

“Tangled Up In Food”

Z.O.B. Industries

07/20/2017

“I can’t believe Rapunzel is getting married to him.” Cassandra put down her flagon of ale, watching Eugene dance the can-can on the Fuzzy Duckling stage with Rapunzel. They looked to be having a great time – which didn’t improve her sour mood. “That Fitzherbert guy is a *tool*. He used to be a criminal, did you know that?”

“Mmmyp,” said the short, bearded drunk man beside her.

“A criminal! I’m her best friend, *and* the daughter of the palace guard captain. I’m supposed to be protecting her.” She pulled back her short dark hair, staring into her glass. “If only there was some way to stop the marriage...”

“Thass irresponsible,” said the drunk man.

“No, it’s not! I’m just keeping my friend from ending up with someone I *know* will make her unhappy.” She peered through the glass at Rapunzel... and her friend’s slender body stretched into a fun-house mirror version, as round as an apple. “Wait! That’s it!”

“Eureka,” said her companion, falling off his stool with a thud.

Cassandra put down her glass and moved through the cheering crowd of scoundrels in the bar. Maximus, captain of the city watch and also a horse, was chewing on some straw that had been served to him on a silver platter. She patted his flank.

“Hey, buddy. How do you feel about Eugene?” Maximus stuck out his tongue. “Yeah. That’s what I thought. He’s sneaky, shallow and his facial hair *sucks*. And Rapunzel is rushing into marrying him – if we don’t do something, he’s gonna make her miserable. Not to mention, we’ll never see her anymore! Because they’ll be off love-birding. The wedding’s in eight months – but I have a plan.”

She whispered her idea to Maximus. The horse raised an eyebrow and whinnied.

“Yeah, I know, she’s not going to like it. But it’s for her own good! Plus, Eugene is a skin-deep kind of guy. This will scare him off for sure.” She caught Maximus giving her a sideways glance. “Hey, come on. I need your help on this. Are you with me or not?” Another, reluctant whinny. “Yes! I knew I could count on you. Now, here’s what we’re going to do...”

After a long night of singing, slam poetry and very watered-down wine with Eugene and the boys, Rapunzel went to bed late and woke up even later. Sunlight streamed through the window as she rolled over onto her hair, which had grown back after an adventure with Cassandra. “Bluh...” She struggled out of it and tossed it aside, fighting a mild hangover. Eugene thought her hair was “awesome,” but she preferred “giant pain in the butt.”

“Pascal... Brush?” Her chameleon friend obligingly nudged a hairbrush off of a shelf at her, and she began brushing, barely even awake. It wasn’t like her magic hair ever got real snarls or knots, but if she didn’t keep it organized she might drown in the stuff. “Ugh, it’s all caught in the bedpost. I guess breakfast will have to wait until we...”

“Morning!” Cassandra’s cheery voice startled Rapunzel as she burst through the door with a servants’ cart. It was piled with covered dishes. “Have a good time last night?”

“Uh... Yeah, maybe a little too good.” She blinked in astonishment as Cassandra uncovered the trays to reveal a breakfast fit for a queen. Pancakes, slathered in butter and doused in dripping syrup, were piled up against thick sausages, strips of bacon and crystal decanters of fresh juice.

“Well, hopefully this takes the edge off. I thought you could use a hangover cure, after last night’s party.”

“Is all this for me?” Rapunzel felt herself drooling a little at the sight of the feast, and licked her lips. “There’s no way I can eat all that...”

“I thought you’d say that! Don’t worry, I’ll help.” Cassandra piled up a plate with greasy treats and piled them in front of ‘Punzel, lifting a rasher of bacon and dangling it in front of her mouth. “My treat.”

“You’re such a good friend... Mmm!” She gobbled up the bacon, the crunchy smoky taste of it lingering on her tongue as she reached for the orange juice. “It’s delicious!”

“It better be. The castle cook himself made it.” Cassandra watched with glee as Rapunzel slurped down juice, chomped bacon, nibbled sausage and sank her teeth into buttery, flakey croissants. The girl had gotten so used to the same food over and over in her tower that the palace’s meals seemed like manna from heaven to her – a fact she’d confided in Cassandra. And the blonde’s best friend was happy to use that knowledge.

“Aren’t you going to have any?” Rapunzel asked, her cheeks stuffed with food. She looked like a chipmunk, Cassandra thought, and smirked. *Too cute!*

“Right, right...” There was no way Rapunzel could eat a meal like this by herself... not at first, anyway. But once Cassandra had done her work, Eugene’s freckly bride would be more than happy to down a smorgasbord like this. In theory. Cassandra scraped some eggs onto a plate, forking them into her mouth at a careful, measured pace.

