The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales. Ed. Maria Tatar. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002.

7

RAPUNZEL[1]

Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

The story of a girl locked in a tower sounds a powerful chord in cultures that cloister young women in convents, isolating them or segregating them from the male population. "The Maiden in the Tower," as "Rapunzel" is known to folklorists, has been thought to be based on the legend of Saint Barbara, who was locked by her father in a tower. In The Book of the City of Ladies *(1405), Christine de Pisan relates how Barbara's father shut her up in a tower for refusing marriage offers. But the story of Rapunzel seems rooted in a more general cultural tendency to "lock daughters up" and protect them from roving young men.*

"Rapunzel" unfolds in two acts, the first beginning with man, wife, and the desired rapunzel, which is forbidden and secured through a transgressive act (climbing over a wall). In the second phase of action, the child Rapunzel is kept in a tower forbidden to others. When the enchantress discovers the

From Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. "Rapunzel," in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 7th ed. (Berlin: Dieterich, 1857; first published, Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1812).

1. *rapunzel.* The critic Joyce Thomas points out that rapunzel, or rampion, is an autogamous plant, one that can fertilize itself. Furthermore, it has a column that splits in two if not fertilized, and "the halves will curl like braids or coils on a maiden's head, and this will bring the female stigmatic tissue into contact with the male pollen on the exterior surface of the column." Most versions of the story give the girl the name of a savory herb.

prince's transgression (scaling the wall of a tower), she punishes once again, this time with blindness. The conclusion reunites the separated partners, restores the prince's sight, and liquidates the forbidden desires that launched the narrative.

In "Rapunzel," as in "Rumpelstiltskin" and "Beauty and the Beast," an adult barters a child to secure personal welfare or safety. This uneven exchange is presented in matter-of-fact terms, never interrogated or challenged in any way by the characters. It is, to be sure, a sign of desperation as well as a move that raises the stakes of the plot in a powerful way. Whereas the parents at the start of the story barter away the child in almost cavalier fashion, Mother Gothel figures as the consummate overprotective parent, isolating Rapunzel from human contact and keeping her prisoner in a tower that lacks both stairs and an exit. In the final tableau of the story, the power of love and compassion triumphs, and Rapunzel lives happily ever after with the prince and their twins. In some versions, as in the French "Godchild of the Fairy in the Tower," things end badly when the fairy turns the Rapunzel figure into a frog and curses the prince with a pig's snout. Much turns on the character of the maternal figure in the tale, who is presented as a wicked witch in some versions of the tale and as a benevolent guardian in other versions. Rapunzel's departure from the tower can be seen, depending on the character of the enchantress, as an act of clever resourcefulness or as an act of deep betrayal.

The first literary version of "The Maiden in the Tower" appeared in Giambattista Basile's Pentamerone *(1636). The name of Basile's heroine, Petrosinella, is derived from the word for parsley. While the Grimms' "Rapunzel" moves in a dark register, with the heroine's exile and the blinding of the prince, Basile's version of the tale is sprightly, with humorous twists and bawdy turns. When the prince enters the tower, for example, he and Petrosinella at once become lovers: "Jumping in from the window into the room, he sated his desire, and ate of that sweet parsley sauce of love."*

The Grimms based their "Rapunzel" on an eighteenth-century literary version by Friedrich Schulz, who in turn had borrowed from a French literary fairy tale published by Char-

lotte-Rose Caumont de La Force. Thus their "Rapunzel" is a hybrid form, drawing elements from different cultures and social milieus.

Like many fairy-tale characters, Rapunzel has given her name to a syndrome, which Margaret Atwood defines in her analysis of the tale's characters: "Rapunzel, the main character; the wicked witch who has imprisoned her, usually her mother . . . ; the tower she's imprisoned in—the attitudes of the society, symbolized usually by her house and children . . . ; and the Rescuer, a handsome prince of little substantiality. . . . [I]n the Rapunzel Syndrome the Rescuer is not much help." The best thing Rapunzel can do, according to Atwood, is to "learn how to cope." And cope she does, first in the wilderness with her twins and then when she encounters her beloved and restores his sight.

