The Madness Catalyst

by ThePowerOfAlchemy

Notes

I’d like to give credit where it’s due— the title of this story came from a close friend on Discord (varian66#7772, to be precise.) and I only take credit for my actual writing.
Tragedy Leads To Insanity

“Oh, and I almost forgot, we’re uh… kinda on a time crunch here so I’m gonna need to speed things along.” Varian moved backwards as he spoke, popping the lid off of a bottle of familiar looking green liquid. He then poured it on some conveniently placed rocks and sure enough, the liquid quickly turned orange and crystal began to approach the Queen. And of course she looked on in horror until,

“Varian! Stop!” Rapunzel pleaded, wanting to run over but the goo trap held her in place.

“Well.” She had been loud enough to draw the boy’s attention to her, it seemed, because that was when he slowly approached, pulling a neutralizer out and dropping it onto the purple substance. “Shall we get started?” He stood up once more, a smug grin growing on his face.

“Yes, if that’s what it takes.” Rapunzel was still extremely hesitant, but her desire to get things over with was certainly stronger. “All I need to do is let my hair down, and once this goo is removed, I’ll be ready.”

“Yeah, yeah. But we don’t have all day. Time crunch, remember?” Varian nagged, tapping on his wrist where a watch would be if he had one. “Unless, of course, you actually want your mother encased in amber like my father is. If that’s the case, be my guest and watch things play out. I honestly couldn’t care less about what you do! Not unless it pertains to my father, that is.”

“No,” Rapunzel sneered. “I’m going to get your father out and you’ll free my mother. That’s only fair.”

“Oh. I make no promises…” Varian was starting to grow impatient as the seconds passed, so much so that he reached his hand out and tugged at her hair, undoing the fasteners in the process. “Let’s just get this done with and then I’ll be satisfied once I win.”

That made Rapunzel frown, before she nervously started to stroke her hair. “What do you want me to do in a situation like this?”

“It’s simple.” Varian stated, grabbing hold of the Princess’s long locks and dragging them towards his drill. “I assumed that you already knew what I had in mind, but I’ll explain it again as clearly as I can. I’m going to stuff your hair into this,” He explained, motioning towards the machine. “And it will act in place of the drill. Does it make sense now?”

“I’m not at all sure about this, but… Yeah. I guess so.” Rapunzel only shrugged, looking downwards at her feet.

“Aw, don’t worry! It’s not gonna hurt. Not after the initial first shock, anyway.” Varian shrugged, while he began to prepare the drill for the job it was about to do.

“But that doesn’t sound like the most promising thing in the world, if I’m being honest.” Rapunzel began.

“What does it matter? I’m doing what I can to free my dad because you never came through for me.” Varian hissed back, banging his clenched hand on the drill out of frustration.

Rapunzel’s eyes widened with shock at his comment. She would have easily retorted had he not sounded so agitated, but he had and she ultimately decided to not argue with him further. Her mother’s life was on the line, after all. She didn’t want to risk it anymore than she already had.

“Varian, if this doesn’t work and something happens to me… Please, please. Let my mom go.” Rapunzel tried to plead with him one more time.

“It’s as I said… I can’t make any promises, Princess.” Varian said in a bitter tone while he slid his goggles down over his eyes and finally began to power up his drill.

“Ahh! Ow!” Rapunzel called out in pain, holding her hands over her head. She couldn’t explain what she was feeling, but it wasn’t a pleasant situation. All she knew for sure was that her hair was being used to drill against an unbreakable substance and it hurt worse than anything else she had felt before. She found herself wishing… No, no. Hoping that whatever Varian was doing was working. Mainly for her sake but also for his father’s.

That was when her hair began to glow, and the once intense ache that she felt turned dull for a few
seconds before coming back with a vengeance. It felt as if someone was trying to pull the hair right of her head. Not a pleasant thing to have to experience, but even so she didn’t tell him to stop.

Varian growled with anger, not paying the princess any mind when he realized that her hair had no effect against the crystal. “What?! Why?!” He yelled to himself, stopping the drill momentarily before going right back in again.

Rapunzel collapsed upon feeling the pain again. She hadn’t expected him to start drilling again but the pain was quickly becoming too much to bare. And she knew that if she complained about it, her words would fall on deaf ears as far as Varian was concerned.

“Stop it!” Rapunzel’s father demanded while the princess cried out in agony. “She can’t take anymore!”

Arianna sat in the distance, looking on in horror at what was happening to her daughter.

“Rapunzel…”

But Varian pressed on, moving the drill closer to the large block of amber, desperately pleading to himself that it would work, though it didn’t seem very certain considering how well the first two tries had gone. “No!” He cried out, banging his fists against the drill as it stopped once again. “It should have worked! Wh-... This doesn’t make any sense! It should have…! It should have cut through it!” He rested his body against the crystal, finally seeming to cease his actions.

“Varian…” Rapunzel stated though she was out of breath at this point. “Try again. I can take it. We’re going to free him…”

“And how are we going to do that?!” Varian shouted, sounding extremely stressed. “It didn’t work, Rapunzel! It wouldn’t make sense if it did work now! It’s not even logical!!”