Rapunzel, meanwhile, had slowly picked up speed. Salting her eggs and sprinkling some diced cheese on them, she mixed them with her sausages to make a gooey savory mess, and spooned it all into her mouth. By the time she’d had her fill several minutes later, she was a

little red-faced and dopey-eyed from an oncoming food coma. “Wow... That’s too much of a good thing. I can’t eat another bite!”

“Are you sure? The cook *did* say it was his best work...” She watched as Rapunzel’s kindness and better nature wrestled with the fact that her stomach was clearly distended and uncomfortable under her nightshirt.

“Well, I wouldn’t want to disappoint the kitchens,” she said, a little reluctantly, and speared another slice of bacon with her fork. “They work so hard, down there!” she said through a mouthful of meat.

“Yeah, they’re pretty great.” Cassandra grinned as her princess dug into the feast once more, her face sweating slightly as she began to push the limits of how much she could actually eat. “Let me know if you want more juice...”

The next day, Cassandra came up with a different excuse to bring her friend a big, greasy breakfast. Same thing the next day, and the next... and Rapunzel was too kind to say no. A few weeks passed – closer and closer to the wedding Cassandra dreaded. The idea of her friend living with Eugene, lavishing all her attention on him, made her furious. So she kept bringing Rapunzel food: teatime sandwiches, desserts after supper, all the while explaining it as “girl time,” because they both knew they’d get little of that, once Rapunzel was Eugene’s wife.

“I mean, what’s in it for you anyway?” Cassandra asked. They were sitting on the palace roof, eating fudge sundaes and drinking mimosas, one of the few drinks ‘Punzel could handle without passing out or getting too flirty. “He doesn’t even have a job.”

“He’s an adventurer! We’ll be fine.” The long-haired girl downed her glass in a single gulp; since she’d started having extra “friendship lunches” with Cass, she’d been able to handle her liquor better. Mostly because she was no longer a petite little barefoot princess.

She wasn’t *huge*, not by any description, but she was getting... fluffy. A plump potbelly stretched out her velvety purple dress, and her butt had grown wider and more cushiony, filling out her skirts and jiggling when she walked. Her arms were softer, and her chest had grown more noticeable. She even had the start of a double chin going on. Cassandra thought she looked pretty good – more womanly, fuller-figured. But they couldn’t stop here. No way was she going to let her country (and her best friend) belong to Eugene goddamn Fitzherbert. She had to make Rapunzel *huge*, and quickly.

“You sure?” Cass said. “He’s a bit... well, irresponsible.”

“Hey, you guys talking about me?”

Eugene peeked out of the roof’s trapdoor, and Pascal squeaked in surprise, turning blue – he’d been sitting on the door. Rapunzel grinned and Cassandra did her best not to tackle him. It wasn’t enough that he took up all of Rapunzel’s time, now he was going to horn in on their girls’ night? *Big jerk.*

“Eugene!” Rapunzel hugged him as he climbed onto the shingles. “I missed you! I haven’t seen you since this morning!” They kissed and Cass gagged, disgusted.

"I missed you, too. I was on a treasure hunt. A guy from the bar says that there's a hidden hoard of gold somewhere in the forest, and Maximus is helping —"

"Oh, spare us," Cass said. She always hated it when Eugene went on about his exploits as a thief. Mostly because she was part of the palace guard, but also, she was a little jealous of the way Rapunzel leaned on him while he spoke.

"Eugene, we don't need any more gold," Rapunzel reminded him. "You be careful out there."

"I will." He looked at her lovingly... but a little worryingly. His eyes lingered on her chubby stomach, her round chipmunk-cheeks. *Yes, that's it, Cassandra thought. Not so lovey-dovey now, are you? Prince Charming, my ass!*

But the look passed, and Eugene pulled Rapunzel close. "You're right," he said, squeezing her new love-handles playfully, "I don't need any of that. You're worth more than a *kingdom* full of gold to me."

"Ugh." Cassandra reached for her mimosa. It was going to be a long night.

She had to pick up the feeding pace, after that. Fortunately, Maximus was able to keep Eugene busy by acting as his steed on hare-brained adventures. That left Rapunzel free for Cassandra to stuff full of pastries, fried foods, fish, beef stew, and anything else she could get down the princess' throat. The results showed up quickly — 'Punzel had no concept of dieting after a lifetime of deprivation, and she all eagerly swallowed each new "generous" gift. Cassandra became a regular customer of the kingdom's cooks and bakers, hauling food back to the castle every evening.

