

The Power of Love

The incarceration of a young woman in a tower (often to protect her chastity during puberty) was a common motif in various European myths and became part of the standard repertoire of medieval tales, lais, and romances throughout Europe, Africa, and the Orient. In addition, the motif of a pregnant woman who has a strong craving for an extravagant dish or extraordinary food is very important. In many peasant societies, people believed that it was necessary to fulfill the longings of a pregnant woman; otherwise, something evil like a miscarriage or bad luck might occur. Therefore, it was incumbent on the husband and other friends and relatives to use spells or charms or other means to fulfill the cravings. Basile's tale about a pregnant woman who is desperate for a certain vegetable delicacy (parsley, cabbage, rapunzel) was one of the most popular tales in the oral and literary tradition, and there have been many different versions of this narrative up to the present. It is apparent that Mlle de la Force was acquainted with his tale, and there is a very important retelling of this story embedded in Mme d'Aulnoy's "The White Cat" (1697). At one point, a young prince meets an enchanted cat, who was once a princess, and she explains to him why and how she was transformed into a cat. She recounts that, when her mother had been pregnant with her, she had taken a journey and had become so desirous to eat some fruit from the fairy garden that she promised the fairies her baby. Her father protested, and the queen herself regretted her actions. However, the fairies took the princess and built a tower for her without an entrance. The fairies entered the tower on the back of a dragon. The princess was never told about her parents, and her only companions were a talking parrot and a talking dog. One day a prince discovered the tower, and the princess and the prince fell in love. The fairies discovered their love and decided that the princess had to marry someone of their own kind, a monstrous fairy king. So the princess and prince decided to flee with the help of the parrot and the dog, and they got married. However, the fairies found them. The prince was devoured by a dragon, and the princess wanted to take her own life, but the fairies transformed her into a white cat. In conclusion, the white cat explains that only when she finds a prince who resembles her dead lover will she be able to regain her human form. As in many of d'Aulnoy's tales, she was concerned here in critiquing forced marriages and courtly customs that did not allow for tender love. "The White Cat" enjoyed a limited popularity in an abbreviated form as a chapbook. The dominant plot was carried in the literary tradition by Mlle de La Force's version, which may have influenced a similar German tale published by Friedrich Immanuel Bierling in 1765. On the other hand, Schulz's version of "Rapunzel" was definitely based on Mlle de la Force's tale, and he, in turn, had a strong influence on the Grimms, who refined their version but also eliminated any indication that Rapunzel had intercourse with the prince in the tower. Ludwig Bechstein included a "Rapunzel" tale, influenced by the Grimms, in his *Deutsches Märchenbuch* (1845) and Vittorio Imbriani published an important Italian version, "Prezzemolina," influenced by Basile, in *Novellaja fiorentina* (Florentine Ta-

les, 1871). The most complete coverage of the Rapunzel cycle is in *Rapunzel: europäischen Märchenstoffes in Dichtung und Kunst* (1993). Useful historical background information and bibliographies, two excellent essays on the illustrations to "Rapunzel" and many color reproductions of the illustrations.

GIAMBATTISTA BASILE

Petrosinella†

Once upon a time there was a pregnant woman named Pascadozia, who leaned out a window overlooking the garden of an ogress, and she saw a beautiful bed of parsley. All at once she had such a craving to have some of the parsley that she felt she would faint. Try as she might, she could not resist her desire and kept watch until the ogress left her house. Then she went down into the garden and picked a handful of parsley. When the ogress returned home and wanted to make a sauce, she noticed that someone had cut some parsley and said, "May I break my neck if I don't catch this intruder and make him repent! I'll teach him to eat off his own plate and not to mess with other people's pots."

Nevertheless, poor Pascadozia continued to go into the garden until, one morning, she was surprised by the ogress, who was bitter and furious and said, "I've caught you in the act, you slippery thief! Perhaps you think you pay the rent for this garden, and that's why you brazenly come and pick my herbs? But, if I must, I swear that I'll send you all the way to Rome to do penance!"

