

Rapunzel

A Fairytale (from Germany)

There once lived a husband and wife who wished for a child. On an upper floor on the back of their house there was a large window through which the couple could see a splendid garden. The garden was full of the most beautiful flowers and herbs. It was, however, surrounded by a high wall, and no one dared to go into the garden because it belonged to a witch who had great power and was feared by all the world.

One day the woman was standing by the window and looking down into the garden, when she saw an area which was planted with the most tasty-looking rapunzel (a herb with leaves like lettuce). The rapunzel looked so fresh and green that she had the greatest desire to eat some. This desire increased every day. The woman knew that she could not get any of it and grew more pale and miserable each day.

Her husband was worried about her and asked "What is wrong, dear?"

"Ah," she replied, "if I can't eat some of the rapunzel from the garden behind our house I think I shall die."

Her husband, who truly loved her, thought, "Sooner than let my lovely wife die, I will bring her some of the rapunzel, no matter the cost."

In the twilight of the evening, he climbed over the wall into the garden of the witch, hastily grabbed a handful of rapunzel and took it to his wife. She at once made a salad and ate it happily.

She liked it so very much that the next day she longed for it three times as much as before. If he was to have any rest, her husband must once more descend into the garden. In the gloom of evening, therefore, he set out again, but when he had climbed over the wall he was terribly afraid, for he saw the witch standing before him.

"How dare you," she said with angry look, "sneak into my garden and steal my rapunzel like a thief? You shall suffer for this!"

"Please have mercy," the frightened husband pleaded, "I had to have the rapunzel. My wife saw it from the window and felt such a longing for it that she would have died if she had not got some to eat."

Then the witch allowed her anger to be softened, and said to him, "If this is true, I will allow you to take as much as you like. I make only one condition. You must give me the baby daughter your wife will bring into the world. She shall be well treated. I will care for her like a mother."

The man in his fear consented and when the baby was born the witch appeared at once. The child was given the name of Rapunzel and the witch took the baby away.

Rapunzel grew into the most beautiful child beneath the sun. When she was twelve years old, the witch shut her into a tower which stood in a forest. The tower had no door. A window at the very top seemed to be the only way in or out of the tower. When the witch wanted to visit Rapunzel, she stood beneath the window and cried,

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair."

Rapunzel had magnificent long hair, and when she heard the voice of the witch she would wind her braids around a hook that was near the window. The hair fell down the side of the tower and the witch climbed up by it.

After a year or two, a Prince rode through this forest. He heard a song which was so lovely that he stood still and listened. This was Rapunzel who in her loneliness passed her time singing. The Prince wanted to climb up to her, and looked for the door of the tower, but none was to be found. The singing had so deeply touched his heart, that every day he went out into the forest and listened to it.

Once when he was standing behind a tree listening to Rapunzel's song, he saw the witch come and heard her cry,

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair."

Then Rapunzel let down the braids of her hair, and the witch climbed up to her.

"If that is the ladder by which one climbs, I will try my fortune," thought the Prince and the next day when it began to grow dark, he went to the tower and cried,

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair."

Immediately the hair fell down and the Prince climbed up.

At first Rapunzel was terribly frightened by the Prince. She had never seen a man. However the Prince talked to her in such a friendly and sincere manner that Rapunzel soon lost her fear. He told her how much his heart had been stirred by her singing. He would visit her in the evenings, for the old woman came by day. After some months he asked her if she would take him for her husband – and she said yes, and laid her hand in his.

She said, "I will willingly go away with you, but I do not know how to get down. Bring a bit of silk with you every time you come and I will weave a ladder with it. When that is ready I will climb down and we shall escape together."

The witch knew nothing of this until one time when the witch was visting, Rapunzel without thinking said aloud to herself, "The Prince climbs up so must faster than she does."

"You wicked child!" cried the witch. "What do I hear you say! I thought I had separated you from all the world but you have deceived me."

In her anger she clutched Rapunzel's beautiful hair, seized a pair of scissors – and snip, snap – cut it all off. Rapunzel's lovely braids lay on the ground but the witch was not through. She was so angry that she took poor Rapunzel into a deep forest where she would have to live alone.

The witch rushed back to the tower and fastened the braids of hair which she had cut off to a hook near the window, and when the Prince came and cried,

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair,"

She let the hair down. The Prince climbed to the window, but he did not find his dearest Rapunzel above, but rather the witch, who gazed at him with a wicked and venomous look.

"Aha!" she cried mockingly, "You've come for Rapunzel but the beautiful bird sits no longer singing in the nest; the cat has got it and will scratch out your eyes as well. Rapunzel is banished and you will never see her again!"

The Prince in horror backed away from the witch and fell out the window and down from the tower. His fall was broken by some bushes, but thorns on the bushes pierced his eyes and he was blinded. He wandered about the forest, ate only roots and berries, and did nothing but weep over the loss of his dearest Rapunzel.

In this way, the Prince roamed in misery for some months. One day he heard a voice singing. The sound seemed so familiar to him and he went towards it. When he approached, Rapunzel recognised him and fell into his arms and wept.

Her tears fell on his eyes and the Prince could see again. He led her to his kingdom where he was joyfully received, and they lived for a long time afterwards, happy and contented.