Rae Greenway

Once upon a time there was a beautiful, intelligent, second oldest daughter whose younger brother and sister had both married before her. And when beautiful, intelligent, second oldest daughters have been beaten to the altar, the wait for Prince Charming becomes a slightly more frantic hunt for Baron So-so and so goes my mid-thirties.

Once upon a time I thought the basic idea was that if it started as a fairy tale, it had to end like one. You know, the obligatory “Happily ever after” that trumps any sort of realistic discontent. Wasn’t that a requirement? A cosmic If/Then construct for guaranteed happiness. Perhaps I should have known that Once Upon a T.G.I Friday’s-frycook-divorcee wasn’t of the same caliber as Cinderella, but I was thirty-four and single and open to the possibility of love between the loaded potato skins.

He came up to us, impossibly handsome, wanting to know how “the ladies were enjoying their meal?” and I ignored the grease stains on his apron and the fact that he said “ladies” in that slightly predetorial tone, because I was distracted by his very white teeth. I’m a sucker for very white teeth, particularly on impossibly handsome men, particularly when I am the last single daughter, particularly when I am buzzed on Blue Moon, particularly when I am ovulating, but I’m not blaming all of this on hormones. Certainly the Blue Moon was an active participant, and no one is arguing that he doesn’t have a great dentist.

I left him my number, the catalyst for three months of dating, extravagant dinners at expensive restaurants, great champagne, great sex, roses and chocolates and teddy bears, a carriage ride or two and the promise that he was my Prince Charming. It did not strike me as odd that a real Prince Charming would not have to self-identify as such, nor did I remember Charming having an illegitimate kid and a history of alcoholism, but I may have subconsciously made concessions knowing that birthday thirty-five was just around the corner. He had a ring already picked out, I had a wedding already planned, we both had reached an understanding: this was a fairy tale romance. It didn’t even feel like the “or else,” was even there.

They call it the honeymoon phase because like all phases, it eventually phases out and then if you’re lucky you still have a little honey left in the pot to get you through the hard times. But I wasn’t expecting hard times because I had signed up for a fairy tale, I had started with a “once upon a time.” In fact I had explicitly done that on purpose because I was under the impression that “happily ever after” was phase 2. And when the other homeroom mom’s ask me, I smile and say everything’s perfect because on my mental to-do list it reads, “Lead a perfect life.” I haven’t crossed that one off yet.

“NO, I do NOT want to have anal,” was the bit of the phone conversation my five year old overheard yesterday and took to her kindergarten classroom, which I found out when she brought a note home informing us that Rosie should be instructed on age-appropriate play-time conversation. Apparently inviting other children to have anal with her was time-out material, which she didn’t understand because “mommy said it!” I wasn’t intending to have this discussion with her until, oh, *never,* so I told Rosie that word was a grown-up word and she should never use it again.

I didn’t want to use it again either, but it came up the next time he called me drunkenly from the bar with his friends, begging me to have a threesome with some slut named Lulu who worked in accounting. I don’t answer his phone calls anymore if he calls after 9 PM.

I wanted to make better excuses for the questions Rosie was asking, like, “why does daddy yell so much?” or, as of yesterday, “why did daddy kick over my dollhouse?” or “why are we having a sleepover at Grandma and Grandpa’s *again*?” but what mother is prepared to answer those? I had a slew of perfect responses to the questions she was supposed to be asking: the ones that normal children in happy homes asked, like, “can I please have more of your homemade lasagna, mom?” or, “can daddy and I go ice skating again this winter,” but she never asked those because I didn’t know how to cook and her father had never once taken her to the park.

I am a wife. I am a mother. I am a homeowner. I drive a minivan. I wear Calvin Klein. I do all of the things that middle-aged women ought to be doing, and yet I am not a princess, nor have I ever been one, nor will I ever be one. I have a picture of us on our honeymoon, at Disney World of course. We are standing in front of Cinderella’s castle, and from the smile on my face, you can tell that I didn’t know he was going to be hammered and hitting on Pocahontas that night. No, I didn’t know that. I didn’t want to know that. I just have this thing for fairy tales I guess. A hope that they’re less reserved for fairies, more accessible for us poor casualties of the animated romance generations, who pathetically await their glass-slipper on the subway, in the supermarket, in TGI Fridays, wherever we imagine them to be.