to mention walking around with a 70-foot train! It is flawless! How did you find out?"

He laughs. "It smelled like corn."

I lift the rope to my nose. What do you know; it does smell exactly like corn. I never thought of that. I feel betrayed for some reason. "But...how long have you known?"

"Since you lowered the rope down. I felt it, and knew it couldn't be real hair, because it was too dry. I smelt it, and I guessed it was corn silk. I figured, since it was braided, and the exact same color of your hair, that you wanted me to think it was your hair, so I pretended that I did. See, princess, simplicity?" He breaks the rope. "Can I have this part?" he says, suddenly, holding about a foot of braid.

"Why?" I ask, befuddled.

"Well, forgive me, princess, if its not my place, but over these past few weeks I've come to think of you as a friend, and since I was the first person to see through your hair ploy, I would like something to remember you by."

"We're friends?" I say. "I've never had a friend before."

"Then I'll be your first. So what do you say, can I have the corn hair?"

"Sure." Roland tucks it into his tunic, and pats the seat next to him. I sit down.
"Oh, by the way, princess, I saw through your witch dummy too."

"But, how?"

"Once again, maybe royals don't know what a scarecrow looks like, but I do." Roland puts his hand in mine.

"So you knew this was all a joke? All a trap to attract the princes? You knew there was no witch, no curse, no enchanted vegetables?"

He smiles. I like his smile.

"From the beginning. That's why I kept bringing you food and talking to you. Would I have risked that if I thought there was?"

"Does anyone else know?"

"From the number of princes offering to try their hand as rescuing you, no." My face lights up.

"There are more princes trying to rescue me?"

"Yes, but that had to pass other tests before they could even try. The prince you've been talking to won."

"So, he's the best of the best?"

"Yes."

My face falls. "Wow, that's depressing."

Every day for the next week, Roland shows up. We talk and laugh for hours, and I realize what Roland said was right. We are friends. On the eighth day, as I'm looking out the window for Roland's brown horse, I see instead the prince's white horse. Great.

The prince stops his horse.

"Your Highness!" he pulls a scrap of paper out of his armor, and clears his throat. "Rapunzel, Rapunzel let down you golden hair!" he says. I have to control my groan, but I let my hair down.

"Princess!" he says, as he begins to climb my hair. "You must have been wondering where I've been these past days! Fear not, I did not abandon you. I was taking climbing lessons. See?" He reaches the window and I pull him in. Up close, he's even handsomer.
He falls on his knees and kisses the hem of my dress.

"Fair princess Rapunzel, allow me to commend you for your bravery and good nature in these horrible circumstance, but no more, thank the Lord, must you suffer. I shall deliver you from your prison tower, and take you to my castle --" Is he going to stop talking anytime soon? I don't even know his name! "-- for I am Prince Phillip, of the country of Tescondia, heir to the throne. It would honor me greatly if you would come to my palace and be my bride, thus uniting our kingdoms. What say you, princess? Will you give me the honor of thy hand in marriage?"

So, that was the point of this speech. He totally needs keep-it-simple lessons from Roland. I close my eyes. Here it is, the moment I've been waiting for. A prince is down on his knees before me, asking for my hand in marriage. My trap worked. I savor the moment. I could make a long flowery speech, but I decide to keep it simple. "Sure," I say.

The prince kisses my hand. "Wonderful! I will hasten back to the castle and tell my father, the king, of the news of our wedding." He kisses my hand one more time, and dives out the window. Luckily, he's holding onto my braid, so he kind of rappels out the window. It looks like he lands pretty hard, though. What is it with princes and making exits like that?

"I'm OK!" he calls from the ground. He hops onto his horse, blows me a kiss and rides off.

I should be happy. I hooked myself a prince. My incredibly ingenious plan worked, and now I have a handsome prince to marry, and one day, I will rule two kingdoms. I will be rich and famous, and have a prince to love me.

Funny enough, all I can think of is Roland.

Two hours of crying later, I hear the galloping of horse's hooves. Roland!

I run to the tower and throw my hair out. Roland hops off his horse and ties her up. I never saw Prince Phillip do that. He grabs on to the rope and I pull him up. He climbs better than Prince Phillip too. Immediately, Roland notices something is wrong.

"Nothing," I say. He sits down on the bed next to me, running his fingers through my hair. He waits until I'm ready. "Prince Phillip came up into the tower today." His face lights up.

"Really, princess? That's wonderful! But…may I ask, if he did, why are you still here?"

"Because the prince of morons had to arrange the wedding, and completely forgot to get the bride." Roland laughs. Then he becomes serious after he notices the look on my face.
"And, you want out of this tower so badly, you can't wait to get out of here?"

"Well, sort of."

"Well you won't have to wait too long. The prince will be back soon. I suppose you have a way to take care of the 'witch,' right?"

"Not really." Roland springs up.