The unfortunate Pascadozia tried to excuse herself by saying that it was not because of gluttony or greed that she had been prompted by the devil to commit this sin but because she was pregnant, and she had been afraid that her baby would have parsley on its face when it was born. Moreover, she told the ogress that she should actually be grateful that she had not given her a sty in the eye for not gratifying the wish of a pregnant woman.¹

"The bride wants more than just words!" replied the ogress. "You won't get anywhere with this chatter. Your life may be over and done with unless you promise to give me your baby after it is born, boy or girl, whichever it is."

Poor Pascadozia was desperate, and to avoid the danger threatening her, she swore with one hand on the other that she would do as the ogress demanded. Then the ogress let her go free.

When the time came, Pascadozia gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, who was a jewel and was called Petrosinella² because she had a pretty birthmark on her breast, the shape of a tuft of parsley. She grew up nicely day after day, and when she turned seven, she began to go to school. Each

† Giambattista Basile, "Petrosinella"—"Petrosinella" (1634), *Primo passatempo della seconda giornata in Lo cunto de li cunti ovvero Lo trattenimento de peccerille*, De Gian Alessio Abbattutis, 5 vols. (Naples: Ottavio Beltrano, 1634-36).

1. Reference to a popular superstition: whoever did not grant the wish of a pregnant woman would be punished with the *orzaiuolo*, a reddening and swelling of the eyelids.

2. In Neapolitan dialect, *prezzemolina*, meaning "parsley."

The two poor children sat on their laps and were so exhausted that they could not even weep. A stone would have been moved to tears if it had witnessed this scene. But help soon arrived. The fairy could not help but be touched, and her love for Rapunzel led her to seek a reconciliation. She came riding through the air on a magnificent carriage, had them all get in, sat them down on splendid pillows, and carried them to the castle in which the prince's father was holding court.

When they arrived, everyone became ecstatic because the prince had returned, for he had long since been regarded as lost, and his father wanted to marry another woman in order to have a second son. Now he dropped that plan because it was no longer necessary. His son was now extremely happy because he had been so unhappy, and he loved Rapunzel more than ever before and she him because they had lost one another. Here is where their story ends.

JACOB AND WILHELM GRIMM

Rapunzel†

Once upon a time there was a husband and wife who for quite some time had been wishing in vain for a child. Finally, the dear Lord gave the wife a sign of hope that their wish would be fulfilled. Now, in the back of their house, the couple had a small window that overlooked a splendid garden filled with the most beautiful flowers and herbs. The garden, however, was surrounded by a high wall, and nobody dared enter it because it belonged to a sorceress who was very powerful and feared by all. One day when the wife was standing at the window and looking down into the garden, she noticed a bed of the finest rapunzel lettuce. The lettuce looked so fresh and green that her mouth watered, and she had a great craving to eat some. Day by day this craving increased, and since she knew she could not get any, she began to waste away and look pale and miserable.

Her husband became alarmed and asked, "What's wrong with you, dear wife?"

"Ah," she responded, "I shall certainly die if I don't get any of that rapunzel from the garden behind our house."

Her husband, who loved her, thought, "Before I let my wife die, I'll do anything I must to make sure she gets some rapunzel."

That day at dusk he climbed over the wall into the garden of the sorceress, hastily grabbed a handful of rapunzel, and brought it to his wife. Immediately, she made it into a salad and ate it with great zest. But the rapunzel tasted so good to her, so very good, that her desire for it was three times greater by the next day. If she was to have any peace, her husband knew he had to climb into the garden once more. So at dusk he scaled the wall again, and just as he landed on the other side, he was given a tremendous scare, for he stood face-to-face with the sorceress.

† Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Rapunzel"—"Rapunzel" (1857), No. 12 in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen. Gesammelt durch die Brüder Grimm* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1857).

"How dare you climb into my garden and steal my rapunzel like a thief?" she said with an angry look. "You'll pay for this!"

"Oh!" he cried. "Please, let mercy prevail over justice. I did this only because I was in a predicament: my wife noticed your rapunzel from our window, and she developed such a great craving for it that she would have died if I hadn't brought her some to eat."

