

## Into the Woods: Plot & Characters

“Be careful what you wish for” seems to be the ongoing theme in Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine’s Brothers Grimm inspired musical, **Into the Woods**. The story follows The Baker and his wife who wish to have a child, Cinderella who wishes to go the King’s Festival, and Jack who wishes his cow would give some milk. When the Baker and his wife are visited by the neighborhood witch, who reveals to them that she placed a curse on their family, the two set off on a journey into the woods to reverse the curse. Also in the woods, we meet Little Red, who is trying to visit her grandmother, the Wolf who loves tasty little girls, the Witch’s tormented daughter, Rapunzel, and the Princes chasing after their loves. By the end of Act I, everyone has gotten their wish and will seemingly live happily ever after. But in Act II, when Jack’s beanstalk brings them a visit from an angry Giant, we see how the consequences of their actions haunt them in disastrous ways. The community must come together to save each other and their kingdom, but sacrifices must be made.

**Narrator:** The narrator is an intellectual and excellent story-teller who relates directly with the audience. He/she helps to orchestrate the show and illustrate lessons to the audience but can also speak to and interact with the characters.

**Cinderella:** Even though she lives with her father, wicked stepmother, and two cruel stepsisters, Cinderella is kind and good and her only wish is to go to the Prince’s festival (a.k.a. the ball), but once she does go and the Prince pursues her, she is uncertain about how to proceed. Cinderella is a survivor, just trying to find her place in the world.

**Jack:** Young, foolhardy, and desperate for a better life, Jack sells his cow for magic beans which lead him on a journey of growing up and learning to accept consequences. Jack is the reckless Giant Killer, who is 'almost a man.' He is adventurous, naive, energetic, and bright-eyed. He is eager to please and impulsive. A little slow of learning, and misled by his lack of self-knowledge.

**Jack’s Mother:** A single mother and a fighter, Jack’s Mother is mainly concerned with not starving. When she forces Jack to sell his cow, little does she know what *big* things are in store! She is a protective mother who is independent, bold, and strong-willed. She is a strong fighter who works hard and is determined to make a good life for her hapless son.

**Baker:** The “hero” of the story (although his actions are not always heroic), the Baker feels he must “fix” he and his wife’s inability to have children and initially tries to pursue his quest without her; but he soon realizes he is much better off with her by his side. He is a warm-hearted and determined but insecure. He has never faced his fears. He is simple and loving, yet protective of his family. He is willing to do anything to ensure his wife's happiness, but it's hard for him to admit that she is the brains behind the operation.

**Baker’s Wife:** Badly wanting a child, the Baker’s Wife would go to any length to have one. When her husband sets off into the woods to seek the things that would enable them to remove their “curse” of infertility, her assertiveness and stubbornness eventually helps bring about a change between her and her husband. She is an ambitious and clever woman who is determined to be a mother. She leads a simple life, but can be a romantic and materialistic at times.

**Cinderella's Stepmother:** Greedy, selfish, demanding, and mean-spirited, Cinderella's Stepmother wants what is best for herself and her two daughters, but not Cinderella.

**Florinda and Lucinda:** Cinderella's cruel, loud, and energetic stepsisters. Cinderella's stepsisters are selfish and mean-spirited, like their mother. They abuse Cinderella but ultimately pay for their ways.

**Cinderella's Father:** A pushover, Cinderella's Father is out-of-touch with his family.

**Little Red Ridinghood:** A sassy, spoiled girl, Little Red Ridinghood must journey from youth and innocence into adulthood and responsibility through an adventurous and scary path. She is a spoiled, clever, vain young girl who is strong-willed. She is also quick-witted and fearless but naive.

**Witch:** Originally portrayed as "the villain," the witch's story is much more complicated. She has an ulterior motive when she reveals she was the one who placed the curse of infertility on the Baker's family. On the surface, she is self-serving, possessive, sarcastic, vain, and charismatic. Inwardly, she is insecure and lonely.

**Cinderella's Mother:** Though no longer living, Cinderella's Mother is still pivotal in granting useful advice and helping fulfill Cinderella's wish of going to the Prince's ball. She is nurturing and loving. Cinderella's mother's spirit guards and aids her, and dispenses useful advice.

**Mysterious Man:** A wanderer in the woods, the Mysterious Man is full of riddles and a secret. A mischievous vagrant and nosy meddler... with a secret. He is a good-natured protector and observer.

**The Wolf:** Lustful, seductive and hungry creature, the Wolf represents a lot more than just a dangerous animal in the woods. The Wolf is an insatiable hunter who takes advantage of the weak by misleading and captivating his prey.

**Granny:** Rapunzel's grandmother who lives in the woods. Granny is feisty and somewhat savage but humorous. Granny is vindictive towards the Wolf and teaches Little Red how to wield a knife.

**Rapunzel:** Raised and locked away by the Witch, Rapunzel grew up confined to a tower in the woods; and even though she escapes to start a new life and learn her true history, she struggles to maintain her sanity after her distressing upbringing. She is a loopy-but-lovely maiden who is sheltered by the Witch and terribly lonely. Being locked away, she is completely and utterly innocent of worldly matters. She yearns to experience the world.

**Rapunzel's Prince:** Attractive and pompous like his brother, Cinderella's Prince, Rapunzel's Prince tries his best to help when Rapunzel starts to lose her grip on reality. He is just as vain and gorgeous as his older brother. He strives endlessly to be beat his brother in all things.

**Cinderella's Prince:** Though charming, handsome, and seemingly perfect, Cinderella's Prince thinks his royal birth entitles him to take anything, and anyone, he wants. He is self-dramatizing and endlessly confident and the hero in his own life's story. Vain and gorgeous, he is a disloyal lover who is always searching for the next new, exciting thing.

**Steward:** A self-important, surly servant to the royal family. He accompanies the Prince on his missions. The steward is surly and bureaucratic, full of self-importance.

**Giant:** Loud, angry. The Giant is a vengeful 'monster' seeking restitution for the murder of her husband.

**Snow White and Sleeping Beauty:** These two catch the attention of Cinderella's and Rapunzel's princes.