“If you won’t try it.” Rapunzel muttered, finally standing up. “Then I will. And I won’t stop until your dad is free.”

“Rapunzel, don’t do it.” Arianna pleaded.

“You don’t understand, I have to.” Rapunzel insisted, pulling her hair out of the drill as carefully as she could manage. She wasn’t concerned about it breaking, but she didn’t want to go through any more pain than she had already been through. No way, no how.

“But…” Varian started, his tone filling with confusion. “It won’t work if it’s not in the drill! Y-you can’t just do that! It’s insane!”

“I don’t care.” Rapunzel was being extremely insistent, but she felt that she had good reason to. She just wanted things to be done with.

“You really should take a break from this,” Arianna tried to talk her daughter down again. She knew in her heart that Rapunzel couldn’t take much more of this, as did her father. “It’ll be good for your health if you do it.”

“Let her do this,” Varian finally spoke, waving his hand in the Queen’s direction as if to drive her away from the conversation. “Any effort is surely appreciated. Though I doubt that anything the princess could do could possibly be more effective than what I’ve already tried. Nonetheless,” He crossed his arms, shrugging a bit after doing so. “She is more than welcome to try. I won’t be the one to stop her.”

“Right.” That was enough to encourage Rapunzel to continue her efforts. She may have been determined to get this done with, but her parents words had indeed gotten to her. Not very much as it was, but they still slightly cracked the surface of what she had set her mind to.

But her determination has been just enough to distract her from the growing problem, the very one she wanted to avoid in the first place. The orange crystals had grown in size since Varian spilled the green liquid, significantly so. It was slowly but surely encasing the Queen in a similar fashion to the way that Varian’s father had been trapped. The only difference being that Arianna was chained to the floor with no chance of escaping. More so now that she really was stuck.

“Rapunzel… Please hurry!”

Varian snorted from a distance, still standing against the wall as smug as he had ever been. “I could have sworn that I warned about this very thing happening in the first place. Not surprised though, you never listened to me before. Why would you do that now?”

“Leave him be, Mom.” Rapunzel requested, looking over at her with a tired expression. “I’m just
doing what he wants me to do. I’ll do this and we can go back to the way things were before all of this started.” She was really trying to assure the others of this, even though she wasn’t sure of the matter herself. At least she was trying.

“Honey, no…” Arianna continued, not giving up just yet.

“Mom, just let me do this… I’ll be okay.” Rapunzel stated once more, hoping to leave the conversation at that.

And so she persisted. It wasn’t in her parents best wishes, she knew this. But at the same time, she didn’t care. All she wanted to do was resolve the problem that her parents were having, the problem that she was having. That was the only thing that mattered at this point. “Let’s go, Varian.”

“Well, well, well… I thought I’d never hear you say those words.” Varian muttered, pulling his drill out of the way. “But I insist. Do what you must.”

“Okay, okay…” Rapunzel took a few deep breaths, knowing that her confidence was faltering. She didn’t think she could actually pull this off. Not in the slightest. A part of her still knew deep down that her parents were right. But she couldn’t stop herself, she couldn’t back down. She wrapped her hair around the amber that was holding Varian’s father, and then… “Flower… Gleam. And glow,” She began.

Arianna began to struggle at this, but the amber had almost fully encased her left arm. “Rapunzel! Don’t do it!” She cried out, reaching her good arm out in an attempt to stop her daughter.

But her mother’s cries fell on deaf ears. Rapunzel was too focused on what she was doing to pay attention to anything around her. “Let your power shine.” She continued, pulling her hair tighter around the crystal. “Make the clock reverse. Bring back what once was mine.”

Rapunzel had been trying to play things off as if nothing was really wrong with her, but that could have only gone so far. Sure she had magic hair, but that didn’t make her immune to being exhausted by everyday tasks. But this? This was an entirely different situation altogether. She was exhausted after everything that happened, but there was a small voice in her mind that told her to keep going. “Heal what has been hurt. Change the fate’s design. Save what has been lost, bring back what once was mine. What once was mine.”

The princess fell onto her knees after she finished the song, letting her hair fall down to the ground and her hands to her lap. She was done with her end of the deal, and she could finally get the rest she felt she deserved.

“That was nice and all,” Varian cleared his throat, moving to approach the scene once again. “But I don’t think that helped the situation very much.”

“W-what?!” Rapunzel’s tired gaze shot upwards. She thought her idea would actually work but she seemed to sit there mistaken. The amber was still there and it didn’t dissolve like she had originally hoped. “But… I just. It was supposed to work! How is this happening?”

“Okay, okay. Calm yourself, princess. You’re starting to sound like me now.” Varian’s tone showed the slightest bit of concern, but he didn’t pay attention to it.

“But I meant it! I was so sure that it would work a-and… it didn’t! This can’t be right!” Rapunzel shook her head, standing up once more. She had every intention of trying again, as many times as she needed to until it did work. She had it in her mind that it was her priority to do so. That is, until her mother called out once again.