"Well, we have to get to work then! We've got to stage a fight, a disaster, something, or else it will look unfinished!" Roland races around the tower, looking at everything. "Princess, I think that you are the hardest-working princess in the world. You'll be a fantastic queen after you marry Prince Phillip."

"Yes," I say, "I suppose I will. Though I must admit, I have no idea how to stage a showdown with a puppet."

Roland smiles. "I suppose you still have that witch dummy you used to trick the prince?"

"You saw that?"

"I've been watching your tower almost constantly. I saw everything, even you obsessively making cornhusk dolls." I laugh.

"When I am queen, I will make you a duke, Roland." He bows to me.

"I shall serve Your Majesty as best as I can, but first we must make a witch doll, before the prince comes back to marry you."

"Yes, I suppose we must." I sink down on the bed. For some reason I start to cry again. Roland drops the dish he's holding and sits next to me. "Is there something wrong, Rapunzel?" It's the first time he's used my name. It sounds so pretty when he says it. I look up into his eyes. I never realized how beautiful he is.

"Yes," I say, "Roland, I don't want to marry Phillip." He looks shocked.

"You don't?"

"No," I say. "I want to marry you." I stare down into my lap. The longest second of my life passes. Then Roland lifts my chin up.

"Guess what, Princess?" he says, as he kisses me lightly on the forehead. "I knew that too."
The next day, Prince Phillip arrives on his white horse, which I'm beginning to hate, followed by a team of courtiers. He's leading another white horse by the reigns. That horse is meant for me.

I cast a last look at Roland, who smiles at me. "I love you," he whispers. That somehow gives me strength. I give the witch dummy a final check.

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel" shouts Prince Phillip from below. "Let down your golden hair."

Deep breath. I grab onto the middle of the flax and slowly lower it down, which Roland insisted I scent with rose water, because its constant scent of corn annoyed him. I feel the Prince's familiar weight on the end.

"Princess Rapunzel!" he calls, as he begins to climb into the window. "I am here to rescue --" Roland pulls the strings from the closet. He's made his own modifications to my tried-and-true dummy-on-fishing-line scheme. The apparatus works more like a clothesline now, so instead of pulling the strings on the dummy, which was risky, as she often jerked, now the wires are moved instead, so she glides smoothly. Right now, the dummy is rushing smoothly towards the prince, the end of the flax in her hand. The prince flails, trying to get away from the witch.

"Foolish man!" I say in the witch's voice, "trying to take my prize from meeeeee!" The arms go out, and the prince screams. But before Roland can make the witch release the braid, the prince puts his arms up to cover his eyes. Of course, both of his arms were previously engaged in holding the rope, so he falls.

He falls all the way to the ground, and onto my rose bush. Roland runs out of the closet.

"My God, what happened?" he asks.

"He fell," I say simply. "He wasn't supposed to. You were just supposed to let the flax go slowly, so he rappelled to the floor and only fell the last few feet. But he got… scared… and he let go of the rope." Hiding behind the witch dummy, I look out the window. The prince is lying motionless on the ground.

"Is he…dead?" asks Roland.

"I don't know…. I think so."

"What's going on?" he asks.

"The courtiers are surrounding him. They're trying to revive him. He's… oh Roland, he's not moving." Even though the prince was boring, and a moron, and I hated him, I didn't mean for him to die! Roland runs to the sink and picks up the remainder of the rose water we used to scent my braid with. Without stopping to check if anyone is looking up, he throws it over the Prince.
"Roland! What did you do?"

"Just a village trick. When someone faints, pour water over them."

"But he's dead!" I say.
"No, he's not," Roland says. "Look!" I look, though I'm afraid to. The prince is moving. It's only a slight movement, but he's moving. I fall to my knees.

"Oh, thank God!" I say. The courtiers must be saying the same thing. They hoist the prince up onto the two white horses, and ride him back to the castle. Before he turns, I notice something.

His eyes are open, but there are no eyes there. The thorns he fell onto… put them out.

"He's blind, Roland. We blinded a prince." I say. Roland wraps his arms around me, and holds me in silence. My plan backfired. I should have kept it simple.

The news of the prince's blinding travels through the land. Roland and I leave the castle that same day. At first, I had no idea where we were going, but Roland took me to his house in the village, while perpetuating the rumor that I had been exiled to the desert.

Of course, while the entire kingdom is searching for their princess, and worrying about Prince Phillip, I have been spending the happiest two weeks of my life with Roland.

Alone in our own little world, Roland and I spend each morning, noon and night together. We plan our lives together, and Roland has even bought me a simple brass wedding ring. It is the simplest piece of jewelry I have ever seen, and certainly not worthy of a princess, but I think it's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen.

Of course, life isn't all easy. We have one more show to perform.

Two weeks later, Roland and I make the trek to the castle where I was born. When the guards see a dirty peasant couple at the gates, they point their spears at us. Of course, when they see my royal signet ring, they give us a guided escort to the throne room.