ONCE UPON A TIME there lived a man and a woman[2] who, for many years, had been wishing for a child, but with no success. One day the woman began to feel that God was going to grant their wish. In the back of the house in which they lived, there was a little window that looked out onto a splendid garden, full of beautiful flowers and vegetables. A high wall surrounded the garden,[3] and no one dared enter it, because it belonged to a powerful enchantress, who was feared by everyone around. One day the woman was looking out her window into the garden. Her eye lit on one patch in particular, which was planted with the finest rapunzel, a kind of lettuce. It looked so fresh and green that she was seized with a craving for it and just had to get some for her next meal. From day to day her appetite grew, and she began to waste away because she knew she would never get any of it. When her husband saw how pale and

2. *Once upon a time there lived a man and a woman.* That the story will center on procreation becomes evident from its opening line.

3. *A high wall surrounded the garden.* Note that the garden, like the tower, is a forbidden site and that both are enclosures for "rapunzel."

OTTO SPECKTER,
"Rapunzel," 1857

Illustrated pages offering both text and images were popular in nineteenth-century Germany. As the story is read, the reader can consult images showing the father caught by the enchantress in the garden, Rapunzel lowering her braid, the prince's punishment at the hands of the enchantress, and the reunion of Rapunzel and the prince.

wretched she had become, he asked: "What is the matter, dear wife?"

"If I don't get some of that rapunzel from the garden behind our house, I'm going to die," she replied.

Her husband loved her dearly and thought: "Rather than let your wife die, you will go get some of that rapunzel, no matter what the price."

As night was falling, he climbed over the wall into the garden of the enchantress, hastily pulled up a handful of rapunzel, and brought it back to his wife. She made a salad out of it right away and devoured it with a ravenous appetite. The rapunzel tasted so good, so very good, that the next day her craving for it increased threefold. The only way the man could settle his wife down was to go back to the garden for more.

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ARTHUR RACKHAM,
"Rapunzel," 1916

The enchantress startles the man in search of rapunzel for his wife. A hideous hag with a scowl on her face, she reaches out a gnarled hand to stop the intruder. The propped-up trees in the garden suggest that the enchantress is a woman invested in proper growth for what lies under her supervision.

As night was falling, he returned, but after he climbed over the wall, he had an awful fright, for there was the enchantress,[4] standing right in front of him. "How dare you sneak into my garden and take my rapunzel like a common thief?" she said with an angry look. "This isn't going to turn out well for you."

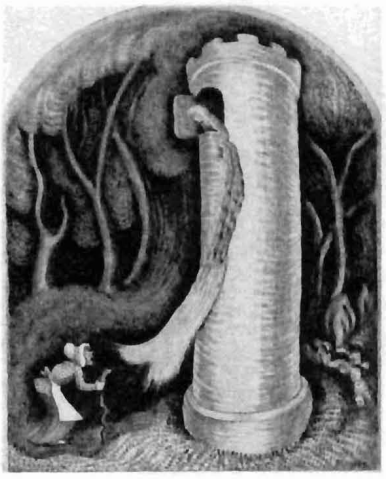
"Oh, please," he replied, "show some mercy for my deed, for I did it only because I had to. My wife got a look at your rapunzel from our window. Her craving for it was so great that she said she would die if I couldn't get it for her."

The enchantress relented in her anger and said to the man: "If what you said is true, then I'm going to let you take as much rapunzel as you want back with you. But on one condition: You must hand over the child after your wife gives birth.[5] I will take care of it like a mother, and it will not want for anything."

In his fright the man agreed to everything. When it came time for the delivery, the enchantress appeared right away, gave the child the name Rapunzel, and whisked her away.

4. [illegible] The Grimms [illegible] "watch."