Within a month, the plan was *really* making progress. Eugene was more and more nervous around Rapunzel as she continued to get bigger and bigger. He didn't seem willing to say anything, too scared of upsetting his beloved, and so Cassandra continued to overfeed her at every possible opportunity. Five months before the wedding, Rapunzel staggered upstairs after another enormous dinner, groaning as she rubbed her stomach. Her chubby feet padded on the stone as she entered her room, its colorful murals now dusty — she hadn't touched her paints in ages, too tired from digesting to feel creative. She gathered up her hair and threw it on the bed, and then fell into it like a blonde pillow. "Oof. Pascal, I don't know if I can keep this up! Cassandra is so sweet, and I know everyone's excited for the wedding, but..." She belched wetly, the smell of her pork roast and potatoes coming back up. "**URRAP.** I think I'm getting kind of... heavy."

Pascal rolled his eyes; this was an understatement. Rapunzel had been eating so constantly she'd gone from a petite, lithe shape to a chunky, wide-hipped fertility figure. Her stomach sagged, bulging out under her heavily patched and expanded dress — the palace tailor had his work cut out for him, re-sizing her clothes to contain each pound of new flesh. Her rear had grown so wide and flabby, it overflowed most of the chairs in the castle, and the underside of her arms dangled with extra chubbiness whenever she reached for something on a high shelf.

Her thighs rubbed together, chafing whenever she tried to run; even her hands were getting puffy and soft.

She wasn't in denial — she could feel herself porking up, day by day. But she couldn't refuse gifts given to her out of kindness, and she loved every subject in her kingdom equally, including Cassandra. If it made her friend happy to bring her meals between her meals, and desserts *after* dessert, how could she say no? Even if she was starting to get out of breath, just climbing the stairs, and her hair was getting snarled more often — instead of brushing it, she'd been using it for a hammock, sipping wine and nibbling chocolates. The last time she'd hugged Eugene, he'd nearly fallen over because of her unexpected weight. But all that was okay, because she was making her friends happy. And that was what mattered.

"Worth it... **hurrrrp.**" Massaging her overfull stomach, bloated with champagne and pork, she passed into a troubled sleep.

While she slept, she dreamed she was back in her tower — with her paintings, her perfectly clean floors, and her single lonely window. Her table was loaded with food, but she was already full, even in her dream. She pushed it away, . "No... I can't have any more..."

But the dream disagreed. Rapunzel watched, horrified, as hair rose in curling strands, and began to grab food right off the table. Caramels, grapes, chicken drumsticks, and bowls of soup were pulled towards her. Loops of hair wrapped round her chubby body, pinning her in her chair. The food was shoved past her lips, tendrils of hair pushing her chin, forcing her to chew. "Mmmf! Mmf!"

She ate and ate, struggling to escape, her stomach growing more and more painfully stuffed. Then to her shock she saw her stomach growing, expanding, her lap thickening and plumping up. Her chest fattened and ballooned, and her arms and thighs swelled up with flesh. Worse than all of this was the sight of a dark figure at the window: a figure she knew to be dead.

Mother Gothel.

"Having fun, dear?" The devious woman stepped down from the windowsill, approaching her runaway child. Her eyes locked with cruel delight on the rolls of fat flopping over Rapunzel's lap.

"Nooo — mmf — **urrrp!**" The terrified princess belched around a mouthful of dream-food, as her dead adoptive mother walked up and slapped her stomach. It flopped and quivered, a monument to her lazy snacking and well-meaning gluttony.

"I always knew this would happen someday," Gothel said. "You were such a greedy little girl, when I had you. Stuffing your face every time I was out. So disgusting." Gothel's wicked face loomed over her, the old woman's sharp nails digging into the fat of Rapunzel's gut. "How's it working out for you? Without your mother to stop you, you're turning into a sloppy pig. A messy, greedy sow!"

"N-no I'm not..." Sobbing and sniffing around the food, Rapunzel squirmed as Gothel grabbed her stomach with both hands and shook it. The fat bounced and wobbled, her insides sloshing. Gothel was right – she was getting hugely, disgustingly fat. Why couldn't she stop?

"It's alright, dear. Now that you're back with me, I won't let anyone hurt you... And this time, you're too fat to get away." Gothel squeezed and poked Rapunzel's wide hips and jiggly arms, delighted. "Soon you'll be too big to fit out that window! And you can stay with me forever... No need to worry about silly things, like running a *kingdom* or getting *married*. Those things are for skinny girls. You're just a pig, my dear... So eat."

Rapunzel shook her head, trying to refuse, but Gothel forced her, stuffing a cookie past her lips so roughly she nearly choked. The worst part was, Rapunzel felt like she deserved this abuse. She'd been a bad girl and gotten fat, it only made sense she should be punished. Years and years of Gothel's vicious behavior had sunk into her, and she found herself believing every mean word her 'mother' spoke.

