

Split Endz

Chapter One

The scent of polished wood and sweat filled the air as Rapunzel twirled in front of the ornate mirror, her pink ballet shoes gliding across the wooden floor of the dance studio. The echoes of her movements bounced off the walls, but the absence of her classmates weighed heavily in the silence.

"Why aren't they here?" she murmured, her voice barely above a whisper. She stopped, her long blonde hair cascading down her back, catching the light streaming through the tall windows.

"I don't know, sweetheart," her father, Hans, replied, leaning against the doorframe. His brow furrowed with concern. "Your mother and I have been worried. It's not like them to just vanish."

"Maybe they're afraid of the new instructor," Rapunzel suggested, glancing toward the corner of the studio where a shadow loomed. The new instructor, Mr. Blackwood, had a reputation that sent shivers down her spine. She recalled the whispers she had overheard—something about his dark presence.

"Afraid?" Hans echoed, crossing his arms. "Girls like you shouldn't be afraid of anyone. You're stronger than you think."

"Maybe," she said, her spirit wavering. She took a deep breath. "But I can't shake the feeling that something is wrong. It's just...different."

"Just focus on your performance. You've worked too hard to let fear take that away from you." Hans's voice was firm, yet gentle.

Rapunzel nodded, though unease twisted in her stomach. After practice, she lingered in the studio, her heart racing as she heard Mr. Blackwood's low voice filtering through the walls.

"...the plan is in motion. We'll move tonight," he said, his tone

conspiratorial. A chill raced down her spine.

"What's he planning?" she gasped, pressing her ear closer to the door.

"Rapunzel?" a voice called. It was Lina, her mother, entering the studio. "What are you doing here alone?"

"I need to find out what he's up to!" Rapunzel replied, her resolve hardening. "I have to follow him."

"Follow who?" Lina asked, eyes widening.

"Mr. Blackwood! He's hiding something."

"Rapunzel, that's dangerous!" her mother exclaimed, worry etched across her face.

"I have to do this," she insisted, the flutter of fear transforming into determination. "I won't let him hurt anyone else."

As night fell, Rapunzel slipped out of the house, her heart pounding. The streets were dimly lit, shadows stretching long as she followed the path leading to an old, rundown building on the outskirts of town.

"Please be there," she whispered, steeling herself. She crept closer, her breath hitching as muffled voices reached her ears.

"Tonight's the night," Mr. Blackwood's voice echoed ominously.

With a deep breath, Rapunzel burst through the door. "What are you doing here?" she challenged, her voice steady despite the fear that clawed at her.

"Little girl," he sneered, eyes narrowing. "You have no idea what you're meddling with."

"Maybe not," she said, heart pounding in her chest, "but I know you won't get away with this."

Just then, the door swung open, and a group of police officers flooded in, their badges gleaming in the dim light.

"Hands up!" one shouted, and Rapunzel's heart soared.

As chaos erupted, she felt a surge of pride. She had faced her fears

and found her strength. Maybe she truly was stronger than she thought.

Chapter Two

The cold wind whipped through the airport, stinging Rapunzel's cheeks as she clutched the ticket in her hand. Her father, Hans, stood before her, a mixture of fear and determination etched on his face.

"Rapunzel, this is for you," he said, his voice thick with emotion.

She glanced at the ticket, confusion flickering in her eyes. "What is it?"

"It's the only way to know you are safe," he replied, his hands trembling slightly. "We should have left Germany years ago. I never imagined it would come to this." He glanced around, his eyes darting nervously. "We're in hot water. I couldn't get tickets to America, but London is the next best thing. It's too suspicious for us all to leave at once. But if you go to university, that holds water."

Lina, her mother, stepped forward, placing a comforting hand on Hans's arm. "Hans, get it together," she said gently. "She will see us again. We will see her again. It's going to be okay!"

Hans swallowed hard, the crack in his voice betraying his fear. "You're right," he said. He turned to Rapunzel, his eyes glistening with tears. "We miss you already. We love you."

"I know," she whispered, fighting back her own tears. "When I get to the UK, I'm going to help the allies. I want this war to end. I want to come back to my family."

