

Rapunzel, Rapunzel, Cut Off Your Hair – Transcript

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great.

I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's story is for pre-intermediate learners. The name of the story is *Rapunzel, Rapunzel, Cut Off Your Hair*. You can find a transcript of the episode at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Cut](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Cut), where you can also download the episode as a PDF.

Now, you might hear the title Rapunzel and think, *I've never heard of this story before. What's a Rapunzel?* Well, first of all, Rapunzel is a kind of root. It is a kind of plant, although not a particularly common one. But it is also a very famous fairy tale, and if I tell you about it, you will definitely recognise it.

So Rapunzel is the story of a girl who has very long, magical hair. She is trapped in a tower, she lives in a tower, and she lets her hair out of the window, and people climb up her hair into the tower. There is a Disney film based on this story called *Tangled*. When your hair is tangled, it means it's tied together and you have to brush it to untangle it.

Now, maybe you don't know which Disney film I'm talking about, but if I sing this song, you might recognise it.

*Now at last I see the light
And it's like the fog has lifted
And at last I see the light
And it's like the sky is new
And it's warm and real and bright
And the world has somehow shifted
All at once, everything looks different
Now that I see you*

Now I know what you're thinking. *Ariel, was that really necessary, or did you just want to show off that your singing skills have improved?* And to that I say, shhhhhh. Hehehehe.

So, the version of Rapunzel I have written is a bit different to the original version. Oh, shocker. Who could have guessed? I wrote this story, well, I came up with the idea for this story at a workshop about queering fairy tales and folktales. So basically taking fairy tales and folktales and making them queer, LGBTQ+.

So, at one point in the workshop, we got into groups and we worked on queering a fairy tale in our group. And we came up with the basic idea for this story together, but I really fell in love with it, and so I kind of took it for myself. Um, I went home and I wrote the story down. So, uh, it's my story now. Uh, I don't remember the names of the people who were in my group, but it's my story. Well, obviously, if they were to write their versions, they would be different.

I think the reason I really thought Rapunzel was appropriate to queer is because this idea of bodily control, like your body changing in ways that you can't understand or you don't like, and also this complicated relation to hair and traditional femininity, is something that is very queer. You know, we as queer people can really identify with that.

So I don't want to ruin too much of the story, but rest assured this version is darker than the original and it has my own fun twists on things. So, I hope you enjoy, but before that, let me just explain some vocabulary that's in the story.

A **loom**, L O O M, is a machine for weaving thread. Weaving is when you put lots of threads together to make a new fabric, a new material. Wool is often woven together to make a strong fabric for warm clothes. In the past, looms were operated by hand, but now looms are often automatic, although I did learn recently that there is one kind of, well, making clothes that machines still cannot do, and that is crocheting. There is something about crocheting that is very complicated and three dimensional, and machines still cannot replicate it. So take that, robots! Take that, AI! You can't crochet a sweater. I also can't crochet a sweater, but that's besides the point.

When something **gets caught on something**, it is stuck to it and can't move. For example, if you have long hair it might get caught on your clothes – a bit of the hair will get stuck in your clothes. I often find when I leave a room my sleeve, part of my shirt, gets caught on the door handle – obviously, if I'm wearing a long-sleeved shirt or a jacket. If you get caught between the doors of a train as they close, it can be quite dangerous, so don't do it.

Your **scalp**, S C A L P, is the top part of your hair, where your hair grows. Obviously, your scalp is usually covered by hair, but if you're bald then your scalp will be visible. We use shampoo to wash oil out of our scalps.

A **pharmacist**, P H A R M A C I S T, is someone who works at a pharmacy, someone who is trained to prepare and give out medicine to people. While doctors tell you what's wrong, pharmacists give you medicine to help with your problem.

Armour, A R M O U R, is a set of hard clothes, made of iron, steel or leather. Armour is there to protect you in battle. In the Middle Ages, knights and warriors wore very complicated metal armour and it took a long time to put it on and take it off. A full set of armour is known as a **suit of armour**. Nowadays, usually only the police and soldiers wear armour, and the armour is much lighter.

A **sword** is a long, sharp weapon. We don't use swords now but they were used in the Middle Ages, about five hundred years ago. In the TV series *Game of Thrones*, most of the characters fight with swords. For example, Arya Stark is very good at fighting with a sword. Although *Game of Thrones* is a bit of an old series now, isn't it? I probably need to update these references. Oops. In *Harry Potter*, Harry Potter uses the Sword of Gryffindor to kill the basilisk in the second book.