5. [illegible]

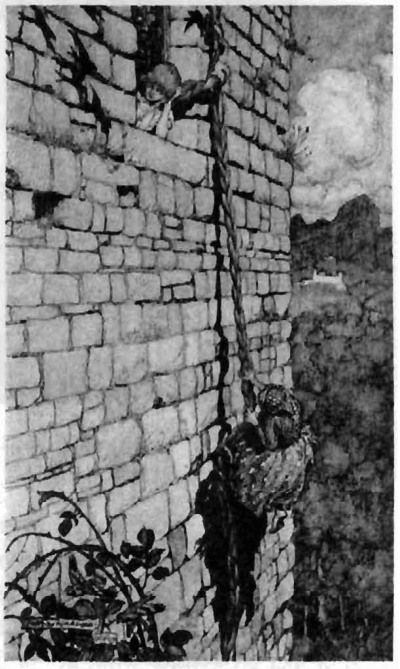


WANDA GÁG,
"Rapunzel," 1936

Bent over with age, the enchantress watches as Rapunzel releases her hair, which takes the form of a fish tail. How she will manage to climb up the braids is not entirely clear.

OTTO UBBELOHDE,
"Rapunzel," 1907

The enchantress watches as Rapunzel lets down her hair from a tower that is somewhat less daunting in its appearance than those in other illustrations.



ARTHUR RACKHAM,
"Rapunzel," 1917

Rapunzel dutifully lets down her golden hair for the enchantress, who nimbly climbs up the ladder with bare feet. The briars in the foreground suggest a connection with the story of Sleeping Beauty, also known as Briar Rose.

6. *a tiny little window.* This window resembles the window that looks down into the garden of the enchantress.

7. *as beautiful as spun gold.* Rapunzel's hair is a sign of her fairness, in the double sense of the term. In fairy tales golden hair is a marker of ethical goodness as well as aesthetic appeal.

Rapunzel was the most beautiful child on earth. When she was twelve years old, the enchantress took her into the forest and locked her up in a tower that had neither stairs nor a door. At the very top of the tower was a tiny little window.[6] Whenever the enchantress wanted to get in, she stood at the foot of the tower and called out:

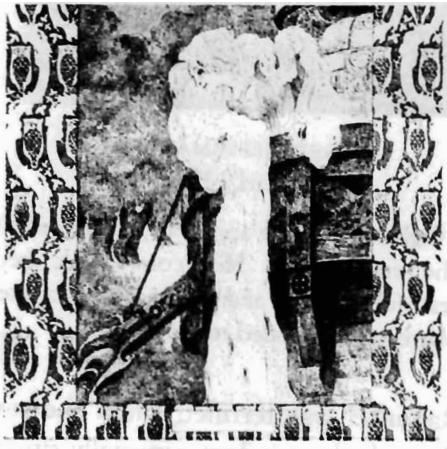
"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let your hair down."

Rapunzel had long hair, as fine and as beautiful as spun gold.[7] Whenever she heard the voice of the enchantress, she would undo her braids, fasten them to a window

latch, and let them fall twenty ells down, right to the ground. The enchantress would then climb up on them to get inside.

A few years later it so happened that the son of a king was riding through the forest. He passed right by the tower and heard a voice so lovely that he stopped to listen. It was Rapunzel, who, all alone in the tower, was passing the time of day by singing sweet melodies to herself. The prince was hoping to go up to see her, and he searched around for a door to the tower, yet there was none. He rode home, but Rapunzel's voice had stirred his heart so powerfully that he went out into the forest every day to hear her. Once when he was hiding behind a tree, he saw the enchantress come to the tower and heard her call up:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let your hair down."



HEINRICH LEFLER,
"Rapunzel," 1905

Yarn-like golden tresses are the center of attention in this portrait of Rapunzel as she lets down her hair. The trees, with their light-brown foliage, repeat in muted form the colors of the tower and the girl's hair. A gargoyle is positioned to ward off intruders. The elaborate border, with its stern owls gazing straight out at the viewer, underscore the theme of supervision in the story.

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

"If that is the ladder by which you climb up to the top of the tower, then I'd like to try my luck at it too," the prince thought. The next day, when it was just starting to get dark, the prince went up to the tower and called out:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let your hair down."

