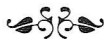


## Rapunzel



**T**here once lived a man and his wife who longed very much to have a child. At last it seemed that their wish was about to be granted.

A window at the back of their house overlooked a garden full of the most beautiful flowers, fruits, and vegetables. The garden was completely surrounded by a high stone wall. No one dared go into the garden, for it was said to belong to a very powerful and wicked witch.

Now, one day, as the woman looked out over this garden, she caught sight of a bed of fresh, green, leafy rapunzel. The rapunzel looked so delicious her mouth began to water, and she longed with all her heart to eat some. Day by day her longing grew until she knew no peace. At last, her husband noticed how weak and pale she had become and asked her what was wrong. "Oh," the woman replied, "if I do not get some of that rapunzel from the garden behind our house I fear I shall die."

Her husband, who loved her very much, decided that he must get her some of the rapunzel no matter what the cost. That night he crept over

the great stone wall. Then he hastily gathered a handful of the rapunzel and took it to his wife. She made a salad of it and quickly devoured it. But the rapunzel tasted so delicious that her longing for it only grew stronger. She begged her husband to fetch her more. And so, once again, the man climbed over the high wall.

He was just bending down to gather the rapunzel when a voice above him shrieked, "Thief! How dare you climb into my garden and steal my rapunzel? You will pay for this with your life."

Looking up, the terrified man saw the angry witch towering over him. He fell to his knees and begged her for mercy. "I only did it for my wife, who is with child," he said. "She glimpsed your rapunzel from our window and longed so much to eat some that I was afraid she would die unless I got it for her."

When she heard this, the witch grew calmer. "Very well," she said. "I will spare your life, and you may take as much of my rapunzel as you wish on one condition. You must give me the baby your wife is about to bear. I can promise you the child will come to no harm, for I will give it every care."

Not knowing what else to do, the man agreed. As soon as the baby was born the witch appeared, named the child Rapunzel, and took the baby away with her.

Rapunzel grew up to be the most beautiful child in all the land. She had sparkling eyes, rosy cheeks, and golden hair so long it fell in ringlets past her feet, forming a long train of gold behind her. Rapunzel was the only living creature the old witch had ever loved. She guarded the child jealously, and when the girl was twelve years old the old witch decided to shut her away from the world altogether. She took Rapunzel to a high tower deep in the forest. This tower had neither a door nor a staircase, but only one tiny window at the very top. Whenever the old witch wanted to visit, she would stand below the window and call up:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!"

Then the girl would unpin her long braids of shiny golden hair and, winding them twice around the window hook, let them fall all the way down to the ground. The witch would then climb up to see her beloved Rapunzel.

Several years passed this way. Then one day a prince came riding through the forest. He heard a girl singing, and her voice was so sad and beautiful that he stopped to listen. It was Rapunzel, who often passed the lonely hours by singing to herself. The prince followed the sound of her voice until he reached the tower where Rapunzel was imprisoned.

Eager to see the singer, the prince looked for a door or a stairway, but there was none to be found. At last he gave up and got on his horse and rode home again. But Rapunzel's singing had so moved him that every day he rode to the forest to hear her sing.

One day as the prince stood behind a tree listening, the witch came along and called up:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!"

The prince watched as Rapunzel let fall her long, shimmering, golden braids and the witch climbed up them. The very next day at sunset, the prince rode to the tower. Standing just under the window, he cried:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!"

The girl threw down her long braids, and up climbed the prince.

At first, Rapunzel was very frightened of the prince, for she had never before seen a man. But the prince spoke gently to her and soon calmed her fears. He told her how beautiful her singing was and how deeply it had touched his heart. The prince's voice and manners were so much sweeter than those of the old witch that soon Rapunzel began to fall in love with him.

He came to visit her every day, making sure to come at sunset when the witch was never around. Then one day he asked her to be his wife and come away with him to his castle. Rapunzel looked at the young, handsome prince. "He is kind and good," she thought. "And he is so

much nicer than the old witch." And so she laid her hand in his and said, "Dear prince, I will gladly be your wife and go away with you. But first I must find a way to escape this tower. Each time you visit me, pray bring a skein of silk with you. That way I will be able to weave myself a ladder and leave this wretched tower forever."

And so each evening the prince came, bearing silken thread with him. The witch knew nothing of it, but one day, when the ladder was almost finished, Rapunzel forgot herself and said, "Tell me, Granny, why does it take you so long to climb up here? The prince is up in a flash!"

The witch was furious. "Oh, you wicked girl," she cried. "I have locked you away from all the world. And still you have managed to betray me!" She seized Rapunzel's long braids in one hand, and with the other she picked up a pair of heavy iron scissors. With a great snip she cut off the girl's long golden braids. Then she took Rapunzel away to a bleak desert place where the poor girl was to live in great sorrow and misery.

When Rapunzel was gone, the witch returned to the tower, and picking up the braids, she wrapped them around the window hook and waited. After a time, the prince appeared and called up:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!"

At that the witch let down the long, golden braids. The prince climbed up them as always. But instead of his beloved Rapunzel, he found only the old witch. She glared at him spitefully and cackled, "Your beautiful bird has flown her nest, and the cat's got her! Now the cat's going to scratch out your eyes, and you will never see your Rapunzel again!"

With that the witch sprang at the prince, and, in his despair, he leaped from the tower. Although he escaped with his life, he landed in a bed of sharp thorns, and both his eyes were put out.

Blind and broken-hearted, he wandered through the forest for several long years, scarcely knowing or caring where he was. Then, by chance, he wandered into the desert place where Rapunzel was living. He heard a voice singing in the distance, and it sounded beautiful and familiar. He



stumbled toward it, and as he drew nearer, Rapunzel recognized him. Weeping bitterly, she fell into his arms. As she did so, her tears fell on his blinded eyes and his sight grew clear again.



The prince discovered then that he was looking into the eyes of his own beloved Rapunzel. Then he saw that there were two children beside her—twins, a boy and a girl. They were his own children, and Rapunzel had been trying to raise them alone in the barren desert. Now, the prince had nothing more to wish for, and taking Rapunzel's hand, he led her and their children back to his kingdom, where they all lived in peace and happiness for many long years. And as for the unhappy witch, no one knows, for she was never heard of again.