

Itchy

The Story of Rapunzel—
With Head Lice



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By Karleen Tauszik

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Summary: When Rapunzel gets head lice, the enchantress who holds her captive commands the local pharmacist to find a solution.

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It was a normal morning at the Far, Far Away Drug Store.

Jack Horner, the pharmacist, sat in the corner at his counter. He smiled and waved at his friends when they came in for help.

“I need cough medicine for one of the kids,” said The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe. Five children trailed behind her.

Jack nodded. “Yes, that nasty cough is going around. Aisle five, on the left side.”

“I had too many pickled peppers at breakfast,” said Peter Piper, holding his stomach. “Where are those pink chewy tablets?”

“Back wall, next to the pain relievers,” said Jack.

The Three Men in a Tub stopped in to take advantage of the Buy-One-Get-One-Free sale on sunscreen. They crowded the front aisle while the butcher argued with the baker and the candlestick maker about how much to buy.

Yes, it was a normal morning, until—

The phone rang.

Jack glanced at the caller ID. “Gothel the Enchantress” flashed across the tiny screen. Sweat broke out on his forehead. The enchantress was his toughest customer. She only called when her spells and potions didn’t work. And when her spells and potions didn’t work, she became angry. Extremely angry.

Jack’s hand shook when he picked up the phone.

“I need lice medicine, lots of it,” Gothel commanded. “Rapunzel has lice.”

“Y-y-yes, Ma’am.” Jack’s voice trembled.

Gothel complained that she searched through every book of spells on her shelves. She searched through the indexes and checked the tables of content. And she even searched through her old notes from sorcery school. But in all of her searching, she couldn’t find anything to rid Rapunzel of the lice. And that made her very angry indeed.

“Listen up, Jack!” Gothel’s sharp tone rose with each word. “Last I checked, Rapunzel’s hair was at least thirty-two feet long, so make sure you have enough treatment, you hear?”

“Y-y-yes, Ma’am.”

“I’ll be out all day teaching my advanced-level spell concocting classes. When I get back, I want this handled! I’m putting you in charge.”

Oh, great! Jack looked over at the five small bottles of lice medicine on his shelves.

“And make it quick or I’ll turn you into an armadillo!” snapped the enchantress, and she slammed down the phone.

Jack groaned, considering life as an armadillo. He hurried out from behind his counter and grabbed one of his meager bottles of lice medicine off the shelf, his hand shaking.

“Three fluid ounces? Oh, no! I’ll never have enough!” he cried.

He squinted at the label and tried to read the tiny instructions. Jack read aloud, “If the infested person has very long hair (longer than shoulder length), it may be necessary to use a second bottle.”

His heart thumped fast in his chest. *Longer than shoulder length? Thirty-two feet of hair is WAY longer than shoulder length!*

His eyes ran back and forth down the bottle, trying to read as quickly as possible. “Ah, a customer service number! Maybe they’ll be able to help. They’re my only hope,” Jack muttered. Scooping up all five bottles from the shelf, he ran back to his counter. He tried to control his shaking hands enough to punch the numbers into his phone.

“Not-So-Nice Lice Company, how may I assist you?” A cheery receptionist answered.

“I need to order lots of lice medicine.”

“I can transfer you to the order department, sir.”

“No, wait! I need more than a regular order.” Jack explained his unique situation.

“Oh, I understand, sir! You need our epidemic coordinator. Let me connect you.”

When the call transferred, Jack explained his problem again.

“I don’t want your three-ounce bottles. I want gallons, maybe even drums of the stuff, and I need it fast! Can you help me?”

“Yes, I believe we can,” said the epidemic coordinator. “Just a moment while I check my charts and add up the calculations.”

Jack scowled and drummed his fingers on the pharmacy counter while he listened to the jingly hold music. Finally, the man returned to the phone.

“Sir, gallons or drums won’t be enough for that much hair. You need a tanker truck of our product. We can send a truck to The Deep, Dark Forest within the hour. And a team of our application specialists will be there to make sure everything goes smoothly.”

“Whatever it takes! I’ll meet them at the tower,” said Jack. *I don’t want to be an armadillo.* He shivered at the thought.

Later that morning the promised tanker truck wound its way along the narrow path into The Deep, Dark Forest. Two fire trucks followed—one with an extension ladder and another with a pump and a tank filled with water. Jack trailed behind in his car, hoping with all his might that this would work.

When they arrived at the tower, the Vice President of Application called out, “Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your golden hair.”

“That doesn’t sound like the enchantress,” said Rapunzel. She peered out of the tower. A crowd of people stood below, surrounded by trucks.

One woman stepped forward and said, “Hi! I’m Heather, the Vice President of Application at the Not-So-Nice Lice Company.”

“It’s about time. These lice are driving me crazy!” Rapunzel called back, scratching her head with both hands. “Stand back,” she warned, pushing her long hair out the tower window. It billowed down, down, down, until it reached the ground.

Under Heather’s direction, everyone got to work. They raised the fire truck ladder. They pumped the lice medicine through the fire truck hoses. They soaked every strand of Rapunzel’s hair.

“That smells disgusting,” she complained.

“I know, but it works. Our research and development department is working on a new, more pleasant smelling formula, but until that’s done, this is the best we have. We’ll try to be as quick as we can,” promised Heather.

She opened big boxes of nit removal combs. Everyone pitched in and grabbed one in each hand. They climbed the ladder, everyone at a different level, and they all combed through the long golden hair. Then they rinsed it with water pumped from the fire truck.

After several hours of grueling work, Heather inspected Rapunzel’s hair from top to bottom. The team on the ground all waited silently. Finally, she announced from the top of the ladder, “Good job, everyone. It looks like we’re done.” Jack Horner sighed with relief, while everyone else cheered. Firefighters

began to roll up their hoses and lower their ladders. The Not-So-Nice Lice Company truck driver started his engine.

“Hey! Aren’t you people forgetting something?” hollered Rapunzel.

Everyone looked up, confused.

“How about rescuing me from this awful tower? You know—the happily ever after part?”

Fearing the enchantress, they all gasped and backed away. But Heather stepped forward.

She called up to Rapunzel. “I’ve just been promoted to the Not-So-Nice Lice world headquarters in Poughkeepsie. I could use a roommate. Interested?”

“Sure!” Rapunzel’s face lit up as she considered a life outside of the tower.

The others shouted at Heather, “Don’t do it!” and “What about the enchantress?”

“Aw, forget about the enchantress!” Heather laughed. “We’ll be far enough away that she won’t be a problem.”

“Anything beats this tower. I’ll try it,” said Rapunzel.

The firefighters raised their ladder once again, and Rapunzel climbed out of the tower. Everyone cheered. Everyone, that is, except Jack Horner who was now going to be in very big trouble.

Heather noticed Jack’s worried face and said, “Hey, you can come too! I’m sure we can find a place in the company for someone with your medical experience.”

“A place with a corner? I can do any job, I promise, as long as I’m in a corner,” said Jack.

Heather laughed. “Of course, Mr. Horner. I’m sure we can find you a job in a corner.”

So off they went. The Not-So-Nice Lice Company tanker truck, the fire trucks, and the pharmacist all wound their way along the narrow path back out of The Deep, Dark Forest. But now, Rapunzel sat in the tanker truck cab, with her long hair out the window, wrapped around the tank.

When they neared the edge of the forest, Rapunzel turned to the driver.

“Any chance we could stop somewhere for a haircut?”

THE END

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Karleen also writes chapter books for children aged 8 to 12.

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