"Yes, that's it. You're a butterball... my little piglet." Brownies and crumbling slices of cake were shoved in her mouth, almost faster than Rapunzel could chew. "Being outside is so difficult, so hard. You have to do things like *walk* and *exercise*, and stay thin for that boy you're so dizzy about. Isn't it easier to just stay in here? Stay inside, and eat, and get fat..."

No! I can't just pig out and ignore my responsibilities. People are counting on... me...

For the first time, she struggled to get away, and succeeded in freeing one chubby arm to stop Gothel. The immortal witch scowled at her as Rapunzel grabbed her wrist.

"You think you can stop it? Rapunzel, dear, you *want* this. You've been waiting to blow up like a balloon since that boy first laid eyes on you. All you needed was an excuse..."

"Liar..." But her hair was lifting a tureen of hazelnut soup towards her. She loved hazelnut soup, absolutely *adored* it, and when Gothel took the bowl and forced it to her lips, she couldn't help but drink. It was as if all her repressed desires from years of being locked in the tower had suddenly taken control of her, made her a slave to hunger.

Helpless, panicked, she felt herself swallowing and swallowing, hot soup pouring into her loaded stomach. A deep gurgling came from the bloated pink mass of her gut. She felt like she was ready to pop, like a piñata stuffed with too much candy. Yet when a tart was forced past her lips, she ate it greedily, automatically. The pressure grew, and grew...

And then she woke up.

She was lying in the palace kitchens, crumbs and jelly smeared on her lips, her stomach painfully stretched under her nightgown. Her feet were freezing and she felt extremely full... and very gassy. Pascal had stuck his tongue in her ear to wake her, and she patted him gratefully. "Thanks, buddy... Urrgh, I'm gonna be sick. What have I been doing?"

Then she saw the mess around her: pie crusts, fruit rinds, empty pitchers of milk. *I've been sleep-walking?* She groaned, sitting down heavily in a nearby chair. A half-eaten bowl of soup sat on the table among dozens of other treats. *No wonder I've felt so lethargic lately.* "Urrp..."

She couldn't just leave food uneaten. Someone would notice it lying around. And besides, someone had *made* this pie: to throw it away would be disrespectful to them. Whimpering a little from the pain in her stuffed stomach, Rapunzel scooped chunks out with her hands, gulping it down slowly and painfully, her mother's words from the dream ringing in her head.

You're nothing but a little piglet... Just you wait and see.

The next morning, when Cassandra showed up to bring 'Punzel her usual huge breakfast, she found the girl already pre-stuffed, snoring loudly with her gut making a lump under the bedsheets. Taking pity on her, she left the food on a tray on the bedside table. She crept out of the room, and bumped into Eugene.

"Morning, Cassandra," he said, leaning on the wall. This would have looked more suave if the wall hadn't been covered in pink and yellow flowers, more of Rapunzel's art. "You're up early. *Suspiciously* early."

"Just making sure our princess has her breakfast. Can't rule a kingdom on an empty stomach!"

"Can't rule on a full one, either." He eyed her. "Which is exactly what she's been doing."

She shrugged. "She's got self-control. She'll be fine."

"No, she doesn't. The first time she drank wine, she ended up face-down on the table, because *you* kept egging her on." Eugene was normally a laid-back kind of guy, but he didn't look laid-back today. He looked menacing. "I'm starting to think you're not a very good influence on her."

"Hey! I'm her best friend. Shouldn't you have somewhere to be? Some kind of 'adventure' to be on? By which I mean, stealing stuff?"

He walked up to her. Normally she wasn't intimidated by his, but today his usual slacker attitude was gone. His shoulders were squared, and he looked every inch the outlaw he'd once been. "Maximus spilled the beans on you, Cassandra. You are fattening my fiancé!"

"What? No, I would never —"

"You've been keeping me out of the picture so you can pull some kind of scheme, to keep us apart." He held up his hands. "Why would you do that? We're about to get married, why are you trying to do this to us?"

"Dammit..." She hesitated. "Because you're not *good* for her, Eugene. Okay? There, I said it. You're not healthy for Rapunzel."

“Not healthy? Look at what she’s been eating lately!” He nodded at the palace cooks, approaching with new trays of food to leave outside Her Majesty’s room. “You’re *hurting* her. She’s out of shape, and her looks...”

“What? What about her looks? Come on Eugene, don’t tell me you’re not *attracted* to her anymore. That would be shallow of you.” She was grinning; she felt like a bitch, but she knew she was on to something. Eugene was faltering, stammering.

“I like her no matter what she looks like. Or how big she gets.”

“Oh, really? Let’s test that theory. She’s almost two hundred pounds now – I had Gunter put a scale under the slate, when he re-modelled her bathroom.”

