



# *Gothel's Odyssey*

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Magic, Retold Fairy Tales

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Back in the days when dragons roamed the sky and monsters owned the night, there was a city called Corona. Corona was a glorious city, with the most beautiful night sky you could ever see. When the moon arose proudly in the sky, dragons and other winged creatures would shed their human suits to unveil their true forms. The silver looking fireworks that appeared as they shot into the sky, earned Corona the nickname, 'The Silver City'.

The Silver City was governed not by a king or queen but by strict laws that favoured noblemen, which were enforced by fairies. The blindly loyal fairies were bald and toothless shapeshifters with silver skin that shined so bright, it was difficult to stare at their true forms. They did everything and anything that would benefit the lords and ladies they served. Although fairies were very powerful they were much like dogs, once they were shown the tiniest morsel of affection they were loyal to that family till the end.

The fairies blessed the nobles with the best of everything, from brains to beauty while the poor were used to replenish their wealth. In fear of fairies, the villagers were very submissive. Fairies were quite rare creatures a few dozen appeared every century, so the chances of finding one were near impossible.

One of the rules in Corona was that all creatures had to take human form during the day. As death was seen as an escape, creatures who broke the laws were sentenced to live the rest of their lives as feeble animals like mute frogs, wingless birds or crippled rodents. The suffering peasants, lacking the will and the power to fight for their rights suppressed every morsel of hope for a better life.

In a small cottage in the poverty-stricken slums of Corona, lived a smart raven-haired girl called Gothel, she

was skinny like most of the poor, not particularly beautiful but with intact body parts, decent features and an intelligent mind. She lived with her father, Otto a diligent farmer who owned a small fertile plot of land that grew whatever was planted. He was mostly bald with sun-darkened skin and looked older than he was due to his hard life.

Unfortunately, Gothel was ambitious and had something most poor girls her age didn't, a dream that she couldn't give up on. She would secretly sell her crops to shopkeepers in the Silver market for prices much lower than their other suppliers, although, peasants were forbidden to trade in the market.

She didn't cloud her thoughts with ludicrous infatuations of marrying a prince or marriage at all, her dreams were realistic involving hard work and perseverance. In hopes that one day she would make enough money to live in the city. Perhaps be rich enough to live pampered by the best handmaidens and butlers. She knew that if she was noble born then maybe, her mom wouldn't have died of the pox. She would have hired the best of doctors and wizards to cure her.

Making her dream a reality in Corona would be a challenge because new money was also forbidden. "The rich were born to be rich and the poor were born to be poor", was the fundamental law in Corona. The poor couldn't marry the rich much like a man couldn't marry his dog. Nevertheless, she had accepted the challenge and began her journey. She had to at least try, contrary to what everyone said, she knew wanting a better life wasn't greed, it was hope.

Her father, Otto was a very content man, he never complained about his poverty or allowed Gothel to speak of her dreams.

The neighbours would tease Gothel saying, "the poor lass has an overactive imagination. Hmm how could their poverty stained blood live in the Silver City?" Otto would often scold her when she spoke of her dreams, saying, "Dear Gothel, shut it the walls have ears" or 'Poor child don't you know dreams can kill". She knew in Corona envy was a crime, dreams were the reason.

So Gothel did listen. She stopped talking about her dreams but kept it to herself. Since the people, she told kept discouraging her so there was no point telling them. She would try her very best to keep pushing and if she gave her all to her dream she knew it would come through, but if it didn't she would accept the fundamental

law. Secretly, she saved up all the money she gained from selling their crops because she knew her father wouldn't approve.

As the winds got colder, nights shorter, the seasons had changed. Every morning, since the start of that new season, the town crier went around the city. Yelling, drumming and posting posters to remind the citizens to prepare their taxes for the dreaded public holiday, Giving Eve.

Giving Eve, came as it always did just after the big harvest, it was a festival prepared by the poor to entertain and celebrate the rich. The citizens paid their half of their earnings to the nobles who owned armies that protected them from invasion. The nobles sat in the town square while dancers, magicians, fire breathers and all sorts of wonders performed for their amusement. None of the peasants had ever been to the festival because only performers and nobles were allowed to see the acts and tickets were only sold at the Silver market.

