

The Story of Rapunzel

Once upon a time there was a woodcutter and his wife, who lived in a small house high on a hill. The house overlooked a vast, dark forest and at the edge of the forest lived an enchantress, who had great power and was feared by everyone in the kingdom.

The enchantress had a beautiful garden, full of sweet-smelling flowers and herbs. The woodcutter's wife would often stand on the hill and look down at the garden with envy. Nothing would grow on the hill where she lived – the earth was hard and stony. The wife wished that she could have a beautiful, sweet-smelling garden just like the enchantress.

One day the wife was looking down into the garden when she spotted a row of tall plants with wide leaves and purple flowers.

“Rampion!” she gasped. “Oh, how their sweet roots would taste delicious with some vinegar and pepper.” Her mouth was watering at the thought. But there was no way the nasty enchantress would ever share the delicious rampion with her.

“What are you looking at?” asked the woodcutter one day.

His wife replied: “Look there – those rampion in the garden. For days I have desired them. Please, ask the enchantress if she would give me some.”

The woodcutter shook his head and laughed. “I hear the last person who went to see the enchantress was turned into a toad. You won't see me going anywhere near her front door.”

The wife grew miserable. Her simple meals of porridge and thin, watery stew just weren't the same. She wanted more.

“If you really loved me,” said the wife to her husband, “you would go to the garden and get me some of that sweet-tasting rampion. The enchantress will never spot that some of it has gone missing – and I will be able to make us a delicious supper.”

The woodcutter's belly rumbled at the thought. He was frightened of the enchantress and her great power, but perhaps if he stole the rampion at night no one would notice.

And that is exactly what he did. At midnight he climbed over the low wall into the garden. Grabbing hold of the leafy stalks, he began pulling up the rampion from their earthy bed. He licked his lips when he saw the thick, white roots that would taste so good with some vinegar and pepper.

“Thief!” shrieked a voice, that made the woodcutter jump. He dropped the rampion and turned to see the enchantress watching him, her arms folded across her chest. “How dare you steal from my garden.”

“Please,” begged the woodcutter, “don’t turn me into a toad. My wife saw the rampion growing in your garden and has longed for it ever since. Nothing will grow on our hard, stony hill. Please, forgive me.”

The enchantress nodded, her scowl turning to a sly smile. “You are forgiven. Take as much of the rampion as you can carry.”

The woodcutter’s eyes almost popped out of his head. “As much as I can carry?” he gasped.

“Yes,” snapped the enchantress. “But on one condition. You must give me the child that your wife will bring into the world. It will be well treated and I will care for it like a mother.”

The woodcutter was so afraid that he nodded in agreement. “Yes, yes – I promise” he croaked, rapidly stuffing the rampion into a cloth sack. He just wanted to get as far away from the scary enchantress as he could.

And so, the wife got her rampion and it tasted even better than she had imagined. Days turned into weeks and weeks became months. As the winter snows began to fall, the wife gave birth to a baby girl with big blue eyes and tufty blonde hair. She named the girl, Rapunzel. The couple were delighted – but their joy was to be short-lived.

Keeping to her bargain, the enchantress came to the house and took the baby away. The woodcutter and his wife were heartbroken, but they knew they could never go back on a promise.

In time, Rapunzel grew into a beautiful young woman. She lived in the house on the edge of the forest, with only the enchantress for company. She often looked out of her window and wondered who lived in the small house, perched on the hill. One day, Rapunzel asked if she could go and visit. The enchantress was angry, and took her deep into the forest instead. There, Rapunzel was shut away in a tall dark tower that had neither stairs nor door – just a narrow little window for Rapunzel to look out of.

“You will stay here,” commanded the enchantress. “When I want to visit I will call – ‘Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair.’ And you will do as I ask.”

Rapunzel had magnificent long hair, as fine as spun gold. Whenever she heard the voice of the

enchanted she would let down her braided hair and the enchantress would climb up it to reach the window. She would bring Rapunzel bread and water, but no comfort or love.

One day, the King's son was riding through the forest. He stopped when he caught the sound of a voice raised in song. It was coming from an area of the forest he had never been to before. He dismounted and led his horse between the dark trees. Following the beautiful song, he emerged into a clearing. At its centre was the tall stone tower. Rapunzel was leaning out of the narrow window, singing a sad melody softly to herself. On seeing her beauty, the Prince immediately fell in love with her.

