

ACT I

SETTING: *A forest. Upstage left, the Tower. The only other set pieces are a few cubes, which will be used to indicate other locations.*

AT RISE: *Forest sounds. BEN enters at a run, a lute strung across his back. He spies the Tower and stops. He examines it a moment then calls off...*

BEN

Jamie! Jamie! Over here! I found it!

(JAMIE enters.)

JAMIE

Where? Where is it?

BEN

(Pointing to the Tower)

Look.

JAMIE

Wow. It's perfect.

BEN

Just what we were looking for.

(BEN continues to look at the Tower. JAMIE suddenly notices the audience. He nudges BEN with his elbow.)

What?

(JAMIE points to the audience. BEN takes them in and nods.)

Right then. Time to get the show on the road.

(BEN pulls his lute off his back and begins to sing.)

*We are two wandering minstrels of old
Known far and wide for the tales we have told
Of beanstalks and giants and Beauties asleep
Of pumpkins-turned-coaches with deadlines to keep*

JAMIE

*But this day we bring a new story to share
Of a maid in a tower with long golden hair*

BEN

And the tow'r looked a lot like that tower over there...

JAMIE/BEN

This is the tale of Rapunzel

BEN

*The Tow'r was enormous - one window, no door
And how the maid got there we're here to explore*

JAMIE

You'll see witches and squires and castles and kings...

BEN

A Prince with a duty!

JAMIE

A maiden who sings...

BEN

The lessons within will be taught for your sake

JAMIE

How tears of a loved one can heal a heartache

BEN

And a promise is something you never should break

BEN/JAMIE

This is the tale of Rapunzel...

BEN

Once upon a time...

JAMIE

Once upon a time!

BEN

Once upon a time there was a castle...

A castle!

JAMIE

And in this castle lived a King...

BEN

A King!

JAMIE

(WILHELM enters and faces the audience.)

A king named Wilhelm and his Queen...

BEN

(WILHEMINA enters opposite, looking over her shoulder. She carries a hoe and is oblivious to Wilhelm's presence.)

Wilhemina!

WILHELM

Queen Wilhemina had long, beautiful hair and loved to work in her garden...

BEN

Wilhemina, what are you doing here, in the Royal Gardens?

WILHELM

The Royal Gardens...

BEN

The Royal Gardens!

JAMIE

(JAMIE pushes the cubes into position.)

A majestic landscape filled with stately plants and flowers, guarded by two regal statues...

BEN

(JAMIE and BEN stand on the cubes and pose as the STATUES.)

Answer me, Wilhemina. What are you doing here? I ordered you to remain in your room.

WILHELM

WILHEMINA

You have no right to order me about, Wilhelm.

WILHELM

What do you mean “no right?” I am the King. My word is law.

WILHEMINA

But my room suffocates me. I long to be here, in the Royal Gardens, walking amongst the flowers I have planted, hoeing in my garden. Look, husband, just see what I am growing. Do you see it? The tall plant with the flower? It is *rampion*, Wilhelm. I am growing rampion!

WILHELM

I don't care what you're growing – I want you back in your room. You are carrying my child, the future King. I will not allow you to risk his life by gadding about amongst these silly statues.

WILHEMINA

But rampion is so rare – and it has powers! Magic powers! It is said that if a woman with child eats rampion, her baby will be guaranteed a happy and healthy long life.

WILHELM

Old wives tales! I will not let the mother of the future King be swayed by such nonsense. Now go back to your room!

WILHEMINA

Why must you control my every move?

WILHELM

I am trying to keep my child safe. We have a duty to provide an heir to the throne!

WILHEMINA

And is that duty more important than freedom? More important than love?!

(WILHELM turns away from her.)

Look at my hair, Wilhelm. See how long it is. Some men call it beautiful. It is beautiful, because it is loved and well-tended and allowed the freedom to grow. The freedom to blow about on the wind as it pleases. This is what I need. I need to be as wild and as free as my hair.

WILHELM

Perhaps your hair has too much freedom.

WILHEMINA

What?

(He grabs her hair with one hand and pulls his sword with the other.)

WILHEMINA

No, Wilhelm, no – not my hair! Not my hair!

(FRIAR enters.)

FRIAR

Your Majesty!

(WILHELM cuts Wilhemina's hair. WILHEMINA starts to cry. WILHELM turns to FRIAR.)

WILHELM

What do you want, Friar? Speak!

FRIAR

I have come again to beseech Your Majesty for the funds with which to build a chapel...

WILHELM

No.

FRIAR

On the outskirts of your kingdom...

WILHELM

No.

FRIAR

So that your distant subjects would be able to worship...

WILHELM

No, no, no! Every week you come here begging money for this chapel, Friar, and every week I say "no". When will you stop asking?

FRIAR

When Your Majesty says yes.

(PAGE enters.)

PAGE

King Wilhelm, the Duke of Ernsberger wishes an audience.

(WILHELM gestures for PAGE to wait while addressing FRIAR.)

WILHELM

I believe that concludes your business here, Friar.

