

## Rapunzel, Rapunzel

*Rapunzel, Rapunzel, ask yourself why you let down your hair. Ask yourself, would anyone who truly loves you ever allow it to be subject to such wear and tear?*

Sometimes the person who raises you from root is not a person you can trust, even though every sign around you says you are supposed to. Sometimes the roots start rotting long before the tree notices. Sometimes all it takes is watching a mother bird teaching a baby bird how to fly to remind us what our parents are supposed to do, teach us to fly into the world and learn how to look after ourselves in it. Not give you away for the sake of selfish love. Not lock you away in a tower and rob you of the freedom of who you are.

*Rapunzel, Rapunzel, she began to rethink how and why she really let down her hair.*

For Rapunzel it was realizing that no one who truly loved her would use any part of her body, not even her hair, as a ladder. No one who truly loved her would hide her from the whole world in a tower. When toxic love is finally recognised for the painful, deep wound that it is, all of us must do the drastic and the painful to cut away the poison thread that binds you together.

*So Rapunzel, Rapunzel, she cut off her own hair, she used it as a rope, climbed down from the tower, and ran away to find her own freedom, to make her own fortune, like a bird finally free of her shackles and without so much as looking back.*

No one is coming to save you, my love. No prince, no saviour, no knight in shining armour. But don't you worry about a thing. You've already got what should save you, hiding in the marrow inside your own powerful spine, your own bones.

## The Red Wolf

*Children go missing all the time.*

*Sometimes it is faeries who steal them.*

*Other times, they trust a wolf.*

Even in times of war, children are innocent to the true ways of the world.  
Their mothers are always wiser.

This is because most mothers know that the softest people with the biggest hearts are the ones who hold the truest magic of them all; purity of this kind can not be bought from the Gods themselves, and it was greatest target of the devil-souled.

When Little Red Riding Hood went missing, a girl so beloved by her mother that she always told her she could be *anything* she wanted to be, her mother never ever left the place where she had grown up, hoping against hope that the trees, the woods, would one day return her child.

Every day, she stood at the edge of the woods, looking into the dark, hoping to find a wisp of her forest-hearted child somewhere within the leaf-strewn wild. Every day, she took a step closer to the darkness, hopelessness making her courage steadfast, stronger every day.

Grief makes unlikely warriors out of us all.

So when she saw the two lamp-like eyes in the dark one day, she was not afraid. Instead she asked, 'Brother wolf, are you the one who has stolen my child from my arms and taken her away?'

'Not I,' said the wolf before disappearing.

## Motherly Advice

Mother says, 'Do not text boys  
that look at you like you are a feast.  
Girls are not feasts.  
You do not give yourself  
up like a perishable thing  
when you have miles  
of growing eternity within you.'

Mother says, 'Be careful of strangers.  
Especially sweet-looking old ladies  
because you never know  
what may come to you in disguise,  
bearing poisoned apples.'

Mother says, 'Do not trust girls  
with fox eyes and too-clever smiles.  
They carry spells between their teeth  
and they use them so cleverly,  
you won't even remember  
how you lost things to them.'

Mother says, 'Do not go into  
the quiet copses,  
do not visit castles,  
do not seek out secrets.  
You could become vanished smoke.'

Mother says, 'I raised you better than that.'

And I think of  
the sins I already belong to,  
all the secrets I already know.

I am already fertile with  
the forest and the fog,  
my mind pregnant with all the things  
she wishes I didn't know.

## The Hatter

To understand what they did to the Hatter, I must first tell you about people who know how to play with your brokenness like it is a fidget spinner without so much as touching your skin—a form of abuse known as gaslighting.

You say it happened, they say it did not.

You say it had to, they say it cannot.

They pull at a thread of pain left by someone in your mind, and sew an entire ghost out of you.

Build you a dark wonderland and ask you to call it home.

Tell you, 'Why can't you just be happy?' And you cannot because happiness in this story is a queen you do not trust being built from your own delusions.

When this happens, you are like the Hatter. Trapped here in this fairytale world, half mad because someone you love keeps lying to you.

Is this rain, dear? *No it isn't, it's a raven.*

Is this a door? *No, it is a writing desk.*

Is this my mind? *No, it is now my rabbit hole, and I'm going to make you fall so far down there is no way out.*

This is why the raven becomes like a writing desk, nonsensical riddles and memories become valid, nothing makes sense anymore anyway.

You start wondering if anything you ever thought happened to you actually

happened to you and *this* is their violence. This is their abuse. It has left bruises and gashes along your brain that no one else knows are there.



## Princess Plain

This was my sin:

I was born plain, to a king who then had  
two daughters prettier than me,  
both younger, both softer.

My parents feared there would  
be no one in this world to love me.

Yet I was lucky,

I was a king's daughter.

A business prospect.

An alliance between kingdoms.

A prince maker.

Who needs love when you are an item of trade?

I made myself comfortable

without being loved,

realised that invisibility

comes with its benefits;

other women in court

do not see you as a threat.

I watched women be cruellest

to the one who was prettiest,

whisper in the darkness

about her virtue being compromised.

Apparently if you are without virtue

to a man, you become valueless.

And through this, I learned  
that more than men ever could  
women and girls scare me in ways  
I haven't even learned to articulate.  
We all seem to be in some kind of  
competition that none of us agreed to.

We all seem to love in a way  
that says, 'See, look. Look at the way  
I am able to wrap whole kingdoms  
Into my cherry blossom smile'  
without saying 'Look at the way  
I sell myself in a smile like peaches  
at your local fruit market.'

I am not beautiful in that way  
that incurs wrath.

Nor am I beautiful in that way  
that incurs desire.

I am safe amongst my own  
for not learning  
the art of being pretty.  
Although from birth  
I have been told that in not being so  
I have failed my purpose as a whole.