Before you eat food, you have to **chew** it. You put it in your mouth and press it with your teeth. Some food is soft and is very easy to chew, like strawberries. But some food is hard and is hard to chew, like carrots.

When you **treat someone like something**, you act like they are that thing. For example, if you treat someone like they are your pet, you will not listen to what they say, and just make them do things for you. Your boss might treat you like a pet: 'Go and get me coffee! Sit down!' More generally, you can treat someone well or treat someone badly. If you sit down and start barking like a dog, woof woof woof, then your boss will probably treat you like you are very strange.

When you are **trapped**, you are in a trap, you are stuck somewhere and can't leave. For example, if you go into a room and the door is locked from the inside, and you don't have the key, then you're trapped. We also use 'trapped' to refer to being trapped emotionally. For example, if your parents are fighting and they ask who you love more, you could feel trapped. You love them both, and you don't want to choose one of them.

When you are very, very hungry, you are **starving**. If you have no food for several days, you will start to starve. If someone starves for long enough, they will die. Most of us have never really been starving before, fortunately.

A **nail** is the hard thing on the end of your fingers and toes. Nails grow and you have to cut them, although some people like having long nails. Some people paint their nails, and some people even put on plastic nails. If you are very nervous, you might bite your nails.

OK, so listen and enjoy!

Rapunzel, Rapunzel, Cut Off Your Hair

Once upon a time, there was an old couple who owned a farm. The ground was hard and the winters were cold, and no matter how hard they worked, they never had much to eat. The couple decided to have a son, so that he could work the fields for them.

The wife got pregnant, and during her pregnancy, she ate lots of coconuts. Coconuts are hard and hairy, so she thought that they would help her have a big, strong boy. The coconuts were expensive, though, and they didn't have much money for other food. She got so hungry that she started eating one of the plants in the garden, a plant called rapunzel. She hated the bitter taste of it, but she told herself that it would all be worth it when they had a big strong hairy boy.

But when the woman gave birth, what came out was not what she'd hoped for: it was a beautiful girl with blonde hair. And this was no normal hair – it was twenty metres long and shone like the sun, or a fresh banana. The woman was so angry that she shouted, 'Take the child away!' and gave her to her husband. When the man asked what they should name the child, she said, 'Rapunzel. She has made me as bitter as the plant I ate through my pregnancy.'

Rapunzel was too weak to work the fields, but as soon as she was old enough, her parents put her to work on the loom. They thought that at least she could make some clothes to sell. But Rapunzel's hair got caught in the loom and caused all sorts of problems. They tried cutting her hair, but it was so thick that it took hours to cut, and somehow the hair always grew back overnight. No matter how short they cut it, by morning the hair was twenty metres long and got caught in the loom, in doors and under her parents' feet.

Finally, Rapunzel's parents had had enough. One day, when the young girl was trying to pull her hair out of the loom, her parents came in with a strange old man who seemed very interested in her. He looked at her hair and her scalp, and said, 'Yes, yes, this will do.'

'What's happening?' said Rapunzel.

But her parents said nothing to her, just gave some money to the man, and before she knew what was happening, Rapunzel and her hair were sitting on a horse leaving town.

At first, Rapunzel thought this was going to be a great adventure.

'Where are we going?' she asked the old man.

'We are going to my tower,' he said. 'I am a pharmacist, and—'

'What's a pharmacist?'

The old man clearly did not like being interrupted. 'Ahem. A pharmacist helps people who are sick by giving them medicine. Your hair is very special, Rapunzel. We are going to help many people with it. Now, stop talking. I need to concentrate to find the way through the forest.'

A few hours later, they arrived at an old tower in the woods.

'Welcome to your new home,' said the pharmacist.

Rapunzel couldn't believe it. The tower was perfect! It looked just like something out of a story book. And best of all, there was finally space for her hair. She could put it on the stairs, and when she moved around the room the hair didn't get caught on *anything*. She felt so free!

For a few days, Rapunzel was happier than she had ever been. But slowly, she realised that she was not free at all. When she asked to go outside, at first the pharmacist said things like, 'Oh, but you must be tired from travelling,' and, 'You'll burn in the sun,' but finally he made it clear: 'Rapunzel, you are not allowed to go outside. This is your home now.'

Not only that, he also spent a long time looking at her hair, and one day he told her to sit still and took out some glass bottles. He massaged her scalp, which felt very fun at first, but when she realised she would have to sit there for hours, she grew bored.

'What are you doing?' she said.

'Quiet! You'll waste the oil.'