FRIAR

Deny me now and I shall return next week and the week after that and the week after...

WILHELM

You will be wasting your time!

(WILHELM turns to WILHEMINA.)

Go back to your room, Wilhemina, and stay there.

(WILHEMINA looks away. WILHELM pulls PAGE downstage.)

Follow her. I wish to know her every move. But stay out of sight. Don't let her see you.

(PAGE nods. WILHELM exits. PAGE hides behind STATUES in order to spy upon WILHEMINA. FRIAR turns to WILHEMINA.)

FRIAR

I should take my leave. Goodbye, Your Majesty.

WILHEMINA

Friar, wait! Take me with you. I must escape this place.

FRIAR

Escape? But you are the *Queen*. You are carrying the King's child.

WILHEMINA

This is my child, too. I can no longer live this way Friar. I can no longer stay locked in a cage. My husband has replaced love with duty and obedience. Look what he did to my hair. Just think what he might do to my child...

I will run so far the King will never find me. I will grow a garden for food. What I don't eat I can sell. I will raise my child in a house of freedom. In a house of love.

FRIAR

How will you escape? You are recognized everywhere.

WILHEMINA

That is why I need your help.

FRIAR

Your Majesty, what you're proposing to do is considered treason!

WILHEMINA

When you took your vows, you promised to serve all God's children, did you not?

FRIAR

I did.

WILHEMINA

Am I not one of those children? Am I not worthy of that promise? Help me. Please.

(FRIAR considers a long moment then takes off his robe.)

FRIAR

You will need a disguise. Take my robe.

(He hands it to her.)

My horse is in the stables. Meet me there in an hour, when the sun has set. Go!

(WILHEMINA exits. FRIAR exits opposite. PAGE emerges from behind STATUES.)

PAGE

The stables. In one hour.

(PAGE rubs his hands together gleefully then exits. BEN and JAMIE come back "to life.")

BEN

The stables...

JAMIE

The stables!

(JAMIE rearranges the cubes to look like stalls in a stable.)

BEN

The Royal Stables of King Wilhelm. One hour later...

JAMIE

The stables!

BEN

And in those stables...

BEN/JAMIE

The horses!

(BEN and JAMIE position themselves in the stall and become HORSES. They whinny softly. FRIAR enters and looks around.)

FRIAR

Your Majesty? Queen Wilhemina?

(JAMIE whinnies softly. FRIAR crosses to him and pets him.)

There, now. We'll be leaving soon, my friend. Only this time you shall be carrying two on your fine, strong back...

(WILHELM enters dressed in a cloak and hood.)

Your Majesty. Hurry, take my horse. We must leave at once if we are to avoid detection.

(WILHELM pulls back the hood to reveal his face.)

WILHELM

Too late.

(FRIAR tries to run off opposite. PAGE enters and catches him.)

I could have you killed for this. You are a traitor to the King. However, because I am merciful, I shall merely banish you to the far reaches of my kingdom. If you set foot near this castle again, you will pay with your life.

(WILHELM turns to the PAGE.)

Take him away.

FRIAR

What about the Queen?

WILHELM

Ah, yes. The Queen. At this very moment she is being taken to a tower...

(BEN and JAMIE are no longer HORSES.)

BEN

A tower...

JAMIE

A tower!

(BEN and JAMIE cross to the base of the Tower.)

WILHELM

A remote tower set deep in the forest, with only one window and no door. At the base of this tower lies a fierce thicket of briars...

BEN

Briars...

JAMIE

Briars!

(BEN and JAMIE position themselves as BRIARS. WILHELM crosses to them.)

WILHELM

In this tower she will be held prisoner until the birth of my child...

(WILHEMINA enters holding a bundled infant, humming.)

WILHEMINA

*Little one, I promise
Little one, I swear
Whenever you need me
I will always be there*

WILHELM

At which point, the child will be taken from her and she, too, will be banished to the far reaches of the kingdom...

(PAGE pulls FRIAR off. WILHELM crosses to WILHEMINA finally sees him.)

WILHEMINA

No. Please. No...

(WILHELM takes the baby away from her.)

No! My son! Give me back my son! Don't take away my boy! NOOOOO!!!!

(PAGE enters.)

WILHELM

Remove the Queen from the tower and banish her. Then announce to the kingdom that she died while giving birth to my son, Prince Frederick.

PAGE

It shall be done, sire.

(PAGE drags WILHEMINA off. The baby starts to cry.)

WILHELM

Don't cry, little Frederick. I am your father. And you shall obey me always and do your duty – as a good son should.

(WILHELM exits. BEN and JAMIE are no longer BRIARS. BEN strums his lute.)

BEN

*The Queen was soon banished and heard of no more...
And Life in the Kingdom went on as before
But Fate may surprise you – let's see what's in store*

JAMIE/BEN

On with the tale of Rapunzel

BEN

Five years pass...

JAMIE

Five years!

BEN

And in a small village on the very outskirts of the Kingdom, there is a house...

(He indicates off downstage left.)

JAMIE

(Indicating off downstage left)

A house!