"Who are you?" he called.

But Rapunzel did not answer. She was afraid that the enchantress would punish her if she spoke to a stranger. The Prince looked for a door to enter the tower, but there was nothing – just cold, dark stone. Scratching his head, he backed away from the tower. "This is a very strange puzzle," he declared. "I can't see how I can climb up to that window. It is far too high."

At that moment he heard the crunch of leaves. Leading his horse behind a tree, the Prince hid from view – just as the evil enchantress stepped from the forest.

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel," she called. "Let down your hair."

Immediately, Rapunzel let down the braids of her hair. The witch climbed up to her and disappeared into the tower. The Prince waited patiently until the enchantress reappeared and climbed back down again.

"A-ha," thought the Prince. "So that is how I will reach my heart's desire." Once the enchantress had vanished into the forest, he walked up to the tower and called... "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair." Immediately the hair was lowered. With a smile, the Prince climbed the tower.

When he reached the window, Rapunzel gave a shriek. She was expecting the enchantress, not a young handsome man.

"Rapunzel," he said, falling to his knees. "Please let me take you far away from this horrible tower. Let me be your husband and love you for as long as I live."

Rapunzel had never heard such kind and tender words before. She lost her fear and burst into tears. "Yes, please – please take me away – far, far away!"

But there was a problem.

"How will I ever get down from this tower?" sobbed Rapunzel. "You can climb down my hair but I cannot follow."

The Prince comforted her. “There must be a way.”

Rapunzel suddenly gave a gasp. “Wait! I have an idea. Bring me some silk and I will weave a ladder with it. When it is ready I will be able to climb down from this horrible tower. Then we can both ride away from here – far, far away!”

The Prince leaned forward and kissed Rapunzel on the cheek. “I will do as you ask. Do not despair. Soon you will be free.”

“Oh thank you, brave prince!” Rapunzel lowered her hair and watched as he climbed back down. Mounting his horse, the Prince set off for home. He did not see the enchantress watching him from the shadows.

Angrily, she marched up to Rapunzel’s tower and shrieked at the top of her voice: “Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!” Too afraid to do otherwise, Rapunzel lowered her plaited hair. The enchantress climbed up – and when she reached the tower’s room, she cut off Rapunzel’s hair with a swish of her knife.

“Wicked child! You have deceived me and now you will be punished,”

Rapunzel begged and pleaded but the enchantress was too angry to listen. “I will banish you to the desert where no one is foolish enough to tread. There you will live – all alone – under the baking hot sun.”

With a wave of her hands, the enchantress cast a spell. Rapunzel vanished in the blink of an eye... all that was left of her was the golden braids, lying on the floor. The enchantress snatched them up. ‘Now I will teach that love-sick prince a lesson.’

At dawn the next morning, the Prince arrived at the tower with a bundle of silk. “Rapunzel, Rapunzel,” he called. “Let down your hair!”

The golden braids fell down from the window. Eagerly, the Prince clambered up to the tower window. However, instead of the fair Rapunzel, he was met by the evil grin of the nasty enchantress. She had used Rapunzel’s hair to trick him.

“Fool!” she mocked. “The bird you seek no longer sits in the nest. Rapunzel is lost to you. You will never see her again!”

The Prince’s heart broke in two. “My love has gone, and now I have nothing to live for!” With a cry of despair, he threw himself from the tower window. The enchantress cackled with glee. “Dear Prince, you should look before you leap.” With a click of her fingers, a tangled wall of thorns sprang up around the base of the tower. The Prince fell into the cruel barbs and was lost from sight.

The enchantress assumed that the Prince was dead, and so failed to notice him clambering out of the thorns, his clothes ragged and torn. He had survived the gruesome trap, but his eyes had been pierced by the wicked thorns. He was blind.

For months he wandered the land, calling Rapunzel's name. At length he came to the desert and began to cross its blistering-hot sands. It was then that he heard the voice... it was familiar to him, singing a sad lullaby. Filled with hope, the Prince pressed onwards, following the sound. It led him to a cool, dark cave where Rapunzel was waiting. On seeing the Prince, she ran into his arms weeping. The moment her sparkling tears touched his eyes, the Prince's vision cleared.

"I can see!" he declared happily.

Overcome with joy, the Prince led Rapunzel out of the barren, hot desert. Together they travelled to his father's castle where they lived happily ever after.

The end