As she approached the ticket booth, a chill permeated the air, and snow began to fall softly around her. She handed her ticket to the attendant, the weight of her decision settling heavily on her heart.

"ATTENTION! ATTENTION!" A voice boomed over the intercom,

cutting through the quiet. "ALL PASSENGERS OF FLIGHT 7680! One passenger on this flight will not be boarding and will be detained! Passenger 24B, come out immediately!"

An elderly man stepped forward, defiance etched on his face. He scooped up a snowball and hurled it at the SS soldier. "See how this snow melts in my hands? That's what will happen to your Third Reich!"

The soldier's face twisted in rage as he drew his weapon. "You're making a mistake, old man!" he barked before pulling the trigger.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Rapunzel's heart raced, terror flooding her senses as the echoes of gunfire rang in her ears. She stumbled onto the plane, her mind reeling. As the aircraft lifted off the ground, she clutched the armrest, her knuckles white. "What have I done?" she murmured, the weight of her choice pressing down on her.

The roar of the engines drowned out her thoughts, but the fear and uncertainty remained, lingering in the back of her mind as she soared into the unknown.

Chapter Three

The hospital buzzed with activity, the stench of antiseptic mingling with the cries of anguish. Rapunzel moved through the crowded wards, her heart heavy with the weight of the suffering she witnessed daily.

"This war," she whispered to herself, her fingers brushing against the bandages of a soldier's wound. "When will it end?"

The soldier turned his gaze toward her, his eyes clouded with pain and despair. "When we stop fighting, I suppose," he murmured, his voice barely audible over the distant shouts and cries.

"Maybe one day," Rapunzel replied softly, but doubt gnawed at her

heart. It wasn't just the physical wounds that troubled her; it was the psychological scars that left deeper marks. She watched as men grappled with the reality of their new lives—some with missing limbs, others with haunting memories.

One day, amidst the chaos, she met John, an American soldier stationed in England.

"Where are you from?" she asked, her curiosity piqued.

"I'm from Los Angeles, California," he replied, a small smile breaking through his pain.

"When you get better, and the war is over, can I visit?"

"Of course," John answered, his voice filled with hope.

But the next day, Rapunzel found John cold and lifeless in his bed. Her dreams crumbled like dry leaves underfoot. Tears streamed down her cheeks, the familiar ache of loss tightening around her heart.

"I haven't seen my parents in over a year," she confessed to the empty room. "What am I doing here?"

As she prepared to take two pills of cyanide from the pharmacy, a commotion erupted outside.

"War is over! The Americans got the Japanese to surrender!" a nurse shouted, her face alight with joy.

"Is it true?" Rapunzel rushed out, hope flickering within her.

"Yes!" the nurse confirmed, beaming with relief.

A wave of emotion crashed over Rapunzel, washing away the darkness that threatened to consume her.

The hospital erupted into celebration, laughter intertwining with tears of joy. "Finally!" a nurse yelled, hugging her colleagues.

Rapunzel felt a strange mix of emotions—relief, joy, and a bittersweet longing for those she had lost. She turned to the nurse beside her. "What now?"

"Now, we heal. Together," the nurse replied, her eyes sparkling with

hope.

In that moment, Rapunzel realized she wanted more than survival. She yearned for a life filled with peace and new beginnings. With determination igniting her spirit, she began to envision a future away from the haunting memories of war.

As the celebrations continued, Rapunzel made her decision. She would leave the hospital and embrace life again, starting a journey toward healing and joy.

Chapter Four

The sun slipped through the heavy curtains of Rapunzel's room, casting a dim light over the cluttered space. The air hung stale, filled with the scent of unwashed clothes and unfulfilled dreams. Rapunzel lay cocooned in her blankets, eyes shut tight against the world outside. Memories of London, laughter, and freedom seemed like distant echoes, swallowed by the oppressive weight of her current reality.

A sharp knock broke the silence. "Rapunzel! Are you sleeping?" Lina's voice carried through the door, tinged with urgency.

"Was," Rapunzel murmured, her voice muffled.

The door creaked open, and Lina stepped in, a wicker basket in her arms. "It's been weeks since you returned. You can't just hide away like this."

"Is that a problem?" Rapunzel retorted, rolling onto her side, her face half-buried in the pillow.