“Rapunzel…” Arianna gasped lightly, trying to reposition her body but ended up failing shortly after she spoke. “Could you please hurry and do this? This is starting to get awfully uncomfortable on me,”

What Rapunzel hadn’t noticed was that the amber had grown even more since Varian spilt the substance. It had grown over her right arm by now, and almost had her head fully encased. She could hardly move any part of her body without pain it seemed.

“Mom!” Rapunzel gasped, shooting up almost instantly when she caught a glimpse of her mother. “It’s okay, you’ll be alright! Just stay with me!”

“Rapunzel.” Arianna began to speak with a shaky tone. She would have easily cupped her daughter’s face in her hands had she had access to her hands. “I don’t think things are looking good
on my end right now. I have no idea if I’m going to make it out of this but no matter what happens. I want you to know, deep down in your heart that I love you. I have always, always loved you and I always will love you. No matter what happens, that will never change.”

Rapunzel weakly smiled at her mother’s words, wrapping her arms around the crystal for a brief moment. “I love you too. And Dad, and our Kingdom. I love it all. And I know things will be fine. I just have to make this work and… and you’ll be okay. We will be okay.”

“I trust you.” Arianna responded after a few moments of silence. The assurance hadn’t really set in for her, but she decided to not argue about this at the moment.

“Good.” Rapunzel nodded, taking a few small steps back. Her smile never faded despite how tired she felt. “That’s just great. I’ll save both of you and then–“

Rapunzel’s sentence was quickly cut off when her mother cried out in pain. The amber was slowly rising up over her head and in a few seconds had her fully trapped, unable to speak or breathe.

“…N-no. Mom. Mom!” Rapunzel muttered, stricken with shock over what she saw. She didn’t want to believe this. All she could bring herself to do was sit there as the tears freely flowed down her freckled cheeks. “This can’t be happening right now! This is all just a nightmare!”

The atmosphere of the room completely changed after that. Things had been tense when the whole incident started, and now it seemed to fill to the brim with an overwhelming amount of anger, and sadness, and frustration which spread throughout the makeshift lab. With good reason, of course. Rapunzel was still crying and leaning against the crystal, while her father was trying to not break down himself. He wanted to regain his composure for the time being. It was that, and the fact the he didn’t want anyone to see him cry.

Meanwhile, Varian was standing in a nearby corner, wide-eyed. He never intended on things going this far, not in a million years. He couldn’t bring himself to do anything, his demeanor had changed once more the second he saw Rapunzel burst into tears. He knows that he vowed to get revenge, but he didn’t intend on any of this. So he just backed away into the darkness and made a quick exit, wanting to go as far away from his lab as he could manage.

“Mom… I’m n-not giving up on freeing you. There’s still a chance! I just have to… Have to keep trying!” Rapunzel stammered, brushing her tears away and began trying to free her mother. The tears still kept flowing, but that wasn’t nearly enough to stop her from wrapping her hair around her mother’s block of amber desperately, trying to grant her freedom again the only way she knew how. She sang the song, the same song she sang for Quirin. It was the only one that she thought would help in a time like this.

“Rapunzel, you don’t have to do this… Let’s just go home and we’ll–” Frederic began.

“No! I’ll do this until I get what I want!” Rapunzel called out in frustration. “Can you just let me do this?!”

A stunned silence spread over the room, neither of them spoke a single word after the outburst occurred.

“…I just need to.. Keep going, Dad!” Rapunzel’s voice cracked slightly, the exhaustion was evident in her voice. She didn’t want to keep going anymore, yet she knew she had to. She would never forgive herself if she did.

“But you obviously aren’t up to it… Let’s just head home and we can figure something else out. Something better than all of this,” he tried again. he knew she wasn’t up for doing this anymore.

“…No. I won’t do it.” Rapunzel snarled, clenching her fists out of anger. She stood up on her toes and, with a brief moment of hesitation, wrapped her hair around the crystal once again. But before she could do anything, she collapsed onto the ground and passed out. She didn’t realize it but doing this had taken a lot out of her.

And sure enough, her father was at her side in a matter of seconds, as soon as he had freed himself from his own chains.

“Let’s go home, my darling…” He spoke in a sad tone, looking over at the block of crystal that held his dear wife in it. He remained there for a few more minutes before lifting his daughter into his arms and finding an exit to take her home safely. He wanted nothing more than to get away from this awful place.
What Comes Next, Part 1

Throbbing. That was all that could be felt as Rapunzel slowly came to. Her head was pounding even though she seemed to just be laying down in her bed.

“W-what…. What happened to me?” She muttered, weakly rubbing at her eyes as she lightly moaned. The memories of what had happened the night before had completely escaped her mind for the time being.
Slowly but surely, they began to resurface piece by piece. And Rapunzel began to panic, hard. “I need to get out of here! And back to Mom! I… Ow!”
The pulling at her hands made her stop trying to get out of bed, while her gaze shifted downwards to see what had been put out to hold her in place.

“Chains…” Her green eyes widened at the sight. “What in the world? Why am I chained up? And how did I get back here?!”
Then the door creaked. There was obviously someone there, and they were trying not to make much noise.