The braids fell right down, and the prince climbed up on them.

ERNST LIEBERMANN,
"*Rapunzel*," 1922

Rapunzel is frightened by the appearance of a young man in place of the enchantress. Her comfortable bed, rich draperies, graceful clothing, and ornate mirror create a sensual atmosphere in her wooded retreat.

At first Rapunzel was terrified when she saw a man coming in through the window, especially since she had never seen one before. But the prince started talking with her in a kind way and told her that he had been so moved by her voice that he could not rest easy until he had set eyes on her. Soon Rapunzel was no longer afraid, and when the prince, who was young and handsome, asked her if she wanted to marry him, she thought to herself: "He will like me better than old Mother Gothel."[8] And so she accepted, put her hand in his, and said: "I want to go

8. *Mother Gothel.* The term is a generic one in Germany, designating a woman who serves as godmother.

away from here with you, but I can't figure out how to get out of this tower. Every time you come to visit, bring a skein of silk with you, and I will braid a ladder from the silk. When it's finished, I'll climb down and you can take me with you on horseback."

The two agreed that he would come visit her every evening, for the old woman was there in the daytime. The enchantress didn't notice a thing until one day Rapunzel said to her: "Tell me, Mother Gothel, why are you so much harder to pull up than the young prince?[9] He gets up here in a twinkling."

"Wicked child!" shouted the enchantress. "What have you done? I thought I had shut you off from the rest of the world, but you betrayed me."

Flying into a rage, she seized Rapunzel's beautiful hair, wound the braids around her left hand and grabbed a pair of scissors with her right. Snip, snap went the scissors and the beautiful tresses fell to the floor. The enchantress was so hard-hearted that she took poor Rapunzel to a wilderness, where she had to live in a miserable, wretched state.

On the very day she had sent Rapunzel away, the enchantress fastened the severed braids to the window latch, and when the prince came and called out:

"Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let your hair down,"

she let down the hair.

The prince climbed up, but instead of his precious Rapunzel, the enchantress was waiting for him with an angry, poisonous look in her eye. "Ha!" she shouted triumphantly. "You want to come get your darling little wife,[10] but the beautiful bird is no longer sitting in the nest, singing her songs. The cat caught her, and before she's done, she's going to scratch out your eyes too. Rapunzel is lost to you forever. You will never see her again."

The prince was beside himself with grief, and in his despair he jumped from the top of the tower. He was still

9. *"Tell me, Mother Gothel, why are you so much harder to pull up than the young prince."* In the first version of the Grimms' *Nursery and Household Tales*, Rapunzel asks the enchantress why her clothes are getting so tight and don't fit any longer. The allusion to the fact that the daily meetings with the prince in the tower have led to pregnancy was considered inappropriate for children.

10. *wife*. Rapunzel becomes a "wife" because the Grimms did not want to suggest that Rapunzel's twins were born out of wedlock.

KAY NIELSEN,
"Rapunzel," 1922

A monstrous enchantress with wild locks and a misshapen nose wields the scissors she will use to cut off Rapunzel's long braid. The coil of braided hair resembles a snake as it winds itself around the feet of the enchantress. The power of this illustration derives in part from the stunning contrast between the simple, flowing lines of the girl's dress and the angular grotesqueries of the enchantress's body.

alive, but his eyes were scratched out by the bramble patch into which he had fallen. He wandered around in the forest, unable to see anything. Roots and berries were the only thing he could find to eat, and he spent his time weeping and wailing over the loss of his dear wife.

The prince wandered around in misery for many years and finally reached the wilderness where Rapunzel was just barely managing to survive with the twins—a boy and a girl—to whom she had given birth. The prince heard a voice that sounded familiar to him, and so he followed it. When he came within sight of the person singing, Rapunzel recognized him. She threw her arms around him and wept. Two of those tears dropped into the prince's eyes, and suddenly he could see as before, with clear eyes.

The prince went back to his kingdom with Rapunzel, and there was great rejoicing. They lived in happiness and good cheer for many, many years.