

## No hero needed

Esmerelda waited impatiently in her tower for her hero. Her hair had grown so long it nearly filled the room. She'd lost count of the number of times it had caught fire on the stove as she cooked dinner. But when she tossed her hair out of the window to check, it only reached half way down.

Suddenly she heard a shout 'Is anyone there? Hello?'

She looked out of the window; below was a handsome young man looking up at her, his noble white steed grazing patiently beside him.

'I'm Esmerela, can you rescue me?' She tossed her hair through the window.

'Of course, my lady!' he said.

'You're a real hero! Thank you!'

He jumped up to catch her hair, but couldn't quite reach. He tried again, and again.

'No, it's no good, your hair's not long enough!' he scowled. 'I'll rescue you another day. I'll bring a ladder next time.'

He vaulted onto his horse and they cantered briskly away through the forest.

The next day he was back, towing a fifteen-foot ladder.

He was still annoyed; 'Well, that was a journey! Quite wore Dobbin out - and me! Had to keep dismounting to free the ladder from the trees!'

She heard him muttering under his breath. 'I just hope you're worth it! I really don't know why I'm bothering!'

Nevertheless, he propped the ladder up against the tower and began to climb. Reaching the top, he just managed to clasp one strand of her hair and began to pull himself up.

'Owww! Be careful!'

Esmerelda let out a yelp as the strand yanked out of her head and dropped to the ground. He didn't listen, tried again and another strand yanked out.

'Wait, I'm not ready! Go down. Owww!'

Esmerelda rubbed gently on the bald patch that had appeared on her scalp. This was not working. Again and again he tried, and each time she lost more hair.

'Stop!' Esmerelda ordered. But he took no notice.

In desperation Esmerelda took the knife she kept in her pocket and cut through her remaining hair and he fell to the ground.

'That's it, I've had enough! If you don't want help then don't ask for it! I wouldn't want a bald wife anyway!' he shouted as he stood up and dusted himself down. 'I've heard tell of a beautiful princess, captured by a dragon; that'll be easier! And as soon as her father dies, I'll be the king!'

He vaulted onto Dobbin and they galloped away.

Esmerelda sighed. But she suddenly remembered what her mother had advised her, long ago, 'If you want something doing well, best do it yourself!'

Finally, it dawned on her. No more heroes for her. Esmerelda grew her hair long again, twice more, both times chopping it off at the roots. She wove a strong plaited rope and attached it to her bed post. The rope reached the ground and she carefully climbed down. She'd finally escaped; no hero needed.