I don't feel like describing the reunion between me parents and I but let me say, there was much crying, much apologizing, and much hugging. Roland stood off to the side, awaiting his cue to enter the stage, so to speak. Finally, when I hear a hull in the rejoicing, I break away from my mother's embrace and bring Roland forward.

"Mother, Father, allow me to present Roland Baker. He is the man who saved me from the tower, and we would like your permission to marry." Roland kneels.
"It would be an honor, Your Majesties," he says. I told Roland not to say anything else, because more likely than not, my father will be outraged at me marrying a peasant. There is an awkward moment of silence, and then my father speaks.

"Him? But what of Prince Phillip?"

I manage to look sad. "Have you not heard the news? Prince Phillip, bless him, was nearly killed by the witch."

My mother gasps. "How awful!" she says.

"He escaped with his life, but he was blinded. Roland had been sneaking off to visit me since nearly the first day, and figured out how to scale the tower long before Prince Phillip, but I did not consider him as a match until it was too late. After the witch blinded my prince, she banished me to the forest, where who should save me before I starved to death, but Roland again. He cared for me well these past months, and I have learned to love him. With your blessing, we would like to marry."

Now, Father looks outraged. "Him? He saved you from the witch?"

"So to speak, yes. He found out how to scale the tower, and kept me company in the long days when I was recovering from the witch's mistreatment of me."

"Yes! The witch! She must be still after you!" announces my father "Now that you are safe and sound, I will order my army to storm the witch's castle, and we shall slay her for her crimes."

Roland and I exchange nervous looks. He rises and whispers in my ear, "What should we do now? We expected the showdown to be one-on-one, her and me, we didn't plan for armies? Should we make another puppet?"

I sigh and let Roland hold me, feeling safe in his arms. "No, Roland," I say "I'm tired of lies. I'm tired of traps. It's time to take the simple way out. It's time to tell the truth." Roland kisses me on the forehead, and I break away from his embrace. I kneel on the floor.

"Mother, Father," I say, my voice far from easy. "I have a confession to make."

Two months later, I find myself back in my tower, staring out the window. Nothing much has changed since the last time I've been here. Of course, it belongs officially to me now. Roland and I have fixed it up, and got a select few servants to help us keep house. It's quite homey now, but I admit, I do stay away from the vegetable garden.

I unpin my hair, which is still the color of corn silk, but is not quite so long any more. I've removed the corn silk braid long ago, but I haven't thrown it away. It dangles out the
window, as a perpetual reminder of who lives here, and what she did to get it. Roland has been gone for three hours now. He should be back by now. I have some news for him.

Finally, I see his brown horse galloping over the hills. I smile to myself. I love that horse. I neaten my dress, check my hair in the mirror and run to the door, flinging it open. There is Roland, looking tired, but happy. I want to throw my arms around him, but he's loaded down with packages. "What's all this?" He puts the packages on the bed.

"I was shopping," he says.

"Shopping? For what? You don't need to shop, you know."

"I know, but I wanted to," he said. "Just a few necessities." He opens his first package. "Pots, pans, cloth, plant seeds, things like that. If we're going to set up housekeeping in this castle, we're going to need some basic necessities." He begins arranging his things one the bed. I decide this is the best time to tell him my news before he starts showing me what he bought.

"Roland?" I say. "Please stop looking at the packages, there is something I must tell you." Roland turns. He is so handsome. "Roland." I say again.

"What is it?" he says. The words are on my tongue, but I can't say them. I look down. He lifts my chin up, meeting my eyes.

"What is it, Rapunzel?" My hand falls down to my stomach.

"Roland." I say for the last time. "I think…I think I am with child." Roland does not react for a minute.

"A baby?" he says. I nod. He puts his head on my shoulder. "You're having… my baby?"

"Yes Roland."

Tears form in his eyes, and he holds me close to him. I must admit, this isn't exactly the reaction I was hoping for. "You're not pleased?" I ask. He laughs through his tears.

"No, Rapunzel, how could you say that? I'm more pleased than I've ever been in my life! A child! Oh, Rapunzel, we'll be so happy! Tell me, is it a boy or a girl?"

"There's no way of telling." He kisses me once more.

"Roland?" I say. "Will you do me a favor?"

"Of course, anything."
"I've been staring out the window for a very long time, and I've gotten quite the unusual craving."

He groans. "Not vegetables!"

"No!" I say, indignant. "Chocolate cake." He laughs.

"I'll go and get you some." He kisses me and turns to leave.

"And Roland!" I say. "Make sure it's not enchanted. We don't want another witch on our hands."

Roland kisses me one more time, and leaves the tower.

OK, so as you can see things didn't really work out like I planned. I didn't net myself a prince. My parents practically disowned me for tricking them, and since I married a peasant, and I will probably never inherit the throne. But personally, I think I got something better out of the bargain. I mean, complicated plans and complicated lives can work for some people, but not me, I realize. Even if I'm not rich or titled, I'm with Roland, and in the end, that's what matters. Maybe my plan worked after all. I can only wonder.