While the festivities went on, fairies who represented the top noble families came to collect their share of the harvest, sometimes in pairs and occasionally with the offspring of those families in an acclaimed show of noblesse oblige.

Otto like everyone else had given up 50% of what he earned and those who had too little gave their hair and teeth to the fairies in a promise to pay later.

That night, the weather was so hot that Gothel thought her harvest would rot before she could sell them. She sat in the barn counting what was left of their harvest when she suddenly heard sounds of munching, crunching and cracking coming from her vegetable garden. A thief was there eating their crops and destroying their plants, she thought.

Enraged she ran to the garden, broom in hand with a nasty frown plastered on her face to chase away the thief, "We barely have enough to live on during the winter, get off my farm!" she yelled as she shook her broom in the air to scare away whatever creature it was.

The thief was a mud-stained blonde little girl, who was a few years younger than her, but in the slums, age didn't matter, a thief was a thief. As the thief was escaping the farm, she fell and injured herself but Gothel's thoughts were focused on her crops as she went to check which crops were damaged, so she didn't notice. Furious, the little thief took her leave, her thoughts clouded with malicious plans of vengeance.

By sunrise, the whole neighbourhood was awoken by noise emanating from half a dozen horses pulling a carriage. This had never happened. So much dust had emanated from the hoofs of the horses that people in the carriages didn't see Gothel peeking through the window.

A bald representative stepped out, holding someone behind him who was hidden by the dust. Otto immediately muttered one word as he ran to the door, "hide". Every pauper in Corona knew when something out of the ordinary happened in Corona bad things would follow. Otto had to protect the person he loved the most, his daughter.

The representative came knocking on her door holding a little girl with long golden hair. "Someone broke the law!" he announced banging loudly. Gothel shaking in fear of being caught selling to crops to the market traders crept out of her hiding place inside the shelves and ran to hide in the dark woods.

Unknown to her the thief of last night was the golden-haired maiden who had wandered off during her visit on Giving Eve. Because the rich in Corona were said to be righteous, the fairies who were the judges and executioners believed the words were the only truth. No trial was needed just a sentence. It was impossible to appeal or challenge the verdict because conversations between representatives and peasants were one way, they always say all they have to say then cast a curse.

"Yesternight, Miss Rapunzel of house Wilhelm was tortured by the farm owner who then called her a thief out of envy", announced the skinny representative while pulling out a wand, in a very assertive and commanding voice. "The representatives have decided this land will be seized as compensation and the offender would live out their days as a crippled ferret".

He turned his wand towards Otto who immediately confessed he was the owner. At that moment, he mumbled some words then smoke started to appear on Otto's feet creeping till it fully submerged him, leaving behind a ferret with legs so skinny it couldn't bear the weight of its body.

The fairy peeped into her house complaining about how shabby it was and how at least now he was a ferret he could live as the house pet of a noble family if only one could find him and take an interest in him. Then the fairy and Rapunzel climbed back into the carriage and went off on their way.

Struck with fear Gothel sat there hidden in the bushes staring at nothing except her dad wiggling on the floor while listening to everything, hate for that lying brat tore at her heart. The crowd of neighbours soon dispersed, some blaming Gothel, saying they knew having a daughter with poisonous dreams would bring harm to him someday.

Gothel knew the truth, she swore that day to become more powerful than those fairies and take vengeance for her dad.

Once she regained her wits, Gothel took the money she had saved up and her cursed father, in search of a new home. She walked for miles and miles, making money of odd jobs like training Unicorns, hunting and capturing Goblins who had stolen gold and babysitting dragons.

She was such a wise businesswoman that even though life had given her a hand full of rotten lemons, she still made lemonade and sold it to people who hadn't tasted lemonade. This forced her to grow up the hard way. Facing thieves and murderers on the road, whilst providing food for her and her dad.

During her travels, she had overheard chatter at some taverns about a land hidden in the desert where a powerful creature called 'the Jinn' granted your heart's desire for a price. The 'Land of Plenty' wasn't something new to her, there were lots of whispers in Corona about it. That there were no fairies and anyone from anywhere could trade goods or services in its numerous markets.