She watched and saw that he was taking the oil from her scalp and putting it into the bottles.

'What are you doing that for?' she said. 'That's disgusting!'

'I've told you,' he said, cleaning his hands. 'Your hair is very special.'

He got up and carefully put the bottles away.

'You must look after your hair,' he said. 'Brush every inch of it, and eat the healthy food I bring you.'

And with that, he got up to leave.

'Wait!' cried Rapunzel. 'Where are you going?'

'Rapunzel!' he said, sounding very annoyed. 'I cannot stay here all the time. I must go and sell my products. People will die if I do not help them. You would not want that, would you? Now be a good girl and look after yourself while I'm gone.'

He picked up his bag, climbed down the stairs, left the tower and locked the door. And so began Rapunzel's new life.

Every day, Rapunzel got up and brushed her long hair. In the late morning, the pharmacist came from wherever he lived to massage the oil out of her scalp. Then they had lunch together and he disappeared until the next day. Finally, she found out that he was selling her scalp oil, telling people that it would help them stay young. She didn't understand why that was so important. She was young, and it was very boring. But she didn't like it when the pharmacist shouted at her, so she said nothing. All she could do was read the books in her tower, brush her hair and eat the boring vegetables the pharmacist brought her.

Things continued this way for many years. Rapunzel spent all her time reading about brave heroes with much more interesting lives than her. They wore **suits of armour**, rode horses and fought with **swords**. The scalp massages weren't so bad, although the pharmacist did them very quickly now, and she had no idea how much money he made from selling the oil. A few times, Rapunzel tried to open the front door to the tower, but it was locked with some kind of magic. No matter how long she pushed, no matter how hard she hit it, it didn't move an inch. So she gave up and went back to reading.

One evening, Rapunzel was so bored that she took a pair of scissors from the drawer and cut off all her hair. It took hours to do, and she looked very silly afterwards, but it felt wonderful not to have all that heavy hair pulling on her scalp.

In the morning, her hair had grown back again, so she took the cut-off hair and made it into dolls in the shape of different animals. When the pharmacist saw what she had done, he was very angry.

'Your scalp oil is only so special because of your long hair!' he shouted. 'One day, you might cut it off and it won't grow back! No. This simply won't do.'

And he took the pair of scissors and all the sharp objects from the tower, so that the girl had nothing to cut her hair with.

Well, Rapunzel wasn't going to stop just like that. For the first time in her life, she'd had a taste of true power, and it tasted good.

So instead of cutting her hair with scissors, she **chewed** off her hair. It took most of the day, and her teeth hurt afterwards, but she bit and chewed until her hair was very short, and then she made more animal dolls. But a few hours later, she started to feel sick, and it wasn't just from chewing the hair. What if the pharmacist got really angry and sent her to live with her parents again?

So she hid the dolls and the next day her hair was long again. Her chewing continued for several weeks, and soon all the cupboards were full of hair-dolls: pigs and cows and sheep and fish and all kinds of animals that Rapunzel never got to see in real life. Sometimes, she made dolls of people, usually the brave heroes from her books.

She started looking out of the window more in the day, and wondered what would happen if she jumped out. She would die, she supposed, but would it really be that bad? At least she would be closer to the birds and the trees.

One day, the pharmacist was looking for a spare bottle, and he opened one of the cupboards. A pile of hair-dolls rained down on him and fell onto the floor.

'Rapunzel!' he cried. 'What is the meaning of this?'

Rapunzel said nothing, so the pharmacist opened another cupboard, and more hair-dolls fell out, and he went round opening all the cupboards until all the hair had come out.

'You must have cut your hair fifty times...' he said, his hands shaking. 'How did you do it?'

'I chewed it off,' said Rapunzel sweetly.

'You *what*?!'

He came and opened her mouth, looking at her teeth as if she was a horse.

'You nasty, *nasty* girl!'

He walked around the tower angrily, and then he saw one of the dolls of the heroes and stopped. He picked up the doll and looked at it for a while. Rapunzel wondered if he was going to burn them. She thought that she should be sad at the idea, but actually she didn't care. The dolls made her think of her hair, and she was tired of them.

'Fine then,' said the pharmacist calmly. 'If you are going to act like a child, then I will **treat you like** a child.'

He left, taking all the hair-dolls with him.

That night, Rapunzel did not sleep. She was beginning to realise that her life was awful. She had always wished she could go outside and see the world, but she had never felt so **trapped**.