“Damn you, Gunther,” Flynn fumed. “His feng shui is too powerful, we can’t take it out now...”

“Your fiancé is two hundred pounds, Eugene.” She held up two fingers... then three fingers, relishing Eugene’s horror. “And you’re already having problems with her appearance. What happens when she hits three hundred pounds, or four hundred? Or five? Will you still love her ‘unconditionally’ then? I don’t think you will.” She leaned in. “Because you’re a man. And all men are shallow, vain jerks. I’m going to prove it.”

“This is crazy! Cassandra, she could get unhealthy!”

“Unhealthy? Rapunzel is magical! She’s never had a cold – not so much as a sniffle. When she scratches her knee, it’s healed in an hour. That hair is keeping her happy and hearty, no matter what. ‘Course, she’ll have trouble fitting in chairs soon. And through doorways. And,” she said, whispering, “I think she might drown you in her own fat, if she gets on top during sex. But you’re fine with that, right? Because you love her, *no matter what*.”

“This is ridiculous. I’m telling the king and queen!”

“And admit you don’t like their daughter’s looks? Please.” She plucked a doughnut from one of the trays. “They’d throw you out. I win this one. You were never good enough for her, and now I’ve proved it.”

“This isn’t about me. This is about you being overprotective, and... Wait a second.” His jaw dropped. “You think I’m not good enough... Are *you* into her? Is that what this is about?”

“Wh-what? No! That’s ridiculous! I don’t even like... um, girls.”

“You *are*, aren’t you?” He shook his head. “Cass, you need to tell her! You can’t lie about that to her, it’s dishonest.”

She went beet-red. “You’re lying to her every day, telling her she looks great when you don’t even believe it! You can’t tell *me* about dishonesty.”

He opened his mouth to argue... and hung his head. She was right – Rapunzel’s new fat didn’t disgust him, exactly, but it *was* super hard to get used to. He was used to dating a dainty princess, not a jiggly barefoot ball of lard, and he was searching his soul for enough love to get

them through this. He was furious with Cassandra, of course, but deep down he was scared she might be right. If he couldn't handle this, how could he handle them getting old together? Wrinkles, warts, bunions? Was he really ready for this marriage?

Then Eugene had an idea. A wonderful, awful idea. "Cassandra. You do what you have to do. And I'm going to hold up my end. I promised I would love her forever – and I will. No matter what it takes."

There was a crazy gleam in his eye, and the stubborn short girl hesitated as she watched him turn and march down the hall. "Eugene! Eugene, where are you going?" He didn't answer. "Hey, don't kill yourself or anything, okay? It's just fat, you don't have to get all *dramatic* about it!"

Rapunzel's bedroom door opened. The princess stood there, blinking sleepily, half a croissant dangling out of her mouth. There were crumbs caught in her double-chin. "Whaff you guys talking about?"

"We were just... chatting. Eat your breakfast, honey." And she shoved the bagel past Rapunzel's lips.

"I can't believe that woman!" Eugene burst out of the castle doors, striding over to Maximus. "She thinks she can drive us apart by making Rapunzel... *fat*? Little does she know, I have a master plan."

Maximus nodded. He had, after all, known the plan the whole time – only Cassandra's relentless obsession had caused him to do something about it. It was, after all, unlawful to fatten someone without their consent – he'd checked the books. And Maximus *was* the law.

Eugene paced back and forth, ranting. "I can't get in her way, because then Blondie might figure out I'm not psyched about the size of her butt. And *that* will be a mess, let me tell you." He sighed, leaning on Maximus. "The crying... The drama... I don't want to do that to her. We need a different solution here. A magical solution. Blondie solves all her problems with magic, why can't I?" He scratched his chin. "But where can I find someone to help me like fat girls? That's a very specific talent."

From far off, beyond the sunny edges of the palace grounds, past the glittering bay the castle stood in the middle of, there was an explosion. Maximus' ears pricked up, and he stamped the ground with displeasure. That kid was at it again – the teenage alchemist, playing with chemicals. If Maximus had his way, the brat would be locked up as a terrorist... but Rapunzel liked him, so for the moment, he stayed free. Then an idea struck him. He nudged Eugene and nodded towards the rainbow-colored mushroom cloud rising from a nearby village.

"Varian! Of course!" Eugene slapped his forehead. "That little whack-job *has* to have something to make me love Rapunzel, even when she's the size of a boat. Come on!"

He jumped on top Maximus and spurred him. Maximus rolled his eyes. If it were up to him, they'd be finding proof of Cassandra's crimes. Then he would start the revolution of forensic science, and become the very first Horse Detective. But *nooo*, the humans had to be in charge. So sure, why not! He would take Eugene to ask Varian for a chubby-chasing potion. What a genius idea.