After months of searching, she was able to find a Captain that been to the land of plenty more than once. He didn't introduce himself or tell her his name, so she referred to him as Captain Blackbeard because he looked like all the other pirates she'd met except for his thick charcoal black beard and tilted captain's hat seated on a

black bandana tied around his head.

The Captain warned her against seeking the Jinn, but she was adamant and was paying him heavily, so he had to talk. Annoyed she refused his advice, he said grumpily, “Avast lassie, you don’t find the Jinn, oh ho! he finds you if you be desperate enough once inside Agrabah”. He then whispered verbal directions because, for some mysterious reason, any map that was written to guide people to Agrabah always caught fire.

Gothel was desperate enough and finally found the land of plenty when she was in her early twenties.

Agrabah was a commercial capital like no other, the buildings and attires were unlike the ones Gothel had ever seen before. Even at night, the city was still alive, with shoppers rushing by, traders constantly chattering and lights making her unsure whether it was dawn or dusk. She adjusted her worn purple hood, to securely hide her father who was wrapped around her neck with everything she owned in a small sack on her back.

By the break of dawn, she left the inn she spent the night at to search for the Jinn. She had heard rumours about “Agrabah’s fast fingers”, a band of pickpockets and thieves, who could steal even the clothes of your body in the blink of an eye but Gothel was no stranger to thieves, so she underestimated the ones in Agrabah.

“My sack is gone!” she yelled as soon as she noticed. “Thief!” she yelled but no one tried to catch him. Thieves were very common in Agrabah and tourists were easy prey. Realising this, Gothel ran as fast as she could, chasing the thief through the city, markets and then the desert.

At last, she trapped the thief in a cave that was oddly self-illuminated. She could finally make the thief rue the moment he decided to steal from her. But oddly it felt wrong, she felt trapped.

“Bravo!” echoed the thief as he transformed into blue smoke. Gothel watched bewildered as a muscular bald man with blue glowing eyes and veins, grey markings all covering his body appeared from within the smoke.

Taken aback, she attempted to run but backed into a wall that had replaced where the entrance used to be.

“Gothel, you found me!” announced the Jinn, with a terrifying grin pasted on his face “I was waiting for you...” he said in a distant voice like it was coming from afar, although he stood right in front of her.

“Have a seat”, he said pushing her against the wall, two armchairs materialised, and he sat too. “What do you

desire?” he asked, the grin sneaking its way back to his face.

Gothel couldn't find her voice, she was terrified.

“Would you like a do-over? Or your dad returned to his true self? I could make sure you never ran into Rapunzel and you could live happily ever after in your rags and shabby cottage”, He said transforming her dad back into a man and the cave into their cottage.

“Or do you miss your mom? I could bring her back to life,” he said in a mocking childish voice, making her mom materialise and returning her dad back to a ferret.

“No. Okay. Should I kill Rapunzel? Or do you want to become a princess?” he said transforming her rags into an exquisite pink ball gown and her jagged black hair into a stunning updo with a long-wisped fringe then materialising a prince and a castle.

“Speak!” he yelled irritated by her silence. She was tired of running. She had seen wanted posters displayed in neighbouring villages, someone had ratted her out to the Wilhelm family as the perpetrator. Corona was her home, so she had to fix it herself.

“Sorry...” she apologised, clearing her throat. “I don't want any of that, I want power so that I wouldn't live a submissive life. I want more power than the fairies and I'll pay any price”, she said believing in that when she got powers she could solve all her problems by herself.

Jinn smiled as he read her thoughts and smelled her ambition, “You came at the perfect time. I'm currently offering cheap prices for my services. I just want thirty...”

“Thirty gold coins”, she said picking up her sack and poking around for her coin sock.

“No, no Gothel you aren't buying a carriage... you're purchasing power. Thirty years,” he said stealing her gaze.

“I don't understand... Thirty years of what? Servitude?”

“Gothel, I thought you were a smart girl. Okay, then I'll tell you a little secret...”, he rolled his eyes feigning annoyance.