"It's rude, Rapunzel! You're shutting us out while your stepfather is doing everything he can to make this work." Lina placed the basket on the floor, her brow furrowing in concern.

"Gustav? Sweet? I think not," Rapunzel replied, her voice icy.

"You haven't even tried to get to know him," Lina insisted, crossing

her arms. "He's generous, and he really cares for us."

Rapunzel scoffed, pushing herself up to sit. "Cares? You mean cares about what I can provide? I saw him shoot a man, mother. He didn't follow orders; he reveled in it."

"Rapunzel, you know he was a soldier—"

"A soldier? Or a monster?" Rapunzel interrupted sharply. "He decided to pick up a gun and murder an innocent man."

Lina sighed, the weight of the situation pressing down on her. "What was he supposed to do? Sacrifice himself? Your father—"

"Don't you dare speak of him!" Rapunzel shouted, the words bursting forth like a dam breaking. "He's in a camp because he chose to help people, not kill them!"

"Enough!" Lina snapped, her patience fraying at the edges. "You are my daughter, and I need you to be a part of this family. You need to find a suitor, or at least—"

"Or what? Move out?" Rapunzel shot back, her voice trembling with anger and fear.

"Gustav can't keep carrying this burden," Lina pleaded. "He needs a wife, not a daughter."

The tension hung heavy between them until a loud crash echoed from the living room. They exchanged startled glances. "What was that?" Rapunzel asked, alarmed.

"Stay here. I'll check," Lina said, her voice tight.

But before she could reach the door, a strangled gasp broke the silence, followed by a thud.

"Gustav!" Lina cried, rushing out.

Rapunzel followed, dread pooling in her stomach. She stepped into the living room just as Gustav crumpled to the floor, his blue eyes wide with shock, his body still.

"Lina!" he gasped, clutching his chest.

"Call for help!" Lina shouted, but it was too late.

Rapunzel stood frozen, the weight of their conflict crashing down like a wave, leaving her gasping for breath amidst the chaos of loss.

Chapter Five

The afternoon sun filtered through the dusty window of Klaus's office, casting long shadows across the oak desk piled high with legal documents. Lina's pen scratched against the paper, her brow furrowed as she signed her name for what felt like the hundredth time. Beside her, Klaus shuffled the papers, his green eyes darting up to meet hers only briefly before he focused on the task at hand.

"Congratulations, Mrs. Gustav," he said, a hint of warmth in his voice as he slid another document toward her. "You are officially the sole heir to your late husband's estate."

"Thank you," Lina replied curtly, the weight of her new wealth settling uneasily on her shoulders. She glanced at Rapunzel, who sat across from her, a small smile playing on her lips as she watched Klaus.

Klaus caught Rapunzel's gaze, and for a moment, the room felt electric. A warmth washed over him, and he cleared his throat, trying to maintain professionalism. "Once you've signed these final papers, we can begin the process of transferring the assets."

Rapunzel leaned forward, resting her chin on her hand. "You really think I can keep all of this?" Her voice had a soft lilt, and Klaus found it hard to look away.

"Absolutely," he said, a smile creeping onto his face. "It's all yours. You're free to do whatever you wish with it."

"Wow," she breathed, her eyes sparkling. "I guess I can finally pursue my dreams."

Lina's sharp tone cut through the moment. "Let's not get ahead of

ourselves, Rapunzel. We have responsibilities now." She signed one last document and stood, gathering her things as if to shield her daughter from the budding excitement. "We should be going."

As they left, Klaus felt a pang of regret. He wanted to know more about Rapunzel, but he understood the boundaries of his role. Shortly after, he caught himself glancing out the café window, hoping to see her again.

"Good morning!" Rapunzel's voice chimed in, breaking Klaus from his thoughts. He turned, surprised to see her standing at the counter, a bright smile illuminating her face.

"Oh... Hello!" Klaus stammered, his cheeks turning crimson. "I didn't expect to see you here."

"I was in the neighborhood," she said, a teasing glint in her eyes. "Are you going to offer to buy me an espresso?"

Klaus chuckled, his nerves settling. "How could I refuse? Of course, I'll get you one."