Varian, as it turned out, was pleased to hear about their plan. He was a short, gangly youth with messy hair and a welder's mask, and was currently sitting in the destruction of his latest experiment: an attempt to combine exploding paint with squids, to create something he called a "splat platoon." Fortunately, he was easily distracted by new projects – to the relief of the villagers who'd been gathering pitchforks.

"A ... to make you like bigger women?" He squinted at Eugene. "I dunno... You're not really the type. It might not work."

Eugene blinked. "The type? They have a type?"

"Yeah! Creepy, pale, usually has mommy issues."

"Oh come on, that's generalizing." Eugene checked his pockets, found them empty. "I can pay you.... uh, later. But I *need* that potion. I told Rapunzel I'd love her until forever, and I meant it! We even sang a song!"

Varian frowned. "So, why can't you just live with her when she's big? You still like her, right?"

"Of course. But she's very... energetic. I don't want a 'droopy flagpole' to break us up, if you know what I mean..." He nudged Varian, who was doing calculations.

"Nah, that went over my head."

"You know, a saggy sergeant. An undercooked sausage."

"Nope, still nothing."

"I need to get a *boner* for her!" Eugene yelled, and blushed as the entire village turned to look at him. "You know. When the time is right. And with Rapunzel, it's right a *lot*."

Varian swallowed. "Right, boners. Don't worry. I think I have just the thing for that... An old sea-witch with tentacles sold me a magic cauldron. If you pay the right price –"

"Yeah, yeah, whatever. Let's do it!"

"Are you sure? That cauldron is like, *super* cursed."

"Sure! I can handle it."

"Alright... Let the buyer beware."

Several weeks later, Rapunzel's whirlwind of overeating had continued. By the time she started having trouble getting out of chairs, she'd figured out that Cassandra was up to something. She was naïve, sweet and caring, but she wasn't stupid. She recognized a zany scheme when she saw one.

"The only question is *why* she's doing it," she told Pascal, munching on an enormous fluffy pancake over breakfast. Tarts, struedels, waffles, and huge chunks of butter on little sun-shaped platters had been laid out for her, and she was chowing through them slowly and relentlessly. "Why would she go to all this trouble? It's not *super* evil either, just kind of... **urrrp**. Inconvenient." She rubbed her stomach with one hand. The palace tailor had quit after she'd outgrown his fiftieth patch job, and she'd started just wrapping her hair around any bits of her that busted through her disintegrating clothes. Her stomach, for instance, was splitting the seams of her dress—so she gave herself a hair-belt, to hold it up. Her cleavage was beginning to sag a little from its own sheer weight—so she gave it a hair-bra to keep her "girls" in place. This improvising could only last her so long, however. Sooner or later she was going to have to face facts: her weight was out of control.

"But I can't tell her to stop bringing me food," she said, as Pascal mimed an elaborate punch-Cassandra scenario on the table. "That would be rude! And a princess is never— **HURRRP!** Rude. Besides, I care about her. She's a sweet girl, deep down." Pascal frowned. "Okay. *Very* deep down. And I know she'd never hurt me. She's just got some kind of idea in her head, and it's making her a little—"

"Who wants more pancakes?!" Cassandra appeared through the door, hair disheveled, carrying another huge platter of pancakes. The top flapjack had a smiley face drawn on it with jam, but the smile was slightly askew.

"Ugh... Cassandra, I can't. I'm absolutely stuffed." Rapunzel leaned back, her stomach rolls poking through the dress and bulging through her impromptu hair-corset. "I really need to slow down on the eating. I think I'm getting a bit... pudgy." As she shifted in her ornate seat, there was a *crunch* and the wooden arms of the chair popped off, snapped by her enormous love-handles.

"Nah, no way! You look great! Here, why don't we put some cream on these." Cassandra reached for a jug of heavy cream. Rapunzel reached out to stop her, but her belly smacked against the table with a soft *plop*, preventing her from reaching very far. Frustrated, she spun some hair into a lasso and snared Cassandra's hand with it.

"I said, that's enough, okay? Cut it out."

Pascal and Cassandra both froze. It took a lot to make Rapunzel mad; the last time it had happened had been when she'd confronted Mother Gothel. Now her normally sweet face was pink with frustration. "You're supposed to be my friend. Why won't you listen to me?"

Cassandra paused. Pascal gave her a knowing look, and she shook her head. *No way – I have to keep going. Rapunzel can't end up with that jerk!* “L-look, you’re probably just lightheaded from lack of food. Why don’t I go get some mimosas...”