“Jinn's can only live in the land of the living for a thousand years, after that we have to go back and I'm

approaching my last year... because I like your fighting spirit I want just a mere thirty years off you... you'll still be able to walk well, your hair would be grey but you can just magic it into the colour you wish, you'll have the same powers I have in exchange, what do you say deal?"

"Deal", she said.

Immediately he snapped his fingers and it was done. In mere seconds her skin aged 30 years, wrinkles appeared, her eyes sunk, her hair greyed and she could feel her formerly supple skin sag a little. Feeling the electricity coursing through her Gothel decided to try her new powers on her dad but to no avail, he remained the same. "Do I need to say a spell or something?" she asked puzzled.

"Oh no! just wish for it, it's working very well but I forgot to inform you that all the previous offers are off the table... no refunds", he said transporting her back to Corona. "Go ahead test your new powers, you're home", said the Jinn as his face slowly disappeared from the sky.

Indeed, she was home, remembered the trail from the bush to her house. She was excited as she ran towards her cottage but when she arrived, it was gone. It was her house, she knew it was but at the same time, it wasn't. Her cottage was gone replaced by a canopy bungalow and her vegetable garden replaced by a floral garden.

That garden wasn't just for anybody her mother was buried there and her father planted the crops. She didn't notice that while those thoughts crossed her mind tears drizzled down her face uncontrollably. She knew she wouldn't regret getting powers.

Then she noticed the person tending to the garden. Even though years had passed, that golden hair and beautiful face was not one to forget. It was Rapunzel. She had grown gracefully. She felt no remorse at all, playing on the farm she had stolen.

Gothel cracked. She wanted to make her pay, but she couldn't kill her. For some reason, at that moment she reminisced about the lesson her mom thought her when she had spent the money meant for grains on taffy.

Her mother was so upset at Gothel that for weeks she made Gothel eat taffy for breakfast, lunch and dinner only. Her mother told her then, "That sometimes the best punishment for someone is to give them too much of what they liked", since then she hated taffy. It was then Gothel realised that she didn't need to punish

Rapunzel.

She would bless her. A blessed curse of beauty. Wiping away her tear she spoke, "I wish that you, Rapunzel who was blessed at birth with beauty would continue to grow even more beautiful, so beautiful that every male creature would fall hopelessly in love with you", stifling her tears she carried on. In Corona, long hair was a symbol of nobility, so the rich and the poor could easily be distinguished by their hair lengths.

"For every peasant child that has cut their hair because their family couldn't afford to pay taxes, your hair will grow by the length they cut. I wish that this blessing will never be lifted by any magical creature." Gothel blew her a kiss upon finishing her curse because in Corona blessings were sealed with a kiss.

Rapunzel remained the same after the spell had been cast but Gothel decided to give it time to take effect.

The next morning, upon leaving the inn where she had spent the night, Gothel was in awe. Taking a stroll down the street was Rapunzel her hair was so long it reached her knees as it swayed behind her. Then there were whistles, hoots and hissing from the men around, catcalling her.

At first, it was surprising and a bit funny, she was like the pied piper of men. Drooling as they mindlessly followed her around town until she, at last, noticed she had acquired a string of admirers. "Sirs why are you following me?" she asked. The men just stared hopelessly smitten. Then after there was no response she carried on and so did her followers.

By evening Rapunzel had to fold her hair over into two because it kept sweeping the street. There was much noise in the street by then because men argued and fought over who loved Rapunzel more.

Many days had passed since the Gothel cast the blessed curse, but the spell only got stronger by the day. Rapunzel feared to leave her house because some men had fought to the death to showcase their love for her beauty. She had often fantasized about something like that happening but when it did it was a gruesome scene.

Unfortunately, Gothel had no clue the ripple effect the blessed curse had caused, because she was too busy planning how she would set up her business.

The women of Corona both rich and poor had kindled a witch hunt and their target was Rapunzel. They

believed her to be the legendary Siren because all the men of Corona were hypnotised and could think of nothing but her.

Wielding pitchforks, rolling pins and knives they laid siege to her house. Chanting, "Release the siren or starve to death", and occasionally they chanted, "release our men and we'll leave you be..."

