



Zel

By Donna Jo Napoli

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High in the mountains, Zel lives with her mother, who insists they have all they need -- for they have each other. Zel's life is peaceful and protected -- until a chance encounter changes everything. When she meets a beautiful young prince at the market one day, she is profoundly moved by new emotions. But Zel's mother sees the future unfolding -- and she will do the unspeakable to prevent Zel from leaving her..."Will leave readers spellbound."-- *Publishers Weekly*, starred review

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

As she has done for *The Frog Prince* and *Hansel and Gretel*, Napoli here visits her magic upon the tale of Rapunzel, creating a work of depth and beauty. In mid-16th-century Switzerland, Zel, on the threshold of adolescence, accompanies her mother on a rare trip from their remote cottage to the village. By chance she meets a youth named Konrad; unknown to her, he is the son of the count, and he is charmed by her apparent simplicity and forthright manner. Napoli gently guides the reader through the inevitable consequences of this meeting, mining every movement in the fairy tale for its psychological treasures. Zel's mother, no longer a routine villainess, has sacrificed everything, even her soul, for the witchcraft that enables her to have a daughter; a desperate fear of Konrad's attentions drives her to imprison Zel in the famous tower. Isolated, Zel wavers between recognition of her mother's sacrifices and her own fury, and wanders into madness. Konrad, meanwhile, must discover the difference between love and obsession. Napoli imagines the precise quality of the mother's supernatural powers, the colors of the stones in Zel's tower, the rustle of the trees in the forest. But the genius of the novel lies not just in the details but in its breadth of vision. Its shiveringly romantic conclusion will leave readers spellbound. Ages 11-up.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 9 Up?This retelling of the story of Rapunzel is no simple fairy tale retold for the entertainment of children. Instead, it is a searing commentary on the evil that can result from human longings gone awry. Napoli sets the novel in 16th-century Switzerland and alternates the various characters' points of view. Zel and Count Konrad's narratives are presented in the third person, while Mother tells her own story. All are told in the present tense. Readers learn that the barren mother's obsession for a child drove her to give herself up to eternal damnation in order to have a daughter. Now, she seeks to keep the child away from the world so that the innocent girl will choose her mother above all others. That this will mean Zel's damnation also does not deter Mother in the least. When the inevitable happens and Zel meets the young man, Mother locks her away in a tower. Unlike most versions, this story realistically portrays the dismal effects of isolation on the girl's mind and spirit. She goes quite mad but is still able to accept Konrad's love when he finds her at last. Konrad's transformation from arrogant noble to a man with an obsessive love for a girl he barely knows is less realistic but follows the traditional story line. In his final confrontation with Mother, evil appears to have triumphed. Even the eventual "happily ever after" ending cannot clear the air of the darkness that pervades this tale. Mother's fatal possessiveness and the horror of Zel's life in the tower are the dominant themes that readers will remember. This version, with its Faustian overtones, will challenge readers to think about this old story on a deeper level. It begs for discussion in literature classes. ?Bruce Anne Shook, Mendenhall Middle School, Greensboro, NC

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From [Booklist](#)

Gr. 7⁺-12. As she did in *The Magic Circle* (1993), a retelling of the Hansel and Gretel story, Napoli humanizes the witch in the fairy tale. This time the novel is based on *Rapunzel*, the setting is fifteenth-century Switzerland, and the story is told in the present tense from three alternating points of view: the happy peasant girl, Zel, about to turn 13, eager, creative, daring; the young nobleman who falls in love with her and wants to marry her; and her mother, who loves Zel so much that she is driven to lock her beloved daughter in a tall tower because she cannot bear to let her go. Only the mother's narrative is in the first person; she's at the center of the story. Her intense tenderness for Zel is never in question; in the wild, beautiful mountains she has raised a wonderful child. But gradually we learn that the loving mother is also a witch--and why.

Barren, in anguish, 13 years earlier she had made a pact with the devil and had stolen another woman's baby. Now she sees that child, Zel, fall in love, and the desperate witch uses lies and black magic to try to keep her daughter. The storytelling is poetic and languorous, especially in the Zel chapters, which show Zel cavorting in the natural world and then held in stasis for two years in the imprisoning tower. Teens may not fully understand the childless woman's yearning. What will move them profoundly is the pull of possessive love, the coming-of-age drama from the parent's point of view. Above all, there's the shocking realization that even the best of us, given the need, will sell her soul. *Hazel Rochman*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Dee Alaniz:

Playing with family in a very park, coming to see the sea world or hanging out with good friends is thing that usually you will have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try factor that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition details. Even you love Zel, you are able to enjoy both. It is very good combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh seriously its mind hangout men. What? Still don't have it, oh come on its called reading friends.

Arthur Freeman:

Do you have something that you like such as book? The publication lovers usually prefer to choose book like comic, quick story and the biggest you are novel. Now, why not striving Zel that give your enjoyment preference will be satisfied simply by reading this book. Reading habit all over the world can be said as the way for people to know world considerably better then how they react in the direction of the world. It can't be stated constantly that reading addiction only for the geeky particular person but for all of you who wants to always be success person. So , for all of you who want to start looking at as your good habit, it is possible to pick Zel become your own starter.

Jason Probst:

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