

And they lived happily ever after.

That was supposed to be the end, the Princess thought. A big "The End" in elegantly fussy, gloriously serif, curlicued handwriting. She'd had her ball. Her fairy godmother had been in attendance. And dwarves. And elves. And a leprechaun. Even the shoemaker's son was there, the shoemaker having been called away to a neighboring kingdom for emergency shoe replacement for another princess. There had been sparkles and silver and diamonds and satin, champagne and caviar, tiaras and wands. It was, in essence, the epitome of the perfect fairy tale.

Until now, as she awoke far too early the next morning with sore feet, a post-party headache and a snoring, drooling prince sleeping next to her with very un-princely, horrifically bad morning breath.

She had the sneaking suspicion that she hadn't really quite thought everything through.

"Just bridal jitters," she said to herself as she staggered into the bathroom to wash the grime of too much revelry from her face. The magic mirror waited at attendance to tell her how beautiful she was, but it was far too early and her head was throbbing far too much for her to want to talk to anyone. She also knew with her bed hair, smeared mascara and dark circles under her eyes she wasn't anywhere near the fairest in the land and she didn't need a gaudy old mirror to tell her so.

"Oh hell."

She sipped quickly from a glass of champagne perched precariously on the counter next to a misplaced slipper, hoping for a little relief. She cringed, her head pounding, and turned around...a little too fast for her unruly stomach, causing her to eye the toilet with a bit of trepidation. And, admittedly, almost with hopefulness to get the worst of it relieved. But her stomach calmed, at least somewhat, and she stepped forward to survey the damage.

Clutching the glass and bracing herself on the doorway she reviewed the carnage of the previous night's adventures. An overturned chair covered in a brocade vest. A lonesome glove tossed haplessly on the bureau. A couple of half eaten apples on the side table. Her ball gown crumpled on the floor by the foot of the bed, covering what looked like the smashed remains of a pumpkin. And perhaps a tail.

"Oh no."

With a panicked start she looked closer, quickly relieved to see no equally smashed mice nearby. Just a piece of discarded ribbon emanating from the pumpkin pile. As her heart calmed, she vaguely remembered seeing the slightly over served mice playing quarters at the bar with a bunch of equally inebriated trolls as she and the prince staggered back to their room. Though she wasn't sure if they really were trolls. Open bars did tend to attract all sorts. At her cousin's wedding last year they had caught a bunch of billy goats attempting to crash the party. "The desperate measures creatures will go through for a free shot of vodka," her cousin had said as the bodyguards had sent them out. "Good thing we caught them before they got to the buffet table."

A long winded, rumbling fart emitted from the bed as the prince rustled and turned over.

"Oh god."

What did she really know of him? Their romance had been a whirlwind, to be sure. All horses and carriages, secrets, songs and fairy dust. But it had been four or five pages, typed, single spaced, at best. Was that really enough to base a relationship on? There were so many important things she realized they hadn't talked about. Would he want their children to be taught by banshees or silkies? Whose family would they spend the feast days with? Did he believe in unicorns? She had been so sure, so absolutely sure of him when her stepmother had questioned the marriage, asked did she really feel like she was ready. But now, in the daylight and the day after, her confidence waned. What had she gotten herself into?

"Oh damn."

Sipping again from the glass of champagne, she glanced at the bed. He was a truly fine form of a man, his chiseled features, the lock of fine hair tumbling over his forehead. If it wasn't for the drool and the farting he would be exactly what he was supposed to be. The man of her dreams. No. The prince of her dreams. But other than a prince, what was he? Who was he? She leaned on the window and sank into her thoughts.

"Ah-hem."

Startled from her worrying, she looked to see a nattily dressed cockroach standing on the windowsill, looking at her.

"Yes?"

"Now what do you want?"

"What do you mean?"

"You got it all. You got the ball gown. You got the prince. You got the crown. You got the kingdom. You got everything you asked for."

She looked at the prince on the bed, smiling in his sleep. She looked through the window at the cheerful green fields below. At the room strewn with silk dresses and sparkling jewels.

"Yes. But..."

"How can there be a but?"

"What happens now?"

The cockroach pulled out a long scrolled list from his vest pocket.

"Well, you can volunteer at a charity. Or take up sewing. Or sell gardening products. People will bow to you and kiss your hand. You will be famous and praised wear lovely clothes and eat the best food and drink the best wine and..."

"But what do I dream of next?"

The cockroach was taken aback.

"You got the fairy tale. It's the dream of all dreams. Isn't that a dream enough for a lifetime?"

She paused. And thought. And tried to imagine a world where yesterday was the end of all dreaming and from this day forward her life would be living out the remains of that dream as it disappeared from the future and slowly ebbed away from a present to a past.

"No."

The cockroach blinked. And put down the scroll.

"We wrote the first dream for you. If you want something different, you need to learn to write the next one yourself."

"But I've never been a writer. I don't even know how to begin."

"Then perhaps it's time to learn."

"But how?"

"Follow the yellow brick road."

"To where? "

She glanced out the window, looking, searching. She didn't see a road. And nothing really yellow other than the sun. Turning back, she saw the cockroach was looking at her in disbelief.

"Seriously?"

"What?"

"Never mind."

He looked at her intently.

"You're only limited by what type of book you decide you want. What you want your story to be. You can decide to make it different. Perhaps more interesting. Perhaps not. Just choose."

"I know. Think outside the box."

"No. Think outside the book. Think outside the story that you feel you're supposed to be in. And see what happens."

She looked at the prince on the bed, smiling in his sleep. And took a deep breath. And downed in a large gulp the remains of the champagne. And regarded the cockroach.

She looked at him for a long time.

"What?" finally he asked.

"I would have expected a cricket."

"You're the one who wanted a different kind of story."

And with that, he bowed, turned and flew away.

Putting down her glass, she staggered across the room and with a most unladylike and graceless clump she fell back on the bed. Her head hurt, her feet ached and her mind was whirling, both from the champagne and from....everything.

"Oh crap."

For a moment she wondered whether she had really just had a conversation with a cockroach. Was it perhaps a hangover-induced hallucination? Though, she admitted, as a person who regularly conversed with dwarves and mice she really shouldn't be one to judge. She'd learned the hard way that outward appearances could sometimes belie the wisdom of the source, for better or worse. And to never accept shiny red apples from strangers. Or trade a cow for "magic" beans. Or buy shoe-shaped real estate from an old woman with what seemed like a gaggle of children.

A waft of the prince's putrid breath floated across her and suddenly she realized that laying back down on the bed had been a big mistake. Maybe one of many mistakes in the last 24 hours, but as her spinning head and overwrought stomach came together in a churn it became clear that it would at least be the largest mistake in the last 15 minutes.

"Oh shit."

Tomorrow she'd plan a new dream. Fit for a princess. Or, perhaps, just fit for her. There was a worthy dream out there. She just had to find it.

But, she thought as she rushed to the bathroom, for now she just had to survive today.