Rapunzel's mother had hired the best healers, fairies and magicians to break the spell, but it was to no avail. It couldn't be broken by magic.

Gothel found out about the siege because the tavern under her room was oddly quiet, neither clicking glasses nor drinking songs could be heard. She walked the empty streets searching for someone or anything that could tell her what's going on and at last, she found a middle-aged woman who smelled like fresh bread.

"Greetings madam, might I ask where everyone is?" The woman stopped and softly held Gothel's shoulder.

"Hide your sons and your husbands... that's the word around town, else the Siren would bewitch them"

"Bewitch them, what do mean?" Gothel asked confused.

"The young maiden Rapunzel has become a siren that bewitches men. The village women have laid siege to her house. So that she'll return their men to their old selves. I was too late she has bewitched my two boys and my husband, I had to tie them up in the room to prevent them from harming each other."

Sirens? Thought Gothel, one of the tales she had heard growing up. Don't try to be too beautiful or you'll become a siren and another common tale was if a pauper prays diligently to the heavens, they'll send the Black fairy to protect them. Those tales gave her an idea.

'A village girl who suffered greatly because of the nobles prayed diligently to the skies and they sent the Black fairy to punish those that wronged her', Gothel wished those words were whispered into the hearts of the women in Corona and soon the tale spread like wildfire doubling the anger the women possessed.

The noble women were fed up they commanded their fairies to find a way to stop the problem, but they couldn't fix Rapunzel because they believed she was cursed by the Black fairy and those fairies were more powerful.

"Is there any way to neutralise the curse?" someone in the crowd asked.

"Erm we could try...", the fairy who spoke was silenced by the others, who shook their heads discouraging him from going on.

"Tell me! Pecker" ordered a seriously pissed off woman with such a deadly glare that the Pecker held its breath, Pecker served her family.

"We could trap her in a tower so high that no one will be able to see her", the terrified fairy let out all it had to say. "Because the men must behold her to fall in love, if no new men saw her no more men would fall in love"

"What about the men who are already in love? how would we cure them?" another asked Pecker, the black sheep of the fairies because it all too often did and said things other fairies didn't.

"We'll have to shield the tower to prevent Rapunzel from escaping and trap her curse in there", everyone was quiet as they pondered on what he said.

And they all agreed, Rapunzel's mother sobbed and pleaded saying she'll take her out of the city, but that wouldn't cure the men. The decision was made for the greater good they told her mother, as they transported Rapunzel to the slums. Rapunzel's canopy bungalow was transformed into a tower with fairies at each side casting spells to make it higher.

They dropped her there and gave her some food and began incantations to create the shield. The process was disturbingly long. The fairies were sweating fairy dust as if it was summer.

By the next day they were done, and the men were back to normal, but Corona was not. Over the night lots of the nobles had packed up everything they owned and left with their fairies in fear of the Black fairy's wrought.

Amongst those who left was the rest of Wilhelm family, in fear of any harm befalling the rest of her kids Rapunzel's mom took off. There was nothing she could do to save Rapunzel.

As time went by the autocratic the nobles and fairies in Corona depleted and almost everyone had forgotten about the beautiful maiden trapped in the tower. Corona saw better days and Giving Eve became Thanksgiving Eve, a day where citizens came together to celebrate the brave women of Corona who put aside their differences to save the men.

Gothel's dream finally became her reality. Peasants could trade in the silver market, she had gotten her mother's garden back and a small house in the city. Everything was going well for her, and although her dad remained a ferret, he was happier and having more fun than when he was human.

One day, as she watered the vegetables she had replanted in her mother's garden she looked up, staring at the single window in Rapunzel's tower. Filled with pity she stocked a basket with fruits and vegetables and called out as loud as she could, "Rapunzel! Rapunzel! Let down your golden hair for me to climb up". Gladdened to see her first visitor after spending many weeks exiled to the tower, she let down her locks and Gothel climbed.

No one ever knew what they talk about during Gothel's frequent visits to Rapunzel's tower, but one thing was for certain Gothel and the people of Corona lived happily for many years.

The End.

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