“Rapunzel?” A male voice, which she soon recognized to be Eugene’s, rang out into the room.

“Hey, uh… How are you holding up, today?”
Rapunzel decided to not respond right away, avoiding eye contact with Eugene entirely up until he was shoved into the room by a pair of familiar looking (and feminine) gloved hands. “You need to stop beating around the bush like that! You act like you’ve never been in a situation like this before!” Cassandra nagged from behind the door.

“That’s probably because I haven’t!” Eugene hissed under his breath, frowning hard in the direction of the hallway, where Rapunzel assumed Cassandra was. “Cut me some slack, why don’t you! Let’s… Let’s not do this in front of Rapunzel.”

“Fine, but you started this,” Cassandra spoke with a sigh before reaching out to shut the door behind Eugene, ending the short moment of conversation between them by doing so.

At this Eugene sighed as well, out of frustration for the most part. Then regained his composure and turned back to face Rapunzel. “Right so… How are you doing?”
Rapunzel frowned, looking downwards at her feet with a small scowl. “I’m terrible, thanks for asking.”

“That’s… That’s not what I meant.” Eugene sighed once more, running his fingers through his dark locks before sitting on the edge of Rapunzel’s bed. “No one has told me what happened, and I’m concerned for you and your dad. Can you please just tell me what went down while you were in Old Corona?”

“I thought you would have already known what happened, Eugene.” Rapunzel muttered, pulling her knees close to her chest. “Varian wanted to get revenge and he did, in what could be the worst way possible.”
Eugene’s eyes widened slightly, he was trying to understand what he was hearing the best he could.

“What are you talking about? What happened in there?”

“Don’t you understand!” Rapunzel burst out, having quickly developed a fit of anger in a matter of seconds. “My mother is gone! She met the same fate as Varian’s Dad, and there’s nothing that I, or anyone else, can do about it!” She hadn’t realized it, but in her ranting she had grabbed hold of Eugene’s shirt and pulled him closer to her and was now crying into his shirt.

“Hey, hey. Shh, it’s okay.” Eugene was speaking calmly despite the state of pure shock he had found himself in. He knew that Rapunzel needed him more than anybody else right now, and he was determined to be that person for her if no one else was willing to do it. “I’m… Not exactly sure how all this came about. But I will help you to the best of my ability.”

“N-no.” Rapunzel shook her head, pulling away from her boyfriend’s embrace. “I don’t need anybody’s help. I am smart, and independent, and I… I can do this by myself.”

“But you don’t have to.” Eugene’s brows furrowed and he placed a gentle hand on the Princess’s
shoulder. “I’m here for you. Right here.”

“That’s what you’d say, sure.” Rapunzel slowly slid over to the corner of her mattress, wanting to stretch her legs. “But this is something I need to do. Whether you like it or not, I’m going to free my mother from her prison. And.. I’ll do whatever I need to do to succeed at my goal.”

“Rapunzel.” Eugene spoke a little bit louder, but he wasn’t yelling just yet. He didn’t have the heart to raise his voice at the woman he loved. “I said it before and I’ll say it again. You do not have to do this. Of course, you really don’t have a choice right now, but… You really should get some rest before you try to do anything risky.”

“Well, I’m the only one who actually seems to be taking this seriously! So I believe we should do what I’d like to do and try everything to save my mom.” Rapunzel was slowly but surely growing colder towards Eugene, and it was definitely starting to show.

“Sunshine, c’mon. This isn’t you..” He frowned, walking over to her and cupping her face with his hands. “There has to be a better way to go about doing this.”

Rapunzel chuckled bitterly, not paying Eugene any mind after that. The only thing that she wished to focus on was ways to free her mother from this awful fate. “It doesn’t matter, as I long as I can get out of these painful chains. They’re doing bad things for my wrists.”

“Yeah, yeah. About that,” Eugene would clear his throat, trying to prepare himself for whatever would come next. “The, uh… Your father gave the guards strict instructions to the guards to not let you leave until you get over this.. I think he called it a grieving phase? I’m not a hundred percent sure about that, but those aren’t my words, you can ask him yourself if he ever stops by to see you.”

At that, Rapunzel began to approach Eugene. The chains on her wrists made loud banging noises each time one of her arms swung forward whenever she took a step forward. “Listen… to me, Eugene.” She grabbed him by the shoulder, looking him in the eyes. “You know that I’ve never liked being restrained, and cut off from the world, or anything along those lines.. Yes?”

He only nodded at her question. At this point he was too afraid to speak actual words for fear that he would offend her or even make her angry.

“So, here’s what we’re going to do.” Rapunzel’s tone lightened ever so slightly, accompanied by the smug expression that seemed to slowly grow on her face. It was obvious that this was not his Rapunzel. “We’re going back to Varian’s lab and I’ll finish the problem we’re having with him. He needs to be stopped and I’ll be the one that does the job.”

“But… You can’t,” Eugene finally spoke, his nerves were getting the better of him at this point. He didn’t care less if it showed, either.

“And why is that?” Rapunzel’s expression quickly turned unamused.

“Because…” Eugene swallowed the lump in his throat, and his nerves. “He ran away and no one knows where he escaped to! At least, that’s what the guards have been saying.”

