

CHAPTER ONE

~ Rapunzel ~

5th of Augustus

I seriously CANNOT BELIEVE what has happened to me today. I am currently throwing a tantrum on the pile of straw that is supposed to serve as my bed (!) and — this is the most unbelievable part — I am LOCKED IN A TOWER IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FOREST!! In case I am never rescued and blackbirds fly through the one tower window and pick my bones clean, I hope the tragic circumstances that have befallen me on the dawn of my twelfth birthday will not go forgotten by history. Kicking and screaming in frustration is not doing me much good. Truth be told, my body is beginning to ache from the effort.

My candle sheds just enough light for me to see the strange shadows dancing on the walls. The only reason I am not lying in complete darkness is that the witch (yes, WITCH, complete with scraggly hair and hairy wart) did not know a handful of candles was in the trunk along with the meager possessions she allowed me to pack.

My day started out fine. Mother was preparing a special

morning feast to celebrate my birthday, and I was setting up the stool and shears that she was going to use later to cut my hair. Now that I turned twelve, this was to be my first official haircut and I couldn't wait. Once it was shortened, I could finally wear my hair loose instead of tied upon my head. It was so long I could sit on it!

From the kitchen window, I could see Father out back, tending the garden. He is famous in our village for the rampion herb that refuses to grow in any yard but ours. In the heat of summer, the orders for fresh rampion pour in and we live high off the hog (or herb, as the case may be) right through the autumn harvest. Then, in November, I help Father dig up the stalks and he rides off for a fortnight to deliver the herb as far as the riverbank on the other side of the Great Forest.

Some ladies boil it and apply it to their cheeks for a smooth complexion. Mostly, though, it is made into salads along with lettuce and spinach. I've heard whispers that there's something not natural about rampion, that it can make feeble old men strong again and will keep your breath fresh even if you bite into a clove of garlic.

Mother had finished spreading honey on the almond pies that would be my special birthday breakfast, and told me to go fetch Father. When I pushed open the heavy wooden gate that protected the garden, I was shocked to