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Rapunzel

Rapunzel by the Brothers Grimm

Long ago, there lived a man and a woman who had no children. As year followed year, this was their only sorrow. Then one spring, the wife felt her dress growing tight around her waist. Joyfully she said to her husband, "We are going to have a child at last."

The wife liked to sit by a small window at the back of their house and look down into a beautiful garden. Flowers grew there, and rare fruits and herbs of every kind. The garden belonged to a sorceress, who had enclosed it on all sides with a high wall. No one ever dared to enter it.

One day, as the wife sat by the window, her eyes fixed on a bed of rapunzel. The herb looked so luxuriant, so green and thick and fresh, that she felt a terrible longing to taste it. Day after day her craving grew, until she began to suffer from it. She became pale and wretched, and said to her husband, "If I cannot eat some of the rapunzel from the garden behind our house, I am going to die."

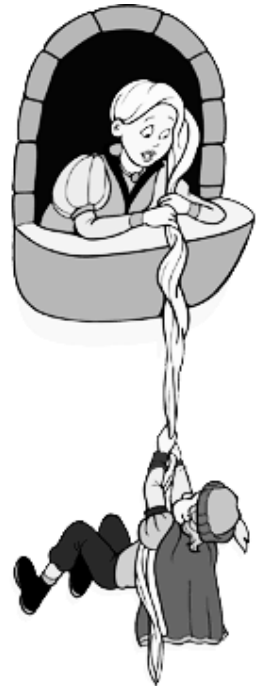
Her husband was alarmed to hear such desperate words. He loved his wife dearly, and saw no choice but to bring her some of the rapunzel.

Ten times, twenty times he circled the garden wall, but found neither door nor gate. So, lowering himself through the window at the back of the house, he climbed down into the sorceress's garden. Quickly he pulled up as much rapunzel as he could hold and scrambled back up through the window.

His wife made a salad of the roots and greens, and devoured it with a wild hunger. So intensely delicious was the taste that she nearly fainted as she ate. Yet the next day her craving for rapunzel was even fiercer than before.

Once again the husband made his way down the wall and into the garden. But this time as he reached for the rapunzel, the sorceress rose up before him. "How dare you come here to steal my rapunzel!" she cried. "Oh, it will serve you ill!"

"Have mercy on me," the man begged. "My wife is carrying our child. She has seen your rapunzel from our window and conceived such a longing for it that she will die unless she can eat some. What am I to do?"



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The sorceress considered his words. "If what you say is true, you may take the rapunzel that you need. But in return, you must give me the child your wife will bear."

The frightened husband did not know what to say. Rather than see his wife die, he agreed to the demand. And when the child was born, the sorceress appeared in the room. She named the baby girl Rapunzel and carried her away.

The sorceress cared for the baby, seeing to her every need. Rapunzel grew to be a child of rare beauty, with pale skin and an abundance of flowing red-gold hair. When she reached the age of twelve, the sorceress led her into the forest to live in a high tower.

The tower was a great column rising in the middle of the woods. Although it looked narrow on the outside, on the inside it was large, with many elegant rooms. Yet no door led into this tower, and its only window was at the very top.

When the sorceress wished to enter, she stood below the window and called, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair." Then Rapunzel would unpin her silky braids, wind them around a hook on the window frame, and let them tumble all the way to the ground. The sorceress would grab hold of them and hoist herself up.

For years, Rapunzel lived alone in her rooms above the treetops, visited only by the sorceress. Then one day a king's son came riding through the woods. As he neared the tower, he heard a voice sweeter than any he had ever known. It was Rapunzel, singing to the forest birds. Charmed by her voice, the prince fell deeply in love. He circled the tower ten times, twenty times, but found no entrance. "How strange this tower is," he said to himself, and felt he would die of sadness.

He inquired at the nearest houses, where he was told that the tower belonged to a sorceress, who was keeping a young girl shut away inside. Day after day the prince returned, hoping to glimpse the girl whose sweet singing had moved him so.

One morning he saw the sorceress appear below the window and call up, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!"

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At once the prince knew how he, too, might enter the tower.

The next evening he stood under the window and called, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!" Rapunzel's hair came billowing down. The king's son took hold of it and pulled himself up.

"Heaven preserve me!" cried Rapunzel when the prince stepped through her window, for she had never set eyes on a man before. But he began to speak to her in such a friendly way that her fear was soon gone.

"Your singing was so beautiful," the prince told her, "that I knew I must see your face, or my heart could have no peace." Rapunzel saw that he was young and handsome; in her own heart she felt a happiness she had never known. And when the prince, grown bold, proposed to marry her then and there, she consented. They held a ceremony in the tower, and every evening after that, he returned. The sorceress, who came only by day, knew nothing of his visits.

One day when the sorceress entered the tower, Rapunzel said, "If you please, Stepmother, help me with my dress. It is growing so tight around my waist, it doesn't want to fit me anymore."

Instantly the sorceress understood what Rapunzel did not. "Oh, you wicked child!" she shrieked. "What do I hear you say? I thought I had kept you safe, away from the whole world, but you have betrayed me!"

In a rage, she seized the braids and coils of Rapunzel's silky hair and sheared them off. Then she sent the miserable girl to a wild country, to live alone with no one to care for her. After some month in this wilderness, Rapunzel gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl.

Once the sorceress had cast Rapunzel out of the tower, she gathered the cut-off hair and fastened it to the window-hook. That evening, when the prince called up, "Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!" she let the hair cascade down. The poor prince pulled himself up to the window, only to be confronted by the sorceress, her eyes wild with fury. "So you have come to fetch your dearest darling?" she cried. "Well, you shall not see her again—Rapunzel is lost to you forever!"

Struck through with grief, the prince let go of the braid, and he plummeted to the ground.

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Although the fall should have killed him, the prince lived. But his eyes were hurt; he could no longer see. Wretched and blind, he stumbled from place to place, eating nothing but roots and berries, thinking of nothing but the loss of his beloved wife.

After a year of wandering in such misery, he came into the same wilderness where Rapunzel was living with her children. There, one day, he heard a voice so dear to him that he rushed toward it. Rapunzel saw him and opened her arms to him, weeping.

As Rapunzel embraced the prince, two of her tears fell into his eyes. Suddenly his vision grew clear; once again the prince could see.

He gazed at Rapunzel and at their two beautiful children. He looked up at the hills beyond the rocky landscape and knew that he was not lost. The prince led his family out of the wilderness toward his kingdom, where they were received with great joy.

There they lived a long life, happy and content.

THE END