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“Ugh.. I hate being in the middle of nowhere with no human interaction.” Varian muttered to himself while he rubbed a stick against the ground. He had indeed escaped with his life and freedom, but he still felt an unbearable amount of guilt over pretty much everything. But he couldn’t help himself.

Ruddiger snuggled up closer to his owner. He could sense that Varian was upset, and the fact that his emotions were clearly showing had nothing to do with it. He wanted nothing more than to take away the pain that the boy was feeling.

“At least I still have you, Ruddiger..” He smiled weakly, petting the top of Ruddiger’s head to show his appreciation. “I just.. I wish things weren’t as messed up as they are now. It’s.. It’s all my fault.”

Ruddiger chittered sadly. He could tell that his favorite person in the world was upset over this, and that upset him as well.

“Thanks, buddy… You’re always there for me, even when I don’t deserve it.” He weakly smiled after finishing his statement. “Now, what do you say that we go try to find a proper place to sleep?”

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“Your Majesty, could I have a word with you?” Eugene’s voice called out to the almost empty bedroom. “It’s important that you hear what I need to say,”
“Yes, please.” The King’s sullen voice responded. It hadn’t occurred to Eugene but the whole incident with Varian was hitting both Rapunzel and her father hard.
“Yeah, okay…” He would have been lying if he said he wasn’t the slightest bit hesitant to actually do this. He knew that the King was hurting, and it was understandable. “It’s.. It’s about your daughter, that’s all.”
“Has she run away?” The deep voice rumbled through the room. “Has she left me too?”
“No. That’s not why I’m here.” He hesitated once more before quietly clearing his throat.
“Rapunzel has just… She hasn’t been acting like herself.”
“Can you blame her?” Fredrick spoke bitterly, absentmindedly leaning against the window.
“Eugene, I honestly do not have time for this. I need time to regroup after the storm of last night. So if you would please-”
Eugene wasn’t normally one to speak up without permission, but this time he just couldn’t help himself from doing so. And it wasn’t in spite of the King, by any means, Eugene was only doing it because he cared about Rapunzel and her father, very deeply. “I’m sorry, Your Highness, but I can’t leave things be as they are now. I’m already involved in the matter, and I just can’t walk away from it.” He paused, just long enough to allow himself time to take a deep breath. “I know you’re hurting right now, but… Rapunzel is as well and I think this whole situation is really bothering her, more than you might realize. You both need each other in this dark time, that’s my honest opinion when it comes to this and whether or not you take my advice, that’s completely up to you. But I’m only saying these things because I want to help and this is the only way that I see fit to do it. I’m sorry, but I care too much.”
A long moment of silence spread over the two of them. An uncomfortable one, nonetheless, but it was still there. Eugene couldn’t help but feel like he had crossed some sort of line with his rant, mainly because he couldn’t see the King’s face, much less tell what he was thinking. “Your Majesty…? Are you alright?”
“I’ve heard quite enough, Eugene.” The King finally spoke after what seemed to be forever. “You may make your exit now.”
I am so getting kicked out of Corona for this. Eugene thought. He couldn’t help but scold himself on the way back to him living quarters. He only hoped that everything would turn out alright in the end.
“H-hey. Pascal,” Rapunzel muttered over to the green chameleon, who had appeared on her dresser that was located almost halfway across the room a few minutes ago. She was trying to get his attention, but seemed to be failing because Pascal himself was trying to eat an apple. And he was doing so loudly, Rapunzel could hear the crunching without fail from where she was sitting.

“Pascal!” She called out again, this time a little bit louder. “Please listen to me. I need your help, desperately.”

Still no response, normally he would acknowledge her when she called for him but that didn’t seem to be the case this time around.

“Pascal!” Rapunzel tried again, this time a bit louder, “Could you please undo my chains so I can get out of here?! I’m literally on my knees, begging you to do this for me! I can’t beg you any harder at this point. Please.”

Pascal then looking up from his treat and over at the princess with curious eyes and a confused expression. There was a language barrier between them yet it didn’t stop him from communicating with his owner.

“Good, you heard me..” She muttered, attempting to scoot closer to her pet. “I need you to.. Find the key to these.” She held her wrists out as she spoke. “Can you do that for me?”

A brief moment of silence filled the room, it seemed that the chameleon was trying to process everything that he had been told, even though Rapunzel was sure that wasn’t the case.

He then shrugged and began his journey over to her. He hadn’t spent much time with Rapunzel since the incident with her mother happened, but despite that he had still been genuinely worried for her well-being. That mattered to him more than eating, hands down. Or in Pascal’s case, claws down.

“Aha, thank goodness!” Rapunzel cried out, a few loose tears of joy forming in her sore eyes. Naturally it was from all the crying she’s done, both yesterday and today combined. “I don’t know where the keys are.. but maybe you could find them! I know you, you’re always there when things get tough and you’ve never failed me once, I just need you to do that very thing for me, again.” At this point, Rapunzel didn’t believe she could beg any harder. She was already emotionally strained as it was, and she also had a pounding headache. But that was besides the point right now.