“No mimosas. Sit.” Rapunzel jerked on the hair-strand and Cassandra fell into the chair beside her with a yelp. Now that she was closer, Rapunzel saw she had dark circles under her eyes, and she’d gained a little weight as well, a softened stomach pooching over her guardsman’s belt. She looked stressed, and upset, and Rapunzel’s heart melted a little. Whatever her friend was up to, it was worrying her. A lot.

“Look. We’ve been friends for years, Cass. You need to be honest with me.”

“But I...”

“Nuh-uh, no butts!” Rapunzel looped more hair around the chair, strapping Cassandra to it without even having to get up. Inspired, she flung out some more hair and dragged the mimosa pitcher over to her from across the table. “Now, spill the beans. What are you hiding?”

“I...” Cassandra sighed. “I didn’t want you to marry Eugene. So I thought, maybe if you looked different...”

“You were feeding me up to... what, scare him off?” Rapunzel snorted. “You don’t know Eugene very well, do you? He’d love me even if I were the size of a Royal Navy ship. Why did you go to all this trouble?”

“Because he’s useless! He’s never going to get a job, and he’s always running off on crazy adventures! We haven’t even seen him for weeks now! How’s he going to support you?”

Rapunzel sipped a mimosa. The buzz helped to soften her frustration. “Cassandra,” she said, wiping crumbs off her chubby face, “I am a *princess*. My family collects taxes from the entire *kingdom*. Eugene doesn’t need a job. Neither of us do.”

Cassandra blinked. “I... didn’t think of that.”

Rapunzel sighed, leaning back in her chair. It creaked dangerously as an extra fold of her stomach popped through her dress. “I know you’re worried about me. You’re not the only one. Trust me, I’ve got butterflies in my stomach— getting married is a big deal.” She belched, syrup leaking from the corner of her mouth. “Butterflies, and pancakes. Oof. Lots of pancakes.”

“Sorry about that.”

The princess shrugged, swinging her plump feet onto the table. “Honestly? I don’t mind being big—the people seem to think I’m ‘growing a queen’s figure,’ whatever *that* means. And Pascal has lots of soft places to sleep now.” She patted her gut. “What I *do* mind is you lying to me.”

“I only did it because—”

“Hey! Your princess is talking.” She looped some hair around Cassandra’s mouth. “You were doing the same thing Mother Gothel used to do: controlling me with my own emotions.

And that's not okay." She released Cassandra, the effort of tossing hair around starting to make her out of breath. "Please... Don't ever do that again."

"Okay." Cassandra looked meek. "Won't happen again. I promise."

"Good. Eugene told me you had a crush on me, too." She poked Cass in the shoulder. "Way to make it weird by *not* telling me."

The girl's mouth dropped open. "You're... you're not mad?"

"Why would I be? I care about you. You just care a little extra, about me. There's no problem with that – as long as you're *honest* with people!" She took a loop of hair, and whumped Cassandra on the head with it.

"Okay! Okay, I get it. No more lies." Cassandra sighed. "I guess... I guess I just hoped you felt the same way. About me."

The princess shrugged. "Didn't say I did it. But let's not rush things, okay?" She swilled her almost-empty glass around, already slightly drunk. "Where is Eugene this week, anyway? I really miss his d – face," she corrected herself as Cass raised an eyebrow. "I miss his *face!* That's what I was going to say."

"Sure you were." Cassandra snickered. "He must be good, if you miss him *that* much."

"Cass, *stop* it!" Rapunzel snorted some of her mimosa by accident. "But... yes. Even if he can be a little... goofy."

As if to prove the point, their chat was interrupted by the banquet hall doors bursting open. In a streaming ray of sunlight, Eugene posed there, riding Maximus. Varian followed them, looking exhausted. The horse clip-clopped down the hallway to where Rapunzel sat. Eugene swept out of the saddle, a rose in his teeth. "Milady! I have returned to you. Embrace me, my darling!"

"Eugene!" Rapunzel hugged him, and was surprised – and a little bit pleased – when he grabbed her by the waist, sinking his hands into her added weight. "You're back! Where were you? Pascal and I were so worried about you – stop, that tickles!"

Rapunzel's chameleon shrugged. Pascal did, in fact, not give a shit about Eugene. Eugene scowled at him and then swept Rapunzel up on the table, grunting with the effort of lifting his recently engorged fiancé. The heavy *thud* of her ass hitting the table was like a huge sack of flour being dropped. "I've been working on a project with Varian. Something that I think will make you... Very happy. In a very specific way." He waggled his eyebrows, and reached around to grab the flabby dough of Rapunzel's rump, squeezing her ass.

"Eugene!" Rapunzel slapped his hand, but she was smiling all the same. *Something* had certainly put the perk back into his passion for her.

Cassandra blushed. "Jeez, guys! Get a room."

"Oh, we will. We will get SO many rooms." Eugene leaned in, kissing Rapunzel passionately. "And couches. And broom closets. And maybe tables."