So in the early hours of the morning, Rapunzel tried to escape. She tied her hair to the bed and went to climb out the window. But as she looked, she felt sick. What if she fell? And where would she go? She wasn't ready for this. No, she would try tomorrow instead. Perhaps there was a book in the tower on climbing...

The next morning, Rapunzel woke up to a voice calling from below the tower.

'Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair!'

Rapunzel thought she must be dreaming. But then the voice called again.

'I said: Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your haaaaair!'

Rapunzel went and looked out the window. There, standing at the bottom of the tower, was one of the heroes from her books! He wore a suit of armour, and had a beautiful white horse and a sword!

'Who are you?' said Rapunzel.

'Why, I am a brave hero!' said the man. 'I heard that there was a beautiful girl with magical hair trapped in a tower, that a horrible old man put her there. And I thought, "Well, that's not alright at all, is it!" So I found the horrible old man, I took my sword to his throat and I said, "You nasty thing! Where is the tower? Where have you trapped that poor girl? Tell me or I will kill you!" And now I have come here to save you. So you just need to let down your hair, and I will climb up and save you.'

Rapunzel couldn't believe it. The stories were real! This hero had come to save her. She took her hair and started throwing it out of the window.

'Amazing, amazing!' she said. 'I was going to escape by myself, but this is much better, because you can help me climb down and you'll know where to go afterwards, and...'

The man didn't listen to her, but watched the hair as it came down from the tower. As soon as it was close enough to touch, he took it and **sniffed** it. 'Ah, wonderful...' Then he started to climb. He pulled on Rapunzel's scalp and it hurt a lot, but she didn't care. Soon, she would be free!

But as the man climbed, Rapunzel started to notice things. The man was not as young as she thought, and the horse wasn't really white. It looked like parts of it had been *painted* white. The armour looked much cheaper close up, and the sword was made of wood.

As the man got nearer and nearer, Rapunzel realised that this was another trap. This was no young hero, but an old man in cheap armour with a wooden sword. The pharmacist had said he was going to treat her like a child, hadn't he? When she was just a child, her parents had sold her to him. He must've decided to sell her again.

Well, Rapunzel wouldn't have that. She grabbed her hair and started to chew on it.

'Beautiful girl,' said the man, 'what *are* you doing?'

'Nothing!' Rapunzel said through her hair, and continued chewing.

When the 'hero' realised what she was doing, he started to climb much faster. He **panted and wheezed**, and he was only a metre away from her window.

'Now, young girl, *listen*, chewing on your hair is a very bad habit. I— I think you should stop right away!'

Rapunzel chewed like a **starving** man with a piece of bread. She chewed like the angriest animal. She chewed so hard her entire face hurt. Just as the man's hand was reaching up to the edge of the window – SNAP!

The last piece of Rapunzel's hair broke off, and the man fell.

'Aaaaaahhh!'

CRACK!

Rapunzel ran away from the window and hid in the corner of her room. For the first time in days, she felt the lightness of her head without hair pulling on it. She also heard the horrible quiet of the forest, with no voice to break it.

It took hours for Rapunzel to feel brave enough to go and look. Down there, on the ground, lay a broken old doll. That man had never been a hero, and now he was dead. The horse had run away. Rapunzel was alone again.

She shut the curtains and climbed into bed, and she did not know how long she slept. Every time she woke up, she remembered what she had done, and sleep was the only safe place to go. She began to wonder where the pharmacist was, why he hadn't come to shout at her for killing the man. Had he left her to starve to death?

Finally, Rapunzel got up. While she slept, her hair had grown and grown. It filled up almost the entire tower, and it was rough from not being brushed, so she had to fight to walk over to the window. She looked out and saw that the body was gone.

This time, Rapunzel didn't think twice. She tied her hair to the bed, opened the window and climbed down. It was awful, and many times she almost fell, but nothing could be worse than living in that tower and starving to death.

When she reached the ground, she couldn't believe how soft the grass felt beneath her feet. She was used to the hard wooden floor of the tower, and it felt like she was walking on clouds.

She tried to bite her hair, but it wouldn't break – it was too rough. She chewed and chewed, until one of her teeth fell out. 'Ow!' she cried.

So she pulled the hair out of the tower. Of course, it was still tied to the bed, so the bed came all the way up to the window. She pulled and pulled, and finally managed to break off the leg of the bed. The rest of her hair flew down, and she quickly untied it from the piece of wood and ran into the forest.

Rapunzel ran all day, although her long hair slowed her down. It started to rain, so she found a cave that was mostly dry and hid there. She pulled her hair into the cave, but it was so long that there wasn't enough space for it all, and she had to leave half of it outside in the forest.