She looked on as Pascal came close enough for her to actually reach her, only so he could observe the situation. The whole thing looked even worse to him now that he was able to see things up close. But that didn’t stop him from being determined to help the princess out. So, with that in mind, he took off towards the door as fast as his little legs would allow him to go.

“Hurry, Pascal! Please!” Rapunzel called out with a tone of feigned concern. She wasn’t at all concerned, or anything along those lines. All she wanted to do at this point was free her mother, and it brought her a sense of satisfaction that she might actually get to do that very thing. “Hurry up and get me out of this awful tower, then I’ll be heading straight for that wimp we know as Varian and I’ll get what’s owed to me.”

Although, in hindsight, Rapunzel really shouldn’t have expected to get the keys anytime soon. Or at all, considering the fact that the King had made the wise decision to stash them away in the safest place he could find. That definitely put a huge bump in the road, but it was nothing Pascal couldn’t work around.

So, when the journey to find the missing keys proved to be harder than first anticipated, he proceeded to go into the kitchen and grab the biggest knife he could manageably carry given his small body, and carefully dragged it with him the best he could back into Rapunzel’s room.

...Or at least he tried to do as much. But he was at somewhat of a disadvantage here, given the situation he had found himself in. Dragging that knife around made him work up a serious sweat. But he let out a big sigh of relief once he reached Rapunzel’s bedroom door. Still cracked open as
he had managed to leave it. No guards in front of it either. It was probably the off time when they were switching out, Pascal assumed. He didn’t sit around to ponder it too much, instead he went right in with the biggest grin on his little green face, and-

“Pascal! That took forev- I mean,” Rapunzel cleared her throat, instantly noticing the mistake she almost made by snapping at Pascal. “I’m somewhat surprised that you.. Didn’t bring what I originally asked for, but. That’ll work just fine. Bring the knife to me, please.”

And so he did. It had to be done, slowly so that he wouldn’t injure himself in the process of bringing it over. He didn’t question the outburst, however, because he was too occupied with his current task to notice it.

“Ah,” Rapunzel growled while she struggled. Her voice was raspy and her arms felt like noodles. It made sense to her, she had to have been chained up overnight. She still didn’t understand how it happened either, but the only thing that mattered to her at this point was making a successful escape.

“...And, I got it!” Rapunzel’s eyes widened with surprise the very second that her fingers grasped the handle of the weapon. It had been a stretch for her to get it, the chains were restricting enough as it was and didn’t allow her much freedom. She didn’t think that she would be able to reach it, but there she was. And it gave her a small sense of pride to know that she did it. “Now all I have to do is.” She whispered that statement under her breath as she began to cut at the chains. “Come on! This is such a simple thing.”

Pascal frowned upon hearing her frustration. He really disliked seeing Rapunzel this way- that much was true. And somewhere deep down, he knew that she wasn’t ok, and he only wanted to help. So, with that in mind, he made his exit once more to find something that could help Rapunzel a little better.

And she naturally continued to struggle by herself. She wasn’t defenseless, not by any means, but the situation she had been placed in was similar to her being in between a rock and a hard spot. And not only that, the chains definitely weren’t going to cut very easily. Rapunzel had only managed to get a few bits and pieces off, but they were small ones and it hardly did any good to get her out. Things definitely looked rather grim on Rapunzel’s end. She was stuck in the castle, her mother was trapped in a block of crystal, and she was probably forbidden from getting revenge on Varian. Not that she could, he was missing and could have easily been out of Corona’s bounds by now.

Rapunzel let the knife fall from her fingers and she scooted over to the window, looking out of it with a growing sense of desperation. “I have to find Varian, wherever he ran off to. She thought to herself as she struggled against the chains. “I’ll do it if it kills me.”

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“Eugene, can you open the door please? I need to talk to you and if you don’t do it, I can and will open the door myself.” Cassandra nagged while she knocked on Eugene’s door in a persistent manner. She had no intention of stopping either, not until he opened the door. “By which I mean, I’ll kick the door open with my foot. Don’t think I won’t, Fitzherbert.”

“Give me a minute, would you!” He hissed from behind the wood. “I’m trying to be productive by doing something valuable with my time.”

“Oh? And what would that be?” Cassandra retorted with a snort. “Combing your hair a million times? Oh sorry, or should I call it- the tactic you resort to whenever you get stressed out?”

“Pffft, No!” Eugene scoffed, knowing that he was lying through his teeth as he stashed his comb away. He wasn’t a fan of being dishonest, but it was all he could do in order to protect his dignity. Or what was left of it.

“Yeah.. Okay.” Cass started once she had gotten over the awkwardness of the previous conversation. She was sure that he was lying but she decided she wouldn’t get into that until later. “Just let me in. I need to talk about Rapunzel. I haven’t heard about her since last night and I need confirmation that she’s okay.”

“Right-.” He cleared his throat when he heard the request. It was reasonable, sure, but he couldn’t help thinking that she came at the wrong time. “Give me a second. It’s.. Uh. It’s locked. Yeah.”