Upon hearing that, the sorceress's anger subsided, and she said to him, "If it's truly as you say, then I shall permit you to take as many rapunzel as you like, but only under one condition: when your wife gives birth, I must have the child. You needn't fear about the child's well-being, for I shall take care of it like a mother."

In his fear, the man agreed to everything, and when his wife had the baby, the sorceress appeared at once. She gave the child the name of Rapunzel and took her away.

Rapunzel grew to be the most beautiful child under the sun. But when she was twelve years old, the sorceress locked her in a tower located in a forest. It had neither door nor stairs, only a little window high above. Whenever the sorceress wanted to get in, she would stand below and call out:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
let down your hair for me."

Rapunzel's hair was long and radiant, fine as spun gold. Every time she heard the voice of the sorceress, she unpinned her braids and wound them around a hook on the window. Then she let her hair drop twenty yards, and the sorceress would climb up on it.

A few years later a king's son happened to be riding through the forest and passed by the tower. Suddenly, he heard a song so lovely that he stopped to listen. It was Rapunzel, who passed the time in her solitude by letting her sweet voice resound in the forest. The prince wanted to climb up to her, and he looked for a door but could not find one. So he rode home. However, the song had touched his heart so deeply that he rode out into the forest every day and listened. One time, as he was standing behind a tree, he saw the sorceress approach and heard her call out:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
let down your hair."

Then Rapunzel let down her braids, and the sorceress climbed up to her.

"If that's the ladder one needs to get up there, I'm also going to try my luck," the prince declared.

The next day, as it began to get dark, he went to the tower and called out:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
let down your hair."

All at once the hair dropped down, and the prince climbed up. When he entered the tower, Rapunzel was at first terribly afraid, for she had never laid eyes on a man before. However, the prince began to talk to her

in a friendly way and told her that her song had touched his heart so deeply that he had not been able to rest until he had seen her. Gradually, Rapunzel overcame her fears, and when he asked her whether she would have him for her husband, she saw that he was young and handsome and thought, "He'll certainly love me better than old Mother Gothel." So she said yes and placed her hand in his.

"I want to go with you very much," she said, "but I don't know how I can get down. Every time you come, you must bring a skein of silk with you, and I'll weave it into a ladder. When it's finished, then I'll climb down, and you can take me away on your horse."

They agreed that until then he would come to her every evening, for the old woman came during the day. Meanwhile, the sorceress did not notice anything, until one day Rapunzel blurted out, "Mother Gothel, how is it that you are much heavier than the prince? When I pull him up, he's here in a second."

"Ah, you godless child!" exclaimed the sorceress. "What's this I hear? I thought that I had made sure you had no contact with the outside world, but you've deceived me!"

In her fury, she seized Rapunzel's beautiful hair, wrapped it around her left hand several times, grabbed a pair of scissors with her right hand, and *snip, snap* the hair was cut off, and the beautiful braids lay on the ground. Then the cruel sorceress took Rapunzel to a desolate land where she had to live in great misery and grief.

On the same day that she had banished Rapunzel, the sorceress fastened the braids that she had cut off to the hook on the window, and that evening, when the prince came and called out,

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
let down your hair,"

she let the hair down.

The prince climbed up, but instead of finding his dearest Rapunzel on top, he found the sorceress, who gave him vicious and angry looks.

"Aha!" she exclaimed with contempt. "You want to fetch your darling wife, but the beautiful bird is no longer sitting in the nest, and she won't be singing anymore. The cat has got her, and it will also scratch out your eyes. Rapunzel is lost to you, and you will never see her again!"

The prince was beside himself with grief, and in his despair he jumped off the tower. He escaped with his life, but he fell into some thorns that pierced his eyes. Consequently, he became blind and did nothing but mourn and weep about the loss of his dearest wife. Thus he wandered for many years in misery. Eventually, he made his way to the desolate land where Rapunzel was leading a wretched existence with the twins, a boy and a girl, to whom she had given birth. When he heard a voice that he thought sounded familiar, he went straight toward it, and when he reached her, Rapunzel recognized him. She embraced him and wept, and when two of her tears dropped on his eyes, they became clear, and he could see again. Then he escorted her back to his kingdom, where he was received with joy, and they lived happily and contentedly for a long time thereafter.