"Oh, ew!" Cassandra gagged while Pascal turned bright pink with embarrassment.

Varian staggered up to the table, his clothes burnt and splattered with potion residue. "Uh, Eugene... The potion does have side effects, you know, I kind of meant to tell you about those..."

"Potion? Is that why you're acting so frisky?" Rapunzel tapped her lover's nose, suspicious. "I couldn't find you anywhere for weeks, and now you can't keep your hands off me. What gives, Mr. 'Flynn Rider?'"

"Rapunzel... I'm sorry. You're right, I've been avoiding you." Eugene brushed some hair out of Rapunzel's face; this was difficult, given the sheer amount of it. "I guess I haven't been completely honest with you lately."

"That seems to be going around," said the princess, glancing at Cassandra, who put her chin on the table.

"The truth is, I was a little... shocked when you, ah, started filling out." Eugene ran his hands along her sides, caressing the rolls, the curves, the bulges of chubbiness where her dress had split and fat spilled out in chunky puffs of Rapunzel-fluff. "But I went on a quest, to help me with that, and now I'm better! I promise I will always be around for you now. And I will be 'up' to any task you need me for. 'Up' in a big way, if you know what I mean." He winked. "Get it?" Cassandra made more gagging noises.

"Eugene." Rapunzel squeezed his cheek. "You don't have to change who you are for me." He nudged up against her, his crotch rubbing on the sagging heavy dome of her belly, and her eyes widened. "But... If you already did it, I'm not complaining."

He grinned. "I was hoping you'd say that. To the bedroom, my future queen!"

Rapunzel hopped off the table... and her dress split right down the front, her gut sagging out of the silky fabric, patches blowing off like ruptures in the hull of a ship. She leaned on a chair for support, gasping slightly. "Slow down, Eugene. I can't r-run like I used to... huff, oof... Maybe just give me a minute, to catch my breath?"

He did, even though he was clearly eager to start a new 'quest' with her – the horizontal kind. "Sorry. I know! I'll get you some food. You're going to need a lot of carbs today!" And he hurried off to the kitchen.

Cassandra banged her head on the table. All her work was for nothing. "Now he **LIKES** you fat? I'm never gonna hear the end of this..."

"Hey. Perk up, Cass." Rapunzel was blushing; she didn't quite agree with what Eugene had done, but at least it meant she didn't have to stop eating – an activity that was now approaching her favorite, right next to painting. "Just because we're having fun doesn't mean I'll forget about you. You'll always be my best friend." She shifted from one foot to another, her

extra weight jiggling. “Besides, I’m not going to be very... flexible, anymore. In fact, I might need a good friend to help me out... You know, pitch in a little bit. Lift my belly, that kind of thing, during... well, while me and Eugene do stuff. I’m getting a little too big to handle him on my own.”

Cassandra sat up, stared at Rapunzel, and blinked. “Oh wow. You... Really? I don’t... I mean, I don’t think Eugene would like if I—”

Rapunzel snorted. “Please. Did you see him grabbing me? He would do *anything* for a little of this.” She shook her gut playfully and Cassandra stared, entranced. “So, what do you say? Ready to serve your princess?”

The brunette stammered and blushed. Fattening her friend had been a spiteful act at first, but the intimacy of it had grown on her – and so had her crush on Rapunzel. “I... I would really like that. Yes, please.”

“Then let’s go.”

“Right *now*?”

“Sure, why not? That’s all I’m going to be doing today, now that Eugene’s back.” Rapunzel tugged her out of her seat and up the tower stairs. “You, uh, might need to push me up the last couple steps. And there’s this really small doorway at the top... I’m gonna need some help, getting through...”

Eugene burst out of the kitchens, arms full of pastries and bottles of wine. Wordlessly, Pascal and Maximus both pointed at the stairs. Eugene sprinted after the two girls, announcing loudly that he was bringing lots of treats to fill his “fluffy muffin’s” stomach.

Varian shrunk into a chair, extremely embarrassed. Pascal glanced at him, as if wondering whether he would stop the polyromantic madness.

“Don’t look at me, big guy.” The alchemist held up his hands. “Whatever floats their boat, right? Too bad about those side effects, though.” He sighed. “I won’t mention the potion gave him a pig’s tail, if *you* guys don’t.” The two animals nodded in solemn agreement.

Upstairs, clothes were stripped off, and awkward alliances made. Eugene and Cassandra were forced to compromise, for the benefit of the girl they loved – fortunately, there was more of her to go around, these days. They agreed Eugene would remain her fiancé, and Cassandra would remain her best friend... with considerable benefits.

By sunset, their love triangle had become very ‘tangled,’ indeed.