From behind the door, he could hear a boot tapping against the floor. Cassandra seemed to be
impatient and didn’t want to wait for him to do what needed to be done, which he expected her to
do at some point. Yet he still got back up on his feet and moved across the room to the door and
removed the objects from in front of it. It hadn’t been locked, he just didn’t want anyone getting in
while he was trying to have some alone time. But Rapunzel was more important than that, so he
didn’t hesitate with letting her best friend in even though he wasn’t fond of her. “What did you
need to say?”
“The answer is simple.” Cassandra rested her hand on Eugene’s shoulder and looked him straight
in the eyes. “And I already told you what I want to hear. Is Rapunzel okay? And can I check on
her?”
“Uh-huh. Well,” Eugene cleared his throat while he tried to squirm out of Cassandra’s grasp
unsuccessfully. “I don’t see any problem with actually seeing her. But..” His sentence trailed off
then, he really wasn’t sure how to put what he had witnessed into words.
“But what?” Cassandra asked, her expression hardening as she gazed at Eugene, clearly she wasn’t
interested in playing games.
“...But,” he continued, hesitantly. “She hasn’t been acting like herself and- I’m worried, to be
honest. I took the matter up with the king and I don’t think he wanted any part of this. No one
seems to want to do anything and it concerns me. So, yes. That’s my problem with the whole thing.
Now you know.”
No response came from Cassandra after that. She seemed to have been put into a stunned silence if
anything. At least, that’s the way it appeared to be until she spoke again. “Listen, Eugene. Your
feelings are justified when it comes to this. You love her and she loves you. I don’t understand
how it works between the two of you, I just know that it does for whatever reason.”
Eugene nodded at her statement. He knew better than to interrupt her, even now when she was
saying something this important.
“And you know that I care about her too. Just as much. I would lay my life on the line for her if I
had to.” Eugene thought he spotted a few loose tears well up in her eyes, a first for him to actually
see her showing any emotion. “And for that reason, I want to make sure she’s fine. And I want to
see it with my own eyes. Would you let me do this?”
Eugene took a few minutes to process everything that he had been told, but he also wanted to make
sure that she was done, in case he overstepped his boundaries. When he was sure he was safe, he
said, “Why are you coming to me for this?”
At that Cass looked slightly annoyed. “Because the King already denied me access. But if I’m with
you, the guards might allow me to see her. Nothing’s certain, but it’s worth a shot. Are you with
me or are you not? Because if not, I’ll do this by myself.”
His eyes grew bigger at her boldness alone. He knew she was like this on a daily basis, but hearing
it now threw him for a loop. So much that he was silent for a good five minutes. Then, he said the
three simple words that would be enough to get them going.
“Let’s do this.”
Clink! went the chains that still hung on Rapunzel’s wrists, much to her annoyance. She had indeed managed to free herself, but that naturally came along with the almost embarrassing leftover part that hung down and made an unnecessarily loud noise due to her moving too fast. It wasn’t very long, but it still managed to pose an inconvenience to her breaking out of the castle. That is, until she decided to take the ends of them into her hands. That helped, just like she assumed it would. “Good,” she would whisper to herself. “Now I can finally get out of here.” Her tone was relieved despite the fact that she hadn’t spoke very loud. If she did, she knew that everything she had done thus far might as well be utterly pointless, and she wasn’t going to take a risk on something like that. That didn’t diminish her determination even though she thought it did, and she realized this when she noticed that she was still walking. Rapunzel didn’t believe that she actually had that in her- the past day (or so, Rapunzel had lost all track of time and wasn’t at all sure of how long it had really been) had been rather stressful and strenuous on her, and that was an understatement. She felt physically exhausted, yet she kept going for whatever reason. As quietly as she could, her guard was up and her nerves were extremely close to being shot.

“Come on, Rapunzel. You’ve come this far, you can make it further if you can just pull through this and keep going,” she assured herself. “I can see the end of the path and I can reach it. Everything’s fine.” ...A little bit of determination never hurt anybody, right?

At least, that’s what she continued to tell herself as she slowly made her exit out of the castle.

“...And are you sure that she wasn’t acting like herself the last time you saw her? I haven’t seen her myself but I just wanna get what you said straightened out,” Cassandra whispered even though she didn’t have to.

At this, Eugene scoffed. Sure, they were going to see Rapunzel and no one seemed to be around, but there really wasn’t any need for this much secrecy. “I hope you realize that’s unnecessary.” He said as he continued to move down the hall.

“What isn’t necessary?” Cassandra hissed, still in a hushed tone.

Eugene then huffed, loudly, and turned to face Cass. “That. What you’re doing right there is completely not needed. You act like we’re trying to steal some priceless artifact or something along those lines. I assure you, we’re fine.”

“Well, with that out of the way..” Cassandra spoke again after a short moment of brief silence. “Are we close to being there yet?”

“Don’t be so anxious,” Eugene reassured, turning on his heel to continue walking at his original pace. “We’ll get there when we get there. And quite frankly, I’m not in any hurry to— Ouch,” He was cut off when he ran straight into the door, hitting his nose hard in the process. “Didn’t see that one coming.”

