



# *The Aria and the Ivy*

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Kids, Magic

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*5 min read*

This is a tale that tells the truth untold of how the season of Christmas came to be cold.

Once upon a time there was a wicked queen who only ever thought of herself. One day she heard tell of a beggar girl in the poorest corner of her queendom who made money by selling the sound of her song and could make the impossible possible. And so, the queen declared she must see it for herself.

She ordered her guards to take the girl from the streets and when they brought her to the castle the queen commanded her to sing. And there the wicked one witnessed the wonder of the girl and the magic she made happen with the secret of her song. The girl would sing an aria so beautiful that as the sound filled the air, a sprig of ivy would spring forth from it and as the aria continued so the ivy would grow. It was true magic and the wicked queen – who could never allow a thing of beauty to be shared – decreed that she would keep the girl for her own and imprisoned her in the tallest tower of the castle with only a single crack in the stone to let in the light.

The wicked queen visited the girl in her tower every day to hear her sing and every day the queen watched the crisp green ivy curl its way around the room. And so entranced was the queen that she failed to notice the ivy creep through the crack in the stone and begin to cover the castle.

So it was for one thousand days.

And as those days passed, the girl in the tower became more and more heartsick and her song became more

and more sad. And the once gloss-green ivy became black and tough and unyielding. It twisted and knotted and gnarled its way around every inch of the castle until the stone could no longer be seen. And still the queen made her sing.

A great many tales were told throughout the land of the girl in the tower and the wicked one who held her there. And people came from far and wide to free her but because their hearts too were selfish and they desired only to keep the girl for themselves, none could ever penetrate the armour of black ivy that now encased the castle.

And then on the thousandth day – the First of December – there came one whose intentions were pure and true. His name was Jack and the warmth of his heart was such that as he approached the castle the ivy began to crumble and turn to dust. He stole his way to the top of the tower, took the great key that hung from a hook on the wall and unlocked the steel door. And together he and the girl fled from the place.

But little did they know that the wicked queen – her heart so full of darkness and cruelty – had put a terrible curse upon the tower that whomsoever should be warm-hearted enough to take the girl would have their blood turn to ice for thirty-one days and thirty-one nights. And so, as the pair crossed over the castle boundary, Jack's heart froze in his chest, his blood hardened and cracked in his veins and his very face became as clear and cold as sculpted ice.

And in her total sorrow at this, the girl began to sing once again. She sang an aria of such wonder that even the tallest treetops bent low so that they could listen. Then once more the ivy began to bud and it spread its curling tendrils back across the castle threshold. It twisted its way throughout the turrets and towers and as the aria reached its apex, the ivy sought out the queen in her chambers and closed itself in upon her. And there she stayed, trapped for the rest of her days with only her dark thoughts and dark heart for company.

And so, the girl was free and Jack was cursed, doomed to live a frozen life every year for thirty-one days and thirty-one nights. But just as he had saved her, so the girl came to save him in return.

'My name is Carol,' she told him. 'And every year we will spend your frozen days of December together.'

And they did, travelling from town to town and home to home sharing their gifts. Jack would lay his frost upon the doorstep and Carol would knock upon the door and sing her sweet song to the people who lived there, leaving a ring of ivy upon their door as a keepsake.

And that is why during the thirty-one frosted days of December we sing carols on doorsteps and hang garlands

from our front doors. All because Carol and Jack Frost spread their wonder throughout the world. And that is how, year-after-year, Christmastime unfurled.

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