"And a strudel?" she added, a playful tone in her voice.

"Only if you join me," he replied, feeling bold.

"Deal!"

They ordered and settled into a corner table, the atmosphere buzzing around them. Laughter erupted as they shared stories, their connection deepening with each word. "So, what's your dream, Klaus?" Rapunzel asked, leaning in closer.

"I want to help people. I want to make a difference in their lives," he said earnestly, his gaze unwavering. "But it's tough starting out. I have student loans, and clients are slow to come."

Rapunzel frowned. "I'm sure you'll succeed. You're passionate about this."

"Thanks," he murmured, feeling a warmth spread through him. "And what about you?"

"I want to travel," she said, her eyes shimmering with hope. "To see the world beyond this town."

Klaus chuckled. "Where would you go first?"

"Paris! I've always wanted to see the Eiffel Tower," she said, her voice rising with excitement.

As they continued to talk, Klaus's heart raced. In that moment, he felt a connection he had never experienced before. "How about dinner tomorrow?" he asked, his voice steady.

"Absolutely!" she exclaimed, and hope blossomed within him.

Days turned into secret nights spent together, until one fateful evening when Lina discovered her daughter's absence.

"Rapunzel!" Lina's voice thundered through the house. "Where are you?"

When she found Rapunzel sneaking back through the basement window, her fury erupted. She smacked her daughter across the face. "You are never leaving this house again!"

"Mother, NO!" Rapunzel cried, panic rising in her chest.

Lina marched her to the attic, locking the door behind them. "This is for your own good," she said coldly.

Klaus, unaware of the storm brewing, knocked at Rapunzel's door days later, worry etching lines across his forehead. Lina answered, her eyes red and swollen.

"She's been missing for over a week," Lina sobbed, tears streaming down her face.

Klaus's heart sank. "I would never have let her go without telling you. I promise, I would have asked for your blessing."

They embraced tightly, the weight of their shared concern unifying them. Together, they began a search that would lead them deeper into the shadows of the night, but Rapunzel was nowhere to be found.

Chapter Six

Rapunzel paced the attic, her bare feet whispering across the creaky floorboards. The air was thick with dust and memories, and the shadows loomed like specters, reminding her of her isolation. She paused at the window, shards of glass glimmering in the fading light, and inhaled the scent of fresh earth that wafted in.

"Do you hear that?" she asked the raccoons, who had taken to scuttling about her makeshift home. Their bright eyes sparkled with curiosity. "It's the world out there, calling me."

The largest raccoon tilted its head, chittering softly. Rapunzel smiled, feeling an unexpected warmth in her chest. "I wish you could tell me what to do," she sighed, her voice barely a murmur.

Suddenly, the radio crackled to life, a familiar tune cutting through the silence. Rapunzel closed her eyes, swaying to the melody, her heart aching with both joy and sorrow. "Oh, John," she whispered, imagining him dancing with her, his laughter echoing in her ears. "If only you were here."

The raccoons scampered closer, their tiny paws pattering softly against the wood. "You want to dance too?" she laughed, the sound brightening the dim room. "Come on, then!" She twirled around, her hair swirling like golden ribbons, and the raccoons mirrored her movements, their playful energy infectious.

"Rapunzel!" a voice called from below, startling her. It was her mother, concern lacing her tone. "I brought you dinner!"

Rapunzel's smile faded. "I'm not hungry!" she shouted back, frustration bubbling up. "I just want to be free!"

Her mother's footsteps retreated, leaving silence in their wake. The raccoons paused, their eyes wide, as if understanding her despair. "It's just you and me, huh?" she said, kneeling to meet their gaze. "I guess we have to make our own fun."

With a newfound determination, Rapunzel stood tall, her heart racing. "Tomorrow, I'll figure it out. I'll find a way to escape this attic." The raccoons chattered in agreement, their tiny bodies vibrating with excitement.

Chapter Seven

The sound of waves crashing against the shore echoed in Rapunzel's ears as she stood on Malibu Pier, the salty breeze ruffling her long, tangled hair. A seagull squawked overhead, drawing her attention to the vast expanse of the ocean stretching out before her—a reminder of the freedom she had finally tasted after years of captivity.