“Whatever. Let’s just go.” Cassandra basically shoved past him as she went to open the door. Eugene knew that she was eager, but he didn’t think she was this eager. Oh well, he simply shrugged it off and followed suit.

The door wasn’t locked- that probably should have been a red flag if there ever was one. It stayed unlocked when there was guards in front of it, because of course no one would try to get in to see the Princess when they were around. But this time it wasn’t. The very idea of it put an uneasy feeling in his stomach. Something wasn’t right, he knew that much.

“Rapunzel?” Cassandra called out into the seemingly empty room, hoping for a response of some sort, anything to give her the smallest sliver of hope. “Are you in there?”

The room only remained as silent as it had been before they came in. Sure, it seemed as if the room itself had been deserted. There weren’t any candles lit and no one was present. It seemed like there was only one reasonable explanation for what had happened:
“Rapunzel’s gone AWOL.” Cassandra stated in a blunt tone.
“...Okay, no. She did not.” Eugene began after clearing his throat. “I’m sure that she’s simply.. hiding in the closet. Or-“
“Are you dense or something?” Cassandra nagged while she glared over at Eugene. “If she’s not here, then she’s obviously ran off somewhere. This isn’t good and we need to find her as soon as possible. There isn’t any telling where she’s ran off to and, honestly- she could be in danger with Varian still on the loose.”
“Sure, but you’re forgetting one small detail here: Varian went missing too and no one knows where he is.” He was rather intent on putting Cassandra’s nerves to rest. But whether or not it was working was a complete mystery to him. “Not even the guards have bothered to look for him, which means he’s obviously not a threat anymore. I think Rapunzel is safe.”
Cass shook her head. Obviously she wasn’t convinced just yet. “Yeah, you don’t know that.”
Upon hearing her comment, Eugene only huffed. “You really are stubborn, aren’t you? ..Okay. Let’s just go and we can form some sort of rescue team.” Then, he promptly took her by the arm and led her into the hallway.
“How are you so sure about this?” Cassandra dragged her feet against the floor in protest. She didn’t want to go anywhere without a good reason to. “You don’t have any idea where Rapunzel went!”
“I don’t, no.” His grip tightened a bit when he felt her resist. “But I do have a few suspicions on where she might have gone. None of which are very good, if I’m being completely honest.”
“.and where would that be?” Cassandra asked, arching a brow as she began to follow Eugene at a slow pace. She was still uncertain about things but her curiosity had definitely piqued.
He chuckled slightly at that, continuing to move down the hall at an eager pace. “Oh, you’ll see soon enough.”
“You make me feel uneasy, Fitzherbert..” Cass muttered to herself.

“Dear… Rapunzel. I would like to apologize for my brash actions back at my house. It was very wrong of me and I don’t think I can find it in myself to apologize enough, yet I’m still trying to do just that.”
The writing would have continued, but that was when Varian got too frustrated to keep going and crumpled up the paper, ripping it out of the notebook and tossing it to the side out of anger.
It wasn’t the fact that he didn’t want to apologize, he did. He just didn’t know how to put his feelings into words, especially not on paper.
“I’m starting to get the impression that this whole thing is pointless.” He sighed, resting his arms on his legs and placing his hands on his head. “Rapunzel is furious, and I want to apologize but.. I can’t. She probably won’t accept me after everything that happened. I’ve doomed myself to isolation and at this point, there’s nothing I can do about it.”
Ruddiger was quick to notice Varian’s unease, and attempted to climb onto his lap to no avail. When that failed, he crawled up Varian’s back only to climb on top of his head. He was willing to do anything to make him feel better at this point, no matter what it took to bring a smile back to his face.
Of course he didn’t notice the gesture at first, but when he did he sniffled a bit and wiped his eyes. “Thank you, Ruddiger.” He muttered, picking bits of paper out of the notebook rings. He didn’t feel much better about the unfortunate situation, but it did help to know that he still had someone to support him through this. He didn’t feel like he deserved it, but he was glad nonetheless. “But we can’t stay here, unfortunately. I don’t think the current shelter I made would be enough to last for very long.”
He tilted his head in an attempt to get a better look at it. It didn’t look steady as it was, but it was big enough to house both of them unless a storm happened to come through, then they’d be doomed.
“I don’t want to take any chances, Ruddiger..” Varian sighed, reaching up to take the raccoon into his arms before he stood. “Perhaps we can find an abandoned barn or something to live in. Because
there is no way that I am going back to Old Corona with the way things are now.”
He then grew silent, looking around to see if he could find somewhere, anywhere to hide in.
Somewhere that nobody would find them. If he could that, they would be in the clear for a good
matter of time.
But what he didn’t know was that even if he tried to hide, he would still be in danger no matter
what. Rapunzel was indeed on the run, and she was searching for him and he wasn’t any wiser
about the fact.
He squinted towards the distance as his feet continued to move. The exhaustion was slowly starting
to get to Varian, but he had enough resolve to keep himself going. That was the only thing he could
think to do with himself at a time like this.
And he found himself able to breath a sigh of relief when he somehow stumbled across an
abandoned house, much to his luck.

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