Rapunzel started to cry. She had dreamed many times of leaving the tower, but it was never like this. She was alone, starving, and her long hair would make it easy for the pharmacist to find her.

But it was not the pharmacist who found her. It was a young man with very long **nails**.

In fact, anybody who saw those nails would find them hard to believe. They were a metre long and as sharp as swords. Why this young man was walking alone in the rain, it was hard to tell.

As soon as he came close to the cave, Rapunzel shouted, 'Don't come any closer!'

The man jumped. 'Oh!' he said. 'I was just wondering what this was... Is this your hair?'

Rapunzel looked closely at him. It was hard to see in the darkness, but there was moonlight shining on his nails. Such long nails...

'I warn you,' she said. 'I've killed someone before.'

'So have I,' said the man, and he didn't sound happy about it. 'I don't want to hurt you. I was just looking for somewhere dry to sit.'

'Then go home.'

'I, er, I don't have a home.'

'Oh.' Rapunzel thought about it for a moment. She had never read about homeless men with long nails in the woods. She had no idea if this was safe or not. But she was tired, and she didn't want to be alone again. 'Then come sit here for a while.'

'Thank you.'

The man came and sat a few metres away from Rapunzel. He tried to find a place where there was no hair, but the hair was everywhere, so she said, 'Just use it as a cushion,' and he did.

For a while, they sat in silence and watched the rain. This was the first time Rapunzel had spent time with a man who didn't treat her like a child.

'I'm Burdock,' he said, when the rain had grown quieter.

'I'm Rapunzel.'

'I suppose you don't have a home to go back to, either?'

'I chose to leave,' she said.

'They threw me out.'

'For having long nails?'

'Well... yes.'

And Burdock told Rapunzel his story. He had grown up in a village not far from the forest, and from a young age his nails had always grown long and sharp. Whenever someone cut them, they simply grew back overnight. When he tried to play with the other children, he hurt them by accident. No matter what his parents covered the nails with, they cut through it, so in the end they kept him inside and told him to make little toys out of wood.

‘But when I grew old enough, they wanted me to marry. I think they were tired of having me in the house breaking things. They found a woman who would marry me without meeting me, but after the wedding, when she saw my nails, she started to cry. I understood. I told her we didn’t have to sleep together – we didn’t even have to live together! But she wanted a child so much. Everything after that was an accident. I tried to move away from her, but she ran after me. That all... happened. We slept together. Then, in the morning I woke up and—’

He went quiet, and by now the rain had stopped. Only the sound of birds came from outside. Rapunzel saw a pain in Burdock’s eyes, a pain she knew from those nights of endless sleep in the tower.

‘I can tell you my story,’ she said, and Burdock said, ‘Mm.’

They shared their pain until night turned to morning, and at some point Rapunzel took Burdock into her arms and held him. He was scared that he might cut her, but she wasn’t afraid of his nails.

At some point they fell asleep, and Rapunzel woke up thirsty. She got up, and her hair got caught on Burdock’s nails. There was a beautiful SHEEN, and the nails cut through her hair like it was nothing. The sound woke Burdock up, and when he saw what he’d done, he held his head and said, ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m—’

‘Don’t be!’ said Rapunzel, holding him tight. ‘Your nails can cut my hair better than any scissors ever could. Would you cut the rest for me? Please?’

Burdock looked at his nails for a long time, and then said, ‘If you trust me, then yes.’

The rest of Rapunzel and Burdock’s story is long, like a head of hair that’s never been cut, or a plant that gets plenty of water and sunlight. It ends happily, in a little wooden house with a warm fire. Every day, Burdock wakes up before Rapunzel, and quietly cuts her hair with his nails. When she wakes up, her hair is short, and she never has to feel it pulling on her scalp. And every night, Rapunzel carefully takes the cut-off hair and wraps it around Burdock’s nails, so that he cannot hurt her by accident.

Together, Rapunzel and Burdock make toys for children, using wood and hair. They do not want children of their own, and this will never change. They never could be happy children themselves, but perhaps others can. And so this story will grow and grow for many years, until finally it will meet...

THE END

Woo! Thank you so much for listening/watching this episode of *Easy Stories in English*. If you didn’t know, you can now watch the episodes on YouTube in video format. And if you would like to stay up to date with the podcast, find out when there are new episodes, when I’m launching my next book, all those kind of things, you should join my email newsletter at Ariel, no! At EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Email. I’ll see you there, friend. Bye.